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Oral history interview with Brooks Jackson,
1976 Mar. 22

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Brooks Jackson on March 22, 1976. The interview took place at the Iolas/Brooks Jackson Gallery in New York, NY, and was conducted by Paul Cummings as part of the California Oral History Project for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the 22nd of March, 1976, and this is Paul Cummings talking to Brooks Jackson in the Iolas Gallery, which is now called what, Brooks Jackson-

BROOKS JACKSON: Iolas.

MR. CUMMINGS: Iolas Gallery.

MR. JACKSON: Iolas Gallery, Brooks Jackson.

MR. CUMMINGS: Okay. That's a shift from the other streets, isn't it?

MR. JACKSON: Uh huh. [Affirmative]

MR. CUMMINGS: A new development. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: Right. [Laughter] Let's see how far it goes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Okay. Anyhow, why don't we get some idea of background about you. You were born where in Texas?

MR. JACKSON: Athens, Texas.

MR. CUMMINGS: Athens, Texas?

MR. JACKSON: Of all places.

MR. CUMMINGS: How appropriate. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: My destiny. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Harold Fieldson's *Greek Origins of Change*.

MR. JACKSON: I know. Iolas was Greek, born in Egypt. So I came to New York in '43.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, did you grow up there, or live there all-through school and education and things like that?

MR. JACKSON: Right.

MR. CUMMINGS: You somehow got interested in dance there or-?

MR. JACKSON: Oh, I got interested in the ballet, came to New York. Like I was completely blind, and that's what I wanted to do, and I did it.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what year?

MR. JACKSON: Forty-three I came to New York and started at the American School of Ballet. It was already too late for a dancer, but I did it. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you pick that school?

MR. JACKSON: Well, it was the only one at the time. We had the only school.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. JACKSON: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: That was the only school? That was classical ballet?

MR. JACKSON: Yes. Balanchine and all the Russian teachers. Finally a scholarship was given to me with the help of Tchelitchew and after a year or so of that, well, before I actually danced on the stage, I met Iolas because he was forming the ballet company for the Marquis de Cuevas.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh.

MR. JACKSON: He had been a dancer and was a dancer at that moment.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was he dancing with anyone or-?

MR. JACKSON: At that moment he danced a few things in the ballet but not much, and then he left and opened the gallery because he hurt his ankle or something. He opened the Hugo Gallery on Fifty-Fifth Street and Madison Avenue.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what was he doing with Cuevas?

MR. JACKSON: He was forming the ballet, getting the dancers together, and giving auditions and all of that, and that's how I met him. He saw me at the American School of Ballet, and he asked me to come to the audition because, in those days, there weren't many boys dancing, and so there was a scarcity.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that was the war.

MR. JACKSON: Right. And it wasn't thought of as something for boys to do, not in those days. I didn't go into the ballet, actually, the International. It was called the Ballet International under the Marquis de Cuevas. Iolas left and opened the Hugo Gallery, and I continued to study, and after awhile I'd-the first time I appeared on the stage in New York was with Martha Graham at the National Theater.

MR. CUMMINGS: Which was a shift from what you were doing.

MR. JACKSON: Well, yes, but it was an opportunity and I took it. That was just for one season in New York which consisted of one week.

MR. CUMMINGS: And what year was that?

MR. JACKSON: It must have been '45 or '46. '45, I guess. And after that, the Ballet Society was formed by Balanchine and Lincoln Kirstein, and I was in that until it became the New York City Ballet, and there I stayed until 1955. But during that period, before it became the New York City Ballet, and there wasn't much work for the Ballet Society, I did Broadway shows and some television, like Ed Sullivan and things like that. Well, afterwards, when I stopped dancing in '55, Iolas said, "Why don't you work with me?" and so I started.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you stop dancing?

MR. JACKSON: It's didn't give me any pleasure any more. It didn't satisfy my needs.

MR. CUMMINGS: You just stopped?

MR. JACKSON: I was becoming a nervous wreck. [Laughter] It's not a thing you can take as a job and work at it. It is very difficult. You can't just do it because there is always someone coming to you, "Well why aren't you doing that role instead of him," and so that creates frustration and-

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, so it's rather a precarious existence.

MR. JACKSON: Right, yes. And besides, it didn't satisfy my needs-and also being a monster on stage at my age, I thought was ridiculous. [Laughter] And taking and doing ridiculous things like that on stage-at that time I thought they were ridiculous, or maybe it's a process of growing up late. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have any interest in being a choreographer?

MR. JACKSON: No, no. Just the dance. I liked it for my own pleasure, let's say, but to be on stage and listen to applause didn't do anything to me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. JACKSON: A lot of people love that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I know. That is a very important part of the whole activity. What intrigued you about it

originally? Just the activity?

MR. JACKSON: The physical thing about it. I thought it was beautiful, and the first time I saw it in San Antonio, Texas, I went crazy. I thought that is really the thing I want to do, and not knowing what it meant to do it and the work that was involved-

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] It looks so simple.

MR. JACKSON: I didn't care and I made my mind up to come to New York overnight. At that time I was working for the Greyhound Bus Company. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous. What did you see?

MR. JACKSON: I saw Ballet Theatre and Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. Well, all the big dancers in this country at that time were in those two companies. And coming from a little town in Texas and being raised for part of my youth on a farm, I'd never heard of ballet. I didn't know it existed.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you see a ballet all of a sudden?

MR. JACKSON: In San Antonio I met a girl who was so-God, that was back in the forties but she was already a hippie-and interested in Isadora and all those people. So she said, "You have to start to dance. It's the only thing." And so she started me going to someone's living room and talking about these classes and then she kept me all excited about dancing and finally, when I saw it, I said, "That's it; that is what I have to do." So I went the next morning to the Greyhound Bus Company and told them I was leaving for New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: They thought I was crazy. And I left-I came to New York. I didn't know what it was like at all. I felt perfectly at home from the minute I arrived here, and I started to work at various jobs that I could, for half a day, and the rest of the day was devoted to dancing.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did your family think of all of this?

MR. JACKSON: Well my family-my-they didn't think anything. They didn't know what to think. My mother and father were dead, and being the youngest, they said, "Well, you have to make your life, so good luck." And I've been in New York ever since. It's home, actually.

MR. CUMMINGS: But now what-you know, I find it interesting - let's see, you've known Iolas then for quite awhile.

MR. JACKSON: Over thirty years, yes. And he formed the Hugo Gallery in 1945 or '44, '44 or '45, I can't remember.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, is that right? The first thing I could find anywhere about it was about in '46 where there was something called Poetic Theater.

MR. JACKSON: Which was what? Maybe it was '46.

MR. CUMMINGS: I don't know. It's all I've been able to find.

MR. JACKSON: It must have been '45 or '46, the Neo-Romantic painters. Romantic Painters.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yes, right, Berman and-

MR. JACKSON: Fini, Berman, Berard, Cocteau, even Tchelitchew. Tchelitchew and Iolas used to be great friends, and they used to spend hours and hours together talking and talking. At that time I didn't speak any language except English, so I used to fall asleep because I couldn't understand what they were saying, so I fell asleep at these big discussions they used to have. And Pavlich designed the first gallery, and the color of the walls, which is different shades of purple, mauve, darker to lighter, and from the back of the gallery dark to the front lighter, strange and sort of telescoped with different partitions. But before it opened they had a fight and Pavlich didn't speak to Iolas afterwards because he said he sold his soul to the devil.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, who is Madame Hugo?

MR. JACKSON: Madame Hugo was, well, she is quite a famous lady. She was born Princess Ruspoli at the Partpour, and when she was oh, fourteen or fifteen, she was married to the Duc de Granmont in Paris, and-I don't know if you want to hear all that?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

MR. JACKSON: She's an interesting character. And he was already an old man, and the Parisians thought that anyone coming from Rome was very provincial, and probably was in those days. Anyways, he kept her outside of Paris in a chateau until he had educated her in the French way, and until she became sixteen or seventeen, or maybe a little older, until it came time for her to give her first ball. And, in the meantime, he had given her jewels and an incredible necklace from Cartier. He gave her just so much money for the ball, which she thought wasn't enough. So she went to Cartier's - it's a famous old story. She had the really necklace copied in fake or semi-precious and sold the real one in order to bring the first jazz band from America to Paris and a gypsy band from Vienna or Budapest. I don't remember.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: So, naturally, after she gave that party, she was a big success. Well, she had two children by the Duc. The younger one was killed during the war. But, when the war started, no, before the war, she was already fifty or fifty-one. The Duc had died and left her-well, she was a spoiled woman and she used to go with the children to the zoo, but before they would go to the zoo they would stop at Fouquet and get filet of sole to give to the seals.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Simple things like that.

MR. JACKSON: Yes, and-I think we could go on all afternoon about her. But anyway in the meantime, I suppose she had taken a lover and the Duc knew it and he collected all the love letters to the lover.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh really?

MR. JACKSON: And on his deathbed he presented them to her.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: In the meantime, before he died, she had had several spats with him. She met the famous Hearst, Randolph Hearst, and he invited her to America -"any time you want to come, just let me know," so she telegraphed him, or whatever, and said, "I'm arriving such and such a date," and he sent a special train from California to pick her up and took her out to California where she met all the big stars, and she had a great time. Then she came back to Paris. I don't know exactly when, but the Duc died and left her a lot of things, which she just sold to museums, and lived and didn't think. She had famous suitors like Ford Beaverbrook and all those people, and she used to tell a story about one weekend-I can't remember if it was Sassoon or Beaverbrook-anyway, they had spent the weekend in the country in a little hotel, and he had given her a diamond about like that, just loose, which she had put in her little blouse pocket, and when they went to the hotel that afternoon, she pulled it off and lost it and never found it again.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: That's the type of woman she was. Well, later on at a ball in Paris, she met Francois Hugo, the great grandson, I guess, of Victor Hugo, and she had a little flirt with him that night, and a little while later she found herself pregnant. At fifty-something!

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: So she married Francois Hugo and that is where the name Hugo Gallery comes from. During the war she came to America to escape the war and-and Elizabeth Arden was always fascinated by titles like most Americans are, and especially in those days they were. She hired Madame Hugo, the Duchesse de Granmont to be in the showroom to excite all these society women to buy these famous dresses of Charles James, and later Castillo, and all those people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh right, yes, fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: And, naturally, she had a big social life at night. She would sleep late in the morning, come down to Elizabeth Arden around noon or so. They'd be looking all over the place for Madame Hugo la Duchesse. "Where is she?" "She's in the ladies room, sleeping." [Laughter] But anyway, Iolas I think met Donna Maria, as everyone called her, through Madame DeMenil, Dominique DeMenil, and they knew a lot of people in common. Iolas, even while he was dancing in Europe, he knew all these painters, Van Dingen, Dufy, and all those people. And, later on, we met Arshile Gorky here in America during the war.

MR. CUMMINGS: Also, he knew the Surrealists from here rather than-

MR. JACKSON: Yes, right.

MR. CUMMINGS: And the Neo-Romantics in the-

MR. JACKSON: Also those in Europe.

MR. CUMMINGS: All the Paris people there.

MR. JACKSON: Right, yes. But also just before the war in '38 and '39, he was living here in New York in the same house. They each had a floor - Berman, de Chirico, Lenore Fini, and Iolas. And they were all poor, and the only one who had money was Eugene Berman. And he was the only one that had anything in his refrigerator, and they all used to go and steal from him. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's incredible.

MR. JACKSON: And that is when Iolas posed for de Chirico a lot and was great friends with Lenore Fini because, I think, Iolas found her to be like his sister Nikki, who he hadn't seen for a long time, and didn't see her until after the war. But then Fini went back when the war started. They all went back except Berman. The first exhibition- and Iolas started the Hugo Gallery, I remember, with five hundred dollars in his pocket, and a borrowed exhibition from most of the galleries in New York.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic. Why was she interested - Madam Hugo - in the gallery?

MR. JACKSON: Well, she wanted something to do, I suppose, and also it fascinated her. She knew a lot of people and it was another thing for her to-

MR. CUMMINGS: Have her fingers in.

MR. JACKSON: Have her fingers in. Also she was crazy about Iolas, and Iolas helped her a lot, even today I think. And the first exhibition was the Neo-Romantics, as I remember, because I wasn't in town. I was off on the road with some Broadway show or something. They lined around the block for opening night, to go up in an awful elevator to the sixth floor of the building-26 East Fifty-Fifth Street. And the elevator man was from Barbados, and he was a preacher, a minister which was a free Catholic denomination. Iolas used to bring him robes from Rome. Every summer he'd go he'd bring Jimmy-Jimmy he was known-Jimmy Roberts was his name-wanted robes from Rome, so Iolas would bring whatever he wanted, and he became a bishop, an archbishop or something, and it was even written up in *Time Magazine*-the cover of *Time*-a few years after that. He was always nice to me, but he was a very difficult person, temperamental. If he didn't like somebody, he almost wouldn't take them up to the gallery. He had two sons, and because the older son married a girl that he didn't like, he disinherited him. I mean, that was also sort of unique.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: And, Donna Maria knew all these people in New York, which helped Iolas at the gallery, and he kept on going from there. Every once in while, he would think about giving it up but -

MR. CUMMINGS: But she was around in New York for a few years, wasn't she?

MR. JACKSON: Until 1950 something and she went back to Paris. And her son-she had a son, George, who must be what, well, in his thirties-was married to an American girl now. And she lives in a little house in the country and she must be, what, well in her eighties. Iolas sees her every once in awhile.

MR. CUMMINGS: She's had a grand life.

MR. JACKSON: Oh, she had a marvelous life, incredible, because she knew all these people in Paris and she was always very erect, never like that, and always interested in people and behaved the same with everybody. She didn't make any difference in people and she didn't care who they were. I know Iolas used to take people to her apartment that most people wouldn't be seen in public with, and she couldn't care less. She enjoyed them.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: I remember her telling a joke once that happened when she was invited for dinner and was seated next to the King of England, and he was telling jokes, and she thought one joke was so funny that she hit him with her fan, which you're not supposed to do-touch the King.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. JACKSON: She was a big success even so. She was such a natural person, and everybody liked her. She was really quite an extraordinary creature. And that fascinated Iolas tremendously. I think two of the women that he really must have admired very much were Donna Maria and Sarah Bernhardt.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] That's a good pair.

MR. JACKSON: And he used to do such imitations of Sarah Bernhardt.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. JACKSON: Unbelievable! He could imitate the voice, the way of acting, in such a way-and of course, besides imitating, he adored opera. He knows the words of all the operas, practically, and the music, too, naturally, besides all the Latin which he knows. What else?

MR. CUMMINGS: It's fascinating. Well, he'd started the gallery and we have you traveling around the country on tours. But you were dancing for quite awhile, and you had a good ten years or so.

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes, oh more than ten years, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, right, a dozen years of active involvement. Do you think that that experience has influenced your taste in the artists you've been involved with, or selections, or installations?

MR. JACKSON: Yes and no. I think the most influence is from Iolas. I learned a lot more from Iolas. Not just on art, but in general. At least, I tried to take from him the good things and not the negative things. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: There are some of those I've heard! [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes, maybe I did without knowing it, but it wasn't my intention.

MR. CUMMINGS: Now, what is the background on him? He was born, where did you say?

MR. JACKSON: Born in Egypt of Greek parents. In those days, there were lots of Greeks, until Nasser came out and they threw out Farouk. Then little by little the Greeks left. He thinks he's very Greek but they're quite different, in a way, from the Greeks in Greece. They speak a little different, and some people say they're much brighter. I don't know. But he feels himself very Greek, and his dream is to be in Greece, and it has always been his dream.

MR. CUMMINGS: When was he born?

MR. JACKSON: Good question. [Laughter] Nobody knows.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's very hard to find out.

MR. JACKSON: His passport I saw once said 1917 or '18, but I can't be sure. It has to be more. He'd kill me if he heard me say that.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: But my wife, Adriana, her father and Iolas were in Elba one summer-I was there, too-and they were walking on the beach and Iolas said to Adriana's father, "Yes, we were born the same year," and Adriana's father was born in 1901. Now, that makes Iolas what, seventy-five?

MR. CUMMINGS: He can't be, though, is he?

MR. JACKSON: I don't think so; I don't think so.

MR. CUMMINGS: No, no.

MR. JACKSON: But, even so, he has to be seventy, seventy something. 908, I think his passport was. Well, I don't know. Anyway, he'll never admit anything.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did he come to this country? Do you know?

MR. JACKSON: He got stuck here during the war, or in '39, and he came here as a dancer. Oh, it's rather curious. He was dancing with someone in Belgium, in a troop, and then he came here to dance at the New York World's Fair. But before that he was dancing with Florence Myers who was the daughter of the Secretary of the Treasury, Myers. And they did sort of ballet things together and sort of nightclub, and then after they broke up, with Theodora Roosevelt. As a team, they did nightclub numbers. In those days de Chirico had designed a costume for him, or costumes, and Dalí, Stuart Cheney, and some other people, for these acts, or these things that he and Theodora were doing. They went through South America on a tour, and they did U.S.O. shows. I remember one with Segovia. And before that he even toured the country with a Ballet Theater, and Dorothy Littlefield Ballet. I think he just stayed here, you know, he didn't go back to Europe '39 like a lot of people did. And, he

didn't go back to Europe until after the war, naturally.

MR. CUMMINGS: So he was here quite a span of years then at that point?

MR. JACKSON: A little less than ten years, yes. I think the first trip back was after he had opened the gallery, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think he became an art dealer as opposed to something else? Was it a major interest of his?

MR. JACKSON: It must have always been. As I've said, he has always known painters and sculptors while he was dancing. So it must have been something he really felt, and got along with them usually, and I suppose they liked his sort of dynamic personality.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did he get all that energy? [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: I guess it is inherited because his father was like that too.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MR. JACKSON: If you walked with the father, he was usually a block ahead of you.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: And Iolas is like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did his family do?

MR. JACKSON: That's sort of a mystery. I doubt if I'll ever know the truth, but anyway, they were in the cotton business. Now, whatever that means, I don't know. I've been in the cotton business, too. I used to pick cotton. [Laughter] But they would never admit to something so humble. [Laughter] Anyway, but that can be fascinating. That is another chapter. One would have to do a lot of research.

MR. CUMMINGS: To figure out.

MR. JACKSON: I must say he has a great sense of family. He has kept his whole family, brother and sisters, and father, and whatever-that, I must say, he is extraordinary about.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. JACKSON: With money.

MR. CUMMINGS: He supported them?

MR. JACKSON: Supported them all these years, ever since after the war when he saw them again, he just took care of them, and his nieces and everything.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's astounding.

MR. JACKSON: And it's curious that (but it may not be so curious) that all of a sudden one of his nieces ended up marrying the son of the Marquis de Cuevas.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh really? I didn't know that. Oh, is that incredible.

MR. JACKSON: How things work around.

MR. CUMMINGS: But he couldn't have had very much money in those days, could he?

MR. JACKSON: No matter what he had, he managed to send the money, and he started the house in Greece, which is now an incredible thing that was one room in the beginning in the middle of a vineyard, with sort of whitewashed mud huts all around. The mud huts have now become sort of bourgeois bungalows, and they have paved streets and electric lights and water now, plumbing. When Iolas started the house in Greece, it didn't have anything. It was just a dirt road, and you used to have water brought everyday, and there wasn't electricity yet. Now it's an incredible house filled with incredible things. It doesn't look too much from the outside, it's more like an Arab house, you know, it doesn't look like anything from the outside, and you walk in and you can't believe your eyes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: And I think in the end what he wants to do, and I think that's all he really had in his mind always, is to leave it to Greece as a museum.

MR. CUMMINGS: What has he collected over the years?

MR. JACKSON: Everything, and every type of thing besides modern art. At auctions here he bought antiquities, Egyptian, and Greek and Roman, and even columns, and sent them back to Greece.

MR. CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MR. JACKSON: And furniture from here, all over the place, from France, from Italy, from, probably Spain and wherever. And this house is filled with all of these things-with art objects, ivories, icons, you name it, it's all there.

MR. CUMMINGS: He is really a collector.

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Had he collected things before he became a dealer?

MR. JACKSON: Always. When he was dancing he was always buying antique furniture and, at one time, the house was sort of filled with-

MR. CUMMINGS: Empire furniture.

MR. JACKSON: -well, Empire, but before that it was sort of Italian Renaissance and Baroque, with angels flying all over the place and big incense burners, you know, hanging chandeliers, and the walls painted sort of Pompeian red, and he did one room in yellow, then came the Empire and French period. At one point the apartment had forty chairs in it, and lolas never sat down.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: And that's why Magritte probably painted his portrait with a homburg, which lolas never wore, and a briefcase, and an overcoat, and underneath he said, "L'homme assis," so that was Magritte's impression, that lolas never sat down.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Oh, that's fantastic. Well, how did he do all of those things? I mean, was it just buying and selling, or trading, or-?

MR. JACKSON: Well, that he loves to do. It must be the Greek character to buy and sell. They are all sort of merchants, I think. It's in their blood. And to bargain, he adores all that. You can bargain to a certain point that you end up sometimes paying more than what it started out to be.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: I remember that happened to his niece in Mexico once, in Oaxaca. Sylvia saw this Indian woman selling serapes, and she liked one of them. She also had the habit of bargaining, coming from Greece. And so in the end she paid more than what the woman started to ask for.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: And, that's also funny-in the old days when lolas's sister Nikki came to this country, the first time she went to a department store, she started to bargain for the prices. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. What did she think of that when it didn't work?

MR. JACKSON: Well, she didn't realize it until sometime afterwards. [Laughter] But I thought it was very clever of the Indian woman.

MR. CUMMINGS: Marvelous. Well, when did you start working with him actually?

MR. JACKSON: In '55. But before that I had been in and out of the gallery all of the time and used to help him a lot, like getting the mailing out, addressing the envelopes, and sticking the stamps, and sealing them and all that. And we used to get-oh, a lot of dancers would come in and do it, you know, just to help out. And then lolas was always inviting everybody home, even if they weren't helping, and he used to like to cook also. There was no money, very little money, and so he'd just cook and eat and have a good time. And the people-well, that goes another chapter of Second Avenue, the apartment which had seen a lot of people.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, that's the famous apartment.

MR. JACKSON: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Is that the one you lived in then?

MR. JACKSON: The one I had after Iolas left New York and, well, where Hartley lived, too, all of those years. The people would come in and out of that apartment from all - well, quite a lot of famous people, from all titles, let's say, all walks of life. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Well he seems to have always been an incredibly gregarious character.

MR. JACKSON: Oh, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did he study art or did he just pick it up from people he knew in the world-

MR. JACKSON: Something that was born in him.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was just there.

MR. JACKSON: Just there. He has an incredible eye, I think. Not only for painting. I mean, that's quite obvious when I see the collection of someone like the deMenils. And usually I can tell a Magritte or Brauner of Iolas's that he has had at one point.

MR. CUMMINGS: How can you tell something that he might have had?

MR. JACKSON: The taste, the quality also of the painting, it's a very distinct-I don't know how to describe it, but I guess it's just from being around him all these years and knowing what he would like in a Magritte or a Brauner. I'll give you a perfect example in the case of Brauner and before Feigen started his gallery. A couple introduced Feigen to Iolas--this young boy from Chicago--back in the fifties before he started, but he was thinking of doing it. And Iolas was very pleased and very enthusiastic to show Richard Feigen all these things in the gallery. And he showed him all these Brauners. I remember this because I drug them out myself, and there must have been thirty or forty of them. And Iolas was working with Brauner actually all these years, but he never made contracts with artists, signed contracts with lawyers, or anything like that. And lo and behold, one year and a few months after that when Feigen opened a gallery in Chicago, Brauner and Iolas had a falling out, for some reason, and then the next thing we know, Feigen has Brauner under contract. Now, I don't mean to say anything against Mr. Feigen, but I can see the different in taste and eye. The things that he chose from Brauner in that year, or in the period that he worked with him, were not of the same quality that Iolas chose. And that's all I can say.

MR. CUMMINGS: Can you guess at what his taste is about things now?

MR. JACKSON: Not always, not always. He fools me a lot.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: He fools me a lot. Often times that has happened to me, and I've thought, not about Brauner, but maybe a painter who would come in and show things, and I would think, "Iolas might like them." I show him-"get it out, I can't stand it."

MR. CUMMINGS: So his taste is very decided?

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes, very. There is no in between. If it is in between you know he does it for some other reason, not because he's convinced of it. But, if he doesn't do much about it, or he doesn't care, he won't give any attention to it. He might do the exhibition, but he couldn't care less. He's out of town, or he's out seeing somebody or something and he couldn't care less, and that's the only way I can judge.

MR. CUMMINGS: How do you think he picked the artists over the years that have been associated with him for so long? I mean Magritte, and Brauner, and-

MR. JACKSON: I think maybe-I don't know. Maybe Julian Levy had a great influence on him. He must have admired Julian Levy a lot because Julian presented all the Surrealists, and I really think that he did.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were they friendly, or are they friendly?

MR. JACKSON: Yea, they were friendly, yes. I don't know about today but then they've both aged, they've gone in different worlds, but, I think Iolas-

MR. CUMMINGS: But his own bent was-I mean-he never really, as I could find out, got interested in total abstract art.

MR. JACKSON: No, he hated it, he hated it, he hated it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why was that? What would he say?

MR. JACKSON: It's just unconventional. He did a show of Mathieu, but I don't think he was convinced of that either.

MR. CUMMINGS: Wasn't that the show you did one year and then pit it away, then brought it back?

MR. JACKSON: Exactly, I was going to say that. Yes, that's what happened.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: But, he didn't care about it, and he sold them for nothing just to get ride of them, whereas with Magritte, and Brauner, and Ernst, and Matta, I know that he was very convinced of them and makes all sorts of sacrifices to keep them although they might not be aware of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh really? For example, what do you mean?

MR. JACKSON: Well, how can I explain it to you? They think he's just probably being tricky or making life complicated and, indeed, it makes life complicated. I mean, he will sell something that he likes very much in order to have the money to give them something, to buy things from them since he never had a contract with them. The only people he ever sort of agreed to make contracts with-it wasn't a contract-but agreed to give a certain amount of money to every month, he did for awhile with Harold Stevenson, with Nikki de St. Phalle, Jean Tinguely, Raysse, Ed Ruscha, and a few people like that. But the older people, he didn't have to because they work a different way. It's another school altogether. Oh, I remember with Fautrier also. He had a moment with Fautrier. It was very difficult.

MR. CUMMINGS: But that's fairly abstract though.

MR. JACKSON: Yea, but that's the reason it didn't go very far with lolas, you see, and he ended up with Sidney Janís. But lolas is also fascinated with the personalities of people, and he likes to get involved with them personally. He likes to get involved with them and go through all the hysteria of life with all of the problems and all that.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] He doesn't want to miss anything, does he?

MR. JACKSON: No, no, no, no.

MR. CUMMINGS: But then he must have maintained a close relationship with the major figures.

MR. JACKSON: Oh, with all the figures, oh yes, all. And he's quite able to talk to all these people in sort of their own language, in some strange way. I don't mean just-I mean their way of thinking. He understands a lot of things.

MR. CUMMINGS: You mean he can think like Ernst, or-

MR. JACKSON: Yea, I mean, he knows what their-at least I think he does. If he doesn't, he's a very good faker, which he may be. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, that's funny when you mentioned Julian Levy because in thinking about this and doing the research, I realized that there is similar tendencies in their interests. Did they ever do business together, do you know, or-they might have?

MR. JACKSON: I think they did in the beginning, yes, because Julian was just about-he was open still for a couple of years after lolas opened, and I think they must have. I remember lolas used to do a little thing, a little business with Curt Valentin, and Perls, here in New York, with Matisse, I don't know, but I think to a certain degree. Castelli was another thing that was- [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Ah, yes, where does Leo come in?

MR. JACKSON: He must have come in at some point. lolas always used to fight with Castelli before Castelli opened the gallery, and lolas used to tease him about making clothes, suits, and whatever it was.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right, but he also-

MR. JACKSON: And I don't understand it, you see, because Castelli is always very polite and a very kind man, but that doesn't mean a thing to Iolas. [Laughter] To the contrary, he can't stand it. In the end he can't stand all that. [Laughter] And, I think even though Leo Castelli owned a gallery-well, he's thrown several people out of the gallery just for the hell of it, you know. [Laughter] You never- well, one day maybe you'll meet him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I've met him many times.

MR. JACKSON: He's a very funny character, really. He loves to play with people. I mean, tease them and lead them on, and just amuse himself.

MR. CUMMINGS: The world is his toy, yes.

MR. JACKSON: I remember when we were up on 23 East Fifty-Fifth Street, I don't know what exhibition was on, but two old ladies walked in-

MR. CUMMINGS: That was the house, wasn't it?

MR. JACKSON: Yea-and Iolas walked out, and he used to like to play with people like that, and I said, "Are you the artist?" and he said, "No, but I am a painter," [laughter] in a silly voice, and I said, "Well, what do you paint?" and he said, "I paint naked women," and things like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] Carry on, carry on.

MR. JACKSON: And, he threw the famous collector in Chicago, Morton Neumann, he threw him out of the gallery.

MR. CUMMINGS: But, didn't his sister or somebody marry somebody who was a collector? Who am I thinking of?

MR. JACKSON: No. His sister married-if you want to get the record straight, first I married her and we divorced, and she married a very rich man from Whaling, West Virginia, who had nothing to do with collecting at all. Now, that goes way back to how those two people met, and it all sort of stems through Donna Maria who knew someone called George Sebastian. Not the conductor, but a Rumanian called George Sebastian who had a house in Hammamet, Tunisia, that he designed (and it has been photographed in *Vogue* and all that) way back in the twenties. Anyway, George Sebastian was married at one point to the aunt of this Arthur Steifle, and it's another story, too. [Laughter] Anyway, funny enough, one night in New York, George came to New York and asked Iolas and Nikki-I wasn't in town-if he could bring his nephew, Arthur Steifle to dinner. And he did, and they met, and they married a short time after this. He wasn't a collector, but he soon became a collector. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of business was he in?

MR. JACKSON: They manufactured cotton material called Steifle fabric, which, a few years after that, merged with Indian Head Mills, and Arthur retired and did nothing. He was a young man, in his forties. And they bought a house in the south of France, in Cannes, and a yacht, and later an airplane, and they just lived the life here and there. He died a year or so ago.

MR. CUMMINGS: Ah, I didn't know that. All these people, how do you keep track of them?

MR. JACKSON: I don't know; I can't figure it out. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: But now what-you know, I'm still curious about your own art interest. Was it developed through your friendship with Iolas or were there other influences?

MR. JACKSON: Well, I suppose I wanted-when I was a kid, I wanted to be a painter, or to draw, and I-

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you know anyone who did that? Was there anything around the house or-?

MR. JACKSON: No, no, my father who was a blacksmith used to draw these fancy birds like they do in pen classes, you know, and-

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yes, right, penmanship.

MR. JACKSON: -and then he used to whittle a lot of things and models of things, and I suppose from that-and then when I met Iolas I began to see painters and all these people from the forties, and my mind opened. It wasn't already closed by education even or anything like that because the education was minimal. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Where did you go to school, just in-?

MR. JACKSON: Gee, I just went to high school and finished. That's it. I didn't want to go any further because I didn't know what I wanted to do first of all, so why go to school if I didn't know what I wanted to do? And then, until I found what I wanted to do, and I went at it like a crazy until that didn't satisfy me any more and, I don't know, I might change this business and change my life to do something in a few years too, if I'm able.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter] One never knows.

MR. JACKSON: Exactly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, that's true. You know, in the years of traveling around the country did you go to museums when you were in different cities?

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes, absolutely. In this country I went to every museum I could when I was traveling with shows or the ballet company, and to see burlesque shows, strippers and-[Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Everything.

MR. JACKSON: Everything. And on touring Europe, always museums and everything, all that was a must, and I kept my followers exhausted.

MR. CUMMINGS: I was wondering, because dancers usually are so tired all the time, as opposed to actors who always seem to have a little extra energy.

MR. JACKSON: No, no. That, and eat well at good restaurants, and to try and stay in a good hotel. I suppose Iolas is the biggest influence. I think there had to be something within me already. I mean, maybe being around him brought it out or made me more conscious of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who worked in the gallery with him in those early years? Do you remember? Was there anybody or-?

MR. JACKSON: [Laughter] Anybody who had been able to do it for nothing. Because there was no money. There was very little money.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's so hard to imagine anyone opening a gallery today and doing it in that fashion.

MR. JACKSON: Well, I almost didn't. [Laughter] I can't get by with it, though. Oh yes. He used to have his friends come in, then he'd have them home for dinner or something like that. Or he might give them something on the side. I'm just not aware of that because I didn't spend that much time there. Oh yes, he never hired anyone to help. I remember after he went on his first trip to Europe after the war to buy things, and he came back with a lot of things. There was a Picasso. That I remember very well. And they arrived at the gallery at closing time and we had to get them off the street into the elevator because Jimmy wanted to go home at six o'clock. I was rushing, just me, to get them from the street into the elevator, and there was a Picasso that, well, I don't remember what it looked like-it all was such a nightmare. I was rushing to get all those things in the elevator, and I ripped a hole right in the middle of the Picasso. Well, that sent me-of course, he was fit to be tied.

MR. CUMMINGS: [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: I don't even know if he had bought it or not. He could have bought it, I don't remember. Anyway, that was-I don't even know if he had insurance or not. I didn't think about all those things. I didn't know if it existed. But my concern was to get the things off the street and into the elevator and upstairs before closing. But, as I say, there was nobody else. He didn't have anybody else to help him, and so there I was. I happened to be there so I had to do it.

MR. CUMMINGS: So, in '55 when you started you were the first one then, were you?

MR. JACKSON: In '55 he already had somebody working with him-David Mannings-for awhile he worked with Iolas.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really, I didn't know that.

MR. JACKSON: Yes, and Iolas started him in the gallery. First of all above the gallery, the Hugo gallery, they had the Bodley Bookshop. That is how that started, with someone called Sam Loveman from Cincinnati or Cleveland, who was a very nice man and so wrapped up in books that it was-

MR. CUMMINGS: Now that was the famous bookshop, wasn't it?

MR. JACKSON: Yes, and Sam and David had the bookshop above, and Iolas says, "Why don't you open a gallery?"

Or, I might have been David who wanted to open the gallery. Anyway, Iolas helped them, and David worked with Iolas for awhile then. And then, Iolas moved from Fifty-Fifth Street to 51 East Fifty-Seventh, and that's when it became Alexander Iolas, Inc., in 1950 and '51. And there he had a Max Ernst show, which was called "Dancers Under the Starry Skies," in which he didn't sell one thing. And he had Matta and, well, he had them all there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, Matta was sort of difficult, wasn't he? I mean, he was in such disfavor amongst certain Americans.

MR. JACKSON: Yea, uh huh [Affirmative], he probably still is. [Laughter]

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what happened, I mean in showing any of the Romantics, for example, people like Berman, a-

MR. JACKSON: Well, he just did it, that one show I think, and then he did a show of Cocteau and Berard, and then I don't know exactly when he did the first show. After Julian Levy, he did Joseph Cornell, all the romantic things of the ballerinas, and the singers, the Lobster Ballet, the Swan Lake, the [Inaudible], the [Inaudible], the Nellie Brown, the Pharmacy, and the Thimble Forest, and the Pipe-that was one of the first pipes and-those are the ones I remember-and a chateau with mirrors in the window-

MR. CUMMINGS: Ah yes, in the window.

MR. JACKSON: And, I remember it was all draped in toile, you know, that they use for ballerina skirts. Joe used to love sweets.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh yes, macaroons.

MR. JACKSON: And Iolas used to get them from the Greek pastry shop and Joe would come and Iolas would play with Joe all afternoon, telling him stories about singers and actors and actresses, and dancers, and feeding him all these sweet things, and Joseph with this hair like -

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, right. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: And for hours they would stay in that back room in the gallery, and Jo Jo would be there.

MR. CUMMINGS: He got very friendly with Matta at one point, didn't he?

MR. JACKSON: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: To me it has always been a strange combination.

MR. JACKSON: Cornell and Matta? Yes. They liked each other very much, I think.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, what was business like in those days? Were there many collectors buying things - you know, the people who would drift in and out of the gallery?

MR. JACKSON: Iolas never seems as if he is conducting a business, not at all. It always looks like anything else but an art gallery because he's always got a crowd of people around him, carrying on, playing, laughing, and drinking coffee. It's more like a Greek-

MR. CUMMINGS: Restaurant. [Laughter]

MR. JACKSON: -coffee shop or something. And it just happens that there would be pictures hanging on the wall, or whatever.

MR. CUMMINGS: Has he always had a group of people around?

MR. JACKSON: Oh yes, he hates to be alone, no matter-he'd go off and get them off the street, or if they came in he'd keep them in the gallery, or something like that you know. And he always wanted a gallery on the first level. That is why he liked the gallery in Paris so much because people just walked in and out, and if he saw someone that amused him, he'd go out and talk to them and have a good time or-I think he just has fun. It's a lot of work for him too afterwards, but he thoroughly enjoyed it. I think he is getting tired now.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did you decided to come work in -

MR. JACKSON: Well, it just seemed the natural thing to do. I mean, I suppose it had a lot to do with my character. It was there, so why don't I go out and do it rather than go out and look or invent something else? You know, take advantage of what's there.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you had no interest in still being involved with the theater?

MR. JACKSON: Oh no.

MR. CUMMINGS: The ballet? Do you go to the dance much?

MR. JACKSON: Once in awhile. It seems to me as if I never danced in my life.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. JACKSON: I've even forgotten most of the terms.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. I mean that so many things have happened in between that-

MR. JACKSON: I go once in awhile but not very often.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you just stop going, or did it taper off?

MR. JACKSON: It tapered off and six months after I stopped, I wanted to go back, but Balanchine said no, which was probably the best favor he ever did me. [Laughter] And so, I settled down.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that life of, you know, living out of the trunks as they say?

MR. JACKSON: Oh, I didn't mind that so much. I enjoyed the time I was doing it on Broadway-that, I loved doing that. I like sort of the night life, of working at night and sleeping part of the day, and having the rest of the day free, and that sort of thing. And, after the theater, going out and eating with friends. Well, that's youth, I suppose- laughing, and not worrying about things. The only thing you worry about is how long the show is going to run and about the next audition you have to go to. And, in the ballet, that was, well, I like that, too. I mean, I liked the traveling. I probably liked the traveling the most, rather than the performing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Really?

MR. JACKSON: Well, I liked the idea of going on stage and all that sort of thing, and going into something-well, I suppose an escape, because it is unreal, the whole thing, and maybe that is what attracted me, too.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's another world. What Broadway shows were you involved in?

MR. JACKSON: Oh, very peculiar ones. One that was quite nice was "Song of Norway" and then one called "Polonaise" with Martha Eggert and Jan Kipura, which they used to call "Ham and Eggert" because he was such a ham on stage, and "Chocolate Soldier" with Billy Gilbert and Keith Andes and-

MR. CUMMINGS: All those people.

MR. JACKSON: All those people. And, a few Broadway-television shows. Some specialists and some Ed Sullivan shows, and I loved it. It was fun. Television was very big because you rehearsed not too much, and then it's over, finished. With Broadway shows, it's doing the same thing, in and out, and that was great fun with your mob scenes on the stage, where you could laugh and just have fun.

MR. CUMMINGS: Carry on.

MR. JACKSON: It was fun; that was all.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the business of doing the same performance over, and over, and over?

MR. JACKSON: Well, I did then but it's not so amusing now. [Laughter] Doing the same performance every day.

MR. CUMMINGS: Maybe that's what happens, you know, really, you have to change at a certain point.

MR. JACKSON: I like the gallery also because (now it is probably less and less) but you can close up and go away for a month or two at least, which is very nice.

MR. CUMMINGS: Hit the holidays, yea.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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