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Oral history interview with George McNeil,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with George McNeil on June 3, 1965. The interview took place in Brooklyn, New York, and was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

Interview

June 3, 1965

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing George McNeil in Brooklyn on June 3, 1965. George, as I was saying a moment ago, I feel that in your case the story, at least briefly, of your early childhood, the kind of family you had, your experiences that you might recall as having some significance for your later - well, sensitivities would be something we might at least touch on.

GEORGE MCNEIL: Well, I was born in Brooklyn in 1908 and I came from a family of entirely working class people. Except for my sister who had graduated from high school, practically everybody in the family more or less went to work when they finished elementary school and in general it was a culturally deprived atmosphere. My sister, however, really did a great deal for me in the sense of putting books in my way and introducing me to certain aspects of life I wouldn't have known of. For example, I'm quite sure that I saw Pavlova dance at the old Hippodrome perhaps when I was eight or nine years old. In any case I was interested in reading and now I use the word "cultural" but I think always I knew that something existed beyond the workday life of my family. But I didn't do very well in school. I went to a technical high school and did very badly in the first year, actually being asked to leave at the beginning of the second year. Then I went to an ordinary high school, an academic high school and I seemed to do well from that point on. In other words, I then very clearly became aware that music, for example, and books were very important. I particularly remember being asked to usher at a concert and this was really my first introduction to classical music. I was completely charmed, thrilled by hearing this girl play classical music. At about 16 I began to be interested in drawing and at this school, Thomas Jefferson High School, I took some art classes. I might say that previously I had drawn in a kind of casual way. In other words, when I was a child I had drawn from cartoons, newspaper cartoons of one sort or another. And I recall that when I was in this technical high school I must have been known among my fellow students as being interested in drawing because I recall once in an industrial class someone was asked to make a drawing of a furnace and the students all pointed to me and said, "McNeil can do it," I remember that. I would have been about 14 or 15 at that time. But when I went to Thomas Jefferson High School the atmosphere was completely different. There were many, many, many bright students and, as I said, I became interested in art and I seemed to do well from the very beginning. The teacher there, a man by the name of Green, was - well, he certainly encouraged many of the students; there was a distinct art climate. I then was a major art student for two years and at the end of this time I won a scholarship to Pratt Institute. In other words, once I started in high school to get interested in art I went in for it head over heels and worked very, very hard. I remember the summer before starting at Pratt I studied anatomy very carefully and - oh, there's something else which is important and that is that through some kind of an art league the best high school students studied at the Brooklyn Museum on Saturday mornings. And it was there that I really came into contact with modern art because the Société Anonyme of Katherine Dreier had their collection at the Museum. So from the time I was 15 or 16, 16 I guess it would be, 16 and 17, I saw examples of modern art, in other words, Picasso and the others.

MS. SECKLER: Your feeling when you first encountered - well, let us say, Picasso?

MR. MCNEIL: I can't recall because it seems that almost from the very beginning I was sophisticated in terms of art. I remember when I was out sketching once, I was maybe 17 or 18, I don't recall, when I thought of that phrase "art for art's sake" and I recall being very perplexed about what art could be if it weren't art for art's sake. So from the very beginning in this high school, as I say, where there was a kind of knowing situation and many bright students I probably read a good deal and I probably always took modern art for granted.

MS. SECKLER: George, your family I assume were Irish?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes.

MS. SECKLER: Were they religious? I was thinking of them as you said "art for art's sake." You might have been exposed to art for religion's sake.

MR. MCNEIL: No. In the Catholic churches the art is, you know, very banal. We were not a particularly religious

family. My mother went to church but when I was a boy my father never went to church except for what was a kind of, oh, I forget what they call it now, kind of a revival experience when special priests would come around and have meetings for a week or so and bring people back into the fold, and my father I think would go to church for a while and then again would drop out. The same with my brother. And I went to church until I was perhaps 15 or 16. But I can't recall that I had any powerful experience.

MS. SECKLER: Then I assume that your next important experience after high school was at Pratt?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. During the first year at Pratt I had some trouble because it was and still is primarily a school of design and I always intended to be a painter. I think that as far as the faculty was concerned I didn't stand out, but I think among the more ambitious students and more interested students - well, there was a coterie of us and I think that it was assumed I would go on and paint or do something like that in some way or another. Then in my second year at Pratt, that would have been in 1928, in the fall of 1928 I heard a lecture by Vytlačil at the Art Students League and he spoke about certain aspects of modern art, making it very knowledgeable, and he spoke about his experiences studying with Hofmann, and this more or less brought to a focus the fact that the work I was doing at Pratt, which would have been representational work, I just wasn't satisfied with. And therefore in the early spring, I guess, of 1929 I left the school, I would say about March I left Pratt. Then I did something which in retrospect was well-advised. I don't know why I did it at the time but I went to the Metropolitan Museum every day and I just drew from the Greek cast that were there, the *Parthenon* pieces, they are not on view any more, I guess they haven't been for some time. And then I also did some work analyzing paintings. I remember copying the small school of Giotto painting that is in the Museum. Then also I would go down to the 42nd Street Art Reference Library and study books there, continually trying to analyze the paintings. Now at the Museum I had an interesting experience in that Gorky was painting from the Greek casts. It turns out that Gorky was only, I guess, eight years older than I was. In other words, at this time he would have been 28 and I would have been just 21 I guess, he would have been perhaps 29, 28 or 29. In other words, he was seven or eight years older than I but he seemed much, much older at the time. He had a beard and he used to go about with a great overcoat and he created an extraordinary figure at the Museum. I remember at that time the Havemeyer Collection was not in the Museum and they had, I think, two or three small Cezannes and, as I recall, they were loaned out for an exhibition. When Gorky saw they were gone he asked where they were and the guard, kidding him, said, "Oh, we got rid of those, we just took them down." Gorky got terribly excited and terribly grieved, I don't know whether he knew that they were just joking with him or not. But he was a striking man just from the point of view of personality. We got to talk to each other many times in fact, but as I say, I never did get close to him because he seemed much older. I would have thought then that he was more than 35. Now, or course, I regret that. In the years that followed I saw Gorky from time to time and he would often mention those days when we were there together.

MS. SECKLER: You were both drawing from some kind of - ?

MR. MCNEIL: He was painting from the casts. That's very interesting. And I remember there was a room there where the copyists used to keep their work and Gorky kept his work there and I used to look at his painting and of course was very impressed by what he was doing. It was Picassoesque and I guess he was working from the Greek things because Picasso had set the precedent for that. So that lasted, say, through 1929 and 1930. Then in the fall of 1931 I went to study at the Art Students League with Jan Matulka. At that time David Smith was in the class, as was his wife Dorothy Dehner, and also Edgar Levy and his wife, and a young man, a friend of mine who had been in high school with me, Leo Manso. Diller, I believe, was registered for the class. He would come in from time to time but he was not a regular student.

MS. SECKLER: Burgoyne Diller?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, Burgoyne Diller. And then also Irene Rice Pereira was in the class too. And I would say that among the young artists, those who were about 22 in 1930, this more or less formed the nucleus of the younger people who were interested in modern art at this time. I remember that the year before Stuart Davis had been scheduled to teach a class at the League, but I don't think he got any students at all, maybe one or two students, that would have been in 1929, and as I recall, the class was cancelled. So that a year later Matulka represented the very best that you could get in terms of modern art education in New York City.

MS. SECKLER: Vytlačil then was not in the League?

MR. MCNEIL: No, Vytlačil went back to Europe shortly after the lectures and then I don't think he returned until later, about 1933 or '34. Matulka, of course, was not a completely abstract painter and in this period I seem to move away from the concept of abstraction. I did make some, well, I was going to say complete abstractions - that wouldn't be quite true, but manifest abstractions, around 1929 and 1930 simply by studying Picasso and Braque and the others. But as I continued to work, to work at the Museum and work with Matulka, I seemed to lose my grip on what the basis of abstraction was. In other words, I never really did have a clear understanding of what was involved.

MS. SECKLER: What had you thought of it as being in the first things that you had tried in 1929?

MR. MCNEIL: Well, it would have to do with something that was nonrepresentational and something which was exciting. I don't think I had any concept of the importance of color. It was just a new way of art and, as I say, a kind of -

MS. SECKLER: Stylization to some extent?

MR. MCNEIL: No, I think I was just fascinated with the whole aspect of what I saw and tried to do the same thing. But I didn't have any real understanding of the reasons why Picasso and Braque did what they did, and I just imitated them and it clearly wasn't working out for me.

MS. SECKLER: You had no idea of Cubism then?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. Well, of course, I read the books that were available on cubism and I knew that their structure was important but I never had any basic grip on it. So then this year at the League, this was 1930 to '31 and then the following year when Matulka had a private class that would have been '31, '32, I tended to move from abstraction to a kind of three-dimensional art, perhaps something like the Greek work of Picasso, very strongly three-dimensional. During the summer I made some drawings in 1932 and they were quite representational and very three-dimensional. I should say that at some point around 1930 or '31 I got an odd job working as a night watchman. I used to work then at night and go to school either before I started on my job or whenever and just kept working in that way. I had a studio on 14th Street, 7 East 14th Street, beginning I guess about 1932. In the fall of 1932 Hofmann began to teach at the Art Students League and that was a very marked change in my development because he furnished the kind of theoretical basis which was lacking before. I stayed then with Hofmann on and off I guess until about 1936. He taught at the Art Students League in '32 and '33 and had a private class on Madison Avenue in '33, '34. Then in 1935 he moved to 57th Street and I guess stayed there a couple of years. In that period I met a number of the men who were then going to be my lifelong friends. Jo Hopper, Giorgio Cavallon, Linda Lindaberg, who became Mrs. Cavallon, Mercedes Kahls, George Byron Brown, Albert Swinden who has died, Brown has died, too of course, and others whose names just slip me at the moment, formed a very exciting group of friends at that time.

MS. SECKLER: They were mostly studying with Hofmann?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. They were studying with Hofmann and in some respects they were like me, they were my age. In other words, in 1935 they would have been about 27, and they already had had a background in art and they would be interested in getting some kind of fundamental understanding of modern art as given by Hofmann. Then I think it was in 1936 that the American Abstract Artists got its start and that meant that a whole nucleus of artists came together in New York. That would have been in the middle '30s and many of the men like Eolty, who had been in Europe, were returning - Vytlacil had returned - and so therefore the group got started. And I would say then in this period, about 1935 to '36 in contrast to 1930, there was a distinct movement as far as modern art was concerned. When this group was started Stuart Davis did not join, Gorky did not join, de Kooning did not join, Hofmann did not join, but other than these I think we had most of the people who were interested and almost surely we had the younger people except for de Kooning.

MS. SECKLER: Did they give any reason for not joining?

MR. MCNEIL: Gorky was always very much of an individualist and that would have been enough. He attended the first meeting of the group and - well, I think when Gorky got into any social situation he tended to monopolize it. As I said earlier, he was a very strong personality, very theatrical in a way, a great sense of presence certainly and he talked in a way which was enigmatic and if it wasn't obstructionist it certainly wasn't going to help the American Abstract Artists get started. I think he left in some kind of high dudgeon at some point. Anyway, he left. I think stalked out, but I'm not quite sure. I seem to remember a dramatic exit but I can't remember it too clearly now. And I think de Kooning was somewhat under the influence of Gorky. Now de Kooning was only four year younger than Gorky and yet what I said about Gorky having this strong personality, I think was true in a sense of de Kooning also. I mean there would be no question that Gorky was an older man and a much more pronounced older man, very sure of himself. I don't think he was sure of himself in his art but that's in retrospect; he seemed to be very sure of himself. And he would be very enigmatic, you know. He used to go around with an Ingres reproduction and things like that and when we were trying to - well, when we were head over heels in our involvement with abstract art he would hold up the Ingres as a kind of bearing on what should be done. Now whether he meant this or not I don't know, but he was like that, that was typical of Gorky.

MS. SECKLER: Was there some issue with the people who were questioning it or leading it of their feeling that it was not right for artists to be concerned with exhibiting?

MR. MCNEIL: There may have been but I think it was just the opposite. This is of great importance because I can't get rid of this attitude that I had then that modern and abstract art was just suffered. As I think of it now, I

can't think of any gallery in New York City which showed the work of the younger modern artists. Perhaps the Artists Gallery did something in that direction. The Valentine Dudensing Gallery, as I recall, handled people who were very established, I think mostly Europeans. By that time people like Sheeler and Demuth were accepted American painters, and Marin, of course Marin is an exception. But Sheeler and Demuth, that type of abstract artist, I think was already looked upon by us as being old-fashioned and not making any vital contribution to modern and abstract art. They would have shown at the Downtown - no, they would have shown at Stieglitz's Gallery and then perhaps at the Downtown Gallery. But there was no place, as I recall, for young painters to show and I don't think there was any place for them to show until after World War II, say, around 1945 to '46 - no, I guess Kootz started his gallery during the Second World War and perhaps some of the artists got their start at that time. But in the 30s it was very difficult to find a place to show so I think that the artists, instead of having any qualms about exhibiting were very, very happy to exhibit wherever they could and that was the main reason why the American Abstract Artists came into being. There was not any consensus about what abstract art was. There was a majority of people working in what might be called the neo-plastic direction, since then it has been called hard edge painting. There were relatively few people working in abstract or, let me say, expressionist directions at that time.

MS. SECKLER: Now this of course was during the 30s, the heyday of the WPA. -

MR. MCNEIL: Yes.

MS. SECKLER: And were you involved in that at all?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, I was on the mural project beginning about 1935 I guess. I know I lost my job in December of 1934 and I got onto the project around June or July of 1935 and I think I went onto the mural project immediately. Of course, Burgoyne Diller was the supervisor on the mural project and he had many other abstract artists working on it: Stuart Davis, for example, and Balcomb Greene and George Byron Brown and Ilya Bolotowsky - these names come to mind but there were others, Albert Swindon also. Most of these murals were intended for the Williamsburg Housing Project but I don't think they were ever used. My mural was never used. It was rolled up and disappeared during World War II. I left and had subleased my studio and then when I came back it was gone.

MS. SECKLER: You went into the Army, is that right?

MR. MCNEIL: The Navy. I went into the Navy in 1943 and stayed there until 1946. So it might be said that from about 1941 I stopped painting until 1946. I had a drafting job for two years and I went into the Navy and of course didn't do anything until 1946.

MS. SECKLER: Did the wartime experience affect you in any way?

MR. MCNEIL: No, it didn't affect me in any way except that prior to going into the Navy - now how can I say this? At about 1940 I was 32 years old and I had gotten off the project, I quit the project myself and went down to Cuba for the winter, I think of 1940. I needed some kind of a re-adjustment of my life. I was tired of the haphazard way of living that I had been having so I went back to school. I went to Teachers College at Columbia in 1941 sometime and I quickly got my bachelor's degree and then I was in the Navy shortly afterward. I was in Washington stationed in Washington most of the time and I had nothing to do so I went back to school there and started working. And then when I came out of school I went again to Teachers College and got a master's degree and by that time I was - oh, in 1946 I went to the University of Wyoming and I kept taking courses from time to time.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[SIDE TWO]

MS. SECKLER: Continuing the interview with George McNeil - we had broken off at a point at which you were concluding your formal education at Teachers College, I believe.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. Yes. Then I went to the University of Wyoming where I stayed for two years and kept painting all the time, of course. Then I came back to New York City and took a job at Pratt Institute where I was the Director of the Evening Art School. That was a good job for me because my work was primarily in the evening and I was able to paint during the day or most of the day. Now when I came back from Wyoming the art scene in New York City was hopping and things had changed quite radically from the period that I had known in the 30s because now modern and abstract art was definitely on the upsurge and there was a tremendous amount of activity. I might say that I had been mainly an expressionist painter in the 1930s. I say "mainly" because when I was working on the Williamsburg Project for the murals I worked in a kind of neo-plastic direction in the sense of making an architectural form which I felt would go well with the architectural setting. So I worked in straight lines for a period, but other than that my work had been of an expressionistic character. And therefore I found

the art scene in New York very much to my liking when I came back in 1948. I had been back summer in 1946 and '47, I had been around New York, and I think it was in 1947 that I met Pollock for the first time. And there's no question that either his work particularly or the spirit that was in the air influenced me at the time. I began to do free paintings or relatively free paintings or continued the free painting that I had done earlier. And I had my first American one-man show in 1950 at the Egan Gallery. In 1950 I was 42 years old. In other words, I had my first American one-man show when I was 42. Previous to that I had a one-man show in Havana when I was there, as I recall, in 1940. And then I had some one-man shows in the West at schools mostly and colleges. But that was my first New York one-man show. Since that time I had had one-man shows about every two years at the Egan Gallery. I think I had three at the Egan Gallery and then at the Poindexter Gallery and then more recently and up to the present at the Wise Gallery. This more or less deals with the whole range of my background.

MS. SECKLER: One thing we forgot to fill in there just as far as the record is concerned, at some point you must have gotten married?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. I got married in 1936, as I remember, but I had met my wife, Dora Tambler, at Pratt when I was a student there in 1928 I guess it would have been, so we knew each other for a long time. So, as I say, I got married in '36 and then I had a daughter, Helen was born in 1942 and a son James born in 1948.

MS. SECKLER: Well, with that much on vital statistics, now I'd really like to go more intensively into the way you think about painting, I mean, as it relates to your work now or if you would like to retrace it a bit in terms of its developing changes.

MR. MCNEIL: Well, this seems to be a kind of epochal moment to talk about the state of affairs, the state of painting, because for the first time since I was, say, 20 years old I seem to be a little bit unsure of the direction of painting, like what's going to ensue. Not that anybody can really visualize what's going to happen or ever that they should. But from about 1929 or 1930 when I was vitally interested in painting and I knew that that was going to be my career I was sure that abstract art was the art of the future. But what has happened in the last two or three years in relation to Pop art and Op art seems to have not so much changed the situation as it has somehow invalidated the situation. I had the idea that you simply worked and worked to become a better and better painter and that most of the painters were working in the abstract direction not because it was a program, not because they agreed with each other, simply because it was the most vital kind of painting. But what has happened in the last years has been a reversal of what I consider to be significant in art. In other words, it seems to me there's been a reversal in Pop art particularly to realism, to the kind of art that was dominant before the 30s and the 40s. Now this art is jazzed up, it's been made interesting and sensational but I don't think that it does anything that couldn't have been done before 1930 and it seems to me that the great effort, the great American contribution, which began perhaps around 1945 and which was going full swing for 15 years until 1960 seems to be invalidated. Now in fact, of course, you don't invalidate anything that's significant but it's as though the whole art world now is just concerned with something that's new, something that's sensational and something that's programmatic. The interest is probably a commercial one and it shouldn't have any bearing upon a serious painter but in some strange way I feel that it has rocked me. So I don't know what the future holds. I have to continue to do exactly what I've been doing, what I believe in. And, of course, I'm going to. Now my work has changed somewhat over the past ten years. In other words, around 1950 I think it was in the straight category of abstract expressionism but images began to emerge if they were not always there. I guess it could be said that they were always there maybe, but in any case they came into focus after 1955 more and more, and in 1958 surely. So the images became clearer and clearer I guess and now in 1965 they are manifest. In other words, they are figures; they're abstracted in certain ways; there's nothing realistic or highly representational but the imagery is much more clear. In other words, a trend starting in 1955 has simply continued where the figure now is more obvious than it had been. And I expect to continue like this.

MS. SECKLER: I wonder if you could retrace the various stages in the way a painting developed for you - in the stage in which perhaps you could have rejected the figuration and then later when you would have accepted it.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. Yes. Now from Hofmann I got a very pronounced sense of structure, of the organizing of a picture in abstract terms. I think what I got from the American abstract expressionist movement when I came back to New York in '48 was a tendency toward a much freer type of painting, an unbounded kind of energy painting and in this period I worked, as I recall, almost completely improvisationally. I don't think I worked from still-lives. As I recall, I didn't have any reference. I just let the picture grow. And I've continued to do that over the years. But I always had this background, this sense of structure and particularly of working from things. I mentioned still-life because that's so ready but from the figure as - well, I remember being in Paris in 1953, in the summer or 1953, and I drew a great deal at that time. But I had picked up drawing since about 1960, I guess, when various sketch classes started around New York City. But I never made a kind of continuity between the sketching or drawing that I would do from the figure and my painting. I used to make paintings improvisationally and then I would, when I got stuck I would work from a still-life on the same painting. And then these still-lives would be abstracted, they wouldn't have any direct reference to the still-life. I would take some kind of movement of color or movement of form and they would turn into images. Now in the last year or so

there seems to be coming more and more a consolidation of the figure as I work directly from the figure, as I draw from the figure for an evening or paint from the figure for an evening, and then the paintings which I work on improvisationally or again from still-lives - the point is that whether they start improvisationally or whether they start from still-life they wind up as figures and quite representational. Well, I'd say they're recognizable figures, whereas before the image would be "figural" you might say. You have to look for it and some people would never see it; some people still don't see it. Most people do.

MS. SECKLER: I remember I saw them when no one else would agree with me. I didn't know whether that made me rear guard or avant-garde at that point. But at what point - you entertain - when this figure emerges let's say, you see it there?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes.

MS. SECKLER: Then do you ordinarily accept the image as it appears or do you then develop it with some consciousness of it having a character of its own that could be heightened or changed?

MR. MCNEIL: That's a great problem because it's somewhat simple and somewhat of a crutch to seize upon a figure and then begin to work in terms of figural terms rather than in terms of the most heightened plastic expression. I've worked horizontally in the sense that the canvas is flat on the floor. I haven't worked from an easel maybe in ten years and when I say worked from an easel in ten years that might mean I just worked occasionally on an easel, because from 1950 for sure I've been painting on the floor, horizontally. This means that I work from the four sides of the painting, I keep walking around, and hence I develop a complete plastic expression. Now when I see a figure emerge and seize it there's a danger that you can stop this heightened plastic extension and just settle for something which is in its lowest terms, something which is illustrative. There's a fascination when the figure comes out. It's like meeting somebody - a little bit of magic in it perhaps. And that's what I'm trying to do now. I'm trying to get the most heightened psychological expression by means of the human figure, distorted, terribly distorted in most cases, and yet try to make it as plastic as possible, as living as possible. I can't see myself ever changing the painting to make it convincing in terms of realism.

MS. SECKLER: How about convincing in terms of an association with the figure? I mean, does the figure have any kind of association that you can sort of make real? Would you ever say this is a kind of a mean figure, or this is a poetic, or this is an enchanting -

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. - Well, that's given to you. The funny thing is that as these things emerge from chance color relations - in other words, as you are walking around and painting on the canvas from four sides suddenly a figure will emerge. Now this is not completely accidental because it means that my interest in the figure, the drawings I do and my tendency to want some kind of psychological expression brings out the figure. In other words, I induce it, you might say. But when it comes, whatever it is, it's there. And I think the figures tend to be more poetic, they don't come out too ominous. Sometimes they do but not in any pronounced way.

MS. SECKLER: Are they ever humorous?

MR. MCNEIL: Humorous? Yes. Yes. They are, yes. But that I don't intend. And that's very nice also.

MS. SECKLER: But they're humorous in a way that is sort of ambiguous too, so it isn't just humorous. It's humorous plus something else.

MR. MCNEIL: Well, there I am very concerned with what I think, to use a fancy term, is the existential condition of man. I wish I could use the subject matter of human experience to a much greater degree, although I don't have any program of using the figure, I'm even against it. Some people talk about the figure as though it's a kind of refuge or resource. I'm against it in that sense. But I think I feel a little bit happier about establishing some connection; perhaps there's some connection to our time. And if the figures do come out sometimes in a horrendous way then that's just because - it isn't just because of - but I can rationalize and say well, I'm interested in that perhaps because that's the kind of society that we live in. But I couldn't explain why, if they're humorous, why they're humorous. Maybe they're ironical, I don't know. But sometimes they come out in a lyrical way. There's a painting here and I don't think most people would see the figure to begin with. This is about five years old and the painting as a whole, I think, is a lyrical painting: it's a pleasant painting. But the difference is that the trend here is simply more marked. Do you see the figure?

MS. SECKLER: No, in this one I don't, George. I usually see them immediately but in this one I don't.

MR. MCNEIL: See, there's a head -

MS. SECKLER: Oh, yes, now I see it, yes.

MR. MCNEIL: - and there are two arms and there's a leg here and so on.

MS. SECKLER: Yes. What threw me off was seeing the sort of mask-like thing there for a moment. But would you ever, seeing the figure, would you work into it - I suppose there's always a way of making it come out plastically in keeping the image? Is that so? Or would you feel sometimes that you're divided between the plastic solution and the painterly solution?

MR. MCNEIL: I think that there's a strong danger of getting seduced by images. And there's so much in the history of art that is in our minds in terms of these images. So I think there's a possibility that you can settle for something easy in making images. Let me say that this year I feel as though the whole foundation of art values has been rocked. I have a personal sense of uncertainty this year, too, because I am moving from energy to imagery and in the past I've been much more concerned with energy, with this as free an evocation as possible, and now I am simply fascinated with the possibility of an imagistic expression. In other words, of a psychological as well as a purely plastic expression. Before, I tried to get as much sensation as possible from pure color and form relations. Now it seems to me that if these relations in addition have some kind of a human overtone or human significance or human connotation the work of art simply gets that much more power. But there's a danger, as I say, of developing imagistic stereotypes, you know, figures as figures and I think that has to be contended with all the time.

MS. SECKLER: I have neglected to bring up the possible influences on your thinking by the group in The Club, too, the Eighth Street Club.

MR. MCNEIL: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. SECKLER: I assume that you were involved in that?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, I guess I was in The Club almost from the very beginning. I think there was some antecedent organization around 1949, even maybe 1948, I'm not sure, but I think around 1950 I was involved with The Club, going to all the meetings that they had. That was important because I got to know artists who were emerging, people like Kline whom I hadn't known before. In other words, there was a whole group of artists whom I had known before World War II, like de Kooning and Brooks and Lassaw, and then there were others emerging after World War II, around 1945, '46. So I met Kline and Tworkov and others for the first time and in the sense of the social situations as well as an art situation it was extremely exciting. These were marvelous years from 1950, I would say, until 1955 before the artists became really successful, really famous and successful. There was a real knockdown, drag-out situation as far as art and ideas were concerned. I think after that some of these men became self conscious and anyway the whole scene changed after 1955.

MS. SECKLER: I was wondering what ideas that were discussed. Of course, you had this energy quality which was a very important thing in the work of most of the people you were speaking of, and I understand that there - I was there for some of the meetings - there was partly a strong feeling that it was necessary to vanquish surrealism. On the other hand the idea of the unconscious was very deeply -

MR. MCNEIL: No, I don't think there was any kind of program in the sense that The Club stood for anything. I think the talk about surrealism is largely one which Pavia is concerned with, and why he is I don't know. I have read or have heard from some of the artists that surrealism was a great influence around 1939, 1940, just before World War II but I can only say that it certainly wasn't with the people I mentioned before, those who were close to the American Abstract Artists. I don't think surrealism had any influence whatsoever and I think this should be spelled out simply because it is in the literature that it was an influence. I think perhaps men like Motherwell or Baziotes may have been influenced by it. You can see it in the work of Pollock also but these were very young men at this time, around 1938, 1940, and I don't think that surrealism had any significant influence except on a very small number of artists. Oh, it did influence Gorky now as I think about it. It's in his work. But he had many influences in his work. There was a show of American abstract art at the Museum of Modern Art some time around 1950 or '51, I don't remember exactly, but if you were to review that show I don't think you would find that surrealism had any strong influence.

MS. SECKLER: Well, if you take this energy thing, this sense of the brush that is a fervent brush, let's say, not a careful brush, doesn't that assume an awareness of the unconscious as the source of whatever is significant in - ?

MR. MCNEIL: Well, I don't think anybody talked about it in such fancy terms. Pollock had shown the way to make an unstructured painting. Almost all of abstract art in the 1930s was structured. Take the work of Stuart Davis, for example - this is clearly shown. When we met in 1950, let us say, some people might have talked about the unconscious but I don't recall anyone talking about it seriously. I think that would have marked you as a kind of naïve person. You might have talked about feeling but I don't even remember anyone talking about feeling. By 1950 de Kooning was doing very free painting. Pollock had sort of set the stage for the use of liquid paint, using sticks and so forth, and pouring the paint. By 1950 de Kooning was working very freely. Kline started to make his big paintings in 1950. So the idea of a large, massive statement which was made spontaneously was seen, was

evident. It could be seen in the work of these men like Kline and de Kooning. And so we just went ahead. And, by the way, Hofmann's style was changing in these years also and he too seemed to be doing much freer painting. Perhaps he was alternating the free painting with more structured work. But in any case, I don't think there was any kind of programmatic statement agreement. For example, Reinhardt used to be at these meetings at The Club and he was always a very structured painter, you would say a hard edge painter today. I think he was always against this expressionistic art. So the great trend at the time was toward free painting but just because it was so exciting. I don't think anybody was conscious or self-conscious about it. I can't remember a single statement or a single conversation where anybody talked about unconscious activity. I mean, intuition has always worked with artists as a kind of unpremeditated way of working. Everybody who works by feeling works in terms of intuition. So this was a kind of massive intuition. That was all.

MS. SECKLER: Well, that's very interesting, what you said, and it's a fresh approach in terms of the same material being covered by other people. It brings in new aspects that are very valuable I think, particularly around that area which people are going back to with a certain axe to grind in some way or another.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, I suppose so.

MS. SECKLER: It's good to have, I mean at least it seems so in some areas. We've almost finished with this tape ...

[END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE]

[TAPE 2]

MS. SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing George McNeil on June 3, 1965. We had previously discussed some of the elements that entered into the fresh expression of the abstract expressionists as their work was developing in the late 40s and early 50s.

MR. MCNEIL: It seems to me that Pollock plays the principal role here and I've often thought about his contribution. I remember speaking, I think, to Reinhardt at some time around 1943 before I went into the Navy, or maybe even after I was in the Navy when, as I recall, he said that there was a good exhibition on of this man named Pollock. I was irritated because I thought I knew everybody who was doing important abstract work and I just thought that if there was a good painter I would know him. Now I think it's true that from the very beginning Pollock made a mark. In other words, from about 1943 I'm not quite sure about the sequence of paintings, the *She Wolf* may be somewhat later, like 1945, but he brought a kind of directness to painting which hadn't existed previously. If you study his background I think there are explanations for this. I think Pollock himself was a very physical man, a man of great physical strength and of great energy, I think not an intellectual, not somebody who thought theoretically about art problems but someone who just went ahead and worked. Then his background, his painting background had certain directions, you might say, or had certain experiences which now thinking backward might explain his contribution. For example, he worked with Benton who was concerned with large paintings, mural paintings actually, and I'm not sure if Benton used any of these commercial art materials - in other words, liquid paint. But then Pollock was influenced by the Mexican School. The symbolic element comes from the Mexican painting and that's in the painting until at least 1945 or so. But clearly men like Siqueiros were interested in enamels and liquid paint so he probably got that from these painters. In any case, he did it and he didn't do it from the background of structure which had been so pronounced in the 1930s, let's say, in the movements of people connected with the American Abstract Artists. In almost all cases this work was structured and I think tended to lead to a cul-de-sac. I see now that there's a revival of hard edge painting and this intrigues me in a way because I had come to the conclusion that Pollock's abstract expressionism had somehow finished off this 1930 hard edge painting, which was really academic abstraction. Now when this hard edge painting comes back it comes back, I guess, with an accent on luminosity, an accent on very large paintings and this does add a new contribution which was lacking in the 30s. But in any case, Pollock did it and when you think of the type of painting that Pollock made it was revolutionary, nothing like this had ever been done and the fact is that in the years after the Americans did make this revolutionary contribution. I think all of us are aware of the fact not because it was a program, not because we were against it. We are just aware of it because it is obvious that the French tradition - the kind of living room painting, what they called the cabinet painting, the small painting, the contained painting, the intimate painting, is something that Pollock knocked out of existence.

MS. SECKLER: But really has it come back with either Pop or Op? I mean, don't they incorporate some elements of the Pollock example in their scale or in the sense of dynamism?

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. I think Pollock's paintings now look quite calm and contained to us because we've gotten used to them, but when they were first made they were pretty raw and pretty unusual. The Pop artists do that, but it seems to me that that is just a kind of exploitive technique. They almost can't help but do it because they're products of Pollock, let's say, in much the same way that I'm a product of Picasso, it's just part of my

background. But I don't think that they are doing it with the same - what you might call - I want to use a strange word now, I want to say epochal justification, artistically epochal justification. I remember we had a discussion, you and I, about Pop art and after we had finished it I thought of something that I had wanted to say or could have said and that is that it's true that abstract expressionism was rejected when it was first exhibited. In other words, in the years from 1945 until 1950 it was a kind of unaccepted or unconventional type of painting, and therefore when Pop art comes along and is then rejected by the abstract expressionists it would seem as though history was simply repeating itself. But I think the big contribution of the abstract expressionists was what they did in plastic terms, in terms of freedom, in terms of energy, in terms of the artistic statement, and the great liability of Pop art to me seems to be its dependence upon literature, upon illustration. Almost all these paintings have to be explained. They all seem to have a kind of gambit. They all have a story, like you can talk about program music. They all have to have some kind of - they don't have to have it but they seem to function better in terms of some explanation as to why the picture was made or as to what the picture actually does. This is a kind of talking painting, or illustration painting, or reading a painting - it seems to me that their paintings have to be read. Now the great contribution of the abstract expressionists was that they really made a pure painting, as pure in another way as Mondrian's painting was pure. In other words, the painting stood absolutely on its own merits and on its own terms.

MS. SECKLER: But there's no one surely whose painting has been more - has lent itself more, let us say, to mythicizing and legendizing and so forth than paintings like those of Rothko. You might say that you can look at it and see simply shapes, but everyone was building legends about what it meant - infinity and the cosmic, you know.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes, but if you take a Rothko and then put it alongside a Pop art painting I wouldn't even know whose painting would be most representative. The Pop art literally has representational elements in the painting. It might be a kitchen sink or it might be a refrigerator or whatever, but there it is in some kind of a strange context and very crude. But there it is. Now I don't know how anyone can in that sense say that the one is not completely literary and it seems to me the other is pretty much as abstract as a painting can be.

MS. SECKLER: Let's talk a minute about the artists you admire now and have admired earlier.

MR. MCNEIL: Well, as I've gotten older I seem to have eliminated many of the artists, in fact practically all. What I'm trying to say is that I guess I was bulldozed by some art history concept, some museum concept that there were masters and you simply were supposed to admire these masters. Raphael was a great master and you're supposed to admire him and if you don't admire him it means that you're a kind of ignoramus. But at some point within the last ten years I suddenly reached a conclusion that I'm only interested in maybe 50 works of art. I'm only interested in maybe 15 painters and if 50 works of art is too small I really can say that perhaps at the Metropolitan Museum there are only 15 or 20 paintings that I would really feel justified in going to see. For example, Rembrandt, but not all the Rembrandts, maybe some of them have been retouched. For example, this new acquisition, the - what is it? - *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* I think? I can take that or leave it. The great *Self Portrait* at the Frick is magnificent. In other words, a great Rembrandt is simply overwhelming in its kind of spiritual significance and majestic - I just can't find the words to express the depth of feeling that I have for these paintings. Michelangelo, Grunewald, Goya, but only some Goyas; Vermeer, and strangely enough, some Ingres paintings. On the other hand practically all the Delacroixs I can just turn my back on completely. There are passages in the Delacroix paintings which are magnificent - some nudes that he painted - but it's as though I could take two percent of his whole production and say these are fine, the others I am just not interested in. The same with Courbet. Very few paintings of Courbet interest me. In fact, some of them I find very repellent. I've just developed this attitude in the last years. Impressionism I don't care much about one way or the other. It seems to me to be a very two-dimensional art, very important in terms of what it did for the later artists. I think it's wonderful to go to the room of Impressionism at the Metropolitan. The light that is created by the painting is marvelous. But let me exclude Renoir from these. Renoir I do find to be a magnificent painter. On the other hand, Seurat leaves me cold almost completely. Now the great, great, great master and for me almost the only great painter I really feel tied to all the time is Cezanne. It's almost as though there's nothing of Cezanne that I can't find some kind of satisfaction not in viewing but in a complete response. Now when you come to the art made since 1900 I think that we are in for a period of re-evaluation. I think I wrote this a few years ago, I'm not quite sure, but I think that most of the art made since 1920 is going to turn out to have been of a negative character; in other words, most Picasso and most Braque; I think Miro had a fine period in the 1930s but I think that in the period after 1940 the work has become childlike, almost; I think that Leger is a very much overrated artist. Now speaking positively, the artists I find very meaningful would be Bonnard, Matisse, Soutine and Mondrian. They're quite different so it must be that I find some kind of a common spirit. But what I do feel and what I know I wrote about then I reviewed a book on Cubism about, oh, I think it was five years ago, I'm not sure, is the spirit of sensationalism which is rampant in contemporary art. The fact that Pop art had perhaps a two year span, assuming at this stage that it's on the way out, which I am told and read about all the time, and Op art now I'm told is finished after one season, these indicate that the life of styles is going to be more and more short lived and one can only think, at the risk of being conservative, that it's a kind of anarchy. Let me say it this way, that whatever new style does emerge is going to be on the basis of some kind of a new

sensation, it's going to be some kind of a new kick, you might say. And this I think was started long ago and I wrote this in the book report on Cubism. It was started long ago by the Cubists when they started to play around with fixing textures, real textures to the surfaces of painting. Then it became rampant, you might say, with the work of men like Duchamp-Villon and the *Nude Descending the Staircase*. What I'm trying to say is that there has been a kind of intellectualization, an intellectualization which is always concerned with effects and when you say this you define a kind of mannerism. I see this in cubism, I see it in most of the work of Picasso. I think Picasso painted some fine paintings in the 1930s, but a painting like *Guernica* to me is not a great painting at all; it's a contrived painting. I think that most of the work of Picasso is going to turn out to have been a series of contrivances. Now why this isn't obvious and why it isn't critically reported on I think is because we all have so much respect for the man as a kind of artistic figure. I think he is that. He's probably a great sculptor and he's probably a great graphic artist but I don't think he's any kind of a painter at all. Now these other men - Matisse I think of in some kind of a divine way, and Bonnard is a kind of a past master. Bonnard sort of reported a pre-World War I world, kind of a delicious world, and he just kept right on into the 1940s, into the period of the atom bomb. But that's something of the past. Soutine, I think, was strange and in his own way a wonderful artist who should have lived on. Mondrian is a completely strange painter and an enigma. What I want in art very much is a kind of organic life, a living quality where the work of art sort of simulates life or is analogous to life. And when we think of energy this is simply another way of saying that the work of art should come to life. It can't come to life, it's made of inert materials. But it can seem to come to life. Now nothing is less life-like than straight lines and that's what Mondrian dealt with. Yet he did it magnificently. I find in some of the hard edge painters today that there's a kind of radiance in their work, a luminosity which appeals to me. It's not organic, it's not lifelike, it may just be because of the thrill from the large expanses of color, I don't know. But I find very little meaning in contemporary art, very little significance, almost none at all. In fact, to me, the great artist of the period is Giacometti. If I can say one other thing which I think might be strange - and that is that there's very little really abstract art that we can look upon and say is great art. I don't want to say that this means that abstract art was a dead end, I don't mean that at all. But in some absolutely enigmatic way if you are going to point out certain artists, abstract artists, and say now this is a great art, you could do it with Mondrian, I think you could do it with Franz Kline, but I think with very, very few other painters. I think the best work of de Kooning was the work that was done until 1953, the figure series, and that of course, was not abstract painting.

MS. SECKLER: We did leave out of your list of masters, Manet. I know he means a great deal to you -

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. Yes, well, see this is something which is a kind of haunting, oh I don't know how to express it, it's kind of a weight, haunting weight maybe, psychological weight, this thing of gift that Manet could take an artichoke and lay it down on a napkin and paint it and produce something magnificent of absolutely commonplace subject matter. And this to me is what is so important in terms of art. To take something which is meaningless in itself and to create something meaningful. Cezanne did this more than anybody else with his still-life paintings. In fact, I think almost everything that Cezanne did was a kind of still-life brought to life. But the Manet figure of *Olympia* is just great, great, great painting; just look at this thing and you can't look at it enough; it's magnificent. I can't say that about the *Desjeuner sur l'Herbe*, I can't say that about all the Manet paintings, but he just had this absolutely divine gift for painting. When I say that I'm a little bit rocked by the contemporary art situation - it seems that there's almost nothing as old fashioned today as what used to be known as good painting. That's just like saying that you're a man of the 19th century or something like that.

MS. SECKLER: Well, I think we'll have to depend on George McNeil to somehow keep producing paintings that will be here when the sides have cooled down a bit, to remind us that there is a mainstream and that it goes underground a bit at times but that there is something of some significance that can be recovered without necessarily being bothered too much by the fact that younger generations come along and insistently take their own heads and directions, upset our apple carts and so on.

MR. MCNEIL: Yes. Well, that's their role. That's their role, and I think it's great and actually there's even a certain virtue in Pop art in its crudeness. I think that's attractive. That's very attractive to me, crudeness is attractive to me, so in that sense they did something. But I don't like the aesthetic, I don't like the general attitude which either produced it or which feature it as serious art. However, I'm going to try as much as I can not to assume the role that my teachers assumed when I was in art school. In other words, when I was interested in Cezanne and was putting planes into a human figure, they pointed their fingers at me and said, "You can't deny tradition, you can't deny the masters." And it seems to me that I was saying something of the same thing and I'm using more recent masters like Cezanne, so it may really be that this is a kind of historical process - that the young always have to aggravate the old by upsetting their values. That may be. I don't think so, I really don't think so. I think without being patronizing that any art student who thinks in terms of "kicks," who thinks in terms of producing something which has not been produced before is in for some kind of a bad situation. Whatever an artist has to do he has to develop some kind of a personal core, a very responsible core which is entirely his own, which has nothing to do with that which is current at any time in the art world, has nothing to do with dealers or customers or museum people. He has to deal with something which is central to his own belief, his own honesty. And if these young painters are thinking in terms of success then I just wonder what they'll do if they ever do come up against any kind of a crisis, simply stated, like a complete change in painting styles. For

example, if someone is trained, or someone is interested in getting on the Op bandwagon what will they turn to when this ceases to be of current interest? Will they jump around on the next bandwagon that's coming along and when that passes will they jump on the next one? This is hardly any kind of a future for a young painter to look forward to.

MS. SECKLER: Well, we're in a state of just having a very raw patronage for the arts and backing for the arts. Maybe they'll have to get educated along with the young people.

MR. MCNEIL: I don't know what to think about this but I think mainly the interest in Pop art has been a kind of conspicuous consumption interest. In the past the rich, the nouveau riche particularly, bought old masters and I think this certainly has something to do with the present situation. I don't think the very rich today have great country homes or town houses but it may be that to have the very latest thing in art corresponds exactly to that.

MS. SECKLER: They're a very small group actually. I was told by someone in the know that there are about 18 in the whole country who buy it. Now that's not a large number. Probably the really rich, I mean the great fortunes are not involved -

MR. MCNEIL: That's right.

MS. SECKLER: - in buying anything except maybe Rembrandts or whatever they can get in the way of old masters.

MR. MCNEIL: Maybe. Yes. -

MS. SECKLER: So in other words this is really the new rich who seem to need conversation pieces above all. But in any case they'll have to go through some sort of process of maybe looking and living with their collection and get to a new stage of thoughtfulness toward what they acquire. But it shouldn't be allowed to have a destructive effect, one hopes, on artists who have been serious.

MR. MCNEIL: No, it can't, it can't; but it can be demoralizing. In other words, there are certain influences in life which are integrative and there are others which are disintegrative.

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[SIDE TWO]

MS. SECKLER: We were speaking about the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum. What is it called? - "American Art - ?"

MR. MCNEIL: "Three Hundred Years - ?" or something like that.

MS. SECKLER: "Three Hundred Years of American Art" and you sound heartening in some way.

MR. MCNEIL: Well, we were talking about how the contemporary art scene is so upsetting in terms of values or what you thought were art values, but seeing the exhibition at the Metropolitan is reinforcing in a completely non-artistic way and that is that so many of the figures who in the 1920s and 1930s were considered to be the most important painters and who won all the prizes, men like Speicher, have no validity at all today. The work is almost - well, not ridiculous maybe but almost unreal, almost as though you were looking at archives of one kind or another written on paper. In other words, whatever modern art had to do in terms of life, and however the movement toward modern art has come to a cul-de-sac critically at the present time or in the absence of criticism at the present time, the exhibit at the Museum I think shows clearly that it was the correct one and almost the only one. Now it's perfectly clear that as I say this I talk in terms of my own interest, my own vested interest, you might say, but nevertheless, I came away with a feeling that just in terms of the painting the whole trend of modern art and abstraction has been a valid one. I think it is equally true in terms of the academic abstract art of the 1920s - the art of Demuth and O'Keeffe and Sheeler and people of this stamp. It's very nice work, it's very careful work but when you say that it's just damning with faint praise. Now I think that there is some particularly American characteristic involved in this 1920s work and here I will make a dig at hard edge art. I think when anything is done neatly and very carefully it commands respect. How long this respect will last - in other words, I think society is happy with neat, carefully made things and I think that that includes paintings. I think that museum directors and critics feel slightly reassured when they see this kind of work and it comes out in the painting of Sheeler and these people that it's extremely dated, terribly, terribly dated. When you move into the room at the Metropolitan, the room which has been there some time, the room with the de Kooning and the Gorky and the Hofmann and the Kline and the others, the many paintings that you have qualifications about because they may not be the best work of the particular artist, but nevertheless I think there's a vitality and a life in these paintings that is not shown in any of the other - well, clearly it is not shown in any of the other American painting. Perhaps what I'm saying is that there really was a revolution in modern art about 1945 and it

took place here in New York, and I think it was an epochal revolution in the sense that the late work of Cezanne pointed the way toward which abstract art should have developed, in other words a free kind of painting. I think Kandinsky had this in the early years before 1910. I think the Fauvists had it. And now to come back to what I said about the Cubists, I think in some absolutely weird and uncalculated way they will be considered later on as reactive. I think they will be considered to have turned back the development of painting. I think they academicized painting in terms of the rigidity of structure and particularly in terms of this objectivity because when you think of it Picasso really has not painted any abstract paintings. They are always figurative, they are always variations on some kind of figuration. Now there's no virtue in being abstract, God knows that's true, but I think the movement toward energy and the movement toward life and the movement toward a kind of massive statement transcending objectivity was started by Cezanne, was picked up by the Fauvists and by Kandinsky. Then I think it was simply stopped by cubism and I don't think it was until about 1945 that it again emerged in abstract expressionism. Now this to me is centered around energy and I think now we're in a period where some kind of illusionism in terms of Pop art or some kind of a feat in terms of Op art has seemingly negated this trend.

MS. SECKLER: George, wouldn't you consider that Op art was concerned very much with Dynamism which has a quality of being perhaps an equivalent to the energy that was introduced by abstract expressionism?

MR. MCNEIL: No, I don't think so at all because I do think that energy calls for a kind of non-calculated approach to painting, to the creation of unknowns through plastic means, to an evocative process which depends overwhelmingly on feeling and more particularly upon intuition and I just don't feel this with this Op art. I think they do contribute something, there's an experience there and in the simpler paintings I think this is more clearly given. In other words, there was one room at the Museum of Modern art "Responsive Eye Exhibition," the first room that you came to, and there they had the paintings of Ellsworth Kelly and the paintings of the Baltimore man ...

MS. SECKLER: Noland, oh yes. Washington.

MR. MCNEIL: Noland's paintings just simply in their size and in terms of luminosity had a certain kind of color energy, they had a color impact in any case which I think I've never seen before. Never! Not in Matisse, not in anybody. So that was impressive.

MS. SECKLER: Wouldn't you think that Ellsworth Kelly could hardly have existed had it not been for abstract expressionism in spite of the fact that the edge is hard?

MR. MCNEIL: No. No. No, I don't think so at all.

MS. SECKLER: You don't think the scale of those color slabs came from abstract expressionism?

MR. MCNEIL: No, I think scale is important if you want to talk about scale - but scale has always existed. Rubens had scale. Michelangelo had scale. That always existed and it's perfectly true that a larger painting will be more sensate than a small one. In other words, Kelly's paintings five by seven inches are not the same as five by seven feet.

MS. SECKLER: No.

MR. MCNEIL: And that's true and it's part of our experience and it can't be denied. But I think the whole trend toward this kind of art, toward the responsive eye or Op - by they way, I don't consider that Kelly and Noland are Op art at all - that kind of hard edge, simple, formed painting I think is the opposite of abstract expressionism. There are certain correspondences but conceptually I think they are the opposite; in other words, one will go more and more in the direction of finiteness and completeness and the other one will go in the direction of unknowns trying always to pull something out of experience which has no right to be pulled out.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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