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Oral history interview with Karl Schrag, 1970
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Karl Schrag on October 14 and 20, 1970. The interview took place at his house/studio in New York, NY, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

PAUL CUMMINGS: Today is October 14, 1970-Paul Cummings talking to Karl Schrag in his house-studio in New York City.

KARL SCHRAG: Right.

MR. CUMMINGS: To begin with, why don't you tell me something about your family. You were born in Germany in 1912?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. I was born in Karlsruhe, a town in southern Germany near the Rhine. It's the capital of the German state of Baden. My father was a lawyer there. My mother was born in New York. She traveled and met my father and they fell in love and got married. I'm the youngest of four sons.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you have a New York background?

MR. SCHRAG: I have a New York background. I have quite a few relatives on my mother's side of the family living in the United States.

MR. CUMMINGS: But you grew up in Germany, didn't you? You went to school there?

MR. SCHRAG: I went to school in Karlsruhe. I went first to elementary school and then I went to the Gymnasium where you study until you are about eighteen. It is usually considered to be like high school and two years of college here. For instance, you get credit for high school and two years of college for the amount of schooling I had, until you were eighteen years old.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it like growing up? You say you were one of four children.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, four. All boys. And I was the youngest.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was your family interested in art or music?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, there was definitely an interest in art. My father had a great interest in literature. And also there was considerable interest in music. My mother played the piano well beyond the average, I think. Families of a certain social standing in Germany usually had a great interest in visiting museums, as you know. On Sundays or on certain occasions there were kind of pilgrimages made to the museum. The Karlsruhe Museum is a rather fine one. It owns one of the most famous Grunewalds, actually one of the very famous *Crucifixions*. Also in Karlsruhe there is a rather famous art school, the Akademie. From very early childhood on I was practically always drawing. I would sit underneath the table while my parents were still at meals and I would be scribbling. This was considered to be very lovely and kind of charming in a little boy.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there pictures at home?

MR. SCHRAG: There were paintings at home. Not very important ones. Some of them were painted by the local celebrities who were professors at the Akademie there. There was, of course, Hans Thoma-I don't know whether you know who that is-he's an artist who is connected with this region of Germany. He was born not far from Karlsruhe. One thing that played a very great role in my life was the very close contact with nature from early boyhood. Not only was the Black Forest so close where we spent many Sundays and where later on I went on excursions with my friends, but also there was a big woods adjoining Karlsruhe where one went bicycle riding, first with one's classmates and later with one's girl friend.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you grow up in a house? Or was it an apartment building?

MR. SCHRAG: It was an apartment building. It was on a square. I visited this square many, many years later,

actually after World War II. In my memory it was a very large square and when I came back it was a small square. Actually it was the same square. It was like a handkerchief that had shrunk in the laundry. It was exactly the same only small. As a boy it had seemed to me so huge.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did your brothers have any art interests?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Two of my brothers I think have a gift for writing. My oldest brother actually wrote a few novels.

MR. CUMMINGS: And his name is?

MR. SCHRAG: Otto Schrag. I have a nephew, Peter Schrag, who writes. He has written on education mostly. He was an editor of *The Saturday Review* at one time. You may have seen his name.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have a lot of books at home? Was there a lot of reading?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, there was quite a great deal of reading. Also we had theater which played mostly the classic plays-Schiller, Goethe, Shakespeare, and so on.

MR. CUMMINGS: When did you start going to the theater? You must have been-what? A teenager.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, right.

MR. CUMMINGS: We're really talking about the mid-1920's.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Well, I have recollections of World War I, too, although I was a tiny little boy then. Those events probably are so strong that they stick in your head. I remember going to the cellar when the planes came at night. I remember in the beginning the beds were all pushed into a part of the house where it was thought to be safer, which probably was not true. But the illusion was there.

MR. CUMMINGS: What other things do you remember of that time?

MR. SCHRAG: To go a little further, I think perhaps I should mention that, of course, my parents were thinking of what would eventually become of me. From very early boyhood on I said that I would be an artist, which was then considered to be sweet and rather charming. But, as time went on, my parents got a little worried about this, that I really was going to do it. Although I want to point out that my parents were interested in what I was drawing and painting then. I mean they were not antagonistic towards my drawing and painting all the time. But, when the time to make a decision came closer, they began to wonder, "Is he really talented?" They tried to get opinions on this, which is often very difficult to get. There was a long parade of kunstschnule (art school) professors who looked at what I was doing and they were all rather favorable. Also my teacher in school thought that I was unusually talented.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have art classes in school?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Actually by a real, a practicing artist. Which was totally kind of a break.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. That's unusual. What year in school was that?

MR. SCHRAG: I think that started when I entered this gymnasium. I must have been ten years old or something like that. Then, when I was about seventeen or eighteen years old or so, there came several professors who looked at my work and tried to give some opinion. Times were very bad for anybody who wanted to go into this. So they always started by saying, "Well, I practically never advise anybody to be an artist," but then they'd say, "Frankly this boy is very talented." One of my brothers was studying in Berlin. In Berlin there was a very famous art teacher, Professor Oelich, an older man who had been a teacher of many artists, including George Grosz. He also was very well known as a sharp man in his speeches; I mean things he said in class were very much quoted. Eventually my parents thought that perhaps this very famous professor should give an opinion. My brother Paul was studying in Berlin at this time so my parents sent to him a parcel containing my work. Paul went to see the professor. Paul told us that the professor went through the work very critically and my brother expected him to say they were no good. First he had said times are so bad he never advises anybody to be an artist. And then he looked at Paul and said, "Tell your parents it would be a sin to prevent this boy from becoming an artist." And then he went through the work once more and explained a little to Paul and marked on the back of certain works for me to see the ones he liked best. While all this was going on I was saying to my parents, "Whatever he may say I will become an artist anyway," but I was a little shaky inside. But when the professor said this my parents had more confidence and so it was decided that I should go to art school. I was quite a good student at school. I got quite good marks, particularly in German--which is about like English here--writing and so on. Some of my teachers in school said, "What a pity that he should become an artist!" They thought that was a terrible downfall.

MR. CUMMINGS: You started drawing when you were very young. As you got older, into your teens, what artists appealed to you? What things did you look at that interested you?

MR. SCHRAG: That's a good question. Actually it's a little difficult to disentangle. At that time, as you know, children draw very, very differently from the way they draw now. For instance, they really were drawing. The tool was usually a pencil, I mean the most frequent tool, while today usually they go into color very quickly with much broader handling. I still have sketches from that time. I guess it's not so much that they are so personal but they are very typical of what a boy would draw at that time. It's interesting that it's something like what one may call the style of the time which even is in children's drawing. Do you know what I mean? This would be a good subject for someone to write about sometime. Children draw completely differently today from the way we used to draw.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was this with training? Or without training?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, eventually there was training when I went to the art school. But this teacher who was himself an artist let you be very free. This was not copying a leaf or something like that; it was much more imaginative. Obviously the course within the school system was not a very important one, as you can imagine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. It never is. I think it's very interesting that there was this rather refined kind of drawing in relationship to what children do now.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. And also, I don't want to go into this because it really has nothing to do with what is personal with me, but I do believe that the child at a certain stage wants to relate more and more to the reality that's around him. And this cannot be blocked. In other words, you cannot transfer this early freshness of the child's world into a certain later age in his development. And any attempt to try to do this, which is now often attempted, must fail because it doesn't coincide with the other development as a person because he himself has to learn more about what surrounds him and he has to go through a phase of coming to grips with reality. And to block it in one section of his experience in his art is, I think, impossible.

MR. CUMMINGS: It affects all the other ones, too, in a strange way.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. I don't think it is possible. I don't think it's even desirable. Therefore, just as little as any painter can be fully naïve anymore-if he ever was; I don't know. But he cannot be, because if he has not gone to art school he has seen art magazines and books or paintings in a window or somewhere he has been in contact and has been struck by some other influence than just the straight experience of the surroundings.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you copy pictures in museums? Or make sketches? Things like that?

MR. SCHRAG: No. I think most of my work all through my life has had some autobiographical meaning, not in the sense that I wanted to draw my own biography in a literary way or literally, but rather that what I lived through and what I saw and what I thought at a certain time is somehow reflected in my work. It is always in close contact with what goes on in my own experiences at that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of things did you draw, what was the subject matter when you were young?

MR. SCHRAG: At that time I drew mostly people. Actually it's interesting that it was later when I began to develop the idea that the landscape or any subject that you paint could have as much personality and be as related to your own very personal experience as the depiction of people; this gradually developed and became stronger and stronger with me. But I do believe that man, or what man thinks and feels, is always very important in any work that I do, not only anything that has to do with people.

MR. CUMMINGS: You drew people. Did you draw landscapes? Did you draw interiors and things like that?

MR. SCHRAG: Most of my work was completely from imagination; practically all, actually. While I was in school at one time I made some caricatures of teachers. I remember once I drew a caricature of one of my teachers. He kind of sneaked up behind me and saw what I had done and he tore the page out of my notebook. I thought I would be dismissed from school and that that would be the end of it; I lived in fear. But nothing happened. He just kept it. He liked it, I guess.

MR. CUMMINGS: What kind of other activities or interests did you develop during school? Did you have other things that occupied you?

MR. SCHRAG: I was very fond of music and for some time I took piano lessons. But there was very little time or practicing because, although I was quite a very good student at school, I found it very hard. Eventually my piano teacher-who was a very good pianist-said to me, "You know, I think the best I can do for you is that I will play for you and I will explain to you what music is and what a symphony is and what a sonata is, and we'll talk about

music. Of course I'll give you some lessons, but I see that you practice so little that it doesn't make much sense." So when my parents heard this gorgeous piano playing come from the room, which naturally was not my playing, after a while they said, "You know, you have a concert every week and we pay for it and it is not fair." So the piano lessons were stopped.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, both painting and piano lessons are very demanding.

MR. SCHRAG: Right. Right.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you decide on that art school? And what happened there?

MR. SCHRAG: At first, of course, there was a question of my going to Berlin because of the professor there who had liked my work. But then in 1931, I believe it was, my parents left Germany and moved to Switzerland. My father had some trouble with his eyes and used to get very bad headaches from reading. So he gave up his practice. Also, my mother had some relatives living in Zurich. And also my father had a pessimistic eye on the political situation in Germany. Actually, on looking back, he was amazingly right in his pessimistic outlook. My parents moved to Zurich and later to Lucerne. So the first art school I went to was in Geneva. That was my first stop when I went to art school.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's very interesting because I couldn't figure out where the transition came in there.

MR. SCHRAG: I had wanted to go to Paris but I knew very little French, and also the jump from Karlsruhe to Paris seemed to my parents almost too much. So there was Geneva in between.

MR. CUMMINGS: Your mother being a New Yorker did you speak English at home?

MR. SCHRAG: Foolishly I took English in school. I should have taken French since I heard English at home; but this made it much easier for me. I spoke English fairly well then. As you know, actually you never lose an accent. I mean if you would work enormously at it you might lose it more than I did; but you never quite lose it. Just as little as my mother lost her English accent when she spoke German. She spoke beautiful German and expressed herself extremely well, but there was an English accent which I heard less than other people.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's very interesting. Were there any interesting professors in, say, even in the gymnasium before the art school, who you think were important or were friends?

MR. SCHRAG: I'm grateful to this rather young art teacher we had. Thinking back now and considering that he was in the framework of a rather rigid and unimaginative school system, I always think he did very well.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you remember his name?

MR. SCHRAG: His name was Mr. Lang. With my other teachers I had a very keen sense of justice and this is a great mistake, I guess. I not only saw when something went wrong with me but, when anybody else seemed to me to be treated the wrong way or unjustly, I got very steamed up. There were a few incidents where I became rather unpleasant, I guess, to some of the teachers. But on the whole I think it was all right.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about the school in Geneva?

MR. SCHRAG: There I had a teacher, Alexander Blanchet, who is a fairly well-known artist in Switzerland, or was-I don't know how he rates today. I was there for only one year. At the end of the year I won a few prizes, strangely enough, for drawing. Actually I didn't paint that year; just did drawing. Art school training also was different in this respect.

MR. CUMMINGS: This was really a professional art school?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, it was a real art school.

MR. CUMMINGS: And you had very set courses?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I probably could have avoided some of this training but I myself felt that I should draw from the model and draw heads, hands, and so on; good basic training. Actually when I came to Paris a year later I had to pass what is called a concours, a competition to enter the Beaux-Arts school (because this is a free school run by the state). I had to draw a statue in such a way that the top of the head would be exactly touching the end of the sheet of paper and the toes the end of the sheet on the other end. Which is difficult to do because you have to have all the proportions in between completely correct; you cannot adjust at all. It's a kind of knotty problem. But I got in.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's a very interesting idea.

MR. SCHRAG: Then again for one year I drew in the morning in what they call-wait a minute-it was just a hall full of statues. Plaster. It was winter; it was ice cold. You wore an over coat and scarf and drew. It was terribly cold in there. And you drew very meticulously, I think what one might call photographically, very correctly, very precise.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have an instructor?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. His name was Monsieur Roget. I certainly did not like him. He was far too-actually, again, I had a kind of trouble with him because he wanted the background of these statues to be shaded in so that the whole thing would look very really plastic in a sense. And I love line. I always refused to make the background the way he wanted it. I always wanted the line to be visible. So we did not get along so terribly well. I hated this kind of smeary thing in the background.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you doing any painting concurrently with this?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. I did some painting for myself concurrently. And in the afternoons I went to another man, Monsieur Billeul, and I did life drawing there. He had models, changing models.

MR. CUMMINGS: This is the same school, though?

MR. SCHRAG: No. He had his own atelier, kind of. I went to the Beaux-Arts only in the mornings. I could not enter the Beaux-Arts as a regular student because my French was not good enough and I did not have the background for French schooling. One needs certain credits to get in. No, I could only be accepted as what they call an *élève de maître*, that is, the student of one particular teacher who would accept you personally without the exam. I wanted to go to a painter named Lucien Simon-a fairly well-known painter, who still today has a good reputation. He seemed the most liberal at that time. I came with in a portfolio of work and showed it to him. And fortunately he accepted me. You know, very few are accepted outside of those who pass the examination. So I could enter the school. And I began to paint. I painted what everybody painted there, from the model. Frankly I don't think it was the most imaginative way to study art.

MR. CUMMINGS: By now you'd been to various art schools and lived in different cities and everything. You'd had all kinds of activities. What was the difference in the whole way of life, say?

MR. SCHRAG: I was a very boyish, a very young eighteen, because living as I did in this relatively small town and in a very protected milieu, I was probably very young for my age. My parents were very interested in everything their children did and there was a very close relationship, very loving, and maybe a little too protecting. Then when I went to Geneva they left me there. They didn't know what I was doing any longer. As parents do, you know, they suddenly drop you and it's finished.

MR. CUMMINGS: You're a bird to fly away.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. "Now go ahead." Then I had to adjust. Was in a constant state of astonishment. I met other people. I met young girls. I was very surprised about everything that happened. It was fun. It was great. And Paris even more so. I remember when I first went to Paris there were some nights I didn't sleep I was so excited. I was just in a state of tremendous excitement. In both cities I lived in a kind of pension with young students, both boys and girls. I got along every well with them immediately. They were from different nations. It was very alive and exciting kind of surroundings.

MR. CUMMINGS: This was getting into the 1930's?

MR. SCHRAG: That's right.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was it like? Were the classes in the schools large?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. At the Beaux-Arts the classes were very large. There was a lot of singing and also often a lot of boxing and tipping over of easels.

MR. CUMMINGS: It sounds like a gymnasium.

MR. SCHRAG: Right. But then the professor came. He was a very fine gentleman who wore a stiff black hat and white gloves. One of the students would rush over and help him and then everything was very refined and very noble.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find the afternoon atelier? Did that help you? Or was it just more work?

MR. SCHRAG: I'll tell you what I think about the whole experience. As I look back on this now, and mixed with my own experience in teaching, this is the way I feel: As long as you do study drawing and do draw from the model you might as well draw well. You see, there is a mistake being made in the minds of people when they say,

"Why draw from a figure? It doesn't make sense. Draw from your imagination. You don't need that." But I do think that just to learn how to see, to observe correctly or closely, or even only to know how one form flows into another form, or how every part of a structure is related throughout the whole structure, and how rhythms catch each other in a movement, and so on. I think the figure is a very interesting thing to study. Still today I feel it is a very interesting thing to study. And also I think that man always has an interest for man. In other words, let's say you would draw something else. I think the fascination that comes from drawing another human being is very considerable for practically everybody. So I believe if you learn how to see, how to observe, and to learn what architecture is within any kind of composition you may just as well study from the figure. I think it's quite a good way of learning. Now I don't mean this photographic kind of thing. I mean more like -I don't know whether you know the book on Matisse, the big book by Alfred Barr which is a standard kind of book. In the back of that book one of his students writes about things that Matisse said while correcting work and this student must have quickly noted that down. What Matisse said expresses what I mean: that a figure really stands and how the arch of the foot rests on the ground and the whole architectural side of drawing which is not the same as what you see in a photograph; actually it's something very different, you see, by understanding the structure. And this kind of thing I think is very useful. I don't say that every artist has to do it, and that nobody can become an artist without doing it, that would be going much too far. But I think it is still today something very worthwhile for an artist to look into.

MR. CUMMINGS: These were all studio courses that you were taking-right?

MR. SCHRAG: That's right.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you study art history?

MR. SCHRAG: Frankly, not so much. I had anatomy courses in France. And perspective, which is rather neglected today, too. But there was not so much art history. Naturally I was a great visitor to the Louvre. I spent hours and hours of many Sundays with friends at the Louvre.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you sketch things there?

MR. SCHRAG: I sometimes drew from something that I liked particularly. There were certain paintings that seemed to me tremendously worthwhile looking at again and again.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you remember which some of those were?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, for instance, what comes to mind are the paintings like the famous Leonardo *The Holy Family in the Grotto*, which is in the Louvre. Or, for instance, *Bathsheba*, the famous nude by Rembrandt, which is a magnificent painting. And there are many more. Personally I never was as excited about the *Mona Lisa* as some other people are. I mean it's one of the great paintings but it's not one that I feel is superior to all the others. We went often with friends. We'd study the composition of an artist like Poussin. His work is very interesting to look at. Actually you see these groups now, too, when you go to a museum; young people discussing paintings in front of the painting. I think this kind of thing is a good, or better, than an art history course.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you go to any of the other museums? There are so many in Paris.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Naturally in Paris I went to the Orangerie and the Luxembourg. And I saw many changing exhibitions. At the same time in the pension where I lived I rented a little room, a maid's room in the same building, a tiny little room under the roof and that's where I painted for my own amusement, so to say. These possibly are the most interesting things I did at that time. Of the paintings that I did then: the studies from the nude, the heads, and so on, practically nothing has survived, frankly. Just before I eventually left Paris to come to America (actually I had lived in Brussels for years)...but in the cellar of that building in Paris were a great many paintings that I used to have in my room. I went back to that pension. They greeted me tremendously. I said that I would like to go into the cellar. You know, I knew I was going to America and they knew I was going to America. I went down to the cellar. When I came up, they said, "What have you done?" They observed how disturbed I looked. I said, "I have destroyed all the pictures." And they thought I was crazy; they really thought I was out of my mind. But what should I do with those, all the studies that were there? Then I called the Beaux-Arts and had them pick up all the stretchers because naturally the art students could use those. So of the studies practically nothing has survived except a few drawings which I have here.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any students that you met, or older people or painters you became friendly with?

MR. SCHRAG: Actually the painter who possibly gave me most was not a Beaux-Arts painter but one who taught at an academie which is called Ranson. His name is Bissiere. He was a wonderful teacher. I think from him I learned possibly more about color and light and cohesion, the unity of painting, than probably from any other.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you meet him?

MR. SCHRAG: I got very restless at the Beaux-Arts, to tell you the truth. I didn't feel I was advancing a great deal. I began to look into other academies, just kind of snooping around. One I obviously visited was Andre L'Hote who was a very famous teacher. Many Americans studied with him.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes! What was that like?

MR. SCHRAG: I went in just at the moment he had stepped out. I looked around and saw what the students were painting. It seemed to me terribly-how shall I say it?-based on Andre L'Hote, let's say. First of all, my admiration for Andre L'Hote already as a painter was not enormous. And then they students seemed to fall in line with Andre L'Hote far too much, too easily, and there was a pattern. Now this will sound terrible to some of his devoted students, of whom there are an enormous number. When one went to Paris to study art and did not go to one of the big art schools, most people went to Andre L'Hote. I just felt it was too confining and maybe too foreign to my personal talent. Then I visited this school Ranson and saw what the people were doing there. I liked it. I liked the teacher because he was very almost in a sense hard. He spoke to you in a very soft, quiet voice and it was very strong, very biting criticism. He liked what I did but he didn't think I had advanced as he thought I should have. Eventually one day he said to me (I know he began to like what I was doing; he corrected me very little after some time), "Why are you still here?" I said, "I like the lessons." He said, "You shouldn't be here any more. You should leave." I thought it was very honest.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's extraordinary.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. He said, "Come from time to time and show me what you're doing but you shouldn't be working here any more. You should not have lessons here any more." I was a little shocked because I liked it there.

MR. CUMMINGS: How old were you when this happened?

MR. SCHRAG: I must have been twenty-four or twenty-five or something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you'd really been working then about four or five years.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. But kind of on and off. You know, art students are not like other students. I mean I liked nothing better than to draw and to paint but it is not so that you have this very strict regime.

MR. CUMMINGS: You can't do it from nine to five.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right.

MR. CUMMINGS: Tell me some more about Bissiere as a teacher and your relationship to him.

MR. SCHRAG: He himself was a friend of Braque's. I think actually he's a kind of celebrity today. He has since died. He has also shown here and has shown pictures at the Museum of Modern Art and various other museums. It's hard to explain but what I was perhaps most interested in was an understanding of color as both space and light; that a certain color within a certain context in the picture.... You see, color by itself has really no character-I mean it has an obvious simplistic character, red is kind of cheerful and things like that, and yellow is more transparent than black, and things like that. But really only in relation to another color does a color gain its real character. This expressive possibility of color and also that each color just by the very singular characteristic it has of density, luminosity; and even the medium plays a big role, whether it's oil, watercolor, gouache, or whatever it is-each color seems to strike a very different note but which is only coming out in relation to other colors. I think just in the same way the colors take a certain place in space as they are related to each other. They have really many functions in the painting, far more than one usually thinks. They have emotional characteristics.

MR. CUMMINGS: So all this really started with Bissiere?

MR. SCHRAG: I mean he was more a man of, let's say, unity of the painting, that any work of art (and this is really a very fundamental truth, to me at least) whatever you may do, a work of art must in the end be one thing, it must have this kind of unity. It would be too complicated to go into why certain things do not have this unity and others have it. But this I think possibly was the main thing that he insisted upon. However, what is the deepest problem of art is the same as the deepest problem of life: which is to kind of find yourself. The development of a human being in a sense is very similar to the development of an artist: he searches to find out who he is. And the artist really in a peculiar way also eventually finds out who he is.

MR. CUMMINGS: You also went to the Grande Chaumiere, didn't you?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, the Grande Chaumiere was just for drawing really. I had no teacher there. For free drawing. Do you know this place?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. That's very interesting. You've done an enormous amount of drawing. Over the years have you continued drawing as much?

MR. SCHRAG: With Bissiere, of course, I did only painting. Well, I always had a tremendous interest in drawing. And I think actually as I moved into painting—well, maybe that's the wrong word—rather as I developed as a painter, I would rather say, certain characteristics of drawing seemed to me very important in my painting, too. A certain kind of relationship of lines which I find so very interesting for expressive purposes in a drawing becomes then the relationship of brush stroke to the next brush stroke. Drawing is not only an outline, it's also what happens within the surfaces. And all of this can have enormous possibilities of expression. Too often drawing is considered to be what happens in an outline, you know.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Exactly. While drawing is really, or at least can be, the structuring of the entire drawing or painting. I think drawing elements in painting are of the utmost importance.

MR. CUMMINGS: You spent about—what? Four years? Five years? In Paris?

MR. SCHRAG: About that, I would say.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find the change? Because it's getting on into the 1930's here and there were all kinds of various things going on in Paris.

MR. SCHRAG: You mean artistically?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. And the kind of life outside the studio.

MR. SCHRAG: Well, you know, the whole time, particularly in the later years of the 1930's, began to be very much under the cloud of the political situation. My brother Paul was then living in Brussels. When I left Bissiere and was more or less on my own, he said, "Why don't you live in Brussels (which is not very far from Paris) and kind of dig in and see what you can do without going to any art school?" So I went to Brussels and had no more teaching of any kind. I went to some more museums but tried to see what would happen if I would be all on my own.

MR. CUMMINGS: This was when?

MR. SCHRAG: I would say this must have been the end of 1935 or the beginning of 1936.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was Brussels? It's another city.

MR. SCHRAG: Brussels is a completely different city. It's much more cozy than Paris. This was really a kind of period of trying to see what I could do and would do. There again I was kind of lucky because eventually a very well-known man who was really a poet became interested in my efforts there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who was that?

MR. SCHRAG: That was Pierre Louis Flukay who is a rather well-known man in Belgium. He is the publisher of a journal on poetry called *Le Journal des Poetes*.

MR. CUMMINGS: I don't know him.

MR. SCHRAG: Well, he has some importance there and it also spreads beyond Belgium. He's a rather well-known man in literary circles in France.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you meet him?

MR. SCHRAG: Let me see, how did I meet him? Maybe my brother met him first—I'm not quite sure. Before I left Brussels to come to the United States, there came the question as to whether I should show this work that I had done in Belgium, which was a kind of chapter in my life; whether I should have an exhibition of that work. Then this Monsieur Flukay visited me. He said he found my work very interesting and that definitely it should be shown and he actually made the contact with that gallery for me. He also wrote a little introduction to the catalogue. I went to see him and I said, "I'd love to have an exhibition but I know so few people I don't think anyone will come to see it." He said, "Oh, I will take care of that." And he went to his cabinet and took out his filing cards and gave them to me saying, "Take these cards home and send to all of these people the little catalogue with my introduction, so they would know where it came from really." And he said, "You will see that quite a few people will come." And when I left with this under my arm he said, "Vous emportez me tete." "You're taking my head along," because this file of cards was the most important thing he had. It was very sweet of him

to do this, to let it out of his house.

MR. CUMMINGS: So, what happened? This was your first exhibition?

MR. SCHRAG: This was my first exhibition. It was at the Galerie Arenberg which is on the Boulevard or Rue Arenberg. For a first exhibition it was quite well received. It was a mixture of drawings and paintings. Of these quite a few still exist because some of these I brought here. And, strangely enough, they could be brought here without any trouble but I had to pay customs duties on the frames because art may be brought in but not frames. They are not great frames but I had to pay some customs duties on them.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like having an exhibition? You were-what?

MR. SCHRAG: I was twenty-six or twenty-seven or something like that. I was kind of scared about the whole idea. But it seemed to me a thing...after all, I was leaving Europe, and I had really worked very hard for many years, and I thought maybe it would be right. In contrast to many other people who paint, I was not somebody who was pushing terribly for exhibitions. I always felt that the work is the thing and I was not that eager, but it seemed to me not out of line that all this effort should be shown at one time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there lots of people? Were there reviews? Were pictures sold?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, there were reviews; that's right. A few were sold-drawings and a couple of paintings were sold.

MR. CUMMINGS: Had you sold many things before that?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, to say many things would not be right. But I was kind of lucky that there were always a few people who made friends with my work wherever I went; they kind of took to it. As I say, I was very little exposed to any kind of wider public. But always I had some kind of echo; I was not quite alone, let's say.

MR. CUMMINGS: What decided you to come to the United States? Was it the war and the political situation and everything?

MR. SCHRAG: Essentially, yes. It was not so farfetched with my mother being an American. By then actually everybody could see that the political situation would lead to some kind of catastrophe. My parents were still in Lucerne and the tragedy of the thing is that my father, who really saw this coming and was heartbroken about all these events that took place, that he should die when he did. The plan then was that my parents, too, would come here. My mother's health was not at all good then. My brother and I came over here and the same summer my father died over there. Then my mother came here. She was already in very poor health. It was very sad because it could have been much nicer. They were not old. I think all these terrible things that happened there kind of really broke my father, I would say. Living in Switzerland and reading the newspapers of Switzerland and France and also the American papers he knew more about Germany than anybody who lived in Germany. And, when his friends from Germany were visiting in Switzerland on vacation or business trips, my father belabored them to leave Germany. He'd tell them, "You don't know what's going on." They would say, "Oh, I can't leave. I have business there. My family is there." My father would say, "I tell you, you will be killed." I said to my father, "Papa, these people are on vacation. Leave them alone." He said, "I have to do it. I know what's coming. I have to tell them. I can't stand it." And so these visits of all the friends which could have been beautiful were dreadful because my father was telling them that they were making a great mistake. And he was right. A great many of them he never saw again. They either were killed or killed themselves. And he foresaw it exactly. He was absolutely right.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[SIDE TWO]

MR. CUMMINGS: This is Side 2. I would like a little more atmosphere of Paris, people you knew or things that went on there, or some things you thought about, or books, or theater or concerts; the things that impressed themselves on you. It's always such an active city.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes it was.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there particular artists that you became friendly with or people outside the art school?

MR. SCHRAG: I think I did what most young art students or any students do. I mean I had my friends. We went on excursions outside Paris. We also saw all of the City. We saw the markets at night and these things. We went to see sunrise on Montmartre from Sacre Coeur after a party. And this kind of thing.

MR. CUMMINGS: All the classic things.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, all the classic things that one is supposed to do. I met one particular artist, Michel Gilbert, and through him I got a little bit into a French family. On the whole, Parisians were not the most what one would call *accueilleion*, receiving people, strangers. I had another friend who was from Tours, a very nice young man. He said he could not take me home because two of his brothers had been killed in the First World War and his mother would never receive somebody who was from Germany. I could understand this to a degree. I mean it was sad. He felt differently about it but he said that's how it was. I had a peculiar position a little bit through my American mother. While people knew that I was from Germany, they did not know that I was also a little bit from America and so they let loose very often against *les Americains*. And then finding themselves very embarrassed when I said I felt this was very unjustified. At that time I was a little bit young to associate with older established artists, you know, and also I was, to some degree, nobody. Therefore, my contacts with the famous artists of that time who lived in Paris, maybe I saw one here or there but there was no possibility of really meeting them in a more serious way.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you interested in prints there? Or did that come after you came here?

MR. SCHRAG: No, not at all. Actually I was always interested in prints. I always looked at prints with great interest. But I didn't make a single print in Europe. I started making prints in the United States. I made no prints at all there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was the opportunity not there?

MR. SCHRAG: Oh, yes, it was there. I believe that printmaking is tremendously--how should I say it?--based in drawing. I still believe today when someone asks me, "How can I become a good printmaker?" I would probably say, "Do a lot of drawing." Because the technical side is not the center of the problem. I think printmaking is an art as rich and as complete as all the others are and it has exactly the same problems and pushing the technical side into the foreground is really falsifying to some degree the whole idea of printmaking.

MR. CUMMINGS: Let's go back to the chronology. You really came from Brussels to this country then-right?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. That's right.

MR. CUMMINGS: You had relatives in New York and you came to New York?

MR. SCHRAG: I had relatives in New York. When I first came that summer an aunt who had a house on Cape Cod invited me and actually it was there that I got the message that my father had died. Then there was this great problem. My mother was in very poor health; how would she come here? And at that time the situation was extremely loaded. War could break out practically any day. It was the time when Hitler was at his most venomous. I believe it was the time when the Czechoslovakian crisis was in progress. So this aunt and uncle-who really were not young people either but were both Americans-immediately got their passports and wanted to go and get my mother. Which was really very touching because it was a great risk for them, too, you know, at such a time when it was thought that war was just about to break out. But fortunately we could then arrange it that a Swiss nurse brought her over. So she came with that Swiss nurse. As I said, she was in very poor health.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do when you arrived here?

MR. SCHRAG: I thought I should still get some more art training. And at that moment I thought actually now maybe I should learn something about printmaking. For some reason I felt that this was still lacking in my education. So I enrolled in the Art Students League in Harry Sternberg's class.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there a reason why you picked him? He was the print man?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, he was the print man at the Art Students League. I had contact with another artist, Anton Refregier, and he thought that Harry Sternberg would be a very fine teacher. Which he is, and also he's a very nice man.

MR. CUMMINGS: How was Refregier? Wasn't he very involved with politics?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, he was very involved with politics and also Harry Sternberg was. At that time that was very much the trend of all artists actually.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. Because I know Will Barnet and I've talked with him about it and he said everybody was involved in this, very deeply involved...

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Actually it was very interesting; while I was at the Art Students League the war broke out. I had made friends with a number of young people there. I came to my class this day and they said that this was not a war that America had any interest in; that it was an imperialistic war. I said, "You're entirely wrong. It's a most important thing that has happened and, if Hitler should win, it would be the greatest disaster in the entire

world. You don't understand." They said, "Uh, you come from over there and it's a completely different outlook. And it's not our war at all." I was very depressed.

MR. CUMMINGS: What was the school like?

MR. SCHRAG: I met a number of artists who I still know today, very nice people. I met William Kienbusch. During this time at the Art Students League I met Fred Farr who is a sculptor. I met Mrs. Rosenberg, I met Carroll Cloar. These all became kind of friends. I got along very well with Harry Sternberg. The second time I met him he said, "Don't call me Mr. Sternberg. Call me Harry." You know, to somebody coming from Europe this was very startling-the professor saying this. I could hardly believe my ears.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the classes there? Because this again is a different kind of school from the ones you had attended before.

MR. SCHRAG: Graphics classes have a little different character from other art classes because usually what you study most is the technique and the teacher more or less helps you along to solve your personal problem. But following the trend of the time and maybe continuing a trend that I already had, there was a streak of social consciousness running through my work, too. What I did was somewhat related to a message in the print. There were such themes as a woman holding a small child in the tremendous crowds and crush of the subway. I called the print *Madonna of the subway*. This was a kind of separate unit, this mother and child within the stream of people. I still like it today; I think it's not a bad print. And then I did a print *Speak of Good Will* which is a man, a little bit of a Christ figure-you know, like in Columbus Circle a man stands on a chair and speaks and there are a few people, stupid people, listening. And then, too, I touched somehow on politics. I made a print *Persecution* which is a little bit like Christ shown to the masses which, however, has a Nazi soldier standing next to the man. So they were somewhat what one might call topical. But always with a little bit more like a religious or philosophical slant-not social overtones.

MR. CUMMINGS: But your work before this hadn't been as pointed in that direction, had it?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, yes; actually the drawings I did in Brussels dealt a great deal with poor people, with very average people. What Pierre Louis Flukay called *un gout humaine* (a taste that is called human). It was quite marked. Eventually, however, for reasons that maybe some doctor or psychoanalyst might find, I drifted away from representing people for quite some time. Only in recent years I picked it up again, in portraits particularly.

MR. CUMMINGS: I notice in looking through photographs and things they are very sparse of people.

MR. SCHRAG: Very sparse of people. They hardly appeared at all, and if they did appear they were tiny. But I think that people, to some degree, or at least myself, is very much present in the landscape. As I say, I do believe that the landscape of, let's say, Van Gogh, is as human as a portrait by Van Gogh. I think this division is drawn wrong if one thinks only of subject matter. There are inhuman paintings of people and human paintings of still-life's and landscape.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long did you study at the League? How long did you work with Harry Sternberg?

MR. SCHRAG: I studied in the mornings. I painted for myself in the afternoons.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you have a studio?

MR. SCHRAG: I painted in my room which I had then.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there any other people at the League that you became friendly with? Instructors or other people?

MR. SCHRAG: I must have gradually met more artists. But I was closest to the ones I mentioned.

MR. CUMMINGS: How long did you study there again?

MR. SCHRAG: I think it was about a year-maybe not quite a full year. Then already I got through.... Rita Ribers, who later married Mervin Jules; she had, I think, inherited a little etching press. And so very early I had my own press. I got it from her. Which was a great help. It was a star wheel little etching press. I loved this like my own piano. Also this gave me freedom. I did not have to go to any studio or art school and I could experiment on my own.

MR. CUMMINGS: You sound as if you weren't as interested in the classes and having a lot of people around?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I'm not. But I'm not really against it. Later we'll probably get into Atelier 17 where I was first a member with a group and then later director. It's a very complex and difficult thing-the artist by his very nature

is a loner naturally; he is not a good mixer. But I think, depending on where and what kind of a studio it is where he works, it can actually give him more than if he were all alone; at least for a certain period of time while he is developing as a printmaker.

MR. CUMMINGS: Talk about his technical problems.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. And the constant contact with really top artists. Like in Atelier 17 where you were working... sitting next to Miro and Masson and Lipchitz and Chagall, and to be in the stream and part of a group that has this creative force is I think extremely inspiring and helpful. I think the disadvantages of not being all alone at all times and even sometimes kind of-how shall I say?-disturbed by people talking and people not letting you get to the press when you need the press, and so on, are not as important as some of the assets, at least for a certain time in your development, a studio that has a group of very interesting artists working together can have.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's interesting. When did you get involved with Atelier 17 then?

MR. SCHRAG: In 1945.

MR. CUMMINGS: So we're really still taking about 1938, 1939, 1940.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Then I began to exhibit in groups. Actually, by the time I eventually had my first show in a commercial gallery in Kraushaar, I had shown a great deal already both in museums and also in other galleries, single pieces in group shows. There were some groups that showed at the Riverside Museum. Every year I showed with the Independents, a group of artists which was still in existence then. Unfortunately, nothing like that exists anymore.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you get involved with the Independents?

MR. SCHRAG: John Sloan was the director at that time, I think. I looked for possibilities. At that time I had done fairly large paintings with a great many figures in them, actually crowds. Some of these paintings were then shown and even got quite good reviews. They were picked out of larger shows by several critics and got quite good reviews. Also my first prints that I showed, which were the ones I did at the League, were picked out by critics as being interesting.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you get to know John Sloan? Did you meet him?

MR. SCHRAG: Later on I met him. He was an artist of the Kraushaar Gallery also. I know his widow quite well now. Indirectly I know that he talked to another artist, Maurice Becker, an older artist. Becker told me that when I had my first show at Kraushaar Sloan said to Becker that he had to go and see it and it was an unusually interesting show. Sloan did not tell me this but I know it through Becker.

MR. CUMMINGS: He said it to other people.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Which may be better.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, sure. Well, did you get to know Sloan?

MR. SCHRAG: Not really; just from a distance. I mean I met him and shook hands with him but I couldn't say I really knew him.

MR. CUMMINGS: You also got involved with Artists Equity and certain other groups.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. I don't know exactly at what point that came.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you ever have any group shows in Europe?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I did not. I just had the one-man show in Brussels.

MR. CUMMINGS: So you really can't contrast there with here?

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. But one thing that seems to me to be true: I thought that at that time at least, there was a fairly good chance for a young artist to at least be seen somewhere. I do hope it still exists in the same way, although I have a feeling that possibly it may be more problematic today. I was for some reason, possibly shyness or silliness or something, not pressing too hard for one--man shows. Actually rather other people were pressing me to have shows. It's interesting then that the first year I had a one-man show that year I did feel that I should show and I made an effort to get one.

MR. CUMMINGS: This was with Kraushaar? In 1947?

MR. SCHRAG: I think it was in 1946 that I began to think of it. Kraushaar was on Fifth Avenue before the Gallery moved to 57th Street (and now it's on 80th Street). Miss Kraushaar already had an interest in prints and did take some of my prints into the gallery already years before.

MR. CUMMINGS: You started winning a lot of prizes, too?

MR. SCHRAG: I won a number of prizes, yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: It seems now that the younger artists don't really care about prizes and they don't want to submit so much to juries and exhibitions, whereas it seems in the 1930's and 1940's...?

MR. SCHRAG: Do you think so? You mean less now than they used to?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. It seems that if you won prizes, say, even in the 1940's, it helped people.

MR. SCHRAG: It had much more effect. Actually I hear from dealers that if you won an important prize the painting was sold. There was no doubt about it because this prize had such prestige. That is not the case any more.

MR. CUMMINGS: No. Either people are more independent or the shows aren't as important. Something is wrong; something has changed really.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Something has changed, definitely.

MR. CUMMINGS: I know younger artists who don't even want to submit to a juried show. If they're picked by somebody who is doing an idea show that's fine; but no annuals.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Well, actually printmakers are a little different on that.

MR. CUMMINGS: They like more shows.

MR. SCHRAG: They like more shows. And it's so easy to submit, you see. You roll it up sometimes and you send it out. Even then the results sometimes are very peculiar because the same print that will be rejected by some jury may win the prize in another show. That has happened to me a number of times. Actually, I kind of like it. I always think I'm still so controversial really. It's interesting. Even now once in a while, strangely enough, I'll send a print out just because it just goes into the mail like a letter and I get a notice that they don't want to have it. But actually most of the time now I'm invited. It's just a freakish thing. There's another feature in it which is very human but kind of sad. I myself have been on many juries by now and some people feel hurt that they didn't get into shows where I was on the jury. But I was only one juror among many. And I don't even remember what I did but I did it as well as I could. In many cases we juried two thousand prints, like at the Brooklyn Annuals. Naturally, in many cases you goof. Even now when I go out of town to lecture or something I'll meet some artist who'll say, "You didn't let me into the Annual." And I'll say to him, "I? That's ridiculous." And so you have made an enemy somewhere without knowing it.

MR. CUMMINGS: In other words, you found it very helpful and useful really to exhibit in those shows?

MR. SCHRAG: Actually I would say that a young printmaker should send his prints to exhibitions. Particularly if he does not take it too tragically if he's rejected.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right. Baskin said he had to send prints out because he got lots of awards and he liked that. He was young and it was very helpful. The ego thing.

MR. SCHRAG: Particularly when the show is judged by other artists I find it very nice to know that all these artists felt that you had done something outstanding. It is, after all, kind of reassuring if you esteem them that they esteem you.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you do between, say, 1945-6-7 before your show at Kraushaar? Were you just working?

MR. SCHRAG: I guess I was working and showing here and there. I showed with Atelier 17 then. I showed also in Europe; I showed at different galleries. And I think the Buchholz Gallery took some prints. And Curt Valentin.

MR. CUMMINGS: What led you to Atelier 17?

MR. SCHRAG: For some time before joining I had heard that Atelier 17 was such a very interesting place to go beyond the known possibilities of graphics. I kind of played with the idea of joining. Then one day a friend of mine, a very well-known photographer, Joseph Breitenbach, who is still teaching at the New School who was for

the UN in Korea, and who is really a very interesting man-he told me that he knew Hayter and that he would invite him for a certain evening and that I should come and meet him. He had a place on Central Park South. I came and naturally we got to talking about graphics. He was fascinating as he always is when he talks about graphics. Then we left. There was a subway stop there and it was a rather cold night. We walked up and down the street and couldn't leave each other because we got so involved in talking techniques. We stood there and talked and talked. I felt I really had to go to Atelier 17 to see what they were doing. And of course he urged me to come. This was really a very good thing, not only because of the enormous widening of graphic possibilities at Atelier 17 and Hayter's particular interest in burin work and what it brought to the whole field, but also the meeting with all those artists, as I said, that you really suddenly were in the presence of contemporary masters who were working side by side with you. There were also some very good American artists like Abraham Rattner and some of the younger men like Peter Grippe, the sculptor, and Hans Verath (Veratz?), who is a teacher at Columbia, and Sue Fuller, and Anne Ryan. I mean it doesn't end.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. Lots of people were there. Well, what was really so different about this place from other places?

MR. SCHRAG: In the first place, the personality of Hayter himself could somehow make one out of this group of very, very different people; and the gift of keeping these rather outspoken and difficult temperaments together in one place is a great one. At this point also Mauricio Lasansky was there. And Gabor Peterdi. I hope I don't forget any. But there were such a number of people there.

MR. CUMMINGS: One of the things that interests me about it is Hayter's ability to cope with all these people and such a great variety of temperaments.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. It was even much more than that. The Atelier was in a sense a meeting place where problems far beyond printmaking were discussed. It was not at all like a crafts school or anything like that. The whole complex of what graphics could be and also the elements that make up graphics, like line, and values, and, to a degree, color-the whole problem became visible and you could make your own choice as to what you would accept and what you would not accept. To me it was helpful in a peculiar way. First of all, as I said, there is something in the atmosphere when you are working together with such enormously creative people which is inspiring. But also beyond that the enormous widening of your grasp of the possibilities of graphics in general gives you not so much the possibility of using all of them but of understanding what would really fit your own needs. You see, once you know so much you can more easily understand where and how you yourself could possibly become more expressive, deeper, richer, through the use of certain possibilities of graphics. To me at least the display of the craft itself has very little meaning and when I go to exhibitions I can look through so to say, the part that is only pyrotechnical and then the core is often very thin. But recently I have tried to reduce the means I was in graphics in an attempt at simplification of the medium again to be most forceful with relatively little. But, as I say, there is no merit as such in such an approach. Another artist may feel very differently and may do very well with something completely different.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm curious more about the things that would go on there on a day-to-day basis. You know, would people drift in, in the morning or a night or in the afternoon? What was the kind of ambience of the place.

MR. SCHRAG: Really, if you think of it in terms of a regular school, you're wrong. What most of them had on their mind was to use their gifts as painters or sculptors in another medium. Actually at that time there seemed to be a kind of fortunate combination in my own search for underlying life and rhythm in the landscape and the use of this one particular instrument-tool, the burin. The burin is an instrument, a tool which is enormously responsive to the least inflection and touch that you use on the plate. Also the tool itself hides the stroke that you make; it lies below-underneath-and therefore it is in a sense like a blind man that you work and your concept of that line is formed in your mind before you do it on the plate, and the resistance of the metal makes you think twice before you make that cut because to make a mistake or to be negligent in any way would lead to a tremendous amount of work in having to take that out of the plate again. Which can be done, but it's extremely difficult and time-consuming. So a peculiar kind of consciousness and control is necessary to use it. And at that time to me this kind of becoming conscious of this interrelation of line within one work so that all speaks and all comes together into one statement eventually builds up all these different cuts in the metal. That seemed to me tremendously appealing at that time. It was something that I had already pursued in drawings but which became even more acute and more dramatic in that other medium. There was some kind of very happy coincidence there for me I believe at that moment. You asked how the Atelier functioned. Well, it actually was not a very glamorous place. Did you ever see it? On Eighth Street?

MR. CUMMINGS: No, someplace else later.

MR. SCHRAG: Oh, later when it was on 14th Street at the corner there?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. SCHRAG: The old place was still darker and less well kept maybe. There was one very long table at which all these people were sitting side by side. Hayter usually came at five and left at ten. After the work was done we all went out to the Cedar Tavern or some other place. There would be a lot of very interesting discussion mixed with jokes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Was there much discussion between various people working at this table?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. It kind of flared up, you know. You see, the interesting thing about the whole medium, both painting and drawing and graphics, is that you cannot really separate the technique from the expression of the work as such. It all combines. It is not an accident that the Marins are watercolors for instance, when they are so typically Marin; or that a sculptor would work in...or that an Arp is not done in clay. The man and the material become bound together and are inseparable. Therefore, when a technical problem arises in a workshop like that--for instance, let's say, a certain jaggedness of the line is attempted, then of course the question is not only how can I produce the jagged line but really what is the meaning of that jagged line for that particular work? What function does it really have? Why is it so necessary? And so on. It seems to me that some of the--how shall I say--very clear concepts that one has to have in printmaking in order to succeed is then a great help in painting and in drawing, too. When you go to an art school or if you are teaching in an art school, you often see the students, for instance, drawing. They make a line; they erase it. They make another line; they erase this much of it. They do this; they erase. On and on. Printmaking rather trains you or wants you to have a real concept of that line and to attempt at least to bring it down immediately. Maybe like the Chinese artists or the Japanese artists. Because once it's bitten in or once it's engraved into the metal, it's a hell of a thing to get it out again.

MR. CUMMINGS: But still it's interesting that there are some people who seem to become very free with their....

MR. SCHRAG: It's not that. Actually those who are free are maybe even very sure. It's not so much that as the clarification of the general concept. If anybody thinks that an artist visualizes a painting or a print or a drawing and then just kind of photographs it on the canvas or on the paper, that's completely wrong. I mean it's complete nonsense because the thing grows. But still, all the steps that you take, all the choices that you make while the work is progressing, have to have some clarity, I believe. Just speaking for myself, I think that that is an asset for an artist to make a statement with conviction and clarity. Clarity can be vagueness in the picture. You know what I mean? He can attempt vagueness but he has to know what he's doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's right. It's very interesting, I have talked to a few people who were at Atelier 17 and some will say, "Oh, Hayter! Everything was him." And other people would say, "You could do what you want and if you had a problem somebody would answer a question." So that it's very hard to get an accurate picture.

MR. SCHRAG: Well, he meant different things to different people. That's probably true.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, I think so.

MR. SCHRAG: It probably was so.

MR. CUMMINGS: Everyone seems rather opinionated about him.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Actually some of those who should be very grateful to him are not grateful to him. Like it often is also how you feel toward your father or something like that. But frankly the truth really is that I do believe that Hayter really esteemed an artist for being himself. I do not believe.... For instance, I can say from my own experience that there was never any collision. Although I think I worked very differently in general idea and based my whole concept on a different line of thought, I think rather he liked that better than some stupid imitation of Hayter.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, he has a whole thing about rhythms that a lot of people seem to have gotten....

MR. SCHRAG: A man like that is an enormous personality. And then of course the tool itself--the burin--I don't know whether you've ever used one; it makes these marvelous loops. It's almost sensuous pleasure to take that tool and to make these loops. And when they overlap, certain spaces are created and so on. And for a long time really there was a group of people sitting making these loops, which look a little like Hayter's. But I think a real Hayter was something far beyond that. I believe in a sense it's unavoidable to be--particularly when you're a young student--to be in the presence of a man like Hayter and not to have some kind of temptation to pick up the mannerisms of that teacher. When you study the history of art you'll find that many features of another artist have transplanted in the work of succeeding artists with enormous success and with completely new results, and in most extraordinary ways sometimes.

MR. CUMMINGS: You went to Atelier 17 when? In 1945? So you were there really for five or six years?

MR. SCHRAG: No, not quite that.

MR. CUMMINGS: You were in and out?

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. You see, it is a mistake to think of it as a school.

MR. CUMMINGS: I've always thought of it as a place where people-not like, say, a l'Hote where you went to do ten things, but where you went to say, well, maybe it's going to work or maybe it's not going to work. But to work and experiment...?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, actually I missed a stretch of it because I was run over by a car and had a broken wrist.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, dear! When did that happen?

MR. SCHRAG: That was not so long after I joined, I think. I fell on my head and had to have stitches taken and all that. You see, I painted. The Atelier met on a certain day of the week for those who were beginning and studying. And also it met once a week with that group of more advanced artists including some European celebrities usually. And if you wished you went to that and worked on something that you had going. Or also you could work there all day and all night if you had a project going, but it wasn't that you would just sit there day after day and work.

MR. CUMMINGS: It was really like one's own studio.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, usually it was like your own studio. Actually Hayter was very wonderful and generous. When you had a difficult problem in painting he would come during the day and stand next to you. But the times that Hayter came in for sure were those certain set days. Actually some of the so-called celebrities among the artists there were extremely friendly with us who were nobodies yet. They were very helpful and even helped us with painting. They were very, very cooperative and everything.

MR. CUMMINGS: That made it very rich.

MR. SCHRAG: It was lovely. The interesting thing is that while it was going on I didn't realize what an unusual moment this was that these people were in one room together. It was really a phenomenal moment. And I didn't realize it. I mean I thought it was interesting that Weber was there, and that Masson was there, and that Moore came in, and so on. But it didn't strike me as being so strange as it strikes me today.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's fascinating that it was happening and one wasn't really quite aware of it.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, it makes it a little more real.

MR. SCHRAG: Possibly.

MR. CUMMINGS: Let me go back here for a second. You illustrated some books and did some portfolios in about 1941.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. The first book that I illustrated was for the publisher Pierre Berez; and the man here who really initiated it and pushed it through was Lucien Goldschmidt, the dealer, who has a shop here. I illustrated *The Suicide Club* with eighteen prints. It's a work of my youth. It was 1939. The other thing you mentioned, the portfolio, was done only a few years ago-by the sea. It's a group of small prints with eighteen poems on the sea, perhaps you could call it. The text is in my handwriting. I wrote a little poem for it myself. First there was the idea of having some museum man or somebody in the print field write an introduction. But then that seemed so out of line with the character of the thing itself that I wrote this little poem. It was show in the same year at the Kraushaar Gallery and at Associated American Artists. It was quite successful in the sense that it was bought by the Metropolitan Museum, by the National Gallery, and by a number of other interesting places.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like doing the fist book, *The Suicide Club*? Because that was a new kind of thing, wasn't it?

MR. SCHRAG: You see, at that time I was still doing figures mostly. Later on Mr. Gordon, who was then with the Whitney Museum, wrote this little monograph which you may have seen. In it he said, "In the landscapes one sees already the landscapes that will later be the center of the work." But it was a little foreign to me, I agree. It's a nice story.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who is Pierre Berez?

MR. SCHRAG: He used to be the main-how shall I say?--the center of the shop that Lucien Goldschmidt has now;

Pierre Berez is in Paris and Lucien Goldschmidt first represented Pierre Berez here at that time. He was an extension of Pierre Berez before he became independent. Pierre Berez is still a very important dealer in Paris. Goldschmidt represented Pierre Berez at that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see that connection. What about this other thing; the twenty-one etchings and poets that was...?

MR. SCHRAG: That was a project which was done in Atelier 17. It brought together twenty-one poets who would write a poem in their own handwriting; then to get twenty-one contemporary painters or sculptors to do a kind of accompanying illustration or interpretation of the poem. In getting this done there were quite a few upheavals and difficulties but eventually the project was completed. I hear that now it's really a rare collector's item. The Morris Gallery brought it out. At first it was not such a great success but eventually it did become a great success. Unfortunately, also in the meantime some of the artists have died which always is kind of interesting commercially-Franz Kline, Salemme, and Dylan Thomas. There are very rare prints in it, a very early de Kooning print and so on. I was paired together with this young poet David Dujay who had written a poem that seemed to kind of go along with some ideas I had in dealing with landscape and the mystery of landscape.

MR. CUMMINGS: Does that idea interest you, the combination of prints and poetry and illustration?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I think it is very interesting. And probably if I were to live in Europe there would be more possibility to use it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why do you think there is more of that in Europe than here?

MR. SCHRAG: It's an older tradition there altogether. Vollard was the great man who brought that out. Also, the idea of having something in a book and looking at it from time to time is different from having it on the wall, and recently prints have been on the wall mostly. In many cases this has not improved the quality of the print much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Who is the fellow who runs the Morris Gallery?

MR. SCHRAG: He's called Morris Wiesenthal. I haven't seen him in a great many years.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's the strangest gallery; sometimes he's there, sometimes he's not.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. I think he's very happy he did that portfolio.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, it is a very famous thing to have done.

MR. SCHRAG: By now it's very important. I must give him credit that against so many difficulties he eventually pulled that through. It was not easy.

MR. CUMMINGS: No. Have you done any others?

MR. SCHRAG: These are the only ones that are in that form, in a series. They're the only ones. Do you think we should stop now?

[END OF SIDE 1]

[SIDE 2]

October 20, 1970

MR. CUMMINGS: Today is October 20. This is Part Two, Side one-Paul Cummings talking to Karl Schrag. Why don't we continue going along chronologically as we have been and kind of pick up in the mid-1940's.

MR. SCHRAG: The mid-1940's actually are a very crucial moment I think in my development. First of all, I went to Maine and I made a series of drawings.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you select Maine?

MR. SCHRAG: First I had been to Massachusetts and then I began to feel or to think that possibly Maine would be a stronger Massachusetts.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what sense? You mean a more defined landscape or something?

MR. SCHRAG: I think Maine is more outspoken actually. In Massachusetts I had been to Gloucester and to Martha's Vineyard. I had heard about Maine and I had heard that some of the artists who I had admired like Hartley and Marin were very fond of Maine. So one summer I began to write letters to the chamber of commerce

in different places in Maine for renting. First I found a little place on Spruce Head. And actually that coincides with the time we're speaking about because it must have been in 1945 or 1946. I got married about this same time. My thought at that time was to find somehow articulate-ful lines, a kind of essence of nature. At that time, for instance, I made drawings.

[Interruption to try to work out some technical difficulties with the machine.]

MR. CUMMINGS: Sometimes there are imperfections in the tape itself. Anyway, you were saying that...?

MR. SCHRAG: Like often when you try to come to something new you advance through drawing rather than through painting, for simple reasons. First of all, it's tremendously direct as a medium and also allows a great deal of experimentation without great loss of time. So what I did was I sat down in front of the ocean and tried to draw what was going on; in other words the movement of the waves, and the transparency of the water, and the feeling of distance that one has in front of the ocean I tried to translate into a series of rhythms and lines which in reality were not visible in nature, but are somehow the feeling you have about it. I did the same thing with trees. For instance, I drew trees in the wind-often from memory-I went out at night and saw the trees moving in the wind; then I went back and tried to draw what I kind of felt more than saw.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. So it's not the tree really. It's the feeling, it's the idea.

MR. SCHRAG: No, it's not the tree. It's the tree subjected to the force of the wind so the wind is maybe the main actor and the tree is only the one that shows the reaction to that main actor.

MR. CUMMINGS: What town did you go to in Maine?

MR. SCHRAG: The first time we were on a small island, a peninsula really; it's called Spruce Head. But I was in many more places in Maine.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, I thought you went to one place.

MR. SCHRAG: No, no. Many, many places. Until finally we did kind of settle on Deer Isle.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you get to Deer Isle?

MR. SCHRAG: I had heard about it and then I wrote to some agency. I always rented these places blindly without seeing them and on arriving it was always a great surprise because there was no real description of the places. I remember on one occasion the people sent us a picture in which their dog was much more prominent and clearly visible than the house. This was one of the great influences at that moment. And then about that same time I joined Atelier 17 and to some peculiar extent this same search for this rhythmic line that would be very expressive was extremely close to what one can do with the burin. The burin is almost-how shall I say?-an instrument of movement because all your finest twists and changes in the direction of your hand and even all the pressures that you apply are immediately translated into that line. So there was definitely a connection between my new experience with the burin and this search for a series of lines which in their sequence would be very expressive. I know a single line has an expression of vertical or horizontal or there is a certain character just in the line itself, but what I mean rather is the sequences of lines which eventually form the entire drawing or print.

MR. CUMMINGS: In your working procedures, do you do a series of drawings and then paintings? Or are they drawing studies for specific paintings?

MR. SCHRAG: Unfortunately, or fortunately, I have no method. It goes back and forth. But let's say a typical print usually turns around a theme which I have been working on. None of my prints is exactly or even very much like something else I've done. It's not in any way a copy.

MR. CUMMINGS: So the drawings or the paintings are all really separate but related?

MR. SCHRAG: They're very much related.

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MR. CUMMINGS: Okay, we'll call this Reel 3. We were in Maine and talking about the relationship...?

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. I guess it was in 1945 that I did a series of watercolors in Maine which were rather small in size and they dealt with these problems: to find kind of a parallel to what you see; not to copy it in any way, but to search for something that was more real than what you see. Then when I came home that summer I felt that now more than ever before I would like to have an exhibition to show those because I felt they were something that I would like to have seen. I went first to Mr. Rehn. When I first talked to him, he was kind of

coolish but then he became much more interested and said he liked them very much and he wanted to think about the matter of giving me a show. Then he called me and said that the Pennsylvania Academy or somebody had already invited one of those that I left, that he was very pleased about it, but he couldn't promise me a show, and would I allow him to show two in his Christmas exhibition with his other artists. I said he could; but I would really like to have a show. He said he couldn't promise it. Then I went to Klaus Perls who at that time still showed some Americans. He said he liked them very much but he did not think he would like to show them himself, that he had all kinds of commitments, but, "Why don't you try the Kraushaar Gallery?" I said that the Kraushaar Gallery had known my work for some years and they had not been too interested. He said, "Oh, I would ask them again." So I went to the Kraushaar Gallery. Miss Kraushaar and her brother, who was then still alive, looked at them and said they liked them very much and that I could leave them. Then I came in again and she said, "Well, we would like to give you an exhibition in a small room." They were on 57th Street at that time and had several rooms of these watercolors and I was very pleased. She said, "I would like to show those." I said, "I have given two to Rehn already for the Christmas exhibition." She said, "Those you have to get back." So I got those back from Rehn. Mr. Rehn said to me, "To tell the truth, if you aren't with my gallery, the one I'd best like you to be with is Kraushaar." Which was very nice of him. I was very happy about this. Then about a week or two later I received a letter of just two sentences from Kraushaar saying, "We have changed our minds. We will give you the big room and make it an important exhibition." I don't know whether they had just thought it over or what. But this was the beginning of my association with the Gallery. Which has gone on for a long time.

MR. CUMMINGS: What else were you doing at that time? You were going to Atelier 17.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Then a few other things happened that maybe were to a degree lucky. For instance, the Museum of Modern Art bought one of my prints, the first one. And Lessing Rosenwald bought one of my prints. This all happened about that time.

MR. CUMMINGS: Does it make a lot of difference if the Modern or the Metropolitan or Rosenwald buys a print?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, I think it would be too much to say that it makes "a lot of difference." I think it meant more at that time than it does today because some work is actually in those collections for different reasons than those the public usually thinks are the reasons.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's true. Museums acquire objects under curious circumstances.

MR. SCHRAG: Often curious circumstances and sometimes there are donations of whole groups of prints and suddenly there is Lord knows who in their collection. But at that time a print was chosen with great care and also which one of your prints it would be and you spent some time with a curator. For instance, I think Bill Lieberman was new then. It meant something for you yourself, I mean maybe not that much in the eyes of the public, but it did also in that respect give you some kind of a standing. Curiously enough, the same print, for instance, was rejected by an important exhibition at the same time, and that was actually healthy for me because I learned early what to think of yes and of no in this respect. So in printmaking this was an interesting-how should I say?-beginning of a recognition during those years.

MR. CUMMINGS: You were in lots of group shows.

MR. SCHRAG: I was in a great many group shows. I cannot tell you that by half but I began to win prizes of all kinds. Very soon afterwards, I think a year or two later, I had my first exhibition of oil paintings at Kraushaar.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you doing paintings and prints concurrently during the 1940's?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Actually there was never a stop like some artists have. But once in a while, and still even now, I have abandoned the one or the other for weeks, let's say. But it's very much interwoven. The painting show that I had at Kraushaar then was rather well received. There was a reproduction in the *New York Times* and that kind of thing. Another thing that happened that pleased me at the time and that I still think was very nice was that from Atelier 17 I knew (though not too well) Yves Tanguy who was then here. I sent him a note with my catalogue inviting him to the exhibition. Not long afterwards I received a lovely letter from him saying how much he had liked the show. I don't know how he expressed it, but he said it was so different from all the "copycats" as he expressed it. I thought it was very nice that he sat down and wrote that at the time.

MR. CUMMINGS: I want to ask you about one other group show. In the World's Fair of 1939, you were in an exhibition there.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: I keep seeing it referred to over and over.

MR. SCHRAG: Frankly I can't remember with what work I was represented there. It's a little too long ago.

MR. CUMMINGS: "A Hundred Painters of the Year" exhibition.

MR. SCHRAG: I would have to look that up. It's a bit too long ago to remember.

MR. CUMMINGS: Apropos of that period when you came here, did you discover American artists that you found interesting?

MR. SCHRAG: Oh, yes. I have always had a great liking for all the American landscape painters; actually a particular liking for Ryder. Not that I wanted to paint like Ryder particularly but the whole thought of mystery being hidden in nature, that nature would be like the stage of human emotions and so on, just like the ideas that may be in the back of the minds of people like Kaspar David Friedrich or people like Turner, possibly. These ideas have always fascinated me.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were there other Americans? Were you interested in Hopper? Or Burchfield?

MR. SCHRAG: Actually at that time I found Hopper always very exciting as a painter of the city scene; yes, I did.

MR. CUMMINGS: But his landscapes, the ones with the trees and things?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Actually I found him always a very interesting and a very-how shall I say?-honest artist. And maybe one day one will find a parallel between Hopper and Eakins actually in that respect, this kind of uncompromising quality that they have. If you wish, possibly you could call that very American, although I shy away from such statements because then somebody else tells you that Franz Kline is the most American of painters. This concern whether this fits well the national character I think is a nice pastime but I think the painter himself should stay out of it.

MR. CUMMINGS: How about somebody like Burchfield who is so involved with landscapes?

MR. SCHRAG: Actually it's interesting that you mention Burchfield. Rehn told me that the things I brought him reminded him of the early Burchfield.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really? That's interesting.

MR. SCHRAG: I like Burchfield quite a good deal. But I don't think that what he was after is very close to what I am after.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's not?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I don't think it is very close. I don't think so. It's hard to say why exactly but, if you just put them side by side, let's say, which is something I have done, even of a similar theme, let's say, and you would see it runs in far different directions. But I do like his work very much. Another thing that has been said from the beginning of my exhibiting time was that there is a great influence of oriental art.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you think that's true?

MR. SCHRAG: It may be true to some degree in the sense that there is a similarity in approach. There are some things in Oriental art that I can easily see that have a strong link with what I'm doing.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you studied calligraphy or anything like that?

MR. SCHRAG: I have not studied it and I have not even-how should I say?-had this keen interest like some Impressionist painters had, you know, in Japanese prints and so on.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's very interesting that when there seems to be a certain kind of line quality in people's work everybody says, oh, it must be oriental influence.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. And then another influence that has often been mentioned was van Gogh. Of course, in a sense all these statements flatter me because I think it would be something that would be nice and very good.

MR. CUMMINGS: Were you interested in the work of any of these artists more so than others?

MR. SCHRAG: I do have a great liking for van Gogh in more than just, let's say, his style. I do think the kind of involvement of van Gogh has always appealed to me enormously. I think the identification practically with nature that you have and also when you read his letters is something that I find quite wonderful.

MR. CUMMINGS: You've written things, haven't you?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I have written a few things.

MR. CUMMINGS: Didn't you write some poetry at one point?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I wrote a few poems but I wrote one particular poem in connection with my portfolio. At first there was a question of having an expert write (I don't know whether I've mentioned this before) but then I rather thought it should be all of one piece. It seemed nicer.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's very interesting that in the late 1940's and early 1950's you were very involved in quite a different kind of group-if you can use "group"-than, say, the Abstract Expressionists.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. I did, however, know many Abstract Expressionists. And at least from my side there comes a feeling that I have had all along in life and in art that in order to be yourself you don't have to in any way attack others. I have found this, to put it mildly, unnecessary. Actually, one thing comes to my mind when I hear that people have condemned other artists because they follow another direction and that is that at one time there was an article, I think it was in *Arts*, and I think it was written by Munter, that both Jawlensky and Kandinsky agreed that Uhde was the greatest living artist. This to me showed such a liberal mind, that people who would do something so entirely different would agree on an artist in a grade so different.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, but don't you think that the Abstract Expressionists had a group of literary people that stirred things up constantly and created rather artificial...?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. Well, I do think-first of all, I'm against groups personally. I do believe there are single personalities in art and personally I do not believe in this marching together in columns. I do believe that all of us were to some degree grateful to the Abstract Expressionist artists for a certain freedom that they brought. There was really like a new fresh wind blowing which came from that direction. I do think that the influence the Abstract Expressionists have had on the art schools was disastrous in part.

MR. CUMMINGS: In what way?

MR. SCHRAG: The teachers came in and said, "Let loose. Go ahead. Forget inhibition. Just let go." And the students took huge canvases and in all kinds of manners applied blotches and strokes of paint which even looked rather attractive and interesting, I must say. But I think very little was learned through this. It was the mannerism of Abstract Expressionism without the basis, really. And this did not appeal to me too much. On the whole, for myself, I felt that it could not satisfy me, because I had this kind of urge to free some kind of a vision of the world. And the entire complex of thought that is the shapes alone and the colors alone and the lines alone would be the carriers of the painting was not adaptable to my own talent, to my own vision. Therefore, I was to a degree through those years in a sense an outsider, which, to some degree, I think I still am, actually. Because somebody who has this kind of talent falls between two things: you are neither an abstract artist nor are you really an artist who shows reality like the plain man sees it, so to say. And the engagement of thought that much of my work requires I think was largely unfashionable for many, many years. This has put me into somewhat a peculiar position which I could neither prevent nor further. I was completely helpless towards this kind of surroundings.

MR. CUMMINGS: You've known lots and lots of artists.

MR. SCHRAG: I've known lots and lots of artists. And also I might say I have been-how shall I say?-happy that artists of very, very different trends have been something, so to say, in my work. And that includes many of the artists who were at Atelier 17 like, well, Hayter himself who, of course, does something very different from what I am doing; and Yves Tanguy, who does something very different; or of the younger ones, people like George Ortman, who is quite a good friend; or Guerrero who has just had an exhibition in town. Of the older ones again I've always been very friendly with and have a good deal of admiration for Adja Yunkers who I think is a very fine artist. I have been quite friendly with Mark Rothko who was our neighbor across the street, who always came to my openings and was very friendly. And Milton Avery. I have been friends with quite a few artists. I just name those who have a name, not because I want to be snobbish but because you also know who they are.

MR. CUMMINGS: At this point, are there younger artists that you're interested in or who you know?

MR. SCHRAG: Through my teaching I have also been in touch with quite a few younger artists.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you start teaching?

MR. SCHRAG: I think I did my first teaching at Brooklyn College. At that time I think Kurt Seligmann was on leave of absence-no, wait a minute, I think it was Alfred Russell who was on leave of absence. I replaced him as a graphics teacher. Actually at that time, which was in 1953 or something like that, I first met Mark Rothko who was then teaching at Brooklyn College; and Jimmy Ernst, who was teaching there.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you get to Brooklyn College?

MR. SCHRAG: They called me one day. I don't know how that was exactly; or possibly they called Atelier 17. I can't tell you exactly. But the year after I began to teach at Cooper Union and that happened because Mr. Douden, who was the dean, called me. I think he had talked to Gabor Peterdi and he had thought that I should do that. The interesting thing about Cooper Union was that, when I first came here and I wanted to learn graphics, I considered going to Cooper Union. I went to the office and they said I was entirely unacceptable as a student because certain things in my education were missing. So it was kind of ironical that later they called me to ask whether I could teach there after I couldn't study there.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the experience of teaching?

MR. SCHRAG: I liked both schools actually, Brooklyn College too, but maybe Cooper Union even more. I had wonderful students. I got along very well with the students.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did you have? First year? Second year?

MR. SCHRAG: I don't know what I had when I first started but during the last years of my teaching I always had the last year which was before Cooper had the fourth year; it was the third, and then the fourth year. On the whole, we had a very good relationship although sometimes I had a few run-ins with one or the other. But usually at the end they brought me lovely presents-books with inscriptions, which I still have. So it was on the whole very successful I think.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the experience, the activity of teaching?

MR. SCHRAG: I like it, but I would not want to have a very heavy schedule, to tell you the truth, if I could help it. As you know, I haven't been teaching now for a couple of years. And as long as I can I want to keep that up. I'm not sure that every artist should continuously teach. For instance, the French artists don't teach if they can manage not to. Here there is always a great deal of teaching. Even by people who don't need it at all. They like to have that contact. I mean it is wonderful but I do feel that I took it very seriously. In the later years I often even prepared things that I would bring to school and show the students and made a great effort to really make something out of it. And classes being relatively small at Cooper one had almost the feeling of giving private lessons. Each student came to me a person, not just one of the class.

MR. CUMMINGS: How many students would you have in an average class?

MR. SCHRAG: An average class would be between twelve and seventeen or something like that. It was very small compared to other classes.

MR. CUMMINGS: And they had already had a couple of years or more?

MR. SCHRAG: Not always. But they had some experience in graphics and they usually had also.... I also taught drawing, and actually just, when I left, the same year I was offered to teach painting. But I just had this kind of idea that maybe Lord knows how many years I have left and I should try to do my own work.

MR. CUMMINGS: Where else did you teach? You taught at Columbia for a year?

MR. SCHRAG: No, no, that is not right. Actually I just gave one lecture there. I don't know how that got into my biography.

MR. CUMMINGS: What about the other artists at Cooper Union? Because so many people have taught there over the years.

MR. SCHRAG: Of course, I met some of the other artists. Cooper Union was an ideal place because there were no meetings. Your contact was with students, not with the administration. You came in and you taught and the administration knew through the students what kind of work you were doing. There were no questions asked as to how you went about teaching or whether you could take them out to museums. I often took the students to the Museum of Modern Art, to the Brooklyn Museum, opened the print rooms and showed them things. The printmaking class went to see paintings for color. Every year I did it a little differently, trying to find a better way to teach, and also not to get into a rut myself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you develop a mode or way of teaching?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I had a mode of teaching, graphics particularly. I was not too successful with drawing in doing what I really had hoped to do. For instance, I think if you draw from the model you should know some anatomy. A terrible thought, isn't it! Not anatomy like a doctor would know it but where certain things are and how this is built and so on. And so, actually I made simplified drawings; invented them myself. Then I made these in front of

the class very big to show them the main points which one sees and what happens if a figure twists and so on. And some loved it and some thought that this was a thing of the past to go into this. This was in the heyday of abstract expressionism. I ran into some opposition when a student made one part of the body rather naturalistically like the breasts or something and then suddenly turned into a wild kind of schmear in another part, wanting to be modern or wanting to be...or not just knowing how to do a knee and so on. In general I always hoped to-how shall I say it?-have a class that would be enthusiastic and alive. I think that is terribly important.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's a large percentage of it.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, it's a large percentage of it. Yes, that's what I thought.

MR. CUMMINGS: What did develop in the graphics teaching that you found you could...?

MR. SCHRAG: The graphics teaching in a sense was...I transferred many ideas of Atelier 17 into my teaching. For instance, in the beginning I forbade my students to do anything that would be supposedly a picture. They learned the vocabulary of printmaking.

MR. CUMMINGS: What would they actually do?

MR. SCHRAG: They would make an experimental plate, a plate that was condemned to destruction, so to say, which would give them their own vocabulary.

MR. CUMMINGS: Textures and tools.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. All would be experimented with on that one plate-scratching and so on, and then the different ways of printing, and everything. So that they would not come and say, "Oh, I have just done this little drawing in life class and I would like to put that on a plate." And we kept this around and once in a while showed them, "See how rich and how marvelous this is in the trial plate. Couldn't you get some of this wealth and this richness into this print?" That is, if the artist was aiming at something of that character. If he was aiming at a pure simple line, of course, obviously this would not be useful.

MR. CUMMINGS: So it became a little reference tool for them.

MR. SCHRAG: It was like your own dictionary of possibilities. When every student had done one plate like that, we made an exhibition of the plates and the proofs and each student would explain what he had done because I let them be very free so that it wasn't necessarily you who had explored this or that; it was maybe somebody else and you could take from him. So maybe twelve people experimented and the experimentation of all twelve became common property.

MR. CUMMINGS: So they had a greatly enriched vocabulary.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. After, let's say, three weeks at Cooper Union, they already had an enormous knowledge of the medium.

MR. CUMMINGS: And this was only with metal plates? There was no lithography or...?

MR. SCHRAG: No, there was nothing like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's very good. And you found that really worked?

MR. SCHRAG: It worked extremely well. The other method where you come with a little project and begin to transpose it, there's always the danger that you will really try to make a duplicate of what you have already done without regard for the new medium in which you're working. And while I'm against just fiddling around with plates or being just a technician and showing fantastic textures and things on plates, still I think that, as long as you go to an art school, you should learn something. And a wide vocabulary of possibilities, even if you never use it again, can be no harm.

MR. CUMMINGS: Well, or you may use it in different ways--not necessarily in prints.

MR. SCHRAG: In different ways. Not necessarily. For instance, I myself know an enormous amount of things about this medium really-I mean by now I know so much-but I use very little in one plate because I don't need it; I need this or that for that particular plate and I usually know how to get the effect that I need and it is completely immaterial by what means I get the effect.

MR. CUMMINGS: I think it's very interesting that there is that problem that so many print makers fall into of just being enamored of the endless technical possibilities.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. And actually the public or the one who looks at the prints often is fantastically wrapped up in technical fireworks which really are quite meaningless to a person who understands how this was achieved. I have perhaps what is an unfortunate gift; that of looking through prints, so to say, as to their faults.

MR. CUMMINGS: How would you describe that? The being able to see through, say, the pyrotechnics?

MR. SCHRAG: In any work of art I believe that as soon as you become conscious of the technique there is something wrong with the work. For instance, if you were to think of what a wonderful gift for the English language that Shakespeare had, how grandly he expressed himself and what a wonderful gift for language he had, you would not really come close to Hamlet or Macbeth anymore. In the same sense I think Rembrandt was a fantastic craftsman, both in painting and...oh, fantastic, incredibly fine. And still, you never would normally be conscious of this, certainly not for a long while after looking; maybe if you were an etcher after a while you might say, "How did he do that?" But it's something that comes much later from your first strong impressions of the work itself.

MR. CUMMINGS: Have you made lithographs?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I have. Also, I was at Tamarind for a couple of months.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that experience? That's recent, isn't it?

MR. SCHRAG: That's more recent, yes. We're jumping a little.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. How was Tamarind? And what did you do out there?

MR. SCHRAG: I had made lithographs at the Art Students League already years before. You know, you get an offer from Tamarind, you cannot apply.

MR. CUMMINGS: Right.

MR. SCHRAG: I got very excited about it and actually before going I planned some projects. Although June Wayne would have liked me to, I did not do a series. Rather I wanted to do single prints. I enjoyed it very much. There was a wonderful master printer there from Czechoslovakia, Bohuslav Horak. I became very friendly with him.

MR. CUMMINGS: I've heard he was an extraordinary character.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. And he was not on too good terms with June either. But we got along very well together.

MR. CUMMINGS: He was only there a year or two, I think.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes. He's a magician of the craft. He's absolutely incredible. Actually it was very interesting to talk to him. I have always had a great liking for a good craftsman. And I have tremendous esteem for a fine printer. And I live to watch them, too, how they go about it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. It's like a ballet almost.

MR. SCHRAG: It's marvelous. It's a magical quality how they kind of bring it up and print it. It's just fascinating.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you find the atmosphere of Tamarind? Which is so organized.

MR. SCHRAG: When I was there, first there was Robert Mallery, the sculptor. And then there was Diebenkorn with whom I became rather friendly, too. Then there was Albers. There's an interesting photograph where we all are, Albers, Diebenkorn and I in conversation.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. It's a real trio of contrasts.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, very great contrast there.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you like this business of working sort of from nine to five?

MR. SCHRAG: Well, I worked more than from nine to five. I worked often at night and also on Sundays. I often came in at night. You could come anytime. Well, what you say is true to a degree because the workshop would be very unhappy with three printers waiting for an artist to print and he would just not show up. Personally I'm not against a certain discipline in art. By no means do I mean to say that an artist who is completely undisciplined couldn't be a great artist, not at all. But I myself find it not difficult to adjust to a working day in art. I tell you I completely forget where I am or what's going on around me. For instance, June brought in visitors

to look at the workshop and I didn't even see them. Later she told me that so-and-so and so-and-so were here. I had not seen them. There would be two artists in a huge.... Have you seen the workshop?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. I was there.

MR. SCHRAG: Well, there were two people in a large area and they really didn't get into each other's way in any way. We had lunch on that nice patio out there. I enjoyed it very much. I made a series of eleven prints, one of which is enormously large and has six or seven colors.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, really? How large?

MR. SCHRAG: Very, very large. Enormously large.

MR. CUMMINGS: Four feet? Five feet?

MR. SCHRAG: No, not that big. Well, maybe by today's standards not so large, but to me very large. It was a very big print. I had considerable difficulty-actually there was a famous print collector there who died recently-you probably remember him-Grunewald?

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, Grunewald? Greenwald? That whole foundation, yes.

MR. SCHRAG: Something like that, private foundation, yes. He came to the workshop just after I had done that. It was hanging up. He said, "But that's not a print." I said, "It is a print." He said, "No, no, that's a watercolor or a gouache." He didn't believe it. You see, through overprinting there appeared many, many more colors. So it has a tremendous range of colors through transparencies and overprinting. And particularly at one point I used a pale gray, a thin pale gray, over many colors which gave a whole new range of colors to all the other colors; a brilliant red became a dull red, and so on. A whole section became completely transformed in color through that overprinting.

MR. CUMMINGS: They've done a lot of technical adventures out there.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Actually in etching I'm often credited with one which is in Hayter's book-in a way I'm not sure that it's that new but he says it is-that is, that printing in two colors, for instance, blue and green, and to print the second one slightly off register intentionally so that there is a certain swampy, dense quality to the print which suited the atmosphere of some night scenes that I wanted to print. But, like with all things I do, I probably could have repeated that many times and become kind of notorious for doing this. But I stopped doing it. Like with so many things that I've undertaken, if I had continued I would have become known for doing this.

MR. CUMMINGS: In 1960 you had a Ford Foundation-A.F.A. show. How did you like the experience of all of that? That was the first retrospective.

MR. SCHRAG: It was a traveling retrospective starting at the Brooklyn Museum. That was certainly one of the more important slaps on the back that I received in my lifetime, particularly as they also published a monograph at the same time, which Mr. Gordon of the Whitney Museum wrote.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like the experience, though, of seeing all those things together at one time?

MR. SCHRAG: It is a little frightening to some degree, I must admit. I'm not sure I would want it to happen too often. But at the same time it also poses once more a question which is possibly anyway a good one, and that is, "Where do I come from, where am I, and where am I going?" Because it is then right in front of your eyes.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's interesting, I always ask people what they think of their retrospectives because the variety of answers is extraordinary

MR. SCHRAG: I believe that.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, somebody said he didn't paint for three or four months after one. It was just so staggering. And his work changed a great deal afterwards. What about the Fulbright jury that you were on?

MR. SCHRAG: I was on the Fulbright jury several times.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did you like that? I always notice that the Fulbright grants that people got at one period particularly, in the late 1940's and 1950's or so, the Fulbright was very good on selecting people and sending them places.

MR. SCHRAG: You think the selection was good?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. SCHRAG: I have been on several. I don't recall every other juror who was then with us. It was very conscientiously done, I must say. I don't think I would be divulging any secret to say that we did not pay that much attention to the recommendation in most cases and rather trusted our own eyes.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's what the other artists have said.

MR. SCHRAG: But actually interesting question came up. For instance, Mr. so-and-so, a famous museum man, was given as a reference by one artist. A letter had not come in and there was discussion on how to interpret this. My opinion was that it should not be interpreted at all because there could be any number of reasons. Some said, "He gave that name to impress us and the museum man never wanted to write about him." The same thing was true about some medical reports. For instance, some artists are a little bit disturbed at times and we felt that that should not be held against them because Lord knows how many fine artists were very disturbed. Now whether these people eventually could go to France or elsewhere in Europe or to India or wherever it was in spite of these letters from doctors and so on, I don't know. But at least we disregarded it. We thought that was not our domain. We really looked at the work and said, "This is really a very talented artist." There are such strange things come up, one of which I can mention. For instance, in later years the first screening was through slides. I remember one particular artist who sent slides and all of us sat forward in our chairs and said, "Very interesting! Yes, let's see what the paintings really look like." We all agreed we wanted to see the actual paintings because only after seeing the actual painting is the final judgment made. So this artist sent in a huge painting. It was so ghastly that we couldn't be in the same room with it; we had to run it to the wall before starting jurying. And still it had looked all right on the slide to all of us. It's an interesting story, isn't it?

MR. CUMMINGS: That's amazing. What was the difference between the slide and the painting?

MR. SCHRAG: It just was in that smaller size and being a transparency was a completely different thing. It was an entirely different thing in its actual size and in its actual execution it was terrible.

MR. CUMMINGS: Slides can do funny things.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. So one wonders whether maybe on the other hand some things looked much worse than they were and we didn't spot them for that reason.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you like the activity of jurying all these things?

MR. SCHRAG: Frankly, to tell you the truth, I really don't like it too much. I always come away with a feeling that it isn't right. I have been on some juries which gave me a deep feeling of depression because all I was standing for was voted down. I have been on two or three juries where I could just as well not have been there; I was voted down on practically everything that I wanted. And it's terrible to sign your name to it and go away. I felt absolutely terrible. But still I feel-just like with juries in court-that the people who think they have some opinion should go. I don't feel that you should just stay away because maybe some young artist or some artist anyway will come through, as they say.

MR. CUMMINGS: You have written somewhere about the difference of studio life as juxtaposed to workshop life. Was that something that just developed?

MR. SCHRAG: No. There is an artist, a printmaker, Robert Broner, in Detroit. He thought out the theme and he thought I would be an ideal man to write about it because of my experience at Atelier 17 in particular, and also at Tamarind. I would never have written it without him, to tell you the truth. As I began to work on it, I became very interested in the whole complex of thoughts that come to mind as to the place where an artist works and the connection with the work as such and the whole atmosphere in which it is created. If you would read the article you would know what I think.

MR. CUMMINGS: I'm just curious how it came about.

MR. SCHRAG: That was the thing. I think it's very personal with those workshops. Personally I really can forget my surroundings entirely. I mean I almost die when I wait to get my tokens at the subway. I stand there for five or ten minutes behind people and I think I can't-everything hurts me. And I stand here for five or six hours working and I absolutely don't feel anything. Time has stopped and I'm out of it. And, fortunately, this seems to function also when I'm in a place where other people are working. I can concentrate very well with other people around. It doesn't seem to interfere with me particularly. Both places are really very--how shall I say it?-an exciting atmosphere of work which is in the whole place.

MR. CUMMINGS: Did you show things at the Contemporaries ever with Margaret Lowenbraun?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, with Margaret Lowenbraun.

MR. CUMMINGS: Because she's somebody that there are not many papers on and I'm curious about what she was like to work with and do things with.

MR. SCHRAG: I don't know her from working in her-she also had a little workshop, as you know, which later-I think the Pratt Graphics Art Center grew out of Margaret Lowenbraun's workshop. I think it was kind of the beginning of the Pratt Graphics Art Center. She was about the only one in New York who was really bringing out the latest people in graphics. And, of course, there was always Weyhe, I guess at the same time. Maybe I'm wrong; maybe Associated American Artists was functioning at the same time. It must have been.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. It's an old gallery. But there aren't very many places that would show.

MR. SCHRAG: Margaret's place had a special twist to it. It was a little bit like a cooperative almost. The artists were very involved with it. And I think it was a smaller group than other artists had. She finally got a grant, too, before she died, didn't she?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes. You never worked there then?

MR. SCHRAG: No. She exhibited me. She was very friendly towards me always. But I never worked in her workshop.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do your pictures as far as, say, the subject goes, relate back and forth to each other?

MR. SCHRAG: Like cycles or series?

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I think there is something like that probably. I think they do to some degree have-how shall I say?-strong connections. But there is one thing that is kind of interesting about me which I find out on looking back, though it was nothing like a plan. For instance, after painting in very high color sometimes the next painting may be practically grisaille-all in grays. And then maybe this may flare up again. But if I may, I would like to say something about all this in one stretch.

MR. CUMMINGS: Sure. Well, we can do it right now.

MR. SCHRAG: You see, there are, I think, three fundamental means that are characteristic of what I'm doing. As I told you, it seems to me the means are serving only the vision of the artist; they are in themselves not terribly interesting. But if they serve that vision and if they bring it out, then they have their reason d'être and they have to be. Therefore, a very simple technique is fine, and a very complicated one is fine if it really is a necessity for that particular work. For instance, the idea that art leaves out, which is an old idea, that the artist looks and kind of leaves out, I think is not a correct idea. Oftentimes the artist puts in things. I think, for instance, the vision of a Durer is far beyond what you see and in its tremendous complexity still is completely convincing because all this is necessary for the kind of idea that he has. In many cases also a number of lines occur in my drawings that are not at all related to nature and still seem to be the only lines that could express just what I have in my head. Therefore, this thought that art is just leaving out something I think is wrong. It could be that; but it must not be that. But to come back to what I wanted to say first, I think there are three means that I rely on most. One is movement, certain rhythms run through the paintings, run through the drawings and the prints which form a kind of language. These rhythms are interrelated in the picture and I think are important supports of a certain kind of vision. They can give all kinds of sensations-excitement, monotony, even cold or heat, darkness, light; all this can be just in the rhythm. This rhythm is not only in the outline but also in the inner shapes or a painting, let's say, the brush strokes within one shape can be used for these linear rhythms that form the painting. The other is of course color. And I think color is a vastly unexplored field still today. The range of possibilities of giving-how should I say?-the character of one particular work of art is absolutely incredible, in my opinion. The possibilities of the paint itself even in all these media, watercolor, gouache, oil, is vastly unknown yet, in my opinion. The thinness, thickness, the sensations of accents, of enormous violence, and utter finesse, all this combined or alone, the possibilities are just unbelievably great. There again it is only the relation of one color to the other, and all the colors to each other within the painting, not the single color alone. It's obvious, I mean. Just like with the line. And the third thing which actually has to come stronger in my thoughts is the use of light in the painting. When you look into a painting gallery, say, at the Metropolitan or the Louvre, what you see really are certain forms of light which dominate the painting. Particularly, let's say, if you look into the Rembrandt room and you see these shapes on the paintings without thinking is it a head? Is it a color? Is it a hand? And so on. You see these and I call these for myself kind of channels of light which flow through the painting. And they are very dominating in a work of art. And these I want to direct also for reasons of expression within the painting and quite arbitrarily, not naturalistically. I flow these lights where I feel they should be. And they also form units within the picture. They can explode here and there like, for instance, in the painting in the other room *The*

Garden, you know, or they can form bands and sequences in the painting. There is also again a whole vocabulary of possibilities. So these three things: the movement, the kind of linear movement which may also be the movement of brush strokes; the color which is re-invented in each painting to find the equivalent for certain concepts and it's not repeated too much; and the third is these kind of channels of light, these light shapes which dominate the painting. These are the three main means on which my work is based.

MR. CUMMINGS: How is it that you developed this thesis? Or is it just a recent observation of what's gone on over the years?

MR. SCHRAG: No, you see, it is a little bit like traveling for a while and then looking back. It is not that it's a plan or even that it's developed by intellect. It is something that you search for and then you hit upon a certain-how shall I say?-way of expression. I've never searched for a personal style. I've never believed in such a search; I think style is like handwriting. You don't form your handwriting willfully. Your handwriting is a natural expression of yourself. And in the same way I think a style grows naturally.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you find that between the drawings and the paintings and the prints that there's a great difference in the way you handle these three major areas?

MR. SCHRAG: I'm not so sure-I really do not think so. I believe that possibly from printmaking I learned to put things down very decisively and to make changes which are rather radical once a change has to be made. I do think that this was a good discipline for all the other media, too. I have since become very interested in ink drawing which also allows very little correction. Therefore, there is a kind of tension in you which is translated into the picture and brings an element of life and of immediacy and of a certain confessional element that comes right out of the artist which I also try to find actually in painting; that the work is alive like, say, a healthy man is alive, that it is moving, breathing, that it contains also feeling and thought like a man would.

MR. CUMMINGS: It's very interesting. Albers has this theory: people don't look at paintings, paintings look at people.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes.

MR. CUMMINGS: In looking through some of the catalogues of your work I notice that the titles are extraordinary.

MR. SCHRAG: Maybe because sometimes they are translations from German titles.

MR. CUMMINGS: Oh! How did you come to make up the titles?

MR. SCHRAG: A title is not there when I start the painting, obviously not. But once the painting exists I try to find something that is a kind of a pointer to what the painting is about. Actually I don't believe in very poetic titles. Though maybe I have made some anyway.

MR. CUMMINGS: Yes, and I think they're a different kind of thing.

MR. SCHRAG: Actually my gallery always says, "That's a typical Karl Schrag title." But fortunately they don't object too much.

MR. CUMMINGS: Do you read a great deal?

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, I do. More than most of my confreres, my colleagues. Practically every day after lunch I read for an hour or so and therefore, although I am a very slow reader, I have read an enormous number of books as time has gone by. I am quite a reader, particularly compared with some of my colleagues.

MR. CUMMINGS: I have the feeling in looking through the titles that there were a lot of other things going on besides just that.

MR. SCHRAG: Yes, It's quite possible.

MR. CUMMINGS: I have a note here that says Bob Blackburn. Did you work at his studio at some time?

MR. SCHRAG: No, I did not. I know him quite well because he was at Cooper Union also. At that time he was the printer for all the people who were doing lithography. I like him. But I have never worked in his shop.

MR. CUMMINGS: And you never worked at Pratt either then?

MR. SCHRAG: No. I know all those people well but I have never worked there.

MR. CUMMINGS: I wonder if we could go back for a second to Atelier 17. You became the director there in 1950?

MR. SCHRAG: Right.

MR. CUMMINGS: How did that come about? What was going on there?

MR. SCHRAG: Before Hayter left he said to me that he would like nobody better than me to direct it. I was quite doubtful about it at that time because I not only thought, but I knew, that it would be tremendously absorbing. At that time he thought he might come back himself to run it again. So first he asked me to take a class while he was still here, make another afternoon. (Actually George Ortman was in that group that I was taking over.) I taught this group for half a year or something like that. And another afternoon I taught an overflow at Atelier 17. Then when he left I ran it.

MR. CUMMINGS: Why did he leave?

MR. SCHRAG: I think he feels closest to living in Paris. That's really what he likes best. Of all the cities he's lived in I think he likes Paris best. He came here—was it during the war? Or before the war? Maybe during the war, in 1940 or something like that. First he went out West. Then he opened the workshop at the New School. It was enormously interesting during the very beginning actually at The New School. Then he moved to Eighth Street. I taught at Eighth Street in a building that doesn't exist any more. Later, under Leo Katz or Peter Grippe it moved to the corner where you saw it, I think the corner of fourteenth Street and....

MR. CUMMINGS: Fourteenth and Sixth or Seventh Avenue some place.

MR. SCHRAG: That's right. Or maybe even further over. Something like that.

MR. CUMMINGS: You obviously were interested in the idea of maintaining an involvement.

MR. SCHRAG: Oh, yes. Actually, even after I had left, later directors called me in quite often when problems arose. I kept kind of contact with Atelier 17 so long as it existed. I really wasn't part of Atelier 17 when it finally was abandoned. There were all kinds of problems including housing and finances and artists who more or less felt like me that they didn't want to give up their own work for reasons of just teaching there and so on.

MR. CUMMINGS: That's it.

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