



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Serge Sabarsky,
1993 April 22

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Serge Sabarsky on April 22, 1993. The interview was conducted by Rose Carol Washington-Long 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

ROSE CAROL WASHINGTON-LONG: Okay. This is Rose Carol Washington-Long interviewing Serge Sabarsky on Thursday, April 22, 1993. The first question I'd like to ask you relates to your biography. And if you could tell me where and when you were born and then something perhaps about your education.

SERGE SABARSKY: I was born on November 3, 1912, in Vienna, Austria, to a, I guess, upper-middle-class household.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Maybe you could tell us something about what your father did.

MR. SABARSKY: My father was a manufacturer of shoes and rubber heels and rubber soles in Austria. And the business collapsed after he got sick in 1930 -- I was 17 years old -- during the big crash. And I had to start. And then he died, and I had to support the family since I was about 18 years old. My education is practically nonexistent. I was a very bad child. I was thrown out of almost every school I went to.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Why was that?

MR. SABARSKY: Why was that?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: I just told you. I was a bad child. I don't know why it was. I was interested in other things, but not in school. My father, who was a disciplinarian, did not know how to cope with it. I saw the light, but it was too late. But still, I read a lot from very, very early childhood. And, I guess, an example of those few self-made people whose education is not academic, but still very complete and very - very mixed and still very complete. And my credo has been all my life that life is a steady, learning process. And I'm still learning today at over 80 years of age. But I had hobbies, of course. And since I'm now some sort of a member of academia, too - I teach, as you probably know. I teach and I give lectures in university and so on. I have less awe and respect for academic training. And I think that the training that you get yourself is, in many cases, superior to the one that you can get in schools. But that's -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Did you have any kind of exposure to art as you were growing up, either with your family or classes?

MR. SABARSKY: Like everybody else, I did, sure. But I was also personally, obviously, very much interested in art because I was, as a child, a talented draftsman. I did a lot of drawing. And later on, I became in one of my first professions, a stage designer.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Ah, in Vienna?

MR. SABARSKY: In Vienna. And if you are a designer, you have to know about everything visual. And art, of course, is the most important visual thing. And since childhood, I had an interest in art, especially since my teenage time. And my poor father, when I was about 15, in his desperation, sent me to a school in Frankfurt, in Germany. And there I changed, and I started at a late age, for at least one year, to be interested also in academic things.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: What kind of school was that in Frankfurt?

MR. SABARSKY: It was Reagonize (phonetic), it is called in German.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, I understand.

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah. And I was there for a year. And then the collapse came, and I had to come back to Vienna and I had to start earning money. But in Frankfurt, I discovered German expressionism. I used to go to the

museums and to the galleries and was very much enthusiastic about it. And that stayed with me, I guess, since then.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Do you remember any of the artists that you saw when you were in Frankfurt?

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, of course, of course. The German expressionists. Frankfurt was the city where there were some great dealers and great museums. And of course, the German expressionists, Kirchner, Heckel, and especially Beckmann -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, Beckmann.

MR. SABARSKY: There in Frankfurt, of course, Beckmann spent the '20s, just the time I was there in Frankfurt. And I was not aware of the fact that he was really, in my maybe unqualified opinion today, the most important German artist of the twentieth century. But I was impressed by his work. And of course, coming from Vienna - going back to Vienna. Coming from Vienna, the Austrian expressionists, which were part also of the German expressionist movement, like Schiele and Kokoschka, not to mention Krimmel, were what I grew up with. And there is a story that I'd like to tell about when I was nine or ten years old, I used to visit a dentist in Vienna. And he was a collector. And he had in the corridor to his waiting room a number of Schiele works on paper.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Really.

MR. SABARSKY: Whether they were originals or very good reproductions, I do not know. But I was very much impressed. Of course, to the 10-year-old one, the certain eroticism in it was also very interesting.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter] Do you remember your dentist's name?

MR. SABARSKY: No. I remember the street, but I don't remember his name.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Tell us the street.

MR. SABARSKY: Vot Selangasse (phonetic). But there are three dentists among the collectors of Schiele's work, his contemporaries, in Vienna. And maybe he was one of them; I do not know.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: But the funny part was that this is where I really discovered Schiele. And up to now, I told you the truth. And now I try to tell another part of the story, which is not true, namely, that my mother was surprised that I started to like to go to the dentist.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: That's for journalists. Anyway, so that was an early start. But otherwise - and then when I finally in 1939 came to the United States, I was too busy to be as interested or as participating as I would have liked to be. On the other hand, I practically grew up in the Museum of Modern Art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: When you were here?

MR. SABARSKY: When I was here, up to the time I went into the army in 1942. So from 1939 to 1942, I must have had hundreds of visits.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: To the museum.

MR. SABARSKY: I was at least twice a week at the Modern Art. And I was - it was a totally different museum at the time. It was the time of Alfred Bar, of course.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And it was a - you could almost feel it without being aware of it, if there is such a thing. But it was a growing institution in its best of times.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Definitely. It was just beginning.

MR. SABARSKY: It was not this pompous institute that - I'm not talking about the Modern Art now, but the great museums. They all become pompous after awhile. And I remember at the beginning of the Guggenheim, for instance, when I think of what it is now, as Mr. Krens likes to say, the galaxy of museums that he's going to be the head of - it really makes me want to throw up. But this is another story. But the Modern Art, especially - the Modern Art was a jewel that was simply indescribable. I mean, you can't compare it to anything that's going on

today. That doesn't mean that there aren't great things there.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: Witness the Matisse show and other things. But it was different then. I was at least twice, if not three or four times a week there. I was at that time, before the - no, was it at that time already that I was in - no, it came afterwards. After I came back from the war in 1945 --

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, before we get on to the war, I did want to ask you.

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You had said that you were a stage designer in Vienna.

MR. SABARSKY: Yes, yes.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Could you just tell us a little bit about that? What kind of theater?

MR. SABARSKY: It was a private theater. Well, we had different types of theaters in Austria. We had one that almost all European cities have, the state theaters, which are heavily subsidized by the government. And we had private theaters. And of course, I had no hope of getting into one of those institutes, the state theaters.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: So I was with this small - the Revoutiat (phonetic), it was called. It was musicals and comedies and things of that sort. And I got in there as a stagehand first, and then

[A TELEPHONE RINGS] Sorry about that.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's quite all right. Do you want me to stop it?

MR. SABARSKY: Well, we'll see what she has to say. But - and I then -

FEMALE VOICE: I think it's Mr. Zirko.

MR. SABARSKY: I have to call back. I'm in - hold all the calls, except it's very important or from Europe, please. You have that? Did you hear me?

FEMALE VOICE: I think it's Mr. Zirko.

MR. SABARSKY: Yes. Please hold all the calls now, and tell him that I'll call him back.

FEMALE VOICE: Okay.

MR. SABARSKY: All right.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You were telling me about the small reviews that you designed. Do you -

MR. SABARSKY: Yes, the stage sets.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Were you first a stagehand and then you -

MR. SABARSKY: Well, by then I became stage manager, and then I became stage designer.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And what did you -

MR. SABARSKY: Because times were very bad then, and we had - there was no money, and so in times like these there is no routine career possible. Everything is possible. And with very, very little money or hardly any money, you just go along and hope for the best. But there is no such a thing as wages, the audience.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, sure.

MR. SABARSKY: I mean, there were, but you were hungry and you wanted - times were worse than anybody - here in this country, people were selling apples on the street. In Vienna, they didn't have the money to buy the apples in the first place.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: So it was a little difficult. But you're young and you don't realize that because you just get used

to these things. I always like to compare it like a dog gets used to its collar. Without it, it doesn't feel comfortable. It's the most horrible thing to see a dog walking the street pulling that collar and almost trying to hang himself. And that's how we all live. We all live that way. But anyway, I was -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Do you remember any of the kind of reviews that were done in this small -

MR. SABARSKY: That was all things that nobody would know about today.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, I'm just trying to think if any artists or musicians came into this small theater.

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, no, no. A lot of people came in there, but it was a review theater and it was something very local. And it was - there were some of the great actors and comedians that played there.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Comedians? Ah. Like who?

MR. SABARSKY: Like Fritz Grunbaum. You wouldn't know the names. Or Calfakas or Frans Engel. Those are local people that it's impossible for anybody to know about them, unless he was a witness of the times or lived there in the times. But these were not repertory - they were repertory theaters, but they were not playing plays. They were playing musical theater.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: Like you had. Well, we remember certain musical reviews here in New York because New York is the capital of the world and you had big musical theaters. This was a small house with a couple of hundred seats.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And do you remember where it's located in Vienna, where it was?

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, Boinsana (phonetic) is the street. It's still there. It's still there. Simpl, it's called, Simpl, S-i-m-p-l. But then I don't know how far I should go in the details, because I could talk for hours. And neither - I don't have the time, and I guess you don't, have, either.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, I'm sure you don't.

MR. SABARSKY: But I don't know of how much interest.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: But just tell us a little bit about coming, leaving Vienna, and because of the Auschwitz -

MR. SABARSKY: First I'll tell what I also did in Vienna, which I think is interesting because I did many, many different things.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes?

MR. SABARSKY: The theater didn't bring in enough money. It was very glamorous, it was a lot of fun, and it was nice to do that and see my names, even on the few posters that we had the money to print. But I made money by doing theatrical advertising, like sponsored shows or things like that. So it has a little connection with what I'm doing now, not much. And because of the limited number of people that could get into this little theater, I was looking for bigger fields. And I somehow got connected with the circus. And for two years I was a clown in an Austrian circus, Medrano, it was called, like the famous French circus. It had nothing to do with it whatsoever. It was just, they stole the name. And I was there, and I did some - I worked as a clown. But I also did some advertising in the arena, which was sponsored and brought in more money than the theater ever could. So I could feed my family. But I was always doing things that were a little bit different than the ordinary thing. There was nobody else that did what I did in Vienna at the time. I used to be in advertising. I used to do drafting and drawing. I was with the theater. I knew a little bit about business. I knew what it meant to be a member in a society in a time of hard economic times. I knew how to cope. And all that together enabled me to do what I was doing, namely, approach a theatrical company or the circus and tell them, "Listen, I will do this and this, and you will get so much money for it and I'll get so much money for that." And I did that, and it was something that I couldn't even put a name to, just like it's difficult for me to put a name to what I'm doing now, to which we are again going to get to later.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And not that I wanted to do it because I wanted to do something original; I wanted to do it because it needed to be done, from my point of view. So I was with the circus. I also, because I had the need to expand in Austria, I put a theatrical group together. And I traveled with them, or made them travel through many, many cities. At one time I had a tour of 90 places, 90 evenings in 90 different places.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: All in Austria?

MR. SABARSKY: All in Austria. But some were villages, of course.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: Every village has at least one inn -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Theater?

MR. SABARSKY: No, no, not a theater. No, they don't have theaters in villages, no. But they had an inn, a beer hall, or something like that. And there was some sort of an improvised stage for a band or for celebrations, for weddings, or whatever it was.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And I used to do this, this circuit. And at one time, as I said, 90 different ones. And we traveled from city to city, from place to place. I sponsored it with advertising that I signed people up for. And for the actors and for - the musicians, I had one piano player - it was a good income because they had - I remember that I had them and I told them they'd take in whatever money is taking in at the box office. They get free lodgings and also the dinner. And I would even pay for the transportation. We had a little band bus. And everything was theirs, without any expense. I paid for everything. I also printed posters, and we - handwritten each day in a different - we had an advance person going through. And we had full houses because the firms that I did advertising for, soap flakes and foodstuff and, I don't know what all - the stuff that is being advertised on radio and television - there was no such a thing as radio.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Of course.

MR. SABARSKY: And television didn't exist yet. But the radio advertising, they didn't have then. And it's less than we have here now. And the only way advertising could reach people in the backwoods was through, maybe through newspapers that a few people read. But when they had a troupe of artists come to their village or town or whatever, hamlet, and work in that beer hall, and a big evening for them, it was sensational, and there were a few hundred people in there. And for the firms that I did the advertising for, it was interesting, at least. It had a certain bohemian character, and at the same time, it was advertising. And so that was just before I left Austria and came here - came to Paris in 1938. And then I left a month after, no three weeks after the Anschluss, after the Germans took over Austria, and went to Paris for a year and a half, and then came to the United States in 1939.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And what happened to your family?

MR. SABARSKY: I had only my mother, my sister, and my brother. And we had a plan. I was the most exposed. I was the oldest man in the family. So I was leaving first. And then my brother, then my sister and mother. My mother somehow didn't - we had some unfinished business. She didn't want to leave. She thought always nothing will happen to her because - well, I lost my mother, and I lost also the other - many members of the family. But my sister and brother came out successfully. But - so that was that. And then I came to the United States, and I started in some business here. I had met my future wife in Paris. She was in fashion. And she started some business in Paris. And they needed for ready-to-wear dresses. They all had - this was the fashion of the times. They had mostly leather belts, or belts, fabric belts that had to be manufactured. And at that time in Paris, you could get very good couture much less. The fine works were very, very cheap. But the little class - I don't know how to call it. The middle genre did not exist. So I make - I started the business. I manufactured belts in Paris, illegally, because I have no permit to stay in Paris and no permit to work. Anyway, and then when I came to this country and my wife had come over, she had - my future wife, and she came here and I came here, too. And I started out in New York, worked for a year and a half in the belt business, too, which was horrible.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Here in New York?

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah. It was a factory on 37th Street and 8th Avenue, 9th - between 8th and 9th. And then the war started. And I volunteered. I had only my brother here at that time, and myself. And we both entered the army, and we both survived. We both were sent to Europe. I was in the infantry. I was from England, we went over at the invasion. And from Normandy till we met the Russians, I had 316 days in combat as an infantry soldier.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: My goodness.

MR. SABARSKY: And was never really seriously injured. A couple of times, never evacuated, and I was very, very lucky.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And your brother?

MR. SABARSKY: So was my brother.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Your brother was also.

MR. SABARSKY: My brother, too. We were both - we were survivors. We survived. And I was in the 30th Infantry Division, which the German propaganda used to call "the workhorse of the western front". They called it "Roosevelt's SS troops". It's amazing. This division was a - it had a very bloody history. And I was a reconnaissance sergeant, too, so that was not an undangerous job.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: No.

MR. SABARSKY: But I was very lucky. I was very lucky. I survived, and I came back to New York. And then I was in pretty bad shape. I wouldn't say shell-shocked, but almost like that, and worked as a designer, as a commercial designer, draftsman.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Because I could do that at home. I was, as I said there, in not very good mental stage at that time.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, it must have been very hard knowing that your mother had not survived the war -

MR. SABARSKY: Well, no, but that - but the war itself was an experience. See, I wasn't young anymore. I was - most of my colleagues or comrades were about 19, 20, 21, and I was 30.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: And there's a big, big difference. And they know why they draft people when they're 18 years old. Somehow, it's easier, especially in Europe. You know, they have school and they're used to discipline. But a man in his 30s, it's a little difficult.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: Anyway, I survived and I started out. And then I started again - I wanted again to be in the design field. So I started as an interior designer, so to speak. And I became a partner in a small woodworking shop, and then had my own woodworking shop, and started what turned into a small contracting and design business. For 23 years I was a builder in New York City. What has all this got to do with art?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well -

MR. SABARSKY: Nothing.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: A little, maybe.

MR. SABARSKY: Nothing. It was just the hobby. I mean, I spent - as I told you before, while I worked, the only thing that interested me was arts. I mean, literature, arts and music, sure, but mostly the visual arts because it was there for the asking.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure. But when you were doing the interior design, did you sometimes have to bring in paintings or drawings?

MR. SABARSKY: Never worked out, no. Never worked out.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Never, uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: It is fallacy to believe that the public at large has any interest in art. It's a very, very small community. And then when, of course, a Matisse show happens and 800,000 people come to the show, one thinks it's a lot. Of the 800,000, at least half are repeat performers. So it's only 400,000. Of the 400,000, at least half, they're from out of town. So it's 200,000. And you think of 10 million New Yorkers, 200,000 at a show like Matisse, you know, you walk by Fifth Avenue, you would see there 100 people; not one of them would have gone into the show. So we are - what has that got to do with what you asked me? It has to do, these business people that I did showrooms or offices for - they're in the rarest of cases interested in art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: I see.

MR. SABARSKY: And if they were, they had their own art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Aha.

MR. SABARSKY: They didn't leave it up to a designer to buy. Yes, they left it up; I did buy some stuff, some popular graphics or something for them. I mean, at that time I remember the New York Hilton was being built. And the New York Hilton's architects had an idea of art in their rooms. And they commissioned, I don't know whether it was 28 or 80, something with "8," artists through the Museum of Modern Art to do graphics for their rooms.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, really?

MR. SABARSKY: Nothing ever came of it.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh.

MR. SABARSKY: For then - I don't know. It would be interesting to write a story about it because they have it. They have these graphics in individual rooms. But I remember also the other Hilton in Beverly Hills, the Beverly Hilton it was called. And it was done by an excellent architect. I was there because my wife worked for a California firm at the time that I visited. And it was all done in white with a few color touches. And the only color I remember in the bathroom was white tiles and yellow tiles. And on the balconies they had Knoll chairs, K-n-o-w-l, the famous firm. And they had on these metal chairs, colored ribbons. Everything else was white. And in each room, there was a nice graphic. After a few years, they changed it. They took everything out and put fake Spanish furniture in.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh. [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: The public is on an extremely, extremely low level of appreciation. And, well, of course, in New York it's different because New York is New York. It's the center of the world. But you go to -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Now, this was in the -

MR. SABARSKY: You go to Salt Lake City in Utah. I was there once, and I asked the hotel, the best hotel in town, "Is there a museum?" "Sure, we have right across the street the most beautiful nativity that you can see in wax." That was their museum.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Wax, yes.

MR. SABARSKY: That's their museum, you see?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: And it could have changed since then. This was 20 years ago.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: It changed. But still, we are - no, that was only in answer to your question about whether I could combine art and my business in any way.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And your business, uh-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Hardly. So, for 23 years I worked, and I was starting --

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Here in New York?

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, here in New York. And maybe a thought that comes to mind, my wife and I supported several family members who were older, all older. She had an uncle who was blind. She had her mother here, who had Parkinson's disease. And I had a sister of my mother's who lived here, who was an old lady. And we supported those. I remember at one time, I paid six rents every month.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, my goodness.

MR. SABARSKY: Six rents, not to talk about what else they needed.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes. Right.

MR. SABARSKY: But both my wife and I made good money, and we could afford it. We supported them. It was normal. And then these people slowly started to die off. So we found ourselves with a little money. So we started

to buy art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Aha.

MR. SABARSKY: It's simple. In the 50s.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Now this was in the late 50s?

MR. SABARSKY: Fifties.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: But I had no idea, no intention of going into the art business. But then I somehow - I don't know what happened to me. I got tired of my own business, not that it wasn't good. But it was getting more difficult. New York City is, for certain trades, very, very difficult to work in. If you have - if you're a small contractor and you have to deliver material with a truck to the place of business - and no civilians - if nonworking people drive through the city and see trucks double-parked, they get mad. I do, too.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, that's right.

MR. SABARSKY: But on the other hand, what are these poor people supposed to do? You get a bill from a plumber who does some alteration work, and he will say 75 dollars an hour, and say he's a robber. He's losing money on the 75 dollars. He has maybe six people working for him. He has a girl in his office. He has three trucks. The tickets alone, every time he has a job, he gets -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, a ticket.

MR. SABARSKY: And by the time you figure, his overhead has to be divided by six. Each mechanic has to bring in a sixth of his overhead. You figure all that out - the telephone, the insurance, and I don't know what, the rent, his cars, and so on. It isn't so much. Contracting is a very tough profession in New York.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah. Sure. Um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: So that's one thing. And the other thing was, I worked mostly in the garment trade. And it was almost impossible. You try to - you know, you have people in the garment trade that work reserving parking spaces for the trucks. If people are out on a weekly wage, they go in and all they do is reserve the truck, because God forbid if a truck comes in with a load of dresses to pick up, and he can't park for a couple of hours.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right. Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: The profit of that day is gone, you know?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Isn't that something?

MR. SABARSKY: And then you go into these buildings, especially in the new buildings that were being built and showrooms that were put in, and there were, let's say, three or four freight elevators. You know, think about the freight elevators in an older building, in the Empire State, where you have thousands of tenants.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: You have a ramp there where two or three trucks can park. It's a nightmare.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: It's a nightmare. You don't know - and when I was a contractor, you had to bribe all sorts of people to get an elevator because if they didn't want you you had to stand down there with your sheetrock or plywood and wait a half a day to get an elevator to go up.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Wow.

MR. SABARSKY: People don't think about that. So I was kind of - besides, it was - I had enough of it. It was - you asked me before about art, and I had to laugh inside because the people I had to deal with were really Neanderthals. You know, the people who manufacture dresses in New York, on what level of intellect they were or education? Not that I want to sound pompous if I say that, but it's not people that you like to associate with.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: No. You should say what you feel for this.

MR. SABARSKY: I did not have dinner with a single one of my clients, never, never, because they were totally different, different people. And you waste a lot of time designing for people who have absolutely no idea what you're doing for them. You're doing it for yourself. And anyway, so one day I had played with the idea of changing. And how did I come about to become an art dealer, right?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: That's the most important part. I was, at that time - it was still called Parke-Bernet, not Sotheby's. And it was across the street from the Carlyle Hotel, that 980 Madison Avenue between 76th and 77th Street. And I was a collector and was interested in works of art. And I had a friend, the late artist Richard Lindner. You know Richard Lindner?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, of course. Yes, I remember the name.

MR. SABARSKY: And he's not alive anymore, and he was -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Where did he teach?

MR. SABARSKY: He didn't teach.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: He didn't teach?

MR. SABARSKY: He was an artist. He didn't teach - maybe private at times. But he was - I discovered him in the show "Americans 1962" at the Modern Art. It was a very famous show, but beautiful. All in there, Robert Indiana and Montico and Montico and Marisol and Thorosiquist (phonetic) and Oldenburg and all the others were in there. And so was Richard Lindner.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Lindner, yes.

MR. SABARSKY: He painted these big women.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's right, yes.

MR. SABARSKY: With belts and leather and stuff like that.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right, yeah, I remember that.

MR. SABARSKY: And dogs, especially. Dogs were to him - it was like for Kubin, horses was a little dangerous animal. He was a short little man, this tall.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: And he got his clothing at the boys' department at Saks Fifth Avenue.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: Was successful after this show. Before that, he was not.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: We became friends. And he was collecting African art and South Sea Islands, and I was also on a small scale. And we went together the primitive art auctions at Sotheby's, or rather Parke-Bernet at this time; Christy's didn't exist yet in New York - but in the afternoon. And there was in that building - well, Parke-Bernet was upstairs. There was a Schrafft's coffee shop. Do you remember the Schrafft's? Or were you too young?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, I remember the Schrafft's. No, no, I remember the Schrafft's.

MR. SABARSKY: And we were sitting there. And I turned to him and I said, "Look across the street." The Carlyle Hotel, it was a string of stores empty, because the Wilhouse Galleries which had occupied them had gone out of business. And I said, "You know, I'm thinking of renting a space there and start an art business." And he looked at me and he said, "That seemed weird." He said, "Do it. You must become a dealer. But don't sell your Schieles." I had a few Schieles by that time already.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, you didn't tell me. Where did the Schieles come from?

MR. SABARSKY: Well, we had - as I said, when these people died - I forgot. I interrupted myself. When these relatives died away and we had a little extra money, we started to collect -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh. And Schiele's work -

MR. SABARSKY: Schiele was one of the first, yes. Not many, but a few drawings.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And do you remember where you bought that? Here in New York?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, sure, sure, sure. A private dealer, I bought it from. And that's also an interesting story to the first Schiele I bought.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, tell.

MR. SABARSKY: I tell it to my students always at NYU. I bought it from a dealer, a private dealer who was also a refugee from Vienna. And he called me and knew I was looking for a Schiele drawing. They were not available, as they are now, at that time, somehow.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh. This would be in the early 50s?

MR. SABARSKY: Fifty-five, middle fifties, fifty-four, fifty-five. And he called me, and I met him, and he showed me a photograph of a Schiele drawing. And he said, "This is 500 dollars." And 500 dollars - well, my heart started this way, you know.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: Five hundred dollars. So I was hesitant. And he said, "I can't give it to you for less. I only make a profit of 10 percent," 50 dollars. So I said, "No, no, no, no, I don't want to bargain." I knew little at the time. And I said, "All right, I'll buy it." And I bought it. And then the years went by, and I met a friend in Vienna. I met a man in Vienna who is the Schiele expert. And he told me he wants to bring the photographs of the works I had with me. And I brought them. And he saw that photograph, too, and he said, "Oh, you bought that from So-and-so?"

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Ah.

MR. SABARSKY: I said, "Yes."

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: From Collier?

MR. SABARSKY: No, no, not Collier.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Not from Collier?

MR. SABARSKY: I told you, a private dealer.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: A private dealer.

MR. SABARSKY: It was not Collier, no. It was a private dealer. He's not alive anymore, so I don't want to mention his name.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: And so this man in Vienna said, "Oh, you bought that from So-and-so?"

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: I said, "Yes." He said, "How much did you pay for it?" So I said, "I don't know." I didn't know - "I think I will tell you." He said, "Well, he bought it from me. If you tell me what you paid for it, I'll tell you what he paid me for." I said, "Yes."

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Okay.

MR. SABARSKY: He paid 340 dollars for it. So he made 160 dollars on the deal, which is perfectly legitimate.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: There is no rule.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: In other businesses, you make much more. But it was a foolish thing to do, without any invitation on my part, without any reason, he told me he's only making 50 dollars. And old experienced dealer -

he's there a long time ago. He should have known better. He should have known that, first of all, it's irrelevant what he paid for it and how much he makes. Second, everything comes up in the art world. Whatever I tell you about the art world, I swear, to the best of my knowledge, I tell you the truth, not because I'm such an honest, ethical, moral man, only because I know that the truth comes out. There is nothing that is more gossipy than the art world.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: With this you and I now, right?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: What we're doing now is gossip.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, they try to call it oral history. [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: Of course. I don't take anything seriously, you'll find out. Only death is serious, nothing else. And I teach that to my students. And I tell them, "You see, let that be a lesson." I tell them the story exactly how it happened. I say, first of all, never volunteer that you're only making so much and so much because when you buy you'll find out that it's irrelevant. You want to buy something, you have certain base of measuring whether it's worth it, whether you need it, but not what the other person makes on it. That should not enter your mind at all; it's irrelevant. And I tell them this story. And I also tell them, "Tell the truth," not because I'm God-fearing or because I'm - but because it's simpler.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: And everything comes out. Everything, everything, everything.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's [inaudible].

MR. SABARSKY: So Richard Lindner told me, "Do it." And so I rented space at the Carlisle Hotel and stayed there for 22 years. Everybody - no, no, not 22 - 18 years, I'm sorry. It was in 1968, yeah, 19 years. Till '87, I moved in here, yes, '86. I've forgot . It doesn't matter. And everybody warned me that I -

[A TELEPHONE RINGS.]

MR. SABARSKY: Sorry about that. Everybody warned me that I would not sell anything for at least a year. It was nonsense, because I put up a show, and -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: What was the show?

MR. SABARSKY: Mixed. It was just German expressionist drawings and watercolors.

FEMALE VOICE: Dr. Kitish?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, yes. This I have to take, I'm sorry. I was told by my friends at that time, and it happened then others [inaudible] they're all not alive anymore. I was told they want me. You know, you have to have enough money to cover the overhead for a couple of years and all that. Five - and I opened on May 15th of '68. And I'm not good in old dates. But I know May 15th. And on June 17 or 18, I was having lunch over across the street, the same Schrafft's that I mentioned before. The young woman that worked for me had come running over there, "There's a gentleman here from the Art Institute in Chicago." And the director of prints and drawings - whew, where is my brain? It will come to me in a minute. And he was a wonderful, wonderful person. And - let me just - it's like my own name that I forget. But that's old age.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, we know. We all do that.

FEMALE VOICE: Yes?

MR. SABARSKY: Look up in the old card of the Art Institute of Chicago. What was the name of the curator? He's not alive anymore.

FEMALE VOICE: Um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: You have it on the card. Please. Anyway.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: So this -

MR. SABARSKY: And he was waiting there. He was a small, very modest human being. And he said to me - he

was also a German refugee, one of the best museum people I've ever met in my life. He said to me, "My name is So-and-so." And then he said, "I was told that there was a jewel of a new gallery on Madison Avenue, but they didn't tell me how precious the jewel was."

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Of course, I melted away.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: He bought a little Schiele drawing, and he reserved the Kirchner drawing. And this was five weeks after I opened. And it went like wildfire through the art trade. Harold Joachim.

[THE INTERCOM TONE IS HEARD.]

MR. SABARSKY: Harold Joachim, I know.

FEMALE VOICE: Harold Joachim.

MR. SABARSKY: Thank you, thank you, thank you, yes. It just got to me. Thanks a lot.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Good.

MR. SABARSKY: Harold Joachim. He was a - Joachim was a famous violinist at the turn of the century, who - at the time of Brahms and all that, a very famous violinist, Joachim. And he was a grandson of this violinist. Harold Joachim, wonderful man - became a very close friend. But he's dead now for at least 15 years, so - Harold Joachim.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Now, how did you find the Kirchner and the Schiele for the gallery at this time?

MR. SABARSKY: Well, it was very easy. I just went a couple of trips to Europe and I went to other dealers. And I borrowed money all over the world. I didn't have enough. We sold whatever securities, stock, and stuff like that we had, my wife and I. And I started to buy -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: But you went back, say, to Vienna to buy -

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, I also went to Vienna. But I didn't buy so many Schieles. They were already getting to be expensive.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Expensive, uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: But I bought other things. And I bought mostly German expressionist paintings.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Paintings, prints, drawings?

MR. SABARSKY: Paintings, prints, and drawings, but mostly, paintings and drawings.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Do you remember -

MR. SABARSKY: And it's an open secret that the first year when I was - won't, I will not sell anything. And this is in '68 - I turned over 840,000 dollars.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, it sounds like that was a good time, good decision.

MR. SABARSKY: It was tremendous. It was as much as, I would say, 8 millions is today.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And for a new gallery, without any experience whatsoever - I teach the business now. But I only teach it because I know how it was to start without knowing anything. So I try to give those people that want to come and listen to my talk the benefit of experience. All right? Okay, and it went off like a house on fire. Whether this was because I was lucky, because the times were right, because the German expressionist movement was upcoming, or simply because I was a genius, I do not know. But it happened.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter] Who were some of the people that you bought? You said German expressionists.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, the dealers.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: But at that time, did you have that many -

MR. SABARSKY: All dealers. There were a lot of dealers in the world.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, no, no, I know that. But I mean, who were you buying? You were buying the Brücker --

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, the same 22 or 23 artists I'm still involved with today.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: I see, uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: They were the Brücker artists, the Blue Rider, the Bauhaus, and a few individuals like the ones that didn't belong to any school, like Beckmann, for instance.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And you also at that time, even in the late 60s, were you buying Dix and Grosz then?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, sure.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You were, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: So I became the representative for the Grosz estate in the - when was it, about 1970 or 71 for the Grosz brothers.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh, after he died.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, he died much earlier, died in 56.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Was it 56, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah. But no, the sons, the two sons had a dealer that was Peter Deitsch who died young on a trip to Europe. He was in his 40s. And he was a very good, fine dealer. He died, and they looked for somebody else. And I was at that time already almost 60. And they were very unhappy about that because the dealer that they had before died when he was 45. And why should they take somebody at 60?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: But still, they - one brother talked the other one into it, and it worked out. Anyway, and the others - I knew - there are only about - I can rattle them off. There is, alphabetically, Beckmann, maybe Corinth, Dix, Feininger, Heckel, Jawlensky, Kirchner, Ray, Kokoschka, maybe Kandinski, but very little because he's in a class by itself; Macke, Marc, Mueller, Otto Mueller, Nolde, Kokoschka I forgot, Klimt I forgot, Pechstein, Schiele, Smithrotkov (phonetic). Those are the artists.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Those are the artists that have been concerned with.

MR. SABARSKY: You have them all here. And Feininger-- did I mention Feininger?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, you did.

MR. SABARSKY: Yes, I guess so. So - and I always made shows. I made - and while I was on Madison Avenue, I made my shows with little announcement cards, very few catalog announcements. And then it was, after the 10th or 12th show, I put a little number on the back of my cards. And the last show I made was 70, seven-oh. So 70 exhibitions is a lot of exhibitions. But it was in 18 years.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And it was a success. I mean, it was a small gallery, but it was the only gallery in the whole world that was not only specialized in German expressionism, it was specialized in that to the exclusion of everything else. I mean, there were others. There was Leonard Hopper who was doing it.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's right.

MR. SABARSKY: That was Mrs. Serger. But they were also doing a côte de Paris. They were doing Russian painters.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right. Yes, the [inaudible] into that, right.

MR. SABARSKY: They were doing all sorts of other things.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, what about -

MR. SABARSKY: I did not. I only did German and Austrian expressionists.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh. But didn't they only do German and Austrian?

MR. SABARSKY: No, I just told you. They did Russian.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Saint Etien?

MR. SABARSKY: Russian art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, Hutton did Russian.

MR. SABARSKY: Hutton did Russian art. Mrs. Serger did a lot of French.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, Serger, yes. But I meant he -

MR. SABARSKY: Mrs. LaBoisse (phonetic).

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: LaBoisse, right. I meant the Kallir Gallery.

MR. SABARSKY: Kallir also did other things. Kallir did Grandma Moses.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's right. Yes, you're right.

MR. SABARSKY: So, there you are. And other American so-called expressionists, he did also. And so I was the only one - and he did not do as much Germans. He did of the Germans, Ballah, Koivitz (phonetic), and maybe sometimes graphic shows. But mostly he was concentrated on Schiele, Klimt, Kokoschka, Grandma Moses, a few Americans then, Corinth (phonetic), Käthe Kollwitz. That was a strong - which I never did.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Did you ever deal with any of the women artists, like Münter?

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, Gabriele -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Or von Barifkin (phonetic)?

MR. SABARSKY: Barifkin, no. But Münter, I did, and Modersohn-Becker.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And Modersohn-Becker, yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah, sure. One of the first paintings that I sold was a Modersohn-Becker painting.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Aha.

MR. SABARSKY: So that's how it started. And in about the middle '70s, I participated in German art fairs in Cologne and Dusseldorf every year for seven or eight years, which was very successful because I had a big -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Could you describe the fairs?

MR. SABARSKY: They were art fairs.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: Art fairs.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: I mean, contemporary art and classic art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: And they were international. And there were some people from different countries. Mostly, the fairs in Germany are done by their associations, same as we do here, on the national galleries. But there are also international shows like the one we have in Chicago now. And there, international dealers are showing. And I had a big stand always. I really splurged, like I did with my couple of -- few catalogs that I printed were always pretty sensational. I only have one copy of this, so I can't - but this was the first catalog I printed. And it was everything in color. And I sent out 3000, free.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Free?

MR. SABARSKY: Free, a book like this.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: What was the date of this? Let's see, so we have it on the tape, the date of the first catalog, which is -

[END OF TAPE 1.]

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: -- called expressionists.

MR. SABARSKY: That's it, yeah.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Our tape has gone off.

MR. SABARSKY: Yeah. Oh, I see. I'm sorry, yeah. I understand, yeah. And that cost a lot of money.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And that had color, all color in it, you said.

MR. SABARSKY: Everything, everything.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And you sent this out free to 3000 people.

MR. SABARSKY: Ever since then, whenever I print something, everything that is in color, I print in color. That's a principle.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm. Why did you decide to do that?

MR. SABARSKY: In color?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Because it's paintings -- are color. It's nothing -- I mean, you can do another catalog or a reference book that's black and white. But if you want to show a painting to somebody who's a prospective client, you work through the color. You impress people by the color.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Now, you told me that you had some museum curators among the people who came to your galleries.

MR. SABARSKY: I told you about one.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: One - were there any others?

MR. SABARSKY: Very few.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Very few. Who were most of your clients?

MR. SABARSKY: Somehow, in this business - this has to do with business practices - there are those that are concentrating on museums. There are those that are concentrating on, do business a lot with auction houses, buy and sell through auction houses. And there are those that sell to the cognoscenti to the public or to the collectors. And it was not my intention, but it turned out that way, that I was known among the collectors as the gallery where they found things that they were interested in. And maybe museums, too - I did sell some. I sold some to the Museum of Modern Art. I sold to the Chicago Art Institute, as I told you before.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: But not many. I sold a couple to very few German museums. I don't even remember if there's any. Austrian museum - but very, very few. And the reason for this is that there you have to also do a lot of administrative work. And I am, as we will come to my activities now, but the exhibitions, I am very, very reliable if I do exhibitions. The catalog is in time, the exhibition is in time, the poster is in time, everything. I arrive in time to give the opening talk. But my paperwork and administration stinks. I am a procrastinator. I don't like to - this clean desk shouldn't fool you. I'm very, very bad.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: And I pick up the phone and call. But I - and with museums, you can't do that. You have to make proposals, you have to write to them, and you have to go through all that. And it was just, the day is not long enough. I mean, some people do only that, and some didn't. For instance, there was -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, who were some of the collectors? Can you tell me?

MR. SABARSKY: Collectors' names?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, if you would like.

MR. SABARSKY: Allotos (phonetic), Alloto family, all three, to give you one.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, that's good to know.

MR. SABARSKY: Let's see. And let's talk about people that are famous. Greta Garbo was one of my favorite visitors. She never bought anything from me. But we had a nice little professional friendship. She used to come in, and she used to sit and talk to me. And it was very nice. Dustin Hoffman, Barbra Streisand, Bowie - Bowie? The one that played the [inaudible]. What is first name? He is also a great musician.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: David?

MR. SABARSKY: David Bowie, David Bowie. Itzhak Perlman, the violinist, is a friend and a client. Famous people.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And then, were there also collectors from cities across the United States?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, sure.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Or primarily in New York and the West Coast?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, no, no, no. All over the world. It wasn't just - it was all over the world. This is a very, very small community in any field, whether it is futurist art, Italian, or whether it is surrealist art or whether it's the German expressionists. There are in each country a couple of dozen serious collectors who also have the means to collect.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: And there are many who appreciate that art. But the collectors are only a few. And if you add that up all over the world, you come to about 300-400 collectors worldwide. And all the dealers and specialists in that field live off those people. It's very, very strange. Of course, in the field, you have not only drawings, watercolors, you also have graphics.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: You have also posters, you have sculpture, and so on. And so there - and every collector usually tries to think of himself, likes to think of himself as a specialist in a certain field. And if he is a specialist, he had to come to me because if you went, let's say, to the director of the Museum of Modern Art and said, "I'm new in New York. Can you give me the name of three galleries who specialize in German expressionist art?" Cotton (phonetic) and Serger would probably be in every list, but I had to be in every list because I was the only one that sold nothing but.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Um-hm, um-hm.

MR. SABARSKY: Right? I sold nothing but. And so that was not - I didn't think about that as a gimmick, but it turned out into a very good gimmick. And anybody that would - that was worldwide, in Germany as well as in South Africa or in Venezuela. Wherever it was, that was always - that is, I remember two very close, good clients that were in Venezuela, for instance. Both of them, by the way, German. Not the refugees, but of German origin. And they used to come to New York. They would automatically come to me and, every now and then, buy something. And in Germany it was the same way. In Germany, there were some collectors. This was 25 years after the war was over. So there were already some new fortunes being formed. And they would buy and sell, and of course, the auction houses and all that. And slowly, I became known as the expert. Of course, the expertise was not only limited to Schiele, but it was the most important, because I did several Schiele shows. Yeah, and then what I wanted to say is then during these fairs in Germany, I was once approached by somebody, a young Japanese man, if I would be interested to do a Schiele exhibition in Tokyo. It was the Tokyo Shimbun in the newspaper and the Sabu Museum, Sabu department store, which worked together in promoting exhibitions. And they hired me, and I did a Schiele exhibition.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah, when was that?

MR. SABARSKY: That was the beginning of the end.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh.

MR. SABARSKY: When was that? [Inaudible] I think that was the second one, but when the first one was? [Inaudible]

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, it's all right.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, I'll tell you. We can look up at the Klimt show, which was later.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Just roughly. I mean, this was sometime in the '70s?

MR. SABARSKY: In the early '70s.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: In the early '70s, right. That's okay.

MR. SABARSKY: So it was about 20 years ago.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: See, I also did - I was lying to you. But that's only the Japanese. And I did the Schiele show, and it was very successful. Then I did the Klimt show, it was also very successful.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: For the Japanese?

MR. SABARSKY: Then they came to me and said they wanted me to do a Chagall show. I said, "I have nothing to do with Chagall." They said, "Yes, but you know who Chagall is?" I said, "Of course I know who Chagall is. I can tell you he was born then and there and [inaudible] and so on and [inaudible] Berlin and so on. But that doesn't" -- they insisted. And I made a show. And then they made me do a surreal show. However, I did hire as my partner in there -- Kramer (phonetic) wrote the introduction - Charles Byron, who was a dealer in surrealism. So we did it. But it was in the '70s. And I liked it so much better than to deal in art, to make exhibitions, that I started without it, and that's how it started.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: And in 1987 - '86, I left Madison Avenue. I took this place. And I said, no customer traffic anymore. No gallery, no shows. I kept on dealing. Slowly - I still do sometimes. I buy and sell. But I concentrated mostly on the museum exhibitions. And I did hundreds of different places, and there's about 30 cities in Italy alone where I did shows.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And you did some, I know out in Long Island. There were some.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, that was a museum there in that - stupidly, for one year I worked as a director there.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: I see.

MR. SABARSKY: Without remuneration. I just wanted to be -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: What's the name of that museum?

MR. SABARSKY: Nassau County Museum of Art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: And I really - well, I can say it. I put it on the map, I think, at the time. I made a Schiele show, a Klimt show, a - what other show did I do?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Where did you do - you did a print show in the late 80s, didn't you? German expressionist prints?

MR. SABARSKY: It's still running now.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: It's still running?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh, sure. Right now it is in - where is it now? Starting in - it's going to Berlin in September. But before that - in Düren here, near Cologne.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: But I did many, many shows. And I did in the last - well, since I started in this business, I showed German and expressionist art worldwide from Tokyo to Palermo and from Berlin to Tel Aviv to over seven-and-a-

half million people. No living - no private person can say that. I don't think even Count Baron Thyssen can say that.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: And after all, what he did is just take an inherited collection, so to speak, and showed it around the world. But I do these exhibitions. And it's very satisfying. It's also very demanding. I work seven days a week.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Do you write the essays for the -

MR. SABARSKY: Everything. I do everything. I do - even like, I do the typographical part. I do the design.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You do?

MR. SABARSKY: I do everything in there, whether it's the spine, whether it's - I mean, if there is anything that is wrong, I am to be blamed for it because this is my - first of all, I told you I was a designer. And so if you're a designer in one field, you're also a designer in any field.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure. Makes sense.

MR. SABARSKY: You visualize things. And this is the big fun that I have, that we are doing these - all these books that you see here.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure. The Grosz I know is a recent one.

MR. SABARSKY: They're mine. Yeah, they're all mine, yeah.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh, and those are all yours?

MR. SABARSKY: They're all mine, yeah.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And you started to teach now? You said you've been teaching.

MR. SABARSKY: I started the New School about, I don't know, 18 years ago, whenever it was, 17 years ago.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And what were you teaching?

MR. SABARSKY: I taught one course for, I think, two years, Vienna at the turn of the century. General - four evenings, it was. And then one general evening, and then one about Klimt, one about Kokoschka, one about Schiele. And then I started - I didn't like that too much because it was with slides. And it's not my shtick. My shtick is to have a more informal talk - lecture. And so I started - I don't know how this came about. The art business and how to become a successful art dealer.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Ah. Uh-huh.

MR. SABARSKY: And then I worked at the New School. A few years, I worked at the New School. And then I changed over from the New School to New York University. And now I've been at New York University for, I don't know, seven-eight years or something like that. And it's a very successful course. It has up to 100 students, worldwide. This last time, I had five or six from Austria, three from Germany, two ladies that came over from Paris. This for those five weeks that the course took, because it's unique. There's no other - nobody teaches the art business itself. Besides, there is an old saying: Those that know do, and those that don't teach.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: And usually, the successful art dealers are not giving courses. It is usually somebody that, even if they talk about the art business, they are not the dealers themselves. And in my case -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You enjoy it.

MR. SABARSKY: Otherwise, I wouldn't do it.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: And it's a lot of fun.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, good. Maybe before we finish, you could -- I just have a couple more questions. One, I'd like to just ask you, did - when you were buying works of art, did you ever have problems with fakes?

Did people try to pass works off to you?

MR. SABARSKY: Of course. There were two here today.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah?

MR. SABARSKY: Of course. Every art dealer has.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: How do you deal with that?

MR. SABARSKY: Well, it's part of my course.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: But I mean, how do you deal with it? First of all, there are only - there is no personal life who can be an expert in all art from pre-Columbian to contemporary.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right. Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: Like you know, we have some professions in this world of ours that are so silly, like people who appraise art.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, how can they appraise art without being an expert?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: First of all, who tells them that it's genuine?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: And even if it is genuine, how much it is worth, because they are not art appraisers that say, "My specialty is such-and-such." They are art appraisers. And even New York University gives a course, how to become an appraiser, which is the silliest thing there is. I was part of it in the beginning, and I stepped out of it because I was very outspoken and told them it cannot be done. That's why also the auction houses that used to be - they still now have so-called experts. You can't be an expert about école de Paris, about the School of Paris with 40 artists.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: Nobody is alive that can be an expert on that. How do you go about it? In each case, you can be an expert in one or two or three or four artists in a lifetime. The next thing is, you have to know who the experts are. Of course, you develop an eye and you see the obvious fakes immediately, if you work long enough in the field.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: But then, you either - you are responsible for it. And if you're sure, fine. If you're not sure, you go to the real expert. And each artist has an expert. Whether they are qualified to be experts or not is the subject for another lecture.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: But they are. They are established. Usually, it's family members, who are in many cases not justified at all. But they are. And in the case of certain experts of artists of the twentieth century, it can often even happen, theoretically or maybe practically that an expert will say a work is fake when it's genuine, or he can say it's genuine when it's fake.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: But if he is the expert, his word is the final word. As you probably know, the Rembrandt research committee in Amsterdam, which has been sitting, the five people, for 26 or 27 years - one died already. They are still not through with the works. They are only up to 1640 or 1650. And they still haven't decided whether all the works are genuine. So who am I? Or who is any dealer to be an expert, right? But it is a very dangerous field, and it is a field that is easily defined by three answers. If somebody shows you a work of art and you are an expert, you have only three answers: Yes, it's genuine; no, it's fake; or the third, which is the most difficult to say, is, "I don't know." And many, many, many people cannot say, "I don't know." They think they lose. And I think again.

And these two that were here today, one was a distinct forgery, a very bad one. And I told the man. And it's interesting that this man has a gallery, or his family has a gallery. And they are known to be questionable. Of course, I won't mention the name.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Uh-huh, right.

MR. SABARSKY: But I always say, if you find something that is genuine in their gallery, it's an accident.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: But the other one that came up was not so clear, and it was a very complex situation, with the real signature of the artist, but the mountain belonged to the work. So I told them my opinion, but I said, "I'm not giving to you in writing. You go to the expert, who is in Europe, there and there and there, and that's it." But you have that all the time. And of course, your very, very excellent -- should I give you a little anecdote to finish?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: There's the story about - there are two figures in Austrian folklore, Count Bobby and Count Rudy. And they're both a little bit, you know, degenerate. So they're not very smart. So Bobby says to Rudy, "I was in Italy and I found a beautiful Caravaggio painting. But I don't know how to smuggle it out of Italy and into Austria." And Rudy says, "That's very simple. You go to some restorer in Italy. You let him - you give him the Caravaggio. You tell him to cover it with something and paint some landscape or still life. And you bring it over the frontier, you say it's back on temporary artist. They charge you a couple of dollars and that's it. You get to Vienna, you go to a restorer. He washes away that landscape. And you have your Caravaggio." And a few months later, they meet in Vienna again. And Rudy says to Bobby, "Well, how did it go with your Caravaggio?" He says, "Wonderful. I went to a restorer in Palermo. He painted something over my Caravaggio. I got it over customs. I didn't have to pay anything - contemporary artist. I got to Vienna. I went to a restorer. He washed away the landscape, and he washed away the Caravaggio, and underneath was a beautiful portrait of His Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph the First."

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: So this is the story of fakes.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Tell me before we end what exhibitions you're working on now.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, we have running right now an Egon Schiele exhibition in Vienna. We have a Klimt show that is coming on May 28 to the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina. Minalti (phonetic), you know the Spoleto Festival, he saw my Klimt show a year ago in Florence, and he was enthusiastic about it, and he contacted me, and I'm doing that. I have a George Grosz show opening in Passau, a city in Germany. I have a Otto Dix show opening on the 30th of April, next week -- yeah, that's April - in Krakow. I give a talk there on the 17th of May. I have a graphics show in Düren on the 16th of May. Düren is a town between Aachen and -- Cologne and Aachen, that area.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes.

MR. SABARSKY: That area. Then I have a Kokoschka, Kirchner, and Klee show at the Museum, the Modern Art Museum in Tel Aviv. And I have a - this is easier. Klimt in Charleston, South Carolina, then the Schiele was in Paris is now in Vienna and then goes to Aix-en-Provence and then to Albi to the Toulouse-Lautrec Museum, and from there most likely to Portugal. I'm still negotiating. And then I have the graphics show, I told you, in Düren. And then it was in Bombec (phonetic) right now. Then I have the Grosz show in Passau and it goes to Bottrop after that. The Otto Dix show was just finished last week in Gara (phonetic). It's going to Krakow, then to Rosenheim, and then to Vienna. The Feininger show goes to Berlin in September. Kokoschka show, I told you about. What else? And then I'm doing a show in many, many cities of Germany, France, Switzerland, Holland, and Belgium, and Austria.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: How do you find time to do this?

MR. SABARSKY: Oh -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: And you write a catalog for each one?

MR. SABARSKY: Of course. Well, each one - not all of these shows are brand-new shows. They are shows that exist, and they just continue.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes. Right.

MR. SABARSKY: But, you know, you can work - do you know how to work 25 hours a day?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: Do you know how to work 25 hours a day?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah, I would love to be able to do that.

MR. SABARSKY: Do you know how to work 25 hours a day?

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: You tell me how to do it.

MR. SABARSKY: You get up an hour earlier.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: [Laughter]

MR. SABARSKY: [Laughter] Anyway, and then I do - I'm working on four or five books. And next year, I'm planning to do this. I haven't proposed it yet. But I want to do a course, also at NYU, how to make international exhibitions. I think there is none. There are several courses, museum administration and all that.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Sure.

MR. SABARSKY: But not for a private person or a dealer.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Right.

MR. SABARSKY: Dealers do not know how to make shows or museums. And I think it would benefit them. I also want to do a little book about that.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: On the making international exhibitions?

MR. SABARSKY: Making international.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, you have certainly led a very interesting life and done a great deal.

MR. SABARSKY: I'm just beginning. I'm only 80 years old. So I'm still have many, many -

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's right.

MR. SABARSKY: [Laughter]

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Absolutely.

MR. SABARSKY: Well, and then I'm doing a series of Little Books now. It's called *The Little Picture Book*. The first one will be *The Little Egon Schiele Picture Book*. And the next one is *The Little Gustav Klimt Picture Book*. I do not know whether it translates well into English because picture book is almost like something that is for children.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yeah.

MR. SABARSKY: But it will be only - it's the size of a novel and it only has 64 watercolors in it that people will buy at my museum shows, hopefully.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, I see.

MR. SABARSKY: I also have another project which I haven't told you about yet, if we still have room on the tape.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Yes, we do.

MR. SABARSKY: Krumau is a city in Czechoslovakia that the mother of Egon Schiele was born. The house where she was born still exists. He himself was painting a lot in Krumau -- he loved the city - until he was thrown out.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: That's right.

MR. SABARSKY: And we are - the city of Krumau gave us the old city brewery. When the Communists stopped - when the Communistic government was stopped, there were many realty objects. There were houses and other things, factories, that were owned by the state. And they tried to make use of them, so they gave us the old city brewery, which was not working anymore. And we are making a cultural center there with the subtitle Egon

Schiele Documentation Center. And that opens in July. And I'm president of that group. So that's another little function.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Oh, that should be a very wonderful contribution.

MR. SABARSKY: Krumau is a city of 15,000. And four weeks ago it was designated by UNESCO as one of the 300 most beautiful cities in the world. And that is where we do this because it has only 15,000 people, but it has one million visitors a year. So we figured that that would be a good addition to the city and so on.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Definitely.

MR. SABARSKY: That's another thing. Okay.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: Well, thank you very much.

MR. SABARSKY: You're welcome, I'm sure. Thank you.

MS. WASHINGTON-LONG: We appreciate that time.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...June 11, 2009