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Oral history interview with Stephen Greene, 1968 June 8

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Stephen Greene on June 8, 1968. The interview took place in Valley Cottage, New York, and was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Stephen Greene in Valley Cottage, New York, on June 8, 1968. Stephen, I'm going to ask you first to tell me about your early life, your family background, where you were born, where you grew up and anything about it that may possibly have some bearing on what kind of an artist you became.

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I was born 50 years ago on the Lower East Side. I lived there I believe until I was nine years old. My parents were Jewish immigrants from Poland. They actually met here. Then I lived very briefly a few times in Jersey.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, before you go too far from the Lower East Side, that was a pretty important part of your life you spent down there, those first nine years.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. The only thing I remember mainly, the most important thing about it was the close tight family situation. It was like a little family village that we had on Madison Street.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How many were in your family?

STEPHEN GREENE: In my immediate family there were my mother and father, my sister, who is three years older, and myself. My grandparents and their seven children originally all lived in the store. That was before I was born. And at one point briefly I lived behind the store with my parents. My father was a tailor and at various times a small businessman, meaning a small unsuccessful tailor shop. My mother worked from time to time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was it a very unhappy time?

STEPHEN GREENE: I don't remember much about being—no, I don't have any particular unhappy memories then. I remember some unhappy times after that that my memory is much clearer on. I just remember seeing how certain people looked when they came from Europe. Like cousins came from Europe and they looked very nice. It seemed that the whole street on both sides was occupied by my family.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there a kind of nice warm feeling of belonging to this clan and being very much a part of it?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, part of that carried on until I was around 21. Then I lived in the East Bronx. I lived in an apartment or with my grandparents. When we got poor we'd go and stay with them. He owned a three-family house which was just sold a few weeks ago. He died recently at the age of 101. In the East Bronx, in the next house, was an uncle. Across the street were close cousins, and further up the street were more cousins, and around the corner were aunts and uncles, and my parents—my mother. So that it was always a family thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You weren't at all lonely then? Did you have children to play with?

STEPHEN GREENE: I was very lonely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't have close buddies among the children in the block?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. I was a loner from the day I was born. There's a funny story about my birth. I was born in the middle of the night. Of course there was no telephone so my father ran to the doctor's saying that his wife was about to give birth. The doctor said, "Oh, don't worry, it's not expected until the morning." I arrived around five o'clock in the morning. The doctor wasn't there. My mother was alone with my grandmother. I think my sister was there; I was told she was hiding under the bed. And instead of my grandmother aiding my mother when I was born all she could do was walk up and down the room and clap her head and say "Oh, it's a boy! It's a boy!" One story I remember, for some reason or other it's sort of important. I remember going to Hebrew school, which I hated, from the age of five on, and my grandfather running out of the store because he had

heard that I hadn't gone to the class. He picked me up by the seat of my trousers and carried me through the street. I was sort of thrashing my arms around as if I were trying to swim. That was my first big embarrassing moment.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How old were you then?

STEPHEN GREENE: Probably around six.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Why did you hate Hebrew school so much?

STEPHEN GREENE: I just wasn't interested in learning the language. You learned it without knowing what it said. If I knew what it said I might have been interested—I don't know. It must be around this time that the first stories I knew were Bible stories based on the Old Testament. My favorite story, which I made my father tell me again and again, was the story of Joseph's shirt.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The robe of many colors?

STEPHEN GREENE: That's right. In fact I used that in a painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But this wasn't a place where you would hear more Bible stories?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, it must have started then. I know that I was told them when I was going bed. So I take it for granted that I certainly wasn't being told Bible stories at bedtime when I was 12 or 14. So it must have been when I was a child.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you feel at all fascinated by the kind of—well, Hebrew lore that you find in many Jewish families? You know, the combination of a kind of intellectual and emotional intensity about traditions?

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, yes, certain people would be Orthodox. My grandparents were very Orthodox. It wasn't that I felt that orthodox. It was that everybody kept a "kosher house." There was the tradition of holidays. Certain things you didn't do on the Sabbath. And on Friday night everybody would be together at my grandparent's house. A lot of that I only remembered later really. But I remember going from that close community to the first place I moved to and suddenly being aware there was that big outside world. Which sort of scared me. And also I don't believe I learned to speak English until I was about five or six. Yiddish was spoken at home. So when I first started moving out I felt like a foreigner, but not quite a foreigner because I couldn't say I came from anywhere. Although my parents were born in Poland, being Jewish they really didn't have any—you don't think of them as Polish either. They didn't think of themselves particularly as being Polish. Well, this is probably all hindsight or rationalization. The only identity I had was a funny kind of religious grouping. You know, in the beginning I knew I was Jewish more than I was American. And maybe this even has something to do with the fact that on the whole I never cared much for American art until fairly recently certain things. Perhaps we can talk about this later. I think even people who have had an effect on me were not American. And I don't think my sensibilities are particularly American, whatever that is. I'm not sure. Then we moved briefly to Jersey. And I lived for a year in Harlem.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you have any friends at all in any of these communities? Or what do you feel was it that kept you from ever developing a sense of having pals? You must have been going to school at this time?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. I just don't remember much about school in the early years. My memory of school basically begins when I was around nine years old. I remember a great deal from then on. I went to about eight different schools in three years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's a reason in itself why you wouldn't have developed many friends.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. I had friends but I think from the very beginning I never indulged in group activities. I did that before painting and I did that after painting and it's not because I think it's desirable or has any great advantages to it. I think it's just that's the way things happen and if that's the way things happen you can't consciously do much to change it. I certainly know lots of people who do things over the years and I've had friends, and I still do. But the fact that I wasn't part of the school thing—there's a certain kind of loneliness. I just feel I'm a loner at the beginning and the end and in the middle; and that's it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there anything that was very pleasurable to you? Well, I mean were you a reader?

STEPHEN GREENE: I read a great, great deal.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of things?

STEPHEN GREENE: Everything. As long as it was written I read it. By the time I was 12 I was reading good

books, bad books, cheap books. I remember that before I went to high school I looked up the list that was required reading and I found I had read quite a few of them. Whether I understood them or not. Before I finished public school I think I had read everything Eugene O'Neill's that was in print. So I did read a lot. And I liked the theatre very much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you get to the theatre?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I was taken to the Yiddish theatre a few times. I was told the story—I don't remember it—that once my mother or father, or both, took me to see *Madame X* a tear jerker. And we were sitting in the balcony, and I cried so much they had to take me out. It was a terrible thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How old would you have been then?

STEPHEN GREENE: I don't know. Quite young. And I had an uncle in semi-professional theatre for a while, for a very short time. I used to go back stage. I liked that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you think there was any connection between these early experiences in the theatre and the kind of things that got into your painting eventually? You weren't seeing paintings or going to museums?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, I didn't actually enter a gallery until I was around 19 years old. I was terrified of them. They looked so rich and plush. When I started going to the Art Students League I started going to galleries.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you see illustrated books then, magazines? Were you fascinated by things that you saw as visual images on pages?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I drew very early. Before I was even 12 I had an idea of being an artist.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You did! That's fascinating.

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, sure. But, you know, I never knew you know, the idea of anyone painting. I don't remember the first time I went to the Metropolitan Museum. But I know I did go there. I said a moment ago that I never went to a gallery until I was around 18 or 19. I remember just now that's not. A woman in high school when I was 15 took the class to a gallery. It was a very old-fashioned gallery. Even at 15 I knew that. It was the Grand Central. She happened to be the drawing teacher and she was a very nice lady.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did they sort of favor you in drawing classes, being the one that made the class posters and that sort of thing?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, I was head of—what do you call it—what is the person they elect in charge of a club—like the president or something of a club? Well, anyway, I was head of the illustration club.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In high school?

STEPHEN GREENE: In high school. That was in the beginning.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you went to the Met do you remember anything that struck you very vividly?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, there was one painting that I used to remember the name of but I've forgotten now; it hasn't been shown in years- it was a late 15th century Flemish *Crucifixion*. It was black, it was a narrow panel, lengthwise it was long and very narrow in width. It was very moving and tortured. It was either Flemish or North German. Later on I was influenced by that. By the time I was 17 I had read *The Wasteland*. I had heard certain music I used to listen a lot to the radio: I heard various things. I used to go to dance recitals. I think I went to one of the first Cunningham-Cage things. I'm not saying that I liked all of this. But, you know, I was sort of caught up in it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was before you were 20? When you were in your teens?

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh. Yes. But I think my first tastes were basically conservative. I think the first thing anyone ever showed you was Renaissance art. Then by the age of 17 I knew about Modigliani and I knew about Chagall, a few Chagalls. By then in high school, the latter part certainly, we knew about early Picasso and a few things about Mondrian. But you didn't know much of anything. It was a sort of foreign world. I know what I thought about some things, and other things I absolutely don't know. But I know I wanted to find out something about the Renaissance. And it was very funny. Because it didn't have to do with the Renaissance- like in terms of scene, because even when I was around 17 I thought it was wrong to work from something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is this part of the Jewish tradition at all?

STEPHEN GREENE: No—maybe it had something to do with it, yes. Because I came from an orthodox family and you mustn't make images, you know. So maybe it's *something* of that. But, no, I don't think it's that. I think it had to do with a romantic idea that you had to create this thing. The hang-up was you wanted to draw things and certainly in my case they were not abstract—so you drew things that also related to things looking like something; but you didn't draw *from* them. Later on I did draw from things. I drew in the streets when I was a student at Iowa. And even as late as 1949 when I went to Europe I had sketchbooks, as late as 1952 in Naples, Rome. But, you know, with the exception maybe of—I'm trying to think—maybe 2 or 3 or 4 pictures out of 23 years of painting, I certainly never painted from anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You wouldn't think of simply sketching one of your family sitting around in the living room or something like that?

STEPHEN GREENE: I did once in 1928 a picture that I'm not very happy about. It's in the Detroit Museum and is called *Family Portrait*. It's very much a picture of my mother, father and in a way myself. But it's not the kind of painting I want, or have ever wanted. I did it just briefly—I wonder if I have a picture of that here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But not from observation? More of a—

STEPHEN GREENE: I drew myself, I drew my father, and I drew my mother. And I think that's what's wrong with the painting. That's one of the things that's wrong with the painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it's still quite a vigorous and an interesting painting. But it's something that's dreamlike.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. Well, I think it's like—whether it's technically correct or not, you know, in terms of the meaning of the word, I think that most of my early pictures were basically based on like a hallucination of reality. And I did have one experience that I think was very important psychologically: I was a student at Iowa. And I had a friend from Iowa who was also an art student who was a friend of friends who went to school in Boston. And I remember his visiting me and my family. I had this narrow room, the bed opened up and made two beds. I woke up in the middle of the night and I saw this ordinary easel and on the easel I saw the Crucifixion of Christ. I got hysterical. That woke up this other guy. He tried to quiet me down. And I think he got on top of me and put his knees on my arms and socked me. And that stopped it. I've always been sure that that incident played some part—that vision—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was not a dream? You were awake?

STEPHEN GREENE: It's hard to tell. I must have dreamed it but it seems like- I dreamed that I was awake or something—I just don't know. All I know is that I was absolutely terrified. And as I was saying a few moments ago before we turned on the tape, for a long period of my life whenever I tried to draw a circle it would come out a cross. So the cross form became very important to me for psychological reasons.

DOROTHY SECKLER: From that moment on particularly?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. No, I don't think I was thinking from that moment on. It seemed a very weird experience. And I'm sure I more or less forgot about it. But when I started using, you know, crucifix forms in my paintings, and you start thinking you know, you do something and then you try to find a rationale for it. And as you go back you think—well, when did you think of those things. So when I started using the cross form self-consciously a good number of times you build up a rationale about it. It was like using as a symbol of how one gets, not just frustrated, but how a man starts out wanting to live well or half-good and then, you know, the whole symbol of like from the Christian sense I'm sure Christ dying on the Cross was a positive thing. I was seeing it in another sense.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Part of your horror at this experience was not a matter of—it wasn't really religious conflict at all? You understood from the beginning that you were not being visited by a religious vision in any way, that it was a—

STEPHEN GREENE: No, I did have some—it was very difficult being Jewish. I didn't want to become a Christian. But I know when I painted around that period I started getting interested—like—well, at school we were allowed to take out as many books as we wanted. And I'd go to the art library and again and again and what I kept looking for was Renaissance paintings. I was fascinated by Hugo van der Goes, Frueauf, Wolgemut, Pontormo, other Mannerist painters. And a lot of the incidents around these people had to do with events having to do with the life of Christ. So it's hard to say. When I was first asked I would always say because of my own background it had no religious connotations. But the older I get I think it had some—but I think in a very mixed-up way. Well, I think it's also a good area in which certain ideas that I was interested in—not that I was interested because I thought they were good things—but had to do with suffering or pain, love, you know, it's sort of like using basic ideas that life is being born, it's loving, and suffering and death, frustration or collapse, or, you know—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. The crutch comes into these paintings a good bit I notice. Can you remember how that began? Or what it signifies?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. Well, there were various things in the beginning like coffins, crutches, candles, mourners, things like that. I did them all basically in the beginning intuitively. There wasn't any—well, by "intuitively" I don't mean that I didn't know that a coffin has something to do with a burial, or that a candle didn't have to do with a light for mourners. And then there are things like a candle for the dead each year. So I was aware of things like that. And it has nothing to do with good or bad paintings. But there are other psychological meanings which I had no awareness of. And I think it's almost dangerous to talk too much about them because I was deeply involved in subject matter, and I still am to a certain extent. I think subject matter has extended itself and changed me so like if a small rectangle of red appears somewhere, or a red dot, or a green dot, which I've used for the last seven years in various paintings, you can't tie that with any symbol. How it happens at that place or how it radiates, or operates, to me is of such meaning. And so one of the things I've been working on all the time is to go underground in some of my meanings, you know, symbolic meanings when they are that so that the picture doesn't read that easily (I don't want it to); and also at a certain point I wanted to get away from—although I think I've never tried to make a Renaissance painting—and anyone who saw it as that is idiotic. Certainly the whole space, even the way the things are done are not Renaissance paintings. Nor did I ever think that they were. But obviously I had looked at Renaissance paintings, paintings or something else. What I wanted at a certain point was to make paintings that didn't refer back to the Renaissance at all. I wanted to be free from a certain kind of obvious historical context. I didn't want to go back.

DOROTHY SECKLER: To make this a little clearer roughly what years would these paintings represent where you have the coffin and this rather compressed space in which things move up to the surface— ?

STEPHEN GREENE: This started first in about 1945 or 1946 and was unsuccessful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now what's the title of that? Or perhaps we ought to describe it a little bit just for the tape.

STEPHEN GREENE: This one I'm sure of. This is *The Mourners*. It's one of the first pictures. I just showed that in the Midwest show. Almost in the middle there's a single dividing line of color. It doesn't have the cross form but it is crossed because there are two cross forms on either side. So you identify. And obviously there are three separated, lonely, isolated figures in some process of mourning.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Boys—they are three youths.

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, no, I never thought of it that way. The thing that is difficult there is that, as I say, it was practically one of the first ones—I started using—well, like this one just before it had a turban, rather a turban look like an exotic thing that had to do with the Renaissance—right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: Then at a certain point I decided I didn't want hair. I didn't want clothes that—I didn't want them naked and I didn't want clothes that were dated so you cannot say something like this had to do with—you can't make a period of the clothes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Nor the faces in terms of age very much. They gradually tend to have diminishing foreheads but here they're still fairly high in many cases.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. Somebody who I was interested in and probably had no understanding of was Mondrian. So one of the first things that I remember like when this was I think 1946 or early 1947—one of the first things I started out was with three bars. So I would have a large space of color and there would be three bars and because of where they are you'd identify the crosses. They could certainly be seen as three bars cutting down those spaces, you know, making marks on that space. And so you notice that a lot of things happened and I thought very consciously of it.

[Audio Break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think we missed the part about the Mondrian—

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. As I said before, he was one of the painters that I was interested in though probably didn't (quote) "understand". I was interested in the idea of bars or stripes and divisions. And so you could take this picture, which belongs to the Pulitzer's, I think it's now in the St. Louis Museum—and it's not hindsight—I remember being very clear starting out a picture like this with a red thing right over here first.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What's the name of that one just for the tape.

STEPHEN GREENE: *The Deposition*. Most of my pictures fall into two categories. The closed ones and the open

ones. This has to do with closed space. That earlier Whitney picture *The Burial*, this, has things happening in a more open space. So as you look at this picture what you can see is that a lot of it is made up, whether it's arms or actual stripes on the shirt forms and the ladders, which are bars—right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Right.

STEPHEN GREENE: So you get these series, and at that time I was very aware of this and this is absolutely correct—it had to do with my delayed reaction to what had happened in Germany. And even an event like that—which is more than an event—unless you're psychologically prepared in part to respond. Otherwise the response might be limited. So I think it has to do with imprisonment. You know, like striped shirts having to do with imprisonment. But not for one minute did I ever want to illustrate anything that happened in Germany, which I couldn't do, which would have been a bad idea. I wasn't interested.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year would this have been, Stephen?

STEPHEN GREENE: This was 1947. *The Burial* was done in 1947. I was still further trying out—say a picture like this, obviously I'd seen Mannerist paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: By the time I got to *The Burial* I had come back to New York from the Midwest. And I was trying to begin to make a conscious effort back and forth to remove my painting from references to Renaissance painting. So this I think is a very 20th-century painting. But what it refers back to in a way bothered me. I think in a painting like this one, which is at the Wadsworth Athenaeum, this light ladder and how it divides that then was to me as important as the expression on the face. It wasn't just background for figures. So one of the things that I did there, there are three lines dividing that space. That is practically the first thing I would do.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then you had had some formal training by this time?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. My exact training was that when I got out of high school, this very conservative, very nice lady that I had studied with in high school had extolled the virtues of the National Academy of Design. It was very important that I go to a school that didn't cost any money. I went there, and it was a disaster. I loathed it from the first day. I stayed a year. You had to start out working from casts in hard charcoal measuring. I just didn't believe in it. I just didn't know what to do. I think that's when I just started wandering around the streets. If I had money I'd go to the movies or if I would draw the cast I would draw it in ink or pencil. By the end of the first year I think everyone in the class had been promoted at least to casts in full. They would have exams I think every six weeks or something like that. They'd check the work. So I was left behind. And I went home and wept because, you know, I did want their approval and I didn't know what to do. I couldn't afford to go to the league. And I tried to think of finding some way. I think I first applied for a work scholarship. Now this I'm not clear on. I know I didn't get it at first. Then in the following fall, for some reason or other, at least one person got interested in me Mr. Carl Anderson of the academy. So they put me in casts in full. I stayed there for about six weeks. And they put me in life drawing, where very often people stay for a year. I got out of that in six weeks. Then I went into the painting class. I hated it. I remember I had an instructor whose work I didn't like. I guess I didn't like the work of anybody there. The instructor said now here's a still life—and I've always hated still lifes and I still do for myself—(I love Cezanne, that's something else.) The instructor said here's the still life. And here was this dirty gray old pewter and tired fruit and tired material. And he said we'll have a contest and whoever gets closest to the look of the thing wins. I don't remember even trying to do it. But shortly afterwards Mr. Anderson called me in and told me that the Academy had great faith in me and that I was one of their most promising students. And then I left. I thought if they liked me it's the end. Then I did get a work scholarship at the league. I was in Morris Kantor's class. There were all lively people in it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How old were you by this time?

STEPHEN GREENE: I was 19, 19 1/2. I must say I just started painting. I had almost no money and no paints. I do remember Kantor saying, "You must next week take your palette knife and use a lot of paint and make a still life." I did it and I hated him for God knows how long because I used up practically all the paints I could afford. And I've always been a thin painter. I think one of the reasons I paint thinly was because of the initial experience with paint and canvas. And now that I have lots of paints and all the canvas in the world that I need—I actually fell in love a long time ago with washes of color and at certain times I've tried to paint thicker. And I have. And I've built up my own rationale. And there's enough in history to prove that how painterly a thing is has nothing to do with whether it's thick or thin. The most fantastic Fragonards or the paintings of someone else, or whether it's the thin washes, all the field painters it's of no consequence about how much paint you use, and it has nothing to do with stinting it. It's what the paint does. So it doesn't matter on the individual basis whether you want a thin wash. A thin wash used in a certain way could be as vibrant and as painterly and with an idea of color permeating it. Very often in more recent paintings a lot of the things I've depended on is what that color does or what shape and the force it has or the delicacy it has rather than how much actual amount of paint is put on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Certainly one of the most painterly painters is Bonnard and he very often worked very thin.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. He's a painter I love very much. Anyway when I got to be around 21 I was utterly lost in New York. I was very shy at the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you living with your family still?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, I was living with my family. And I went to school at the League in the afternoons. Then I would work from I think 4:00 to 7:30 for tuition before I'd go home. So I just didn't think I was getting anywhere as a human being. I was an impossible artist. I was depressed. And I began hearing about a thing called the BFA program. And some people at the league told me about a school in Richmond, Virginia, which seemed very far away, but they said it wasn't bad.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What does BFA stand for?

STEPHEN GREENE: Bachelor of Fine Arts. Originally when I had gotten out of high school I had gone to NYU and worked in the post office to help pay for it. I hated it because I couldn't take any art classes. It wasn't allowed. I don't know if they had any. I think they did in the third year; and they probably weren't any good. So after about 10 weeks I left. But the idea of college got interesting. So I went to Richmond where I got a tuition scholarship. I worked in the kitchen for meals. I remember I was able to live on around three dollars a week. But as a school it was a disaster. It was tired. Academically it was beyond belief, poor. Somewhere in the middle of that year *Life* magazine had a big issue on the University of Iowa. Looking back on it now it seems as if they had forty pages. It seems that on every front porch someone was composing. And inside someone was writing a book. People were painting pictures. And it sounded fine. The tuition there was around $55 a month. I think I just went and then sort of forced my family somehow or other to pay for it. I stayed there until I graduated in 1942. There were a lot of very good things about the school. Philip Guston was there the last two years. We became very closely acquainted.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean as a student or a teacher?

STEPHEN GREENE: He was a teacher. Philip is about five years older than I am. I saw a great deal of him. It was a rather close relationship I think for about 20 years. Now we don't see each other. I've thought about that period a great deal. I think he had some influence on me in the beginning. But I think a lot of it had to do with the idea that for the first time I really knew an artist, and certainly the first time I knew a painter at close hand. We'd drink together. We'd talk sometimes until four or five o'clock in the morning. Or I'd go over to his house and have dinner there with them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were married already?

STEPHEN GREENE: They were married. Their daughter was born about that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he painting then in that style rather inspired by Piero della Francesca?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. And I like Piero very much as he did. A person I started to like when I was around 19 is Beckmann. Anytime I would see a photograph of his work in the newspapers I would clip it. I remember clipping the first Beckmann I saw. It must have been around 1920s. It was *The Old Actress*. And I'd go to the library looking for books. And I met Beckmann when he came to this country and saw him at various times during his lifetime. For a few years after his death I saw Mrs. Beckmann. I think I know his work very well, at least for me, you know. And I think that had an influence on me. Certain things he did—the ladders and people climbing—some of that came from Beckmann. And also the idea of torture. And also in some way the way Beckmann would crowd things.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Pushing everything up in the picture.

STEPHEN GREENE: That's right, yes. The early Beckmann's of the 20s. So Philip and I had that in common.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you never took his vehement brush strokes and that sort of thing at all?

STEPHEN GREENE: I could never make a vehement brush stroke. It's not in my mind.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's not in your nervous system.

STEPHEN GREENE: No. I've got a nervous system but I think some things are by choice. You know, it's like one is bounded by—no matter how open you are—by your personality. And so I find that when I'm functioning best, although I use violence again and again as subject matter— a whole section of my personality is very gentle, at least the best part of it. So there's that funny mixture of a certain gentle quiet—and I think even in those first pictures at certain times I consciously wanted to use almost lovely colors. And I thought that it was that mixture.

Because I remember talking about it in 1947. Another person I talked over a lot of things with was Perry Rathbone, who was then at the St. Louis Museum. And there's one picture we both liked very much—da Massina's *Crucifixion*. I think it's in the National Gallery in London. It's a pastoral scene; Christ is on the Cross, and on the right of Christ there a tortured figure on another cross— it's probably Barabbas. There's something about that combination of gentility and loveliness and awfulness. I think it's something like in my best pictures, you know, I've certainly painted happier pictures and all that—there's a word that I know has been verboten aesthetical—for a long time—if I'm painting what I think is my most "beautiful" picture at that moment if I want something to enter, throw something away and I think that way. It's like the life experience has certainly been that way. Maybe I'm just building up a rationale. So I'll never be a gutsy painter. And I'm not saying this apologetically. I think the guts come in in another way. A painter I admire and have since way back and am moved by is Watteau. Certain things, certain drawings just chill my back. It's like for whatever the nostalgia is. You know at certain times a painting becomes so physically delicate that if you did a quarter turn and turned around again it might not be there. Like the *Embarkation for Cythera*, it's in a haze and it's in washes and from where they're embarking I don't know, or to where. So it's not just a question of subject matter. The physicality of the paint is so fantastic and its preciousness—not "precious" in the bad sense— makes it almost more valuable. So I know I have these ideas and certainly they are ideas that are anything but the acceptable ideas. Maybe they are no good. But it's like I'm devoting my life to proving that they're valid for me. I'd say the most marvelous painting is a painting that offers nothing to anybody other than itself. Maybe someday painters will do it like—certain paintings lead to other paintings. There's nothing wrong with that obviously. Most of the best painting has done that. I also like paintings that sort of offer nothing but their own history. I respect Frank Stella's work. It's great. It does open up a lot. And I think he's a much more powerful painter than Poons. There are some Poons that are so isolated and removed and esoteric and the system is so almost mystical by why does that dot come there, you know. Not all his paintings, but some of his painting. And I like some of that idea because the picture also remains a kind of puzzle. There's just something you want to work with. I've been trying to do is like, say, I very consciously programmatically in the first paintings wanted to use common symbols. I guess because of my whole background, you know, certain things about the Bible were the closest things I knew. It is very funny to say common symbols because if that was common to me the Coca Cola bottle is to the Pop artists, which is *really* a common symbol. I never had anything about it, you know, actual life things until I was married and moved and created something. Wherever I lived it was barren by my own choice. It would be maybe two canvas chairs and this iron chair and that was it. A bed, and a couple of books, later on a phonograph when I could afford it, and a coffee table to eat from. I remember the last year before I got married I had a marble-topped table that I put together. And since I moved constantly I never had a sense of place or belonging. Like originally I didn't feel that I was American. And when I went to the League I didn't like American painting particularly. So Beckmann meant a great deal to me because I could respond to him. And I think a lot of that response had to do with like I've never responded to a thing because it was the best painting. I responded because it meant the most to me. And so when I was influenced, say, by certain things of Wolgemut a great deal it wasn't that I thought that he was a great painter but the sensibility gave me breathing space to work at, to work in, and to know what area I think I belonged in. And I think an important thing happened when I first started painting I was quite successful. It was certainly looked at. And even today various people remember pictures from 1947.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was soon after you left Iowa?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. What happened is I left Iowa after 1945. In 1945-1946 for a period of 14 months I had a teaching job at Indiana University in Bloomington. That's when I first started painting really seriously. At school I had the problem that I could not finish a painting. And it was very clear that I was fascinated by drawing. I drew all the time. I drew in art history classes; I drew from slides or I just drew in the dark. I knew I wanted to be a painter but I couldn't conceive how I'd ever make a painting. I was in an absolute state of terror. What would I paint? How would I paint? All the time I was in school I learnt certain things but I always feel that I never quite studied with anybody. Not even with Philip Guston. With Philip it was that I was with him as a person. You know, the idea of an artist that you could talk to, you could take walks with, you could go to his house, you could see his wife and child, go to the studio—and suddenly it was a real situation. But I don't know what I learned from him as a painter at that point, if anything, specifically about paintings or ideas. And I say, I was someone who went to art school and college. And I think maybe I have suffered from this that I didn't come in contact with anybody who had anything to say about the 20th century. So although Philip became at a certain point a mover —if a late one—in abstraction I don't remember in those years that he had anything of the slightest interest to say about anybody painting anything. Whatever interest he had in Beckmann was a limited one. What he would always talk about was Piero Uccello and his personal life. He used to talk about Pollock but it was always of Pollock as a man of the time, not about what he did. I don't even remember his ever talking about Pollock otherwise until Pollock really became a force. I think my upbringing was mainly or always very unsophisticated.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So here you were in Bloomington and drawing a lot and still not sure how to go about painting?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. something had happened at Bloomington; there was a change. When I was in a

graduate program I decided to try to show a few things. This was painted in Bloomington—*The Mourners*. 1946.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How about that first one, of *The Turban*. When would that have been?

STEPHEN GREENE: That was Bloomington.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They still have heads here. But the stripe is there, the Mondrian sort of stripe. Where had you seen Mondrian at this point?

STEPHEN GREENE: Once I was at the league I went to all the galleries. And then, you know, you looked at art magazines.

STEPHEN GREENE: And I went to the Museum of Modern Art all the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But even after that and during your relationship with Philip the modern world didn't intrude very much?

STEPHEN GREENE: It just didn't exist. I don't think it existed for him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very curious.

STEPHEN GREENE: I mean I can't recall any conversation about anything having to do with really contemporary issues.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was after the period of WPA [Works Progress Administration] and the Depression and all that?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. This was 1941, 1942.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The war was on.

STEPHEN GREENE: 1941-1942 and 1944-1945.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you hadn't liked American painting because that didn't seem to you to relate to the modern world as you felt it?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, it didn't seem to relate to anything that meant much to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Somebody like Grant Wood would have not even—

STEPHEN GREENE: No, because I wasn't interested in things like detail. Grant Wood was there and they placed me in his class and I immediately left his class. I'd rather stop painting than be in his class. I hated what he did. I hated what he stood for.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You hated the tightness of it?

STEPHEN GREENE: I thought it was stupid. And I still think it's stupid. I think it's backward painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You thought it was a kind of literal provincial idea of painting?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. I thought it was sort of dull. Very dull. And I think it's like—you see, whatever story thing I used—see my basic idea was—which connects with why I didn't like American painting, was I wanted someone to look at a painting and be deeply moved. So it's a very funny thing. Perhaps for all the tightness of the work I use very shallow space, nothing existed, say, in three-dimensional space. So to me doing that in terms of what I saw, by flattening things out, I thought that was doing something very special, you know, by making it practically airless.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you done that when you were working with Philip Guston?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. You know, in those classes there'd be a model and you'd work from the model.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see. You aren't really painting in a way.

STEPHEN GREENE: No, you weren't. And no one ever said to. I mean what I learned since one the first things I start with beginners is to say you're confronted with a white blank surface and what do *you* want to do with that surface. You know, even the painting that existed that related to seen things—like let's take all the *Crucifixions*. No one ever saw a Crucifixion. So it's always even when people use a certain amount of exactitude of observation the basic idea very often or the whole spatial setup or the depiction thing had to do with an idea at

the time rather than an actuality. Because all the *Crucifixions* we know happened an infinite number of years or centuries after. So I feel that my education on the whole was for the birds. Although I went to school for seven years in some ways, with the exception of Philip, I had no teachers. I loved drawing. But I walked out of every drawing class I ever had. I couldn't bear being in class.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you have some of the drawings that you did in those years?

STEPHEN GREENE: I recently came across—do you want to see what I've drawn?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, let's not interrupt right now but I would like to see them later.

STEPHEN GREENE: You know, it's very funny. There was something I was telling someone—I think I told Barbara Rose about this recently. I said that one of the things that people misunderstood about that whole period of the 40s other than Matta, other than Motherwell, the only part that I connect myself with was that everybody sees me in relation to Pollock, which is kind of hindsight because that really happened a bit later, you know, he came to be known later. When I went to school just before that when I'd open *Art News* you'd see Eugene Speicher and Alexander Brook. And there were these sort of semi-competent single figure things. They were better than academic portraits I suppose.

[Audio Break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Stephen, you were just talking about the fact that when you opened *Art News* 40s, 50s the things reproduced would be by Speicher and such artists.

STEPHEN GREENE: Or Alexander Brook. Also a little landscape. Then there were things like whenever you saw, say, abstracts of American abstract artists. You felt that it was tired. And whatever interested me about Mondrian was in an almost primitive way. I just liked the toughness. You know, there was a bar and there was another bar. And that so appealed to me. I remember even my first show Jewell mentioned something about the Mondrian-like structure. So anybody who was interested in Mondrian and saw what I did might be horrified by the idea. But anyway I think that's idiotic. You use what you use the way you want to use it. Before we started the tape we were talking about Frank Stella, how he's indebted in the beginning to Jasper Johns. And one of the revolutionary things of Johns's at that point in history was the way he used subject matter and Frank just threw it out the window immediately and used a certain idea of repetition of stripes, bars of color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But if he had done those stripes in the same kind of impasto way that Johns had done his *Flags* it would have been a very different kind of thing from his doing it with thin paint. And maybe your example was an inspiration for that.

[END OF SIDE 1.]

STEPHEN GREENE: I think it's almost as much a wild coincidence as anything else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it's interesting.

STEPHEN GREENE: Because I don't think he knew my painting particularly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He hadn't seen your work?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. I remember once his asking me about—he'd looked it up somewhere in the library.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you tend in talking to students to point up the possibilities of thin washes of color?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, I think with students, as I said before, it's that they have different problems. So I think it would be just as silly for me to say to them paint thick as paint thin. Most people are painting this today so *they* tend to paint thin. I haven't come across anybody recently painting thick. Generally I try to let the students make—you know, state his premise and then sort of go in and really make him stand up for it and talk about it. With some people it's not a question even of talking. I think sometimes with a very good young painter you don't talk for a long time. And then it's also accepting the fact that at certain times all you're there for is to let it happen and not to be in the way. I think it varies.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: I don't want to go into that anyway.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But we were about to the point, and I was hoping that you'd remember to mention again, that at that time of any American artist that you could have respected it might have been someone like Hyman Bloom.

STEPHEN GREENE: I did very much, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This didn't go very far?

STEPHEN GREENE: It meant a great deal to me. Hyman Bloom's work preceded mine by a few years. I think the religious subject matter he used a certain part of I'm close to. I think that even my first pictures, although they were painted very differently, had certain things in common with Bloom's, not by look but they were subjective. You know, people tend to think that an expressionist picture is necessarily like Soutine or de Kooning. It's not true. So when I talk about my interests in, say, people like Frueauf or Wolgemut or certain Van Der Goes, they are expressionist pictures but the actual painting is something else. I talked about hallucinations or an idea of a hallucinatory image or form. I think it could be done either way. Sort of, say, like certain Surrealist images and certainly a painter I dislike thoroughly is Dali—actually at times the painting is meticulous. And I don't think that's what's wrong with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you had liked a little bit of Chirico?

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, de Chirico I liked a lot. I think it's that whole haunted nostalgia. It's marvelous. De Chirico I came across when I was around 19. And another picture that was very important to me—I think probably it's the first really, you know thing that got to me was *The Dog Barking at the Moon* of Miro. It has to do with large space, open space within this A form which sort of cuts it, it's like a white ladder form; and then there's a dog. And that's another thing. So at certain times I've had certain pictures where there's a large space and then a point or something happens and then something else happens. I think one of the things that happens is that the years you spend at school—I'm sure this happens to a lot of people—the tendency is to teach technical things—how do you draw this, with what pencil, or how to use oil paint. It has to do with how rather than with what or what you are or like with Guston in retrospect—it was a question of being a younger man and a student still being permitted to admire; to like and to be liked in return was very nice. But it's not my idea of what possibly of the best relationship involves. I think it has to work both ways. Is there something you could bring out in the student rather than have another admirer. And, you know, that idea is a rather dangerous idea. As I said before, I think that everything I've come across basically has come out of some sort of isolated need, or when certain things happened. I think the important point I want to make is that at some point in about the mid-forties and for the next two years I think what I was doing in a different way was not making full figure paintings. For myself I love the human figure in the way I did it or the way I would even look at certain people is that it had to do with making a very moving, deeply-felt—corny as that may sound. And this was wrong—say, once or twice or three times I put into it social realism. I remember one remark that offended me a great deal. Very briefly around 1946 there were a few Ben Shahn's I liked. And then when Soby's book came out just as I started painting and I was showing what I had done I was put down as a follower, as one of the most gifted followers of Ben Shahn. I never read the book. I just went through the ceiling. I think basically I've never had anything to do with Ben Shahn. I think he liked Siennese painting. And I like Siennese painting. He had a heart and eye, everybody does. I think he liked dry paint. I like dry paint. That was all. Nothing seems to have happened to Bloom since he did a series of marvelous things. I haven't seen him since.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He's quite a recluse.

STEPHEN GREENE: He was then. I met him once in Boston, I looked him up. We spent until 2:30 in the morning and we wandered around. We went to a sort of village party. About 2:30 in the morning I was exhausted. But to get back, the next big thing that happened was that in 1949 I painted those first pictures that I'm known by.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just mention one or two for the record.

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I think one picture that's quite well known is *The Deposition*, the first one. You know which one it is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The one at the Whitney, you mean?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, no. It was reproduced a great deal for a number of years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The one with the coffin shape?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, that's *The Burial*. I'll try to find it here. This is *The Deposition*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes. Yes, it's really like a traditional Deposition in the figure taken off the ladder.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. I was influenced by the Mannerists.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where is *The Deposition* now, did you say?

STEPHEN GREENE: In the St. Louis Museum. They own three pictures of that first year, 1947.

DOROTHY SECKLER: *The Burial* was 1947, too?

STEPHEN GREENE: 1947. I came to New York and I did that in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And that's the one in Whitney?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, that's the first Whitney picture. Then at various times I did things like this through all of that period. This is actually 1951. There were certain things I had started that I kept going back to, sort of like restating my identity. This I think is just a freak picture and it's got part of my—it's *Family Portrait*, which is in Detroit.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes. That one with your mother and your father and yourself in front of the crucifix with a crutch.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. Well, you know, that thing I told you about the dream.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, the vision where –

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I use the easel cross form. But the fact that it's the way things are seen is one of the reasons why I don't like it. Well then, - well, before we go into this, two things happened. One was external and one was internal. The external thing that had happened was the whole change in the American scene. Certainly by then I knew that the whole painting world had changed. I was very aware of it, you know. It was very nice, say, in 1947 when I showed and in the Soby book there was a full-page photograph of mine. In that book there were Motherwell and Pollock and all. So I didn't feel, say, left out. Those first two years were rather funny years. I'd been away from New York for seven out of nine years. I came back to New York and, quite honestly, I hoped for a certain amount of success. And I didn't have it. There was no money. So I was teaching for $1800 a year, three days a week. And I felt a certain amount of disappointment. Instead of becoming a full-time painter—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where did you show at that time?

STEPHEN GREENE: At Durlacher's.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was a good gallery.

STEPHEN GREENE: It was excellent. Well, the amount—I'm not actually a quick painter. What happens is that some paintings come quickly and some paintings are very slow. The last pictures that were in the gallery in 1965, one called *Edifice* basically looks as if it were painted in about two days. Actually I worked on it for a year and a half. And so a few things came right away. And a few things I would have to sort of wash out, change the structure, at certain times various other things worked out; and take my time because it still had to look fresh.

DOROTHY SECKLER: While I think of it, your medium in the early pictures was oil all the way through?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, there was something—from time to time I'd get letters from people about it—I never liked the look of oil paint at that point. I hated it. I hated anything that looked greasy. And I still do. And so also I just couldn't understand how would I ever paint when the medium itself gave me the creeps. I just didn't like it. And it never occurred to me to try... Then people came up with encaustic. And I didn't like that particularly in spite of the look of it either. So I was trying to find some way to drain the oil.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You couldn't use turpentine washes?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, that's what I ended up doing later on. I also loved the idea of something of fresco, you know, very quiet, very matte, dry. So I started working with—I fooled around with Shiva Paints which had then just come out. And I sold them for a while; I was a salesman for them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which line of the Shiva?

STEPHEN GREENE: Shiva Standard.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But I mean this was not oil paint?

STEPHEN GREENE: That was oil paint. But there was a casein white that I tried—they were also putting out casein. And I was just fooling around trying to see what would happen. Like say if you use dry paints and tempera what if you mixed it. I found that if I put a certain amount of white casein oil paint, ground it together with a painting knife, if it was predominantly oil it would curdle, the casein would curdle and you couldn't work it. If you started then using turpentine with it it would curdle. So then I made a mixture of four parts Demar, two parts unthickened linseed oil glazing medium, two to four parts turpentine. And I found you could do that. It gave a certain kind of clarity. It wasn't as dry as fresco, but it was dry. Then I finally gave that up because it was only

good for a predetermined image and it was hell to try to wash out because the paint physically started opening up. Eventually I gave it up. Now I just use basically washes of turpentine. Or sometimes thicker paint.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's very successful.

STEPHEN GREENE: The next big break, and one that threw me for almost a decade, was in 1949. As I say, these two things happened. One, there was an awareness that the world had changed. I remember in the early spring of 1950 having dinner with Betty Parsons. Betty was the first person ever to show anything of mine. She showed at the Wakefield Gallery and she had picked up some drawings and a painting of mine and I'm very grateful to her for it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean before Durlacher?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, just before. And she said, "You know, I'd like to get you and Pollock together. Would you spend an evening in my studio?" I said, "I'd love it!" She said she'd call me. For weeks and weeks I waited for her call. Of course I could have called her. But I couldn't conceive of how the two of us could have anything to say to each other. My first reaction—and this may be hindsight—is that if something happens and certainly I've never been a joiner, but almost the reverse happened. It's like I became very withdrawn aesthetically and it's almost for the first time I started using certain things realistically. I started to work with some things in front of me. In 1949 I had gotten a Prix de Rome and went to Europe. I got wildly ill. There was something wrong with my lungs and I was close to death. They were so sure I was dying that they sent for my family. That was a rather scary time. My mother got there—I think they went through their life savings in about two weeks—they got there with a lung surgeon, his nurse-wife, and my brother-in-law. My mother wasn't allowed in my hospital room. They said if she walked in I'd be dead in a minute. I was in a coma for ten days.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Why didn't they let your mother—

STEPHEN GREENE: I was completely run down.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I mean why would your mother's presence—

STEPHEN GREENE: Any shock would have killed me at the time. Well, anyway, I had pneumonia and I was completely run down.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you been living under very rigorous conditions?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. As a matter of fact, it wasn't rigorous at all. I had a perfectly good studio on Madison Avenue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, but I mean in Europe. This happened in Europe, in Rome—right?

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, in Europe I just sort of went crazy. I didn't sleep much. I wander around till 5 o'clock in the morning. I had worked very hard to become a painter and to show. I suddenly found myself in a foreign place. And I bought canvas there and it was the wrong canvas and the paint went through. Everything seemed to go wrong. I had sort of loss of nerve. And so when I got a little better, the doctor asked me if I would prefer to go home rather than staying there. Well then I came home. I had taken leave from my job. So I had no job. The Gallery gave me around $150 a month for two or three months: no, it was a little more than that. But in a very scary way. The Whitney bought *The Burial* just about that time. And the Gallery was so peculiar about giving me the money sometimes I'd have to call 4 or 5 times for the check. And I needed it. I didn't live sensibly enough so I could live on $150 a month. So I finally said give me $100 a month. I tried to teach privately. And then I got a one-day job back at Parsons. And I think that psychologically I had undergone a very bad experience. And so suddenly from someone who had been known I became unknown. It was like everything I had sort of worked for for a long time was rather difficult. I was very depressed. And so I had to start off like an invalid almost. I'd put something in front and almost trace it, fill it in. I wasn't sure whether I'd ever be able to paint. So I painted this picture. It's called *The Shadow*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Would you want to describe it for the tape?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, you know, it's a setup. But it's a very simple form easel with an actual skeleton on it, and a bone on the floor and then the shadow of the skeleton on the thing. And in retrospect I certainly am not very happy about it. You know, it's very morbid and I think subject matter can be murderous because no painting is worth anything unless it's formally exciting in some kind of very different way. So I think this is just some sort of—you see when anything gets so straightly autobiographical and not much else, no matter what anybody else might see, I just don't like the picture. That is never with me, too. And I find it's just a curio out of my existence.

STEPHEN GREENE: So I did drawings of skeletons of mice and birds. And then I did *The Flagellation*. This was in 1951. It's in the Kansas City Museum. And I did things like this.

DOROTHY SECKLER: An armor thing.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. I just feel that they're sort of strange in mood and things like that. And I think that in some sort of literal way these are surrealistic pictures. I meant to sort of take an object and give it a certain kind of context and make it specific. But it's a part of my life that I'm not very happy about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This then had not been the trip to Rome in which you became fascinated by Roman mosaics? That was later?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, that was later; that's another trip. I always felt very bad about, one, I went to this place and I failed. And so I wanted to go back. I went back in 1952 and I stayed for two years. In the beginning of the second year I met Sigrid, my wife. We got married in December—Christmas 1953. Sigrid was there also on a Prix de Rome. She got it from the Institute of Arts and Letters. She's a writer and she got it as a writer. And that year that we got married I worked on a painting for eight or nine months. First for three months we traveled. I destroyed that painting. But these things I did around 1953 and they're sort of transition pictures. I think they were—

DOROTHY SECKLER: After you came back from Rome?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, in 1953 before I met Sigrid. I tried to open up the paint, you know, still using some of the older forms. Right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And I'm just not convinced—you know, I like it up to a certain point but they don't break open anything for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you began to apply the paint in a different way rather than with touches, almost a mosaic look perhaps.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. There are some—let me see if I have photographs. This I did of a kind of an easel thing. This was done in Rome. That belongs to Lillian Hellman. And I did this thing. And then I thought if I could do the single figure. And so I really started getting so modest it was painful, you know, and so I hate that picture. This is the picture that I destroyed that I worked on for almost a year. And some of it is terrible.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it still has a certain quality, something rather interesting about it, a series of figures behind it, a grid of bars or intermingled with bars dividing –

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you like to describe it? It seems to be such a crucial turning point.

STEPHEN GREENE: No, I think the turning point was trying to use some of that imagery and trying to move it into an even physically contemporary thing. I think it's actually those first pictures which set up my whole career. What happened and what they meant to me and still mean to me is that it's like the image has to be stranger, more moving. And so whatever it related to from the Renaissance, it was that they're very special pictures. And also it had to do with when the forms were really—I was very clear about making the body form flat; they're absolutely flat, the heads having a certain amount of modeling. And then certain things in the background being absolutely flat, airless, then the bars. Right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now I want to make it clear for the record that what you've been talking about are the very early ones.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. That's around 1947. This is where I started trying to even model and all that. It was a sort of hang-up. And so I knew it was utterly impossible. Then I painted this when we came back and moved out here. It's called *The Marriage*. And Sigrid had this bowl of, you know, they come out of an onion-like shape, I think they're called narcissus. I just wanted to make a marriage celebration picture. And one of the paintings I loved so much is *The Jewish Bride*. So I used it like that. Again it's a personal thing. But the way the flicker of the paint—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Now had this come about in any way through the mosaics? Or was that—

STEPHEN GREENE: That, and also the fact that somehow or other everything that happened from around that period on somehow or other I was trying to move into where paint becomes also subject matter more—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, was that to some extent a response to what was going on in the New York School? A sense that paint should be more directly handled or?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. Because if it were a response it wouldn't look like this. Do you know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I just wondered how—

STEPHEN GREENE: Some way or other I knew that what was happening was not my area. And so I didn't try. You know, if I wanted to do it I would get just a little of it, or just having it painterly. And I think, say, like if de Chirico tried to be painterly he'd collapse. There's always that danger. At one point, you know, I think from my crazy training or whatever it was I was just sort of wandering around. I'm very unclear about things. And then something I wanted to discover was about what paint could do. And basically those first pictures were drawings and, you know, like you could have changed the colors and they were filled in. There's nothing wrong with those paintings. But I didn't want to continue painting that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But I seem to remember, Stephen, one show in which the paint was put on in that mosaic way in which there was a kind of luminosity.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oranges and yellows and blues.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. That's one of the things that was very important; that's one that I think is in storage.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just a second.

[Audio Break.]

STEPHEN GREENE: Actually it's hard to tell from the pictures—this being black and white—because actually one of the things I was getting involved with was light and a spot being important. And as I look at them now I think the trouble was that I couldn't find any form to use them with. So the basic form of that single figure in some way was retrogressive. Do you see what I mean by that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Now we're looking at a painting. Does this have a title?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes, it's called *Villum*. That's the phylactery for morning prayer that the Jews use. It's not that I used it. My father used it. I almost never used it. It's just that I have them and I just wanted to paint myself that way. And so that period of the 50s—well, this a picture that I don't have here that I did like very much. It's called *The Deposition*. But it's a very different one.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And that's all blues. At various times I have pictures that are close to all blues.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would there have been oranges in that one, too? And warm tones? Or was it all—

STEPHEN GREENE: No. Just a little bit. The effect was all blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mostly blue saturation.

STEPHEN GREENE: And this is around 1956.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now that seems like quite a different step.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. It's a change. This is 1957. It's called *Nemesis*. It belongs to Joan Simon. Well, one other thing. A certain subject matter changed. Before I got married, with the exception of that *Family Portrait* where my mother appears, certainly all the paintings were figurative, there are figures in them, but the figures were always men; never women.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I noticed that.

STEPHEN GREENE: So from the marriage picture on was the question—and I could show you pictures I'm painting even now—it's like you could say the columns and things like that are male forms whereas in these pictures what happens is it becomes like a circular form here. And then the whole spatial thing is more mysterious. So there was some sort of beginning break for me. It took sort of like 7 years to try to find this—this is around 1955 and this is like little spots of color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: I'm still using similar subject matter. But it never quite worked right for me. I knew that I was having problems. This is a painting I destroyed; I hated it. This is called *The City*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That somehow has a beautiful surface quality. Almost like a pastel.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. And that was around 1957. It was called *The City* because it was commissioned by somebody who has a whole collection—Nan Rosenthal's mother. She asked if I would do one. So I just used a shape that might have been—it has to do with a towering form. So it was one of the first pictures where just by color or where a thing is placed it takes on a meaning. The subject matter there is almost non-existent.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That must have felt like quite a breakthrough?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. Now this is that thing with *Joseph's Shirt* that I painted before. Now that's all oranges and yellows. It's almost like some sun thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Very vivid.

STEPHEN GREENE: Now this picture was the beginning of a big change. It is sort of one of the last pictures where the figure is still recognizably there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Barely.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. But somehow or other drama really comes by forms, where they are, what happens to the space. So there's something—so like it's one foot there and it's one foot in another place.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: But then, you know, something that happened here; there was against this brown, then against this sort of brown and black something of yellow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now when you were thinking—let's say the point was you introduced that large, looming black oval.

STEPHEN GREENE: It's very funny. Now there all things were unclear. I remember thinking I had sort of a ladder shape first. And I don't remember this. This still was ground.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was to be read horizontally though, wasn't it?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. This is the bottom. So one of the things is still sort of figure and ground and all of that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have thought about it's being more a female shape because it was an oval? Or at the time it was just a shape?

STEPHEN GREENE: I don't know. No. No. There's one thing I've got to find here that's very important. A sort of crucial picture of—I have it somewhere—a thing called *Paradise*. It was painted in 1957. I know I have some photographs. I wonder if you've seen it. It belongs to NYU.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I probably wouldn't remember the title.

STEPHEN GREENE: It's a triptych. And there are three blue panels. It's all blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was it shown at Staempfli's in one of the last shows?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, it was in my last show at Borgenicht's. I'll have to find it somewhere. No, I don't have it here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was called *Paradise*?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. Basically it was three panels. It goes about 130 inches this way. It was basically all blue. And there is sort of a cruciform on the right panel. And it looks like an abstract form. It's like a serpent form but it doesn't look like a serpent. But then there are two recognizable figures at the bottom of the middle panel like a tree form. And that opened up a hope I feel it was like the first period was important and that painting started again for me from around 1957 on. It had to with certain things that I had done intuitively, like the first paintings closed space. Do you see what I mean? So that all that almost pressed in. Well then, say, opening up a little. And in all things I was clear. I was even emotively clear about what I was doing. The things in between were sort of like I wasn't clear. And also I wasn't moving forward. I was learning something about paint. As I say, I was like a kid learning how to walk in mid-career. It's not that I disliked all those pictures but in terms

of doing something in a bigger sense I've never been happy about that period. So the minute I did that *Paradise* thing you say in 1957-1958 and I knew I had 130 inches of blue and that the subject matter really also became all that vast area of blue—

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you proceed with that? How did you arrive at your 130 inches of blue? Did you decide now I will saturate the canvas with blue?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, it wasn't saturated because if you look at the painting it's still not blue-blue. Because actually blue-blue doesn't happen until around 1960. There are certain things where I use—of course I'm still using that white with the casein; or I was more, you know—it's like something was always being held back. And also I think it's all hindsight, I didn't know that you can't place a figure in the middle again unless you re-order that whole figure. So what I did was sort of little steps. So something that I had all blue although it wasn't the blue that I eventually thought—you know, the idea of blue. I still had the idea of blue without it being really going all out. It had to do with all that space and then something happened there. So actually that picture didn't have a full effect on me until around 1960. In 1960 I did a whole bunch of pictures. I think this you know maybe from *Art In America*. That's around 1961.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I do know that one.

STEPHEN GREENE: Then suddenly I did three red things like this. And I remember when I painted that—there are certain things that I do remember clearly—it was my old ladder. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And so like this maybe has some figurative thing which it does. So somehow or other I fell in love with what I thought was a more valid idea of space.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How would you begin such a painting as that one now?

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, very often I'd begin in a corner, you know, rather than like before it was centralized. And, say, here I'd have something coming in. And then, say, like that need for a threatening form. For the threatening form I'd have actually like a beading thing right here. And so then it would be like this entering this space. Right? And so in some ways it goes back to the early pictures in a sense, like the first thing I did was to start dividing the space. And also I started finding a mode which I felt was now I've sort of come back to the first picture I thought were very contemporary pictures. I still do. The other thing were sort of moving around in a rather scared way. They were deeply felt. But it was a period that always worried me. And here I felt it was kind of an open thing by comparison. And, you know, you could find, say, even cross forms if you look.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. They're implied that way.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. But it's like a cross that you've never seen before in your life. Do you see what I mean? It's not the Christian cross. It's not the American cross.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you begin with drawing in charcoal or with paint?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. this painting is a departure. I don't remember how I did it. But what may have happened is that I put a yellow here and I'd start with a large area of blue. And I remember some of this in this picture came right away. But you know that certain things carry over. Remember I said that period that I was very unhappy about—the skeletons?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. This almost might be a skeleton.

STEPHEN GREENE: This is thought of as a bone shape. So then it becomes a very strange—there's also a neurotic thing about it. It has to do with that red against all that vast blue against the white thin line. Right? And so it's not abstract in the sense that it has no reference. What it actually refers to sometimes is very ambiguous. Sometimes it's more specific. And so like I think, as I say, the way it relates spatially to certain forms to *The Burial*. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, it's fascinating.

STEPHEN GREENE: So you get that slim thin thing. And so I myself like best my earliest work and I like my most recent work. And so there are things that happened. There's a whole series sometimes in my mind I think of in the 60s as my Love pictures.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's a very beautiful one. What's the name of that one? Not that names are so important but they help us to identify.

STEPHEN GREENE: That's a love picture called *Garden of Love*, 1960. It has to do with the pleasure element coming into the thing. And this has almost some recall to the figure thing. But it's all strange. And it has to do with trying, and I hope succeeding, getting to a point where—as much as I love those first pictures, the good ones of them—establish my personality, or I mean establish me as a painter, is that there's always some point to move it where you can't look at it and say Renaissance or you can't say—much as I love Miro—you don't find Miro in it. Somehow or other every artist is trying to find a unique imagery. And I do have subject matter things only not because I think it's right but because I just function that way. I see things—god knows what. And so if I want to make it so convincing, sometimes I want to prove that—it's like I have all the propositions. I've got so many propositions that are wrong externally and some that I think are not wrong in the least. And that's how I work. I want to show you some of the things.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you discover the image, the overall image in the act of painting now? Or would you begin with some—

STEPHEN GREENE: Some is in the beginning and some comes as I work. Right? So like, say, something like this which utterly makes no sense without—I think that's around 1963—and very strange colors, very peculiar greens, I think it has plum color, there's a yellow. And I call this *Altar*. Because it reminded me of an altar form. And there's some kind of sensual thing happening here. But sometimes the subject matter gets more devious. I mean actually what it becomes there's a color thing that was called—-

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I remember keeping that.

STEPHEN GREENE: So that, you see, there's nothing supposed to be here that you can recognize. Right? So the whole thing would be that—yet at the same time various things that I work on—- like this is pure yellow bars at that point. Right? But this has a strange mouth-like opening. So around 1961 I did a series I think for—Dore was having a show of drawings that was going to travel around South America or Central America. I did a series of drawings. And I tried to get a name for them. And the name I thought of was Mouth and that sounded so clumsy and awful. Then I looked up the German word for "mouth". I saw this thing that had happened in Germany because it has all kinds of things that could happen in other places in different ways, you know. So we said we'd call them Maule, M-A-U-L-E. I told George Staempfli about it. He said you know that's very heavy-handed, in German it's extremely vulgar. I think it was George or Dore—I don't remember which—came across with Maw, M-A-W. And it had to with sort of a devouring shape. So there are certain sexual things here, you know. So like certain things I had in mind like this is like a mouth, it might be like a pincer, a sort of breast, sort of male parts. But, you see, it's very funny. I don't mind telling you this in an interview but it's not supposed to be seen that way. Do you know what I mean? I mean I'm just talking about what I did in making the painting. So you get sort of like threatening forms or these abstract forms and somehow or other by God, I hope by sheer genius I make these all diverse things exist. Here I can't rationalize about it like the earlier things. Some of it is intuitive. Like this is that other picture that's in the Whitney that I told you about that they got recently. Remember I said there's a bar of red?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: What you can't tell here is that that bar of red is very vibrant. And then this sort of orange thing is something else. This deep yellow against this white yellow. And I call it *Edifice*. And the reason I call it *Edifice*—the title came later—is there's my ladder shape. Right there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes. Just barely existing as a lighter shape.

STEPHEN GREENE: There's a ladder, too. Right? Literally.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: Then from that I've been using it again and again in various pictures, from that serpent thing that I spoke about in *Paradise*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It's a little crutch-like too.

STEPHEN GREENE: It's a crutch. And it's also like a ladder. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And then this is a mathematical form. This is almost a triangle. And then this is like almost some kind of bimorphic form that has like an eye. Do you see what I mean? And when I started this I had it like some sort of a head.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I can see.

STEPHEN GREENE: So by *Edifice* I mean building of all these almost crazy irrational things. It's a triangle and a triangle next to a crutch, it's also a thing—and then also I wanted it to exist if you made no identification and it's just on the level is that you would love the way that white is washed on that blue where it exists as a shape. So in some way it's like, you know, one of the scary things. I remember once someone said to me after some talk I had given—I think it had been at The Club which I had been to three times in my life and very belatedly, and I didn't belong there—someone came up and said, "You want it both ways." That's a very important issue. I don't want it both ways. I don't want it to be figurative and abstract in spite of what I've been talking about. What I'm really talking about is not wanting the figurative because I think on the figurative level this is so obscured in a way. Right? That it can't be much as figure. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: It serves your purpose though in the creative process.

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, it has to do with I'm going to have it my way if I can. And I have some sort of thing like things existing on a complex level. I can see it one way and you look again you might see it another way. Do you know what I mean? It has to do with levels of meaning. And that does interest me. It has nothing to do necessarily with anything more profound. It has to do with my thinking process and my emotive process.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would there be a point where you might for the sake of the presence of the picture as a whole have to sacrifice some of these subjective associations, would you then do it?

STEPHEN GREENE: Sure. Oh, again and again. Because don't think that I did this and said now I'll have the face and now I'll have all this and now I'll have all that. As a matter of fact, some things come, you know, just by an exciting division. And then there's a question whether it's a division that becomes part of a whole total thinking. You see, because just a division by itself may not fit into the whole thinking. The whole thinking isn't just symbols or anything like that but by a certain point it becomes so convincing, so right. Like I say, I think that this form to me exists perfectly well as a form. But if you know my work over, say, a period of years in its different manifestations then you won't be reminded—like it's almost kind of wild ego, it's as if you really want to know what it's about, I don't mean subject matter but about form. You have to know a lot of it. So this form exists on the level as a pure form and also it exists without reference. It also, knowing the other things by recapitulation, has reference. And the reference in this is not supposed to be a crutch. It's for me the more involved kind of thinking and I'm sure it has to do with like, you know, when I studied literature to a certain extent in school I remember one instructor talked about levels of meaning, or things like that. I'm sure anybody who's ever read anything about analysis, it appears one way but has other meaning.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Would you find the form most acceptable to you when it was ambiguous? I mean if it became too clear then would you likely eliminate it?

STEPHEN GREENE: No—I don't even know. Because right now I'm fooling around with something else. I want to show you, Dorothy, my drawings done in 1968. They're there. Now these I showed, a number of them—I forget—maybe this one went to the Museum of Modern Art. So in some way I'm not forgotten, lost, or anything. Take a picture like this. A lot of these are done with rulers... Now here's sort of a bone, a pelvis. And here's a finger.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's fascinating.

STEPHEN GREENE: And here's that division again. Right? Here's this thing only it goes back a little and then there's a small spot and wide and these sort of mouth-like things become a mathematical formula and then suddenly fan out. Here's a piece of musical notation—right? And then you hope I—here again I literally use the street map—right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Part of the map.

STEPHEN GREENE: Then part of a bone. Part of a weather indication. Music. Spotting of like dots. And then it's like a mechanical drawing which really isn't mechanical in a lot of ways. This is a crucifix thing. This is a ladder thing. Right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And some way or other you have a map and the map is a riddle. Do you see what I mean? So that actually what I think is happening is that I have discovered certain spatial things and there's a certain kind of play on—what I'm hoping for now is sort of wild play on subject matter. Well, you know it's very funny—like in the beginning when you're younger you say, well, it's like this. And I get older—well, it's like this: then it's the other way. And then it has this meaning and it has something else. Or it's here and then it disappears. As with my first pictures and until fairly recently most of my pictures were seen as a whole. I don't know whether I can do this in painting—like these things I'm looking at you can focus on this spot even though the paper is only 29 inches and you have to travel, and you stop here, and you move here. Then you're like on a street sign in this finger thing. And yet it has nothing to do with illustration. It's not quite a crucifix. It's not quite a machine. And

the imagery seems fairly sparse—right? A certain kind of mechanical means but it's not mechanical in sensibility and trying to get all these. Well, you know what it is. Maybe it's conceit. As I've grown older I think I'm a more complex creature and so that although I think I was one of the first painters—I know Newman did it in his way and later on I did it in another way, using larger action pictures where around 1960 there's a large area of one color and one little spot of something and nothing else. And now I'm just trying to work with an idea, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's very sparse and yet it's very full. It's one complete image too.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. And you move like this. And I may never be able to do it but what I'm trying to move to is I think practically all of Western painting has been meant to be seen as an entity. I mean even, say, like an Olitski expands but you still can take it all in in spite of that. Even a Pollock. You know so much has been talked about keeping the picture plane or some people have been going in—right?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: Recently. But it's almost time I think—like until we—maybe it's beginning to destroy the whole idea (quote) "picture". Do you know what I mean? So in some ways this doesn't exist for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a different way of taking the thing in psychologically. You perceive it differently.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yes. You know, I originally thought I did 31. Actually I did more and I kept 31. I had hoped that the gallery would show all of them but they showed 10. But I thought of it like—being as I say I'm subject-ridden even from a formal thing—it's like you had a space and you took a walk and you hesitated and a certain memory and then a certain specific. Now I don't mean by this just a literal walk or an illustration. But it had to do with as your mind moves and some parts become conscious and some parts become unconscious in some way trying to find a kind of tapestry of behavior in drawing. So whether I'll be able to do it in painting—I'll show you a few paintings so you'll know what I mean.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The frame becomes a very different—it functions in a very different way. It's almost as if you don't refer to it too much. You really are moving around through the space.

STEPHEN GREENE: And you're not working *in* the space. Do you know what I mean? My feeling is that it's not a framed area, say, a 1960 picture.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's not held in, no.

STEPHEN GREENE: It's not held in so you move up to here, right? And it allows you to walk this mile by tracing yourself for that line. Right? Then you move up and you go from a smooth line to a nervous line. And well, my intention is in all of these that the things are very definite. It should be a surprise and it's almost a mathematical thing but suddenly you see a bone shape.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: Or like a street map and there's a finger mark. Or then this is just a dot of color which you could only see as that dot against this. It takes on a kind of mysterious space meaning. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. These that we've been looking at of course are drawings without any color whatsoever.

STEPHEN GREENE: No, there are some colors.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course I'm looking at a photograph.

STEPHEN GREENE: Now this I remember is red. Now this will have an overlay—it's a very heavy rice paper and then there's another thin rice paper over this section and then some of the drawing underneath will come through and it may have been a slight color and this is a real white. And then this might have been maybe a deep green. Do you see what I mean?

[END OF SIDE 2.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's Dorothy Seckler, continuing an interview with Stephen Greene, on June 8, 1968. In looking at the drawings photogra—I was looking at photographs of drawings—I was impressed, the fact that in the photographs there is no color—there actually is, of course, as you pointed out, on the drawing—but that one doesn't need to see color to be—to find them quite fascinating and that they hold up—even without it, they hold interest—

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —in a very intensive way, I think.

STEPHEN GREENE: Also, Dorothy, with—the whole drawing—I worked on a funny idea—I worked eight or nine months on them, nothing else, no painting—is the—

DOROTHY SECKLER: What time was this? Just very recently.

STEPHEN GREENE: Las—all last—like last year, you know, like a s—a gallery year.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: You know, I sort of got involved in—like I—drawing meant so much to me and—no, it's—with teaching, one of the great problems is it's hard for me to teach, have my family life and commuting, all that and paint and draw. When I get involved in drawing, I draw. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: Like if I'm painting, I paint. You know what I mean? So my thing is like, absolute concentration. I don't do a drawing like a drawing on the side. You know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: So like I have to live with the idea of drawing, day after day, week after week. That's the only way I'm a—I'm able to make drawings. And I had this almost peculiar idea, is like—I'm a deeply subjective man—you know, a lot of basing my paintings very subjective. But I wanted to make drawings where most of it was done—although some people are using, you know, mechanical things, this is not mechanical drawing, really—is using rulers, using a compass, and all tha—not using—making only—you know, very rarely making a line that would have a personal touch, in sense, you know, like it would run or—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative]. [00:02:14]

STEPHEN GREENE: —it would be nervous. So I had to do—like if I used the most rigid means—right—of course, you know—by lining and not giving it a personal thing, and says how you drew it, supposedly. And then, you know, just b-b-by the fact that, you know, nothing became black, you know, like—graphic sensibility, where you get dark, you get rich, big forms, and—do it by getting delicate enough, spotted enough, surprised—and still, you would always have to put your nose to the drawings to see it, that there almost be invisible—that you would have to, in looking at—extend a great deal—and that, when the drawing was, you know, really there and it worked, it would be profoundly personal. This is my view, that, due to—it's not that I use my ruler—or how can I then maybe draw a bone or how could I use just a section of a street scene or something of a map or something—well, it has to do with, you know, like something that—you know, like my early reading, you know, an obvious thing like *The Waste Land*, which I read in high school, you know, that we read many times afterwards, is like the idea of a fragment. And so like—and like the fragment or certain things about Cubism, do not just with, you know, destroying certain visual things, the—remaining from the 19th century and earlier but also that had to do with the idea of fragmentation. So like one of the things that I'm trying to be involved in is that to literally fragment the whole picture itself. [00:04:12] You know, and I 'm not saying I can. But it has to do with it's time that the, you know, something about pictures, the entity, have involvement that is, you know, it's like being taken in all at once, less and less interesting. I know, I suppose, like in a Pollock, you can go from skein to skein, and line to line. But that isn't what I mean. It has to do with like a kind of absolute focus, a spot. And so as you move—so like in the painting, you know, against the door there—is that you might say focus anywhere, for—maybe on the orange and like that sort of white shape. Right? But when you move to anything, everything you move to becomes a—sort of, terribly important thing. And then you stop again. You know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: Or you could take pleasure a-a-at a piece, a piece of—you know, I'm sure all painting has some of that. But this has to do with a—the emphasis on the isolation of a section. You know what I—so like, that sort of terra-cotta red, whatever, the strange red, isolates that truncated form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: So certain things come together. My painting—like, in *The Burial*, of '47, there's this figure without arms or legs, you know, truncated arms and legs.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, that's a truncated form you're seeing. Things were like—but then it's also not—it's also like saying—but, I'll show it you this way, I'll show it to you another way. [00:06:00] It's—and then there's the thing, is that that paint against that slate, a whole area, is meaningful. And that's just that way it just passes that paint forming. And so it's a question of like always different things I'm working with, you know, so like making—

DOROTHY SECKLER: In this case, you would not have made a drawing first and then—

STEPHEN GREENE: And none of these things—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You would never do that.

STEPHEN GREENE: No—it's not never. It's like, I'm going to Des Moines tomorrow, because a job there pays very well. It's been offered to me a number of times. And I'm going to haul myself up for five and a half weeks. And then I'm going to meet my wife and daughter in Mexico, for around 12 days. And I'm going to try to make drawings from paintings, for the first time. Something's come up that, I think I would enjoy having certain things clearer initially, so I can concentrate even more on painting. You know, because sometimes, when things—painting after painting gets destroyed—because, you know, as I change my mind, as I'm not sure if the basic—not sure the word inspiration is right—so, you know, my painting doesn't allow for much washing away.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you say washing away, you mean wiping out with turpentine?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: You do it enough, it goes through the canvas, destroys the work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I've never seen one of yours that really affected me that way. So I guess you must—do you destroy a fair amount?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then you can't color again—

STEPHEN GREENE: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —might start again—

STEPHEN GREENE: So everything—you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because you want to be able to recover the raw—I mean, what kind of—

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, some—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —canvas do you work on?

STEPHEN GREENE: I work on double-prime—it's called Ninelle [ph] US canvas—I've been working with it for 20 years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Canvas what?

STEPHEN GREENE: It's called Ninelle [ph].

DOROTHY SECKLER: But did—

STEPHEN GREENE: You'll—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't say canvas board. [00:08:00] Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: No, canvas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Canvas. That's what I thought. Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: Company's US-owned. It's not—

DOROTHY SECKLER: That isn't important. I just wanted—

STEPHEN GREENE: No. It's no—it's not the most satisfactory canvas. I just have to blow it and work with it. And—but I think, as you go through this—you know what—

DOROTHY SECKLER: These are very, very fascinating to look—and in a way, there is a different spirit from even the last show that I saw. Perhaps there's less of the—well, the sense of—that blueness, of course, that was always deep and infinite. Kind of the infinity thing isn't here as much. Everything is—

STEPHEN GREENE: —I'll tell you what.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Like here.

STEPHEN GREENE: Something happens. It's like—you know, it's like, if you had a—you know, we're close to like the end of the tape. Is this. We've talked about certain things, the time I worked together. One thing hasn't come in, you know. It's like—I think one of my differences with what—with various painters, when a form comes or a concept comes long enough to me, after using it for a number of years, say like for—I remember like, in early '60s, I think we had a catalogue. Dore [ph], she said, "How blue is blue?"

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: Then Generis [ph], you know, picked up something about—Dore's talking about blue is blue. And then Yves Klein came to this country and said, "I hear you paint blue paintings too." And I said, "It's very different." You know neither of us like to worry about each other. You know, different painters. And so after, you know, five, six years, you know, so many of my paintings really had large—I can show you a whole series of photographs—large areas of blue. [00:10:00] Well, then the surprise went out of it for me. You know, like—it was like then it would have become a method of—and not saying you can't paint that way but I know I can't, after a certain point. So like, you know, I haven't used blue for quite a while, for the last few years. And now I'm sort of free, this color I loved more than any other color, to use it again. But I know that if I covered a thing all blue now, I'd be going back, you know, unless it occurred to me in some other way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: These blues are not receding particularly. They're rather right on the surface, I would say.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah. And part of the thing is that, at the present—you know, I think this—you know, so my mind doesn't work right sometime. Lost what I'm trying to say. Is that I think, you know, like, say—in '58, I painted the *Paradise*. Was this whole area. And so, although I'm not with all—you know, so many painters, I have a whole series of pictures with large areas, a few forms. And I think I did them—almost be historical—early enough and earlier than most people. Is that I'm all really int—like because I feel a great need for more complex imagery. And so like, that picture over there, someone came to see it recently, and, you know, said it was too much. And that's one thing that—having like—but my work, about the time—someone who knows a great deal about it, has written about it and all—and my feeling, whether I can do it or not, this is what I'm deeply interested in. And I'm going to prove I can do it. And it's like we've had all the pictures I want to see with two or three discrete forms. [00:12:04]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: And by now it's an academic, you know, idea, for the most part. I don't think it is with Barry [ph] Newman, you know. But I think it's like, for myself, I just—a certain point, you know, I want to sort of turn the whole thing upside down. And still refers back to me. You know what I mean? But I would like—you know, it's like I never—you know, like say if you look at these four and another picture there. You notice it's sort of like, if I were to, you know, show them right now, whatever is similar, how wildly different each experience is, whatever ties them together. Do you see what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: So that the dependence of one picture on the other. It's a very tricky thing, you know, sometimes where it's n—is the formal idea strong enough—you know, that worries me—so that I can—but I think the formal idea is basically fairly strict. But like—so like, the colors I use there are not the colors I use here. It's like, they tie together for some inner reason but not by saying canvas will be divided into so many sections. Do you know what I'm trying to say?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm. [affirmative]. Well, there is considerable variation. And yet they all do seem to be part of the same—well, the same outlook. And the drawing, the element of that sort of linearism working through and kind of complex and surprising juxtaposition—scrubbiness, of course, of the gray—the grays recur a

good bit, in different—very different kinds of grays. And they're beautiful—the very flat ones next to the ones that have a kind of fluctuation going through and then the drawing element moving through and across. [00:14:11] I think, you know, it's very appealing. You know, this is an immediate reaction to the quality of the—of the handling and so—and fascinates me, in addition to, you know, looking at the new, well, image formation. It's —

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, you notice three pictures, I'm saying, it's like this, you know. These are the ladders and the ladders are s—and there are, you know, prisms and all that. And I think it's like—I mean, these pictures do leave open more kind of reaction. And I don't expect everybody to react the same way. You know, it's like, that whole blue form shooting through on the bottom—you know what I'm saying? The lines. And then certain forms could be—you know what I mean? They don't have the—I think it's that liberating quality, you know, not there in that way anymore. So that's almost like what I'm trying to find more and more is kind of enigmatic juxtaposition of form, forms infer forms that don't. So like, again, you get—everything becomes a—you know, like, for all—you know, it's like all that delicate white and scrubbing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: And then you saw—as you make the adjustment to that delicate thing, I want to make a line, that's more delicate. [Laughs.] You see what I mean? So like, you know, by those—almost surprise of the line, of what happens, or the shape, I wanted to sensitize a thing that—you know, that is enigmatic. [00:16:09] Now, it has to do—like, in the beginning, you know meanings. Later on, you know what you don't know. And you get little flashes. Do you know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: So I'm trying to be, you know, like—well, you know, I hope I'm trying for, you know, a formally more profound thing—so—but without negating certain earlier things, you know. For myself, it's like, that's what I think about. We don't have to think—like even, you know, that whole period which I—beginning—you know, painful, slow way, 30, this whole about being—I think where it came through with those little bits of, you know—flash of yellow and orange, that I've talked about at our first but the mosaics, where, you know, I've had a little glimmer, you know, beginning, maybe I could do something. Clearly, you get to that picture on the right, the strange gray line.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: But the via—the clear canvas was something—and then there's a charcoal line and there's orange and then there's pink, this wild blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: You know, so I think it's like, somewhere, that other thing has come up. I finally had some sense how I can use it like I wouldn't use it before. That's what it's all been about. So that's what I mean by whereas, I mean, I'm slow. I don't think that I—I think those first paintings really started when I was 17. When I was 17, remember the series of drawings? There's one around that period my mother has, only related to it, or influenced a little by Modigliani. [00:18:09] And they were sort of rough drawings, with lines. There were sort of mourning figures. Sounds terrible. But 10 years later, I sort of went back to that idea—and try to make something out of it. And so, my thing is, you know, I want the spatial thing more enigmatic. I want any kind of literal meaning, if there is such a thing. I'm not even sure there is any more. And where—or where, when? What do you—like there. And I think, if I'm ever going to be known, you know, beyond, you know—I think it'll have to be like some—Jay [ph] [inaudible] is saying. You know what I mean? Just I don't get it. I think, you know, in some ways, you know, as far as—so not an enviable position. It's like—I said I was al—if I have to make anything, like even in the world—I'm not with organizations. I'm not with—you know, I mean, even my few oldest friends are off in another area. My closest friend is Frank. And that's another world.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, Frank Stone?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

STEPHEN GREENE: So that's another world—it's another age. See, actually I've known—actually, I'm married to a writer. Before that, I knew another writer and she was very important to me. So even in the cultural, intellectual, aesthetic thing, I've been involved. First it was theater, then it was people [ph], writing. [00:19:55] So like I feel like, whatever I do or I don't know—you know, I'm not a permanent—I don't know. Somehow or other, something's, you know, like I can't place. And that worries me a great deal, at times. Because I don't mean about company. But I would like to, for myself—no, sometimes, after this—yeah—and certainly reemerge.

But I can't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You feel, in these, your path to finding the thing is markedly different from what it has been before. How do you go beyond? I mean, is it a matter of—

STEPHEN GREENE: Uh—yeah, go ahead.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I'm just saying, if something seems like, well, this is something I've done before, then do you destroy? Or do you change it abruptly? Or—

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah. Well, if it's like—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —how would you do that—

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, you know, sometimes you go back to something you've done before—begin your identity. So you start with something that may be a reminder. Then you want—you know, you want to do something else with a picture, you know. Sometimes I know that I stop very often on the top left or the top right or right at the bottom, you know, again starting, you—but I think even those pictures I started, you know, I said, like de-positioned those two approaches, like the same old regime. Start at the side. Start at the side. Although, you could see them centrally. And it's—I think, if it starts looking like another picture, that you may have painted three years ago, you better destroy it real quick. And then also it becomes a tired experience. Because you already had it and you're a different person now—certain extent. So like there always has to be—like of the—obviously continuity. And yet it's that you never painted that picture before. [00:21:51] You know, if you have certain painters one doesn't like, for certain reasons, sometimes certain reasons is that, you know, the worst thing you say about a painter has some success, "He makes merchandise. And he is selling his name. And his name means a certain type of picture." So one of the things, you know, I keep doing is like, I'm basically restless. As I said, I went to eight different public schools, because it was forced on me, or various—I did go to one high school. I went to a number of different colleges. I taught in a lot of—many schools, you know. That's not that I've done badly at any of them. At a certain point, I've had it. I am bored. I can't stand it anymore. And, you know, I wouldn't mind, you know, I have seven years—Columbia—all the other—

DOROTHY SECKLER: We haven't even put on the record that you have been teaching at Columbia—but for seven years. And then, well, what have you been teaching, specifically, and research—

STEPHEN GREENE: Part of seven—part of it was with graduate students. And that got—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Studio courses or—

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —you lectured or seminar?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. One was a graduate seminar, drawing for—but I basically turned it into a class of aesthetics, where we basically worked with ideas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: And I believe very much, you know, like no matter how you paint, whether it's conceptual or more intuitive, you're almost immediately responsible for your premises. And you set up certain premises right away. So like, say, if Mott, in '41, is, say, making automatic drawings, in the beginning says, "I am making automatic drawings," it rules out—so like nothing may be decided about that piece of paper. What is decided is all else that's not going to happen. That's already that things are going to happen in. So, you know—and I think that's the way I work. I work best if I know there's some base of thinking, formally too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just to set—I have a feeling that you've touched on so many fascinating things related to your series both of the drawings and of the new paintings. [00:24:06] And I know how difficult and how maybe even undesirable it is to formulate too closely, [laughs] as you said you before, your premises. But if you could think of anything that would mark these off as having a different premise from the others, could you—I mean, could you for—

STEPHEN GREENE: You mean these, like—

DOROTHY SECKLER: These four specifically that we were looking at.

STEPHEN GREENE: —the immediate others?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: Or you mean all the others?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Or the others—let's say, up until you made mixed drawings. Let's just make that as a demarcation point. Yeah. One thing that you mentioned was the sort of entertainment of more complexity—

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the wish not to have this sense of the extent space with one or two things happening.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah. Well, that's, you know, the painting, you know, spatially, there are areas where you really stop, just stop. You know, I mean, like I think you see that almost like red, deep red, academy red, deep, almost like bone form—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: —I think, to really see that form, you really have to stop on that and it literally stops the picture, I think, by the way, I think. You know, I mean, in some ways—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You can't lose yourself in—

STEPHEN GREENE: —you can say the light just enhances it and it's that relationship—like relational. And you have to sort of focus in on this thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Is that the same thing? You were talking about, in the drawings, that there are certain stopping points and places where you really have to—you're psychically arrested at that point —

STEPHEN GREENE: And you stop.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —for a certain period of time—

STEPHEN GREENE: And stop.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —there's a temporal thing related—

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and when you're taking—

STEPHEN GREENE: Which is not to say you move from this distance and move from—and move another distance. [00:26:00] And so like, all that the eye, you know, moves around the picture and can enjoy details, that's not what I'm talking about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No.

STEPHEN GREENE: I think it has to do with like absolute arresting of things. So like, you know, well, you know, like—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's—

STEPHEN GREENE: I think like, up there on the top there, you know, just by that blue being that pale—and there's something about that circle being such there's a line to it. To look at it, you have to sort of stop. Do you know what I mean? Or sort of like the yellow against the white is so—destroys even some of that space. Right. Or —so it throws that space, you know, as does the blue. And then, to try to make it work, something tries—that it's like—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're still working on this one?

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah. And if you—and that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because I love the quality or—[laughs] of the tones, all the way through it.

STEPHEN GREENE: So—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's very beautiful. But also, you know, it's one of the things that sort of interests me is that you do have the erotic elements here, as you had before, but they're like in a context that's not—almost organic, sometime, you know, like they're getting out of being organic [laughs] and yet they seem related to the same things that would have been, you know, sort of sensual forms, in the other paintings.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is that true?

STEPHEN GREENE: You mean the—what do you mean by they're less organic?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well—

STEPHEN GREENE: You mean they don't grow out of each other or—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that's part. Or they also have straight lines going through them, that relate them to mechanical things.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where I don't recall—

STEPHEN GREENE: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —maybe if I was really [inaudible]—

STEPHEN GREENE: No. The other thing, you know, was softer and rounder.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

STEPHEN GREENE: And it's like—well, there's certain soft areas there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: So actually, the one thing I'm avoid—I am not moving into, you know, a hardening of the edges, you know. [00:28:04] A hard edge would be something else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. But the line is moving through.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What really has—what I had in mind more than the edges themselves, some of it has—

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, I think it has to do with sort of also destroying the fact that some of the times—I like—so I'm not saying it's wrong—became so central and so much related back. This is not related back.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Back—

STEPHEN GREENE: But that, well, you know, of course, like—well, one take, that's a truncated torso.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: There's a truncated torso.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, I—yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: So like, this thing, what I'm trying to do is also saying—is you can accept that form as an abstract form and it has a kind of recall. So it's like a memory thing. And it's no longer as, you know, the original thing, something else. So what I'm doing is, again and again, you know, removing it from the danger, I think, of any kind of work like this might be that, you know, certainly, no storytelling but, if it were to be read. I remember once having a Freudian tell me some of the symbols, you know, according to the light of Freud. Just gave me the creeps! Because I'm not writing a tract. I'm painting pictures. So at certain points, it moves in different directions, I think sometimes for no other reason because that direction, for other—you know, but maybe because—to work against the art world.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

STEPHEN GREENE: Do you know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I too—

STEPHEN GREENE: Or at certain times, to draw—and so when I say, you know, like I got tired of the—it was all right for me to paint, you know, large areas a single color, maybe a few reds, a line, something like that, then,

when, you know, I have to see every—I do teach. You know, every second, third student is making three simple shapes, something else. [00:30:00] I find it unbearable. I couldn't possibly go to the studio and make a simple picture now. I would die of boredom. Because I've seen, you know, the yardage of it. So a lot of times, things come just as—to make certain things stop for yourself. So I think—so sometimes it's necessarily that a less soft image, I think, is better. At this point—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a new adventure too.

STEPHEN GREENE: —it's a new adventure to me. That's all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh. The—

[Audio Break.]

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, you know, I mean, just go back and wait. And there's the, like go—actually, all I can think of is that certain things were set for me in the first paintings. The first paintings had something to do with —I envisioned myself as a—want to be great tragic painter—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

STEPHEN GREENE: —you know, in terms—that kind of sensibility.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You wouldn't formulate it that way today. Or would you?

STEPHEN GREENE: No, I don't think so. I don't find that a tragic painting or—that way. I think it's actually—it may have been part of my romanticism. I do want to make them a moving, exciting image. And I don't want to move people a certain way anymore. And then I think certain pleasure things have come in. And I think I've—

DOROTHY SECKLER: The pleasure things, for you, had the connotation of a kind of sensuality.

STEPHEN GREENE: Yeah.

[Audio Break.]

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, you know, I think I'm unique, I'm a very—see, even those first paintings, if you look closely enough, in certain ways there are very strong sexual implications of all my paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does this every disturb you, if you recognize—while you're painting?

STEPHEN GREENE: No. There was one painting in my last show, there was a question of it being shown. And I don't think I have a black-and-white on it. There was a cross, that became part of a sort of like a snake-like form, became like a male phallus thing, became something like women's parts. [00:32:03] And I meant to be—it's one of the most beautiful paintings I've ever done. And it's a very formal painting, very strict painting. But it had to do with the cross. It had to do with sex. It had to do with a kind of fright. It had to do with beauty. And quite a few people were very much offended by it. I wish it would have become publicly offensive to some people, so it might even—would even look at the painting. So now it's a lost painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what do you mean it's lost? Don't you—

STEPHEN GREENE: Well, if you have a painting, you show it once, you're not showing it—you're not showing it again. So if something came up like, what happens with painters like myself or a lot of—you have a show and some of the paintings, you get back. The only way a gallery can operate. And then some paintings you get back mean a great deal to you. And you pray for a chance to show them again. So that the only time you can get a chance to show them is, you know, a big museum show or—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. Yeah.

STEPHEN GREENE: —a retrospective.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you do have the painting, for an—

STEPHEN GREENE: Oh, it's in storage.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]