Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Arthur Polonsky, 1972 Apr. 12-May 21

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Transcript

Interview

RB: ROBERT BROWN
AP: ARTHUR POLONSKY

RB: First I'd like to have you say what you will about your upbringing, and family, your childhood.

AP: I started in Lynn, Mass. 1925. My parents and one sister. What I supposed would now be described as a state of chronic poverty. It wasn't so melodramatic. After all, they were good times. My father was a tailor, with, even in the earlier childhood, some years of a certain ease and success, and some devastating declines during the depression. A lot of time for reading, drawing, which wasn't anything very special; something like this one I did at the time. Not much play or what now seems more like childhood, lots of groups of children doing things together. The area itself, the isolation in that part of Lynn, it wasn't oppressive in any way. I seemed to enjoy it. Books were very important. Public schools, and always that contact with some remarkable teacher who seemed to be an opening into something mysterious in art or in science. I lived in Lynn until I was about thirteen, and then moved to Roxbury where economically and other ways things were going worse than before. But many new things were happening, especially the literature things, the local library, certain librarians that made things accessible, and I worked in the library there. I also went to the Hebrew Teachers College. It was a kind of secular interest in the language and the history especially, which I found very beautiful and meaningful. But later I made a decision to take a scholarship that was available to an art school, Boston Museum School, the school of the Museum of Fine Arts, and stopped all that Hebrew study.

RB: Was your family a fairly religious one? Did they encourage you to go into Hebrew study?

AP: I think my mother was, and still is, intuitively religious. That is, there is a meaning to her, certainly in the ritual and the warmth of the idea, and she's always done what she could about it, which was partial. My father stayed out of it. So that it was my mother's idea to send me to Hebrew school, and always I felt there was a kind of division about it, in a way, a disloyalty to my father. I know he wasn't against it really. He felt, in a way, incompetent. That wasn't literally true. He knew the language, the Hebrew and the ritual, too, but he never seemed to make use of it. I mean, I think there was a piety, or kind of worship within him that didn't take those conventional forms, really, which is very understandable to me now.

RB: What was school like in Roxbury? Could you describe your high school there?

AP: Yes. It was called the Roxbury Memorial High School For Boys which adjoined the high school for girls, but we didn't penetrate the barrier. I had a pass that did get through because I was supposed to do a portrait of the leading actress in a school play, but it made me very nervous and I didn't confess it to many of my classmates that I was able to get through there. There was that sort of segregation. It seemed normal and most traditional there. The school itself, this was just before the war, it was during a school session that we heard Roosevelt announce the entry of the country into war with Japan. It was broadcast in assembly, of course. The school itself would, I suppose even then, have been considered rather low-grade academic quality. This was not consistently true because again there were teachers here and there who were inspired and sometimes very informative. But it was a sparse kind of a contact with this part of education. The rest of it was pretty competitive, rough. I don't know. I suppose I isolated myself with a few friends who were more compatible, that is, I felt more comfortable with. I also associated with all elements of the school in one way, in that I did caricatures or portraits, and that was the key to a larger society that surrounded me. During the blackout drills, we would make arrangements for me to make some sketches later. I did many portraits, sometimes quite seriously. I began to paint portraits during the summers, after school. Made some money with it, but still I didn't feel that this was the precise goal of all my efforts, painting. Although I knew I would always do it, but portraiture had a meaning, fascination, it still does.

RB: Had you been trained, or were you still studying with anyone?

AP: No, not then, but the high school had a program in cooperation with the city of Boston, I believe, in which students who qualified, who actually won a scholarship in competition, would get out two or three afternoons a week from their regular classes and go up to the Museum and have special classes in there. Most of us who were there studied with one woman, I think, for a while, that lives in retirement now, named Alma LeBrecht, and at various times so many of the artists I knew as young people my age, and some of those I knew as slightly older and already respectable artists, such as Levine -- I'm not sure of Bloom in this case, I don't think so -- but others

who are now teaching in the various departments of art in the universities surrounding us here, went through these classes. It was . . . it's not an academic, or you wouldn't say it was an introduction to the arts, but there may have been other forms of introduction, but it was a way of assembling around a common interest, that brought us together, and for many of us was the introduction to the Museum School. We saw the exhibits of people in the school proper. Many of us wanted to try to get into it and I did. And aimed at that from those years, and went through with that project, always surprised that it had happened, scholarships all the way through, and so on. That was wartime, and everything was unsure, the draft was always menacing, in some cases it took away people we knew in class, and they came back. I'm now into the Museum School days. That was 1943. But at the high school there was military drill, a sharp marching band, as I remember; remarkable old teacher of English who had written his own textbooks. That was interesting enough. But I always felt that these were the years of education, of informing myself. I just read whatever I could find and theorized and thought, even went into Proust in those years, because of that remarkable library that was there. Behind the glass cases I could find these books that I needed.

RB: I did notice at school that you also had a circle of friends around you . . . ?

AP: Yes.

RB: Were a good many of those to go into the arts themselves?

AP: I suppose I now remember the ones who did, or did something still noticeable because I didn't know most of them for very long afterwards, and I don't know what's become of them. But I know there was a man who then must have been a poet and became a poet-translator, editor of the Paris Review. I found this out only recently, the extent of his career. But most of it took place in Europe. There was a person with whom I attended these classes at the Museum who died and was, at that time, a very promising young artist, I thought. But I also knew others who were not in my classes, who were in advanced schooling or had gone to other schools, who lived nearby in really a small compex of streets around the Grove Hall area in Roxbury, including . . . . I began to meet such people as Reed Kaye, now a professor at Boston University, where I teach. Jack Kramer, the Swetzoff brothers. I later met David Aronson and Bernard Chaet, all within a small . . . . It's an area that extended as far as Franklin Park and then down to the Grove Hall area in Roxbury. We had heard . . . . I began to hear about Jack Levine at that time, probably through Reed Kaye, and one of the librarians who knew him from his Roxbury days, you know. He had also lived there. At that time he was in the Army. So that I got to know his work from reproductions first, from the few examples in the Museum, in those days, and then later the exhibits. I would see that he was far more celebrated, having won the Carnegie International Award, during the time he was in the Army. There was a high school teacher (laughter) who I believe was a painter, but I have no evidence to inform me of that, who in his rather humorous, sometimes sarcastic way, seemed to be pushing us, either to an acceptance or refusal, but to his art as a possibility. Maybe an absurd possibility, I don't know. But he was very influential, I feel, and for many of us.

RB: Who was that?

AP: His name was Morris Grazer. He taught what we then passed as an art course which was almost formless but it had many peaks of interest in it. The first time I saw a large reproduction of a Cezanne and a good reproduction of a Homer watercolor was in his classroom. I had seen, of course, Homer at the Museum of Fine Arts, but this was there every day and it sort of hovered over everything else that was going on.

RB: You were able to, and your family encouraged you, to draw and paint in any free time that you had?

AP: It was always a natural thing since my sister did it before I did it, usually before. We would get the cardboard from the samples of cloth which my father had in his tailor shop. These were always salvaged and they became the drawing material. Now that sounds rather colorful, but it was the only drawing material we had, and we weren't limited to that, but they were very good for that purpose. And my sister did portraits of historical figures, from photographs probably, and then she would switch to people surrounding her. I would do the same. I would spend a long time working on a drawing of Pasteur, as a child, and then some movie actor star. And then imaginary work, but I always wrote things that went along with them. It didn't seem like any special activity, but one of the most enjoyable ones. I began to work in pastels, probably when I was nine or ten years old, and color. Certain experiences then doing subjects that were cartoon or adventure illustrations of a subject, derived from others, with certain definite sense, intuition experiences that have remained as the important ones, haven't really changed, even though my subject matter has changed. The design has been augmented, I hope, by a certain complexity.

RB: What would you say those experiences were, essentially?

AP: I wonder if I could say. But they exist. But I don't say that. For me, reality, it's a kind of adventure which doesn't take place in the time of calendars and clocks, but in time, nevertheless, which comes into a kind of existence before the eyes. It isn't like living or seeing, but it's a kind of equivalent with a vitality. This is, what

I'm describing, is an abstraction, in a way, and seems to be attached to an abstract experience, that is, an experience derived from an abstract play of color that seems to be near or far, the spatial use of color. But for me it's all further enhanced and complicated by an image. It looks like something. I have never continuously separated the two in any way in the work, although sometimes I don't work from observation but from a kind of image-forming. But the feeling, when it goes well, could probably be described as certain reactions and intentions in relation to abstract. But here the word becomes inadequate, a kind of pure pictorial, visual thing. That later it becomes a head, or a landscape, in a way still surprises me. Although I sometimes plan this, and I've worked conventionally looking at the object and done portraits, both. That experience is so well known to artists and so badly described, because again, the word seems to stand in the way of the meaning which is entirely personal for each one. But it may also be a link between the personal reactions between people too. There's a sort of presence at work, as in a dream, which I'd like to find taking place in the work. It could be a fragment of a painting or the large composition, in which there's no doubt that we stand before this image and gaze at it altogether. That's an aim in my work. And it's not only a conception that I hope to carry out, an intellectual conception, but it's again a surprising discovery that I'm enriching the painting or that I'm happy with it, or simply languishing in it until something happens, as though from outside, or I make something happen, for that reason to make that kind of richness of existence visually. I think my students now swerve in feeling from a kind of anguish to elation quickly, within minutes or seconds perhaps, but quietly in the classrooms because of such intentions which can't even be described. They would be called poetic or expressive, but we talk about the anatomy and the distance and the methods, the perspective, the paint itself because it must take place in this, through, by these means. The body of the spirit of the work is a painting, which is something. Now I've gone into a lot of wordy exposition of it all.

RB: To you, a painting was a special thing, an object, a being in itself?

AP: Yes. And the act of painting and the kind of fraternity with those dead and living people who did such things . . . . Then we didn't try to keep . . . . It wasn't a social thing. That is, it wasn't a matter of ranging myself along with other people who had become an artist, with artists, but a kind of fraternity of meaning in the world, in a way I could find it probably more easily in reading and in poetry then. Painting was not easy for me because I would immediately engage in the simple struggle of wanting to go beyond what was actually happening as everyone seems to, to make more of it than it is in itself. That's the kind of amplitude of expression that I hoped for. In a way my work is divided now between what I call my work and what I also do in portraiture. And sometimes they come together. I think it started pretty much as portraiture. My parents were not artists. There was always that time when my mother would model a little cat out of wax, candle wax; my father would draw something similar. I can't find a direct evidence of that kind of activity in anything they did. My father played the violin in a self-taught way, as I do, probably with his mistakes grafted on to mine, the way I first heard it. There was something he did though, in drawing the white chalk marks on the black paper, which would later be the pattern of the suit that he'd just designed, that I still find fascinating almost beyond simple description, which he found apparently very easy and natural, that he was making descriptive designs that one day would become three-dimensional. As he talked, rather light and casually with other people, the chalk would go very rapidly and would later become the contour of a living person expressed by the envelope of that contour. These are conceptions when turned into words or intellect that are very interesting and endlessly mysterious to sculptors and artists. So I feel, you know, there's always that essential art intention in everybody. It's not exceptional, but some of us make the paintings somehow.

RB: As you've been talking, it seems that you were going on pretty much in a self-generating way, and yet, some things you say indicate that the Grove Hall area in Roxbury was a pretty nice environment, essentially, for resources, for friends. Was it also psychologically a good place for people who were wanting to express themselves?

AP: I believe what some of us did when we would meet at a drugstore and discuss poetry, for example, down on Blue Hill Avenue past the Franklin Park area, was a typically romantic activity. It wasn't entirely special to that area, but we did it against a background that was entirely unlike that, a bit of snobbishness in it, maybe, but it also made that contrast. I don't think we intended to pretend that we were artists and poets. It wasn't as cold as all that. We simply enjoyed it as some people enjoy other things. But there was that evident contrast. We weren't with the other gangs that were hooting their way through the park, and probably most of us were simply pretty bad at sports or never had an introduction to such things that brought enough competence in it. I know that was true of myself and maybe some others I knew. So I felt that the surroundings were favorable to, at least the first step, into a life of art. But not because they presented museums, concerts, things of that sort. We had to go outside of that area for that. But there was a kind of contrasting of flavors of a kind, a sort of serenity when everything else was turbulent. In society at that time there was not an ongoing unrest with violence in the streets of that area. But it was in the world in general. Devastations of the Second World War that was going on and the streets were relatively peaceful. And people walked. We took walks. Perhaps that was partly a condition of not being affluent, that we had to do this, but also we could do that, and all the meaning that it could have to a young person at times. When my sister had a friend, who would quietly take us into a basement apartment and play, the first time I'd heard the recording of Schumann's piano concerto, the full recording that had to be

changed. And then one of the friends got up and sang a bit of Wagner. It was overwhelming. Possibly it is that I had never really heard much of this before, unless it was through radio, old recordings. The restriction on so-called culture made the availability of certain fragments of it so much more meaningful. It was good also to meet the other people who were interested in art, generally. A kind of refuge in that, and mutually supporting. It began to form that way; friendships that still exist. I suppose this is exactly the way it happens now among my students, too. But we, most of us, were doing something that was, if not menacing, at least mysterious to our families, unknown. Not only the American-Jewish families, there were others that were not Jewish who also felt that their children were getting into perhaps lurid and strange areas of existence by going to an art school. And I know that many of us felt that we had to somehow pacify them, that is, reassure them, and there was, I think, much early exhibiting, in order to show a certain respectability. There weren't many opportunities to exhibit, but we, in a way, allowed this to happen, I think, to be able to go home and say, see, what I'm doing is all right, it's serious, and there's competition in this department store, like Jordan Marsh or whatever, or I've won this prize, or I'm going to teach next semester. That is a way, too. I had no active opposition, personally, from either parent, but a certain concern always, that concerned me. That tradition of the art school which was fully becoming better known to us, was not known to us artists, it was another world.

RB: What did they think when first, while still in high school, you went to the Museum for the special classes, LeBrecht classes?

AP: I believe that my mother, for example, considered it an achievement, like getting good grades, because there was a singling out of people. Some got'em and some didn't. So that must have been a positive thing. Just what I was doing there, I would describe endlessly, but I always felt that I was not really getting through.

RB: Could you briefly say what you were doing there? [Laughter]

AP: Yes [Laughter] I was just thinking of that. We made copies of fragments of wooden sculpture from Germany, several centuries ago, or tapestries that were displayed in the hall, or some Egyptian object. And this was to improve our ability to render, to simulate surfaces, illustrate really. For so many of us, this was a fascinating exercise, if you had a taste for that, and I did. Sitting there in that cool corridor, while it got dark, and just rendering the little threads of the fabric, as though there was nothing else in the world that mattered, for a while. It was valuable. It wasn't escape from other problems, at least in art it wasn't. Also, we worked from the statues, that is, the casts of heroic-sized sculpture, the Greek, Roman, Roman sculpture. There were large plaster casts and we drew from that in certain ways. But then there was a class in what was thought of as free, expressive watercolor. Big brushes. Wet colors. And what did you see on the way to class today was the subject. That kind of thing. But, if we felt like liberating something, there was the permission that those circumstances gave, and many of us were very experimental in those days, doing that. There were large classes, but somehow we managed, I think, to get a more intimate kind of notice of the teacher, certain ones of us did. Because it went on all year it was possible to get to know the teacher, and she was helpful. We sometimes went to exhibits. All got on the subway, trolley, whatever it was, subway, and went down to see a large show together. It was truly an introduction. There was the Museum itself. That was a fascinating thing and I spent more time there then, than ever after, even when I later worked for it, in a way, by teaching at the Museum School. No, that's not quite true, because later in the Museum School classes, the School itself, during the War, the School moved to the Museum, took over areas, large areas of the Museum. I don't think what we did there differs very much from what similar classes would be doing today, technically, or even philosophically. But we also met each other there, many of us who went on together. The Cast Court is no longer there in the Museum. That's where the early American collections are now. It was called "Cast Court" then. Huge statues. I suppose students would not copy bits of sculpture unless it was for the rather more limited objective of copying the texture plus the reproductions of an exercise, something like that. But we did it so that the more mysterious internal occupation was proportioned. This was to be the ideal state, and the relationship of sizes, and so on. Ideals of grace and power, words we don't use much now.

RB: But to your students they still have impact?

AP: Yes, I do think so. Yes. But the silent occupation of the drawing was never verbal. It was the same thing we now try haltingly, as I'm stumbling over now to describe in words which is really a very nonverbal and sense-connected kind of experience. We would have then have called it abstract, in the way it appeared in work. Abstractions were known to us then, in the Forties, the early Forties, and visible everywhere. And some of us already, when we thought in terms of style and period, already thought that the abstract style was outmoded, a style not very much unlike what we see now as minimal art in many ways.

RB: You mean, speaking of Pevsner or Gabo . . . ?

AP: Yes. In fact, I was thinking of Gabo. Yes. I originally saw an exhibit out at school, at Boston University, of plastics and sculptures. I remembered handling a Gabo which I once got for an exhibit at Brandeis; unpacking it, and so on. How it was made in the early Thirties, I believe. It seemed so fragile. The plastic wasn't as good as the

plastic we have now. It wasn't as uniform, or shiny, but it was far more humanized by these imperfections in a way, as sometimes Duchamp's work is. There's still the touch of a hand in his, very nice. But, you know, we thought, I'm speaking, I should not perhaps say we, but it seems that around me there was that kind of agreement which, when you don't question it, it exists in your mind and it's functional. We thought and we felt that we were about to see something different happen in the manipulation of pigment itself, which now is simply called expressionistic brushwork, but this had a metaphysical meaning to us then, and also a new beginning. Because painting around us either at the academic end or what we thought, felt, some of us, was a kind of sterilized, expressionist sort of geometric purism in a way. That end, too. The surface itself didn't hint at much, didn't involve as much, and we wanted it to, I think. That's why the early works of Levine, that we saw for the first time, which are all thick and tormented in paint and, sometimes, they're extremely lovely in exactly that variation of surface, were both a link with the way we felt painting must have been at certain times in the past and also a new use for such things. Soutine was of great interest to us. Our teacher, Karl Zerbe, in school, was cooking around all the time, literally, with encaustics, getting thicker and thinner. [Laughter] It was all marvelous and personally meaningful. Later it became really only another way, and not the only one. Each generation had areas of fascination with the hows, the techniques, the undoubtable failures and all other problems.

RB: You were particularly interested, then, in the painting of surface and expressionistic things which you saw either in the old academic way or in the contemporary work, for the most part. Most of it was too smooth and bland?

AP: Yes, at this point I think I'd better start, in self-defense, dividing myself from the "we" that I brought up here, because I felt already, as each of us must have, of course, that there was a personal and a kind of group interest in both novelty and research at both ends. I was interested in the academic painters of Boston. It seemed for a time that I was alone, but later in conversations with my friends at that time, I knew, I found out, that there was an equal interest. We condemned the old Boston artists of being a dead end. We were afraid of them, not personally, but the fear was that we could never, in a way, become noticed, or made a mark when there was still this power which many of us felt was decadent. All this is unjust, but it's entirely typical of an exuberant newcomer, in a way. But I was also fascinated and quietly went to see, not deviously, but quietly, when there was some quiet, to see the shows, and the works of these men, and the reproductions and so on. I also understood that each man was a revolution that became a tradition, in a way. There must be more vitality, certainly, to these works than the simple dismissal we gave them as being academic. Now some of us are in the position of being called academic as we called them academic, these other artists, academic. Of course the same thing has happened. We'd like, I think, each one, to claim a certain margin of more sympathetic understanding, I suppose, like some of us, something, the dead ones, that worked for you, could never say to us unless we drive them back.

RB: These Boston painters corralled the Boston exhibits, did they? At that time, didn't they?

AP: Well, I'm speaking now of the early Forties and I think what was known then as Boston art, massively . . . .

RB: Could you say something now about your going to the Museum School? Why, perhaps, you went to it?

AP: Yes. During the years, they were called City Scholarship Classes, the high school years. At the Museum itself I began to realize that there was a large and very productive art school associated with the Museum, next door, in its own building. And I visited the student shows and I was really seized by the fascination of seeing a kind of involved craftsmanship. The students were doing things that I thought were being done now with a flavor of, an intensity of, craft that I hadn't seen anywhere and this seemed out of the academic, including my own tendencies to the academic. Also, it must have been a solution to what I was to do. I never meant to go on to be a Hebrew teacher, although I think people around me thought I did, but I knew I didn't. I knew there were fellowships available and I just took the exam. I didn't prepare myself for it. It was actually painting all day. We painted and drew from the model and did some work from imagination. We were mostly high school students. And I won it. Entered the school on a half scholarship and found there people with whom I now share many common interests still. So many years after, as sometimes happens. I didn't know who Karl Zerbe was. I was talking about the first glimpse of the man we considered to be important, perhaps inspired; a teacher at the Museum School, Karl Zerbe. And he was that, for us. He had come from Germany, not many years before. His school of painting would include people like Otto Dix and Grosz, people who were familiar with him personally, their work, the conditions surrounding that work. He had also gone to Mexico; knew about the painters such as Rivera, Siqueiros, and so on, Orozco. We didn't, generally, and the lectures were really revelations. Although we had seen reproductions and sometimes originals of a Braque, a Picasso, his words, which went along at the same time, the slide itself in the dark room, it expanded the possibilities of expression so widely for so many of us, I thought. And also he was able to permit a certain personal experimentation by just a friendly sentence. As it happened in my case, he would say, "I don't really like what you're doing, Arthur, but I think you have to do it." That was enough and I felt that was as helpful as he could be as a teacher at that time. The School had what seemed to be a system, and the school at which I now teach has. It was based on something we never thought of in philosophical terms but is a philosophical dilemma, whether the mind can inform the hand. We felt, yes, it

could. Later I've had endless questioning going on privately about such things. And yet I teach, you know. It's resolved by that, more or less. But we had an approach and it was based on study, as though the science, let's say, of anatomy, or the realization of pure geometric form, as a concept, could break into the whole experience of sensation and inform it and guide it and make something intelligible of it and, I think, we felt, something artistic of it. That was the traditional approach. It was unique in Boston, then, to have such an approach. That is, people worked more with the flavor, in a way, of the derived sensations, let's say, from looking at a Sargent or, before him, a Frans Hals, which he must have looked at himself. But in this case we actually looked at the cube and the cone. And, as so many people have in so many centuries, including Cezanne, we had something to say about this kind of solidity. It was to strengthen and give certain rigor to our work, we felt. I think it did that; at least the feeling that there was some solid ground in the paths of study. Also, there were many relatively intense personal careers starting around us, among the students. Zerbe always seemed to appreciate this, and was extremely helpful that way. We studied perspective, art history, to a certain extent, never very scholarly, never very interesting in a scholarly way, but enough to introduce that whole . . . . It was pretty much limited to Western art history, which I later felt was a limitation and I still feel was. We saw these large black and white slides -- four inches, or whatever they were -- of cathedrals, and architectural details, and sculpture, and so on. The European treasures. But also I saw, in a kind of square in front of the cathedral, a 1920 automobile, a person crossing the street in front of Chartres, something like that, which gave me, or I took from it, a kind of promise to myself that I would be there. [Slight laughter] Later, when I got there, it was in a way lucky, visiting, of course, with all the . . . continuously really being there, the air, the sore feet, the cold, the happiness, whatever it was. But also it was in a way inhabiting that kind of history almost through the slides. There was a fascination that held through experience later, in the fragments of art history, the School then; it was wartime, and all the uncertainty, and so on. The building itself was transformed into a hospital very rapidly, for women sailors, as a matter of fact. We moved into the Museum itself, unheated sometimes, rooms of that kind. It was an adventure in itself to just cling to the experience of school. It also made the School quite small. Those of us who did not go into the War, or those who did and were in the School at times, did not form a very large community. So that kind of educational condition, which is sometimes very favorable, took place against the background of all that uncertainty. That is, we were close and knew each other and respected each other. Much humor, even nervous humor, went on all the time and much, I think, crossed inspiration too. Also, the beginnings of the differences in the personal approach were there, even then. But they didn't matter; they didn't divide us. Then the Institute existed, the Institute of Modern Art, as it was called. And what seemed then, now as I look at it, to be really fine, revealing collections of what's now considered to be an expanded assembly of European painters: Miro, Picasso, Braque, and so on. But for us it was the first time really. And along with what the Boston Museum had, it was another view of the extent of art activities. The possibility. It was a very exciting time for me, meeting some of the people. I think what had already started privately, I'll never know in what origin, just had the possibility of cultivation in such an atmosphere. I'm grateful now, even now, for it. We had an emphasis on technique at the School. Karl Zerbe had actually studied with Doerner, the man who wrote a massive volume on technique that was a cumbersome and very scholarly work. But that, too, gave a kind of sure footing to the process. Then there was the Fogg Museum and what I later found out was that tradition of research into materials, and such durability of materials. We didn't think in such terms as immortality, but we cared whether the yellow would darken over the years or the oil itself would yellow the pigment. We cared very much about it. Now I think that in a larger sense that development of a concern for the utmost durability, permanence, sort of arose in a time when another kind of art came about, almost which destroyed itself, or lived for a moment, sort of happening. This was not unknown to us. But we had designations for the real, permanent art and tended to adapt. Some of us taught during the school year. We were allowed to assist. Always in front of us there was the possiblity, and a very fine one, of the European Traveling Scholarship. In the War years this was all suspended, if course, and it was impossible. But shortly after the War, they were awarded, and sometimes retroactively, so that when I got mine, in 1948, I was already assisting teaching at the fifth year, special students, had the experience of teaching, and also went to Europe at a time when some of the older students went who had already graduated. This was to be that kind of a modulation between the student life and the real life for those of us who were lucky enough to win it. It was not liberation from school because, in a way, we put ourselves to school. Perhaps I should speak for myself right now. When I got to Europe, within a few days, I set up a kind of drawing class for myself. Later I found that somewhat ridiculous. That I'd have to live and looked around, whch I also did, later. But that kind of constant training, self-training, went on. . . . . about Zerbe. He was also a practicing artist. That is, he was in the full moment of the production of his work when I went to School. We could go to his home at the end of the School year and see what he'd done during the year. It wasn't a simple matter of liking, or approval, or disapproval. It was a certain observation of how a man transplanted into another country, into our geographical area, could continue to work in a personal, expressive way. Could show in a way what his work had been and what it was becoming while we still studied with him. There were other teachers . . . .

RB: Speaking here about Zerbe's work, did that indicate any feedback from what you were doing? Into his work?

AP: Into his work? He would say such things. It was to him a populous notion, that I learn from students, that idea. He would say that, too. I always felt that he meant it. I couldn't see it directly. I think no student then was ever in a position to see that he had influenced his teacher in any figurative, configuration, area of the painting

or the subject matter. But I think probably that it was true that there was this feedback exactly. Certainly, many of the students seemed to imitate him. And this was an accusation even then against the . . . . There was a Boston Museum School critique which went on around you. I now hear it sometimes at the school in which I teach. These simplifications are always unfair. They're never quite accurate, but there is a reason for it, just grossly looked at. The students seem to work pretty much in this way and not another way. And it's true, because there was that influence, technically, especially. We experimented with encaustics. We revised what we felt must be the way the Sienese, the Umbrian painters worked. We had regular courses in -- which I later taught -- in the application of gold leaf and working with simple egg temperas. Later I met Shahn, Ben Shahn, who was working in the simplified technique of the early Italian painters, thirteenth century and before, using egg tempera directly, when I first met him in 1948. We didn't talk much about the rest of it, that is, style or personal expression. It was acknowledged with a few words, sometimes friendly or complimentary words by Karl Zerbe, or between ourselves. We had a certain modesty about that, and almost joked about it. So that when we talked it was shop talk but not philosophical, and not aesthetically oriented. That became rather bewildering, it seems to me, to many painters I knew who had come from New York later -- painters and sculptors -- and found that the Boston artists of that time, those I knew, as groups surrounding me, just didn't get together to talk all the time, as they must have been doing in New York. This must be different now. I think it is. But we, in a way, were very protective about our time, and went off to work. It always seemed that we worked harder in the past, and I still feel that's very likely true, but with a certain pleasure, I guess. Many of us began to get studios in the area surrounding the Museum. Such people as Esther Geller and John Wilson, Conger Metcalf who had already graduated from the School, were really professional artists by that time, who exhibited and sold their work. During the school years we met Boris Mirsky. I had heard much about him because he would sometimes give temporary employment to the art students to do some sort of a copy of something or commission of some kind, or even cleaning, or taking the 'phone occasionally. I later did all these things for Boris. And I was in on the first, the move from his Charles Street, the first gallery, which represented contemporary artists, to the gallery on Newbury Street, which was around 1945. It as the first group show, which had the work of, perhaps, 25 artists. Some of these have survived, these artists, and are now still my friends and contemporaries, in a way, and productive still also. I can't give a round view of the reception of our work at that time. For example, while I was perhaps a second or third year student, Professor Sachs at Harvard bought a few of my drawings. There was that sort of thing. It didn't seem then like either a remarkable or historical kind of fact. It was a pleasant surprise, a small one. It came against a background of almost impossible, impossibility, any sort of recognition, which we rather meekly didn't really expect. We didn't expect to sell. At least I didn't know of it, that kind of ambition. So that everything seemed to be a surprise when it happened. Not long after, there was a certain attention given to the so-called Boston School. So that, by the end of the Forties, there were exhibits organized in Andover, in the Addision Gallery, by Mr. Hayes, of promising young art students of the country, in which Museum School students and the Institute also would have shows of this so-called Boston group. Already the entity of a group had been formed in the critical mind, and I think it took a bit longer for us individually to feel we were part of it that way. I remember an article in which I appeared, probably Art News, in which the youngest and the oldest, I was the youngest, but Charles Hopkinson was the oldest, the Boston . . . . People aesthetic community were already grouped together as criticism and reporting must do, of course. And so it became the Boston group.

RB: Do you think this is a distortion of the facts?

AP: No. Not any more than we recognize, on a larger scale, the Paris School, or the painters of the Barbizon forest, or whatever it was. It was a way of identifying what was going on, but we couldn't see it ready-formed as a thing to be into words. We thought it was all rather personal . . . . We just happened to be together, individually.

RB: Could you characterize it? If you accept it, how would you characterize it?

AP: I think, reading over, as I've done recently, some of the, for example, the Christian Science Monitor critics -- Dorothy Adlow would write about the group -- we were described as, most of us, the students of Karl Zerbe in the Museum School. Even a book such as Sam Hunter's book, called, I think, American Paintings of 1945 made the simple biographical mistake of classifying Jack Levine as one of the students in the Museum School. He never was, really. But it seemed natural to make that . . . to assemble around that kind of study, a sort of mutual incentive. This was Hunter's nucleus of incentive and interest. I think there was a mixture of tradition and experimentation that seemed to characterize, for others, this group, and each one would have admitted that in his own work. We didn't see the similarities because, you know, it's an endlessly private thing when you produce. You're startled perhaps, -- later, unless you've been tricky and simply copied (which we mustn't admit), to see these similarities. They can always be traced, culturally, economically, by all the paths of study, and all these have truth in them, certainly. It was a figurative school. We painted people and things. A few painted geometric abstractions, so-called, but that was exceptional. Usually they were done with design elements that made them seem to be imaginative. That is, there was always some intervention of the artist who was not simply a reporter. It was not that pure impression that a man like Velazquez seems to have made when he looked at the princess from a certain distance and painted what came to his eyes, apparently dispassionately, at that distance and got a marvelous new view of something we could never see otherwise, anyway, in the same of

something we always see. But most of us didn't do that and, in a way, we tormented the subject matter. It swirled and it got disfigured and newly arranged, and so on. All that was sort of a rich possibility for expression for us but there wasn't much simple naturalism or much simple pure form geometrically.

RB: Was there much interest in torment and disquiet?

AP: I think it must be admitted that they must have been conscious . . . . This is what seems to come out of looking back at the subjects of the paintings sometimes. They were crucifixions done again. Without humor, let's say. Or without a cool detachment that later seemed to become necessary in depicting such subjects. Also, many humanistic categories of subjects, stories, at least, of people toiling and suffering. But then as much as that there was a simple realization in pictorial form of just a head against a background which, philosophically, in terms of itself and outside, itself and others, we shouldn't call it that; but it's as though we did portraiture in an interrogative way, asking what could be made of it, not remembering what had been done with it. I continue to speak using the pronoun "we," and probably confine it because I vaguely remember certain experiences in painting, certain subjects in painting. A man like David Aronson, for example, caused quite a reaction in the country because his subjects, which I could describe as being imaginatively-designed human figures, were also Biblical figures and New Testament figures. There was much indignation and interest and support, and it was not taken calmly. He did a "Last Supper" which was called by one Boston critic "the devil's bedboard," but it won the Institute prize of original paintings. So things seemed to be going on and there was some attention to what was happening. I think, generally, our work seemed to be respected for the craftsmanship. That kind of background of cultivation that did distinguish it, I'd like to think, from many other experiments of comparable young people. I guess we're somewhat proud of that too.

RB: Through all this, at least for Europe, was Zerbe the main teacher?

AP: Oh, there were others. Our drawing teacher, with whom most of us that I'm now referring to studied, was Ture Bengtz. He's still an active painter and graphic artist. He was especially inspiring to me in that he maintained a large graphic art studio within the School and, after teaching the rudimentary techniques, allowed a larger personal development, since we went there until midnight, when necessary, and began to learn in our way what to do with the simple knowledge of lithography and etching. This was very important to me. Drawing was very important in a conventional sense of drawing. It was also a time when drawing -- we knew our own projects in drawing -- could be exhibited as works that were independent by themselves, ends in themselves, which is also a tradition in Western art, perhaps Eastern art too. But it became especially like that around Boston, and continued to be like that. We began to . . . would think of the drawings of Hyman Bloom and still do, perhaps, as work. Perhaps they're preparations for painting but derived from the general experimentation around the painting, but each one had the right to a serious attention of the work. For me, of course, the drawings of Sargent were important. It was also at that time that I heard much denunciation of the superficiality, so-called, of technique such as Sargent's. We didn't trust it, you know. I never really joined in that. There were other marvels in the accomplishments of Sargent that outweighed any . . . . It wasn't what Cezanne was giving me beyond the surface of the flower pot he painted. No, but there was something about light and the human standing there, depicted, after all, not photographical. Or only . . . it was never only that. This was part of my private treasure and is why I'm grateful to be in contact with the Museum. The men we often spoke about included Modigliani and Soutine. But then it would go right back -- Rembrandt, Tintoretto, and so on -- as it has probably for centuries.

RB: What were your reactions to things by Picasso, Miro, and others at the Institute of Modern Art?

AP: I think first there was that personal, somewhat intellectual, excitement of seeing something new, it was new then, which wasn't a deep, mutual . . . that is, the painting and art together. It wasn't that. It was the category of excitement, first, which I later thought of as a purely cultural thing. But that didn't preclude an involvement with each man so that I might later, after seeing a large Picasso, get involved in this mysterious, appreciative way, with a small reproduction in a book. But the two came together at around the same decade. The Museum had very few paintings of the contemporary school, but some, and some American men who were unknown to me before that. Dali, for example.

RB: So that Picasso, Miro, these, you didn't absorb into your own expressive life, intellectually?

AP: I remember in school, perhaps even the third year, doing some drawings that I felt . . . . There's a certain acknowledgement of having seen Picasso's work. It isn't that it ever looks like a Picasso. There was a certain built-in restraint about doing that, although other people did it with great profit. They simply worked in the manner of, as students do. I tried not to do that. I set certian limitations on that. But I wanted certain surfaces, let's say, that neither old masters or contemporary masters, as I felt they were, had; and I wanted to find out how I could make some for myself, then extended what I tried to do. For that reason the exposure -- it really worked in a limited way. This is not a European city in which exhibits pass through, or already existed in the town, nor was it New York. I remember a visit to New York in the late Forties, the first one, and how some of us

young art students went there. We went to see Jack Levine -- I never knew him personally until that visit -- but also to see the museums, the galleries, yes, that existed then. I had referred to Hyman Swetzoff, who was at that time . . . at that time worked for the Institute. And it was in itself a fascinating thing to know him then, with his intellectual and personal contacts. He knew the biographies of the men. He knew their writings. He had translated Redon's statements on art from the French, and so on. It isn't that I simply sat with open eyes and mouth and absorbed something new. I think there was a preparation. There always must be, for these things.

RB: Did you go on a European scholarship that fall or right after you had completed the Museum?

AP: In '48.

RB: Did that seem a natural thing to do next?

AP: I knew that people I knew were doing that. Those who had won scholarships, competed, and won it. There was a conflict. I really felt, and that's the word, that I should settle down somewhere and paint without school conditions for a while. So that displacement in going to Europe was a distraction, which was not altogether pleasant for me. Afterwards, of course, I was glad it took place. It did take a while because of the conditions in Europe at that time and also having to see certain things. It seemed like the first and the last time I ever would. I didn't work much the first year. As I said, I drew all the time but that was a kind of keeping things going. But I was there longer than a year and worked continuously for many months, an experience I've never really had since then; the privilege of unbroken work, when I chose to do it, and so on. That seems to me the best offering of the whole deal, the whole scholarship. I heard many concerts there, travelled somewhat, not very extensively, and went to see many films. They would be Cinematheque Francais -- the Museum of Film -- which still exists and is flourishing now, I hear. And every day they'd have a new film, starting with very near the first one, to the contemporary. This was not directly, visibly related to anything in my painting, but certainly related. The whole mystery of sitting in the dark and watching this world take place in films, it's never stopped being mysterious, rich, and reactions, and so on.

RB: You had an interest in historical examples. Was this an opportunity you availed yourself of?

AP: Yes. In Europe, of course. Well, I did what other art students did and walked through miles of paintings, probably (laughter) in those years, and a lot of architecture. Sometimes I managed a certain reaction as I thought that, here you are, look at it; and at other times I couldn't because I was there long enough and could go back and quietly see whether it meant something. Certain experiences before the "Little Blue Vase," by Cezanne, for example. It's a big thing. I don't know how to describe that afternoon. But I know my clothes were stolen the same day (laughter) in my room, when I got back. There were large exhibits, then. It was beginning to be impossible to have them in post-War Europe, and collections such as the Kroeller-Mueller Museum outside of Amsterdam, of not only van Gogh but French paintings, the certian peaks. One of the best things, I think, for me was the visit to the Gauguin Museum in Paris. I had never seen so many of his drawings. They were not reproduced as they are now, and the small plasters [?]. Also I was much interested as many young people have been and are, and will be, perhaps, in the poet Rilke, with whom I knew in translation but I also knew that he had been Rodin's secretary. I had this personal reason for wanting to stand in the garden and look back at the house where I thought once he had been, this man whom I had admired so much. But then there was also the sculpture. Always that literary and artistic merger. The city itself, which then was sometimes cold and difficult and depressing, was also the city of all these artists and looked like so many of the paintings.

RB: Were you in touch with artists much over there?

AP: Sometimes it was only the few American friends who had come on similar scholarships. In '48, in Paris, I didn't know many European artists. I knew many musicians and later I met some artists from Israel who just happened to be in that painting area with me, who had a very the way I felt about it before I got to France. They were almost an example of the worship of this culture and they were beginning to do things of their own. I was not in very long contact with them, some sculptors and painters. I, without thinking very clearly about it, had this feeling that what was germinating in Boston, among the young painters I knew, was pretty much related to what I found historically, that is, in the paintings of the past. Perhaps more than what I found in the contemporary work in France at that time. I joined an exhibit there of artists under thirty. A salon of the young artists, and there were other Americans whom I didn't know, and the paintings by these people were . . . it sounds like a very protective, patriotic sort of thing -- they looked like they belonged in that city. Also this was a difficult time for French art. They were the masters of French painting. Picasso was, as always, very active and new works were coming from Matisse, Braque, and so on. We saw these. But they didn't know much about the American experimentation. They had a very simplified view, those artists, or people I came in contact with. I found myself almost explaining my country's art, which was a position I never thought I'd be in -- or at least saying there's more to it than you might see. Later, of course, all this was very much rectified by an exchange of information and travel and exhibits. No. I think when I went to Italy it was to see what had been done and maybe some of the films, which I saw in Paris and saw in New York, [I mean] in Boston. But it's possible I simply didn't go to where

things were going on. I went to Belgium and I knew James Ensor was alive, and in that town, Ostend. He was at that time beginning to be extremely important to me as a painter, and remained so for an extremely long time. He died in 1950. A huge exhibition in the Thermal Palace at that time, which had magnificent galleries filled with Kokoschka, Chagall. People like Dix and Modersohn-Becker. The French painters. Modigliani. It was a magnificent exhibit. What an assembly of things, including the Ensor, "Entering of Christ into Brussels," which later came to Boston. And the window of the Institute was removed, it's so large.

RB: What particularly attracted you to Ensor?

AP: It was a kind of direct, almost impertinent way, of using the paint and the subject, that is, there was a sometimes silly, sometimes solemn, but ranging kind of subject matter. It thrust itself, his work, away from its own foundation which was a classical and very thorough grounding in draftsmanship. He had it and he didn't use it. In abasing it, it revealed itself in a new way. This was personally interesting for me. I had to overthrow the skill that I had once wanted and couldn't constantly want, and wanted something else. And this man, in his own way, in his own very rich way, did that. It was simple reaction to certain colors sometimes. What he could do with rooftops . . . . Also, there was something about . . . . He was an extremely provincial man in a way, almost his free [attitude]. The whole life was lived within a few buildings, although a few trips also. He made a kind of expansive world in his work out of this apparently limited experience. This was to me a very important, inspiring idea. I think Kafka did it in his writings. That is, it was always that question, do we take in the world and give it out in the form of paintings, or is it relief from an inexhaustible self-germinating source, which I seemed to favor at that time.

RB: Yes. You've mentioned that, in your childhood, that is the contrast and how that actually goaded you on, the poverty and the culture.

AP: There's no end to that question, really. I can't deny that I was prepared to seek a course by some mysterious origin in me, and also, if I hadn't seen him, I perhaps wouldn't have done what I did. You can't know that.

RB: When you were there, would you say you were behaving still as a student, or were you considering yourself as a professional?

AP: I think when it was possible to get a place and the time, as it was in the second year, at the end of 1949 to the close of 1950, that I began to work with continuity of work leading to work which I could not think of as being a student in the sense of being at school, or still going along with the momentum of being a student. It was a different experience and one which I still seek in a way. The study was . . . . I didn't have to go out to see anything. I just had to go see what I bestowed and what struggle was, what could be revealed from one work to the other. So I felt that the student days were over. I think also all through the student days there was a certain reserve. This notion that, with all respect and interest I felt for the teachers, really no one could tell me what I was about to do, not what I was doing, which could be observed objectively, and I could take that other view of it; but what interested me was not that (laughter), but what would happen. It still does. Perhaps now in my teaching that's still a question. More than anything it's that I don't have the way in for the student. I have only that view, and a kind of friendly, I hope, observation. And a certain personal experience I could share. Craft . . . .

RB: Before you went to Europe, you had already done some teaching, hadn't you?

AP: Yes. Those guys who competed for the European Fellowships usually stayed on a fifth year which was partially paid for by assisting in the department we were interested in which was paying. Also, I taught children, earlier, in a school, which I think was mainly an adult education center but on weekends had children's classes. I did that again later in the Chinese area of the city; Chinese Y.M.C.A., in the Fifties, for some years. Teaching was familiar, way back, and also portraiture. Even as a student I had commissions and I would get commissions to talk to part of the course and do a portrait. And did even public portraiture then. I had a few private students in France, also. One or two, I think. I remember two. Occasionally. I didn't mean to do that. It seemed natural. And when I came back I almost immediately found myself involved in the last summer session of the Museum, a school in the Berkshires, running the painting area.

RB: Had you a number of colleagues out there?

AP: The first session of that . . . the first year of the summer session was 1947. It was a new thing -- a new undertaking. It was housed in the Berkshire Museum in Pittsfield. The first instructor in painting was Ben Shahn and I assisted him. I think Laurent, Robert Laurent, the sculptor, was the sculpture department at that time, and he was assisted, I think, by a friend and colleague, Rino Pisano. That was the year, I'm pretty sure. The second year I was in Europe and Kokoschka was the teacher at that time: the artist-in-residence, teacher, both. That also took place in Pittsfield and I know about it from the people who lived through it as students, in a way. No, I'm sorry, the second was not that. Mitchell Soporin was the instructor then, assisted by Reed Kaye. It was the year after that Kokoschka came, and I was not there. My wife was a student in his class. I heard about it through

her and others. There were some notes written up. Apparently, it was a lastingly exciting experience and it brought about many experiences that continued through the work and the teaching of some of the people who were studying then. It was after that that I taught the last session of that whole enterprise, but the people who came up to assist me -- it isn't exactly that they assisted me -- but also to appear occasionally as teachers -- were my own former teachers, Karl Zerbe and Hyman Bloom, who at that time were doing some teaching in crafts form. Mestrovic, the sculptor, was there in 1950 also. Also, we met many of the composers and musicians from the area, Tanglewood, which was very important. Jacques Ibert, who had known Debussy, of course, and so on, was there to supervise the production of one of his operas. Koussevitzky was alive in the late Forties and very vigorously participating in the activities, the musical activities, of Tanglewood.

RB: Well, Shahn and some of the others weren't, of course, regular parts of the Museum School . . . ?

AP: It was only a summer session . . . .

RB: Special -- specially constituted staff.

AP: Exactly.

RB: Do you have any recollections about Shahn, the way he talked, and some of your . . . .

AP: I know that the first days after he arrived were difficult for him because he simply hadn't taught before -- at least around that setting -- as far as I know. I, and some others who were the assistants, had set up something like a miniature program that, in a way, condensed and repeated the program of the winter school. And so he found it all existing, but he immediately got into, quite properly, a far more personal kind of dialogue with the students. But there were so many that I think it seemed exhausting to him at first. I know he went on to do this in summer schools and other schools, later, and was after that a teacher. Yet, he seemed to have no defenses and he would answer everything -- which I think is very profitable to a student -- on technique, on background and light, his ideas. He told stories. He seemed to enjoy the company of students, interested in the music that went on nearby. We didn't do much then -- that is, as assistants of other faculty or students -- didn't go much into his life, somehow. What appeared later in the biography by Rodman and others, we didn't know much about this. Perhaps I did have a rough idea of its existence then, but it was the evolution of his work that we knew. The exhibit that took place was very important, in the Berkshire Museum. Later it came to Boston. What really seemed to be a political visit, that is, the Institute, had him speak. He came to my studio earlier, privately. He was still continuous of the friendship from that summer, and to look at some of my work which I, like, wanted him to do. That was the time of the Progressive Party. Henry Wallace was the temporary phenomenon, an artist who is apparently involved in politics and social change, as he felt it would take place, history, pictography, other things. But he openly professed an interest in everything and said that what he did in his home town in politics, or in some state, in a state election, was as important to him as a painting. This was not at all like our romantic notion -- I'm speaking of myself and some friends -- of what the painter did. We didn't think of it as escaping, certainly, but we thought of it as some other kind of involvement which was, if not deeper, at least, quite aside from the activist mass in the world. But Shahn was quite different, and his work had, soon after, an immense popularity. It went into all the levels of graphic representations so that it became almost boring to see the ramifications and repetitions and that went back to his own work. Unfortunately, we could see something like a diluted Shahn in wrappers and advertisements, which were fine and someone profited greatly from his experiments, but made it difficult to see in clarity what he had done, for what. I lost contact with him; of course, he didn't write much and I, occasionally, wrote to him. Saw him for the last time when he came to deliver the Norton lectures at Harvard, which had become the book's shape of content. Later his son was one of the students at the Museum School. I saw him and was rather friendly with him for a time. He was a sculptor then, the son. Surrounding Shahn at that time, in l947, were such people as Sholom Asch, the writer, and others I didn't know but I knew in other fields of activity, and not only art. I went to visit him once after that, in New Jersey, in a studio there. He talked about his earlier days in Europe. I hadn't yet seen Europe. I just sang a folksong, Spanish, or French, played the guitar. But he was very much, at that time, in the whole ferment of political activity, the whole notion of a third political party in this country. [END OF SIDE ONE] The second session of an interview with Arthur Polonsky May 21, 1972

RB: I'd like to get started today by asking you some of your involvements with other artists beginning in the 1940's. I know there was one occurrence in 1948 where Boston area artists were in some kind of confrontation with what was then the Institute of Modern Art, which very shortly became the Institute of Contemporary Art. Could you say something about that?

AP: I recently found a typed announcement of the event that was the public manifestation of this problem. A meeting which would now simply be called a protest meeting -- I don't know which term we used then -- at the Old South Church in Boston, I believe in 1948. It seems to me, it was . . . . It might have been '47. I knew of it this way, that it was a long . . . . Well a couple of years of resentment by many of the younger artists against what was in the Institute of Modern Art, which we considered to be an important and exciting and enlightening

kind of institution in Boston. In fact, quite rare. For many of us it was the beginning of a certain recognition of what we considered to be a powerful and important production of European and American art. But I think we -- I, at least -- didn't know the background to it. There was a series of acts that seemed to us to be a kind of retrenchment of the progressive attitude on the part of the Museum, of the Institute. Many of the people I now think of as the young people who resented this are now, I'm sure, considered to be either the academic or at least the mature or the conservative artists of the area, if they're acknowledged as artists at all in this area. But, at that time, what seemed to be the liveliest aspects of the Institute were being cut down in favor of, I believe, something like shows of design in industry, which was not categorically a bad idea for us. It wasn't bad. It seemed to me that support of interest would be withdrawn from what was about to happen, that is, what was happening among the younger artists. Then the change in the title, which did cause some confusion and consternation outside of the Boston area because, at that time, -- all these words change, of course, their meaning -- the word "modern" seemed hopeful and full of future and the word "contemporary" seemed like a milder substitute. For some reason the Institute changed its name to the Institute of Contemporary Art. And we thought then that the conservative elements that were sought for its financial backing had put certain pressures on it. Also, there were the little incidents like double -- two openings for an exhibit in which the artists were invited one night and the public, which was the private public, at that time, invited another night, the explanations being that the staircase was too fragile to support so many people. With the kind of characteristic, maybe, malice of the youth at that time, we felt, no, that was a discrimination against us because of our being artists -- even though our work was being exhbited -- and also, perhaps, the way we dressed or acted. Now this may have been unreasonable. Not all that's fact, but I heard about the voicing of such resentments at the time. It built up quite remarkably that year. We had organized meetings in which we -- I was not personally involved in it, although some of the people I knew were. A man like Jack Levine, who hadn't really been in Boston for several years, for example, came in for the first time in many years to speak at this meeting. Hyman Bloom also had a polite, carefully-worded document of protest which was read by somebody else. He didn't often appear, vocally, publicly, at the same time. Janson, the art historian, came up. Karl Zerbe, he'd been our teacher. The Institute definitely felt attacked because that was, at that time, the equivalent of public notice. That is, it's not television but at least newsreel and magazine and newspaper coverage in all its aspects. And I believe there were statements in response to it, and I think one of them was made in collaboration with other institutions. I'm not sure, but I think also the Museum of Modern Art got in on defending itself publicly, the choice of the title "contemporary" instead of "modern," and so on. And restatement of its allegiance to the vitality of what was going on.

RB: What was at the root of the artists' complaint or unhappiness with the Institute? Besides, as you mentioned, the openings . . . ?

AP: Yes. But I think that's true in life generally, a fear, or in some cases a certainty, that the Institute would veer off into -- become a showcase for -- something quite different that what we thought it ought to show and support, and especially to show . . . hold that to the public. This was a time when, in Boston still, the people who considered themselves either young, contemporary, or in some way forcefully novel or personal, had widespread way, did not include these people, including such men as our own teacher, Karl Zerbe, who was respected and collected throughout the country and, in a way, quietly in the New England area but never by the Museum of Fine Arts, for example. Or, I believe they owned one watercolor, and at a time when his work was being acquired quite seriously, with pleasure, by some of the other institutions.

RB: Could you see, for example, in the Museum of Modern Art, twentieth-century American art?

AP: I can't remember . . . .

RB: Was it exhibited?

AP: I remember European art perhaps more than American, although there was something that continued in the Institute during this -- after this problem, and I don't really know how it is now. It changed activities and aspects so much that I couldn't compare it to those times. There was a show of New England artists every year, which was very important. There was a jury and prizes, and so on. Then there were one-man shows of -- I believe, I don't remember specifically, whether American artists were shown often. I remember seeing an original Dali for the first time, for example; a certain painting by Matisse that I had never seen reproduced. Dufy. These were from New England collections. That is one of the men directing . . . . The Institute in '46-'47 was directed by a Mr. Metcalf and another man named Mr. Allen who had this marvelous information, knowledge, and sometimes acquisition of the works of recent great European artists such as Cezanne, Matisse, and so on. Dufy, others. And prints too. And would get either loans of these interesting objects, or get similar objects for their exhibitions. It was a very exciting and informative event. I wasn't close enough to the controversy to know exactly what the points of protests were or the response either. I was somewhat more involved in it after it was over, and this was in 1948, when it seemed to me as though the Institute had, in a way, modified its policies because of the whole painful business of the reactions of the artists. So it seemed. And they had a three-man show, at that time, which must have been in the early fall of 1948, which was, I thought and felt, was when the director I

thought it was an attempt to start over again with a kind of friendly coalition, you know, of forces. I was one of the three artists and a man named Lucas Messler, who was . . . an older European artist who had settled in the Boston area, not well known, and Panos Ghikas. But each one of us represented an obviously different approach in painting. Ghikas was in what was then considered to be a geometric or abstract style, and Messler, representational, but very much personalized, somewhat close to Feininger, Klee; kind of quiet, small format, beautifully drawn, and so on. And my work which I suppose seemed to some to be at least characteristic, if not typical, of what was going on then among some of the people emerging, for example, from the Museum School, Boston artists of a younger age. A 3-man show. It was widely reported, the show. It got into Art News, for example, in New York, with serious and lengthy reviews. Some of my friends considered my participation to be betrayal, and it was only then that I realized that the enmities persisted and that I was naive in thinking that it was over.

RB: This was after the . . . ?

AP: When everything calmed down, really. I remember, now, that some of the problems seemed to us to be the terms on which we exhibited there. The selection was made by the directors of the Institute, which wasn't an unusual thing, but we did resent it. We had nothing to say about, again, the opening or the presentation to the public, publicity. I think that was important to people protesting against the Institute. And it seemed to me that, when I got the telegram, as a matter of fact, from Mr. Plaut, saying, "Will you agree to show in this three-man show? Pick out your work," that some of the terms that in a way we had won, on some points, at least. I thought so. It seemed reasonable.

RB: You were allowed to pick out your own work?

AP: Yes. At least I submitted a larger number which was reduced somewhat. As a matter of fact, I was not invited to the opening, formally, of the show (laughter). I was looking through the window and the person who was then the secretary, said, "Why don't you just come down tonight. We're opening tonight." This may be a dramatic view of some oversight, but I'm not so sure it was. It went on that way. It was, possibly, from their point of view, not a kind of social discrimination against artists. It could not have been. But it was easy to interpret it that way. We became rather touchy about it and felt it was. That there would be a different direction. All that would not have been painful and important to us if we hadn't had such hopes for the Institute being such a force, both privately, to us, and publicly, around Boston, so that such a thing was really needed at that time.

RB: Your three-man show was widely covered in the press . . . . At that time there was a good deal of focus on what went on in art in Boston, wasn't there, nationally?

AP: Yes. There was a man who worked for Time-Life who was in Boston -- stationed in Boston somehow, or lived there, I'm not sure -- who had a real curiosity, interest, in exactly that, the so-called New Boston Group, school, which even then I couldn't see as a school or a group. I always thought that was a humorous designation; but later I came to agree. Historically, at least, categorically, it must be that. And he would interview, singly interview artists, and talk to them in a friendly way and come to the shows; and occasionally give some notice of it. I think he was responsible for a large column, at least, in Time magazine on Boris Mirsky and on the simple story of Mirsky's pioneering efforts for modern art, contemporary art, in Boston. That was a time of, for example, an exchange exhibition between the Downtown Gallery in New York and the Boris Mirsky Gallery of Boston. I think 1947. In '48 I know that sometime that year Art News had a large double-page comment and a large group photograph which gave a kind of round picture of the various artists' concern with this new productivity around Boston. It included people such as Maude Morgan and Lawrence Kupferman, who were then already the more mature members. I believe I was mentioned as the youngest and Charles Hopkinson as the oldest. I don't think either of us ever thought of being, at least formally, a member of any kind of designated group, but simply geographically and, in our activities, we worked at the same time in the same place.

RB: Who was this reporter?

AP: I wonder. I don't know now who it was. I have this somewhere.

RB: Did you artists feel he really knew what he was writing about? If he'd met with you . . . ?

AP: Characteristically, we never discussed these things. At least I wasn't around when most of the artists concerned said anything about all this. We lived and acted almost independently, or in small groups, friendships. Until Artists' Equity was formed, I think also around that time, I knew of no meetings of any larger groups of artists in Boston, and I think it remained even after Equity -- the New England chapter of Equity. But generally the Boston artists didn't congregate, didn't assemble for any special purpose or with any regularity. Maybe for special purposes, occasionally. I remember that, more recently, but during those years not much of that. You asked . . . .

RB: Yes. Could you say something about your sheer, physical . . . work, your studio and the various places

where you were when you were still -- during this period . . . ?

AP: I'm thinking of the studios during the student years. There was one in which John Wilson worked and it was just opposite the Museum, corner of Parker Street, in a brick building. I think it still exists. I now see John Wilson almost on a daily basis during the school year; we're on the faculty together at Boston University. Then, he was a bit more advanced in school than I. I think in fourth or fifth year when I entered the Museum School, and already he had a studio which was, in a way, an exciting, somewhat respectable, thing for one of the student artists. Many of us would drop in there often to see what he was doing and also speak to him and spend some time in the studio of a young artist. It was a new experience. Slowly, many of us began to get studios in that area. That was the Parker Street, Tavern Road, Field Street area between Huntington Avenue and Ruggles Street. One street especially, Tavern Road, already was the location of two sculptors. One of them was a teacher, who was then an old man, at the Museum School, named Frederick Allen, and Elizabeth Smith, a younger sculptress. But the street immediately after that was where I found an old, decaying, in fact condemned, building -- this was wartime -- and shared a small apartment in this building with, at that time, my closest friend, Michael Pulachefsky, a fellow student at the Museum School. In that buiding . . . . It was wartime, the rents were frozen by some office which froze rents. The place was cold also, difficult to heat, uncomfortable, but possible, and very cheap. Hyman Swetzoff lived downstairs for a while. He later ran a very successful gallery for many years in Boston. He was writing at that time, and I came to see him later at night when we both stopped working. I had known him before. Allen Levine, the composer was there for some of the winters for four years. An artist named Jenkins lived upstairs. He was, perhaps. the most characteristically Bohemian type of all of us. That is, it seemed like he really didn't do much work, but it appeared. And years later I knew him very differently in France. He simply went there, as many of us did on scholarships, and remained. And I believe he's still there. And began to lead that sort of expatriate -- continuation of the expatriate's life -- that I had read about. Somehow got to know Picasso, acquired a letter of recommendation from him which he carried around, and just stayed on and on . . . . This little place was adequate. I was both a student and an assistant teacher at that time in the Painting Department at the Museum School. I did some portraits there. My first large commission, I think. I had done many portraits that were smaller and less important in many ways, even during high school years. We would go to school all day, paint in the evenings, paint on weekends, and, in general, enjoyed the whole thing very much.

RB: The time you had that studio, on what was it . . . ?

AP: Field Street. Yes.

RB: Field Street, in Boston. You were living away from your family, or living . . . ?

AP: Well, it was because of that studio. My parents and my sister lived in Lunn. They had gone back to Lynn. We had lived in Roxbury for some years. And, having that studio and working at night, it seemed reasonable to simply stay on there. Although I would go home on weekends to consider taking a bath, for example (laughter). It was not possible in such a studio. There was a bathroom there but the bathtub was filled with frames and very cold. In fact, it sounds colorful enough, but we would crack the ice through the kitchen sink in the morning to get going. It was heated by a small oil stove. There were some parties. There was a housewarming (laughter), as a matter of fact, for this place, which I very well remember.

RB: Could you describe it?

AP: Well, it was actually a surprise party, and simply the people we knew as fellow students came in with objects. Towels -- I don't know what -- cooking utensils, which in each case were needed, therefore wanted (laughter) and so were appreciated. And some music, and much humor. Music was important, different sorts of music. An old record player and some instruments we had. My violin. Michael Pulachefsky, with whom I shared this place, played guitar, trumpet, sometimes violin, and recorder. We would occasionally get together with these instruments. David Aronson came up once, with his recorder. It was into this studio that I once took Shahn on a visit to Boston, in that place. And although, at that time we . . . . Because I worked with him the summer before, we were very friendly and very easy with each other, but I assumed, even on early Sunday morning, that, when you had a guest of that sort -- that is, a famous man -- you had to do something like get out a bottle of sherry. Sherry seemed to be the thing. It must have startled him to see it, in the middle of that Sunday morning; but there it was and we drank it. He looked at some of my drawings then. Then he went down to the Institute; gave a political speech. There was a show of his work going on at that time. In that area there were other artists. I remember some names. I don't think they're now familiar as artists, although they worked quite seriously at that time.

RB: Could you mention some of them?

AP: There was Stephen Sidropolous who was one of our most admired older students at school for his work in lithography, especially the scenes he did of his experiences in the War. Henry Baum, who had the whole place

really . . . . It resembled almost a caricature notion of an artist's studio, and he worked and seemed to be terribly fatigued by his labors in art when we visited him. He still exists. I haven't seen him for many years. Later, when I taught at the Museum School, in the early Fifties, this area of Boston was animated again by student artists. Another generation. Perhaps there was one in between that I'm not accounting for right now. And I remember in almost the same building that I've just described -- this being the building in which my friends had studios -- visiting my students at that time, who had their studios. One of them is Allen Coty, who is right now in New York, doing very well. And making enormous canvasses which, I suppose, would be described as completely abstract. That is, they're simple geometric forms put together in what I think is a marvelously poetic way for that kind of simplicity. But very popular, acquired, very large, and the subject of much involved commentary (laughter). But it was not the way he was painting at the time, naturally.

RB: Would you say . . . ? Could you go as far as to say that when you were within that area was there a sort of communal or community feeling at all?

AP: Yes. There were others and I don't think I -- Francesco Carbone, who is still a painter and teacher in the Boston area, also had a studio on the Huntington Avenue end of Parker Street. There were visits between us. We knew . . . . There was a proximity, of course, we used it. There were others, I'm sure. There was a man just across the street who had an old and very much dilapidated home in which instruments and paintings abounded. He was a restorer. And he had statues in his garden. Everything was falling apart and being repaired, in some state of transition, but marvelously interesting, including the instruments and what he called a Rembrandt that he was restoring, which we think was a Rembrandt.

RB: Did you have a sense of being a distinct group within the community of Boston painters?

AP: I think that took place in two forms: the Museum School students or recent graduates and the Mirsky group. And these overlapped, of course, to a great extent, did. In 1945 the Mirsky Gallery was on Charles Street. Even before that time I had heard of Mirsky because I knew such people as Jason Berger, for example. Others who had mentioned Mirsky. And I thought that when I tried to get a summer job I would go down to the Mirsky Gallery on Charles Street because I had heard that he gave out work, like copying things and making French watercolors, pastels, or whatever they were. It was a kind of artwork sort of art which at that time was still a possible summer occupation. And it turned out, in fact, to be true, and many of us worked for Mirsky here in his frame shop or doing some special craft or art, sort of, operation which he needed for his varied activities at that time.

RB: This artwork you speak of, is it the kind of thing that would be low-priced that he would either sell or would put into a large store or something?

AP: We called them potboilers . . . . I can remember doing such things as using photographs of Egyptian wall paintings or tomb paintings for what I did as an enlargement of one motif of one figure that became an Egyptian painting. Whether anyone could consider a show card color -- poster color -- reproduction of an Egyptian painting an original, I don't believe that's possible. No one tried to present it that way, I'm sure. I hope not, anyway. I'm quite sure. But there was this Egyptian painting which I produced, for example, or sometimes it was simple restoration. Or usually, portraits. Portraits of Franklin Roosevelt or Chaim Weizmann, or some important national or international figure, which was done almost on an assembly-line basis (laughter), using any means to turn out a great number. Actually, these little jobs and working on . . . involved themoving of the Mirsky Gallery and in the frame shop . . . . So many of us worked for Mirsky in his framing operations in one way or another. These were also life-saving activities for many of us. A certain part of our lives, let's say, were saved by doing this. The contact with his gallery which was important. Friendship involved in it, and the money obtainable from that sort of activity, that was at least somewhat related to what we were doing.

RB: Was he a man that got pretty close to the young men who were working with him?

AP: There was always that kind of jovial intimacy here. It resulted, or it went on into long friendships or, at least, associations sometimes, friendships and affection. And allegiance and betrayal. Nothing was taken very lightly in these associations, really. If you mean that, I think that's quite true and quite characteristic of Mirsky and the whole surrounding . . . the activity surrounding him in his first shows. For example, both Hyman and Seymour Swetzoff worked for Mirsky; and, during the days of the first gallery on Newbury Street, it was Hyman Swetzoff who ran the gallery. And Seymour had the experience then of framing. There were others involved, related to these people. Many of the artists I knew then, as either practicing or student artists, were involved with Mirsky in one way or another, helping to reconstruct the building in which his new gallery on Newbury Street would be, or exhibiting through him. All the one-man shows at that time. Bernard Chaet, the first one-man show, in the Forties. Hyman Bloom was associated with Boris, too, at that time. Levine. That association went on for many years. That exchange exhibit I mentioned, the exhibition in 1947 between Downtown Gallery and the Mirsky Gallery . . . there was that kind of working relationship between the galleries. Such artists as Zerbe, Julian Levi and Shahn and Soporin. Sheeler, others came down from that gallery to Mirsky's and we were sent up there. Sent to New York.

RB: Probably you . . . . Were you brought in to do some summer work but a good many of you were also then exhibited in regular exhibitions at Mirsky's?

AP: When I went to work for Mirsky on Charles Street, the little place on Charles Street, I would answer the 'phone, or would do some sorting, or house-cleaning, or whatever it was, and that went on. And these odd jobs too. But I was also one of the members of the first group show and the other shows. These were quite sumptuous, in a way, the group shows, when they finally took place on Newbury Street, with large openings, well attended, well-fed (laughter), and entertaining. There was music. It was a kind of -- not circus -- but, at least, a kind of fair sort of atmosphere surrounding what was really a serious and pioneering beginning of a serious exposing of the various types of art, including Mexican painting, which wasn't often shown around here then. The artist Carlos Merida who came here for the opening of the show. With real loyalty to a certain belief that Mirsky had, I believe that's the way it was. A regular exposure of what was going on among the emerging artists in Boston. Other galleries did this. The Margaret Brown Gallery, for example, had such fine shows of artists that we knew of and hadn't seen, or that many of us hadn't at least seen the originals until that time. Gaston Lachaise. I wonder if I can remember the artists who were introduced that way. Gardner Cox, Conger Metcalf, who still, when I see him, as I often do now, remembers Margaret Brown and those days and her activities with such respect.

RB: Was she very closely involved with her artists as well?

AP: I believe so. I didn't know her as well. I knew some of the artists.

RB: But Boris Mirsky was, wasn't he? You mentioned this kind of fair-like quality of the openings. Did you young artists like that, or did you perhaps resent it, because you mentioned that these were also very serious things and pioneeering?

AP: Well, I'll speak very subjectively. I rarely liked any openings, but I consider that entirely my business and my response. I've had the experience of sometimes wishing that the opening had been livelier, like in the old days, when it goes to the other extreme. There was a show I had in New York in 1965 at Durlacher, where nothing liquid was allowed, not even water, apparently; although I managed to get some downstairs (laughter). And it was very quiet. You know, very quiet. An afternoon opening, and I think this was because of some problem they had at the time of people coming in just for the drinks. But I realized it was quite serious, then, that it could be quite frightening, and everyone simply whispered and tip-toed around. Not very good for other aspects of the show, except eating. At Mirsky's there was a kind of celebration involved in his openings, then. First, there was the new place, which had recently been fixed up and we, most of us who had been associated with him in some way, had worked on this place. That is, painted it and stripped off the old carpeting and changed the staircase, and so on. And he knew musicians, and he wanted it to be that way. I suppose it was mostly from him, and I think everyone seemed to enjoy that too. There was a space of two years where I was away and then came back and had a large exhibit on all three floors of his gallery. Each floor had three rooms. And this is the sort of thing that sounds immediately like a vulgar exposition of everything that he had. But it was not that . . . being almost original because openings in Boston were not like that. And the noise and the warmth of this kind of pesentation were, you know, quite rather charming things at the time, and I think enjoyed also by the public.

RB: If there was music and sort of almost a program, it wasn't exactly the same then as a cocktail party opening?

AP: Oh no, no. He would have someone who played the guitar and sang folk songs, for example. Shep Ginandes, who now has a school -- professionally, I believe, he's a psychiatrist, educator -- would often entertain at these things.

RB: What kind of people were coming to the openings? What was your impression of them?

AP: As I answer immediately, without thinking too carefully about it, I think of the variety, socially speaking, of the attendance at such things. Judges, musicians, many students and all the professional levels and categories in between. Quite amazing. It was, perhaps, at least looked at this way from a distance at the real mingling of areas of society -- not all areas, but a good many. Mirsky had many, at one time, young people who were beginning to become collectors, or if not that at least a curiosity and a certain affinity, very much interested in what was happening, what he would present, and had special interest in certain artists. I don't think it was financially very successful, then. I think those were real hard times. At the same time, all this genial interest. Prices were very low then on the work of relatively unknown artists. But things were bought, then, and sometimes, for example, in my show in 1951, more than half the exhibit sold within the first week, or something like that, which was considered a phenomenon at that time. It was not going to support me in any way, or even repay me for the three or four -- two or three -- years of work that led up to the show. Also, Mirsky then had invited, too, the interest of people like Paul Sachs, for example, who would come in and buy two or three things and later give some of them to the Fogg Museum, and keep some for himself. And others. Collectors who would

own things by Durer, Matisse, and a few things by the Boston artists through the agency of having such a gallery as Mirsky's to go to, to look at.

RB: But he was known to be very discriminating in what he showed, is that right?

AP: Well, when I referred to these three categories of artists whose works they might have owned -- I mean, they didn't buy the Durer, if they owned one, through Mirsky. I don't think that was going on; but they saw a kind of draftsmanship, let's say, almost fanatical interest that some of us had in drawing in the many traditional senses and some experimental senses. That was shown at Mirsky's and also at Margaret Brown Gallery, then. I don't remember other galleries. I know, of course, the Vose Gallery and Doll and Richards existed in New York, for one thing. I used to see their shows. The Guild of Boston Artists, through all those years, which I had regularly attended to see what was happening there too, or what had happened, rather.

RB: Was that true that such groups as Vose or Doll and Richards or the Guild of Boston Artists didn't very much involve you younger artists?

AP: I think we would go . . . I remember going to see a show at the Doll and Richards Gallery. I would pretty much go there alone, you know. It seemed to me that if I heard of an exhibit by Meyerowitz, who was then . . . or Corbino, or one of these New England artists whom I respected at least for the large production, or sometimes for the work itself, in certain respects. I would go to see that; but I didn't see many of my friends at such exhibits. Hardly ever. I know that someone named . . . a person named Morton Sachs knew of these exhibits and, perhaps, went to see them. I'm not sure. I know him to this day. We work together at Boston University. I've never discussed this with him. But I think, generally, we, too, we had our prejudices, and we felt that what was going on at suppose I, privately, went in to see these works, out of curiosity. I never lost that kind of prejudice, distinguishing from vital and academic. At that time, I clothed myself in the prejudice, too, as everyone else did, but, at least, through the eye I saw them. Another side of Boston art. The older side, perhaps, and sometimes very valid and important to me.

RB: The other galleries in Boston -- the other dealers weren't quite so embracing of younger artists as Mirsky was, is that right?

AP: In the Forties there was nothing else, really. And if the Institute didn't have this New England -- this show of New England artists or of individual artists in it, and Mirsky hadn't gone on through, I think, not only indifference but opposition too, there would not have been a place, or if there would have been another place that I didn't know about, perhaps it would have happened in some other way. But that's how it did happen.

RB: You've said something before about Artists' Equity, the New England chapter, and I wondered if now you could describe how you heard about it and then how you became involved with it?

AP: The New England chapter, or the interest in it here, was simultaneous with the formation of Equity on a national -- nationally. I think then, one of the original founders of the organization was my former teacher, Karl Zerbe. I think I heard of it -- I don't remember exactly how it came up. But, during that year of 1947, I believe, which I think was its beginning -- the year of its beginning -- such men as Kuniyoshi and Levine and Shahn were forming this organization. In New England, a man named Leon Kroll -- I believe he's still alive, I'm not sure -- whom I had known through reproductions of his work and his biography and so on, for many years. So that at one time during the year Kuniyoshi came here to help in the formation of the New England chapter of Artists' Equity. It seemed then that what was proposed for its business, its activities, was very important and timely and necessary. It was to be an organization for the economic help, equity, of the artist, and nothing else. It was formed, I think, I believe, in that year. I don't remember the first president in Boston, or nationally. I believe the first president was either Kuniyoshi or Leon Kroll, nationally. Probably Kuniyoshi. He soon became honorary president. And he went around the country trying to form chapters. that would simply help artists in distress after fires or during difficult periods. We were to avoid both exhibition and political activity. I think the exhibition prohibition didn't last, and Equity began to get very much involved, locally, in various chapters, and here too, in exhibitions for recommendation.

RB: You mean by promoting or urging certain galleries to show?

AP: Equity began to do things, at least locally, to support a fund to raise money for the fund. And I remember parties at Mirsky's, as a matter of fact, in which the artists tried out their other abilities as comic actors and pantomime artists. I played what must have been an uninspired parody on the jazz violin, which I knew nothing about, and so on. The fund was used. Each chapter also provided the members -- or tried to -- with legal assistance. It was during those years that the attentions of certain legalities in the artists' economic existence was a very new thing. At least new again, at that time. The organization, the national organization, did become politically involved, mostly because it was attacked in the Congress, I believe, or Senate, by a Senator or Congressman, Dondero. I hadn't heard, of course, it was so many years -- for the radicals among the leadership idea. Some of the artists, locally, considered these attacks very seriously because, in those times, it was

dangerous, especially to those who taught in large public and state-owned schools. One especially. And we lost members because of the attack. It was not possible to intelligently answer the attack. It would have simply continued the controversy and in some cases brought attention to an absurd charge of some kind. I didn't know the extent of the charges or the foundations for them, really, on a national level. But I doubt if, in our time, what was brought out that was found, right now, would be considered significant at all, in an organization like that. It must have been the political associations of one or two members, directors.

RB: Was that true among some of the New England members too?

AP: Well, it didn't . . . . The attack didn't get to the New England members. It was the national organization which had headquarters in New York at that time. Eventually, Equity had its own building in New York, which I never saw, and became quite a strong organization with policy on a national level, testimony given before Congressional comm an artist named Bernard Perlin who wanted to form a chapter of Amerian artists abroad of Equity, and nothing came of that, really.

RB: What did he have in mind?

AP: Well, he thought all the Equity members who might be around Rome or Paris in those years should get together. Just why, I'm not sure.

RB: What concrete effects do you know of that it had here for artists?

AP: Equity worked in various ways on inequity (laughter), really. For example, it mattered somewhat that in large national exhibits the artist sometimes, at great expense to himself, would crate and ship off his work and it would be accepted, seen, reviewed, become the substance of educational programs, the maintenance of the institution itself would depend on such shows, reproductions were paid for, advertising, catalogues, guides, everything but any return to the artist unless he was among the one or two prizewinners. We wanted to work for some kind of a paid participation in exhibits. I think this eventually took place, here and there, in the country in some way, but something more concrete came of it in the form of a . . . some sort of payment for the artist whose work was reproduced. For example, it was possible, in the Forties, for a living artist who needed . . . lived on the return from his work to have work reproduced in the hundreds of thousands of copies to be used as an advertisement for a museum, the Metropolitan, for example, in all subway cars, and receive nothing for it, or not even be thought of in connection with payment of any kind. We were against entry fees, and for many years, including some years after my last days as an active member in Equity, I felt that was right, that it should have been pursued as we did all those years. Our method was simply not to exhibit, a kind of withholding of participation. I don't know whether that significantly changed the practice. I think it did for a while, and that committees of artists who almost automatically considered that the artist would pay so much for an entry into a show really did reconsider and it was changed in some casees. Probably quite widely. More than I know of, specifically. But it's all come back recently and I'm not aware of Equity's activities now, although I believe it still exists, quite differently. So that there isn't an organized effort against this sort of thing. It's accepted as part of the

RB: To cover basic expenditures?

AP: Yes. It's understandable that way, now, but once it was more important to this inequality of the simple profiting by so many from the exhibition. It was not glorious profit, certainly, but some return; but the artist himself paid to participate. The old notion that he would be repaid by the publicity involved was never a practical result for most of the artists because many of these exhibits were two or three day stands, sometimes for the benefit of other causes anyway. They became, in a way, entertainers who paid for a place to entertain. Equity had much to do with advising artists on income tax procedures. Simply the organizing of information on deductions -- business deductions -- which was done in the form of a well-written and careful counsel.

RB: Before that had most of you not even thought of your work as a business, or were most of you not that naive?

AP: I know that in my own case I hadn't because I hadn't been in it long enough. It was in a way a formless notion that it might be that some time. It would have to be that, but always it seemed surprising that it could be anything like that.

RB: Were there a good many people of good will who weren't artists who were associated with the Equity, who worked with it?

AP: There was always a difficult redefinition going on of the qualifications of membership, at least in our chapter. I know at one time they considered -- and nationally this was accepted -- a kind of associate membership simply to get people with interest and time to do some of the work. So many organizations have to do this.

RB: What of accountants and lawyers? Were they people you were going to have to turn to for copyright and tax advice?

AP: Exactly. We always had troubles here, in the New England chapter, getting good attendance. There was a faithful core of members who ran Equity locally, communicated with national headquarters, became very much activated during sometimes extensive periods of turmoil between chapters and national headquarters, policy, resigning presidents and protests. All this took place, naturally.

RB: Could you name some of the artists and nonartists who were most involved here in New England?

AP: We didn't have a membership that included nonartists, but I think we had a rather flexible measurement of professional standards here. I remember, of course, Karl Zerbe as President. Charles Demetropolis, president for a while. Ernest Halberstadt, an artist and photographer -- commercial artist -- who worked very hard for Equity. George Aerons, the sculptor; sometimes we would have meetings at his home in Gloucester. One man, I don't know whether I remember his name, it was so familiar for a long time -- Coubini, Carmen Coubini, an artist who had come from Cleveland. He and his wife, Doris Hall . . . and he was one of the most active and inspired members of Equity. That is, he had ideas and carried them through, and much knowledge of that kind of organization.

RB: Were there any local collectors or patrons of the arts who were involved, at least informally, with your chapter?

AP: No. I don't believe that it was ever done that way here. I think it was pretty much within the group of what was the artists' community itself that this activity took place. At one time we did something that eventually, I believe, became the Boston Arts Festival. That is, Equity got into -- put its toes, so to speak, into exhibiting to the extent that we had a show in the Boston Common. It really was an Equity activity. It was taken up by a group of businessmen later, with the collaboration of artists and gallery people, and it became the first experimental Boston Arts Festival a year later, but preceding that, that year, I remember actually working on a station wagon at night, hauling paintings in from what was then the Copley Plaza out to the exhibit place. Equity had a booth of its own in the first Arts Festival -- six years of that -- simply giving out information on the organization. Recruiting, I suppose. Between that first year -- that show -- there was some association we had with a prominent businessman who had a large collection of what he thought was certain to be important French painting. In the market, in the world of prices and names and so on, it was not important. It was just a large volume of paintings done in France, and he wanted a place to show this; and he probably was a supporter, along with other businessmen, of this Equity effort to have an exhibit of invited or competing Boston artists. I do believe it was noticed by such people as Jerome Rosenfield -- Rosenfeld -- others who became very active in the formulation, the formulation of the Festival as it began. The Back Bay Association -- an association of businessmen, and women, as I remember. The businesses in that area had something to do with it. There was no thought then -- perhaps there was thought, but there was no money derived from city government or any other public source. Not at the beginning.

RB: Was this art club that became the Arts Festival, was this considered a major change in the way art was brought to New England -- presented in New England?

AP: Yes. I knew of nothing like that and I think that had been true for a long time. I don't know about different times. It seemed like a kind of romantic notion which had been realized. That is to have a popular exhibit outdoors and accessible to everyone. The eventual problem, just sometimes seeing a painting looking rather vulnerable and naked outdoors (laughter). This may be very subjective, but still it seemed like a good, exuberant, democratic, freeing kind of idea to many of us. It was very hearty, the sensations among the artists of Boston in those festivals of the first years, certainly, and the public. And much was accomplished. People like Robert Frost and MacLeish had taken it all very seriously. Productions in opera, along with that fragile tent city of exhibitions went up each year.

RB: You took it seriously, didn't you?

AP: Yes. For several years, of course.

RB: Would you say, mostly, that you and your fellow artists were egalitarians who wanted to put yourselves in a common forum and expose yourselves?

AP: I don't think that this was discussed by us in such terms, but I would assume that that was always an aim. Yes. When sometimes that happened, actually, that we saw paintings over the vegetable bins of a large supermarket, for example, well, I mean, it was a bit shocking: both that the paintings looked that way, as they did there . . . . But such private and almost inexpressibly pictorial -- not verbal, not commercial, not edible (laughter) -- things there. This was not quite like the romantic idea, really, of a free interaction of art and practical reality, but also the exposure. That undoubted feeling that there was an aristocracy of art, which was a

pleasant belief, at least for me. I wanted always that idea, you know, that anything that would teach could formulate, let's say, between one color and another, could bring the mystery of the interaction of the color into a kind of glorious, existing harmony of contrasts, or whatever. That it should happen in an automobile, as well, and it did, later. But I found myself not looking at the automobile in the same way, feeling that I should. This still goes on as a private dialogue in many ways.

RB: So you very much approved, then, of this?

AP: Yes. I know I did. I think I tried to assist them for years, and I exhibited these things outdoors there. Helped quietly make out some sort of cover over them. Didn't have to take them in every night as they did, originally. And I saw, with a certain pleasure, the real intention and interest of a great number of people, and of course all the other circus attributes that had to go along with it.

RB: But you could tolerate those?

AP: Well, I intellectually believed in them. I still do.

RB: Do you feel that the interaction with painting could come about from possibly these things -- circus acts -- here to provide a catalyst for certain persons, who otherwise might not be drawn to art?

AP: Yes. The painting -- I'm just going back to when it leaves the contact with the artist's brush, or whatever he essentially uses. It already has -- takes its chances in the world, just as his ideas do, or he does too, as a social being. And sometimes so the artist could express aims, baffling, that it could be neutralized that way. A form of entertainment, snobbishness, a pleasure that can't be expressed to him by somebody quietly who later hears about it; but all this seems quite natural. It becomes another object with meaning, and if it's not his specific meaning, then it's a kind of wealth of meaning (laughter). Look at any ingenue, sometimes it's painful, sometimes it's . . . . I'm so much interested in all of this because I'm interested in unreasonable attitudes to art. How much we expect the art to go directly without private meaning to the person? The communication idea. How much we do in making the painting to try to guarantee that reliable effect in another? And now it can never really take place that way. Perhaps it shouldn't, or if it does, we may not ever know. So I could watch clusters of people looking at my painting in the Arts Festival, or in associated exhibits in store windows, and listen to the comments and almost look at it as they could see it, but which I'll never know, and then be far removed from my contact with it as the maker of the painting. All this I think is not only acceptable but necessary, but not constantly necessary. And sometimes, alone with the work or the hope for the new work, you simply can't think of it that way. Or I can't. It's as though it's being fabricated for an ideal, never-to-be-realized, audience. But that's all right. (Laughter.) It's one of the occupational conditions.

RB: Was it always so with you? When you were a very young student, did you think about the ultimate communicating -- the release of a painting?

AP: Yes, but not while painting. I think, as I understand it, one of the necessary attributes of the act of making art -- that is, not what can be decided or assumed, but has to be there -- is that in the making of it, in moments of involvement in the making of it, all of that is pulled together in a very different way and there is no external appearance to the work. It's only what it's about to be and as it has to stay. But it's rather futile to long for that kind of unification of self and object as a permanent condition. Then the work goes out as the adventure of El Greco, through the centuries. In the business world, for exmaple. Discovered, rediscovered, bought and neglected. All this, of course, relates very much to teaching too. The view and the comment of the teacher on the work of the student, and the reception in the student of what that teacher might mean and what he could be seeing when it's set up between two people with one as an authority and the other as a listener or an apprentice. That isn't reasonable either, and yet it goes on and for good reason (Laughter) . . . .

RB: And you think there's a -- just as you said -- a necessity and then sometimes it isn't necessity. Sometimes it is a necessity for you to have your work out with other people who will react to it differently from you, put different things into it . . . . So, with teaching as well, that's a necessary extension of your painting?

AP: Yes. I think some students understand that the teacher comes to them from the experience of being with his own work or not being with his work. And that all this effects very much the so-called objective comment of the day, of the year. And that's a necessary exposure that the student undergoes, as well as the teacher, to these differences. But, amazingly enough, there is a contact of some kind, or a start of a contact, and the student may feel, oh, this is far from what I'm experiencing at the moment, or what I mean to do in my work. But it's listened to, nevertheless, and then it becomes a kind of negative point of resistance, or it becomes positive, or an encouragement. It's the richness of interaction, really, that's important in the situation.

RB: Does such interaction ever threaten your own creativity? Or is it, generally speaking, an accretion that's good, enriches it?

AP: I think that, like all moments of anxiety when you feel that really this has mounted up and can't go on, that it's based on an acceptance of clock time. That is, if I see that for so long an account of that period of hours and days and so on I haven't been able to work because I'm involved in teaching, then I feel that this encroachment, you know, it's stronger than I am. It'll always be like that, and I resent it. In the act of being there, teaching, joking, discussing, sometimes objectively -- trying for an objectivity -- the whole complex of actions, of feelings of teaching -- there's something very similar in that to the actual work of the artist, I believe. Giving himself to it entirely, if he does, is not unlike the painting itself -- his work on the painting itself -- except for the physical (laughter), the act. But essentially it's like that, and you can't at those moments regret not being in the studio. But you certainly can, after a class is over, and you see that another day is gone and so much energy. So it, in a way, rides between the external personal involvement and the simple economic expenditure of time and energy.

RB: When you get back to your studio, do you sometimes reckon your time in teaching and interaction with the students, or when you've been to the public to see how they react, do you sometimes think this is an input into your work when you get back to doing it? Or is it really not precious to you?

AP: I'm not aware of the external input. I know, reasonably speaking, I know it must exist. It's far more the feeling that I'm bound to release something already there. The experience of that sounds . . . it seems more fitting, more like the feeling when I approach my work. That wasn't always true, and when I saw things when I was younger I wanted to make things myself like those things. A similiarity. I wanted to see if I could. To astound myself in a certain way by making that flavored area of expressive pictorial skill, or whatever it was, This was called eclecticism, or being influenced by someone, and so on. That had its ideas.

RB: In your early work, was there any of this influence factor in your work? Could you describe your early work?

AP: Yes. I know there was in the work I did before and during art school days. There might have been an area I'd seen in a reproduction of a surface of a painting that had for me all this fascination. That I would either intentionally strive for in a work, or try -- or find myself doing, as though I had discovered it. I would make an eye like an English portrait or an American. Somebody else's work in other words. I then looked up and saw nature, above all, as that kind of painting. I was not unaware, though, that it wasn't mine. You know, that this was in a way an assumed, a kind of borrowed experience, and would have to give way to something else. I still feel that way. Only now it's more -- the thing to avoid is to copy myself. That is to do what I have done, can do, instead of the discovery of something new. It's far more the motivation, the impetus in work. I don't know, I always find it difficult when an art . . . who influenced you, and I feel I ought to come up with a name. And I bring up Degas a great deal, and yet there's nothing that looks like any special painting by that man. But I still give him all the salutations that are due to him, and others too.

RB: But even before you were . . . while you were still in art school you'd mentioned that Zerbe kept you in fairly loose reins. Were you already getting to the point where there was much more Polonsky and much less assimilating things that you saw?

AP: Yes. I knew his work and the recent work, and the work almost as it was done because he showed it to us, and if there was a direct influence on my work it was usually a technical influence. That is, I wanted -- I would find myself delighting in using outlines the way he did, but always it was a subject he wouldn't do. Or if I used a kind of granular surface for the paint that he would use experimentally because he had done it, it would be balanced by something else that he would find absolutely impossible, I would imagine, in his painting of another kind of surface. This wasn't a conscious attempt not to be directly a copyist, although that might have been in my mind at times. I wasn't worried about that. In fact, the whole subject of influences and so on was not a difficult one for me. I would trust the feelings of affinity, even when it was something that was pretty much generally considered to be unpopular. You know, what, naturally among us as a group of art students there'd be certain painters we admired and certain ones we felt we had to denounce. Sometimes I was at what was the other side of the same snobbishness I would defend the one that was denounced and pretend to be most interested in the minor men, the superficial painters . . . .

RB: Was this just sheer stubborness on your part (laughter)? Or did you think it was possibly a good intellectual exercise?

AP: It was also in a way because I had two underground aspirations: to be the greatest painter who ever lived nad also to be a minor (laughter) -- to be a rediscovered, petty, minor, insignificant, superficial artist, which I didn't really mean; but I was fascinated by that.

RB: You mean the idea of being obscure and then suddenly discovered as really pretty great?

AP: Yes. Sure. In other words, the qualities in the popular artist who's considered a certain area in a Fortuny painting, for example, who was damned by being so popular, let's say, that area could look like the significant fold that was the ...could show works of de Kooning . . . matured work in the Fifties of de Kooning. But that's, of course, only a special, creative kind of view. Like taking a small piece of sculpture and making a photograph that

makes it seem to be a monumental, colossal work, but a work that's appealing. That's a reality, too, of the work, but only as it's photographed or, in my case, only as it's looked at with the special intention of finding the masterful stroke in the insignificant larger work.

RB: Now then, you had your ambition to be the great artist. Is this what pushed you along as a young man?

AP: I don't . . . for some years, didn't put it in those terms, but I don't mind . . .

RB: No. You were optimistic, were you not?

AP: Yes. I had that, but it was never constant. And I had as many periods of absolute realization of not only failure but failure forever and, what is this all about. Which I now understand is an inevitable second side of that arrogance or confidence, or optimism, and the hewning union of these added to dim the work. Just as all the old painters have always said, you know, in that banal, repetitious advice, well, paint, paint, paint; or as Rilke would say to the young writer who couldn't understand how one would ever see the world as an infinity of singulars, you know, that things were not the same. What are you going to do? And you say, well, you're going to write, write, write. It isn't only therapeutic. It may be the best thing to do (laughter) for many. I don't know what morality determines that so, when you're involved in this work, in that way, and it isn't always that way, these questions don't always come up. I've been interested, very much interested in an essay on Cezanne by the French philosopher Merleau-Ponty which is called "A Doubt in Cezanne." It's about certain letters which showed that Cezanne had these doubts up to three weeks before he died about what he could have been doing and what it was all about. I once tried to extend that idea into what -- again, theoretically -- what may have abolished actually working that made him go on. This isn't simply a kind of colossal and romantic notion of the artist, fanatically pursuing his strange, little dream. I think it pervades all activities and has much to do with the difference between what the hands do and the mind in this return to craft which we see periodically in history, and that sort of purity and unification of purpose that seems to happen during those timeless hours, so to speak, of working, manipulating some materials in different forms. That seems to be in praise of painting (laughter).

RB: And at other times you integrated what you were doing . . . ?

AP: Oh, yes. I was embarrassed by it. I still, rather nervously, joke about the activity of the artist in general, but I find my jokes no longer really attack it and that it seems as solidly placed as it ever will be, for me now.

RB: What external stimuli do you suppose sometimes make you joke about this?

AP: It's again that feeling . . . . Well, I'd better talk about an example, which I often give, because I still haven't come to the end of its meaning for me. I was in France on a scholarship, walking around Notre Dame. It was a cold night and it was getting dark, and I wanted to get back to my room. And I was running. And I ran around the corner, and came up suddenly to a low window, that is, a hotel window on the first floor which was low enough so that I could see the whole illuminated interior of the room. Right before me, like a film on a screen, but in reality, there was a young man with a beret, a scarf, an easel, a painting, a palette and some brushes, who was making that dramatic and skillful stroke on the canvas just at that moment, and it was, for me, a disgusting sight. This was what I was doing. What I had come to Europe to do. To be that caricature of the artiste, as it was sometimes pronounced. It made me run home. I can't, in telling you now, drum up that feeling of disgust again. I don't feel it. Maybe I've lost both the feeling of fascination for that scene and art to be not to live in its external . . . You know, that activity of the colorful, bohemian type, which I found fascinating too, I must admit. But it was embarrassing. And also it implied a certain privileged and aristocratic view, if not financially or socially, at least culturally, that notion of Cocteau's of the artist is twenty years ahead of his time. When I denounced that all through my life, I also secretly hoped it could be true. No, recently I know it doesn't have to be true and that there is no definition ahead or back of . . . . I don't see it as that avant-garde any more, that way. Perhaps I can't at this age.

RB: Where do you see the artist is at?

AP: Well, in that way I don't really see such a great difference between the artist's artistic activity and the activity of the non-artist. I know about the external differences. I must admit I do. And, as an artist, I generally kept in their specific place also; not only by the way they actually made me feel, but the way those who do not paint or who are not artists feel about them. And there's this kind of mutual acceptance of the artist as being some sort of a magic-maker. That is, he's feared and admired, unreasonably. All this interests me because I think that art is the release from reason. That it lives in a world where reason is the goal as well. There it is interpreted, loved, maybe useful. That's the word. I always wanted to find it useful in some way. I'm fascinated by the double lives of certain artists, writers, who were both diplomats, for example, and poets.

RB: Useful and practical too? Did you mean when you said useful, practical?

AP: Yes, but the application of that practicability is often not successful. When you see a painting by Holbein of

a covered bridge in Lucerne, I think it is. All those years it's been out there well-varnished and preserved. It looks beautiful. It looks just right. Just right. But that doesn't mean that a bridge in our time must have a painting on it. It could be that the practical workings of the art -- the fabrication of art -- that this act and its results are formulated in our time in a different way? Of course, obviously this isn't so. It might be that but very different ways, it may be what generates the technology. [END OF SIDE I] [SIDE 2]

RB: You were talking about your work. One thing you brought up, a few moments ago, is what we already talked about, the influence system. Is that if they do come in they just sort of become part of you? Now, you've mentioned avant-garde-ism. How have you, in your career of about three decades, how have you stood in relation to this?

AP: Well, I'll try to see it from the outside. As a student at the beginning, I think I would have been included in the small sprinkling of young artists who were considered to be rebellious, avant-garde. It would swing from one to the other and I subsided, I suppose, into a kind of conservatism for a year or two as a student. Noticeably, in the work; something I had to do. It was considered a betrayal by some of my friends, perhaps even the teachers. Then, in the late Forties, you see, in Boston it was quite possible to be completely figurative as a painter. That is, to work in a representational way with figures from life, from imagination, and because of certain inconsistencies with what was then considered to be the traditional proportion of beauty or composition. This work was considered to be wildly radical then; but it was work, generally, something common between many of us which was bolstered in a way by an investigation of what we considered to be the techniques of the masters. That is, the paint itself was manipulated and sought as an expressive material. This is what we thought was new in our work. We knew it was a return of something though; as all new things are. So there was what was generally called distortion in the proportion of the drawing in the work of many of us, and also a new application of a richer kind of use of the paint itself, of grounds for paintings. This went on and led to a kind of restlessness with the use of traditional techniques that I think brought up combinations that hadn't been used around here for a while, of tempera and oil, indirect methods of painting, even that very ancient encaustic painting method which our teacher, Karl Zerbe, worked in, currently and constantly, at that time. Then the new application of plastics for painting was investigated, at least by some of us. Now, I teach in a school where the technical course is very much the explanation, analysis and fabrication of oil paint in a time when oil painting, generally, among the younger artists, is almost nonexistent, but it is not thought of as a new and contemporary pursuit but a kind of, almost, nostalgic way as far as keeping something alive.

RB: By you, or others?

AP: No, not by me. No, I'm just making a summary of opinions. I don't think the material matters that much. At times it seems to. Artists are now working in materials which I, as a young artist, thought were the materials of the artists of the 1920's. Gabo and so on. They're a little better. There are different plastics involved, different ways of using illumination. But for me, the new materials are the same. The same hope, the same pursuit with the new actual resins and fibers and whatever of our time, that was not, unlike Bernini, would have in his time used for poetic-expressive purposes, by combining metal, wood, marble . . . each for their own, in that combination that made it greater than one . . .

RB: So that when you were a young artist you weren't very arrogant about the fact that you were using these new materials because you realized that, say Bernini, or somebody in the Twenties had experimented with similar things.

AP: Actually we were using the oldest materials in the oil painting technique and hoping actually . . . . I wasn't as much involved with this as some of my friends were -- hoping to discover the secret for the old masters agian, as so often it is. This had gone on, perhaps unknown for most of us, in the Fogg Museum during those years of research with men like Polk and Forbes. We heard of this, but we were doing it again for the pleasure and curiosity and, in a way, the need we felt for a more substantial surface. There were artists, especially like Soutine, who would not only paint the carcass of an animal as Rembrandt had -- I don't mean it looked like a Rembrandt -- in his own way, of course; but also would use that -- his -- adaptation of the impasto technique of certain areas of Rembrandt, for example, similar too -- thick. We had seen the early work of such men as Levine and Bloom, for example, with a substantial, buttery, almost sculptural accumulation of pigment which seemed to us to be a fascinating new possibility. It's one of the oldest possibilities, of course, of the oil painting technique, and of other tempera, because, I suppose, I had been exposed to it at school in our technical course and found it beautiful, with certain affinity for it, and some people later said, because Ben Shahn, whom I knew, then, in the Forties, was using egg tempera; but I must say that it was a familiar medium years before I knew Shahn, and I had used it, continued with it, and made my own variations on it, using it with oil. Many of us wanted the qualities of the oil painting: the thickness, the richness, the indirect qualities, but a faster drying material and I guess this was a certain inclination that was going on everywhere at that time and led to a new interest in the new materials, such as the plastic temperas.

RB: Well then, egg tempera is very painstaking in its application, isn't it? So it does dry.

AP: Yes. When it's done the way we believed the Sienese and Umbrian painters worked, with the point of a brush, hatching little strokes constantly over each other with a few simple colors, drying each layer, and so on, waiting for an accumulation to make the color, it certainly is. We had seen a new application of this from the school at Yale, perhaps in the early Forties. I don't know who the instructors were. There was one painter -- he lives in Boston still -- Nathaniel Jacobson, who had been a student at Yale and had been . . . was rather well known as a prizewinner in national exhibits for these egg-tempera paintings, renderings, actually. I found that interesting, but I wanted to use the egg in combination with the oil as something that would make the setup dry fast, easier to manipulate than oil painting which doesn't have to remain liquid for so many days and still has got that quality of impasto, thickness. There was, at that time, around the end of the Forties, an interest in . . . . I think I perhaps mentioned this before -- a man who was related to the Museum of the Louvre in some way who wrote a book, "Marigee," on what he thought was the chemical secret of the old masters. It was a method of making a medium out of oil with lead -- litharge. And when this was done -- I never did it, most of my friends did -- it was a syrupy sort of medium that gave an ancient tarnished look immediately to the painting and also hastened the drying so that you could glaze within perhaps hours, or a day, and that had some of the attributes that later some artists found in the temperas, tempera and hyfelorine which was a turpentine, soluble, Lucite, actually. That is, it didn't look like the temperas. It looked very much like an old and beautifully patinaed painting from the museums and the ages past. This was of interest to us, to make the paintings look that way. It was a system, in a way, of underpainting that Karl Zerbe had and taught which brought a great response in the active student painters of that time. And it was to make a painting that was really a monochrome study in browns and whites, and then to go to the color. This, in a way, was to provide a sort of bridge between drawing and painting, that it was a drawing made of paint. And it was based both on that need to desire to control the design from the beginning and also on what we felt must have been the procedures of various artists, like Rubens and, in other ways, the Italian artists, Botticelli. That carefully constructed underpainting. That idea of a work with notions of immortality. That is, a permanence in the chemicals, in the structure, in the methods. This was all very appealing to us at the time. It was just the opposite of the superficial, or the entertaining, or the fleeting, or the charming, which we suspected.

RB: You obviously very much admired some of the old masters?

AP: It was always that way. Of course.

RB: You really wanted to sort of take them up or take up in some measure them, again?

AP: Yes. I don't think this was . . . this came about in the form of a studied decision in any of us, really. I don't know of it. It's not unusual even now, in a way. Well, we now can find a young painter who refers only to painters of the last ten years and then suddenly to one of 500 years ago in another culture, perhaps, but nothing in between. That isn't generally true, but we had, in a way, rediscovered the European tradition. It was pretty much limited to European, and we were fascinated by what we thought must have been the procedures of the artists in building up their work, in preparing for it. This was very much inspired by Karl Zerbe who gave a special course in techniques, and based it on the history of techniques. The evolution of oil painting as a medium, of course. Then he went off into other uses of color in encaustic and tempera. I taught a course in egg-tempera painting at the Museum School. I never really studied in that course. As a student I got special permission to do portraits, which I did partly as a living as a student; but I did them in egg tempera. I remember pretty much that ancient method was a very contemporary stylistic appearance of portraits.