Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Michael Loew, 1973 Oct. 5-12

Funding for the digital preservation of this interview was provided by a grant from the Save America's Treasures Program of the National Park Service.

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 recorded interview with Michael Loew on October 5, 1973. The interview took place at Loew's studio in New York, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the fifth of October, 1973. It's Paul Cummings talking to Michael Loew in his studio, 39 Bond Street. You know, it's interesting, you're, you're a born New Yorker. Very few of the artists seem to be born in New York [City], [they] come from all over the country.

MICHAEL LOEW: They knew of its wealth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. So, um, so what, what part of New York were you born in, whereabouts?

MICHAEL LOEW: I was born, I don't know exactly the street, but it was supposed to be in Upper Harlem somewhere. And, uh, but we lived there for only a short time and then moved from there to a place in Brooklyn, and then we lived in the Rockaways, [Long Island, NY]. Then by the time I was six, or five, we came back to New York in—to Harlem again, except it was near the lower part, around the 90s. So it was closer to [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: And there I started to go to school. My first school was, uh, the Elementary School, around Third Street and 99th Street, places there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like the neighborhood school?

MICHAEL LOEW: That neighborhood, yeah, until we moved to the Bronx. By the time I got to the eighth grade, I think we moved to the Bronx. I'm Jewish in origin, and in those days mostly Jewish people were beginning to move out of that whole tenement district, in that area.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the upper '90s?

MICHAEL LOEW: No, it was the Bronx.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They moved up there?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. Of course, the Bronx was actually in that time, uh, another status in those days, upper status compared to the tenement district down in Flushing, the middle of Harlem, New York, and so forth. Of course, now it's become ghetto again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, it changes round and round. Well, did you have brothers and sisters?

MICHAEL LOEW: I had. I was the oldest, and I had a brother, two sisters, and two brothers. Except for Lily, I was the only one who had a predisposition for going into art. I do have a sister who, uh, who paints and draws fairly well, but she's never taken it up professionally. But she continues to do so, never had a career with it. She's two years my junior.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What's her name?

MICHAEL LOEW: Lily. She used to be married to a poet and a painter. Now she lives alone. And she's had a troubled life. But we're very close. She's been very close to, you know, the whole beginnings here in New York, with our schools, and knows most of the people. She knows [Willem] de Kooning very well and many of the people who teach in New York Studio School. She knows all those people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mercedes [Matter] and that whole gang.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. Uh. Well, how—you know, did you start drawing as a child, or—

MICHAEL LOEW: No.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —how did?

MICHAEL LOEW: My—I was drawing all through my childhood. It was a, it was an eccentricity actually, as compared to all the other kids. In that respect I was—I, I felt isolated, but at the same time I was always singled out as having, you know, some special attribute. They'd say, "Oh, there's that artist." [They laugh.] [Inaudible] artist and be seven, eight, nine, I was already an artist!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. How did your family react towards this?

MICHAEL LOEW: My family fortunately liked the idea of my talents as a kid and, uh, were always ready to show me off to other members of the family as being, you know, having this talent. And they took a great deal of pleasure in it, see, although they were far from being well off. My father was a house painter who then became a baker, and then became a house painter. Well, maybe. Although he made a fairly good living, but it was—we were still stuck in the tenement area. All my life, I mean my early life. I was—the poorest streets of New York, my playground was the streets. My studio was the streets. The graffiti you see now on the subway was on the [inaudible], with colored chalks. And I remember—I was 10 or 11, 12—drawing all over the gutter with colored chalks, doing a whole scene of, uh, World War I.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, my gosh.

MICHAEL LOEW: With battleships, you know, and all kinds of explosions and airplanes. And there wasn't much traffic in those days, you see, and so the street was a true playground in that respect, very safe, except for a horse and wagon might come down.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once in a while. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: We lived in a neighborhood that was between, on one side across First Avenue, an Italian area, and on the west of us towards Second Avenue was an Irish area. We were between. And sometimes you had to run the gauntlet to get to school. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: One way or the other, right?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. [They laugh.] But it was rough, but always in the open somehow. And, uh, and to be brought up on those streets was really to be able to contend with almost anything later in life. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, it does that, I guess. Yeah, makes one inventive.

MICHAEL LOEW: The drugstore man, he was somehow—it was like a cultural center there, because some of the more, more intelligent kids used to hang around and talk with him because he had a college degree, education, and he knew a little bit about life beyond the streets we were in. He had known very well Jo Davidson—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the sculptor.

MICHAEL LOEW: —the sculptor, as a young man, and told me how Jo Davidson studied very hard to get where he was—already he was, had quite a big reputation in England—and how it was possible to, by stint of hard work, to become a known artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember that man's name?

MICHAEL LOEW: The man's name?

PAUL CUMMINGS: From the drug store?

MICHAEL LOEW: The drug store? Gee, that was—I never, you know, it never occurred to me that I ought to remember it, you see. But now that you ask me, it comes close, something like—there's a Bernardi [ph], Bernard something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I was just curious if you'd remember offhand.

MICHAEL LOEW: Anyway, his store was over towards Second Avenue.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did—

MICHAEL LOEW: Anyhow, he—that impressed me very much, you see. That it was possible, you see, it was possible to lift one selves, lift one's self out of such an environment, you see, and get into the world outside and do something. It seemed impossible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he served like a window for you then?

MICHAEL LOEW: He, he served as a window. He served as a, oh, as a sort of, kind of a beacon where I could—and he was lighting up the parts of the world that, which were all vague to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you travel around the city as much as children seem to do today when you were that age?

MICHAEL LOEW: I did a lot of—I did traveling, my travel, yes. You walked to Central Park. I used to go a great deal to Central Park and enjoy the beauty of the park, the lake, and, uh, and go to the Metropolitan Museum [of Art]. In fact, my first trip to the Metropolitan Museum was with my father, who felt that since, I was so interested in art he was going to show me his particular choices in art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How old were you then, would you say?

MICHAEL LOEW: I was right about maybe 10 or 9, maybe. And I was quite surprised that my father even had such an interest and I admired him more than ever, because he took me to the Metropolitan Museum. We went to this one particular room where there was a painting that, that was ostensibly an Impressionist painting. I did not recognize it as such then, you see, but one that, one that was done I think by an American Impressionist. The colors were much darker than the French Impressionists. And upon close inspection things looked very vague. Things looked vague. And my father said to me, "See, it's very difficult to make out what's going on in this painting. But if you walk back with me," and then we walked back about a few steps, he said, "See, now you can see what's going on." And I thought that was really wonderful, that something like that could happen. It was a piece of magic to me. I thought—it was one of my prides to have been able to see this wonderful piece of magic, you see. And so that was a very, you know, bright moment in my life, it seemed, at least then anyway. At any rate, I remember my father very much for that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. Did you go to the museum after that very often?

MICHAEL LOEW: After that I would go periodically to the museum. And it took me a long time to get familiar with what was going on in the museum. It was very peculiar pictures and the various rooms with different kinds of art. And by the time I began going to art school the picture became a little clearer. I started going to—shortly after graduating from high school, and then only at night—the Art Students League. During the day I had a job.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did, how did you pick the League?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, I had this, I found this job after high school—I answered an ad in the newspapers—as a stained class apprentice. I brought my drawings to this place, and the man liked the, liked these drawings. He says I have the job as a stained glass apprentice. I had a very vague idea of what stained glass was all about, but it was—it struck my imagination when he said, "Well, you know, you'll be great, you're going to be into this." So at least I was, you know, possibly functioning as an artist, and better doing that than running as a messenger for Con Edison or some other places, which I had done. So I felt as if I had achieved something already.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And using your talents, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: I used my talent, although it wasn't being put to real, to best use, but nonetheless it was being used. So I met someone there around my age, and he said to me that he goes to the Art Students League at night, and he draws from a model. I say, "Gee, that's wonderful. I was looking for something like that. I've never drawn from a model." So one night we went. And, uh, I don't know whether you remember the model, Suzie [ph]. Well, I don't know whether anyone ever told you about the model, Suzie.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I've heard about her.

MICHAEL LOEW: She is supposed to be quite a character. And, uh, that—now she was in that very class that we walked into. She was the first nude female I'd ever seen, and she was sitting there in Nicolaïdes' class, Nicolaïdes, the artist. His class was filled. He must have had about 50 students in that class. He was one of the most popular instructors in school. Susan was sitting with her back to the door when we walked in. And I wasn't in more than a minute when she suddenly turned around and said, "You! You don't belong here! You shouldn't be coming in here to peek." And I turned, and I flushed red, you know, but I stood my ground as if, well, you know, uh, I hadn't even heard her. And she was great and I walked out of there. I said, "Oh, boy, who the hell is she?" [Laughs.] This, they told me a little later. Then later after I joined the school, it wasn't long before I became a monitor, and I had to select models, and so she and I became [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who did you study with there at the League?

MICHAEL LOEW: My first instructor was a man by the name of—a fine man, a fine, I thought he was a fine artist, too—Richard Lahey.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Richard Lahey was one of these people who was very good with beginners.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way, would you say?

MICHAEL LOEW: In the sense that he sort of opened to you the whole romance of art, you see. I mean, he wasn't, you know—who was this fellow who was so good with anatomy again, at the league?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [George] Bridgman, [inaudible], Bridgman?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, there's people like that. I mean, he wasn't one of those kinds of artists, you see. He was a—he had a great love for French painting, for instance, and the Impressionists. When he talked about, uh, when he talked about Renoir, and Manet, and Monet, and [Jeannette] Koczela, his, his mouth would water. He gushed. Just to listen to him was like being transported to [laughs] Never Never Land. And so it was very good for a beginner. It opened up, uh, painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You never made paintings before this, had you? Just the drawings here and there?

MICHAEL LOEW: Little paintings, copies, uh, rarely anything of my own, sure, what I could see. I was pretty good making drawings of people. A lot of things, you know, I did through my head. So we had a model there. I did a great deal of drawing, and also he wanted us to paint. So for the first time we started to paint in my, this particular class. And I had some great people. Some of them are dead. David Smith was one of the students there. David Smith. They were very close with that family; we had the whole group, David Smith, Lucille Corcos, and her husband [Edgar] Levy. [Inaudible.] Do you know these people?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some of them, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, you know her and David Smith.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: Lucille Corcos died about two months ago now. Uh. There was another one. Oh, she was great, yeah. She was unbelievable. I mean, she was a very well-known painter. At that time she was painting the largest canvases in the class. She'd come walking in. You didn't see her, you saw canvases. [They laugh.] And, uh. What was her name? Then she became well known in later years working with various materials, very abstract. Oh, layers of glass, stuff like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Oh, [inaudible] Ferrera [ph].

MICHAEL LOEW: Maybe. Maybe. Maybe. We were all—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was quite a group.

MICHAEL LOEW: A wonderful close group that was. Every other evening or so, every evening we were there each week. See, this was five evenings a week. It was not like you take a course, you see, and we'd take it every Monday or Tuesday or something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: This was every day.

MICHAEL LOEW: This was every evening, see, from seven, or eight, to ten-thirty. And we went at it hammer and tongs. This was, this was it!

PAUL CUMMINGS: And a good long day for you, wasn't it, working in the daytime?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, the energy was all there. Yeah, we all had the energy. David, at that time, I think he was working in some kind of a foundry, or he was working as a steel worker, I'm not sure. But whatever it was, it was very heavy work usually. He didn't do any sculpture then, he was still mostly bronze. We all loved Richard Lahey. We thought he was wonderful. And he encouraged me very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like the League as a place—

MICHAEL LOEW: The League in those days was a very, very exciting place to be in. We all sneered at the

daytime students, because we thought they were. You know, just too rich to be able to do any work there. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Marvelous.

MICHAEL LOEW: So, uh, anyone, you know, worth his salt was really—he had a job every day, and he did his studying at night, and so we did have a fine, fine bunch of people at night. We'd meet in the lounge, and we'd have some real hot discussions down there, or we'd be taking off to the Village somewhere and drink wine after school. We had good times, you see. We were serious. We had a good time. We had our pranks, many pranks. [They laugh.] We wrecked the Childs Restaurant one night after a big party. Fifth Avenue. It was crazy, the things we did, and yet somehow we kept working. [Inaudible] Surrealists. The Surrealists carried on in Paris. Well, that's how young people do carry on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, you went to the League for what, about three years?

MICHAEL LOEW: That was, uh, it was only three years I think, a little over three years, or three-and-a-half years maybe. Then after Lahey I went to Boardman Robinson. He was a great teacher, too. But he was like an antidote to Richard Lahey; he wasn't so much of a manic. He was more of a philosopher and a great draftsman.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it about his drawings that appealed to people so much then?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, he, uh, had a great love for Giotto, yeah, Piero della Francesca. Mostly Giotto, he loved the work of Giotto, and in his own work, the real work that he did, he recaptured that, you know. He was quite an influence. But the way Giotto marbled things, and the way Giotto would arrange compositions. There were places in his studio, when he was working on various commissions at that time, he was working on the Kaufman department store commission, in his studio, [inaudible]. And some of the people from Richard Lahey's class came to Boardman Robinson. Then after Boardman Robinson, while I was there, I think [inaudible] came, came to visit. He had come from Europe, having studied with Hans Hofmann. He came to the League for a series of lectures. This was already late '28-'29, '28. And, uh, he set that place on fire. His lectures were really packed, and, you see, he was talking about Cubists and structuring your painting through use of planes, well something happened, to most of us this was brand new. I attended very diligently all these lectures. His classes changed a great deal for me. I had already gotten a scholarship to go to Tom Benton's class during the day. Of course, I had given up my job. I had a little money; I gave it up. But I couldn't take that more than about two periods.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really, why?

MICHAEL LOEW: To paint that dramatically.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] He certainly is. Still. [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: I think Pollock was there then. His brother was there, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Charles?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. I'm not sure whether they were both there at the same time. One of them was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start going in the day?

MICHAEL LOEW: To where?

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start going in the daytime to the League?

MICHAEL LOEW: It was after my third year. And I—what happened was the last—it was the end of the spring semester. It was the beginning of the summer, I think. Yeah, it was the summer session I started to go. But then I had, and this is what I had, I had the scholarship at the time then, you know. I went for seven weeks. Then I heard of a monitorship that was open in Gloucester, Mass, the Thurn School of Modern Art. Ernest Thurn was looking for a monitor to prepare the school, and it amounted to getting there, a place to sleep. So I applied, right, and I got the job. And I chucked everything, and his private students were saying you're insane. Now, I would have the whole summer to myself. If I don't become an artist now, I never will. And it was my—I really felt I was launching myself. I got drunk, you see. I didn't even care whether I even had a job with him. It seemed that the only thing that matter now was that, you know, I keep working in this period.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was that summer like?

MICHAEL LOEW: That was an amazing summer for me. As a matter of fact, that was the most, uh, that was one of the highlights of my life was the summer. The school catered mostly to a lot of middle-aged teachers from Midwest kind of places. How he ever got them to come to his school was, I suppose, through all kinds of

advertisements. Thurn was a great guy. He knew how to, uh, project Hans Hofmann; he was his, like, alter ego.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Used to [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: He almost—he even had a bunch of, he adopted many of the characteristics of Hans Hofmann, á l'américaine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, he was very good, and also he was a very handsome man, and he attracted all these women. One of the women, Saidie A. May, I'm not sure just what the attraction was there. It could have been eventually many things. Saidie May, you've heard of her—okay. She backed the school; she gave money to him. And she also studied with him. She had studied with him and studied with Hans Hofmann too, and so she knew him there, and she knew the others, like [inaudible]. But she was very close to Hans Hofmann—to, uh, Ernest Thurn. She was also close to Alfred Jensen, who was in Europe, in Paris at the time, and who disliked the whole idea of her coming back to lend her support to Ernest Thurn, see. He was very jealous of Ernest Thurn. I don't blame him. He felt he had a, you know, he felt he had first hold on Saidie May. So, I knew a little about Saidie May. I was an innocent about all this. I found out about this later on. I kept to my own business. As a matter of fact, I found a girl. For the first time I had a real love affair, and I was going to explain why. I was—I could sure break it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She was a great start. That was a great summer, huh?

MICHAEL LOEW: Terrific! And she was a great girl, and, uh, but I worked hard in the day, you see. I was working hard to get to the evening. [Laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did you do for him in the school?

MICHAEL LOEW: In his school I arranged the easels, swept the floor, and also, now and then, assisted him when the classes got crowded. I found I was a pretty good teacher, too, after a while. Some of the—there was a—there were a couple of people who were women who liked my style, and they'd ask me to give private lessons to them. So that was nice. Uh, Saidie May kind of watched me from the distance all this time. And sometime about, oh, almost, near the end of the summer she came and had a chat with me and asked me if I was, asked me if I would be interested in a fellowship in Europe. I said, "Very much so." She said she had in mind for me to study in Paris where I would really, you know, it would help me very much in my art. She said she had been watching me, she thought, you know, I had all kinds of great possibilities. I said, "Great. I'd love to go to Paris to study. Who wouldn't?" Well, she said, what she had in mind was this: that I was to prepare myself. I said, "What do you mean?" She says, "First, French is a wonderful language, and you should know something about it, because in that way you would be able to really assimilate French culture, French art, and so forth." I didn't like that idea so much, because I didn't, I thought art had—was its own language, I didn't need to learn some other language. However, that was her idea. She had ideas of that sort, you see. She would—and, uh, you'd go along with it. So she said, "You should wait and study a while," and then possibly in a year or so, or six months, uh, I would be ready. So the summer was over. I went back to New York, and I didn't know what to do. I was sort of between and betwixt. I had to prepare myself to go to Europe. I didn't feel like studying French that much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

MICHAEL LOEW: I felt more like, you know, just hanging around, painting, drawing, and things like that, you see. And another thing, I was worried about money. I had none. I had to start paying some, so I messed around with jobs. Anything. This was already October, and then around November this cablegram came from Paris. She was back in Paris with Jensen, and she said, she says, "Apply for passport immediately. We decided it would better that you come to Paris now and not postpone it. We'll tell you why when you get here." [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Great.

MICHAEL LOEW: So I ran and got my passport, and I sailed on the *Olympic* [inaudible]. If you look, it doesn't exist anymore. It was a rough voyage. Jensen was there standing with Saidie May to greet me. He looked at me very suspiciously. I don't know why he looked so suspicious, because after all I was still wet behind my ears. I didn't know anything about, about the things that were going on, and the rivalries between different people in order to get someone to be interested in you and all. This was going on all the time in Europe.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, still. [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Especially in those days. So I stopped in the hotel, the Rue de Saint-Paul, a five-flights walkup. Got me a nice paint box, a decent paint box. I still have it. And I signed up with the, uh, ecole de [Academie] Scandinave.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick that? Was there any special reason or?

MICHAEL LOEW: Jensen was going there. He said that was the best school to go to. [Charles] Despiau was teaching there, [George-Charles] Dufresne was teaching there, uh, people he admired very much. I was ready to listen to anybody.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the whole new world, right?

MICHAEL LOEW: A new world to me. I went to the—it's not ecole Scandinave, it's called something else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Academie, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Academie Scandinave.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: So I started—I started going there. I should tell you a little story first. New Year's Eve. Marc Rousseau [ph], [inaudible] yeah. Saidie May was giving him a party at her hotel on Rue Raspa [ph]. Rue Raspa. Right. This spot was called the Hôtel de Raspa. And Jensen was there. Schempp, Ted Schempp. Do you know who Ted Schempp is? Nobody knows—

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've heard about him, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: You been talking to Jensen?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I have known him, too, for a while. [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Now Jensen may, uh, will tell you a great deal of things that went on between, you know, Saidie May, our group, and so forth. I don't know whether he's told you anything at all. I have told stories about, you know, this group to many people. They think it's a great story [laughs], that if anything like that could have happened, see. Saidie May and all her protégés gathered together. We went down to, uh, to Africa. That was the whole idea for my coming to Paris, so that we could go to Africa in February, North Africa, and take advantage of the, you know, warm weather there and get away from the winter in Paris and everywhere else. We went on a painting safari, you see. Let me tell you about this little—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The party, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: —party, this little dinner party. So, uh, Schempp, Ted Schempp, Jensen, myself, Saidie May. There was somebody else, because somebody was missing, yes. Max Schnitzler was missing. Max, I had discovered this painter when I arrived in Paris, three or four years previously, and he was discovered by Jensen, starving himself. And he, uh, he told Saidie May about it. So Saidie put him on his feet and bought some of his work. Jensen admired Schnitzler very much. He felt he was the greatest, and Jensen never went out of his way to praise anybody, but he really admired Schnitzler. Because Schnitzler was really [inaudible].

MICHAEL LOEW: Excuse me. [Inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. No.

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's all new. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Max Schnitzler. Have you heard about him?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Vaguely, and I cannot—I'm trying to place him, but I can't.

MICHAEL LOEW: In those days Max Schnitzler—this I found out later—the name is [inaudible], and I sat there [inaudible]. Max Schnitzler was one of the most colorful people in Montparnasse. He would hold court at the Café du Dôm. He had a thick Jewish accent. I think he was born in Austria and as a young man came, or very, very young, he came to America. He worked in the embroidery shop and made enough money to go back to Paris and study, do work. He had been living there about four years, and his money was running out. He needed a sale. And during that time he had made a new reputation for himself in Montparnasse as a [inaudible] and colorful character. He walked about with his overcoat slung over his shoulders like a cloak. It was an old frumpy-looking

overcoat, but he made that overcoat look like it was a really handsome cloak, hanging loose, striding with a cane. How old was he then? Maybe 34 or 35. He thought of himself as a poet, as well as a painter. He didn't write poetry. He thought of himself as a man of the world, too, as a true cosmopolitan. Uh, Jensen admired that characteristic in him. Whether it was because he saw it in him, or whether he really, whether it was because Max acted out the part so well that he believed it, you see. This is a thing about Jensen, that with all, you know, a native shrewdness, there was a lot of naiveté about him. It's a very strange mixture there. And so, Jensen and the others said—and May—she said, "You know, you have never met Schnitzler. So why don't you go to his hotel and fetch him, and tell him, 'You're missing a very good dinner,' and to hurry up before it gets too cold." So he lived down in the Rue Desseaux [ph], on the fifth or sixth floor of this building that was all full of prostitutes, it seemed to me. We're not going to let him to starve. She said, "I'm your harlot. Come in." And he, when he saw me, he said, "Oh, I know you. You're Michael. You're Michael. I heard about you." And he's lying stark naked in bed right next to the door, and this is in dead winter. You know how it is in—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It gets chilly.

MICHAEL LOEW: French buildings are usually cold. And he has a box of talcum powder in his hand, and he's rubbing his skin with it. I said, "What's—" And I say, "Gee, I'm don't want to annoy you, but [they laugh] you're supposed to be down for dinner. They want you there." He says, "Me, eat? I won't." He stuttered a bit. "I won't touch anything. No food. You see that Avalon table. I've been looking at it for a whole week." I said, "Why?" He said, "I'm fascinated." I said, "Why?" "For my health." I said, "Are you sick?" He said, "Am I sick?" He shows me his tongue. Of course, it's all white. He hasn't been eating for a week. [They laugh.] I said, "You look healthy to me." He says—and he stuttered. Then I realize he was trying to show me how his bones were cracking.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: And then I realize this guy was real hard to comprehend. I said, "You know, you'd do yourself much better getting dressed and coming down to eat with us." He's going—"I'm going to lie here until I get rid of this sickness." I say, "I don't know what sickness you're talking about." He says, "I have all kinds of things wrong with me, and I want to get rid of them." [They laugh.] That's true, he'd been living in this cold basement for so long, his bones were probably aching all over and stuff that has to do with food, and possibly for the first time he was eating well. You know, this is [inaudible]. So, [inaudible]. I went back.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the talcum powder for?

MICHAEL LOEW: Pardon?

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the talcum that he used?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, the idea was to—see, he was really massaging himself. This is a warm massage, and talcum powder was a way of making it easier, you know, to get on your skin that way, see. So, then, he was okay. About 10 days later we, uh—no, about a month later, first of February, we packed off for North Africa.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So did Saidie.

MICHAEL LOEW: Saidie May traveled in the first class. We—Jensen, Schnitzler, Schempp, and myself—second class, sometimes third class. And we went down to Marseilles to the boat on a train. It was a weird journey for me, because, uh, I was trying to get myself acclimated to the new food, the wine. I never drank wine that much. I got so sick. Anyway, I arrived, we arrived, and I was so dizzy they had to carry me to the hotel, I was so sick. [They laugh.] I won't go into where the sickness was, but you can imagine. I was that sick for about a week. Then I came out of bed, first thing, and I—the very first thing that really hit me was the smell, the odor, of camel dung. You know, it was like being transported from one place to another, you know, nothing in between, sort of. [Inaudible.] [They laugh.] Camel dung! And it was like now, now I knew that we were, you know, this was my life. This is a way of getting yourself reoriented. This was after. And also there was this kind of stench of things that were rotting. There were oysters nearby. You gradually get used to it. You get used to anything. You know, I got used to much worse than that when I was overseas in the Pacific.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do there, in North Africa? Was this just a—

MICHAEL LOEW: Every morning we went out to paint the oasis. Sadie May came with her maid, who carried her paint box from her first class hotel. And we carried, of course, our own. We walked into the oasis. It was about a 20, 25-minute walk. We would find a spot to paint ruins. It's not country in the oasis. I think actually it was great.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you spend there?

MICHAEL LOEW: You know the guy who—who didn't go through that whole rigmarole with Schnitzler. He just took six steps from the hotel with his paint box. He found a—he planted his easel, and he never moved from

that spot. He never went, he never, he never went to another spot. That was his spot; he worked it the six weeks we were there. And the only way he moved was by moving circularly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, he'd just look around a little?

MICHAEL LOEW: For his work. Beautiful paintings. We were supposed to spend more than six weeks, two months, but through a series of incidents, which were very almost tragic, and I'm not sure whether I ought to go into it, uh, we had to—and Schempp, Schnitzler, and myself had to curtail the two-month sojourn to six weeks. We left Jensen and May behind. We went off to the South of France, Saint Paul.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that though? A battle royal, or something?

MICHAEL LOEW: Something happened, a very unfortunate piece of business took place. And I'm not sure I should, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it might explain a lot of things about this.

MICHAEL LOEW: Beg your pardon?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It might explain why you went to the South of France and what happened afterwards.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, all I can say is this, that Schempp and I, who, you know, we understood each other very well. We were Americans, that is, born native American back then, and so we roomed together, see. It was as if when we—as Americans we seemed to understand each other. We had more in common, let's put it that way, you see, although I felt I had much more in common with Schnitzler. But Schnitzler and Jensen roomed together then. You know, it was one of those hotel rooms with two beds on either side, and a table for two—breakfast was served to you. Good morning. We shared the toast, we shared the coffee. Well, it seemed that Schempp felt he could do that better with me, I think. [They laugh.] I wouldn't!

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

MICHAEL LOEW: He hadn't seen that, that Jensen, that Jensen and Schnitzler, who hadn't thought about that aspect of it, because they're not that, how shall I say, insane about things of that sort as Schempp seemed to be, now that I think about it. Schempp was a man who was concerned about—he didn't touch things. That's why he was good as a businessman there. Gave up, became an entrepreneur. Sure, he's a rich man now, buying and selling art. Right? You know about him?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not recently, but I remember, you know, I've heard his name before.

MICHAEL LOEW: So Schempp—so Schnitzler and Jensen he didn't like living with each other. They just couldn't stand each other. They were very close friends, but they just couldn't stand each other, next to each other in bed that way. Schnitzler couldn't stand the way Jensen would get up in the morning, without even looking to see what kind of a day it was. He says, "What kind of vulgarian?" This is Jensen. "He doesn't even go to the window. He starts doing exercises." And Jensen would say, "What kind of vulgarian are you? You spit all over the place," which he did. Which he always did. Jensen at least was clean. But Schnitzler thought he had a filthy mind somehow, which was the worst thing you could have. So, I can't see Jensen with a filthy mind. He was very naïve about a lot of things. Well, there was a falling out at the table, they were—a dinner table. We were at the dinner table. Jensen scolded Schnitzler for his manners. See, Jensen was really trying to become a more mannered man. He felt that because he had a terrible upbringing—he claimed to have been brought up by Grace, an Indian maid who initiated him into sex when he was only six months old, or something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Didn't wait long. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: And sailors who proceeded to, while he was a sailor, who would continue to initiate him in different ways. He, he had a rough life. But other than that, I think he had a very—his mind was not that, you know, [inaudible]. He was endeavoring to become a gentleman, in many ways. He started to become a very cultured man of the world, see. He loved, uh, Goethe, Beethoven. He thought it was great, the ideal. Schnitzler hated Goethe. He hated all those Germans, you see. So it seemed like an impossible friendship, and it proved to be so when we were living together. Are we running out of tape?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: That and other things caused a terrible disruption there in Taza, and especially when Schnitzler called Jensen an ass-licker, because Jensen tried to rub, you know, rub with Saidie Mae in a manner that was very distasteful to all of us, see, in our eyes, see, you understand. In his eyes, he was being loyal and appreciative. So the disruption took place. We were all so young, at least—I've seen it be even—yes, I was younger than these others but they were so much more young, because I could sense what was going on, and

they couldn't, see. They were so extremely egotistical in their ways. They couldn't, you know, beyond their own, beyond their own noses. Anyway. It was sad. I sided with them for the reason that I felt I didn't belong with Jensen. No question about that. So I told Mrs. May I would be leaving with the others. I felt it was an impossible arrangement now, with all the feeling that was stirred up, see. She felt very bad about it, too, because she wondered whether I was doing the right thing.

[END OF TRACK]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side two.

MICHAEL LOEW: Starting again?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Schempp, Schnitzler, and myself made it to Saint Paul. We felt like birds released out of a cage.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was Saidie May's reaction to your departure?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, she didn't mind the others so much, because her arrangement with them was different than her arrangement with me. They weren't on a stipend, more or less. Now, they were—she would buy their paintings, but I would have a stipend, see. I would get a check from her every month. She said to me that, uh, she liked me very much, and I liked her. I didn't like Jensen and her, see, at the same time. She seemed to be like, uh, part of Jensen already, and Jensen part of her, and that was difficult to take, especially at that time. Jensen has changed quite a bit since, now that he has a wife, and he's married. But in those days, no one could ever picture such, you know, with Jensen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. Jensen has gone through quite a transformation. So she said to me, I mean, Saidie said, Saidie May said to me, "You sure you're doing the right thing, Michael?" I said, "I don't know whether it's the right thing, but I know I have to do it." So she said, "Okay, if you feel you have to do it." So, we went to Saint Paul. Why Saint Paul, I don't know. I didn't know. Schnitzler's idea. He had great influence over us. Over everybody, see, in those days. He, he spoke with such conviction about everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: People just believed him?

MICHAEL LOEW: You believed him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: So. Saint Paul was beautiful. Oh, especially in those days. I don't know what it's like now. It was a great place. My checks still came from Saidie May, so that was great. We did some painting in Saint Paul, and we walked around the countryside. We would climb the mountain and back, although Schempp wouldn't go up it. Schnitzler was, I mean, mountains to him were challenges, so he, you know, he challenged me to go, and so I went. We'd slash our names on a big wooden cross at the top. We found out later that we went up the wrong way. We could have gone up very easily if we had known that. [They laugh.] But this is Schnitzler. It was always—you know, if there was an easy way and a hard way, he'd pick the hard way. So. Schnitzler was a man of many moods. He was already beginning to—it was as if through him was passing a crisis that Europe was going through. You could see it going through him. 1929 and '30, questionable years, years when all the expatriates were getting ready to leave Europe, a year when Hitler was already beginning, beginning to have his voice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

MICHAEL LOEW: In Munich, Germany. There was a kind of lull taking place, like as if we were staunched. Schnitzler was feeling all this, because he was more political than all of us, you see. It wasn't so much that he was political—he just felt things. A sort of crisis was affecting him as a person as if it was affecting him physically, mentally. He felt he had to go back to the States. He couldn't stay in Europe anymore. He had to go back to something that was healthy again, because we felt everything in Europe was, was going down to a bad end. He looked towards California.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From the South of France.

MICHAEL LOEW: He looked towards California as a place where he would regain all his mental and physical health, because of the sun there, see. As for the South of France, he felt that had its day. So he left. Shortly after we got back to Paris, he left and went back to America. And then I heard that the Greyhound bus went out to California and when he saw California he stayed on the bus, and he came right back with the same bus.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: And then he wanted to go to Israel, because he heard that maybe there he could redeem himself somehow in every way, the spirit, and everything else. And when he saw Israel he went right back again. So he finally ended up in Coney Island.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Boy, now that's an alternative you'd never expect. [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Basking in the sun. He couldn't stand Israel, because Israel had everything American, the worst features of the American, uh, image. He couldn't stand it. And yet America, there were things about America that had great appeal to him, you see, and so he could make certain choices all the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you stay in Europe that first time?

MICHAEL LOEW: I stayed on. I went back to school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: At the Academie Scandinave?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like—

MICHAEL LOEW: And then left in early July to go with Schempp down to Cagnes-sur-Mer, and we lived there. We got a little house together, and we lived in this house. Schempp liked living with me because, uh, it, you know, we could share expenses. It would be nice. And I was easy to take. When he traveled—easy to take me to things. Okay, [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like being a student in Paris and going to the Academie there?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, being a student, it was in crowded classes. I felt a little bit like—I had already had all this, see. And I wanted to get it over with as fast as possible, you see. I was getting tired of school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Did you have criticism once a week?

MICHAEL LOEW: There was criticism, uh-huh, Dufresne. Dufresne. Oh, no, wait. There was—not in summer school. Not Dufresne, but Friesz. [Othon] Friesz. He was great. But he knew Jensen very well, too. Jensen knew Harold [ph]. Jensen [inaudible] at that time. He gave us criticism. He was pretty good. But I was very tired of school. And, uh, I wanted to be on my own, painting on my own. And it cost me, whatever, you know. Maybe the school would have helped out so you could—more so than being on your own. But I felt it necessary. And so my work improved by slow degrees, on my own. And, uh, there were other people of my age, or a little older, on their own. In the south of France I saw many and became friends with many. At that time Lanny Schulwitz [ph] was a kind of [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. I don't know. That's when I first met Lanny Schulwitz. And he and I didn't hit it off at first at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was perverse, that's all. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Right, perverse. He looked at me. And when we first met he said, "And why did you come to Europe?" As if I was some wild immigrant from the West.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. One can just see him doing that, looking at you.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. So, we didn't hit it off, but I figured he was a—he meant well, but he had funny ways of saying it. And there was Victor Thaw. I don't know whether you remember him, know of him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Victor Thaw, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Victor Thaw.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

MICHAEL LOEW: You must have—

PAUL CUMMINGS: A dealer.

MICHAEL LOEW: You've heard of a lot of these people. Now, Victor Thaw was, uh, quite a rambunctious fellow, individual, then. He probably still is. There was a lot I [inaudible] for years. But he conducted himself like a real master, you know. He adopted attitudes as if, you know, he was a, he had been a close chum of Manet, Renoir, and all the greats, see. He gave, you know, quite an air about himself. But when he was in the presence of Schnitzler, he calmed down a bit, because he sensed that Schnitzler was more the real thing than he was, although Schnitzler was putting on an act too. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: We've had a lot of fun with all of these. That's [inaudible].

MICHAEL LOEW: Now Schempp was—with all of Schnitzler's airs—he liked Schnitzler, because he felt he was a good painter. Schempp noticed. Victor, he felt was a phony, that he wasn't a good enough painter to put on airs like that, you see. But I didn't think Victor was a phony. I thought Victor was simply, you know, trying to get along in his world, you see, in his way, see. And his art wasn't that bad. There was art that was much worse. Schempp was a very, a very snobby guy, you see. He thought—he looked at Thaw as if he was dirt. Well, of course, he wasn't really dirty. He had a bathtub. He and his wife, you know, lived in a place there in [inaudible], had nothing—they had no way of bathing. He asked me if he can come use our bathtub. I said, "Sure. Anytime." And when Schempp heard about it, he says, "What the hell is the idea? I don't want that guy around me." I said, "Let him get a bath." He said, "I don't want him around." It was, oh, it was Hunter, the musician, who had a house nearby, George Hunter. He couldn't stand Thaw. He had, he had this big party for Peggy Hopkins Joyce, who he was trying to get interested in him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of a character was he?

MICHAEL LOEW: Who?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.]

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible] was a very energetic—a bundle, you know, he was like a bundle of energy, moving around. He played the piano that way, the piano bounced, even. He could bounce. He had a very, very boyish-looking face. Well, he was young, too, of course. Maybe, maybe 10 years older than I was then, or more. I couldn't understand all the admiration that was going his way, because he looked like, you know, the guy around the block. He looked like too familiar a personality to me, see. But nevertheless he had this talent, great talent. So Peggy Hopkins Joyce came to this party with her whole entourage of people, men, both men and women both, who looked a little bit homosexual, but I don't know. That was her little entourage, you see. And Victor Thaw was not invited to this party. [Milton] Avery and Conyers [ph] were invited. [Inaudible] I think the fellow was being ostracized, you see. And, of course, he said, "To hell with all of you. I'm going to this party, since everyone else is," and so he went. Because he had met Peggy Hopkins Joyce once before, you see. He felt then he had to go see her again, and he hated her guts. And, uh, she draped herself over the piano while George played, and Victor glared at her from the corner where he was sitting there. You could see that any moment something was going to happen. And it did happen. I mean, out in the garden, uh, Peggy is talking to Bessky [ph], Bestik [ph], Becky, George Armstrong's [ph] wife, who was Hungarian. She was Hungarian. Peggy, in her best English accent, is saying to Becky, "How could you, a European, marry an American?" You know, the snobbishness in those days. It sounds silly now. And Victor heard this and says—jumps out [from] beyond the tree. Underneath, around through the garden there. He jumps out. It's really dark. And he comes in front of Peggy Hopkins Joyce and says, "Who the hell are you to talk that way?" So she looks at him, "How dare you!" Heard him say, "Bah!" [Inaudible.] She gives him a whack in the face. So the party was over. George is stamping around, you know, asking, trying to get Victor to apologize. It was so quiet you could hear a pin drop. I guess she had a good reason for not wanting to invite him. I mean, it was as if Victor had busted up George's chance. He had, he had her there so she could finance this opera he was trying to get over. In fact, the opera was about her. It was, it had something to do—she was part of the fee. At least, uh, some piece of jewelry she had, what was it, the Hope diamond? Yeah, it was about her, you see. And here she was getting ready to leave this party with her entourage, Peggy—and George was going crazy. He says, "You got to apologize to her!" He says, "Okay, George. I'll do it for you," he says. Victor walks up, and as she's coming out of the garden, out of the garden, into the house, and heading towards the door, he says to her, "Peggy, I guess because of George, I'm needing—" He didn't finish that sentence. She gave him another whack. [They laugh.] You know, this is work. Keeping the Rolls Royce right outside the house. We all climbed in, and off we went down those cobblestones, you know, English cobblestones. We all thought this was very funny.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A great [inaudible] here. This is incredible.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh. I think later somehow they got together, George and Peggy Hopkins Joyce. That was one of the big incidents in that summer, except for another party that, uh, uh, there must have been about, maybe, uh, at least 50 or 60 people there. Everybody. Connie [ph] was there. Lewis [Norman] and Hale Woodruff. You know Hale Woodruff?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I know who he is.

MICHAEL LOEW: He was there at that time. Oh, any number of artists. Victor. It was a great party. All together different than George's party, but it wasn't in order to cater to somebody. This was all—oh, we were going to have a great time, and we all did. In fact, I think five marriages were broken up, and couples went off on each other, you know, because wives went off on a trip to Austria. My girlfriend—I had a girlfriend—she ran off with somebody. And no one was left in this party at five o'clock, or four o'clock, five o'clock in the morning. [Inaudible] at one end of the table. It's a long table about 12-feet long. It was a banquet table. It looked a little broader than this. I'm at the other end. Now, I was quite—I drank too much wine and stuff, and I was drowsy and falling asleep. Lewis was down at the other end, down at the other end of the table. I said, "I didn't know you were at this party. When did you arrive?" He said, "I've been here all the time." He's sober. I said, "Gee, you must have seen everything that was going on." He said, "Yes." "It was terrible, wasn't it?" "Yes." I said, "Did you drink anything at all?" "No." I said, "Everybody was drunk, and you didn't drink a single thing?" He said, "No." I said, "You must have a lot—you must have seen a hell of a lot, and a lot you don't know about." He said, "Yes." He says, "Come. Come down to the cafe, and we'll have some coffee." I said, "Okay." So the sun was coming up, down below Cagne-sur-Mer, and we had a cafe and croissant. And he says to me, "You know, you never saw my work, and you've been here almost the whole summer." "I saw some sketches." He says, "You never saw my paintings." I said, "Okay, sometime I'll come see them." He said, "Now." I said, "No, I can't even stand on my feet. It's five o'clock in the morning. I've been up all night." He says, "Come now. It's a good time. You got to come now." "I can't climb that hill." He says, "You don't climb. I'll carry you." He carried me up that hill. He says, "I'll carry you." At that time, gosh, he was, he had the strength. I said, "That's foolish."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's very funny.

MICHAEL LOEW: I stood up, and I couldn't quite stand up. As a matter of fact, I felt that I couldn't even walk. He says, "Okay, he says, "I'll carry you." I said, "Okay." So I climbed up on his back, and he carried me! Up the cobblestones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: That was a good 15-minute climb. Then we went into his house, down a couple of stairs. He put me down on this cot and he started to drag out all these paintings of his. But as soon as he put me down on this cot I started to, you know, get drowsy, and I began falling asleep. I think I was asleep, as a matter of fact, because when I woke up he was still bringing out paintings, as if, you know, I was sitting there looking at them all this time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's marvelous.

MICHAEL LOEW: So I, I suddenly realized I'd better look.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of painting was he doing then? I don't remember seeing anything that early of his.

MICHAEL LOEW: They were what he calls crayon paintings. He called them paintings. They were crayon paintings, you see, they had that kind of look like—he worked with, uh, pastel colors then. And I really didn't like them. I thought they were very—too effeminate—see, it's the wrong word to use today. But in those days we used this, without being called a chauvinist pig or something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's the new word. That's interesting, because I think the oldest thing by Lewis [ph] I've ever seen is [inaudible] and that's—

MICHAEL LOEW: What?

PAUL CUMMINGS: The earliest work of his I have ever seen was maybe something from the '40s, never anything —

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, this was '30s, the early phase.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of painting were you doing at this point, all the time running around North Africa, and Paris, and the South of France?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, in the South of France I was lugging my easel out every day. I'd walk a lot to find a spot, and I'd paint it. I'd paint from a scrap book. I had my lunch with me. It was a kind of painting that sort of grows out of French painting. I admired very much mostly Manet and Courbet. Then later—no, it was Monet at that time. I wasn't too clear on the whole technique, as many Americans became, you know, familiar with, even earlier in those years, all the American Impressionists. But they had actually studied with these people, and I was already quite removed from that. Then I was also—I'd become aware of the modern, the modern painters,

Picasso, and Braque, and Matisse. My friend Schempp had great admiration for Matisse and his painting [inaudible]. Some of that had come into my painting. It wasn't very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I'm curious about the time when you were in Paris. Did you go to a few galleries, or the Louvre, and do studies?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. Yes, there was always the museum, the Louvre, and, uh, I was always taught that art [inaudible]. The Louvre was really French, except in the back there was a little—where it'd been kept, in order, in good shape. There was this room filled with Rubens, this tremendous room. There must have been there, it must have had about 35 Rubens paintings in there, paintings, 20 feet high, all full of dust. That's how they kept things in those days. In fact, some of the Frenchmen were so incensed about it, they'd write, "These are the best [inaudible] *Pousson* [ph]."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Imagine, in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The paintings. Fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: Today you'll never see anything like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. That's incredible. Well, you spent, what, a year, or two years abroad then?

MICHAEL LOEW: It was over a year. Maybe a year in the whole—[inaudible]. I came in January. I came in December. Then December went by again, and it was February, March, April, again. Then Saidie May came back from South America with Jensen, and we arranged to meet in the Café du Dôme. And she said to me, without Jensen there, how much she thinks I had gotten out of Europe—she'd seen my work—and how necessary it is to continue, and how, whether I could go back with Jensen, to Majorca, and stay on in Europe. She had abandoned the others already. She doesn't like Schempp. So I said, "It's a beautiful idea, but I don't think it would be good, Jensen and me and you, all together. I don't want to contend with Jensen. He is a—he feels very possessive of you. Not that I want to possess anybody, you see, but he thinks that I want to, because he feels so strongly." He thinks everyone feels that way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Competition.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, because he thinks everyone feels that way. So I said, "I don't think it's a good idea." And that was the end. I mean, I think she was trying to arrange for me to stay on, under such conditions, too, that I accompany them. And I didn't want those conditions. That was the end of that. I felt, too, that, uh, I felt I wanted to get back to the States. I thought Europe was—had played its part. It was no more the place where one could really, you know, get that much out of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did that feeling come from? Was it just from observing what was around, or talking to people?

MICHAEL LOEW: I think the Depression had a great deal to, a great deal to do with that. I think also there was something in the air that, uh, politically, too, you see, that Europe was in for some critical changes at that point, and the fact that many Americans were leaving, and so were Europeans going to Europe—to America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I see.

MICHAEL LOEW: European painters, artists, were already beginning to leave for America. They felt this. So it didn't mean—so it began to lose its attraction for me, and I felt that in New York I would find myself, much more likely than in Europe. I was really looking for myself all the time. It used to seem to me my one big question mark.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And who you are, and what you were going to do, and how? Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: And it seemed that in Europe, uh, I found myself pulled by dozens of different directions, none of which could really—I could really never get a hold of, see. It was like my roots were really in New York. This is where I had to grow, learn to grow, anyway.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had to go away to look at it, to come back there.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. So what, you, what did you do when you came back here?

MICHAEL LOEW: When I came back, I came back right in the middle of the Depression, you know, right—I had, I found myself a cold water flat down on Twelfth Street, East Village. Later I moved in, I found a place with Lee Krasner and Igor Pantuhoff, whom she was married to then, before she met Pollock. And I was living around the East Side then, the East Village, and I became part of the first rent strike when I lived in Paradise Alley.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I heard of that. That was then, uh. Who else was in that? A lot of people lived there, didn't they? Who else have I talked to who stayed there?

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: A painter.

MICHAEL LOEW: Painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Jasper? Jasper?

MICHAEL LOEW: No. No, no. He has a little heart condition [inaudible]. He was living there. Then there was Mike Klein [ph]. I don't know what happened to him. He was living there. Paradise Alley. Quite a number of painters. We had a rent strike, wouldn't pay the rent because we—man, that was. I don't know what he was doing, doing something bad. He didn't fix anything. Everything was leaking everywhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened because of the rent strike?

MICHAEL LOEW: It's all so vague. We didn't pay the rent. We had to do something to get by. I think many of us didn't even have the rent to pay.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it relieved you of that.

MICHAEL LOEW: I lived in this other place, when I lived in this other place, and I was already, I already owed them six months' rent. The landlord came to me, you know, "Punk, do you have your month?" He said, "You're owing me now five months rent. Now you owe me six months rent. When are you ever going to pay?" It was only about $12 a month. I didn't even have that. I said, "Would you stop bothering me? I'm going to—when I have the money, I'll pay it to you." You could say it in those days. Now, once he came around with his wife and daughter, and he said, "Look, you don't have the money, so I'll take a painting." I said, "Okay." So I spread out all the paintings; he took a painting. That became our arrangement. Then I got to do some work. Never did he let—the city would accept a barter. This was the Roosevelt administration. He was, you know, making it possible for artists to somehow survive by creating work for them. First I think he worked with the city to get the initial commissions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was that one of the first of your—

MICHAEL LOEW: Worked for churches, decorated. In fact, I was given a church to do on 54th Street, 54th Street, between Eighth and Ninth. It was the only Catholic, New York Catholic church this side of the Mason Dixon line. That's what I had heard there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I didn't know—what was it? What kind of project was that?

MICHAEL LOEW: We were to repair and redecorate some of these churches that were falling apart, you see. These were city projects. And, this came before the Whitney thing and before the WPA.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was this before the Federal Art Project?

MICHAEL LOEW: Before it was directed by the WPA.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I didn't know that. I've never heard about this.

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was the, who operated it, or whereabouts was it?

MICHAEL LOEW: It was—I don't know who the—it was operated by the city. I don't know exactly who the people were, or what they knew about art. But this is what they were after, see, this kind of functional art, that is, which would help, you know, restore some of the churches that were falling apart, you see. And I was given a crew of people to work with because I had experience with stained glass. Who did I have with me? I had people like—Jose Guerrero. I don't know whether you know about him. He was very active in the artist group in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, right, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: I had Hans Fallada. See, I don't know what he paints. But he became well known at one time for painting [novel] called *Little Man, What Now?*. He became, he became nationally advertised, I guess. He won some kind of [inaudible]. The guy for the lead—[inaudible]—became fairly known, well, he's dead now. You know, if you had, you know, asked me to remember—that was some time ago—see, I would remember, but now it's hard for me to remember other people that were there. I had a crew of about six people, and I had to find ways of keeping them busy, see, so they could collect a check every week, you see. And I had to—they asked me to, to restore the stained glass that didn't exist, as a matter of fact, which is cut-rate stained glass. You make stained glass out of it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Right, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, how to make plain, how to make stained glass without going into the expensive stained glass. This is—because they had real low budgets. So I had to make stained glass, imitation stained glass, looking like stained glass.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you do that?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, I figured out a way of doing it. I took—I got plate, heavy plate glass, put black lines into it, found a kind of paint which, uh, could be very transparent, translucent when applied to plate glass, and over that found a method of antiquing that translucency, you see. So the final effect looked like stained glass. You couldn't tell the difference in that stuff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: But you got to [inaudible] in glass, you see. And I used the biblical subject matter, which I was very familiar with. I'd make it—I went through the whole process, you see, I'd do fresh sketches, cartoons, went on there. Large cartoons to transfer. Then transferred them to the glass and make the, the black lines. Then made the drawing, over the—add the poems, but I made the drawing, like we still had the glass to begin with, see, and made the drawing that goes into it, you know. Painters have brains, too. We all had fun, but [they laugh]. Then the glass went up, you know, about three panels a day, or four. It looked pretty good. I don't know what happened. But the simplest work like that, I don't know what happened. I'd be working. Then, then WPA. I have this. That scared me, because I had a whole lobby. [Jean] Charlot was working in the main lobby. I was working on another lobby, which had much more interesting walls, iron walls, big walls.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was this?

MICHAEL LOEW: This was the—it's now called the Charles E. E. [ph] High School. At that time it was called the Trad Miller [ph] High, a textile high school. But this is all right now the WPA. This is already after the, the Whitney thing where you were being paid so magnificently. They'd just bring you the paint every six weeks or so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the Whitney? That was where—

MICHAEL LOEW: The Whitney thing, it was around—did you hear [about] the Whitney thing? It was called a PWAP [Public Works of Art Project] or something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the Treasury—

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —Department, yeah, right, right, the Treasury project, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, you had to submit paintings to be accepted, and only a limited number were being accepted, and I was one of the fortunate ones. The kind of painting I was doing in those days, it was almost social content painting, of course it almost was social content, but it had somehow—it was being done like a Frenchman might do it, you know, who had been studying, uh, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.]

MICHAEL LOEW: [Laughs.] And Honoré Daumier [ph], that kind of [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, I'm curious. It's very interesting. I've been looking at a lot of things of that, of the sort of early and mid-'30s, and I'm curious about what, you know, you would have talked about with other artists at that point as far as what was going into their paintings, and what the, kind of what their general interests were, and what, you know, as far as the subject matter and images.

MICHAEL LOEW: In those days, uh, this is already the early, you know, middle '30s now. Towards the middle '30s, right. I already had met Bill Dupree. We were friends. There was not that many nights when he sat and

speak. He said that. And Bill, uh, we met on the street. He was carrying at that time in one arm, uh, a book, *Das Kapital*. In the other arm, he had Juliet, who was about this big. That was his girlfriend. Three years later he married her, but anyway. Twenty years later he's still been attached. I got to know him in the, uh, service. I used to see him in Hollywood, when I came in [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Tell us where he's been—

MICHAEL LOEW: He just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in the '40s.

MICHAEL LOEW: Huh?

PAUL CUMMINGS: He was there in the '40s.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, he played jazz. A nice man. "What you got going?" He was a nice man, he talked. He talked [inaudible] to me. Anyway, uh, my friend was listening to Bill, and he says, from the side, "That's the best painter in America." He says, "How can he say such a thing?" He says, "Well, he hears you all the time. He's just learning how to speak English." [They laugh.] "That's the best painter in America." This friend of mine, Bob Jervis [ph], who had quite a nose, he'd listen to you talking. "That's the best painter in America, too." [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that was a title he used, right? Oh.

MICHAEL LOEW: So here are the two people who I was, you know, the best painters. And, uh, he was trying to show me that my interest in painting, and my interest at that time was along social content of a kind, although I hated some of the social content of some, some of the people who—

PAUL CUMMINGS: And why was that?

MICHAEL LOEW: I thought it was just bad painting. I was looking for the social content, but with good painting, which seemed to be almost impossible to see. Because in order to get social content, you got to make, you had to make the paint look messy, and raw, and loud, and that kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was all—and you had to tell some kind of story, too.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. You had to do it with a kind of a, you know, like the paint, like you didn't care for color, and if you cared for color it meant you were a little too much on the bourgeois side.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, it doesn't go together? [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. It couldn't look rich, it had to look tired and worn out.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All right. That makes sense [ph].

MICHAEL LOEW: That's where I found I was sort of not, you know, there, I mean, my social content, and I quickly, you know, moved towards this, what I—seemed to me at the time, this builds my interest in art when we took a larger view of things, you see. You're not so [inaudible]. And, you know, for whom art was something you do at [inaudible], not of the moment you know you're going to move past, you see, out on a very, you know, rich world. And that's simply, you know, because—and I simply see something on top of that. I was very nervous and impressed by that, really. They were concerned with you know—the classics, classic structures. Through a [inaudible] every back down. [Inaudible.] And he was dark his whole life in those days. [Inaudible.] He came back from the public library where there were large photographs of antique pots [ph], fragments, and he boasted of that. See, he turned it around, it looks like, this abstraction. In fact, he began using those shapes in his painting. It's very funny. I feel very strongly that Darking [ph] was the first one in America to create the [inaudible] that was fueling, you know, another [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even if it didn't derive directly from something else.

MICHAEL LOEW: Didn't derive. It was—yeah, without deriving, except from Anni [ph], we had the shapes then took on a new meaning, uh, on your own terms, and nothing else. But, I mean, shapes that were non-geometrical. They were more or less, they were—it wasn't the geometric abstraction that was taking place, but the non-geometrics, see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible].

MICHAEL LOEW: And organic, the more organic shape.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, organic.

MICHAEL LOEW: Not because we [inaudible]. Because at that time, de Kooning was working with figures quite a bit. And, uh, Pollock was involved with the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Still involved [inaudible].

MICHAEL LOEW: —with batten [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was there a meeting place in those days, in the mid-'30s, where the artists got together, besides the, uh, project offices? Was that—

MICHAEL LOEW: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are?

MICHAEL LOEW: There was quite a few meeting places. Unofficial. There was a meeting place in the automat on 23rd Street, off Seventh Avenue. Lunch hour. We'd meet about two, three o'clock. In fact, whenever I went in, there was Bill sitting there, Martin Craig [ph] was sitting there. Who else would be—the musician, composer? Good. But—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who?

MICHAEL LOEW: He wrote music for Martha Graham. Who was he?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, not Cage, no.

MICHAEL LOEW: Not Cage.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Before him.

MICHAEL LOEW: He had a—that was, uh, some American, you know, imagery right then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, uh-huh. Copland?

MICHAEL LOEW: Copland. Very focused.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Right.

MICHAEL LOEW: Aaron Copland. Uh. A dance critic now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Edwin] Denby.

MICHAEL LOEW: A brilliant guy.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who? Denby?

MICHAEL LOEW: Denby.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Edwin Denby, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, everyone [inaudible], or seemed to be, you know. Then there was also the Waldorf, down in the Village, down on Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. The place was a—

MICHAEL LOEW: That was at nights.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. For years though, wasn't it?

MICHAEL LOEW: Huh?

PAUL CUMMINGS: And people met there for years.

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yeah. That was only at night. We went down, you know, after lunch. Up on 23rd Street was

during the days. Later, it was in New York, when we moved downtown, rather. Bill did; I did. We would meet at the automat. Now, it wasn't arranged that way. We just—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Happened that—

MICHAEL LOEW: Kline, Resnick, uh, Bill. There was an automat there on Broadway and, uh, and, uh, Eighth Street, yeah. It was on Eighth Street or Seventh Street. Those were meeting places. That was the cafe life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You're right. [Laughs.] But were you involved with the Artists Union, or what was that?

MICHAEL LOEW: Later I would be involved with the Artists Union. In fact, during the time, too, right. I became involved with the Artists Union very early. In fact, I was one of the early charter members, you might say, myself. [Inaudible] talk about it. Max Spivack [inaudible] was in Taos, Mexico, New Mexico.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That explains it.

MICHAEL LOEW: Reback [ph], Spivak, myself, who else, [inaudible], Arelic [ph], then Stuart Davis, and then came along, uh, Bernarda Bryson, uh, her husband [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, one thing that's intrigued me, is Spivack seemed to become so involved with the organization. Or is that just what it looks like from this point of view in history? Was it really so active with unions, and the social problems, and everything that was going on?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, here, let me try to explain what was going on. See, Spivak was an interesting personality. There was a certain kind of contrariness to his personality. I'm not saying that he didn't have a legitimate beef every now and then about not liking certain things that were going on, you see. And he tried to instill issues that none of us were really quite aware of, the way he put them in, see. He made, you know, real political issues on the most innocent kind of things that were going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because there are still some people, you mentioned a—

MICHAEL LOEW: What's that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: There's still people who you mention his name to, and they blow up.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. You see, that was because he was sort of a, almost like a provocateur that way. See, the Artists Union was beginning to—it had no political ambition whatsoever. It was solely, you know, for the purpose of getting artists organized, you see, so that they could become aware, so something can be done about their plight, that's all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. It's economics.

MICHAEL LOEW: Economic plight. So when political issues started to come into it, it was a kind of a strange juxtaposition for artists to be involved in, see. But there were people who were working for the artists, who were trying to, you know, further their interests, and they were very political, you see. But, but while they remained, you know, loyal to the artists' interests, no one had any—why should anyone complain? Except Spivak, he would complain, see. He had—he figured there were certain motivations there, see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. That's, uh-huh.

MICHAEL LOEW: And so it became, to him, a cut-and-dried issue between Trotskys and Stalinists, suddenly. That was it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see. That's what—

MICHAEL LOEW: Now, you know, when you start looking for things—Jesus, it was going to be—people, some people started believing it, too, you know. You make a big enough—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Noise, yeah. Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: There were people who believed him, and other people were shocked. What the hell are you talking about? Now Stuart Davis was, what the hell is this guy talking about? He's there, and now it's him saying, the artists, right? And why, why are you bringing in all this other crap?

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's interesting. Interesting.

MICHAEL LOEW: That was true. There was, uh, there were people who were close to the communists' cause see.

Nonetheless, they had tremendous organizers and ability. As long as they helped us, see, we had no complaints. We felt more like we were using them than they were using us, even though, even if we joined them, we felt we were using them, you see. In my mind even if I joined them, I could use them. [Inaudible], you know, it helped, is my, uh—my main interest in this thing was to, uh [inaudible]. Other political things, political things always, it was to just going over their head a bit, which wasn't hard. We couldn't, you know, hold onto it. The immediate thing that, now, that we saw before us were things we could get, and hold onto, and get involved in, you see. And that was the difference, you see. Some people couldn't quite make that difference in their own minds, you see, about the things that were really relevant and the things that were not relevant, they mixed it all up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay, well—

[END OF TRACK]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let me say this is side three, and it's the 12th of October, 1973. Paul Cummings talking to Michael Loew in his studio.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. All the artist organizations are starting.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You were active in quite a few of those, weren't you?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, I was active probably in the very beginning, and continued to be active after, uh, a spell of time when I became I think quite disenchanted. But when I resumed my activity, it was in a more apolitical sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think politics was so important to everybody then? Because everybody that I've talked to, and whose tapes I've read, mentioned, you know, politics was so important in the '30s to the artists as a topic.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, during the Depression people became very political-minded. And everybody wondered about the whys, and wherefores, and what was happening.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was the economic situation provoked the political—

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yes. It was, it was primarily economic, and, uh, also the fact that behind the economic there were some terrible political events had taken place, which, you know, had to do with the economics involved. So that most artists, you know, who are, who have a sense of things of that sort, but never, I suppose, in a very active way, that is, in an organizational way, suddenly felt the need for organization. The reason [is] that they were so totally affected in terms of now having been pushed to the outer perimeter of everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And individually they couldn't get a voice, whereas if they have a group group, they can do something.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. Right. And so they felt the need of coming together, and actually in their coming together there was an amazing amount of camaraderie and a realization of friendships which had, which previously didn't have a chance to be crystallized as much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it had a social overtone—

MICHAEL LOEW: It had—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —that wasn't—

MICHAEL LOEW: It had social overtones, and so it had a lot to do with what was, what is, you know, regarded as community. The community of artists suddenly began to shape itself, which, included artists of almost every persuasion as far as their art was concerned. And, as far as their politics was concerned, it was, nip and tuck all the way. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Everybody had their own idea, too, right. [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, uh, generally that was the scene.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, uh, were you involved with the—you were involved with the Federal Art Projects and various things?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yes, uh.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which ones?

MICHAEL LOEW: When I was involved with the Federal Art Projects I was fairly active with the Artists Union, which came right after, I believe, some kind of organization we had previous to that, which was much smaller. But the Artists Union was a broader organization.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was a national organization, I believe, too.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. And, uh, right. And it included branches all over the United States. What the—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well—

MICHAEL LOEW: —because Spivak had a lot to do with the, with making contact with other places in the States. My main function in the beginning was membership chairman, trying to sort out the people who should be with us, who should not be with us.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. How did you decide on that? [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, it was a touchy subject all along. Balcomb Greene—let's see, first Bernarda Bryson, I believe she was the first president-secretary. After, after Bernarda came Balcomb. We, then I came along, since I was next in order. And then I—we kept changing all the time, because none of us liked the idea of [laughs] holding onto any such job [laughs].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Doing any paperwork.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. But not only paperwork; it was quite a responsibility. There was an executive committee, and we had to chair that and keep things going, the various chairmen. I had to be making reports in the executive committee sessions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It must have taken an awful lot of time.

MICHAEL LOEW: Eventually, eventually the membership reports in regard to the various programs that were being formulated, in regards to various interviews that were being held with various administration officials, in regard to getting up picket lines and protest marches. And there was a great deal of that going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There must have been some good arguments over those things, too.

MICHAEL LOEW: Good arguments over those things, true, but also at the same time you heard—in the beginning there was a tremendous amount of unity, unanimity in regards to the need for protests. And what we managed to do was quite wonderful in that we—our particular protests had its own unique quality insofar as it was, one: very colorful. But, you know, with the kind of, the kind of placards, and posters, and even the props that only artists could get together, you see. And also we could create quite a rumpus, if necessary. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Get all those imaginations going.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. Well, once when we were arrested—you probably heard this story—there must have been about—there was a massive arrest, about, you know, about 40 or 50 of us. We were lined up in court, in the courthouse. And, and we were supposed to give our names. And not one of us gave the correct name. We all gave names such as Cézanne, and Leonardo da Vinci, and Daumier. Stuart Davis gave, I think he was the only one who gave his correct name [laughs], and they thought he was lying. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's marvelous. What year was that? I don't know that story.

MICHAEL LOEW: It was around 1934 or ['3]5, I think, around.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. What was the, what was the protest, and where was the demonstration held?

MICHAEL LOEW: It was, uh, at the College Art Association offices. They were in charge of the city projects at that time. During this time I was, this whole period I think, 1933 to '36 or something, I was doing, uh, this mural at Textile High School, which the WPA had started. That's what I was doing. Before that I was working at some church, [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. We talked about that, yeah, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: I had a crew of, a different crew of about five people. Max Schnitzler was on that, one of my assistants. So was Lee Krasner. And, uh, we had a lot of fun. We had—

PAUL CUMMINGS: She was a very active woman in those days, wasn't she, with all the organizations and things?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, she, she was active for a while, not, uh, uh, not too long. I think she had her own differences, and she wasn't the type that would—wanting to be part of a group that much, you see. But nevertheless, she did go along for quite a while, you see. None of us were that type anyway, see, to be part of any kind of a group, see—

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the situation of the pack, they just—

MICHAEL LOEW: But she, you might say she got a—her level of frustration was at the, you know, much lower than ours, let's put it that way. Probably around 1936, only because I was able to get this job. Well, I hadn't—I knew this architect, and he was interested in—he was very ambitious. I don't want to mention his name, because he became a kind of a dubious kind of celebrity for a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's about the only kind there is, isn't there? [They laugh.]

MICHAEL LOEW: He got into trouble with a broad. But at that time he was idealistic and ambitious. He wanted to do some very fine architecture. He entered into a competition in the New York World's Fair for a building, a fine arts building, and this was a national competition. And because I knew him and he liked me, although the commission wasn't too reasonable, nonetheless I felt here was an opportunity for me to do some work outside WPA and work that had, you know, all kinds of possibilities. Not so much economic, but at least artistically, you see, although I did get some good, a fair return on it. And so we worked on these competitions, and I helped along for making some mural decorations for him on these projects he submitted. And he was so good that he had just three projects at the World's Fair. 1939 World's Fair, but they were already, you know, in preparation I think, maybe '36 or '37. And he won first, second, and third prize. First prize, not under his name. Second prize, not under his name. Third prize, under his name.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. He had other names for the first two prizes. And he had—you know, you've seen national publicity, and a full page of the *New York Times*, you know, on this great event.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

MICHAEL LOEW: And so he got this building to do at the World's Fair, which was not a building, a fine arts building at all. It was a, it was called the pharmacy building [Hall of Pharmacy], and then he had another building, the Hall of Man. So for the pharmacy building he needed, you know, mural painters, so naturally I got in on, oh, one of the big walls. And he needed someone else for another big wall, and so I suggested de Kooning at the time. And he didn't know who he was when I brought him to his studio, and, and Bill was in bad need of a job of some sort. He could hardly pay his rent at that time. And so he and I finally got this contract to do these murals for the Hall of Pharmacy. I had front and side and he had a perisphere [ph]. He had a back high wall, a round high wall. He didn't like it; I didn't blame him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Inaudible.]

MICHAEL LOEW: True. But it was very dramatic. And we finished it, and then—

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you each had separate murals there?

MICHAEL LOEW: They were separate murals, yeah, under one contract.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, because I had always seen it lumped together as—

MICHAEL LOEW: No. They were separate galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It sounded like it was [inaudible].

MICHAEL LOEW: Separate murals. He had a back wall, and I had the front, under one contract, and we were, you know, consulting with each other about what we were doing all the time, and also with the World's Fair Committee and also with the architect. It was all a big pain, because this, you know, it's so different than just working in front of your own easel and doing the work without regard for anybody but yourself, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, they wanted to get in on what the subject matter was, and what it looked like, and everything.

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yeah, the kind of color you had, the kind of subject matter you had, everything, they had to stick their noses in, so to speak. And it all had to be related to everything else that was around, you see. You

couldn't be, you know, because it was an open space. A closed space, you know, I think like Gorky had, and Bill, definitely he could feel freer there. I think, I'm not sure. Anyway. We did our designs, and then they'd put—and then someone else did the execution of the murals. However, we were retained, you see, to supervise the execution. And the kind of people that do execute murals and that stuff, so are people who do, oh, like the big billboards, theater sets, they were all, you know, organized for that kind of blowing up many times a sketch, see. However, they have to be supervised, because they do it rather mechanically, you know, and unless the artist, you know, who originated the design—unless he's around, oh no, it's just going to get messed up. So we were being paid handsomely just to supervise. And also, we couldn't help but, you know, also work on the thing while we were supervising. And in time it was finished, and we were very happy it was finished, because we were sick of the whole thing. And I didn't even stick around for the World's Fair to open. I just, I had to leave. I mean, I decided I had to leave New York and everything, because, one, I had some money out of all this, and two, I thought it was time I took a trip anyway, see. I went to Mexico and stayed in Mexico for over a year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really, it was that long.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. And I didn't come back until 1940. I left around 193[8], end of 1938.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you really missed the whole fair thing.

MICHAEL LOEW: Pardon?

PAUL CUMMINGS: You really missed the whole fair.

MICHAEL LOEW: I missed the whole fair. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, fantastic. You know, I was going to ask you one thing about, uh, the projects before we get so far away from that. Um. Did you ever feel that there was any influence on the part of the people who ran the project about what you should paint, or the kind of images, or the style, or the sizes, or anything? Was there any criticism given, or did they just say, well, okay, you did that, and that's fine for this week?

MICHAEL LOEW: Uh. I had very little trouble in that respect. My immediate supervisor was Burgoyne Diller, and —who I got to know very well and who had—with whom I struck up, you know, a nice friendship. And he had a great deal of *empático* with what I was doing with these murals. Even though they were very figurative and everything else, and he was already beginning to be quite abstract in his own work. Nonetheless he saw that I had a pretty good sound base I was working on, you know, and he liked what I did very much. In fact, he thought —you know what was put out on *New Horizons in American Art* by the Museum of Modern Art?—he wanted to have my mural on the frontispiece, see, of that book, but in a funny way, like the perforated drawing of it, you see, which he sort of gave it a kind of decorative cover to this book. But somehow I missed being reproduced in the book itself, or that my name appears on the first page is really, you know, having made a cover, based on the murals and so forth and so forth.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Cover disappears.

MICHAEL LOEW: The cover disappears in time, in relation to the name in the book. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh. Well, you know, you said that the mural was figurative. When did—but you were involved with the American Abstract Artists very early on, weren't you?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, no, that came later, before. American Abstract Artists were around quite a while, yes, I think from about 193[6]—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Thirty-six, wasn't it?

MICHAEL LOEW: Six, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. You came in later.

MICHAEL LOEW: I didn't come in till later, because 1936 I was not that abstract as a painter, one. And, uh, it was only until around, during the World's Fair that I began to, while working on these murals, that I began to make use of abstract elements. Matter of fact, I remember when I was working on these sketches, a friend, Léger, came to visit me because he was a friend of friends of mine who lived below me. They brought him up. And we spent an hour or so together, although it was difficult. His English was not good. My French wasn't that good. But he actually gave me criticism of some sketches I was working on. He was here in this country for a while, and I think he had a big influence on, uh, on quite a few artists here. Certainly, uh, our better artists I think he influenced. Bill, who was on a project in those days, and Gorky, of course Gorky's influences came from many places. But nonetheless, uh, Léger had quite an influence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he was a big name, and, you know, lots of, lots of things like that. But, um—

MICHAEL LOEW: And later, in Europe, I actually went to his school, and that would be—

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was about 1950.

MICHAEL LOEW: —1950, yeah. And, uh, I hardly really made use of the school. It was simply a way of, you know, getting some GI benefits. I was working mostly in my own place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was going to [inaudible]—what did you do in Mexico for all that time? And whereabouts were you?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, Mexico was a very interesting adventure, all the way through. In Mexico I met [Josef] Albers for the first time. In fact, we lived in the same house in a pension. Also, living in that same house—this was a place outside of Mexico City, called Tlalpan, near Coyoacán. In fact, during that time I think Trotsky was murdered in Coyoacán. But by that time, all things political had very little meaning for me. I wouldn't say completely so, but I was quite immersed in a new kind of existence now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What caused that, the fact that you got out of New York, or it was living in a different situation, or did your just interests change at that point?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, moving out of New York was, uh, and going down to Mexico, it was, uh, like I was really trying—I was trying to cut away from my life up to that point. I felt, I felt as if, uh, much of it was, uh, should be changed. Personal, I had some very unfortunate personal experiences. I didn't like the relationship that took place between myself and this architect. I felt sorry that I was leaving behind some very good friends like Bill and others. But then I felt glad that I was leaving behind a girlfriend who was making my life miserable, because she was a sister to this architect, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Oh, heavens, you really had a—

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, I know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —a little circle there then. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: And then I felt, too, that, uh, my art had reached such a point where I wanted to be disassociated from everybody somehow, from everything in New York, and somehow find, uh, other roots in Mexico possibly with a past somewhere which I felt passed certain primitive, archaic elements, which I felt would be helpful for my art then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you known anybody who spent time in Mexico before this, or was it just through what you gleaned through the life and conversation?

MICHAEL LOEW: No. I didn't know anybody. It was all, I'm—I think there was a person, yes, who said they had spent some time in Mexico, yes. There was a dancer I knew, and she said she had been in Mexico, and I did hear reports about Mexico, about, you know, what a marvelous place it was. Then, of course, there was—I still had a kind of—I had a kind of interest for—despite the fact that, you know, I cut myself off politically, I was still intrigued by what had gone on in Mexico in their art because of their revolution.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, well, then the [inaudible]—

MICHAEL LOEW: With Orozco and Rivera, and [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, and of several Americans who had gone down there previously. And I wanted to see, you know, what this work looked like too. But more than that, I wanted a place where I could feel a certain kind of seclusion too, and where possibly I could start new work. So on the way down I met somebody on his—down in Vera Cruz, I was on this boat, and I met a musician who was a very good friend of John Graham, who I knew in New York, but I didn't know he was in Mexico at this time. And he told me that he was staying there in Tlalpan outside of Mexico City, so, I thought it might be a good idea to go outside of Mexico City rather than staying in Mexico City. Now since this was at a pension he was staying at, I thought that would be good too, because it would make life a little simpler. This pension was run by a French woman who had taken over the former French, uh, embassy in Tlalpan, of all places, I don't know. And this was a handsome building. And so, uh, in this place I also meet Albers who had come down from, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's, by the sound of it—

MICHAEL LOEW: Not immediately, because, I wouldn't get there until—I only—sometime in early spring. And Albers came down just about, you know, when summer began. Meanwhile I used to see Graham a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was he like in those days?

MICHAEL LOEW: Both Albers and Graham were two people who shouldn't really have lived in the same place. We used to face each around a table for breakfast, lunch, dinner sometimes. It was just too much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

MICHAEL LOEW: Graham was, especially in those days, he was very, very highly charged with all kinds of conflicts that was going on, with his wife, his rich wife, who he wasn't really getting along with, and an analyst who was giving him a hard time as well. In fact, he was deciding to be his own analyst and take on people too. Then there was Albers, who, you know, in his Germanic way, everything's so clear cut and systematic [laughs], right? So, temperamental.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Oh, heavens.

MICHAEL LOEW: So, I felt like a peacemaker between them half the time. But there were—I enjoyed each one of them in their own way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, I get the feeling that Graham was much more influential on a personal, uh, kind of person-to-person way—

MICHAEL LOEW: Graham?

PAUL CUMMINGS: —in the '30s, yeah, and the '40s, than most people imagine.

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, because of his ideas and his, uh, relationships.

MICHAEL LOEW: There was—Graham was, you know, now that I think, there was a quality about him, which was quite wonderful. He warmed up quickly to any serious artist, see, regardless of whatever his art was, but he'd warm up very quickly to him, see. And you would think that, you know, as he warmed up to you that it was because of something about your art that he was warming up to. Actually, what he was trying to put across is something about his art, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's not too unusual.

MICHAEL LOEW: He was very good at that, you see. In fact, and later he was really, he was, you know, trading with pre-Columbian stuff, and he did very well with that, you know, buying and selling stuff. I could see why, see. There is something in him of a born salesman. And not in a cheap sense, but in a sense of—

PAUL CUMMINGS: He'd get everything across and—

MICHAEL LOEW: He can get, you know, things across that had to do with, you know, the spirit of man, you see. You know, he could sell that. I liked him very much as a person, and uh, we had a nice relationship.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think it would be marvelous to see he and Albers confronting each other. What a plot, you know.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. Albers, yes. Albers was not a pedagogue, no. Yeah. Nice man. I liked Anni, his wife, very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you travel around Mexico a great deal, or did you just stay in [inaudible]?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, what happened was that, uh, when sometime after Albers came down I decided to take a—I decided to go down to Taxco. So I left a good part, a good deal of my stuff there in Tlalpan, and settled in Taxco, in Taxco, in a house, a wonderful house with a maid that came attached to it, who took care of it and even would cook a meal or two, but I didn't like her cooking, and so forth. It was too greasy. So, uh, but the house was great. And it was like a studio, too, and I could work there. And then I met another, uh, three Americans who were eating at this place where I would take my meals, too. It was the only place in Taxco where they could cook vegetables properly. And so, we became quite friendly. And these three Americans were younger than myself. They had, they had each won a prize of some sort. One had the Prix de Rome, one had the Paris Prize, the other had a Cornell prize in architecture. And war had broken out in Europe, and so they had decided to, uh, contact each other and meet in Mexico, since they couldn't go to Europe. And so they all came down to Mexico, and I met them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember their names and who they were?

MICHAEL LOEW: Uh, I could, but I would need time to think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay, well, next week, then.

MICHAEL LOEW: I'm not sure just where they are now. I lost all contact with them. And I haven't got the faintest idea. I did have a little contact with one of them after I came back from Mexico, only because he, uh, he was the most sensitive of all the three and ended up in a state, um, unstable state. He had a breakdown. I used to see him in the hospital.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do there? Did you get—

MICHAEL LOEW: We got to know each other, as I say, and decided after a week or two to take a trip to the Yucatan. And since they were so very much interested in the, uh, archae—archaeology of Mexico, and it was something that I had sort of an interest for too, but, you know, in a kind of vague way. As for them, they were more, very much wrapped up in it, because they were architects. So I felt the association with them would help me a great, you see. It was a kind of education. And so we took this map and, uh, of Mexico and planned a trip to the Yucatan that would not be by plane, but by bypass and byways that, uh, were off the beaten path.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You could see the ruins, and the country, and everything there.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. And so, whereas you could go from Mexico City to the Yucatan inside of several hours by plane, it took us three months.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: But it was a wonderful trip. We went by mule, the horse, broken-down buses, uh, trams when we could find one, boats, and so forth. And along the way, we covered, uh, everything [inaudible] Chiapas. Palenque, that town was highly overgrown. Dug up. And, uh, and lots of things at Chiapas, too. Of course, in Mérida everything was already fairly well, uh, restored. And Quintana Roo, a lot of stuff there that one rarely sees. And, uh, well, it was great. Uxmal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do much work there, all this traveling? Were you—

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, I had a camera; I bought a camera in a Mexican pawn shop, you know, which is a national thing. But at that time, you know, you can buy great bargains. I bought a marvelous Leica camera for about $75 with a terrific lens, and I just got, I went crazy taking photographs. And, uh, and I was doing some drawing and painting, uh, when I settled down anywhere. But on the, while I was on the go I would be taking these photographs, you see. Of course, uh, in Tlalpan, Albes gave me that idea too, you see. And when I met these architects in Taxco, they each had a camera, and who knows what. I mean, you don't travel in Mexico without a camera. So then I was convinced. I never had taken a picture in my life, a photograph or anything. I finally found myself going crazy with this thing, and I did hundreds of photographs. And some of them were quite [inaudible]. They were not only [inaudible] sites, the people in the various, uh, regions. And you know, from Mexico all the way down through Oaxaca, down to Tehuantepec, into Guatemala, and Quintana Roo, and, you know, like Aztec into Mayan, and [inaudible]. And also photographs of, uh, festivals, which are rarely seen in remote reaches, and where cameras are not even allowed, but somehow I managed to sneak in a few photographs of everything. So I came back with a bunch of stuff, which I'll someday put together into a book. I never got around to it. Meanwhile the originals were destroyed, but I do still have the photographs, which I have. The film was destroyed. I gave it to a photographer who was supposed to make enlargements for me, but his place burnt down, so it all—it was a mess. So, in—Mexico was exciting all the way through, all the way through. In Guadalajara I met, uh, Orozco. He was working there on some of his murals. We had lunch together. Later I met him again through Graham, who was selling him some jade head.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh-huh. Always wheeling and dealing, huh.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, well, there are endless stories of Mexico, but I wouldn't know where to begin really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think of—that living there for that length of time affected your work in any particular way, or was it just a way of enriching life generally?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, uh. I think it was a great tonic for my disquieted spirit, you know, when I left from New York, and so it revived me there, as—and it was very good, you know, having that kind of a—meeting, you know, people like Graham and, I mean, resuming acquaintances with him was—And also Albers, and knowing these architects, all very brilliant young men. And just in general, you know, it was one of my most exciting, one of the most exciting years of my life. And I never went back, because, uh, I'd never go back to a lot of places like that. You know, you don't go back to love affairs.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once is enough. [They laugh.] It changes.

MICHAEL LOEW: It changes, yeah, [inaudible]. So when I got back to the States, I went straight to Provincetown.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, it was near summer, and I, uh, became involved in doing a mural competition—I still had it in my blood—for the, uh, there was the—this was through the Treasury building at the Treasury Department. And the competition was for, at that time, the Social Security building that was being built in Washington. So it was a national competition. Anyone who could do, you know, who had experiences making murals entered. There must have been about 5[00] to 600 contestants. So I got into that and worked on sketches. Then I went to parks and worked on these sketches. I was living with, uh, at that time—in fact, he was living with me. We rented this house together. He, he promised to do the cooking if I paid the rent, you see. He had no money. A big Dutch fellow who had fought in Spain. And I had, you know, I had a feeling for that all the time. And he was quite a hero, and, you know, in his time. He was a great singer, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MICHAEL LOEW: And a close friend of de Kooning. His name was Bart van der Schelling. In fact, they came to this country together. In fact, they both jumped ship together, he and Bart. So, uh, he did the cooking, and I worked on these mural sketches, and sometime near the middle of that summer, he introduced me to a girl who he had known in Boston at one time when he'd been there. She was the girl that I finally, I married, you know, deciding that it was about time I settled down. And, uh, and so we've been married since. It was a very interesting summer. My old girlfriend came back, and she wanted to resume, uh, I don't know what she wanted. But I told her she was just in time to meet my wife, that is, the girl I was going to marry. And that ended that. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, um—

MICHAEL LOEW: I should tell you that, one, when I went to Mexico, her brother, that is, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the architect?

MICHAEL LOEW: The architect, he followed me, you know. He needed a change, too, it seemed, and he followed me around like, you know, like as if he wanted to prove to me he wasn't such a bad fellow after all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Curious. Um. Well, you know, this is just more, uh, some months before the war started almost, wasn't it?

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. Yeah. And this mural, incidentally, I was working on, I finally submitted the sketches, and I didn't win the first prize. Ben Shahn did. But I won an honorable mention, which gave me a commission for another mural. So I had a, I had a talent for coming out second best, it seems, because then there was another mural that Phil Guston won. You know, I never won first prize, you see. This was for the War Department I think. And, uh, and those were the two murals. After that I said I had it. I went—I was finishing the second one when I thought I should, you know, resolve it one way or the other as far as getting into the war was concerned. I had a draft number, but they were sort of slow about calling me, and I didn't like hanging that way between, you know, things. So I finally went to them and said, well, I pushed the number up, I want to go, and, you know, let's get it over with. So they did, and so I went. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You went into the Seabees, right, in the Navy?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, I didn't intend to go into the Seabees, uh. When you're being inducted they ask you, "What would you like?" and I said, "Well, if it's up to me I'd like the Army," and so the next man looks at me and says, "Well, is it the Army you want? What about the Navy?" I said, "Well, I'm not sure. Well, maybe the Navy." And the next man says, looks at me and says, "You're in the Seabees." [They laugh.] That's how I got in the Seabees. See, you know, [inaudible] record. I don't know. It's an engineering corps. I had no business in an engineering corps. I don't know what in my record suggested that, you see. But now, after being in there for—in basic training my commander, commanding officer, he calls me in. He says, "I see by your record that you have quite a past as an artist." So I said yes. There's one—he, he used to room with an artist when he was up in the Aleutians, and this artist, uh, made paintings of the places they were at, and brought them back, and they're now in the Navy Department. So would I be interested in doing that? So I said, "I certainly would." So then I became battalion artist, uh, had basic training, and then I went, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was the artist that he had roomed with, do you remember?

MICHAEL LOEW: I don't even remember. And, uh, and so they outfitted me with everything I would need out of money they called the welfare money of the battalion, since I had no commission. And they upgraded my rank, and I found myself, you know, like, again, like it seemed all my life, you know, I'd become isolated. [They laugh.]

There's that irony. He's supposed to be the artist now again, you know, and that kind of thing. And, uh, we went through various, you know, the whole campaign in the Pacific, several invasions. I never knew what I was supposed to do, whether I was supposed to be, you know, a—I carried a gun, and I carried a helmet and a, and a gas mask, and my paraphernalia, pads, colors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Doubly equipped, huh?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. I was working three times as hard as the ordinary infantryman, see, when there was work to do that had to do with the, you know, getting in place, started right, or, you know, building barracks and Quonset huts, and all that, you see, the whole fleet. You can't—I'd already be pitching in myself. And when everybody was resting, you see, after a hard day's work, I had to get to my work, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, heavens.

MICHAEL LOEW: So I wasn't so good. After a while, of course, when the things quieted down, and they did quiet down when we finally got to Tinian, and the war was well on its way. Of course, we were moving closer and closer to Japan and the islands in the Pacific were less and less a threat. So we settled down to a kind of domesticated life practically with, uh—we even ran a little—I was in charge of a little art class, you see, between the chaplain and the welfare, uh—what was he, lieutenant or something. And so some of the enlisted personnel used to come to class, we had a model, a, a girl, from among the natives.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Korean?

MICHAEL LOEW: There were Koreans on Tinian. They also had on the island of Tinian, some prehistoric, uh, edifices, which were never restored. They were standing columns. Some were all busted up, and a few, quite a few remaining. These columns were very interesting. They had a lotus, a lotus kind of a top—the shape of a lotus. And this gave a distinct character as, you know, compared to any other columns. They were distinctly Indonesian, in that area. Anyway, uh, that became—I made paintings of that. My experience in the Seabees, on the whole, was on the one hand, as they say, it kept my hand going, kept my hand in. The paintings I did about, uh, I don't know, about, many—I think it's about 16 or so—most of them ended up in the Navy archives. And about three or four went to—the chaplain took, because they were done for his, for his chapel. And since I was so very good at making religious paintings—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Back to the stained glass windows again.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. He had me make some paintings for his chapel. And my first painting was one of the Virgin Mary, and the mother and the Christ child. I needed someone as a model, and, uh, so there was no one I could find to do the modeling, so I had the fellow who was in charge of the Jewish services on Friday—his name was Saul Kaplan, and he had a very sweet-looking face, and I had him pose for the Virgin Mary, see. When the chaplain heard of it he was, uh, he thought it was a marvelous idea. [They laugh.] Took it—he took the painting back with him to I think Wisconsin, together with some others, and of course, people don't know this is Saul Kaplan [inaudible]. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very funny. So when you came out of the Navy you came back to New York, and you went to the Hofmann school. Was that, again, a GI bill project? Were you interested in studying with Hofmann, or how did that—

MICHAEL LOEW: Almost every artist who had gone through war was offered GI education, which meant that they were able to get a supplement of 105 minimum dollars a month. At that time, you know, not a bad sum, you know, to work with. Helped pay the rent maybe, some meals, and some supplies. And so you can only get it if you signed up with a school, see. So that's what most of us did. We went to Hofmann, because there was a place where we'd be least bothered, see, although Hofmann had meanwhile became concerned about it, because he wanted, you know, he had to account for our presence, see. And a good many—well, they liked Hofmann all right, but they already had their own, you know, way and their own work, and so like [Conrad] Marca-Relli and [Milton] Resnick. And I don't think they even cooperated, you know, to bring in a painting once in a while, you see. Maybe once or twice they did. But I did it quite often. I would bring in a painting. I felt Hofmann was an okay guy, and at that time I was beginning to work with rectangular masses, shapes, and forms, and color.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is that when that began, that?

MICHAEL LOEW: Right after the war I started to shift again. Right after the war I started to—I was starting clean with, uh, going back to the whole Cubist idiom and through that—

[END OF TRACK]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side four. Why, why did you decide to go back and look at Cubism again?

MICHAEL LOEW: Because I'd never taken a real good look at Cubism. And, uh, it seemed that the war, uh, brought out a lot of things in all of us. Those who stayed behind, of course, were in a better position to, uh, look into things. There's another better word for that but I can't think of at the moment. Anyway, uh, those who were busy with the war also had time on their hands now and then, you see, but not the advantages. So, uh, when we came back, most of us I think were ready to make a fresh start, you see. And, of course, most of us had not, you know, previous to the war, even with, you know, all our tendencies to work towards the abstract, it was never, you know, with a—at least not on my part—with a very clear understanding of its origins. I felt I had to go through Cubism to really understand its origins. Now, so for a while I worked—not for long though, because I didn't want to make Cubist paintings, you see. And, essentially I was interested in color. Now, it's simple, shapes and color. I worked directly, still lifes to begin with, and then gradually I realized that in order to, uh, create the kind of color I wanted I had to destroy even, any kind of resemblance to still life after a while. What began happenings--it slowly became more and more geometric, whatever I was looking at. And, uh, by 1949 I had—'48—I had—about three years—by '48 I had enough paintings for a show, and then I contacted the Artists Gallery. They liked my work there, and were interested in having a show. And they had a, they had showed everybody really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. It's a famous gallery.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. So, uh, the show was very successful, because I met a lot of people who, you know, who were suddenly, who became very interested in my work, which was good. And then they invited me to join, like L. K. Morris, George L. K. Morris, yeah, and Charmion [von] Wiegand, they invited me to join the AAA, American Abstract Artists, and, uh, I joined. And it was—they were a good—I mean, a lot of people were still around then, I mean, like [Burgoyne] Diller and [Giorgio] Cavallon. He resigned from it. [James] Brooks was there at that time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you go from, you know, a Cubist kind of beginning into the kind of not reál [ph], not really geometric, I guess? How would you describe it?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, you see, later I found out—you asked me how—later I found out that it was very natural to go that way, see, because although I was stumbling along, later I found out that [Piet] Mondrian had actually said so, that Cubism, uh, Cubism's next logical step was, uh, Neo-plasticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you looked at Mondrian or known his work or anything?

MICHAEL LOEW: At that time I was, I had a very vague idea of Mondrian, and the thing I was doing was, uh, not in the sense that Mondrian thought about—make—the way he did his things, you see. Maybe there was something similar in the, uh, in some of the steps that came out of, you know, looking at something and slowly, you know, disengaging from it towards a very abstract kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did these [inaudible]?

MICHAEL LOEW: Maybe some of the same processes involved. I, in my—but I went about it in a very awkward way, there's no question about it. My paint started to pile up on my canvas. I made many, many changes, you know, as I went along.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you use a still life? Did you drop that after a while and just paint sort of out of your head or from—

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. Later I dropped the still life, but I worked from a figure. And I always used a model, and from the model, uh, I would, again, arrange compositionally the basis for a painting, see. Now, I started to do that with Hofmann. I first began doing it on my own with still life, but with Hofmann, because there was a model there, I was always drawing from the model, you see. And then, uh, he liked what I was doing, you see, and he would suggest certain things. When I brought him my paintings, and they were, you know, very much unlike what anyone else was doing there, because at that time Hofmann was nowhere near anything geometric, you see. And then I would, I mean, other than myself I think the only other person there was [Myron] Stout, who was doing some curvilinear things geometric.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, with the horn.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. Kind of curvilinear, with a curve to it. And, uh, and a hard edge. Mine was not that, you see. But nonetheless, you know, they were geometric. You know, a kind of painterly geometric, let's put it that way. Although I wasn't trying to be painterly. It just worked out that way, see. Later on, you know, a lot of people tried to get painterly about it, and I always used to say, I always wondered about that, you know, how do you get painterly about something that, you know, wasn't meant to be that way in the first place, you see. Nonetheless, you know, it had its popularity. And Hofmann, uh, liked what I was doing. I was surprised, because it was so

unlike what he was doing. In fact, he pointed out to everybody there, I think, you know, the thing about it that made it, you know, good, so. He also convinced me, you see, after awhile. [They laugh.] So I stuck with it. I liked it, because it was good, you see. And, uh, after—and that was before my show, and my show then was all quite geometric, although a little remnant here and there of some watercolors of, uh, nature. But in the oils, they were all kind of geometric, very geometric, yeah. And very, very much worked on, you know. They were, yeah. Nothing clean about them. Later on I learned how to do a cleaner kind of geometric.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that, that they were worked on when you—

MICHAEL LOEW: Because they, they went through constant changes, you see. I never, I never decided on leaving the color where it was. I would always shift it around to another place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which meant over-painting, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: Everything kept shifting around, you see. It started off one way and went through about 50 different states before it ended up. By that time that, that surface was pretty cruddy though, but people liked it for their interesting surface, you see, which I wasn't really interested in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's fascinating. So like these paintings, were the others very—

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, well, even—

PAUL CUMMINGS: —even, smooth surface is really—

MICHAEL LOEW: These paintings don't go through that process at all, because these paintings are, are fairly well in my head before I even begin them, you see. And so the changes that I—that take place are changes that do not disturb the surface too much. There are changes taking place all the time. Like for instance, let me show you this one.

[Audio break.]

MICHAEL LOEW: There are only three, four, five times is all. Everything can change. But in making, making my changes I try not to disturb the surface too much insofar as the, uh, piling up of paint. In fact, if paint starts to pile up I scrape it down a bit, you see, so I don't have that obstacle to work with, you see. But—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You use acrylics? No, they're oil.

MICHAEL LOEW: No, these are all oils, mostly oils. Some of the, some are acrylic. In earlier days, uh, I, I wasn't that concerned about the, trying to maintain a—not so much a clean and, you know, smooth surface, but rather it didn't bother me so much if all the changes that I was making remained to be seen, you see. Now it bothers me a little bit. I don't want to have all those changes, you know, and all those traces around. Still they're around, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, but they're less apparent.

MICHAEL LOEW: But they're less, not, they're not so much the whole thing about the paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the recent ones you do, you make drawings for, don't you?

MICHAEL LOEW: I make many, many drawings, and, uh, it's only—and before I even get started on one of these paintings, as I say, a good deal of it is in my head by then. And, uh, but even then, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once it gets on the canvas, it's there to change.

MICHAEL LOEW: Once it gets on the canvas, everything changes, and before I know it, I'm up to my neck in it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] Is that because the proportions change, and the—

MICHAEL LOEW: Everything changes, proportions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The size, the color, everything's different.

MICHAEL LOEW: You make a sketch, it's on a piece of paper, you used some crayon, I mean, what is it? Just a paper and some crayons, you know. That's, that's the material there, you see. You start working on canvas or any kind of material like, you know, like that which has a different grain, paints, color, you know, they always change, and the kind of substance. You have to [inaudible], when you're working with different materials, these materials have to somehow, uh, come alive on their own, on their own, you see. Not—and that then becomes,

you know, at least 90 percent of the painting. The other idea you had about, you know, when you're going to rearrange, you see, really becomes the least important part of it after a while. That's the funny thing, you see. In the beginning it seems to be the most important part, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] It's fascinating how it changes like that.

MICHAEL LOEW: And then it becomes the least important part, because after all, that part, that part of it is nothing but the, you know, the skeleton. Now you have to put the flesh on, you see, and that's the hard part, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, um, let's go back to the Léger in Paris in 1950 after, after Hans Hofmann. Um. Lots and lots of Americans were in Paris then, at least in the late '40s, after the war. Did you go to study with Leger, or was he just a school you could get into when you got there?

MICHAEL LOEW: It was the best. It was about the only place you could get into. There were other places like, uh, I suppose Marchand [ph], but, and exacting, yeah. I wasn't—interested in the sculpture. Uh. I heard, it was pretty good there. Yeah, he wouldn't bother you too much, see. Maybe once every couple of weeks Léger would come around, but he didn't bother you either, because he hated to come around himself. [They laugh.] [Inaudible]—

[Audio break.]

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, and a lot of other [inaudible]. So I hung around in Paris for six months, my wife and I. We went down to, uh, Italy, Florence, and we stayed there for six months. I signed up with a school where they bother you even less. They didn't care whether you came around or nothing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get any criticisms from Léger when you were in his school?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, his criticisms were rare, you know. He would, uh, he would look at the painting, and he'd say something like, that, it was interpretive. He said, what he had said was that he thinks the red should be redder, and the blue shouldn't be there, it should be over there. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. [Laughs.]

MICHAEL LOEW: That was his criticism.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like a Léger painting, right?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Push it over here, pull it over here.

MICHAEL LOEW: Just like, just like, and the only time, the only work he liked was work that looked like his. And he gave—and he brought in, once or twice, a paper that his secretary read, and she translated it, because most of us were Americans, you see. And, uh, it had to do with his ideas, how he felt that art had to serve society. He, he had a Marxist, strong Marxist point of view about art, you see. And, uh, I'd been through all that—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Before.

MICHAEL LOEW: And I thought that was very funny, . Léger was a good artist. Most Marxists wouldn't even like his art, you see. What, what was he taught? This, like Picasso, who most Marxists never liked his art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. I often have been curious about the period after the war with the Americans who were in Paris, and the schools they went to, and the whole relationship, because it seems there are a lot of individuals who went there.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who hardly had anything to do with other Americans, and yet there are some who were gregarious, and very involved with an American group, and spent all their time just the way they might have in the Waldorf on Sixth Avenue.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, right. There was, there was a lot of that going on. And I entered into it for only a short period. Of course, there were certain friends I had who were connected with groups there. And Mark Craig [ph] was one, a couple of others. And, uh, but then, I'd been through all this, you know. I had had enough of groups than anyone. And that, in that way anyways, the way they were going about it. As if they were all, you know—I don't mind my own country, but in a foreign country you get into a group, it's as if you were, you know—

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's tighter. Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: As if you're hatching some kind of conspiracies. [They laugh.] I didn't feel comfortable about it. I like the idea of having friends and seeing the same friends a little bit. But the whole idea of the whole group. That was too much for me. Florence, there were a number of friends. We used to see each other all the time, and, uh, they became good friends after. We traveled together. Stephen Pace and his wife. And there was Schmidt [ph].

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you were—

MICHAEL LOEW: We then went to England a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long were you abroad then? Was that a year or two or—

MICHAEL LOEW: It was about, a little over a year, a little, six months in Paris, six months in Florence. We used France as a base to get around, down to Rome, to, uh, all around. As far down as Paestum, below Pompeii. Went up to Pompeii. Went up to Pompeii with this poet, a mad poet. He was [inaudible]. You know the poet, Koch? Kenneth Koch?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, Kenneth Koch, yeah. Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Real mad. He, uh, went up to the top of Pompeii, to the top of Vesuvius, he, uh—it's late at night. You say, "Let's go home. It's, you know, it's getting late. It's getting dark." No, he wanted to see the very top. I had to do the driving. I had the car. It was Schmidt [ph] and his wife, myself, and Mildred. And he had to see the top, so Schmidt's wife went up, and they were gone for over an hour and a half. We were waiting for them to come back. We thought they fell into it. We went, we started a search party. Finally we found them wandering around on a riverbank. Kenneth Koch, oh, man.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you run into him? Was he just there or what?

MICHAEL LOEW: He knew, I think, the Schmidts. And then I ran—then I used to see quite a bit of him in New York when the Artists Club got going. And he's a good friend of Frank O'Hara a good friend of de Kooning. In fact, he only met them after, you see. Now, he was a very gregarious guy. He knew how, he knew how to meet people fast and get to know them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He does, yeah. What about the club? Because that had started when you came back, hadn't it? By the time you came back?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, the club was—I think I had said that the club had gotten started about, in late 1949, right after my show. And it was just when we were planning to take this trip, my wife and I. And there was a meeting, I remember, uh, with Harold Rosenberg, and Marca-Relli, and James Brooks, a few others, and myself, and we were sort of hashing the idea of having a place, you know, to come to every week or so. I think Lewitton was there. But, I had to leave because the trip was already set, so, uh, uh, I had a—arranging a show at the Stable Gallery, too. That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the Annual.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah. I'm not sure whether it was, the show started before I left or after I came back. Anyway. Anyway, when I came back The Club was already started, and then I got in, and I worked for [inaudible].

PAUL CUMMINGS: What did The Club mean, mean in those days? Did you find it a useful experience? What, you know, what purpose does it serve?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, it's main purpose was, one, a place, you know, to get together, you know, to meet, talk, and get away from that Waldorf place and all the other places where, you know, all the bums were hanging around and make it miserable for you.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah they used to throw everybody out of the Waldorf at a certain time, wouldn't they?

MICHAEL LOEW: And, uh, of course, later the Cedar Bar was nice, but it was a place to go to after, you know, after where you could sit down and talk. You couldn't sit around and talk at the Cedar Bar.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It got too raucous [laughs].

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible.] So then sitting around and talking meant getting serious talk going, and that developed into, you know, a kind of symposia talk, you know, having guests and having, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you like that, the fact that they did have, you know, musicians, and philosophers, and all these different people coming around?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yes. Yes. It was a bit on the sophomoric side at times, but other times, you know, you became part of it, too, you see. So, what the hell. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. It's interesting how the, uh, one painter referred to it as his graduate course.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, graduate course, right. They trained a good many of us, too, for college teaching later. [Laughs.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you did start teaching, didn't you, after a while?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Let's see, when?

MICHAEL LOEW: No, I can see. Also, you see, what happened there, people from the university would come down, you see, from various parts of the country. And, uh, many were coming down looking for people to teach. And then people were coming to the Artists Club to find jobs, you see, and that became too much. Or find or meet someone who would help them, you see. It became too much of a thing like that. And then we decided The Club had had it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you, you never had any of the jobs there, did you, that were employed at the club, you know, like Earl Fields was there for some [inaudible]?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, yeah. Well, Earl Fields did come down, right. I remember he came down, and I'm not sure just what the heck he had to do with my finally getting the break there, because it seemed to me that, if anything, I did say something to him that was very nasty. I told him that his book on Cézanne was all wet, that everything he was saying in that book was a little bit on the, uh—it was so academic, you see, that anyone trying to learn from it would, would end up very bad, as a bad artist, you see. Now, I was a little bit hard on him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that was [Meyer] Schapiro's book on Cézanne?

MICHAEL LOEW: Erle Loran's book on Cézanne.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, Erle Loran, yeah, no. Yeah. No, I know, that's [inaudible], too.

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible.] And he was kind of shocked to hear me say this. His book was selling like mad all over. So, uh, we kind of, you know, we were friendly, nonetheless. I don't know how we could be, but, you know, I felt very strongly about his book. I thought his book was bad in that respect. I liked his intentions and all that, you see, and I thought he did a wonderful job with photographs and the way he went to these places, and the way he [inaudible] tried to, you know, show how the painting is one thing, the place was another thing. But when he started to analyze the painting, I thought he, you know, it was a little bit, a very academic way of doing it. Anyway. I think it was about a year or two later, I think, maybe, I didn't get—I heard from not Earl, the chairman of the art department, only because I think—so many of my friends were going there, you see, that finally they put in a word for me, and I needed a job badly. I had a kid by then and could use the money for his, you know, as he was growing up. My wife was working. I just had some private teaching, not very much, you see. I had about six or seven students, and, uh, I liked their—I thought some of them were very good. Martha [ph], you know, right now is having a show. She was one of my students. And, uh, I used to send some to Jack Tworkov because, I couldn't even handle them, you know, that many in my small place. He was a—he has students now, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like teaching? I mean, do you think in the college level you can teach those students very much, or just kind of watch what they do and, uh, hope for the best?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, the first time at Berkeley, and this is the deal, I had already been to—in '58 I already had been to a college situation in Portland. So, uh, I had some, some kind of an entrée into that kind of a scene. But in Berkeley, uh, it wasn't that much different, you see, except that I did have a graduate student. And it was interesting working with, you know, the more experienced student, you see. A less inexperienced student is—it's a chore, you know. You have to explain the ABCs of everything. More experienced students, well, it's, you know, you're man to man again, see, so it's not bad. That was the first time. The second time there was a lot of trouble there at Berkeley. In, uh, '66, you know, the student protest movement and everything else. It was already beginning in '60, but in '66 it was reaching a head, and it was affecting everything around the place, in art certainly, too. And then I had this one student of my, my seminar, one of the graduate students, who would never—who came to every session but never, never with any work. I finally said to him, "Look, I haven't seen a painting of yours yet, Paul. When will I see a painting? Everyone else brings in paintings." There were about 15 of

us. Now, he said, "Well, I got a painting. It's in my head, but I'll bring it here." I said, "Good, bring it next week." Of course, I was there for, I don't know, 10 weeks or so, 12, and only eight weeks, seven weeks had passed, he hadn't shown up with anything. I said, "I have to give you a grade. You know, they require grades here." So, uh, he said, "I'll bring you one next week." Okay. So next week, he's not even—he doesn't even appear. Everyone else is there, and the paintings are all arranged, set up, and, uh, I'm beginning to talk about them. And, uh, suddenly there's a side door which opens up to a gallery, sliding doors. This gallery was closed, and now there's no exhibition going on in there, so everything was dark in there. And so when these side doors opened up there we all looked, but we were looking in the dark there. We saw nothing beside the—but the sliding doors were opening. And, uh, and suddenly he appears, all stark naked. And he stalks in like a somnambulist, carrying a big fluorescent eight-foot light tube. And, uh, he walks over to all the paintings, a little, one by one, and nods in front of them, and slowly starts to dance, carries on about 20 minutes dancing with this neon, this fluorescent tube. He falls on the floor, crawls through some chairs, a chair that I left behind because I joined the students to watch. And, uh, finally he falls in a heap next to me, and, you know, nudges me, like, apologetically, hoping that, you know, I would approve, see. I told them all to take a break, a coffee break, we'll come back and talk about this. [Laughs.] And when we came back to talk about it, and, uh, and there was a lot of, you know, pro and con discussion, and they were really all excited, you know, in the pro and con, not that they liked it one way or the other, but. The girls liked it very much it seemed. There was one girl in particular said it was the best thing that ever happened here! I said, "Well, I can see why you say that, but, uh, you know, he's—" I can understand that. They get dull after a while in seminar, you know. He came in all, and he came along with something very dramatic. Okay, we sat down and said to the guy, "Okay"—the floor—"What's this got to do with painting?" He said, "A lot." I said, "I don't see it as a lot." I see it as the idea, you know, of crawling in today and that, but, you know, see it as getting so mixed up so that there's no borderline between anything. Okay. But, uh, really, what has this got to do with painting? We all have paintings here, you see. So he says, "Well, it's a, it's a happening." I said, "Yes, true, it's a happening, but it's more like a theatrical event, isn't it?" He says, "That too, yes." I said, "Doesn't it belong someplace else, not here?" He says, well, he thinks it belongs here. Okay. So we carried on that way. Everyone was discussing it, you see. Next day at a faculty luncheon where I used to eat, uh, there was a long table there in this room, and the whole university art department there, including art, art history, and maybe architecture. I don't know. There must have been about 12 or 15 of the, uh, hierarchy of Berkeley sitting there at this table. And I said to my friend, Sid Gordon, "Something very funny happened yesterday in my seminar." He said, "What was that?" No one else is listening. They're all having their discussions. And I said to him, "This guy, Paul," you know, and I told him, and he was, he almost fell to the floor laughing. And everyone wanted to know what it was about, so I told everybody. There was the museum director, there was the chairman of the art, of the art department, the chairman of art history, and they all wanted to know about it, so I told them. See, they didn't laugh so much. They started to—they took it very seriously. And you could split the table right down the middle, because half was pro, half were pro and half were con, and we had a discussion there that Berkeley never had before. Regarding the merits of [inaudible] of that form of art. Later I was called in by the dean of the school. He wanted to know what was going on in my art classes. I said nothing, nothing really except that, you know, we were having some, we were having—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Ritual dances.

MICHAEL LOEW: Some of the students have, think they have some real advanced ideas, and this is one of them, you see, and he came in dancing in the nude. Well he said, "But, you know, I should think that the women there would object with something like that, wouldn't they?" I said "No, they all loved it. They loved it." That was the end of that. [They laugh.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, marvelous. Well, you know, you've been involved with the School of Visual Arts for a long time now, haven't you?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, I—when I went to Berkeley it was, I took a leave from the school, two occasions, that school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you start or get involved with the—

MICHAEL LOEW: The school? When I came back from Oregon I needed a job badly, and through a friend I was recommended to, uh, Silas Rhodes, at the School of Visual Arts, who at that time was having, was in the throes of transition of some kind. He started off with one type of school, and he was trying to get in to another type. I think he started off as an illustrating cartoon school, something like that, and he was now moving towards an expanded field in commercial art and also hoping that, you know, possibly to get entered into fine arts. But his plans were very vague at the moment. And although there was a—it was, uh, divided into years, you know, first, second, and third year, a three-year, uh, with a certificate in three years. The first year being what was called foundation, of course, which was similar to Bauhaus and what was being done in Chicago. And so I began to do my teaching in the first year there. The second and third year were of commercial majors by then, you see. The only fine arts that was being taught was in the first year, painters who, and sculptors who were doing, uh, you know, who were teaching their stuff there in the place, here to people who would end up possibly be doing, uh—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Commercial design.

MICHAEL LOEW: [Inaudible]. So—but we went at it, you know, so seriously, teaching this course, that some of them began, you know, some of the students wanted to be fine artists, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Some of the students. Kind of the students who were affecting a change.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, the students became affected. And because so many wanted to be an artist, you know, a fine artist, you see. And there were so many of us who were, were fine artists who were teaching at universities. The second and third year there were people mostly from the industry, you see. So it was a small school then, very small, on Second Avenue and 23rd Street. So by 1960 he realized the school has to be expanded so that something—so that the fine arts can be taught as well, and he asked me to formulate some kind of a program for, you know, teaching of fine arts as well, so I did. Then when I went off to Berkeley, by the time I got back things were getting started, and I became chairman of the—a co-chairman rather. And the work, it was hard administrative work, you know, getting going with the fine arts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But the school was growing and changed so much in the last few years.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. [Inaudible] by now. I would have to, you know, get people to teach there, interview people, and we tried to get a lot of good spirits into the place, you know. And it grew like mad. And then I thought I had—the director thought I had had it, you know. It was something that I didn't want to keep doing, see. After all, I wanted, I wanted to do a little teaching, I didn't want to be running the school practically. So then we got other people to take over that kind of administration stuff. He took it over himself after that, because he realized that it was, you know, a very important job, you know. He couldn't even trust—he felt he couldn't trust anyone so easily again, see. He took it over himself for a while, and now finally he has a chairman.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who is that?

MICHAEL LOEW: Uh. He's originally from Mexico. His name is, uh, Wiley, Wiley, Wiley, uh. I can't think of his name. A nice fellow.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's really gotten to be a large school though in the last six or eight years. I mean, they have a lot of students now, don't they?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah, now, finally, 175 people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

MICHAEL LOEW: And more. They have film. The film department is very big.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, right.

MICHAEL LOEW: Photography. That's very big. Uh. Sculpture, painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How has he been able to do all of this, do you think, grow this?

MICHAEL LOEW: He knows how to select people. He's got a good eye for picking the right people. He also makes bad mistakes, but he learns from his mistakes, which is very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, well, that's good. He's a rather flamboyant character, I hear.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've never—I don't know him. Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: And he's a loyal person, [inaudible]. He's loyal to people he has had around a while.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you think that there really is a lot that you can teach a young art student in a situation like that?

MICHAEL LOEW: You know, Tom has asked me the same question. He came to interview me when he did a review of my work, my show. And, uh, I don't know. I don't—there are, there are certain things you can, you know, you can talk about. There are always things you can talk about. You can't—look, if a person has no talent, what, you know—

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can't do anything.

MICHAEL LOEW: It's like, you know, like a horse, you know, that's lame. What can you do with it? You can't do

anything with that, with a person like that. But if the person is, uh, has some talent and is the least bit receptive, there's a lot that can go on, you see, if you're willing to give. If you're not willing to give, naturally nothing will go on, and the teacher has to be willing to give. I don't think anyone should teach who is not willing to give, which is in the, in a way a bit of social work in that sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Laughs.] That's true.

MICHAEL LOEW: And I can see why, you know, artist, an artist might, uh, not like that whole idea, see. Not because stuff cannot be taught, why, because that—a lot of new social work, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, that's true. That's true.

MICHAEL LOEW: But you know why the—it's not so much that, you know, most other things you teach, if you have to teach how to run an automobile, or how to, anything in chemistry so, or anything in the sciences, you never have personality situations. In art there's always a personality situation, you see. You have a person who is an artist because he's a certain kind of a person, too, you see, and you're addressing yourself to that certain kind of person as much as you are addressing yourself to what he's trying to learn.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true, yeah. You know, I was going to ask you, because you, uh, had a number of exhibitions with Rose Fried—to kind of finish that section off—through the, well, all through the 1950s. How did you like her as a dealer in those days? I mean, did she do very much, or was it just a place to, uh, to have things seen?

MICHAEL LOEW: Rose Fried was a wonderful woman. She was a, well, she had her whole heart in art. I mean, art was her life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: And it was not like, you know, it is today where, you know, she has high pressure promotion and that stuff. And, uh, but she was a difficult woman, quite neurotic, too. Maybe it was because she was not with the tide of things, you know. You know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She held different parts.

MICHAEL LOEW: The way the tide—with the tide of things being, what is meant by that, sooner or later everything takes on the same coloration, like the machine, machinery of a corporation, you see. Everything falls into line, even the way the galleries are lined up. That falls into the line. She was not that, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. That's true.

MICHAEL LOEW: She, uh, and she couldn't even understand it, as a matter of fact. And I got in a lot of the old galleries, you know, that finally folded up now, couldn't, couldn't, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Make all the new changes.

MICHAEL LOEW: Couldn't adjust to those changes. Besides which it took a lot of money. And, uh, people like Eleanor Ward, for instance, Rose Fried—they were operating on a shoestring most of the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But yet they had very good shows, were well respected.

MICHAEL LOEW: And, right. They had, uh, they were able to put on some of the best shows at the time, that we were having in New York, you see. And after four shows or so I felt that, uh, it was time for a change, so I hadn't even crystallized the thought when, uh, I think Eleanor Ward called me. She already knew about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating, how quick the word goes around—

MICHAEL LOEW: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: —isn't it? Yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Amazing. So, uh, I was happy for change. At that time she was up on Seventh Avenue. So I didn't have my show with her till she moved to Seventh Avenue, because I had, I went off to Berkeley about 1960, right. And when I came back I had a show with her. I had three shows with her.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you find her, uh, that much different a dealer from Rose or not?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, uh, she—they had one thing in common. They both had a real keen eye for, you know, for

themselves and what they—not according to what was going on, but for themselves, what they liked, you see. And it was usually very, you know, much original, personal taste sometimes was somewhere, not that personal that it didn't somehow fit in the world sometimes. You know what I mean by that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, yeah. No, there are—I always thought they were fascinating dealers, you know.

MICHAEL LOEW: You know, one thing about Eleanor was that—I suppose you can say that about Rose, too—they couldn't hold onto their artists, you see, only because there were, you know, there were other galleries who were always making better deals for them, you see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, it's curious, because in a—since you've had two of the most famous women dealers, why do you think that is with them?

MICHAEL LOEW: And I had all kinds of opportunities while I was there with both of them, you see, to get into other galleries, you see. I didn't, and I don't know why I didn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I'm always curious. I've talked to, you know, like painters that were with Betty Parsons, and they would say, well, you know, she did beautiful shows, but she just after a while couldn't sell enough work, couldn't, you know, move the market, and do all those other things.

MICHAEL LOEW: They operated very much like they were artists themselves, see, and that is—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which is very different—

MICHAEL LOEW: —artists in another, of a time past, not of a—like some artists in the present moment, you see, who operate like they are business people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's rather interesting.

MICHAEL LOEW: They weren't like business people, you see. Today, of course, do you know of a gallery where it is operated on an un-business-like way?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It doesn't last very long if it does.

MICHAEL LOEW: What?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It doesn't last very long.

MICHAEL LOEW: It doesn't last very long.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, uh, one of the things that I find interesting, because I haven't seen these paintings in this, this file, um, how long have you been working this way, in this vein?

MICHAEL LOEW: Oh, this, things I'm doing now are outgrowths of—everything is an outgrowth of things you did previously, see. But, uh, I began working in this way, developed into this thing, about three years ago or more, about '70, or '60, about '70. [19]69, '68, '67 was already something that was heading towards this, not so much as would have seemed on the surface, but something in the forms and so forth were already there, see. The forms were more closed. Now I opened them up, you see. That was the only difference. And, you know, and now I work [inaudible] possibly arranged, maybe with white, or arranged with color, and so forth. Like, this is arranged with different blues, now different ochres and pinks, and this is straight white. The white changes, too. But, of course, working with white is something that is, uh, not new to me. I love—I always have loved working with white.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I remember those large white ones with the colors.

MICHAEL LOEW: Right. And so, uh, it's as if coming back to it is coming back to familiar ground again, except I'm coming back with different, a different type of, uh, form, quite removed from anything that went on in, uh, my former work, which was a little related to the Constructivist Neo-plasticists idea. Yet these, I suppose, can also relate to Constructivists, except you have [inaudible] Neo-Plasticists. I don't know of any. And how, how—I don't think of them in the same way I think I used to do the other things, because I don't, uh—when I did the other things I was still, because I was making paintings in a way, uh, paintings were always made where one color relates to another color, you know, and there is an interest taking place between these various intervals and positions and so forth. And now I seem to be interested in monotony for some reason, except monotony was a way—or repetition, rather, I think, monotony and repetition, to—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To do what?

MICHAEL LOEW: To close everything down through a point where, where hardly—not too much is taking place, but whatever is taking place will be noticeable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, but I mean, this, the painting over there, I don't know how you title them now, but with the blue and the greens, you do get a certain optical play, and then the bands and all, it seems to me a great deal of activity going on there.

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, when I dip into a—when I lose the white I do get into a great deal of activity, but that's right, at the same time, while I—whatever activity is there is confined to a rather repetitious scheme of bands.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I noticed that the drawings over there are on graph paper, aren't they [inaudible]?

MICHAEL LOEW: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you make smaller sketches, and then work on graph paper, and then do a painting? Or do you work on graph paper normally for drawing?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, when I got into this sort of thing I began working on graph paper in order to, uh, in order to simplify my, the measuring of things, you know, and the arrangement of my shapes. That simplified it, so I could measure exactly the distances, which later I could then enlarge proportionately, so that I could do it in scale somehow. And I've always—that goes back to my mural days, too. I worked on it—not graph paper, but worked on sketches, which I could later enlarge.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. You'd square them up.

MICHAEL LOEW: Yes, square up, you see. So squaring up is something that I used to do, too, see. And graph paper is already squared up, so you don't have to go through all that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Now, I think, you know, going back to what we had said before of the white background, it certainly doesn't produce the kind of optical effect that the blues and the greens do in that painting. I mean, they are more, more reticent than this one, but there still is a certain amount of, um, you know, visual activity that's, uh, that's happening. Do you do many paintings still with the, with the white background like that? Or do they—

MICHAEL LOEW: I'm working on that large one. I was going crazy with the large one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: With the big—oh, I see, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: It's the largest one I did, and looks like I'll be on it for maybe months, because I had some marvelous sketches going, and then when I enlarged it, it looked like, uh, it was just the beginning. I thought I would have approximately a pretty good thing going, but then I realized that spark was going, which is something I have to, uh, make some radical changes with. And I will have to take those sketches I have to begin with and simply put them away, because they have nothing—they won't have anything—

PAUL CUMMINGS: To do anymore. Yeah. Yeah. Well, have you evolved any theory about the colors or the use of color in, in the paintings? Or is that an arbitrary? There seems to be a certain pattern of, um, of using?

MICHAEL LOEW: Well, these paintings, you see, have so much, uh, feeling of being like each other, but actually, you know, each one is very different. Even the whites become different because of the colors I use, and even sometimes that's—I use a different kind of white, a warm white or a cool, a cold white. And, uh, the particular color I use, you know, color is so arbitrary. You select a color, and that leads you to selecting another color, and that leads you to selecting another color, you see, and before you know it, you are, you've started something going, you see. Or sometimes you might have an idea about, you know, a certain kind of color you want to use, when you're working with a ground that is not white but all color, you go through many changes to find that very color. You don't, or rarely ever hit it off the first time. And as, and then you end up with making many different colors so that it looks like one color when it really isn't, you see. If you keep looking at that you'll see maybe—

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, a lot of blues, for example, yeah.

MICHAEL LOEW: Three, three or four different blues, but, uh, the final effect I want to be just one blue. And that way I get a certain richness out of it, or that [inaudible] will be rich enough. Yet I don't want it to be that rich where it, you know, looks too pretty or something. I don't like, uh, some of these over-rich paintings where they, where they look so—where they're always seductive. I don't like—

PAUL CUMMINGS: The color? Well, color does, you know.

MICHAEL LOEW: Color has its own way of being seductive anyway, but if you start making—that's why I loved

Mondrian. He didn't try to seduce you, you see. Yeah. But a lot of colorists today try to seduce you. I don't care for that so much

PAUL CUMMINGS: Making big displays of color or something that's a grand gesture. It's, uh.

MICHAEL LOEW: Out of a grand gesture or to kind of lead you into it like it was a terrific kind of atmospheric allure, color. No, they use a different kind. They use a, you know, like a, they use the tools like blowing it on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, the sprays.

MICHAEL LOEW: Spray as art to get these effects, you see. I could never use those tools, you see. I feel that the painting is still something you do by hand.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well—

MICHAEL LOEW: No matter how, no matter how mechanical my forms may look, they'll always have to be done by hand. I'd rather have a mechanical form done by hand, than a freeform done by a machine.

[END OF INTERVIEW]