



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ivan C. Karp, 1986
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ivan C. Karp on April 17, 1986. The interview was conducted by Ronnie Cohen for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

RONNIE COHEN: -- April 17th, this is side B of the first tape.

IVAN KARP: The advantage that we have over other galleries is, of course, that we have a very nice physical location down West Broadway, a pioneer location on the Champs Elysees of SoHo. The fact that we put on -- and this, of course, is not an advantage; it happens by chance -- is that we put on -

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: I was describing the advantages that we have over other galleries. The advantage, of course, is my own conviction about what we do here. That's a big advantage, because I can speak about what we do with great thoughts, you know. And I have been blessed by nature with the ability to verbalize. And so I venture a great deal around the country, and I can speak of my convictions.

MS. COHEN: When did you start lecturing?

MR. KARP: I started lecturing in 1958, at the Martha Jackson Gallery, but I think I reported that incident on the last interview, that a group of people came in to an exhibition of Antonio Tapias, the [inaudible] Spanish painter. And I was so dammed up with not being able to tell people how I felt about that artist -- I loved it, you know, and I had formulated phrases in my mind about what this work meant, you know -- and there was this group before me. And I made a spontaneous lecture, and they were delighted, you know.

They said, "Gee, are you a professional docent? Do you work here as a docent in the gallery?" I said, "No, no, I am a regular employee at the gallery, and I really like the work that we're showing here, and I thought I would tell you about it." They said, "Gee, you should do this kind of thing, you know," so I was encouraged to proceed.

And, to begin with, I volunteered for any lecture opportunities I had, and now I don't have to solicit them any more, they come to me, which is wonderful. So I do a those quite a bit. When I was with this other gallery, I would do one or two a month, wherever I needed to go, for fees of various types, you know. Now, that's in remote places, you know, in small college towns or art centers in states I never visited, you know.

And now, it turns out, looking at my lecture schedule over the years, I have been to 47 of the 50 states, and lectured. And a couple of states are still resisting me: Oklahoma, Alaska, and Hawaii. And I've been promised to lecture in Tulsa for next season. And somebody has already approached me on Alaska. And I'm not sure I want to go to Hawaii.

In any event, I have these advantages. Where the gallery is located, to begin with, we have a big space and we can put on rousing exhibitions. We put on rousing exhibitions because we have the mental capacity to put on rousing exhibitions, right? And, because of my strong convictions about the work, I am impervious, to a degree, of some portion. You could probably say, "There is Karp, down there, he's got strong convictions, he loves what he shows. Maybe he's right," you know, for those who don't know. So, we have a wonderful attendance, and we manage to keep ourselves above the water. We sell a lot of art here, and we do it with great finesse.

MS. COHEN: Did you see a different collector emerge in the 1970s, versus what you had known in 1950s?

MR. KARP: Well, [inaudible] the art world, and that's another topic, entirely, is how the art world has grown from a small, intimate community to a larger intimate community, which is essentially what it is.

Now, you know, you fly across the country as I do often, and you look down on the great plains, or on the barren tracks of Utah, and you say, "There is really nobody down there who gives a fig for what you do," you know? And actually, I think a larger portion of any public is not really interested deeply in the visual arts, you know.

So, we know that we're a small world, and we know that it's important, what we do here, you know, that future

generations are concerned with the culture of our time, and that if we can contribute something meaningful to the visual arts culture with our activity, we will have done something meaningful, even heroic, for that matter, and I will have been proud that I did that, you know. Just having said, "I put on a sequence of really good exhibitions, I identified some artists of consequence, their work is lodged into art history now, and I played some role in that." That's a wonderful thing to have done.

Because I have given up pretty much on my literary career, I still scribble a little bit. I wrote an essay recently on visual perception. I write about gambling -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- and other topics, you know. I still enjoy it, but I'm not as passionately involved in literary destiny as I had been during my earlier years. So I am really enjoying this profession, and I put all of my strength and energy into it, you know.

The basic format has changed. It's a larger public, with the growth of prosperity and with the growth of strong nationalism in the country. There is pride in the culture, right? If the government itself takes pride in the culture, if the business world takes pride in it, then in a sense the culture is [inaudible], it's uplifting, in a way, you know?

MS. COHEN: How important to your operation is the corporate collector?

MR. KARP: It has grown rather dramatically. I could say that, up until about five years ago, it was up to three percent of our business. I would say now it's 15 to 20. And 15 to 20 means it's patchy. It doesn't -- like for one period of time, I might not see anybody of the corporate collecting. Then we may get five consultants, you know, at once, you know. Their ability to sort of break out, I find, is superior to [inaudible].

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: -- just to intrude into what we were describing as how the art world has changed, the corporate art [inaudible], here is an artist who has called me. I saw her work at a group exhibition of artists who were affiliated with the local arts school. And I was overwhelmed with what I had seen. This art school -- it's the School of Visual Arts -- has an exhibition facility, here on Worcester Street. And I went in it one day, and I saw this phenomenal sculpture. And I said, "Who could this be? It's incredible."

So, I tried to find out where she was, but all I had was a name. I called the school, and they said, "Oh, she's a student here, and this is her graduate work," or something like that. I sent over -- at that time, he was still alive - - the Duke of Chicago -- I can't say his name right now, but I will say it in two or three minutes, as we get -

MS. COHEN: Oh, I know who you mean.

MR. KARP: Yes.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: Let's go back to the growth of the art community.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: We were describing the corporation [inaudible]. I had said -- and it might be a caustic remark, but I say it with great sincerity -- that the people who are working for the corporations, the so-called advisors, or consultants, show a greater degree of professional acumen in judging art than many of the professionals in the museums, and certainly more than the professionals who write for *The Journal*.

MS. COHEN: Do you think that the quality of the professionals in the museums has declined?

MR. KARP: It has declined. It's always been scholarship that has been the criteria for hiring people into museums. It's very hard to tell somebody's -- to test somebody's perceptual ability, their visual perception. It isn't possible to test it. And if there was a test, who would give the test?

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: I was saying that, basically, the museums have to hire professionals. Where do they get the professionals to hire? They get it from hearsay information, that who-knows-who is available. That person is available. Well, the director of [inaudible] -- this happens regularly -- has just recently resigned or been fired. He's available. Well, so-and-so is available, here is a wonderful [inaudible], this guy has just written a fabulous tome on Gorky, he must be bright, right?

But, basically, these are people with an art history background who really haven't been challenged as to their visual perceptual ability. That is, have they put on shows? Have they had to identify work of consequence, without identifying work that is already locked into art history?

It is very easy to make a show of Prouseant [phonetic]. We know who the classics are, right? You take a museum director who has just put on a show of Caravaggio [phonetic] and say, "Oh, what an achievement, oh my God." Well, basically, the achievement is, well, did he need a show of Caravaggio? Yes, it's a wonderful thing to have happened. Where did he find the pictures? Well, his staff will do that, right? Because we know where they are. The organization of the exhibition, which is quite an achievement, I think it's an astonishing achievement when I see a great show like that. But it's not creative work on the largest level.

Creative work is: being able to identify forgotten masters, right; to acquire significant works, for the proper price, for a museum by forgotten masters or by unknown artists, you know; to put on, for instance, the Museum of Modern Art, or the Guggenheim, or the Whitney, which are redundant, in a way, showing contemporary art. The shows, for the most part, they put on of contemporary art are, essentially, weak. These are bad shows. They don't really know what they're doing, because they don't have the networks of intelligence to supply them with the information. They don't respect those networks to begin with, right? They trust their own judgment, which is faulty, for the most part. They are art historians.

So, they're not as good as the consultants who work for the -- I don't know how -- somehow it happened that the independence -- even the independent art dealers who come in here are so-called [inaudible], or private dealers. These are sharp characters, right? They know their goods. They know what they're looking at. When they come and [inaudible].

Well, here is a fair example -- I'm sorry, but I need to be honest -- but here is a fair example of something. This man brought me a Winslow Homer yesterday. He says, "Here is a nice Winslow Homer." I say, "Are you saying it's not a great Winslow Homer?" He says, "No, it's not a great Winslow Homer, but the price reflects that." Now, if he wants to sell [inaudible], "Here is a [inaudible] Winslow Homer, it's the best." Well, he couldn't fool me, I know a number 10 Winslow Homer, and he knows he can't fool me, and he's a sharpie himself. He's going to be candid. The private dealers are like that. The consultants for the corporations are largely like that. They're very smart folk.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: They know what the corporation needs, they know how to sort it out, they can find it. They got good eyes. That's the whole thing in this business, isn't it? Right? It's good eyes. That's the thing. And only a handful of people have it, right, according to my view, needless to say. In other words, if they share my opinions with me, they must have good eyes, right? And there are only a handful of those, right?

You know when you have it, and that's the important thing to say, is when you know that you can walk into a room of 50 unknown artists and walk up to the 3 best works and announce them and pick them out, you know that you picked the best work, you know it when you do it, and I know that most curators don't know when they're doing it. They don't know it. They don't feel that. Because when you have that passionate surge of need to look at things, you know when you have detected something every time.

I know some of my colleagues can do that. I know my friend Paul Brock [phonetic], down the street, can do that. He can walk into a room with me, as John Caterio [phonetic] in my artist group, he can walk into that same room -- and my wife can do this, too -- walk into the same room with 50 artists, totally unknown, and pick the same 3 artists, right? Because it has the goods. And fine art is fine form. And you detect it, once you are capable of detecting it, right? And you know when you can detect it.

I can go to an antique shop, and through the right ear lobe I can feel the vital object. I can feel it, you know? And I know other people, collectors like that, who come into this gallery who do the same thing. They will walk into a gallery, the gallery here will be open even during the installation time, while the works are being put up, walk into it and say, "That's a terrific picture over there. That's what I want," right? I'm not telling you what they say after that. "I want a good deal" is what they say after that, right? First thing they say, "That's mine." And they know it's good.

So, when you walk in here on the opening day, it's possible that the works of the greatest salient power have been identified. They frequently are. So there are people out there -- and I share my happiness with them, more than anybody else -- is that group of cognoscenti, who have the vision and know they have it, right?

And there is a group of collectors like that, and I am enchanted when they come in, because we can talk about what's happening in town, about the museum shows, about the things that are over-appraised, about the failure of criticism, about the bleakness of the museum shows. We can talk about that, and we share our enthusiasms, right? And that gives you the happiness in the art world. What gives you less than happiness is when minor

artists are celebrated, and major artists are overlooked.

MS. COHEN: And you find -

MR. KARP: I know with my own gallery -

MS. COHEN: -- a lot [inaudible] -- yes.

MR. KARP: -- but I stumble around the neighborhood. I went yesterday to see an old friend artist of mine. He's having a little [inaudible] gallery here. And I walked in, and it was all of the highest professional standards. He gets no attention whatsoever. His work is serious. It's somewhat enclosed. Tough, straightforward, honest, abstract art. There is no audience for it, except real smart people, right? There is no imagery to seduce naive collectors. There is no flash of agony and stress to win over the hearts of the curators who have been so responsive to new figuration, most of which is utterly trash, you know?

So, these are the injustices. And, of course, in every sphere of activity in every part of any art community, or the world at large, or in business, there are injustices, you know. And there is no less injustice here, you know, as much anywhere.

So, we can't [inaudible] we suffer more injustice than other communities do [inaudible]. I have had some [inaudible] artists, I'd like to say I've known over the years, who were just utterly neglected by the art community, right? I have had one artist say he's had 10 1-person shows, and he sold maybe in those 10 1-person shows 6 or 8 objects at modest prices. This man is a significant contribution to the art world. I know he makes important work.

People come and say, "This guy is terrific, Ivan. You know, like every time I see his show it's a fresh vision. It's a revelation. What happened with him?" I say, "Nothing." He never got any attention from the press. He hardly ever gets a review. He is admired within a certain small part of the art world. People don't buy art, in any case, like that.

Anyhow, so we see these injustices, and we try to correct them. How do we correct them? By making strong, convincing speeches, if possible, right? By giving the artists exhibitions as often as possible. By trying to get their works shown around the country or in Europe, if possible, right? That's what we can do, you know.

But if you pronounce your opinions with great vividness and with great candor into this little community, you're going to antagonize some people, right? If a man calls me as he did yesterday from the *Life* magazine and says, "Mr. Karp, *Life* magazine is doing a piece on Roy Lichtenstein, and the installation at the new building uptown. How do you feel about that painting," right?

Well, Roy Lichtenstein is one of my oldest friends in the arts, I helped him come into the art world, right? I actually admire him as one of the great [inaudible]. I said I thought it was a failure [inaudible]. Roy is going to hear this, but he has much strength in character, [inaudible]. But his dealer is going to hear it and say, "bad blood," right? He'll say, "spoil sport, what are you doing," right? And other artists who are friends of the artist are going to say, "Why would Ivan say something like that," especially those who have no judgment about the qualities of that mural. I'm not declaiming against the mural because it's something I would like to have one of my artists do, which I would, you know. If anybody deserves it, Lichtenstein deserves to have that mural. It's not a great picture. It's a minor painting. It's got failures about it.

So, I say it. I say it to the man from *Time* magazine -- *Life* magazine. He distorts, to a certain degree, what I say, very likely, right? And it comes out in journalism, right? But I still said it, and somebody is going to be peeved by that, and so the factions -- of which the art world is composed of 50, at least, factions -- formulate their tactics and their territory, which can be very enjoyable at times, all these strategies and all these -

MS. COHEN: Do you ever enjoy that aspect of the art world?

MR. KARP: Everybody in the art world waits only for one thing, for recent gossip. That's what they wait for. It's a [inaudible], and you want to hear about something happening to somebody: romance, criminality, right, something, you know? And when you see somebody from out of town, they come in, the first thing they say when they come to the gallery, "What's new, kiddo?" And they mean, "What's happening around the art world that I would enjoy hearing about," right? It's small community. You thrive on that. [Inaudible] interesting.

There are really no great conspiracies, and I miss that, really, in a way. Nobody gets together in a smoke-filled room and says, "We're going to launch this artist's situation." One critic, an art dealer, a museum person, right, and somebody from the fashion magazine, if you get them in the room and say, "Let's work out a strategy for launching this artist's case." It can't be done. You can't get that many people to agree, you know? If they do agree, then they agree by chance or by ignorance, you know?

It's like David Sally [phonetic], which did not get a great deal of attention. It wasn't a conspiracy that made that happen. A lot of hype helped it, you know, and a lot of ignorance helped it. These are artists of some competence. I think [inaudible] had some competence. He is not a major artist. [Inaudible] is almost always insufficient to the task. Sally's work, I don't know, really for me, it's not even fully professional. You know, I see some small passages in his work, but it's third year college art, as far as I'm concerned, you know? So he gets a lot of attention, and he should have his blessings, if he wants to. The only thing bad about that is maybe other artists of greater consequence are neglected as a result of that. And that is the only bad part of a bad artist getting a lot of attention, is that a good artist will be left out, right?

Nothing bad about that. The worst thing that could happen is that a good artist is neglected during the course of his lifetime. It doesn't happen that often now. If there are people like myself out there -- and there are others like myself -- who are concerned with passionate inquiry, who want to know, a great artist will not be overlooked if he or she makes themselves available, as if somebody hands me slides, and it's a major artist, it's going to be me or somebody else who detects vitality, eventually. It may be late in the artist's life, but it's not likely to be a Van Gogh syndrome, not going to be a tragedy of an artist being totally ignored and neglected for a whole lifetime. If that artist reaches out at all into the art world, that artist will be detected.

And that's the peace of mind that it gives me, to know that, that the art world has become so large and so complex that no great major talent is going to get totally ignored, you know, and that the lesser talents who have achieved a great deal of renown, will finally be found out, you know, which -- and it may take time, you know.

And I hope it's in my lifetime, that they discover how bad Alex Katz is, you know. I hope that happens. And I'm very amiable with Alex Katz, we see him at social occasions, and it doesn't diminish our friendship, all the years that we have known each other, but I think his art is not sufficient, you know, and that he is certainly not worthy of a retrospective at the Whitney, when there is 500 other artists who deserve it more. Right?

MS. COHEN: But how perpetuating is a conspiracy of ignorance? It seems that ignorance can be a very powerful -

MR. KARP: It can be very durable. It can be, over a period of time, if we allow ourselves a mature lifetime of 30 or 40 years -- that means from the time we come to the art world -- it could last that long, you know? And you're saying, "Oh, they're still celebrating that terrible artist," right? Or, "Has my friend, Harry [phonetic], come to fame at last?" You know? You could say that. But I would like to think -- and I think, with a vision that you could have beyond your own years, that the truth will triumph.

It didn't triumph in the case of El Greco. El Greco, he's a very cool artist, right, and he gets a lot of attention, still, from the art press. But I don't think he should be in museums. You know, he's one of the few failures. But for the most part, people [inaudible] the great museums of the world, it filters out, you know. For the most part, you see pretty good pictures, you know? And the [inaudible] genius seems to have been identified. [Inaudible] and the consensus of the informed. This is the salient line, because [inaudible] will find its truth, right? That's where it happens.

I think that's fairly comprehensive, for the moment, and I hope that I will [inaudible] again with a shorter period of time than five years. A lot of wonderful things are going to happen during this interval, you know. There isn't much else to be said about the art world. For the most part, I'm very comfortable in the art world. I like my colleagues, I like the other dealers, I enjoy the artists. The collectors are a wonderful, strange breed of people, you know. I like the curious little consultants that come in here, I like the private dealers and the [inaudible], you know. I enjoy the students and their inquiries. I like the amazement of the groups that come in here all day long. I enjoy most of it. It's a great arena. It's a wonderful place to be, and I think that it's a life worth having lived.

MS. COHEN: Absolutely.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MS. COHEN: Well, what are some of your more recent activities?

MR. KARP: Well, one of America's more illustrious collectors, he's been very actively engaged and put together a significant collection of post-war American art from the abstract expressionist period to the present, who lives in Florida and owns some property there, is opening a center -- a shopping center, I think you would call it -- in which he would like to see galleries bring their facilities. The galleries around the Miami or south Florida area are rather scattered, and it's his idea that if the galleries could be close together, they would become a community, an arts community.

And so, he opened the shopping center, and has invited me to open a gallery there in south Miami, in his center, right, so that maybe it would be attractive to other dealers to do that. And [inaudible] galleries willing to open in this center, so they will have a little kernel of activity there. So we plan to open some time late spring, you know,

and we will put on a series of very -- very gratifying, I'm sure, always -- enjoyable, and provocative exhibitions.

[End of CD 1, Track 1.]

MS. COHEN: -- 1988 [sic]. I am here with Ivan Karp. And, Mr. Karp, to continue your interview with the Archives of American Art, I understand that you have distinct and clear opinions on the -

MR. KARP: Strong convictions is the word.

MS. COHEN: Fine. You have strong convictions -

MR. KARP: Right.

MS. COHEN: -- on the subject of over-valued artists.

MR. KARP: There is a whole group of elements concerning the present state of evaluating artists, and the present condition of collecting in the United States. We have, of course, a growth of the economy over the last 20 or 30 years, which has brought people to consider -- many for the first time -- that acquiring art is a legitimate, and in some cases, significant kind of endeavor.

A large number of the people who have so embarked are really not equipped for the -- they're not equipped with the expertise to identify artwork of consequence, according to our view. So that we have developed in the art scene in the United States -- even abroad, for that matter -- a rather dramatic distortion of value.

MS. COHEN: How would you define value in contemporary work?

MR. KARP: Value, for me, a general term meaning works of cultural consequence, things that will remain in the visual arts culture for a protracted period -- or might even be considered immemorial, you know. I would like to think that significant art remains in the culture for as long as the culture cares. And a number of objects have been identified by both collectors, museums, and art historians, art critics, as objects of consequence, which, in the view of some of us -- and particularly me, in this case -- have no consequence, whatsoever.

What causes this kind of development which so dramatically distorts the present state of affairs, and is so discomfiting to our artists who have been functioning for years in the community, and have gained no progress in their careers, and for artists entering the art community who are profoundly distracted by what they read about certain artists, and about the prices they hear, works being sold at auction and through galleries, has created an atmosphere of shocking distortion, as to the cultural value of objects. And they are commercialized.

And, once again, to repeat, this probably results from an influx of a great deal of both old and new money into the art world, and much of it, again, by people who are really not acquainted with the art scene, and have developed a romance with it. And I'm not decrying their reason for their involvement. It could be just flirtation with ornamentation in their lives, or it could be a serious embarking on another path to comfort-making.

And it can be both. There are people who buy serious works of art who, of course, are very pleased when they discover that what they have acquired was -- has increased in value. It sort of verifies your judgment, in many cases. But, in many cases, it doesn't verify anything. It just verifies a distortion of the market.

MS. COHEN: Well, you just said that there were a number of, I guess, what could be described as art professionals who have also identified objects which -

MR. KARP: Yes, the art professionals are largely responsible for the distortion, in that -- it's not as if an art critic and a museum person and an art dealer come together in a conspiratorial effort to launch a particular artist's case. That doesn't happen in the art world. I mean, there is no smoke-filled room, in that sense, where these conspiracies are generated.

But there is a kind of what you would call a conspiratorial structure involved when a particular critic or two or several artists or a dealer or museum people agree with great conviction, and vividly, about a particular artist's work. And, of course, we know, of course, that anybody can be wrong in their judgments of these things.

But some people have got a better track record of identifying objects of consequence than others. And museum people are not among them, unfortunately, not contemporary museum people. It just happens, if you look over the relevancy of the museum professionals across the country, and find out what their credentials are, one of the credentials of people who take museum jobs, for the most part, they're good scholars, good art historians, and they probably write good prose and fine essays. But they don't have what we call perceptual ability. You can't prove perceptual ability, and you can't give a test for it.

Even the director of a museum or the board of directors hires a museum professional based on curious and

mysterious factors. He has good credentials, he has a master's degree or a doctorate degree in art history, but there is no way of challenging that person to identify works of consequence by modern masters, and so forth. I mean, it's easy to proclaim that a Caravaggio or a Rembrandt or a Van Gogh is a significant work of art. I mean, these credentials are there.

To say that maybe the director of the Cleveland Museum -- I always use that as an example, the Cleveland Museum, which is a very prosperous museum, and has a marvelous collection -- the director is often credited with a remarkable ingenious kind of collecting instinct if he buys a Caravaggio. Well, [inaudible] Caravaggio, there are only two on the market at any given time, and you buy the more expensive one, right, because the more expensive one is likely to be the better one, especially with all the masters, because their works have been identified in sequence of importance, clearly identified.

So, if a museum director buys a work by an old master, the only thing you can say is that he had the acumen to be there before somebody else was there, and managed to raise the funds to acquire the object. But you cannot be giving credit to the director for special acumen, for perceptual acumen.

Now, we have to -- curators of modern collections, who we challenge about this acumen, right -- you've seen a series of show, like, at the Museum of Modern Art. Even the present Kiefer show for instance, Anselm Kiefer, considered the leading European hero at this point -

MS. COHEN: What do you think of his art, Ivan?

MR. KARP: From what I have seen of Anselm Kiefer -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- including the show at the Modern Museum -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- there are only five paintings of any consequence, right? I mean, I had seen, before this show, and in several shows, two or three paintings that were majestic in scale, enormous objects, you know. They had a kind of brooding power about them. And good craft skills, which is not usual among the painters we've seen from Europe in recent dates, a lot of the Americans who have gotten attention. They don't have any craft skills. That's their main deficiency. A lot of these artists are ingenious in their ideas and theories, but they don't have the solidity, the structural foundation for their work. It's college art, insofar as the craft skills are concerned. But we see Kiefer has that. He has the craft skills. But these works are enormous in skill.

You know, the fact of the matter is that anything that is larger than you are is going to be impressive or imposing. So, an artist who embarks in working large scale has an advantage over his audience, in that the work is going to be impressive no matter what it is, because it's larger than you. It threatens you by its scale, alone. And Kiefer does have -- I'm not saying that's a conscious strategy on the artist's part, that he makes something large just to impress you. He makes something large, because he feels like making something large.

But the works themselves have very little in the way of content, they don't have much in the way of drama. I'm saying that the show is 90 percent thin, empty, vacuous. Most of these paintings sell for half a million dollars or more. And this man has been getting so much [inaudible], so much commentary -

MS. COHEN: And why do you think that's so?

MR. KARP: It's failure of judgment. But it's not just failure of judgment, it's the consensus of the failure of judgment. And if you have two or three museum curators saying that this man, he is the hero of Europe right now, he represents the best of the German painting, and the he deserves, after having two or three shows in Europe, a retrospective at the leading museum, when there are artists who have been working in the arena for 30 or 40 years and have been totally ignored -- I'm trying to think of an example, maybe somebody like Tom Westlamy [phonetic], for instance, who came up with the pop art movement in the 1960s, with Warhol, with Lichtenstein, and whose work has been successively sound, intelligent, progressive, he receives no attention, whatsoever in the art museums, and never the press.

For an artist who maybe is much despised and resented by the art establishment, somebody like Richard Estes, for instance, probably the great realist in the 20th century, whether you like the style or not, he is the greatest realistic within the context of what he does, this kind of hyper-realism, or super-realism, whatever, or magic realism, whatever term you want to bring to it. He is a grand master. And, of course, he has an audience beyond the establishment. But he's never had a show in New York at all. His paintings sell for \$500 to \$1,000 to \$1 million. Never had a survey show, even, you know, in any institution here.

But I could cite, you know, 15 or 20 artists who have been so profoundly neglected, while an artist like Kiefer is given a retrospective after having been seen maybe 2 or 3 times, here in town -

MS. COHEN: That's right.

MR. KARP: Somebody like, also, David Sally was given such a show, as well, and he is the weakest of the bunch. I mean, David Sally, for me, is second-year college art, on every level. Conceptually and technically, these works do not qualify to be shown under professional auspices. And yet, we have metaphysical commentary written about this work, as if they images have some kind of profound and everlasting meaning, when basically they're just a pastiche of abstract and figurative painting that we've seen in the last 30 or 40 years.

MS. COHEN: Now, do you feel that people are not using their eyes or their guts in responding to art any more?

MR. KARP: Oh, it doesn't make any difference if you use your eyes. If you have the ability to perceive it is something that crops up only infrequently in people. And there is no way of accounting for that. It has nothing to do with human intelligence. It has nothing to do with practice. Some people have perceptual ability, and some don't. It doesn't make them, necessarily, better people. It doesn't make them more human, it doesn't make them more generous, it doesn't make them kinder.

But some people have it, and when you have an art gallery like this, people are coming into it who acquire art, and they're all not the fine, elegant people. Some of them are charmless and even vulgar at times. And some of these people are blessed with this visual perception, and walk into a room and identify an object of consequence without reading any articles, you know, just point to something and say, "This is something I want to have, and I want to give you something for it," which is the vital proof of conviction, is when you give something that you have made for something that somebody else makes.

MS. COHEN: Right.

MR. KARP: Lip service is nothing. So people who write commentary and proclaim their expertise, they're not proving anything at all. The only proof about conviction, really, is the giving of something.

But that's beside the point, because a lot of very prosperous people give something for bad things, as well.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: That's what I'm declaiming against at this point, that there is a gross and dreadful distortion. You look through the auction catalogs of the last three or four years, and you see prices on works that are absolutely spectacular and scandalous. Somebody said to me the other day they saw a David Sally at auction listed at a reserve price of \$260,000, and that in a forthcoming show there was a Delacroix [phonetic], which was estimated at \$250,000, which was just as big. So, you could buy good Dutch 17th century paintings for the price of a David Sally. I mean, there is something all wrong here, you know?

So, we have what you might call a kind of hysterical environment for the acquiring of potential painters, which has dreadfully shocked the texture of the art world, by the distortion of value. Now, of course, you know I could get into a verbal conflict with any number of my colleagues about what is value and what is good and what is bad. And, of course, I'm going to say that the artists I've just described, like Kiefer and Sally and [inaudible] as being of modest consequence -- if anything at all, for that matter.

[Inaudible] of our time. My dear friend, Arty Glincher [phonetic], was on a panel discussion up in Boston. And I, in my time, have become, you know, more than candid in recent years. It's just what I believe, you know. No sense not saying what you believe, as you grow older and wiser. And I said that his acquisition of Stahbler [phonetic] was probably the weakest acquisition that he had made, and I enjoyed and appreciated the theater that surrounded the acquisition and the acquiring of the artist away from other powerful galleries, and that's good theater in the arts, but he made a terrible [inaudible] that day.

He said, "No, Stahbler is one of the great painters of the 20th century." That's his words. I say, "No," and he says, "Yes," and I say, "No, what do you see there?" And he says, "Well, what do you see? You don't see" -- "I see" -- "We don't see," right, that kind of thing. So, you know, there is no way of proving, by an equation, or by any chemical test, that an object is a durable work of art. All we have, in this case, is the consensus of the informed over a protracted period. That's what establishes the masters.

Now, what is a protracted period? Will 10 years tell us whether Stahbler is a good artist or not? I mean, all you need is one minute, right, to tell you that he is not. And other people maybe need 10 years. But the society, the civilization, the art community may need 20 years, it may need 50 years, before I am proven utterly right, you know. I know I am right.

But Mr. Glincher knows he is right, also. Like I said, he sells them for \$300,000 and \$400,000. So, in some ways he has evidence that he may be right, because people are willing to pay \$300,000 or \$400,000 -

MS. COHEN: But that's like apples and oranges for evidence.

MR. KARP: It's an evidence of conviction, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Conviction. I give you \$300,000 for the object [inaudible] by this artist in this show, [inaudible] prices. And so, what we have, basically, is what you call a conflict of an opinion, conflict of opinion, you know. But let me say something to you about visual perception.

MS. COHEN: Please.

MR. KARP: There is something very special about that.

MS. COHEN: Please.

MR. KARP: You know when you have it. You know when you have it. There is something that jolts your whole well being, your whole chemistry, your whole temperament. Your whole psychology is at work. When you see an object that has a great deal of visual power, you know you're perceiving its power. You know it.

I can walk into a room of 90 objects I have never seen before. And if you were the tester and said, "Write down for me the three objects that have the greatest and most dramatic aesthetic merit," I would write down three objects. And you would say to me, "Now you select five other people that you trust, whose vision and perception you trust, that can verify," to walk into the same room and write down also what I have for the three objects with the largest merit.

Those five people that I select would write down exactly the same three things, possibly in different sequence, of power. Because after visual perception comes personal taste. It doesn't come first. Taste comes after judgment. First you judge an object as to its merit, then you apply your preference, which we call taste. Now, the five people that I sent in the room to look at the 90 objects agree with me about the best 3, but they may put them in a different sequence of importance, based on their preference of style, form, shape, and outline.

But there is no question that is my equation of proof that I [inaudible]. Maybe I can even identify 10 that I know from my own circle of acquaintances in the arts who I trust fully to come up with the same judgment that I make, which, for me, is my equation of judgment. If I say, "This is a master work, this is a work of consequence," and these 8 or 9 or 10 people agree with me, I don't need more than that.

I don't need more than myself, as far as that goes, because I'm involved in this arena all the time. I have to make these judgments every day of my life. We're practically the only gallery that looks at artists' work all day long, and I do that. [Inaudible], we see 5,000 a year. I make a selection among those artists for -- excuse me, who is that, please? Hello? This is one of my judges, right here.

MS. COHEN: Come on in.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: -- host the Moynihan fund raiser uptown.

VOICE: Does he need money?

MR. KARP: He's going to win by, like, 75 percent.

VOICE: Michael Dukakis should have his luck.

MR. KARP: That's right. Just what I said. I said, "Now, why isn't Moynihan" -- I said, "Moynihan is so far ahead in this contest, that he could go out there and preach for Dukakis, and even lose a few votes and sacrifice himself a little." But I said this in the fund raiser, "Why doesn't he get out there and [inaudible]. He could rid New York state" --

VOICE: People -- politicians know that they -- even when they're ahead, they should not get smug, and they should keep working for themselves. And there is a kind of axiom about that. The Truman Dooley thing, you know, it's not going to happen again.

MR. KARP: Yes, we pray for that. I will occasionally [inaudible] for the archive.

VOICE: About what?

MR. KARP: This is a major -- the Archives of American Art is one of the most significant involvements -

VOICE: Absolutely.

MR. KARP: -- you can have. These verbal recordings are so critical to the well-being of future generations -

VOICE: Allan Kaprow and I sat in my -- does that name have any resonance?

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes, yes, yes.

MR. KARP: She knows everybody.

VOICE: Sat in my dining room in Santa Monica and did our reminiscences of the 1950s -- I, in terms of the group somewhat dominated by De Kooning and Kline [inaudible], and Allan, his associations with John Cage, with neo-Dada, et cetera, and the Hoffman school, at the very beginning of the 1950s, and where our experiences -- we both -- it was the year we were founding Cal Arts, he was my associate [inaudible]. And we sent that tape away, I'm sure. Allan kept it, and then copied it and sent it to the archives.

MS. COHEN: Have you ever been formally interviewed by the archives?

VOICE: I don't think so.

MS. COHEN: Oh, put him on the list.

MR. KARP: Ray Canterbury [phonetic].

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: He's [inaudible] --

MS. COHEN: Yes, put him in.

VOICE: Someone else who would be good for the interviews would be -- although she gets interviewed so much - is my wife, Mary Shapiro [phonetic], who would also be interesting.

MS. COHEN: We'll put you both down.

MR. KARP: [Inaudible] put Paul down, because -

MS. COHEN: Sure.

MR. KARP: -- knows the art world in New York intimately.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And he can speak about it with great eloquence.

MS. COHEN: What's your number?

VOICE: It's B-r-a-c-h -

MS. COHEN: Yes, I know you.

VOICE: Okay. And it's 966-1694. I would be delighted to do it.

MS. COHEN: Oh, great. Okay. I will let them know.

MR. KARP: And do it with great fluency, eloquence, and conviction.

VOICE: Is it Robin [phonetic]?

MS. COHEN: Ronnie Cohen [phonetic].

VOICE: Okay.

MR. KARP: Today's discussion was about the distortion of values in the art world. And I have been describing artists I thought to have achieved notoriety and fame far in excess of their work. And we got down to the ideas

of how you establish these principles and these opinions, and where do you finally establish aesthetic merit. This is the main problem that we have in making these discussions, in discussing these conflicts. And I was talking about how I proclaimed that a certain artist was of no consequence at all, and the dealer of this artist says, "Well, I have a certain kind of evidence that he is, because I sell him for \$400,000," right?

VOICE: Yes, yes.

MR. KARP: So he has a kind of concrete evidence of someone's conviction, while all I have is my word of mouth, right?

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: It's my opinion.

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: But I had said -- to use an example of how you establish this stature of an artist, and I said it was the consensus of the informed over a period of time, right? There is no other equation. No other equation, right? To establish the merit of an artist who will be durable in the visual arts culture is through the consensus of the informed over a period of time.

So, I said, however, that people of perceptual ability have a profound sense of their ability to perceive.

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: Like I say, when you and I walk around an art gallery, we can tour the neighborhood, get 150 galleries now and -

VOICE: I would say that our opinions overlap 80 percent, that's why we walk around.

MR. KARP: [Inaudible] 90 percent -

VOICE: The 20 percent would be probably the stuff that will eventually show up in his gallery and I don't like.

MR. KARP: [Inaudible.]

VOICE: No, we're very independent of each other, but it is not by accident that we are relatively of the same generation, it is not by accident that our backgrounds are not totally dissimilar, although I come from a far more assimilated background than Ivan. But it's also not by accident that I say we've become pretty close friends in the last 10, 15 years, but we've known each other for 30, you know.

So, there are a lot of -- and that our case was formed -- he, as part of the art support system; I, as a maker of art -- out of the same consensus of artists' opinions in the mid-1950s, early to mid-1950s, so that -- I want to respond to what you said, first of all. Granted, no one has yet invented an aesthetic Geiger counter that can be pointed at an object and beat to a certain degree, okay?

MR. KARP: I tell artists, when they come in here, that there is a device in here which measures the consequence of their work, and that I have a little meter -

MS. COHEN: And they probably believe it.

VOICE: I've never heard him say that. And the very fact that our tilt of mind is sufficiently similar that we both use the same metaphors, you know, [inaudible]. When you say, "period of time," that is an -

MR. KARP: I just described [inaudible]. Is it 10 years? Is it 20 years? Is it 50 years?

MS. COHEN: Now, let me ask you guys a question.

VOICE: Yes, yes.

MS. COHEN: Do you think there are any more universal or eternal values of quality in aesthetic matters?

MR. KARP: You have to -- constantly, when you're going to the universities and lecturing -- I do a great deal around the country -- you know the syndrome of questions you're going to be asked. They say, "Well, why do you value your opinion, Mr. Karp?" "Well, why should we believe what you say?" Right? And I say -

VOICE: That's the light version of, "Who the fuck are you?"

MR. KARP: That's right, who am I to make these judgments, when I go and proclaim that if you see 50 Rothkos around the room, which is a rather numbing experience, that Rothko, for all the majesty of his achievements, you know, is a very uneven artist, you know. And I say that, "My God, this is a holy substance you're talking about. This is the shrine of American culture. How dare you decry against this artist's work."

And I say, "Well, the fact of the matter is that here is an artist that worked with essentially one format for most of his career, and a lot of it is just exercises. A lot of it is a very numbing kind of experience. Before he gets to a majestic achievement, there is a lot of numb stuff in between, right? But that upsets people terribly, when you say that. Because, after all, you're supposed to whisper his name, he is a holy shrine."

MS. COHEN: Why?

MR. KARP: What?

MS. COHEN: Why has he become -

MR. KARP: Well, he became that way because of the journalists, for the most part, because of certain collectors and museum officials, and because people build these religious shrines about his art. There is this lady out there in Texas who built this chapel. How many arts have a chapel [inaudible] --

VOICE: Have you been to it?

MR. KARP: No, I've not been there.

VOICE: Okay. It was one of the most numbingly disappointing experiences.

MS. COHEN: Mm-hmm.

VOICE: Have you been to it?

MS. COHEN: No.

VOICE: Okay. I liked Mark. He was a difficult man. I looked up to him. I have been deeply moved by some of his paintings, which means that when I approach others I give them the benefit of the doubt, and question myself if I've not been moved.

I went in and saw -- if sheets of dark paint remain sheets of dark paint, and I approach it in a state of total goodwill [inaudible], I made the gracious assumption -- that's his way -- that if I invest enough time and enough of myself, something will happen, so I stayed around for a half-an-hour. That's a long time to meet with art you don't like, waiting to have my mind changed by someone who, as an artist, and as a personality, I had been impressed with when I was much younger.

Nothing happened. It remained simply paint. What you saw was what you got, and not one square inch of the paint transcended itself. It looked to me the way abstract art looks to the uninformed.

MR. KARP: That's a critical phrase, a critical phrase. A critical phrase, but [inaudible] the same person looking at a successful work by Rothko, that is the uninformed person, has this sensation of numbness, right, looking at a surface that has tonalities on it, and there is no reaction to it, there is [inaudible] --

VOICE: Because they bring with it -- to it a set of expectations of what they want art to be. Everyone has those expectations. The most innocent person, everybody, puts something up on their wall. It can be a cheap portrait of John Kennedy in a sharecropper's shack somewhere, you know. Everybody puts something up on their wall.

MR. KARP: Yes. The general population trusts what it sees. It trusts its perception of art, the general population. The [inaudible] population has an opinion about the visual arts that would not have an opinion about literature or fine music. It would set that aside, and say a person who would say something about a Franz Kline or a Rothko or a De Kooning or a Twombly would not say anything about late Mozart or late Beethoven's quartets. They wouldn't involve themselves, because they would consider that's an area of special expertise that they are not involved in. Also, they would not have any comments to make about Proust or Dostoevsky. But about art, they would in every case, because people trust their eyes, not their intellectual judgment.

So, it's easy enough to establish the merit of a literary work, or the merit of musical work, but it's almost impossible to establish the merit of a work of visual art, because everybody has an opinion about it.

VOICE: I -

MR. KARP: Because the perceptual device, the eyes itself, believe that they're seeing the truth every time that

they see the same thing that you see. And nobody sees the same thing.

Now, [inaudible] says you can get very close to seeing the same thing, getting back to the room of the 90 objects. And I said that I could identify 10 people who would agree with me to identify the 3 most powerful and successful objects in that room. And you would be one of the people I would trust. I -

VOICE: -- that experiment with my friend, Ben Hiller [phonetic], the art collector. He was going to look at some primitive art at the dealer [inaudible]. And we were down there. It was a slow day, we were downstairs in the storage area, and I said, "Let's try an experiment. Let's put up 5, 6, 10, or 12 objects." This was all tribal art, of some sort. You know, some with [inaudible] images, and larger [inaudible] in a tribe. But I said, "Let's see if, of the three of us" -- and Ben was a quick study. When he started buying primitive art, he read everything he could get. And I knew less of it, I couldn't tell, offhand, one African tribe from another, except for very well-known art of Bombara [phonetic], antelopes and birds, you know.

Which would be the one that the collector and the dealer -- and/or the dealer -- would prize most, and what would the semi-sophisticated [inaudible] choose? In every case, we picked the same objects, which meant that there was, at this particular point, a sufficient consensus, probably, about quality, given the parameters [inaudible].

Now, you mentioned before -- and I want to get back to what you said -- are there any enduring values. I would say that the collapse of the values is in direct relationship to the collapse of tribalism in the western world. In other words, if every monk in Mount Athos would agree on what was the best icon -- and there was a chance, or if not everyone, a significant majority -- that meant that they had so internalized the values of their tribe.

If, in looking at the luminations of the Brothers Limburgh [phonetic], the [inaudible], Burgundian and Flemish traders, well educated of the rising middle class, it was probably an agreement. But when we started to collect the work of everybody, everything, put it in huge museums, everything, and when nobody knew what tribe they belonged to any more, with the rising middle class, with rising literacy, with all the teaching in recent years of art appreciation in colleges, et cetera -- so, once I was giving a talk, and someone asked me that question.

I said, "Yes, I will define a masterpiece. It will have the transient sensitivity to light and reflections of Pierre De la Francesca's [phonetic] *Resurrection*. It will have the deep, architectonic, monolithic forms of Monet's water lilies. It will have the flexibility and immediate emotional excitation of a Mondrian, and so on and so on. And in each case, I described an agreed-upon masterpiece in the exact opposite of its qualities.

MR. KARP: So the tribal thing, now, has -

VOICE: Am I making any sense?

MR. KARP: Yes, you're making good sense. And the tribal thing now is world culture we're talking about, because now you have -

VOICE: [Inaudible] without walls.

MR. KARP: Yes. The Japanese entering the Western market, right? And they -- because of their innocence, insofar as how this market functions, and the values of things, are so anxious and enthusiastic about acquiring Western art that they are being dumped upon by everybody. That is, by -- mostly more by cynical people than by intelligent -

MS. COHEN: Are you dealing with the Japanese collectors, yourself?

MR. KARP: Yes, very, very minor involvement with them. And I don't resent the Japanese entering the market, and I don't resent people doing business with them. But the evidence we have is their failure to perceive what's of consequence, and paying incredibly high prices for things of no consequence.

VOICE: Before that it was the [inaudible] did the same thing.

MR. KARP: Yes, to a degree. That goes on. You're going to say -- people say the Japanese make these errors because their orientation was wrong. But I don't make any -- I wouldn't have any trouble looking at Japanese art and telling you what's great without any orientation. Or you can show me Chinese -

[End of CD 1, Track 2.]

VOICE: -- with your own private perception, as if it's simply a fact, [inaudible] --

MR. KARP: Yes, I announced that earlier in this interview, that I trust myself absolutely. I do not need anybody else's judgment to support mine. I am never confounded by the vital presence of an object. Never, as to its vital

presence, and that includes rugs, pottery, chandeliers, whatever you have. I feel the same thing about -- I can walk into any cultural [inaudible], any kind, right, and tell you which works have the greatest vitality, based on my principles of vitality.

VOICE: [Inaudible.]

MR. KARP: An object has either convincing physical presence, or it doesn't have convincing physical presence. You want to call that significant form, you can use those terms, and I like those terms.

VOICE: But that's such a lovely value judgment word. In the end, you know, you're saying, "My principles are what moves me most." That's what -

MR. KARP: Well -

VOICE: It's a -

MR. KARP: No, it's more than that. What moves me is fine. I am announcing that. But I say -- but I share this with people. And in my environment -- and this is 32 years I'm doing this -- I will say that 10 percent of our audience knows what they're looking at, right, that they're being responsive to the thing, and not to the environment, or not to a social climate -

MS. COHEN: Not to what's said about it, to the thing.

MR. KARP: Right, right, not to what's said about it -

MS. COHEN: To the object.

MR. KARP: -- but the thing itself, right? And we have people who can walk in here and identify an object, and say, "This is a wonderful object. I need it in my life, and I'm going to buy it from you." Right?

MS. COHEN: They may not be able to describe it in words, how -

MR. KARP: They've never read anything about it, nothing. They have no verbiage -

MS. COHEN: That's right.

MR. KARP: -- to tell you why they feel that way. And these are the miracle walking people for me, and they are the consensus of the informed who will eventually establish which works enter the culture. This is -- of course, it again remains mysterious, it remains amorphous, you know. And we still have to believe that, because we couldn't get through the day unless we felt this way.

VOICE: You think time will correct the injustice -

MR. KARP: Oh, yes. Well, they didn't correct it with El Greco. He's one of the outstanding cases where he was not corrected. And it's very surprising to me that he ever achieved the meritorious place that he has -

VOICE: The reason I ask you will time correct -- what period of time? For example -

MR. KARP: We're talking about the contemporary situation.

VOICE: Okay, but we know, for example, that Marie Antoinette was a woman of some level of taste in what she owned. If she had been presented with the best of the Rembrandt self portraits, do you think that she would have wanted that brooding, Protestant introspection in her life?

MR. KARP: Well, we -

VOICE: I would suspect not.

MR. KARP: Yes, but there are any number of factors working on her which may have deflected her perceptual ability, right? I mean, she was in the court, and she had her own [inaudible]. She didn't have the ability to make the judgments outside of a political and social context, which we have in modern times, right? There were too many things working on her.

But the Burghers of Holland in the 17th century were really remarkably independent people, and they were very good. And they saved us, people like Adrian Brauer [phonetic], one of the greatest painters who ever lived, you know, and Jan Steen [phonetic] and Van Ostey [phonetic]. They survived, these artists' works -- and Rembrandt, you know, for me, is one of the great treasures of their existence, these people who were there and gave these artists something to keep them going with, you know.

So, there you have the first case of what you call independent judgment, I think, would be the bourgeois society in Holland, in the Flemish area, in the 17th century. [Inaudible] about that, why we have the first instance of that -

VOICE: I think the rejection of Spanish Catholicism with the symbolism, they started to look at paintings, you know, as paintings. But there was also symbolism -- I knew someone, I can't remember who, who was writing a thesis on the fact that in Vermeer and the other Dutch painters of interiors, the tuning of musical instruments and the playing of them was an illusion to sexual play, so that -

MS. COHEN: I think they get too carried away these days with those themes -

MR. KARP: Oh, they love that kind of stuff. They try to locate -- they figure there must be symbols in paintings from that period, so they go out and find them, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And, the fact of the matter is, I don't think those paintings were bought because of their symbolism -

VOICE: Wait a minute. It might have been an [inaudible] joke. It might have been -

MR. KARP: I think so.

MS. COHEN: Yes -

MR. KARP: The artist put in --

VOICE: -- will not be -- let's say if Vermeer and Metzu both have a girl with a lute in her lap, waiting for her lover, she's tuning her lute, et cetera, so that was a little topical reference. It is not the element that obviously makes the Vermeer an enduring masterpiece, and the Metzu a pretty good illustrative -

MS. COHEN: Yes, but you will find in the study there will be no allusion to the pictures -

VOICE: They can't [inaudible]. They can't -- as a matter of fact, I feel -- and I will go on record in a bit -- that the artness of art, whatever that is, is the hardest thing to perceive, and the ability to perceive it is an increasingly waning element. And many of the artists, the newest artists who are getting a great deal of attention, usually give us something other than the artness of art.

Witness the tremendous kind of popular love of red rooms. It gives us all sorts of things, other the artness of art.

MR. KARP: You mean theater? It gives you play?

VOICE: [Inaudible] the frozen theater of Louise Nevelson, who is a pretty extraordinarily over-rated artist. There is that immediate sense that you're in the blasted cathedral, or a burned out organ that also looks like a computer -- you know, all those things, those multiplicities -

MR. KARP: You're talking about people as the general audience, or a very [inaudible] audience perceives them, right?

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: Not the way you perceive them, because I don't get any cathedral -

VOICE: Nothing, nothing. But I can see the -

MR. KARP: [Inaudible] experience with her recent work. And what she did in the early 1950s had a certain real vitality, in which time she was totally neglected and ignored.

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: And she achieved popularity and fame when her work became thin, right, because of what you might call the accumulation of mythology that surrounded her, right? And these things we see all the time.

VOICE: Her work became [inaudible] on other than aesthetic issues.

MS. COHEN: How important do you think an artist's personality is in establishing a career?

MR. KARP: I think it can be dramatically important in certain cases, where the artist happens to be charming and good looking and sensual and flamboyant and communicated, if the artist enters the social -

MS. COHEN: Is that true, do you feel, for the Castelli artists that you dealt with in -

MR. KARP: Well, I knew them very well. In the case of Andy Warhol, there was a mystic given by nature -

VOICE: As a wise -

MR. KARP: Andy himself was not a charming personality. He was just a curious presence. And if he did not have a model complexion -

VOICE: But he had -

MR. KARP: -- and a shocking crop of gray hair, and a funny last name, and a halting way of speaking, the mystique would not have generated. If his name was "Berkowski, [phonetic]" and he was slender, and gaunt, and meaningless looking, it probably would not have happened that way at all.

VOICE: If Roy Lichtenstein had to sell his paintings based on [inaudible], he would have starved to death.

MR. KARP: [Inaudible.] Roy's work managed to [inaudible] a lot of our convictions, but Roy's work didn't go over very well in the beginning, at all. The hostility to his work was ferocious, unbelievable. And the arts press just [inaudible] on Roy. He still decries against the whole pop art movement, he despises it, right, and never [inaudible].

The only supporters of that particular movement were collectors, a handful, a very small handful. Those who were the [inaudible] collectors of the time. This was Newman [phonetic] and Mrs. Tremain [phonetic] and Richard Brown Baker. These were the first buyers of Roy Lichtenstein and they bought them independently, because nobody was saying anything good about them. And those works first cropped up in the fashion magazines, they thought it was funny or hilarious, right, and they used them in juxtaposition with other things in the fashion culture. So that's how that thing generated.

But in the case of certain artists, they have to make it on merit, right? We have a very curious case here, somebody who lives in our very building here who never wanted to show in an art gallery, is Neil Jenning [phonetic], who worked independently, somehow made a career for himself creating [inaudible] his art, and painted very good pictures for a period of time, right? Very good pictures, right?

And so, you don't have to confess over what period of time he created those marvelous pictures that looked like finger painting. It seemed like a three or four-year period, to me, that he did those works. He never wanted to show in an art gallery, he was very distrustful of the commercial [inaudible] of the arts, and he created his own mythology without reaching out into the art world. That happened for him. Those paintings are terrific, and I think they made it on merit, they made it on merit.

VOICE: But you can take -

MR. KARP: It can be helpful, to a certain -

MS. COHEN: What about Johnson, Rauschenberg, in terms of this?

MR. KARP: Rauschenberg didn't begin to sell pictures until the early 1960s. Rauschenberg's conglomeration of objects, those things that are compoundings of things that were found did not go over well at all until -

VOICE: [Inaudible.]

MR. KARP: The other artists liked them. I was very attracted to [inaudible] gallery, because I had seen them, and particularly Rauschenberg. That, of course, was out here, his rough shod, almost [inaudible] kind of stuff, you know, it was a thrilling kind of break-away from certain traditions. It was fresh, you know.

But there was no collecting public for them. We showed these things, we showed how many? We showed five times before somebody bought their first picture. Who buys Twombly now? Do these people know what they're buying? Twombly was one of the greatest abstract painters of the century -- I believe maybe five abstract painters of our time, you know, and we couldn't sell anything in the first five shows, nothing at all. "What is the meaning of these dribblings? What is this refuse on the surface?" People would decry against them, you know?

And then, things happened for him in Europe, a few sharp collectors in Europe picked up on him, and it rebounded back here to New York, somehow. People pay now prices for Twombly way beyond comprehension. I'm not saying -- Twombly deserves it, if anybody does, but \$800,000? We couldn't sell them for \$800, right?

But who is buying these pictures? People heard, "You must have a Twombly. If you have a Kline or a De Kooning, a Rothko, and Stahler and a Sally, you must have a Twombly." So they bid at auction \$750,000. What is the

meaning of that? It's a gross distortion. So we've got bad people buying the right pictures, right? Right? So you got bad people buying bad pictures, and bad people buying good pictures, right? And this totally distorts the market in a hysterical way, besides the overload of Japanese into the market and competing and paying more than anybody would pay, and not knowing in hell what they're buying.

VOICE: Do you feel that the authority of the consensus of opinion of a group of artists who helped regulate the reputations of their peers [inaudible] in the 1950s -

MR. KARP: [Inaudible.]

VOICE: -- had authority to undermine -

MR. KARP: Doesn't exist any more. Doesn't exist. It used to be that artists played a role, a significant role, in the social organism of the art world. Back in the 1950s, particularly, when the art community was such a very intimate community. There were just several hundred people in the -

VOICE: I think I -

MR. KARP: And you could always see them on a Tuesday night at an opening. They were all there. That was the art world. There were six collectors, there were five hero artists, right? There were three critics, right? Two museum officials, right?

VOICE: A dozen dealers.

MR. KARP: Yes, a dozen dealers, and the general group of onlookers, people who were there -

MS. COHEN: So, would you say -

VOICE: How many people -

MS. COHEN: Would it be fair to say that Rauschenberg, Twombly, were part of the heroes?

MR. KARP: They were my heroes. They were my generation, and they're still my heroes.

MS. COHEN: Yes, the 1950s.

VOICE: Well, you have -

MR. KARP: They are the heroes of the younger artists.

MS. COHEN: The younger artists?

MR. KARP: Not their peers.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

VOICE: You have a break-down there, for example.

MS. COHEN: Okay.

VOICE: A lesser abstract expressionist artist, who is now dead, said to me, "I had my first show with -- my first two shows [inaudible]." And after Jasp had his show, Jasper Johns, this man said to me, "If you continue to show at that gallery, you are a man of no integrity."

MR. KARP: Somebody said this to the artist?

VOICE: To me.

MR. KARP: Said it to you, if you continue to show there, under those conditions -

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: -- with the exhibiting of this artist's work, you mean?

VOICE: Exactly.

MR. KARP: Yes.

VOICE: I replied, "You know, I am very ambivalent about this work. On the one hand, it excites me. On the other

hand, I can't [inaudible] its terms yet. And I have been on the fence. But now that I hear you put it down, I am convinced that it is really good."

MR. KARP: That's a different kind of equation. Let's get back to this, though. You have kids like Jasper Johns, whose achievements are of some merit, of some measure. Say his first four shows are works of true consequence, and of course I pay homage to that, you know. His work beginning in probably 1968, 1969 becomes repetitious and shallow.

But I was going up -- I remember there was a show just after I had left the gallery in 1971 up at the Castelli Gallery, and I remember walking up 77th Street in anticipation of seeing the Johns show. And I see -- how I measure this, Johns is a friend of mine, a lovely man, intelligent man, whose work I very much honor. How will I judge this show? Will I be dominated by the mythology, or will I look at the works?

I said, "This is what you do when you walk into a gallery where a famous artist is showing. You make believe you're visiting the studio of an artist for the first time, and deciding whether you want to exhibit his work." Right?

MS. COHEN: Don't you think people are dominated now by the price tags?

MR. KARP: Yes. Well -

MS. COHEN: They walk in, and there is a hush, and they see something they know sells for almost a million bucks -

MR. KARP: Yes. Every so often I have a knee-jerk reaction when I see a price and I say, "Hey, what happened here? What happened here?" But I don't distrust myself. It's come to that point where my mind is clear now. I cleared the refuse out of it, and I think he has, too.

VOICE: Well, wait. I go just the opposite, and I think this is a terrible burden for a good artist to have. "Yes, but what have you done for me lately?" In other words, on the one hand, I'm willing to honor my contemporaries and elders by saying that if they once moved me, I keep expecting them to continue, like de Kooning, who, after about -

MR. KARP: 1968 -

VOICE: -- 1970 -

MR. KARP: Yes.

VOICE: -- stopped moving -- got the news, those pictures, and then he stopped moving me. Okay. I still, even though de Kooning was a senile man, now the only thing he can do is reflectively hold a brush. He doesn't recognize -

MR. KARP: It's called painting your own pictures. You paint your own pictures there for a while.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

VOICE: Yes.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

VOICE: But he still is reflexively enough of a master that in this debilitating state he still does almost credible paintings. But they are de Kooning, and I don't know what's going on now, but for [inaudible] perhaps a million a piece. I mean, it was a very crazy kind of thing.

There is a show out now at Castelli's, the new Jasper Johns, who feels compelled to take on Picasso, for some reason, David Sally, and Bruce Monmouth [phonetic]. And I find the show absolutely [inaudible].

Now, I have to do something very different than Ivan does. I will stop and say I had a conversation with Barbara Rose [phonetic], who is doing a new magazine for the *Art Journal*, and we were talking about our disenchantment with the new art, and she says, "You want to write about it?" I said, "I think it's unbecoming for an artist in late middle age, who is not an international household word, to offer a negative diatribe. It smells from sour grapes. If I heard it from someone else, I would suspect sour grapes. I would not put myself" --

MR. KARP: It's hard for [inaudible] to do that, too, right?

MS. COHEN: Sure.

MR. KARP: So all your have is your own interplay and your own repartee with yourself about these things.

MS. COHEN: That's right.

MR. KARP: I walked up that day to the Jasper Johns show in 1971 at that gallery, I decided not to offer this artist a show. Cross-hatch pictures, you know?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: You know, they were lightweight, nice surfaces, a little poetic gesturing, you know. They were conventional abstract pictures. And as I was walking into the show in this artist's studio, "I'm not going to show his work." And Barbara Rose, for me, is not the person I would consider to be the measure -

VOICE: Not at all -

MR. KARP: -- her, because she was told to give it -- this is the important challenge, [inaudible] the paramount personalities in the art world are given. [Inaudible] show called *The Art of the 1980s*, right? A tremendous show over here, I think it was at -

MS. COHEN: The Gray Gallery, yes.

MR. KARP: Yes, called *The Art of the 1980s*. Well, it has nothing to do with the art of the 1980s, whatsoever.

MS. COHEN: That's right.

MR. KARP: Right? This was done in -

MS. COHEN: 1979.

MR. KARP: In 1979, right. And it was [inaudible] and developments.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: It's one of the shabbiest shows I've ever seen.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Now, here is not only maybe a failure of perceptive, which very likely is the case, but a failure of information. How much could she have seen, right?

Now, I'm saying I see 5,000 artists a year here, right? And so I'm getting a lot of information. I can tell you what the rhythms of preoccupation are among artists across the country, who they're being responsive to, for good or bad. Back in the mid to early 1980s, it was all responsiveness to figurative expressionism, and it was one of the most -- the bleakest periods in my life, seeing some of the worst trash ever generated by a civilization was agonized figure paintings all about personal revelation, personal agony, psycho-drama art.

VOICE: All right, I can tell you -

MR. KARP: [Inaudible] in the world. And the worst [inaudible] of that were the Germans, like Immendorf [phonetic] and -- just the names are [inaudible], right? There are dozens of them. And the Museum of the Modern Art, in the opening of the new wing, did a show, the worst single show ever put on by a public facility, and I said that to Bill Ruben [phonetic]. He said, "Well, I didn't [inaudible] curator responsible for this." And I think there were some very good choices. He had, like, three artists in that show that you could even call reputable.

And there, I'm sitting with what's his name, Hilton Kramer and Bill Ruben on a television program, saying it was the worst show put on by a public institution. And that doesn't put me in a good light in the art world. You can get into a lot of trouble that way.

VOICE: The other thing -- funny position, Hilton loves to hate everything. But -- and he is a defender of all the great values of Western civilization, Hilton. Bill no more shares Kinniston's [phonetic] taste -

MR. KARP: No, he doesn't.

VOICE: -- than you and I do.

MR. KARP: Yes.

VOICE: But he was an officer of that museum. He can't undercut a younger curator. He had to go to bat for him.

MR. KARP: You don't go to bat after -- I mean, he was obliged to go to bat after the fact, but he should have been there before the fact when the design of this exhibition was being formulated, by saying, "Who are you identifying? What is the program here? What is the principle at work," right? "Are you going to show a bunch of upstart young artists that's supposed to be a fresh, new spirit? Are these fine paintings? What are they supposed to be?" They did a show again called *Berlin*.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Right? Recently. It's the same pile of agonized trash, right? Now, of course, the Americans, looking back away from their own shores -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- to Europe, are hoping for vitality to come, and there is probably vitality.

I went around, for instance, in Czechoslovakia. A woman who had been a former resident took me around to studios there. I saw fabulous things which would probably not come to the surface in our lifetime, you know.

And I was just in Moscow, invited by the minister of culture, to poke around in dark corners -- they're being very open right now, and there is a marvelous atmosphere there, at least for the arts, I don't know about for industry.

MS. COHEN: What do you think of the stuff that's been coming over here -

MR. KARP: Well, I saw better than what's coming over here.

MS. COHEN: Yes -

MR. KARP: I mean, Phyllis Kind [phonetic], who is one of the pioneers, so-called -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- and she brought back some mediocre artists, right? I saw one or two that had a certain [inaudible], nothing special. But I was taken to studios there of tremendously powerful work. Now, some of those artists are being shown in Europe, they are. And a lot of them have been identified. A lot of them don't want to be identified. A lot of them are resisting what they call commercial entrapment.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: But if you ask them the price of their pictures, "It's \$20,000." So this -- again, this recent auction of Russian art has completely shattered their principles of commercial life. They don't know how much to charge for their paintings. There is no Russian artist who charges less than \$10,000 a picture, and he's totally unknown. So, I went over there with a collecting group, and they were unable to collect, right?

MS. COHEN: When did you go over?

MR. KARP: Two weeks ago.

MS. COHEN: With a collecting group from New York?

MR. KARP: Yes, a collector and his son. It's a collecting organization, it's going to be.

MS. COHEN: Oh -

MR. KARP: And I went over with an art historian, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And we were there invited, we were treated with great courtesy [inaudible], and we were permitted to poke around in the darkest corners. And so we had a guide who took us to the so-called refusnik [phonetic] painters. They had previously been refusnik, now they were [inaudible]. They no longer have the drama of refusnikism.

MS. COHEN: That's right, they're not -

MR. KARP: They're acceptniks [phonetic], right? It's a real problem now, that alienation which had formerly sustained a lot of their emotion is no longer there, right? So they create different kinds of alienation by saying, "The group of artists that are being [inaudible] in America are not us, they are not us. They are not the best," right? So they have a different drama now. And, unfortunately, other groups are infighting, where there had only

been unity before.

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes. They're great at -

MR. KARP: See, which is really -

MS. COHEN: Russians have a great tradition of fighting among themselves, yes.

MR. KARP: -- capacity for that, yes.

VOICE: If you were asked between 1955 and 1960, pick your year, to -- when did you work at the Hansa Center?

MR. KARP: 1956.

VOICE: Okay. If you were asked, "Did you have anything to do with who was admitted for shows at the" --

MR. KARP: No, the -- it was a coop gallery, the artists had to pass on it. But I submitted the slides for consideration because I, myself, and Dick Bellamy were the directors there, for \$9 a week. And we -

VOICE: What percent -

MR. KARP: We -- I did the interview on -

MS. COHEN: Yes, we did that.

VOICE: Let me go on with this question.

MR. KARP: Yes.

VOICE: It's a multiple-part question.

MR. KARP: But we do have to answer that question first, is that we played some role. We would make a recommendation.

VOICE: Right, and it's relevant to the -- what we're discussing. What percentage of the people who had shows, because of you good officers, or partly, ended up having somewhat durable careers?

MR. KARP: Well, we were there in the environment that allowed people like Al Leslie [phonetic] to show, Lucas Samaras [phonetic], George Segal.

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: What's his name? Bob Thompson [phonetic] showed there.

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: Jan Muller showed there.

VOICE: Right.

MR. KARP: Of course, he died young, as did Bob Thompson. They also achieved -

VOICE: I am not talking about great international -- or what, in Hollywood, is called the "bankable" --

MR. KARP: Well, now, certainly the Lucas, you know, top of the world in [inaudible] --

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- Leslie is [inaudible] --

VOICE: Yes. Okay.

MR. KARP: So is George Segal -

VOICE: All right. Now -- okay. Now, in terms of the number of shows you have here now, what percentage of the people that you show for the first time in any year -- let's say starting five years ago -- have gone on and gotten a great deal of art world attention?

MR. KARP: Art world attention is something that is very hard for us to measure. Because, as you know, we are

totally deprived of journalistic commentary at all.

VOICE: Okay. Now -

MR. KARP: We haven't had a review [inaudible] in 18 years.

VOICE: Now, I'm asking -

MR. KARP: We've broken some world records here for no attention.

VOICE: All right -

MR. KARP: [Inaudible], artists who have made progress within their careers who maintain a regular exhibition schedule -

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- whose work progress in price -

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- and who manage to sustain a collecting public?

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: About 20, 25 percent.

VOICE: Right. So not nearly as high a percentage, which then leads me to believe -

MR. KARP: Not nearly so high a percentage as what?

VOICE: As when you chose those guys in the old days.

MR. KARP: That was only 3 out of 50 at the Hansa Gallery.

VOICE: No, no. It's more. It's a higher percentage. I suspect it's a higher percentage, because I suspect that, even though you have this marvelous ability to turn your personal Geiger counter and pick up on authenticity, form, significant presence, whatever the buzz words we would use are, something is going on out there.

The authenticating system by which -- on which careers are built that you and I are really out of tune with, that system you call totally corrupt, or -

MR. KARP: [Inaudible] corrupt, I just say it's a consensus of the misinformed.

VOICE: All right. Whatever it is, I go a little -- I am a little -- I have less of an investment, and perhaps more -- not wanting to sound like sour grapes, I remember my painting teachers, who were men in late middle age, who felt [inaudible] merit, et cetera.

So, I say that maybe something is going on that, from a generational standpoint, or whatever it is, the tribes have changed. And I can only relate to the values of my tribe, although the number of people who were my students [inaudible] and, you know, just an endless list, is very, very high, I have a lot of trouble with many of their works. Like David Sally, I have great trouble with the kind of systematic [inaudible] that reduces every edge to nothing.

MR. KARP: You say systematic, as if it was conceived. It's conceived bad painting. That's what it is. I mean, you can say what you want about it. Ineffectual.

VOICE: Well, 3 years -- I'm sorry, 10 years ago or more, I got David a [inaudible] in Hartford. After a year or two, he left the job [inaudible], and he said, "I want to thank you for the teaching job." He said, "You know I've been working with these very different images, and I had not found, until I started teaching, the right vehicle for them." I said, "What is it?" He said, "It's the style of the C- undergraduate [inaudible]."

MS. COHEN: Of a C- what?

VOICE: Undergraduate [inaudible] student.

MR. KARP: Lifeguard?

VOICE: Life drawing student.

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes. I thought you said "lifeguard."

VOICE: Really? Sorry, I thought I -

MS. COHEN: C- life drawing student.

MR. KARP: That's what I said. I said second year of college -

MS. COHEN: Yes, yes.

MR. KARP: It comes out to pretty much the same thing.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Yes.

VOICE: Now, that's on purpose. Now, what I find interesting is -- and excuse the in-house anti-Semitism -- it's almost redundant to say, "The young Jewish collector," because, you know, most of -- a good percentage of collectors, and the ones who are either imaginative or think they're imaginative, are Jewish.

MR. KARP: It's got to be 80 percent.

VOICE: The people with the nice coops, with the house in East Hampton, with their kids in Dalton [phonetic] and Briely [phonetic], et cetera, who buy a David Sally because they believe in the myth of the endless avant garde. And they don't want to be the people who overlook Vincent Van Gogh. Those people who are really into their clean, well-ordered, optimistic status-anxious lives, a David Sally, which sets out to undermine all ideas of what drawing is, all ideas of what relates to what, you know, and so on -- is the joke on them?

Are they sharing in his content? The content is hostility, annihilistic, you know, all of those things, if it has any -

MS. COHEN: It's their shadow, in a psychological sense.

VOICE: What?

MS. COHEN: It's their shadow. That's how -

VOICE: Say that again.

MS. COHEN: Shadow. Shadow.

VOICE: They are shadows?

MS. COHEN: No, the Sallies are shadows for the lives and who these people are, in a public sense. They can relate.

VOICE: Well, that's what Allan [phonetic] said.

MR. KARP: I don't think that they physically, mentally, or perceptually, relate to -

MS. COHEN: No, it's on -- it's not on -

MR. KARP: Anyway -

MS. COHEN: It's on another level.

MR. KARP: Another thing.

MS. COHEN: It's on another plain.

MR. KARP: I think that -

VOICE: Allan Haklan [phonetic] says that subliminally, David's earlier work -- maybe not so much now -- subliminally, he was able, in the same way Warhol was, subliminally, to tape the particular flavor of contemporary anxiety.

MR. KARP: I think that this kind of analysis does us a disservice in our opinions, because it's not worthy of it. No object of no consequence is worthy of analysis. It really isn't. It's only worthy as a sociological phenomenon. Why

does it enter society? That's all we can describe -- yes?

MS. COHEN: The cleaning lady.

MR. KARP: The cleaning lady.

MS. COHEN: Wait a minute. Continue without you?

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: Well, I want to thank you for your contribution.

MS. COHEN: Thank you.

MR. KARP: In many ways, it was an ambition, a verification, a supplement to what we've been saying there.

VOICE: Very nice. I've been working since 7:00 this morning -

MS. COHEN: It enhances the moment.

VOICE: I stopped a few minutes before 9:00 -

MR. KARP: America is thankful for your contribution.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

VOICE: I stopped up here [inaudible], I had to walk out to find out whether I existed or not.

MS. COHEN: You exist.

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: It's important to understand that these are not vilifications. We're being responsive to phenomena and to occurrences. And I have been writing this essay -

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes.

MR. KARP: -- on -- called, "The Artist and the Dealer," which, with some variations, is likely to find its way into print. But my last paragraph here describes what I really feel about our situation. It says, "Instances of gross injustice, the neglect of the truly talented, and a celebration of the vivid and vacuous is a parcel of all professional concourse, and is certainly sufficient in the art world to derange any artist who is fragile or disconsonant."

MS. COHEN: Absolutely.

MR. KARP: "In spite of this, frenetic society is embellished and enriched by its vital fine arts community." I believe that. "Only the most cynical and sullen observer would vilify the interplay of elements that presently comprise it."

And that is why -- because they abject developments, and this distortion of value, might drive some people to remove themselves, you know, become -- no longer be artists, or to become [inaudible]. I am still a participant in it. I still have good feelings about it. There are good things that happen. There are vital people, like Paul, here, and people around me -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- who confirm an interest in this culture. And we hope to continue to contribute to it, right, in our best way. But it's [inaudible] to try to identify where its defects lie, according to -

VOICE: And you have to -- for me to put my last two cents in -

MS. COHEN: Yes?

VOICE: You have to use every bit of your intelligence and sensitivity to understand the scene around you, to keep from ending up in a sullen and resentful kind of [inaudible] --

MS. COHEN: Yes.

VOICE: Do you agree?

MR. KARP: Absolutely.

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes.

MR. KARP: Absolutely. I have moments at night when I'm chewing my gums from the injustice that's being done. And I say, "Why do you do this to yourself, Karp? You're still out there in the arena, you can right a number of these wrongs by proclaiming your opinion, by showing the very best art you can find. That's your obligation, is to refresh this environment by showing the best things, and finding artists who have been profoundly neglected, you know, and bringing them to prominence."

That's what our role is, here. And he is a supporter of that, as an artist. He is also an observer of the scene, a very sound, intelligent observer of the scene. And together, with others, you know, we can keep the system refreshed.

MS. COHEN: Great, thank you.

VOICE: What a nice way to wrap it up.

MS. COHEN: That was beautiful.

[End of CD 2, Track 1.]

MS. COHEN: -- with Ivan Karp at the OK Harris Gallery. What's the address, 4 -

MR. KARP: 383 West Broadway.

MS. COHEN: Sorry, 383 West Broadway. Today is Good Friday, April 17, 1987.

MR. KARP: That's right.

MS. COHEN: Well, Ivan, your last interview for the archives left off with your last year at the Castelli Gallery, where I believe you worked for 10 years.

MR. KARP: That's correct.

MS. COHEN: What prompted you to start your own gallery?

MR. KARP: I had always been wonderfully amiable with Leo, we always got along as close friends, and we still maintain a warm relationship.

The gallery, after 1964 or 1965, began to gain significant momentum, and began to attract the attention of the general art community. Previous to that time, although we had been showing some very advanced artists, and there was a great deal of ferment around their activity, yet the gallery itself had not achieved the notoriety or fame or the prosperity, certainly, that it seemed to deserve. About 1965 or 1966, things seemed to warm up around the gallery.

And with the attention and the fame and the growing prosperity of the gallery, the tone of adventurousness seemed to ease off somewhat. The spirit of questing after significant new talent, you know, that we were so much involved with in the early years of the gallery, you know, seemed to be less urgent than supporting the artists who were already with the gallery, to getting them to national notoriety, you know, and perhaps bringing in some artists who had achieved some attention and fame elsewhere.

And there was a minor conflict between me and Leo about what artists should be coming into the gallery. And he proposed bringing in several artists who had achieved exhibitions elsewhere, and I thought it was the gallery's main proposition to identify its own talent, and to bring people in.

VOICE: Yes.

MR. KARP: So there was a little conflict about who he wanted in the gallery. And I told him at a certain point in 1968, that if certain artists were brought into the fold, that I wouldn't be comfortable there. I didn't think that they would be appropriate for our setting, and they didn't represent the gallery's original philosophical posture.

MS. COHEN: Can you identify any of those artists?

MR. KARP: I really prefer not to do that. Since it goes into the archives, it can be easily identified who came into the gallery during that interval.

MS. COHEN: They came in anyway.

MR. KARP: That's why I came here.

MS. COHEN: Oh.

MR. KARP: No, when it was announced that -- he said, "Listen, Ivan, everybody tells me that this artist, you know, is probably going to go to the big time, and that he's an important force," you know, I said, "Leo, you know, we always made our own judgments about these things, you know. We always got together and decided what was appropriate to show here, you know. And here, you made an independent judgment here, you know, against my own best interests in this matter, you know, and I am going to be uncomfortable if you show this particular artist." And it was in late 1968.

And when the guy came into the gallery, the artist, I said, "Leo, I'm sorry, but I told you that I was going to leave if he came in. I'm leaving," right? He said, "I thought you were kidding." I imagine he was somewhat disconcerted when I announced my departure, because we worked and formulated that gallery together, from the time I went there in 1959, to 1969.

MS. COHEN: Well, what would you say happened in 1965, 1966, that changed the condition there?

MR. KARP: Well, when Johns and Rauschenberg first showed in 1958 -- and they were the artists who attracted me to the gallery originally -- when I was working at that time in Martha Jackson's gallery, I used to go over there. I saw that show for the first time and I thought, "Well, here is a significant event," you know.

And I wanted to meet Castelli, who, of course, I had already known, but just to tell him that this was a wonderful achievement on his part. He had a lot of other artists there whose work was not of special interest to me. But when I saw Johns and Rauschenberg for the first time, I thought this was a significant event, and I wanted to be associated with it.

And one day, somebody came into the Jackson Gallery and said, "You know, Castelli, he heard you talking to some clients, and he thought that you talked with great conviction and eloquence, and we would love to have you working with him. Why don't you come meet with us and talk it over?" So, I went there in 1959.

And, shortly, in the 1960s, Frank Stella came to the gallery. It was a [inaudible], you know, and his work was not really accepted. Rauschenberg was doing very rough, difficult-to-come-by structures at that point, assemblage -

MS. COHEN: Was that work selling at that point?

MR. KARP: No, it was not selling at all, not at all. Rauschenberg's work did not really begin to sell until he did the paintings with the screened images, you know. Those were -- broke open for him, and then it reverberated back to his earlier work. And that came, really, about 1964, 1965, for his work.

John sold regularly, not for remarkable prices, but it was small production, and there was an interested audience.

Lichtenstein came, as you know, through my good offices in 1961, 1962. His situation didn't develop dramatically until 1965, as well. And then, Frank's work, when it got into color, also began to ripen quickly for the audience, you know. So it all came together pretty much at the same time, you know. Those artists began to achieve whatever we hoped they would, and began to get reasonably good prices for their work, and the gallery began to balance its books and even show a little profit at that point.

MS. COHEN: How instrumental would you say, looking back now, from the perspective of [inaudible] you were in establishing those artists?

MR. KARP: I played a pretty significant role, in all modesty.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: I was there every day of the week, you know, and I sat at the front desk. And the artists who came in with their slides, came to see me first, right?

And Leo, who was more fragile about receiving people -- though he was very good about it, and very diplomatic, and when he did do it, he was charming and affectionate and considerate -- still, it took more out of his spirit and strength to receive people all day long. So, basically, it became my role to do that, and I was willing to. I had the energy and the capacity to receive people, as I do here. We see 100 artists a week here, and I am probably just among the last dealers who receives every artist without appointment. So, on an average year, we see 5,000 applicants at the gallery. Last year, out of 5,000, we only took 1.

But we still continue to do that. I am able to help out artists [inaudible] about 45 boxes of slides, I have artists who look awfully good to me. They are not affiliated with my gallery. Some may eventually be, but I try to farm them out, try to get them in shows outside the gallery. So I've been doing this all my career, and I still retain the energy and verve to confront artists all day long, and I do it.

So, I played a large role in the gallery's policy making, in the exhibition schedules, you know, in the whole relationship of the artist to the dealer, and the artist to his audience, you know. I reached out into the community. I was always very willing to communicate, you know. I lectured a great deal around the country. I started doing that to supplement my income. I lectured all over the country.

MS. COHEN: Were you talking about the artists at the Castelli Gallery?

MR. KARP: I was talking about the artists in the gallery. Not only that, but I talked about the art, historical foundation for their work, and I became a good, acute, and remarkable lecturer and scholar in that time.

MS. COHEN: How important do you think it was to -- what you just mentioned, the art historical foundation for their work, and --

MR. KARP: If you spoke at --

MS. COHEN: -- making people aware of that -

MR. KARP: It depended on where you spoke. If you were an invited speaker at Princeton, you know, or the National Gallery, or someplace like that, then it seemed important to part of the audience that you provide a spectrum of history to support the events and developments of our time. But I didn't feel that was critical when I talked about the artists, and we're talking about their natural vitality, right, their contributions to the visual arts culture for what they, themselves, did, you know.

MS. COHEN: Did you basically communicate the same kind of message to the collectors at that point, or the potential collectors?

MR. KARP: The collectors represent a very broad spectrum of humanity, from the most charming, elegant, cultivated people to some of the grossest, vulgar people you've ever met in your life. And it really -- the perceptual ability and the collecting instinct lodges itself in the most curious types. You know, it can happen to almost anybody.

So, I learned that over the years, you know, that as naturally, part of our own character at the gallery here, we treat everybody with courtesy. We -- the scruffiest student will get all the attention he or she needs for requesting after some scholarship for photographs, for information, and so forth. We treat everybody equally. But it pays to do that anyhow, if you're a professional in business, because some of the most powerful millionaires, very eccentric characters, they don't always appear in limousines, or elegantly dressed, you know.

So, for people who are not disposed to being diplomatic with everybody, it pays to reach out. I teach that, I tell that to all the young, formative art dealers, is to be equitable with everybody who visits your gallery. It's a small community. Everybody knows everybody, right? Bad posturing, bad manners, you know, exclusivity, pretentiousness, arrogance, these things get out after a while, you know. It doesn't pay for you to do that. It doesn't pay for you to do that as a person, to begin with. But if you're not disposed to being amiable, you should put yourself out.

So I was able to do that, fortunately. And Castelli, himself, was a very social being, you know. So, between the two of us, we created a very nice atmosphere at that gallery, and we created a little circle of collecting -- loyal collectors.

MS. COHEN: Did you have the people you dealt with, did he have the people he dealt with?

MR. KARP: Yes, that's right. It's interesting that you bring that up. There were some people he was more comfortable with, certain collector characters, you know, that he gravitated -- Europeans, in particular, you know. Leo speaks a lot of languages, and he loved meeting people. He came from Europe, some of his background, you know, he speaks Italian and French and German to a degree, you know, and is a charming, gracious person, you know.

And there were others among the collectors -- actually, the young, new collectors -- who I would meet for the first time, and among some of the artists, of course, also, we portioned them out. Leo was comfortable with some of the artists -- typically, Rauschenberg and Johns, not so comfortable with some of the others.

MS. COHEN: Who were you most comfortable with in that -

MR. KARP: Well, I was very, very close to John Chamberlain, who came to the gallery with me at that time. He was with me at Martha Jackson's gallery, and when I went to Castelli, I had hoped that he would show Chamberlain's work. And Chamberlain, you know, he is a bearing person, you know, and he is very outgoing. And his presence in the gallery was a shadowing experience for Leo. So, I had to receive John, and receive his embraces and his affection and his turmoil and his stress.

And with Roy, of course, whom I had met earlier, I was very warm and affectionate with Roy. A lot of my family life -- we came up together, as it were, in the early 1960s. And with Andy Warhol, the same thing. I was -- Andy is, you know, he is a very enclosed person, very insular. And it was only on very special occasions, when we went out with him on the town to dinner, or to a rock and roll concert, when he really expanded a bit. Otherwise, he was always very reticent, you know.

So, Leo didn't really have much relations with those artists. Although [inaudible], who never had much relationship during that interval, they were the people who I made a major liaison with during that interval. In any event, I left the gallery in 1969.

MS. COHEN: Did you take any -- did any of the Castelli artists go with you?

MR. KARP: No, it didn't seem to have -- I wanted to be able to prove, again, my own ability to sort things out, you know. And so, my basic proposition at the gallery in 1969 was not to try to pirate artists away from either Castelli or from the other galleries, because there are always some disgruntled artists somewhere. There is always somebody who blames his or her dealer on their lack of fame or fortune, and there are always out there ready to switch galleries for a new opportunity, in particular, you know.

But it seemed like a great adventure to be able to start afresh. But, however, at that point, I already had in my drawer, as I do here, 30 boxes of slides of artists who were not showing at the gallery. And among the boxes of slides -- these are among the artists I had never met -- were Duane Hanson, John DeAndrea, Ralph Goings, and maybe five other artists, who are presently with me at this gallery. I had never seen them personally. I had their slides in the drawer, and I was trying to think what could be done for them.

And I used their slides at lectures, before they were ever shown. I used Hanson's slides in lectures about anxiety and stress in contemporary art, like that, that kind of stuff, you know? Or the classical nude and its development, John DeAndrea. Or, brutalist realism, which I called it then, about people like Goings, doing -- dealing with aspects of the urban landscape, you know? So, I used their work in lectures before I ever met them as artists.

MS. COHEN: Did -

MR. KARP: When I opened my gallery -

MS. COHEN: Did you, yourself, have a special sympathy for figurative work?

MR. KARP: No, not at all. Not at all. My artist -- my favorite artists at that time was Twombly and Franz Kline. Cy Twombly, for me, was the effigy figure of modernism, you know, of the modern movement. And he came to the gallery not until 1962. He had been a friend of Rauschenberg's and Johns, and he came to the gallery in 1961 or 1962. We didn't sell a painting until about 1964. He had three shows before we sold a painting. Nobody liked them, nobody wanted them. I lectured about Twombly endlessly, until my face was blue, you know? You could not find anybody to buy one for \$600.

So, we sold one in -- I think 1966 was the first time we actually sold 4 or 5 paintings. I remember an old friend of mine bought two of them, and Richard Brown Baker bought one, and Morton Newman [phonetic] bought one. And the same pile of collectors, it was the same people, you know?

Finally, it came to the point we said, "This guy has really got something strange going with his work, you know? Let's try it out," \$550, \$400 for major paintings, right, of Twombly. He was a poor guy at that time, you know.

In any event, when I opened the gallery here, the idea was to open up a new territory. And I had been coming down to this neighborhood, the SoHo district -- which had not been named at that point -- to see artists' work. A lot of artists live in studios here, there were about 15 or 20 artists here at that point, and they were living surreptitiously, because it wasn't legal to have a loft in that district at that time. The city did not approve the use of these lofts for habitation.

MS. COHEN: But was 420 open?

MR. KARP: No, no, no.

MS. COHEN: No, no, that was in the 1970s, that's right.

MR. KARP: No, I was the pioneer gallery here. There was one other gallery here. Paula Cooper [phonetic] had a loft space here, where she showed a few artists, you know. But my entrance into the area is what opened it up. There is no question about that. We opened up in October 1969, at 465 West Broadway, up the street, with the largest space in the history of the world for an art gallery.

MS. COHEN: Did you have any model, or you just wanted to have a big, big space?

MR. KARP: I wanted a basic democratic, industrial look for the gallery. I wanted it to have a very open look about it. I wanted there to be no secret zones, no exclusive areas. I wanted it to be a wide open, democratic gallery, where we could show advanced work under wholesome auspices, you know?

MS. COHEN: Well, wasn't that a bit radical, even for that time?

MR. KARP: Well, my mind has always had curious turns, as far as that goes. I have always considered myself an outsider in that regard. And much of the arts establishment still considers me that, because we get very rough treatment from the arts press.

MS. COHEN: Let me ask you about that.

MR. KARP: Yes, yes.

MS. COHEN: Because, once you opened your own gallery, how would you say your position in the art world changed? Or did it change?

MR. KARP: I had -- at that point, already I was 13 or 14 years in the art community. And there was a -- certain people around who really paid some homage to my own intelligence and my own point of view.

At my opening, we had 3,000 people, you know, the first opening. And we served champagne for the first and last time. Even Bill Ruben [phonetic] turned up, his last visit to my gallery. We've been here for 18 years.

MS. COHEN: Well, what do you think -

MR. KARP: I do not think anybody from the Modern Museum has been in this gallery for 11 years.

MS. COHEN: All right, let me ask you the three-letter word. Why? Why?

MR. KARP: Yes. Well, I've tried to analyze it sometimes. We haven't had but two works in the Whitney annual in 18 years.

Do you realize this is one of the largest galleries in the world? We have the largest loyal attendance. We have 5,000 to 7,000 visitors a week. If you asked the people who come here what the best gallery is in America, there is no question, this is it. It's the most enjoyable place, it's the liveliest place. There is an awful lot to look at, and all the work is professional, right?

What it was, is that they pigeon-holed us. When I opened the gallery in 1969, the first interesting things I saw in 1969 were a group of hyper-realists. That was Ralph Goings, Richard McLean [phonetic], Robert Bector [phonetic], John Caseeli [phonetic], Robert Cunningham [phonetic]. And these were artists who did not know each other.

MS. COHEN: Did they have a name for it at that point?

MR. KARP: There was no name. No, it was called -- Alloway [phonetic] had done a show at the Guggenheim with Richard Estes, John Claw [phonetic], Malcolm Morley, and a couple of others, called *Painting from the Photograph*, and it got a great deal of hostile press. In fact, it created a great deal of stress and bitterness, I think, in Alloway himself, with the amount of bad guff that he took on that show.

In any event, the -- some of the pioneer artists were already shown there by Alloway, which was Estes, basically, who was the grand master, and Morley, who was painting in a very intense style, which he called the "process painting."

MS. COHEN: Did they have galleries at that point, do you recall?

MR. KARP: Oh, no. Estes had just gone with Allan Stone, right? And Joe Rafael [phonetic] had a gallery. I don't know what he was showing there, but he was also included in the show, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And it's possible that Glen Clark [phonetic] was with Twombly at that point. That's about 1968, 1967, whenever it was.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: In any event, Morley and Clark came to me immediately and said, "This is the right environment for our art." I have been very supportive of them, when they were not functioning.

When Morley first came to the United States, I was his only liaison into the art community here, the only one who talked to him. I walked up eight flights in an industrial loft building to commiserate with him. Very stressed, anxious, and very eccentric character. And I'm sure I'm just the only person he talked to at that time. And he will tell you that. A very turbulent personality, and a great talent, you know.

And it was true, that I walked -- at Castelli's gallery, when I was there, I used to receive all these people and give them some of the time of day. I would give them some good words, a little bit of affection, you know, a little discussion about their art, and that, in a sense, accumulated, at least in the arts itself, among the artists themselves, so that, you know, I created a nice atmosphere, it was a great turn-out. As I say, on my opening day, that was the end of it, right?

What the art community decided was that I was a hyper-realist gallery -- which I wasn't -- because we opened our show with five abstractionists and one realist, right? The gallery was meant and conceived to be a balanced emporium of contemporary art.

But, having seen five interesting realists in the first six months that I opened -- none of them knew each other -- seemed to me like the same harbinger that pop art had when I first saw it, because I saw Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Wesserman within a three-week period. And Rosenquist. And they didn't know each other. And when this first occurred to me back in 1961, that an event like that was taking place, it seemed to me like the germination of a new movement.

And that's the way I regarded the hyper-realists, you know, at that point. It seemed like a body of artists coming from all over the country, working in somewhat the same philosophical style, representing a point of view, right? So, we showed their work, and those who despised that kind of work -- of which there was the majority, saying, "Well, if the peasants like realism, then realism has got to be bad," right?

Of course the peasants like realism, because it's subject matter they can understand, and it looks like it's hard to do. They're not reading the aesthetics, they're reading the subject matter, right? This is a traditional thing, right? It's easy to get in and say -- the word that is used, and it's a despicable word, is it's "accessible." Art is not accessible. Art can be read by people who can read art, right? By those who have the judgmental ability to read it, a perceptual blessing that nature provides certain people with having, right, a small portion of the population. I think it's only 10 percent of my fabulous audience here, my loyal audience, that even knows what it's looking at, right?

They enjoy the shows, you know. They come in, and we even sell things, you know. People don't know what they're buying. This is a commonplace occurrence, especially in the last three or four years now. We have a frantic situation in the art community of selling bad pictures to rich people for incredible amounts of money. That's not going to happen here.

In any event, the gallery was immediately identified with hyper-realism. Though, as I said, at that point already, by 1970, we had a beautifully balanced gallery with conceptualists, photographers, abstractionists, and realists, you know. And we were showing monumental sculpture here from the beginning.

MS. COHEN: So why, Ivan, do you think that tag stuck?

MR. KARP: I suppose, in some ways, my own vivid character and personality, going around lecturing, and saying what I felt about certain things, like there is an artist who I thought was achieving a great deal of adulation and wasn't worth it, and I would say it, right? If there were -

MS. COHEN: Did you step on some toes?

MR. KARP: I expect I may have stepped on some toes. If I said a couple of bad things about Hilton Kramer in Cincinnati, it got back to him in 30 minutes, I'm sure, right? You just can't go into any part of the art community where somebody does not transmit the message.

And I go around and say, "Look, the critics for the *Times* are the walking dead," right? They don't go to the shows, they don't know what the hell they're looking at. All they are is scholars with big art history background. They haven't the faintest notion what they're looking at, right? And I say that around the country.

Especially the students love to hear that kind of stuff anyhow, right? You go into an art college somewhere and they say, "What do you think of the critics, Mr. Karp?" What are you going to tell them? You're not going to be bluffing the students, they know when you're [inaudible] anyhow, right? Say, "Well, the critics really contribute very little to the visual arts culture," right?

MS. COHEN: So you call them the "walking dead," huh?

MR. KARP: So they're the walking dead, right? So I'm sure it gets back to them. "Do you know what Karp said about you? The last five shows he had at the museum were drab. He said the installation was all wrong," right? "And that you don't even have historical perspective intact, he said, I heard him say it."

So, nobody came in here. Nobody comes in. Two visits from Guggenheim personnel in 17 years, right? It's unbelievable. So we have no coverage.

MS. COHEN: No coverage?

MR. KARP: No coverage at all. *Art Forum*? Two reviews in 17 years in *Art Forum*. It's unbelievable. Five reviews in twelve years in the *New York Times*. Five reviews. Not favorable [inaudible] five reviews.

A curator at the Whitney Museum worked here for eight years, and my people don't get into the Whitney. I mean, it's a complete realm of art being shown here, right, from the most esoteric kinds of abstraction in the art to the most advanced kind of kinetic art, right, to monumental sculpture -

MS. COHEN: How did you feel about this, when it was dawning on you?

MR. KARP: Well, I got -- I got -- I suppose, in the beginning, there was a lot of -- I felt a little bile, you know?

MS. COHEN: Bitter?

MR. KARP: A little bile, you know?

MS. COHEN: A little bile.

MR. KARP: I was being totally ignored and neglected. And, for the amount of work that I do, even within the context of the art community, just the service that we perform for receiving artists, that alone is a significant community service, you know.

And then, our 4 shows every month, 40 shows a year, every one beautifully mounted, professionally mounted, every artist at least right within the context of what he or she does. I mean, you don't have to like everything you see here, but it's intriguing, because it's professional, right? There is no amateur work here, there is no student work here. Things are ripe and ready to be seen, you know, whether you like it or not.

And I have a -- and I am not a painter, you know. I like visual experience. And I like a broad visual experience. And people say, "Well, Karp, why don't you dedicate yourself to one proposition? I mean, like, you know, there is what's his name, John Webber [phonetic], he shows very intellectual and geometric art." I say, "[Inaudible], he's like a museum, you know?" I'm a helpless enthusiast, I like a lot of things, you know.

So, we show more photography than any fine arts gallery, and we sell nothing. I mean, we're having a show again this month called **The Mississippi Delta**. There are some terrific photographs. Everybody comes out of the room and says, "These are incredible photographs. How much are they?" "Oh, they're \$400? Gee whiz." We don't see anything. Nothing. Nobody wants photography. We keep showing it as a cultural service, you know.

Anyhow, I got calmer after a while. I realized that we have a loyal audience, the gallery pays its bills, you know. We're having a wonderful time, and my employees and I are like a family, you know.

MS. COHEN: Did your audience change immediately, when you went out on your own? Did you find -

MR. KARP: Yes, I managed to harvest some -- I mean, the collectors who came to the Castelli Gallery who I was very affectionate with, they came to me, also. The same people, Mort Newman and Richard Brown Baker, they come in all the time. And these are people who enjoy the art scene, and love to look around, you know? And, of course, a lot of young collectors came in for the first time, and new people have popped up on the scene.

As we know, as the American prosperity grew, and the fascination with visual art has grown so dramatically, you know, our audience is pretty large here. Our general Saturday attendance is between 4,000 and 5,000 here. It's unbelievable, you know. And we have a good time.

I lecture on the premises, I have three or four lectures scheduled right here. These are like doctors, when you go

to the clinic, you know. These are the free lectures, and I give paid lectures all around the country. I have a lecture in Laramie, Wyoming in two weeks, right? Who goes to Laramie, Wyoming? Who is going to want to go there, right? Well, you've got to bring the message, right? If three smart people hear you, and they are inspired to some degree to pursue a significant career in the arts, then you've done good work, you know?

So, I lecture all the time, right? I have the [inaudible], art club in New York, uptown -- that's a luncheon event, you know -- and that's a charity event, also. And I enjoy doing that, right, because I like it, especially if it's on [inaudible] get something like that. But I did a lecture on Twombly at the Whitney. It got to be a significant and pivotal lecture -

MS. COHEN: When was that?

MR. KARP: -- only lecture on Twombly of any consequence ever given. Who can talk about Twombly? It's very difficult, you know.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: That was about five years ago. I felt inspired at that moment. I gave a great lecture about Twombly, right? They don't have me back. They had me back once on the panel discussion about the pop art movement, right? And they had two of the most inappropriate other characters with me. It was designed so poorly, this thing.

First of all, they know that I am an outgoing character, I'm going to say my piece, right? Bring in two spirited rousing characters. They brought in two victims, right?

MS. COHEN: Who were the victims?

MR. KARP: Right. Oh, victims. John Cage. What has John Cage got to do with the pop art movement? Nothing at all, as far as I'm concerned, right? And John is a charming man, and he is very sweet, and he is mystical and he is Buddhist, and he started talking about certain mystical occurrences and about -- oh, you know, it was so alien from me, that I had to say some very different things, which I did.

There was another character who also had nothing to do with the pop art movement. Because the whole thing was misconceived. The people who put this together didn't understand it at all, didn't know what was going on then, right? So they're not inviting me back, apparently, to appear, because I looked at the Met many years ago. You know, the Met is still curiously affable to us. They buy work from us, the curators come in and look around occasionally, you know. So there are still good relations there. You know, and -

MS. COHEN: So, what --

MR. KARP: -- we have good relations with them.

MS. COHEN: Let's go back for just a minute to the hyper-realism.

MR. KARP: Yes.

MS. COHEN: Well, what happened? I mean, you said the response -

MR. KARP: We weren't dedicated to that, as a -- the only proposition in life.

MS. COHEN: Right.

MR. KARP: But it was a significant development.

MS. COHEN: Okay.

MR. KARP: All right? And after the pop art movement, there was minimalism, like the fact that -- to refresh the idea of complexity and vision, the idea of dealing with American urban landscape seemed logical, somehow, especially after the fact, when you began to see all these artists working that way. We took a great deal of guff on that, as you can imagine, even from my friends in college. They would say, "Why do you show that precise realist stuff? All the goons like it," right? "All those people who don't know anything about art like it," right?

Well, they do like it, because they don't like it because it's art, they like it because it looks like it's hard to do. And I know it's no harder to do a realist picture than it is to do a De Kooning. [Inaudible] to do it, you know? They're selling these pictures to people who know nothing about art. I said, "Don't you sell them to people who know nothing about art," right? Who buys Morris Lewis [phonetic] and Jackson Pollock and -- all the people who know about art? They're buying it because it's either fashionable, or the right thing to do, right? The number of

people who buy art, because they perceive its vitality is a small percentage of the population, you know?

So, we sold a lot of good pictures to some very shallow people, and we sold some very good pictures to very good people, also, right? I mean, all the major collectors have bought all the realists. Estes sells for what? \$400,000, right? Right? Hanson is selling now for \$150,000 to \$200,000.

MS. COHEN: How long did it take for that to hit?

MR. KARP: It didn't take any time at all, because the Europeans bought it, like they bought pop art first, right? They came in, because they were fascinated with American culture, right? So, for the first three years, we sold only to Germany.

Peter Ludwig [phonetic] bought every realist painting. He bought two of each of everyone. He bought three DeAndreas, he bought three Hansons, he bought all the other realist artists. He says, "Seems logical that this should come," you know, talking the way he does, modernist character, right, still buys art from me. He's a lovely man, got a very generous point of view. He's got two museums in Europe, right? Sweet, lovely presence to have in the gallery, right?

And so, it was all -- basically, it was the Germans and the Italians who were buying the realist art from me in droves, you know? And then, reverberated back here. When a lot of the American collectors heard that the Europeans were buying it, they got involved -

MS. COHEN: Was that the same dynamic that happened with pop art?

MR. KARP: With pop art. Almost exactly the same sequence of events, you know, because the pop art actually created deep rancor, hostility, bitterness, especially among the established expressionist painters. They were so upset about it, you know.

So, it was recently -- it was bizarre that the fashion press picked up on it first as being charming. They thought it was cute, that artists would be dealing with their world, right, with advertising and with the fashion world, right? And so Andy became immediately a hero, because he came out of that world to a degree, right? And so that was the whole bizarre set of circumstances.

With realist painters, the Europeans were fascinated with the idea of dealing with aspects of the American landscape, especially the cold, brutalist aspects of it. Of course, these paintings were not charming at all. They dealt with the darker aspects of life, you know.

So, we had good support there in the beginning, very good support. And it continues. And I know a lot of people resent the idea, they say, "Well, that stuff has gone into obscurity, hasn't it?" No, it hasn't gone into obscurity, not with Estes selling for \$400,000 to \$500,000, and a 5-year waiting list for his work. Right? That kind of stuff.

So, whatever it is, those artists who worked within the context of what they did, or the first generation, they did it well. And some of the good artists from the second generation, those artists are here. They are active, and they contribute to their own advancement.

MS. COHEN: So there is a number of them that have been with you -

MR. KARP: Extremely active and with me, you know -

MS. COHEN: -- a long time.

MR. KARP: But they don't represent the large burden of what my gallery shows here. We show an awful lot of different kinds of things here.

MS. COHEN: Well, what else were you enthusiastic about in this early period?

MR. KARP: Well, I [inaudible] movement as well. I love the implications, its philosophical implications. But there were so few things that you would exhibit that you could sell, you know. You couldn't pay your bills. And I show a lot of documentation, writing on the wall, you know, curious [inaudible] objects, you know.

MS. COHEN: Did anybody sell that stuff?

MR. KARP: Very little of it was sold. Joseph Beuys was probably the most successful working with curious things, you know. And a few others. What's his name, the guy who wrote the stuff that was at Leo's gallery. What's his name, again?

MS. COHEN: Oh, I know.

MR. KARP: He just writes messages on painted canvases.

MS. COHEN: They sold that? He -

MR. KARP: Yes, yes, he sold some. Not at high prices, mind you, but he was very interested in character, you know. So his own personality, as often happens in the arts, contributed something to his well-being, you know. And some of those artists are still around, but the dealers don't show photography or conceptual art, because you can't pay your bills.

MS. COHEN: Yes, I forgot the name of the guy -

[End of CD 2, Track 2.]

MS. COHEN: Side two.

MR. KARP: Pay \$150 for one of these things? I can go home myself and take the picture, right? So, we continue to show photography in the utmost futility, but we see so much interesting stuff here we feel obliged to show. We have marvelous -- we do a lot of journalistic photography, and urban and industrial. We have no nudes on the beach, and no views of the southwest, and no gnarled tree trunks, and no gnashing of the sea against a rock. We don't show any of that nature drivel, right?

You know, that's -- you know, I can enjoy it, you know, and I see examples of it that are just phenomenal, but we thought that we would dedicate ourselves to the kind of photography that would not achieve a [inaudible] audience, you know. And we don't get any ready audience for it, maybe one or two, three -

MS. COHEN: So you had, in the beginning -- say, the first five years of the gallery -- you had photography?

MR. KARP: Yes.

MS. COHEN: You were showing photography already?

MR. KARP: Photography, conceptual art, abstraction, realism, and monumental sculpture, from the beginning.

MS. COHEN: From the beginning?

MR. KARP: Yes. We had kind of dust piles laying on the floor, too. And we still show dust piles, occasionally, you know. But we have a nice, big space here, and we can do it. Right? If I have four spaces here -- it's like a museum facility -- there are two shows or three shows here that don't sell. It's all right. If one of the shows finds a little audience, we can pay our bills, and we're doing all right.

MS. COHEN: So, did you have the artists -- did you have simultaneous shows from the beginning?

MR. KARP: Always had simultaneous shows.

MS. COHEN: Was that your concept?

MR. KARP: Even down at -- it was never really -- I suppose my own sense of pitched up excitement and restlessness. It never gratified me to have the one artist at one time in the gallery. You had five paintings or six paintings on the wall, sit behind a desk, and wait for something meaningful to happen.

Well, we did that at Castelli, but it was the one show, and you put all your show into the one show, and it was not enough adventure for me. Right? I need several shows going at once, you know? Besides which, I was seeing so much talent, you know, I would have been scheduled 30 years in advance if I was going to show all the people that I really enjoyed, you know.

So, I have this Titanic space -- 7,000 square feet down there, at 465 West Broadway, which, at first, I thought would be too big a space for an art gallery; I offered half of it to Mrs. Ellerbahn [phonetic], which would have made her space 3,500 square feet. She said, "I can't deal with a space that large." It was too enormous, right? But I do three shows there at a time: photography; sculpture; painting. We have balance. Every month we have a nice balance.

And then, when this space came available, 11,500 square feet, I said, "Not big enough," right? So we divide it now into four nice spaces, one intimate room to show photography, drawing, watercolors, prints, conceptual art, and the other galleries to show, you know, a variety. We have one beautiful space to show monumental sculpture. We have a wonderful aperture -- our doors are fabulous -- we can bring in monumental things.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And we show a lot of big, hefty, industrial type sculpture, for which there is no audience. So we keep showing it anyhow, because I enjoy it, and I love to walk through the rooms at any given time, and say, "This is a gratifying event." I love the installation, I like the balance of the shows going against the other, I like all these aspects of our culture being shown.

And I love my audience. They're all here. So, you know, it -- the people who have been in the art community for a long time, it's the greatest community in the world. It's the place to be, you know. If you are a person disposed to visual experience, you know, you want to share that with people. And that's where you're going to share it, is right here. And even my enemies are nicer, right, than people outside the art community. Even those that are really -- with whom, you know, I don't have much harmony, you know, I prefer them to other people, right? Even the bad ones, you know, and there are some of those.

And I like to call my art dealer colleagues. You know, they're nice people, all of them. A lot of them are very cultivated people, and maybe even one or two intellectuals among them. Not that many, mind you. Some of them are good cooks. Most of the artists are good cooks, you know.

It's not that -- intellectually speaking, that you really have to really nourish yourself, you know. You have to embark on your own scholarship and your own art historical research, and nourish your own speculations and your own philosophy, because you don't get that much from the artists like that. Only a handful of the artists in my gallery will talk about the higher, or farther reaching meanings of their works, you know. And among the collectors, there are a handful of people like that who are philosophical, you know. And among the visitors in general, there are some very, very smart people, who -

MS. COHEN: Well, from, say, what you -- your experience here at the gallery, how would you say the American art scene has changed or hasn't changed?

MR. KARP: Well, it's gotten bigger and better and worse all at once, you know, in that so many people of great prosperity have entered into it and distorted some of its objectives. I mean, basically, the objective of the art dealer or the museum is to show the very best work produced in our time, right? It's to show what contributes in a meaningful way to our experience during our lifetime. And a lot of very, very abject work is being shown as being significant and important to the culture, and it's not. And we know that.

And if people come in to see me here, and some of my old artists [inaudible], "Did you see a show of so-and-so down the street, he got a two-page review, and his works are selling for \$40,000? What do you make of those works?"

And I say, "Well, it's like second-year college art. I wouldn't give it the time of day." And we see work like that getting a great deal of adulation, not because of a conspiratorial arrangement, because there really are no conspiracies in the arts. I mean, you really couldn't put together a good conspiracy, because nobody would agree with anybody, you know?

But a series of events can take place where a particular dealer likes a certain artist's work. The dealer is charming, the artist is very attractive, right? Two museum people come to a dinner party, they meet the attractive dealer, the attractive artist. They all agree it's a wonderful occasion, right? One particular writer comes along and says, "Hey, they're nice people, you know. That must be wonderful art." And this comes to be what you call a confluence of conviction, right? And that is how certain artists of no vitality get a great deal of attention. You see how it happens?

Physical charm, it's an important factor. Psychosexual preference plays a role in all this, really. Political ability, diplomatic ability, right, dinner parties, attending all the social events of the arts, being seen over time, bludgeoning advertising -

MS. COHEN: Was it always that way, Ivan?

MR. KARP: Well, the art community was so much smaller, and you could find out what was really good and what was really bad, just from your friends, right? When I came onto the arts scene in 1955, and I was writing art -- I was the first art critic for the **Village Voice**, right, there were six or eight galleries to go to. That's all there was, you know? There was the six or eight pilot galleries. If there was an opening on Tuesday night, everybody is standing around drinking bad wine, and everybody knew everybody.

There is -- over there, Jackson Pollock, breaking glasses, right. There is Franz Kline, being affable and drinking some beer, right? There was Rothko, pontificating, right? There was Barney Newman with his beautiful vest, you know, in the corner. Right? Everybody knew. Sam Francis [phonetic] there, in the corner, right? Everybody was there. Everybody you knew was there. It was seven or eight prominent dealers, right? Six or eight collectors. Thirty-five or forty artists, right, and their friends.

And that was it. And you went from opening to opening, and that was the thing you knew, right? And, of course, it grew by degree, you know, until it's become a major event. It's 112 galleries here now. I walked down West Broadway in 1969 and said, "Holy cow, is anybody going to show up here after the opening," right? And I went out and swept the street. It was quiet, and there was trucks on the street, and garbage, and you know, and that's what it was, you know. There is 112, 115 galleries here now, you know.

And it is a marvelous community, and I love it, you know. Though you can't get a parking place on the street here, I like the people who come in to see me here. I like the community, you know. A lot of unity and spirit in the community, you know. And I like to visit the other galleries, most of which show terrible stuff, you know. I just enjoy going around.

The other dealers don't come in here. Nobody comes in here. I don't think there are three other dealers in the neighborhood who come in here on a regular basis. I go to all the shows. I am interested in seeing what's happening, you know. Leo, an old friend of mine, he's been in my gallery twice in 17 years. I mean, he's just down the street, right? I mean, once in a while I think John Webber comes in. Frankin [phonetic] goes to all the shows. He is a miracle person. He comes from uptown once a month, and he makes sure he sees all the shows. Doesn't like the shows, necessarily, but he goes and takes -- he looks in. He says, "Hi, Karp, just looking in." You know, there he is, you know.

And that is it. And I go around. Nobody else turns up here. They like the art scene. They like art activity. They may like art profits too, a great deal, for that matter. But I'm not sure they like the art that much, you know. From what I make out, I'm fascinated by what's happening, you know, and I want to see -

MS. COHEN: Do you think the art is the last element that we are talking about in the -

MR. KARP: In certain circles it is. Among certain collectors, the art is not as large as the socialability.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: It's getting the applause at the opening for having acquired certain works. They're going to some of these wonderfully glamorous events. They are. You see colorful characters. It's enjoyable. I don't do it much any more. I only go when maybe a friend of mine is -- like Roy had a show opening at the -- his drawing show at the Modern. I mean, I don't go to openings at the Modern. There is a certain amount of tension between me and them, you know. It just doesn't work. You know, I don't enjoy it. I don't feel that warm atmosphere when I go in there. But for Roy's show, I went. And I saw all my old friends there, you know. All the pop artists were there, you know. Some old timers were there, some dealers I hadn't seen in 15 years. So it was a nice occasion, you know.

There was a dinner party afterwards, you know, where they managed to politically position people so that nobody would antagonize anybody, you know. And antagonism, we're not talking about people punching each other in the teeth -- I've witnessed that a couple of times, too, there are some great stories, you know -- but that doesn't happen very much. And if there is a certain amount of stress between people, they are usually affable with each other, you know, even though over the years, you know, things sort of soften up considerably.

I have said some sort of harsh things about artists who have achieved fame who shouldn't have. I know I've said that, you know, and I had to announce my feelings, you know. And I continue to do that, and I suppose it continues to alienate people. Of course, my artists tell me, they say, "You know, Karp, you know, you're a famous character, but I'm not. How come I'm not," right? "How come there is nothing happening for me? I haven't had a review. Since I've had seven shows, and I haven't had a review." Seven shows, one of my artists had, eight shows, didn't have a review. It's unbelievable.

Now, of course, the journals in New York, you know, there used to be a lot of newspapers covering events, right? So you got the *New York Times* doing the Friday reviews -- they do about 10 reviews, that's all they can do -- and they come from the same galleries all the time. All the time, it's the same galleries. I saw one gallery this season covered seven times. One gallery, right? They show schlock, this gallery, and it's always getting a review. Why? It's a popular place.

And then, there is no -- **Daily News** doesn't do much art, right? The **New York Post**, you're going to read their art page, right? **The Christian Science Monitor**, yes, that guy reviews one or two shows a year, you know. **The Washington Post**, they don't come here very often, right? So, who is covering it? Not the magazines. Well, if you don't advertise, you're not getting any coverage.

MS. COHEN: You don't advertise, do you?

MR. KARP: No. Once in a great while, we put in a full page that says, "OK Harris does not advertise." That's all we have done. We have maybe -- we've placed 10 ads like that, that say, "OK Harris, America's leading gallery" -

MS. COHEN: Did you not advertise from the beginning?

MR. KARP: -- "refuses to advertise" -- we advertised our first show, only. And then, of course, once in a while, an artist will say, "Listen, Ivan, it's my first show. Can I have an ad in a magazine?" I will say, "Look, if you want to do it, I will go halfies with you on it," right? You know, something like that.

So, we have ads placed here and there. I like this little journal, called **The Gallery** [Inaudible] you know.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: I like the man who runs it, I like the way he manages it, right, it's a wonderfully, wonderfully -

MS. COHEN: Very good.

MR. KARP: I was with him in the beginning, when he first organized it, you know. And it's a wonderful document. You carry it in your pocket, and we advertise in it occasionally. And usually, when we advertise an art show, it says, "OK Harris, America's leading gallery, refuses to advertise in this leading journal of the arts," right? We've been doing that, and we get a lot of attention for that, but we don't get any reviews. Nothing. Nothing at all.

Milt Mesner [phonetic] runs **Art News**. I say to him, "Hey, Milton, we've had 3 reviews -- one for photography -- in 14 years." He said, "You don't have to worry, Karp, you're famous, right? We don't have to do anything. Don't worry, Ivan," right? That kind of stuff. But my artists want to be covered.

[Inaudible] has a show, he comes from a small town in the middle west, right? He's having his first show in New York. It's a big event for him, right? This would be a life's work waiting for him, right? Young woman comes up from Florida, is having her first show. It's a big event for her, for her family, for her friends, her colleagues, her teacher. They all come to her opening, right? There she is, the center of attraction. Thousands of people coming in to cover her show. No review. No reverberation. Nothing. I mean, we may sell the work, but there is no press coverage there.

MS. COHEN: Is that a source -- a sore point with some of your artists?

MR. KARP: It's a sore point with a lot of my artists, yes, yes. It's a very sore point with them. And, finally, this week, after 18 years, I wrote a letter to a magazine -- what is that called-- **Flash Art**, which has never made reference to any of my -- well, it's a magazine, they cover everything, right? A lot of the stuff they cover is pure schmuck. I say, "Listen, at least what we're showing is professional. Walk in some time, in God's name." You know?

So, I wrote at the bottom, "If it's all about advertising, tell me bluntly if that's the case," right? So maybe it is, you know? I know the Pace Gallery, they advertise full pages, right? They got four covers of **Arts Magazine** last year. We had one cover in a magazine in all our years of operation. One cover. And that's it.

So, it's not conspiratorial. I don't think they come together in the editorial rooms of these magazines and say, "Let's ignore Karp, you know, he's such a vivid character, let's ignore him. Give him back what he gives us," right? It's not like that at all. It's a matter of, basically -- it's a failure of information, for the most part, right? And a failure of our reaching out into their sector, and of our not reaching out into the social climate, which is a lot of it.

MS. COHEN: So you haven't been reaching out into that social climate?

MR. KARP: No, I don't. I'm doing this for 33 years. I know everybody. I have a small circle of friends who I see all the time. They're all in the arts. I know who the good cooks are, right? I see them occasionally, you know.

I say to my old friends and colleagues, like [inaudible] or even Sal Scarpida [phonetic] or Paul Brach, who is having a show, I will come to their opening. Otherwise, I don't go any more. Right? I don't go to the Whitney annual opening. Why would I go there? I should honor them with my presence, right? Do they honor me by saying, "You have one artist we would like to show," right? I'm not going to give them back anything.

And I don't want to see that little [inaudible]. The politics in the arts have become so complex and intense, you know, with all these prosperous new people seeking social posture, you know. It's discomfoting to see that. I see some collectors I've known for years who are buying dreadful pictures because they think it's the right thing to do, and they're paying incredible prices for it, right?

And I see some of those dealers who came up from total obscurity, who used to come in to me and say, "Ivan, how do you make a living at this business," you know, who are prospering now, you know, who have become suddenly terribly arrogant, you know, and they wear special kinds of clothing, and you can't get into their back room, you know, and you can't reach them on the phone without going through three people. I mean, I knew

them when they were peasants, in God's name, you know. How can they behave like that, you know? I know the very grit of their beginnings, you know?

[Inaudible] is a [inaudible] Pace Gallery. He had a little gallery in Boston, and he used to come to me and say, "Ivan, can I make this go in New York," you know? "Do you think it would be too much of a strain? It's very expensive, isn't it," you know, that kind of stuff. I said, "Artie [phonetic], it's the great adventure in the world, you know. Come in here and try to do it," you know? And [inaudible]. I mean, he will talk to me. But you know, some of the other dealers who came up like that, no relations, you know? I would meet them at a social thing, they would say, "How are you, Ivan?"

That's it. The end of the relationship, right there. That's hard to believe, you know, because it is, for the size of the art world, which is, you know, pretty large at this point, it's still an intimate community, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Everybody knows everybody. You're going to see somebody -- if you go to a major social opening, you're going to know 40 percent of the people there, 50 percent. Maybe not some of the new collectors who arrive by limousine, you may not recognize them. People from investment banking, you know, the big corporations that are buying Titanic Frank Stellas, you know, you may not recognize them.

MS. COHEN: You get much corporate consultants in?

MR. KARP: Yes, it's about 15, 20 percent of our business. We show a lot of things that are suitable. You have two or three very good geometric painters who work with a very pure style. The architects love that kind of stuff. We have two or three landscape painters who the consultants like. They figure a landscape painting, no matter how difficult it is, right, does not antagonize people, so they can put it in corporations. As long as it's got a horizon line, right, that's okay.

So, we have two or three good landscape painters, and we have success with them in the corporations, so it's about 15 percent of our business now. The consultants come in all the time. I hold them the smartest people around. Because consultants, they know their art.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Why? They go everywhere, they're interested. They pry things out, right? And they're going to be challenged if they put in bad work. Right? They put bad work in the corporations, they will lose their contracts.

MS. COHEN: That's right.

MR. KARP: They buy a lot of good stuff, they do. They're very smart, and they're independent, and they're clever. And they're prosperous as hell.

MS. COHEN: Well, do you see any movement, or any style, or anything happening at the moment that you are particularly interested in?

MR. KARP: I don't see any dramatic intonations of a break-through style. And if anybody is going to see it, it's going to be right here. If I see 100 artists a week, we're going to get intimations of something developing.

It is a hot and cold syndrome in the arts. And if you're going to get a very hot [inaudible], like you did with a lot of recent very bad expressive figuration, you're going to get a cooling off tendency. So it's very possible we're going to see a lot of abstract art during the next little interval, right? It's very possible we will.

But, see, the audience that was fascinated by very aggressive figurative painting doesn't know how to read an abstract picture, because they can't read any picture. But they got involved with figurative art because there was subject matter. What are they going to do when they see abstraction, right? And when the dealers decide that it's de rigueur to show abstraction, they're going to find out that there is only 50 people in the world who collect abstract art. And that's what there is. That's it, right? We have 50 collectors. We counted 50 smart collectors who sustain and nourish our enterprise. We have a lot more people who buy pictures, but there are 50 people in the world, who I can count on to come into the show and say, "Ivan, that's a wonderful work, I would like to have it."

MS. COHEN: You mean who really respond deeply to abstract art?

MR. KARP: They're not reading the journals, they're not following -

MS. COHEN: Just visually.

MR. KARP: They walk into a room and say, "This is a terrific work," right? "If it's the right price, I want it," right? And no matter who the artist is, they will acquire the thing. These are the pilot collectors, and there is only a handful of them, right? And they know what they're doing.

And those are the greatest pleasures a dealer can have, when he puts up new artists, and somebody comes in, an independent collector comes in, and says, "Hey, this person looks good." Right? "I would like to have one of those."

MS. COHEN: Can you really sell a work of art?

MR. KARP: You can't. There is no -- you can sell very bad pictures to very ignorant rich people, possibly. But you can't sell difficult advanced art to anybody. You can't. There is no way of doing that. A person really has to either know what they're looking at, or told what to acquire, or you have to create the atmosphere in which the situation creates the right moment for them.

And that's what we try to do here, is it's an easy, comfortable environment to be in. I can speak about any of the works in the gallery with clarity, with eloquence, and with proper historical knowledge. So, in many ways, I can say securely that I am smarter than my clients, right? I know more than they do about what they are looking at, right? And I know as much as they do about everything they have, right?

I mean, I'm really involved in the arts. It's been my whole life, 33 years, you know?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: So I think it's a constant nourishing experience for me. And I know a great deal. So, I feel secure when I'm out there in the open with my clients, telling them, "This is a wonderful painting," right? But you can't sell that. The only thing you can do in the selling process is, if there is a choice of two or three interesting works, is to make a recommendation, right?

You can [inaudible] Harry [phonetic] comes in and he says, "Ivan, I like this artist's work, but I'm really in a quandary. Which do you think is more characteristic of his style," right? And you say, "I think maybe these elements in the work represent what he is seeking," right? That's what you can do. That's your salesmanship. The rest of that is negotiating the price, and that takes tremendous finesse, especially with people who have been buying from you from years expect special consideration.

MS. COHEN: Well, how do you handle that?

MR. KARP: It's extremely difficult. And you can never learn enough about how to do that, because the immediate formula is, once you've learned that the powerful collectors who spend a lot of money on art expect consideration, the tendency would be to raise the price when you see them. But you can't do that. You [inaudible] price class, right? If you're going to put a cushion in there, a 20 percent cushion -- say a major collector expects a 15 to 20 percent discount, which is often the case, even more sometimes, you know?

MS. COHEN: Yes, yes.

MR. KARP: And they pay over protracted periods. They don't pay you right away. And they don't pay interest. There is no interest in this business, you know? Someone wants to buy a picture and pay -- or maybe a regular collector buys five paintings a month, he's going to buy two paintings from you, he's not paying you for six months, maybe even to a year, you know. He wants a 20 percent discount, or a 15 percent discount for 2 paintings, right? What do you do, put a cushion on it? Do you add \$5,000 to the painting? You can't do that. First, it's not ethical, right? It's a disservice. And when you announce that price, it might be too much for the collector to consider.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Say the painting is \$20,000. You've established it with the artist. The artist says, "Well, I'd like to get, you know, so much for myself, \$12,000 for this picture," 40 percent or 50 percent, depending on the situation. So you work out 50 percent, which is common. The artists says, "You know, I'd like to get \$10,000 for these pictures, I worked on them for 2 years, [inaudible] new show, and if I sell them all, I'm not rich, right?" I say, "Okay, we're going to ask \$20,000 for them," or \$22,000, because everybody wants a little consideration, right? They want the work shipped free of charge -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: -- or they want it installed by some of your people, right?

MS. COHEN: Something.

MR. KARP: So maybe we'll go for a \$2,000 cushion, you know. So, say you're pricing it at \$22,000, and you hope to achieve \$18,000 for the picture, right? If you put \$25,000 on that picture, right, you may be scaring away your buyer, right, when he reads your chart. He says, "Can I have a list of prices of the works in the show?" Right? You don't suddenly send somebody out and say, "Tell him how much they are." Sometimes that person doesn't want to be intruded on by somebody.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: They just want to look at a price chart. Give them the chart. If it says, "\$25,000," they say, "Thank you for the list," and that's it, right? Well, if you put the right price on there, the \$20,000 price, or maybe even \$18,000 or \$22,000, they may say, "Well, I like this painting."

MS. COHEN: How -

MR. KARP: "What can you do for me," right?

MS. COHEN: Yes. How do you price your artists, particularly people that, say, you're showing for the first time -

MR. KARP: For the first time -

MS. COHEN: -- who haven't been seen in New York.

MR. KARP: I'll tell you, the formula is this. An artist who paints five or six paintings a year is working in a particular, very precise style, right, is obliged -- if he's going to produce five or six paintings a year, or if she's going to do five or six sculptures a year, and that's all these artists to do, it's very likely, working within the context of their style, that five of the six will come out well.

If an artist works out of a different kind of creative spirit, an exuberance, like Rauschenberg did, there may be 6 or 8 good pictures out of 30, right? This is an artist who produced a lot of work, and it's the obligation of the dealer -- and, hopefully, the artist, if he has any objectivity -- to sort out the work in the studio, and to show only the good stuff in the gallery.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: We have an artist there who does -- it's hard to believe it -- two paintings a week. He does two paintings a week. Half of his paintings are very lively, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: So, we decided that when we started him out, that we could start him out at \$2,500 for a 4 by 5, 5 by 6-foot painting. That's basically the starting price these days, the basic starting price. We used to start pictures out, when Twombly was first showing, it was \$350 for a 5 by 5.

MS. COHEN: So now it's about \$2,500?

MR. KARP: It's \$2,500 would be a sensible starting price for a substantial painting, 5 by 5, if the artist was reasonably productive.

Now, with that artist I have out there who does four paintings a year, he's an illusionist/precisionist, he does four paintings a year. If we sold the four paintings at \$2,500 each, he would make \$5,000 this year, right, \$6,000. I can't do that, right? So, what you do is you start the higher price class, and you tell the collector, right, that there is a very limited production here, right, and that, in order to sustain the artist during the interval of his beginnings, right, you're going to ask a higher price, \$4,000 or \$5,000 for a picture like that, and hope for the best, right?

MS. COHEN: Oh, yes.

MR. KARP: And I don't know if that's a standard formula in the industry, so-called, but for us it seems like a logical situation. All the artists who are very productive, in fact, are very agreeable about easy prices. They have a lot of work, and want to get some out of the studio, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: While the artists who do a few works are very anxious about their prices.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And it's logical, right?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: So there is no rigid formula for this. You have to have an instinct for it. And some dealers will never have that instinct. They are all totally bizarre in their pricing concept, they have no idea.

MS. COHEN: And what about dealing with, say, a collector you have a long, say, 20-year relationship -

MR. KARP: I have plenty of them, right, yes.

MS. COHEN: Yes, you have plenty of those. I mean, how -- is each transaction a different tail?

MR. KARP: It's usually -- well, every dealer, depending on the subtlety of his or her mind, has special relations with their collectors, right? I know all the characters, and I know, basically, the range of what they own. I know sometimes the dimension of their prosperity, but it's often greater than I ever believed, you know?

It's never less than what I think, the curious thing. The collector is rarely poorer than I think he is, he's almost always richer, you know? I guess I come out of the 1920s, I was born in 1926, I came out of the Depression period. I always think people are at the edge of their financial wherewithal, you know? So, I basically am victimized sometimes by my own beliefs that way, you know?

But if you see them, and they come to the gallery, and they see something they like, you know in your mind already that you have to do something for them, right? So you can show them your price chart. Say you're looking at a painting that's \$25,000. They say, "Well, I bought his work when it was \$5,000, and it's \$25,000." I say, "Isn't that wonderful?" Right? "You were able to buy it then, and it's gone up dramatically in price, which proves two things, that the artist has a successful career underway and has a large audience for his work, right, and that you made a very wise choice, right? Both of us did, didn't we?" He says, "Yes, but I want this one, too," and, "What can you do for me," right?

So [inaudible] and I am very generous, easy going. So what we do is we take off the gallery's share. If the gallery has 40 or 50 percent, the discount is off the gallery's part of it, negotiation -

MS. COHEN: So you leave the artist's share alone?

MR. KARP: The artist's share is left intact.

MS. COHEN: Oh, well that -

MR. KARP: Yes. All right, sometimes -- now say a picture is \$80,000. And some museum personnel come in, right, the [inaudible] during the course of a year, a museum collecting group will come in, 8 or 10 people.

MS. COHEN: Yes, that's right.

MR. KARP: And they will write down on vast reams of paper the notes that they have taken over the week, they write down the artists that will be candidates for their acquisition program. Say they have \$100,000 to spend, right? And they come to me -- if they come to me first, then we're in jeopardy, because [inaudible] 15 galleries, they may forget the wonderful experience they have here.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Because I always take them on a walking tour of the gallery, with a description of the neighborhood, the sociology of the art, and I describe the art, and we have a nice affable occasion, we serve a little wine. We're very nice with those people, and I enjoy them, especially a couple of the museums, like people from Louisville. I'm very warm with them. You know, people from Tampa, Florida. They come in every year, the collecting group, right? They have a certain amount to spend, they're looking for a particular kind of work. So we have a rich variety here.

Someone will say to the other person, "That's the best thing I've seen today," right? "That's the best thing." And I hear them saying that. They're making notes. And then the director comes over and says, "Mr. Karp, we have a little consensus here. We're not supposed to have a consensus until we have our meeting back in our home. We have a consensus here about the interest that we have in a particular work that you have. Now, we've seen wonderful things on our trip. What can you do for us on this picture," right? \$80,000.

MS. COHEN: You mean right on the spot?

MR. KARP: Right. They will say, "If we are interested, and if our meeting decides this is what we want, what will you be able to do for us," right? So, at that point, basically, if I am trying to get a portion of their \$100,000 expenditure for the season, and I'd love to place that artist's work, you know, in a museum setting -

MS. COHEN: Yes, yes.

MR. KARP: -- then I have to do something special.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: We sold one last year, like that, to a particular museum for \$80,000, one of my artist's works. And this artist, he had been totally neglected by the museums. We sell everything he makes. But he's a hyper-realist, and museums don't buy that. Why? Because the peasants like it, right, for their right reasons. So it can't be esoteric, right?

So, they don't buy his work, but we sell his work fabulously well, \$50,000, \$60,000, \$80,000, \$90,000. They came in, they had \$100,000 to spend. They were talking to me about that picture. they said, "Could we pay over two years," right? And I said, "Well, I will call the artist." In this case, they said, "Oh, just a minute. We want a 15 percent discount," right? "And you pay the transportation," right? All of that. That was the conditions, right?

So, it's an \$80,000 picture. It's not like this artist, who is selling for \$4,000, where I take the whole discount here. Here, I have to negotiate with the artist. So, I called the artist up and said, "Listen, what will you do? Will you share with me in waiting for the two years to get paid? Will you take 5 percent off your end, and I will take 10 percent off my end?" Which was bingo. The artist said, "I would love to have my picture down there." Right? So, we agreed. So [inaudible] another year. Our last payment will come a year from now.

MS. COHEN: Wild.

MR. KARP: Fortunately, out of \$100,000 that they had that year, they bought -- they spent it all on me.

MS. COHEN: Oh, that's fabulous.

MR. KARP: Now they invited me down for a lecture.

MS. COHEN: That's a wonderful story.

MR. KARP: I tell them, yes -- it's a great story, you know?

MS. COHEN: How many dealers can say that?

MR. KARP: Yes, not that often, you know.

MS. COHEN: Nobody.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: Right?

MS. COHEN: People like strong convictions.

MR. KARP: Yes. National Association of Women Artists, right -

[End of CD 3, Track 1]

MS. COHEN: This is Ronnie Cohen, interviewer. Ivan Karp, interviewee. Today is April 18th, and we are conducting the interview at OK Harris Gallery.

Now, the last time you interviewed back for the archives was back in March of 1969.

MR. KARP: I first appeared in the district. There was a whole change of climate during this interval. We arrived here in October 1969. There had been an art gallery that occupied a loft space here, in the neighborhood, but I had never been there. And our reason for coming here -- I think I also explained during the first interview -- was to open -

MS. COHEN: No, I think you were still at Castelli.

MR. KARP: Was I still at Castelli?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Well, I think I remember doing an interview in this office with Paul Cummings.

MS. COHEN: When did you open here, because you -

MR. KARP: In 1969.

MS. COHEN: Okay. You did your interview with Cummings -- the date on it is March.

MR. KARP: March 1969?

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: Well then, it may have been over at Castelli's.

MS. COHEN: Yes, I think it was.

MR. KARP: If that's the case, then -

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: I hadn't even planned to shift my operations. Anyhow, in any event, after being 10 years with Castelli, and we had a very affable relation -- we still [inaudible] each other, though I am not involved in the climate of his activity, and he rarely turns up here, I don't think he has the faintest idea what we're doing here -- we're still -- we have good memories together [inaudible] the years I was there.

I left the gallery because it wasn't -- I left Castelli, because he wasn't really engaged in the art I considered to be exciting, adventurous, pioneering activity. He had lost much of the interest in acquiring new talent, and I thought the gallery should retain that special interest and ambition, to seek always, to keep alert to new talent. A number of the artists at Castelli had achieved national, even international, fame. The gallery seems to have been satisfied with their fame. It was progressing in an economic way, dramatically. It had much stress and strain during its early years. It only came into reasonable prosperity in 1966, 1967. By 1969, it already achieved significant notoriety.

And other factors entered into it. I felt that the artists in the gallery who had achieved some measure of fame, notoriety, and power in the art world were playing some role in the gallery's management, in that they would make suggestions about what artists should be shown, and so forth. And I felt that was an intrusion into the policy-making process that myself and Castelli should have engaged in at all times.

Also, Castelli and I became detached in certain managerial methods. That is, we became separated, in a way. He would be responsive to certain clients and certain artists, and I would be responsive to others.

MS. COHEN: So you really split the operation?

MR. KARP: Yes, essentially, it was a split operation, though I'm not sure that he noticed or observed that. But in my physical location in the gallery, there were people who would be coming in who would only get as far as my desk, and not go any further, because they were comfortable to do that. And there would be many others who would ask to see Leo, because they were comfortable to see him.

And so, there was no estrangement between us; it was always very affectionate and affable. But the gallery lost some of its pioneering zeal, I think, at that point. And so, I thought that, perhaps, I might go into something else. And I had been engaged in literary work for many, many years. And I thought I might give my full energy and strength to that. I had, recently before that, a novel published.

But then again, I was so involved in the art community, I knew so many people, I felt almost a sense of obligation. And this is not a prideful thing to say. I had a sense of obligation, really, that I had been so complexly meshed into the art world, and it had served me so well, in giving me a kind of a buoyancy and happiness, you know, that I really couldn't disconnect myself from it.

MS. COHEN: So, at that point, in your own involvement with the art world, how many years would 1969 make?

MR. KARP: I entered about 1955 into the art community.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: So I had already been in for some time, you know.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And I really was a personality who was well known and reasonably -- well, of course, the circles were smaller then.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: They were very small when I first went in, in 1955 and 1956, there was just a small circle of people. Visual arts. It was a community. Everybody knew everybody, you know. And if there was a social event, everybody would recognize the social event. The basic outlook, and the mentality, and the way of behaving was a little different. And those things changed, you know.

Anyhow, by 1969, within a day of my announcing to Castelli that I planned to leave the gallery -- I don't think he really fully comprehended the implications of that at the beginning -- I told him that I was a happy person there, but I had other ambitions, you know, Newberry or otherwise -- political? I had several telephone calls immediately thereafter, people offering me funding for a gallery operation. That was within 24 hours.

MS. COHEN: Oh, really?

MR. KARP: And I had not circulated the world, but the art world is a very small place.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: And it only had to be me or Leo who said it to just one person in the entire art community, it would interconnect -- as they even still do now, even though it's larger now. People knew that. And I received some very affable telephone calls inviting me to open a gallery wherever I wanted, under any circumstances.

But there was only one offer that was particularly attractive, in that the sponsor of this possibility didn't require any managerial participation, didn't care what I did, where I did it, had full confidence in my objectives as an art dealer, and said, "Well, you pay me when you can, I will lend you what you need." And that's a very generous kind of thing. And this man is famous for his generosity. And I'm sure his name permeates the art world for that very generosity and for his other good qualities.

MS. COHEN: You don't want to say who it is?

MR. KARP: I don't want to discomfort him in any way, you know.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: In any event -

MS. COHEN: Did you take him up on -

MR. KARP: I took him up on it, yes. And I was living at that time right at the edge of the SoHo district, and I admired the neighborhood for its grand architectural unity, though it was a rather melancholy place in the 1960s.

During the middle 1960s, artists began to move in here, to begin with, on an illegal basis. But I used to come to studios all the time, because all during my formative and ripening years as an art dealer, I always received artists with courtesy. It seemed like the right thing to do. Not only because I was a buoyant, outgoing, good-natured character, but I always thought it would serve us well to keep alert to everything that went on.

I thought it was also, you know, an absolute obligation on the part of art dealers to be alert to what was happening, you know. And even though all of the artists who came in didn't necessarily deserve one's consideration or one's time, nevertheless, you had to look, you know?

And so, I looked, and I made it a habit of being reasonably kind, and looking at everybody's work, and giving them a few minutes of my time, and learning how to, with proper diplomacy and a certain gentility, reject people, because most of the time you're rejecting them, you know. It's 99 percent of the time you're telling an artist their work is not suitable. And we continue to do that here.

And it grieves me to hear that most of the dealers don't do that. The large majority require, by some kind of regimen, that the artist leave work behind -

MS. COHEN: They have rules, yes.

MR. KARP: -- or return envelope, or mailing situation, or not this year, or not next year, or -- well, we will get back -- further into detail about that.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: We opened the gallery. I observed SoHo. I thought it would be an adventurous, almost daring thing to do, to open a gallery in this remote district, outside of the golden gallery belt of 57th Street and Madison Avenue, which I knew so well.

MS. COHEN: So who was down here when you -

MR. KARP: Only one gallery. I didn't know of the operation, I had never looked into it.

MS. COHEN: You mean Paula Cooper?

MR. KARP: And it apparently was Paula Cooper, which I have discovered, had a loft situation here. I think at that time her husband -- her former husband, I think, had a factory facility here, making fine arts objects of some sort. I think they were commemorative coins, or something like that. And I think that her gallery was adjunctive to his. That's what I had heard. But I never visited it.

Anyhow, that was certainly not the reason for me coming down here. It was my own sense of adventure, you know. I loved the idea of the district, and I thought I could be brave and bold enough, and demonstrative enough to bring people down, you know? I would put on wonderful shows, and it would raise the passions of the public. Whether they liked it or not, they would come look, you know?

And I had, during the interval that I was with Castelli, amassed boxes of slides, as I can show you I have right here. These are artists who come in during the course of the year. And those who seem to be of some real professional ability, I ask them to leave slides with me. And so I have a fine archives of about 65 or 70 boxes of slides here, of artists who look better to me than things that I see being shown, you know, around town. And, of course, I can't serve them all, but I try to get them into group shows, if I can, into theme shows, particularly. And then I recommend them to exhibitions that I hear around the country, when information comes in here. And I do the best I can to serve them.

And, once in a while, we will do an invitational exhibition, where I will take some of the work that is shown here, and I show it to other dealers out of town. Most of the dealers in town don't want to see what I have here, because they are, "Well, if you like it so much, you show it," right? It's not like that. I can't show it, we're scheduled far in advance.

In any event, I had the same kind of drawer at Castelli Gallery. And in that drawer, I had slides of artists who looked promising to me. And among them were Duane Hanson and John DeAndrea and Ralph Goings, and many other painters, you know. And so, I had my foundation group, to begin with. I knew these artists would be delighted to show in New York, under any auspices.

So, I got in touch with them, and I had never met -- speaking of just those three alone, Goings, and DeAndrea, and Hanson, who have come to some measure of attention, they didn't know each other, they never -- we never met each other. And they were out there somewhere. And Hanson was living, at that time, in Florida? No, he was living in Wisconsin or something.

MS. COHEN: Did they send you -

MR. KARP: Slides came in the mail.

MS. COHEN: Oh, in the mail?

MR. KARP: Yes, in the mail.

MS. COHEN: Oh.

MR. KARP: And I kept them here, and I wrote them a nice letter. I think DeAndrea and Hanson still have the first letters I wrote them, saying, "I am interested in knowing about your work. I am going to keep your slides here, and use them for lecturing purposes," which I did. I used their works for lecturing purposes, before I ever saw the work in person. It was so intriguing to me.

MS. COHEN: Who did you open with? Do you recall?

MR. KARP: I showed -- I opened with mostly an abstract painting show. I think it was Richard Calina [phonetic], Gary Bauer [phonetic]. We have an archives here, and you can identify the artists in our opening show. Maria

Arisari [phonetic], Robert Rohm [phonetic]. These were almost all abstractionists. And at that point, I had Goings, but I don't think I had a major painting of his in the gallery.

In an event, we opened in October 1969 here, at 465 West Broadway. And I was charged up with great excitement, you know? The place was 7,000 square feet. I had tried to rent half of it, because it was too big. It was the largest art gallery in the world, 7,000 square feet. So I tried to get some other dealer from uptown to take half the space, at least for a warehouse. But I couldn't find anybody who wanted 3,500 square feet.

Who could deal with that much space, you know? I thought Castelli's gallery uptown, which was something like 850 square feet of exhibition space was enormous, you know? The galleries uptown were basically intimate circumstances, you know? The biggest one was Sam Coots [phonetic]. He had maybe 1,500 square feet.

MS. COHEN: So, in terms of scale -

MR. KARP: It was enormous, the place. And it was very reasonable, of rent -

MS. COHEN: And a radical departure, as an exhibition space.

MR. KARP: Well, the whole thing was radical.

MS. COHEN: Yes.

MR. KARP: We decided that we would make it -- we would retain the warehouse look, and we would have that sort of sense of democratic appeal, that we wouldn't have thick rugs on the floor, which I couldn't afford anyhow, and sumptuous trappings, and that my office would be open to the public, and all of our functional areas would also be open to students.

MS. COHEN: What did the galleries -- what was the look of the galleries at that point?

MR. KARP: The galleries proposed to be elegant and charming and appealing physical entities. They meant to be jewel cases, for the most part. That was the basic look of the gallery. It had to be a jewel case, because basically, people who were involved with acquiring fine art wanted a seemly setting, you know, acquisition. The traditions of a seemly setting were not a warehouse. They were basically a fine-looking, elegant premises. Most of them were like that. They were coops, and I came from one, which was very simple, straightforward, democratic [inaudible], you know?

But downtown -- I thought, well, I keep [inaudible] neighborhood and my own outlook -- a very broad, democratic outlook, you know, was a very simple premises, you know. We would have all our bricks exposed, and all our columns honest, and all our floors straightforward, and all our furniture blunt, and all of our spaces open to the public.

And we began with a show, we had a wonderful turnout. I think the only time we actually took a major advertisement for our gallery was the opening for our new show, announcing our gallery at 465 West Broadway. And it was a photograph of all the people working on the premises, that's all it was, just all the workers who were doing work to build the place, right? The place cost, to build, it cost -- I remember that the loan that I had received from this very generous friend was \$50,000 to embark on this operation. And it cost \$44,500 to build the premises. So, we had very little to open the gallery with.

And I had my -- at that time, two aids. I had Joan Farrell [phonetic], who works with me still here, as my bookkeeper, and Patterson Sims [phonetic], who came to me at Castelli's, looking for work at that time -- is now a curator at the Whitney -- as my helper in the gallery. So just the three of us, that's what there was.

And we opened, we had a champagne opening, you know. And I remember a lot of illustrious characters came down. I think it was the last time that I saw Bill Ruben, from the Museum of Modern Art. He actually turned up, and I was very pleased to see him there. And other museum people, it's the last time I've seen those people. I don't think Bill Ruben has been back in this gallery since that time. That's 17 years. And we rarely see people from the museums.

And I think that perhaps we've played an increasingly renegade role in the art world. And maybe, for some reason, I have ignored or estranged a large portion of the so-called arts establishment, and we don't have much relationship with them. They don't come in here, they don't acquire our work at all. We have a very independent collecting public here. And there are two or three museums outside of the city that are loyal to what we do here, and intelligently so.

Anyhow, my basic strategy at that point was to show new art, and that I wouldn't attempt, through all the possible skills and diplomacies and convictions that I had, to try to pirate artists away from other galleries that I admired. There were a number of artists that I admired. And there were a number of artists who came to Castelli

through my good offices, who I could have appealed to, and said, "Listen now, I helped you get into Castelli Gallery, and you are moderately famous. Come on with me now, and let's brave another brave new world."

MS. COHEN: And so you did none of that?

MR. KARP: I didn't do any of that, any of it. I took the drawer out with the slides, and I looked through that, you know. And I said, "Let me start from the beginning here, and it will be a great adventure for me, and for the artists," right?

Well, I had some loyal following from the days I'd been with Castelli, people who admired my style, or my outlook, or my point of view, or my cigars. And they turned up there. And we managed to sell work, from the beginning, at \$600, \$900, \$1,200 for a major painting, you know. And that's what they sold for in those days. And we managed to balance our books, and we paid our bills.

And within three years, four years, we were able to pay back our loan, which was simply a miracle, you know. And several of the artists began to get some attention. Other artists became disgruntled, their progress was not dramatic, you know. We were very loyal to the first group of artists that we showed, but we began to see a great deal of very intense realism among the artists applying to the gallery. It was the best work that we saw in 1969 and 1970, were the artists described as photo-realists, which is a misnomer, since they're not all responsive to photograph. We call them the hyper-realists, people who work with intense realism, mostly concerned with urban subject matter, as we know, you know, they're very straightforward, rather blunt point of view.

And I had no predisposition for that kind of art, but it was the best thing I was seeing. So, we began to show artists like that. And our erstwhile enemies, or those who were antagonistic to our position, pigeonholed us into a realist gallery. We were told that we were a hyper-realist gallery by any number of people in the press --

MS. COHEN: What about the -

MR. KARP: -- which was very disgruntling to us.

MS. COHEN: -- this issue, which I think is an issue that came up -

MR. KARP: Yes.

MS. COHEN: -- in the late 1960s, early 1970s, of this pigeonholing of galleries, that galleries should represent one view?

MR. KARP: I don't know why a gallery should represent one view. We had, at that point, 7,000 square feet. I had three distinct exhibition areas. And my passions and enthusiasm for visual experience were very broad, you know. And I wanted to show all of the significant currents of contemporary art that I could identify as consequential. And we still do that here. I have a -- it's like a museum setting. We have four galleries. We do 40 shows a year, and they're quite complex. They represent, to me, the best professional work.

There are certain things that I do exclude. I am not really interested in post-cubist art, that is, art that derives specifically from cubist orientation. I don't really respond specifically to surrealist imagery. I don't like personal agony, and I don't like bad political painting, right? I don't like bad painting of any sort, for that matter. And we show some paintings that hover at the edge of surrealist intimation, and we show other works that have cubist echoes. But these are the basic restrictions that I put upon myself, but not rigidly so. We will show the best art we can find, right?

So, that's what we began to do. And, of course, a gallery of limited scope, a gallery that has but one exhibition room, might want to establish an image, a face, facade, an emblem, a style, so that it can be identified with that style. I always find that immensely boring, you know. But galleries did that. We [inaudible] basically minimalist art, you know. And I like to go [inaudible]. I always feel refreshed at seeing certain things there. Then I can always go to other galleries and see a different temperament, you know.

But I was too interested in everything to do a thing like that, and I think the arts journalists and the museum people and the art historians, who are, for the most part, extremely narrow in their point of view, were more comfortable with the idea that they can identify galleries with a particular type of art. And so, we were locked in by -- against our will -- to being a gallery of representing hyper-realists. And we never had a preponderance of them. We have always shown more abstract art than realist art. But, during that interval, it was the best work that I saw.

And so, we affiliated Goings, I had McLean, Bechtel, Robert Cunningham, right, John Caseeli during 1969 and 1970, and these still represent -- along with Richard Estes and, maybe if you want to include Chuck [inaudible] at that time, the ground school of hyper-realism, that is, the first generation, so-called, you know.

And then, we were flirting with others who were working in like styles. There was John Badard [phonetic], Idel Webber [phonetic], who we already can lock into the first generation of artists who have their own so-called visual territory -- which is critical for abstraction and for realist art, is to have a signatory style that people can identify you for. And all good artists have that, automatically. They have something that represents their spirit. That's their signatory style, and it's critical that an artist have that.

Now, sometimes the styles emerge. In the case of, for instance, let's identify the late work of De Kooning and Kline -- the late work of Kline, as against De Kooning of the same period -- there is some very close interchanges there, and I was confounded sometimes, trying to make out who was who.

And, in the case, of course, of Georges Broch [phonetic] and a certain period of Picasso's work, they are also very closely identified.

Anyhow, we liked the idea of having -- the artists having very [inaudible] identity. And of course, those who are hostile or antagonistic to the idea of a new realist art occurring in this particular way -- that is, in a precisionist format, devoid of what you might call traditional humanist trappings -- humanist trappings means revealing the nature and substance of humanity. This recent development in 1969/1970 was devoid of humanist trappings, completely. It was concerned with aspects of the urban and industrial landscape, and it was a very detached, very objectivized vision, and it caused a great deal of consternation among certain art historians and journalists, who felt that the naive audience would love it too much, right? That is the -

MS. COHEN: Are you saying it was too popular?

MR. KARP: Yes, it would be too popular, and it wasn't esoteric. And, therefore, it couldn't be good, right? If the general public liked it, it couldn't be fine art. But it wasn't just the general public that liked it, it was the cognoscenti, as well. And they were the fine arts collectors, the [inaudible] credited for making every art movement, and for developing any artist's career, are a group of pioneer collectors. And I don't think any dealer or any museum person, after the fact, would have to object to that.

There are 25 or 30 collectors who know just what they are doing. They have full conviction about their judgment. They can walk into an exhibition and identify consequential work when they see it, right?

MS. COHEN: Did many of the collectors that you had worked with while you were at Castelli follow you here?

MR. KARP: They turned up, yes. They turned up and looked around. And, of course, they liked the idea of this gallery in this remote district. "Now, where will we eat?" And, "Is it safe to walk on the street?" And, "Where do you go after dark?" And, "Where do I park my car?"

But, fortunately, within six months after my arrival here, there were five other galleries. Max Hutchinson [phonetic] opened here shortly thereafter. A man named Reese Paley [phonetic] opened an enormous premises, since defunct, and a place called "Food [phonetic]," opened around the corner, you know. And then there was a little boutique opened next to me over there, at 465 West Broadway. And I was comfortable to have a little partner next door, a little companion, a friend, who could join in this new neighborhood, which was still full of garbage and bleakness and trucks and desperation.

There must have been maybe a couple of hundred artists living here by then, and they had just achieved some kind of detente with the city about occupancy here. If [inaudible] AIR [phonetic], and you met certain fire regulations, you could live in the neighborhood. And so, things started to perk up a little bit during that interval.

And I can say, I think with great assurance, that I think my appearance here is largely one of the significant reasons for the neighborhood to have developed. It opened up a possibility. I mean, it was my good fortune that it happened when it did. The neighborhood had not been touched. It was primitive territory when I decided I could come here. And it opened up the possibilities for galleries with big spaces and low rents to show very aggressive work of large scale with easy [inaudible] access, you know, to the facility.

We had front doors you could open up, you could put anything in there. We showed monumental sculptures that couldn't be shown uptown, because of lack of facility. We showed enormous paintings, you know, difficult work that was difficult to install. That was the great advantage. And, of course, at that time the rents were very attractive.

In any event, of course, things progressed very rapidly in the neighborhood. And within 2 years, there were 15 galleries here. The 420 building began to be developed, where the warehouse [inaudible] fine arts first opened, invited dealers to come and keep their stuff there. They eventually opened galleries. There was Emmerich, to begin with, came early, and Castelli came early, and this other [inaudible] was there, and John Webber [phonetic] was in that building, you know. And that basically just about turned the corner, when these illustrious uptown galleries announced that they could feel secure and safe and comfortable in this district, then it became

a flood tide. And we think now that it's almost 100 galleries in the neighborhood that we can identify.

And, of course, we have moved, since, down the street in 1974. We were offered more space, 11,000 square feet [inaudible] for an incredibly low price, and we have used our resources to buy [inaudible] --

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: -- it was an incredibly low price, it was a low price at that time, a really low price at that time, it was the right price, \$30,000 for 11,000 square feet. This space is probably worth maybe \$1.5 million at this point. Of course, [inaudible] it was a hell hole.

[Tape stops, re-starts.]

MR. KARP: And we fixed it up. We decided to maintain the same posture of the gallery. That is, straightforward, honest, democratic look, to retain much of the character of the old building [inaudible] maybe 110 years old. And that was 1974, a very troubled year for the American economy, all around.

MS. COHEN: How did it affect -

MR. KARP: It affects the arts -- it's very hard to measure how economic changes and rhythms affect the art business. There is a long way before you feel the effects of it. And sometimes you don't feel it. And sometimes you feel it severely, even with no lag. You know? It's very hard to make out. I have been doing this now for over 30 years, and I have not been able to make out the rhythm of this business at all. It's really pretty much a mystery.

But, of course, it's always an adventure. When I come in in the morning, it's always an intriguing experience for me, and I really enjoy doing it, watching it happen. We have put on, over the 16 or 17 years that we have been here in the neighborhood, a fabulous number of shows. We do 40 a year here. And I know, in my soul and my heart and my intelligence, that it is all professional work that we show. And that is why I am proud of our achievement. And I think it's consequential that we have shown always work of the highest professional standard. And I have enough confidence in my judgment over the years to be able to identify artists who have come to maturity within the context of what they do.

The audience may not always enjoy what we show here, but we have the largest audience in the city or the country or the world, for an art gallery. I think our average weekly attendance is between 5,000 and 8,000. We get certainly -- we have counted it with one of those clickers in hand -- 5,600 people on a normal, pleasant Saturday afternoon. That is incredible. Our average daily attendance is between 300 and 600, you know.

Now, a lot of students come in here, a lot of groups come in, and we receive them without appointment. We are very nice to anybody who asks questions about what we do here. Our archives are open to everybody, you know. And I receive every artist without appointment. Any artist comes in with work from anywhere, I will personally receive that artist and look at the work. Now, I can't give them much of my day. I give each artist about three minutes, right?

If the artist's work looks especially intriguing -- and I can judge it easily that way -- I will visit the artist's studio, if I can. If the artist lives far out of town, say it's in one of the leading American cities, if I'm scheduled for a lecture in one of those cities, I will visit that artist. Otherwise, that artist is obliged to bring the works somewhere where I can see it, either a colleague's studio, or a local warehouse, or even bring it in by pick-up truck, if necessary. And I go outside the gallery, or let the artist bring the work in, if it looks very good to me by the evidence submitted. That's how I do it, right?

Now, a lot of dealers, as I said previously, are loathe to go through this arduous process. I see between 50 and 100 artists a week at certain times, you know? Sometimes they're just lined up, and I will receive every one of them, and give them a measure of my energy and time. And then, once in a while, I see something quite splendid. And that's why you do it, you know?

Now, last year, we must have seen 4,000 or 5,000 applicants, and we identified, we think, 2 artists of consequence. We have had shows of both of their works, and we have had wonderful response to it. I hope they continue to do important work like that. But it wouldn't have happened unless I had been open, you know? They might have gone somewhere else, they might not have come in at all. They might have turned inward to themselves. One of them lived far out of town, you know, and he may have decided that he was going to be satisfied with a career in a small community. It could have happened, you know?

The other dealers are reluctant to look, and often for understandable reasons. It's a painful process, rejecting people all day long, you know? Like yourself, you know, you feel their anxiety, their ambition, their need for something to happen for them, you know. Some of them are people of large intelligence, very personable

characters, and some of them not so personable, you know, you feel their energy in committing their work. They want to get it shown. And you have to tell them you can't do anything for them.

And, after a while, if you say it 50 times or 100 times a week, you hear yourself echoing that phrase, "I'm sorry, I can't be of service to you," you know? And so it becomes discouraging, distressing, and you don't want to do it. So you say, "Leave your work, and we will write back to you," a little note, you know, about what we have seen. Most dealers do that. And I don't do it. I still continue.

In fact, for those dealers, a number have come to me and said, "Ivan, how do you reject people? How do I say no with dignity and kindness?" And so I typed up a list of 30 kinds of rejections for dealers. I actually have typed up ways of rejecting artists in a nice way for the various kinds of work they submit, you know, or for the various types of personality they are. And, of course, it's a funny document, but it's also a usable document for somebody like myself, who doesn't mind doing this kind of thing. And I have learned how to do it over the years, to be reasonably kind and efficient at the same time.

So, the artist comes in here. And, in a sense, if I have rejected that artist, that artist has gone within three to five minutes without having suffered too much pain, right? There are some artists I have to reject more coldly than others. And I am very candid with those who seem to be able to put up with candor. An older artist comes in, and I say, "Listen, can I tell you how I feel about your work, and where it's at?" You know, "According to my judgment, and it's strictly my opinion, now." They say, "Yes, I can put up with it." [Inaudible], "I'm sorry, I'm not concerned with your opinion about it, either you like it or you don't like it," that's what the artist can say to me. I say, "Well, it's not right for us," you know? Essentially that.

And it happens sometimes they're very disgruntled about that, and even hostile. And a lot of them don't say, "Thank you," even though I put myself out for them. But, for the most part, the great majority are very pleasant, very kind people, and I enjoy seeing and meeting them, you know.

MS. COHEN: We are --

[End of CD 3, Track 2.]

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