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Oral history interview with Manny Silverman, 2004 December 10-11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Manny Silverman on December 10-11, 2004. The interview took place in Los Angeles, California, and was conducted by Anne Ayres for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Manny Silverman and Anne Ayres have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MS. ANNE AYRES: Yes, the sound quality seems very good, Manny. This interview is with Manny Silverman, founder of the Manny Silverman Gallery, Los Angeles. The interviewer is Anne Ayres.

The interview takes place at the Manny Silverman Gallery on Almont Drive on two consecutive days, December 10th and 11th, 2004. This is the 10th and it is disc number one. Thank you, Manny, for agreeing to this interview.

MR. MANNY SILVERMAN: Okay. My pleasure.

MS. AYRES: Looking back over a lifetime, an ongoing lifetime of active participation in the art world is a daunting endeavor. May we start by sketching in a bit of biographical background? When and where were you born?

MR. SILVERMAN: I was born in Los Angeles, 1941, February 13th, 1941. So I'm a local kid. I went to – well, the high school I attended was Los Angeles High School. I also went to California State College, LA. Got my BA there. After my BA I was a social worker for the County of Los Angeles, was married, went to – didn't care for social work as to be my life's endeavor. And got a job with the Ernest Raboff Gallery on La Cienega.

MS. AYRES: Would you spell that, the Ernest?

MR. SILVERMAN: Raboff. R-a-b-o-f-f.

MS. AYRES: Ernest Raboff Gallery.

MR. SILVERMAN: And both my wife Jackie and myself worked there. He put – he used to do art auctions of all things on Monday night. That was during the Monday night art walks on La Cienega also.

MS. AYRES: Would you be a little bit clearer about the date now when you graduated from college –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, sure. It was – that was – it was the Kennedy years, I guess, so it would be 19 – late '62. So I went to work for Ernie in probably the end of '63, beginning of 1964.

MS. AYRES: Before we go into that, could I ask you a little bit about your parents?

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh sure. My mother was born in Russia. She was – she came to the United States in the late '20s, married my father in 1939. He was from Philadelphia. He was disabled early on in my childhood, but overcame it as best he could. He was paralyzed on the right side and eventually they scrimped and saved and he went into the liquor business and had a retail liquor store, which he bought when I was about 9 or 10 years old.

And he had two of them. Not all together – he had one, sold it, and then bought another one. Used to be on Doheny Drive actually, only a few blocks – a couple of blocks away from where we are now. And I worked in that store. It was a perfectly normal American upbringing. You know, we had our trials and tribulations but –

MS. AYRES: Were you an only child?

MR. SILVERMAN: I was an only child, yes. And my mother was actually 41 when I was born, so she – so I only – she didn't want to have another child. And then, of course, my father got sick when I was three months old, so I didn't have any siblings.

MS. AYRES: Was there art in the family or was it a really –

MR. SILVERMAN: Not really. My dad loved to take me places. He certainly loved the opera. We would go there, and we did go to the museum.

MS. AYRES: What opera?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it was the San Francisco Opera, when it came to LA. There was the LA Opera, I remember.

MS. AYRES: But the New York City Opera came out –

MR. SILVERMAN: That was later, though. By then I was an adult. I did that myself. Yeah, right. But I'm talking about – he loved classical music. I remember seeing Nathan Milstein back in the '50s. And he liked to go to the museum down in – when it was in Exposition Park. He didn't particularly care for post-war art, you know, like most people of his generation.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of the museum at Exposition Park, could you talk a little bit about what you saw there?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, my most found memory of it is actually a show when I was a young adult. Actually I was married, I think. Jackie and I went to a show called "The Bitter Years." And it was a show that Henry Hopkins put together about the WPA photography of the '30s, and we actually got to hear Upton Sinclair speak about his governor's campaign in California.

I remember there was a Van Gogh show down there that was really quite interesting. I wasn't really involved in the arts except on a very peripheral nature until such time as I, of course, went to work for Ernie Raboff. And I went to work for Ernie Raboff because he promised to pay me $100 a week clear, which was more than I was making as a social worker.

MS. AYRES: How did you meet him?

MR. SILVERMAN: We walked in, Jackie and I, one night on a Monday night and were taken by a painting. It was a show of an artist who was very influenced by German expressionist Edvard Munch. His name was Karl Ragnar Johannson. And we saw a small painting there that was like – I remember it was $150. And a couple of weeks later, my father-in-law actually came back from Las Vegas, and he had won some money, and he gave me $100. So $100 was quite a bit back then.

MS. AYRES: That's more than you made.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. And, you know, well, what should we do? And like Jackie and I both at the same time said, let's go tomorrow. Like I think it was on a Sunday or it may have been on a Monday. And I called the dealer. I was – we were excited. We thought we'd buy that painting. And I actually offered him $100. And he said, well, he'll take the $100 but then I could pay the $50 off.

And we just kind of like connected. We still have that painting too. And we actually bought another one by that artist later. But once I hit that street and there was so much – you know, it's probably small by today's standards, but it seemed like a wonderful world to get immersed in.

And he was putting on these auctions about once a month where he would use – there was a movie – a legitimate theater. I think it was called – I think it was the Wadsworth Theater or something but it's not there anymore. It was a theater in which we saw – I remember it was the theater where we saw – what was that, Zero Mostel, oh, *The Rhinoceros*. And it was the theater that we saw *The Balcony*.

It was kind of like, for its time, a bit on the avant-garde side and everything. But that theater was legitimate theater. And it was on Waring and La Cienega, where the restaurant Patsia is now. It was used by Mr. Raboff once a month for an art auction because the theaters were usually dark on Monday night.

So he could get that and he would do his previews the previous weekend, starting the previous Monday and actually going the whole week. And Jackie and I both worked for him. Jackie was sort of like a recording person on the stage, as people would bid, and she also was there when people would come into the – she couldn't work full time because she also had – we had had our first child, you know.

But I would work for him part-time while I was a social worker, and then he offered me the job full-time. And what I did is I used to do a lot of research for the things that we sold. Now, what did we sell? We sold all kinds of art, from ethnic arts like New Guinea and African Art, pre Columbian, to Tamarind prints, to contemporary art of the day, to American – you know, American printmakers at the turn of the century, National Academicians and American Academicians.

MS. AYRES: When you say contemporary art of the day –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that was the Tamarind prints and things like that.

MS. AYRES: June Wayne's Tamarind Lithography Workshop [founded 1960].

MR. SILVERMAN: June Wayne, yes. And Sam Francis, Emerson. People – Emerson Woelffer, people like that.

MS. AYRES: They were primarily prints?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. But what he would also do, interestingly enough, is he would buy works in Europe, from auction houses in Europe, bring them to Los Angeles and put them up in his own auction. You know, there was no Internet then and there was just a hunger to buy, you know, drawings. I mean, there was German expressionist drawings. You know, it was a whole different period then.

In the meantime, I was meeting people on La Cienega: such as Irving Blum, who was at the Ferus; and Walter Hopps, who had just gone over to the Pasadena Museum; David Stuart, who had a gallery up the street; Felix Landau, who was across the street; Frank Perls, who had a gallery in Beverly Hills; Paul Kantor. Because we would also go to these galleries and try and get things in their back room and put them up for auction. And it seemed to be a very good way, in those days, to sell art.

MS. AYRES: So from the very beginning for you, your involvement with the art world connected with a market, selling things –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I think so. Yes.

MS. AYRES: – and you took it for granted that that was the way to –

MR. SILVERMAN: And then what happened was after about a year, Ernie wrote – he started writing these books, art books for children, by Ernest Raboff, and they began to sell. And he was starting to make a bigger living on the books than he was on the gallery, and he sort of like lost interest in the gallery. Well, I was an employee, and at that time a friend of mine, Jerry Solomon, who is a picture framer, well, he was at Solomon's at that time and he was just starting Art Services. And he said, why don't you come and be my partner. And that's how I became a partner with Jerry Solomon.

MS. AYRES: A full-time partner?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, we were 50-50 in Art Services. And I used to run the business and he used to run the production, primarily. And we moved into – the building that we moved into was the same building which – we had the master lease in Gemini.

Ken Tyler was starting the print shop, the lithography workshop. And it was Ken, had about 40 percent of the space, and Art Services had 60 percent of the space. And we hit the street running. We did framing and Ken sold a lot of prints and we had contacts with museums. And we started doing very contemporary type framing.

MS. AYRES: Did you feel closer to Ken than to, say, Rosamund [Rosamund Felsen]? You knew Rosamund –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, no. You see, Rosamund and Sid didn't come in until about a year later. Sid was actually – Sid Felsen was my accountant, and he was Raboff's accountant, and that's how I met Sid. And we kind of like – I introduced Sid to Ken Tyler.

MS. AYRES: Yes. Rosamund credits you with that. And also –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. AYRES: She also says that you were very good to her in terms of –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, she was good to me. So Sid and Rosamund, Jackie and I, we were all friends with the Grinsteins, who came in. It was kind of like – it was very small and it was very – it was trying to just make something work.

MS. AYRES: So this must have been around 1965.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sixty-five, exactly. It was the beginning of '65. It was –

MS. AYRES: So you were aware of say, the Duchamp show at the Pasadena?

MR. SILVERMAN: Totally. Totally. That was Walter's show. I was also aware of Walter's show of the very first Jasper Johns exhibition, which kind of like turned my head around. But the show that really influenced me – you know, I came to gestural painting kind of late. And it was the show that – I think it was Maurice Tuchman's first exhibition, and it was called "The New York School."

And that's kind of like been my bible. Now, while I really appreciate the later generation, for instance, the pop

minimalist artists, the art that I really always hankered for was the art of people locally like Sam Francis and Emerson Woelffer. And, of course, even back then I couldn't afford [Mark] Rothko and [Clyfford] Still and [Willem] de Kooning.

MS. AYRES: When did you decide to open your own gallery?

MR. SILVERMAN: This was many years later. I mean, I – after 23 years at Art Services, and many metamorphosis over there, which I don't want to get into because it's not germane – and meeting so many of the artists here. Considering friends of mine to be people like Ed Ruscha and Joe Goode, Sam Francis and Emerson Woelffer. And, you know, knowing people like Kenny Price and Billy Al Bengston and Bob Irwin. I could go on and on, and younger generations like Peter Alexander or Marvin Harden, you know.

MS. AYRES: So you decided –

MR. SILVERMAN: I decided after my children graduated from college –

MS. AYRES: Two children?

MR. SILVERMAN: Two daughters. The second daughter graduated in 1986 or '87. I wasn't really personally happy doing what I was doing in Art Services anymore.

MS. AYRES: You were running the business.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was. It became a big business. We had at one point over 100 employees. And I remember saying to Jackie, "I want to open up a gallery." And she was very supportive. And we did. And the first person who said to me, if you open – the first artist who said to me, "If you open up a gallery, I'll give you a show," was Sam.

MS. AYRES: Sam Francis?

MR. SILVERMAN: Sam Francis.

MS. AYRES: And this was in -

MR. SILVERMAN: Nineteen eighty-seven.

MS. AYRES: I was going to say the mid-80s. Nineteen eighty-seven.

MR. SILVERMAN: Nineteen eighty-seven. It was – we opened in September of '87 and we did the Sam Francis show I think in November of '87?

MS. AYRES: And that was on La Cienega?

MR. SILVERMAN: It was at 800 North La Cienega.

MS. AYRES: On the corner?

MR. SILVERMAN: On the corner was a photography gallery. And then Ulrike Kantor –

MS. AYRES: Kantor.

MR. SILVERMAN: – had that space. And then when Ulrike closed, Terry Delapp and Herb Palmer, Herbert Palmer, both took their space. And then Terry said that he was going to quit, and did I want the space, because I told him I was looking. And I took that space on the corner of Waring and La Cienega, across the street from where that old theater was.

MS. AYRES: And David Stuart's gallery was –

MR. SILVERMAN: David Stuart used to be across the street, and Irving Blum and Ferus were across the street, but not at that time, not in '87.

MS. AYRES: Rosamund was still on La Cienega then wasn't she?

MR. SILVERMAN: Rosamund, yes. No. Was she on La Cienega? She may at that point –

MS. AYRES: She was just about to move –

MR. SILVERMAN: – moved to the Kelly – the old Kelly place, the photographer's, on La Cienega and Santa Monica.

MS. AYRES: I remember going from her gallery to –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. But then she moved to Bergamot.

MS. AYRES: So when you talk about the art walks, you're not talking about participating when you had a gallery?

MR. SILVERMAN: No. No. I was working in the gallery. The art walks were the '60s incarnation of the art world meeting on La Cienega. It's funny, you know, the art walks were interesting and exciting, but there were a few galleries that really didn't participate. They were more avant-garde galleries. I remember Irving never really opened on a Monday. I don't think Nicky Wilder did, and then he moved to Santa Monica Boulevard anyway. But there were still a number of galleries –

MS. AYRES: Were they more about a kind of social glue than they were about making sales, or were they actually useful –

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, look, in those days you tried to make sales. There were a few, I would say, gigantic dealers in terms of their reputation, like Paul Kantor and Frank Perls.

MS. AYRES: And when did they close shop?

MR. SILVERMAN: I think sometime in the late '60s or maybe earlier. Frank died and I don't know –

MS. AYRES: So you're talking about a whole new generation?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. I think that it was – you know, with David Stuart, he was a great raconteur but I don't know if he made a tremendous amount of money. Felix Landau was a very successful dealer, but he eventually closed I think in the '70s and moved on.

MS. AYRES: And did they tend to show European art?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, none at all. David, as I remember, showed –

MS. AYRES: Not David but Felix Landau.

MR. SILVERMAN: Felix? No. I think Felix showed a lot of California artists. I can remember seeing works by Dick Diebenkorn there. I can remember seeing Norman Zammitt. I can remember seeing Paul Wonner, Theo Brown. California had a lot of Bay area figurative, while David was showing the Bay Area abstractionists. He showed, David – I remember seeing shows by Hassel Smith, Elmer Bischoff. You know, also John Altoon was a mainstay at the David Stuart Gallery after he left –

MS. AYRES: Ferus.

MR. SILVERMAN: – Ferus. So I remember galleries such as Rolf Nelson. I think Rolf eventually closed to become a flower arranger or something.

MS. AYRES: There was also Ceeje Gallery.

MR. SILVERMAN: Ceeje kept in business because they had a restaurant on the top. And they – it was – Cecil & Jeri both I think –

MS. AYRES: Kind of a labor of love.

MR. SILVERMAN: If I remember, Cecil was the waiter and Jeri was the chef. And it was open I think on Monday. No, Monday was the art walk, so I think it was only open on the weekends or like on a Sunday and a Saturday. And you could make reservations, and they only served about 12 people at a time, and it was always delicious. That was before they – I think they moved off to the desert or something. Yeah, Ceeje Galleries showed – I remember Lance Richbourg there.

MS. AYRES: And Chas Garabedian.

MR. SILVERMAN: Charlie Garabedian, absolutely. I remember Bob Comara, who showed people influenced by the Cuevas School, the monster school of Mexican art I would call it.

MS. AYRES: What about Virginia Dwan?

MR. SILVERMAN: Dwan had moved. She was in Westwood. And I remember – my goodness, what's his name. We used to run the gallery for her. And then he moved to New York, opened his own gallery. Very wonderful guy, wonderful dealer.

But Virginia I didn't know, but I remember the gallery when it opened. It's where Flax is in Westwood now. And I remember she did that – she did shows of Kline and Guston. And then she did a show – and that may have been on La Cienega. I don't – you know, but when she moved to Westwood, I remember her first show was a pop show, and it included [Robert] Rauschenberg's bed. And there was I think an [Claes] Oldenburg hamburger. So she's very important. But I didn't know her.

MS. AYRES: Did you know Eugenia Butler?

MR. SILVERMAN: I did. As a matter of fact, at Art Services I made the boxes for Deiter Roth's infamous smelly cheese show. No, I knew Eugenia pretty well. I had left the gallery – I knew her through Art Services because – you know, because she used to come in. Yeah, used to see shows there.

MS. AYRES: Well, that was a good place for you to be in terms of meeting other dealers.

MR. SILVERMAN: Totally. Totally. I remember going to Eugenia and Jim's house to see the Rudi Gernreich show, which is Peggy Moffit, and I don't know who the male was, where he actually – everybody, they had their hair completely shaved and everything, and walked down in the nude. It was just kind of like an asexual/sexual experience.

MS. AYRES: Well, Eugenia was really known for those kind of performances, if I can use that word.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right. Right. Well, she certainly produced it, you know. Well, it was Rudi Gernreich who did it. Yeah, she was very interesting and influential.

MS. AYRES: Would you talk a little bit about Nicholas Wilder, because I think he was –

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, Nick is one of my favorite characters. I mean, I really love the guy. He had a close relationship with André Emmerich and I think had a sort of a Greenbergian view of the art world, witnessed by his exhibitions. It was the first time I ever saw Bradley Walker Tomlin's show. I also think that Nick was instrumental in opening people's eyes to Helen Frankenthaler and Jules Olitski, artists of that generation. And he was very scholarly, but he was also very quirky.

MS. AYRES: Lively.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. There were parties at his house. You know, I think that his – he was one of the early – I think he was one of the early – if I could say, one of the early advocates of making no bones about his sexuality either. I mean, I think he opened a lot of people's eyes with his courage.

He didn't live in a closet, or he didn't live a lie. He couldn't. And Nick also brought Joe Goode to me, in terms of introducing us. Showed the *Staircases*, I think. And Art Services also had a hand in helping make those and transporting them.

MS. AYRES: So we're still talking perhaps about the late '60s, early '70s?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, were talking about mid-60s.

MS. AYRES: Mid-60s?

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, that's when I first met Nick. I also think that Nick was very passionate about his beliefs, but he was also very funny. And I remember in the late '60s, when there was – or maybe it was the early '70s, in the Nixon years, there was a situation whereby if you wanted to teach at a college or a public institution – you can do some research on this – you had to sign a loyalty oath.

I had gotten an invitation by Moorpark Junior College, which was out in Thousand Oaks, to speak about the importance of picture framing. Jerry and I were partners. And Nick was on the same bill, talking about collecting.

Well, I was – and I remember Nick, and his partner at the time was Katie Bishop [ph], who is Katie Crumb now. Anyway, Jerry and Nick and Katie and myself and Jackie, we were driving out, and I was saying to Nick, "I'm incensed about signing the loyalty oath to get money." I said I would talk, but I wouldn't sign the loyalty oath, and I'd do it for free. I just was against that.

And I said, "Aren't you incensed?" He says, "Well, you know, business is not so good." [Laughter.] So he wanted that $100 or whatever they paid. And I don't say that because he didn't have convictions or anything like that –

MS. AYRES: But he was –

MR. SILVERMAN: He had his head screwed on right about certain things, and he wanted to tell them about art.

And it was one of the funniest lectures I ever saw, because someone asked him, what do you think about the current – I remember one of the questions after he gave his marvelous talk about Greenbergian philosophy and stuff like that, or about his artists and what he thought of the art world, why isn't religious painting being done today? And I think he was not wanting to put anybody down, but he said something to the effect that religious art is still being done today, it's just that you're not really looking.

Anyway, it was a very – that was one of my favorite stories with Nick, and I just am so heartbroken that many years later Jackie and I were walking in SoHo in New York, and it was only a few months before his death, and he was one of the early victims of the AIDS epidemic and he looked terrible.

MS. AYRES: He painted at the end of his life.

MR. SILVERMAN: He did. He did. I think he was – his paintings reflect the influence of John McLaughlin primarily.

MS. AYRES: They were very pared down.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well, you know, personally speaking, I think they were a yeoman's effort but I think he's better known as a guru than as a creative artist.

MS. AYRES: What about Larry Gagosian in the early –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I don't know Larry that well except that we've, like many people, had – I mean, I'm cordial with him. I think that someone who started as a Prints on Broxton or something like that – he had a – he showed the limited edition graphics, humble origins in the art world, to become the giant that he is today speaks very highly of his intelligence and his acumen. And I will say that we had some rough times when I was supplying him with picture frames at Art Services.

But all in all, I've never had any experience with him that would cause me not to shake his hand or something like that. I feel that he also was very instrumental in advising certain collectors out here about a more national view and maybe an international view of contemporary art with his early shows of Basquiat and Salle. You know, for – they're not my favorite artists, but certainly he has – he certainly opened new horizons in the Los Angeles area. Why he left LA is open to a lot of speculation, but it's amazing to me that his first show in New York was the Tremaine collection.

MS. AYRES: Talk a little about that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I mean, the Tremaine's were renowned collectors in Connecticut who probably had one of the greatest collections of post-war and especially pop – it started with abstract expressionism, and even Picasso, into the pop generation. And I remember going to Larry's gallery in SoHo, where Chiman Reed is now, and seeing art from the Tremaine collection. And I think he actually sold a few of those pictures. The art world is not always given to saying who sells what to whom and everything like that, but Larry continued to be able to plumb the depths of great collections and collectors to bring out work that interested other collectors, and he continued to grow.

Now, he also had a stable of artists that he worked with and, you know, I think in those days he was showing David Salle. I think he was exhibiting Basquiat, as others were. I can't remember his stable. But he has grown into someone who's probably the single most influential contemporary dealer in the world today of more classic contemporary. In other words, Larry is not making careers of young artists. It's not like that. It's more I would say – I hate to use the word blue chip, but it is.

MS. AYRES: Well, it's an expression that makes sense.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. It is, yeah.

MS. AYRES: You would draw – one would draw a distinction between dealers that are encouraging and discovering new artists. Although some may do both.

MR. SILVERMAN: Definitely. They definitely would do both.

MS. AYRES: Would you talk – since we're talking about – do you prefer the term dealer or gallerist?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't care. What's in a name? I don't care.

MS. AYRES: I think dealer is –

MR. SILVERMAN: Dealer is just fine with me.

MS. AYRES: Riko Mizuno?

MR. SILVERMAN: Riko. Well, let's see. How did - I remember she opened on La Cienega. She was a good friend of Henry Miller, if I remember, the writer, or of Henry Miller's wife. And I think we knew Miller. He was a water colorist.

I think Riko's first show was a group of watercolors by Henry Miller. I'm not sure about that. You might ask her. She was there and we became friends. I think the first time – she was very innovative in the sense that she brought Arata Isozaki to build her gallery. I mean, she moved to La Cienega, left La Cienega in Rosamund's hands. That was Rosamund's gallery. And she moved over onto Robertson. I think she moved downtown first. I can't remember.

MS. AYRES: Well, there was that period when galleries were all moving downtown.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. She was down in Little Tokyo for a while or something. I don't remember the years. But she did have the wherewithal and the foresight to get Isozaki to do this gallery on Robertson, where Earl McGrath Gallery is now. It was quite beautiful, and I remember seeing a Mark Lere show there, "The Tornadoes."

Riko did very interesting – she was good friends with Sam Francis. I remember seeing a lot of Sam's work there. I remember seeing Ed Ruscha works there. I know that she was married to Vadim Kondratieff, who was Virginia Dwan's ex-husband. So there was sort of like a connection that way in terms of the older art world, because Vadim knew everybody. He was a – I think he was a shrink and very interesting guy. I used to think it was like the re-telling of the Russo-Japanese War at one time, you know. Anyway, they were just very interesting people in the art world.

MS. AYRES: Were you – let's see. You opened your first gallery in 1987 on La Cienega. How long were you there?

MR. SILVERMAN: Five years.

MS. AYRES: So you moved to this space in –

MR. SILVERMAN: I moved here in 1992 and I've been here ever since. Wait a minute. You know, let me backtrack. I think I was – I'd been here – I think I was there for three years and then I moved here.

What happened was the art market was really tanking. And a lot of the galleries were having problems. Now, Stuart Regan was here. He had taken the space over from Dan Weinberg, who had taken the space over from Larry Gagosian, because this was a Gagosian gallery at one time, before Larry moved to where the present Morton's is now.

And Stuart called me and he said that he was going to kind of like scale down. This was a great space. Why don't I come look at it? Because, you know, we used to talk about our leases and stuff like that. We knew each other.

And I really – he was a really terrific man, by the way, Stuart. And in any case, I came and took one look at it and I asked him what he was paying. And my landlord was about to raise my rent on La Cienega, and I had 1,800 square feet on La Cienega. This gallery is 3,500 and change, so it's almost twice the size and I could do more with it.

MS. AYRES: How much of that is exhibition space, public exhibition space?

MR. SILVERMAN: Two-thirds. And in any case, when I found out what the lease was going to cost, it was only going to wind up costing me very few hundred dollars more than what I was spending –

MS. AYRES: For twice as much space.

MR. SILVERMAN: – for twice as much space. And I still had faith that things were going to turn around. And they did, and we've been here ever since.

MS. AYRES: Were you ever tempted by Bergamot Station?

MR. SILVERMAN: Never.

MS. AYRES: Why not?

MR. SILVERMAN: When I opened on La Cienega, it was a dream fulfilled. I never forgot those early days on La Cienega. I felt that the move from La Cienega was necessary also because La Cienega had changed to more of antiques and rugs and things like that, and there had always been galleries in this area. In fact, when I moved

here, Asher-Faure was across the street.

MS. AYRES: They had moved –

MR. SILVERMAN: Michael Cohn was on the corner.

MS. AYRES: Asher-Faure had been up where Dagny Corcoran had her book –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. And then they moved across the street to the old – you know, and then when Dagny's old place became Stuart's place when he moved up there, which was the old Asher-Faure.

MS. AYRES: There would be a mildly interesting history of the –

MR. SILVERMAN: Right. Well, you know, this –

MS. AYRES: – the evolution of various galleries from one to another.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. These were, you know, like public buildings at one time or, you know, they were light industrial buildings and things like that. Anyhow, I took one look at Bergamot and I thought that what Wayne Blank was doing was fantastic. But I never really liked – like I was never tempted in the early incarnation to go on Colorado Boulevard, where it was like a strip mall of art galleries, where Fred Hofmann was or –

MS. AYRES: Christopher Grimes.

MR. SILVERMAN: – and Irving Blum and Christopher Grimes, stuff like that. Nothing against it. I kind of like the idea of being a little bit off the street in a space that had more of an identity, that was individual versus an identity within a group.

MS. AYRES: You're not looking particularly for drop in traffic?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. There is a point of destination and people know – if people walk into my gallery they know what they're going to get. They're going to get painting basically. It's going to be post-war, it's going to be abstract.

MS. AYRES: I'm particularly interested in why you decided to concentrate on post World War II –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there was nobody doing it, first of all. No. Let me backtrack on that, because I think that – as I told you, that show that Maurice Tuchman did.

MS. AYRES: I was going to ask this question and I'll ask it right now. Maurice Tuchman organized an exhibition at LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art] in 1965 –

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – called the "New York School: The First Generation, Paintings of the 1940s and 1950s," which presented all the important pioneer abstract expressionists.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Did this exhibition seem like an introduction or summing up? I think I want to ask how knowledgeable were you about abstract art?

MR. SILVERMAN: I wasn't – okay. I wasn't so knowledgeable about abstract art. And it just opened my eyes about this whole school. Now, later on –

MS. AYRES: This was '65?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. And this was certainly 20 years after it really started to become so dominating. In fact, by '65 it wasn't dominating anymore, it was all about painting. So shall we stop?

MS. AYRES: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: So in any case, I never got it out of my system. Let me put it to you. And then I began reading more and more about it in the intervening years. I wasn't the dealer. And eventually I even met Phil Guston at the end of his life almost, when he was doing prints at Gemini.

MS. AYRES: So you're saying while you were working at Art Services, you're developing this really –

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: – passionate interest in the abstract expressionist?

MR. SILVERMAN: I was. And I was always passionately interested in Sam Francis's work. Now, he comes out of that school. Emerson Woelffer, who was great friends with some of the pioneers, including Motherwell.

MS. AYRES: And Pollock, I think. He knew –

MR. SILVERMAN: Emerson knew everybody.

MS. AYRES: Emerson would.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. I was always in love with that kind of painting. After all, John Altoon was so influenced by the gestural painters and [Arshile] Gorky. And we spoke about that. Those were – you know, but it's not as if I didn't love Joe Goode's work or Ed Ruscha's work or something like that. When it came time to make my life in a gallery, I decided that I wished to go back to those kinds of painters. Now, Sam introduced me also, since that was my first show, by telephone to Joan Mitchell.

MS. AYRES: Yeah. Well, 20 years after Maurice's show, Paul Schimmel at the Newport Harbor Art Museum –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, indeed.

MS. AYRES: – organized "Action Precision: The New Directions in New York, 1955 to '60."

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

MR. SILVERMAN: He certainly did.

MS. AYRES: He showed six so-called second generation abstract expressionists: Norman Bluhm, Michael Goldberg, Grace Hartigan, Al Held, Alfred Leslie and Joan Mitchell. You have shown all these artists, with the possible exception of Hartigan, I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're absolutely right. And I have – interestingly enough, I was able to get the Hartigan painting, which was the cover of that catalog, and it is here in Los Angeles because I sold it to a collector here. I do show Alfred Leslie. I do show Michael Goldberg.

MS. AYRES: Do you intend to show the early work of Alfred Leslie?

MR. SILVERMAN: Only the early work.

MS. AYRES: That's an interesting point. That would be true if you were showing, say, Al Held too, I suppose.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah. I would say so. And Al has his own representative showing the later work anyway. But Norman, it's also true of Norman.

MS. AYRES: Norman and Michael Goldberg and Joan Mitchell all were, shall I use the word true to their abstract expressionist instincts.

MR. SILVERMAN: Absolutely. Never deviated and never will. I even think that Al was too. It's just in his own way. Grace, I don't know, okay. And, of course, Alfred became more and more imbued with filmmaking and the figurative. But, yes.

As a matter of fact, Paul [Paul Schimmel] once came in – I think the first time Paul ever came into the gallery, I had the "Action Precision" catalog on my desk. He was at MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] by this time. And in his – in a very friendly way he said, "Oh, my God. I write the catalog and he makes the living." [Laughter.] Something like that.

MS. AYRES: [Laughing.] Sounds like Paul.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Something like that. And Paul's been, I think, quite supportive of what I do. But I also – there were artists that even Paul didn't put in that show, and I had done exhibitions of Jack Tworkov. I have the estate of Edward Dugmore, who was a student of Clyfford Still.

MS. AYRES: He was in the Bay area and then moved to New York.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. He was a San Francisco Art Institute graduate with Diebenkorn and Smith and Bischoff and things like that.

MS. AYRES: You know, the phrase “second generation” is –

MR. SILVERMAN: I hate that phrase.

MS. AYRES: – simply a descriptive one.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: But it has sometimes implied a kind of reproach, as if such work is inevitably derivative. Would you speak to that?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I would. I would prefer to use – Friedman, B.H. Friedman wrote a catalog and did a show – I can’t remember if it was at MoMA [Museum of Modern Art] or one of the New York museums. And he said, “Abstract painting from the younger generation,” or something like that. I think I have that catalog somewhere.

MS. AYRES: He also wrote in Paul Schimmel’s catalog.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, he did. And I would just like to speak to the fact that certainly while the abstract expressionists of the older generation, of the generation of Pollock and de Kooning, certainly translated European modernism and turned it on its head to make it very American in the mid-40s, early – actually, I think Still was the first one to do it in ’42-43, but some people think it’s Pollock in ’45-’46. But it doesn’t matter.

And, you know, de Kooning’s first really great abstract paintings probably were in the Charlie Egan show in 1947-48, the black and whites, or ’48-’49. The marvelous thing about the younger generation was they expanded the ideas of the older generation. They didn’t copy the works, they just continued to speak the language, and they spoke it in their own way.

Now, by virtue of the fact that they were, in essence, a lot of them, 10 years younger and some of them less than that – some people considered Tworkov to be a second generation, but he’s really not. When you think that people like Alfred Leslie had their first show in 1951 at the Tibor de Nagy Gallery, which was really only three years after de Kooning’s first exhibition at the Egan Gallery, that people like Rauschenberg, who at that point was not considered the great pop innovator that he became, but he was teaching at Black Mountain [Black Mountain College, Asheville, North Carolina]. Emerson was teaching at Black Mountain in ’49 and expanding on the ideas of the first generation, or the older generation. What I’m trying to say is it was more of a continuum.

MS. AYRES: Yeah. Was it ignored by some because of the immediate popularity of pop and then minimized because of – I want to say because they entered into the art world that put a stronger emphasis on the new and –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, maybe. I wasn’t in New York at this time, and there are people who can probably talk on it ad nauseam and probably with more scholarly intent than me. I personally think that, you know, the art world is given to controversy and it’s given to differences of opinion and that’s just part of it. There was your controversy between Greenberg and Rosenberg about the school. There were things that – Greenberg in many ways probably felt that it had run its course in the early ‘50s, and consequently that’s why he felt that the great painters now were the Colorfield painters.

MS. AYRES: Was there a relationship between the Colorfield painters and this so-called second generation in terms of their, say, overall composition?

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course there was. Of course. I mean, Colorfield really in many ways can come out of Rothko, and it can come out of Reinhart. It can come – you know, minimalism comes out of it. They all come out of Kandinsky, for God’s sake, or something like that.

MS. AYRES: And Malevich.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, and Malevich. Listen. As far as I’m concerned, in many ways, the only original work or unique – the only original work was probably the first damn cave painting, and everything after that comes from that. There has to be an egg. And I think that we want to put down these schools and these dates and I think that the abstract painters have been maligned in many ways, these younger generation painters, to the effect that nobody really wants to say or nobody really wants to take up the mantle that they continue to plough new grounds in an abstract motive. It’s almost like they’re saying abstract painting is continually rehashed. But those same people will not say that as much about conceptual art.

MS. AYRES: Which is continually rehashed.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I mean, well, I’m not here to defend conceptual art, but isn’t the father in a way Marcel Duchamp?

MS. AYRES: Duchamp.

MR. SILVERMAN: And so in abstract painting, is the father Kandinsky, Malevich, Arthur Dove? Who knows? It doesn't really matter. If the work is there and the work is good and the work speaks to you – and all these other – you know –

MS. AYRES: Well, people also try to place the second generation more in the mould of landscape. Even dubbed abstract impressionism –

MR. SILVERMAN: Impressionists. Well, that's a – but, you know, Guston was in the New York School. He was part of – he may not be in the photograph. But, I mean, here's Philip, who changed – in 1950-51, he came late to it. He was put in the show by Maurice Tuchman and he also – if I'm not mistaken, he was in the new American painting show, with Tworkov and Hartigan, by the way. And that was a show that the MoMA put on and sent around the world in the late '50s. Now, Philip's paintings have been called abstract impressionism also.

MS. AYRES: And de Kooning certainly worked with landscape.

MR. SILVERMAN: Certainly. Well, de Kooning worked with the figure, he worked with the landscape. He's the giant. You know, when they went into the studio, they didn't care what some scholar determined what their motivation was. Their motivation was their philosophy and the language that they were speaking at the time.

MS. AYRES: Both Norman and Joan Mitchell lived in Europe. I mean, Joan made her home in Paris. They didn't seem to need to buy into the sort of anti – the need to establish a strong, raw American style.

MR. SILVERMAN: No. Joan – you know, look. She never lost her roots in this country. Certainly painted for years in France but had shows continuously in the United States at the Stable Gallery. What's her name, Marcia – gee whiz, the curator.

MS. AYRES: Marcia Tucker.

MR. SILVERMAN: Marcia Tucker did that – thank you very much – did that early on exhibition at the Whitney. I think Joan really is an example of an artist who just did her thing and without any – gosh, I'm running out of the words. She didn't give a – as she would say, give a shit what people thought. It's what I thought.

And completely – if you would have seen where she lived, on the banks of the Seine, when she moved there in the early '70s in Val-d'Oise, which was the house that Monet lived in before he moved to Giverny. Although the house she lived in was not the house that Monet lived in, because that house was built in the '20s. But the carriage house was still there, and that was what she used as her studio.

You could look over the balcony and see how an artist can just live off that landscape. Now, certainly there was a marvelous show called "Five Years in the Country" which Jim Harithas did at the Everson Gallery in Syracuse. And at that time Joan was – this was – we're talking in the very early '70s or late '60s.

And Jim Everson – Jim Harithas at the Everson showed five years' worth of sunflower and landscape type paintings, which all came out of that area. And it was just a marvelous exhibition. I never saw that, I only saw the catalog. But when I went to visit with Joan, she would have some of those paintings still to show me. And I did sell a couple of them.

MS. AYRES: Well, were these artists collected in depth in Los Angeles?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I don't think so. Certainly – maybe the earlier generation. I mean, you know, certainly we had people like David Geffen with a lot of money who has a number of Pollock's and a number of works of the early abstract expressionists.

MS. AYRES: And the Weismans.

MR. SILVERMAN: The Weismans. There were collectors. If you look in that New York School catalog, you can see the Sherwoods, the Weismans, well certainly and Gifford and Joann Phillips. There was a whole group of Polly Hirsch. Great collectors out here who brought the earlier generation but not so much the next generation because by then even Los Angeles was turning its view onto the pop painters.

MS. AYRES: Well, yeah. The very next year after Tuchman's 1965 "New York School" exhibition, LACMA presented a Man Ray exhibition. Just before that Duchamp was at Pasadena and Warhol was at Ferus.

MR. SILVERMAN: Certainly.

MS. AYRES: Did you feel at the time there was a shift in making from the high seriousness of abstract

expressionism to the kind of irony –

MR. SILVERMAN: To be very honest with you, no, I didn't see it that way. I was not – you know, we love to rewrite history, but I wasn't as knowledgeable then. And I don't mean that in a –

MS. AYRES: Well, it's 1965.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. I don't mean that to be, you know, like I have so much knowledge now. But we do – I do have more knowledge now than I did then. No, I remember those shows, and I just relished in looking at them. I remember – listen. I remember the sculpture of the '60s. And I remember the David Smiths, the six David Smiths, if I remember, in the old county museum – not the old – well, before the addition that's there now was built.

MS. AYRES: It's still –

MR. SILVERMAN: There was the pond on either side of the walkway. Or was the pond in the center? I think the pond was in the center. I don't remember now.

But I remember there were six David Smith Cubi pieces in front of the museum. The story is that I think Maurice really tried to get them for the museum and I think that the board only bought one. Unfortunate, isn't that? It would be nice to think that the county museum would have six David Smiths, but even David Smith back then was considered maybe by a lot of people not to be as great an artist –

MS. AYRES: Well, you know, it was before the new addition. It was and continues to be a generalist museum.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, indeed.

MS. AYRES: I had worked there briefly when I was in graduate school, and it seemed to me that the modern and contemporary department was pretty beleaguered. It was very different from what it is today.

MR. SILVERMAN: Absolutely. I'm not casting aspersions at the county museum when I say that. I'm just saying it's just – it's kind of like too bad.

MS. AYRES: Well, I can remember when they purchased and were installing a Caro [Anthony Caro] that there were many people who thought that this was –

MR. SILVERMAN: But doesn't that go on – it goes on in all cities at all times.

MS. AYRES: All generalist museums.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, sure. Sure. It's a problem.

MS. AYRES: Which probably means there's a reason for a contemporary art museum or a modern contemporary art museum.

MR. SILVERMAN: True. True.

MS. AYRES: You yourself have not been drawn to pop or assemblage in any kind of passionate way I would –

MR. SILVERMAN: Assemblage I love. In fact, I have in my own collection six [Joseph] Cornells.

MS. AYRES: Well, Cornell, I was going to – I mean –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, he's assemblage. And I show Hannelore Baron, who was – and I've shown Ray Johnson.

MS. AYRES: I was going to say with the exception of –

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. So I do love collage and assemblage. And George Herms.

MS. AYRES: Have you – you've had works of George Herms?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I do.

MS. AYRES: You show –

MR. SILVERMAN: And Bruce Connor. And I would love to have a Jess [Jess Collins] now and then.

MS. AYRES: Well, it seems to me that that early Californian assemblage has something in common with gestural

mark-making, especially –

MR. SILVERMAN: It's all hands-on, isn't it?

MS. AYRES: – especially Bruce.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it wouldn't be the place to come for a Jeff Koons, you know, or things of that nature that are made by machines and things.

MS. AYRES: You showed Johnson [Ray Johnson] after he died. How did you get involved with this?

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, that's kind of interesting. I was – I had done a big deal with Dick Feigen, you know, and got to be very friendly with Francis Beatty over there at the Feigen Gallery. They loaned me, for my Gorky show, a few pieces, because at one time they had the Gorky estate. And we just kind of like hit it off. And then she invited me in for a private showing of Ray's work.

And then I spoke to some of Ray's friends, who had that whole – now, we were doing – we did the Cornell show before that and we had already borrowed things from Feigen. And we also showed Hannelore Baron, because we have that estate, and she's collages, assemblages. So Francis prevailed upon me to – she felt that the Ray Johnson show would be a good place in Los Angeles, a good place for Ray Johnson.

MS. AYRES: And you showed him twice?

MR. SILVERMAN: Twice.

MS. AYRES: The second time –

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. Actually we've shown – we've done it three times. Two solos and then one show, which was called – it was a New York collage, three different views, in which we had Cornell, Baron and Johnson. But we've done two solo shows of Ray's.

MS. AYRES: And the second one happened when the movie *How to Draw* [*How to Draw a Bunny*] –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: – which I noticed is out on Virgin Records in the video department, being sold.

MR. SILVERMAN: Good. That's good.

MS. AYRES: I want to go back a little bit to abstract painting in general. Some of our newer LA artists have drawn on the language of Colorfield painting but not gestural abstraction. Why do you think that is?

MR. SILVERMAN: You'd have to ask them.

MS. AYRES: It might be somewhat connected to the use of the computer, I think, too, to try to generate work.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it could be. I have a sneaking suspicion that – you know, I don't want to speak for an artist's creative intent.

MS. AYRES: No. But?

MR. SILVERMAN: But I do feel that there has been a sort of a feeling that gestural abstract art is such an old language that everything in it has already been said.

MS. AYRES: Which was said in the 1960s.

MR. SILVERMAN: So consequently, if you're an artist – and this is something that Louise Fishman, who we show, goes through all the time. Now, she's certainly – if Joan, by virtue of the fact that when she was born –

MS. AYRES: Is second?

MR. SILVERMAN: If Joan Mitchell is a second generation, then Louise is the next generation. But if you look at Louise's work, well, it certainly has that thread going back to the abstract expressionists of the older generation. It certainly is her own language that she's speaking.

MS. AYRES: And seems more closely related to the first generation than to the second.

MR. SILVERMAN: Absolutely. I would agree with you. In fact, she's kind of like devoted to the works of early [Ad]

Reinhardt from her heart, and she loves Barney Newman. And she talks so reverentially about these artists. And why artists today feel that doing more of a field of color, maybe it is related to the computer, I don't know that.

But I feel a lot of the abstract painting today is very facile. I think, by the way – I must say, today – I don't think I have seen a better show in a few years than Russell Ferguson's show on "Undiscovered Country [UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, California, 2004]." I was really knocked out by that.

Now, that is basically figurative art. And I remember standing in front of a Neil Jenney with him and Russell reminded me – because when I called him after this article about him and the times since we were talking – and I think Russell is a very, very good young curator, because I helped him – we helped him on his Frank O'Hara exhibition. He said, "What do you think of that Neil Jenney?" And I said, "Gosh, I really love the background."

And that Neil Jenney there that was in the show, or was one of them, had a gestural background. And it was just interesting that that show, which started early on with – who was the teacher? Alex Katz's teacher. My goodness, this is terrible, Anne. My memory is – I'll think about it. Turn if off for a second.

MS. AYRES: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: The show having earlier – the earliest examples, as I remember, being like Fairfield Porter and going through Neil Jenney and right into I think – wasn't Laura Owens in the show and some of the younger abstractionists, and not – I don't know if Laura was in that show. No. But we should look that up. But I remember seeing – feeling it was such a wonderful thing that painting is still being done and can be done in a very positive manner today.

MS. AYRES: You once did a show that was curated, I believe by Bennett Roberts called "LA," though it presented a younger LA.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there were younger. It was –

MS. AYRES: People in their 50s.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know. I think – right. And he said it was beyond the idea. It was sort of like painting beyond the idea.

MS. AYRES: Beyond the idea of painting.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah. I think it was, you know, also – Bennett and – he felt that there was, if I can – I don't want to put words in his mouth – that they could really talk about their work too. You know, that the painters could. It was more than just the idea of painting. It went beyond the idea, like if they could explain why they did things like that.

MS. AYRES: Well, that gets us briefly, I suppose, to the art schools today. You show a generation – another generation of painters that did not necessarily think it was their job to talk about their art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Their art talked for them.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, yes. Well, this is a whole different theory. I allowed Bennett the gallery because I felt that everybody was – if you want to know, from a personal standpoint, everybody's saying, you're just such an old fogey and you're so back in the early days and everything. It turned out Bennett showed me pictures by artists like Michelle Fierro and Dennis Hollingsworth and I liked the work.

MS. AYRES: Lari Pittman?

MR. SILVERMAN: Lari was in it, absolutely. Well, you can go through the catalog. And I also did a show that Jimmy Hayward curated not too long ago, which had abstractionists.

MS. AYRES: More hard edge, more –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah. But then there was Sam Tchakalian, and he's not necessarily a hard edge painter and things like that. So we do venture out of our world a little bit.

MS. AYRES: Yet none of – all of this work has some sort of contemporary take to it that makes it look considerably different from the second or third generation abstract expressionist. Do you think that that language of abstract expressionists still needs to be developed and worked on if it was done –

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know if it needs to be done but I think we have to be open to an artist who feels they want to still do it.

MS. AYRES: But it's not very old really, as a language.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, no, it isn't. It isn't. But, you know, I think in the final analysis it's the work. If the work can still say something that is new or that is reasonably different, and someone can get something out of it, why should we say to that artist, don't do that because it's already been done.

MS. AYRES: So are you talking about the artist's passion not how it's received into –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I think I'm talking about it kind of like as a generality, in a way. I think I'm talking about it – when you get right down to it, it's the artist that is the creator. All we can do, if we're writers or dealers or gallerists or however you want to say it, is put it out there. But the ultimate thing is the final product or the final picture, the final creation.

MS. AYRES: A dealer friend of mine who will be nameless commented to me recently about an artist who does abstract painting that she felt the work was too gestural. Now, I think that that was just a code for what we're talking about, that it looked derivative of the abstract expression, because all sorts of different art is gestural. It seemed a silly thing to say. But I think it was a code term.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there is definitely, I think, a built-in, almost prejudice to those kinds of painters.

MS. AYRES: Well, then we're getting at it, because when you say it depends on what the art is, it also depends on an openness to looking freshly at that.

MR. SILVERMAN: How will we get to that point?

MS. AYRES: And is that a job of education? Is that a job of –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, as far as I'm concerned, I'm still doing it. So I'm doing the job. Now, if it's you, as a curator, or someone else as a curator who likes that, then you have to do it. We have to suffer the slings and arrows of a group of critics sometimes and just go on our own – doing our own thing. You know, I don't know if it didn't happen to painters in the '40s who were out of a figurative school of the '30s and '20s by the critics who felt that the new painting like Rosenberg and Greenberg, those kinds of critics, didn't – that the artist of the generation before didn't feel persecuted. This is –

MS. AYRES: Or even the figurative painters of the '50s themselves.

MR. SILVERMAN: Exactly. So this is an old story. And what we have to do is we have to smile and continue. Wage the war. It's an ongoing war that nobody gets killed in, thank God.

MS. AYRES: Yeah. [Laughs.] You know, I at least – one might call your exhibitions in this gallery museum quality. That's another word like blue chip.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, thank you, but –

MS. AYRES: Do you feel you are often supplementing the modern art program of local museums in these post-modern times? It's just what we were talking about.

MR. SILVERMAN: I never really thought of it that way. Let me just tell you what I think. When I get up in the morning and I walk into the gallery, I want to be happy as to what I'm hanging on the wall. And in the final analysis, this is a self serving business and it doesn't always have to do with the highest profit margin, although it's always nice to make money. It's not about that primarily all the time. It's about an inner fulfillment of what I do.

MS. AYRES: And you live with this work on a daily basis –

MR. SILVERMAN: I do.

MS. AYRES: – and you have to see it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're welcome to come to my house and see my collection.

MS. AYRES: No, I mean you live in your gallery.

MR. SILVERMAN: I do. I do. I do. Absolutely. I don't want to live in a gallery and offer art that I don't feel good

about.

MS. AYRES: So it seems to me that the more different kinds of dealers we have, the better.

MR. SILVERMAN: We do. I wish that there was more of a dealership that didn't seem to be so – that their galleries didn't seem to be so eclectic, but that's just a personal opinion. This gallery is not an eclectic gallery in that sense that, you know, we don't have a little of this or a little of that, and a little of this or a little of that. It's not that kind of a gallery. But, you know, we're in an age where people like to come in and have many, many different kinds of choices.

One of the things that really bothers me, by the way – and I would like to get this on record – I am very disturbed with the lack of the gallery gallop. I use that term that –

MS. AYRES: The gallery?

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay, Al Ruppersberg once said – I remember him saying that someone asked him why does he use so many words. And he said, "Well, I want to stop the gallery gallop." He wanted to stop people from –

MS. AYRES: Gallop, you said?

MR. SILVERMAN: However, I use it in terms of the gallery gallop meaning that people have stopped, or many – they don't go to galleries like they –

[END TAPE 1, SIDE B]

MS. ANN AYRES: Good morning Manny.

MR. MANNY SILVERMAN: Good morning.

MS. AYRES: It's December 11, 2004, our second session, and this is disc one of our second session. We finished yesterday just about when we were beginning to talk about handling – what it means to handle an estate. But before we get back to that, I want to discuss a little bit about Russell Ferguson's exhibition at Armand Hammer ["The Undiscovered Country"], since you brought it up yesterday and sent me off to it. And I thought it was tremendously provocative and interesting.

And just to clear up the question about Laura Owens, yes she is – she has one painting, that rather amazing white horse painting of hers. Russell comments in his introduction that, "Advanced painters," and I'm quoting now, "owe little allegiance to the hectic expressionism that equates wild gesture with authentic emotion," unquote.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: I have two questions and, of course, you can guess what these questions are. The first one is, what does the phrase 'advanced painting' mean to you?

MR. SILVERMAN: Possibly I would use the word "mature." I would use the word advanced painting coming out of not a timeline of great practice and probing. In other words it doesn't matter, you can – to me it means you can be a prodigy and come out and be an advanced painter in a few months, a few years, it depends kind of what the creative juices that are inside. However, I personally think advanced painting can't come – this is a very old fashioned idea – can't come out of at least knowing the technique of the painting, at least learning some of those techniques, whether they be as mundane as mixing colors and knowing color combinations, whether they be as mundane as choosing the proper kinds of materials, as pedestrian as the proper types of brushes, some of those experiments which are necessary for young painters to experiment with, before they kind of like feel comfortable, as an old fashioned writer might feel comfortable with a number two pencil, before the typewriter or something like that.

I think – I've never been a painter. It would seem to me that you'd want to be comfortable in your skin, and comfortable in painting in the act of creating. You can't become an advanced painter without that, first of all.

MS. AYRES: You're presenting the argument that before you break rules you have to know the rules?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, Anne, that's a good way to say it, if there are rules, though.

MS. AYRES: That's a good caveat, but –

MR. SILVERMAN: You see, the other thing is that they wish to ignore the gesture or the old ideas, but those ideas are like a solid oak, and if you are in the forest of painting, you're always going to find that tree to look at, and

it’s going to leave some kind of resonance.

MS. AYRES: I’m sorry, I’m looking for a quote. I thought this comment by Neil Jenney was something like a zen koan. He said, “Even if I produced the worst paintings possible, they would not be good enough.” He’s talking about –

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, here’s – here’s a kind of relationship with a different generation. There’s a story of Bill de Kooning and Phillip Guston attending an opening at Betty Parsons gallery of Barney Newman’s work, and walking into the gallery, and looking at the paintings and having their few drinks and saying hello to Barney and hello to all the people there, being very cordial and possibly leaving within a half hour, 45 minutes, an hour, who knows, to go back downtown to their studio, and walking – I think she was on 57th or whatever. They walked to the subway to go downtown, and they were silent for about 10 minutes. And finally Philip Guston looked at de Kooning and said, “Bill, I guess there’s enough said about that,” and Bill agreed.

MS. AYRES: That’s also beautifully enigmatic. You equated advanced painting with mature painting?

MR. SILVERMAN: I read that someplace –

MS. AYRES: In terms of a particular artist’s development, I have the feeling that it tends to mean some sense of moving painting on, although at the same time of course, we can’t think of painting as a progression. Moving painting on in the sense that one is always aware of the tradition out of which one comes, but yet the work itself must somehow be fresh to the moment and not look as if it’s formulaic or academic?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that’s true, but I don’t necessarily feel that the formulaic or the academic would be something that we should just necessarily turn our backs on. I still feel in my formless pea brain, I guess, that every period should be in essence some type of a synthesis of something that went before, if you’re going to say something.

MS. AYRES: And bringing your own period to it?

MR. SILVERMAN: Exactly, I mean isn’t it the same in writing? Isn’t it the same in poetry? Isn’t it the same in music? I mean there are – you know, even many of our composers today are steeped in classicism and they certainly know the scales and everything like that. Shouldn’t art have scales? Shouldn’t it begin with some kind of a regimen? If it doesn’t, why are there art schools?

MS. AYRES: Well, let’s look at Russell’s exhibition, you wouldn’t be arguing that those artists didn’t have a scale?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I wouldn’t be arguing that at all.

MS. AYRES: Their work looks very contemporary.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: And certainly it does not come out of abstract expressionism except insofar as much of the work is gestural.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, not at all, I think possibly the thing that drew me into Russell’s exhibition was the profound feeling that there were truly a group of strong artists still having messages that didn’t necessarily mimic, in a sense, what went before. But, you felt they had somewhat of a grasp of that history of what went before, and they weren’t threatened by it. You know, you can be threatened by it, and then start to copy it, because that’s the only way you can deal with it, and the result is awful.

You can study it, admire it, let it seep into your pores and yet what comes out becomes a different language entirely. But there is a thread. If you look at Philip Guston’s picture in the “Undiscovered Country,” as an artist himself, it’s all the same strokes of what he did when he was doing his abstract work.

MS. AYRES: Russell –

MR. SILVERMAN: It’s just a matter of connecting the dots.

MS. AYRES: Russell also commented that Guston felt he had to be one or the other, he moved first from realism to abstraction and then to his last style, and that many artists after that, Gerhard Richter is the best example probably, felt that they could move back and forth between abstraction –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I think –

MS. AYRES: That looks new, I mean that was a new idea.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it is a new idea, but I don't think that Guston did anything differently than let's say, Picasso. I don't think he did anything differently than Joan Mitchell, even though Joan Mitchell continued to be an abstract painter all her life, or Ad Reinhardt. Just because they're abstract painters all their life and they don't move back and forth, they're moving within their abstract medium, and making enormous changes. De Kooning with his women and his abstractions.

I think that's really something that when a woman said to Guston in 1970, right on the eve of his death, when he was sitting in San Francisco Museum. Hopkins had done the retrospective there, and this is a story I think I picked up in Lisa Meyer's book called *Night Studio*. Lisa Meyer being his daughter.

The story goes something about the woman who came over to Philip Guston, and said, "You know, I really love your work, I really especially love the works that you did in the early '50s, those pink abstract paintings. May I ask you a question?" He says, "What?" She says, "Why did you change?" He said, "Why do you think I had the choice?"

And that maybe the ultimate romantic answer, and I think the answer was even longer than that. It was probably shorter than Rumsfeld's answer the other day about the body armor. But – and he was exasperated by the questions, most artists are. I mean people have to accept what an artist does. I think that's one of the most profound – that's why he has one of the most profound influences on young painters.

Because a friend of mine, Bud Holland who used to show him in Chicago, said you know, Philip could have made a very good living, he'd have been a rich man if he continued to do those damn beautiful pink paintings. Well, he did do the pink paintings. I have a painting called *Pink Sea* from 1978. It's kind of like a synthesis of a lot of the figurative elements. But the more you look at it, and I have a painting from 1951, '52, they're the same painting.

The same painting in a sense that they're by the same man, same painter. And years ago, when I was working for Ernest Raboff – you have to realize, I have no art education. I took one class in college on art history, but I just came to it empirically, and I just loved it, I kept on reading about it. This man would say to me, "Art has nothing to do with subject matter, it's only line and form and space and color." I'd say, "Well, you're crazy." I was so imbued with social commentary art, the art of Ben Shahn and many of the German expressionists and George Gross and things like that, you know, being kind of a social activist that I was in the early '60s until I saw that damn New York school show.

And then I didn't feel that abstract art couldn't be part of social activism in a way. When 1972 came along and McGovern was nominated, you know, I got a call from the Democratic committee, could I prevail on Sam Francis to do a poster? So Ken Tyler and I prevailed on Sam and he did an image. I mean, Andy Warhol did one of, if you remember, Richard Nixon smiling, and saying "Vote McGovern" underneath. Well, the Francis image was a typical Francis image of an explosion of color, totally abstract, and below it said "Vote McGovern."

And we went to the debates. There were debates between McGovern and Humphrey. At the time they were both wanting the nomination. Humphrey had lost in '68, he wanted to try and make another run. The Democratic party was split.

The McGovern wing, if you remember, was – well there was like knighthood was in flower, to us, with George McGovern, not realizing how strongly – we were naïve – to the Republicans. And I'll never forget presenting that poster and showing it to Tom Brokaw, who was covering the debates. And he said, "I don't think this prairie guy's going to understand this."

I said, "Well, the colors are nice." He said, "They sure are." And I said, "And the thought behind it is good. It says "Vote McGovern." What more can you say?"

And I remember Sam going and giving that poster – standing there, Rosamund Felsen was there that night. Sid, I think the Familians, Liz and Gary, because they were very prominent Democrats at the time. And every – they were all pushing ahead of Sam. And McGovern said, "Where's the artist?

And we finally pushed – he was very shy, pushed ahead. And McGovern looks at him, and he says – he looks at this poster, and it's the first time he's seen it. Now what does a guy that's not imbued in art from the prairies of North Dakota or South Dakota, wherever he's from, probably the best – I'm speaking for him, the art that he would most relate to would maybe be a Grant Wood or something like that, regionalist art. He's looking at this, and I'm saying to myself, oh my God, what's he going to say?

And he looked at Sam and he said, "You're the artist?" He says, "Yes." "I'm George McGovern." "I'm Sam Francis." He says, "May I ask you a question?" And Sam said, "Sure." He said, "Why did you do it?" And Sam looked at him and said, "I did it for you." And he said, "Thank you."

He didn't say "What is it?" He didn't say, "My child could do it." I mean so if you put a little word on it or

something like that, it has meaning. You want to bring a meaning to abstract art, it doesn't mean that. I don't know where we got off on this tangent, I'm just going on and on.

MS. AYRES: We were talking about whether abstract art can have – what was conventionally called a subject. Well, of course, it has a subject, that was a huge issue with the abstract expressionists.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I mean when Joan Mitchell would finish a painting, she might title that painting based on her stream of consciousness of the day. I once had a painting called *Your Boat*. A beautiful painting, aren't they all.

Your Boat, it was a big painting. It was painted in 1976, '77, and what was running through her head was the nursery rhyme, row, row, row your boat, gently down the stream, merrily, merrily, merrily, life is but a dream. And there was a whole series of paintings, *Row, Your Boat, Row, Row, Row, Gently, The Stream*, and they were all kind of like a small body of work. There were large sizes, big sizes, mostly predominantly blue, maybe evoking water, or something like that.

MS. AYRES: Don't you think that the combination of title and painting is like a leap to another level that you maybe don't take, that it means something but if you talk about it and try and make it into an explanation, it loses it?

MR. SILVERMAN: I think so, unless – okay, if de Kooning does a picture, *Grease on 8th Avenue*, okay, and it's – the reason he did that painting, supposedly he said is because when he finished – titled that painting, he just thought about there's this – on 8th Avenue near the studio we'd drive and there was always this pile of grease, and that's what he was thinking about. It had nothing to do with the painting. I didn't see an avenue. You know what I saw in the de Kooning paintings of those times, those urban landscapes that he did? I didn't see them so much as I heard them.

I heard horns honking. I heard New York. I could see New York in them, and they were totally abstract because that's what I brought to them. I knew they were New York school. I knew where he lived. I knew where the studio – I mean, I didn't know him personally, I was too young. But when I look at it today, and I go crazy when I think about that environment.

When I look at Michael Goldberg's paintings, when he lived in the East Hamptons, and I see those titles, *House on Pomfret Center*, which is – it's a development in Connecticut, actually, or *Dune House*, or *Georgica Association*, or *Lands End*, these are all titles of where he was living at the time. When you looked at Diebenkorn, the titles of Diebenkorn paintings are quite interesting because they're very pedestrian. I'm living in Berkeley, so this is *Berkeley Number 3*. I'm living on Ocean Park – my studio is on Ocean Park, this is *Ocean Park Number 223*.

But then the titles – maybe we're getting off on a tangent here, but then the titles sort of – by titling a painting to the viewer, you almost want to use that as something that you want to delve into more.

MS. AYRES: As a hook?

MR. SILVERMAN: Right. And my favorite title for a painting of all time, is *Untitled*.

MS. AYRES: I know from my experience with students, contemporary students, that they often now don't want to use *Untitled*, because that now has resonance to them as a historical period, and they will fuss and want to say *No Title*.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, here we go again, gallerist or dealer. I mean –

MS. AYRES: But it's an interesting way to point out that a convention for the next generation becomes that, a convention. Roy Dowell whose work is hanging out there just numbers his paintings for identification purposes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I had an artist, Edward Dugmore. We have the estate. And most – with the exceptions that he might call *Osgood Street* because it reminds him of the street that the studio was on in San Francisco, he did what his teacher did, Clyfford Still. If you'll notice, Clyfford Still's paintings all have – well, I should – nothing is ever all, Anne, okay? But primarily all have – they primarily have numbered titles and dates, so it would be number *4-79*, number *3-72*, and Dug would do the same thing.

MS. AYRES: Maybe we are getting a little far a field, because as you say, this is probably an example of a habit or a convention of a particular time. I want to say one more thing or ask you one more question about Russell's exhibition. I thought there was a wonderful example of the way in which paintings done in the past, or the recent past, live again in a different way, freshly, that they always seem to live in the moment, and that was with his brilliant inclusion of Fairfield Porter.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wasn't that something?

MS. AYRES: Because Porter next to Tuymans [Luc Tuymans] or next to –

MR. SILVERMAN: Wasn't that wonderful?

MS. AYRES: Talk to me about your response –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, my response is that, you know something, we can talk about schools, and we can talk about eras, and we can talk about philosophies, but when we get right down to it, if you've got good painting next to good painting, that's all you really need. If you've got a good group of paintings, you've created a symphony that just sings. And I think Russell has just put together and hung a show that sang.

MS. AYRES: This has to do with installation too –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, absolutely, yes.

MS. AYRES: And your shows are beautifully installed, would you –

MR. SILVERMAN: That I have nothing to do with it.

MS. AYRES: Who does it?

MR. SILVERMAN: Linda Hooper.

MS. AYRES: Your director?

MR. SILVERMAN: My director, she yells at me, because I'll have a tendency to want to overhang sometimes. She says, "Don't be in such a rush." I feel that we can throw them up on the wall and get them done in a couple of hours, and two days later we're still tweaking. It's not that I don't have input, it's just that my input is relegated to the back burner.

I think that Linda, working with this art, with me for so long and loving it as I do, instinctively has a good sense to know the spatial determination. She can determine the spatial needs of a painting, and why it's so important for there to be a kind of a flow in the gallery. It's not bump-de-la-bump-de-la-bump. It might be more of a jazz rift, bump-deedle-bump-bi-bump-bi, you know, something like that. You expect it but you don't expect it and yet it still works. And it is important, installation.

MS. AYRES: It's important that paintings next to each other can have a very subliminal conversation with each other without banging up against each other.

MR. SILVERMAN: You bet.

MS. AYRES: And that's a really unusual skill, I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. AYRES: Fairfield Porter, it just amazed me that a painter in a different context would come alive in a different kind of way.

MR. SILVERMAN: And they are also great paintings.

MS. AYRES: And they're also great paintings.

MR. SILVERMAN: See, that's so important too. He – Russell – I think Russell has a marvelous eye. I think he just – he gets it. I think Annie Philbin is the luckiest director in the city.

MS. AYRES: Would you say a little bit about the place of the Armand Hammer museum the past and in the present?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I don't think –

MS. AYRES: Not terribly interesting.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not to me.

MS. AYRES: The comment that I read earlier, the second question I wanted to ask had to do with the hectic expressionism that equates wild gesture with authentic emotion. In some ways that's at the crux, I think, of the argument, perhaps, about first and second generation abstract expressionism?

MR. SILVERMAN: Nah, I think that's an overblown thing, about this business, that you have all this passion and it can only come out with a gesture or manner, is that what you're saying?

MS. AYRES: Well, saying once the pioneers made that equation through intent, that it then became problematic, questionable.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know if the pioneers made that equation.

MS. AYRES: Talk a little bit about that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, the more I study and look at Franz Kline, for instance, the ultimate gestural painter, and I think David Anfam has written about this in the "Black and White" show that he did at the Whitney, or was one of the essayists. They are finding more and more that Kline, being a formalist painter in a way, was consistently exploring his ideas on paper, and were then translated to a larger canvas. I just don't see Franz Kline going into the studio and slashing around on a big canvas.

Also for two reasons. One, I don't think that would have given him the kind of gratification of the act of painting and that's not the way he was trained. And secondly I think there's an economic issue involved. The guy had no money.

He, from a practical standpoint, painted his first canvas, if I'm not mistaken, about 1950 or '51. And the reason he had the canvas to paint on is that – I don't know if it was at Boceûr or one of the art supply places – there was a bolt of canvas which got wet in the basement, and it was offered to de Kooning for a very low price. And de Kooning bought it with Kline.

And they rolled out all the canvas. It was a big bolt. And part of it was stained. And they rolled out as much of it as they could, which they cut off and then they split between them. I don't know if it was cotton duck or I don't know if it was linen or whatever. And it was on that canvas, I don't know how many he got out of it or anything like that, but it was on that part of that bolt that he began to paint on canvas.

Now, before that it was all boards. It could have been corrugated board. It was just paper. He was very careful. He was very – he wanted to be as careful as possible in terms of the materials that he used.

So his ideas on paper were transcribed in many ways. I mean there are innumerable paints which one could open the book, and you can see the drawing, and you could see the painting, the painting on paper, which are studies, the paper being studied. And I think that's just kind of like – it's gestural. It's a gestural language but it's not the wild – what we kind of come to term that "action painting" term that you get into a studio and you just start wailing.

Sam Francis told me that he would get into the studio, and sometimes for days looked at prepared canvases on the floor. And he had that rocking chair, that zen rocking chair and he used to sit in it, with his feet underneath. There are pictures of him. And he would just rock back and forth, and put himself into some kind of a state before he made the first drip, or before he made the first brush. And it would take him sometimes hours and sometimes days. Does that mean that he's doing studies in his mind? I don't know.

MS. AYRES: Could the same thing be said about Jackson Pollock?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know, notwithstanding Ed Harris's performance. I'll tell you a funny story. I once offered a Jackson Pollock to someone and I took it to their home and it didn't have, as the woman said, the rivers running through it, you know I saw the movie. I said, "Ah."

Anyway, we did sell the Pollock to somebody else, who had also seen the movie. I don't know, I think that Jackson also to me would be someone – the great technical achievement – you know, there was an exhibition at the Art of This Century in 1942- '43, in New York. That was the Peggy Guggenheim Gallery. And it's quoted in a lot of books, where Jackson walked in with Clement Greenberg. The artist was Janet Sobel.

And Janet Sobel was a Brooklyn housewife who took to painting later in life. She had been a student, I think, of Hans Hofmann. She wasn't a particularly great painter, nor is she a particularly giant in abstraction, but Peggy Guggenheim must have seen something in this body of work. And what the work contained was about a half dozen or dozen splatter and drip paintings on board, I think.

And this is three years before the first Jackson drip. Now, there are other painters that had done drip before, Knud Merrild, Hofmann himself. The interesting thing of what Jackson did, he is quoted as saying to Greenberg, in one of the Greenberg books, Greenberg said that Jackson was quite taken with Ms. Sobel's work. And I don't think he forgot it.

He did those wonderful paintings with such control. He wasn't a wild man. You don't go in there, you didn't walk

in a stand and cut your canvas or something like that. It wasn't the day of the painter. This was really serious, serious probing, and you have to be careful when you do it.

Jackson was a student of Fletcher Benton years before. Of course, they had a falling out – not Fletcher Benton, Thomas Hart Benton. Excuse me, Fletcher. Thomas Hart Benton, but then he became a student of Hofmann's. He was at the Art Students League. He was certainly aware of the trends in New York, but he literally broke away from surrealism.

I never thought he was an interesting surrealist anyway. I think Jackson deserves to be in the ages from just the paintings that he did from 19 – late '45, '46, into '51. Five years. Not that the other paintings aren't wonderful to look at, but God, what a comet he was. And I don't think he was just one – by the way, from what I've read, for most of those paintings he was sober.

MS. AYRES: Yes, that's what I've read, too.

MR. SILVERMAN: So I mean we have to get rid of this fucking romantic notion that these men just went in there and said, well, today, I'm going to make a painting, and I'll go to the right, and I'll go to the left, it's not that way at all.

MS. AYRES: That was the comment that Robert Rauschenberg made when he did *Factum I* and *Factum II*.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, he was doing a rift.

MS. AYRES: He was doing a rift but he was making a kind of point about it, about the expressionist –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, the erasing of a de Kooning drawing was making –

MS. AYRES: That's true, but those were points of a particular time –

MR. SILVERMAN: I think that Richter [Gerhard Richter] is not a serious abstract painter. I think Richter is seriously making – he's seriously poking fun at abstract expression by showing people that he can do it. What has really happened with Richter is that they had become so commercially viable. I mean they are so strong in the marketplace, why stop making them?

MS. AYRES: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: And I don't want to say any more about that.

MS. AYRES: Speaking of the marketplace, why don't we get back to the happy commercial aspects of –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it's not always happy.

MS. AYRES: No, I was asking you about – this may be Nuts and Bolts 101, but if you would talk a little bit about what I means to handle an artist's estate and how you go about getting –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, to me, I don't literally go after estates, estates came to me because the artist died. I was showing the art of Dugmore, Woelffer – who was it – Dugmore, Woelffer, Sam Francis, you know, Georgio Cavallon while they were alive. Some estates I got – the Daedalus Foundation came to me because Motherwell while he was alive had promised me a show. And unfortunately he had – he pre-deceased any show that we could work on together.

But five years later when the Daedalus had finished all their – what they had to do to clean up the estate, you know, tax wise and stuff like that, I got a call. Did I want to do a show? Because Motherwell had promised me a show and I had been the representative out here for the Daedalus Foundation.

All it means is that if Bob was alive, send me pictures, give me prices, and I'll sell them. Emerson died just a couple of years ago. I was always Emerson's dealer. He had made a deal with Otis Art Institute [Otis College of Art and Design] to sell his work there so that he would be able to enjoy a stipend – not a stipend, a payment every month. And the art has been transferred to Otis and I sell the paintings not for the estate but Otis. And the money goes to an Emerson Woelffer scholarship fund, minus the money that is paid out for the – Emerson's survivors, there's a widow, and it's a contractual obligations.

MS. AYRES: But you get your –

MR. SILVERMAN: I work as if I'm working with Emerson. We have our own arrangements with the school. We have our, you know, our percentages, you know, the school gets this, I get that. We have an agreement on expenses, how we share that, and that's it.

MS. AYRES: But you've never actively searched for an estate? They come to you?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I would, as a matter of fact there's a couple of widows who have called me. I was called – I never actively searched the Pousette-Dart estate, but the widow called me and we've been quite successful. I mean, you know, selling Pousette-Dart in California is not an easy thing to do.

MS. AYRES: That was my next question. How does a dealer go about strengthening a reputation of an artist that's no longer alive?

MR. SILVERMAN: I think – I don't know how other dealers do it, I know how I do it.

MS. AYRES: How do you do it?

MR. SILVERMAN: I am devoted to a certain period. I am devoted to a certain style. I'm devoted to a certain kind of art. Consequently, when people come in here they know what they're going to get. And I think that has been the saving of the gallery. When I say it's not a gallery where if you want to find – if you want to walk in and find different kinds of art from different schools in figurative, expressionistic, conceptual, minimalism, there are those galleries who are very good at having a much more broader outlook. We're very myopic.

MS. AYRES: But very much in depth?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's getting difficult, to be in depth too, because much of the art that I love and like to show is being bought up and it's not being created any more. The artists are dead. I'm not talking about Louise Fishman and I'm not talking about Michael Goldberg. They're the only two artists that I have that are still alive. And Joe Goode, I show Joe Goode's early work.

MS. AYRES: But you talk about when people come here, but you're not really talking about drop in people, you must certainly have your list of people –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, when we have a show, we send it out to our list. They come for the openings and everything. And then they –

MS. AYRES: You must be on the phone a lot?

MR. SILVERMAN: Constantly, I'm also in the business now where I'll sell to other colleagues who are looking. We're always selling to each other, you know, that happens.

MS. AYRES: Well, talk a little bit about the secondary market, and what that is –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it is primarily – unless it's an estate piece – a secondary market work, I'll – you know, sometimes a client might call me, they're getting – I have a couple that did call me about a number of pieces and I negotiated to buy those pieces. They wanted to sell them as a lump sum. They didn't want to sell one or two at a time or something like that, and let the auction houses cherry pick. So what I do is try to come to a payout schedule, and then I have a few pieces from them to sell.

MS. AYRES: Do you do that because you know you can place them with someone –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I do it because I know I can place them. I do it because I know I like the art, and I do it because I need material. And if I don't place it right away, it stands – you know, there's and old story about Ernst Beyeler, the great Swiss dealer who the Beyeler Foundation is named after him in Basel. And he's probably one of the most famous dealers in the world.

And he was given a testimonial and he told everybody there who had consigned to him, and who had bought from him, thank you so much for buying from me and keeping me in business. Now the rest of you I want to thank even more for not buying from me and making me a rich man. Meaning that the paintings that he didn't sell and he was able to keep in his collection, made him a rich man: the Rothkos and the Picassos, unbelievable in the Beyeler Foundation.

MS. AYRES: And he couldn't sell them?

MR. SILVERMAN: Couldn't sell them, or maybe he wouldn't sell them at the prices that people offered, who knows.

MS. AYRES: I don't want the particulars, but as an example let's take the Roy Dowell, which you actually have included in your exhibition –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. AYRES: – which is an odd thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it comes from this particular collection. I certainly –

MS. AYRES: Is this show a prominent collection?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. I took Roy's piece in. I put a fair price on it. I don't believe in – even though it's a difficult sell for me because people don't expect it here. I've called people around. I want to make sure that it makes the private market. I don't necessarily want this to go to a Butterfield's auction. That would hurt his market, and that's what I – so I'm hanging it up and trying to sell it.

MS. AYRES: And you have no arrangement with Margo Levin in terms of this?

MR. SILVERMAN: No.

MS. AYRES: It's totally outside the situation. What about – is there still a Californian law about money going to the artist –

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, the California Resale –

MS. AYRES: And you certainly honor that?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, where I can.

MS. AYRES: Because you deal in the art you do, I imagine you are less apt to attend the yearly MFA exhibitions of our three major art schools and university art departments. [END TAPE 2, SIDE A] But, still, could you comment on the importance of LA art schools to a vibrant LA art scene?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I think they are important. My goodness, I think that – and Chris Knight has written ad infinitum about this. I mean, I think he – and I think certain critics have their certain favorites and everything like that. But certainly art schools have been important and they're the – I guess you would say the minor leagues of the major leagues. They're the place where young people hopefully learn how to be artists.

MS. AYRES: The graduate schools today?

MR. SILVERMAN: The graduate schools and, you know, even the undergraduate schools that get them excited to go on to graduate schools.

MS. AYRES: Is it possible for an artist today to have a career without his MFA? Surely yes, but they're the exceptions it seems to me?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah, there is. There is.

MS. AYRES: The schools graduate so many from their MFA programs year after year after year, and obviously not everyone is going to be –

MR. SILVERMAN: No.

MS. AYRES: – a well known artist. But would you, from your own love and experience of art, argue that an art school education is as useful as, say, a sociology education or –

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I think so. I think so. I think it's – you know, I think it's part of an education of culture. I think it enhances us. I mean, it would be a terrible society if everybody was an engineer or everybody was an attorney or everybody was a doctor. And I think an art major could probably become a good banker some day.

MS. AYRES: It certainly gives you a particular way of looking and being in the world. We talk about that –

MR. SILVERMAN: I think art degrees, philosophy degrees, music degrees, history degrees, I think it enhances society. That doesn't mean that every artist is going to be – there's no room for more de Kooning's. There's no room, there's not enough room out there for artists in the firmament, so to speak.

MS. AYRES: As someone once said, I forget whom, that every generation only has five or six great artists. Does that –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I don't –

MS. AYRES: – make any sense to you.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think that's just bullshit. I mean, how do they know what they're talking about? And how do we know who's a great artist and how do we know who's a successful artist? You know, Emerson was a guy who got up every single day and he painted. He did what he wanted to do.

His paintings had integrity. His teaching had integrity. He had a house. He had a life. He listened to music. He ate well. He didn't owe anybody anything. He lived to be 89-years-old. His last years were not easy for him.

MS. AYRES: He was very influential on students. He –

MR. SILVERMAN: He loved – students kept him young. I think –

MS. AYRES: Were you –

MR. SILVERMAN: I can think of about 90 artists – 90 percent of the artists who probably if they had their choice would love to live that kind of life.

MS. AYRES: You're saying he had a successful life and he was a successful man –

MR. SILVERMAN: That's right.

MS. AYRES: – and you would rate that higher than some artificial successful artist?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. I think that you – I think it's important to be a successful human being and to have a reasonably happy life. What is it worth to be tormented or to be so career driven that it torments you and you can never feel assured of yourself? That you become almost – well, I mean you develop an attitude or you become so self-important. Nobody should be that self-important. I mean, after a while we're all just going to die and it's what we leave after us that's going to be there, so just make sure you're making good paintings. That's the payoff.

MS. AYRES: That they satisfy you?

MR. SILVERMAN: You're damn right.

MS. AYRES: We've talked about the art schools, but then there are museums and active curators. Could you talk a little bit more about Maurice Tuchman because he was a force in the LA art world for about three decades. Is a position of power like that bound to be controversial, because he was somewhat a controversial character.

MR. SILVERMAN: Totally controversial. I was – in the beginning I was really – I think he was a force for getting a number of people locally interested in what was then very avant-garde. Or, it may have been old avant-garde back then because it came from New York, you know. You know, the abstract expressionists and painters and stuff like that. But I thought he was extremely innovative in his first 10-12 years. It was – as I remember the first show, "The New York School" show, I remember "Sculptures of the '60s." I remember the "Art Technology." ["American Sculpture of the Sixties," LACMA, 1967 and "A Report on the Art and Technology Program of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art: 1967-1971," LACMA, 1971] I remember – I think he did an Oldenburg show didn't he?

MS. AYRES: And the Kienholz show, of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: And the Kienholz. Oh, yeah.

MS. AYRES: He also did a rather interesting show on European abstract – ["European Painting in the Seventies: New Work by Sixteen Artists," LACMA, 1975]

MR. SILVERMAN: He did. You know, he – well, he did that show – yeah. Yes, he did that London show, with Avigdor Arikha and people like that. He was – yeah, I think he showed – did he not show some of the – also he did the very early show of Schnabel in the Projects Room. I don't know if that was his show or Stephanie's [Stephanie Barron] or something. There were a lot of very innovative things.

What happens I think to curators, unfortunately, is possibly a state of ennui or you know, it – I don't know if you get stale or you're tired of fighting battles with boards or – I was never there. I would say that Maurice Tuchman on balance was quite good for his innovative thoughts in the '50s and '60s.

MS. AYRES: Yes. When you look back on his shows, his –

MR. SILVERMAN: And on what more should we actually judge a man? I don't want to get into the –

MS. AYRES: Yes, I agree.

MR. SILVERMAN: – the politics of the situation or of his leaving or of his attitude or his relationships. I wasn't in that inner circle.

MS. AYRES: Well, someone I know fairly well is Paul Schimmel. I think he has had a tremendous influence.

MR. SILVERMAN: I love Paul. I'll just state that right out.

MS. AYRES: Of course, his "Out of Action" show was tremendously innovative. But there are other shows that I think he's important for: the "Interpretative Link" at Newport –

MR. SILVERMAN: Absolutely. Those are my bibles, the two shows – the –

MS. AYRES: "Action Precision" –

MR. SILVERMAN: "Action Precision" and the "Interpretative Link." I mean, and I talk to him about it all the time. And I don't necessarily always agree with him, but what's the difference?

MS. AYRES: Well, what about – I think "Hand Painted Pop" was a very interesting show, which I think –

MR. SILVERMAN: It was.

MS. AYRES: – he did with Donna DeSalvo, but nevertheless it was part of his –

MR. SILVERMAN: It was. Any time he's done a show – the big de Kooning "Women." Could you think of a better shown than the de Kooning "Women?"

MS. AYRES: No, and also his Arshile Gorky.

MR. SILVERMAN: But that was the show of the – the little show, you mean?

MS. AYRES: Yes, the little show that compared –

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, that was the Schreiber painting *The Betrothal*. That is beautiful. All those things. The thing that pissed me off, and you can put it on, is I went to a – during the de Kooning show I went with Jackie to a talk. It was Cecily Brown, Paul McCarthy and Klaus Kertess and it was moderated by Paul's assistant. What was her name? She also did that show with him – Connie Butler.

MS. AYRES: Oh, Connie Butler. She's not his assistant.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, assistant – she's –

MS. AYRES: Associate curator.

MR. SILVERMAN: Associate curator. Excuse me, Connie. Sorry. And Connie did a yeoman's job of trying to moderate it, but the only one that was reasonably interesting, and he was quite interesting because he knew de Kooning and he knew what de Kooning was about, was Klaus. The other two artists came to de Kooning from their art, which was – I mean, to have – what's his name, Paul showing the video that he did where he sticks on a dick head and fucks a board or something, and he's de Kooning and de Kooning and de Kooning.

You know, that had nothing – that wasn't inspired by de Kooning. That was – you know, and Cecily's paintings who they say are inspired by de Kooning, I don't really see it. I think that's just all – it's all about trying to take history and making it relevant to the 21st century. Why the fuck does somebody have to do that?

History is history. Examine it as it is and don't try and change it. Don't try and – you know, I mean you can always re-interpret it. I mean, there are always things like that, but I don't know. It just doesn't work for me.

MS. AYRES: Well, there seems to be a push for entertainment and provocation –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, because that draws people to museums.

MS. AYRES: And does it? I mean, would you –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. I go to MOCA openings once in a wile. I never saw more people in my life. Whether it draws them as members I don't know, or whether they're just going for the drinks or –

MS. AYRES: The event.

MR. SILVERMAN: – the camaraderie.

MS. AYRES: The camaraderie and the event too.

MR. SILVERMAN: You'd have to ask Jeremy and what's her name at the County?

MS. AYRES: Andrea Rich.

MR. SILVERMAN: Andrea Rich about their –

MS. AYRES: Well, the Armand Hammer openings are the bounciest ones I've –

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. But I'd love to know how many people go to Armand Hammer during the show.

MS. AYRES: Well, I was at the gallery yesterday and there were three other people there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you see, there you go.

MS. AYRES: But this is so typical of Los Angeles and not of New York, I think. And I think –

MR. SILVERMAN: Or Philadelphia or Chicago.

MS. AYRES: I know that people like Ann Philbin and Elsa Longhauser when they first came out to Los Angeles to really enrich our city were a little bit shocked about this – about how few people –

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I don't know. That's the museum's problem of trying to get an outreach program to bring people to the galleries in the midday.

MS. AYRES: Although I can remember in my youth in New York going to the Museum of Modern Art and it wasn't as crowded as it is today. It seems to be –

MR. SILVERMAN: You know the Museum of Modern – the Metropolitan Museum of Art is the largest single tourist attraction in New York. The art museum, not the Natural History [American Museum of Natural History]. I think that says an awful lot. It says a lot about the myopia in this town.

MS. AYRES: In this town. Well, do you think the new Disney Hall is going –

MR. SILVERMAN: Disney Hall has brought people downtown.

MS. AYRES: Yes, it has.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it would seem to me that there should be more events that MOCA should tie in with Disney Hall.

MS. AYRES: What is the role of museum support groups and their gallery visits with their particular curators. Do they come to you often?

MR. SILVERMAN: No.

MS. AYRES: No? Because they come to galleries that show alive artists that come and talk to them?

MR. SILVERMAN: Right. I had a few groups. You know who comes? A lot of classes come.

MS. AYRES: Classes? History classes. [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: I have very few collectors groups that come. I used to.

MS. AYRES: Do you ever facilitate a donation to a museum from collectors that might be well placed to –

MR. SILVERMAN: Absolutely.

MS. AYRES: Tell me about how that works. You would say to people, "Don't sell it. Give it to the museum instead?"

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. I got a call from a collector in Chicago at a very early – Edward Dugmore and he wanted me to – I could've sold it. And I had gotten a call from Walter Hopps and he said, "You know, we could use a Dugmore here at the Menil." I said, "Well, I've got one. I can sell you one."

He says, "No, I don't have the money." I said, "You know something, Walter, I can't give you one out of the estate. They don't have that – they're not going to give it to you. But I have a great collector in Chicago who

might be willing."

And I worked on it for about six months and I facilitated the donation from the Chicago collector to the Menil. And that way Dugmore got a painting into the Menil. Sometimes that works, sometimes it doesn't.

MS. AYRES: And it would help you to have a work placed in the Menil?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I think so. We did finally – when San Jose did a big show of San Francisco Art Institute artists, San Jose – Susan Landor – I felt it was incumbent upon the Dugmore people to give a painting there. And also the Orange County Museum of Art did a big show with Dugmore in it and we facilitated a painting there. Sometimes I will get – try and get a board member to finance buying a picture if the curator wants it, but that doesn't happen too often with me.

MS. AYRES: Do you work closely with curators when they do shows that –

MR. SILVERMAN: If they ask, yes. I'm always – I'm very open to do that.

MS. AYRES: And a dealer can be very useful to a curator.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I think so.

MS. AYRES: Your gallery is called the Manny Silverman Gallery, but I also certainly associate your wife Jackie Silverman and certainly Linda Hooper is a very active force here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. AYRES: First of all, what is it like to work with the person you are married to?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, we don't work together.

MS. AYRES: No, but you –

MR. SILVERMAN: We work in the same place and we really have – she has separate phones, I mean she has her separate business. She does art –

MS. AYRES: Yeah, because she's an appraiser.

MR. SILVERMAN: – appraisals. Yeah. And we try and stay out of each other's hair, you know, and we try and make it very clear that what she does is different from me. We'll have – like, for instance, if someone needs an appraisal on a Robert Motherwell, she might ask me what a Motherwell could be worth like she would ask any other gallery. But we've been working together – we've been married 42 years and we've been working together for a good part of that.

She worked at Art Services before she started her own business. She actually started appraising 10 years before I started the gallery, so she had her own business when she – and we only – and she used to work out of the house. And we decided to have her work out of the gallery because we both – we have an extensive library now and I wanted to share the library with her.

MS. AYRES: Well, she could work out of the house when the children were younger probably too?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah. Excuse me, I have to –

[Audio break.]

MS. AYRES: Okay. Welcome back, Manny.

MR. SILVERMAN: Thank you. I wanted to – like I was saying to you, there's something about early LA art history that in all these symposiums and everything that are held, and I have absolute utmost respect for most of the people who I have known for almost 50 years now and we've been bumping into each other at parties and having drinks together. But I have a little bit of a different take about LA art history and I feel that a lot of people feel that art history in Los Angeles began with Ferus Gallery. And that is, the Ferus Gallery was definitely in my mind probably one of the most important galleries that ever opened in this town. Ferus Gallery opened the eyes of a lot of collectors and brought a lot of new ideas to the town. But never should we view Ferus at the expense of galleries like the Copley Gallery, like what's his name? [Bill Copley]

Who had one in Beverly Hills, or should we forget the absolute contributions of galleries not only like Paul Kantor showing Dick Diebenkorn and Emerson Woelffer amongst the Picassos and things like that, or the galleries like

Frank Perl's and Stephen Silagy in Beverly Hills. But we can't forget there was a gallery Datsell Hatfield in the Ambassador Hotel. They used to show German Expressionist art.

There was the Biltmore Gallery downtown that showed Western art, started by Charlie Russell. Los Angeles had the first public exhibition of *Guernica*, I think, outside of France. These were all important ingredients that drew people from all over the country to Los Angeles and we had that great expatriate community here from Europe. And also while we lost the Arensberg collections, they did live here. And I just wanted to set the record straight that I don't think enough is done about that LA.

MS. AYRES: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Art did not start in 1960. That's all I want to say about that.

[Audio break.]

MS. AYRES: Hi, Manny. Welcome back again. I have always thought of you in terms of a real sense of old fashioned connoisseurship when you look at work, and I'm wondering if you could even begin to describe what goes on in your mind and gut when you look at a work of art? And could you, because I know we all struggle with that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, let me put it to you this way. My wife says I'm an easy grader. Now, what constitutes being an easy grader is two things probably, from my – it's the dealer part of my brain and the collector part of my brain. I cannot possibly show museum quality works day in and day out. The best that I can do is put on my wall what I consider to be the best I'm able to get. Now, that doesn't mean if I'm doing a Motherwell show from the estate that certain works on paper or paintings are better than others. And certain works are better than others, or aren't better than others. I know – either negative or – so I want to direct the clientele to a really – what I consider to be a good work, and it becomes as a dealer a fine line. You can't say, "Well, this work is so much superior than that work. He didn't get into it."

You have to do it in a manner where you should be positive if – and I'm not talking about a piece of dog shit, okay? Excuse my expression. You have to do it in a manner in which you give justice to everything that you put up on the wall. If you can't do that in a reasonable manner, then some of the pieces shouldn't be up on the wall.

Now, that's where my easy grading comes in. I put pieces up on the wall and Linda and my wife say, "Uh-uh." And sometimes, being a dealer, I say, "But I can sell that." "Uh uh." And I think I'm being very honest with you. It is good to have people around you that are not afraid to say, "Don't do that."

And consequently I will say this, in most cases I am extremely proud of the way things look in the gallery. If that's connoisseurship then so be it. If it's just more about I think an obligation, an obligation to show the best works you can – when I work with Louise Fishman, who's a live artist, I go to the studio. And God bless her, she allows me to pick the paintings. She doesn't say, "I'm doing five paintings and this is what you're getting." It's hard for me to do work that way.

When I work with Michael Goldberg it might take two years before we decide which paintings to show, and I prefer it that way. When I work with the Daedalus Foundation, with the Emerson Woelffer/Otis crowd, I'm able to choose what I want to show. In terms of the Daedalus, they don't always pull out – they don't pull out 500 things to let me show. I don't know how many works are left there, and that's their business, but they give me good examples to choose from and I do my best.

MS. AYRES: Would you say then that there is such a thing as an eye? Or is that a romantic conception, or is it something that's –

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know. I don't know if it's –

MS. AYRES: – learned through the years? Learned through experience?

MR. SILVERMAN: I think there's an eye, but the eye is helped with a certain amount of experience and historical knowledge. My grandson Victor is eight and a half years old. The best eye that he has is probably moving from second to third and finding it. He's not nearly – you're not born with something like that.

MS. AYRES: You don't think you are?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't think so. I think that's baloney. Maybe what you're born with is some kind of a feeling that you can appreciate or you have the patience or the right brain or the left brain, or whatever part of that brain says, "Gosh, maybe I ought to look at this stuff."

A lot of people don't want to. They'd rather go to Wal-Mart or something like that and buy the latest boat.

Whereas I would rather go to James Corcoran or Manny Silverman or Stuart Regan [Shaun Caley and Stuart Regan of Regan Projects] to see what's the latest Lari Pittman. What's the latest Michael Goldberg? What's the latest Ed Ruscha? So when you get right down to it, that's –

MS. AYRES: So you might say you never get tired of what you're doing?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't get tired of what I'm doing.

MS. AYRES: Well, let me just – thank you, Manny, so much for your patience and your enthusiasm and your history.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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