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# Oral history interview with Everett Ellin, 2004 April 27-28

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## Transcript

### Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Everett Ellin on April 27 and 28, 2004. The interview took place in the office of the Archives of American Art in Washington, D.C., and was conducted by Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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

### Interview

LIZA KIRWIN: This is Liza Kirwin interviewing Everett Ellin at the Archives of American Art office in Washington, D.C., at the Victor Building. It's April 27, 2004.

And we've had numerous phone conversations about your career, but I guess it would be best to begin at the beginning, when you were born, and some information about your early education.

EVERETT ELLIN: Oh, I didn't know we were going to do that, but that's easy; that's easy. Well, it was a chronology; it was a classic - I guess I'll begin with high school maybe.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay, what year were you born?

MR. ELLIN: Nineteen twenty-eight.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay, and where?

MR. ELLIN: In Chicago, Illinois. My father was a CPA [certified public accountant], my mother was a librarian, and I went to public schools, which were very good in Chicago, not fancy but good, tough schoolmarms, good education. I went to a public high school. My parents wanted me to go a private high school sponsored by the University of Chicago, paid to go, and I said I didn't want to go, because my friends who went to that school were all mixed up, I said, and not happy kids.

And I liked the public school; it was a chance to be a leader. There were students from other ethnicities. There were some who were juvenile delinquents. It was just a good - it was life, and I said I would have preferred to stay at the Hyde Park High School, and I had a first-class education. And then the question is - oh, and I was a student leader. I was president in my class and editor of the yearbook, and I was very happy. I enjoyed my life, couldn't - you know, then comes the issue, what is this promising student to do with his life? I was interested in architecture, I thought, and my father -

MS. KIRWIN: Chicago is a good place to get interested in it.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, it is. And that's one of the reasons, because I was very aware of all of the wonderful architecture, and even Mies van der Rohe, you know, and others held forth in Chicago, did a lot of great work there. And my father, a cautious man, had me meet with a client of his who was an architect, and this man said - he was a little bitter - no son of mine would be an architect and told me everything that was wrong about it.

So I changed my emphasis and I decided that I would study engineering, because I had an uncle who was an electrical engineer, and I had a technological aspect. But my father wanted to make sure that we'd made the right choice. He said, I want you to go and get some aptitude testing, and there's a man called Dr. Johnson O'Connor, who was a pioneer in aptitude measurement in adolescents. He was in Chicago. So I went to his mansion right off the blustery Lake Michigan, within eyesight of the lake, and I had two days of tests, and I enjoyed them very much. And the scores came in - in numeric form, like a report card. And my father couldn't make head or tail of what this told, about what this -

MS. KIRWIN: He didn't know how to interpret it.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, no. So he said we're going to meet Dr. O'Connor, and he's going to tell me what this means. So I groaned. And then we went down and we sat in his study, and he welcomed us and he looked at the score, and he looked out at Lake Michigan for about a minute or two, and then he said to my father, "Your son suffers from the handicap of the too-many aptitude boy." And I thought that was great; I just - oh, wonderful, too many aptitudes. What's wrong with that? And he said, "He will have difficulties in making choices because he rates high in every category. He could do all of these things." My father was heartbroken. I was delighted because I knew what a Renaissance man was, and I said, okay, to myself, you're a bonafide, qualified, young Renaissance

man, and go forth - frock to fry - you know, be one.

And then I opted for engineering school, and it was the wartime by then, and I was - I think I was admitted to MIT, but we had all decided that the University of Michigan was a good place to go. They [have an] excellent school of engineering, Big 10 school, and I could get there by train from Chicago. So I went to the University of Michigan.

I studied engineering, and they had a - it was an excellent, old-fashioned engineering school but very good in the fundamentals - very, very good. And they had certain options where you could produce - or pursue - two disciplines at the same time, and you didn't get two degrees, but you were basically certified in two fields. So I got a kind of a joint degree in mechanical and industrial engineering. It required an extra year of study, but I was a fully qualified mechanical engineer and industrial engineer.

And in Michigan I was a notorious student leader; it was easier because the older guys were all fighting the war. And I was, you know, the student body president in the engineering school twice, and I was an editor on the yearbook, and I was - I edited the sports page on the school - on the college paper. And I did many, many things, and I was also on the disciplinary - the student disciplinary body of the entire campus, sort of for self-governance of students who were - [inaudible.]

And I moved very widely in the liberal arts area because I was so very diverse in my interests. And I had a fairly good liberal arts training as an engineer because we had good English teachers of our own. I took poetry class, and, you know, I was very, very fulfilled in college. I had fun. I was a leader.

I did very well as - even though I played hard, I studied hard. I had time for everything. I graduated with Tau Beta Pi, which is the engineering Phi Beta Kappa. I had very high grades. I tried for a Rhodes Scholarship. I didn't get it because they always favored liberal arts students for Rhodes Scholarships. So I decided to go to law school -

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: - and the dean of students suggested that to me, because he said, "You did such a good job as heading this men's judicial counsel, you know; you have natural gifts in the law and you're restless and you're very young." I was just 20. He said, "Why don't you go to law school?" I didn't want to go to work as an engineer. It looked too mechanical, too restrictive. I didn't like the kind of recruiters that came to hire us. And so I applied to Harvard Law School, and I got in, and I had a half a year to wait because I was a mid-term student. So I was an instructor in mechanical engineering for a semester, as the veterans began to come back and they were really short -

MS. KIRWIN: At Michigan?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. I taught a steam laboratory. It's like steam engines, you know. It was a basic school, you know. We really worked with steam engines. I taught steam laboratory and thermodynamics, and I was at least five to six years younger than all of the students I had.

And then I went off to Harvard Law School, and I had three wonderful years there. Sometimes you were in a class that is special in terms of diversity, or just the verve, you know. I was in a class that was bright and playful, and the professors adored us because it was once a decade a class like that came through, and the faculty just doted on us. And so there was a lot of great camaraderie, a lot of friendships built.

It was highly competitive. I mean, you couldn't - there was a movie called Paper - a television show called Paper Chase. It was all about how hard it was to survive Harvard, and that was all true. It was hard to survive in the sense of doing well, but it was also hard to stay in the class - I mean, not to be excused. And on the first day of - when you'd come to Harvard Law School, there's a big meeting of everybody, all the new students, and they break them into three - I think three groups, about 150 each. And the dean said, "Look to the man to the left of you, look to the man to the right of you, and one of you won't be here for graduation." I mean, it was about that - it was about the attrition rate.

But I survived, and made a lot of friends. And I did well at law at Harvard. I graduated cum laude, but I made a promise to myself that I was going to use my presence in Boston to become a cultured man as well as going to Harvard Law School. So - well, my roommate and I got some season tickets to the Boston Symphony, and we tasted the fruits of Boston, and we went to lectures at other schools. And he ended up - I ended up - I said, I want to work only hard enough to graduate with honors. I didn't care about being the highest amongst them because then I wouldn't be able to do the other things.

And I was so ecstatic when the honors were awarded. I was the last man in my class to graduate cum laude. The - tuned it perfectly. So I left Harvard. I wasn't - I just felt worldly, you know. I was very at ease in a different

arena than I had been in before.

MS. KIRWIN: And at that time, what did you think you would do with the law degree, initially, when you left Harvard?

MR. ELLIN: Well, you have to understand that the Korean War was going on at the time, and all of us believed - it looked - it did not too likely that we would all come to graduate, because guys were getting drafted. Unless you got a deferment - and some draft boards gave deferments if you had only a year left. I was deferred once, but I was also in a navy reserve unit and in my third year of law school; I was still there, and I was trying to get a commission in the air force.

One of my professors was an ex-air force general, a military law expert, and he had me be a student aide to develop a manual for the air force county contract officers - how to enter contracts for military equipment and paraphernalia. And I did all the research for that manual. It was a big project. He said, "You know more about military contract law than anybody in the country except me, and I want to see to it that you get a commission in the air force, because what you know is very valuable." And he gave me a letter of introduction to somebody at the Pentagon, and I went to see that man on spring break and he said, "Oh, very well, put your papers in the normal way," he says, "I'll have the general who's in charge of the procurement division put something in your file and maybe you'll get a commission." And I did; I got a direct commission, and so my career was on hold.

No one knew how long the war was going to last. I figured I was in it for two years, and I didn't know - I had some idea that when I got out I would go into intellectual property, because that was a special interest of mine at Harvard. I had a teacher who taught it, and I won the Nathan Burkan Prize, which is given at certain major law schools for the best thesis on intellectual property, copyright, intellectual -

MS. KIRWIN: What's the last name again, Burkan?

MR. ELLIN: B-U-R-K-A-N, Nathan Burkan Prize. It was awarded by ASCAP [American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers], and Nathan Burkan was the founder of ASCAP. And I won the Nathan Burkan Prize that year, which almost assured me a job in Hollywood. So I just said, "Well, when I get out, I'll move to California and I'll get into the entertainment industry."

And then I went into the air force, and I did end up where I was supposed to end up. When I met this colonel at the Pentagon, he said - general - "If you do get a commission, and you do get orders, and you're not ordered to his command and you're sitting there, you know, at your officer's course" - because you had to take a course, although you had a direct commission. You had to go through kind of a boot camp for officers. You had to learn how to salute and march and the basics. He said, "As the orders come through, if yours doesn't say you're going to General C.R. Smith's command, you call me." I said, "Call you?" And he said "Yeah, and we'll take it from there."

So the orders start coming through and everybody was going to Aircraft Observer School. That means you sit in the back of a bomber and you look to see what was happening out there. It wasn't that I didn't feel bad about being in combat, but I didn't want to end up doing that job. So I called this man, the colonel. His name was Moroni, and it was very comical to me, like the Angel Moroni [important figure in Mormon theology]. I called Colonel Moroni, and Colonel Moroni said, "Lieutenant, sit tight."

So, I went back, and the orders kept coming in, and one by one everybody was leaving. And there was like five of us left, and then comes my orders to report to Air Materiel Command, Office of Major General C.R. Irvine, Chief of Contracting, and that's what I did. And I was a second lieutenant on a general on a - two-star general's staff, and nobody below the rank of colonel in that office, except me. And I had an office and a secretary, and my job was to write an air force regulation that may introduce logic to the process of deciding when to leave a particular airplane or technology and go for something better, you know, to obsolete -

MS. KIRWIN: Upgrading.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, or to - a logical way of declaring obsoletion[sic]. And I wrote that regulation; that's all I did. And I had a colonel - a civilian colonel supervising me, but he says, "Just do what you're doing; you're getting it right." And then the reg was written, and then I had to take it to various places around the country and have it reviewed by boards of officers.

I even had to go to the Pentagon once and present and defend this regulation, and the commanding general of the Air Materiel Command, the whole command, who was the three-star general, was there. And I would salute him sometimes coming out of the headquarters building, but he didn't know who the hell I was. But I did my presentation, and he came up to me - and he was not a tall man, but he came up - his name was - not Curtis LaMae, General - General May. He came up and he put his arm around me and he said, "That was a mighty fine presentation, Lieutenant." And this was a three-star general. And I said, "Thank you, sir; thank you very much."

And I got all my papers and went back to my home base.

MS. KIRWIN: Where was your home base?

MR. ELLIN: At that time Dayton, Ohio, Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. And then the war ended surprisingly soon. There was an armistice, and it ended way ahead of schedule. And then it was a question of, what next? And we got called in by the adjutant for the general - adjutant was a colonel - and he said, "I have the unpleasant duty to inform the assembled officers that the air force requires eight percent of the officer corps of every unit be discharged immediately." And I looked at the number, and I said, 8 percent of this number is 1.8 or something. So - and they were all career people. He says, "Before we make our selection, one of you volunteer." And I said, hell -

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLIN: - and I just said, "Lieutenant Ellin, sir." He said, "We have our man; officers dismissed." And all of these colonels came over and congratulated me, and within two weeks, I was out.

MS. KIRWIN: Hey.

MR. ELLIN: Out, and I did valuable work. I know it was valuable work, because the ordinance stayed in effect for something like 20 years.

MS. KIRWIN: Wow.

MR. ELLIN: I followed it. And it was the whole process by which we spend money on this stuff.

MS. KIRWIN: Very significant.

MR. ELLIN: And I was a 23-year-old guy given that sole responsibility by the air force, and I've had a love affair for the military ever since, because there is an intelligence there. I've known many professional officers - well, because I like them. I've always liked them. It was a very, very good experience for me.

And it was very valuable, because it got rid of good deal of the arrogance I managed to absorb by osmosis at Harvard Law School. It's - it can be a handicap; it can be a handicap. I was too much of a smart-ass when I went to that training program. I would sleep in. They said they'd never missed me and why do I have to get up at 4:00 a.m.? And a captain who ran our unit, our squadron, called me in and said, "I looked at your record, Ellin, and I'm really surprised at you with your record, and you obviously are a leader among these group here, and you're just a smart-ass. You're not setting an example." And in effect he said, you're disgusting, or something like that. And I said, that guy is right. And I just dropped everything and I was determined to become a good soldier. And I never missed drill, and I took marching very seriously. I took the whole thing very seriously, like I was a cadet at West Point. And that was really, really good for me, really.

I got out of the service with - I was the least decorated that you could be. I didn't have one medal or one ribbon, because I never was overseas, but I came out a man, and I came out with somebody with a true love of country. It was a great experience for me.

And so I got out and I went to - I did Boswell's tour. I toured Europe with a fellow officer, and I didn't know what I would do next. I had been offered a fellowship at Harvard - a teaching fellowship - when I learned that I was getting out of the service, but I didn't get out soon enough and they gave it to somebody else. So I went to Europe, and then I came back, and then I went to California.

Meanwhile, I had passed the bar. I took the bar exam just before I reported to the air force in Illinois, and I got - I passed it. So I had a law degree - I had a license. But I went to California and I took the bar exam there, and while I was practicing for the, you know, for the bar exam, I went to San Francisco to visit a law school classmate who was a clerk for a federal court of appeals judge, and I liked it. I knew that clerkships were tasty assignments. They were really nice for a young lawyer. And I saw my friend, and I said, "How do you like clerking?" And he said, "It's just great." So he said, "Why don't you look around yourself?"

So I'm walking along in downtown San Francisco on the Civic Plaza, where is the supreme court of California. So, I said, what the hell? You know, I just knocked - I went in and I asked to see - "Can I see the clerk of the court?" And they brought down this guy, William Sullivan [sp], and he said, "What can I do for you, young man?" And I said, "Well, I just got out of the air force, and I wonder if there's any judge here who, for some inexplicable reason, needs a clerk in a hurry?" And he said, "Well, how do - you were in the air force?" I said, "Yeah." "Were you an officer?" "Yes." "What did you do?" And I told him. And he said, "How did you do at school?" And I said, "I graduated cum laude." He said, "Just a minute." And he disappeared and he came back and in three minutes, said, "Come with me." And I followed him and I was ushered into the chambers of the chief justice.

And I said, "How do you do, sir? It was very nice of you to see me." He said, "Well, tell me a little bit about yourself." And he was a full, he was - had a lot of Cherokee in him. He was - looked like an Indian chief, and he was a self-taught lawyer, but he was a great judge, and in California the chief justice of a supreme court also manages the whole court system for the state; that's another function. So I told him a little about myself, a little bit, and he said, "Write me a letter when you get back to Los Angeles and tell me in writing a little bit about yourself."

And I did, and within two days I got a phone call from him, about 6:00 in the morning. He said, "I'd like you to be my law clerk." And I said, "Well, gee, sir, that's a great honor," I said, "but, you know, I haven't taken the bar exam yet and I'm basically boning for it on my own. I'm just - I don't want to drive downtown every day." He said, "Listen, don't worry; if you don't pass it the first time, you take it again, and if you don't pass it the second time, you take it again. You'd make a good clerk. When can you be here?" So there I am, a clerk to the chief justice of California's supreme court, which is a very desired job, and I don't know, there at the right place, right time. I clerked for him for a little over a year; that was standard.

And then I started looking around for a job in Hollywood, and having the Burkan Prize and being the law clerk of the chief justice - and no matter where I went to interview, I was offered a job. I went to all of the studios, and each one has a law department. Each one offered me a job, and I went to work for a law firm that did all the legal work for Columbia Pictures and operated the studio law office.

So I went to work for them, and there I was in my own little office on the studio of Columbia Pictures. All of the glamour and people with makeup and starlets and, oh, it was just wonderful. So, I enjoyed that. That was a neat job. And I was treated as a young executive who had an executive rank. So I would go to the secret screenings they would have of films, and I was also supposed to go to the sets when they were making movies. I was supposed to be on the set and see if any legal problem was arising because of deviation from the script. So I spent a lot of time on sound stages, watching films made. I learned the motion picture industry quite well.

I stayed with that firm about a year and a half, and a law school classmate of mine, who was my roommate, a good friend, he came out of the air force, too. He was the one who graduated not cum laude, magna cum laude. He was in one category above me. And he was with a spiffy law firm that represented only movie stars and major motion picture producers, as they were all leaving the employment of big studios and became independent operations. So I joined that law firm, and I did - I don't know, I did the lower echelon work, but I met a lot of famous people in the course of that. I met a lot of young actors. Wrote contracts for some of the people who, you know, when they came to work at Columbia, somebody had to write their contract, and I always got the job. James Coburn became a personal friend. I wrote his contract. I wrote a lot of contracts for people who became big TV people. Sony was - and they were starting to make television programs at Columbia and then -

MS. KIRWIN: What year was this?

MR. ELLIN: Well, that was - let's see; I clerked for the chief justice in '50. I guess '54, round numbers. And then I went to work with his firm, and then I was there about a year, and then I got offered a job with the William Morris Agency as the aide - the sole aide to its number two man. And the William Morris Agency owned the building where the law firm rented offices, so in the elevators just going up to my law firm, I met a lot of people at William Morris.

And one of them suggested me to the number two man, who wanted a smart young guy who could learn his job in case the founder of the company were to die and this man took over, that it would be somebody who could handle his job. So I really got a chance to see the theatrical agency business from the inside. I listened in on all his phone calls. He wanted me to just listen, and I attended all his meetings, and I represented him at other meetings. So I really saw, you know, the commerce of Hollywood, and like you never, never get to see it. And I can't tell you what that insight did for me in my abilities to observe and diagnose the imaginations of the art world. It was kindergarten stuff compared to Hollywood. I mean, it was laughable, it was so similar that -

MS. KIRWIN: In what ways?

MR. ELLIN: Well, the main players - for example, an art dealer was like a movie producer, you know, and he does shows, and they're like movies; and the art dealer is also a kind of an impresario for artists. And he is also just like a theatrical agent; he represents talent, and guides their career, makes their moves, and is a godfather and a friend and confidante. You know, the titles were different, but the functions were very similar. Like Sidney Janis was like an independent motion picture producer, and then he would have younger people working there and they would do - sometimes they were allowed to organize shows.

It was - the whole process had to do with stardom, money, and celebrity, and being in the public eye, and how to be strategic about when to release a talent, you know. Sometimes if you do it too soon, it's a big mistake. How do you capitalize on talent? I mean, I understood that so well, and it was not overlooked by the art dealers I was meeting in New York, because I asked them questions about strategy, you know. Why are we doing it this way?

Why has this show been - what kind of pictures are going to be in this Jasper Johns show? I mean, have you thought about this? Is it really the right timing? Is that the right body of work to bring forth?

They saw me as canny, you know, because I had - I wasn't just doing things - knee-jerk reactions. I had a strategic mind about fame and fortune. I learned that in Hollywood. My father-in-law, by the way, was the president of Technicolor Corporation. He was a good businessman. I was well schooled, but basically by observation. That's a - you just learn by being there, and that's what that man at William Morris - he didn't have time to train me; he just wanted me to see how he made his deals, and included is seeing how he cut the ground out from people. He did the same thing to me, by the way. He got nervous when I learned his job so well that he boxed me in a corner and gave me a suite of offices, and called it a promotion, because he was frightened and he was afraid of me. Typical, typical Hollywood.

MS. KIRWIN: Hollywood paranoia.

MR. ELLIN: So I suspected that was happening, and I kept seeing him in the corridors, and I said, you know, I like my new office, and my secretary is fine, and I'm not getting much work and I'm not getting much in my in-basket, you know, anything you need me for Morris. And in William Morris Agency, you do well if you had a New York accent, because they all came from New York. So his name was Morris Stoller, but you had to call him Marris [ph] - Marris.

So I saw him in the corridor. I said, "Marris, I really don't have anything to do. Can I just see you for a minute?" So I came into his office, and he wasn't very happy, and I said, "Marris, I don't think you ever intend to give me any work, do you?" And then he looks out onto El Camino Drive, and he looks and looks, and he says, "Everett, it's time for you leave the Marris office. There'll be a month's salary there tomorrow; turn in your car." And he didn't even say good-bye or wish me -

MS. KIRWIN: Your car?

MR. ELLIN: Well, they gave us cars.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. ELLIN: No, actually I didn't - I wasn't given a car. I had a car, so they paid for all my oil and gas. If you moved from New York, they gave you a car - a company car. And I was out of the Morris office so - [laughs] - and after the Morris office, I studied acting.

KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. ELLIN: I got involved - the fact that I was starting to start up acting while I was there, I got into a workshop with Eugenie Leontovich. She was a disciple of that great art - he had this actor's workshop in New York; his name escapes me at the moment. She was a great actress.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you spell her last name?

MR. ELLIN: Eugenie Leontovich, L-E-O-N-T-O-V-I-C-H. She played Anastasia in the Broadway show Anastasia. She was a great actress, a Russian. And she worked under the Actor's Workshop, work out - player - Actor's Workshop in New York. It was Lee somebody. It will come to me.

MS. KIRWIN: Probably.

MR. ELLIN: He was the leading trainer of people like Brando and others. The method -

MS. KIRWIN: Strasberg?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, Lee Strasberg. She had a workshop in Los Angeles, and I attended it. I got accepted by the instructor just by [her] saying, "Here, join this improvisation. Here's the situation: go on out there; let's see your stuff." And she said to me afterwards, "That's remarkable; you were very good. I got students, it's been a year, don't do any better than that. You can join us."

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. ELLIN: So I went to it diligently for six, seven months. And -

MS. KIRWIN: Then did you try to pursue acting in any serious way?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I made some attempts, but it was difficult for me to be taken seriously because I was known as having been, you know, a senior agent at William Morris. And they would laugh, and they would say, "You an

actor?" You know, "Come on, you're an agent." I wasn't taken seriously.

So I was pondering, what do I do now? And I had a girlfriend who was a painter, and she knew some of the younger artists in Los Angeles who did not have gallery connections and couldn't find one, or they didn't like the gallery owner or the lack of professionality [sic]. So they said, "Could you help us negotiate a contract with this gallery?" And I tried and nothing happened. So they said, "You know, you would make a good art dealer. Why don't you open a gallery in Los Angeles?" And I said, "That's an interesting idea." I had a good art awareness, because when I was a high school student in Chicago and I used to work for my father's accounting firm, it was within walking distance of the Art Institute, and I went there all the time when I had free time.

And in the beginning it was to impress a young lady from California who was in Chicago for the summer with her family, and she liked art. So I figured that would be a good way I could make some progress with her, but I liked it very much myself, and I got a very good grounding in art just by looking, and I liked it. And I was very meticulous; I looked at everything in that museum a lot, and I read, but I didn't take any - I didn't like instruction, particularly. I just liked to know about the schools, and I was doing - I was my own art historian in a way. So I was at ease, you know, with art, and I decided to open this gallery.

MS. KIRWIN: Who were the other galleries in town at that time in Los Angeles?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I'm talking - this was the end of '57. And I told you, did I not, about Ferus had opened that year, but there was - Paul Kantor was the - had a very elegant practice selling high-priced 20th-century pictures.

MS. KIRWIN: That's K-A-N-T-O-R?

MR. ELLIN: K-A-N-T-O-R. Yeah, he's in my list.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay, good.

MR. ELLIN: Dealers I knew - and Frank Perls had been around a long time. He was sophisticated. And then there were quite a few galleries that just were making the motions of being a gallery, but they weren't - they didn't have any particular message. They were doing all right, but there was so little there. We were not producing the collectors, because we didn't have good stuff in Los Angeles, except those few dealers who had more or less expensive art, and then there was some Hollywood people who were collecting. But there wasn't a core, or a cadre, of collectors. When -

MS. KIRWIN: Who were some of the Hollywood types? Vincent Price and people like that?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. People - Vincent Price was a collector of some renown. Milton Sperling's wife - by the way, I married that young woman artist [Joan Jacobs].

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, you did?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: We'll get back to that.

MR. ELLIN: One of her best friends to the same art teacher that my wife went to, a very good teacher. It was Betty Sperling, Milton Sperling's wife, who was a pretty good painter, and she and my wife were very good friends, and her husband - she was Jack Warner's daughter, and Jack Warner was the most powerful of the producers of Hollywood. He was like an aristocratic sort of guy, well mannered. And they were the royalty, you know, of Hollywood. They did a lot of entertaining, and my wife and I were typically their representational interesting young couple with taste.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] Oh, that's lucky for you.

MR. ELLIN: It was. My wife was very timid about social events, very timid, had a great difficulty growing up. And always at the last minute she would bow out and not go.

MS. KIRWIN: And what was her name?

MR. ELLIN: Joan Jacobs. And Joan Jacobs - I gave her some shows. She had wonderful reviews. There's a writer - an art historian in Philadelphia - who was having a book published on her. She was one of the overlooked figures of the times. She had shown at the Green Gallery in New York, which I arranged, very well reviewed. David Smith, who I knew very well, loved her work. They swapped pictures. She was very, very talented, very precocious, preceded - she did paintings, Rauschenberg-like paintings, before he did, and I have many catalogues of her work; you can see it - a very good artist. I gave her about two or three shows, and then I was able to arrange one at the Green Gallery, which was a good avant-garde gallery, a few years later.

MS. KIRWIN: What year did you marry?

MR. ELLIN: I'd say we married probably, let's see - I guess in 1958, because we were dating each other when I created the gallery. And then we got married in that year, and then when I had to go to French & Company, she was too shy to go to New York, and I had to do something to - you know, for economic recovery. I couldn't carry the burden - [inaudible] - of the gallery. So she stayed in Los Angeles and promised that she - you know, if things worked out at French & Company, she would move to New York. But she was never quite up to the move, and French & Company - I had this premature death, you know, when the owners of French & Company, the Samuels family, were in dire straits because they weren't doing well with their antique business; it was outmoded.

And it was very prestigious, but they had this big, valuable property, that whole building on Madison Avenue, and they were offered a chance to sell the building at a profit, bail out, sell the French & Company business, and to name somebody who would stay in the building. And then Parke-Bernet remained in the building. You know, Robert Dowling, who headed this company that bought out French & Company, bought out the building. He wanted this space that the gallery was in as his private office, because I remember the day he came by to look at that space, and I had no idea who he was or what this guy was doing looking at - you know at - at, like a real estate broker, you know. He - that's when they sold out, and it was a great shock to Clement Greenberg, the mastermind and the spiritual leader of the gallery, and certainly to the artists who - the gallery was a success of esteem beyond belief.

It was really - to be in that gallery - you know, tomorrow's big stars: [Kenneth] Noland and [Morris] Louis and [Jules] Olitsky were there, and David Smith was in the gallery, and Barney Newman and [Adolph] Gottlieb, and, you know, it was a stellar operation. When it shut down, it was the talk of the town, because it was very much liked by the artists and it was - it was very museum-like in quality. You know, it didn't have the aura of a Sidney Janis or Leo Castelli, because the gallery didn't have a following of customers, you know. There wasn't much selling happening at French & Company, because there was nobody there to sell or who could sell. Even the director they had in the prior year wasn't a good marketer. I was able to sell, but it would have to be to people who came into the gallery. I didn't have a clientele in New York.

MS. KIRWIN: Now, how did you make the move from Los Angeles to New York? In one of your pieces here you said that Clement Greenberg lured you?

MR. ELLIN: No, no, Clement didn't lure me. What happened was - it was totally serendipitous; it was not - visualize it being 1957. I had maybe four or five shows in my gallery of Abstract Expressionists from California, and I had the good ones, the ones who were starting to make it, and some sculptors like Bruce Beasley, who turned into a big figure. I gave him his first show when he was still an art student at Chouinard [Art Institute, Los Angeles]. He was still a student and I showed him, and it was a very good show.

And while my show was going on, Dorothy Miller was traveling around to organize "Art of Assemblage" [William Chapin Seitz, Art of Assemblage. New York, Museum of Modern Art; distributed by Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y. 1961] at the - at MoMA, and she saw his work - sculpture, which was assembled from pieces - and she took a piece to "Art of Assemblage." And he was the, I think, the youngest artist in that exhibit.

But anyway, I was dying of curiosity to see the whole Abstract Expressionist environment in action. I needed to see it. So I went to New York for a foray, you know. I had no expectations except to learn, and I called on what I considered the best dealers. They all saw me, because things weren't all that busy and they were all interested in the potential of Los Angeles as a market, because the money was there and the celebrities were there. And every one of them saw me when I came in off the street, and the secretary said, "There's this young dealer from California," and they said, "Show him in." And they all spent the time of day with me, you know, at least a half an hour with each one of them. Sidney Janis, Leo Castelli, Betty Parsons -all the ones I called on, I saw them all.

Sam Kootz was amongst them. He was a senior dealer and a very nice man - Kootz Gallery. And while I was visiting with him, he was asking me a lot of questions about, you know, my background, and what was I doing in my gallery, where was I going. And he said, "Listen, Everett, there's an opportunity in New York. You may not know about it, but I'd like to tell you; maybe you should look into it." And he told me about French & Company, in which I had a very little awareness of, and he said, "They're in trouble. They are in the second season, they haven't had a director this season; and Clement Greenberg doesn't want anything to do with meeting collectors and selling art. He has to retain his image as a connoisseur, as a visionary, as a critic," and he was garnered that intellectual status that he had. He didn't want to be a merchant, so something - "they need somebody and they need them now."

"Why don't you just go over to French & Company and ask to meet Spencer Samuels, the president, and take a look at it." So, I thanked him, and I went over to French & Company unannounced, and I told the receptionist who I was, that Sam Kootz sent me over, and I'd like to see him.

And I was ushered right in. We talked about an hour or so. I liked him; he was very, very refined, warm man with

a - born into the art dealing and furniture business. I liked him; he's a classy guy. And he told me a little bit about the gallery, and he asked me a lot of questions about myself, and he said, "You know there's somebody you need to see - I'm going to call up and see if he's in his apartment. And then you can go over and talk to him." And I said, "Certainly."

So he called Clement Greenberg, Clem was home -

[Audio break. Tape change.]

- and he said, "There's a young man here I'd like you talk to. I'd like to send him over now." He said, "Fine." And I went over to Clement's apartment, and maybe it was now about 2:00 in the afternoon, and I did - just talked to Clem Greenberg like we're talking.

He was asking a lot of questions, but it wasn't an interview. He just wanted to figure out, well, who was I? And we talked a lot about, what did I like in the 20th century? What did I like in the 19th century? What do I like amongst New York artists? What am I doing in my gallery, and what do I want to do that's better? A lot of questions having to do with taste, and he asked my opinion.

MS. KIRWIN: How did you respond to some of these?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I just told him what I like. And I said, "Well, that painter doesn't interest me as much." He says, "Well, why?" And I would tell him why. And he would not - and Clem had a - he had a wonderful face, like a Samurai, you know. He had this big smile ,and his head was bald like a Samurai, and when you resonated with Clem, you could almost see the glitter in his eyes. He liked that connection. And he would nod, smile, and, you know, he asked me what I thought about Pop Art and, you know, all kinds of questions. And he - after about two hours of this, he said, "Everett," he says, you know, "You don't have your art history training, but you know what you're doing," he says. "But most importantly you have the eye." That was Clem's rubric that said everything, you know; you have the eye. You can see what's good by some golden standard, and he said, "You're very fortunate."

MS. KIRWIN: What, for instance, things did you tell him, and just to get a gauge of what your taste was at that time that resonated with him?

MR. ELLIN: Well -

MS. KIRWIN: Can you recall?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I told him - oh, well, I can remember something. This is coming - [inaudible] - but I know this is right. I told him I had some misgivings about Action Painting per se. You know, just - I said, just the fact that gesture enters into the making of the picture strikes me as not a good theme for a certain type of expression, because I think there's a kind of gimmick there, making something out of simply the novelty of how you apply the paint. And I'm not sure yet how much legitimacy there is and who are the legitimate artists in that group. I'm really not sure.

Well, he liked that a lot, because he had already gone through that process and there were many of them that just caught onto the Action Painting thing for want of a movement. Everybody needed a movement at that time; everybody wanted an American school that could coalesce and stand for something that we could say to the Europeans, we've got our own style - school of style - now and watch out for us, that kind of observation - a similar question about what I thought about Pop Art. I had an opinion, you know, and I said, "I wasn't so sure about the legitimacy there, because, after all, we had Dada, and some of those things were done before, but I think there's going to be good work, people approaching objects in an interesting way. And objects and visuals are becoming trademarks in advertising. It's all around us. Let's wait and see."

I gave him answers like I had an opinion. And if you had an opinion and you thought, you got a lot of points with Clem, and he had his opinions. He never rode over me hard about - in terms of disagreement - because he liked that to a degree, and he felt that I was feisty enough, you know. You had to - you couldn't be wimpy and be a protégé of Clem's. I mean, he liked to fence with you a bit. So - and he said some nice things, and then he said, just a second; he picked up the phone in my presence and he called Spencer. It's now about 4:35, and he said, "I just talked to Everett; the kid will do." And that was the end of the conversation. And Spencer got on the line and said, "Come and see me tomorrow morning." And I did, and he offered me the job just on Clem's say-so. Clem was a - there were many people Clem never accepted. He could be a tough cookie, but there was a side of him that was very special.

He was a very unique man in his scholarship. He did have an amazing eye for painting. He knew exactly how paint was laid down and all the different ways paint has ever been laid down. He had the word for - "scumbling," and all of this. He painted a bit himself. He wasn't a bad Sunday painter, but he was interested in the making,

and he understood it and he understood the innovation. He could recognize innovation that he considered masterwork, which is what he found in the Color Field painters, you know, the staining. He liked that a lot, I mean, that way of working with color.

He knew why he liked it, and he - in his counseling or observations - his painters - he did; he was very outspoken when he talked about one of their works in front of them, about discussing this work. It was a thing to watch. I watched him. I watched him in the warehouse at Santini Brothers when he would meet Morris Louis, who would come up with a roll of canvases without having been cropped yet, and they would be rolled out like a rug merchant, and he would look at each picture, and then he would look at the next one, and then he would talk about it sometimes with - to Morris Louis, sometimes with William Rubin, who was not yet curator at MoMA. He was a professor who actually, you know, came forth as a very good curator.

MS. KIRWIN: What were some of those conversations like between Clement Greenberg and Morris Louis?

MR. ELLIN: Well, it wasn't exactly a conversation with Morris Louis, because Morris was very quiet.

MS. KIRWIN: Very quiet, yeah.

MR. ELLIN: And he was very passive. Once he did the work, he didn't stand up and defend it or do anything. He said, "You decide," and it absolutely flabbergasted me to see that Clem and Bill Rubin would decide how to crop the picture and stretch it. That bothered me a great deal, because edge is edge, you know, and he selected the edge, and Morris said nothing. And I sat there; I said, "These are his pictures; how can he let somebody decide where the edge is?"

Well, that wasn't true of all of them; some were more outspoken. Ken Noland was a little more outspoken, but not a lot. If you were a disciple of theirs as a painter, you know, you had to trust his judgment. But Clem got into that stuff a great deal. I don't think it was to the detriment of the artist, because Clem - if anybody knew where to put the edge, Clem knew it. I just felt that the artist has a certain responsibility to set the edge. Kind of like an architect doesn't say, "Well, the building ends over here; just draw a line and we'll put the corner in there." It just didn't work. Clem just - there were all these gatherings -

MS. KIRWIN: Did he reject certain things and reject certain canvases and -

MR. ELLIN: Well, yeah, there were some canvases that he said, "Let's not stretch this one." And Morris Louis himself would look at his unstretched pieces and withdraw them. I had a painting of his, and I got a phone call from him; he said, "I want that painting destroyed, and I want you to tell me on the phone that you did it." So I got a young painter, and we got a hose, and we hosed the picture back to loosen it up a bit, took it off the stretcher and told him, it's done.

What was your question that I wavered from?

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, whether Greenberg had rejected certain things or works in particular?

MR. ELLIN: Yes. Greenberg didn't always like everything to the same degree, but if you were one of his painters, he respected everything you did. But, I think, Noland and Louis, they were a whole new school, you know, in what was good and what was too far out and was not yet known, you know. There weren't any real absolutes out there. Clem's opinion of excellence was - a wise man would pay attention to his opinion. He was very opinionated, and there are a lot of artists he didn't want anything to do with, really. He wasn't so unkind as to say, hey, that guy's a phony, but he had his favorites; any others, he wasn't very interested in.

He wasn't interested in the Pop artists at all. He didn't, say, get angry at me, but when I had a Jasper Johns retrospective in my second gallery, he said, "Why on earth did you do that?" And I said, "I think he's a good painter. I think he handles images in a most interesting way, and he takes commonplace images and makes them something to think about. And there's no gimmick there - there's a - it takes a lot of skill to do what he does, and he works in hard media and he has to be taken seriously." I said, "I'm going to have this show. I'm sorry I lost some points with you, but I'm not on to all of them." I liked Rauschenberg's work a lot and I liked Johns's work. I didn't quite understand Warhol yet, but I missed the call on that one. But I think what distracted me, he was so weird as a person and I knew -

MS. KIRWIN: Did you see the show at the Ferus Gallery when [July 9 - August 4, 1962] -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. Oh yeah -

MS. KIRWIN: With the boxes?

MR. ELLIN: Yes, but anyway I didn't dismiss him. I just was wondering exactly what was he doing? But then I began to see. There was something cinematic in Warhol, and I should have noticed that, because I came from

the world of cinema. But Clem didn't like all the people I showed in my California gallery, but he couldn't fault me for showing Jack Youngerman. He's a very good painter. And I showed - I gave Helen Frankenthaler a show, and he liked me for that. [Chuckle].

MS. KIRWIN: Now, when you were hired at French & Company, what was your title there?

MR. ELLIN: I was director of the Contemporary Gallery at French & Company. That was just a - that's the way French & Company chose to call it. Not French & Company's Contemporary Gallery, but the Contemporary Gallery at French & Company, and I'm director, comma, and that was my title.

So, I met all the collectors. I met all the museum people. I met the critics. I just dealt with everybody. Clem didn't want to do any of that. And I had tremendous exposure because everybody came to David Smith, everybody who could walk and some who couldn't even do that. The attendance was unbelievable, and it didn't stop for the entire run of the show. It was that way every day, and all the directors, all the museum directors, came and I got to meet them, and there wasn't much to do. The work spoke for itself.

But I had one advantage: I really understood David Smith's work. I understood his imagery; I understood how he made the sculptures. And that was one of the bases of our friendship, that being an engineer, a mechanical engineer, an industrial engineer, I knew all his tools. I knew how he bent plate steel, I knew how he cut it, I knew how he welded it, and I knew how he put on patinas. I knew all those things. In other words, I knew what his palette was with engineering terminology, and he just loved that, that I took such an interest in his -

MS. KIRWIN: In the process?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, he called it the Iron Works at Bolton Landing.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah. Did you go to see him work? Did you go to the studio?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I visited him several times, and I stayed about three or four days once and was in the studio with him, with his - he had only one helper; he was a welder, old-time welder named Leon. David was a good welder because he worked in shipyards in World War II. David knew how to weld. David knew how to bend iron, and he knew how to deal with I-beams and plate stainless steel. He knew all the materials because he worked with them. So those were like his paint.

And I knew how - it was like, Greenberg knew how to handle paint; I knew how David Smith handled the metal. And I had my - when I had my David Smith show in my own gallery, I wrote a little piece about David Smith. I always wrote something. I wrote a longer one on Ed Cattalard [ph], art and Frank O'Hara told me when he was - not that long afterwards he said, "You get Frank O'Hara to ask me for all my communications with David Smith." And he got it into the archive and he said to me, "Everett, of all the stuff I've ever written - read - about David Smith or written, this was the best piece about David's new work of anybody." I have that with me, and that was one of the highest compliments I ever got, because Frank O'Hara was something else. He really knew what he was doing, and he said, "You got it."

Yeah, and see the nuances - whether this plate was five-eighths or three-eighths was a big difference in how the thing came through. So I could see that see, and I could talk to David about it. I could say, I like that, David. I mean, I like what I - I like the way you did this. And David would love that.

And we just were two bachelors hanging in, and it was a trip visiting David, because instead of orange juice in the morning, he started out with a good brandy in lieu of orange juice. I remembered picking me up at the airport and on the way to Bolton Landing and the so-called Iron Works - he has a name for the [Terminal Iron Works] Iron Works; it's escaping me at the moment. He had a name for it. It was on the lake, the big lake up there.

MS. KIRWIN: We can figure that out.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, Lake George. He stopped his truck, and we pulled over, and he went down to a little creek with his pocketknife, and he cut out a big wad of watercress and we took it home. We used it to make a salad. David was a - he liked the woods. He liked the local people - he liked the rural people. He was a curiosity to the people at Bolton Landing. They sort of knew he was famous, but not exactly why, and it was a good setting for him. And I took note of that, and that was the first time I began to take seriously that I was similar in my makeup, that I am at my best when I live rurally and I live on land. And I own land, and I have stewardship of land, and I'm close to nature. Whenever I've gotten away from that, it's not been good for me.

I bought a farm outside of New York City, and not when I - not in those times, but a bit later - and that's one of the things - I think one of the things I learned from David is that your eye in space is important. You know, the visions - the visions that you get on a daily basis from your space was very important if you had any interest in

art, but to me it's also very important for my well-being. And it's just - David was the same thing. He had to get back to Bolton Landing. He spent four weeks in New York as toast of the town and he loved every minute of it. He rented a room at the Chelsea Hotel and he stayed for the month.

And he picked me up and came by French & Company every day at 4:00 and wanted to know who came in and what I sold, and then he said, "Come on Everett, it's time to go." And we'd go down to the Cedar Bar [Greenwich Village], and it would be about 5:30 and we'd walk in, and we went right to that big round table in the corner where only the superstars could sit: de Kooning, Motherwell, Kline was dead already, but - well, the stars. They all sat there, and you couldn't sit down at that table if you were even an artist well-known to them unless you were - they would say, like, sit down, Joe.

And Frank just - David just had me in tow, and I was the kid wizard, this - the wizard kid art dealer - and they all knew me, and they heard about the sales I was making, and they thought I was something else. So I was somewhere - and it was a few months before I came there to see what the art world was, and then I'm at court, but not in the last layer of royalty; I'm right up there a few feet from the king. That was fun but -

MS. KIRWIN: But what happened to your wife? You divorced?

MR. ELLIN: Pardon me?

MS. KIRWIN: You divorced your wife, or you got a divorce?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, we got divorced.

MS. KIRWIN: She wouldn't - she didn't come to New York -

MR. ELLIN: No.

MS. KIRWIN: - and your gallery in Los Angeles, that closed or what?

MR. ELLIN: Well, the second gallery, the one that was open -

MS. KIRWIN: The first gallery.

MR. ELLIN: The first gallery closed when I got the offer from French & Company.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: Then I came back, and gallery number two was a success of esteem. I mean, I had a lot of notoriety, a lot of press internationally. Everybody knew of the gallery, that's why people like [Jean] Tinguely came and -

MS. KIRWIN: How long were you at French & Company?

MR. ELLIN: That was rather a short period of time. It was, I think, from - his show opened there, I think, in the first part of '64. French & Company, I was only there about seven, eight months, and then I went back, and then I opened gallery number two.

MS. KIRWIN: Why did you leave?

MR. ELLIN: French & Company?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. ELLIN: I had to. They shut down.

MS. KIRWIN: They closed? Okay.

MR. ELLIN: The gallery was closed.

MS. KIRWIN: Even though you were - had David Smith sales and -

MR. ELLIN: Oh, no, the buyers couldn't care less, and one of the conditions of the sale of the building was the gallery shuts down. No more shows, and you get out as quickly as possible; Mr. Dowling wants it for his office. So I got called in by Spencer Samuels. He said, "I got good and bad news." He said, "We've sold the business. We're bailed out. One of the conditions - we should close the gallery. We feel really badly we brought you out here, but we'll pay all your expenses going back."

And a friendship formed with me and Spencer that lasted for many years. Many times he brought collectors to

me. I had a nice friendship with him. He was a neat guy, a classy guy. So that's - and then I had to go back, and then I - this time I didn't tackle a big warehouse, but I did go onto the Sunset Strip before Sunset Strip got really classy. It was starting to get interior decorators and a coffee shop, and there was a block of stores that was very pretty, and a very good Los Angeles restaurant was there just a few feet away. And I rented one of those stores and turned it into a very nice gallery.

MS. KIRWIN: Tell me the address of your first gallery in Los Angeles?

MR. ELLIN: Ah, well, let's see; it was something like 8330 Santa Monica Boulevard, but it's on a -

MS. KIRWIN: 8330 Santa Monica Boulevard.

MR. ELLIN: It was on - remember I showed you that little map?

MS. KIRWIN: But I wanted to get it from you.

MR. ELLIN: Yes, I think it was 8330 Santa Monica Boulevard, just a half a block or less from Dohini Drive, which was the street that separated Beverly Hills from Los Angeles. And Santa Monica Boulevard was not anything to look at; it was just a way to get through, but it became - it was a well-known street. It was easy to get to, and it wasn't all that far from La Cienega, where the galleries tended to agglomerate, either in Beverly - yeah, in Santa Monica - La Cienega Boulevard was the main thoroughfare for the art dealers, and I was close enough to it.

I am - I have to confess to being an existentialist, and I do have a problem about doing things exactly like everybody else. So I didn't want a gallery where artists hung out. I didn't want a gallery on a block of other galleries. The warehouse suited me fine; I liked the scale, and I didn't want to just be another gallery that you pop into. That wasn't a bad decision.

But, anyway, the second gallery was doing fine. I had no intention of leaving, but I did get an offer from Marlborough that was hard to turn down, because all of the - all of those big New York artists - he was moving away from Sidney Janis, or Leo Castelli and others, that included Motherwell and Newman and David Smith and other folks. They were not sure they wanted to go to Marlborough. They were concerned about having a British firm with some young British lackey because, you know, in - there's always - in Britain there's always the owner, and then everybody else is the lackey.

They didn't want that kind of a gallery and they didn't know what to do. So Motherwell was sort of the head of this little group, because he was a very articulate, suave guy, and I knew him quite well, because I had been his neighbor, too. I lived next door to him and Helen for a while. They found me a place when I moved to New York for French & Company, and I saw a great deal of him. He said, "Everett, why don't you come out here and talk to us, individually? We're talking amongst ourselves about maybe opening our own gallery."

So I did go out and I met them all privately, and I even met de Kooning - well, I sort of met him. I had a date with him out in Long Island, where he lived. And the day I went out, there was a brush fire and I had a - I didn't want to miss the appointment, so I drove right through the brush fire. I didn't get burned. I got to his house, and I got there and I rang the phone, and a woman answered the phone and said, "He can't see you today," which meant he was just plastered.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. ELLIN: So I never really got to talk to him about it, but there was an agreement amongst the artists how to do this. So then there was a suggestion to Mr. [Frank] Lloyd that, we'll give you the name of a guy we could - we would all like to have, and I was the man. They said, you hire this guy and we'll join your gallery.

MS. KIRWIN: This is Frank -

MR. ELLIN: Lloyd.

MS. KIRWIN: Right, at Marlborough.

MR. ELLIN: At Marlborough. And Frank Lloyd called me, and he told me who he was; of course, I knew who he was. And he said he was a Viennese - Jewish Viennese man, very, very dapper, nice looking, small statured. His English was terrible. I mean, use of words like which, that, and whom. And he called me and he said, "What which how can I do to bring you to New York?" [Laughs.] I felt like saying, well, learn how to speak English, but I said, "Well, money would go a long way." And he offered me a big salary, and I said, "Well, the cost of living in New York is high, and I need to be in a nice apartment." He says, "Don't worry, we'll pay your rent, and we'll take your unused, unsold inventory from your gallery and you can sell it out of Marlborough from the back room. How soon can you get here?"

I mean, it was a lot of money and it was exciting, and I said, here I'm doing what a museum should be doing in Los Angeles. I'm paying for all these shows. I can't be the Museum of Los Angeles right now, and I took the offer and in an orderly way shut down my gallery and showed up at -

[Audio break.]

MS. KIRWIN: Let me start this again, disc two. This is Liza Kirwin for the Archives of American Art at our Washington office, and I'm interviewing Everett Ellin for the Archives of American Art. It's April 27, 2004. And from the last disc, you left off with just coming to Marlborough.

MR. ELLIN: Just coming to Marlborough.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: All right. And how the circumstances, and how I got there?

MS. KIRWIN: The artists got together and decided you were -

MR. ELLIN: The artists he was trying to woo from other dealers wanted a solid young American dealer they could work with, and they picked me. And then I got the unexpected offer, and it was a very attractive one, and I was ready to come. So that's when I went to Marlborough. You know, I had been really working hard with that second gallery, and it was - I was doing shows that really were museum-grade shows, on a smaller scale.

And our museums in Los Angeles were nonfunctional. The County Museum had no money; they never did shows. And I'm embarrassed to say that the whole time I lived in Los Angeles, I can't even remember going into that building. What was the reason? I mean, there was nothing there. And the Pasadena Museum was also asleep at the wheel. So whatever was brought in of museum quality pretty much had to be brought in by a gallery, and I was the one, I think, doing most of that importings of good art from elsewhere.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you talk about some of the shows that you had at that second gallery?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, yeah, the second gallery - well, the second gallery I had -

MS. KIRWIN: Was it also called the Everett Ellin Gallery?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, it was also the Everett Ellin Gallery, and it was on Sunset Boulevard. That was in a nice, straight part of Sunset Boulevard that eventually became very fashionable. And I was one of the first moving in up there, but there were nice stores and some good restaurants, and it was lively. It was a good location for a gallery and easy to find, and it was a classy address, and it was good, good parking, and everything.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you remember the address?

MR. ELLIN: Well, the address - I've even got a catalogue with me that shows the front of the building with the address. I think it's 90 - it was 93-something Sunset Boulevard. I can - but close enough.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: And it - anyway, I had -

MS. KIRWIN: When did you open the second gallery?

MR. ELLIN: The second gallery was opened - let's see, when I got back from French & Company. I think it - I got back in - I got - let's see. I can tell you in a second.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: Because that's a date that's a little hard to remember, because the '60s, sometimes the dates blend together, but I have it - I have it right here. And it was - okay, the chronology. Okay, Everett Ellin's - yeah, that gallery, it opened up at the beginning of 1960. You know, I got to French & Company in 1960, and then when they shut down, it was the same year. And as soon as I got back to Los Angeles, I found a place, and I think I managed to get it opened in - yeah, I did; I got it open in 1960, because, I think, David Smith was maybe one - about my first show.

And I showed - in that gallery I showed all the people, many of the people I met and liked and could get a show arranged. I had Helen Frankenthaler, Jack Youngerman. I had a David Smith show. I had - through Leo Castelli, he helped me organize what we called a retrospective. It was a large show of Johns, and it was about 20-some works. It was a very good exhibit, and Leo kind of saved it for me. He wanted to introduce Jasper to the West

Coast, and I had a lot of good material, a lot of - it was a good, good show. And I handpicked the pieces with Leo. I remember, I got to know Jasper quite well. Jasper was very worried, or let's say uncomfortable, by the use of the word retrospective.

MS. KIRWIN: How old was he then?

MR. ELLIN: Well, he was probably - well, he's a little older than me, I think - or maybe about the same age. Maybe he was - '66 maybe - in his 30s, middle thirties. And I said, "Well, listen, it just means it's looking back over a period of time and it covers a broad period of time. It's not this year's work, or last year's work, and it's kind of a mini-retrospective and there's nothing embarrassing about it. And it doesn't put you on the dime, you know." They're all good, good works, and so that was fine with him, and I had that show.

And I had Tinguely, and then I had other shows that were not one-man shows. I had a Dada exhibition, with Duchamp and a lot of good works in it I got from various dealers, a very good - a very good show, and I also had an Arp sculpture show, very good, very complete.

I had a[n Arshile] Gorky drawing exhibition, 40-some drawings, assembled from Sidney Janis and from the sister of Gorky. It worked out that way because the show was scheduled earlier, but unfortunately the airliner in which the paintings - the drawings - were coming crashed outside of LaGuardia on takeoff and everybody was killed. And all the works were, of course, destroyed, and Sidney Janis rallied to help me regroup and gave me another group of drawings and introduced me to Gorky's sister, and she gave me the rest. So it was a very good drawing show. These - you know, these were all museum-grade exhibitions.

They were not ridiculously small. I mean, there would be 25 Arps and 40 Gorky drawings, or Jasper Johns; there was a - you know, well into 28 drawings and paintings. There were - they were pretty much one after the other, and some of my West Coast people got tucked in between, and so it started creating a mix between the East Coast and West Coast, as far as my audience was concerned. And then the California artists, by being in the same sort of venue and the same dealer who - there was more dignity to the West Coast work. It was working very, very well.

The trouble was - I mean, we had lots of reviews, a lot of interesting exhibits, but the collectors were still a small number in Los Angeles, and those, you know, more elegant exhibits - the Arp - and the Dada had a lot of [Kurt] Schwitters. I had a lot of interesting material in the Dada show that Sidney Janis helped me do. It's just, you know, you just couldn't find people that would be willing to buy that. So I ended up in the position of, you know, putting out money to do exhibits when the museums weren't doing them really at all. And it was getting difficult to sustain that quality, and by this time I was so used to doing everything really top-drawer, it was really difficult to think of retrenching, having fewer shows. I mean, if you have fewer shows, that works if you want to have a large group of collectors. I had collectors, but it wasn't enough of them.

MS. KIRWIN: Who was buying at that time?

MR. ELLIN: Well, the people that I was - well, I made a short list of some of the folks that I drew up who - that I now considered buyers. There was - Fred Weisman and his wife [Billie Milam Weisman] had become - yeah, Fred Weisman, who became not only the most distinguished collector on the West Coast, - in a very short time, but in the nation at large, and he's the Frederick Weisman who's endowed all these museums. Fred Weisman actually - he actually gave me some working capital for my second gallery when I opened it. He was kind of a backer, but he didn't own the gallery.

There was a film writer, Michael Blankfort; he bought from me. Gifford Phillips, who was probably our most sophisticated collector in Los Angeles, had been around for a while and had been buying from me before. He bought, and André Previn, the actor - or rather the musician in - the symphony orchestra director; Robert Rowan, who was a financier from Pasadena; a fellow named William Chinn; Claire Trevor, the actress; two brothers, Edwin - Ed Janss and Bill Janss were very active collectors; Betty Freeman, who not only collected but subsequently became an art consultant and I think still is; Milton Sperling, who was a movie producer and the son-in-law of Jack Warner; Betty Asher. This was a nice number, but, you know, you can't really have a predictable revenue when you're working essentially with maybe a dozen or two dozen collectors. The math just doesn't work.

I wasn't worried, but I was concerned that the Los Angeles market was starting to take shape, but what do I do in this interim while it is not yet quite in shape? It was something to think about. And when I got that unexpected offer from Marlborough, when the artist wanted their man, it was so tempting that I really just had to go. And I knew the artists who wanted me, and I knew I would have my group of artists, and it was - I couldn't really plan to continue doing the kind of shows I was doing. And it was really hard for me to think of having a gallery that did less. You know, once I set those standards and got into that groove and I could get any material I wanted, I mean, from - any one of the good dealers in New York would give me material on consignment and help me put a show together.

I had those contacts, and they liked the shows, and everybody from New York thought that they were going to be getting Los Angeles collectors, and, you know, they did. The collectors in Los Angeles would learn from me and buy in New York. So, sure, why wouldn't the dealers give me some help? It was - the dealers in New York, they were rather fraternal. There was a lot of competition between them but very little backbiting, and they had their own organization, which André Emmerich later became president, later in life, for that organization.

There was a decent group of dealers who I knew in those days, you know, and the women, Betty Parsons and Martha Jackson, you know - there were 15, 20 really classy art dealers who were decent people. I enjoyed my knowing them, and that's what - in the life of the second gallery, I was in New York constantly to maintain these contacts, to do deals together on paintings to - I mean, I was able to do sales with my own collectors. But usually I had to get the material from another dealer in New York, and by the time we split the profit - you know, the work had been done, but the profit was split and that's - I was really set up mentally to respond to Marlborough, although I was not looking towards an overture like that; it's just - it was a rather total surprise.

MS. KIRWIN: What sort of relationship, if any, did you have with Ferus Gallery at this time?

MR. ELLIN: Well, Ferus Gallery - you know, when I resurrected that warehouse and opened my first gallery, Ferus had been open, I don't know, maybe a span of six months or so. And they had a very good stable of avant-garde artists who were all from Los Angeles, maybe six or seven of them. It was Ed Kienholz, [Ed] Ruscha - well, let's see here. I had a little list in case I would be asked. The Ferus Gallery - I mean, here's a list. These are all good artists by any standard, and Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Billy Al Bengston, Ken Price, Craig Kaufman, Ed Moses, Edward Kienholz, Edward Ruscha - as he pronounced it then - John Altoon, Jay De Feo, and Allen Lynch. They were all good, good studio artists, and that was their stable. I think they were almost all aboard when I first paid attention to Ferus Gallery.

But then Ferus was very busy showing its own people, and it was - they were rather inbred. I mean, it was a clubhouse. They were very tight with each other socially, and they would not deign to say anything nice about any other gallery, but I was on good terms with them socially. I was interested in the gallery. We hung around at the same bar called, Barney's Beanery, which was next to a Beacon's warehouse, and there were either Ferus people and me or truck drivers from the Beacon Storage Company. It was a famous little place. We had parties together. We were the art world. There wasn't any sense of competition between the galleries. Ferus people did not pay me any respect until I had my second gallery. Then, when I had all this good stuff from New York, then they would sheepishly show up and see the shows and privately tell me, good work, Everett; you're making a difference.

So then I think that my success of the second gallery, in terms of the work I got and how I started building a good clientele - not big enough yet but the right people - I think that inspired Irving Blum and Chico [ph] and Walter Hopps to start doing the same thing, reaching out more. And they began to make their New York contacts and bring in work from New York by - you know, by Johns and other people, and by Warhol, and they moved in a similar direction.

But by the time they were starting to do that, I was gone from Los Angeles. I was in New York and - but they continued in that vein, doing a mixture of what they were doing, before I got to know them and what I was doing with my second gallery, and they did it very, very well. So there was a spiritual camaraderie between the two galleries. We were friends. I mean, I considered Irving and Chico friends; basically we were together a lot of the times just as buddies, and we were supportive of each other. We were trying to have what appeared to be a full deck as an art community -

[Begin Tape 2 Side A.]

- but the missing components were the museums and collectors. We had an art press that was pretty good, and we had some good critics in Los Angeles.

MS. KIRWIN: Who were they, people that you were - [inaudible]?

MR. ELLIN: Well, let's see: Jules Langsner with the Los Angeles Times. Henry Seldis was a good critic in Los Angeles, wrote well. Jules Langsner was known more nationally; he wrote for some of the national art magazines. These were competent critics. I mean, they could have been a critic, those two, in any large city. And then we didn't have that much going on, so, you know, these good critics would review all of our shows, and they were intelligently written up. I began to advertise. When I had my second gallery, I ran ads in Art International. I would - I have several with me - and I have full coverage. I sort of bought the inside cover, back cover, or the back cover itself, and I ran - I took the whole cover for my Jasper Johns show. And I had others like that for the Helen Frankenthaler show. I -

MS. KIRWIN: Did you advertise in other magazines, too, like ArtNews and Art in America?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, ArtNews, and there was an art magazine published in Los Angeles. I forgot the name of it. It was published in California. But I advertised in ArtNews and Art International. I have some of the ads. I ran good ads, and they were all noted. And I was surprised to find later that I was known of in Europe by those ads, and them reading these reviews of this gallery.

That didn't come to light until I was with the [Solomon R.] Guggenheim [Museum], but I felt when I went to the Guggenheim, I was - as an art dealer, I was well-known generally in the international art market, which I didn't quite realize that there was curiosity that far away, but it was a global market, you know. The press - the art press was a big factor.

Then comes the surprising offer from Marlborough, and my friends there - you know, the gallery was scheduled to open. Some of them hadn't signed up yet; it was very critical for them. I had to make a decision on the spot, and then Lloyd - Frank Lloyd, the chap from Great Britain who had Marlborough Gallery and owned a gallery called, I think, Hanover, but he had quite a bit of capital and he was very aggressive. He was a whole floor of a nice office building at the corner of 57th and Madison, and he made a gallery out of the entire floor, hired the Museum of Modern Art's architect Wilder Green [sp], who designed the gallery and put in slate floors on this whole floor of this building. It was very, very elegant. And he was really going in a big way - everybody was waiting, because it was going to be biggest gallery in New York, and it seemed like the money was endless. Well, they needed a good blockbuster show, not the first show but after that.

They opened more or less with a potpourri, just because it was a big social event. And when the gallery opened, the line was around the block just to get in the elevator to be there for that occasion. And Mr. Lloyd - Frank Lloyd, he was funny. He would give a $10 bill to the operator of the two elevators in the building, and their mission - if somebody got in and called for the sixth floor for Marlborough, he took them there first, and then he took people to their floors. And that is how far he went. [Laughs.]

MS. KIRWIN: [Inaudible.]

MR. ELLIN: It was like an express, and everybody else was on a local. [Laughs.] But that was Frank Lloyd. Marlborough, everybody was watching Marlborough, you know, the invasion of the Brits, and what was this going to make. And then the fact that so many good New York artists had changed over - either they were without a gallery for some reason or another and got tired of somebody, but they came to him, and he had quite an interesting group. But he also had some very good British artists, and it was a really lively place.

So my first job was to - he told me to organize; he wanted me to put a [Jackson] Pollock exhibit together, drawing on works from Pollock's estate, because Marlborough represented the estate, and with the help of Lee Krasner, Pollock's widow, who was executrix of the estate. She was going to help me with the details and get the loans, because she knew all the collectors personally and she could hardly be refused to loan somebody's picture and move it six blocks from their apartment to Marlborough.

So we had a high acceptance rate, and there were 149 works in the exhibits, going back to his earliest days. And it was all quality material, even the earliest days, that came from Lee. It was a very, very complete retrospective. It covered every period of his life, and there were some very, very important, large works from museums. It was quite a spectacular exhibit. That was in '64 it opened.

MS. KIRWIN: And you needed to get this together in a pretty quick time?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I had something like four weeks to get it together and get the catalogue done. It was - but I don't know how that was done, but it was done, and the show opened with 149 works, and it took 34 years more before anybody ever did an exhibit as comprehensive as that one, and that was MoMA in 1998 [November 1, 1998 - February 2, 1999].

So that was a huge success, and there were an awful lot of people in for the Pollock show, as you might expect. And I thought it was a yeoman job. The press liked it; they said it was a great show, and Frank Lloyd never had time to thank me for my effort. [Laughs.] Everybody else did, but the owner of Marlborough just took it for granted.

MS. KIRWIN: And that was your very first assignment with them?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, that was my first assignment, yeah, and it was - but then Frank Lloyd, he was a Dickensian sort of person. He did - everybody was a lackey to him except himself, and he worked his people mercilessly. We didn't get a - we worked six days a week and that's - I told him once that this was not medieval England and we don't work six-day weeks, you know, in American anymore. Professional people don't do it, and employed people don't do it. And I said, it's too much to ask, because this is a high-pressure environment. Everybody was coming into Marlborough, all the big collectors in New York, all the museum directors, and I had to, you know, meet them in person. And I knew some of them from the - you know, the French & Company days, warmed them up,

and, you know, it was very stressful; it was very hard for him to give you just one day off a week. And I saw this was - I found out that was pretty much his reputation. He was a hard taskmaster.

And he just - that aspect of the environment wasn't pleasant. You know, there wasn't any camaraderie and there wasn't any appreciation for good work, not that you need it every day, but you can't work that hard and be treated like a floorwalker. He wanted me on the floor. I mean, he wanted me to be there when everybody got off the elevator. And I said, "Frank, I'm not - if I look like a floorwalker, I'm not going to perceived as an art dealer. There's got to be some mystique. [Laughs.] Getting in to see the headman, that's the mystique; that's the way you do it."

MS. KIRWIN: You stay in the back.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. And he said, "No, I want you right out there; greet all the important people you know." And so I did. And I was - I wasn't really pleased by the working conditions. I knew that it would never get better, exciting as it was. And it was at that time that, once again, I get a stupendous unsolicited offer, this time from the Guggenheim Museum. And it came in a phone call from Tom Messer. He wanted to have lunch with me. He was the recently appointed director of the Guggenheim. I knew him when I was at French & Company, and he was not yet director. He ran a small contemporary art museum in Boston, and he was struggling to get works to show, and I generously loaned him things from French & Company, and we formed a friendship.

Attendance needed to be built at the Guggenheim. It really didn't get the attendance it should be getting by this point. And he prevailed on Mr. Guggenheim to hire me, because he said, this guy knows the art press; he's very personable; he knows enough collectors here. He'll be able to build an audience; I know it.

So I get a phone call. He said, "Well, Mr. Guggenheim would like to meet you." I said, "Of course." And he said, you'll get a call from his - well, it was like his chief steward - he was like a feudal lord and his chief steward, called Frank - Frank something, and he said, and now could you, or would you, he said, "Mr. Guggenheim's limousine will pick you up at 4:00 tomorrow on the corner of 63rd and 5th Avenue, south corner - southeast corner, and you will have your meeting as you drive." I said, fine. It was a very cold day, and I'm at the appointed corner and here comes this big limousine, with a livery driver, britches and all, you know, and the British hat. And he opens the door and puts me in the back seat, and then he tucks a fur blanket around me as Mr. Guggenheim had, and we started cruising around the park, Central Park. And he asked me lots of questions about art, and he had a pretty good idea where I'd been, and he was a very - he was a very charming man when he wanted to be, but he was very superior of air, very aristocratic. He'd been an ambassador; I think it was to Cuba or someplace like that. He'd been a captain in the navy, you know. And I remembered clearly that we made three tours around the park that whole drive, and that's how long it took, you know, to have this little talk.

And he made me an offer in the back seat of his limousine. And it was quite fair. You know, he exceeded my salary at Marlborough, and he gave me the title of officer in charge of public affairs, which to Mr. Guggenheim was a big-time title, because that's - in an embassy, that's a nice title. But it was very clear that I was supposed to build the public image at the Guggenheim, and I said, "That's a nice mission because the museum deserves more recognition than it's getting." And I said, "Yes," and I gave Mr. Lloyd - Frank Lloyd; I called him Frank - I gave him about a week's notice, and he very quickly turned it into something positive, because every time he had a client of any importance, he would call me in and say, "This is our man, Everett Ellin, and we're giving him up to become director of the Guggenheim." I said, "Mr. Guggenheim - I mean, Mr. Lloyd - Frank, it's not director, you know." And to the end - he was exploiting me to the end.

And then I went to the Guggenheim, and I set about, you know, building an audience, and I started out - I made a personal contact with all the members of the art press in New York. I knew all of them from French & Company. I met each one, took them to lunch, told them what some of the future plans were, and I said, "Whenever we have an exhibition, I want you to come a couple of days before you have to file, and when the show is hung, I'd like you to come by yourself and roam through the gallery and look at it in the quiet, spend as much time as you'd like; I'll give you any photographs you need. We want you to have a real opportunity to see it." And I had such good rapport with the press, we started getting much better reviews, bigger reviews, and I left no stone unturned when it came to getting attention to the museum of a legitimate nature.

MS. KIRWIN: Can I pause it for a second?

[Pause.]

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, tell me who the artists were in that - [inaudible]?

MR. ELLIN: Well, there was at the Dada show, [Francis] Picabia, [Marcel] Duchamp, [Kurt] Schwitters, all of that caliber. And incidentally, I spent an afternoon with Duchamp after the show was done. He had a nephew or something, some sort of ancillary relative who was from Los Angeles, and he arranged for me to have tea with Duchamp, which I did. But I had also a show of Wilfred Zogbaum, a good sculptor from New York, who died soon

afterwards. And my own young artist who I got into that - into the "Art of Assemblage" show at the Modern - I gave him a show, too, in my gallery. See, that was an artist who I gave a start to when he was a student, and now he was - you know, let him rub noses, shoulder to shoulder with good art. See, I liked that formula, you know, and I would have done that had I kept the gallery. Well, anyway, that's the way it was.

And then - when we left off, it was a question of -

MS. KIRWIN: You were talking about the Guggenheim and -

MR. ELLIN: Oh, Mr. Guggenheim.

MS. KIRWIN: And you had just been hired, and things that you were doing with the art press.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I worked with the art press. I had cocktail parties for them when we were opening a new show. I'd let them come over and meet amongst themselves. Mr. Guggenheim was a very hospitable man, and when we had our openings, they were always typically black tie, and the members - the food and the bar, you wouldn't believe. It had to be Johnny Walker, you know, and Beefeater. I mean, he was an elegant host, so he encouraged that. I would have cocktail parties for the press. I gave them a great deal of attention. I allowed myself to talk about it sometimes; they wanted to talk about what they were looking at - whatever they needed, and that made a difference.

I made sure that anybody of importance who came to the museum who was not recognized or noticed, I would come down and greet them personally on behalf of the museum. Like a day on a - on a Monday, when the museum was closed, the head guard called me and said, "There's a man at the front gate." And I said, "Well, gee, George, you know, we're closed," and he said, "You better come down, Everett." So I came down, and it was Kirk Douglas. And Kirk - the Gauguin show was on, that we - the van Gogh show, and he wanted to have a chance to see it, you know, without a lot of people, and I said, "Mr. Douglas, my pleasure." I spent two hours with him, walking that exhibit. And it astounded me that he had done so much research on van Gogh when he made the movie. And I have a photograph of me and him talking in the Guggenheim, and he was making a point about the self-portrait with the bandage on the ear, and you looked at van Gogh and you looked at Kirk Douglas, and there was a striking physical resemblance. That was a great day. And I did that, you know, I made - I left no stone unturned.

And when the networks wanted to do something, like they wanted to preview some new work of Shostakovich - or was it Shostakovich? No, you know, the man of very small size - Stravinski. They wanted to try out a new work of Stravinski, and they called, and I arranged on the day we were closed to bring an ensemble in the rotunda and do this broadcast, and then Stravinski was there. I mean, it just took a lot of attention and -

MS. KIRWIN: Did other museums have similar positions at this time - was this a new position for the Guggenheim?

MR. ELLIN: It was a new position for the Guggenheim, which leads me to how the title changed. It was not a title that you find in museums; you find it in embassies and places like that. And I did very, very well with building attendance in that first year. In fact, I have - in an interview for the Archives with Thomas Messer, which I printed off, he mentions several times that attendance really bloomed, in the millions, and they got enough money from their modest admission charge to give them funds to buy pictures, because the endowment didn't put up much for that, and twice he acknowledged how amazing the increase in attendance was.

When we had a [Alexander] Calder show, the line went around the block. I'm not exaggerating. So Mr. Guggenheim called me - the same man who called me to pick me up in the limousine said, "Mr. Guggenheim would like you to come over for tea this afternoon." I went to his townhouse, his mansion, and he said, "Everett, you've done an excellent job for the museum, as I knew you would, and I'd like to do something to thank you." And I said - I knew Mr. Guggenheim of being very generous with hospitality, but with money for services it was entirely a different matter. I knew he wouldn't give me any more money, but I had it all figured out. I said, "Mr. Guggenheim, a raise would be very nice." And he said, "Oh, that is impossible." So he said, "Is there anything else I could do?" I said, "Mr. Guggenheim, I'd like a different title, because the one that you have is very appropriate in diplomatic circles, but it means nothing to people who interface with museums; they don't know what that is." And he nodded and he said, "What title would you want?" "I'd like to be assistant director." And he looked out the window for a minute and he said, "All right." And if he had his sword of King John, he would have knighted me on the spot, but he did the equivalent.

And I walked out of there as assistant director. He didn't go to Tom Messer at all. He was not exactly delighted, because it didn't have an assistant director, so he insisted in calling it assistant to the director, and I said, "No, I was there, and Mr. Guggenheim said assistant director. You can ask him." And so I got the title, and all of a sudden I was a celebrity; I was assistant director of the Guggenheim. And I was already its front man; see, I was the "Perle Mesta" [famous socialite hostess of the 1950s] of the Guggenheim officially, official greeter and

everything else.

And Tom Messer was wise enough to say, "Well, if he's got this title, he can represent the museum at these meetings I hate to go to." Tom Messer hated to go to museum meetings. It was beneath him. So I went; I was the representative at ICOM [International Council of Museums] and everywhere internationally - the New York Counsel of Museums; no matter what it was, I was the man he sent. So I got very well known, and I did good work in that capacity, and as assistant director, more things were open to me. They let me work on exhibits like Calder; they let me basically be the administrative organizer of the Peruvian exhibit ["Master Craftsmen of Ancient Peru." 1968], you know, the -

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, talk about that, how that came about.

MR. ELLIN: That, well, that - people wondered how did this museum get ancient arts of Peru, ceramics and textiles? Well, Tom Messer's wife was Filipino and she spoke Spanish, as the educated Filipinos do, and she prevailed upon him to do this. And he acceded, and the board said, okay, and the Guggenheim hired a curator. Actually, he was director of the Textile Museum in Washington, and he was what they call a Peruvianist. His field was ceramics, but he also knew textiles to a degree. And he knew Peru inside out, and he had many contacts. So -

MS. KIRWIN: And what was his name?

MR. ELLIN: Tom Sawyer. Tom Sawyer was - his job was to find the work and select the work. My job was to win the approval of the Peruvian government - the president and the legislature - get a decree that I could take the stuff out of the country, to sign agreements with small regional museums and with private collectors, and actually be the persona of the Guggenheim and make commitments and sign documents.

So we went to Peru together and we traveled the country, from top to bottom. We visited archeological sites that nobody had ever been to up in the Sierra, you know, and up in the high Andes. I remember, not too far from Machu Picchu, we stayed at a small hotel, and we heard that there was an old shepherd's camp up there, Inca camp, and we walked up this trail, and halfway up the trail I heard flute music, you know, ancient flute music, and suddenly comes into view a shepherd in Inca costume, hat, everything, carrying sticks down for firewood, and he didn't even acknowledge me; he just played this tune, and this eerie music came by and he walked right by. And I said, "My God, time has stood still."

Then I was in very great shape, because I was a runner, and I made it to the top before anybody else, and then I said, "Well, I'm going to run down." They said, "Run down?" I said, "Yeah. There are flat stones in that trail that I think are there to arrest your speed as you come down." And I ran down the trail, and sure enough, those stones were right where they had to be. I reached the bottom in something like 10 minutes, two hours before they got there.

But I had wonderful experiences in Peru. I did meet the president, the U.S. ambassador. I made friends with all these collectors, rich people - rich Peruvians.

MS. KIRWIN: Because you spoke Spanish fluently?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I spoke Spanish very well. My pronunciation is perfect, so people understand me. I may not have all the words, but my grammar is okay and my pronunciation is perfect. In fact, in Peru - in the boonies of Peru, the people who worked at hotels and cafés, when they would say, you know, "Where are you from, Señ or?" And I would say, "North America," and they would say, "No es posible," and I said, "Well, what do you think I am, Señ or?" And he said, "Tú eres un Limañ o." You are a man from Lima. And I said, "Well, Señ or, if that pleases you, I am a caballero de Lima." They thought I was an aristocrat, you know. And I have a Castilian look. I can pass for a Castilian, pass for a bullfighter in Castile. I have that long face. I look like Don Quixote, and the [Gustave] Dore prince, close to resemblance. Sometimes I think I am him, but that's another issue.

It was a rich experience, and I came back from the Guggenheim, from the three - four months in Peru, and I was a changed person. I was spiritual; the last of my arrogance was gone; I felt in touch with time, I was - it was such an amazing experience to, sort of, see a culture that still exists, to see colonial culture, to go to the little towns and hamlets and be ushered into a room in a little, not even a hotel, just a home, and they had to shoo their cows and pigs out before I could use the room. It was a marvelous experience. And after I got back, I was a very different sort of person. I found the Guggenheim confining and unbelievably stuffy, and I was bored to death when I got back.

So I started thinking, using my mind, and that's when I came up with this revelation that museums haven't changed in 150 years, since the Louvre. They're still linear; everything is linear. It's a repository. It has to be an imposing building like the Louvre was when Napoleon opened it, you know, the first public museum. The Guggenheim and museums of the day hadn't changed all that much, and I said, something is missing here. I

noticed the galleries are too crowded when you bring people in, literally through like cattle, you know, like running the bulls at Pamplona. There isn't quietude; there isn't a chance to convene with the art. Something has to be done to recognize another - other manners of confrontation with art.

And that's when I started reading Marshall McLuhan, you know, and the theory of media, media theory, and I started reading his books. And I said, you know - I read several of his books - all of them, as a matter of fact - and they weren't very long, and I said, a museum is a medium of communication, in the McLuhanisc sense. And I went to a roundtable that he was chairing in Manhattan at NYU, a small roundtable, rather intimate, but I got in - just being at the Guggenheim, I got in. And there was a discussion period, and I asked him what he thought of my observation that museums are a medium, in your sense of the word. And I said, "What do you think of that?" And he pondered and he said, "You know, I think you're absolutely right." I said, "Well, don't you think, Mr. McLuhan, that museums should be addressing this reality and beginning to function as a medium and understand how they are, because inevitably they will have to square off with mass media, which will be far well ahead of them." He said, "Yes." And I said, "Well, I have this idea for a project called the Museum Computer Network, to bring the electronic age to museums." He said, "Good idea; pursue it." And I walked out of there all glowing, you know, because - like I met Moses and I told him that I - like - I found the tablet, and he says, yeah, go forth. So sell it, you know. [Laughter.]

So that's when I began to really work out the concept, and I found a professor at NYU who had an Institute of Computers in the Humanities, and I called him.

MS. KIRWIN: Who is that?

MR. ELLIN: His name is Jack Heller. And I said, "I need somebody - first of all, I want to discuss this idea with you; then I want to ask you if you can give me a quick course in computers. I need to -"

MS. KIRWIN: This was 19 -

MR. ELLIN: Sixty-six. And I said, "How do they work? Talk to me about digital data." I said, "I'm an engineer; I should get on pretty quickly and - and I'll tell you more about the dream and I'll tell you about this network concept." So he did coach me. I went to some classes of his, and I said, "Could you help me organize the computer side of this project?" And he said that he would. And he had a journal of Computers in the Arts and Humanities, so I - encouraged by him, and knowing a little bit more about computers, I went to Tom Messer and I said, "Tom, I've got this project; I think it would be good for the Guggenheim to have something to do with it." And he - I was sitting down and I told him about it, and he said - he patted me on the head and he said, Everett - he liked to talk in whispers - "Everett, we have more important things to do at the Guggenheim." And I felt like saying, you jerk, there's nothing more important than this. [Laughs.]

So I went to Rene d'Harnoncourt. I knew him because I was the museum's representative. All the museum directors knew me, treated me like a peer. So I went to Rene d'Harnoncourt and I said, I don't have much enthusiasm -

MS. KIRWIN: At the Met?

MR. ELLIN: At the Museum of Modern Art, MoMA.

MS. KIRWIN: The Museum of Modern Art.

MR. ELLIN: And I said, "My museum is not responsive. Would you give safe harbor to this project? And do one thing more for me; let me use the auditorium to convene about 15 invited museums and present the idea with Dr. Heller here, my computer man, and you don't have endorse it, but just introduce me." And he said, "I would do that. And what's more, if you get the - if you put this together, I will give you work space in this brownstone next to the museum, which was going to be torn down someday. I will make you a department chairman at MoMA so that you can come and go and have an employee's card, and you will have that office separate - separate building, and you will be paid by us, and the money from the grant will come in and we'll administer the money." And I said, "Magnificent."

So he gave me the auditorium. I invited the people. He introduced me, and there was a lot of interest immediately, and there were a few other meetings of the same people - a few more museums invited, and at that auditorium that day - I invited the National Gallery [of Art, Washington, D.C.] to send somebody, and they sent Carter Brown, who was assistant director - he had the same title I had. So he was very friendly to me, and he came up to me and said, "This is a great idea. I'm going to talk to Mr. Mellon about it, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if he funded it." And within a week's time, he did it.

MS. KIRWIN: And tell me more about - can you tell us of the idea that you had presented?

MR. ELLIN: All right, my idea was that museums have to begin keeping the information pertaining to their work in a digital form, because everything is on index cards in shoeboxes, and no curator or scholar lets that box out of his drawer. So to research what's going on in museums is a horror story. You've got to physically go to them all, and nobody tells you the truth. This is not good for scholarship; it's a lousy attitude.

So museums should know how to reduce all records, all registrar records, records of accessions, to a digital file, and each file is kept in an archive, a digital archive, and we tie all the archives together by a computer network. We take all these archives and we link them up, and then when a technology comes that I know is certain that will let you take reasonably good photos digitally, then we will make digital files of those photos and we will put that in a separate part of the same archive - I have that language from 1966 in print - and we will begin to get into the electronic age. And we or you will be ready for the day when you see what I mean about that you are a medium, and that you have to stand toe to toe with mass media, because it's going to be a battle of images inevitably - inevitably. It's moving that way.

And then I had to sell that story to the American museum community, and I traveled the world in a period of about two years.

MS. KIRWIN: So did you go to the Museum of Modern Art and have -

MR. ELLIN: I moved there.

MS. KIRWIN: You moved there?

MR. ELLIN: I resigned from the Guggenheim and I took Rene d'Harnoncourt's offer, and I didn't miss a beat. I left the Guggenheim one day, and then the next day I reported at MoMA. And I had a nice office and a secretary, and I had the friendship and support of Rene d'Harnoncourt, who was the most respected museum director in the country at the time, and I had the money from Mr. Mellon. And I got a matching grant from the New York State Council on the Arts to top it off. We had plenty of money for three years. I had a good salary too. I mean, in those days I think I was paid like $22,000. That was quite a bit of money in a museum, and I had travel money and I had a steering committee, and I -

MS. KIRWIN: Who were the members of the steering committee?

MR. ELLIN: Let's see, there was my friend from the Metropolitan. Well, there was David Vance at MoMA. There was Fred Dockstedder [ph] at one of the museums in New York. There was Dick Culk [ph] from MoMA, and the registrar at the Met was a member of the board. We had seven all together, and there was a very good group, an excellent group, hardworking, and gave me a lot of leeway, but I did fly everything before them as a courtesy. I didn't consider it a board of directors that I had to get a vote out of, but they liked what I was doing, and I was the one willing to go everywhere, and I went everywhere. I mean, I lectured all over the world.

I lectured at museums in Europe. I lectured at the British Museum. I lectured at universities like University of Lund and University of Oslo. I mean, wherever I could get a hearing, I lectured: at ICOM at their annual meeting, at many, many places all over the United States, and all kinds of meetings of college art associations. The Museum Association of Great Britain, I addressed them. I spoke at Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Institute of Contemporary Art in London, Cornell; on and on it went. There were all together about 35 lectures and/or published papers, and many read papers. I mean, I really went everywhere that anybody wanted to hear about the project, and it made the difference. I won them over.

MS. KIRWIN: Were you involved in developing standards for the kinds of information that museums need to track?

MR. ELLIN: Well, at the time, it wasn't all that complicated, because we started out with registrar information and just got that down, and we developed the software that made that possible. I got IBM to give us access to one of the first delivered mainframes, the 360. And they also gave me free computer time and programmer time so we could develop the software, and we were able to figure out criteria for fields and things so you could do some research, and this material actually useful for scholarship. By the end of three years, we had files that were useful and being used. And there was proof of concept.

And the registrar of the Museum of Modern Art, David Vance, who was also on our steering committee - no, he wasn't on the steering committee, but he was working on the project with the consent of his institution, and he took over as executive director. I didn't feel like I was needed anymore, because I'd sold the story and got it going and got the money, and I didn't want to spend my life, you know, running that organization. So I departed the Museum Computer Network and I figured, well, it would run awhile, and it did. I went to one of their annual meetings maybe four years later in Albany, New York, and it was growing, but I had no idea it was going to grow so long and have so many members who are museum people. You know, they're in all ranks, but they're the IT people, they are curators, they are directors, they're librarians, and they're the committed people - people like -

Jane Sledge [National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution] was a very key member.

MS. KIRWIN: Hi, Richard. We're talking.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, an interview in progress. Jane -

MS. KIRWIN: Richard Wattenmaker [former director of the Archives of American Art] has just joined us. Everett is talking about the computer -

MR. ELLIN: Museum Computer Network.

MS. KIRWIN: - Museum Computer Network that he started. It's too bad you missed the earlier session about the Guggenheim and his move to MoMA.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, well, the Guggenheim, I got recruited - I was always recruited from where I was - didn't ask for the recruitment, but they came, and they were usually better circumstances. And having once been a young executive in Hollywood and an aggressive Harvard lawyer, I never walked away from an opportunity that improved my circumstances. Each one did.

So now I have left the Guggenheim to launch this project called the Museum Computer Network, which I think you know about. It is an organization formed by me in 19 - initially in 1966. It was actually formed, but it got the money from Paul Mellon early '67. So there we are. It's quite a long time: 37 years. It's become the global clearinghouse for museum uses of computer technology in all its forms as they may apply to museums: imaging, archiving, many, many functions. And it's a very active organization, 350-plus museum professionals as members, and over 250 museums as members around the world. And they have working committees and they get something done. They have a good journal. And they have the best minds in the country on the technical side, information technology, all the IT people; they plug into the museum world through the Museum Computer Network.

I forgot about that organization, and I assumed that it no longer lived. But three years ago - two years - two and a half years ago I was delivering a Pollock lecture at the - I guess it was at the Dallas Museum - Dallas Museum of Art. And the librarian - I was doing some work in the library to connect a few dots, and I's and dots. The librarian said, I saw that you were with the Museum Computer Network, and founded it. Do you know that organization is still alive? I said, it's not possible; it's 37 years. She took me to the library, showed me their journal, their membership roll, and there it was.

So I took some names out of the directory, and I called a couple of people that seemed like officers, and they were astounded to find - some of them didn't even know there was a founder. They heard there was one, but they had no idea who it was. And the annual meeting was coming up, and the president - the outgoing president - wanted me to show up and be a mystery speaker and jazz up the plenary session. And he said, just be nostalgic and nice; they'll just love it. So I did what he said, but the night before, he said, Everett, tear up that speech you're going to talk about. Give us a mandate for the next decade. You did such a good job three decades ago; we need some energy. And I just gave them a locker-room talk about, okay, you've developed all the technology; it all works; it just has to be integrated into one system and get it out. So what are we waiting for? That should be your motto of this organization for the next couple of years. And ever since then, I've spent all my time energizing them and getting them to move in this direction, and I've made considerable headway.

[Audio break, tape change.]

I've got basic standards for digital photography. I found the right technology for image acquisition because I know the man who is the keeper of the gate for that technology - he's an old colleague of mine - and I'm quite expert in digital imaging, for reasons I'll tell you later, not pertinent to this interview. And I got all the pieces in place. I have two universities, three actually, interested in hosting the project, and what we would - and then I have a couple of sugar daddies waiting, I hope, who would then fund it. And the purpose of the project is to actually set up an archive that works. It differs from what ARTstor wants to do because we're paying more attention to image acquisition than how to put it in an archive, because how to put it in an archive technique is more known, but image acquisition in the museum is still a bit primitive. But -

MS. KIRWIN: Tell me what ARTstor is. I know about JSTOR, but what's ARTstor?

MR. ELLIN: ARTstor?

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, ARTstor.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, ARTstor is the - is the Mellon Foundation project.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: And they've gone about it in a way that I don't approve of. I told Neil Rubenstein [sp] when he announced it that you must pay equal or greater attention to image acquisition than you pay to archiving, because the archiving know-how is more in the vocabulary; digital image acquisition, that's worth the trouble; where the images are so good that they will excite the eye is where - that's the critical path, and you're not paying any attention to that. I didn't get any encouragement.

MS. KIRWIN: And how do you store such images? Isn't that the issue?

MR. ELLIN: Well, yeah, the how-to-store issue is being addressed by so many people in so many kinds of data that, you know, if the data produces an image with six primary colors for each pixel, you know, it's the same kind of storage problem. Image acquisition is a harder hurdle right at the moment because - what kind of camera do we need, and what kind of quality to the eye of image do we need? But I made a lot of headway with that in the past year. And at the last annual meeting, I moderated a roundtable on new-level digital photography for museums. We have the technology ready to go, and the man who has it in usable devices - that are not prototypes; they're demo units - is ready to provide them to museums. So we're very close to being able to make the goal of MCN, which was my goal, a reality.

MS. KIRWIN: And can you state that goal succinctly now?

MR. ELLIN: The what?

MS. KIRWIN: Can you state the goal now succinctly for the -

MR. ELLIN: For that project?

MS. KIRWIN: - for the interview, yeah.

MR. ELLIN: Well, the goal of the project is to design a repository in terms of how it is used, and how it distributes its content to certain individuals who come in and ask for it, and how do we get digital images into that archive that are so telling, you know, in content technically, in depth, that when they are plucked out of the repository, either in hard copy with a next-generation printer - and there are printers that will do this that are maybe in the $15 [thousand], $20,000 realm and dropping steadily - that when those images are pulled out and seen by somebody on a proper monitor - and the monitor that is needed is coming on the way right as we speak, from Phillips in Europe. They teamed with the Israeli outfit, and they have a monitor in the works they'll probably commercialize within a year that can deal with that kind of color and be affordable as a consumer item.

Then we figure out how to get it in, how to get it out, and how do we shape the outreach of museums so that people who cannot get to museums because of distance, time, cost get a fair chance at seeing something that begins to evoke the experience of looking at an original work. And these photos will do that. I mean, I've seen them, and I've got a good eye, and I'll tell you, it works for me. I mean, I saw the first printed-out photos and I didn't believe it. And it's my best friend that has the technology. We're so tight that we help each other. I've been a consultant to him when he was manager of programs or presidents of divisions of major companies like Picker and, oh, let's see, Varian. I was a consultant to him, and then we became friends.

So now he's helping me out, see, and when he took the marketing rights to the Foveon technology, I reviewed the contract for him and helped him write the agreement he made with Foveon. So I was there before anybody else knew about his plan except himself. And we talk all the time, so - and he has a clear mandate to do what he wants in the way of niche markets, because one day the Foveon technology will be the basic technology for digital photography. But before it gets all busy with the consumer market, I want that technology to come to the niche market called museums, because we can get the hundred-percent attention from them right now. And I sold them on this idea. I said, "If your camera can be said to be a museum-grade quality, produces images satisfactory to a museum, what a hallmark of quality you have for the consumer market," and that they understood. So this is what I'm consumed with now as an undertaking, blessed by the Museum Computer Network board and generally its rank and file.

RICHARD WATTENMAKER: Is the Getty involved in this at all?

MR. ELLIN: No. I gave him every chance. I tried to get staff members who work on this ARTstor, and they wouldn't come and look. I tried to get Neil Rubenstein to at least acknowledge that possibly I was being friendly to give him a warning, and I got a rather cold informal letter saying, "Oh, no, we are Mellon Gallery; we don't make mistakes, you know; we don't need to know that." So it's a waste of time. They are really playing games with themselves. And the archives, they've done good work on the archiving side, but they have ignored image acquisition. And I think that's a serious mistake. You've got a brand new bank, marble floors, stainless steel everything, and you've got no money to put into it, so what's the purpose of the bank? It's - it doesn't make any sense to me.

But I wanted to work with them and I made the offer about three times, had intermediaries repeat it, but they're very arrogant and they're very slow. So I don't think that would be practical, unless you want to wait five years. You can't get answers from them. And they don't have a lot of technical confidence in the staff of ARTstor. They're not - there's not a techie in the bunch.

MR. WATTENMAKER: Do you know Murtha Baca [Head of Standards & Vocabulary, Getty Research Institute]?

MR. ELLIN: Murtha Bacca?

MR. WATTENMAKER: Bacca.

MR. ELLIN: Where would that -

MR. WATTENMAKER: She works at Getty.

MR. ELLIN: No, I'm talking about the Mellon Foundation.

MR. WATTENMAKER: Yeah, I understood.

MR. ELLIN: But, oh -

MR. WATTENMAKER: She's at Getty and -

MR. ELLIN: Oh, no.

MR. WATTENMAKER: - she's their technology person and I've -

MR. ELLIN: She's the IT person at Getty?

MR. WATTENMAKER: Yeah.

MR. ELLIN: I don't know her. I know the - all my - I know the IT people, many of the IT people, and our new president of MCN is a professor at Harvard [Sam Quigley, Director, Digital Information & Technology, Harvard University Art Museums]. He's the number two man in the Department of Museums of Harvard, and he's also a technological person, very, very capable. He's going to be a very good president. But I don't know her, but I - but I know many of the IT people at other places who are good. A fellow in Chicago, Alan [sp] - see I'm not great on names today; something's wrong here. It must be the weather.

MS. KIRWIN: That's okay.

MR. ELLIN: But we have good people, but you can't have enough of them. The IT person - the arrival of the IT person in a museum is one of the best single developments of the century, because now in the museum, in high places, is the person with the technological connection, in reality, the IT person. It's a bifurcated sort of person part - part curator, part director, but fundamentally IT. In all major museums that I have run into, the IT person is the number two man in the institution in terms of what do we do next.

So that's changing things; that's making museums less frightened, and knowing that they can make technology work for them because they've got people aboard who know how to make it work for them - their own people - and that is a very, very healthy development indeed. So this is the time when museums have to begin to make this transition. They can no longer claim, the stuff isn't here. I predicted digital photography of this order; it would come maybe in a decade or two. That was 37 years, and now it's just here. And it's not because there was no effort; it was hard. So - but now the time has caught up, and museums have to catch up.

MS. KIRWIN: What was it exactly that gave you the seed of this idea? I mean, you've mentioned coming back from Peru and having a changed outlook on life.

MR. ELLIN: Well, when I came back to the Guggenheim, I was bored to death and -

[Audio break.]

MR. ELLIN: - the Jasper Johns thing before.

MS. KIRWIN: This is Liza Kirwin interviewing Everett Ellin at the Archives of American Art office in Washington, D.C. It's April 27, 2004. This is the third disc.

Okay, and you were telling me about -

MR. ELLIN: Well, I -

MS. KIRWIN: I just reviewed some of the catalogues that you produced for the Everett Ellin Gallery in Los Angeles and the - do you want to talk a little bit about the format of some of these, because you have this pulled out?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I developed a format; when they were folded, it was almost like a roadmap. You could stick it in a vest pocket, or you can put it in a mailing envelope. And it's just sort of lended itself - I like when you unfold it; it's like the sequential viewing of works. You get to see each one separately because each one is a separate plane. This was all deliberate. It worked very well. It's like a walk-through of an exhibit, which is exactly what I had in mind, see. It was a format that I developed that I used constantly. This was a newspaper - white numbers - that might have been the one where I had this - I had, I think it was, white numbers. I think so, but in any event, I sold one of these - are we on?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: I sold one of these [Jasper] Johns to one of my collectors, who was Bill Janss, the two brothers; they were avid collectors. And they lived in Palm Springs, which was quite a ways and it was summertime. It's like 110 there in the summer, a dry heat. And I had a Jaguar with a tilted - you know, a coupe with a tilted window, and I put the Johns in there, comfortable blankets around it. And I got to Janss - Bill Janss's house, and he said "Come on in," and I went to the tailgate, you know, to open that window, that tilted window, and I looked at it and I said, "Jesus, this looks gooey almost."

MS. KIRWIN: It cooked?

MR. ELLIN: And I said, "My God, it's encaustic and it's melted in the heat of the sun." So I said "What am I going to do now?" So I carried it in like this, see, and I said, is there a flat surface I can lay it down? And then I made all kinds of excuses that I needed some cool drinks and a chance to get out of the air, and then we talked for about a half an hour, and then he wanted to see the picture. And I said, "Well, it's now or never." And I was going to say, "When I tilt it, all the encaustic could be in a puddle on the floor, or we'll have a nice work by Jasper Johns." And the good Lord watched over me, because I lifted it, and nothing moved.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh.

MR. ELLIN: But it was a -

MS. KIRWIN: I wonder if it was just sitting in an air-conditioned place?

MR. ELLIN: Well, his house was air-conditioned, but in the window of the car with the noon sun baking down, and it was almost -

MS. KIRWIN: Liquefied.

MR. ELLIN: It would have flowed, yeah. Man, was that a close call. That was an expensive picture. Life of the art dealer.

So, well, you were looking at the catalogues, you know, you see in them a good graphic style and -

MS. KIRWIN: And you also wrote the text?

MR. ELLIN: I always did. I always did, and it was my own take. You know, like here's - here's Jasper Johns. I haven't looked at this since the catalogue came out, you know. [Reading] "Jasper Johns's first one-man show in January of 1958 at Leo Castelli Gallery consisted primarily of paintings depicting targets, numbers, letters, and the American flag, several of which are incidentally included in this exhibition. In the five years which have elapsed since the appearance of this body of work, Johns, now 32, has emerged as the most influential American painter of the post-Abstract Expressionist generation.

"Despite the fact that his intentions are often misunderstood, his preoccupation with ordinary familiar objects has triggered a chain reaction of neo-Dada - or, if you prefer the term, neo-realist - painting by a battalion of younger artists, all of whom are involved in one form or another with prosaic images selected from everyday experience. Although many of these younger painters appear, on the surface at least, to be closely allied to Johns, a more careful inspection discloses certain unique aspects of his work which mark him as an artist of unusual importance.

"What strikes me, perhaps, as the most penetrating distinction is the fact that, by deliberately choosing to work with accepted forms presented in a context of their conventional meaning, Johns has freed himself to work conceptually on other levels, which again by choice, he confines to intellectual and aesthetic inquiries conducted by visual means and in a style reminiscent of traditional painting. By this, I do not mean to imply that Johns is not inventive, but quite the contrary, that he has found a way to express statements of universal significance in a highly personal sense through the use of commonplace symbols, which when taken as paintings, nevertheless

stands scrutiny as works of art by classical standards."

It wasn't bad.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes, not bad at all.

MR. ELLIN: This kid dealer. I could write in those days. I don't write that well now. I mean, I was really good when I wrote about art. I didn't want to take it out of a book. I said, if I can't write about it, I shouldn't show it.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it sounds as if you were very engaged in looking at it.

MR. ELLIN: I was.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: Very engaged. I knew what it was that got me. First of all, it registered; it zapped me, and then I could figure out why I was feeling butterflies, and then I wrote. And that's the way I think - this is exactly how I think art should work. I couldn't have said - if I put this in lay language, that's what I said. Commonplace things - artists, they paint for the common man. Just like Copeland's work "Fanfare for the Common Man" - for the common man. And I believe strongly in that.

MS. KIRWIN: You told me earlier you had a story about Edward G. Robinson. Could you tell that?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, Edward G. Robinson. That is a story I - I tell - retell - myself when I need to hear something funny. When I worked for that law firm in Beverly Hills, they had all the big stars, you know. Remember, I left Columbia Pictures to go to work at this firm. And being it was a small firm and I was the junior lawyer, my law school classmate who was already in the firm had seniority over me already, because he'd been there for eight months.

Anyway, one of my first assignments, the senior partner said, "Everett, I want you to go down to the Beverly Hills Bank and meet Eddie." I said, "Who's Eddie?" "Edward G. Robinson." "Oh, what am I supposed to do, David?" He said, "Well, his divorce has reached a point where the court has issued the decree about how they divide their stocks and bonds, and there's a checklist of pile A and pile B. I want you to take the list and go into the safety deposit vault with Eddie, and make the physical division, and initial that you've done so." I said, "Okay, David, I can handle that."

So I go down to the bank, and in the vault is Edward G. Robinson. He has a built-in scowl, just like in the movies, and he was snarling, like, what do you want, kid? And I said, "I'm here from the Tannenbaum firm, Mr. Robinson. I'm supposed to help you make the physical division." He said, "Damn, I don't need any help," you know. "What the hell good are you?" And then I sat down, and he's fuming, and he starts to rant and rave about the evils of marriage and the unfairness of it all, and he says, "Take it from me, son - sonny - never get married." And as time went on, he got softer and softer, and I calmed him down, and we got the thing sorted out. But I spent an entire day with him in this vault.

And then we got to talking about art. I asked him about his collection, and I distracted him entirely. We talked about collecting. And he invited me to come see his collection, and I did, and at the end of the day, he was like my best friend. But he was the vicious gangster, big cigar, big rings, and he lives like Yasser Arafat, sort of lives at - we're not linear - they were like rubber bands and -

MS. KIRWIN: Did the art have to get divided, too?

MR. ELLIN: No - yeah, it was ultimately divided. One person started, and each person took the next picture, that's how they did that one. And that was particularly vexing to him, but I - he used to visit my gallery, and I visited his home a couple of times. And he rather liked me, and I liked him. Those encounters were - those were Hollywood-type encounters, people like that. The William Morris Agency, when I worked for the number two man, I sat in the desk outside his office. It looked like maybe I was a male secretary. And one day in walks Danny Kaye. He comes in, steps on the chair there, steps on my desk, walks across, gets off, comes down, and walks into my boss's office.

MS. KIRWIN: Just like a movie.

MR. ELLIN: Just like a movie, just crazy, like he is in the movies. And he said, "Oh, don't mind Danny," my boss said. "He does those kind of things." [Laughs.] Things - I mean there was so many episodes like that that were hilarious.

I was at a little party, you know, when I was with William Morris, and in walks Sammy Davis, Jr., and that's when Sammy Davis was playing in westerns with Frank Sinatra. And he had this thing about - that he was a fast gun. He had a pair of six-shooters and, you know, he could twirl them, and he was a big-time, deadly cowboy. And he

walks in with his gun, and he's flipping it, and then he leaves the party. I wanted to put him - cut him down a little bit, so I slip the six-shooter out of the holster as he was walking out of the room. This was the fastest guy alive, see. Half an hour he comes back, said, "Where's my six-shooter?" [Laughs.] And I said, "I think it's over there. I think you dropped it on your way out."

I mean, there were opportunities - all the time - that things happened like that. It's a playful place. We've got a sense of humor. It's a gas. But one needs a sense of humor, even in serious things.

Well, so, I'm glad you liked the catalogues.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, and the David Smith catalogue that you were mentioning, I guess you did mention that earlier on the tape. I can't - no, maybe you hadn't - about what Frank O'Hara had said -

MR. ELLIN: Oh, at lunchtime.

MS. KIRWIN: About - at lunchtime, you mentioned that. But you didn't include it in the interview, so.

MR. ELLIN: I mentioned - yeah. Well, Frank O'Hara was a good friend of mine, and when he was working on a David Smith show - they did one years ago that wasn't the big one that they ultimately did - and he asked me while he was working on that show, he wanted all my correspondence with David. And that's when that was sent in to your archive. And he told me that at the time, because he read everything about David Smith, and he said, "What you wrote about David Smith in that show that you did in your gallery in the very end of 1960 was the best thing I've ever read about David Smith, and will not be exceeded." And he said, "I want you to know that."

And I was smitten because - well, I just didn't - he really was a true expert and he knew what he was talking about. Here's an excerpt from that: "The artist's concept of his technology and his raw materials, most often iron and steel, plays an important part in the determination of his sculpture. He has written, 'I was acquainted with metalworking before studying painting. The equipment I use, my supply of material, comes from factory study and duplicates as nearly as possible the production equipment used in making a locomotive.' The studio at Bolton Landing, known as Terminal Iron Works -

MS. KIRWIN: That's it.

MR. ELLIN: - "is constructed, equipped, and operated along the lines of a well-outfitted steel fabrication shop, as is suggested by its name, which he inherited from the small ironworks on the Brooklyn waterfront where he took up working space in 1934 and maintained his first studio. His facility in the techniques of working iron and steel lends to his sculpture a sense of power in repose, conveyed by his prowess in overcoming the resistive quality of the metal, and enables him to achieve an enviable purity of expression in the very way that his shapes are cut and joined.

"Inherent in his craft is a keen sense of the physical properties of his material, which leads him intuitively in the making of an individual piece to a selection of components that seem to relate dimensionally within the whole and a sense of inner harmony. This is particularly evident in the Albany series and the new stainless steel sculptures, where the thickness of the separate pieces of steel plate vary as if by some personal equation."

Damn, that's almost poetic.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] That was your -

MR. ELLIN: Wait a minute here!

MS. KIRWIN: That was your first show - that was your opening show at your second gallery?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, that was my opening show - I think that was - that was the opening show at my second gallery. And David was nice enough to give me my opening show, and it really got it off nice. Obviously, everybody came in the art world. The 50 or so people in the art world all showed up - here are the crates. His crates were even a work of art.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, really?

MR. ELLIN: I photographed them. These are the crates in which the work came, and these are his stencils. And it was a collage - the crate was a collage, see. David was something else. So this was - this was the curtain-raiser of a really - the gallery that was a meteor on the horizon for a period of time.

MS. KIRWIN: Did you scout around much for local talent?

MR. ELLIN: Yes, I did. I did. I went up to the Bay Area quite a few times, and I was very keen on bringing Northern

California artists down so there wasn't a schism between San Francisco and Los Angeles. And I showed people like Charles Frazier [ph] - was very good. He did little sculptures, almost looked like Cornell's boxes - I mean, imaginative figures. Charles Frazier; there was a Clayton Pickerton [ph] - I showed you that photo of the gallery, and I said he was one of our best ones - Robert Downs, Hassel Smith, who was an older one and far more recognized.

I brought down the best painters and sculptors I could find who I liked and were not encumbered by another gallery. And I brought them down just to have them, so it was California, not just Los Angeles. And San Francisco was suffering through the same thing; they didn't have an art world. They had museums more - they had some museums, but they didn't have many collectors, and they had almost no galleries of any consequence. So it was a desert up there, too, culturally.

And then the Pasadena Museum almost tottered. I mean the museums were so weak. It was sad for the artists. We had very good artists around - Dick Diebenkorn became a friend of mine in those days. I wanted to get him to show at my gallery; he would have liked it. But he had a long friendship with Paul Kantor, who sold - just sold pictures without doing a show. So he didn't want to rock that boat, and he didn't want to have somebody represented him when he was selling pictures through Paul Kantor, and that never happened. And when Diebenkorn eventually moved to Los Angeles, I was no longer an art dealer. If circumstances had been a little different, I would have had him. I thought he was the most interesting of the Abstract Expressionists.

MS. KIRWIN: How about somebody like Sam Francis?

MR. ELLIN: Well, Sam Francis was already -

MS. KIRWIN: - with André Emmerich or -

MR. ELLIN: Well, Sam Francis - I think he was with Emmerich and - or I know Irving Blum had some works of Sam Francis. I met him and I knew him, but he was pretty well represented. And, you know, the matured painters were not falling - the California guys were not falling all over themselves to be represented by a Los Angeles artist, because they knew the action wasn't there. So they showed up, they would get - they would put a painting in a show.

And Diebenkorn is somebody I would have liked. I think when he shifted a little bit and got figurative, he made a very happy merger of abstract and representational art. He was a very - well, you - I just read over his interview with you. It was - a lot of it - well, he must have been sleepy that day. His responses weren't particularly interesting and he couldn't get anything right, so I said, "Gee Richard, you better get your stove lit before you come." [They laugh.] He was a quiet guy.

But I did make an effort to find Californians. The trouble was Ferus had some of the best ones, and they were all Los Angelenos. In the Bay Area there were fewer of them. And I didn't - I showed those people, and I didn't think I had any others, but it wasn't so bad. I had about five or six one-man shows, maybe seven.

MS. KIRWIN: Did the New York galleries ever come to you looking for Los Angeles people to represent on the East Coast?

MR. ELLIN: Nobody came looking to me, but I got a show for Joan Jacobs, and I don't know whether I helped [Bruce] Beasley get a show. They weren't particularly looking for California artists to show. They were looking for California buyers to buy works that they handled, another outlet. They were looking for me to make deals with California collectors and sell something that they owned and I would get a commission. But you put in the same amount of time that you did if you owned the work, so, you know, you're not really doing all that well for your time.

Though they were not looking for California artists, some made it to New York. It was difficult without a dealer to get you a show. Very, very difficult to just walk in. There were too many people walking the streets, going to the galleries with - to dealers - with their slides. And they didn't want to see them anymore. It was very difficult at that time. As it heated up, there wasn't a chance. I mean, it was, sometimes you got lucky and you caught a dealer's eye. They were all watching, but they weren't polite in looking at everybody's slides. That didn't happen anymore.

MS. KIRWIN: How many people did you have working at your gallery? Was it -

MR. ELLIN: It was never more than two.

MS. KIRWIN: Two? Okay.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, I typically had a secretary, because there was paperwork, I had to travel, the phones had to be

answered, and you couldn't do it if you were just there by yourself. You couldn't show paintings and leave the front door open. Actually, I hired Paul Kantor's secretary when she left him, and she was a pro. And I had one for the first gallery who was very, very competent.

And as far as installation, I always did it all by myself. As far as shipping is concerned, I basically did that by myself. You had to be pretty handy, you know, with crates and lighting. I was always good at lighting. I had a flair for lighting, and that was helpful. I knew how to light a show, just intuitively. I'm very good with light, and I know about reflectants [sic], and I know what the angles should be. I mean, you don't want to stand with a bright spot behind you like you're in the sunset. There's a lot to lighting, and I knew that, so that was not a problem. It was a one-man show in a one-man gallery. At least it was symmetric. [Laughs.]

MS. KIRWIN: Who - you'd mentioned some of the artists that you had a social relationship with, too. In California, did you have - who were the artists who were part of your social circle there?

MR. ELLIN: Well, there was the Ferus group mostly, but, you know, they were so tight amongst themselves that it was like the - Frank Sinatra and his rat pack, you know. They didn't - they were fun. We would have fun together, but they weren't my pals, because they would have lost points, you know. They were tight, see, and it was like a Cub Scout pack and they didn't want you to really break in. But, you know, we had parties together; we had fun together, but I didn't have any pals who were Los Angeles artists.

They were very, very critical, and it was an inside thing. I guess this fraternal order or something was important for their survival because they were - it's like those guys who fly on the same bomber crew. They go out and drink beer together. We were always drinking beer at the same place but I didn't have a pal. I didn't have a pal in the art world and in Los Angeles.

I was disappointed that I didn't get more support from the museum. The museum wasn't doing much in the way of exhibiting, but they weren't helping me all that much, either, for all the work I was doing. An important person would come to town, and sometimes they would just neglect to bring them by to my gallery, and I didn't think that was very nice. You know, I was helping them. It was an affront. I mean, I didn't miss meeting somebody I should meet, but if they're bringing someone to show them the art, seeing them - you know, they should take them to the few good galleries we have.

It was just a funny place. We weren't working together to build an art world. I was trying to build an art world, but I'm very often in a situation - a crusader situation - and I don't wait for a lot of people to get on my boat before I push off, you know. That's a dumb way to move because then you're always waiting for somebody who is slow-footed. I like to get things done when I have the passion, and I just do it with or without the other guys on board. Like MCN, I mean, I did it - I didn't wait for a bunch of support. I just sold it, and then it was really - it was there. I wasn't peddling it and looking for cronies. And in Los Angeles, that consolidation where we were really wanting to build an art world for ourselves, it wasn't an organized effort. We could have been more helpful to each other. But we weren't hostile. It just was a - everybody was in his own little thing. That's the way it was, and then you just had to accept it.

I found it hard to find genuine friends in California. I lived there quite awhile, and I just found out that things were rather superficial in terms of friendships. Everybody was very busy. It was a characteristic of the community, a quite self-indulged community. And I know I was right, because when I lived at other places, it's been better than that. We should have worked together more instead of, you know, having this little game about who's important. I don't feel bitter about it. It's just as I look back, I don't know if we would have done everything possible, whether it would have made a big difference.

It happened in due course. An art world developed, more collectors came, and collectors married collectors and bred collectors. And before long, you know, you have real collectors out there, or at least enough of them. I don't know what's going on - I haven't tracked it at all. I don't know what's going on today in the way of galleries. Some came afterwards. After I left, there was a fellow named Winnick Wilder [ph]. I don't know what he did. I read some things about him that - I don't really have any idea about his sincerity, what he was doing. He was somebody that Irving Blum liked, and he wasn't a threat to Irving, and he was trying to do some good things.

I really didn't want to spend any more time in my life in the task of building a strong art world in Los Angeles. I had given it my best, and I just couldn't hang in until it all happened. It was a bit easier for Ferus, because they had this good California group, and they had a following and that was good. The collectors - there were collectors that liked the gallery and hung out there and bought something from everybody. So he had a good formula there for his gallery. But the price for that was you had to have a clubhouse, and I didn't want to pay that price. I mean, I didn't want to run a gallery that was, you know, a VFW pub or something. It was just not the way I wanted to do it. But they did it, and it worked for them, you know, and it was a tight outfit.

Well, but art is - when it's created and it's out then, you know, that was my interest, was to get some good art out, but then my interests changed, you know, as time went on. I got very interested in the whole process of the

way art is disseminated. The dissemination of art became very fascinating to me. And I had a great compassion towards artists and the difficulties they have in accomplishing that. I mean, it's hard, and some of the artists I know who had to do this - after the '60s, when things kind of went sour, good artists like Larry Bell had to become their own maestros, their own impresarios, and do everything. It was very, very hard for an artist who was good and catching on and maturing; he's got to do all that stuff himself.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you think that the Internet now holds promise for disseminating, other than the museum network idea, but for individual artists, through their own websites?

MR. ELLIN: I think it's very possible. In fact, right now there's an artist I know in Texas who, I think, has tremendous potential, and his father was a very good painter. And he has some real gifts and great imagery, and his imagery is in keeping with the times. It's imagery - it's about things we're used to seeing, but he sees them in a different way and often very playfully, just like [Rene] Magritte, with a sense of humor. I don't know, he just has something really good going, a lot of ideas, good execution, and, you know, I recommend - well, he has a website, and I helped him make some changes on it. And I said to him, I said, "William, you're going to make it good, with or without a gallery."

MS. KIRWIN: What's his last name?

MR. ELLIN: William Young. And William is the - William was one of the sons of the artist who is my companion. Reneta Nunn's late husband is Ancel E. Nunn, and William was one of his sons. And William didn't follow exactly in his father's footsteps in how he worked, because he was in commercial art. But he developed amazing tools in commercial art, including graphic techniques, computer graphic techniques so elegant that he can test any visual idea he has. He can test it and try it and look at it and change it. It's like it's an expansion of his sketch book. It goes from the sketch book to the digital medium, and he doesn't have to fuss around with a lot of sketches for two weeks. He can try these things out, make changes digitally, and then go and do it on a canvas.

And he's got that down so well, and his work is fresh, because each painting comes out while the idea is fresh. He doesn't get caught up in the trial-and-error part. I think he's very, very good, and this is not an obligation that's owed to me because it's a family thing. He's got his father's genes as far as innate skills, good eye. He has his own imagination, and he has the discipline. I called up - this is a little sidelight - I called up - I was checking on names and places, and there was a Cordier Gallery, Cordier & Eckstrom. It's in my CV. It's one of the - in my little diary that you'll see that helped me a lot - and I was trying to remember the name.

Eckstrom's the silent partner, because it was called Cordier Warren. But the real operator, the real owner of the gallery, was someone else, and I plucked the name out of my mind in about a half a day. Finally I came up with E, and I came up with Eckstrom, and then I came up with the first name and Arnie. And then I looked in the web, and I found Eckstrom Cordier. And then I found an Eckstrom, and Eckstrom which is alive today. And I said, "You must be the son of Arnie Eckstrom," and he said, "I am." And he said, "I have a private gallery." And I said, "I wanted to check on your dad's name. Was it Arnie?" He said, "Yep." I said, "Oh, great." I got it.

And we talked - I talked about his father, and then I talked about who I liked very much, and then I talked about his father's classic style and his willingness to work with young people. He was a classic dealer, and I said, and here you probably you have the same genetic make up, and you're a private dealer. And in your dad's day he was in a major gallery with new people. And I said, "What do you do about new people?" And he says, "Well, we have to stumble on them." I said, "Well, I have somebody. Your father liked Magritte, I remember, and I'm going to send you some images of this artist William Young. He's really good, and his imagery is right for America that's looking for its roots. His images go to the land and the sky, and they are very figurative, but beautiful execution and nice textures, really good."

So he sent me back, and he said he'd like to see some visuals. And I'm determined that William gets his fair chance. But, see, coming from the cruel world of the commercial art, he knows how to create a website. He can create a website, a very good one, very quickly. So I said, "We don't have to bicycle around Texas looking for a gallery, but I am going to find you a gallery." So I think that will be a way that it will be done. And that will level that playing field.

And that's an offshoot from what I want to do with the Museum Computer Network. It's the same thing; it's connectivity between an artist and his intermediary, and between museums and their digital public. And these linkages will - it's like nerve endings that reform and rejuvenate, and gets the mechanism working again. I think that we have to be very imaginative to bring about change. The change is happening with or without us, so we might as well learn how to work with change and make it work for us, instead of sit back and saying, "Well, we can't do anything about it. In museums we don't have this and we don't have that."

[Audio break, tape change.]

It's the way - these are the times.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it's sort of visionary of you to imagine this world, so many years ago, that we live in now, with the insistence of the Internet and making material available on everyone's desktop. But it's something that we face every day now at the Archives of American Art, just how much can we digitize and how much more we can make our material accessible to the public.

MR. ELLIN: Well, one of the things I'm going to have to do is I'm going to have to conceive of new forms of outreach, and I have to plant those seeds in museums and show them what the options are. What kinds of outreach could you do if you had this sort of material? It's going to be a whole new world for you, and you will begin to discover the value of the virtual visitor in terms of your survival. It's very, very high, because it's the same - it's support. And whether the money comes in, or the moral support, from the virtual visitor or real visitor doesn't make a great deal of difference.

And at the same time, all of us in the process have to adapt, I think - I told Edie [Hedlin] that I had some ideas about how archiving is changing, evolving quite rapidly now into a different set of responsibilities because of the way it's moving. It has nothing to do with what archives haven't done; it's, how do we use the material in archives in such a manner that it permits new outreach, effective outreach, so that some of the - in the sense, some of the creativity comes - would come from archives and their imaginative view of the usability - how to use what they have. And she said, "I would be very interested in hearing any views you have on that subject because it vexes us."

Well, I said, I think about it every day, and I said, "I have some reflections I would like to make." I think that the archivist has a very important role in society, much more than conservation - you know, retention of materials - but they have within their power the means to get things out. And if you have digital files that can get an image out that's really a showstopper and you do that, think of what can come from that. So I'm going to send this to her in the hope that I can encourage some initiatives in the archive in this direction somewhat parallel to, but the not the same as, the initiatives that I have with the Museum Computer Network. Some leadership there from the archives would be very good right now. Its value in society is known, and its value is increasing day by day, and its integrity is known, and it is a logical organization to do something about this.

When the Museum Computer Network had its last annual meeting, it was in Las Vegas, and there was - the archives group were meeting at the same hotel for the proceeding five days, so there was a certain sharing. And they came to some of our programs and met - I sent an e-mail to all the members of the two - of the archiving groups, and quite a few archivists came to my roundtable on digital imaging and found it fascinating. And it was very obvious that there was a common ground, and archivists and museums together could work to the common good. Archivists could loan know-how to museums, and museums could give new meaning to archival material, and then the whole economic system that supports archives will have more of a reason to support it. It isn't files, it isn't papers, it isn't the stuff I give; it's really the archives. The content of the archive becomes the same content as art itself, in forms that are usable. They may not be - you may not get that sensation exactly the same way, but you can have the same excitement from looking at things that way.

She said that she would like to hear what I could send her, anything of that direction. And I have a belief that when the Museum of the American Indian - National Museum opens, there will be a lot of exciting outreach coming from them, because of the good work of Jane Sledge and others. And they have this mandate to resurrect the pride and joy of the, you know, the indigenous peoples, and I think they're going to do very interesting things. I feel the Smithsonian, the Archives of the Smithsonian Institution -

MS. KIRWIN: Institution.

MR. ELLIN: I don't always - I have to think why it doesn't stop at Institute. The Smithsonian is a logical place to lead, and nobody is leading. The museums don't lead. I mean, their professional organization is nonsense. It doesn't do any good. The American Association of Museums doesn't do much good for anybody. But the Smithsonian is an independent entity, and it could take up some leadership under its general mandate and do some very good things. I am absolutely sure of it, because it has the stature to come and say, listen, we've been doing archiving for a long time, and we constantly restudy what we have and how it fits society, and we have made the following observations and we're going to have a symposium or something to get into this. I think that would be a wonderful thing to do right now. And I'm going to write her somewhat in that vein because she invited me to do it. And I mean - well, now you've heard -

MS. KIRWIN: On that note -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, is that a good note -

MS. KIRWIN: - I think - [inaudible] - more work for us, but - [laughs] - on that note, maybe we should stop for the day and take it up again in the morning?

MR. ELLIN: Yes, yes.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay, it's 4:25 now, and we can reflect on what we talked about today and -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, we talked about a lot of stuff.

MS. KIRWIN: A lot.

MR. ELLIN: Was it interesting for you?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes, yeah, very interesting.

MR. ELLIN: I just decided not to do any canned talk. I didn't have one really. It's what came out as relevant and - which I think is what an interview should - supposed to do. But things that I care about have come forth in quite a natural way, and I'm, in fact, humbled by having the opportunity to do this.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it's our pleasure, really our honor to preserve history. So, let's take it up again tomorrow.

MR. ELLIN: Well, you know -

[Audio break.]

MR. ELLIN: It was on yesterday, wasn't it?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes, oh, sure it was. I turned it on. [Laughs.]

MR. ELLIN: My nightmare is -

MS. KIRWIN: No, it was like the - I just turned it off at night.

This is Liza Kirwin at the Archives of American Art in our Washington office. I'm interviewing Everett Ellin for the Archives of American Art. This is our second session. It's April 28, 2004.

And we talked about a lot of things yesterday and probably will be jumping back into a couple of different topics today with - I'm trying to have some regard for chronology, but maybe not. It depends on how it goes. I'm going to move these sugars, because they make a lot of noise, actually.

Could we go back for - to French & Company -

MR. ELLIN: All right.

MS. KIRWIN: - and talk about the end of French & Company and the dispersal of the artists that were shown there.

MR. ELLIN: All right.

MS. KIRWIN: And, you know, what role did you have in placing the artists in other galleries?

MR. ELLIN: Sure. Well, if you remember from yesterday, the decision - the act of shutting down as a company called French & Company, as an entity, as an art entity, that happened as a total surprise to everybody, with the sole exception - maybe even of the Samuels family, because they got an offer from a Robert Dowling, and then they made a deal. So we were all quite shocked. And they had to shut down pretty quickly; that was part of the deal.

MS. KIRWIN: This was for the sale of the building on Madison Avenue?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, the sale.

MS. KIRWIN: Is that now Sotheby's?

MR. ELLIN: Well, it was the home of Parke-Bernet for a long time, and I think it's now - Sotheby's is in the building. But Dowling's Company - I think it was called City Investing Company - they owned the real estate, and French & Company sold its antique business as such. And the person who bought it - his name was Martin Zimmit, Z-I-M-M-I-T - he operated an antique business, a much reduced one, under the name of French & Company, in the building, so he probably became a tenant of City Investing Company.

And as a matter of fact, I did some consulting work for him early on. He ran a much smaller-scale, more privately oriented little antique business. So that was the building, and Mr. Dowling and his - maybe a few other individuals - took over the former gallery space as his offices, and there we were. We didn't have a lot of artworks stored in the building. I mean, it wasn't set up so much as a gallery with an inventory there. It was not -

it was never a really dealer - art dealer-oriented operation. It was more like an exhibition venue, when you think about it, in terms of how it was run, because Clem wasn't a salesman really, in the sense of meeting the public. And so we didn't have to worry about, where do we put all these thousands of objects?

But I knew the artists by this time. You know, in a short time, I spent a lot of time with them individually, and I was perceived sort of as their young savior. They treated me very nicely, and I got to know them all quite well. And my first concern was, what happens to the artists? And nobody else thought about that, and what I said, I could probably - nobody knew we were closing yet. I mean, it wasn't on the street yet. And I thought that I could help at least the painters, you know, Louis - Morris Louis, Ken Noland, Jules Olitsky, in particular, were painters on the rise, and younger, and I thought I had more responsibility towards them as far as their next move than with the more mature people like Barney Newman and Adolph Gottlieb, who were senior guys already. And, you know, they could make another gallery connection easily because they were stars already.

And so I picked up the phone and I called André Emmerich, because I knew him quite well from my art-dealing days, and I had a great faith in him as a sophisticated, you know, elegant dealer and a fair man, very effective. And I thought he would be the best place, because he already had [Helen] Frankenthaler, and therefore he had a little feeling for Color Field painting to begin with.

So I called him, and I told him, I said, "André this is entré nous [between us] at the moment, but the gallery is going to be shut down." I told him why, and I said, "Here's an opportunity for you to take on Louis and Noland and Olitsky, because they would fit in well with, say, Helen. And you're the Color Field gallery." And he thanked me profusely, and he contacted each of them, and Noland - Ken Noland and Morris Louis joined the gallery. I'm not sure if Jules did right away, but I think he eventually ended up with André.

And that was - so there was no interruption. It was a smooth transition. In fact, in many respects, it was much better for them, because André had the contacts; he had the clients, he had the space, and he was very polished. He could talk about art. He was very good, pre-Columbian or anything. He just - well, he was a real connoisseur; that's all there was to it. And that's what happened. Clem didn't pick up the phone and call him. I took it upon myself because I felt I was their dealer, and although I was a bit younger - maybe not much younger than Noland, but I felt it was my responsibility, and that was the transition.

David [Smith] went with Marlborough, and I think Gottlieb went with Marlborough, and, you know, they could pick and choose their moves because they had the oeuvre, you know; they had the work, the reputation, and the others were just - they were a harder sell because, you know, Color Field painting hadn't quite established itself as a school like Abstract Expressionist. So that's how that happened.

MS. KIRWIN: Good, okay.

MR. ELLIN: See what a nice daddy I was?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes, you took care of them.

MR. ELLIN: I took care of them.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] That was good. And I wanted to ask about - even going further back in your chronology, about your trip to Europe. This is after you left the air force - or this is after you left your job in contracting and took a travel time.

MR. ELLIN: Oh, that was - you mean after the air force?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: My -

MS. KIRWIN: With your friend?

MR. ELLIN: - self-awarded Boswell's Journey?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: Yes. Well, I just traveled around.

MS. KIRWIN: That's - you just ran around Europe?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I had never been to Europe, and there was a period where, you know, I had no other plans. I really thought I was going to end up at Harvard Law School as a teaching fellow, but I missed the cut. My orders didn't come through in time enough for the school. So they reluctantly had to take somebody else, and therefore

I was sort of freelance. And I had money in discharge pay, and I felt I fought for God and country; why shouldn't I take the grand tour?

So I went to Europe, and I just went all over. I mean, I was in Scandinavia and through Europe and spent three weeks in Spain, you know, traveling through Castile. I always liked Spanish music, flamenco, and I could speak Spanish, so I spent a good deal of time in Spain. I went to North Africa. I went everywhere - most everywhere I wanted to go for that type of trip. And I went over on an ocean liner and even - [laughs] - even my departure to - for Europe on the Ile De France, which was the old, the former star of the French fleet of tourist vessels, was the Ile De France.

And I met my buddy, this other officer who came from another part of the country; we met in New York City. And we went to our cabin, and there was some other guys in the next cabin, and it was that - Sam Jaffe, the actor who played Gunga Din [Gunga Din, 1939] - he was Gunga Din - he is a famous character actor. And he's in the next cabin, and he's got a couple of buddies with him, sending him off, and one of them was Zero Mostel, the comedian.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, my gosh.

MR. ELLIN: So we had a little private ceremony as we departed, with no less than Zero Mostel, one of the funniest people in the world, and Sam Jaffe, and that was our send-off to Europe. [Laughs.] To me, that was of no surprise, because episodes like that happen to me all the time.

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: Well, in Hollywood it's almost like I had a magnet, you know, and if there was a celebrity around, the next I thing I knew, he was at my elbow. Many, many such experiences that I had that it was not surprising to me at all. You know, William Morris taught me, they're just people, and they look for folks to like, too.

The William Morris Agency, early on they gave me little, sort of, escort assignments. When they had one of their major clients go to, let's say, do a show in Las Vegas, they always sent, you know, an agent along as a - not as a chaperone but just as a companion. So I accompanied David Niven and his wife to Las Vegas while he was - did a show for three nights or four nights. And there were so many episodes like that. Zero Mostel - I said, "Hi, Zero, nice to meet you." [Laughs.]

MS. KIRWIN: Did you - had you met him again or it happened -

MR. ELLIN: No, no, I just had those kind of -

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, those kinds of encounters.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, too many to even list. So I wasn't surprised at all. My buddy, the other ex-air force guy, was - was overcome. [Laughs.] I said, "Listen, this is nothing; you haven't seen anything yet." And off we went. And I did the grand tour, and then I came back and I had to -

MS. KIRWIN: And that was after the Korean War?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, that was after the Korean War. But I - when I came back, I had to get my - I wanted to get myself to California, and I wanted to pass the bar in California. So I had only that plan, and I remember very clearly, I picked a time. I said, I want to be home by Thanksgiving, and that was - and I did. I got back to Chicago in time for Thanksgiving that year, which was probably - yeah, probably '53, something like - Thanksgiving, showed up in Chicago. And then I got myself packed up and bought a car and went to California into the lap of the chief justice. That was always a convenient lap; there he was.

MS. KIRWIN: You've had some amazing opportunities presented, and you're available and -

MR. ELLIN: Well, I don't -

MS. KIRWIN: - you could do what you wanted -

MR. ELLIN: Well, it's -

MS. KIRWIN: It's also astonishing in -

MR. ELLIN: It's hard to explain. There isn't much logic to it, but it's something like a magnetic field, you know. If you see yourself as a very mobile and accessible person, it's like, you know, putting on - and you're not even aware of it, but you turn on this magnet, and metal particles are always kind of coming in and can join you. That's the way it, sort of, has worked. I had not gone after these people, but the magnets on - the magnetic field

is there, and if there's any colorful person of public note within five miles, I'll probably meet them. [Laughs.] If you can accept that theory -

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] Okay.

MR. ELLIN: - my gravitational theory of making contacts.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: All right.

MS. KIRWIN: Sure, all right.

MR. ELLIN: Yes.

MS. KIRWIN: And I was thinking also last night, thinking over the first session about your wife, Joan Jacobs.

MR. ELLIN: Jacobs.

MS. KIRWIN: And how much of an effect did her work have on your early ideas about what to show in the gallery, because you said she was an Abstract Expressionist -

MR. ELLIN: Yes.

MS. KIRWIN: - and a natural [?] painter?

MR. ELLIN: Well, what I learned from her before I even opened the gallery - I really had an understanding of the travails and challenges of the artists with talent to connect themselves with the art world. And, of course, we had a highly organized art world in America. I mean, at least there was a Mecca in New York, and there was a mechanism you could recognize and try to connect with. But I could see how hard it was, and the artists that encouraged to me to open the gallery - almost pleading, you know, we need a spokesmen; we need a godfather and we can't find it, and you would make a good one. Because I've always been a good listener, and I care about creative people and their safety and their realization of dreams. So I could see that I liked that role. I liked to be the guide - the Portuguese navigator, the term I like to use - for those kind of people.

That helped me a great deal, and, of course, talking to her and seeing how she was dealing with it. She knew what was needed, but she couldn't do it, because she was a shy person, and many artists are, you know; they can't make that overture. They can't be their own impresario. So I was conscious of the need, and it was always part of my style. I was very protective of the artists, and, as I told you, I did not encourage a clubhouse environment, but I did - I had to have close - I had close personal ties to the artists, as a guide, you know, as an inspirer or a mentor almost. Even older artists, you know, would listen to me.

David Smith listened to me about things, about, you know, how to move the sculpture, how to price it. That was just part of my M.O. But then when I went to New York, I found that the best dealers also had that quality. It was one of the reasons that Leo Castelli was such a great success. He was a wonderful godfather, you know, uncle, very avuncular relationship with his people, and that was my style, and I think that was why he and I got on so well. He was the most protective and the most helpful to his people in that capacity of any of the dealers I knew. He just had the right balance, you know. He befriended them; he guided them. It was just the right chemistry, and I tried.

So I learned a lot from Joan, and I also learned a lot about how the artist tries to create their own niche, their own imagery, their own message, what is their content as they grope to define something original that rang true with them. That's a difficult process, and it's helpful to have a dealer who understands the artist's perception of who they are, and instead of trying to reshape it, be a sounding board and be able to make comments about new work and be encouraging, say, you're onto a great visual concept, and I think you should really give it full max because you've got something good you're doing. That kind of talk was something I did. I did not presume to shape how the work was done, but I look for threads of what was already natural, and then I - if I thought it was really good, I would encourage them.

I did that with Bruce Beasely when he was very young, and only about five years or six years ago, I reestablished contact with him. He found me in New Mexico and said he wanted to see me, and he said of all the people he's ever known, I'm the most memorable one to him in terms of him being an artist. So I went to California just to see him. And he said, "You, you know, you - the guidance you gave me was so right. It wasn't restrictive, but it - you weren't dictating, you know, what I should do." And that was a nice moment in my life, because I met him so young. I mean, he just he - I told you, he was still a student.

So that was - Joan helped me a great deal in understanding the artist as a creator, because I watched her work,

and I watched it evolve, and I watched her make choices. She was very, very original, and she had a great deal of confidence in her work, but she couldn't talk to people very easily. Well, that's not unusual. Morris Louis couldn't talk to anybody except Clem. It's not unusual for the - there to be the shy ones, too. In a way, Johns, when he was younger, was quite shy. He changed, I think, as he got older, but it wasn't easy for him to talk to people. I was able to talk to him because I knew how to talk to an artist. I knew what an artist was, and I wasn't intimidating.

So that's - does that answer that question?

MS. KIRWIN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What were some - you'd mentioned some of the ways that you had steered or advice you'd given to David Smith, what was that in particular?

MR. ELLIN: Well, I would talk to David about, oh, the imagery in general, the daring move to go to big pieces with steel, you know, the challenge he took to make sculpture of that scale, the way he worked his metal, the times he changed the vernacular. He came back from Spoleto, from an event there, and he found a junkyard there in Milano, and he started making, like, metal collages out of found objects, and I could talk to him easily about my impressions of, you know, what was going on.

He was always so right that all I did was say, David, that, you know, I respond to that; I like that because. And I never said, you should. I said, it reaches me because. And that was useful. The fact that I was an engineer and knew how he did the work made him very comfortable with me. It was like two engineers talking shop.

MS. KIRWIN: He probably didn't find many people that related to his work in that way.

MR. ELLIN: No. No, he didn't find anybody. That's why Frank O'Hara thought that my writing was so good. He said, "Because nobody has seen David's work in terms of the media itself as you have done." And I said, "Well, it's because nobody who writes out criticism is a mechanical engineer and has held a welding torch himself."

You know, when I went to engineering school, we had workshops; we had to learn how to do all these things. I had a welding course in Michigan. I had metal laboratory - you welded - you wore a leather apron and you put a manny on and you welded. And I knew how hard it was to do a perfect weld, because you have the welding material, and you have to move it forward with one hand while your torch dances around the metal. And if you do it right, you have a lot of little wavelets. It's a smooth weld with little wavelets and it's very symmetric. Well, see, I knew that. It's just like knowing how to put paint down the right way. And he liked that a lot, and I liked talking to him about that.

So rapport - there's so many different forms of rapport, but that's where, you know, as an art dealer, if you have some diversity in your background, there's just more possibilities of what ways you can talk to artists.

MS. KIRWIN: Do you think there was greater reception for Dada or Surrealist art in California? They had a bit of a history of Surrealist art on the West Coast -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, they -

MS. KIRWIN: - and do you think that your shows of -

MR. ELLIN: Like the Dada show I had? I think it was a particularly responsive place because Hollywood is Hollywood, you know. The bizarre characterization, you know, cartoonlike - I mean, living in Los Angeles is like living on the comic page of a newspaper. Anything goes, you know, clothing, cars; everybody was different. When I worked at William Morris, I drove a Morgan, which was a fast British sports car that was actually made partially of wood. It still had wood floorboards with metal over it, and I had a little cabriolet top. Everybody wanted to do something very different; nobody liked to drive a car that was too much like anybody else's.

So new things, provocative things, I think, were more easily digested there because of the nature of the community. It's a bizarre sort of place, Hollywood especially. So I think it did go down better there, and I think that accounts also for the fact that Ferus Gallery was very effective in selling [Andy] Warhol - Warhol when, you know, there was still questions about Warhol. It was perceptive but, unfortunately, not enough people to be the receptive ones, you know.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, speaking of collectors, if we jump coasts. Could you - you talked about some collectors on the West Coast but not the New York people that you encountered in -

MR. ELLIN: Well, see, I met all of the important New York collectors. I met them either at Marlborough - I met them at French & Company, and I knew them by name; they knew me, but I wasn't in New York with my own gallery selling to them. I would often collaborate with New York dealers in a sale to those people, but in that situation, typically the New York dealer would be dealing with his client there. I would just be helping the

transaction.

So I didn't have a lot of repetitive contact with big-time collectors. I knew Ben Heller, you know; he was a big-time collector in New York and he owned Pollocks. And I knew him a bit personally because of the Pollock connection and the fact that he, you know, liked the show I did, and I had - I participated in sales to him. Robert Scull, who owned a taxi company and made a lot of money right after the war, I knew him pretty well. Richard Brown Baker, who was a bachelor who had some money and collected on his own, I knew him pretty well. And I knew Bernard Reis well because Bernard Reis who - an accountant -

MS. KIRWIN: He was a lawyer, too, wasn't he?

MR. ELLIN: He was an accountant. He was the accountant for Marlborough, and he was also a collector. And in the Marlborough days I saw a lot of him. I knew him pretty well. But I - never having been - having my own gallery in New York, I can't claim to have known those collectors well. I knew Fred Weisman very well. I mean, my California clients, they would come in, and I knew them, and sometimes I did find works for them, but I told you my frustration is they usually spent their money in New York.

Does that answer the question?

MS. KIRWIN: Yes.

MR. ELLIN: Okay.

MS. KIRWIN: And in New York, you said you lived next to, was it, Motherwell?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, the Motherwells they - they wanted to help me get set up, you know, in anticipation of Marlborough. And Bob Motherwell was maybe more instrumental than anyone else in putting me forth as the acceptable young dealer. So they were delighted when that happened, and they - it was, sort of, summertime, and I had to get there - well, it was late summer I guess it was. They wanted to help me set up, and Helen said that she would - well, they said, come out and spend a little time with us in Provincetown, and then you can stay with us and we'll try and find you an apartment. But they did find me a duplex in the brownstone next to them on West 94th - 93rd Street in - no, East 93rd, in Manhattan. And so I was actually right next door, and I had a duplex, so I had two floors and because -

MS. KIRWIN: That must have been a great address.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, it was a nice address, and it was an easy place to flag a cab in the morning, because all the cab garages were up there and they were all coming onto duty. You went out and there were 50 cabs coming down - you know, Third - not Fifth - Fifth or Sixth Avenue, something like that. And that's about where we were.

And they had - they were very, very social because they were very, very polished people and energetic, and they had many friends. And they had a soirée, as I called it, on average about once every week, it seemed, an evening where, come over for drinks was all you needed to say, and then it would be an interesting group of people. And me being next door and sort of, in effect, their discovery, I was always invited. But I just had to wash up a little bit and go next door, and those were very fun gatherings, because they had a very interesting mix of people. It was lively; it was just like Gertrude - it's as if Gertrude Stein was having a little, you know, party in those days.

MS. KIRWIN: Who were the sorts that would show up?

MR. ELLIN: Well, there was a mix. There were collectors; there were other artists; there were critics, museum people, and they - they knew everybody, and they just would mix it up and - but they did this with regularity. And I would run into them, you know, going in and out of the house. And Helen and I used to have conversations. I said if we each leaned out of our bathroom window - which happened to be on the common wall between the two buildings - I could talk to her, and that was sort of a fun thing we would do.

And so that was a nice friendship. I knew them both well. I saw them socially. I saw them in the context of the work. I had to eventually - and Motherwell was with Marlborough. I think I made some sales of his work. I made some sales of his work in California to my clients. And then I gave a show to Helen in my own gallery when I went back to - when I had my second gallery. I did a nice show of hers. And, you know, that was a good friendship and, of course, a learning experience, because they were very, very effective as communicators, the two of them, about their work, about art in general. They were very polished and very bright people who could talk and had tremendous confidence - self-confidence. That was - those were the Motherwells.

MS. KIRWIN: The artists that wanted you to come to Marlborough, were they disappointed when you left Marlborough for the Guggenheim?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah - yeah, they were. Sure, because, you know, they benefited from my presence at Marlborough. I mean, after I left, I didn't know where or how they plugged in. Dealing with Frank Lloyd was - it was never, it was a unilateral connection. Frank was not a good listener. And you couldn't really depend on what he was going to do, you know, with you or for you.

So they were disappointed, but on the other hand, they all wished me well, and there's a certain value of having a friend at the Guggenheim, too. I mean, everybody - relationships were often used for your benefits by what you did. It's just like Hollywood in that regard. I mean, you had a friend and he liked you, then you had - you could call upon him for help, and that was part of the mutuality of help; it was part of the deal, and so it was okay. There I was at the Guggenheim, for whatever it was worth. They were disappointed, but it didn't affect friendship in any way - no, not really.

MS. KIRWIN: Were there any direct ways that you brought them into the Guggenheim, through shows or -

MR. ELLIN: No, no, they were already well established. See, the Guggenheim was just beginning to become involved with contemporary American art. It was about the time I joined the Guggenheim, maybe almost at the same time, that Lawrence Alloway was hired as the curator, a curator of modern art. We didn't have such a thing. And then the Guggenheim started moving in this direction. They didn't show any contemporary - there hadn't been a show yet at the Guggenheim of contemporary American artists when I joined the Guggenheim. But Lawrence Alloway was hired to close that gap, and though British, he really knew our art world and the people. He was a very talented guy.

And then they hired a couple of other younger curators, one at a time, to work with him, and they began to build a curatorial capability in contemporary American art at the Guggenheim. And though I was there and could have helped a lot, the museum was too stodgy to really let me act in a curatorial capacity because of the - not having an M.F.A., and then they had Alloway, too. I mean, I was listened to; I could talk to Alloway and the younger curators, and they often did, because they knew I had plenty of experience, and in some respects, knew American art of the 20th century better than they did because, you know, I had worked with it. Alloway, as a newcomer, read about it, but that was all right. I had a few chances to work on exhibits, and I certainly was able to talk to the curators.

MS. KIRWIN: Can you talk about some of those experiences, because I don't know that we talked on tape yesterday about your involvement in the Calder show. I think that was the time -

MR. ELLIN: Oh, yeah, the - well -

MS. KIRWIN: - and some of the other exhibitions at the Guggenheim.

MR. ELLIN: Well, there was. The first one they really let me work on was a matter of practicality. I told you that they decided to have an exhibit of master craftsmen of Peru -

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, yes.

MR. ELLIN: - and that it was sort of a glitch, and they said, what's the Guggenheim doing with archeology? And what the Guggenheim was doing was Tom [Messer] was pleasing a whim of his wife, who was a Filipino who spoke perfect Castilian, and it was a nice idea. There hadn't been a major exhibit of ceramics from Peru in a long time, and the trustees said, yeah, my, that fits. It's old anyhow; we like old stuff.

And so I went to Tom and I said, "Tom, this is great you're doing this, but who speaks Spanish on the staff?" He said, nobody. I said, "Well, I do; I'm virtually fluent in Spanish. Why don't you use me in some administrative capacity?" And he talked to Mr. Guggenheim, and they liked that idea, you know, that I would represent - I was already representing the museum in a lot of capacities, so why not send him to Peru and let them cut all the deals with the president and the legislature of Peru and with little museums and certainly with collectors, because I had a really good way with collectors. And I had to get permission from dozens of people to take works, and I knew how to do that.

So they sent me with the archeologist to work on that project, and although I was not an archeologist, he had respect for my eye in ceramics. I was already collecting, privately, pre-Columbian juacos and things. So I had some sense of it.

MS. KIRWIN: What was that you were collecting, and how do you spell that?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, well, that's a pot.

MS. KIRWIN: A pot.

MR. ELLIN: And Spanish for pot, "juaco."

MS. KIRWIN: Juaco.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, it's J-U-A-C-O. I was already collecting that material, and I was able to deal with the aesthetics under his tutelage. It was easy, you know, learning the different types of the periods, different cultures, and what was good and what wasn't. That part was easy for me. So I made some aesthetic contributions, but it was his choices, and he knew where to go.

So as it turned out, the job was, for me, not just administrative and diplomatic, but I actually - well, I was the photographer for the project. I took all the photos of the things we saw. And I was working in, like, an assistant curator capacity, virtually. I told you what a rich experience it was, but that's how the Guggenheim sent me. They needed a gringo who could act like a Latino at the right time. Mr. Guggenheim was very -

[Audio break, tape change.]

- comfortable because he saw I could handle myself in those kind of circles, and he could see me dealing with the ambassador of Peru, and I had to deal with Peru's ambassador to America. Even in South America, I had to meet him. I needed him, you know, to get my appointment with the president, which I spent time with the president and got his support with the entire project.

He was an architect, the president of Peru at the time, so he was an art-oriented - his name was Belaúnde [Terry] and he was an architect. The people called him el architecto, not El Presidente. El architecto who happens to be the Presidente. So he endorsed it, and he gave me a proclamation with his seal and a red sash on it that said that the president endorsed this, and that it'd been taken up with the legislature and had the full blessings of the country; and it was good for the nation; and anybody who sees this, I ask to be very cooperative with these people. And we took this document with us whenever we called on people, and we would bring it out. [Laughs.]

MS. KIRWIN: A proclamation?

MR. ELLIN: Yes. [Laughs.] As the curator - [Tom] Sawyer - I told you. He was really - knew everybody and he called that kind of document - he called it a "dago dazzler" -

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs.]

MR. ELLIN: - which I thought was a very vulgar - because I couldn't think of calling a Latino a dago, but - but he called it a "dago dazzler." And, boy, it opened every door. [Laughs.] And that's how we got everywhere. If we ever needed anything - if we needed a helicopter to go to some remote village, the army sent a helicopter, and we were taken care of.

MS. KIRWIN: Visiting dignitaries.

MR. ELLIN: Visiting dignitaries who were about to do something cultural, and I had my whole little talk. I'd say, "Soy el director assistant del museo Guggenheim. Assemos una exhibicion de art Antigua de Peru que es muy importante para la gente,", you know; we're going to organize a big exhibit of art - ancient art - and it's going to be very beneficial to the people of Peru. I had that down, and I could speak fine. And I did have a Castilian, look which was very, very helpful, and they said I spoke very well, and they would say to me when I finished, "Bien dicho," like, well said. And I said, "Muchas gracias señ or."

I got the, you know - I can figure out how to make it in almost any environment, and I loved it down there. I liked the people. It was a great experience, and I told you, it just changed me. But that's how it happened.

MS. KIRWIN: What other shows had you had some hand in at the Guggenheim?

MR. ELLIN: The only other show that they let me work on in an official capacity was the Calder exhibition, when nobody could figure out how to display the something like 36 miniature mobiles that he made as jewelry for friends. And he made all those pieces himself, and we had a lot of them, and we couldn't figure out how to show it. And I told him I had this idea, and this is where the engineer stepped in. I said, "I can design a vitrine just for these things, and then we'll have air movement so that they flutter and it will be controllable." And they said, "You can?" And I said, "Yeah, and I can draw it up and have it made." And I made this vitrine and then I installed the pieces, and it was a major hit. Kids liked it because you could stand up and look into the vitrine and see -

MS. KIRWIN: [Inaudible.]

MR. ELLIN: And Calder talked more about that vitrine of mine than the whole installation.

MS. KIRWIN: You had a little fan?

MR. ELLIN: A little fan, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: What was it like?

MR. ELLIN: Well, being a mechanical engineer, there was a time when I did some consulting work, engineering consulting, in some prior years, and I did some work for a company that makes the little fans that go into computers - Rotron was the name of the company - and so I understood little fans, where to buy them and what they could do. And I just got the right little fans, and they were tunable. I could adjust them and get just the wind that I wanted.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] That's great.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. So that was - those were the fun things, and I told you - Calder, he liked me for what I did, and also I had something to do with how the pieces were installed so that they would be safe. And I was listened to, and he wanted the work to be not behind ropes; he wanted the people - the public - to be able to touch things. I thought that was dangerous, but we opened it on the first day and the public poured in. And I'm telling you, kids were hanging from mobiles like it was a carousel.

We had to shut the museum for a couple of days and move the pieces around and put ropes in, because I said, somebody's going to get hurt, and we couldn't let it be opened as he wanted, too many people, too many kids. So there was no touchy anymore, feely-touchy was gone. But for one day, it was a carnival.

MS. KIRWIN: I wish I had been there to see that.

MR. ELLIN: Well it was funny, but it was very frightening to see kids hanging - [laughs] - you know, Calders going around and the kids hanging three feet off the floor.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, that's funny.

MR. ELLIN: But nothing happened, and we shut the museum. I think that's the only time it ever shut.

The only other time it shut was when there was a power out in New York in an afternoon and everything - a lot of people were caught up on the ramp without any lights. And I was one of the staffers. We all grabbed flashlights, went up on the ramp, and guided people out, you know. It was a bit scary. Some colorful moments, fun things.

MS. KIRWIN: How involved was Mr. Guggenheim in the daily runnings of the museum?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, very involved, very involved. Tom Messer, who did an oral history for you - I just read it over again - and he talked about - very candidly about his level of contact with Mr. Guggenheim. We called him Mr. Guggenheim; we didn't call him Harry. Only one person called him Harry, and that was Harvey Arnason, who was the sort of - he was a member of the board and he's supposed to be a liaison between the board. He was a museum person and - between the board and the directorial staff. He still had that role. He eventually left because Mr. Guggenheim said, we don't need an intermediary.

But Mr. Guggenheim would - oh, about every other week, sometimes more often - he would meet Tom Messer and go on a gallery - he would take him to galleries. He was interested to see what was going on. He was interested in the thought of becoming involved with contemporary art. He was open to that, and he wanted to understand the aesthetics of what was going on in the museum, not trying to master it, but he wanted to understand, and he had veto power, you know. I mean, as far as -

MS. KIRWIN: Acquisitions or -

MR. ELLIN: Acquisitions to some degree and exhibits to some degree. He was more involved than people thought. The museum was very, very important to him, and his responsibility. He was the ultimate decision maker. The board meetings were formal and correct, according to Robert's Rules of Order [standard business meeting model], but what got done was only what he approved. If there was a vote - and I sat in on all the board meetings; Mr. Guggenheim wanted me to sit in in order to understand the working of the museums and therefore be more effective as its representative, which I thought was very unusual. But I did it and all - while I was there, I attended all meetings of the board of trustees - very, very unusual to get to see how boards work. It wasn't a very democratic board, because whatever Harry wanted, Harry got, but they went through the steps anyhow. And there were good people on the board.

He was an involved person. He was tasteful in his own right. He wasn't a real collector, but he had been exposed enough to good work that he had developed a kind of a sieve. He could sort out, and he could listen, and he had great respect for Messer, which was good that he did because Messer, he was a very capable museum person. His tastes were - well, he was flexible; otherwise he wouldn't have done the master craftsmen of Peru. He wouldn't have hired Alloway. Messer had some problems just letting authority go on the modern art realm, but once he got Alloway, and there was some good shows and some good junior curators, he gave them sway to do

things. And that was about the time - as they were getting into contemporary art was about the time that I left to do the Museum Computer Network.

See, I came back from Peru, and then I was there for, you know, four or five months of brooding, as I was starting to get bored. And I enjoyed working on the show so much that I said, gee, they'll never give me this chance again. And there was increasing pressure on me to sell the museum because - I mean to - to be the front man. That job became more demanding as the museum began to grow, and I just didn't want to be essentially so much involved with public image and public relations.

In the beginning it was okay. When I got the attendance up to a certain level, I was well pleased, but to stay forever there and be the Perle Mesta of the Guggenheim was not exactly a delightful thought for the indefinite future. And that's when I - in that period of brooding, or self-introspection, is when I began to think of museums in a broader sense. And that's when I began - that's when I gave birth to concept of the Museum Computer Network.

You know, in my office, sitting there brooding, and thinking more about museums generally. Where are they going? It was a natural thing for me to do, because I was an engineer and I had this early awareness of computers, because they were starting to be talked about. It fascinated me, and I put the two together, just like I told you what the process was yesterday.

MS. KIRWIN: Yeah, yesterday we went through a little bit of the - how they came about. But I did want you to talk more about your lecture tour. After you were established at MoMA under Rene d'Harnoncourt -

MR. ELLIN: Okay.

MS. KIRWIN: - and the Mellon Foundation.

MR. ELLIN: Well, when I actually showed up physically in MoMA in my new offices at the early part of '67 and MCN was founded, I had my space. I had a salary; I had a job, a position at MoMA, and this was my only assignment. And then it was -

MS. KIRWIN: Did you have a title there?

MR. ELLIN: No, I was the - my title was Executive Director of the Museum Computer Network. It was sort of considered as a department with no interference.

MS. KIRWIN: A special project or something.

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, but no interference from MoMA at all about what we were doing. They just housed us, and that was such a remarkable thing for Rene d'Harnoncourt to do, just to give us safe harbor and want to nurture this. It made all the difference in the world. And my own museum had no interest. MoMA had a tremendous amount of interest, and that's how we got going.

But then we had the money, there I was, and I said, well, I guess I got to start making some things happen. So I had the philosophy worked out in my head very, very well, and it wasn't two weeks after - three weeks after - we had the money, I called Jack Kroll, who was, at that time, the art critic for Newsweek magazine. He later became the editor of Newsweek. Jack Kroll was a good art writer, and I told him that I was at the Guggenheim now -

MS. KIRWIN: Or the MoMA?

MR. ELLIN: No, I was at the Museum Computer Network. I got to know him when I was at the Guggenheim. I knew him pretty well. And I told him about this project, and I said, "We've got the funding, you know, from Paul Mellon, and offices at the Modern." And I say, "This is a good story." He says, "You bet it is." And he interviewed me the next day, sent over a photographer, and I got Jack Heller to show up from NYU. He was going to be our computer guru. And I laid out the great story, and in the next week it was a full page in Newsweek magazine. It hadn't even started yet.

MS. KIRWIN: I wonder what Tom Messer thought about that, having sent you on your way?

MR. ELLIN: I don't think he was all that pleased. You know, he was reclusive in some respects, but he liked notoriety - but he didn't want to be bothered, you know, too much. So there - that's something I would like you to ask the library to get me a copy of that.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: I haven't been able to get it out of Newsweek, but there's plenty of places that have microfiche of Newsweeks, and I can give you the approximate month and year, and the fact that Jack Kroll was the writer and

had a byline shouldn't make it all that hard to find.

MS. KIRWIN: Is it K-R-O-L?

MR. ELLIN: K-R-O-L-L. He was the editor for many years. He was promoted from art critic to editor because he was really so smart. He was a good guy.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: So then the next thing was, okay, telling the story. How do I, first of all, win the heart of American museums, and then the larger museum community? How do I get people to buy into this challenge? And I had several approaches. One that I thought was very important was for me to start going out and telling this story. And once I had the article in Newsweek, it became, oh, relatively easy for me to call people and arrange visitations.

And I went - starting in '67, I went anywhere in America where there were professionals, museum professionals or art teachers, who would like to hear the story of the Museum Computer Network. And I made close to 30 appearances, not only in this country but abroad. I made several trips to Europe, and I lectured there, because I wanted world support. And I wanted the International Council of Museums to be aware of what we were doing, and I even gave a paper at ICOM in '68.

In 1968 I was really cranking it out, and I was going everywhere. Here are some places I was - in more or less a chronology. College Art Association - that's all the teachers of art - I did a talk at their annual meeting. I was on the program, "Art, Education, and the Computer." I went to - the Metropolitan Museum had a kind of a conference on computer research for museums, which stemmed from what I was doing, and I did a lecture there, called "Computers in the Service of the Arts and Humanities." There's a joint computer conference several times a year of all the computer people, and I went to their annual meeting in '68, and I gave a talk, "The Central Archive for the Records of Museum Collections" in 1968.

I went to the American Association of Museums' annual meeting - my favorite organization - in New Orleans, and I gave a lecture on "Information Systems for our Museums." Then I went to colleges. Sterling - Francis Sterling Museum [Sterling and Francine Art Institute] in Upstate New York [Williamstown, MA; at Williams College], I did a talk there with professionals. This is not a complete list; this is maybe the more important places. I went to the annual meeting of the International Council of Museums in Munich in '68, and I did a lecture, "Scientific Documentation: a World Summary of Current Research Projects," and I talked about museums and computers.

I went to a colloquium at Queen's College [New York City] on the computers and the humanities, and I did a talk, "Museums and the Computer." I went to London and addressed ICOM again. I met at the Meeting of the Committee on the Documentation of Collections at London. I did a talk - a report - on the "Status of Computer Research in American Museums." Then American Society for Information of Science - that's great computer people. I went to its annual meeting, gave a lecture, "Automated Storage Systems for Photographic Material."

MS. KIRWIN: When you talked to these groups, what was the biggest concern that they voiced about this idea?

MR. ELLIN: Well, they wondered, what's wrong with the way we do it now? You know, I mean, I said, you like index cards in shoeboxes? Fine for yourself, but suppose when you need something and you have to find 30 people out there and - who have shoeboxes and get into them, it's another story. It's give and take. You have to become more collegial. You have to share your research. You have to get the habit of that, because the world is not going to move in the direction where each scholar has his little box of stuff. And because there can be no meaningful research on any scale if it's all kept that way.

And I said, you've got to start to change; you will benefit from it, trust me. You will see that you don't have to spend five weeks traveling to 12 museums to put together a list of works for an exhibit you're doing. You can do it in two hours. Well, I told them about the practicalities and - and the benefits.

MS. KIRWIN: So would you say the greatest resistance was the unwillingness to share information?

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, and well, why are we doing all this? And I said - that's when I started doing this museums as media thing. I said, "You know, you must begin to understand that museums will not always be what I call the linear, 19th-century museum, where you walk in at point one and it's like going down in the subway platform, you know. You go through all the stations of the cross and then come out the other end and you're done. It's not going to be that kind of a thing. We're going to have something that is a different creature. And it's going to reach its audience in many ways other than just people in the galleries."

And there's something called a medium, and I talked about McLuhan a lot, and I said, this theory of his has attracted great attention. He has seen something that is undeniable, that there is something called a medium.

And I even told them my idea that museums themselves are a medium. Like television is a medium, radio is a medium, movies are a medium, museums are a medium. And you're going to wake up to that one day. And that's when I would do the doomsday thing. I said, if you're not ready, and you wake up to it only when mass media is unbelievably powerful, it'll swallow you, because you won't be able to compete with the proliferation of images that mass media will deliver to your eye, I guarantee it.

And, you know, I got arrested attention. I mean, even in places where you wouldn't think. I went - I lectured at all kinds of places in Europe. I even went to universities that had art departments, you know, like the University of Lund [Sweden], University of Oslo [Norway]. I did talks in the London Institute of Contemporary Arts. I did a talk called "Museums as Media." Same title as that article I did, you know. I went to many places in Europe, to London - Scandinavia, London, Paris, Germany - any chance I got, and my steering committee encouraged this. There was enough money in the budget for me to go travel. It wasn't all that expensive, and I went.

MS. KIRWIN: Were the Europeans more or less receptive to these ideas?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, they were not as nearly as responsive. They nodded, but they didn't feel the threat of change. They were stodgier. I thought nothing could be stodgier than our museums, but I was wrong. [Laughs.] You know, they were slower. They thought it was very interesting. They didn't understand too much of what I was talking about media because they weren't as far into the electronic age as we already were, and they were slower on the uptake.

But I went because I wanted an international base for this whole thing. I didn't want to pretend that Europe wasn't there, so I went. But, of course, when I actually - I did - I mean the International Council of Museums and UNESCO published a journal called The Museum, and I did an article for them called "Computer Prospects in the Museum World." I did another article for them, "Considerations in the Formation of Museum Databanks." And I was the first person to talk about databanks for museums.

I went everywhere I could go, and then, of course, a lot of published stuff in journals in America. Altogether, there was all - some three dozen actual appearances - invited to talk about this. That's a lot of places to go, and it was all over the country. So -

MS. KIRWIN: Can you talk about some of the support that you received from the American government, if you will?

MR. ELLIN: Oh, yeah, that's - that was very, very important - very, very important. I had a real lucky chance, and it just was the way the timing was. When Lyndon Johnson took office, his wife, Lady Bird, she was already an art collector. I know this because I know people who are close friends of hers and knew her as an art person in those days. That she prevailed upon Lyndon Johnson, busy as he was as the new president, to address the fact that America's museums were - they were in plight. They were not getting government support, attendance wasn't that great, and they were suffering, and they couldn't do the things they want to do.

And she in effect said, Lyndon, I don't ask a lot from you, but I want you to have some responsible federal agency in collaboration with the museum community of America to determine what their needs are. And I want you to do something about the federal government addressing this shortfall. And Lyndon acted, and what he did was he asked - I think it was maybe the National Endowment for the Arts, or the equivalent - Federal Council on the Arts. He asked them to come up with a report that listed the needs - that described the needs of America's museums.

And the Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities said, "We'll do it, Mr. President." And they contacted the American Association of Museums, and they - which was a more scholarly oriented organization than today, much more serious about museums as such - to write this report, to get a committee together and determine what our needs were. It took - it was a very good committee appointed, and they worked close to a year, looking in all these areas. And they came up with a list of the 10 most urgent needs of America's museums, and they delivered this letter to Lyndon Johnson in the form of a report. And the report was actually put together at a conference that was held at - in Belmont, that conference center. I think it's the one that the Smithsonian owns.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

MR. ELLIN: It's - when you did the pull-out today, it said that Belmont - it was a place where conferences occurred, and from what your library pulled out, it's the Belmont Conference Center in Elkridge, Maryland. That's the place called Belmont, and now I see for the first time how it got its name.

So there was a conference and - there, and then there was an agreement of the needs, and then there was this report written. And it was a printed book about three-eighths of an inch thick; it was very comprehensive. And on the list of 10 most urgent needs was the need for computer technology and capability in museums. I made the cut, and that's pretty good to go from zero existence to one of the 10 most needs.

It was nicely reported in the report, but the editors of the report asked me, as the founder of the Museum Computer Network and the executive director, to write a separate appendix and go into more detail of what is that need. That was only one of three items like that to fill it out, and I wrote that appendix and it had my name on it. It was my text and they printed it as such. And that book was widely read, because it was a lot of wisdom about museums and what they are in America and what's the challenge, and there had never been anything like it before and never anything since.

Museums at that time were able to make a very clear characterization of their role, what was missing and what could be. It was a brilliant piece of work. And for many years it was recorded, Belmont Report this, Belmont Report that. Well, I helped write the report, and it prompted, before long, federal aid for museums. And then MCN was - at that point, it was really aloft. It had credentials, you know. It had an imprimatur on it now of the federal establishment that was, of course, amazing at the time, and that made things move faster. With all that, I was able to get IBM to give us use of a mainframe, a 360, give us computer people to do work pro bono.

MS. KIRWIN: And did this mainframe go to MoMA?

MR. ELLIN: No, we just were allowed to use it.

MS. KIRWIN: Oh, okay.

MR. ELLIN: No, never it got moved. But we got access to what was state of the art, and the 360 was the first system that had promise of multiple applications and it changed everything. In fact, last week was the 40th anniversary of the launch of the 360, to the day. And I read about it in the New York Times and Washington Post, and it was almost - it was almost the day that we got everything, you know, put together in terms of money in my office.

So it was just serendipitous, the kind of attitude towards computing - the practicality of computing was assured by the arrival of the mainframe. And we just, well, I had the good judgment to call IBM right away and get them involved. And they thought it was wonderful. They were very receptive and they gave us a lot of help. And we wouldn't have - we didn't have to spend any money for computing time or access to computers, and it was a great boon to us.

So does that answer -

MS. KIRWIN: Well, what did you actually do with the computer time? Did you -

MR. ELLIN: Well -

MS. KIRWIN: - begin to develop the database or -

MR. ELLIN: Well, yeah, there was a lot experimentation about how - what do you put in a database about your collection that is useful at a future date? And there we had several on the steering committee. Bill Wilkinson was the registrar of the Metropolitan, and he was on our steering committee. David Vance, the registrar of MoMA, was not on the committee, but he volunteered to work hard at MoMA, with approval from the director on this project.

And there was investigations about, how do you establish the fields, and what is the information that you put in this record that will let you access things that you need? And then how do you like the software that you can give to the computer to pluck out what you need and get printouts? And that took about a year. It was just basics. What are the kinds of things we often use?

And there was a proof of concept when we were able to put things in the database and actually retrieve. And since I had this network idea that was critical and central to my idea for the Museum Computer Network, is that there would be a number of archives around the country, not necessarily one at every museum, but whatever they were, they would be interconnected by a computer network. And that was the exact language I used in writings, and that was what I called the project, which was a rather precocious name, because the word "network" was not in anybody's vocabulary except broadcasters.

MS. KIRWIN: When did Lawrence Alloway's book [Network: Art and the Complex Present, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1984] come, about the art world network -

MR. ELLIN: Well, if he did, he stole the word from me.

MS. KIRWIN: [Laughs] Maybe he did.

MR. ELLIN: Anybody who used the word "network" in the context of computers had to have gotten it from me.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it was very much in - you were very much of the moment to have this vision when the hardware was available.

MR. ELLIN: Well, that was luck. I mean, there was - the mainframe was the first practical computer for business to buy. And there were no PCs, and that - the first mainframe - I've seen them; in fact, I have a piece that IBM gave me of a mainframe, a vacuum tube. It's a piece like that that plugged in. It took a room bigger than this office.

MS. KIRWIN: About 15 [feet] by 15 [feet].

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. It took an air-conditioned room with a raised floor to put thousands of cables and that - a mainframe was formidable. And companies, big companies, began to buy the mainframe as soon as it appeared because it was - it had multiple applications and it was practical. And then everything began to change. So then things began to move faster.

IBM's involvement was very, very important. I acknowledged it. They had a fellow working at headquarters who was the liaison with the museums, and I knew that guy, and we got all kinds of help from them. And then we had computer scientists in colleges who were wanting to use computers for various things in the arts and humanities. And there was this network of computer scientists in universities who were concerned with that, and they were working in small ways with computers. And we began - the Museum Computer Network project was where all this experience was coming together and being used in a practical way, and progress was being made. And finally, it reached a point where we proved the concept - this works. And I had already - in fact, two years before - prophesised that, do not think only of digital files of data, alpha numeric data -

[Audio break.]

MS. KIRWIN: This is the fourth - I'm sorry, fifth - disc and the second session, and it's Liza Kirwin interviewing Everett Ellin at the Archives of American Art office in Washington, D.C.

And you ended the last disc on a very important sentence, and we just wanted -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah, what was the - the sentence was basically -

MS. KIRWIN: It was about the importance of capturing -

MR. ELLIN: Okay.

MS. KIRWIN: - digital images as well as -

MR. ELLIN: Yes. Yeah, okay, I know where I was. Where we left off was I said that MCN did an excellent job in figuring out how to create digital files of data. But when I made the initial model for MCN, I talked about records, alpha-numeric records, but in the same breath, I said, in due course there will be available devices which are able to capture digital photo - digital images of works in a collection or on exhibit of sufficient quality so that we will be able to store those images as digital files, along with the data, and be able to pull them up separately.

And once you can do that, then, I said also that those images at some future time will be distributable, viewable by people. They could be sent to the home, to businesses, to the classroom, almost anyplace you can conceive, and that will be a wonderful day. That was way out, because I said, when - eventually we will have such technology; it is inevitable. And when that happens - I was trying to say, outreach busts wide open. There is no limit to what you could really do. That was the - a very, very important thought. To my view, more important than just storing data in digital form, because now, with digital images, you can move the images to where you want them, to the people who can't get to them, and in a variety of ways.

I did not realize it's going to take about 35 years to get digital photography of that quality. I hoped maybe it would be maybe a decade, 15 years, but it's taken awhile. It's hard, and we needed a lot of things. A lot of enabling technologies had to appear, like the chip - well, you know, and the design of chips and all that had to happen before we could have this capability.

And now the new technology, which I called - which is the Foveon technology - has one final twist. It puts more color options in each pixel than the basic primaries, and what you can put in, say, six primaries - one of six primaries at each pixel - you'd be able to - you can produce an image with so much color range and intensity that the image begins to dish up to the eye what the eye sees when it looks at the original object. And that is a real breakthrough in terms of what museums can do, and fortunately, I got involved with the Foveon technology when -

MS. KIRWIN: Could you spell that technology?

MR. ELLIN: Foveon is F-O-V-E-N - F-O-V-E-O-N. And it's a derivative of some technical word, something to do with eye and perception, but it's a technology that was ingenious in its invention, and it was developed by a smart group of people. And they had the good judgment to sell about half the stock of the company to National Semiconductor, which is the most skillful company in creating chips. They have what's called a foundry, a chip foundry - very exotic technology is necessary to make a complex chip. This company has that capability. So being a stockholder in Foveon, they were able to devote part of the plant whenever they needed it to make instantly, or very quickly, the chips and test them. And that's very, very important.

So Foveon technology has appeared; it's patented; it's been used only in one commercially made camera, made by Sigma, which is a good camera outfit in the Pacific Rim, and the camera's been a big hit. And then, through my intervention, I got the company that is doing the marketing for Foveon - the developers of the technology have looked to outsiders to help them with marketing. And a very good friend of mine has a company that has a mandate to find applications to determine which are the most interesting ones. And he's a close friend. I've been a consultant to him and a participant in joint ventures, and he's one of the earliest people in the country who is still young and has worked on digital imaging from its very inception.

So I was informed by him of what he was about to do. I helped him write his contract with Foveon, and I've been apprised of all the advances, and I got him to interested in the museum application. And I got him to the symposium that I recommended be done by the Cleveland Museum to investigate the potential of advanced digital photos. He was at that symposium and won the hearts of the museum people who were there. He was on my roundtable of five experts that I moderated at the annual meeting of MCN just a few months ago [November 5-8, 2003; Las Vegas, Nevada]. So he knows the museum people; he knows the applications; and he's got a model of this camera that's designed specifically for museums. So -

MS. KIRWIN: I'm sure you hear this all the time in dealing with museum people, but I'm playing the devil's advocate: what do you say to people who say there's no substitute for the original?

MR. ELLIN: Well, that's - one has to accept that. I mean, that's what the word "original" means. But that's a fine phrase when you can get to the original. Then that means - that's kind of Darwinian. If you're strong and you can go there, you can see the original. And I - there is a Darwinian component, you know, to art and culture. It should be there for everybody, but you have to have a little gumption, a little incentive, and then you get it.

But when you reach a point where physical access to the original work becomes very, very difficult because of various circumstances and the difficulty in going to another city in terms of anxiety and expense - it's - any business trip - any pleasure trip today is an anxious experience, because there's so many things that can go wrong. It's uncomfortable, it's very expensive and people - a lot of people used to be able to pack their family up and go to a - to Denver to see a great show, but they just can't get there as a practical matter.

People who live outside of cities, in the suburbs, find it difficult to go into the center of town and spend a museum afternoon. It's hard to get to; parking is extravagant. You know, you go to the Dallas Museum from some community that's an hour away, and it takes half a day and you spend it with a small family - $50, $60. It's getting - it's a daunting experience.

So when you reach that point and when museums themselves are frantically trying to make ends meet and putting on more and more entertainment-oriented things - street fairs, jazz music, a constant array of entertainment things - it's like a Barnum & Bailey - it's a three-ring circus. It's difficult for them to bring forth things from the collection and show them on a regular basis.

So access to the original is becoming tenuous, and it will get worse. So I say, if we can't see the original, but we can see something digitally created, and digitally displayed, that approaches the sensation - the rush, I call it, that you have when you look at original work - approaches it, then it's a better way to go than not seeing anything. And I know enough about perception to know what the butterflies feel like. And I have looked at some of these photos, and my socks - as sophisticated as I am in the way of viewing - it knocked my socks off. It comes close; it comes close to what the eye itself generates when it looks at the original work. You have to understand that -

[Audio break, tape change.]

- when there's so much color accurately captured and re-presented, you approach the object itself, in terms of the eye, because the chip works a lot like the eye. The new ones work like the eye does, like for human perception. So it's foolhardy to ignore that we have this option.

Then there's another thing, too, that museums need revenue sources to supplant things that are going away. Fewer visitors at the facility mean less revenue, and so what are they supposed to do, just ring their hands? No. How about looking upon the individual who comes to see things in the museum collection via the web by going to a database that has these superior images in it and pays a modest fee for the experience, much like the

download of a song? I mean, America's ready to pay for downloads, because they know it costs money to go to places and see things. There is revenue produced that - and museums should get their fair share of that. And that kind of revenue from digital visitors supplants or substitutes for lost revenue when fewer people come. That's very, very good.

Of course, museums have to have some different attitudes, a little more flexibility about an intellectual property, but, you know, what's more important to a museum than sustainability? Come down to it, it is the most important concern. You know, when survival on the near horizon is, maybe, iffy, it's good to have some options.

So, yes, nothing supplants the original, but just there's things that come close. And what the hell, I mean, we go to movies and we see visuals and scenes that are not the same as looking at it, you know, through binoculars. We're used to that. But there has to be a certain threshold where it approaches the real experience, and this technology does more than approach it. It gets you into that realm. And I've talked to the museum people that have seen these images - anybody that looks at it says, wow! What is that? And when they - when you take printouts of these images to trade shows and you show them to people, sophisticated people in the imaging realm, within about five minutes after the show opens and about 30 people are around looking at these images. They're so good.

Well, that's fine. That's a wonderful option in difficult times. I don't want people to be cut off of the experience of confrontation, and there has to be a substitute confrontation that approaches, you know, the actual experience. And then we have done something to restore access and to give most anybody that delightful sensation of seeing a good work of art without hopefully too much didactic elements or too much instruction. Just let the eye do it. The eye knows how, and that's - that is a real option and a very important one.

And I'm very involved now in telling this message of the option, the alternative, and showing museums that there is the potential very soon of new and varied forms of outreach with these images. There are many things they can begin to do that are appealing to an audience that arise digitally, including recreation of the sensation of being in an exhibit space and/or looking at individual works. You know, there is something about the aura of an exhibit that's nice, exciting, in and of itself. And then as you go in on an original work, the experience changes to the intimacy. Well, those kinds of things could be done.

And there will be a different sort of curator talents. There will be people who can design outreach using these tools. Optional forms of outreach - very, very important that museums do - that they talk about outreach. It's in the vocabulary, but they don't articulate very well what they mean - well, we've got to - we have to do better outreach.

It's more than just different audiences, different segments of their constituency. It's what they deliver and how they deliver it, as well as to whom. And outreach is going to be the new kind of outreach, made possible by technology like this and, I'm sure, the other technologies. It's going to be a challenge and an option for museums. I know it, because I watched the word "outreach," and two years ago you barely heard it, and now everybody talks about it. But if you sit down with curators and museum directors, they can't articulate too well what they're talking about, except speaking about the type of individual they reach. It's more than the type of individual; it's, what do they dish up?

MS. KIRWIN: Well, it's also evaluating the experience. I don't know how we do that.

MR. ELLIN: Well, we do it by experimentation, and we have to test these things. Just like MCN had to test all this stuff out and see whether it was worth it. And I've designed a project that's meant to do this, and it's poised and ready to go. And the purpose of the project is to create a repository of the kind I'm describing and actually put images into it using this technology, and then delivering them to various classes of individuals, including, very importantly, those who come in, dial in, and get these images. And seeing what it does, and how good it does, and what are the difficulties, and what sort of broadband capability on the backside, to respond to audiences coming, you know, over the web.

We're going to work with the technology and with the camera, and with real service, the kind that we have today and T1 lines, and we're going to walk through this and figure it out. It has to be done. It has to be experimented with, and it takes the same kind of energy that it took in MCN to do the equivalent thing at a different level. So I've got the people assembled; I have the museum IT experts who want to be part of this. I've got several universities thinking about housing the project, because if it's at a university, then we can make use of computer capabilities that are already at the university. They all have servers; they all have big computer centers; they all have T1 lines that are not overtaxed; and it's a good place to put a project.

MS. KIRWIN: There are consortiums of research at universities that share visual images for teaching theaters, and I think it's variety of sources of funding, the Getty, the Pew Charitable Trust, and a couple of other places. Are you familiar with those initiatives?

MR. ELLIN: Yes, I am, and there's also the Mellon Foundation that has quietly offered assistance to museums that want to improve their image acquisition capabilities. And I have the project organized as a mechanism, ready to move, with really capable people ready to do the job. Then if we have this capability and this willingness, then that's the time to go to those places and say, well, we've got this set up now, and whatever you could do to partake in this would expedite the results.

I'd like to have the entity, the mechanism, in place, just like MCN. We had the mechanism in place before I went to IBM, and if it's real, it has a situs [ph], it has a computer facility to use, it has a director - I volunteered to be the executive director for an interim period until it gets in orbit. You know, somebody has to spearhead that who has the passion to do it and can arrest some attention. And then the project gets going. And I have high hopes that this can happen, I hope, in a matter of months.

I've put quite a bit of time in designing the project and lining up all these people, including MCN and its board of directors. MCN is a great place to get specialized talent for issues that come up, because their rolodex of capable people is their membership. And so you don't have to look around for the best people; you can find them instantly and involve them.

MS. KIRWIN: Are you talking about comprehensive databases for museum collections, or just a selection?

MR. ELLIN: Well, in the beginning - I think eventually it would be comprehensive, but in the beginning, we need to know that it works in terms of image quality and convenience. Then scale - scaling is another issue. You know, do we want everything that's in a museum on this database? It's probably impractical. But if people can get a pretty good feeling of the general nature of a museum or highlights from its collection - if people - if the greater public can just see highly commendable works from a variety of institutions, it is to them exciting. So the level of comprehensivity [sic] will be determined by what's practical.

MS. KIRWIN: A lot of museums do this now. They have established image databases linked to cataloguing records for individual objects and works of art. But your idea is pairing it with a much higher resolution printer. How does it differ from what exists already in numerous websites?

MR. ELLIN: Yes, yes, yes, yes - yeah, because it - well, they're working with basic chips with three primary colors for each pixel, and there is a severe limit at what you get. I mean, you - the excitement, you know, the classic reaction to a work of art is not attainable with that kind of image. It works fine for scholars. It works fine for teachers doing a lesson plan. But it doesn't approach a replication of the experience of confronting objects.

That paradigm shift that moves it to a higher quality image will change that. And if we think, too, of the public - the greater public - instead of just teachers and scholars - which is the focus of the Mellon Foundation and ARTstor, is basically teachers and scholars - that's fine. And it's good that the files are perhaps smaller there, because the art historian just needs to know what the image is. He doesn't need to get his jollies. I mean, he's really doing his work.

MS. KIRWIN: He should.

MR. ELLIN: Well, yeah, but it isn't the same as winning - as reaching the people to such a degree that what we have done in this experience has helped them pursue happiness. You know, we need the ability in America again to pursue happiness in a meaningful form. And this is one of the ways that we can do this. And when we have the option of a pursuit of happiness in - in the colonial sense, a sense of the founding fathers - we become a stronger society and more fulfilled.

I don't want to see the opportunity to confront something in a near-life experience - I don't want to see that gone, because it's hard to get there. And I think that's a good thesis. We need to do this. We need to do both those things, and we'll only know the true challenge when we work with this and see the level of excitement and see the storage problems and, you know, broadband and - and we put some real numbers on it, and then we decide how far we can go.

We're not going to know this until we do, you know, the classic development of a project, and we'll hire the people that think it's important enough to do it. I think it's important enough for me to drop other things I do, and for the last eight months or so - close to a year - I've basically done nothing else. And I get the awareness of this technology out, talked about, seen by museum people, appreciated, understood, so they say, hey, this is good. We could use a camera like that, and then you have groups of them come and say, we need a camera that does, basically, this.

And then I got the people with the technology that got them their information and got them in touch with the museum people, and lo and behold, the camera that's wanted exists. It's not a prototype; it's a production unit, but it's - you know, it's for field testing right now. And it's being bicycled around and shown to museums. Well, that's quite a step ahead; instead of five years of research and development, we have it now.

So if we have it now, let's take the next step of seeing what to do. Most of us feel that it's well worth the effort, and at a certain level that's practical; it will do a lot, compared to the absence of access. It's, you know - it's - you have to think about, what does it mean when you can't get to museums? I know for myself, I would have a ball being able to just go in there and look at some good stuff. You know, just look at it and say, honey, will you look at that? Look at - look at that [Edward] Hopper. Now, isn't that amazing?

And I do this all the time with people in my rural art enclave, farmers, farm hands, ranchers, repairmen, out in the boonies in a way, and walk through my collection - many that's in my collection of about over 200 paintings, and there's some very good stuff there, you know. A great variety, very eclectic collection, and I just watch them look and comment and get excited, and it only confirms the theory I have that there is a purity in art's ability to reach the eye - thrill the individual - without a great - without much instruction involved in the process. They get it, and they see what I see, you know, with all my sophistication and experience. They have the same excitement. Well, that's very nice to have tested the hypothesis. I guess one of the reasons I'm living where I live is that I am living among the people that, you know, the general population.

MS. KIRWIN: Where do you live now?

MR. ELLIN: I live on a 90-acre ranch about 12 miles outside of Longview, Texas, which is a pretty good-sized town of 80,000. But it isn't a sparsely populated area. It's a fully populated rural area where people are alert and they're home-centered, and they know that the art component is missing and they have some sense that's it's a missing ingredient. They love coming through and seeing what I have, and talking. I ask them, what do you see, Fred? And what gets you here? And it's the same as what I see. And I can't tell you what a thrill that is, you know, because it works; it's how humans are. So it's a very representative, lively community of a rural - basically rural structure, with towns, too.

But the towns - a city in that kind of part of the world of about 65,000, when it comes to art, isn't very sophisticated either. It's a city, but it - you know, it's just not connecting. So this is a good place for me to have lived to test these things, and to be fairly confident that I have it right, you know, about what matters. Somebody has to think at that level, and it usually starts out with somebody like me, and then museums hear about it and think about it, and they say as they did with MCN, you know, now that I see it, it's a good idea; we should be doing this. It's the same process. I'll get the same reaction.

And there is more and more talk about the problems of museums in terms of survival. The big museums haven't suffered as much with attendance, but they have rapidly rising expenses just by keeping the place titillating. They're spending a lot of money to do that; they have to, and that's not working well. They need to reach out in a way that doesn't consume them in this frantic attempt to match mass media, to catch the public eye.

And then, of course, the smaller museums are having trouble getting traveling shows, and the big museums are having trouble creating blockbuster exhibitions, because it's hard to get people to send them around. Insurance costs are prohibitive, very - and so big museums that used to do three blockbusters a year, and basically cover the nut, can only do one, but the expenses remain the same. Well that's - they all think about that.

And it's interesting, too, that larger museums use the information technology manager as a key decision maker. IT people have a lot to say about priorities in museums. Their recommendations are listened to. There's this general awareness that of the threat of mass media and what a museum has to do to have its own place in that mix so it's still there. I am a strong believer that museums would be responsive.

But somebody has to do the work and present these findings, and then museums can make actual decisions, because we'll have the economic model designed for this project. How does it work? Who pays what? The model will be designed, the cash flows, the dollars flows that result from it will be known, and then evidence can be put before museums, and then some good strategic choices can be made from facts, not speculation. This is necessary. And who better to do it than the one who worried about this a long time ago? And I've had -

MS. KIRWIN: Because you've been away from it for a number of years -

MR. ELLIN: Yeah. Well, but you see, you know -

MS. KIRWIN: What pulled you back to this mission?

MR. ELLIN: Well, in the years that I was away, I became quite a qualified technologist on my own, you know, especially in digital imaging, although I started out with digital radiography. I've learned a lot about the technology of imaging, and about the creation of products, and about what happens, and I needed that information to then look again at my art self. I reached a point in life where I recognized that the art person is the primary person, that I'm really an art person who went off and did other things, but the other things I did are very useful in this mission. See, I know all about manufacturing cameras and developing applications and how to get that done, you know, which is a mystery in itself. And it's only because of that that I can lay out the blueprint

now.

So I - I've, in a way, returned to the Museum Computer Network, and by choice I just decided that it's where my spirit dwells, and I go back to it, but now with extra knowledge that is helpful. And I got encouragement from the Museum Computer Network's leaders and the general membership to do this. It was almost said, we need you back, you know. You've got this extra layer of experience now, and we need you to come back and apply this knowledge and inspire some initiatives here that get our job done. They've done such good work, created a lot of useful technology.

There's nothing left to be created. Now it's a question of, how do we use it? MCN is the right organization to take the bit in the mouth, because they have worked in this direction for all this time and they're at all the museums. They're in the museums; they are museum people. So it was a suggestion on their part, and I said, you know, I'm thinking along the same lines, and I will come back.

I'm already back in a sense - living - moving to the life I have caused me to use my eyes a lot more. And I had a big house that came with this ranch, 4,200-square-foot house, lots of wall space. I was able to hang everything, my collection and Reneta's, the best of it, and it's a nice collection. I look at art every day, talk about it.

MS. KIRWIN: Tell me the name of your companion again?

MR. ELLIN: Reneta Nunn. N-U-N-N. And it was her late husband who was a really - a very important artist of the South - the Southwest. His name was Ancel Nunn and he was a great painter. And we have some of his best work at home, and art is just - it's part of the daily vocabulary. And then it's mixed with nature, you know; you look at art, you look at nature, and the commonality is so obvious.

I sit in my office just a few feet away of one of his best paintings. It's well known. And I look out at the cattle and the lake, and then I turn my head and there's this painting of - you know, it's of symbolisms. It's interesting; there is a man trying to mount sort of a raging bull in order to take an action that's important in his life. And it's a very, very good painting, and then it's - there's no gear changing. You go from nature to that masterpiece, truly a master painting, and it's all the same. I've learned a lot about - and many theories I have now have been confirmed by my own experience with my eye. Nature, sky, critters, it's all the same. It's one thing. Well, that's a good thing that I have that perception and that I share this.

It's not as complex as some museum people make it. It's not as complex. It's more direct, and it's not something we have to sell to the common man. The common man knows all about that. It's been looking since colonial times at the best vistas we have. They always put the ranch house where the view is best. They know what they're doing - they know what they're doing.

The rhetorical question is, do museums? Well, I like to think they do. I am able to get my ideas in front of these people. I'm not laughed at. They think about it, and they say, perhaps this guy is right again, see, that's - I'm gambling on the fact that Nostradamus returns a second time.

MS. KIRWIN: Well, maybe we could break there on that.

MR. ELLIN: Yes, yes, yeah.

MS. KIRWIN: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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