Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Ira Spanierman, 2007 June 6-12

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

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Ira Spanierman on June 6 and 12, 2007. The interview took place at Spanierman Gallery in New York, New York, and was conducted by James McElhinney for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Widgeon Point Charitable Foundation.

Ira Spanierman and James McElhinney 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

JAMES MCELHINNEY: Shall we begin? This is James McElhinney interviewing Mr. Ira Spanierman of Spanierman Gallery, 45 East 58th Street in New York [NY] on June 6, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Good afternoon.

IRA SPANIERMAN: Good afternoon.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's very kind of you to share your time with us and have this conversation.

Where are you from?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm from New York City. Was born here and raised here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What neighborhood?

MR. SPANIERMAN: West Side to start with and then over to the East Side, Manhattan.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what was your childhood like? Were you encouraged in art at all? Was there an interest in art?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, but my father was an antique dealer when I was young, and then when I was about nine – I think I was nine years old or thereabouts or maybe older – he became an auctioneer, and he started something called Savoy Art and Auction Gallery, which he used to operate between Fifth [Avenue] and Madison [Avenue], sorry. So he was a block and a half away from where I am now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wonderful.

MR. SPANIERMAN: And his Uncle Fred, my great uncle, had a shop, an antique shop called Old World Antiques on 57th Street between Lexington [Avenue] and Park [Avenue], which is, again, a block and a half the other direction. So I'm right in the middle of those old memories.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you haven't left the neighborhood?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I haven't left – well, I did at one point, but I'm back in the neighborhood, with my son; so here we are.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's great. And was his antique shop near your home, or –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Whose shop, my uncle's or my father's?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Your father's.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, my father's – in the beginning, no, but then, yes, because we lived on 70 – well, 69th Street on the West Side, between Central Park West and Columbus [Avenue]. So, sure, he could walk home.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So this area of Manhattan is an area that you are intimately acquainted with over a long period of time.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, well, it changes. People change; shops change; things change, but the neighborhood is basically where I've always been.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where did you study?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I studied at Syracuse [University, Syracuse, NY], and here in New York.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I did not study art, though.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What were your studies?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Just English major.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you did a liberal arts education?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, a general liberal arts education.

MR. MCELHINNEY: At Syracuse University. And then how did you become involved in the art business?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I went to work for my father, and I always helped him. When I was in high school, I would be a porter; I moved furniture around and things like that. And I heard so many auctions, and I got involved so much with the people who would catalogue art and antiques, that I began to – you know, I asked questions, and I'd read things, and I took a few little lecture courses and began to know a little bit, and also conversations with various dealers and collectors who would come to the gallery and would be talking about things that were of interest to them in the gallery. So I started to pick up knowledge.

And then when I was 21, which – you couldn't be younger and be an auctioneer because you had to be bonded, and you couldn't be bonded unless you were 21. But the minute I was 21, I started to become an auctioneer, became an auctioneer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that was at Savoy?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Savoy Galleries.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And when did you begin to operate independently as an art dealer?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I always sort of helped my father out, even when I was operating independently. So I would go back and help him on Saturdays to auction, or if he needed me for some particular thing, I would come and help him. But when did I start to operate independently – I'm trying to remember – probably about 48 years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did he have a general antiques line, or was it more –

MR. SPANIERMAN: More than that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: – an emphasis on –

MR. SPANIERMAN: About 50 years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the emphasis of his business? Was it antiques in general?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, everything. He was an auctioneer that sold everything. He sold household goods; he sold antiques; he sold books; he sold furs; he sold paintings; he had art sales. He had just everything, everything that came down the pike.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how did you begin to move more towards an interest in art?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I was interested in things. I got a little interested in silver, and I was pretty interested in arms and armor. But I think the most interesting thing – the thing I was most interested in and seemed to be most attracted to was art. And I found the people who were also interested in art, who were clients of the auction gallery, were very interesting people and had a more international or worldwide view than, say, silver people or arms-and-armor people; they were more interesting to talk to.

And, also, I had a good feeling for art; I had a good eye, for some reason, and I would respond to it in an interesting way. I just naturally went in that direction. I started to buy things that came up at auction here or there just because I'd like them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you were a collector, too, or you were an art collector?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I don't know if I was a collector or what I was, but I just bought them because I liked them. And I think I thought I could make a profit in them if I figured out who the hell painted them. In some

cases I didn't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So a lot of the pictures you bought were unattributed?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I bought one, I remember, which turned out to be a [Camille] Pissarro, which was very good. I sold it half-share to another dealer, and he sold it to a museum. It came in a box of old pictures that some dealer had put in. I know who it came from; it came from Herbie Trigger [ph]. It just was in a box, and I thought, oh, that looks pretty good. It was dirty. You could buy pictures then that were dirty and not taken care of. Today, everything is sort of primed up and ready to be sold; you know, it's all packaged up. But in those days, anything was possible. Any kind of miracle was possible.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, also it was much harder, I would think, to do the research because there was no Google, and you couldn't Internet.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No Google? [They laugh.] No Google? [They laugh.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: No Google.

MR. SPANIERMAN: We never appreciated what Google was going to be. Nobody even had a hint of Google. Well, there were places to go. You'd, obviously, go to the Frick Library of Art [Frick Art Reference Library, Frick Collection, New York, NY], where you could pull up supply, and look through many, many photographs and make comparisons if you could – that's where I did a lot of studying of art – that way. I would buy something or see something and go over to the Frick to see if I could identify it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's a great library here in New York.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, yeah. They have got great stacks, and they had great, what they called "supply," which was all cutout photos from ads and everything under a particular artist's name. So that was very interesting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So from the time you got out of school and you got involved with the auction business, you became an auctioneer, and began to deal in silver and arms and armor–

MR. SPANIERMAN: I didn't deal in them. I dealt in them for the gallery.

MR. MCELHINNEY: For the gallery, right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Right. But the art, I sort of did a little more independently or buy for myself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So arms and armor and silver, it seemed to me, to be things that would demand a lot of patience and study in order to understand well.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't think so. I mean, not as much as art, no; it's more identifiable. I don't think arms and armor was that difficult. To know a good piece from a bad piece wasn't hard.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So how much time elapsed from the time that you went to work after you got out of college to the time when you hung out your own shingle?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I say I hung out my own shingle from my own apartment probably about 50 years ago, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that was where, here in this neighborhood?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Here, well, just over on 60th [Street]. I had got a little shop over on 60, 60th or 61st Street and Third Avenue, something like that. And then I operated from my apartment when I gave that up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It seems like a lot of dealers, some old-time operations, have gone from walk-in operations to appointment-only operations.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's true.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And do you see any evidence in that of some change in the market or the way art is being sold or art is being bought?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I see that as a definite change in the market, because people are very auction-oriented now, whereas private people were not so auction-oriented in those days; collectors were not – a little bit, some, of course, but not like now, and not with the same consistency or the same level. In those days, the precursor of Sotheby's was Parke-Bernet. Parke-Bernet's annual take – annual take – was six million [dollars]. The other day –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very small by today's standards.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, the other day in a two-week session, both auction galleries [Christie's and Sotheby's] sold a billion-and-a-half-dollars worth of art. So, compare that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's how long ago?

MR. SPANIERMAN: What was how long ago? Six million?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's a good, 55, 60 years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So even if you adjust the currency to the equivalent now, that's still an enormous increase.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I mean, it's just become – Wilson, Peter Wilson did that. He was the PR man. He took over Sotheby's, running Sotheby's. And he had that in mind the whole time. He made them very user-friendly. Auctions had been kind of – well, how shall I phrase it – a little taken with themselves, as it were, in those days and, you know, above it all, but Peter decided to descend to the level of the buyer, whatever level he thought that was – [laughs] – and he made a very big success of it. In fact, he was heard to say at a cocktail party at one point, several years before he died, "Soon there will be no dealers."

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is that true, do you think?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, I know it's true.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was he the one who instigated the use of a kind of secondary auction level there? I'm trying to remember, it was Christie's or Sotheby's had –

MR. SPANIERMAN: PB84 [salesroom on East 84th].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. That's right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: PB84 was Sotheby's.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that was sort of the –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, it was PB –

MR. MCELHINNEY: – the economy version of –

MR. SPANIERMAN: PB meant Parke-Bernet [Sotheby's acquired Parke-Bernet in 1964].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, I see.

MR. SPANIERMAN: It was then called Parke-Bernet-Sotheby's [aka Sotheby Parke Bernet, Inc], if I'm not mistaken – I forgot exactly. And it was very good. They got rid of a lot of what they thought were cheaper things. I remember going in there and getting some – I used to walk in there with my hand up, because if I was late, I didn't want to miss something. There were a lot of bargains sold there then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when did you actually open a gallery, per se?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I opened a gallery on Third Avenue years ago, but I won't count that. When I actually opened a gallery, it was on 1109 Lexington Avenue, on the third floor. I would say that's when I began. And when was that? That was probably – let's see, 44 years ago, something like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And what were you exhibiting?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I was showing American paintings. In those days, I was dealing in a lot of things because I was trying to make a living, and I knew a little bit about a lot of different things. I knew something about European art. I knew a little bit about Old Masters. I knew a little bit about American art. So whatever I could find around that I could convert into a profit, I would deal in. But a lot of American art, of 19th and 20th century – I'm trying to think.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So mostly 19th and 20th century.

MR. SPANIERMAN: American.

MR. MCELHINNEY: American art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And/or European and some Old Masters paintings. So more or less anything that –

MR. SPANIERMAN: - I could move.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - that you could move. Yeah. And what did you find to be the most rewarding or interesting of all of that?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I was very interested in Old Master paintings and dealt in them. I liked everything, but I think the easiest thing to deal in was the American paintings, because in American paintings, I could find them from the source, from collectors, and I could sell them to collectors; whereas with European paintings, and with 19th-century European paintings, and Old Masters, I could get them here and there, but I didn't have a clientele for them. My clientele were either another auction or dealers, other dealers. I was the dealers' dealer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Or I was the dealers' dealers' dealers' dealer, which I would actually do in those years. One dealer would buy it, sell it to another dealer, and sell it to another dealer. It goes to five dealers before it wound up in some retail hands, but not now. That business is dead.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that is also a consequence of the Internet, do you think, or just auctions?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Or a consequence of the auctions being so strong, or a consequence of the Internet, in the sense that all of the prices are posted publicly and easy to find because they are in alphabetical order or whatever – by time, by price. You know, you can order it up any way you want. It used to be that it was the hunting ground of the dealer at auctions, and we're the ones who more or less bought at auction. And eventually the collector, so-called, or buyer, nonprofessional buyer, moved in, and, as usual, the invader took over the hunting ground of the Indian. It happens all the time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you exhibit any works by living artists?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. In those years, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it was mainly works that you acquired at auction. Any estates?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not in the beginning, no. I wouldn't have gotten estates in the beginning. But I did do a – Cooper-Hewitt [National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, New York, NY] had lost its home downtown before they moved up here. I did an exhibition of Winslow Homer for them, which was a great coup, in a way, for me as a young dealer to have this little exhibition in my first important gallery on – downstairs gallery, which was a gallery [Eugene] Gene Thaw had had on 78th Street – 40 – 50 East 78th. And I took it. He moved, and I took it. He gave me the lease that he had.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That was, again, the gallery of Gene Thaw?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Had been Gene Thaw's gallery. And then I very quickly had this wonderful exhibition of works by Winslow Homer, which I had got from Cooper-Hewitt. They had had them just hanging out there. They had 23 or 24 paintings by Homer that were in cheap frames, never been cleaned, never been attended to, and I suggested that I fix them up for them and frame them and give them a show and put out a little catalogue. And they were delighted with the idea, because they wanted some publicity; nobody knew what they had anymore. And the show was a huge success; I mean, lots of people came. Nothing was for sale, but still.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One of the notable qualities of the gallery, of Spanierman Gallery, is that you have a very aggressive program of publications, it seems; a lot of really excellent catalogues.

MR. SPANIERMAN: We have wonderful catalogues.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah.

MR. SPANIERMAN: We've put out some really major catalogues. We do the catalogue raisonné of – I publish and distribute and underwrite the catalogue raisonné of Winslow Homer. First two volumes are out there; there are three more volumes to come out. I mean, that's a monumental work, with 70 or 80 years in the making, starting with Lloyd Goodrich.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you got involved with that –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I got involved in it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Early on?

MR. SPANIERMAN: My first catalogue raisonné was [John Henry] Twachtman that I undertook. I mean, I haven't published it yet. Then I undertook another one, Theodore Robinson. Then I undertook a third one, which was Willard [Leroy] Metcalf. And the fourth one, which I undertook in a different way, was Winslow Homer, because I am not the co-author of that. So we do a lot of scholarly work here, and we put out some very interesting catalogues, very informative catalogues.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who is the author of the Homer catalogue?

MR. SPANIERMAN: [Abigail] Abby Gerdts. Well, actually, no. She is the – it's actually Lloyd Goodrich, I guess. It's the Lloyd Goodrich catalogue raisonné – that's not the actual title – of the works of Winslow Homer, undertaken since his death by Abby Gerdts.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is she related to William Gerdts?

MR. SPANIERMAN: She's the wife of William Gerdts.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay. I'm asking the question because some scholar years hence will be curious.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, she was responsible for the bicentennial survey of American art, and she was a friend of Lloyd Goodrich's, and he wanted her to take this over; he assigned it to her.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's interesting to know; that's really interesting to know.

So when did you get started as a publisher?

MR. SPANIERMAN: When I did my first catalogue, which was, I suppose, the Homer catalogue. I guess it was.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That was a long time ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And that was what year?

MR. SPANIERMAN: [Nineteen] Sixty-seven.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Something like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's excellent. When did you start dealing with living artists?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not till fairly recently. Once we moved here – we didn't deal with living artists before we moved here. We moved here to this premises at 45 East 58th Street about 14 years ago, and we started to deal with living artists at that time because we had the space for it. The other gallery I had, although it had a lot of room all over the building, the space of the gallery itself was very small.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Before we talk about some of the living artists whom you've shown or are showing, over the years did you find people coming to you, other institutions, like the Cooper-Hewitt, seeking some kind of collaboration?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We've done collaborations with institutions. We've loaned pictures; we've borrowed pictures. I've never done another – well, I'm doing one now; I'm doing a Fitz Hugh Lane [since 2005, aka Fitz Henry Lane] show in the fall ["Fitz Henry Lane and Mary Blood Mellen: Old Mysteries and New Discoveries." Cape Ann Museum, Glouster, MA, July 7 - September 16, 2007, and Spanierman Gallery, October 4 – December 1, 2007], and I'm doing it in conjunction with, and I'm supporting it, with the Gloucester – what's their official name?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is it Cape Ann?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Cape Ann Historical Society [since 2007, Cape Ann Museum].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, Historical Society.

MR. SPANIERMAN: And John Wilmerding is writing the catalogue for it, or has written it. So, that's one. But, basically, I don't do a lot of that.

We've done other things; we've had a – did a big Twachtman exhibition and gave part of the exhibition to the Historical Society of Greenwich [CT], where they had a show. We've done things like that. I had a big Twachtman exhibition after the Homer exhibition in the old space. And I had some beautiful Twachtman – I had that *Arques-La-Bataille* [1885], which I sold to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY] at that time. It was a picture that would be worth, you know, millions of dollars now; I sold it for $40,000.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow. So in dealing with all of these dead artists, how frequently did you encounter fakes?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Very frequently. You had to know the difference.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. [They laugh.] What are some of the challenges of attribution for –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, in the catalogues raisonnés we have committees; so it has to be unanimously accepted, or we won't publish it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you have a panel of scholars who –

MR. SPANIERMAN: A panel, and after years of working with these artists, we know a lot because we have seen so much.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it's a matter of just experience –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Experience has got a lot to do with it, and the feeling.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Provenance?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Instinct, feeling, provenance, eye, a good eye – it's connoisseurship, is what it is; there's no scientific way – well, there are some, but when all scientific ways fail you have to rely on your eye.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I imagine there must be ongoing conversations in the academic world among art historians about the merits of spectrographic analysis of pigments or X-rays or this, that, and the other thing.

MR. SPANIERMAN: It could be important.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you think –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It depends on how old the piece is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. But you would say that the eye or the collective agreement –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Connoisseurship is the main essence of any kind of catalogue raisonné; if it's not, then it shouldn't be a catalogue raisonné.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what kind of collectors do you work with?

MR. SPANIERMAN: All kinds. I mean, what kind of collectors? I don't really understand that question.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, maybe it was ill posed. Speaking about connoisseurship, I guess I'm asking if you find that a lot of the collectors who come to you share your point of view.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, a lot do, sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you see a lot of others who are more mercenary in their –

MR. SPANIERMAN: We see every kind of people now. We see – well, since art has become monetized, which is only recently, really – it wasn't always – people are thinking of those terms, and not incorrectly, because as the money decreases in value, which is actually what is happening, hard things go up in value – goods go up in value – so paintings, too, go up in value. If they don't lose their value that you buy it at, you're actually saving – I mean, if it goes up a little, you're saving money because the money is going down or has been going down. And people are thinking about that much more now than they did before. But people also like to make a collection; they like to give the collection away to a museum; it pleases their ego to do so; it's something thrilling for them, and, I think, very emotional. And that's how – my feeling about art is quite emotional. I really have an emotional approach.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It has to speak to you.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: What kind of collectors do you prefer to work with? You see somebody walk in the door who is looking at it mostly as an emotional thing, something that triggers some kind of response, or taste, or somebody who's interested in it as a hedge against –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I would respond more to the people who look at it the way I look at it; naturally, I would be more sympathetic to that. I mean, I'm sympathetic to any approach anybody wants to use, but there's a kind of language involved in looking at art, which I cannot explain to you, but you feel it. And when somebody is speaking that language, you know it, and they know that you're speaking that language to them, and you have kind of a meeting of the – I was going to say soul, but it sounds so ridiculous – a meeting of the, not the mind so much, but some kind of meeting happens, and it's a very – thrilling, really; you really feel a communication with somebody sometimes in looking at a painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You could say, I suppose, that the role of art is to bring people together in that way, so that they –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It does. I don't know if that's the role of art, but certainly it could happen.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One role, perhaps. That's interesting because in a lot of the conversations I've had with other gallery owners, I've heard a lot of stories about how the interest in art has moved away from art more towards, you know, the protection or the acclamation of wealth, the accumulation of wealth, and, it's become –

MR. SPANIERMAN: But it's not so much about the accumulation of wealth; it's also about ego; it's about I am showing you, look how successful I am; I bought a picture for a $100 million; here it is on my wall. That makes me – you know – same as if he has a fabulous apartment and a fabulous house and a fabulous car and his wife has fabulous jewelry: why shouldn't he have fabulous paintings, what he considers fabulous paintings, part of his success, part of the rewards he gets for being so successful?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you have any collectors or any clients who scrape and save to buy one painting every five years?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Absolutely. There are people who do that, people who pay us out over a period of time because they can't afford it, and we deal with them. There are people who just like to have art, you know, make a sacrifice to have it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So do you think there's an attraction to certain buyers, let's say, that, you know, the work is an American painting versus a European painting?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, sure. American collectors like to collect American paintings, simple as that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I noticed, having looked at the logo of the gallery, that there is a patriotic – you know, eagle with a shield and all of that.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That sort of says something about the identity or the taste of the gallery.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That was the point of the eagle. Yeah, exactly.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it's clear. So in dealing with some of the contemporary artists, in recent history of the gallery, how do you pick them? How do you find them? How do you choose who to show?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't even know how to answer it. My son finds some of them; you'll have to ask him how he finds them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MR. SPANIERMAN: We now have a contemporary and modern section, which we opened in June, next door, and he's really doing that more than I am. Other artists that we show here in this part of the gallery, the Spanierman LLC part, the old part, are artists that - contemporary artists that would be traditionally based. And so we pick them for what we think is their quality.

And how we get them, I don't know; they come to us, or we come to them, or somebody recommends them. There was an artist named Paul Poskas we show, for instance, who was with another gallery that closed down, and a good friend of his thought we would be a very good gallery for him. So he introduced us, and got off – we hit it just fine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Paul Poskas? There's a Peter Poskas –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Peter Poskas.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, that is what –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I meant Peter Poskas! [McElhinney laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I know his work. He was from Connecticut. Landscape painter.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, still lives there. He's a very good painter. He gets better all the time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I saw some of his paintings up at Cooley [Gallery, Old Lyme, CT], I guess.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, good for you.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And a lot of them.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He's got a son who paints the same way, sort of, Peter Poskas III.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The third.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He's Peter Poskas II.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who's the first?

MR. SPANIERMAN: The first wasn't a painter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He wasn't a painter.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But maybe he made it possible for the other two to be painters.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, in dealing with any of these contemporary artists, what kind of agreements do you use?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We just have a regular consignment agreement, for now. We may change it later.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is there a set percentage, or do you –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not set, necessarily, in stone. It depends on the situation, what part they're paying for, what part we – I mean, every deal is a different deal. You have to come to terms with somebody that you can – you have to come to a situation where you can both deal with it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I know about 20, 30 years ago, a lot of galleries and artists started dealing more with contracts and codifying all of the aspects of the agreement: who is going to pay for X share of the announcement, X share of the catalogue, X share of the opening, framing, shipping, handling, and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It becomes an issue, sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. And the gallery keeps half or more or less of –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, well, it changes. It depends on the artists. It depends on the popularity of the artist. It depends on scope of collectors the artist has or knows himself what he can produce. It depends on the amount of work you have to do. It depends on a lot of factors, going into contracts now – we haven't yet, but, with the new gallery of contemporary and modern, I think we will have to, and so it wasn't ever an issue for us before.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No. So, you know, I'd imagine dealing with a resale market, where you are buying and selling or accepting works from collectors or institutions to sell, that's pretty straightforward.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How frequently were you acting as an agent for a museum or university?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Rather frequently, or for collectors and owners.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So who was the best – you know, of all the consignors you worked with over the years, who was the best?

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's a hard one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you don't have to name a person.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm not sure – no, no, but I'm not sure I know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, okay.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's what I mean by hard one.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How about the most spectacular sale?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I hope that's going to be in the future.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, that's a great answer. That's a great answer. What about clients, collectors?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, I had a lot of very good clients. I had the Baron Thyssen, who is a very good client of mine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Baron [Hans Heinrich] Thyssen-Bornemisza.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. Jack Warner, guy from Tuscaloosa [AL]. [Daniel] Terra, a big collector – the Halles [Diane and Bruce Halle] from Texas.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, the Terra [Museum of Art, Chicago, IL; closed 2004, collection on permanent loan to the Art Institute of Chicago], out in –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: – in Chicago, all right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: [Inaudible] – all kinds of museums. We have sold to well over a hundred museums, so museums. Let me think of some of the other big collectors. Oh, the Fraads [Daniel and Rita Fraad] were clients of mine. He died. His collection recently came on the market. The Horowitzs [Raymond and Margaret Horowitz] were clients of mine; his collection was dispersed; they died. You know, all of the big collectors of Impressionist painting, American Impressionist paintings, came by me.

I did a big catalogue of The Ten Americans years and years ago before – [inaudible] [*Ten American Painters*. New York: Spanierman Gallery, 1990]. And here, the funny part about it is, mostly we were dealing those years ago in the Ash Can school. In reading about the Ash Can School in the history of American painting, every once in a while you would come across something called The Ten Americans. I didn't know who the hell The Ten Americans were.

I spoke to a friend of mine, Roy Davis, who also dealt in The Eight and [Maurice] Prendergast and everything. I said, Roy, who are The Ten? He said, I don't know who The Ten are. I said, we keep reading about them; we don't know who they are. One day he calls me. He says, come over, come over, come over, and I ran over there, and he's got a photo of The Ten Americans, which are actually 11 because one died. When Twachtman died, [William Merritt] Chase, I think, took his place. And with these 10 or 11 American, basically Impressionist, painters who exhibited together over a certain period of years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like Twachtman, [Frederick Carl] Frieseke–

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, Frieseke was not one of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He was not, but Chase.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Chase was one later, [Childe] Hassam–

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hassam

MR. SPANIERMAN: [Frank] Benson, [Edmund C.] Tarbell, and on – Robert Reid, others. In any event, we finally got together a book we published years ago, in which we've wound up actually listing all of the paintings The Ten ever exhibited together in their history. It was a very important documentation.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not widely known. I mean, everybody's heard of The Eight.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, it's widely known now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's widely – yeah, but I mean –

MR. SPANIERMAN: The Eight – if you could – years ago if you could name The Eight you were considered an expert in American painting. All you do was name them. [They laugh.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that's changing. I see John Sloan is having a big reprise at the Delaware Art Museum ["Seeing the City: John Sloan's New York." October 17 - January 2008, Wilmington, DE], and it's supposed to come here to the National Academy [Museum and School of Fine Arts, New York City].

MR. SPANIERMAN: That would be good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are you exhibiting any Sloans?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, don't have any.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Why don't you talk a little about the exhibitions on the wall here at the moment, because I saw the catalogue a couple of weeks ago. And would you say that Bogdanove - is that how you say it?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Bogdanove, Abraham Bogdanove.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - is the kind of artist that you –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think he's a superb painter now, but I'll tell you a story about Bogdanove. Years and years ago, I came across the estate, which I acquired. And I was prejudiced about it because there were a lot of rock-and-sea pictures, and I always sort of thought in the back of my mind, oh, rocks and sea; that's calendar stuff, without really looking at it or analyzing it. And so I just kept it in the warehouse. And then I thought to myself, well, what am I going to do with all of these rocks-and-sea pictures? So I thought, I'll call up the auction galleries in Maine, because he was a painter who painted mostly in Monhegan, and see if they want to sell the estate.

So I called three auctioneers. I want you to know that I never really looked at these paintings; I just had them. I never put up one on an easel; I never hung one on a wall. And none of the auctioneers wanted to sell the estate. [Laughs.] I said, oh, my God, I'm stuck with all these works.

And so once we moved here, which was about 14 years ago, I said, you know, let's get a couple of those Bogdanoves out and clean them up and put a decent frame on them and see what they look like and put them on the wall. So we got a couple out, and cleaned them up, and put them on the wall. I said, my God; I said, this guy is a really good painter. And so, since then, we've had two – this is our third show of Bogdanove, and we've done really well selling them. People love them, especially people who collect Maine paintings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's a popular area for people–

MR. SPANIERMAN: But he's a very powerful painter, a very modern painter in his way, a very powerful painter, probably influenced by [Paul] Cézanne. I mean, you have to really look at them. He's got great strength of the sea, like Homer had; this great – what's the word I want to use – power, enormous power of nature is in these pictures. And he was a strong guy. He was a muralist who worked in the – he taught in high schools, but he loved to go to Monhegan every summer and paint there. He would actually go out on the rocks and paint these rocks-and-sea pictures. And since he was very strong, he could carry – because the wind takes the canvas – it's like, you know, they're hard to handle, but he could hold onto it because he was a strong guy.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did the works come to you?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, I've forgotten; it's so long ago, but they came to me via somebody called me, or a friend of mine called me that this was [an] estate; were we interested? We went and looked at it, and we acquired it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so it just sat around for a while?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. But there are other artists like that that I've taken an interest in that I think are under – well, years ago you could buy things, find things, of a more recognized nature, that you could buy at prices where you could make a profit; however, that seems to have largely come to an end, because everything's so recorded, and everybody's so on to what's coming up, there's no secrecy any more. There were secrets about everything: nobody knew prices; nobody knew what was coming up in the small auction rooms. Everybody knows everything now. It's all online. So what I try to do is see and find an artist that's been overlooked by the critics and by the public and by the other dealers, and see if I can gather together enough to have a good show and promote that artist. That's one of my functions as an American art dealer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's great. In a way, it's not unlike somebody finding a young artist and helping them create a career.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, they call that – what do you they call it when they find a young artist? Emerging art. We call it "reemerging" art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Reemerging. That's great; that's great. So you're finding people who were overlooked and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Or weren't overlooked at the time; just forgotten maybe.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or forgotten. Well, one could say that a lot of the painters of the 19th century, until not long ago, the Hudson River School Painters and all the Luminists were –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I go back to the time –

MR. MCELHINNEY: – overlooked.

MR. SPANIERMAN: - when you could buy a beautiful, big [Frederic Edwin] Church for $3,000. I go back to the time when a friend of mine and I had to buy two big [Albert] Bierstadt upright paintings. We didn't have the money; we borrowed the money from a bartender: 600 bucks, and we bought them and sold them to another dealer for a profit. But that's not happening anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wouldn't that kind of a story give an investment-minded collector the jitters, because you know what those things sold for at the time they were painted. Heart of the Andes [Frederic Edwin Church, 1859] sold for 10,000 [dollars], which the equivalent would be, what, a couple of million today.

MR. SPANIERMAN: It was cheap. What would it bring now?

MR. MCELHINNEY: But, now, yeah–

MR. SPANIERMAN: A hundred million? A hundred fifty million? I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But that for a time, it went–

MR. SPANIERMAN: I know. The lady who founded the whole Cropsey business [Newington-Cropsey Foundation, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY], who was a granddaughter of [Jasper Francis] Cropsey –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Barbara Newington.

MR. SPANIERMAN: - Barbara Newington came to my father's auction when I worked there. We had a big, beautiful Cropsey coming up. And she had not bought Cropsey before. She told me she was the granddaughter of Cropsey, and she was buying things for her house: chairs. She came with her husband, and she left me a bid on this big Cropsey of $700. But I got it for her for $300. And she was my client from then on. [They laugh.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is she still?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, she went off on her own to buy Cropseys. But I'm just pointing that out as to what was happening. That's what was happening then, but that's not now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you acquired this exhibition that you have up on the wall now, which is a really strong exhibition.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, yeah, he's a strong painter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But do you deal now also with any estates?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I do deal with some estates, particularly in the modern section. I call this an estate because it came from an estate. We have some other ones.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I mean estates where you are having to deal with the relatives or descendants of people.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, not in this case, but, yes, we do have some of that, particularly in the more modern things. Frailwitz [ph] is a place we have – we deal with the granddaughter. We have them on consignment from her, and various other ones.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So just wondering, you've opened a contemporary wing, or an addition, an expansion of the gallery. What inspired you to do that?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, we wanted always to have the place next door, and it finally came about that we could have it. And we didn't want to continue what we're doing here; we had enough room for what we're doing. We wanted to expand into an area that we felt was a growth area, which is contemporary, because in

contemporary, you do have direct connection with your artist and the public, and if you have a contract or an agreement with the artist, if the public wants to buy it, they have to buy it from you; they can't buy it elsewhere. So we thought that was the future of this art business, for now anyhow, until it reverts back or changes or does something else.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. And is your son planning to go to any of these art fairs?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, he goes to them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, he goes to them?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, he definitely goes to them. No, he's tuned in; he's tuned in. He's going off to Maastricht [Art Fair, Maastrich, Netherlands] – not to Maastricht, to Basel [Art Basel], in Switzerland, and he goes to the one in Miami [Art Basel Miami Beach, FL], and he goes to a few other fairs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maastricht he goes to?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, he used to go to Maastricht. Maastricht is really right up our alley; it's just a wonderful fair to go see.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it is.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I took him there because it was so beautiful; we went a few times.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a great little –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's a big fair.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I mean the town is a great little town.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, it's okay.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Maas River.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But the guy who was the heart of Maastricht for me died, and so I didn't really want to go last year.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who was that?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Bob [Robert Noortman] – he has a gallery in Maastricht. He was one of the founders of the Maastricht fair. He was very hospitable to everybody. And every year he had at least two big parties in his castle, which was in Belgium. One was for his clients and museum people, and the second one for all the dealers. They would lay out just an incredible amount of food, and all the dealers would go to his house and have this really nice party. And so I – he's dead now, and I just didn't feel like going there, because it was too sad.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's too bad. Do you do a lot with any of the dealers in Europe?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I used to do a lot with the dealers in Europe when I dealt in Old Masters, but I don't. I know a lot of them, particularly in England, some Italian dealers, but I don't deal in that anymore. Basically, I don't deal with them anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you – you were dealing in Old Master paintings or also the works on paper?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Works on paper and Old Master paintings. I had the first – well, one of the things I specialized in when I worked for my father were Old Master drawings. I would go to Europe, and I come back. I would buy these packets of drawings, with 30 or 40 in a packet, at Sotheby's and Christie's, and I wouldn't pay more than a pound a piece for them, which was $2.80.

And I'd come back and go through them all and look at the attributions on the mats or look through the books and reattribute them or whatever, and sell them at auction. And you know, something I paid two dollars for I was getting $30 for and $15 for and $17 for. On the other hand, I was buying loss-leaders, or I was buying some very good [Luca] Cambiaso drawings and things like that, for a hundred dollars and taking them back and selling them for $85 just to make a good sale.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, right, right. Interesting.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I sold a lot to Ian Woodner – one of the beginners of his collection.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Ian?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Ian Woodner, a great collection of Old Masters drawings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, did you ever deal with any of the European artists who would have been contemporary to the Americans you were showing, like the Macchiaioli [19th-century Tuscan (Italy) painters] or –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I've had them from time to time. Now, the Macchiaioli were hard to get; they didn't come to America much; you hardly found them. I would find more French things, like the Barbizon things–

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Narcisse Virgilio] Diaz, [Henri] Rousseau, those–

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I used to deal in those a little bit – [Louis Auguste-Victor] Henno or other, prettier pictures, you know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So that's no longer an interest of yours?

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's no longer anything I do; I don't do it. I'm concentrating on American things. No. What happened to me was this: I was used to advertising in Antiques magazines. I would take a third of the page and show American; I'd take another third somewhere and show European. And that's the gallery I had at 50 East 78th Street. I would mix them and put them on the wall, or I would put European things up, because those days a lot of European dealers didn't come to the sales, but they came to America, and they'd buy from dealers. There was a lot of dealer – intra-dealer buying then, a lot.

And one day, I said, let's just put up American paintings. So we put up all the American paintings. And some chap came in who knew me – I can't remember who it was - and he said, oh, I didn't know you dealt in American paintings. And I'm thinking to myself, what a jerk! [McElhinney laughs.] And then I said, well, wait a second, wait a second. Why does he say that? I'm sending out a mixed message. This is not right. Why would he think that?

So I decided at that moment because of talking to him - because at that point, now, the European dealers were coming over and buying European paintings at auction themselves. They started to come over. Before that they didn't, so the market was left to us, and we could resell them to European dealers. But now they were picking up the slack and doing it themselves. So it was no longer possible to buy European pictures and make some really interesting profit. And also, if you made a mistake, you would wipe out your profit, too, which could happen.

So I said, why don't I just get rid of all of my European things slowly and just concentrate on American? Because the European things I really did not have a clientele for. I had to depend on other dealers or auctions. And the American things I actually had a clientele for. I could buy them privately, and I could sell them privately. So that's what I did. And over a period of time, I sold off my European paintings and concentrated on American. And it was because that guy said that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But you never undertook any kind of catalogue raisonné of a European artist, for example?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or had an inclination to go in that direction.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. I had my favorites, but I never did. No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, so, you know, a lot of more traditional galleries have some kind of a contemporary operation, thinking Hirschl & Adler, as another example of a gallery, an older gallery that is an established gallery that also has a contemporary –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Of course, originally they didn't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No. Well, they did back in the '80s, I think.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well I knew [Abraham] Abe Adler, and I knew Norman Hirschl pretty well, and they didn't used to show contemporary art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. They showed European art, a lot of European art, and they showed Impressionists, and they showed – well, they showed Arbott Blattus [ph]; he was contemporary at that time, so maybe they did. But they were very European-oriented, in fact. And then when – Abe Adler was, and then when Norman Hirschl joined him, they became more Americanized.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm curious, was there anybody when you were young – dealer, collector, a developing connoisseur – was there anybody who, for you, apart from your uncle and your dad, who was a mentor?

MR. SPANIERMAN: A lot of mentors. I had a lot of mentors. Abe Adler was one mentor. Another mentor was [Leroy] Roy Ireland, who did the catalogue raisonné on – the first catalogue raisonné on [George] Inness. He had been a dealer. He was a painter and a dealer, and he'd been dealing in the days of [Albert] Duveen. And he actually turned me on because I was, like, 16 years old or 15 years old or something, and he mentioned something to me, which – he was a very chatty old guy, and he liked younger people; he would talk to them, and was a good tale-teller; he could spin a good yarn.

He told me, you can clean a painting. I said, what do you mean, you could clean a painting? What are you talking about? So he said, well, if you got me a little dirty painting somewhere, I would show you. So I went down to my father's subcellar and found something on a panel that was really dirty. And he said, okay, get me some turpentine, get me some acetone, and get me some cotton. And I did.

And he showed me downstairs. He took the cotton, dipped it in acetone, and all of this old yellow varnish came off and underneath would just grab a painting. And, you know, he kept it from going further with benzene or whatever he used – turpentine. And I said, wow. My eyes were popped out of my head. I couldn't wait to get some cotton and benzene and – [McElhinney laughs] – and alcohol myself and try it myself.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm sure that a lot of conservators in the museum world are probably cringing hearing this story. [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, maybe cringing, but that's what got me going. I loved the idea that you could convert something that was old, yellow, and everything into this beautiful, bright colors.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That had to have been a really –

MR. SPANIERMAN: That was a great turn-on.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Cool surprise.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, yeah. I can remember it to this day. I remember when he did that, when he cleaned that, and my eyes actually popped right out. I said, wow!

MR. MCELHINNEY: So did this happen in his office, or some kind of lab in the back of the gallery?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, it happened in the cellar of my father's -

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, in the cellar of your father.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Right, we went from the subcellar up one floor to the cellar.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so, Abe Adler was over at your house.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, this wasn't Abe Adler.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh.

MR. SPANIERMAN: This was Roy – the guy who wrote the Inness book. Ireland. Roy Ireland.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Very cool. So he was a painter also.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, he painted flower pictures, but he also was a good dealer in his day. He loved Inness. He was a man before the computer, and without really having studied art history – he was an artist – he still compiled a wonderful catalogue raisonné on Inness. That must have been so hard with a card catalogue or however he did it. But he did it – he had a good eye for Inness. He loved Inness.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Inness was from [New] Jersey, right; he was over in –

MR. SPANIERMAN: He lived in – yeah –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Montclair.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Montclair and places like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, any other stories like that? Any other older art dealers who inspired you?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, Abe Adler was a good friend of mine. He came to my Bar Mitzvah, you know, and he came to my mother's sister's wedding, anyhow; I know that. He was a friend of my father.

An old fellow named Leon Medina who had a gallery downtown. He was really – he was an old Turk, Sephardic guy, and he was very kind to me, and very sweet to me, and knowledgeable, and helped me, talked nice with me, was kind to me. And there are other people, too; there are a lot of them. There were a lot of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You talked about going to the Frick Library to research.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were those skills acquired at Syracuse, or were you –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Were you talking to museum people, too?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I just did it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You just - autodidact; you learned how to do it yourself. So there were no museum people or curators who were guiding you?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, no. But I had a good eye, so. But my – well, actually, the biggest story of my life, in a way, is when I once bought a painting at Parke-Bernet. I used to go and look at all of the Old Master paintings. And even when they skied them - which is salon hanging, up high to the ceiling - I would climb up on ladders and look at them under my glass. I wasn't going to miss anything. And I really looked hard. And I saw this one painting. It was so dirty you couldn't see it hardly, but I could see the hand and a little white on the cuff, or some little part of it, and it looked like it was beautifully painted. So I bought that for $325, and it turned out to be Raphael.

MR. MCELHINNEY: After a little acetone and turpentine.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I didn't do that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just kidding. [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was the most spectacular find you ever made?

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's it?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. That's it. That's a miracle. It's in all of the books, catalogues raisonnés, everything now – a big portrait of Lorenzo de'Medici, the father of Catherine. Beautiful portrait – late Raphael, 1518.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Here in New York.

Well, it seems like a lot of your clients are museums and institutions.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, we've had a lot of museums. I'll give you the PR sheet we've run up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I'd love to see that. So who around the country have you worked with? You said Terra –

MR. SPANIERMAN: The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, Metropolitan.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Terra. The Louvre [Paris]. I've sold to the Louvre. I've sold to almost all of the big museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Getty [J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, CA]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Getty, I – yeah, I once sold something to the Getty, years ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Gilchrist [Gallery and Museum, Cumberland, MD]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Gilchrist, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. [C. William] Gilchrist is not a buyer. He would go by us when he was alive.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, so it's just a static collection.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about Denver [Art Museum, CO]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I've sold to Denver.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever do anything with western artists?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, I did.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I had a [Henry F.] Farny exhibition here one time, a long time ago. Beautiful Farny exhibition.

MR. MCELHINNEY: There's a show going up shortly of Charles Deas, I think.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Deas. Yeah, I had a Deas once I sold to Baron Thyssen in those days, very rare painting. [Deas] went crazy, and then he went to an institution. And I think they found some paintings he painted after he went to the institution, but they are not really very good. Earlier, I think he was painting up in Minnesota or thereabouts, and he was a very tight painter, very tight.

I had this wonderful painting of an Indian playing some – two Indians playing a game under a teepee. And the funny thing is I bought it from somebody because I loved the quality of it. And when I took it to be relined, on the back was fully signed and inscribed "Deas."

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, wow. Well, yeah –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It was so rare that you – you know, if you had one in your life, you had a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, he had some real emotional problems.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, he wound up in an institution.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like [Ralph Albert] Blakelock.

MR. SPANIERMAN: More so, maybe. Blakelock painted a lot – after he [Deas] went to the institution, there was nothing of any interest. Blakelock was still painting in the institution, so Blakelock still had some artistic –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever handle any of his work?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, a lot. Blakelock. [Albert Pinkham] Ryder I even handled. Very rare artist – I think about a hundred known. I've handled four or five.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, I guess that that whole realm of American art has really –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's very rare; it's hard to find. It's crazy; you can't find it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Ryder must be extremely–

MR. SPANIERMAN: –very rare.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Blakelock, too.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not rare.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not rare.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. He painted a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But I guess a lot of attention has come to him because there was a show a few years ago.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, a lot of attention has come to him lately because, for one thing, they are still not expensive, so people can buy them and trade them, and dealers can – and you can find them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: You know, if something is not findable, how are you going to deal in it? How is anybody going to collect it if there are none? You could stand on your head. You couldn't make a collection of Charles Deas now, and no matter what, no matter how much money you have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Just too few. Are there any of those artists who you feel are kind of off the radar, about to, you know –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I think there are a lot of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Seth Eastman –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Seth Eastmans you can't find either. [Laughs.] Not off the radar, just not available. Go find a good Indian Seth Eastman. [Laughs.] I haven't seen one for a long, long time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Even a watercolor drawing, I guess?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I haven't seen him for a long time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about somebody like John Mix Stanley?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Also, John Mix Stanley painted before the fire [at the Smithsonian Institution Building (aka, the Castle), Washington, DC, 1865]. No, you can't find them. After the fire, yes, but they are not so good. He repeated his own.

MR. MCELHINNEY: He had that studio in the Castle down on the Mall [National Mall, Washington, DC].

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, so they weren't as good as the early ones. In the first place they were repeats – he painted under different circumstances. You can't have the original inspiration; it wasn't there anymore. It was a recreation of something he had already done.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, that happened with a lot of [George] Catlin's work, right, where he had to repaint them after –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, no. Catlin painted more than one version, and he painted them himself. Catlin was an entrepreneur. I mean, he wanted to have big shows and exhibit the life of the Indian. Very understanding of Indians, Catlin, but he wasn't a painter; he wasn't the same quality of painter as John Mix Stanley.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But he was early, and he caught the Indians when they still were in their primitive state. So he is – he's an okay painter; he shows the colors, and he shows you the life of the Indians and everything, but is he a naturalist, or is he an anthropologist, or is he painter? He is all those three things mixed up. Is that why he's important? I think because of the latter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, I think you're right, too. How about somebody like Alfred Jacob Miller?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Miller. Again, difficult to find a good painting by him – hardly show up – watercolors here and there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, but they seem – I have seen a few of them. They don't seem that expensive, so.

MR. SPANIERMAN: If you got a good one, it would be. A good one with Indians in it that he painted where the Indians used to gather – went out there – where the hell did he paint –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Fort Laramie [WY].

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, there was a big meeting of trading partners –

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Rendezvous–

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, and he used to go up there and paint that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Green River Rendezvous [WY] [The Rendezvous Near Green River 1837].

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, but, you don't even see any [Thomas] Morans of Green River anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. A wonderful collection of those over at the Cooper-Hewitt.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, yeah, but those are the watercolors and drawings. Well, I appraised that whole collection for them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The expeditionary artists.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. You get a really fine Moran western, you know, it would be worth a lot of money, but they're not showing up; same thing with Bierstadt.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So if you were to counsel a younger collector to try to pay attention to a certain corner of American art that's off the radar now, or not as celebrated, what would you –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, there are various elements. There are independent artists that are off the radar independently that don't form any particular cohesion, but as a collective group, the American Tonalists are way off the radar, which includes Inness, who is way off the radar. Even if you paid a lot for one – a real – would be a great one, it would be way off the radar. I know people who still claim he's the greatest American landscape painter that lived. It's arguable.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They just had a big show at the NAD a couple of years ago ["George Inness and the Visionary Landscape." National Academy of Design, New York, NY, September 17 – December 28, 2003].

MR. SPANIERMAN: Very well attended. People loved the show. That's what changed. I mean, I suddenly I saw people really looking at Inness, like discovering him. Really, I went to that show about five times. It was amazing the response it got. I was surprised.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, curated by Adrian Bell. And then there was that show up at the – the Berkshires show at the Clark, too ["A Walk in the Country: Inness and the Berkshires." Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA, February 6 – April 17, 2005]; that was nice.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I didn't see that one. But Inness is way off the radar. I mean, and his whole group, and people around him are way off the radar.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And who else –

MR. SPANIERMAN: And Tonalism was a particularly American style of painting. It came out of the Barbizon painting, but it was American more so than anything else.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who are you specifically –

MR. SPANIERMAN: So many. We did a big book on Tonalism, very important catalogue [The Poetic Vision: American Tonalism. New York: Spanierman Gallery, 2005]. All of the people are in there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: All of those guys.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about America in the 20th century? There's this interesting period before the Armory Show, and sort of after the –

MR. SPANIERMAN: The abstract painters.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, kind of earlier than that.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Before the Armory Show?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Before the Armory Show.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That is 1918.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Nineteen thirteen.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Nineteen thirteen. Who are we talking about?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm just wondering, if people like [Charles W.] Hawthorne and those guys -

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, oh, not abstract painters.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No. No. No.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, they're good painters. Hawthorne was a wonderful painter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, wonderful.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But he showed subjects – his subjects are tough because they are all fishermen and fishermen's wives. He really captured the spirit of that place, of Provincetown [MA], but they're not easy to live with. It was a – you know, painting a social situation almost, but he could –

MR. MCELHINNEY: More challenging.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He caught it, but tough. People want pretty pictures; I mean, that's generally what brings the most money. But there are many painters that are overlooked. They need to be presented to the public and properly promoted, and let people judge for themselves if they're good or not good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: We did a very good catalogue of a friend of Inness. He was younger; he was as young as Inness's son, and, what the hell was his name? I can't even think of the guy's name. I will; I'll get it for you later – but, very successful.

The funny part about that is they weren't very expensive. I was buying them at auction at that time and taking them in and then hanging them on the wall. And people would come buy them, no promotion, no anything; they just liked them. He used to work – actually work in Inness's studio. And I suddenly realized I had sold, over some period of time, 50 of them without trying. So then I came across part of the estate, what was left, and I had a nice show, and it was very successful. Eaton. Charles Warren Eaton.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Charles Warren Eaton.

Maybe this is a good time to stop.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Okay.

MR. MCELHINNEY: If it's okay with you?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Sure.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Signing off. I appreciate your time today and look forward to speaking with you again on the twelfth. Thank you.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Okay.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I thank you.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Thank you.

[End of June 6, 2007, session.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: This is James McElhinney interviewing Ira Spanierman at Spanierman Galleries, 45 East 58th Street, New York, New York, on the June 12, 2007, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc number two of two.

Good morning.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Good morning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I've been asked to fill in a couple of gaps from our chat last week, which was excellent, and that is, when were you born?

MR. SPANIERMAN: When was I born? October 25, 1928.

MR. MCELHINEY: New York City?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: A neighborhood?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Brooklyn.

MR. MCELHINNEY: In Brooklyn. Good. Well, that was the main thing. And what year did you graduate from Syracuse?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I can't even remember.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Some time after that.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Some time after I was born. [McElhinney laughs.] Probably, let me think –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Nineteen fifty?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm just trying to think. Yeah, about then.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, it's a matter, I suppose, of public record since you're an alumnus. Are you still active at all with the university? Do you have any contact with them at all? Have any awareness of their art school or museum or anything?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Nothing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Let's talk a little about your gallery here. Now you've been here how many years?

MR. SPANIERMAN: This place where we are now?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Right now.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think we're about 14 years. We moved in just before the opening of the Four Seasons [Hotel]; it was just when they opened it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: One of the things, I think, many people imagine, if they close their eyes and think about a New York art gallery, is they think about a big white cube with hardwood floors, echoing, people walking around dressed like undertakers, that kind of thing. And your gallery has a different ambience altogether. It's very comfortable; it feels like –

MR. SPANIERMAN: We try to be user-friendly, as it were. I didn't particularly go along with that other way of handling things, and this is more the old-fashioned way.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So, what kinds of galleries, when you were young, were you having a look at, and say, well, if I were –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, Wildenstein [& Co. Inc.], and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: [Off mike.]

MR. MCELHINEY: The old Hammer Galleries when it was in the Fuller Building on the ground floor. That was a good example of how I'm set up, in fact. They still are like that, desks out front, and not, you know, some big high things, which I don't really like. And also, I don't like the idea of being inside a building, you know, that you have to go up an elevator and go down a corridor and get in because where access is difficult like that, egress is also – you also get the feeling that egress is difficult, which is a feeling of entrapment, almost.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Of course, it is.

MR. SPANIERMAN: So we don't want to create that feeling. We want to create an easy flow.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the room we're speaking in is, if I can try to describe it - it's got a brocade wallpaper.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, this is the viewing room.

MR. MCELHINEY: Yeah, it's a viewing room.

MR. SPANIERMAN: This is a viewing room. There is nothing on the walls because we don't want to be distracted with anything else except what we are showing on the easel. This is the room where we take clients. We bring clients here when they want to see individual paintings or certain kinds of works.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So were you actively involved in choosing wall covering, the upholstery –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Extremely involved.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It seems like everything –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I set up the flow here, of where the rooms would go to.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So we seem to be in one of the more secluded, private spaces –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, we have three viewing rooms, and they are private.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So here we have a –

MR. SPANIERMAN: A William Merritt Chase of Shinnecock.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a wonderful painting. But we have it alone, on this –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Easel.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The velvet easel, and the choice of wall covering, was – you know, the color, for instance. How did you choose this?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I think the green is good with gold. We have mostly gold frames, so I thought we ought to have something that goes with gold frames.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And antiques? It seems like a lot of the furniture here are antiques.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Some of it is, and some of it isn't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But I mean, obviously, this isn't –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, but some of it is, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's quite different from a lot of the spaces that most people summon up when they imagine a New York gallery. Also, few people would imagine a gallery a couple of steps away from the Plaza Hotel, too – so, or Park Avenue. So what is your opinion?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm not following what you're –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I mean that I think that a lot of people imagine 57th Street itself, or they imagine SoHo, or they imagine now, Chelsea, you know, and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: We consider ourselves from the 57th Street area.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you are. Yeah, but Madison Avenue, also. I guess the galleries up the street like Graham [James Graham & Sons Gallery] and others that are older galleries -

MR. SPANIERMAN: Graham's leaving there, though.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, really? Hirschl & Adler.

MR. SPANIERMAN: After a lot of years, over 50 years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But how do you, as an art dealer, regard these sort of herding tendencies of groups of dealers from SoHo to Lower East Side, to Chelsea to – does that have any impact on you at all?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, it doesn't have an impact on me in contemporary and modern because I've just gotten into that. Maybe if I had decided at one point to just do that, I might be in Chelsea. I don't know. But some of the Chelsea galleries are moving up here now, saying they prefer to be up here. The rents are catching up with

them.

The point about this was, and the point about SoHo was, you got very beautiful spaces for very little rent. The galleries could afford to have those. But in SoHo what happened was the retail stores sort of took over; the rents escalated and forced the galleries out. Now, I think that, you know, with these very high prices, it may not happen right away, but the same thing probably will happen in Chelsea: the retailers will move in – clothes stores, things like that, restaurants - and pay higher rents per foot, and move the galleries out.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, correct me if I'm wrong –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Although a lot of the galleries own their own buildings, apparently.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's my next question, because people like Ivan Carp and Louis Meisel and others, I guess, made –

MR. SPANIERMAN: They stayed in SoHo.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But they were heavily involved also in the acquisition of property, too, weren't they?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, yeah, he has - I think Ivan has most of the building he lives in, and I think he owns the building where his gallery is. But when he bought that, he bought that for nothing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. It was a long time ago.

MR. SPANIERMAN: It was the first or second gallery to move into SoHo. I think Paula Cooper was first.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, how common is it for a gallery to own the building they are in? I assume –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hirschl & Adler probably owns theirs –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, they don't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They don't? Berry-Hill [Galleries]? No?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, they do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They do.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But that's for sale. That's the only ones I know over there. Wildenstein, of course.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Knoedler [& Company]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. I'm not sure Knoedler owns their own building. They might. They might.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, they kind of – wait till you go into those –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Acquavella [Galleries] owns them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: - oh, Acquavella; oh, okay - into these grand townhouses where people have established galleries, you know, you take away some of that kind of ambience, too. But even those spaces seem less comfortable, in a way, than yours because this really is very much – it seems like the gallery is designed to accommodate, as opposed to intimidate. I think a lot of the big white cubes are a little daunting.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Right.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So a lot of the dealers are coming up to midtown again.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Some are, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Who?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't know. I just met somebody the other day. I don't know their name. He was downtown and said they moved uptown, and they're very happy with their move. Somebody I also know was in Chelsea, street level, and moved upstairs. I said, well, why did you do that? He said, well, we have less traffic, but they have more efficient traffic.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, we were speaking last week about the impact of the Internet and art fairs – this, that, and the other thing, and I think you expressed it –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's enormous.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Enormous.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Nobody can measure it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, or even understand the long-range consequences, because –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's just new.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But you expressed the opinion that there might someday come a time – probably will – when the gallery as we're accustomed to it will become a thing of the past.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, possibly it will. I don't think the contemporary gallery will become a thing of the past because I think that artists need places to show their work, and they need a gallery owner to do the publicity for them, and to do the ads for them, and create the shows for them, and contact the museum people for them. Artists are not particularly aggressive – some are, but generally, they prefer if somebody else did that work while they paint.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are you seeing – well, again, this is a question having to do with contemporary artists, which is a new field for you. But some of the things I'm hearing from some of your colleagues out there in, you know, the gallery industry is that a number of people have moved. Like Kraushaar [Galleries, Inc.] has moved from a walk-in space to an appointment-only space.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Phyllis Kind.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Kennedy [Galleries] did the same.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Kennedy. Others have expressed the opinion that maintaining the high overhead of a walk-in space is not really that effective a way of selling art, that in fact, these art fairs and Internet give the dealers a chance to meet everybody in a short period of time where they don't have to encumber themselves with –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think the combination is important. I know that if I were shopping, I would like to know that there was a place that existed where there was a gallery. I would feel comfortable knowing that. If you've got bricks – what is the Internet term – bricks and –

MR. MCELHINNEY: - mortar.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Bricks and mortar. And if you note, on my Internet [site], I show this gallery in a photo. When you click onto my site, you see the gallery; you see a shot taken by a photographer at night, wetting the streets down, a good dramatic photo of the outside of the gallery, so that they can identify with the fact that there is a bricks-and-mortar place, because so many places on the Internet don't really exist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, while anyone – almost, anyone – anyone today can watch a website, very few – in fact, I think none of the real, credible international art fairs, whether they be contemporary or traditional, or works on paper, will sell space to an exhibitor who doesn't have a gallery. A lot of them have that as a requirement. You can't even apply for a space unless you have, as you say, bricks and mortar. So I don't know if that's changing, but that, I understand, from some other people I know, is a requirement for a lot of contemporary art fairs.

How do you see the future of the art market? We spoke about the impact of auctions, Internet, all that stuff last week.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I think that certain areas of art get kind of bought up, as it were. The better things get bought up in this country. So many things – did we go over this museum business the other day? So many people are collecting and then turning their entire collection over to the museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, we didn't talk about that. Let's.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, a fellow I know, Peter Lunder, who lives up in Maine, is going to give everything to Colby [College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME] – a beautiful collection of things he's got. He's been collecting for a long time. His cousin, very well may, too. Also he has good collection. Barney Ebsworth, who's in – who

moved from St. Louis [MO] to Seattle [WA], has already given a group of pictures to Seattle [Art Museum].

There's another fellow who's helped bring American 19th-century paintings to the attention of the Seattle Museum and public. Tom – I can't remember his last name – he's probably going to give all his things to the museum. I hear they just got a huge amount of money to expand in Seattle because there's so much money there. Plus, [Bill] Gates may give his entire collection also to Seattle, since his stepmother [Mimi Gates], or the woman married to his father [William Gates, Sr.], is director of the museum.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Hm. Is he a collector himself? I was unaware of that.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes; oh, yes!

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you ever had him in the gallery?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, he never comes to the gallery. He works through people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But does he – have you ever sold anything to the Gates family?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm just curious.

MR. SPANIERMAN: If I have, I don't know that it was to the Gates family. It was through an intermediary.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Through intermediaries. What about – there was a lot of stir awhile ago about the sale of *Kindred Spirits* [Asher B. Durand, 1849], from the New York Public Library, to –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Alice.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Alice Walton.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. And the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art in [Bentonville,] Arkansas.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, Alice and I go back a long time. I started her out.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MR. SPANIERMAN: She bought her first American painting from me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. SPANIERMAN: So we go way back. I feel I played some part in this. I don't know what part, but some part. Alice can do what she wants. With her mother – I mean, anything that pleases her. She got involved in American paintings; she became passionate about it. She had a very good eye, I thought, always. And had a real feeling for it, and a passion for it. And so it could be natural for her – I mean, she got the idea to build a museum. If she's going to build a museum, she wants to build one with really great examples of American art. So she's looking for iconic things, which I don't have much of or even come across – here and there, something, but, basically, they are not available.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They're all in collections already.

MR. SPANIERMAN: In collections or in museums or given to museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it seems like a lot of the pieces that have hit the radar that have stirred up controversy – I know people were upset about, you know, the Durand leaving New York. That was sort of like –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, like they rushed over to the – nobody cared. All of a sudden they cared.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But in contrast to that, when she tried to purchase *The Gross Clinic* [Thomas Eakins, 1875], from [Thomas] Jefferson University [Philadelphia, PA], other things happened. That painting, I guess, was not acquired, but she was able to –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. She wasn't, but she bought another picture from them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Exactly.

MR. SPANIERMAN: If she had come in and offered more money, she probably would have had it, because they wouldn't have been able to match her.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I'm from that town. I heard some stories about threats from the mayor's office to declare a landmark, et cetera, and so forth, and make all sorts of – but my point was there was this sort of popular outcry –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, it's one of the great – it's a great painting. I think it's probably got more press in its way than *Kindred Spirits*, which is also iconic, but people kind of don't know about it. In fact, the Metropolitan Museum of Art has a group involved with American art, and we call ourselves – what do we call ourselves – it's based on *Kindred Spirits*, the – who's in the *Kindred Spirits*? Who's up there? [Thomas] Cole?

MR. MCELHINNEY: [William Cullen] Bryant and Cole.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. Oh, we're the Bryant Fellows.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, the Bryant Fellows.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's what we are.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, it seems like there's a lot of interest now in American art, and there are these two exhibitions that are up now of Asher B. Durand and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't know what they're pulling in terms of attendance.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I don't know; the shows are interesting.

MR. SPANIERMAN: One's at the Brooklyn Museum ["Kindred Spirits: Asher B. Durand and The American Landscape." March 30 - July 29, 2007].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. And the other one at the Historical Society ["The World of Asher B. Durand: The Artist in Antebellum New York." New-York Historical Society, New York City, April 13 - September 30, 2007]. But you've worked a lot with scholars, I suppose.

MR. SPANIERMAN: A lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And, well, I guess the organizer of the Asher B. Durand show, Linda Ferber, was a student of Barbara Novak.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Linda Ferber is a very, very good scholar herself. She really has been for years.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so who are the other stellar scholars you've worked with on exhibitions or catalogues?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Bill Gerdts is a consultant here. He is probably the best known. John Wilmerding is writing a catalogue for us on Lane.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: I can't think of who else. Oh, so many, really, in one way or another. I can't even begin to tell you – different kinds of aspects of – maybe doing some writing for us or whatever.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it's interesting, as a gallery –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I worked with [William] Bill Agee one time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Spanierman Gallery seems like it's more than a gallery; it's a publisher; it's a venue for scholarly activity. It's not – a lot of people, I think, when they hear the word "gallery," they figure it's just a place to go buy pictures.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, well, a lot of people who are advocates of American art over the period that I deal in understand where the gallery comes from, and we have produced some really major and important catalogues – I will say that. We are doing some of the things that museums should really be doing, or universities, because I take a personal interest in the scholarly aspects of American art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, you spoke last week about studying at the Frick Library and –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, that's when I started. I'd go there and look through all the photos, and I'd get the supply. The supply was all of the cutout ads and everything of that artist. You could learn a lot like that if you

have something in mind, and you were comparing it. You came away with some information.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But do you think that all of the publishing and all of the working with the scholars has helped, also, to educate your audience?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think we've done a lot of educational work in America. I think we've always done that. You go back to when I had my first gallery, it was in 1966 or '[6]7. We had a Homer exhibition for Cooper-Hewitt.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you spoke of that last week.

MR. SPANIERMAN: So we started it, and then we had a Twachtman exhibition after that. Beautiful Twachtman exhibition.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what is going to happen now that Fitz Hugh Lane has become Fitz Henry Lane? [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: We'll have to rethink his name every time we speak. All these years, I have a hard time getting to the Fitz Henry from the Fitz Hugh. I keep saying Fitz Hugh. But what's happening is, he had a pupil, an associate, named Mary Mellen, Mary Blood Mellen. And she worked with him on many of the paintings. She did replicas of his paintings, but she also must have worked with him, and this exhibition that we are going to do is uncovering some of those mysteries, where, what part is Mellen, what part is Lane. Interesting – a whole new aspect, a whole new study of Lane.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So was she more of a technician? More of a –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, she was just an artist, another artist.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Studio assistant?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Often, they painted the same paintings together. She'd sign her name, and he'd sign his name. For instance, there's one of the Blood Homestead. [Nicholas] Nicky Wyeth, the son of Andrew Wyeth, owns the Fitz Hugh – Fitz Henry - Lane, and a client of mine owns the Mary Blood Mellen. It's the same subject, same picture. They were side by side when they painted it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And you think they were working on each other's pictures, too?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think there's a possibility of that. We really haven't got that totally sorted out yet. You have to wait until the catalogue comes out; see what John had to say.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Stay tuned.

MR. SPANIERMAN: This is all – this is John Wilmerding's area.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, yes, of course –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't want to intrude on his thoughts – he's made a great study of Lane.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And an important artist Lane is, too.

There does seem to be a big resurgence of interest in American art. Can you explain that in any way?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't think there's been – why do you say "resurgence"?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I think for a long time, at least – I mean, I can only speak from my own experience, but people like Thomas Cole, Church, Lane, these guys – as you were saying last week - that you could buy these pictures.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But that's a long time ago. That was a long time ago.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Forty, 50 years ago.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But, you know, during the period of Abstract Expressionism –

MR. SPANIERMAN: That is a lifetime.

MR. MCELHINNEY: – Pop art. They've come back, since –

MR. SPANIERMAN: They have come back. Yes. The museums want them; collectors want them, if they show up. [Richard] Manoogian was a big factor in that in buying Hudson River School.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We also spoke about Barbara Newington –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Crospey only.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Only Cropsey. Only Cropsey.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So –

MR. SPANIERMAN: But she's taken tons of Cropseys off the market.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I gather she's got that establishment up –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Weeding them out.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Up in Hastings[-on-Hudson, NY].

MR. SPANIERMAN: Plus she has a huge collection of her own in her home. Plus there's a whole bunch in the Cropsey house [Ever Rest, National Historic Trust Site, Hastings-on-Hudson, NY]. There are a lot of Cropseys there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Up at Ever Rest.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did you ever work with Barbara Novak?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Sure. She's a good friend of mine.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And one of her students is the curator up there, Ken Maddox.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He knows a lot.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. He's doing, I think, a catalogue on Cropsey.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. He's amazing. He has a great knowledge of Cropsey.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Did Spanierman Galleries launch any illustrious careers? Was there anybody you hired, 20, 30, 40 years ago, who is out on their own now?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. People are out on their own, but I wouldn't say that we have anything illustrious to show for it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, any surviving or any living in the business?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, sure. They're around.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where are they now?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Different – a couple of other galleries or on their own. Yeah, we had our share.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But, no one –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No one I could point out and say, oh, look it's a great graduate of the gallery, no.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, yeah, just curious if there was anyone who sort of –

MR. SPANIERMAN: – made his mark.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Made their mark in some way or carried on, you know, the culture of the gallery. The interest in scholarship, the interest in publishing –

MR. SPANIERMAN: It's hard to carry on the culture of the gallery. You need a lot of people to run this kind of a situation. People leaving from here don't have that kind of financial arrangement. This has been built over a long period of time, this system and this way of approach, and it needs numbers of people to deal with it. You

can't do it just because you want to; you have to have the manpower.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So you've got a fairly extensive staff.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, we do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you have – if we could talk about, a little bit, the human resources here in the gallery. You have, obviously, yourself, your son, who's in charge of contemporary division.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm involved in everything else as well.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Right. But, for instance, do you have someone in house who does writing for you?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, we have a research staff here. And we have an archival staff here.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, you do have an archivist?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We have archival staff, I'd say.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Staff. How large?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, there's three people in it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Wow.

MR. SPANIERMAN: More or less. They do other things as well. We have a computer staff, because I believe in the Internet very much.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Tech support, you mean people to look after it?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, quite a large computer staff.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And sales?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Sales, we have a staff. Sales. We have art handler staff; we have a registrar's office with two people in it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So when you say "art handler," would that include preparators?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, that's what I mean. They call them "preparators," I don't know why. I think "art handlers" is more appropriate.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Art handler.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's more –

MR. SPANIERMAN: To the point.

MR. MCELHINNEY: – blue collar. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So, shipping, handling –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, shipping and handling –

MR. MCELHINNEY: – building crates –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Bringing out paintings when the clients come, putting them on the easel, lighting them for us, lighting the gallery, and hanging the paintings, and fixing the walls, and storing them, and all kinds of things.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Framing?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We don't – we would frame something; yeah, we usually have the framers do it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Sure, framing.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Conservator? Do you have any –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, that's out of house. We don't do in-house framing really, and we don't do conservation work.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So how large is the staff of the gallery, all told?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well over 40 people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really. Wow.

MR. SPANIERMAN: All over.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They're all here?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, some – couple live in East Hampton, one's in Vermont, somebody does work from their own apartment, things like that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But who punches a time clock here everyday?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Quite a number of people.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thirty?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Or more. We have more – at least 30.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting. And you have on-site storage here?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We have on-site storage here, but we have warehouse space too.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the gallery owns a vehicle as well, I guess?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Actually, we don't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Really?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We don't own a vehicle. Well, I own a vehicle in East Hampton, a big van, but I don't use it here because I never kind of got it together to do it, but I think I'm going to try to do that. But I want to get my warehouse straightened out first, and then I think I will get a van.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Where's that located, the warehouse?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Fifty-fifth [Street] and 12th Avenue.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Over on the West Side. So, it's quite an operation. I was really unaware. You really almost are a museum. Some museums have smaller staffs than you do.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, I know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What are the goals of the gallery, long-range, at this point? Have you got a five-year plan, a 10-year plan?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I really don't have a five-year plan, as it were, where I've laid it out, but generally speaking, we want to continue endeavoring to find artists for our contemporary area, and work with that, and also introduce some more historic shows there that are modern. So a mixture of those things – contemporary and modern, maybe a few dead artists that are very modern belong in that space rather than this. This is an old-fashioned space. I don't think really modern things hang well here; they hang better next door. And to continue to try to see what we can get in American paintings, and to introduce some of the artists that have been forgotten, which I like to do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You spoke about that last week, your efforts to discover artists after –

MR. SPANIERMAN: We call it reemerging art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, reemerging artists. That was a great term. So one of the trends you just spoke about was that of these collectors donating large amounts of work to regional art museums. Do you see a robust future for the regional art museums? Certainly somebody like Alice Walton –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, according to the amount of construction that's going on in museums in this country, I'd say yes. I think the museum is replacing the cathedral as the center of spiritual and social gatherings, because

tremendous monies are being employed to produce these huge spaces. I mean, 50 million, a hundred million [dollars]. And people meet there. There was a seatmate of mine the other day, last night, at the dinner party, telling me all of the – from Chicago - and all the parts of museums she belongs to. Her life is in the museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Friends, organizations, committees –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Friends, organizations, yes; all kinds of things like that. And I think probably, although the Met certainly plays a good part, as the MOMA [Museum of Modern Art, New York City] does – we have our museums here that have their own kinds of groupings, you know, just like a church has its own kinds of groupings, but also I think out of town, maybe even more so, because there's less museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I guess there's less costs –

MR. SPANIERMAN: We have so many museums one can be involved with here in New York, and out of town, one or two maybe.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And there is the movement of wealth – a lot of new wealth in the South, and a lot of activity there.

MR. SPANIERMAN: The South is active.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Philadelphia is just in the midst of adding, I guess, new space.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Philadelphia has suddenly added this whole new area to the more expensive collecting, the New Hope School [Pennsylvania Impressionism centered in and around Bucks County, PA, and the city of New Hope], which is really based on – and Philadelphia collectors, and not anybody else.

MR. MCELHINNEY: People like [Edward] Redfield –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And [Daniel] Garber.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Prices have gone way up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Way up.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you know, Michener Museum [James A. Michener Museum, Doylestown, PA] is a small museum.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I've been there, yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I guess that sort of gave them a venue.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But in any event, people, collectors, in Philadelphia are very interested in that area. They will pay – just as in Los Angeles, with the plein air artists, the Los Angelitos, the Angelenos will pay a fortune for them, but you can't sell them anywhere else in the country.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting, so there is a –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Regional. So there's a huge regional movement.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you see that also growing your –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, Bill Gerdts wrote a book, way ahead of the game, about regionalism in America, a four-[three-]volume set [*Art Across America: Two Centuries of Regional Painting, 1710-1920*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990].

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think I know the book, yeah.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I forgot the title of it. And he really forecast that, in a way, I mean, the interest in regionalist art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well there was –

MR. SPANIERMAN: You have people collecting Chicago art. You have people collecting – let's see, what is the

name of that? In Illinois there was a place where everybody painted. I have forgotten the name. But this is happening all over. I mean, this is –

MR. MCELHINNEY: One of the interviews that was part of this project was an interview with Phyllis Kind, who ran a gallery in Chicago.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Have you got, have you ever interviewed Bill Gerdts?

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think, I think –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I mean, has your organization ever interviewed him? If not, they should.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, the Archives has a variety of different programs in their Oral History.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, this is such a recent study, American art, if you want to get to it. For instance, the guy who wrote the book [*American Painting*] *From The Armory Show to the Depression* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955], Milton Brown, he was the first human being to ever earn a doctorate in American art. I knew him for years. He was really my kin within my experience, within my area. And from him came other doctorates in American art, like [Theodore E.] Stebbins [Jr.], and Gerdts, and Barley [ph], from –

MR. MCELHINNEY: Novak.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Barbara Novak and that whole group. Bill Homer.

So they, in turn, were working in universities and had other students that became – so today, there are many, many, many people who have earned doctorates in American art, and they are exploring all kinds of things, all kinds of currents in American art, from every kind of area that you can think of, because that's what they have to do for a doctorate.

And that information was never available before. It was a huge amount of information that wasn't available. Abby Gerdts, Bill Gerdts's wife, conducted the survey for the government bicentennial, where she more or less found, at that point, where every painting was, with a huge survey of people. That was not available that long – '76, '78. So it's only like 25, 30 years old. But that wasn't available either; nobody knew anything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: With all of this interest in regional American art, have you had any success bringing California Impressionists to New York, or –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Usually, if they come to New York, they go out; they go back again to California.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Of all of your clients, how many would you say are New Yorkers, as opposed to outside New York?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I don't know. I don't know. They come from all over the country.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Okay, so you've got a clientele that's not primarily local?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, absolutely not. Built them from everywhere. Every state.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what area of the country, in your opinion, is sort of the next area, sort of hot area, for art?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, the Texas Regionalists are in now; they're doing that. The Texas Regionalists – there is a bunch of people – The [Dallas] Nine and some other ones. It's just, I really don't know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Is there a museum that you like especially in one of the new - or one of the growing museums out there?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, the growing museums are pretty generally contemporary, so I'm not really that much involved in what's going on. So I have no real opinion – [inaudible] – anyhow about the museums. I like the museums in New York because those are the ones I know. I love the Met. I like the Museum of Modern Art. I like the Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggeheim Museum]. I like a lot of these –

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm just curious if you've been –

MR. SPANIERMAN: The Whitney [Museum of American Art] is good.

MR. MCELHINNEY: If you've been to, like, the Milwaukee Art Museum [Milwaukee, WI], the new museum [wing] –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I like the Kunstmuseum [Basel, Switzerland] –

MR. MCELHINNEY: That's a good one. [They laugh.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: Talk about museums.

MR. MCELHINNEY: That is a good one.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I might as well go for that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or the Sainsbury Wing over at the London, the National Gallery.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh. Yeah, yeah, fabulous.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or, you know, the Denver Art Museum.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, that has just been – I haven't seen it since it's been rebuilt.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The [Daniel] Libeskind Wing. Have you had any dealings in western art at all?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes I have, sure. Had a [Henry] Farney exhibition one time. I've sold a lot of western art, a lot of Taos Founders, and some [Frederick] Remingtons, and [Charles M.] Russells and things like that over the years. They're very hard to get now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Ernest L.] Blumenschein.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I've had Blumenschein.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And all those guys.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So they're all in collections, do you think, or they have –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, they're just hard to get now. Yeah, they're all in collections. Also the museums – I mean, for instance, the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum [Santa Fe, NM] now has a huge amount of Georgia O'Keeffes, which they didn't have before. So where were those O'Keeffes before they went to the museum? They were out there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I guess artists tend to produce a lot more work than people imagine sometimes.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, yes and no. I mean, not necessarily. I did a catalogue raisonné on Twachtman and Robinson, both of whom didn't live huge long lives, I mean. And probably, they hadn't painted more than 700 – I mean, I wouldn't say painted. They are probably not represented by more than 700 works each. [Pablo] Picasso, look at Picasso – there are thousands and thousands of paintings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How dependent have you been over the years on critics?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: On you know, the daily fish wrapper.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Not at all.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, they don't generally review my kind of art. They don't generally bother.

MR. MCELHINNEY: They're mainly interested in –

MR. SPANIERMAN: - contemporary; most of the reviews are on contemporary art.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Novelty.

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I wouldn't say that; I'd just say contemporary art; that seems to be where they are at, for whatever reasons they have, because that's what the public wants to hear about, I guess. I would assume the newspaper reports what the public wants to hear about, so I guess that's what the public wants to hear about.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The Met opens a wing of Greco-Roman art, and there's a lot of attention about that.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, they do big PRs.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Yeah. So I guess a lot of people hadn't seen all of that –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, go back in a year and see what's going on. See if there is anybody there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, anytime they broadcast a show, as it were, they get attendance. So all they really have to do, ever, is to take their own collections, and reassemble them and call it a name and say it's an exhibition, and they'll get attendance. Meanwhile, you go over there during the day, go into the American wing during the day, of, you know, 19th century, and you won't see many people there. They have superb American modernists upstairs on the – I forget what floor – beautiful things, beautiful things, including O'Keeffes. And there are not many people looking at it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, you're right; there aren't.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But if they were to advertise it and make a big production out of it, people would come.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you imagine artists like [Vincent] van Gogh or people like King Tut[ankhamum], who bring millions and millions and millions of dollars for museums year in, year out – [Claude] Monet, you know, another exhibition of the same stuff we've seen, spun in a different way.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, Monet always brings people in. Monet is close to money. [McElhinney laughs.] It brings a lot of people in. I mean, the attendance for Monets are huge.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I remember going to a Picasso show at the MOMA –

MR. SPANIERMAN: That would be huge too. Van Gogh would be huge.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. It was a portrait show. There was an elderly couple, and they had the headphones. And he wanted her to look at another picture, and she said, leave me alone; I'm watching this one now, as though it were a television.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I know.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I'm watching it.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Or they're listening to it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or they're listening to it.

MR. SPANIERMAN: They don't watch it. They don't open their eyes and look at it; they listen to it, because I step in front of those people, because they have a tendency to stop right in front of the painting with their earphones. I used to be polite, but now I just go right in front of them and look at the picture, and they don't even care. They're listening to it; they're not looking at it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, there was an interview with Charlie Rose with Mr. [Ronald] Lauder up at, you know, the Neue [Gallery] museum. And Charlie Rose said at one point in the interview something about watching a painting.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Watching a painting.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It struck me as amusing. You are on television watching an interview; he is talking about watching a painting. [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: I can see looking at a painting, but I don't know about watching a painting. It's like watching sheep – [McElhinney laughs] – so they don't wander. You watch a painting to make sure nobody steals it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you had clients –

MR. SPANIERMAN: If you want to get more out of it, you should look at it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [Laughs.] That implies a little more engagement than just watching.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What about international collectors? Have you had any of those? Have you had a lot of those? Is there any interest?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not really. The international collector kind of begins collecting American art with the Abstract Expressionists.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I see.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He doesn't really basically go into the American art before that very much, and doesn't really go into the American modernists very much, but picks up a Jackson Pollock and further – that's what's international – [Edward] Hopper might be international if there was any European or whoever bought one, because you can't get them now, so – but I don't think there are any.

One of the collectors who was international, in fact, was global, was Heinrich Thyssen. I sold him a lot of American paintings. He has, you know, several rooms of American paintings in his museum in Madrid [Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Spain]. But outside of that museum – I don't know if we did this ground last time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No we didn't. We –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Outside of that museum, outside of the Terra Museum, which I'm not even sure it's going to stay – in Giverny [France], which is really the Terra's Foundation pictures; they're not French, not owned by the French - which is all American. Outside of those two places, there is another place called Blérancourt, in Picardy [France], which was given by Anne Morgan, [J. P.] Morgan's daughter, to the French government [Franco-American Museum of the Château de Blérancourt, near Compiègne].

And there they have arranged to have a museum of their American holdings, not all of them, but a lot of little pictures that are in various systems of the Louvre are going to go there. And they are just building there now. I belong to the [American] Friends of Blérancourt, this organization, and so that would become another kind of a center of American paintings in Europe.

But outside of those places, I don't know of another one. The Louvre itself has a few great pictures, but it's not basically American. They have *Whistler's Mother* [James Abbott McNeill Whistler, *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1*, 1871], they have a beautiful Homer of two women dancing by the seashore, but then that's it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Are you involved at all with this show that's going up in October, November in Brescia [Italy], of a large exhibition of American art in Italy?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Have you heard about it at all?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I haven't heard.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Maybe it's just –

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's like Ted Stebbins's show, "The Lure of Italy[: American Artists and the Italian Experience, 1760-1914." September 16 - December 13, 1992, and traveling], I guess. It was a very good show. They have shows called "The Lure of France," "The Lure of Italy."

MR. MCELHINNEY: As I understand, it's a show of 19th-century American painting in Italy.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, well, Ted Stebbins did a beautiful show of that at the Boston Museum [of Fine Arts, MA], when he was at the Boston Museum, called "The Lure of Italy". I think the catalogue won an award [Minda de Gunzburg prize].

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. But these are not paintings made by Americans in Italy; these are paintings by Americans of American landscapes, being exhibited in Italy.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I see.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So it's a new show in the fall.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Okay. Okay.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just curious. Have you ever commissioned works?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or acted as an intermediary between an artist?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, there are some clients for contemporary artists that come in and see something that's

sold and would like another thing like that. We ask the artist if they can do that. In that sense, yes, but not really.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Like portraits?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, we don't – we haven't done that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And I guess another question would be, with the museum world, especially regionally, becoming so much more robust, do you foresee yourself in an advisory role or helping these institutions acquire works for their collections? Are you in contact with any?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, we have sold to many institutions. In that way, we certainly help them. I mean, if they wanted my advice on something, I'd be glad to give it to them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But you're not sort of working as an –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Advisor?

MR. MCELHINNEY: As a paid consultant to any –

MR. SPANIERMAN: No. No. As a dealer, it doesn't quite fit for me to be a paid consultant for a museum at the same time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Now, a couple of people I've spoken to in the business, say, especially in the secondary market, or resale market, of older works or even works by the living artists that [say] they rely heavily upon intermediaries. I guess you spoke a little bit about this last week.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's a new aspect of the business, to consultants.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, in the 1980s there were a lot of corporate art consultants for contemporary art, but now –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes, a lot of consultants for everything.

MR. MCELHINNEY: For everything.

MR. SPANIERMAN: From Old Masters to modern to contemporary. The contemporary market is so huge; there's so much that you think you have to know, that if you had some other business, you couldn't do it. You need somebody who is 24/7 to know what's going on.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. So, again, just speaking about the regional art museums, are they working through consultants?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not that I know of. The curator would be the only person who would be working through, who is supposed to have some knowledge of whatever market that they are the curator of, I would assume.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: But other than that, I don't think they work through consultants. I don't think so. Private people do, private collectors do. Corporations do.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How is the corporate scene these days? Is there a lot of corporate buying of art?

MR. SPANIERMAN: We don't see it. We don't see it. Not for our –

MR. MCELHINNEY: There was a lot in the 1980s, and that kind of dropped off.

MR. SPANIERMAN: There was more then, yeah. A lot of corporate collections got sold. One in Philadelphia got sold, the insurance company.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Cigna.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, Cigna got sold. They had a terrific collection. Who else got sold? [Thomas J.] Watson's collection got sold, of IBM – had a great collection of American art. Got sold.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How did they sell them? At auction?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. They sold them at auction, both of them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Interesting.

Is there anything you would like to say to scholars and dealers a hundred years from now?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, I would like to be here to talk with them.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you are in a way. [Laughs.] To be here.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, we can make a date. Would I have anything to talk to them? Not really. I don't think so. You know, it's fickle; the market's fickle. It changes fashions on its own. One day somebody's interested in one aspect of art, and the next day, that's not as interesting as others. One of the great lessons is the Barbizon School, which was what was collected by millionaires in America and elsewhere for huge amounts of money at the time, and now is not very interesting for people. I mean, they don't care about it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And so they're –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I mean, they don't have a huge market value, not like the other things. If a [Jean-Baptiste-Camille] Corot brings a million dollars, it's a really a lot of money for a Corot. And the other people don't bring anywhere near that. I just have seen some [Gustave] Corbets go for change. Chump change.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So what do you suppose drives those kind of trends?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Market. The market, and I don't know how to describe what creates that. Must be a cultural feeling of what people want. I don't know if that's created, or that just is.

I have a kind of theory about American Tonalism, for instance. When we had a Tonalist show, I suddenly realized that almost all the Tonalists were alive and children, perhaps, or young men, during the Civil War. And they saw this country in a – we can't even guess what the country was like in the Civil War. It must have been horrendous. It was torn apart. I don't think we – probably like Iraq, probably not different. We know how horrible that is. Well, we think we do; we don't.

So these people saw that; they experienced that. Or if they didn't actually experience it, certainly their fathers and mothers did. They somehow experienced it. And I think that Tonalism was a way of putting things back together again. It was a healing process for the country to become unified again. It may have not been said by anybody; it may have just been a feeling. They may not even have realized that's what they were doing, but I think they were doing that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It seems reasonable. I've heard similar speculation about Luminism as well, sort of spirituality and light and water, that kind of softer feeling.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, "Luminism" was a word invented by scholars now; it never was used in its time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Oh, I understand that. I've gotten myself into a lot trouble with my wife, who is an art historian, just because –

MR. SPANIERMAN: There wasn't such a thing. I mean, it's invented now by Barbara Novak and John [Wilmerding]. But that's okay; it works.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I think it's a way of organizing that art, you know, around ideas [so] that you can talk about it, because there is a sudden change, away from an interest in science and empirical observation to more expressive, transcendental - however you want to put it.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, that continues then with Tonalism. But I think John Wilmerding once gave a talk about – was it Lane or was it [Martin Johnson] Heade? It was Lane – I can't remember - anyways, about the idea. He was predicting what was going on at the time, like the war that was going to come, the lightning in the sky, the black skies. And he felt that that was leading up to the Civil War. The artist felt that and was expressing that.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A sense of dread.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Mm-hm. Mm-hm. [Affirmative.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Foreboding.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, the silence before the storm.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, you can see that in a number of his pictures. Did you know that the house where Heade was born is now for sale?

MR. SPANIERMAN: What?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Lumberville, Pennsylvania. They're looking for $800,000.

MR. SPANIERMAN: For what?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Stone house and post office built by Heade's father, where Heade was born and raised.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Really.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, right across form the Black Bass Inn on the Delaware River.

MR. SPANIERMAN: He was an itinerant painter.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah. Oh, he was very restless. If I'm not wrong, he died in Florida, right?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I think so, yeah. He wandered about.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So having a look around at the art business at New York, at the condition of the audience and the condition of the galleries and the condition of the museums, do you feel that this is a better environment than the one that you entered into as a young man, full of enterprise?

MR. SPANIERMAN: I like the environment I entered into as a young man better.

MR. MCELHINNEY: How would you –

MR. SPANIERMAN: One of the reasons is because I was younger. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, of course. [Laughs.]

MR. SPANIERMAN: And, the other one is because – I don't know if it's fiction or not – but anything could happen then; anything was possible. You could wander into somebody's house, and you could find some great masterpiece. You could look at some small auction and come away with something remarkable. It was possible.

Everybody didn't know everything, and, I don't know, you didn't have the Internet. You didn't have the – the dealers ruled the art business, not the auctions. It's not like that now. The auctions were our hunting ground – the dealers' hunting ground. Private people had not invaded it yet. So it was more fun in a way. In those days they had what they called these "knockouts," which probably were illegal. Dealers would get together and buy some things at auction and later on have their own little auction, to see who would wind up with it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: What was lost, then, do you think? What was the –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, the dealers also were the – there weren't consultants. There may have been one or two here or there, but basically there were no consultants. So the dealer was the consultant, also.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right.

MR. SPANIERMAN: The dealer was the consultant; the dealer was in a much more strong position in a lot of ways than he is now. But just the idea that anything could happen, that was fun. I don't think that now.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Everything is too transparent; everything is too accessible.

MR. SPANIERMAN: I'm selling a painting in auction at Christie's, on, I think the fifth of July – I'm not sure – by Raphael. I bought that Raphael from Parke-Bernet.

MR. MCELHINNEY: You told us that last week.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, for $325. So, that happened. I don't really believe that could happen anymore.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Or if it happens, it happens seldom.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, it happens seldom in any event. [Laughs.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right, but more so.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, and I think earlier on, before that happened, that used to happen all the time, I think, to other – to dealers. It happened more frequently. I think it became less and less frequent.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So all this scholarship, all this access to information –

MR. SPANIERMAN: You still got to be dependent on the one thing –

MR. MCELHINNEY: The eye.

MR. SPANIERMAN: The eye. Without that, the scholarship has no meaning.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Do you think you've made the art world a better place?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I've educated people about American art. If that's making it a better place, yeah. I mean, I've brought things to people's attention they weren't aware of. I've brought beauty to people's minds they didn't know existed. Yes, I suppose I have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: And do you have a look around at your colleagues in the business, see other people who are –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, I think they did the same. Not that many people left in this American business anymore, like there used to be. So that's a reason for that, I guess: the material's not there.

MR. MCELHINNEY: We talked earlier about the future of the gallery, and you were saying that you felt that, for contemporary artists, that the gallery would still serve a purpose as being a venue to get the works seen. It has to make some kind of a stop between the studio and some other kind of destination, whether it be a collection or just being returned to the artist's studio; it has to come up for air. But with existing works of art, with historical works of art –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Used paintings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Used paintings.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Used paintings. Secondhand paintings.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Reemerged, used paintings.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, right. [McElhinney laughs.] They've become less and less available over time. Don't forget, your population also grows. When I went to grade school, there were 120 million people in the United States. It's now tripled. I mean, it's hard – that doesn't mean much, but think of yourself in an elevator by yourself, and then think of yourself in an elevator with two other people there. Suddenly, it's much more crowded than it was before.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Right. Well, the picture you painted about the growing regional art museum scene, there are many more destinations for these pictures to go to, as well.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Sure, absolutely.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, if you were to – a question here, which asks how would you like you and your gallery to be viewed in the future, or how would you like you and your gallery at some distant point in the future to be remembered; what do you think your contributions have been in American art? We've covered that, the publishing, the educating the public –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, yeah, yeah; we really have.

MR. MCELHINNEY: But as with the distillation of time, what –

MR. SPANIERMAN: I would like to think of myself, to some extent, a groundbreaker, only in the sense of – not a groundbreaker, perhaps, but bringing historic American art to the attention of the public, of being involved with it. I told you before about The Ten Americans; did I tell you that story?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yes, you did.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, nobody knew who they were. [Laughs.] Now, these are the guys that became very hot, but actually nobody knew who they were, which is remarkable, to me, when I think back on it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So, bringing American art – historic American - art to light?

MR. SPANIERMAN: To life, and the appreciation of the public.

MR. MCELHINNEY: To life, to the attention of the public, and undertaking ways to sustain their interest in it, such

as catalogues and exhibitions and scholarly works, et cetera.

Do you have any plans for establishing a foundation or anything to carry on your work?

MR. SPANIERMAN: No, I don't.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Just as a private individual, as a connoisseur, businessman, that's it, right. You're not –

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I do have a foundation, the Thomas Cole Foundation, but I haven't kind of decided on what direction it's going to be in - because I owned the Thomas Cole house one time.

MR. MCELHINNEY: The one in the Catskills [Catskill Mountains]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Cedar Grove [Catskill, NY]?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yes.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, the Heade house is on the market.

MR. SPANIERMAN: It is?

MR. MCELHINNEY: Yeah, it is. [Laughs.] But –

MR. SPANIERMAN: If only there were Heades in it.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, the store's there.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah.

MR. MCELHINNEY: His old man's store and the post office.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Years ago there was a lady in Echo Valley, in Connecticut, and I was trying to buy a house in Connecticut, or I thought I'd like to have one. I was looking around – this was an old French designer lady, and she had some really interesting paintings. And she – they weren't up for sale. So I wound up buying the house if she included these four paintings. So, she said, okay. So I sold the four paintings, and then I sold the house for a loss, and what I sold, of the loss is what the paintings cost me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: [They laugh.] Is there anything you would like to add?

MR. SPANIERMAN: There is really not. We've covered a lot of territory.

MR. MCELHINNEY: I think so. It's just a huge amount of information. So, you see that the art world is really changing a lot.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Oh, absolutely. Everything is.

MR. MCELHINNEY: It's getting much more regional with museums.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, the Internet is changing everything anyhow. The Internet is absolutely changing it. Everything is available. Every dealer is on the Internet with their goods. You go on there. It's global. We put things on it, and we get calls from Italian dealers; we get calls from people very far away asking about some little thing that really doesn't have that kind of meaning, you know, but they look.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, here's a question I didn't ask you: how many sales have you made online without the person actually seeing the painting?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not too many.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Any?

MR. SPANIERMAN: Not seeing anything, because they see a photo at least.

MR. MCELHINNEY: No, I mean without actually seeing the actual – like the Chase here.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Well, I made some sales – like, mostly they had come, and finally they see the picture. What

it is is a window on the world. So you have paintings in the window, people come and see them; they come and negotiate, or do whatever they have to do. And I think the Internet's the same. But I have made some important sales where I have not – I have just sent a photo.

MR. MCELHINNEY: So the Internet is the window shopping.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Yeah. It's a window on the world.

MR. MCELHINNEY: A window on the world.

MR. SPANIERMAN: A big window.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Well, I think we've covered a lot of ground. Mr. Spanierman, thank you so much for your time.

MR. SPANIERMAN: Okay, thank you very much for spending your time interviewing me.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you.

MR. SPANIERMAN: You are a good interviewer.

MR. MCELHINNEY: Thank you; you are kind to say so.

MR. SPANIERMAN: That's for the record, too. [They laugh.]

MR. MCELHINNEY: You are kind to say so. Thank you, sir.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...February 9, 2007