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Oral history interview with Willem De Looper, 1992 January 26-February 29

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

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Willem de Looper on January 26 and February 29, 1992. The interview took place in Washington, D.C, and was conducted by Benjamin Forgey for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Willem de Lopper has reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

BENJAMIN FORGEY: Okay, we're in the – what's today's date, Willem?

WILLEM DE LOOPER: I think it's the –

MR. FORGEY: 26th or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Of January. Super Bowl day.

MR. FORGEY: Super Bowl day.

MR. DE LOOPER: 1992.

MR. FORGEY: We're in de Looper's studio in the St. Regis Apartment on California Street in Washington, DC.

Willem, how long have you been here in the St. Regis?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, we've been in this building almost 25 years – I think 24. This has been my first big studio. When I had one before, it was a little place.

MR. FORGEY: I'm jumping ahead actually. Let's start at the beginning –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, all right.

MR. FORGEY: Let's go back up.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: Where were you born and what date?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I was born in the Netherlands in October '32 – October 30, 1932. I came to this country in October of 1950, so I've been here what? Well, 41 years now. I guess you want me to talk a little bit about how I lived in Holland and –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, describe – like describe – yeah, because we want –

MR. DE LOOPER: Having been born in the Netherlands in '32 means that I was a young boy when the Second World War started. I guess I was six years old in 1940 when, you know, Holland was invaded by the Germans. And so I spent my early years in Holland during the war, which meant a rather restricted way of living obviously. And after the war I went to high school. I went to several high schools, because during the war we moved a lot.

MR. FORGEY: All within The Hague?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, all within The Hague, yes. I lived in The Hague. I was born there. And –

MR. FORGEY: Describe your house.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay.

MR. FORGEY: I mean, did you live in the same place for the first few years of your life or were you always –

MR. DE LOOPER: No. Interestingly enough, no. I was born in a section of The Hague that I don't even really remember anymore. I have an older brother and an older sister. My sister is 7 years older than I, and my brother is 11 years older.

MR. FORGEY: What is your sister's name?

MR. DE LOOPER: Her name is Annika. And my brother is Hans. And they now both live in Switzerland, and they're retired. The reason I mention this is that, to a large extent, my brother and sister, being so much older than I was or were, brought me up, you see, for a great many years, and my brother, in fact, played a very important role in my life in that he was almost like a substitute father. That had to do both with the war and with the years right after that, because he caused me, in fact, to come to the United States. He gave me the opportunity to come to the United States.

MR. FORGEY: Describe your family, I mean your parents.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, right, okay. My father was a banker. We lived, in fact, during the years that I'm conscious – from about six years old when the war started – we lived in what you might describe as the northwest section of The Hague, and we lived upstairs from a small bank of which my father was director. And he had a co-director who did not live in the house obviously, but I lived there with my mother and my brother and sister. And this was very unusual in the sense that we were occupied by the Germans and the whole city was occupied. And we lived, in fact, in a section of the city that was where the Germans had their headquarters. So you had to have a visa to go in and out of the section, which obviously didn't have much to do with me because I was so young, but certainly my parents and my brother and sister if they had to go to another part of the city or something like this. I don't think there was any question of traveling to other parts of the country, although I don't remember that so particularly. But we lived there surrounded, in other words, by German troops, which is kind of interesting. Certainly as a kid I both hated that but I mostly loved it to be quite frank, because, you know, soldiers are very interesting to young boys, and there was a lot of activity always with troops marching and tanks and all that sort of thing. That goes along with having lots of military people there.

MR. FORGEY: The Hague wasn't destroyed in any way, was it? It was –

MR. DE LOOPER: It was destroyed at one point when, interestingly enough – we had a fairly severe bombardment, but, interestingly enough, it was by the British and it was done by mistake. It was one of those things –

MR. FORGEY: Was this during the –

MR. DE LOOPER: This was during the early years of the war. They had – the Germans had bombed Rotterdam very severely, and Holland being so small, you could, in fact, in The Hague see the clouds of smoke. You see, it was one of those kinds of things. The Hague itself was not bombed, except later on in the war in that there were some – I think they were B-2s or B-1s. I always forget. The ones that look like rockets that now go, you know, to the moon and things. They would be sent up by the Germans, and they were meant to go to England and often they would sort of fall back into the territories where they got started. So there were some fairly severe things like that that happened in The Hague. But on the whole it was not a real strife-storn city.

MR. FORGEY: You were, at that point then, during – while The Hague was occupied, you were going to going to school every day?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, right. I mean –

MR. FORGEY: Pretty normal.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, it was fairly normal. I think early on I went to the Montessori school, and I still have a picture of myself, strangely enough, which I guess the school took at that time, and I'm drawing in fact. I must have been five or six years old. And in the Montessori school you draw with these geometric sort of shapes, so it wasn't freehand drawing or anything like that, but it's kind of fun to look at now.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah?

MR. DE LOOPER: And, yes, that was fairly normal. And then my sister would take me to grade school, and it was one of those grade schools where they also had an upper – like a junior high, and she was going to that, so she would bring me and bring me back every day. So I think that was all fairly normal, and it was all done by walking the way I remember it. And – because it was not until I was a teenager or so that I had a bicycle. And, of course, Dutch people are pretty good with bicycles, as you know. So that was pretty normal. It came less normal as the war went on, because eventually we had to move, and I don't know exactly what year that was, but even out of that sort of protected section. And the reason, of course, that we were allowed to live was that we – because of my father's bank – we did business also with, you know, the Germans that were there and everybody else. So it was kind of an essential service that they –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – felt should be there, that should be allowed to be there, you see? But, yes, life was fairly normal for all of us. Towards the end it became a little hairy in the sense that obviously everything dried up, including food and so forth and we started feeling that quite a lot. And during the last year we had very severe hunger in the Netherlands. And we suffered –

MR. FORGEY: The winter of ’44-’45 –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And we suffered from that ourselves. The only other thing that we had was – of course that – and that involved my brother actually. My brother was of student age, you see? Of college student age. And so he, like so many other people in Holland, was, in fact, taken to Germany to do forced labor in a factory.

MR. FORGEY: I see.

MR. DE LOOPER: And this – I certainly observed all of that, because these people were all gathered up in public places, and then they were, in fact, marched, you know, down the avenue where we lived. And so he went to Berlin, and he worked in a factory of some sort. I’ve forgotten what exactly. Oh, he had something to do with making machinery or something like that. And in his particular case he became extremely ill. He had diphtheria, and so as a result of that he became – he almost died, and he became totally paralyzed.

MR. FORGEY: While he was in Germany?

MR. DE LOOPER: While he was in Germany. And interestingly enough – and, of course, all of this is a little bit vague to me because I was so young, but the Germans gave my parents permission to go to Berlin, and this was during the years that Berlin was being heavily bombed every day for instance. I know that. They went by train, and they were extremely courteous and all that, and they actually brought him back on a stretcher. He was – and that I do sort of remember. I mean, it’s true that my brother and sister sometimes remind me of this also, but I have an imprint on my mind of that – of we all went to the station then to welcome him back.

MR. FORGEY: Right. Well, you would have been about 13 at that –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And we were, you know, extremely shocked. We were more shocked. We didn’t know what to expect, you see? And he was in such bad shape that he couldn’t even talk, because even his tongue was paralyzed. So we did have that, and we did have occasionally some German troops that held what they called “Ratzias” [raids], which meant that they went, you know, on house-to-house searches and things like this. And they came into our house several times too. What they were basically doing was looking for, you know, young men or, in some cases, also for illegal things like having a radio or something, which you weren’t allowed to have. And so that’s really the way the war went in a sense. And so it did certainly affect me, but it affected me a little bit at a distance.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: I mean, it was horrible to see my brother suffer the way he did.

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: Fortunately, he was allowed – you know, he got help and all that. He turned out – he was better in a few years, miraculously. And that was a big deal obviously.

MR. FORGEY: Really.

MR. DE LOOPER: And –

MR. FORGEY: Tell me a little bit about your parents, your mother and father.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, my mother –

MR. FORGEY: Were they both – they were both Dutch?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes. Oh, sure, yes. My mother, whose maiden name is Huizinga, which –

MR. FORGEY: How do you spell that?

MR. DE LOOPER: Huizinga. H-U-I-Z-I-N-G-A. Well, you may have heard there’s a famous historian [Johan Huizinga (1872-1945)].

MR. FORGEY: Historian, of course.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. Well, it's really that family, you see? And they come from the very north of the Netherlands called Groningen. It's a province. I've never been there, but my mother used to talk about Groningen. And, in fact, it's very close to the north of Germany, like Hamburg and where my wife now comes from, you see? And she early on went to Rotterdam and worked as a government something or other in an office, and I remember that she did a lot of swimming early in life and that sort of thing. But basically my mother was a housewife in the old-fashioned way. My father was a young bank clerk at the bank, which was very much larger than the little thing that we had on the avenue in The Hague where I grew up, and he worked there for many years. And he was – the way that looks, he was more or less picked to set up that bank and start it with a colleague in that section of The Hague where I then grew up. So we were, if you want to put it that way, white collar, you know, but to some extent self-made. Certainly my father advanced himself to that position, which was a nice position to have. And, of course, being in a very prominent part of The Hague as well, it brought us all in contact with, you know, more interesting people than it might have been.

MR. FORGEY: When you emphasized before the northwest section of The Hague, is that –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, well –

MR. FORGEY: How do you characterize that?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, all I mean by that is more upper class.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You'd see people with sometimes fairly large homes and that sort of thing, professional people. And I think that possibly in the area that I was born in The Hague it wasn't quite as upper-class, although it was certainly, you know, very decently middle-class. And it was not lower class or anything like that. But, you see, that was really the best section of town. That's more or less what I meant by that. Certainly the way we talk about that nowadays, especially in America, we also use it as a kind of a codeword for racial things, and it obviously had nothing to do with it whatsoever. Everybody was Dutch, and everybody was white, and, you know, that sort of thing.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But it was just, as I say, professionals –

MR. FORGEY: When did your parents – how long did your parents live?

MR. DE LOOPER: They lived fairly long. My mother died when she was about 75, and my father, interestingly enough –

MR. FORGEY: When was that about?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, that's a good question. That's about 20 years ago [ca. 1972]. And my father, interestingly enough, because he had – after he retired he had some physical problems and we never thought that he would, you know, become very old, but he became 88 years old.

MR. FORGEY: I see.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, in fact, the first time that he ever came to the United States was in 1980 when I was in this *Golden Door* exhibition at the Hirshhorn Museum [*The Golden Door: Artist-Immigrants of America*, 1876-1976].

MR. FORGEY: Right, I remember that.

MR. DE LOOPER: Where he proudly stood next to my painting and a picture from my passport and the visa card which they had reproduced and said, "That's my son." [Laughter.] He met Joe Hirshhorn, and, oh, that was a great kick for him.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: He loved it. And my mother, in fact, came here much earlier. She was here in the early '50s because she was closer to my brother.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Because, quite frankly, what happened is that my parents, right after the war, split up.

MR. FORGEY: I see.

MR. DE LOOPER: They never officially were divorced, because that was one of those things that still happened then. You know, when people got very angry at each other, but they would – one of them would refuse – in my case my mother – to give the other a divorce because there was another woman involved and that sort of thing. And there were some pretty hard times, which also certainly affected me. I felt very often then as a young teenager as a football a little bit, you know, because I was caught in between.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I had to go visit my father with the woman that he was living with at the time for instance, and there were some sons that she had, whom I got along with fine. They were very nice. And I liked her actually also. But it was extremely uncomfortable because my mother was so deeply hurt by this whole thing, and as a result also, as I pointed out earlier a little bit, you see, it also thrust my brother into a situation where my father had, in fact, sort of abandoned us, you see, to a large extent. I mean financially –

MR. FORGEY: You and your mother and your sister and brother were living together –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, yes. No, we were. Well, okay, that's yes and no. My brother studied economics, and so he studied in Rotterdam, and when he –

MR. FORGEY: This is after the war I presume.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And during the war as well, I believe. But certainly after the war. And he got his, well, what you over there call a doctorandus, which is a Ph.D. without having written a thesis and you get "Drs" in front of your name instead of "Dr." And after that he went into the Dutch Foreign Service for some years, and, in fact, I think he worked in The Hague for a while, maybe as long as a couple of years. I'm not sure about that. What I do remember is that after that he was sent out to Buenos Aires for the Dutch Government, you see, and he was there and he loved it there. It was, you know, just an enormous thing to him. But what I'm getting at is that, to some extent, quite frankly, with the breakup of my parents we – our financial situation became a lot worse. And fortunately my brother always had, you know, rather good-paying positions and all that, and he felt – and I'm very grateful to him, obviously, for that – very responsible where I was concerned, because I was the youngest, you see, and I was the one who was being kicked around a little bit, you see, both by the war and then the school systems, because every time we moved, which towards the end of the war was about four or perhaps five times in a very short period of time, I had to switch schools and all that and, you know, a kid sort of suffers from that obviously. And I was a lousy student, but I – I will know whether that was because, you know, my life was so unsettled or whether it was because I was stupid. I don't know, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Well, it wasn't because you're stupid. All your friends will say that. [Laughter.]

MR. DE LOOPER: That's what I hope anyway. But so in that sense, as I say, then he became a bit of a father figure to me, and he obviously stayed much closer to my mother as well because my mother also needed some help. Well, she stayed in The Hague.

My sister was early on pretty independent and even during the war had a boyfriend who was also of the same age as my brother in that, if he had been caught, he did not – he was not a student in college, but he was of that age. So he, in fact, hid out, you know, from being sent to Germany. And the way they did that – he did that with my sister, for at least a period of time – I don't know exactly how long that lasted, a year, two years – they had a boat, a sailboat in fact, and they stayed on one of the better-known lakes in the Netherlands where people go sailing. And they lived there year round. But they – so they lived a fairly scary existence, but it was also, obviously, rather exciting, you see? And somehow he never got caught, and my sister early on – she must have been in her late teens when she really started living with him, and then eventually they got married. And I became fairly good buddies with him. He was also somebody who – he liked me as a younger – sort of as a younger brother or so of his or whatever, and I remember we went on some camping trips in, you know, modest proportions, like maybe two or three days or whatever, with a tent and various things, and then later on, of course – he was from a family that had a business, so after the war when nobody had cars, for instance, he was one of the first ones because he was really in that business which his father had started. He had a car for business, and he did that. I mean, you know, he went on trips and so forth, and he would occasionally take me along so that ultimately I also learned to drive from him because he always had cars of all sorts. So I learned to drive fairly early on, you see? He was exciting in –

MR. FORGEY: This would have been in the years immediately after the war –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – '46, '47.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: That kind of – mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And – but in the meantime, of course, I had then gone to high school.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the first high school I went to is what they – what you – here would call – so, in other words, after I think it's three years you can choose whether you go into the very more esoteric section where you learn the humanities including Latin and Greek and that sort of thing or you can go into the somewhat easier one with science and so forth. I never got that far at all. In fact, I think that I was only there for about one year. I didn't, quite frankly –

MR. FORGEY: Where was this –

MR. DE LOOPER: This was in The Hague.

MR. FORGEY: In The Hague.

MR. DE LOOPER: And it's also small. We're talking really about a neighborhood where you walk from one thing to the – everything that I've told you so far is really – you know, it's from here to, say, the cathedral or –

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and in between. And, in fact, as you well know, that's even now like that in Europe. People just don't move around quite as much as they do, and they tend to be very much married to their neighborhood and so forth and, therefore, also to a group of friends that sort of stay around through the decades even, you see? And so we're talking about a school that was as far away as the other school would have been where I'd gone to a lower grade school, and it was just a couple of blocks away from that. But I did learn some, you know, general studies obviously, and languages. Languages, of course, you start early, very early, in Europe in any event.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that's also – I learned English, of course, to the best of everything, but I learned German and French, and I took a little Latin and a little Greek too. And I did terrible in those – Latin and Greek – although, interestingly enough, I was very fascinated by it. I always liked it. And, strangely enough, I learned certain things that have stood me in good stead later in life, even though I got bad grades in them, you know what I mean?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: But as a result of the language, I spoke fluent English pretty much when I came here in 1950. French I did pretty well in, but, you know, there was no opportunity to keep it up. German I had a lot of trouble with, and that probably was a psychological thing, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: I had just terrible trouble with German. And –

MR. FORGEY: And you still do. [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. I still do.

MR. FORGEY: Like me.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, yeah, that's right. I've never become fluent, and ironically, of course, I'm married to a German woman [Frauke Weber, married 1969], who is – well, part of the reason for that – you know, that's a little different too. Also, I really I don't believe – even with my brother and sister, you see, I speak English.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: I dropped this whole Dutch thing. I really turned my back almost on my past when I came here.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't – I don't know that I did that consciously. I did it somewhat consciously because I really – although – there were inklings that I might be able to stay, you see, early on.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, you –

MR. DE LOOPER: And I wanted to be an American, and I wanted to be –

MR. FORGEY: We're at a good point here to – I mean, to get you to the United States, but I read in the interview you did with David Schaff [December 1977] –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – he asked you a question about early drawing and so on. You mentioned the Montessori, but why don't you go back and tell –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, okay. Okay, in fact, my early art experience, and I was even talking to my wife about that a little bit this morning anticipating your interview, I do not remember that I ever set foot in a museum in the Netherlands at all. I mean, my family was like most families that artists seem to come out of, not basically interested in the arts. I mean, they might not put it the same way, but that's the way I would put it. Of course, there was on top of that, you see, all the business with the war.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I don't even know whether the museums in '47 or '48 in the Netherlands were operating very well. For all I know, they may have been closed. But even so, I don't think that I would have necessarily gone, because also education nowadays is very different, certainly in this country but also worldwide. I mean, young people are just not schlepped to museums, and they certainly they weren't in those years, whether it was in Europe or here. Certainly The Hague has a lot of wonderful museums, but I think I got to see them much later in life. So my only art experience was – well, it's not really art experience. It was exposure to the United States, and that took form in two ways. We listened as soon as we could after the war to the AFN a lot and to the BBC, but the AFN –

MR. FORGEY: The AFN was the Armed Forces Network?

MR. DE LOOPER: Armed Forces Network, mm-hmm. Which was somewhere – I think it was in Stuttgart or somewhere, but I don't remember exactly. And so this – I'm talking especially about my brother and I, who in that sense have more common than even my sister and certainly also my mother and father, because it stirred a real interest in popular music and jazz in my case and some jazz in my brother's as well.

MR. FORGEY: They were playing a lot of jazz on the AFN?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, yes. And, of course, there were other stations that I would listen to. I would listen to Paris a lot. I was reading recently – they apparently still have that international program where they play it. Then my brother was always, early on, reading a lot of English and American books, and he has a big library, which he still has. And some of those books I poked through, you know? And then he started to subscribing to a lot of things that were American-oriented, so early on, you see, we had lots of subscriptions to *The Saturday Evening* – what is it?

MR. FORGEY: *Post*?

MR. DE LOOPER: – *Post*, *Collier*'s, and *The New Yorker* and things like this. And this continued. And so I became very early quite interested in America, which I also read about in books that are written for teenagers, you know?

MR. FORGEY: This is somewhat characteristic of your generation of European youth –

MR. DE LOOPER: I think so.

MR. FORGEY: – is it not?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think so.

MR. FORGEY: I mean, immediately after the war the –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, no question. I mean, that whole thing. You see nowadays people would almost laugh at that, but I mean, you know, you have to look at it in perspective. I mean, also Americans – let's face it – they were looked at – and Canadians and the British – they were looked at as liberators. They – you know, they liberated us from something pretty horrible, and – on top of that. And then they were all over the place. Well, the Americans were really not that visible – and the United States. But that culture was, see? And their culture was –

MR. FORGEY: You mean in the Netherlands?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, I think there were not too many American troops.

MR. FORGEY: Not – yeah, they were mainly in Germany –

MR. DE LOOPER: In the south. And we were – in our area after the war we were surrounded mostly by British and Canadian soldiers, and even Israeli troops. I remember that distinctly. And nobody's ever heard of Israeli – I know there were guys who had the Israeli flag on their uniforms and all that. I was always fascinated by it, and I made early drawings of – terrible drawings, but anyway – you know, kids' drawings – of these soldiers on their heavy-duty motorcycles, probably – whatever they were, Harleys or something. And they would wear these enormous belts to keep their insides in, you know? You've seen those. And I was just fascinated. That was one of my big aims: to one day be a soldier with a motorcycle. You know, that's the –

MR. FORGEY: Yes, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – the kind of thing that you dream about.

MR. FORGEY: You did draw quite a bit as a youth, didn't you?

MR. DE LOOPER: I did, and I – well, because I drew – that's right. I started drawing what I was interested in as a kid, see? As a teenager. And that was, in my case, not so much sports. That came a little bit later, interestingly, when I came to the States. But it soldiers, and it was girls, and I would copy a lot of illustrations from these magazines, you see? And then, of course, jazz. Very early on I was really – I became really interested in jazz. And after a very short time I pretty much outdistanced everybody in that my tastes somehow became rather avant-garde, and I started out, say, with Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa and that sort of thing, but pretty soon I was listening to Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie and –

MR. FORGEY: Right at the time, yeah. That was the avant-garde, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: That was really. And that's the interesting thing, you know, looking back on that, because, of course, when I came to the United States –
and, in fact, those records are still there – I took a whole handful – an armful – of 78s with me on the boat. You know, in those days you came on a boat. And so that was one of my immediate inspirations. Also going to the United States. You see, I grew up really wanting to go to the United States. I mean, that was a dream, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so, in a sense, my brother made it possible by being able to sponsor – he had probably the same dream –

MR. FORGEY: At last reference, your brother was in Buenos Aires.

MR. DE LOOPER: Hmm? That's right.

MR. FORGEY: Then he –

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think he stayed there about two years, if I'm not mistaken. And he was, you know, at the Dutch Embassy there. And when his tour of duty was over – and as far as I know this is accurate – he came back from Buenos Aires via the United States and, therefore, via Washington. And at that time – this is '48, and '48 – or it may have been '49. It was '49, I think. Anyway, in '48 they had started two institutions which are still with us in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And he applied as an economist for both – they had openings in both organizations, and then he went back to Holland, and I assume that he went back to, you know, the Foreign Service there for a while. And then after whatever time that took, he was accepted in both organizations, and he picked the International Monetary Fund, being elitist I'm sure. [Laughs.] It's a smaller organization, and you can –

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so that's the way he came, you see? And so I am just assuming that to – although he has never voiced it quite the way I'm doing it, he also – I think he saw the United States as the place to be, although ultimately his ties to the Netherlands were much more – much stronger than mine and have remained that way. And he even, of course, went back to the United – to Europe to – after his retirement, although he didn't go to Holland, which a lot of Dutch people don't do for various reasons, including the climate I guess. But so – so only

a year after that, you see, he sponsored my coming to the United States as a – on a visitor's visa. And a visitor's visa allows six months. And the way I remember it – and I think that sort of works out – I had it extended three times. And then I applied for the universities here. Well, of course I had not finished high school. In fact, the high school that I had in the Netherlands I hadn't really done very well. But I had certain credits, and there was a lot of, you know – George Washington, he talked to them. I wound up at AU [American University] on probation, but I did make the probation. I had to have a C average, which I did maintain. And so that's the way I got started here.

MR. FORGEY: When was it that you came?

MR. DE LOOPER: This was in October of 1950.

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so I went –

MR. FORGEY: So you were – you spent – you arrived here in time for your 18th birthday I imagine.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, exactly. I had my – that's right, exactly right. I had my – I was 17 when I was on the boat or something, and then a few weeks later I was 18. And so –

MR. FORGEY: What boat was that?

MR. DE LOOPER: It was the New Amsterdam. And, yeah, you know, nobody flew, I guess, in those days, right? I don't remember – to the United States. I suppose of them did come on the Pan Am Clippers or whatever.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: But –

MR. FORGEY: Well, that's the way you traveled at that time.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's the way you traveled. That's the way you traveled. And, yeah, I remember meeting at least one young guy from the Bronx who also liked jazz a lot, and so we – for some reason – I don't know how we did that, but we played some of my records, I think.

MR. FORGEY: On the ship?

MR. DE LOOPER: On the ship. That's the way I remember it. I'm – and – but then I obviously lost touch with him. I otherwise didn't know anybody.

MR. FORGEY: You were able to buy these records in The Hague?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes. From my pocket money. And I remember still – you know, again – you see, nothing has – nothing changes, so the store that I bought them in is still there. Of course now they only sell rock and roll and that sort of thing. But, you know, they were 78s and they were fairly expensive.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: But some of them have become collector's items, I'm sure.

MR. FORGEY: I'm sure.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, you know – well, it's fun. So that's the way I got here.

MR. FORGEY: Okay, we're – I'm going to change the tape – I'm going to reverse – get on the other side.

MR. DE LOOPER: Do an overlap?

MR. FORGEY: These are 45 minutes each, but before we do that for the transcriber –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – the spelling of the area in northern Holland where –

MR. DE LOOPER: Groningen.

MR. FORGEY: Groningen. How do you spell that?

MR. DE LOOPER: G-R-O –

MR. FORGEY: G-R-O –

MR. DE LOOPER: – N-I –

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: Let's see. I have to write that out myself because I don't – because also even when I – yeah, G-R-O-N-I-N-G-E-N.

MR. FORGEY: G-R-O-N-I-N-G-E-N. Groningen.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: I just remembered when you mentioned Huizinga he wrote –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – a book that I read when I was in college, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, and the funny thing is the last time I – that's right. And that's – it's a wonderful book.

MR. FORGEY: It's still a classic.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the interesting thing is that I found the last time – see, I was – in August I was seeing my brother and sister in Switzerland where they now live, and they talked about another. And apparently the Huizingas were – that branch of the family – see, they were involved in art history and also they were involved with theology, and –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and, therefore, with Harvard University. Apparently one other – or it may be the same man – I may be confused about it – taught theology at Harvard.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh. I think not the same.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, probably not the same, right. And so there was this vague thing about – they were always talking about Harvard and – but on the other hand, it's interesting, too, because the Harvard collection of art, of course, is very deep in Dutch studies –

MR. FORGEY: Northern European and –

MR. DE LOOPER: – and Northern European. But also there was lots of Dutch art there.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And there's lots of art history that comes out of there.

MR. FORGEY: Interesting, yeah. And the other spelling is the degree that your brother got – the doctorangen. [Mispronounces.] How do you – do you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Hmm, how would you spell that? I don't know.

MR. FORGEY: I spelled it phonetically as "doctor rondus." [Transcriber note: The spelling is actually "doctorandus."]

MR. DE LOOPER: That's exactly right.

MR. FORGEY: R-O-N-D-U-S.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: R-O-N-D-U-S.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. It's just a title that doesn't exist here.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, right. Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And –

MR. FORGEY: Okay, so I'm going to switch now.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. FORGEY: We're recording again. Willem has just been showing me some old magazines. Among the other American magazines that you were reading or seeing at the time was *Downbeat*.

MR. DE LOOPER: *Downbeat*, yes. I think – I know there was a library of some sort. It must have been a USAI thing. And that was an old source of seeing American publications. And since I was interested in Jazz, I did read *Downbeat*, which, as I mentioned, was then kind of a tabloid, and was glossy paper, and that was certainly in the library there. I would devour that kind of stuff. The other thing that we had. That's why it's so interesting to me to having a German wife. The Netherlands is always, it still is, it's much more oriented towards the English speaking, both the BBC gets listened to a lot and American culture gets listen to and read. It's the kind of country where people, unlike in Germany for instance often don't translate certain novels that are popular here because they learn how to read them in the original language. It's not that they don't do it, because of course, also the *Reader's Digest* says you can get it in Dutch. But, a lot of people who are better schooled don't bother with translations and they read it in the original language. I don't see that quite as much in other countries in Europe and so –

With popular music, for instance, that all came out and as I said I used to listen to AFN and all those kinds of things and we had magazines, which were Dutch, they printed over the text of the popular tunes at the time. And they would have been the kind of stuff that was either very popular at that very moment in the United States or maybe a year or two before. And so as a kid already, as a teenager you see, I had learned a lot of English from trying to sing and understand what they were singing, and that sort of thing. So if you had Nat King Cole trio or something or what ever.

MR. FORGEY: The Four Freshmen.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well that came a little later.

MR. FORGEY: A little later.

MR. DE LOOPER: But yes, in other words, so you could relate to it better you see. They were not translated in to Dutch. So that was nice.

MR. FORGEY: Were you seeing any art magazines at that time?

MR. DE LOOPER: No, and I just remembered something else. Because even from Argentina somehow and certainly – my brother used to send me stuff too, and two things that pop up in my mind are little pocket books of something very American and that involved drawing and one of them was the cartoons of Bill Mauldin and they came out in these little pocket books that in those days cost like twenty-five cents or something like that.

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I still have them somewhere. And the second one was Li'l Abner. And that also was –

MR. FORGEY: Al Capp.

MR. DE LOOPER: Al Capp. Exactly. And again that's the kind of thing I tried to draw, I tried to copy that sort of thing, and certainly Bill Mauldin, in that sense a big influence on me. But that's not, I mean it's terrific, but I don't call it art.

MR. FORGEY: It's exposure to American popular culture.

MR. DE LOOPER: And ultimately to drawing, people who really know how to draw. Fine art came later, quite frankly.

MR. FORGEY: This is the real end of side A tape 1.

[Audio break.]

MR. FORGEY: This is tape – side B, tape 1 of the Willem de Looper interview.

And we are now in Washington for your 18th birthday.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, that's right. Well, okay, so, as I told you, I came on the boat, and my brother, who had a Studebaker, one of those cars that looked the same from the front and the back, which, you know, now I wish that we had kept it somewhere on a rack. It probably would be worth $50,000.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: He came to pick me up in New York. It's funny, because I have sometimes thought whether there was at that time a New Jersey Turnpike or not. I have no idea, but –

MR. FORGEY: No, I don't think so.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't think there was either.

MR. FORGEY: No, no. I think it was – New Jersey led the world in – there was the Pennsylvania Turnpike –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – and then the Jersey Turnpike opened up shortly thereafter.

MR. DE LOOPER: On the Eisenhower, perhaps?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Eisenhower started building all the roads.

MR. FORGEY: I think it preceded that – the National Highway Act – by some. That's why they still call them the Jersey barriers. [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, really? Yeah. Well, anyway, somehow we came to Washington.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the fact is, you know, people often ask me to – over the years – I mean that's sort of*en passant*, but, you know, "why you're not in New York?" Well, one of the reasons was that my brother, who was my sponsor, was in Washington.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: If he had been in New York, I would have always been in New York. And who knows what would have happened then?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You can only, you know, speculate on that. But so we arrived in Washington –

MR. FORGEY: It's even hard to speculate on it.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's right. You couldn't. I mean, you really couldn't, because even in mine – I mean, obviously I had no idea whatsoever that I ever would become an artist, and that developed over the next decade really. And even that went not in a straight line at all, but it went in a crooked sort of line altogether. And I will tell you about that. So the first period of time that I was here I was here just as a visitor because I couldn't work and I couldn't study either. And, quite frankly, we also, you know, hadn't really worked that out. It was really almost like a respite for me, and it was something that we needed to get out of the way so that I could go to the United States. I think it's possible that in the back of everybody's mind was that perhaps, if all went well, that I would stay here, just as my brother, but he was only in this job for two years also. And he didn't know that he was going to be there for 25 years either. So those things you can just not tell. But in any event – so the first three periods of the visitor's visa I didn't really do anything, and that particular time, of course, we were much more in touch with certain Dutch people who were here with the embassy –

MR. FORGEY: Where was your brother living at the time?

MR. DE LOOPER: He lived on – in the west – no, that's – in the Birkshire, which is up on Massachusetts near American University. And then, of course, I wound up going to American University and so I just walked to work, which was about – to school, which was about five minutes away. So it was very handy. And we shared an

apartment there and his car, his Studebaker, you know? And so we did certain things. And it was fairly soon or after that also my mother was here to visit and all that, but of course, that was all a bit of a burden for my brother too, because he had to finance most of it. But he somehow managed. And certainly in my mother's case it was never meant for her to stay, but – so, after a while, as I mentioned perhaps earlier, it seemed that perhaps I should stay and then do something, and doing something would mean to –

MR. FORGEY: Going to school.

MR. DE LOOPER: Going to school to continue my education, which was rudimentary, although it might have been more so. [Laughs.] In retrospect, I guess I still learned a lot even so, despite everything. And so I did go, and we went to various of the universities. And George Washington did not accept me because I didn't have a high school diploma, and ultimately American University did accept me. And the first year I was on probation and I had to have a C average which I managed, which is kind of interesting. In certain things, of course, I was way ahead of other freshmen and in other things I wasn't. Certainly in languages, for instance, which I had to do, I remember having to do rather advanced French for instance, which at that time I could cope with. And I still have some of the books, but I couldn't hardly cope with that anymore now because I've forgotten most of my French, so – or, you know, to read heavy-duty kind of stuff, novels. But, you know, I managed. And, interestingly enough, I think, certainly in retrospect – and I touched upon that earlier – that I did want to become as Americanized as possible. I spoke good English, obviously also with an accent, which I have, although I could swear that I had less of an accent then, which is possible, because I was only then surrounded by Americans.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Because I'd even joined a fraternity, and I was – you know, I was rushed on the American University campus, and I think that was good for me ultimately, although it was a real – it was a fraternity that had mostly jocks and I was –

MR. FORGEY: What was the fraternity?

MR. DE LOOPER: It's Phi Sigma Kappa. It's still there, in fact, but I haven't had anything to do with them for 30 years. But it was an interesting fraternity, I think by far the most interesting on campus. It was also, interestingly enough, the only – this is a total aside and has nothing to do with anything, but it was the only fraternity that accepted Jews. So we had some pretty interesting mix. We had a lot of basketball players. We had one guy who was a basketball player who was also on dope, and that's in – you know, we're talking about '52, '53, and stuff like this. And then –

MR. FORGEY: What do you mean "on dope"? He was smoking marijuana or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Marijuana and stuff, and maybe even some harder stuff occasionally. He was a real problem, but he was a, you know, very intelligent sort of person who could also play very good basketball sometimes. But he would also, you know, really get strung out.

And so it brought me into contact with, you know, Americans from all over the place.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Some of – our fraternity was also a little bit more New York-oriented than the others, and that was possibly because some of the Jewish members were really from New York and that – and it's interesting to see how American University has developed over the years, and it attracts a lot of people from New York and so forth. So I was with those people. Most of them, the way I remember, were not really involved with the arts either. There was one basketball player who had a wife who also studied in the Art Department whom I saw many years later, and she had become an art administrator or director of a small museum on Long Island. But, anyway, it was an interesting environment. It was not a very intellectual – or far from it actually – fraternity. It was mostly parties and sports. And I was never a sports person, but interestingly enough, I did become interested in the first years of my life here in the United States – I became terribly interested in baseball by listening to the radio, you know? These are the good old days as everybody always talk about when a lot of baseball games were recreated by people like – I don't know – Red Barber, people like that.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know? And so –

MR. FORGEY: Mel Allen.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mel Allen. And there was a guy here in Washington called Nat "the Cat" Albright.

MR. FORGEY: Nat "the Cat" Albright, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Who made all the sounds and all this stuff, and –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Anyway, but I was – I became a real big baseball fan, and, as a result of being in this fraternity where everybody else was a – you know, many of them were athletes on the AU teams, I actually became – I got an "A," you know a letter, because I became equipment manager of the baseball team.

MR. FORGEY: Of the AU baseball team?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And so I actually went – I think it lasted one year or so.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so I learned how to score and things like this. And so somewhere – this is where it ties in with the art – I started then – that became another area of interest, and so I have some, again, somewhat more advanced but still fairly primitive drawings of baseball players, you see? I used to then get involved in that. So –

MR. FORGEY: I'd love to spread all this stuff out some day and take a look at it.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: We should do that.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, we'll try to – I'll have to sort of really put my mind to where any of that stuff is, but – so I started making that, and I – and one sheet is very clear in my mind, but I just don't know exactly where it is, and it has not only drawings of these baseball players, but it has the scores and so forth next to it, you see? They were actual – there was a baseball team here in Washington as you know, the Senators. [Telephone rings.] And so all of that is in there. Can I just?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, sure.

[Pause.]

MR. FORGEY: We have American University and baseball at the moment – baseball and art. So this sheet you were talking about?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right, so in other words it has – I was obviously drawing as I was listening to, you know, some of the games and things like this, and so you can see, you know, the scoring, which I've mostly forgotten, but – and the actual players were the Senators at that time who were playing somebody or other or whatever. I don't know. I also remember, in fact, that I was very involved with the – you know, again, by radio in those years with the Brooklyn Dodgers –

MR. FORGEY: Interesting.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and rivalries, of course, that they had. So I knew the – the Dodgers, I guess, were really my favorite team for years.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, that's interesting.

MR. DE LOOPER: Later on I –

MR. FORGEY: Did you go to Griffith Stadium at all or –

MR. DE LOOPER: I think I went once.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's – I don't really – I've been to baseball perhaps twice or something like that in my whole life. It was not really – it was more a –

MR. FORGEY: You mean Major League Baseball?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. It was more a conceptual thing than anything else. And I think also that later on the enthusiasm somehow disappeared as quickly as it had appeared. But what I'm also saying is that the – what I always did was the things that I was interested in, you see, I drew. And maybe that's also a natural thing, but that's why that happened at that time.

So at American University then. So I've started at American University, right? And I've gotten past my first year somehow.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I was studying – I was really going to be studying economics, which is, you know, my brother's profession and sort of my father's as well. And obviously, as I said, art had – still to that point was not playing any major role, although I was certainly interested in it and I had drawn for quite a number of years. But it was not seen as something that I was going to really follow up. And it is vague to me now whether I was actually already also taking a few art classes at AU. I probably did do that.

MR. FORGEY: In your freshman year or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Maybe in my second year –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I have a vague impression that I probably did, that I was interested enough to see, you know – also, because, quite frankly – and that's sort of the crux of that – that this economics business was nothing for me at all. It was just a total disaster for me. I mean, I had just no mind to deal with that at all. And so I had – you know, I did badly in there. And that's why ultimately, quite frankly, I didn't do very well at American University either. I mean, I did – I was a little bit handicapped in that I had never even finished high school, but I was also really concentrating on something that I shouldn't have been concentrating on. And I can only say in retrospect it was also because of a natural thing that happens. I mean, you know, people don't want their sons to necessarily go into something – into the arts if they can do something more practical. And so, with an implied pressure perhaps or suggestions certainly from our family, you start studying something that you're not –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – deeply interested in. And then, you know, since I was also not in a fraternity that encouraged studying very hard, it was not necessarily very good for me in that respect, so that I was originally of the class of '55 and I graduated in '57, you see? And the reason for that was that I actually – to put in bluntly, I flunked out of school, and so I had to sit out for a year and then was readmitted. And by that time I had made up my mind, and that's why I think that I did take some art classes before and that by that time I had sort of figured out that that was probably the way I could go. Now, even there we're not talking about fine art. I was always – for quite a long time I was interested in pursuing the drawing. You see, I was always drawing. I wasn't really painting. And I was thinking in terms of pursuing the drawing so that perhaps I could make a living from that eventually and that means that I was probably thinking in terms of being an illustrator, you see, of some sort. And, in fact, even after I graduated, I pursued that further. And there I was lucky perhaps, because when I ultimately graduated in '57 I was 25 years old, which is actually fairly late. And then the other thing that happened was – in retrospect again it looks like a total disaster – I got drafted in the American Army. And without making a peep or anything or making any attempt to go into graduate school, I just went.

MR. FORGEY: One didn't do it then.

MR. DE LOOPER: One didn't do it. So you've got to go up there –

MR. FORGEY: You got drafted, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. Well, I'm glad you said that, because I always say that to people and people don't understand that too well. But nobody – nobody – dodged the draft. You got drafted, and that's –

MR. FORGEY: I know. What I did was – I mean, I was – I had to go.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: I either – I was going to join for three years.

MR. DE LOOPER: Really?

MR. FORGEY: And then – the sergeant said, "Oh, I can only guarantee you 99 percent that you'll take Russian at the language school out in California."

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes, right.

MR. FORGEY: And I thought about that other 1 percent, and this was a little later – this was just the beginning of Southeast Asia.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, exactly.

MR. FORGEY: And so I could drafted. I could join for three years, or – but I was really red hot to go in a way. I ended up in the Reserves. I thought, "Well, all right, I'm not going to get drafted."

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, yeah, you see?

MR. FORGEY: So I was in the Reserves for six years.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay. Well, I actually went on active duty for two years.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I do remember other people in the fraternity, for instance, getting drafted, and nobody, as you say yourself, nobody was dodging the draft –

MR. FORGEY: Well, this interesting commercial art that you're referring to, you showed me earlier a letter you wrote right after getting out of the army –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – on November 6th, 1959, where you're referring to –

MR. DE LOOPER: A job.

MR. FORGEY: A job, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: You – "In October of 1957 I was accepted in the advertising department of Kann's Department Store in Washington, where I was to work with layouts and occasional illustration" –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – "illustrations. However, I was inducted into the army about a week later" –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – "from which I was honorably discharged on 20 October of" –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's exactly what happened. I had forgotten the dates, and so I referred, too, to that same sheet. That's exactly what happened, see? In other words, I was thinking then in terms more of illustration, although obviously I then became part of the Art Department –

MR. FORGEY: Well, yeah, let's back up, because –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – now you've made this decision. You've had a year –

MR. DE LOOPER: But there are two things.

MR. FORGEY: You had a year off, and that year you spent here in Washington living with your brother.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah. Right. I don't remember what I did that year, except probably fret on how I should finish and get a BA, you see, and whether they would accept me again if I, you know – I talked – I remember talking to certain deans and stuff like this. That was a bit of a problem, okay?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And – to be quite frank. And so I had to get back in there and – otherwise, I wouldn't have finished college either, and there was never any question that, you know, you had to have a college education. I mean, you know, that's just taken for granted. So, in order to – so I was allowed to reenter American University with a major in art, and that went very well, quite frankly. I mean, that was obviously perhaps also partly because of the layoff of a year. You see, I was doubly inspired, and I had to pull out these grades. And since a lot of them had to do with art – and it was just strictly fine arts. In those years American University also didn't offer printmaking or design or anything. It was either drawing or painting, and that's what you did. And that's what I did. Oh, and they had sculpture too, which I didn't take. And so that's what I – I applied myself to that, and quite

frankly, I was pretty good at it, you see, early on, because I saw a reference also in my files somewhere, and I remember that very distinctly. I still have stuff that I made at AU, and some of it I wouldn't even be ashamed of at the moment. It turned out I could draw very well in an art way, you see? In other words, at American University the – obviously the teachers had something to do with it as well. The –

MR. FORGEY: Tell me a little bit about the department at that time.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, well, we had – basically had – basically four people – Bob Gates, Ben Summerford – Joe – Sarah Baker, and Bill Calfee. And you know all of these people as artists and/or teachers. The only ones still alive, I guess, are Calfee, who is very old and frail –

MR. FORGEY: And Summerford.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and Summerford. Summerford, I think was –

MR. FORGEY: He shows under the name "Ben" –

MR. DE LOOPER: Ben.

MR. FORGEY: But you call him –

MR. DE LOOPER: Joe. Everybody –

MR. FORGEY: I mean, everybody calls him Joe.

MR. DE LOOPER: We call him Joe, exactly. And he was by far the inspiration behind, as far as I'm concerned –

MR. FORGEY: Tell me –

MR. DE LOOPER: – a large part –

MR. FORGEY: Good. But let me –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah

MR. FORGEY: Just structure that department a little bit. I mean, you had studio courses and –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And –

MR. FORGEY: Tell me a little bit about the system of education there.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, okay. Well, all right, as you perhaps know – and some of this I actually found out later. In other words, the – because I wasn't too aware of that.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: There was a little gallery there called the Watkins Gallery. And, strangely enough, now I'm involved in trying to get more art for Watkins Gallery. But Watkins Gallery was right on the campus opposite the Art Department, and the Art Department was very small. They had bad facilities. Even now the facilities are not very good.

MR. FORGEY: But they had what was a new building –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – that must have gone up in the '60s –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – after you left.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. But – so we had Quonset huts and various things, and that sort of thing. But basically you had – it was straight painting and it was straight drawing and sculpture. As I say, sculpture I was never involved in.

MR. FORGEY: Calfee was teaching the sculpture –

MR. DE LOOPER: He was teaching sculpture, and he also taught drawing, because I had him as a drawing

teacher, for instance, as well as Sarah Baker. I remember how tough Calfee was. I mean, he was one of those of people who didn't try to be particularly nice to a student. You know what I mean? If there was something to be criticized, he would be pretty open. And, you know, as a young person, you know, you sometimes take that a little bit hard. Joe Summerford is the great enthusiast there, and I – in my mind, I had learned more from Joe than from anybody, because he was the one who was the person who would give you assignments, whether you or other students doing the same thing – a still life or a figure or whatever – who would be very encouraging about – not only – he's very verbal, as you probably know. He explains things very well. But more than anything, as I say, there was this enthusiasm about being a painter or being an artist that was very infectious. And I remember distinctly even some paintings that I've worked on where he would be so excited about the way you got off to a good start or something like this, and then much later I always remember – I don't know whether I was in my last year or wherever – when he made a remark to me. He said, "You know, you're going to be a real painter."

MR. FORGEY: Ah!

MR. DE LOOPER: And that was – I mean, you know, I still remember that all those years, right?

MR. FORGEY: Really.

MR. DE LOOPER: I didn't know what the hell I was doing at the time, but –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that was really – so that also shows, you see, that there was obviously a seed in my mind about being an artist. I think, you know, it's very hard to analyze yourself, but I think obviously there were some indications at that point that I wanted to do that. But I was also practical, and there are also practical, you know, considerations about how you're going to make a living. I mean, you obviously cannot have people take care of you for the rest of your life –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and that sort of thing. So – Sarah Baker was very conservative, and there used to be arguments, even at the time of the student shows for instance, you see. She was a very fine painter, as you – again, as you know, but she was much more conservative at that particular time than Ben and Gates. Gates was not a teacher that I remember with a great deal of – he was a good painter, but he really didn't convey much to the students.

MR. FORGEY: Looking back, of course, all – we all – and as we have done many times, you look back and you can see –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – and the record is clear, the progression from the Phillips Collection to –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – American University. And a certain what we now even – even today still call an AU style or touch –

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: – or feel.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, absolutely.

MR. FORGEY: But my impression was that they were also – I mean, coming from the Phillips school and so on – that they were very interested in the avant-garde and they were looking at abstract –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – expressionism and trying –

MR. DE LOOPER: No –

MR. FORGEY: – to occupy a space –

MR. DE LOOPER: Different.

MR. FORGEY: – that was different –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – from that but wasn't totally conservative or totally rejecting of the avant-garde.

MR. DE LOOPER: The way I see it, in fact, no. You know? I –

MR. FORGEY: But you were there, so I'm interested in how that –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, okay. So –

MR. FORGEY: – dialogue played out.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. The – as you know, I mean, one of the enthusiasms as it was at the Phillips, where he also taught, was the painting of Karl Knaths for instance. Then it shifted to [Willem] de Kooning. There was –

MR. FORGEY: That's Knaths – K-N-A-T-H-S?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. He is, of course, a hero – he was a hero of Duncan Phillips, and he collected some 40 of his paintings.

MR. FORGEY: Correct.

MR. DE LOOPER: I met him much, much later in life just because I was so curious. He – his paintings had never really interested me very much.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But I found it so interesting, so in the early '60s I actually went up to Provincetown and met him and was quite impressed, you know, by him as a man and as a painter and all that, but in a different way than I would ever want to, you know, paint or that sort of thing.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, as you know, then the Watkins Gallery was, in fact, a place where some real things were shown –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and it just also goes to show how things in Washington itself, of course, have changed. In those days there weren't too many places where you could see what was going on in New York, for instance, and I remember distinctly that there was a de Kooning woman that was actually shown at the Watkins Gallery of all places.

MR. FORGEY: While you were an undergraduate there?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, I'm pretty sure.

MR. FORGEY: Wow.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I just recently – as a matter of fact, I have a piece of paper proving that – somewhat later, but during the period that I was in the army for those two years – Vincent Melzac showed some of his collection at the Watkins Gallery, and that included some drawings by de Kooning, by Kline, and then also some indications of what would become the Washington Color things.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: These were all very modest in scale.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, in fact, as I say, somebody sent me those for another reason, and they have –

MR. FORGEY: Those what? What are you referring to?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, the list of what was actually in the show, because I was trying to figure out for collecting reasons since now the Watkins Gallery is interested in updating its collection and so forth. I wanted to see what

kind of connection they had with Melzac, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: With any of that. But these things were arranged by Ben Summerford and Bob Gates I'm sure and also a woman who at that time was the secretary at the Watkins Gallery, Helene McKinsey, and later –

MR. FORGEY: Right. Helene Herzbrun.

MR. DE LOOPER: – Helene Herzbrun –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – who then became a painter, and – well, she was, I'm sure, a painter then, but I know her as, you know, somebody who ran the gallery.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so they were looking around, and they were fairly adventurous, you see? And I think that, in fact – and the record would show that, you see – that in Washington you couldn't really see very much of these things, possibly some things on whatever that outfit on Meridian Hill was called, you know, where some early interesting things were shown as an adjunct almost, I wouldn't way to say in competition, to whatever was being shown at the Phillips Collection, which, of course, was not really avant-garde in that it didn't show abstract expressionism for instance. And so these painters were interested in that. What is that called? You know what they call it. I even saw – I remember seeing – just put it on pause.

[Pause.]

MR. FORGEY: Well, we've been stumbling around and around.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Our faulty memories. And we figured it out that the operation on Meridian Hill that Willem referred to was run by – was inaugurated by a man named Robert Richmond.

MR. DE LOOPER: Who was a poet.

MR. FORGEY: And what – who was a poet, and –

MR. DE LOOPER: And it was called the ICA.

MR. FORGEY: The ICA.

MR. DE LOOPER: And we don't quite understand what it's –

MR. FORGEY: It's the International Cultural Association, something like that.

MR. DE LOOPER: Something like that.

MR. FORGEY: But it was known as the ICA. That's how we've always –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – referred to it and so on.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I'm aware of it to some extent because I saw some fairly significant exhibitions, but not a lot of them. And that will come out again later when – also even when we get to talk about, you know, how I got started with – say, with Jefferson Place and vis-à-vis Sam, for instance, who was a few years ahead of me.

MR. FORGEY: Sam Gilliam, yeah, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And he showed up there, for instance. I'm pretty sure of that. And [Kenneth] Noland I think showed up there. But it was – that was a very interesting outfit, and – so anyway, which showed in earlier years as well what was to be seen of contemporary art, I think, in this city to perhaps a larger extent than anybody. But in any event we were really talking about Watkins, and Watkins Gallery did have some – I mean, everybody, of course, was very young also, and they were interested in showing what was going on between Karl Knaths, and that was – that turned out to be de Kooning and [Jack] Tworkov and people like that. And I seem to remember that a woman by de Kooning was actually shown at Watkins Gallery, that I have seen that. Now, that

wouldn't be actually that surprising, because we nowadays think of even a painting of – even a painting like that in terms of huge insurance values, and that painting at that time was probably worth a couple of thousand dollars or so.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And they were probably able to manage that. I do think, in fact, that is one of the reasons why they quickly got out of that business as well: that they could not afford to do it in small, you know, underpaid probably art department –

MR. FORGEY: But philosophically that makes a lot of sense. Tworkov – they were – they would be aligned more with the de Kooning type of –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, oh –

MR. FORGEY: – abstract expressionism.

MR. DE LOOPER: – absolutely.

MR. FORGEY: And a woman by de Kooning would be – would fit perfectly into their construct of what was possible in art.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And the way that was reflected, of course, was in the teachers – in the teachers in the sense that Bob Gates and also Ben Summerford himself, you see, from that early style where actually both of them were very on the influence of Karl Knaths and very cubist and very restrained sort of painting became much more gestural and they were obviously quite interested in what was going on in New York. And they'd probably seen a hell of a lot more of it than almost anybody, you see? And so, therefore, they – that became a part of their teaching as well. Now, I do, on the other hand, remember that nobody ever pushed anybody into any particular direction. That's perhaps important to point out because in so many art departments you – since you asked me about American University and what kind of department it was, people were pretty much left on their – you know, to their own direction. Of course, with most students there is not a particular direction in any event, but, say, the more advanced ones, nobody was told to paint abstract pictures or gestural pictures versus something else. But you could see it, you know, as I say, in the – perhaps even in the faculty exhibitions for instance, which would show a more – an interest in the faculty that had the most to say that they were becoming more involved with what was really going on in New York.

That certainly would not have been the case with Sarah Baker, who was really in that sense stuck in the things that she was good at, which was the Paris school of the, you know, '20s and '30s and all that. And, in fact, that's probably also why they would argue more about – at the time of probably the exhibitions at Watkins as well as student exhibitions which were – where it might show some artist, young artist, going into directions that Sarah Baker didn't really approve of, you see? And since they were all fairly strong personalities, you would get these particular things hashed out. They were mostly resolved in the way of modernism rather than, you know, the old days, the Matisse-inspired sort of painting, which Sarah – which played a large role in Sarah's work. But anyway that's the way that went more or less.

I don't remember that the things at the Watkins Gallery of such interest extended much beyond 1960.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, in fact, I think that's also, quite frankly, that after I graduated and went into my direction I frankly was never really interested after that in American University at all, because my own thinking became very different. The way I've always seen it is that, in fact – and you can fairly well see that in the leading artists who taught at American University too. They, themselves, became more – they turned their own – they turned their own backs on some of the things that they had been enthusiastic about, and they became more conservative. Certainly that's true of Ben Summerford's work. He's a very fine painter, but he – his painting after a few years of being enthused by abstract expressionism, certainly the de Kooning kind of abstract expressionism, turned away from that all together. There was a short period where he became interested and, therefore, again allowed his students, even though as I said earlier he didn't force anybody to paint in a particular way – but, you know, you pick up stuff from the people that you learn from, in Nicholas de Stael for instance and that sort of –

MR. FORGEY: Nicholas de Stael, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, very much so, right. And that was probably again also due to the fact that the Phillips Collection, which had a strong bond with the American University via the Watkins Collection and Gallery, started showing Nicholas de Stael with some of the outstanding paintings that that particular painter had done. And I

think that was ultimately the solution to the thinking of perhaps Bob Gates and Summerford too, of a way of working basically with nature, rather even – rather than with the figure even, in a way that was more – it would have been interesting to see them pursue the abstract expressionist thing longer. And as I will point out to you, that after – during my stay in the army and afterwards, you see, it –

MR. FORGEY: Well, you've given a good portrait of AU at the moment that you were –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – an undergraduate there in '57. That's –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: That's about what it was like.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: In '57 yourself –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – as we just went through, you were – you had graduated, and you were about to accept a job here, and you got –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – drafted and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay.

MR. FORGEY: – went into the army.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And so we were talking, in fact, that in those – I was thinking in terms of drawing more than anything else. And, in fact, many of the paintings that I did at AU were – they were basically drawings. I was very good at drawing right away, I remember, and of course, those were the first years that I'd ever drawn seriously and from live models and all that. That's the way you learned. You didn't learn to draw from casts or anything like this. I think that even the more conservative person, Sarah Baker for instance, didn't have anybody draw –

MR. FORGEY: Did you ever – I mean, did – were they plein air painters at all? I mean, did you ever go outside –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, we did. We did. I – in fact, I still have some things that we did at Great Falls, so that was certainly – and later on, you see, I was there when Bill Woodward was an undergraduate too, and Frank Wright. Frank Wright I never knew very much, and I think that must be – he was probably a year or two years ahead of me, I think. And he may have gone for an MA. And I think perhaps even Woodward did.

MR. FORGEY: Yes, I think so.

MR. DE LOOPER: But Bill Woodward and I had – we shared a studio. We – during – certainly during the last year I was there, I was pretty much independent, and I think in itself it means that they didn't really have to look after me. They had –

MR. FORGEY: When you say you shared a studio, the setup was you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, we had – in a Quonset hut in the basement we both had a little studio. It was separated by a wall and a little window with a curtain over it, and Bill Woodward was on one side and I was on the other one. And so we pretty much painted on projects of our own choosing. And the way I remember it, I think it was at that point probably Bob Gates, who was the senior advisor or something like that – but since he wasn't the kind of person who would – he would more just approve of what you were doing rather than he would try to guide you.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think the other way you can look at it is that I think both Woodward and myself – and I don't remember anybody else, but we were pretty much independent. So it probably also means that we were rather more advanced than everybody else and that they just decided, you know, "These guys can just paint and then we'll look at it and grade it at the end of the year or so, but basically they're going to get an A anyway."

You know? That kind of thing. You have to be practical about it.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so I did also in those years become friends with Woodward, and that continued. In fact, that's the way I ultimately got my job at the Phillips – just by pure coincidence. But if you want me to, I can try to be –

MR. FORGEY: Tell me – well –

MR. DE LOOPER: – logical with the drawing, see?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, please.

MR. DE LOOPER: So many of the paintings that I did – I did some paintings, you know, from the figure – and Cezanne was a big thing with Summerford, and I must say, as I said earlier, that Ben Summerford's classes I remember more than anything.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were the most substantial, certainly to me. And that was partly because of his enthusiasm and partly also because he could explain things so well about early art. And he – it's a very traditional art department. I still – I think it still is. But that's both good and bad. It's – it also means that you get a very good grounding –

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so when –

MR. FORGEY: I can see where, as for you at that stage of your life, to go through Cezanne in a systematic fashion –

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: – would be – absolutely be revelatory –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I think so. Right. And it's never been the kind of art department – and it still isn't – where they, perhaps too early, make students really experiment before they know what they're doing, you see? And so – anyway, so I drew a lot, and also the – even the paintings that I made were often – first of all, a lot of it was done on paper rather than on canvas, although I did do some on canvas. And that obviously had something to do also with money in that canvas is more expensive. But I used to make a lot of drawings of the figure and landscapes and so forth, including the ones at Great Falls, that were drawings but they were also – they involved a lot of color, but they involved very-thinned-down-with-turpentine oil paint, and I see that now as actually starting something that I have really continued for the rest of my life. I've always been interested in thinned-down paint. There are some exceptions to that, including some fairly recent stuff where I do some of the opposite, but I keep doing some of the same thing even now, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so those were the kind of things that I exhibited at that time.

MR. FORGEY: I saw here a reference to something that was interesting. You referred to –

MR. DE LOOPER: The student show?

MR. FORGEY: Well, you referred to your area art shows –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – such as the Washington Market Exhibit, I believe, in 1956 –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – the Bader Gallery and a place I've never heard of – Abbott's in Georgetown –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well –

MR. FORGEY: – "where I had a one-man show of my drawings." What was that?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I had forgotten that actually until I found that sheet. It was some sort of little gallery which is – the way I remember it is it's sort of in a neighborhood where there are little – where the – opposite from the Texaco station. And it was just a tiny little gallery. I think this was, of course, after I graduated. I did go around with early stuff, and I found some people that were, you know, willing to show it. And I did have a show of drawings –

MR. FORGEY: But you graduated in '57, right?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. What year is that –

MR. FORGEY: I'm not so sure this would be before you graduated, because you went into the –

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no –

MR. FORGEY: I mean after you graduated. Or immediately after, it would have had to have been.

MR. DE LOOPER: Do you think it was before?

MR. FORGEY: Well –

MR. DE LOOPER: No?

MR. FORGEY: – if you graduate, say, in June –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – you're in the army by –

MR. DE LOOPER: October.

MR. FORGEY: – October.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right, I was.

MR. FORGEY: So, I mean, there is this – in '57 there were a few months –

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, it's possible that I went immediately around with some things.

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Certainly the Franz Bader Gallery – that's not surprising at all. See, Franz Bader had the bookshop, of course, at that time.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And he was one of the people willing to take a chance on some things that artists, especially also the ones that came out of AU, would do. And these things were drawings, and maybe some of them had some color, but I think they were mostly black and white.

MR. FORGEY: Mostly black and white?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think so.

MR. FORGEY: Not these oil-washed drawings that you referred to?

MR. DE LOOPER: Possible a couple of them, and they were framed up, and he – you know, these things were not necessarily hanging on the wall. I think they were more in bins. You know that sort of thing?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. And that's at Bader's?

MR. DE LOOPER: At Bader's.

MR. FORGEY: But this place – at the Abbott, you actually had a layout and you –

MR. DE LOOPER: I actually had stuff on the wall, and my memory of that is very vague, but they must have been obviously these big – because that's what I was doing – figure drawings. And there may not have been a lot of them, and I don't really remember the circumstances of that.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, do you show any landscapes either at Bader's or there?

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. It was mostly all figures, because by that time I also then – you see, I was still thinking in terms of illustrating. And then the illustrating thing – and that's why I ultimately got that job, which then I didn't have to fill because I went in the army.

MR. FORGEY: By good fortune, I guess.

MR. DE LOOPER: Probably by good fortune, certainly in retrospect you see.

MR. FORGEY: Well, you wouldn't have stayed there very long. [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: No, probably not. But it would have provided me with a –

MR. FORGEY: A little money, sure.

MR. DE LOOPER: Because obviously I was also – you see, until I went in the army I was sharing an apartment with my brother. It was his apartment.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: So it was also time for me to do something and go live somewhere –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and get a job or whatever. And I was very interested in pursuing the drawing, and I was very interested in fashion illustration. And, well – so you have both an element of naiveté in that you have to obviously be trained to do that, and I thought I could do that without – you know, just with a natural way of being able to draw the figure very well. And that, of course, didn't work out at all. But that was something that I thought about for quite a long time, and that's, in fact, the way I got even into Kann's Department Store, which is like a Hecht's or –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or a Lansburgh's or anything like this. And I had – even I –

MR. FORGEY: I remember Kann's. It was still open when I came to town in '64.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes. Oh, yeah, it was a big department store.

MR. FORGEY: Big department store down where Market Square is today.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so, anyway – and even in the fashion drawings, see, I had actually a hero, or I should say heroine, because there was a woman illustrator at that time who illustrated, and her name was Dorothy Hood, and she was the top illustrator in America I'm sure. And that was because she – now, I've forgotten whether at that time Bloomingdale's existed in New York. I'm not –

MR. FORGEY: Hmm, yeah, I don't know.

MR. DE LOOPER: But she illustrated for something like that, and my brother read *The New York Times* obviously, so I saw these things, and they were really magnificent. And they were the kind of drawings that I could relate to in that they were – basically they were line drawings, and then with some washes. And as you can even see behind you, I have liked to draw that way, you know, with serious drawings over the years as well. And some of these are pretty early.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, you know – and – anyway, so I thought I could get into that kind of thing, but of course illustration, when you really start looking into that, is all tricks, and she was a master at this and she was – I talked later to other people, because then I went around to other advertising departments, you see, and talked to people who could, in fact, sort of give me pointers and that sort of thing. And so they all sort of, you know, laughed at this, that you could do this, you know, just by some kind of genius that you might have, you see? You had to train, and you also had to know what I had never known, for instance, about illustration or ads for that matter. Any ad for a refrigerator or something like this – it's all – for a newspaper it's all whited-out and things are –

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: The drawings. And I was that naïve, you see? They don't look anything like drawings at all. They look like drawings that somebody took a brush of white paint and yellow paint and stickum and all kinds of stuff to. And they – you know? And that was, of course, not the kind of drawing that I wanted to do. I wanted to just draw them like Picasso.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, they would be ruining your work of art.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And so anyway – so for quite a long time I thought I could do that, but then it became – and so ultimately I was accepted in this advertising department, and I would have probably just done, you know, some dumb clothes that they wanted to sell, and I would have picked up some of these tricks, but I would have become an illustrator –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – rather than anything else. And so I think that the army save me from that in – certain in retrospect –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and that I was kid of lucky. I was –

MR. FORGEY: It saved you from – [audio break, tape change] –

MR. FORGEY: This is side A, tape 2, Willem de Looper, same day, same place.

Willem and I were getting into some heavy theological waters having to do with predestination and such –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – such difficult topics. We'll drop them. We're at Kann's – or the escape from. We're at the US Army getting your induction notice.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. Okay, well, anyway, to put that into fairly simple terms is I was in for two years. People obviously always even now think, you know, how weird that you went into the American Army because you weren't a citizen, but anyway, people just don't know how this – how alert the American government is drafting even – [laughs] – you know, alien –

MR. FORGEY: You weren't a citizen of course, no.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I was not. No.

MR. FORGEY: At that time. Are you now?

MR. DE LOOPER: You had to ask. No, I'm not.

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: But that's another – that's one of my big secrets, you see? But that's all right.

MR. FORGEY: Oh, well, it's no longer a secret, Willem.

MR. DE LOOPER: I know. I know. It's no big secret, but that's the only really dumb thing that I did. When I was in the army I should have just become a citizen then. I didn't do it. You know, I could have – I had two years to do it, see?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But anyway –

MR. FORGEY: Where did you do your basic training?

MR. DE LOOPER: Fort Jackson, South Carolina. And – which was – you know, it was – I mean, the whole thing – the whole army experience was a real mixed bag, okay? For me it was perhaps even a little bit more bizarre than for somebody who had been born here, although I suppose, because you get exposed to the kind of people that you cannot even imagine, you know, are alive. [Laughs.] I mean, there are some dreadful characters that you run into, but on the other hand, also very wonderful people that you have something in common. I mean, all I'm

saying here is that in the army you meet people, as somebody coming out of a city perhaps especially and having some culture, who have no culture of any kind, or at least not the way you understand it. And that's very disconcerting. Or people from –

MR. FORGEY: Well, really – I mean, basic training is a shock to anybody.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, of course it is. I mean, it's – you know, it was horrible in many ways. It was also exciting. I – you know, I try to – I'm one of those people who tries to look at the good side. I had a friend in the army who has become a fairly well-known artist himself. His name is Sigmund Abeles.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm. Chicago? No –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, he originally came from South Carolina, I think, and he – I believe he lives more in Upstate New York –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or something like this. And he is primarily a printmaker. He's a figurative artist, but he's a pretty good one. And –

MR. FORGEY: You met him in the army?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah. We were in the same company or something –

MR. FORGEY: In basic training?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think so. I'm pretty sure. And one of the things that we did is, with the few hours of free time that you have in those situations, is that we drew. And so we had something in common. I still have drawings that I did in the army, in fact. That's when I started – I kept on drawing quite seriously, and throughout the two years that I was in the army I drew a lot. And in basic training it was partly – [laughs] – some of the – it was interesting. I was already – I think that he too, although he was obviously my age – I somewhere have some drawings that I did when I was in Fort Jackson, I think, and later when I came out and was in Fort Dix or something. And so the subjects were – they were all men, and they were in some ways more psychologically burdened than figures that I would otherwise have drawn or have drawn since. You know –

MR. FORGEY: I'd love to see them.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, yeah, well –

MR. FORGEY: I'm not sure of the quality or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – did you think ironically or otherwise –

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I didn't think about –

MR. FORGEY: – of "Back to Malden" for example.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, not at all. They were – what I did was, not only in basic training but later also, I drew a lot of fellow soldiers, and what I started doing early on also – but I don't have any record of that, because that I gave away; the other ones were in little sketchbooks or something or loose pieces of paper – but what I started doing very soon, and that was also a way to make a bond with other people, some of whom as I indicated I had really nothing in common with at all – say small-town, you know, farm boys or something like that or whether they were the Midwest or from the Deep South or something, you know, people in some cases who could barely speak well, and you know, that sort of thing –

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that's the kind of shock that you get when you get drafted, because you're in with everybody, and so it's a very interesting experience, to say the least. I mean, it's very hard on you, but it's also exhilarating in some ways. And you do try to get along with your fellow soldier, you know, even although you might in some cases consider him, you know, an animal or something like this. And, in fact, you meet some people that you have not imagined are almost animal-like. I met some later – even in Germany I remember –

MR. FORGEY: You tend to take – I think you have to be distanced from it somewhat, but –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – but I know you start taking military training seriously.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: I don't know if this is relevant to this particular interview –

MR. DE LOOPER: No – oh, absolutely.

MR. FORGEY: – but you take it seriously because you're learning how to kill.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's right. That's right. But the – okay, but – so what I did do is I early on, since I liked to – loved to draw, I started also asking people for pictures that they had in their wallets, say, of their wives or girlfriends, and I started making drawings of these. Whether they resembled any of these people, I don't know. But that was kind of a big hit.

MR. FORGEY: Would you give – and you'd give them –

MR. DE LOOPER: I would just give – oh, sure. It was not, you know, for money or anything like this. It was a way of not only passing the time and for me also to practice my drawing I suppose, but it was also, as I indicated –

MR. FORGEY: A way to socialize.

MR. DE LOOPER: – as a way of socializing, you see? And it was ultimately kind of fun. But I do have some drawings, as I say, of fellow soldiers and that sort of thing. And Abeles was – I think, began possibly a little bit more advanced. He was – I don't know, but he drew also. And some of the figures, in retrospect, looked like the kind of stuff that he may have drawn or something. They're a little different from his style in other things. So I was in basic training, and then I was supposed to be sent to – the whole company was supposed to be sent to Korea. The Korean War, of course, was over, but as we are now aware, even in '92 there are still American soldiers in Korea. So it was just one of those, you know, draws at –

MR. FORGEY: Europe or Germany – Europe or –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – Korea.

MR. DE LOOPER: Far East, right. And it was Korea. And so the whole company, in fact, got orders, and they were already cut for Korea. And for some strange reason they were withdrawn, and we didn't go to Korea and we went – well, it's not quite that simple. At – when I was in – after I had – when I was still at Fort Jackson, the Hungarian uprising [1956] had started.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And as a result of it, many Hungarians and others had joined the armed forces. In fact, it was talked about often in kind of – in cynical terms in the American Army in that their ticket to come to the United States was to sign up for a long time in the infantry –

MR. FORGEY: Right

MR. DE LOOPER: – in the American Army. And, you know, obviously a lot of these guys, after – especially when they had to go through infantry training and then knew that they still had stay in for three or four years or something, got a little bit bitter. But the main point that I wanted to make was that they didn't speak English in most cases, or not English very well. And some of us who had college training were picked to teach them English by rote. And I was one of the people that they picked, because in the army, you know, when you are there, you do – ultimately you hang out with the people that have something in common with you, and in my case it was they were also people that were college graduates, some of whom, as I think you referred to that earlier, went to language schools and so forth, and some went into intelligence. And I was – partly because I was a foreigner, I could not apply for OTS, for instance, which is Officer Training School, and I didn't qualify for a lot of things like intelligence training and that sort of thing, which I might have gotten because I had a BA, you see? Whereas many of the other people were high school dropouts even, or whatever.

So I started actually doing that. And for several months I taught English to Hungarians. And it was really kind of interesting. What you did was you would write things on the blackboard and you would have them repeat it and that sort of thing. Actually it didn't last very long, because then the orders again came – and they call come from the Pentagon, you see, by some unknown hand, so your whole future is in – really in somebody else's hand – and

then I was sent to Germany instead, you know, rather than Korea. I was, of course, very happy to have gotten out of Korea in the first place by choosing to be a teacher, and by having made that choice, you see, I would have been there for the rest of my two years –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – in South Carolina. But, you know, then these orders came, and I was sent to Germany with the rest of the company. And so I was stationed in the south of Germany near Stuttgart in a place called Ludwigsburg and spent the rest of my – I guess it's basically a year and a half really by that time in Germany. And this is where I became more and more interested in art, because what I was – I was a – I was in a headquarters company of a helicopter battalion, but I obviously had nothing to do with a helicopter myself. In fact, few of us had. What we all did were – we were clerk typists, which means, for somebody who doesn't know that, that you're basically just an office worker and you have a 9:00 to 5:00 or 8:00 to 5:00 job and you type things which have to do with the company.

MR. FORGEY: File a lot.

MR. DE LOOPER: You file, and you – well, I made the daily report always, or at least for a long time I did that. And I even wound up driving a colonel for a while, because the other thing that we all had – it was a transportation company, you see? So everybody – it was filled with – everybody – it was a trucking and jeep kind of company. So we all drove a truck as well, and so we were assigned to – I was assigned to a three-quarter-ton truck, which I always rather enjoyed driving. But basically you worked in an office. So it also meant, in turn, that at 5:00 in the afternoon you could put on your civilian clothes and you could either go into –

MR. FORGEY: And you had probably three weekends out of four off.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right, right. And then occasionally, unlike infantry companies or so, which have to go into the field all the time for training and all that – and it was a fairly soft life to be quite frank, within the circumstances that you're in the army. And so at 5:00 you're off. So what do you do after that with your free time? Well, you can go drinking beer, which of course you do also, but – and you can go into the town, and that all depends on the small amount of money that you have too, how much – how often you can do that. And then so, for me, one of the things that I became very much involved with is a service club that was on the kaserne in fact. What do they call that? What do you call that? The post.

MR. FORGEY: The base.

MR. DE LOOPER: The base.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And it was – the thing was kind of an interesting one. It was called Flak Kaserne, and it belonged at one time to what's his name? The great German Luftwaffe general. I think of his name. Goering? The big, fat one, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: The Luftwaffe? Yeah, Goering.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. And that's the –

MR. FORGEY: Flak Kaserne?

MR. DE LOOPER: Flak, Flak,

MR. FORGEY: How do you spell that?

MR. DE LOOPER: F-L-A-K, like –

MR. FORGEY: Oh, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know? Right. Like the stuff that they shoot down plans with, I suppose.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Flak. Anyway, so that's the base. It's a fairly small base. But anyway – so the whole base was just covered with trucks rather than with helicopters. The helicopters were – I think that had once a helicopter ride. That's all. But anyway – and that's also the way I got to – as a driver, you see, I also wound up driving the colonel who was the commander of the post from time to time and that sort of thing. But, so, the point of it all is that after 5:00 I spent a lot of time in the service club, which was well-equipped, and it was equipped with an art

shop, or an art facility and also a photography lab. And I did even take some photography at that time. I mean, I learned under the guidance of a local German who ran the photography shop how to develop black and white pictures that I took and so forth – mostly of people, you know, and that sort of thing. And – but in the service club I spent a lot of time, and of course the service club – you, having been in the army, you know what that is like. I mean, you do also lots of other stuff, like dancing and bowling and bingo and all that sort of stuff.

MR. FORGEY: Ping-pong was always good.

MR. DE LOOPER: Ping-pong. Right. All those things. But we – the craft shop was run by a German woman who had materials for you to work with, you see? And there were a number of us who went there fairly regularly to paint, and they didn't have oil paint I remember, because I painted with printing ink, which is soluble in turpentine. And so I continued this kind of thing that I had really started at AU, where the paintings are really almost like drawings but they're filled in with color, but again with a very thinned-down sort of thing. I made one – she even had a lithograph press, but it was very primitive. And I made one lithograph in the army. But I spent a lot of time there. So I made lots of drawings and lots of work.

I was – all the time, of course, I continued to have an interest in drawing, and again I started hanging out with people that were similar to myself in education and interests. And it meant that at that point also we went into Ludwigsburg and also into Stuttgart, which had a museum and it had – it had even an opera and it had other, you know, cultural things which we occasionally did. Not all the time. You know, I don't want to over-exaggerate it, but certainly we were exposed to some of it. And there were others that I befriended who were also artists and they liked to draw, and so we went drawing for instance. And I have some things of that nature too. And that was mostly drawings in the neighborhood of – there was a castle for instance. There was a beautiful park. And we – there were certain structures in there that were nice to draw and that sort of thing. And all the time I was also still drawing people in the – in their uniform or, you know, lying on their bunks and that sort of thing.

But in the service club the other thing that was very interesting was that they had American magazines and they had *Art News*.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: And those were the great years of *Art News*. And –

MR. FORGEY: Or *Painter, Painting*.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right, exactly.

MR. FORGEY: "Jackson Pollock paints a picture." That kind of –

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. Well, I don't know if they ever had Jackson Pollock himself, but they –

MR. FORGEY: That's the famous example, I think, in the early '50s, was –

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. They had a lot of those, and –

MR. FORGEY: Great feature actually.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the interesting thing is that still have some of those magazines that I –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – was either given or snitched them, I'm not sure. But the way – I certainly remember it. I started reading these kinds of things, you see? And you could – through articles like that you could actually see an artist who was creating his picture. And this made a big impact on me. And then in 1958 I think it was, much of the – a very important thing happened where American art was concerned. There was a World's Fair. In Brussels?

MR. FORGEY: Brussels, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I actually went there, and I saw a lot of the American art that had come from New York, you see? De Kooning, Pollock, Kline, Smith – all those people. And that was the way I see it: as a very important event for me, because I actually saw this stuff. I – whether I understood it or not, I don't know. I probably had an inkling because I'd been reading some of those articles.

MR. FORGEY: But you were –

MR. DE LOOPER: But I was really taken by that. And certainly I find those experiences to be very crucial in my

even deciding that, you know, when I came out that I would become a painter rather than anything else. But in those years, you know, I wasn't even thinking of going into commercial art anymore.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I must say that I didn't have any clear conception of what I would really do when I came out of the army, but it was really then that the real interest in real art developed. So that was terrific to see all that stuff in Brussels, and it seems like a long time ago. It is a long time ago. But – and to think how new that art still was, because that was, in some cases, only, you know, maybe five or ten years at the most after it had been created. Perhaps some of those paintings – yeah, I think Pollock (1912-1956) was probably still alive or something like that.

MR. FORGEY: I don't think in '58.

MR. DE LOOPER: Maybe he wasn't, but he was barely dead by then. But Kline certainly was, and – you know, and all those people – Guston – all those people were in it. It was quite a stupendous thing. It – I sort of vaguely remember that the press in America – *Time* Magazine, *Life* Magazine – they all had stories, most of them probably not very favorable, but still – because it was still very controversial, all that stuff. It still is to some extent, I guess. [Laughs.] But – not for the artist, but with the general public. It was a big thing, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah

MR. DE LOOPER: And I'm so happy to have seen that, you know? So –

MR. FORGEY: I can understand that.

MR. DE LOOPER: So –

MR. FORGEY: So you're saying you – there's a good chance –

MR. DE LOOPER: In some – right.

MR. FORGEY: – this worked out pretty well, this period in Germany?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, I think so. I really think so, because I think I think it just gave me a couple of years to really –

MR. FORGEY: And –

MR. DE LOOPER: – sort of think in some terms –

MR. FORGEY: Did you ever consider staying in Europe when you got out?

MR. DE LOOPER: No, never. Never.

MR. FORGEY: Never?

MR. DE LOOPER: No. What had happened on a personal level was that I had actually gotten married to a girl whom I had known before in Holland before I came to the United States, you see? And I had not been back until –

MR. FORGEY: Who was that?

MR. DE LOOPER: She was a girl that I knew in The Hague, you see, who had not gone to the same school, but we all knew – we all lived on the street around the corner from where I lived. And we were sort of a gang of, you know, teenagers who used to spend a lot of time together, and we used to dance and things like this and listen to American records and that sort of thing. And so it was the first time I had been back in Holland, and quite frankly, I sort of made a pretty big mistake that way, I guess, again certainly in retrospect, but I married – I had always been very fond of her, but in the years before I went to the United States – she was a touch older than I was and certainly went out with boys that were older than I was. You know how it is, especially when you're a teenager. If a girl goes out even with a guy who's two years older, it seems like she's going out with an old man, you know? Whereas later on in life that all telescopes a little bit. But, you know, it was one of those kind of things. And so not only did I go back to the United – to Holland for the first time seeing my parents, but I also took up this particular friendship and we decided to get married. So we got married in the army in Germany but never lived together, because I was just a – I lived in a, you know, barracks. And, of course, I had no rank of any kind. I was just a PFC. And later I guess I was a Spec4, which is one rank higher.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: But you're just peon, you know, and you get paid hardly anything at all and you have no privileges, you see? And so the point was that she lived – after we were married we saw each other and we went to Brussels together, that sort of thing. But she lived in Holland, and I lived in Germany, and that was, of course, a recipe for a disaster. So, in fact, my first wife never came to the United States at all.

MR. FORGEY: I see.

MR. DE LOOPER: So after I – things started going wrong pretty rapidly, and in fact, that became – I mean, we were already getting divorced by the time I was getting out of the army, you see? It was a – it was unfortunate, but it was a bit – you know, it was something that we shouldn't have done, and it was badly handled and all sides, to put it bluntly, you know, simply – and so that was, in that sense, not a real big factor in my life, but it did happen and it is part of my life nevertheless.

MR. FORGEY: What was her name?

MR. DE LOOPER: Here name was Lili, and she came from a very large family.

MR. FORGEY: Spell it, please.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mentrop – M-E-N-T-R-O-P. No, it means nothing at all. She has a very large Catholic family, in fact, and, as I say, we had – there were a number of us living in this neighborhood, and we all hung out together. And I told you earlier about my interest in jazz, for instance. See, one of the things that we had that I used to go to just before I came to the United States, there were certain clubs – there was one in particular – that we went to – I'm sure they had it in Amsterdam and other cities like that too – within The Hague where you would go and you would listen to the latest records. And they were really more on the jazz side, I mean serious jazz side, rather than –

MR. FORGEY: On the pop side.

MR. DE LOOPER: – on the popular music side.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But people would dance to the stuff, and I did too. And so we would go to that. So that was another way that we, you know, hung out together more or less –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and, interestingly enough, of course, that's the kind of concept that came to nightclubs and so on much later, where people just had turntables and they – you know, they played – they were probably 78-rpm records and that sort of thing. And so it was kind of interesting.

MR. FORGEY: You had continued your interest in music throughout –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes

MR. FORGEY: – in jazz. I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – you are one of the most knowledgeable jazz people I've ever known in my life, and I presume –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – through the '50s you were –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. Oh, definitely that. In the army as well there was a club on the barracks – no, not that – you know what I mean.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, on the base, on the post.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, on the base, on the post, right. And, yes, I made a poster for them and so forth. I was involved with the jazz club. There was also – there were – in Germany they still have these things even now. For some reason in Germany they put jazz clubs a lot in cellars. And there was one there too. And so we would go and listen to jazz, you know, being made by German musicians.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, this is in Ludwigsburg, huh?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. I don't remember seeing any American musicians particularly, but, yes, and we – I – what I also did is I had, as you probably – as you know, I have a very large collections of records, and I had already started that from the first day that I was ever in the United States. I remember buying some stuff in New York.

MR. FORGEY: Was it Colony Records? Did you ever go there? That was the big –

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't remember where I bought them, but I mean, I bought early on some Bud Powell and Earl Gardner and things like this, from the very beginning, when I, you know, was – when my brother picked me up.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But anyway, so also when I was in the army I couldn't live without my records, and the other guys in fact, many of whom were black, they were also terribly interested in jazz. And so I had my brother ship me a whole lot of LPs, and so we would listen to these. And we'd have get-togethers, again in that service club, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: For that sort of thing. And – oh, no, I've certainly had a deep interest, and they were just as interested. These guys were from Detroit and places like that, and all that. And there was this jazz club. And then occasionally a jazz band would play in the service club as well. And so we had a bit of an organization involved with jazz.

MR. FORGEY: I hate to make an aside here, but the jazz scene in Washington the '50s, did you ever go into live jazz here?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah, I did. I certainly did. In fact – oh, certainly I saw some of the early jazz clubs, including on 14th Street and all, and even higher up there was a place called Olivia's Patio Lounge.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm. On Georgia Avenue or on –

MR. DE LOOPER: I'm not sure –

MR. FORGEY: – 14th Street?

MR. DE LOOPER: I'm not sure exactly where it was. And I saw Bud Powell there once in his –

MR. FORGEY: Aha.

MR. DE LOOPER: – in his declining years quite frankly, but I also saw – I saw Chubby Parker with Strings once. And the way I remember that, that may have been at something called Uline Arena.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: It was an ice-skating rink here in the Northeast or somewhere –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, it's over in the Northeast.

MR. DE LOOPER: It still exists I think.

MR. FORGEY: It still – the building still exists.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay.

MR. FORGEY: I don't know if they're still using it.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's where they had – and I saw –

MR. FORGEY: You pass it on the Metro train still.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, really?

MR. FORGEY: It's on H Street or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, it is?

MR. FORGEY: – right close to H Street –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – and Northeast.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, because as you know yourself, in those years, you know, Washington didn't have any stages really.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I mean, I did go, I think, to the Howard also. It still had stuff.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I saw Ahmad Jamal real early on, when he had a little trio called Three Strings. And – anyway – and I got to know – well, I went once. That was a thrill for me too. Well, at AU, in fact, I was a disc jockey for a while, see, playing my own records –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – on the local radio –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – which didn't go beyond – it was AM, and it didn't go beyond –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – the scope of the campus. I mean, probably two or three people listened to me ever, you know? But – and an aside to that was that Willard Scott and Ed Walker were there too, you see? They were in Alpha Tau Omega, which was the fraternity right next to us, and they were both – Ed Walker was a very good engineer, and I think that at least once he engineered for me. He was blind, of course then as well as now, and – but – and he did all of this miraculous stuff by touch, you know? It was a very small thing. It was WAMU, just as it is now, but of course you know. And I have at least one photograph somewhere of where I'm doing something like that.

MR. FORGEY: So when you're heading back to the United States and your brother is still here in Washington –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah, he was still here.

MR. FORGEY: – so you're – naturally you're coming back to Washington.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. So I came back to Washington, and I came again, strangely enough, in October. October seems to be a kind of a month for me to – for big decisions or something. And so, for the second time in my life, I came to the United States in October, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: But this time on a troop ship from Bremerhaven and that sort of thing, doing KP along the way on the ship, you know? [Laughs.] But – and so then it was a time to make up my mind about what I was going to do, and there I was helped by – just by pure coincidence, you see – by the fact that the Phillips Collection, which I had visited and possibly not more than two or three times – the only thing that I ever remember having seen there which made an impression on me, and I'd have to go and look up the date somewhere, but there was a John Marin exhibition, a big one, which I think was organized by the Museum of Modern Art, and it came to the Phillips, and that was – must have been maybe in '55, '56, something like that. And I saw that, and I was quite interested in John Marin and the way he painted. And then I was especially in the paintings that he did where he beyond the frame. Where he painted the frame too?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: So anyway that's the only one that I really remember. I don't remember the – you know, the Matisses or the Renoirs or anything like that until later on when I started working there, which was very shortly after I came out of the army, because in October I came out, say it was the first week or whatever, and then during October of that year a small picture was stolen at the Phillips Collection [December 5, 1959, *Pink Candle* by Henri Rousseau], which I think at that time didn't have any guards at all. It had –

MR. FORGEY: What that a Rousseau or what was the picture?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think it was the little – yes –

MR. FORGEY: The little –

MR. DE LOOPER: – the *Pink Candle* by Rousseau, exactly. And it was a tiny little picture, not bigger than a postcard, and with its frame maybe 8 by 10 inches. And fortunately it was returned [January 14, 1960 at the Trailways Bus Terminal, Washington, D.C.], as you well know, too. It was, I think, found –

MR. FORGEY: Sent back in a package or –

MR. DE LOOPER: – in some locker.

MR. FORGEY: Oh, was it?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think it was in a locker in a train station or – you know, the Greyhound station.

MR. FORGEY: And a note was sent or something –

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't know. Something like that. But, in fact – so they had, obviously, a staff, and they would occasionally circulate through the museum. People nowadays couldn't even imagine something like that. But, you know, they didn't really have any guards. They had people would occasionally do that. But this was, of course, a terrible event. And I had mentioned earlier that I knew Bill Woodward and his wife, and his wife at that time – I don't know how long she had been there – she was working as a secretary to the woman who ran the personnel, Elmira Bier –

MR. FORGEY: Elmira. She ran a music –

MR. DE LOOPER: She ran the music program as well.

MR. FORGEY: – program as well, yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes, very interesting.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: An interesting woman. And she was there for many years, and she retired ultimately in the same years when – after Marjorie Phillips retired in '74 –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or something like that. Yeah, '74. So anyway – so, after – so the Woodwards, knowing that I had just come out of the army and we had been before, just sort of blindly they called me and did I want to come and work at the Phillips Collection for a while? And that's the way I got to work at the Phillips Collection, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Amazing.

MR. DE LOOPER: As a guard.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that was also – it was in October, probably the same month. And that then led from – one thing, you know, led to the other. It meant that after a while – I mean, I had an income, and I – it was probably ridiculous, but, you know, it was an income at least.

MR. FORGEY: And you were hanging around paintings.

MR. DE LOOPER: It –

MR. FORGEY: – and great paintings.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I started hanging around with paintings, and it meant that I – I'm not completely sure when I did that, but very soon after that, I moved into my apartment, see, I was able to afford. And that in itself has kind of an interesting tie, because that ties in again with not only the Phillips, but with American University, because my first apartment was on N Street, Northwest, which is not so far from here, not so far from the Phillips, more – 20th and N. And into a house which was divided up into four apartments, and I had – I think I had the top apartment, and on the first floor somebody called Arthur Hall Smith.

MR. FORGEY: Yes, he's – I know Arthur of course.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. He was there. And Arthur, of course, is and was a painter, and he was –

MR. FORGEY: He teaches at – well, was he at GW at that time or –

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no.

MR. FORGEY: Probably not.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no. In fact, he started working at the Phillips Collection then a little bit after me –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – because these were the years – and this is where I have a real big gap of memory somehow about some of it, because these were the years that they were building what we then would refer to ever since as the New Building of the Phillips Collection, see, the modern addition, which was done by – Wyeth and King [Frederick Rhinelander King] I guess were the architects. And I have a very vague recollection of the actual building of that, and that's partly because I think we were so low on the totem pole, you see? In those years all these things were handled by Mr. And Mrs. Phillips themselves, Duncan and Marjorie. And so they dealt with the architect, and – I mean, obviously there was something going up there, but I have very vague –

MR. FORGEY: Well, it opened in [November] 1960, did it not?

MR. DE LOOPER: 1960, it did. And that's when Arthur Hall Smith, who was living in that same house that I was, you see, started working there. And he worked – he went under somewhat different circumstances in that he actually went to the Phillipses, who lived on Foxhall Road, and applied to them directly. The other thing that I wanted to mention is that the house in N Street was owned by Bernice Cross, who was a well-known painter at that time in Washington –

MR. FORGEY: Yes, indeed.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and who was – had been married to James McLaughlin – Jim McLaughlin, who much later became the curator of the Phillips Collection. He was, of course, already –

MR. FORGEY: See, I never knew that they had been married. I didn't.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: I just wasn't aware of that connection.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, they lived in the – one of the houses behind – in Hillyer Court, which is behind the Phillips, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, I see.

MR. DE LOOPER: Several other people lived there, too, over the years.

MR. FORGEY: But James McLaughlin, he was working at the Phillips –

MR. DE LOOPER: He was working. He was – just as Bob Gates. Bob Gates had also worked at the Phillips, you see, in the early years already. And there was another fellow called John Gernand, who –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – became the registrar later on. For many years, see, people had no title of any kind at the Phillips. That didn't happen until after Marjorie retired. Then people were given titles. And some of those people – in fact, Jim McLaughlin and John Gernand and there was one more person called Harold Giese –

MR. FORGEY: How do you spell Giese's name?

MR. DE LOOPER: G-I-E-S-E.

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were all painters, and most of them have shown at one time or another at – certainly at Franz Bader –

MR. FORGEY: Bernice Cross showed at Bader –

MR. DE LOOPER: Bernice –

MR. FORGEY: – every other year –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, absolutely. And Bernice Cross was obviously, for a long time, one of Phillips' favorites as well of the local artists.

MR. FORGEY: She had a sweet little mystical –

MR. DE LOOPER: She did.

MR. FORGEY: I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, many – she was a very adept painter. I mean, it's in a style that, you know, nowadays would be fairly retrograde, but she was very good at collages as well. She made very – some of her most interesting works, I think, were – she always worked on a small scale – but were basically collages, and they were very original, although I imagine that artistically she probably had learned a lot from Arthur Dove. Of course, Arthur Dove was a big factor in everybody's life at the Phillips too, you know? I mean the other people who painted. But all those people, you see, painted on a much more regular basis, and then slowly over the years they – you know, they're unlike me, where it was just the opposite, you see? I started working there and became painter. They became less –

MR. FORGEY: Painted less and less.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: It became a much more private activity.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: I always had that feeling.

MR. DE LOOPER: Private activity or even an activity that they – that would have five-year interruptions or so.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And some of the – even like Jim, for instance, over the years – all of a sudden he would produce a show of some sort. But then years would go by and he wouldn't paint at all. And you'd see that sort of thing, yeah. Oh, and that's perhaps something to do with his family. But anyway, so all these – anyway, what I didn't mention to you – what I wanted to mention is that Arthur Smith was in some ways one of the early real artists that I knew.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You see? He had come originally from Seattle, and he had –

MR. FORGEY: Talk about black and white. I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, exactly. Well, he is – and he had studied with [Mark] Toby, and so he often talked about Toby. It was not until much later, you see? He worked for almost 15 years at the Phillips before he decided he'd – he then – during those 15 years he dried up as an artist, and he just didn't exhibit anymore at all. And then he made a big decision in his life, you see, to become – to go to teach.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that revived him as a human being. It was incredible. I've never seen anything quite like that. It made him work, and he it made him happy. It made him, you know, everything that he wasn't anymore after all those years at the Phillips.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that's sort of an aside, but it all sort of ties in because on the other hand, see, I had access to his studio, and I saw, you know, a real artist working on paintings that he exhibited. You know, he was obviously very advanced, and he talked about Toby, whom, you know, I – who was a big-name artist. And he had a very close contact. I think that Toby actually came to his studio, for instance, when he was in Washington, you know, that sort of thing. I never saw him, but, you know, this was the real thing, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And in the meantime I had my first apartment and, therefore, my first studio.

MR. FORGEY: This is in this house on N Street?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. My first studio as a result of that upstairs, you see? And I was painting paintings in some cases based on some work that I had done in the army.

MR. FORGEY: Were you painting – did you start – then pretty much get into a routine of painting all the time at that point or –

MR. DE LOOPER: I think so. I'm pretty sure of that. I painted in the very beginning figurative things, and some of them based on drawings and even some paintings that I had done in the army, you know, which I had rolled up in –

MR. FORGEY: Other than Bill Woodward, did you establish – reestablish any contacts with AU people?

MR. DE LOOPER: Not that I remember, no. I pretty much stayed away from that. I don't know if that was an instinctive thing or – no, because, you see, in those years, I mean, it's probably – I don't know exactly when the original Jefferson Place was founded, but it was probably founded around '61, '62 or so?

MR. FORGEY: Around then, yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think I was pretty much just painting on my own –

MR. FORGEY: But you were starting to do it as – I'm just trying –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGER: – to establish –

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no, I –

MR. FORGEY: – a routine.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, certainly.

MR. FORGEY: Pretty much continuing –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – the way you did in the army. You had a 9:00 to 5:00 job, and then after that –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – your main activity –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – was painting.

MR. DE LOOPER: And on weekends, I'm sure.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, I mean, I still have some of the things that I worked on then, but they were stretched canvasses. They were on linen. They weren't on –

MR. FORGEY: Well, I mean, the date on this painting that we just got out before –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, that's right.

MR. FORGEY: – was 1960.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, my god, yeah, that's right. That is 1960. So I probably painted that on N Street right there. But – this is a figurative painting obviously. It's intensely red and – it's –

MR. FORGEY: When did you frame it? Is that just recent?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, no, it's been framed –

MR. FORGEY: That's an old frame, isn't it?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. Framed for a long time.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: As a matter of fact, it looks like one of those Phillips frames.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, it does.

MR. DE LOOPER: You see, it looks like it might have been made by Jim McLaughlin or somebody like that, because – or, you know – you see, this is this way the whole Phillips thing worked. He – Phillips employed artists who not only helped him hang paintings and everything, but they also framed and they took care of the things.

MR. FORGEY: Well, it's a very lovely painting. I see a little [Georges] Braque in the still life part of it, and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – certainly you're here – you're talking about your drawing so much in these – in this whole decade, but here you see Willem de Looper painting in color. I mean, the colors are – the rich oranges and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, right.

MR. FORGEY: – and carmens and reds in this are quite extraordinary.

MR. DE LOOPER: It's still a very good painting, I must say. It's the best, obviously, of anything – you see, there weren't too many of these things.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: It was very – it was serious painting –

MR. FORGEY: Well, it's a tentative, but –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – serious painting.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: I mean, this was a big effort for you at that time. You were experimenting. You're obviously serious. You're into color. You've –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – looked at Matisse and Cezanne and Braque. There's a little bit of all of them in there, isn't there?

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, absolutely. It's very – it's – certainly for, you know, people in Washington, they would immediately recognize it as somebody who has looked very carefully at the paintings at the Phillips Collection, and I would certainly never deny that. Obviously that's been a great thing in my life, and obviously they – yeah, it's much more a painterly thing than a drawing. But I – what you are aware of, and I am also, is that I probably couldn't repeat this very often, you see? That the next painting might have been not as solid as a painting, for instance, depending too much on drawings or whatever. Those were years that were very interesting in some ways in retrospect, especially because pretty soon I started experimenting with abstraction, and that went in all sorts of directions, you see?

MR. FORGEY: You were a – you always classify these years on your – at least in your early biographies where you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: – as "1960-65, painted alone" –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – "did not show." I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's right. I mean, I did – certainly that's the way I remember, that I didn't make any big efforts. '65 is when I joined – '64 I think I first I had some things at the Jefferson Place, which was by that time –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – run by Nesta Dorrance. I never had any dealings with Alice Denney, who had been hired, as you know, by the same people that I – that were basically my teachers –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – you know, Calfee and Gates and –

MR. FORGEY: Summerford and –

MR. DE LOOPER: – Summerford and perhaps one or two other people in order to have an alternative to the Franz Bader Gallery really.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's really what happened.

MR. FORGEY: Helene Herzbrun was pretty active in that.

MR. DE LOOPER: She was probably – right. I think so.

MR. FORGEY: In the founding of it, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Being called McKinsey at the time, though.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And she was married to somebody called McKinsey, and I remember they had a little MG or something like that, some – [unintelligible] – you know, it was kind of just a little sports car. So, yes, I think it's quite clear that in all those years, or basically four years, I painted in many styles, developing my first interest, which obviously had been born somewhat earlier, towards abstraction. And always, you know, it's one of those things that people are constantly asking me about: do you – how do you start painting abstract paintings? You do that by learning how to deal with form and – but also you have to create not only the colors but also the form and all that sort of thing. And I did that, I think, by painting first landscapes and figures that became more abstract or – to use that word fairly loosely, as I went along from painting to painting. And that's also why the paintings were –

MR. FORGEY: Well, abstract, of course, was always used as a difference – that's why –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Not as a differentiation between –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, they weren't –

MR. FORGEY: – non-objective and –

MR. DE LOOPER: There were not non-objective, I would say, no.

MR. FORGEY: They were abstracting form –

MR. DE LOOPER: You were abstracting. And just as this one – I mean, the man's face, for instance, is really fairly abstract in that way from, say, what I may have painted a year or so before that at American University. I mean, there – and even the landscape, I mean, in these little still-life pictures, Braque-ish. It's really a group of forms that is easily recognizable as being fruits and having even shadows, but the shadows are, in some cases, green. And it's really an abstract – very much abstracted thing from something observed. Also I see – you see, at that point – I mean, this is a crucial point. When you come out of school – [audio break] – okay, so this is the crucial time when all of a sudden you're out of – or you've decided that you're going to be a painter. At least certainly that happened with me. But I assume that that happens with other people too. All of a sudden you're totally on your own. There is nobody there – I mean literally nobody, except maybe if you're real lucky. In my case I had, for instance, Bernice Cross or somebody that I could very occasionally drag up there and say, "Is this thing good?" You know? Or "Does this make any sense?" Or something. But these are interesting years, especially in retrospect, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Because you're really digging into yourself and into what you relate to visually and, in my case, since I started working at the Phillips, I was immediately surrounded by all this great art. Now, I do think that I fairly early probably made up my mind, and I would still preach that, although I'm not a teacher, but if I were a teacher I would certainly, not to be intimidated by great art, but to grow your inspiration from it. And I think I set out to do that right away. In other words, I didn't start by looking at what other people were doing in Washington. I didn't really go to galleries as I remember. Not much. I mean, I certainly was aware of some stuff, as we've talked earlier about the ICA for instance. And certainly I must have gone to some exhibitions. But I was basically looking at art made by people that were great artists, whether they were American or French, and this is why during those years, you see, I worked through myself through all these things in my own mind and I did it, and that's still the way I work now: by actually trying to do it, you see? My way has always been to paint and to draw, rather than to think about it. In fact, I don't understand the impulse that some people have to just sit and endlessly, you know, think about what they might paint and that sort of thing. I like to work it out. And that's – and those years were filled with that, you see? And from –

MR. FORGEY: Well, you can see in this painting – I mean, I see immediately Cezanne, Braque, and Matisse in various elements.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Did you go through any periods of examining Braque or Cezanne? Or did you decide –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well –

MR. FORGEY – "this month will be…"

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I don't think it was "this month will be," but obviously the Phillips Collection itself was in – very inspiring, but I think it was also confusing, because there was so much –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – that was real interesting. Now, first of all, I didn't have much of a grasp of non-objective art. But I think there was something in me already very early on that – certainly that's the way I see it now, is that I always wanted to be an – [audio break, tape change] – effective painter. But obviously you have to find yourself a subject, and the way I did that was by working my way through some of the things that I experienced at the Phillips. The easiest of that, although that seems like a silly thing to say where you're talking about Braque and Matisse and all that, was those kind of artists, because they were still dealing with the figure or with an interior or with a still life and that sort of thing, whereas very rapidly after that, you see, I started looking at things, in some cases things that I didn't even respond to or I didn't know how to respond to, like, for instance, Arthur Dove. I saw these paintings by Arthur Dove, and the way I remember it is the first times I saw those perhaps – I don't know how long. It might have been even a year that I really didn't get them very well. But there was something that attracted me to them, you see?

And so that's why, again, I now think those years were really the years during which I became an artist, because I had to dig into not only art that I, for the first time in my life, really started observing, with some few exceptions like the – you know, the World's Fair exhibition of great art, of real art. But I basically had not been, you know, a museum goer or an art gallery goer. And then tried to find a way of making something that was ultimately my own out of that.

And so in 1962 and '63, for instance, I had veered away from drawing the figure more and more, and my first paintings – and you have seen probably some of them – are semi-abstractions or abstractions, depending on how you use the terminology, which dealt with forms in nature. They were really plants or they were abstracted landscapes, and they were, in some cases, very abstract. But I also – that was also due to the fact that not only was I interested sometimes for a few months – or very intensely, say – by John Marin and the way he abstracted the landscape, you see? And I liked this kind of gloppy sort of thing that he had going and maybe the action that was in his paintings. And then Arthur Dove – there were some paintings that I did that were Dove-like.

But it's interesting, and I don't know how to explain that quite, I tried to paint fairly large right away in the sense that even some of these things that are pretty tentative were done in many cases on large sheets of paper. But they were almost the kind of sizes that I am still painting with. In other words, I paint a lot of paintings on paper now that measure by 40 by 60 inches, and some of the earliest ones, some of which I still have, are about that size. But they are of, you know, imaginary plant forms and that sort of thing, and color becomes more important to me. And I tried consciously to get away from drawing, and that's partly also something that I learned from Ben Summerford – I still remember – in the sense that, even when I was doing these things at American University, some of which are quite handsome, they are – the line and color don't completely relate. And I

remember him talking about – at some point, you know, when I was a student – about watercolors.

And that's – I think that was especially true when, for instance, probably shows reproductions of Cezanne or something, that that was a real watercolor. It's just like, when you look at a Turner watercolor, where it's not a drawing that is then filled in with color. It's a – it is something that is – it really exists of its own color, and maybe there are some drawing highlights in a Cezanne, often just a faint little pencil line that seems to support the color structure or something like that. And the same thing in Turner, although Turner gets almost even more abstract than that.

MR. FORGEY: It's the oil kind.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that's the kind of thing that certainly I was aware of, you know, partly, as I say, because my teacher had set that and partly I think I started really using my eyes when I was at the Phillips. I looked at this stuff, and – well, you saw –

MR. FORGEY: Well, I tell you, we're right at a point which is an interesting point to begin with –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – at the next session.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, that's fine with me.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, I think so, because now we're getting into –

MR. DE LOOPER: Absolutely. Yeah, that's right.

MR. FORGEY: – the actual development of the art and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Let's do that. That's fine.

MR. FORGEY: Okay, very good.

MR. DE LOOPER: I enjoy it. Did you get any of this stuff?

MR. FORGEY: I did.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh.

MR. FORGEY: Thanks.

MR. DE LOOPER: There's a lot more.

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. FORGEY: [In progress] – of Willem – or in the living room now of Willem de Looper. It's February 29th –

MR. DE LOOPER: Leap year.

MR. FORGEY: – 1992. And the first thing – this is Ben Forgey, and I'm sitting with Willem de Looper. And the first thing I'd like to say is that both of us, I'm sure, went immediately to our books at the conclusion of the last interview and are knocking ourselves in the head.

MR. DE LOOPER: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: It's the Institute for Contemporary Art.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's exactly right.

MR. FORGEY: Right. Robert Richmond founded it, and of course, it was a major cultural –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – influence here in Washington in the postwar years and early '50s –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – through the '50s.

MR. DE LOOPER: And –

MR. FORGEY: I just wanted to make that clear, that you –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And, as a matter of fact, an historical note came up just the other day. I was telling you before the tape was running –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – that I'd talked to Sam Gilliam, who had a talk at the Phillips Collection just a few days ago –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – it being February 1992 now.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I said that to him that it seems me that I saw one of his paintings at the ICA, and he said, "Yeah, it was in there." And that was apparently a show that was organized by Alice Denney. And it was a bit of a protest show the way he explained it to me, because there was another –

MR. FORGEY: About what year are we talking now?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, we must be talking about '62 –

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: – because now – because I've had to look at that up. But Gerry Nordland did the Washington color painting show –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art that –

MR. FORGEY: Right. That was in '65, was it not?

MR. DE LOOPER: Was it really?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, I thought so.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, okay –

MR. FORGEY: '64.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, in that case –

MR. FORGEY: Not earlier than '64.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, well, in that case, that knocks a hole right in my theory right there.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Because what's – and that could be then that Sam is either referring to a different show or that he's just mistaken about that.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: But he said that Alice Denney then put some paintings together of some artists that he – that she liked, including Sam but not including me, and showed those at ICA as a – as sort of a critical comment on Gerry Nordland's show.

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But you're familiar with that then?

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, okay.

MR. FORGEY: Well, not familiar – I didn't see the – Alice's show, but I –

MR. DE LOOPER: I must have seen it, but I – you know, I don't remember too many things visually, except that I – because, until the other night, you see, I thought that Sam had, in fact, painted different paintings than he really did during that particular period, because as it turned out, we both joined Jefferson Place in what must be '64 and had our first one-person shows in '65. And we were never involved – certainly I was never involved with Alice Denney. And he was perhaps only involved then with Alice Denney in that context, but not in the context of Jefferson Place.

MR. FORGEY: Jefferson Place.

MR. DE LOOPER: She was long gone.

MR. FORGEY: Were these the paintings of Sam's where the geometry was beginning to –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – to dissolve?

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. That's right. They were really triangles in a way. They were very Noland-like things.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were sort of hybrids between Noland and [Morris] Louis, I would think.

MR. FORGEY: Right. Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And then I think that he did some bit of folding so that the center of the image or – would get very free and "Louisy-looking." It was interesting –

MR. FORGEY: Because he had been doing hard-edged –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – geometric painting.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: Well, we want to talk about your relationship with the – with Sam and with the Washington Color School, but –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – as we were discussing before, perhaps we ought to go back and fill in some of the gaps –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – in terms of your AU years –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – as to what you were looking at then. You –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, since the last interview, I sort of remembered that I don't think I mentioned that, as far as I know, when I was studying at American University, I was at the Phillips Collection, where I wound up working for 25 years later on, only once. And – or at the very least there was only exhibition that I – that really made an impact on me, and that was a John Marin exhibition. And the John Marin exhibition, I think, was organized by the Museum of Modern Art and was pretty large. And so it would have shown typically John Marin's watercolors and his paintings, and what I remember most about that is that not only because, during the years that I then graduated from AU and then next few years before I really – when I made up to be – made up my mind to be a painter and that sort of thing, I went through a lot of influences.

And John Marin certainly was one. The thing that I remember most about the paintings is I think the paint quality – because from very on – very early on, and despite what I actually found out a few years later with Louis and Noland and that bit of staining, I seemed to have been attracted to very fluid paint and watercolors, some of – you know, I'd done some watercolors in the army. I think I explained that once before. And with the Marins, the fascinating thing was that in some of the paintings, the way I remember it, Marin had actually painted on the

frames, thereby extending, you know, the image that he had painted beyond the frame and onto the frame and all that. And I had never seen anything like that before, and I found that extremely interesting.

And again, you know, in retrospect you start looking at something like this, and you say, "Aha!" You know? This is where perhaps things really start fitting together, because after all Louis and Noland were doing things like that as well, you know, the paintings of [Augustus] Tack which were at the Phillips – and we were talking about the other night again in the context of Gilliam too – almost surely seems to – seem to have had an impact on almost all the painters, including painters that you don't even think of. Apparently people on the West Coast were – occasionally when they came to the Phillips they were quite fascinated by Tack. I think all of that you have to take with a grain of salt, you know, that only the very best and certain examples of that were of interest. But people – it was sort of in the air that a lot of artists after abstract expressionism and that sort of thing were, I think, interested to look towards doing something with the edge or beyond the edge of the canvas in a different way altogether than abstract expression. At least that's my interpretation of that.

MR. FORGEY: It's interesting to me that you remember this so clearly now.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: Because it seems to me that your painting has always been quite conscious of the edge as a –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, absolutely. As a matter of fact, yeah, I mean, you know, I do do a certain analysis of my paintings from time to time, maybe not quite as many – quite as much as some people do, or perhaps more than I think I do. You know? It's one of those kind of things.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, in fact, obviously one thing that I have always done, except again with a very important exception, I've always painted stretched. And as you can see in the '69-'70 painting that's hanging here on the wall and in other paintings that you have seen, even now I am extremely conscious of the framing edge. But I have to have a framing – framed edge – framed canvass in order to work with it to be really comfortable. And the only exception to that again in my own work is in the '70s, actually starting in, I suppose, about '70 or so. Then we moved into this particular apartment on California Street where we still live and where my studio is, where in fact I started painting on stretched canvasses and did that for a few years. But on the whole that has never been my approach. So, you know, it's like that.

So Marin, on the other hand – I also bring up Marin in the sense that I talked about some of the other artists that influenced me, sometimes for a very short period of time. And so I did some "Marins" – you know, on cotton duck canvas and on paper, that sort of thing, just as a few years later I was very interested in Arshile Gorky's work, and that was really as a result of the exhibition at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art. And again to analyze myself, obviously I was also very attracted to his watery kind of textures and that sort of thing, you see, and the kind of almost staining that he did, although he did it with oil paint and I think he probably did it on prepared canvas and all that. And for that same reason there were a couple of – and still are – significant things in the Phillips Collection which I became acquainted with in the – you know, in the early '60s by [Wassily] Kandinsky, and Kandinsky – of course that time I also read his book, and what I understood of it –

MR. FORGEY: *The Spiritual in Art*?

MR. DE LOOPER: *The Spiritual in Art*. And I remember I even drew a little cover drawing of it – you know, for it in an imitative style – a "Kandinsky" in other words, in quotation marks. And these paintings also had a great influence, and Kandinsky certainly is another painter that I have always been terribly interested in. And if – as – if you look at the painting that is in the Phillips Collection that I'm thinking of especially – it's the *Composition Storm* with the right band all that – I think there is – it's a variation of one in the Guggenheim up there. And it's a thing basically – an abstraction of an landscape and all that, but – and it's rich in color, and it's – it's a landscape with perhaps some figurative elements in it, but it's basically a total abstraction really. But again its surface and its texture are very closely related to – the way I see it – to color painting, which was the other dominant inter – you know, interest here in Washington certainly.

MR. FORGEY: When did – I mean, I know that another thing that you got from Gorky for a spell there was – and it lasted quite a long time through many variations in your work over a period of three or four years at least –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – was interest in biomorphic shapes –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – we might call them, or natural kinds of forms, very abstract of course, maybe totally abstract –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – but nonetheless could be called biomorphic.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, that's –

MR. FORGEY: And this is very "Gorky" in –

MR. DE LOOPER: I think that's true. The way I've always seen that, again analyzing myself, is that – you know, I think I may have mentioned it in the earlier part of the interview, but I'm not sure – I had to – somehow I wanted to make abstract paintings, but they had to come out of something.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Just as the Kandinsky was clearly something of his Russian background and of landscapes that he had looked at and, you know – and he used to be a landscape painter and all that sort of thing, mine had to have, if you want to call it a crutch – and the crutch really was – and that, I think, also I recognized, you see, in somebody like Gorky. So here this man was doing what you could look at as abstract paintings, but, sure, they were grounded in something. And of course, in his particular case, they were grounded in surrealism as well, which was never of that great interest to me, except possibly in the – you know, in the way again that you sort of let your self-conscious do a lot of the painting, and I would dare say that even now I do that, you know, being basically an improviser.

MR. FORGEY: How do you describe the relationship between this period in your work – we're talking the mid '60s now –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – around the time that you had your first-person show at – one-person show at Jefferson Place [1966] –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – between drawing and color or drawing and painting?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I think the – in the earliest paintings, the ones that were most rhythmic looking and all that – most of the people in Washington, unless they were around then, have never seen them, but you happen to know them quite well. I think that drawing had a very important part in it. And, strangely enough, I feel that I'm almost re-interested in some of that now. I seem to be doing more drawing in my paintings, certainly at the start of them. Sometimes I paint it out so those traces are really no longer visible. It's always freehand and all that, but certainly there in those paintings of '65, say, they were very rhythmic as I say, and they were – yes, the shapes were drawn.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I mean, they were drawn in paint. I mean, I have never drawn with charcoal, say –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or made a preparatory drawing and then painted the thing.

MR. FORGEY: But at the time they were very bold and they were –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: They were outlined almost –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – against a white or a –

MR. DE LOOPER: I think I used –

MR. FORGEY: – a neutral brown.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. I think I used a canvas often to show the white and sometimes I would fill it in. Yes.

And so you can read the white as drawing, and I think quite frankly we all know where that came from. That came from Matisse.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that came in particular again – you know, the most obvious example is the*Interior with Egyptian Curtain* at the Phillips Collection –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – where he also uses the canvas itself, a prepared canvas but it's white, and then in other parts, I think on the right where the curtain is and all that, he actually uses the white with white paint. And it's that sort of thing. I mean, there's just no question that above all artists I imagine that I have ultimately been interested in Matisse and how he solved his pictorial problems. And sometimes you could see that very clearly, and other times you'd have to perhaps guess at that.

MR. FORGEY: We were – at that time too – I mean, a time of quite rapid change and experimentation in your work –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – you started to overlap transparent layers –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – of color.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: It was a way of, it seemed to me, a contest between drawing and color and drawing and painting –

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – and trying to resolve that. Is that an –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I think –

MR. FORGEY: – adequate way to describe that?

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I think it is. As a matter of fact, here again I cannot help but think of an important teacher – Joe Summerford, whom I regard above all as having been my teacher really, because he gave me a clue to a lot of stuff. He didn't tell me how to do things, and about, say, watercolors or – that they were not – he made it clear perhaps to me, perhaps to the whole class, I don't know, but I mean, I remember that very clearly, that, when you were doing something on paper, say, you could make a drawing and fill it in with color or you could integrate the two things and – like Cezanne did with line and color. And sometimes that color would overlap or obliterate, say, a piece of drawing.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that that was really the way to get any kind of vibration in your paint.

MR. FORGEY: Very interesting.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think that's really probably –

MR. FORGEY: I had always, I think, misinterpreted this or to some degree hadn't gone – never knew of this Summerford relationship of yours and tended to interpret this as a result of contact with Morris Louis in the Color School when you – did that have an effect at that time?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, you see, if you come right down to it, I really didn't see a lot of that. And – I mean, I saw – you know, Morris Louis never had any shows at Jefferson Place. Louis did – I mean Noland did. And Noland I continued to, in fact, see during the '60s, including one time Sam and I went to Europe and he went to Europe. I stayed in England with Frauke [Mr. de Looper's wife], and we saw a big Noland show there, and that was in – at the end of the '60s or so at the Kasmin Gallery in London and – where he was doing these enormous horizontal paintings that stretch about 20 or 30 feet or so.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And –

MR. FORGEY: They were shown in Washington, too.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, they were. I know that. But I think these were even newer or something like this.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And it was extremely impressive. But anyway, be that as it may –

MR. FORGEY: Well, let's – I want to pursue this, because –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – you're saying he didn't have –

MR. DE LOOPER: I –

MR. FORGEY: What was your –

MR. DE LOOPER: I did see the show, of course, in '65, if you say that was '65, that Gerry Nordland put together.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I did see, you know, constantly paintings by Downing and Marin, because they were always shown at the Jefferson Place or –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: All of them.

MR. FORGEY: And Paul Reed as well, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Paul Reed. I remember being very interested in the Marins because, for one thing, he was a very impressive painter. I always liked his work a great deal. And I always remember large paintings of his hanging. Of course, it's also true that Gene Davis was probably showing there at the time, but I don't remember him being much of an influence.

MR. FORGEY: What is it about Downing particularly that interested you?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, my interest in Downing actually came later than at the time that he was painting those paintings, quite frankly. I think at that point, the way I remember it, the way I look at it now, is that they were probably too intellectual for my taste.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think I probably had some problems with Noland as well, because they're ultimately very intellectual paintings. And so I related more to the Louises that I saw or Marin and possibly, you know, the influence of nature directly on those painters. It's not until much later that I, in fact, when I organized a small show at the Phillips in – whatever that year it was – you see, a little respective –

MR. FORGEY: Oh, of Downing.

MR. DE LOOPER: – that I got to see a whole lot of Downings that he had done in those years in a warehouse.

MR. FORGEY: This was in the 1980s, wasn't it?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's right.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: See? And then I got to see all these magnificent paintings that he had done which would never even have fit into the Jefferson Place because they were – I mean, the ones that were really outstanding to me were extremely ambitious. They were 20 feet, 30 feet, you know? Or whatever. They seemed at least to be that – that big. So I don't think that Downing was an influence, and so – but unlike, for instance, Sam Gilliam again, who was talking about this sort of thing the other day at the Phillips, it was clear that Sam and – I'm still friends with Michael Clark, for instance, too. You see, Michael Clark worked and knew Downing. I never really knew Downing.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You see, what you have to remember – I had a 9:00 to 5:00 job already then. So I was a different kind of artist. On top of that I was – I felt that I was not quite as advanced as even Sam was, although now that I've seen some of his early stuff, I'm not completely sure. I mean, I think that we were both, quite frankly, still groping around to some extent, going from one style to the other. But unlike some of the people that I've just mentioned, for instance, they were – they talked to Downing, and Downing was a bit of a – he was teacher –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – a couple of –

MR. FORGEY: Michael Clark was a student of his at –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And he was a very good teacher. And he was a bit of a guru to some of these people, and he, without a doubt, was also, as I said earlier, very intellectual, and he could explain things, and so people would probably also go to museums with him, you see, and look at things. And that's the interesting thing about the Phillips, because, of course, I started working there and looking at stuff daily, but all these artists did visit a museum like that and they tended to go to the same paintings really, and that again comes out when you see these slide lectures for instance, you see? They tended to go to the Matisses and the Doves and the – in other words, things that were useful to them – the Kandinskys, the Klees. You know, ironically I – I mean, I've always loved the Klees, but I don't think – I think other people have made more of Klee than I have, and just because I also, especially in late – much later years, do lots of work that is very small and intimate and sometimes witty I guess. People, therefore, assume that it's Klee-like.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, you know, that's an oversimplification certainly.

MR. FORGEY: In terms of technique, in terms of staining technique –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – where did you learn that? I mean at this time you started to stain directly –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, okay, yes, I painted with oil paint until about '62 I think, and then – and, you know, some of these things I still have in my storage, but I mean, when I lived on N Street, which is when I started working at the Phillips around the end of '59, early '60, that sort of thing, mostly for financial reasons, I painted on large sheets of paper, rather than on canvas. And those paintings were – first of all, they were very plant-like, you know, flower-like, that sort of thing. But they were meant to be abstractions, and they were painted with oil but very much thinned down. I mean, I used to use very large quantities of turpentine. Quite frankly, I didn't even know until later about – fairly shortly after – but I didn't know about plastic paints, about what they used to call plastic paints, acrylic paint, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the first acrylic paint that I started using – and I may have made some of my, in quote, "Marin-" or "Kandinsky-like" things with Magna acrylic, and Magna acrylic is something that I think that both Marin and Downing used. It's – it comes to us ordinary citizens, except for Morris Louis – you know, they mixed up special paint for him, but it was also Magna – it comes in tubes, and you thin it down with a lot of turpentine or other thinners. And so I had attempted to do that as well, and I did do that. But obviously being not in jars but in tubes, it was very difficult to get it all very smooth. And there was a tendency for me to want it to be very thin and to be smooth as well. And with Magna acrylic you do go through the canvas, and in fact, you can read a mirror image of the canvas on the other side. And I've had occasion to see Marins, for instance, and all that which are quite remarkably beautiful – and, of course, Louises as well – on the other side, because there's this sort of faint impression of the same thing that goes on on the other side. But I don't think that was the main thing. It was a way of sinking into – certainly I picked up on the philosophy too. Now, I'm not even sure where, although again in the early '50 – early '60s at the Phillips, you see, everybody who worked there was either an artist or they were reading the latest, hottest magazines like *Art Forum*, and people went into big discussions about art, whether it was about Rothko, about Pollock, or about anything like that, much of which you couldn't see in Washington, but it was discussed, you know, very – fairly deeply. So somehow I learned both about acrylic paint and also about staining and all that, and certainly I did do some paintings, but I don't remember even any particular painting.

MR. FORGEY: This may be jumping a bit –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – but when did you switch to using water-based paints?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that came – well, okay, that was more a practical matter than anything else. I liked Magna a lot, but I lived in a very small apartment, which was also my studio, on N Street.

MR. FORGEY: Where was that on N Street?

MR. DE LOOPER: 2020 N Street, which is –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: It was – interestingly enough, it was a house that was owned by Bernice Cross, who is a painter who is not shown much anymore now, but was at – in the late '40s and '50s was rather well known and showed – and was married to Jim McLaughlin, who was my predecessor at the Phillips Collection as the curator and of course, in fact, had worked there for many, many decades. And so it became sort of a house where a lot of people who worked at the Phillips lived. The house divided up into apartments.

MR. FORGEY: Right. Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And Arthur Hall Smith, for instance, was downstairs –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – on the ground floor. And again, to me, you see, he was already so much more advanced as a painter, and in those days he painted regularly. Fortunately he has been painting recently – in recent years very regularly too. And he had that whole Toby influence and that sort of thing. And, you know, all these things certainly had an effect on me as well. It was interesting for me to live with a – you know, be in a close proximity to a painter.

MR. FORGEY: So the switch to a water-based paint was because of the –

MR. DE LOOPER: The fumes basically.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I mean, it was just something that, you know, I could barely live with, especially during the summer, you know? I didn't have an air conditioner. I had a fan. You know, that sort of thing. And so when I did find out about the other – I must say I liked Magna even better in the sense that, you know, it has a real beautiful velvety sort of texture, but then, you know, that's – you have to be sort of working with what you can as well. And even there, you see, in the beginning – and other artists knew that too. Sam knew that, and all these people knew that, that even with the water-based acrylic, you see, you could put certain things in your water that you mixed the paint with and it would still sink into the painting very well as well. And I have lots of examples of that. I never did that on purpose, and depending on how much – there was a photo – I forget what it's called even. You know, something that you – that photographers use to keep water from their negatives.

MR. FORGEY: An emulsion?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, it's an emulsion of some sort. It comes in a little bottle, and you put a few drops in a, say, bucket of water that you use to thin your paint with, and it will immediately go through, you see? It sinks in, like with the Magna acrylic. And I certainly have used that quite a lot. And then let that – later that became less of an issue, and by that time, you know, I was so used to working in acrylic – I mean, I almost think as if I've only ever worked with acrylic, but that's not really true. So that's where the textures are concerned. And so I – I think I have explained that I have always – I've always been attracted to matte surfaces, surfaces that are – whether I heard that as a piece of philosophy of, you know, the new kind of painting or whether I just reacted to this, I just lacked, you know, a painting that was somewhat velvety and didn't have a whole lot of added-on surface and all that. And there had been only exceptions to that really in – as time goes by, you know, into the '80s and '90s and that sort of thing. And even now I paint some paintings that are very stained, quite frankly, and they – you know, I don't set out to make a stained painting, but just – I mean, it's the kind of thing that I liked in Arthur Dove. See, people are always talking about the forms and all that, and certainly I was very involved with that and attracted to that, just as other people were obviously, but I think I also liked the surfaces that he cut. And they are just – they are also very velvety, and – if they're well done. Sometimes they're done with wax emulsion rather than with oil paint, and in fact, those are perhaps the most beautiful ones of all. And certainly there is also a way that he worked with, you know, the abstraction of nature in significant form he created.

MR. FORGEY: One thing about your paintings at this period, I mean, we refer to their origins in nature or their

plant-like –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – or biomorphic qualities, but it seems to me that, starting from ’65 on, it was quite clear they were genuine abstraction.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: It was only by analogy you could say that they were plant-like or so on, but they were genuine –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, the –

MR. FORGEY: – abstractions, totally –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – conscious of the framing edge, almost all of those paintings. However they wind, whether it was horizontal or vertical or whatever the displacement of the forms on the surface, it was primarily their abstract qualities that – well, they were primarily abstract qualities.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm. Well, yeah, I – you know, I guess the only thing is that I used blue and green a lot, and for a lot of people I think that brings out nature and, therefore, landscape to such an extent that they will always say, well, you’re just – you know, you’re just painting a landscape, you know, that sort of thing. But I think I’ve made clear that, even from the very beginning, I didn’t really have the crutch of – I wanted to do something that is purely, you know, shape and color and all that sort of thing. And that’s what it really was. Some of the early paintings – I think you have a slide there that you’re looking at of this kind of flower form? You know, I don’t think I made too many of those, and that’s sort of a hybrid of color painting and a certain geometric abstraction, and I – you know, that was just my way of working towards a more fully developed abstraction. And that came a couple of years later, I guess, or maybe the same year even. I don’t know.

MR. FORGEY: Well, I was – yeah, the same year. You were going through lots of changes at that time.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, you – yeah.

MR. FORGEY: I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Because I have at least once or – one or two slides of early shows, and I noticed that even within the show – you know, that’s the kind of thing that you later become critical of – they – you know, the style sort of changed, whereas when you’re a more mature artist you have exhibitions where everything is sort of a piece, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And there were certainly – oh, yes, well, now that is a – [laughs] – okay, there I lived already on Decatur Place, which is a few years later. And I had actually a separate room as a studio, so that was nice.

MR. FORGEY: But these – I – these paintings, I think, were all in your first show at Jefferson Place with –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, it could be. I think may be right. That is a painting which is very Louis-like. Of course it has nothing to do with Louis in the sense of scale.

MR. FORGEY: This painting is about four and a half feet high by –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – three and a half wide.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. It has very large areas of white canvas, cotton duck, on either side of the form, which is really basically a form that you can interpret as a – as something growing, a flower or a plant or a –

MR. FORGEY: A tree or –

MR. DE LOOPER: – a tree, something like that.

MR. FORGEY: – transparent membrane –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: It could be microscopic or –

MR. DE LOOPER: It has an upward movement, and it's stained. It's done in water-based acrylic. That I remember. And certainly, you know, it relates to – I think for a very long time I related to easel painting. Do you know what I mean?

MR. FORGEY: Yes. Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: Even although I had conceptions of – you know, of the more modern sort of painting, but they were – you know, they were home-sized paintings, and I recognized that myself. And that, for instance, is one of the big differences right away with somebody like Louis – like Davis or Sam, who immediately wanted to do this, you know, to me perhaps very American, real ambitious, big thing. I didn't have that until later. And I'm just throwing that in for whatever it's worth.

MR. FORGEY: No, it's very interesting.

MR. DE LOOPER: But it's true.

MR. FORGEY: It's true. I think in your '67 show there were a few big paintings.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: You might –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah –

MR. FORGEY: It's not exactly easel size, but they weren't – they weren't expansive wall –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – size either.

MR. DE LOOPER: No –

MR. FORGEY: The one that I have –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – is a beautiful painting. It came from – the '67 –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right, and that's about seven feet wide or so?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I did a number of those. But – but that would – that was pretty much the limit for me, and I really didn't have the ambition to make a 20-foot painting or something like that.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Whereas, obviously, some other people obviously had that ambition. And I can again only speculate at, you know, maybe that had something to do with my European background or it had something already with the grounding of the Phillips Collection and all that sort of thing, although as you well know, you know, pretty soon I got very interested in Rothkos there, just like other artists did too. But – and certainly I didn't attempt to buy myself a 10-foot canvas and paint that, you see? But – either vertically or horizontally. So I think it – you know, it's one of those things that had to come naturally, and it didn't come until much later.

MR. FORGEY: You relate it to your European background. Also to your studio?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, of course, because that certainly has a lot to do with it too, because it was not until we came to California Street – I had just gotten married, and this was – the room that I still paint in even now was at that time the largest studio that I'd ever had, and it was, of course – when we moved in, it was totally bare. It had – I had not accumulated any paintings yet, or hardly any. And so obviously that – I have always believed that the size of your studio has a lot to do with your ambition too. But on the other hand, you see, that can also work the other way. I mean, if you really have an ambition to paint 20-foot paintings, you go looking for a space that allows you to do that, or you become like Morris Louis, who did it apparently in a much smaller – I've never been able to figure out he did that, how he could visualize these paintings – but, you know, make paintings that even larger than a room or by even in his case many times larger than the room. You must have an incredible visual image to be able to see something that you can't even see. You know, you can't even thumbtack it on

wall.

MR. FORGEY: Gene Davis did it with a system –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – which is – I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – could tack it up, but he had a system. If you're doing a vertical-striped painting –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – he did big ones, and he'd wrap them around a corner –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well –

MR. FORGEY: – sometimes two corners.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes. Well, okay, but sort of that's what I'm saying though. If you really want to, you can do that, and you can –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – work out a system. I don't know – I saw once early on in a Downing studio or a place where he had lived in the basement of a house –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – which Frauka and I were considering, and he could obviously not have made some of those huge ones there either, or perhaps he had a system too, you see? That I don't really know. But I just didn't have that ambition to do that, you see? That's really the point, I guess –

MR. FORGEY: Well, you found the scale you were working at satisfying.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly. And it was not until the studio became larger and I, you know, came here that I started, first of all, unstretched for a number of years, not even that many years if you – you know, especially in a whole lifetime it's not really very many years at all. But perhaps significant years. But – and the paintings could be – but even there they weren't like 15 feet or so. They were perhaps 10 feet at the most wide, and they were taller too, because the studio was – you know, had higher ceilings and certainly I could, working on the floor, which by the way I started doing almost from the very beginning – now, I don't know where I picked that up, and people even now are still kind of amazed at that, that I still paint on the floor. But I always have, except for very early, you know, oil paintings. And I felt very comfortable with that. But the paintings from '69 on into the middle '70s and late '70s could be painted unstretched on the floor and then tacked up on the wall where I could see the whole thing. I think I would not have been the kind of person who would have worked out a system where, you know, maybe next week I'll see the other part of the painting. [Laughs.] You know that sort of thing?

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't think that I would have ever been able to do that.

MR. FORGEY: That's very interesting. I mean, your paintings seem to me to be complete statements in and of themselves, and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. Well –

MR. FORGEY: I guess that's the way of visualizing it. You have to visualize –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – the complete statement, how does –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, and, see, maybe – I mean, I don't know. I mean, obviously I sit around and think about some of these things occasionally, and maybe that has to do also, you know, with working in a museum, although there are many painters in New York and elsewhere too that have always worked in museums and they do something quite contrary to what they – so some of these things I cannot really answer. I can only, you know – and people have – oh, the reason that I mentioned about the European thing is that I think inevitably, not only

because other people have said so without being able to pin it down, but I am of European background, although I consider myself an American painter. There is not one European painter – well, except these early people – that has ever inspired me to do anything. But, you know, there is – there are certain things that your background and your culture and so brings – that you bring, you know, with you – that baggage, I'm sure. And the Phillips Collection, again, is a very European sort of museum, even in its American paintings, you know, I think. So –

MR. FORGEY: This period around – in the late '60s –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – was a very – quite a dramatic change in your –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – in your paintings. It's where the shapes dissolve.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: You can describe them as more liquid and more all-over –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – in feel.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Can you discuss that a little bit about how you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. Well –

MR. FORGEY: – reached that point in –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I think that I had, for one thing, you know, reached a point where I had a better conception, whether I can verbalize it or not, of what an abstraction was that I wanted to paint, and, you know, most of that came forth in the process of painting it and that sort of thing. But I started painting in a different way as well. I painted, as I've pointed out, always stretched, but I did also start manipulating paint. And I'm not completely sure how I started doing that, whether I saw other people who had done that. Again, as I saw the other day on the slides, of course, Sam was doing that also in the late '60s, early '70s. And it could also be that – you know, the medium itself, you see? After all, we – in most of those paintings, even the ones that we've discussed before, the paint is extremely thin. You're really working on an enormous watercolor, you know? It's just that you happen to be working on canvas and on a – with a stretcher bar and that sort of thing, but it lends itself, especially when it's lying on the floor – I suppose it – even somebody who probably knew nothing about art might at some point say, "Oh, there's an interesting mass of color there; let's see what happens if I tilt one of the corners up and see where it runs." You know, that sort of thing.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I think quite frankly some of that is induced by those simple things that happen in your studio. There have been some people who have pointed out that I, too, ultimately have been very interested in process, and, you know – I mean, yeah, if you call all of that process, yeah, that's exactly what I'm interested in. You know, I'm – I would never really have thought of it that way. It's just the act of painting, of completing that painting. But the fact is that, you know, I've had – I've hardly had a brush in my hand since – well, you know, I mean sometimes to put a little corner on something or whatever, but I mean, basically here you have a painter who has basically not worked with a brush for 20 years or so, or longer. And –

MR. FORGEY: Longer, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know? And so if you think of that in terms of art history, say, or of how other painters' paintings are made or are – how paintings are made by people that you admire a great deal, be they Matisse or Rothko or [Richard] Diebenkorn – most of those – well, I don't know how Rothko has got some of his effects, and people, you know, sometimes argue about that a little bit. But most of those painters use – and Kandinsky and Dove and all those people – they used brushes, and they dipped their – they used palettes and stuff like this. And somebody like me has never done that. I've never used a palette. I wouldn't. I've never taught, so I wouldn't – if I had to go teach in a school, I'd have to learn how to lay out a palette, because I'm sure somebody taught me that once, but I haven't the slightest idea, you know, how you arrange it in terms that a Karl Knaths would spend perhaps a day laying out his palette, or Bonnard or somebody like that, or Matisse maybe. That's totally foreign to me. If you think of it that way, what an enormous, interesting kind of schism you have with

painters like me and many other people who have just developed totally different ways of making art. And that's only in painting, you know? So –

MR. FORGEY: This big break occurred in around '68 or '69.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: And that's when you moved in here.

MR. DE LOOPER: With me, I mean, yes.

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, I mean, ultimately it also came because of the invention of plastic or acrylic paints and –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – emulsions and things that had not existed that allowed artists to do things.

MR. FORGEY: When you show these paintings, I mean when you put them up at the Jefferson Place, it seemed like one was always impressed with the consistency of the show. Did you – I was commenting on your shows and how complete they seem. We were referring to the experimental – [audio break, tape change] –

MR. DE LOOPER: [In progress] – kind of an interesting point. I had never really discarded a lot of paintings. I have done paintings that I haven't shown, but there have not even been that many. In fact, this has both a positive and a negative aspect as far as I'm concerned, because I've always worked towards the completion of a painting, and the negative part of it is that in some strange way – and I admit that frankly and I admit it as a weakness – I was sort of hung up on the kind of a philosophy that seemed to be around here in Washington that had to do with stained painting, with Louis and Noland and all of that, and that seemed to imply that everything had to be very fresh and, therefore, also didn't have any repainting. And, of course, the fact is that, when you're staining, there isn't a hell of a lot that you can repaint, but there are ways that you can do that on the other hand. And, in fact – so, first of all, I was a little hung up on that, and I – later on, you know, when I was older, I said why shouldn't I have just taken a glob of paint and put it on there? Just because that was not what you were supposed to do. And that was, of course, silly, you know? In other words, I was really listening to other people rather than to myself.

On the other hand, the positive aspect of that was that after a while I started, when I wanted to complete a painting, doing it in a different way in the sense that I would mix in a certain ground – Gesso for instance – which you can see in this painting here for instance. You see, that painting is Gesso. And so right away you could – you were able to get one layer over another in a way that was, in fact, if you wanted to call that that way, a correction to something that you may have not been satisfied with.

But the paintings that you are referring to specifically were pretty much done – I guess they were done very carefully. [Laughs.] You know, I didn't really have that many more paintings, and I remember specific exhibitions in fact where I showed just about everything I had. So I don't know quite how –

MR. FORGEY: I always thought it was also a – in terms of working out – you say working towards abstraction. I mean, I think you reached that around 1965 and just continued rather consistently in different ways. These paintings might be called more abstract and yet analogically they can be –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – to all sorts of natural phenomenon.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Cosmic phenomenon, skies, oceans, you know?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Again, just analogies.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, yes.

MR. FORGEY: One uses those as not ways of comprehending process but of –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I –

MR. FORGEY: – reaching towards the poetry of the expression.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes. Well, as you well know, there was one critic in particular, Paul Richard, who always kept on insisting that they were Dutch skies, and he would bring in the fact that I was from Holland and that sort of thing. And, quite frankly, I thought that was a very narrow way of looking at my work. And on top of that, it wasn't very helpful. And on top of that, you see, they weren't Dutch skies, except maybe after the fact. And that, quite frankly, kind of bothered me, and I sort of fought that for a while, including sometimes verbally with him when I would see him, because I was trying to explain and he was even not interested or just, you know, was so sure of himself that he did – you know, that he didn't want to take at face value how I approached painting. And that's what I have always been trying to indicate to people: that, in fact, they are total abstractions to me and I'm only interested in the process and in all the abstract qualities of painting, you see, and that how it looks finally is a different matter.

MR. FORGEY: Well, when you – when you describe it that way, though, it –

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: – it makes it sound rather dry. It makes it sound almost –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's partly true.

MR. FORGEY: – scientific.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I know that. That is very true. But – and the only reason I'm saying that is that I do honestly believe that I'm very – I'm a real formalist. I'm a formalist painter. I have no pictures in mind that I'm going to paint. I have no romantic or other thoughts beyond arranging what I'm arranging on my canvas. And – which is kind of ironic even to me.

MR. FORGEY: This gives you pleasure, does it not?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, it does. But it's also true. See, in other words, people are always asking you, you know, how do you decide, you know, you're going to have a blue painting or green painting or whatever and that sort of thing, all the color choices in all that too. And I'm all I'm trying to say is that it goes hand in hand with a very instinctual thing too, that you just walk into the studio and you say, "Oh, that's a nice color; let's start with that one." You know what I mean?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: So that's like the surrealist almost perhaps. It's totally uncontrolled by your intellect, because otherwise I could also make drawings for the paintings, say, but they're not. So you have on the one hand that, and on the other hand they're just abstractions. And, in other words, I'm not really going for any particular meaning that I'm – you see? And there are lots of artists, and lots of terrible artists in fact, who are all too sure of what they're after, you see? And they know the philosophy before they can paint a picture or – and often they cannot even. But then there are also lots of good painters who know exactly what they're after. All am I saying is that I really don't quite know what I'm after, except what is made visible in my art. And I sort of leave that up to other people. Do you see –

MR. FORGEY: I understand.

MR. DE LOOPER: Does that still sound so dry? I don't know. That's just the way I work. I couldn't work any other way. And so that, you know, the business about the Dutch landscape or anything like that is not even a thought to me for that matter. Only in very recent times I had let myself sometimes think of, say, the Southwest, where I've been going from time to time, and in very vague terms. And I, on purpose almost, keep it very vague, you see, even of certain Native American, to use the fancy word, iconography. But if I really wanted to – I was thinking of that the other day, because if I really wanted to study that – you see, I've looked at these balls, and I would say – and there are artists I are even know, you know them too – who would do that. And in many cases they are actually very fine painters, terrific painters. But they study all the iconography and then they use it, and that mythology and all of that means a great deal to them. To me it's more a visual stimulant, you see? And I sort of let it float like that. It's like the music that I listen to, you see? It's all there, and it all has certain effects.

MR. FORGEY: Well, this brings up a question I was going to ask you. It's as good a time to ask it as any –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – about the relationship of music and your painting.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, you see, I mean, obviously – I mentioned that early on I did, you know – I was interested

in Kandinsky and I read his book, and obviously – what he said in there to me made a lot of sense. Again, depending on how you look at it, that has critically almost been overdone – this whole business of art as music, painting as music, and that sort of thing. But the fact is that I can't really deny that it is not like that for me. You see, it is like making kind of music, and I hate saying it because it sounds like such a terrible cliché. But, as you know –

MR. FORGEY: Well, I bring it up not only – I bring it up because it's so autobiographical.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: In your life, you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I mean –

MR. FORGEY: – have been consistently interested in jazz. We described how that was a big –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – force in your life –

MR. DE LOOPER: It was.

MR. FORGEY: – coming to America. It had been throughout your life. You listen to music, either jazz or classical music, when you paint.

MR. DE LOOPER: All the time really. And –

MR. FORGEY: And then you have one of the great record collections of Washington and so on. So I ask that not only –

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no.

MR. FORGEY: – as a theoretical question, but –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – it seems to me that there's got to be some direct relation. There is a direct –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, there is.

MR. FORGEY: – relationship in your life.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, yeah, you see – and the only thing is that also, having worked in a museum and all that and, you know, being familiar with a lot of art criticism, I feel a little uptight about talking about it because so many other people, including a lot of people in Washington, have talked about the same thing. But the fact is that, yes, it's an undeniable influence on me, and I've even thought, you know, that, if I hadn't become a painter, I probably would have liked to maybe be a drummer in a jazz band or something.

MR. FORGEY: Well, your approach to process. Your talking about –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – process as very akin to the improvisational aspect of – that makes jazz.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. Exactly. But, see, a lot of other people claim that too, but – and I don't want to say that I'm the one where it's really true, but it is really true. But on the other hand, I can also do that with classical music. Now, I couldn't in the early – in the years before I knew anything about classical music, which is quite a long time, but even so that's still almost 30 years that I'd started knowing something about that. And I know actually quite a bit about that. So certainly, you know, the kind of lyricism that I find in music, the – I like very spontaneous, just as I make very spontaneous decisions in my painting for instance, see? And that is certainly very much akin to jazz, if you will. There's no question about it. I mean, you can go further. Jazz or, for that matter, classical music all has a certain structure, and within that you can do a lot of things, and that's kind of what I do also. And certainly that's why I have admired a lot of especially jazz musicians in where that is very clear, because they are very well-trained and they work within these limits that – you know, that an ordinary

person who never hears jazz is not aware of, of course. But within that framework, they can go every which way, and often have. And that's extremely appealing to me obviously.

MR. FORGEY: Let me ask you an irritating *People* magazine – it'll irritate you –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – but if you had to compare your painting with a jazz musician or two, who would you pick?

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I mean, certainly the people that I grew up with. That's my biggest – you know, I have a scrapbook of Charlie Parker.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: I mean, that's – now, you see, the thing is that, when you do something as autobiographical as this, I mean, I had no idea when I was 14 years old and living in Holland why I liked Charlie Parker's music, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And whereas my other friends liked whatever else was popular at that time.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But certainly Charlie Parker was not popular. But why did he strike a note with me? I mean –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – for that I need a psychiatrist, okay –

MR. FORGEY: [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: – to figure that one out. But – and even there, you know, there are lots of interesting ironies in life that – because certainly my music – my paining has nothing to do with his music per se.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But, if you want to, you know, talk about somebody who filled a lot of my hours – and I spent a lot of time listening to him or looking at his pictures and reading about him and that sort of thing – you know, you could almost say something like that was as important as –

MR. FORGEY: Matisse.

MR. DE LOOPER: – later on reading about Matisse and, you know, reading every book. Now it's much – of much less significance obviously.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And you have to keep everything in perspective.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know?

MR. FORGEY: In retrospect, it seems to me that this period of painting of yours – and it was a consistent period for over a period of years, maybe three years that you were doing these kind of poured paintings on the –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – on the floor – was also a solution to a technical problem you were feeling: the difference between drawing and painting.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: It eliminated drawing pretty much from the –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, it did, and – okay, and –

MR. FORGEY: Almost entirely.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's interesting that you would ask that, because there I have often felt that I on purpose suppressed drawing, and that also means, say, drawing a figure, which I always liked doing and I was pretty good at, you know. I really felt that I had to learn how to paint, and possibly we've talked about that before. But certainly, yeah, I wanted to certainly say that, and I'm glad you asked me that, because – you know, and now I feel possibly in later years – and I'm also doing more small stuff, you know, including those books and tiny little things and sometimes not so tiny, but more intimate things that are more closely related to drawing and all that and where a pen or a – is often involved and that sort of thing. That has come back to some extent, but certainly then I really did feel in order to make my own kind of breakthroughs I had to paint and I had to work with color and with paint, and that's what I did. And that certainly is – that continued actually for quite a long time, because I was looking at some stuff the other day. Even with the figure drawing for instance, I think I did some fairly consistent figure drawing in about 1975, and at that time I was painting these large horizontal paintings which, you know, otherwise – well, accept for the – you know, the watermarks and the marks made by the roller by that time, had that kind of drawing in it. But –

MR. FORGEY: This – these poetic, all-over paintings –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – did inaugurate more than a decade –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – in which you painted –

MR. DE LOOPER: Just paint.

MR. FORGEY: – almost exclusively in series.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. That's true.

MR. FORGEY: This was a series –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – that lasted about three years. And then you worked into the horizontal band format –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – for maybe five, six years.

MR. DE LOOPER: Five, six years.

MR. FORGEY: And then gradually over a period of two or three years started to introduce rectangular –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – configurations.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And then the curve –

MR. FORGEY: And then the curve starts to come in.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – and when you see the first curve after 10 years – or after five years of the bands, let's say, you see the first curve, it's quite a shock to the eye –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – I mean, to look at this in retrospect.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's true.

MR. FORGEY: And then in the early '80s something else happens, a great deal –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – of a new kind of experimentation, bringing back all sorts of things.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. Also much more color, because –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – I was thinking of that the other day, especially since I prepared those slides for you to look at, because during the ‘70s when I did all these striated paintings, these horizontal paintings, it – I also had a very limited palette. My –

MR. FORGEY: They were tonal in a sense.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were tonal, and they had a lot to do – yeah, they had earth tones and grays and whites. I found that terribly interesting the other day when Sam was showing his paintings of about ’75 that he was doing, some white paintings, and that’s exactly when I was doing some white paintings too, but very differently obviously than his. But – and I’ve always pointed out – I remember I talked to Walter Hopps about that point. I said I was very interested in stuff that I most likely saw in New York, like Robert Ryman and people like that who paint white on white and that sort of thing. And, you know, I had my own way of adding my – it has nothing to do with Ryman, but – or for that matter Agnes Martin and – you know, that interested me very much. And so it’s just remarkable how people sometimes have parallels of – given all the –

MR. FORGEY: It is.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know, it’s really remarkable to me.

MR. FORGEY: Well, you and Sam have been asked this question many times about the similarity –

MR. DE LOOPER: I guess.

MR. FORGEY: – of your work, and so on.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I never know how he answers that, see? I have no idea. But I know how I, you know, respond to his art and all that sort of thing. And – but, yeah, you know? And I do think obviously it also has to do with exhibitions that one sees or, you know, things that are in the air, that sort of thing. And yet it’s kind of remarkable in some ways.

MR. FORGEY: The – in terms of process and how it relates again to expressiveness, it strikes –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – me that gradually – this painting here, this big blue painting, is – aquamarine painting is –

MR. DE LOOPER: It’s called chinois.

MR. FORGEY: Chinois. And that is from 1971, you say?

MR. DE LOOPER: I think it’s ‘70

MR. FORGEY: ’70. Okay, so quickly, you can see already, you’re becoming more and more interested in texture, surface texture –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, right.

MR. FORGEY: – as well as –

MR. DE LOOPER: It is so, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah. And this is followed through in the striated paintings, as you call them.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Again, incredible –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – interest in a variety of surface texture.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, because there I actually – you know, I painted those on the floor of the studio, and I actually, you know, all of a sudden decided to use the bumps and all this stuff, which therefore, I suppose, really ties into Pollock and the whole thing, and – you know? But something totally different from the color painting

thing, which was smooth and uninterrupted and that sort of thing. Yeah. And that lasted for quite a long time. You asked me – and that's up above, maybe, of what you asked. I'm not sure. You asked me whether there were a lot of paintings that were abandoned.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And there really weren't, but there were paintings that I didn't show. But – what was I going to say? Oh, what I meant – what I do mean is that I did – I have always worked out my problems on the canvas.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: That may be obvious to you, but it wouldn't be necessarily – in other words, I spend very little time looking at a blank canvas or even at a canvas in progress. That might be of some interest to some people, but – you know, because there are so many painters who paint in a different way altogether. It's not a – in that sense, it's not a contemplative sort of thing. It's kind of action-filled in some ways, although it's not action painting by any means, you know? And – yeah, and the series sort of developed. It's like when you were just talking about how the one thing sort of goes into the other. There is obviously no point where you say, "Well, I've done enough of these and now I'll do something else. It's just something that naturally one thing starts going a little differently and you, you know, follow the lead more or less of your painting rather than – at least I do – just as then after the horizontals, you know, then there's – they become more rigid in formation after a few years, and then pretty soon you say, well, you know – or you don't – or let's put a – let's put some vertical movement back into the painting and that sort of thing. And then something else happens, and then maybe a curve or something like that.

MR. FORGEY: Your paintings always have been some – about movement of one sort of another.

MR. DE LOOPER: Hmm. I suppose that's true. Yeah. Well –

MR. FORGEY: It's, you know, in the –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: In the work of the '80s –

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: – in retrospect, I mean, I see that as a clear – some kind of break happened where you don't – you stopped working so consistently in series and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – pursuing an idea –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – and gradually refining it and developing another and so that you can – we can pretty much align years, periods and years, but the last consistent series that I see, and you were doing other things at the same time, so it's a little different, were the – sort of those – the frame, the doorway, or the open series.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Whatever you want to call that. And that was in the early '80s.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's true.

MR. FORGEY: Now – I mean, so – just comment on that –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, that's –

MR. FORGEY: – because your work has become –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – a lot more varied. In a given show it's likely to have – in your most recent show with Jones Troyer, for example – related paintings –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, right.

MR. FORGEY: – but not a series of paintings. The show itself has three or four major themes, or major and minor themes.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, well, let me see how I can address that. The show that you refer to where I started showing the curves, I think that was in 1980 when I showed it with Nancy Drysdale now, but then Nancy McIntosh Drysdale, who had the been the director of Max Protech's gallery on P Street. And I had been during the middle '70s and all that with Max for some years doing the – you know, showing the horizontal paintings. And I had a big show at the Phillips, too, where I showed large paintings and a number of what you might call watercolors, although they were really acrylics on paper, but they were kind of more "landscapey" in fact, and they were modest in size. It was after that – hmm, I have to sort of – yeah, I know that that's a bit puzzling to me also, what you have just brought up, because Nancy Drysdale then closed her gallery and went to Houston for a couple of years. And so until Barbara Kornblatt came along, I was really without a gallery for a while, which didn't bother me at all because I – you know, I worked on things in my studio and I wasn't really working towards a show. Perhaps that had something to do with it. I really don't quite know. And I think that Barbara Kornblatt opened a gallery in '81 or '82, and I probably had my first show there. And it's true that for one thing color had really come back into my paintings. The paintings that – were very colorful. There was one big red painting and one very large diptych which is predominantly dark blue and had some peculiar painterly effects on the top, and somebody described it as a mountain with smoke coming out of it.

MR. FORGEY: Uh-huh.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I'd never seen it that way, but, yes, they were right, you know? I think it was Paul Richard in fact. And, okay, maybe several things had happened now that I think of it. Interestingly enough, there was a show at the Phillips that I didn't organize, but it was with Howard Hodgkin's paintings [*Howard Hodgkin: Forty Paintings*, 1984-1985].

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I remember liking his work a great deal, and I thought his paintings were extremely inventive and wonderful. And I was always amazed – I never actually even met him, so –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – so I was totally removed – this sometimes happened at the Phillips, that somebody like Robert Cafritz, who organized that, organized it without any involvement of some other people, unlike other shows. And – anyway, so I was there as if I were a visitor to the museum, and I would go and look at these things and I took slides of it as well. And I always – I had never heard of Hodgkin at the time, and I thought he was pretty terrific. Maybe I'd seen a couple of prints or so on, whatever. And he had a very playful attitude to – or seemingly a witty sort of – although his working method, which I heard about at that time and I've heard about since, is diametrically opposed to what I do, because he paints apparently for a very, very long time – years sometimes – on his paintings, which look like, if I did them, they were – they would be done in 20 minutes, you see? Or 10 minutes even. And I've always been able – I find it fascinating to see how he kept his spontaneity in these paintings that he labored over obviously. I have thought that that may be one clue. I don't really know. I obviously had made a pretty dramatic – oh, the other thing, of course, was that – and I think that's why I included those slides – I had worked – I started working on paper a lot –

MR. FORGEY: I –

MR. DE LOOPER: – on large sheets of paper.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, in fact, that's – now that I think of it, that's also why I included those in the slides for you to look at. I had made a lot of paintings which were about 30 by 50 inches on paper. And the first ones involved the curve, and now that I think of it, that probably had something to do with the fact that I didn't have a gallery, you see? In other words, I had really no show coming up, and I could, on the other hand, also yet – you see, sometimes practical considerations are here too. And on the other hand, I guess I didn't want to make paintings that I would just pile up and had nothing – you know, no place to show. And so that – and then economically too. I was working on paper a lot, and the paper –

MR. FORGEY: And you could ship them, too.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that too. And then – and you could store them easily, you know? They're all flat and – and I think, now that I think about it more, the works on paper led me into a lot of directions, because – you can probably see that –

MR. FORGEY: I was going to ask you what in the world does the curve have to do with working on paper. That connection escapes me.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, oh, oh. Oh, no. Okay, no, that has nothing to do with it per se, but what I'm – all I'm saying is that originally – I'm trying to trace myself back now – after the paintings with the curves, I then transferred a lot of those kind of ideas to paintings on paper of that 30-by-50 size –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – 40-by-50 I guess they are.

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: And first of all they involved a lot of curves, and then very slowly or even quickly more color came into the paintings too. And then from that I started joining two sheets of paper together. I've always had a very – I've always been fascinated by diptychs, and I've never really analyzed that too well, you know? I mean, the open book thing or whatever, or all those yang and ying and – I left that to somebody else. But the point is that I have always been very attracted to diptychs. And so from the single sheets, of which I made quite a lot, maybe as many as 50 or 60 – and those are mostly the years that I wasn't showing them, between –

MR. FORGEY: Yes. There's a very beautiful one at the Washington *Post*. I see it –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh –

MR. FORGEY: – occasionally in a hallway on –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, really?

MR. FORGEY: – the sixth floor.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I have recently seen some in a public place too that I hadn't seen for a while, and they looked pretty interesting to me, because in the particular – in the ones that I saw for instance I was exploring something very dark. I mean, I was doing pitch black with very intense red for instance in some, in some diptychs and some singles. And they were in a law firm recently, and I saw them, and I didn't even know they had them. But anyway – and since I'm analyzing myself here too, those were the years that I was becoming more and more involved at the Phillips as a curator. I was also traveling a lot more. I was going to the West Coast a lot, and in fact, that's where I took a whole lot of these paintings on paper and sold some and showed some at a gallery there in LA, at the Janus Gallery, which was at that time in Venice, California. And I was probably also more interested than some people –because of my curatorial work, interested in some of the things that I was, you know, pursuing curatorially. Those were the years that we were working on a Morris Graves exhibition [*Morris Graves: Vision of the Inner Eye. The Phillips Collection*, April 9, 1983 – May 29, 1983], which was a real big retrospective with a guest curator, Ray Kass. And I got to see a lot of things. In other words, I started thinking about other things than – maybe my vistas opened a little bit.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't know. I've always been very attracted to California since I discovered it in '81 on the first trip that I ever made there – well, not literally, but for all practical purposes. And that had to do with the organization of the Morris Graves' show. So I suppose that I was even interested in vessel configurations and so forth in his work. And I don't remember that I saw anything else of any particular interest in – on the West Coast that – you know, that made a real impression on me, except that there were interesting galleries both in San Francisco, but especially in Los Angeles already even then. And I used to tell people about it, that actually Los Angeles had a pretty good scene.

Then, of course, two years later I went to Japan, and again I did that in my capacity as curator of the Phillips Collection. We went with the paintings of the Phillips Collection to Tokyo and Nara and Kyoto. And Frauka and I, my wife and I, spent three weeks there. And we looked at a lot of things. And I think that I've always been somewhat interested in oriental art anyway, but if anything, it sort of heightened my interest. And, again, I referred to something else before, I'm the kind of person who looks more than analyzes. In other words, I let my, you know, my visual capacities and my brain sort of do the analyzing, rather than I sit down and become an expert on Japanese art or something like this. But certainly we saw a lot of significant – to me significant things, and in fact –

MR. FORGEY: You're referring to screen paintings or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, screens and doors and especially also the use of black, in fact, was something –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – that I really became quite interested in. I think I may have been interested in it to some extent, but I'd never really probably put it down on either paper or canvas. And, in fact, also we went, for instance, to this city called Nikko, which is a very Chinese-influenced Japanese city, and unlike most Americans, I loved Nikko. Nikko was very decorative.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: It has red and gold and silver and black in abundance – to such abundance that most people get – unless they really relate it – get sick and tired of it in no time at all. But I was very much taken to it, and it is also after, you know, I came back and I did do, like I always have, you know, small paintings and books and stuff like that, and also did some in Japan. And, of course, also on the West Coast always. But I started slowly getting into metallic colors after that as well, because, in fact, I was very interested in what oriental artists – Japanese artists – had done with gold leafing. And so that certainly carried over into my painting, and I do remember some paintings that I did – now that you – now that I'm really going through that, I had actually not really thought about this at all, but anyway that's coming back to me now. A lot of – I was actually imitating some things that I had remembered from the Japanese experience in fact, and certainly in a more subconscious way, you see?

MR. FORGEY: No, well, you imitate a memory, that's –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah – well, yeah.

MR. FORGEY: It's at some distance from imitation.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's something – sure. So, yeah – so a lot of these things in the early '80s started being – and middle '80s started being, you know – started relating to an oriental experience as well, it seems to me. It's just like even with calligraphy and all that, I've always been rather interested in that, but I would never dream of getting a calligraphy pen or –

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or a brush, except as you may have noticed even, I even have some Japanese brushes hanging there. But I would never really dream of using them, you know? They're just sort of there as a memory of the experience –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and that sort of thing, as a clue maybe to something that I'm interested in.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the inkwells –

MR. FORGEY: Did you ever go into some of those Japanese brush shops? I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, yes.

MR. FORGEY: – that's all they sell –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – and they have these enormous brushes –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – outside and –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yes, absolutely.

MR. FORGEY: Fabulous places.

MR. DE LOOPER: They are fabulous places. But, see, I think I'm – what I'm trying to say is that, you know, they didn't interest me enough to say, well, this is really going to, you know, change my painting forever or I'm going to be an oriental artist or something like that. I think I wouldn't be that foolish to. Some people are like that, and I sort of hate people like that, you know? But I do think that – I hope at least that some of the good influences of some things that I saw that have to do also with doors and with windows and with screens and all that have

come out in some of the paintings. And then there's this other thing that I mentioned – you know, the freedom of working on paper in fairly large quantities, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: There were lots of paintings. And so, whether they were single sheets or the diptychs, they became more and more loose, and they started relating to nothing in particular that had anything to do with my earlier painting.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, an incredible amount of formal freedom and adventurousness in them.

MR. DE LOOPER: I think I made some pretty interesting ones. I didn't really show very many of those at all, but, see, it sort of reinforces on the other hand where I – the way I work. See? That's the way I get from one stage to the next –

MR. FORGEY: Yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: – you see? By doing something. Does that make sense?

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: It also strikes me that the later work is – there's a lot of consistency through your work. You can look at early works and right through, despite all the changes –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – but the later work is a compendium, you know? You feel now free to –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – pull various elements from memories of Japan, from impressions –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – emotions, inclinations, and from your own work and from the work of others –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, you know, there is –

MR. FORGEY: – but there is a certain abandon.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. There is no question that the good thing about getting older is that you have, you know, fewer hang-ups if it goes well at least, that you don't really care what anybody says. You just sort of do what you need to do or what to do. You know, it's partly that, and also by that time you sort of know how to paint after you've been painting for 25 years. And all those things. And that is true. I've certainly felt that. And that's even truer in the five years that I've, you know, been removed from the Phillips Collection altogether –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – where I could just think about my painting.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: It has other handicaps, but partly where time is concerned in the sense that I was for so many years able to paint in a very small amount of time, you see, which was basically the weekend, which was a three-day weekend for many years. But for most people that wouldn't be enough, where somehow – you know, it's the old thing. There's some kind of law, right, that you have more time and you can still do only the same number of paintings.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But in other ways it's been very liberating, you see? And, yeah – and then – and then the other thing about just – you just feel more liberated. I mean, you really don't ultimately care what anybody says. You just do what you need to do. And it's amazing how long that takes, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Some people, I suppose, have that very early, but I don't suppose that artists have that until they get to a certain age. And so that's kind of fun.

MR. FORGEY: I wanted to ask also about the relationship of your working in books –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – small-scale books. And you've doing that for – that, it seems to me, also has room because your productivity in books has increased –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – in the '80s immensely. But trace that a little bit. I mean, when you started working small and keeping books –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, yeah, I started that a little bit longer ago than I thought I had. I have quite a number of them, and some of them are totally incomplete. And you have to, first of all, understand that all of them were done really for my own amusement in a sense. I – you know, to some extent, I was always aware of certain art historical things too, but – so I would sign them and date them. So – but in the – well, into the early '70s I already started carrying around little books. And there too, back with the painting on canvas or something or a big sheet of paper, I tend to work towards a complete picture for one thing, and that's very – in other words, I don't use a sketchbook to make – it's not – it's never a sketch of something.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: It's always – whether it's a little something that I work on for a couple of minutes or something that I work on for, you know, half a day or whatever – it's just a little bit more developed – it's always there to be completed and then signed and dated.

MR. FORGEY: Well, I'd just interject here to say, when I was looking at the slides –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – the sense that I've always been impressed with the scale of these things in their completion, but when you look at them on slides and you don't know their size at first –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah. Oh, really?

MR. FORGEY: I mean, I thought, "Well, I've never seen this big painting before."

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, I've never – [laughs] –

MR. FORGEY: And, you know, it didn't click – "oh, no!"

MR. DE LOOPER: Uh-huh. I've never done that, so maybe I should do that.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah, you should bang it up –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – on the wall sometime. They're –

MR. DE LOOPER: It might be interesting.

MR. FORGEY: – every bit as complete as either one of these big paintings.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's very interesting that you say that. Well, as I say, I mean, they've always been, you know, things that I have done fairly seriously, but playfully as well. And, as you know, I think, because I've probably told you and I've told other people, I obviously did a lot of them when I was working at the Phillips, also when I traveled for the Phillips. And I've continued to do that. I mean, I'm – some working material is always with me. I've always just done that. That's all. I cannot conceive an artist who is even on vacation at a beach or something who doesn't have something with him to work on. But, you know, on the other hand, I can't speak for some –

MR. FORGEY: Sometimes you even work on other people's walls.

MR. DE LOOPER: Exactly.

MR. FORGEY: [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, right. We had a weekend where there was nothing to do and it was raining or something.

MR. FORGEY: [Laughing.] This is a great story. I'll tell it briefly.

MR. DE LOOPER: You do that.

MR. FORGEY: Willem de Looper and Frauka de Looper visiting Ben and Gabriella Forgey in Lewis, Delaware, in the early '80s. Ben is painting the livingroom, and it's raining outside and there's nothing to do. I mean, I'm literally painting the walls of this place.

MR. DE LOOPER: [Laughs.] That's right.

MR. FORGEY: And our daughter, Martina, has some crayons, and she had been drawing with them, and while Ben's painting, Willem picks up the crayons and starts off – starts in on a wall above the fireplace. [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: They looked good.

MR. FORGEY: And then works the day long and then paints this beautiful –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. It was –

MR. FORGEY: A beautiful piece.

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: Which fits the – there was this splotch –

MR. DE LOOPER: The space.

MR. FORGEY: – of concrete.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: I mean – and so you shaped it, according to this kind of a meaty-shaped –

MR. DE LOOPER: I shaped it – right.

MR. FORGEY: – splotch of concrete.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. Oh, yeah, well –

MR. FORGEY: Which –

MR. DE LOOPER: – see, that's the kind of – it's a funny thing.

MR. FORGEY: So –

MR. DE LOOPER: I'm just one of those people who abhors a blank of sheet of paper or a blank wall or something.

MR. FORGEY: [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: And – but fortunately it brings a lot of joy to me and sometimes to other people as well. It's funny, you know, because the – I've thought about that sort of thing, although I would like to go back to some of this – the books a little bit too.

MR. FORGEY: Sure, please.

MR. DE LOOPER: As a very strange role model I've always taken Picasso, interestingly enough, but not for the reasons that people look at Picasso. I mean, I – his paintings don't really mean that much to me, if you know what I mean. I mean, that sounds too flip, but you know – he's a great painter and all that, but, except for the early cubist work maybe through the '30s and '40s he's really not of that much of interest to me. But I've always enjoyed – and my brother used to give me books for my birthday and for Christmas and all that, early on when I was not even a painter yet, you see? And they happened to often be about Picasso. Why, I have no idea, because, you know, he's not a great art expert or anything, but for some reason. And so not only did Picasso become a model for me as a draftsman, because I thought that he – and I still think that he's a magnificent draftsman, and, quite frankly, I think that he's much better than Matisse, but – and that's not what most people

think, you see? Most –

MR. FORGEY: As a draftsman, you mean?

MR. DE LOOPER: As a draftsman I have found just him magnificent, and I have quite a number of books actually about – you know, of his prints or whatever, but they're drawings. And that's one thing. And even the dating of my work I got from him. People often are asking me, you know, about these Roman numerals and all that sort of thing. Apparently nowadays nobody knows what Roman numerals stand for. But it's obviously the month and, you know, that sort of thing. And – but also since you were talking about this wall thing, you know, which is funny – you know, it's just an empty wall and you have some crayons. You can paint with that too. I think that Picasso also has made remarks to that effect, which have been very –

[Audio break, tape change.]

MR. FORGEY: And, Willem, you were just discussing Picasso.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, yeah, we were talking about Picasso, or at least the Picasso that exists for me in the sense that I like the playful aspect of his work and all that. And I was saying this thing about somewhere along the line he talks also about that, if he were in jail or so and he had no materials to paint with, he would probably make a painting with his excrement or with blood or spit or something. And I've often thought, you know, maybe I would do that too. I'm not trying to prove anything necessarily, but I – in other words, when I travel and I have these little books with me, I wouldn't think of not even setting out on any particular, you know, excursion – except in the neighborhood, you know – to – without something to work with. And they're not imitations of what you see, but they're just a continuation of, you know, visual ideas that do not stop, you know, flowing when you travel. In fact, they might even be juiced up. Does that make sense to you?

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that's the way that really started. So, as my wife now says, you see, I have all these books, and some of them have become like the most personal kind of postcards that you could imagine of a place that would certainly not be recognizable as so and so unless I told you or I might have said, you know, Japan or La Jolla, California, or – you know, as an example, or something like this. The fact is that, when I was in a place like that, or Cincinatti, Ohio, in a hotel or Paris or something, I would do something or other, you see? And it would become like a travelogue as well, but a visual one. And somehow it all goes into what winds up eventually in the paintings. But they are never – not even once are they – and the few times that I've even tried that, of using –

MR. FORGEY: To start with a –

MR. DE LOOPER: – using –

MR. FORGEY: – scene from a noteback?

MR. DE LOOPER: – using something like that. It really doesn't work. They're just totally parallel, but they're obviously very important to my way of thinking, you see? And I just get a lot of joy out of it. And – just as I also like to go – I'm sure other artists do this as well: When you're in a strange place, you like to buy some art materials that might be somewhat different from the ones that you have at home, you know, in the places that ordinarily supply you with your – you know, the tools of your trade or something, some different kind of paint or some different brush or something like this. And you sort of get your inspiration from – or at least I do. And then you – and that's, of course, also the case with the actual books. So the books slowly became something that, in some cases, people would say, if I showed them to them, you know, that they're pretty interesting and maybe you could show them. And then it became a question of, well, do you tear them all apart or what. And, quite frankly, they have almost become something a little bit different now, because it was a few years ago that I'd seen – I think it was Sally Troyer, who is one of the three original members of Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick Gallery that I had, quite frankly, never paid that much attention to because it's very small and it showed mostly photography and all that. I ran into her once at a party – I'm pretty sure that's the way it started – and she asked if, for some reason, if I did any small work. And I happened – I don't know if she knew that or that – or what.

MR. FORGEY: And did you ever, huh?

MR. DE LOOPER: And do I ever. But then, see, it became a question of – well, first of all, at that time I was with Kornblatt, and I was with Kornblatt for about 10 years, showing my big paintings. And Barbara had never been particularly interested in any smaller things.

MR. FORGEY: That's interesting, because she had that little room –

MR. DE LOOPER: I know that.

MR. FORGEY: – in the back there.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't know if that was – well, you know, it's funny. I mean, a dealer really should know everything about an artist, but the reality of it is that, first of all, of course, I wasn't really pushing it because I wasn't really looking for exhibitions of that work. And I – in her case also, I think the – you know, the larger galleries and very big spaces took the emphasis of the gallery, both for her and for me basically, and then she was probably also not maybe in a personal way really interested in that sort of thing – you know, the way some people would be and other people are not. And so that never really worked so well. So, to come back to Jones Troyer, we then arranged that I could maybe show some things there at the same time that I had a show with Kornblatt, and that was, I think, about three years ago.

MR. FORGEY: About '87, '88.

MR. DE LOOPER: '87, '88. Right. And so the first year it was a joint show, and for – and so for that I had to, in fact, take one of the books that I had made – that I had no intention of taking apart – apart.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so that was, in that sense, kind of a big step. And that's also why I say that now I work as a result of that – because now the Kornblatt Gallery has gone out of business after all those years and I am only now with Jones Troyer Fitzpatrick. So now the small work has become something, first for all, that I'd exhibit. That's part of my work, and all of a sudden it's public. And so I work as a result of that on some things that are to be exhibited, if you know what I mean, and I still work on some books that are not to be taken apart at all and are, perhaps, in the more personal category.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm. And the books have gotten a little larger, too. I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, and that is – but most of those are the ones that are to be exhibited, you see? They are – and then for practical reasons I tend to not work in books that are sewn together or something but are easily, you know, taken apart and framed and matted and all that. But it becomes a completely different experience. And so, as a result, I still have these other little things that I – or sometimes they're bigger, but also – you know, that I have really no intention. And in case anybody is interested, they can buy a book, for instance, possibly, although in the beginning, you see, that was really also not –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, we discussed that at length.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. I have just recently sold a little book to someone –

MR. FORGEY: Oh, really?

MR. DE LOOPER: – in fact. Yeah. And, you know – so you get – I'm still very comfortable with it. It's not that. But it – but you understand it does become a little bit something different. And, in fact, in the more private books I occasionally in recent years have actually done a real landscape, for instance, too –

MR. FORGEY: I've seen some of those.

MR. DE LOOPER: – where I've, you know, traveled. Not so many years ago we traveled to Tuscany and all that, and I actually, you know, drew the countryside a little bit and then – and I do that in other places. In California I did that a few times.

MR. FORGEY: Have you done any figure drawings along the years? Have you –

MR. DE LOOPER: No. Only in – I think I mentioned in '75 for some reason, and that was mostly because an opportunity was there to do it also. Mark –

MR. FORGEY: You and a few other artists got together –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, Mark Clark –

MR. FORGEY: – with a model once a week.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. Mark Clark, who is a painter here in Washington, had a studio above the Ben Bow. Remember that?

MR. FORGEY: Michael's brother. Yeah –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – the Ben Bow on Connecticut Avenue, sure.

MR. DE LOOPER: So – and so he had a very large studio, livingroom or whatever, you know? And so not only was it terribly convenient, but it was a very fine space to be working in too. And I think that must have been around ’75 or something like that. I mean, that had been owned for a while. And I think about it constantly, but I never, you know, wind up going to wherever they have sketch classes where you sort of mingled in with both amateurs and – or, you know, people – not people that are just friends or other artists that you know.

MR. FORGEY: You – several times through the years you’ve described yourself as a loner. Do you still –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, in some ways, oh, yeah, I think I’m very much a loner, but – well, you know, partly that is also I’m certainly in terms of the Washington community of artists – first of all, I think it was a little tighter at some point, and that may have also had to do with age. But certainly when the galleries were on P Street, and Jefferson Place for instance, people did know each other and people, you know, went to the same parties and went to each other’s weddings and that sort of thing. And that was already gone certainly in the ‘70s when galleries were still on P Street but – Osuna was there, and I was Max Protech, who really – and Jefferson Place closed in – after ’74.

MR. FORGEY: ’74.

MR. DE LOOPER: I still had a show in ’74. But it was already really becoming a totally different art scene and everybody had their own interesting – I always found that very interesting –

MR. FORGEY: Well, there was a major exodus of art talent from Washington –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that’s right. People went –

MR. FORGEY: – around ’75, ’74.

MR. DE LOOPER: That’s true. People went to New York and that sort of thing. And – but also all the galleries seemed to develop their own clientele and following, which I’ve always found very interesting, because even now I think that’s very true for a small – smallish kind of city – you know, I mean, we have an art scene, but it’s not anything like LA or New York or Chicago even – that it’s so diverse in some ways and also where the audience is concerned. So that pretty much had a lot to do with it. And then, of course, my working in a museum distanced me from a lot of younger artists or even older artists – I mean, even somebody like Sam Gilliam, for instance, whom I’ve known all those years and basically we’re friends and we see each other occasionally for dinner, you know, and that sort of thing. But the fact is, when you’re real busy you don’t really have a lot of time to hang out either, because you’re producing work or you’re working at teaching in his case or you work in a museum. That sort of thing. I’ve made a bit of an effort in recent years to get to know some of the younger artists that I find more interesting also. And, in fact, at the Kornblatt Gallery there was none of that. And that was a problem for me to some extent, that there was no community of artists at all.

But then it probably had a lot to do with 7th Street too. The galleries moved from P Street to 7th Street, and although the galleries were fine, even if you think of other galleries that were there at one time – Harry Lund and –

MR. FORGEY: Lund, Osuna –

MR. DE LOOPER: Osuna and –

MR. FORGEY: [Jane] Haslem.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and the woman who’s still in New York, sculpture especially. What was her name?

MR. FORGEY: Not Fendrick –

MR. DE LOOPER: No. Right. Oh, I can’t think of her name now.

MR. FORGEY: Oh, Diane Brown!

MR. DE LOOPER: Diane Brown. See, I mean, none of these – I mean, I think there were just really no – galleries were already not a central point of artists getting together and being involved in each other’s lives, it seems to me. And so in recent years I’ve gotten – as I say, I’ve gotten to know some of the artists that – most of them of interest to me, you know, teach at Maryland, for instance –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and they happen at show at Baumgartner. And, you know, some of those people, for instance – and I make a point to see them more often than some of the other people.

MR. FORGEY: Let me ask you about – I mean, it's been woven throughout this conversation, but about the Phillips Collection.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: We're going to switch gears and talk about that.

MR. DE LOOPER: Sure. Well, it's a big part of my life actually.

MR. FORGEY: Absolutely.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: Why don't you describe the atmosphere at the Phillips Collection when you first started to work there. And when was that? 1961?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, I actually – well, okay, I came out of the army in October of '59 or something, and I think I – I knew Bill Woodward, whom I've mentioned before –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – who was at AU with me. And, in fact, we had a studio in one of those –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, it was '59.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. So I started there at the end of '59. And I think mentioned that earlier. They had stolen a little picture and they needed somebody to guard and –

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and Bill Woodward's wife, you know, knew me, or he knew me, or whatever.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And they called me. Okay, so I needed a job of some sort, and so as a – as fate would have it, I wound up being a the Phillips. And in many ways it was, of course, a very interesting time to start there, because it was the start of – they had already started on the new building which was to open in 1960. And, interestingly enough, I've blanked out a lot of the details of that. And, on the other hand – of the actual building and of the opening and so forth. But I remember the people that worked there, for instance.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that was the other part of it which was very stimulating. Okay, the Phillips was, of course, very much privately run at – in those years. And, in fact, although I was not hired directly by the Phillipses, unlike Arthur Hall Smith, who actually went to the Phillipses on Foxhall Road and their house and applied, you know, for a position there as a guard or what – nowadays they call them museum assistants, but we were guards really. [Laughs.] And so everything was very personal, so – and the Phillipses, quite frankly, played everything very close to the vest, which they – you know, why not? I mean, they were the director and they were also the curator of things. Duncan Phillips would have six years more to live, so he was relatively active, and, of course, he was very involved with the architect and none of us had anything to do with that whatsoever. I would be there many more years later when those buildings were renovated, and the curators and the son [Laughlin Phillips] who had become the director and everybody was involved, in fact, with the architects.

But, you see, it was a totally different thing before. And this also meant that exhibitions that were held at the Phillips were completely of Mr. Phillips' choosing and his doing, and all he had was people to help him install them in effect, or maybe help him, you know, print a little brochure that didn't really explain anything. I saw one of those brochures the other day and realized that people in those days – and I think that was true in other museums as well – were just made to look at things, and brochures or little catalogues didn't really say a thing about the art. And it was really kind of interesting. It's kind of an elitist way of – you know, kind of a nice elitist way of dealing with a museum. And, you know, now in the early '90s and the '80s already all of that has changed somewhat. Everything has to be pre-chewed. But anyway, be that as it may. So I started working there then, and then a few – some months afterwards the new building was opened, and as a result of that, a lot of new people were hired. And most of them were young artists. One of them was Bob Swain, who later became an assistant to Tony Smith, when Tony Smith did his big exhibition at the Corcoran with a piece called *Smoke*.

MR. FORGEY: *Smoke*, yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: He built – he helped build him that piece and so forth. And Bob Swain I think also went to American University and then developed into a pretty good painter and has sort of in recent years pretty much disappeared as far as I know. Lowell Nesbitt actually worked at the Phillips Collection too. I have been asked, and I don't remember how he was hired. And he may well have also gone to the Phillipses. He had something or other to do with Walter Reed. He worked in public relations there or the television station or radio station there, because I do know – and I think I may have somewhere a copy of it – he did an interview for whatever that radio – probably a radio station I would imagine with Duncan Phillips once, you know, asking him to talk about the Phillips. And so there was a – and then other people, including a friend who is a painter who has lived in Ireland for many years who still comes to see me every year.

MR. FORGEY: Who is that?

MR. DE LOOPER: His name is George Potter, and he is a Washington painter. He went to RISD and had a Fulbright in Berlin at one time and worked with George Rickey and then decided to – you know, after living in Berlin for a while, he decided to live in Ireland for tax reasons, and that sort of thing.

The fact is the staff was small, but it was extremely – it was mostly artists, and including – there had already been three members of the staff that had worked for Mr. Phillips.

MR. FORGEY: This is John Gernand –

MR. DE LOOPER: John Gernand, Harold Giese, and especially Jim McLaughlin.

MR. FORGEY: Jim McLaughlin.

MR. DE LOOPER: Jim McLaughlin was really the key to everything. Jim McLaughlin also – he was, by the way, married to – for many years, but I don't think at that point – to Bernice Cross, who was mentioned earlier, who was a painter who was well-known too. And he too. And all these other people in fact. They had come there as – early on as young artists in Washington, and they – you know, they used to show at Franz Bader and the White Bookshop and Gallery and places like that, at American University. I think that John Gernand and Harold Giese actually did some teaching at the workshop that Berkowitz made.

MR. FORGEY: The Washington Workshop for the Arts?

MR. DE LOOPER: I'm pretty sure. I'm pretty sure of that. I found that out much later because they never really talked about that. And so –

MR. FORGEY: That's where Berkowitz was? I'm just –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, that's right.

MR. FORGEY: I didn't want to slur over it.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no, that's perfectly –

MR. FORGEY: For the transcriber was it was –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. Berkowitz –

MR. FORGEY: – Leon Berkowitz.

MR. DE LOOPER: Leon Berkowitz was the director of the place or something.

MR. FORGEY: Right. And Ida – the poet Ida, his wife, the poet Ida Berkowitz.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And they were in the building which is diagonally across from the Phillips Collection of course, which is – you know, it's now the Indonesian Embassy.

MR. FORGEY: Now the Indonesian Embassy.

MR. DE LOOPER: So it – so Duncan Phillips obviously had always hired people. Bob Gates and his wife, his first wife, Margaret, whom I never met, were also involved with the Phillips Gallery as it was called then in various

capacities, and they did everything. I mean, they installed paintings, and they made frames, and they did this and that. And nobody had any titles. The titles all came much, much later.

MR. FORGEY: What do you remember about Duncan at the time? I mean, was he –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I –

MR. FORGEY: – a sort of ghostly presence that you knew or –

MR. DE LOOPER: No –

MR. FORGEY: – did you see him a lot or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I can't claim to have known him very well, because I worked in the old building almost exclusively and I really didn't work that very long as a guard, except that I, interestingly enough, many years later, when I was already a curator – not *THE* curator, but *A* curator – I would still do what they call lunch relief at the desk, and I would –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – sit there for fairly long periods of time. It was that kind of place, you see? And then I would go back upstairs. But, in fact, I worked – I started working upstairs fairly early because I got pretty tired of only guarding the place. And so my way out was first making slides of things. No, Duncan Phillips I did know, and I've often wondered whether he knew who I was or whether he knew my name. And he would smile at us and all that sort of thing. He would briefly talk to us. But we were there mostly, quite frankly, to serve him in – you know, in the few hours that he would come in. He would come in never for a full day, and usually, you know, they had a limousine which would park out front of the old building, and he and Marjorie or he alone would come in, mostly to do some sort of business in the office which he had upstairs, which, interestingly enough, I later had when I was the curator, which was always kind of nice, you know, to know that I sat there. And – or to – more importantly, to re-hang or install an exhibition. And it was actually a rather interesting time, because when the new building was opened he was obviously very proud of the new building. And I've often told people that are now there, you see, that, since I was there when the – when it originally opened, I noticed that they have just made the entrance into the new building again. And he – of course, also, being proud of his new wing, he wanted everybody to come in there, rather than in that old building that he probably hated by that time. I think the – I think there are many reasons to believe that he really didn't like that old building at all.

MR. FORGEY: That's very interesting. I hadn't heard of this –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, I think that we were talking about that the other day with somebody. And I – it's mostly speculation, although I think there are lots of hints. You see, the old building was a terrible place to show art. I mean, it was very intimate and very nice to you and me who have never grown up in a place like that, but to him you have to visualize that he lived there for what? By that time about 60-65 years he had a connection to that house?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Which was, you know, a family mansion never made to show art. We were talking about that in – vis-à-vis the renovation of the building in the '80s, because first of all, he painted everything in a kind of a neutral color, covering up any architectural detail – the ceiling of the music room being the most prominent example, the beautiful mantelpieces – to us beautiful mantelpieces which were recovered after the renovation of the building, but to him were just things that got in the way of displaying the art that he wanted to do, you see? So that in one of the galleries upstairs, the small gallery called Gallery C, which is right off the stairwell when you come up, there are all these beautiful Dutch tiles for instance, which were discovered when the renovation was done. You know, all you did was you started scraping – off some paint –

MR. FORGEY: – yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and you knew that there was something interesting underneath. And that was, as I say, even more so in the music room, which in my opinion he probably would have hated –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – to see renovated, because immediately – I mean, that's obvious to even people who, you know, don't know anything about art. It all takes away from the art, looking at the art. And in those days that gallery, as an example, had cloth on the walls which had faded and was sort of dark brown and – but the point is that –

MR. FORGEY: It was never a very good place for it.

MR. DE LOOPER: No.

MR. FORGEY: The Rouaults ruled –

MR. DE LOOPER: But it was –

MR. FORGEY: – the kingdom there –

MR. DE LOOPER: But on the other hand it was magical.

MR. FORGEY: – the sort of art kingdom.

MR. DE LOOPER: It was –

MR. FORGEY: You're right.

MR. DE LOOPER: It was magical, because, you know, here on these funky walls you had these beautiful Rouaults, and they glowed and you looked at the paintings.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right? You didn't look at the ceiling –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or at the columns or something like this. So it's – you know, it's one of those things. And so, therefore, the new building, I think, had a great deal of significance to him.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And that was fairly clear. I mean, I was around enough – I dealt mostly with Elmira Bier, who was –

MR. FORGEY: Her name was spelled – her last name was spelled B-I-E-R, wasn't it?

MR. DE LOOPER: B-I-E-R.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, Elmira Bier.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. She had started out many years before as his secretary I guess, and by the time I got there – and she had also hired me – she ran whatever personnel there was.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, and she ran a wonderful music –

MR. DE LOOPER: And then, of course, that was the most interesting part, that she – although she is not a musician – she wasn't a musician, she, in fact, became the director of the music program, too, and had a very interesting way of dealing with musicians, which was quite imaginative, because she looked like she was still part of the 19th century almost in – you know, in appearance and in hairstyle and all that sort of thing, but she was rather avant-garde in many ways. People like that were, of course, totally and absolutely loyal to the Phillipses, you see? And you have to recognize that that was also true of Jim McLaughlin and John and Harold. And already us new guys who were much younger didn't – we never had that opinion of Duncan Phillips that they had. Do you see what I'm saying?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: We were young artists, and we had our own ways of looking at things – not that we didn't have tremendous respect for him, but he was not faultless by any means, you see? And it's sometimes funny to think back at that, you see, because he was in many ways a god who ruled over this little wonder empire that he had there. And that was also true of Marjorie, who became the director of course after he died.

MR. FORGEY: Duncan Phillips died in '66 –

MR. DE LOOPER: He died in '66, and she was director until '72. And so they had a way of being somewhat imperious as well, you know? They – you didn't really mess with the Phillipses particularly, but then that was okay, you know? And they picked the art, and they picked where it was shown. And obviously Duncan Phillips had a magnificent eye about installation as well, and I never had an opportunity to talk to him about any of that.

I had some much later with Marjorie, but that was already a little different. But I have always felt that, in some ways – I think I was probably certainly not alone, and certainly I never dreamed that I would be one day installing the Phillips Collection. But we certainly all watched him very carefully, how he arranged paintings and all that. And the way that was done was very simple: that he would call up or – and Jim would get – Jim McLaughlin, who, as I said, had no title of any kind, but he was really the man that you could depend on. He – Jim could do everything. He could – he knew about art, and he could also, you know, do the plumbing or turn the lights on. He would climb on the ladder and all this, much of which we inherited for many years. That was really fascinating of course, and that's all now changed. He would get a lot of paintings out of the storage or, in some cases, if it was a very simple thing of a painting going on exhibit somewhere, Duncan Phillips would have thought about what to place there in its stead. And, you know, when you – sometimes you have an idea of something will look good and when you actually do it, you hold it up in the place where the other painting was before, it may not be quite as wonderful as you think it is. But, in fact, many installations were changed just by telephone.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, you just – in other words, sort of what I'm saying is he just came to check out, you know, whether it looked okay, and then they could just hang it up. If it was a whole room to be changed, it was much more complicated, although still very simple in terms of the kind of fuss that people nowadays make of it, you see? The paintings in those days were all in the closets, in various closets, all through the old building, which again, you see, you have to also keep in mind in terms of what that meant, which was that that drove everybody crazy too. That was very charming for everybody who heard about it or just came to visit, but if you had to deal with that day in and day out, that was, in terms of being a museum, a real negative thing too, you see? So – and then these paintings would be placed around and various combinations would be used – would be tried, and then paintings would – most likely he would – he and Marjorie, they were often together, most of the time they were together. They would look at it, and he had a rather low voice, and he would – he would not really speak – you know, he had a kind of a bit of a hoarse sort of old man's voice, you know? And he would not really talk at length about any of the paintings, I don't believe. But then I must admit that I didn't really see that much of that either, you see? As I mentioned him several times, Arthur Hall Smith was somebody he – who got his position on the second floor of the new building from the very beginning, and he stayed there for 10 or 15 years. And so that became his floor, since that was the floor with the *Boating Party*, the Van Goghs, the Greco, the Goya, the Courbets – everything went there. I mean, the heavyweights were all on that floor. He saw the Phillipses and their innumerable and very interesting visitors over the years much more –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm

MR. FORGEY: – and heard a lot more about the discussion of the art and so forth than I ever did. Nevertheless, you know, from observing that sort of thing, you can learn quite a lot when you see, you know, somebody do that. I learned ultimately, I think, a lot from that, and I learned a lot from Jim, who was really his right hand, you see? And a lot of that is osmosis too, you see? It's not stuff that you explain –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or anything like that. In fact, that's kind of the thing that sort of disappoints me nowadays, that in most museums everything is according to rules, and there were really no rules at the Phillips.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: It's – it was also improvised, but in an elegant and in a magnificent sort of way. And it all worked, you see, because the right intelligence was behind it and the right spirit, and art was, you know, looked at in a very particular, admiring way, in a good way, you know, and it wasn't picked apart. I don't remember that people would analyze paintings quite as much as they did later on, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Well, Duncan liked to analyze paintings.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, he did. And as you also undoubtedly know, one of the things I always regretted is that, with the contemporary art, he would – you know, in the early '60s he had a lot of shows of sculpture. He did [Seymour] Lipton. He did Smith. Giacometti, and various other people. And a lot of his sculpture shows were really important, and I and some of the other people that were working there at the time – see, we always used to talk about that, and that's also where, quite frankly, we were sometimes critical, because the Giacometti show, for instance – Duncan Phillips, interestingly enough, he had a great interest in this, but he would install it as if they were paintings.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm

MR. DE LOOPER: They were not the kind of objects that you could walk around, and he would line things up, and

it was very interesting. And some of us who were, you know, artists or painters – young painters – we couldn't understand that he couldn't make that particular jump. But, you know, I mean, there was the great art, and that was the main thing and it was there to be seen and all that. So –

MR. FORGEY: What's your impression of Marjorie?

MR. DE LOOPER: What do you – [audio break] – I think that Marjorie was in a very difficult position, and I have never held to what to me is a more revisionist aspect of looking at her, that she was very sure of herself. I think that she stood in an enormous shadow for a very long time, just as Laughlin would later on stand in that shadow, and God knows he's still standing in that shadow even now, even although he's been the director of that museum for a long time. That's in my estimation. What was interesting about Marjorie is that she was interested in what was going on in Washington, and she was interested in abstraction. And, in fact, after she died, you probably remember that the Phillips Collection acquired a Sean Scully painting.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I feel that I had a lot to do with that in the sense that I, unfortunately – and that's the kind of place it was even then still, whatever year that was, and I had been curator – I was still the curator of the collection – but it was still the kind of place where the curator – I had a lot to say about a lot of things, and there were some things that I had absolutely nothing to say about. That the painting itself was actually selected by Laughlin and his cousin, who had the connection –

MR. FORGEY: Gifford Phillips?

MR. DE LOOPER: Gifford Phillips. Who had the actual connection – Gifford did – to New York and to Sean Scully and his studio. But the point that I'm trying to make is that I was very aware of the fact, and that took some of us by surprise, that when Majorie became director, she did some things that some of us thought were a little strange, but she did go to galleries on P Street for instance, and she put two exhibitions of Washington artists together. Some – and what we found strange is that, in some cases, some of the art was installed in a way that somebody who had really known the stuff would never have – remember – you may have even seen at least one time there was a Noland, which was a very thin painting and not very tall, and it was displayed not at eye level where it was supposed to be seen as a painting, the way you would even look at a Greco or something like that, but it was above a door. And this was the kind of mistake that – you know, that in effect, to be frank, an amateur would make, you see, but not somebody who was knowledgeable. But at least it was mostly seen as a goodwill gesture. And, in fact, Sam Gilliam, for instance, benefited greatly from that –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – from her looking at his work early on.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And in '76 he had a big one-man show at the Phillips Collection.

MR. FORGEY: No, no, it wasn't '76. It was '67.

MR. DE LOOPER: '67. I beg your pardon.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: '67 exactly. Which was quite remarkable, you see? And it took everybody by surprise.

MR. FORGEY: And she bought a painting out of that.

MR. DE LOOPER: And she bought a painting out of the paint – out of the show. And, of course, it did a great deal for him as well. And, as a result, there were some other shows like that over the years as well, but mostly not curated by her.

MR. FORGEY: Well, I'm also interested in your career there. I mean, you started out as a –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: – guard and then gradually worked your way upstairs, but in –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well –

MR. FORGEY: – '72 you officially become –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: – assistant curator.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, in '72 the Phillips Collection had a professional curator for the first time, you see, an outsider.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And –

MR. FORGEY: Was it Richard Friedman?

MR. DE LOOPER: Richard Friedman. And Richard Friedman also did, you know, at least one more Washington show.

MR. FORGEY: Right. I remember that.

MR. DE LOOPER: And he made a – he went to a lot of studios and galleries and stuff like that. And he also did some things that were not only horrendous for the gallery but for his own career as well. And so he left after a couple of years. But the fact is that he also did, within the museum, some things that were very professional, and one of the things that he had found –

MR. FORGEY: This was after Laughlin became director. His mother resigned in '72, right?

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: And – okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And Laughlin –

MR. FORGEY: Persuaded him to become director over –

MR. DE LOOPER: That's correct –

MR. FORGEY: – his own objections.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, that's right. And Laughlin – well, not only – right. He had genuine objections, besides all the psychological ones of standing in the shadow of a father like that who was a great collector, and Laughlin's interest in art has – you know, it's not to be compared to his father's at all, and – even not now. I mean, he has enthusiasm sometimes, but you can't – you know, he would be the first one to admit that.

MR. FORGEY: He would be the first one to say that.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know – okay. And not only that – and he had made his own career first in the Foreign Service, and then he had started a magazine called the *Washingtonian* together with Jack Limpert, I guess –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – who's still there, which became an enormous success. And he had broken away totally from anything to do with –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – the Phillips Collection – the Phillips – yeah, Phillips Collection, which it became in 1960. But, of course, in time of that particular need, when Marjorie retired, she did persuade him to become director. And, quite frankly, he didn't spend a hell of a lot of time at the gallery at all in the beginning years, and, in fact, it was – I have always thought that part of the problems that became so large vis-à-vis Friedman were the fact that Friedman was acting as a director as well as a curator. And he was the only one ever visible in Washington at that time to represent the collection, you see? But in fact he did not have the ultimate authority of being the director. He had to ask everything, you see? Permission this, permission that. That sort of thing. Money to spend. You know? He was pretty good at that. I'm not saying that. But, you know, nevertheless, most people don't know that. In fact, even I had that. Many years later in the – when I was the curator I was also more visible than Laughlin was, and people would always insist on calling me "director." And I would always have to say: "No, I'm not the director. Laughlin Phillips, remember him? You know, he stood there, right there, in the same receiving line." You see, it was very interesting. It's a psychological thing that's happened to the Phillips Collection for a very long time, and that's also because Laughlin himself is so unassertive, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And – so – so anyway one of the things that was very professional, I think, and was also right, is that especially, again concerning the older members who had been there by that time 20 – 15, 20, 25 years, they were given titles, and it was obvious that Jim McLaughlin became the associate curator at that time and then the other people became, you know, registrar and assistant curator, or something like that. And it was at that time that I was also called the assistant curator, because, in fact, I had been working upon curatorial – what you now would call curatorial matters, because, as I was telling somebody the other day – again, this all goes back to that lecture that Gilliam just gave, and people were asking some stuff – in 1952 Duncan Phillips had written a catalogue of the collection. Well, the catalogue was as personal and as bizarre as the collection itself, in a wonderful way, you know, in the wonderful way the collection is. But the collection – the catalogue was only the pictures that he really liked, rather than it would show –

MR. FORGEY: And what was in –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. You know, how many Daumiers do you have? "Well, I have these." But then the other ones he'd just have to guess at because they weren't in there because he had a peculiar and a very interesting way of having that whole collection in his mind constantly, and he was always thinking about how to rearrange it, you see? And, I mean, I shouldn't sound as if I don't approve of that, because I, in fact, admired it. But it was a bizarre catalogue, because if somebody bought it, they couldn't say how many Daumiers you had. But he was always measuring one painting against another or the units that he – you know, when had more than five or six, he would call it a unit. And this was especially true with the newer artists, of course, say with – say like Morris Graves. He had many more Morris Graves than you would ever see from that catalogue.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: But he obviously made distinctions of "this is a really good one and that is a really good one; oh, that one, you know, is somewhat more minor and so perhaps it doesn't deserve quite the emphasis" –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – "it doesn't deserve a picture." And all of that. But what also – [audio break] – well, we were still talking about the catalogue. The fact is that – okay, after I made at slides at the Phillips Collection I started working in other capacities, and that included working on another catalogue of the collection. It was really Duncan Phillips who was working on the catalogue, and what I'm trying to say is that he was really mostly working on that, first of all, on Foxhall Road, you see, not in his office. He never worked on any of these things in his office –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – which was in a way a very great handicap, because you never quite knew what conclusions they had come to on Foxhall Road, you see, until you saw the end result. But in the case of, say, the catalogue he would be continuously supplied with photographs of certain paintings and captions –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and I would, you know, type the captions and glue the photograph, the 8 by 10. And by that time I was also working then with the photographers who would make the pictures and that sort of thing. So, in some ways, that's a curatorial thing already, and that interested me greatly. The fact also is that he never really did – he was never really made – you know, able to really get down to making another catalogue or an addendum to the catalogue of '52 or anything like that. And it was not until many years later, you see, with heaps of research, including really research of the whole collection on what was the contents of the collection and what was, you know, the condition of every object in it and all that, that a catalogue was made. And ironically some of that cataloguing of the collection was actually, in terms of the drawings and prints for instance, where we started having some problems with Mr. Friedman, who ultimately absconded with a number of them, that was actually initiated by him, because the drawings and prints were, except for occasional small exhibitions during the summer – maybe you'll remember that; I don't know if you go back that far. In the old building they had a couple of rooms downstairs which were, in fact, called the print rooms. It was also the rooms that later on the first Rothkos were shown. But they were there to be – to – mostly to show works on paper, and – but the thrust of the collection was also painting, and the works on paper, even although there were some magnificent objects in between some minor things as well, was never very great. I think that may have been the case in other American collections as well, that drawings and prints, except for certain collectors – obviously there are some great exceptions – were – sometimes, as you probably know, they were even part of a purchase, you know, that, say, some dealer would – to a collector like Duncan Phillips, he would buy, say a Daumier or a Corot – he would almost throw in such and such a work on paper, which by time and the economy and all of that now in 1992 seems like a bonanza, but it wasn't necessarily quite the bonanza that it was then. So that work

was basically – [audio break] – really be at the end of –

MR. FORGEY: No, we're – this is tape – side B, tape 2.

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, okay.

MR. FORGEY: But we've –

MR. DE LOOPER: All right. Are you –

MR. FORGEY: We've been talking –

MR. DE LOOPER: Are you going to listen to this?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay. Because I think that we may be skipping a little bit from one thing to the other a little bit, but that's fine –

MR. FORGEY: No.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay.

MR. FORGEY: No, I don't think so. I mean, we're –

MR. DE LOOPER: All right. Oh, okay, because – I've forgotten –

MR. FORGEY: No, no, if there's a transcript then we can look at that.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes, that's right. Okay, that's fine. Because Marjorie, in other words – because – okay, I think I did go a little bit from one thing to the other there, but – well, the interest in abstraction, I think, was rather interesting that I talked about. She bought the Clifford Still, for instance, if you remember that, and –

MR. FORGEY: I remember it very well.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so, in other words, when she died, there was a painting to be given, you see? And that was the Sean Scully. That's what I was –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – getting confused by. Anyway – and so everybody thought of her because she herself was a figurative painter, you know, and many of her paintings used to be displayed, especially in the days that Duncan Phillips was there, and that gradually changed. Actually Laughlin is the one who changed that very gradually from a whole room of her paintings to one or two, and that's the way it usually still is. And so it was – as I said earlier, it was then that I made a real big pitch, and I actually went through the records and went through all the things that she had acquired as the director, and there were never a lot because even Duncan Phillips, you see, in those years – after he built that new building, he really didn't have much money left over. So people sometimes don't understand that. The collecting stopped pretty much when the money ran out also. I mean, he paid for everything – you know, every nail in that new building and every painting on the wall and all that, and people, you see, tend to nowadays think of a museum more the way a museum is now –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – with fundraisers and members and all that. There was only Duncan Phillips.

MR. FORGEY: Well, you know, you've got to give credit to Laugh Phillips –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh –

MR. FORGEY: – for accomplishing that necessary task –

MR. DE LOOPER: Absolutely.

MR. FORGEY: – transforming the Phillips from a wonderful, bizarre –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – eccentric –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yes.

MR. FORGEY: – family institution to a fully professional museum –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh.

MR. FORGEY: – which it had to do because they – not only financially, but for the condition of the paintings. I mean, you must have lived in terror of a – [audio break, tape change] –

MR. DE LOOPER: There was no conservation of any kind.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And even that – I mean, the younger museum people or people who know anything about art don't even understand that. But the fact is, the way I remember it, that was never even a question. I mean, collectors didn't think about conservation. People – you know, we used to – and not only me as a young artist, but I had learned it from other people who did this, and not only at the Phillips Collection but other collectors did that too. We used to not have mats for drawings that were pH –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know, they were cardboard. They were –

MR. FORGEY: Acid paper, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: There were acid paper. I mean, the younger generation doesn't even understand that it's, you know, only a few years ago that none of that was even done. And so all of that Laughlin also brought to the collection. There's no question about that. And I think – somebody asked me that yesterday. I saw an old friend who I've known and who – I've dealt with him professional well. And in my opinion that probably has something to do also – I mean, actually he almost made that fairly clear with his retirement. You know, he set that as a task to bring the museum both physically and, in a way, mentally to the 20th century, and that's accomplished, you know?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: There are other factors, I'm sure, and also personal ones, and besides, he's at retirement age.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: That too. But obviously we're also talking about how fascinating it was as a museum and how warm it was as a result of that.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: See, Duncan Phillips was the kind of person that you could actually see in the museum, and there are people also who didn't work there who would actually, you know, be able to say, "Thank you, Mr. Phillips, for creating this," or "What do you think of this painting?" Or something like this, you see? Towards the end of his life, obviously when he got older, he wasn't at the museum that often, and you couldn't grab his – grab him by the sleeve that often. But there was this enormous personal thing. And I think, as employees, we all felt that very strongly. It's sort of unsaid thing, but sometimes when I see some of these guys that I still see from those years there was something about it that we felt that really represented him when he wasn't there or something.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: You see? And that's just changed, and it's just very different. And, therefore, you have a very different responsibility towards the place as well. See, it's not just a place that you work, but it's a place that you love and, you know, it's part of you. At the – on the other hand, of course, they also expected that, because I mentioned earlier that they had a kind of a salon on Foxhall Road, and they had many, many very interesting visitors, constantly, who would come for tea or they would come for brunch on Sunday or whatever, and inevitably all these people wound up at the Phillips Gallery as well –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – to look at the art either accompanied by the Phillipses or alone or something like this. And so you were, in fact, an extension of that, and you were also expected to be, you know, an extension of the hospitality that they provided as well. So it's very different. It was interesting.

Curatorially it was Friedman really who started then using – I became pretty much his right-hand man in many ways, and Jim McLaughlin also – although Jim was never quite as interested in organizing exhibitions –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – as I became, you know? I mean, being – partly being an artist, I guess, I saw certain art. What people sometimes forget is that Friedman himself had certain ideas about certain shows that, because he was not director, he couldn't do because they didn't have the approval of the director. And that is especially true – I know, for instance – one that I've often talked about with friends is we would go together to New York to see certain shows.

MR. FORGEY: You and Richard?

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah. And in one particular case we saw – in the early '70s I saw a show at the Uptown Castelli of Ellsworth Kelly's sculptures that were colorless and they were just vertical, you know? And I was terribly impressed. And, in fact, they were an inspiration to my work as well. And I haven't really mentioned that, but they were. And I was very interested. And we thought of, you know, bringing that sort of thing to the Phillips, but that was not approved.

MR. FORGEY: Laugh didn't –

MR. DE LOOPER: Laugh didn't go for that. Later on when I started showing at Max, you see, I saw a lot of art that I became very interested in that I still am interested in, and so even later yet when I was the curator I would have liked to do certain exhibitions, say, of certain people like [Robert] Mangold and Sol LeWitt and people like that, in certain contexts. I've always been very aware, just like everybody else is, of what you can show at the Phillips and what you can't, but I think I would have been able to do certain things, and that was basically not really in the plan either. So it's just that, fortunately, I was in some cases able to get my enthusiasm to introduce the work of that kind to other artists – Will Brunner – he's a young artist in town who knows a lot of – he has a very good memory about all of that stuff too. He knows everything – how all of that worked and I how I schlepped him to certain exhibitions in New York, for instance. Well, that's, you know, the kind of thing that I would have liked to do.

MR. FORGEY: So the first really major curatorial move you made was the –

MR. DE LOOPER: Was the Kline show –

MR. FORGEY: – well –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh.

MR. FORGEY: But this anecdote you were telling about persuading them to buy the Sean Scully or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, yes, but I mean that was much later. That was –

MR. FORGEY: Oh, that's when Marjorie died.

MR. DE LOOPER: That was when Marjorie died, see – not when she retired.

MR. FORGEY: Right, okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: No, no. So that – no, no, so that –

MR. FORGEY: That is really skipping around.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah, we are skipping around a bit.

MR. FORGEY: But your first exhibition was this *Franz Kline: The Color Abstractions* [February 17 – April 8, 1979, Phillips Collection].

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. And I still that as the first real exhibition, large exhibition, at the Phillips. Phillips' own staff, be it with – albeit with a guest curator – we had a man called Harry Gaugh, whom we got to know through a gallery where Kline had shown, at the Key Gallery. And he didn't write the catalogue, but – and, you know, yes, because there was, as you know – also, as – there was a big Cezanne exhibition, but I have always said that Cezanne exhibition, despite anything that you might hear, was never organized by the Phillips. It was never organized by Marjorie Phillips. It couldn't have been, because I have always said, "Where are the papers?" There are no papers. And even when she died and the contents of the Foxhall Road house came forward, there are no papers showing anybody organizing – now, I don't say that she didn't work on it in a capacity with Harry

Rathbone at the Boston Museum at the time, and I forget now who it was that she was –

MR. FORGEY: That was a big major anniversary show that she –

MR. DE LOOPER: Oh, it was a fabulous show. It was great.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, she sold a painting to pay for it. What was the painting she sold?

MR. DE LOOPER: No, I don't think so. Did she?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, maybe I put that out of my mind. I don't remember that one. Really?

MR. FORGEY: I thought so.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, there were a number of paintings that were sold over the years, you know, including there was a Max Ernst that was sold, which I – just a few years ago all of a sudden I saw it hanging in the Chicago Art Institute.

MR. FORGEY: No, I'm sure she did. I just can't remember what painting it was.

MR. DE LOOPER: You may be right now that you said it, but I –

MR. FORGEY: No, I'm quite sure.

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay. Because Marjorie, in fact, did sell some paintings occasionally.

MR. FORGEY: Well, I just wanted – I mean, in terms of – kind of talk about your –

MR. DE LOOPER: Mm-hmm.

MR. FORGEY: – talk about your career as a curator, which really –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – in essence started with the Kline show –

MR. DE LOOPER: It started with the Kline show.

MR. FORGEY: – which, when you mentioned Hodgkin before, I was thinking, yeah, and also Kline must been – I mean, working on the color Klines. I thought it was a wonderful, revelatory show –

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: – to bring them all together, because we think so much of Kline as a – or did anyway –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, it was also partly –

MR. FORGEY: – as black and white.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. It was partly, you know, put together – I don't know if you remember that, but, well, there are several things. There was at one time a big painting which had color in it by Kline which was owned for many years by Thomas Hess.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And then he showed it to – by the time we were doing the show it was already no longer available, plus it was in horrible shape. But he did manage to somehow sell it to a German museum I believe. Then it turned out that another collector here in town, Mrs. Jane Sudan, had a 14-foot-long – or wide painting, and she used to live on Foxhall Road, I think opposite the Phillipses – Laughlin Phillips and his first wife lived there. And they were all friends and all that. And she had actually commissioned that, and it had a lot of color in it. And, in fact, it's the painting that's reproduced on the catalogue of that show. So one thing led to another, you see? And so that show was totally organized by all of us, and obviously Jim McLaughlin was involved with it, but mostly it was me and the guest – and somebody called Sasha Newman, who was then – when she first started working there, you see? And it was that informal. We all sat in – we used to have four people, five people sitting in one office doing various things. And it all – it was all very informal, and it was interesting, but – and she was there originally as an intern, and she was hired during a preparation because she sort of became my right-

hand person. And she then became later assistant curator, you see –

MR. FORGEY: Right, I remember –

MR. DE LOOPER: – for several years.

MR. FORGEY: – you and she collaborated on the –

MR. DE LOOPER: On –

MR. FORGEY: – Duncan Phillips show.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And then, of course, she did the Bonnard show.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And, see – so that, as a curator, I was involved, of course – and I was really involved in a lot of the shows, but it also, in most cases, had a curator for the exhibition itself. I'd have to look at some of the ideas there myself because I keep forgetting, but some of them obviously were also really my ideas as well, including – oh, we did the – Sasha Newman and I did the Arthur Dove show.

MR. FORGEY: Right. Okay.

MR. DE LOOPER: And the Arthur Dove show was obviously something that needed to be done, just as later the Bonnard show needed to be done as well. And in connection with the Arthur Dove show, for instance, all the paintings were also conserved, which was pretty exciting. You know, [Marion] Mecklenberg was then the conservator at the Phillips or at least on a consulting basis and so on, all that, and he fixed all of them. And that was wonderful.

MR. FORGEY: What was his first name? Mecklenberg?

MR. DE LOOPER: Marion. Marion. His wife is Virginia Mecklenberg, who is at the National Museum of American Art [now Smithsonian American Art Museum].

MR. FORGEY: Right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: He has, over the years, become less and less involved with conservation but – excepting very technical aspects of, you know, how things are made up and so forth and all that. Morris Graves was proposed to us, but I became very involved with the guest curator, who was Ray Kass. And, in fact, in that exhibition I had a large role also in picking paintings and all that. I mean, that's part of the, you know, curatorial thing. I also, by the way, did a number of shows that, quite frankly, some of the other curators were not interested in, and, you know, the Phillips Collection has always done a number of things especially dealing with foreign artists.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And this – I had an advantage because, you see, even although I was for years a curator and then I became – I guess for five years really – the curator, I was not – I never saw myself as *the* curator as compared to somebody who did it totally professionally and didn't paint. In other words, all those years – in other words, I always first of all saw myself as a painter, not that I didn't pay full attention to being the curator. Do you see what I'm saying? But I wasn't making a career – I didn't really care that somebody said – well, you know, I certainly cared that somebody identified me with things that really were of great interest to me, like Kline or Morris Graves or we talked earlier about some local artists like Simon Gouverneur for instance. And I was really interested in that. But I was also willing to do certain things that would not have been appropriate for my career perhaps.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so some of them actually became kind of interesting, because they became actually the kind of exhibitions – we did a Japanese artist called Kimura, who is a painter who lives – who lived in Paris for most of his life. And that was the kind of job which I wound up doing and did it with a lot of interest. And interestingly enough, I have noticed over the years that the paintings, when they were actually shown at the Phillips, were – stuck in the minds of a lot of people, including artists, who talked about them – in some cases artists that I never would have thought would have really been interested in his paintings because they were

very French school-oriented.

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were – they came really out of Bonnard and all of that.

MR. FORGEY: They fit very well at –

MR. DE LOOPER: They fit very well at the Phillips.

MR. FORGEY: They looked wonderful.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And so I worked on that. I worked on Leland Bell as well. Leland Bell was this interesting kind of artist, whom I felt felt – had a connection to the Phillips in that it was part of his life as well. He was a New York artist, you know, a figurative painter, almost too much academic. But I thought he was worth looking at. And the right set of circumstances came around to show him at the Phillips. And I thought it was worth doing. And it turned out to be a semi-success, let me put it this way. A bigger success was when somebody offered us a show of Elmer Bischoff, and I really fought for that one. At the time people didn't really know much about Elmer Bischoff, and I had seen more of his stuff because I'd been in California a lot.

MR. FORGEY: Been out in San Francisco.

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And, of course, people only – and I happened to – we had one connection with a major collector in New York who had a major painting in his house. And we borrowed that, and then other things started falling in place. And the interesting thing was there I felt very strongly that we should do it because I also felt that not only we shouldn't only be showing abstractions and so forth at the Collection, and there were a lot of shows of abstract art. And I tried to think of another constituency that you have here as well, and in fact, all the AU people and the people of the school that was a break-off in – that's in Georgetown –

MR. FORGEY: The Washington –

MR. DE LOOPER: You know, they're in Georgetown.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: They were all – they all came, and they were all highly enthusiastic, and that's exactly what I had hoped would happen. You know, it's called the Washington Something School –

MR. FORGEY: Washington School of –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: – for Art, or whatever. Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: Leslie Newman [sp] and people like that –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – who are all basically, you know, AU –

MR. FORGEY: They had a wonderful show there of Robert Darista after he died.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right.

MR. FORGEY: Hell of a painter. Anyway.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right. Darista. So, you know, that was – okay, but I notice here on my own list here we also did a show of Indian art, for instance. And that turned out to be kind of interesting too. And all I wanted to say also is that I wound up having a fairly large part in picking all the art and that sort of thing, in this particular case out of one collection. And it's the kind of thing that even Duncan Phillips used to do, because people had long forgotten that. But he would not always do only the people that were in the limelight, but he would – there was – just before I was there, there was an exhibition of some sort, and I'm sure that it had something to do again with the constituency also of embassies here and all that, of Swiss folk art that was shown at the Phillips Collection. He would do – and there was one that I – of things from Peru or something.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: But objects. Do you remember that?

MR. FORGEY: Right. Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so in that tradition Laughlin always felt that he should also do that, and some of it became actually rather successful. And, as I say, sometimes it was kind of fun to work in there too. One of the things that I was – that I'm kind of proud of is the John Graham show that we did –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – and I really did push for that. We had a lot of problems with the John Graham show, and first of all, I'd be the first one to admit that we weren't the ones that should have done that. It should have been Harry Rand at the National Museum of American Art, who is a great expert on Graham and has written about him and all that. And that was all obvious from the very beginning. And I knew that perfectly well. And, in fact, I actually also talked to him, and I talked to Betsy Broun – at that time she was not the director. She – I don't know who she was. Was she the curator or something? Whatever. And how we would deal with that, because I had actually even had an idea at one point of him contributing –

MR. FORGEY: Guest curating?

MR. DE LOOPER: – well, or contributing to the catalog or something like that.

MR. FORGEY: Right, right, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: But it really didn't work out. And there are very many reasons for that sort of thing, but the fact also remained that John Graham was a very important aspect of the Phillips Collection, and I've – all the years that I was there I had always been very interested in emphasizing the 20th century aspect of the collection, because, you know, I knew all their closets full of paintings by Dove and by Marin and – but also other people like Graham, you see? Graham was supported, just as Dove was, in the early years until there was a break, and I think that had a lot to do with personal matters rather than – you know, than the art itself. And in fact, Graham had turned out in the research of the collection – he received a stipend, just as Dove had, and that sort of thing. And then – so – okay, so then I have over the years worked well with Sue Green – Eleanor Green. And to be frank – I guess we can be frank on the tape, and we're trying to be frank – a lot of people cannot work with her at all. And so she was identified as the person who should help us with that. But obviously when you organize a show there is much more than only that part of getting the thing through. And the organization of the exhibition was very cumbersome at the Phillips Collection, and we had a lot of support of many people that are no longer there who felt it was important. And here in fact I also see kind of a little bit of a change, that it would be easier nowadays – maybe I benefited from that to some extent – that we would have cost overruns that were tolerated. It was sort of understood that curatorially you could do certain things where you wouldn't necessarily get any A money or corporate money. Do you see what I'm saying?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: Obviously after I left that really dried up. Probably the new trustees all completely, you know, pounced down on that and forbade that, and that certainly ties everybody hands greatly. But be that as it may, as I say, I worked well with Sue Green, and Sue Green did a very good job I think of organizing the show.

MR. FORGEY: Yes, indeed.

MR. DE LOOPER: But again, you know – so we worked very much hand in hand and that sort of thing. I mean, it's her show, but I do feel even the administrator whom we had at that time, Mike Green, who then died, was the kind of person who was also almost a bit like me. He had come in there not as a professional, you see, but he had basically the enthusiasm for certain things that needed to be done artistically at the gallery and would stand up for it, you see? And as I say, Laughlin would allow us to do certain things, but you did have to, you know, put up your –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – your fight for it. And so there were, as an example, overruns. But in the case of the Graham show there were also philosophical differences. And I don't know how far I should go into that, but – and that has a lot to do with creativity versus, you know, a kind of a dry art historical approach to everything –

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: – which exists a lot and also exists a lot not only at the Phillips but in a lot of other museums. And –

MR. FORGEY: But the show turned out splendidly.

MR. DE LOOPER: Great. I mean, it turned out great. And it – and – and, you know, as you are probably aware, is we have in most of these cases also circulated the exhibition. And we got – we came to that conclusion right away at the Kline show, that as – because as soon as it started leaking out that somebody was doing this particular subject, then it was that you were able to, you know, share it with other people. And that seems to have become much more cumbersome too. It's true that I suppose we benefited from a number of things, including our enormous enthusiasm and that the insurance prices weren't quite as bad as they are now and that sort of thing, and we used to be able to send exhibitions on a truck just wrapped in plastic and, you know, between cardboard sheets rather than in crates, you know, when the occasion was relatively right for that. And you can't do anything like that anymore. So there have been a lot of constraints put on things too.

MR. FORGEY: Have you been active at all since leaving the Phillips Collection as a curator or –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, only with the sculpture program, see? And ironically, because the sculpture –

MR. FORGEY: The sculpture program of the Phillips Collection?

MR. DE LOOPER: Right. And, see, I did pick almost all those people here. It started what? In '85. What – and the sculpture program has a lot to do with the renovation of the new building and the – of the old building especially. When that was renovated, all the ivy was gone, all the greenery was gone, and all that. And ironically, interestingly enough, Laughlin had often talked about sculpture. And of course in the renovation here we were getting rid of the sculpture court.

MR. FORGEY: Getting rid of that little sculpture court, right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And yet there was more interest in sculpture than there had been before. Plus there was this – you know, this very bare-looking building, and it seemed appropriate to put something there to liven it up. And again, since I was interested and I knew some of these people, or at least I knew their work – in some cases I didn't know them personally but got to know them –

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, it's very interesting. You have a mix of people who basically work in the Washington metropolitan area, I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: Well –

MR. FORGEY: – and then from –

MR. DE LOOPER: Right.

MR. FORGEY: Chris Gardner was the first, I guess.

MR. DE LOOPER: Well, first of all, you see, the reason that – it was done, in my opinion, for two reasons. It was to give these people a little bit of a leg-up, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Mm-hmm.

MR. DE LOOPER: And also, since there was hardly any budget at all, we were, in fact, required to get these people to install their own piece.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You see? There wasn't even, in some cases – later on some of the programs were a little bit better funded than others. There wasn't even money enough to rent a crane or a truck or something like that. And so this was made very clear, and whatever money there was was to go to a brochure that was published. So Chris Gardner I saw at the Vinton Art Gallery [sp], and I'd –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – seen his stuff, and there was a nice piece there. And so he was the first one that we borrowed a piece from. Robert Lehrman, I guess. And then another piece he made.

MR. FORGEY: Peter Charles, John Van Alstine, John McCarty.

MR. DE LOOPER: John McCarty I got to know from seeing his stuff at Baumgartner.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Baumgartner, as it turns out, is actually one of the few galleries that shows a lot of sculptures

in the first place. But I had not known McCarty. Peter Charles' work I knew. I had known him. Osuna's gallery, of course, showed John Van Alstine. That was –

MR. FORGEY: John Ferguson showed – the Baltimore fellow, he showed at the Kornblatt.

MR. DE LOOPER: That's right, but I had never met him. And he –

MR. FORGEY: I like the choice of Dimitri Hadzi? That's –

MR. DE LOOPER: Okay, now, I did not do Hadzi. That shouldn't be there. It was actually Eliza Rathbone who knew him. And that was for – due to the fact that he is well shown in the Boston area. I mean, I knew him as an artist –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – when he was – in fact, one of those interesting and wonderful man to meet as well.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: But he was one of those people who, you know, in around 1960 or maybe a little later was actually quite famous.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: He was a real big deal. And then his star was more associated with abstract expressionism or –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – something than with, you know, anything Caro-related later on. But he's still a, you know – a big, wonderful sculptor. And he had also – and then I found out later when I went to make prints of my own work in Palo Alto, he had made prints there as well. So then I got to know him a little bit. But basically it is to – in my opinion, it's to help, you know, artists also from – and it has helped a lot. Van Alstine is now so – he's almost untouchable. [Laughs.] And he was – you know, I think it was the second show at –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – at Osuna, and I took my camera and took some installation shots and all that. I never – interestingly enough, in that particular case I never met him. We did a brochure, but we did it all by telephone and all that, and for some reason I wasn't there when he installed his stuff either. But most of the other artists – and there is a –

MR. FORGEY: Do you miss doing the painting shows?

MR. DE LOOPER: I would like to do some more contemporary art stuff.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah?

MR. DE LOOPER: Because – partly because I think that people are not, you know, looking around as they should be.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I also do really believe, because, you know, Duncan Phillips used to – I remember Kenneth Noland. I – the other night I referred to something, but I didn't mention his name. When I first worked at the Phillips that's one thing that Phillips had his office for: so that artists could bring their work. If they – if he hadn't had an opportunity to see a show or I'm sure there were other reasons too, that sometimes he didn't want to go because he didn't want to be brow-beaten – and so in the privacy of his office they would – you know, they would bring some of their paintings to his office where he could look at them for a week or something or whatever. And then everybody, of course, kept our fingers crossed that he would buy something. Well, I remember, because I didn't meet Kenneth Noland, unlike Sam or Downing, who knew all these people.

MR. FORGEY: – yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And Jim McLaughlin knew him because he used to hang out there for years, see? But I remember that he had a show at some point at the Jefferson Place, and obviously Duncan Phillips didn't see it. And in my opinion he probably after the fact didn't like it very much either. And those must have been of targets, because that's the reason we got –

MR. FORGEY: You got that little target.

MR. DE LOOPER: He bought – what is obvious to me, he bought the least – the little painting where he had to commit himself the least.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: And so he bought that, and that's the reason that the Phillips doesn't have the targets. You know, any of the targets we could have had, I'm sure, you know, then established Noland as one of the –

MR. FORGEY: Well, it's true. I mean –

MR. DE LOOPER: But that's the way it went. No, no, I'm not saying –

MR. FORGEY: Duncan Phillips was –

MR. DE LOOPER: I'm not saying that even as a criticism, you see?

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: I don't – I really don't, because that's the way he did it. The Morris Louis he got out of a show at the Corcoran that he saw. And he was obviously very careful about looking at these painters in the first place. I mean, who's to say that he would have even given Sam Gilliam a shot or –

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: – or Gene Davis? Gene Davis, I remember, showed some of his work, and I think that Duncan Phillips was still around. But it could be that it was during Marjorie's – and it was not until much later, let me put it this way, that he got into the collection.

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: You know? That's the way he was. Duncan Phillips, on the other hand, was still looking at French art, right? He was still looking at Soulage. He was still looking at this guy that I read about the other day in connection with John Mitchell – Riopelle?

MR. FORGEY: Right.

MR. DE LOOPER: Remember that? Riopelle?

MR. FORGEY: Riopelle, yes.

MR. DE LOOPER: We had to take all the brand new doors of the new building – they had to all be taken off in order to get the paintings inside because they were so huge.

MR. FORGEY: Yeah.

MR. DE LOOPER: And I mean, who would have shown somebody like that? He was bigger then, granted, that he has –

MR. FORGEY: And he's –

MR. DE LOOPER: – been ever since.

MR. FORGEY: A Canadian painter.

MR. DE LOOPER: Yeah.

MR. FORGEY: Canadian.

MR. DE LOOPER: And he showed – but, you see, the whole thing was there was also the little – you know, the kind of galleries that Marjorie and Duncan used to deal with: Pierre Matisse in New York and Knoedler and Marlborough. And so a lot of things came to their attention that way.

MR. FORGEY: Well, Willem –

MR. DE LOOPER: Now I'm going to pass out.

MR. FORGEY: – this is the end. This is the end. How does it feel to be an old master?

MR. DE LOOPER: Old [59 years old at the date of the interview.]?

MR. FORGEY: [Laughs.]

MR. DE LOOPER: I need a drink or something.

[END]

Last updated... February 16, 2006