Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Richard Haas, 2009 Jan. 13 and Mar. 16

Funding for this interview was provided by the U.S. General Services Administration, Design Excellence and the Arts. 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 recorded interview with Richard Haas on January 13, January25, March 5, and March 16, 2009. The interview took place at the studio of Richard Haas in NY, and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the U.S. General Services Administration, Design Excellence and the Arts project.

Richard Haas and Avis Berman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Richard Haas for the GSA [General Services Administration], Archives of American Art Oral History Project, on January 13, 2009, in his studio on West 36th Street.

Would you please state your full name and date of birth?

RICHARD HAAS: Richard John Haas. Born August 29, 1936, in Spring Green, Wisconsin.

AVIS BERMAN: Allright. Spring Green, Wisconsin, of course, is very famous because of Frank Lloyd Wright. And I know that Frank Lloyd Wright was hugely important to you and your family. And I wondered if you'd like to begin talking about that.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, since I was born in Spring Green and my father and great-uncle were partners in Haas & Haas Meat Market, they served everyone in the community, including the Taliesin Fellowship [Taliesin, The Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture] from day one and even before. And so both my father and great-uncle were quite familiar with Mr. Wright and he with them. Then in 1942 when they closed the butcher shop, my father moved the family to Milwaukee [WI]. My great-uncle went across the river at Frank Lloyd Wright's request and became his chief stonemason, master stonemason, and stayed there 'til he died in '62, two years after or three years after Wright. And I was invited to go there. Well, I had a long conversation with my great-uncle about my interest in architecture when I was a senior in high school and a freshman in college. And even planned, hopefully, to become an architect. But since there was not an architecture school in the state of Wisconsin, I couldn't get that free education start-up. And that's probably the only thing that prevented me from probably sitting here now in an architectural studio, to be honest.

So I, through uncle George's arrangement, went out to Taliesin in 1955, in the summer, and spent the summer there ostensibly as his assistant; but with the allowance to kind of rein freely throughout the fellowship and even over to Taliesin itself. Kind of being a busybody and observing everything that was going on. And, of course, always starting out the day working with my uncle: cutting rock and laying stone. I did that again in 1956 for the summer; I continued that project. And that gave me, I think, a fairly good insight into what the fellowship was all about and certainly what Wright was about, and a pretty good sense of what the work was and what architecture was at the period.

AVIS BERMAN: Gee! I wonder, back to the first, back to the butcher shop, did they pay their bills on time? He was notorious.

RICHARD HAAS: [They laugh.] In a word, no. And, you know, I was too young to be aware of how serious that might have been. But my brother just recently—who's older than I am—said, "You know, we used to go over and get our Christmas trees at Taliesin." And my brother, being a priest [inaudible], said to—[Telephone rings.] Sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: Let me pause that. Now when we were interrupted, you were talking about Christmas trees from Taliesin, and your brother who was a priest.

RICHARD HAAS: My brother who was not a priest then but just a kid, we'd go with my father—and I remember vaguely doing it myself—to chop down our Christmas trees. And my brother being someone with honorable intentions, said, "Dad, are you sure we can just cut these trees down? I mean, because, aren't we supposed to pay for them?" And my dad said, "He owes me so much money, I could cut the whole forest down." [They laugh.] So that was what happened there.

AVIS BERMAN: But your father, the Haases, continued to extend them credit.

RICHARD HAAS: Apparently. Up until the end, yes. And I guess he did get paid. One of the stories that my father would tell is that he knew [Eugene] Gene Masselink very well, who was Wright's personal secretary. And whenever a check would come in, Gene would call my dad and say, "Get here early in the morning tomorrow. There's money here from Johnson & Johnson." Or Johnson's Wax. "And if you're the first ten in line, you'll get paid." So that's kind of how I think my father managed to get some of the money back.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, when you said you knew what the fellowship was about, would you elaborate on that?

RICHARD HAAS: That would be a book in itself, and there is a book now that I just read called *The Fellowship* [Roger Friedland and Harold Zellman; New York, Regan: 2006].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I just thought when you said that you—I just wondered what your own idea might have been.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, this book I would recommend. It tells a lot more about it than I could ever know or tell. But it did corroborate a lot of what I had hunches about, about a lot of these individuals and so on.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what, among the people of Spring Green, your circle, that were not the fellowship, how did the local folk regard Wright?

RICHARD HAAS: I think for the most part they saw him as "Old Shaggy-Hair." That was one of the terms that was used around town; and they knew him mostly for his famous lack of paying bills and, grandstanding around, and braggadocio beyond belief, etc. But there was a kind of grudging admiration for the fact that he happened to be there in their town.

AVIS BERMAN: So there was the knowledge that he was a great architect.

RICHARD HAAS: There was among I'd say certainly the elite of Spring Green, if you could be as hilarious as to say there is such a thing, and beyond that I'm not so sure. And even when we moved to Milwaukee [WI], we would mention him to neighbors, and they'd say, who's that? What's that all about? So on and so forth. He really wasn't very well known back then in any sense compared to how he became known after his death.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, when you were there for the two summers, you must have met or had some encounters with him.

RICHARD HAAS: I had several. All of them, I would say, in secondary ways. Because he would come around and see what we were doing. And he had a nose for following up on everything. My uncle had a different relationship with him than I think most of his people there, and there was a kind of a stand-offish reverence that went down in some odd way toward a craftsman like my uncle; and so he would never really be on his case, as it were. But when we were laying stone, he would sometimes tap his cane next to us where we were working, and say things like, "What are you doing here? And what's this all about?" And I would answer him in very simple terms. And he would call me "nephew" because he could never remember my name, after all. He would say, "What are you doing this morning, nephew?" Blah blah blah. That kind of thing. And then he would address us, when we were working sometimes, and go through one of his great Wright lectures, which he could do at the drop of a hat as he would go around, even with workers.

And there was that one that I have related several times, including to Brendan Gill when he wrote his book [*Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright*, Brendan Gill; New York, Putnam: 1987] though he didn't include it, about when he came by us as we were putting up rafters on top of a stone circular base that would ultimately become the restaurant for Taliesin, which is now the orientation center and restaurant. We were just starting to build this thing which they didn't really know quite what they were going to do with, but he was always doing a project. And was nailing up the rafters along with his sort of lead carpenter, and Wright tapped on our scaffold, and said, "What's this rickety mess here?" And the lead carpenter yells down to him, he said, "That's our scaffold, Mr. Wright. We're putting in these rafters." And he said, "Well, it's ugly. Get rid of it." And then the carpenter said, "And how are we going to nail in the rafters?" And Wright said, "You'll hang like monkeys." [Laughs.] And then he walked back, got in the car, and rode off to Madison [WI]. And, of course, then we went over to George, who was always the sort of elder statesman of any of these workforces—

AVIS BERMAN: This is George your uncle?

RICHARD HAAS: My uncle. George said, "Oh, forget about it. He won't remember it when he comes back." And he came back about an hour and a half later from Madison. And of course we were still working, and so he stopped and came out and started yelling at us again. And then my uncle must have placated him because we didn't tear it down. Then he started talking about how he was going to change everything in our site—his vision for our site. And one is, he wanted to get rid of the abutments of the old bridge that had collapsed between

Spring Green and Taliesin. And he told one of the workers there, he said, "You should go there at night with dynamite, swim out there, put dynamite on each of them, and blow them up." And that got a laugh. [They laugh.] Then he said to another one, "If you look up on the hill behind Taliesin, we're going to have to build a tower up there so we can get television reception from Madison." I thought this was kind of interesting in 1956 [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: I'm sure, because he had been on television.

RICHARD HAAS: Right. And then he was saying, "And, of course, the people of Spring Green, they don't appreciate any of this because all they're interested in is half a night's fornicating and half a night's snoring." And then he went off. So this is a typical Wright encounter that I saw on two or three or more occasions.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And was he aware that you were allowed to go through and see the drawings in there at Taliesin?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know what he was aware of in terms of what I ever did. But I had a good enough ongoing relationship with Gene Masselink, who knew my father, as I said, as well as my uncle, of course, and had some regard for the fact that I was an artist, because he was artist-in-residence at Taliesin. And so he would allow me to go and look through all the books in Wright's private drafting room over at Taliesin. And I remember doing that and even going into the safe and looking at the piles of [Ando] Hiroshige and [Katsushika] Hokusai prints; or to go into the storeroom where all the drawings were kept—in very bad conditions by the way—over at Hillside [Home School, Spring Green, WI]. I remember them in a room in Hillside. And I would go through drawer by drawer of files, and start with the late 1880s and on up. And I acquired a pretty intense knowledge especially of his early work, which really hadn't been published at that time.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: I had an interesting subsequent experience. I went out because one of the people who had been there at that time remembered me and certainly my uncle, and when I went back to Taliesin West, about eight years ago when I was doing a big project there, she said—I had mentioned that story. She said, "Well, come look at the drawings now." And I went in, put on white gloves, and we went carefully through several drawers where each of them were laminated under archival plastic, and you could see these same drawings now kept in museum perfect condition.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And looking back, was there any particular aspect that resonated most for you in your future work, in your mature work?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, there are several things that resonated really. I mean, one was it probably gave me a sense that I really didn't like seeing a lot of what was going on in terms of the drafting room and what these people actually had to do on a day-to-day basis to design architecture. It was boring. It was tedious. It wasn't really what I enjoyed. I mean, yes, I loved seeing the loose drawings and the perspectives and the sketches that were done. But the rest of the stuff just didn't seem to really appeal to me. That was one experience. And on a more direct note, I didn't really feel that I would fit into that fellowship, and I didn't like how it felt there and what I would have to regiment myself to do on a day-to-day basis. So it cleared me up in terms of wanting to stay there, because that was discussed as a possibility, though my uncle was against it. And I think it just clarified for me that art was my more major interest.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And even though you might not have been doing it then, I mean, an artist who uses architecture or exploits architecture.

RICHARD HAAS: Now that I think, you know, that receded into the background for a long period of time as I got more engaged in the art experience, and being a student of contemporary art: the flavor of the month is where you're always looking [laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Why was your uncle against your—

RICHARD HAAS: It's a long-term thing, and I've discussed it with my brother as well over the years. I think he really did sense that it was a somewhat morally corrupt kind of atmosphere there, being a good Catholic, right? Though he didn't openly discuss it with me, he felt it was a bad environment for a good Catholic boy to be in, basically.

AVIS BERMAN: It was also more like a medieval fiefdom with the king and the queen. And there was a lot of serfdom going on, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, on that, there was a lot going on, period. [They laugh.] If you read that book, I mean, if it's even half true, it was a pretty strange environment, as you know. And I didn't understand any of the [Georgi]

Gurdjieff stuff at that time. But he dominated the background of that whole—

AVIS BERMAN: Olgivanna [Hinzenberg-Wright] was really involved with that.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, it was beyond that. I think there was something psychologically overwhelming about her fixation on him and how she operated.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I want to now backtrack and just do a little bit of housekeeping here. Is that your parents—your father was Joseph Haas.

RICHARD HAAS: Joseph.

AVIS BERMAN: And mother was Marie Hilda—

RICHARD HAAS: Haas. Nachreiner Haas.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And your father was born in Germany, is that right?

RICHARD HAAS: He was born in a little town called Spielberg, Germany, in 1908. He came to the States in '22, with the sponsorship by my great-uncle. So my great-uncle became his surrogate father after he was 14—from 14 on.

AVIS BERMAN: So your father came to this country when he was 14?

RICHARD HAAS: Fourteen.

AVIS BERMAN: All by himself?

RICHARD HAAS: All by himself.

AVIS BERMAN: What was that like?

RICHARD HAAS: Horrendous. Beyond belief. If one goes out to Ellis Island [New York Harbor, NY], he has a one-hour transcript and tape that he talks about that experience which was one mishap after another, where he was just totally scared to death and not knowing that was going to happen next.

AVIS BERMAN: Because he probably came over in steerage, and then he got to New York [NY].

RICHARD HAAS: And they lost his papers, and he was underweight, and they didn't know whether to ship him back or not. And so on. He spent three weeks there instead of a couple of days.

AVIS BERMAN: But got to Wisconsin.

RICHARD HAAS: He somehow got to Wisconsin eventually, yes. And then once he got there, I guess, things slowly picked up. [They laugh.] And my uncle sent him to school to learn English for one year, but had him start to work with him in the butcher shop, which was interesting. I mean, he wasn't a slave obviously. I think my uncle was a very sweet and generous guy. But he had two sons that were sent off to college, and my dad was the one who was going to continue as his associate.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I guess also he had to earn his keep.

RICHARD HAAS: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: And he probably wouldn't have gone to college had he stayed in Germany no matter how intelligent he was.

RICHARD HAAS: No, he would've. That was very clear.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, really!

RICHARD HAAS: He was the top student in his class, and he was picked to go to engineering school even in the eighth grade because the German system was so much geared that way even then.

AVIS BERMAN: Even with the poverty and the inflation then?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, that's the story. Now who knows how it would've played out. But his teacher, who was apparently someone who had picked him as the bright one in the group, had already sort of told him that that was what he had plans for him to do. And then when my father had this offer to go to America, that was the first

guy he went to was this teacher and he said, "What should I do?" And his teacher said, "Go." Because things were falling apart completely in that country. So he said go. So had he stayed, that's probably what he would have done, and he would've been dead anyway.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. He would've had to have been in the army.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you feel that your father was frustrated that he didn't get to persevere with higher education—or discontented?

RICHARD HAAS: That's a hard one to answer because he certainly didn't let it out to us in any way. But his mind was always clicking in that direction. And he would go in the basement and design automobile engines and do stuff like that. I mean, he was going on in his own way as he did stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you make things as well?

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah, I did. Because we always had a little workshop in the basement, and I was always down there, playing with wood things, sawing things.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And welding—not welding, but gluing things together and so on. Yes, it was always a hands-on kind of environment that he encouraged and I was part of. I helped build a house when I was a kid [laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Now your mother was born in this country.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Her family, it's a little harder to trace, but they came much, much earlier in the 19th century. And on her mother's mother's side it's quite interesting. I even investigated it last summer in Munich [Germany] again because I was invited over there. But the Bettinger family, there was a Von Bettinger connection. And her great-uncle was the cardinal of Munich [Franziskus Von Bettinger], which we found out about, and I went and saw the grave and statues to him and all that stuff. And the ones who came to America—and I don't know how that happened—but many of them were quite distinguished in their own way back then. One was the chief accountant for the largest hotel in Chicago [IL], as a woman; she was unusual in the early 20th century. And another one became a priest and the head of the Chaplain's Corps in the Army in the Second World War. One became a mathematics professor at Creighton University [Omaha, NE]. And the other one ran the general store in Plain, Wisconsin.

AVIS BERMAN: Both your parents were born and raised as Catholics.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. And the town where she grew up was, I'd say, 99.999 percent German Catholic. But she learned German and English in school, as everyone did in that town.

AVIS BERMAN: And did your parents speak German at home?

RICHARD HAAS: Not really, no. I mean, when other Germans came over, they would be speaking German. But other than that they never spoke German to us. And very seldom did I ever hear them speak to each other in German either. English was her primary language, so that was—

AVIS BERMAN: And how did they meet?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know. Somewhere probably in a dancehall in that area. I don't know exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: She had been a teacher, is that correct?

RICHARD HAAS: She was a teacher. She graduated from the little high school in that town, and she was 16. She went to Normal school for one year, and by the age of 17 she was teaching in a one-room school.

AVIS BERMAN: And that's in Plain, Wisconsin?

RICHARD HAAS: Plain, Wisconsin.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: It's a town of about 400 people.

AVIS BERMAN: And—

RICHARD HAAS: But she stayed teaching for about three and a half, four years—four years I think—before she married my father.

AVIS BERMAN: So we've mentioned your brother, Joseph. Now, he became the priest?

RICHARD HAAS: He became the priest.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And he was born in—?

RICHARD HAAS: Thirty-three.

AVIS BERMAN: When were your parents married?

RICHARD HAAS: Thirty-two.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And then—

RICHARD HAAS: And they went to Germany on their honeymoon. That was his first visit back, ten years after he had left, bringing his bride. And I'm sure bragging everywhere he went. And they traveled, too. They went to Rome [Italy], and they met the Pope [Laughs.]. I mean, in some audience or something. I have a diary that my brother gave me. She kept a diary of what they did every day on that trip. That was interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: And then did they travel after their honeymoon?

RICHARD HAAS: No. I mean, not—they did after the war, much, much later. No, but that was the only trip they made before the war.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Exactly. Thirty-two was kind of critical versus '33. Although your father was probably a U.S. citizen by then.

RICHARD HAAS: He was a U.S. citizen.

AVIS BERMAN: And married to a U.S. citizen.

RICHARD HAAS: And married to a U.S. citizen. So I'm sure there was no big deal in terms of travel at that point in time. But, I mean, what they experienced en route, who knows? Yes. But then he had all these brothers and sisters over there that stayed.

AVIS BERMAN: That's the awful part. He was the only one. And did he try to persuade any of them to leave?

RICHARD HAAS: He tried to persuade John, who was, I think, the second oldest, to come over to the States. But it all got messed up in—this is too late already, '38. And it got messed up because they would allow—they wouldn't allow farmers to leave.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, they had to supply the food to the Reich [Third Reich, Nazi Germany].

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And they mistakenly said he was a farmer instead of a stonemason.

Bauer instead of Hauer. And that one letter killed him, if you could put it in simple words.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: So he didn't get over. And that was unfortunate. He was trying to get them over because he knew what was coming. And they all, he was hoping—and that was the one that wanted to get out the most.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's really sad.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: That's horrible. You also had a brother Eugene [inaudible].

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, he's still there.

AVIS BERMAN: And he was born in '34.

RICHARD HAAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And your sister Rosalyn [Marie Haas].

RICHARD HAAS: She was born in Milwaukee in '45.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And was anyone else, the other children, interested in drawing and doing things like that?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, interestingly enough, my brother Gene, I could show you his drawings right around the corner here. He does a drawing of me every five to ten years. He's done a book of—David Levine is his sort of hero, and he does those kinds of drawings. And he's published a book of his, *Thirty Years of Gene Haas's Drawings of Famous People*. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: So he likes to do caricatures?

RICHARD HAAS: Caricatures, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And, of course, he does a lot of sports figures because that's what he's most interested in.

AVIS BERMAN: But you were the only one who was going to pursue it.

RICHARD HAAS: His son became an artist, as did his grandson.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. So there was some—so maybe back in the families that you don't know about, there may have, I mean—

RICHARD HAAS: Some artists?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, some inherited—

RICHARD HAAS: I think there were, and it's hard to pinpoint. There were some watercolors that were sent to us after the war as gifts. And it was some relative who did watercolors that were quite competent.

AVIS BERMAN: And your father worked with his hands, and so that's—

RICHARD HAAS: But he would never in a million years say he was an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. But he had crafts.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, he was a craftsperson definitely.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And so was the stonemason. But you were always drawing or painting or whatever.

RICHARD HAAS: Pretty much. Yes. From early days on. And I got I guess what you would call my rewards in school more for that than anything else.

AVIS BERMAN: And did your parents encourage that? Or were they worried about it?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, they tolerated it in an open way. But encourage it, no; I would say that would be what they did. I mean, my father didn't have a great knowledge of or interest in arts per se. And my mother—even though she had more connection to it, and her sister painted in a fairly simple way, but was interested in art—there was a little more sympathy toward it on her end. But my father's side, not really.

AVIS BERMAN: What did they hope you would become?

RICHARD HAAS: What would my father have hoped for? Probably that I go to some kind of a—maybe even engineering school to fulfill his ambitions, if that was the case.

AVIS BERMAN: And was there anyone there who was culturally a mentor, who was encouraging you—this is up to high school, not beyond—but in those early days?

RICHARD HAAS: In the actual family itself?

AVIS BERMAN: Or at school or a teacher or anything—anyone you knew?

RICHARD HAAS: I'm trying to think of anyone I knew who would really be plugged into that. Not really up through maybe the last year or so in high school there were a couple of teachers who started talking to me more about that as a possibility a little bit. Though I always relate this rather humorous story where I was brought in by Sister Beatrix, who was the principal of our school, and each of us seniors had to have an interview with her as to what we were going to do in life. That was probably as far as they went in terms of helping you on anything

then. And I told her I was interested in being an artist. So I had already had that in my head. And she said, "Oh, no, no, no, no! You're too smart. You can't do that." [Laughs.] I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "That's for dummies." Or something like that, you know. It was a very clear-cut slam on the whole idea of anything artistic. And I even related that to the school about 40 years later, and it was published. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: But as you say, you were being praised in school for these drawings. You must have been drawing your class [inaudible].

RICHARD HAAS: I was being praised by the little art teacher who didn't have much going on in that way. And it was an English teacher who was very encouraging, as I remember.

AVIS BERMAN: And, well, you liked it. Now just in terms of that, were you interested in books or literature? Or what kind of things were you reading?

RICHARD HAAS: In a very simple, primitive kind of way I started to get into that, mostly through a pretty good public library in our town, West Allis [WI], where they had a little art section. And I started pulling those books out by—[*In*] *the Nature of Materials* by Henry-Russell Hitchcock [New York, DaCapo Press: 1942] about Wright, for instance. And other books of that nature. And I started getting really kind of refocused on what architecture was about, what Wright was about. And in terms of reading more extensively, I think [Ernest] Hemingway was the first one I remember, pulling a novel out and reading it. *The Sun Also Rises* [Ernest Hemingway; New York, Grosset & Dunlap: 1926] I think was the one.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: But very little. Because that, too, wasn't really encouraged at home.

AVIS BERMAN: West Allis [WI], the family moved there in 1943—is that correct?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. We moved to West Allis in '43. West Allis being an industrial suburb of Milwaukee [WI]. It has a pretty nasty little White enclave of blue collar workers. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: And your father closed the butcher shop. Why did that—?

RICHARD HAAS: He closed that, I think, in '42. Spent a year working in a defense plant near Spring Green, which was being built. And then when that closed—that project stopped—he had to find a new one. And that was why he had to go to Milwaukee and not stay there. He was 1-A [Available Immediately for Military Service] even with three kids, at 34 years old, he was 1-A. Because farmers were exempt in Sauk County, and there were probably a dozen [inaudible] not exempted out of the whole town. So he was on the list.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: He didn't want to go.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't blame him in that. I think that would've been very difficult. Not just because of his age and his family, but he was German.

RICHARD HAAS: In Germany he had four brothers who were in the enemy army.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly. And who knows if they would—sometimes they were sensitive. But it would've been horrible. He would have been sent—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. He actually - I think even mentioned this to somebody. He said, "If I go, I want to go and fight the Japs [Japanese]."

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Exactly.

RICHARD HAAS: You know, because what were they anyway? [Laughs.] That kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, going into the Pacific wouldn't have been any picnic.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. And he even—there was a thing called the Seabees [The Construction Battalions of the United States Navy]. He put himself on the list, I remember; he told me that, to become a Seabee, I didn't know much about them. But I learned later it was a pretty rough outfit; probably would've been very rough.

AVIS BERMAN: The Pacific was ruinous. But it would've been heartbreaking to be in Germany.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. I think he would have not enjoyed that at all. I mean, even though I know after the war he

was put on a list, about interpreters at the trials and somehow—or guards. Because he had had experience as a deputy sheriff of Sauk County, he was a candidate—and spoke fluent German—candidate for possibly being a guard in Nuremberg [Germany].

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: He didn't get it or do it, but that was something that was talked about.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, did you ever, just because you were from the area of the country where he wrote about, did you ever read anything by Sinclair Lewis? Was that meaningful?

RICHARD HAAS: I did. Yes, that's a good point. I did. That was one of the early people I picked up on, and *Main Street* [Sinclair Lewis; New York, Harcourt, Brace: 1920] was definitely something I read about and actually visited Sauk Centre [MN] later because it sounded like Sauk City, which was the town next to Spring Green [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: And there was a lot of overlap about my Spring Green roots and what he was talking about.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Exactly. And some of the smothering qualities of the small town and getting out and restlessness and all sorts of things.

RICHARD HAAS: I didn't warm up to the guy for some reason. And I don't know how people look at him today. But, you know, he wasn't somebody I really identified with, although I kind of felt some affinity to what he was talking about.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I think he had ideas, but the writing was more—it was certainly the opposite of Hemingway. It was more and more bloated. If you were going to pick a writer in that tradition, someone like [Theodore] Dreiser is going to be far greater in terms of—

RICHARD HAAS: Whom I would not have known about at that time.

AVIS BERMAN: At that time.

RICHARD HAAS: Upton Sinclair I probably connected to a little bit. I didn't read poetry. To this day I'm probably poetry-deficient. I mean, I did once attend a reading by [Robert] Frost live, and that was interesting. And a few people like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, when you were in Bennington [Vermont]?

RICHARD HAAS: No, when I was actually in Milwaukee. He came out and gave it in our college.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: A lot of interesting people came to that college then.

AVIS BERMAN: You did go to the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. And so you, I guess, in order to be an artist, you would've had to make a living. You were going to become an art teacher or—?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it was something that most of the artists at that time in that particular school did because it was really a teachers' college that had kind of grown up. And it had a history of producing the art teachers for the state of Wisconsin. And it was a very highly thought-of art department in that regard. There are some very famous people came out of there actually.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And so that was just something you did.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you able to go in as an art major?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no, I didn't. I started out as an unclassified major because I was still thinking about architecture and maybe eventually transferring credits to somewhere like Illinois. That was the only other place I knew about. Not IIT [Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, IL], which would have been smarter, but the University of Illinois had an architecture school. So I had that in the back of my mind. But within a semester, because of this class I took with [Joseph] Joe Friebert, I switched over to art as my major. And I have hanging in the other room the first painting I ever did with Joe, too [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Why don't you talk about that because it was such an important experience?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Well, Joe was just one of those amazing guys. And I decided to sign up for an actual studio class. I think it was my second—I can't remember whether it was—no, it was my first semester. Along with my mathematics class, which I almost flunked, and a couple of other classes, I decided to take this studio class, which was watercolor. I think it was the only one available to me, and I never had done any water—I had a watercolor set, one of those cheap Prang sets. So I said, well, I understand watercolor, I guess. I never did anything with oil. So I took the class. And in the first project Joe kind of said, I want you to think of something that's very wet. And you make it up, you know, a memory painting about something, an experience that's very wet. So I did all these umbrellas in the rain. [They laugh.] Pretty literal. I've always thought [inaudible] a literal person. But it was done in such a loose manner—and you'll see it if you want to look around the room—that it only just came out of me in a matter of an hour. And Joe walks around looking at various things that these kids come up with. And he saw mine, and he grabbed it, took it, and put it up on the wall in front. And he said, "This is a masterful work of art!" I was shocked. I mean, what was that all about?

AVIS BERMAN: He called it a work of art.

RICHARD HAAS: A "masterful work of art." I thought he said masterpiece, but I think he said masterful. And I, well, [Laughs.] what could I say? So that's how I started out with him. And I think I did a few other pretty good things in that class. Nothing came up to that first painting. But that got me very interested, and got him very interested in me. And he started working me over pretty heavily after that. And so talked me into becoming an art major.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So he was really your first real mentor, the first—

RICHARD HAAS: Right. Absolutely. He was, definitely. And he stayed that way right on through, I mean, through the whole four years and beyond. And he was that kind of guy. There just was a memorial to him this year, and I had some pieces in it and wrote; and I got on the Internet all the statements by other students. And to a person, they all said that this guy was just incredible, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: I've actually—Now, I should just say for the tape that the daughter of Joseph Friebert is Susan Rossen, who was head of publications at the Art Institute of Chicago [Chicago, IL], and actually guest-edited a book for the Archives of American Art, [*Speaking of Art: Selections from the Archives of American Art Oral History* Collection, Liza Kirwin; Washington D.C., Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution: 2008] and was—

RICHARD HAAS: She did?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. I don't know. Has she retired from the Art Institute?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. I was there about a month ago, and I saw her in Chicago. So she's still there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And she has helped to keep some of her father's paintings—keep him alive through his art. And I'd never seen a painting of his until recently. I really liked it.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, he was an amazing artist, really. I mean, totally restricted by his environment there. And so he didn't probably have a career that blossomed as it might have somewhere else. But he's still highly respected, I think, by anyone that knew him, and anyone that sees his work or owns his work.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, absolutely. Well, that was the other connection through Joseph was Katharine Kuh, who always respected and liked his work and visited his studio.

RICHARD HAAS: That's right. Did she—? Yes, she put him in the Venice Biennale [1956, Venice, Italy].

AVIS BERMAN: The Venice Biennale. And also through him at this very place you went to college was where she found the early [Fernand] Léger on the staircase.

RICHARD HAAS: That's in the museum there?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: I remember that painting. I mean, vaguely, very vaguely, I kind of remember that painting, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: It had been lost since 1914.

RICHARD HAAS: When did they take it out of the school? Was it in the '50s?

AVIS BERMAN: The early '50s, when Katharine went to see—went to visit Joe and recognized the painting when she was with him.

RICHARD HAAS: And they took it out right then?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. It had to be cleaned, and then it went into the Léger Retrospective ["Fernand Léger: A Survey of His Art," 1953] at The Art Institute [of Chicago].

RICHARD HAAS: Okay. I think it left when I was like a freshman. And then maybe he showed it to us or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Exactly.

RICHARD HAAS: I kind of remember that. I certainly knew the painting later.

AVIS BERMAN: But it had hung there on the staircase. And it was so dirty, no one recognized it.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, as I said, Milwaukee was an interesting school, and a lot of major people came through there, I mean, [Edward] Steichen, Holty, Carl Holty. There were a bunch of them. And there were some very good artists who lived and worked in Milwaukee at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Were there any other teachers there that were important for you?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, the next one I would mention is Bob [Robert] von Neuman, who was an older guy, kind of the old mentor of everyone there, including Joe, looked up to Bob because he was much older. And he harks all the way back to Berlin in the early '20s—or early teens. He studied and worked there. And, I think, I mentioned Max Liebermann was his teacher. And he was just a wonderful printmaker; and he really got me into printmaking more than anyone.

AVIS BERMAN: I should ask at this point, what did your prints look like then?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, there were a lot of figures. There was even some religious subject matter; that was still carrying over. A couple of crucifixions, I remember [Laughs.]. There were a few landscapes and cityscapes that mostly probably came out of postcards. Maybe one or two came from real life. And then I started doing etchings, and I was very enamored of Seymour Haden and [James McNeill] Whistler because there was a wonderful collection of it in a little museum called the Charles Allis Art Library [Charles Allis Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI] down the street. I was just there again a couple of months ago because I had a show in its sister institution ["Richard Haas: Thirty Years of Looking at Architecture," 2008, Villa Terrace Museum, Milwaukee, WI]. And I went and looked at all those again that were hanging there. And some of my work was looking like that, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: You know, dry points: the forest and the trees and the reflections in the water, that kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you doing any oil painting in college yet?

RICHARD HAAS: I started probably—yes, maybe my freshman—no, probably my sophomore year, I started to do oils. And that became probably the primary thing I did then for the next three years or four years.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you painting or drawing from the model?

RICHARD HAAS: A lot of work from the model in drawing. And there was some in painting as well that was pushed. We all got the book *The Natural Way to Draw* by Kimon Nicolaïdes [Boston, Houghton Miffin Company: 1941]—I don't know if anyone heard of that—but it was a very important book for people at that time. And we followed some of his lessons. We painted mostly on Masonite. We didn't paint so much on canvas at that time. And, you know, there was a lot of mixing your own paints and using the old rabbit skin glue and all the wonderful stuff that, you know, was—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you were being taught the craft or how to make the basics of—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. That's part of what was important at that time. And you didn't go to the store and buy everything premixed. And so you had to know something of that. We even did egg tempera, which I remember as a terrible experience. Ellen [Lanyon] taught something about that recently because of this show of George Tooker ["George Tooker: A Retrospective," 2009]. She seemed to take to it to some degree. I didn't take to it at all. I thought it was an impossible medium.

AVIS BERMAN: Ellen Lanyon, right?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. So I mean, we learned something about technique. We learned a lot about scumbling and about laying down what we called "brown sauce," and painting the light colors over the brown sauce from thin to thick. And all of these various things that really come out of the old classic training of the 19th century.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And meanwhile—and this is '54 to '59—and so at this moment the New York School is quite ascendant. Are you looking at these things in art magazines? Or what's going on in your [inaudible]?

RICHARD HAAS: I'm beginning to recognize art magazines as an important component, especially if you live in the Midwest. And I think *ARTnews* was the big one at that time. And I did, yes, start to see these strange paintings that they were showing and these guys in photographs standing on the street wearing these engineering outfits and so on and so forth. And so, Tenth Street [New York City, NY] was like this Mecca.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And we would go to Chicago. And see the shows in Chicago were—within five minutes of something happening in New York, it usually ended up appearing in Chicago.

AVIS BERMAN: Correct.

RICHARD HAAS: So we did see what was going on through that experience. And I saw [Mark] Rothko, I saw [Willem] de Kooning I saw [Jackson] Pollock, I saw [Franz] Kline and several others. And I just was blown away.

AVIS BERMAN: This was at the Art Institute, right?

RICHARD HAAS: At the Art Institute, yes. I was blown away by some of that. And then the show even came to Milwaukee at that time, right in my sophomore year. And I remember going into the little Layton Art Gallery and seeing right in front of me a beautiful yellow and orange Rothko. And getting excited, confused, whatever. Joe Friebert, of course, was a little taken aback by some of this work, and didn't respond to it maybe in the most positive manner. Other teachers were more excited, younger ones. But in general I'd say the Milwaukee art community was still really not getting on board, as it were, with what was going on in the Abstract Expressionist era. That didn't happen until just about the time I left undergraduate college and took these courses at night and so on at Milwaukee. And when some of the Abstract Expressionist artists were actually coming to Milwaukee and teaching. Jack Tworkov was my teacher for a whole summer.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I'm going to get to that a little bit later. So college was the first time you would've been exposed. Were there other students who were interested in this [inaudible]?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yes, we talked about it a lot, all the students. And I suppose you could say the overwhelming opinion was these guys are obviously off on some track that we don't understand. And I don't know if we can do anything about it. But it sure is interesting, [Laughs.] whatever it is that's going on. And then we saw *Life Magazine* and that article about Pollock, right [Dorothy Sieberling, "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?," *Life Magazine*, v. 27, Aug. 8, 1949: 42-45.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: Is he the greatest American painter? You know, we had to deal with him, in other words.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Just like earlier you would have to deal with [Pablo] Picasso.

RICHARD HAAS: Exactly. And we were still trying to deal with him, too. But that was different.

AVIS BERMAN: Before the Abstract Expressionists, I should ask you who were some of the artists that you admired?

RICHARD HAAS: [Paul] Cézanne was my first super-hero of any importance, I think. And I bought my first book, my skira book, on Cézanne. And I was imitating Cézanne from almost the get-go or trying to. And I started looking from him out to the other Post-Impressionists, I guess, you'd call them. Impressionism itself was something I certainly acknowledged. But I was always more interested in the Post-Impressionists, right?

AVIS BERMAN: More structure.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah, yeah. And gradually moving toward [Henri] Matisse and Picasso. And certainly Picasso ultimately became the most significant one to look at.

AVIS BERMAN: And in printmaking? Would that have been a different—?

RICHARD HAAS: Printmaking's a little different. There I was looking more into history. Like more - like I see that Seymour Haden up there. That kind of wonderful 19th century painter/etcher history is what got me going at first.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and I'm sure Rembrandt [van Rijn] as well.

RICHARD HAAS: And Rembrandt certainly, yes, and those people were accessible even in Milwaukee; you could find them.

AVIS BERMAN: I'm just looking. Is that a [Félix] Buhot print there?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. He was discovered, I don't know when, maybe later. Yes. And certainly [Giovanni Battista] Piranesi was always front and center, and that influence carried. It probably didn't really become that important as an undergraduate student. It kind of came later. But I was looking even then at probably first [Giovanni Antonio] Canaletto and then maybe Buhot—I mean, then Piranesi.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Now you graduated in '59. Did you have to go in the army then?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Partly subsidizing my undergraduate education with ROTC [Reserves Officers Training Corps.] money. And that was what—the citizen army where you were still under—subject to the draft, and therefore the decision to go in as an officer seemed a more logical one for a lot of us. I didn't understand fully what that all meant down the road. But that's what I chose to do. And then we had to make a commitment for either six months in the active duty or two years in active duty, and then a subsequent total of eight years under the, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: The [Army] National Guard?

RICHARD HAAS: The Reserves.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, the Reserves.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. So I opted for the six-month program for whatever reason because I wanted to get—if I were to get two years to go to Germany, that was the way to get abroad. And I had never been to Europe obviously. And it seemed like most of them were being sent there then. But they said I wouldn't get that. And then I said, oh, can I transfer back and get my six months? If I'm going to be in the States, I'd rather have the six-month program. And that's what I took.

AVIS BERMAN: Get it over with. Well, you were lucky. You would've got to Vietnam, I'll bet, if you'd done it the other way.

RICHARD HAAS: No, I think I still would've missed it. We were in that little window of time that I—at the end of my Reserve time, I was heavily under the gun, so Vietnam. Yes. I reacted to it violently. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: You went to Fort Benning [GA]?

RICHARD HAAS: Went to Fort Benning for eight weeks of officer training, yes. And that was intense and interesting for me in many ways. And also it was the first chance to see the South and see segregation full blast which, for a northern Wisconsin type boy, was pretty interesting to see.

AVIS BERMAN: In northern Wisconsin, were there many Black people anyway? So it wouldn't have—

RICHARD HAAS: Not many.

AVIS BERMAN: —it probably wouldn't have come up too much?

RICHARD HAAS: No. But, you know, we started seeing it on television a little bit by then. And we certainly knew about it. It was becoming a more and more important issue for everybody to deal with. Plus I'd gone to Chicago a lot, and I started seeing the jazz musicians on Rush Street, and all of that kind of experience.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so when you were in Chicago, you were interested in jazz.

RICHARD HAAS: I was interested in jazz from the mid-'50s on, yes. So I would stop into jazz clubs and catch all those names that are now historical guys.

AVIS BERMAN: And then you were in Missouri, is that correct?

RICHARD HAAS: I went from there to, yes, Fort Leonard Wood [MO] for four and a half months, I think. Miserable

place. And, you know, it was the summer, and it was just hot and awful. And I was assistant company commander for a basic training company. Meaning we would get all these raw recruits who had been dragged into the Army [Laughs.]. And run them through this miserable experience for eight weeks. Then we'd get a new bunch. So it was a lot of fun. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Didn't you paint murals there at some point?

RICHARD HAAS: At one point, yes. I was bored to death on just about every level you can think of. And I had kind of a funny company commander who was—we were all young guys.

AVIS BERMAN: Now is this in Georgia or Fort Leonard?

RICHARD HAAS: No, this is in Missouri.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: We had all these old barracks from the Second World War. They were kind of falling apart; they were still patching them together, keeping this army that was really pretty primitive by any comparisons. You know, being trained with old equipment from the Second [World] War. But in the mess hall, I said, it's such a dingy place. Why don't we paint something in it. And Captain D. T. Adoro [ph.], he was my company commander or battalion commander—

AVIS BERMAN: Could you make a stab at spelling that?

RICHARD HAAS: I can't. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: D. T. Adoro. Who was an Italian kid from New York [NY].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: One of my first forays into New York guys. And he said, "Yeah, you can paint anything you want, Haas, as long as you paint it with army paints." And I would go into the storeroom and I'd find a bucket of deep red, a bucket of deep green, and a few other colors. Just shabby colors. But I tried to jazz them up as best I could. And I painted this, I guess you would say, a Charles Demuth-like landscape of the base with the water towers. They had these beautiful water towers with red and white checkers on them, you know. And they would be sticking up every few feet throughout the mural. And then there were all these barracks, very geometrically made, and the sky was being slashed with geometric lines. And he kind of liked it, even though he had no interest in art. And some of the other officers and noncoms [non-commissioned soldiers] came in and thought it was pretty dismal and grim to paint the place, you know, that we had to live with. But in general it was accepted. They kind of liked it, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was interesting because you certainly met a basic requirement of the mural is that the subject has something to do with the situation where—

RICHARD HAAS: That is true.

AVIS BERMAN: Then, of course, it was painted on site for the place.

RICHARD HAAS: It was painted on site, and the subject was what you might see out the window if you stood on a high enough ground, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I mean, it was related to—I mean, it wasn't like plunk art, done somewhere else.

RICHARD HAAS: I didn't do bikinied girls on the beach, which was probably what they would really have liked.

AVIS BERMAN: That would've been much more appreciated.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah, yeah. But I didn't do that. No, I mean, that was probably far from me then.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess you weren't there long enough to find out its fate.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, I'm sure its fate was very clear. It probably went away shortly after I left, yes. Then they had to repaint the place. Army Regulation 606 says you will repaint everything the following yellow. Or whatever. You know? [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Did you take any pictures of it?

RICHARD HAAS: No. I didn't take pictures. I didn't have a camera until I moved to New York. I literally did not own a camera. I don't know why I had no interest in cameras or in photographs or what. But it was something that didn't register with me until much later.

AVIS BERMAN: And while you were there, didn't you go to the [Harry S.] Truman Library [and Museum, in Independence, MO]?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. That was one of my escapes. I could either escape to St. Louis [MO], or I could escape to Kansas City [MO]. So I went down to Kansas City, and that was when the library was starting those murals by Thomas Hart Benton [*Independence and the Opening of the West*, 1959-1961, Truman Library and Museum, Independence, MO]. And he wasn't there when I was there. But it was underway, and the scaffold was there. I could see the mural being painted. And actually, as I recall, Harry Truman met us on the steps. He would stand there in his three-piece suit if you were lucky enough to be there at that time, and I did meet him when I went up to it at that time.

AVIS BERMAN: When you say us, were there students or friends with you?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no, it was a couple of other guys from the military that I went there with, you know. I must have dragged them over there, as a matter of fact.

AVIS BERMAN: Now did Truman discourse on the murals?

RICHARD HAAS: I have a recall, but I don't want to say for sure that he did.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Because that might be my own fantasy that it was something he did, you know.

MS BERMAN: Yes. Right. So what did you think at the time of Thomas Hart Benton?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, he didn't register very deeply with me. I mean, I knew about him in some history class certainly. And I don't really think I liked what he was painting very much. I thought it was a pretty stiff piece. And it was in a hallway, a large entry foyer, as I recall, on a wall that was up above the doorway as you saw it. So it didn't really bowl me over in any regard at that time.

AVIS BERMAN: Had you been able to ever see Jefferson City [MO]? I mean, you know—

RICHARD HAAS: No, I didn't go there, and I still haven't ever seen it. As a matter of fact I did go to Jefferson City, but I didn't see the murals [*Social History of Missouri*, 1935 by Thomas Hart Benton in the Missouri State Capitol]. Nor did I know about them.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But I remember going to Jefferson City.

AVIS BERMAN: Later on in your career, when you were involved in murals, did your attitude toward Benton change?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: How do you look at Benton today?

RICHARD HAAS: I think he's still the best of the whole lot by far. And I think his

persona is so intense, his background is so complex and interesting, that especially in his earlier work, he really did, I think, move the whole mural movement in America up several notches that it might not have otherwise gone to. I think he had a—as everyone agrees—a very difficult personality that probably did more damage to him than anything else. And I do think he painted some pretty dreadful murals from time to time, especially later on down the road. But his early work is fantastic.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, the great murals in the '20s, wonderful.

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely. And, of course, later with my conversations with Charles and so on, I got much more interested in him.

AVIS BERMAN: I'll say for the tape—for the record—Charles Pollock. Now when you say the best of the whole lot, you mean—?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, as [John Steuart] Curry and [Grant] Wood are always connected to him. I really hadn't seen much of Grant Wood up to that point, and very little of Curry for that matter. And I hadn't seen the murals [*Tragic Prelude, Frontiersman, Conquistadors,* and *Kansas Pastoral*, 1937] of Curry in Topeka [KS at the Kansas State Capitol] then. I hadn't seen the Grant Wood that I later saw in Iowa [Iowa State University Library, c. 1930, Ames, IA] that I admired quite a lot. But I think they were much more restricted guys, and much more classical Regionalist guys than Benton. I mean, Benton after all had been to Paris [France], and he'd seen—what are you going to do after you've seen Paree, right? He was part of that whole post-war American crowd.

AVIS BERMAN: And also he had really grown up in Washington [D.C.]. I mean, you know, I always say that being a Benton in Missouri is like being a Cabot or a Lodge in Boston [MA]. He was not backwoods in the least.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. And he was a very big figure here in New York City [NY] for a long period of time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And spent his summers on Martha's Vineyard [MA] not the backwoods.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I don't know exactly what that was all about up there then. I know that both Charles and his brother did go there, I guess, every summer.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was certainly rural. But there were a lot of the intelligentsia that went there, not just Thomas Craven, not just—but there were a lot of people up there. It was like Wellfleet [MA], or someplace like that.

RICHARD HAAS: And he was married to this woman, this very intense Italian woman.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, Rita. Who was a great artist's wife and could sell anything and devoted herself to him. So she was a terrific helpmate of his.

RICHARD HAAS: She was definitely.

AVIS BERMAN: And a good businesswoman. And sort of often had to smooth things over when—

RICHARD HAAS: When he got himself in trouble with his mouth?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes.

RICHARD HAAS: As it were.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: You know, it's interesting that he's been dead for so long and they still use that almost as a thing against him. I mean, it's held back, I think, the regard for him in many ways, especially among the critical public.

AVIS BERMAN: But his writing is wonderful, his autobiography [*An Artist in America*, Thomas Hart Benton; New York, R.M. McBride & Co: 1937] and all that.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I guess, I haven't read much—

MS: BERMAN: Well, he was an alcoholic, too. And that was unlike someone, you know, that he spoke—

RICHARD HAAS: I mean, you know, I suppose of all of those guys the one that I kept coming back to the most is [Charles] Sheeler who - I really haven't investigated his life all that deeply either, but I certainly looked at a lot of his art. And, I think, he was just the most amazing artist in many ways from that whole period.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. He was wonderful.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And he certainly influenced me from time to time more than the others.

AVIS BERMAN: [Charles] Demuth as well, as you mentioned—I could see that as well.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, well, Demuth is a little more complicated for me. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, you have finished your tour of duty. And then you became a high school teacher at Lincoln High School in Milwaukee.

RICHARD HAAS: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And you were teaching kids. During this—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, that's when I learned a lot about the Black American experience.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Because it was about half black and half multiracial, I'd say. Whatever minority existed in Milwaukee at that time ended up in large numbers in Lincoln High because it was a center-city school. So I had a tremendous amount to learn about all kinds of things when I went there. Discipline was certainly one of them. And having just come out of the army, I thought I knew a little bit about it. But I knew nothing as opposed to what these kids demanded and required. You know, it was a mixed blessing. There were wonderful experiences and pretty awful stuff all combined.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you remember having an effect or encouraging any students or anything like that?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if any of these kids that I taught got something from me that maybe kept them going. I doubt it.

AVIS BERMAN: Was art just a requirement? Or everyone thought it would be a snap course?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't think it was a requirement. Maybe in—I taught seventh and eighth grade as well as ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth. I had the full run. And so for the younger kids, yes, it was a requirement; for the older kids it was a voluntary thing. And I did get occasionally some of the athletes who needed an easy mark. [They laugh.] So it was kind of fun because I was already a sports junkie to some extent. And the basketball team was very famous in that region. And I had two of the superstars in my class. I, of course, encouraged them as best I could, although they had almost zero talent [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Then while you were there—this is in 1960—you took summer classes, you took graduate classes. Were you trying to get a degree, or was it just—

RICHARD HAAS: I was trying to get a degree, a master's degree, because in art and art education that always meant you got more money and maybe a better job.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: That was part of my rationale. Plus it was just something to do when I was bored to death half the time anyway, especially being back in Milwaukee. Even though Milwaukee was an interesting enough city in some ways, and I was learning more about that other side of Milwaukee that I hadn't known when I grew up there. It was still a community that I was, I guess, you could say, outgrowing rather rapidly.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you painting or making prints on your own, in your own time?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. I had a basement studio at the house filled with stuff in this tiny little dark room, and they were kind of coming out of my ears and annoying my parents with the smell of the oil alone.

AVIS BERMAN: So you were living at home at this—

RICHARD HAAS: I was living at home for that two-year period, yes. Then that was another issue obviously, not so great [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Especially after college and the military.

RICHARD HAAS: College, the army, and so on, coming back and living at home. I was earning $4,000 a year. Or $4100, I think, that was the top pay then. And even then that was tight to have to live off that. So I was taking the easy route. I spent a lot of time away from home. I had free rein. My parents didn't hold me back on any level.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, you probably—

RICHARD HAAS: I had my own car. And so I would be hitting the bars at night and going to plays and musicals and operas and symphonies and ballets and everything that was—I was becoming a culture person as well.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you had Jack Tworkov. So why don't we—

RICHARD HAAS: Jack came in the summer; I guess it was '50—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, 1960.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, '60, I'm sorry.

AVIS BERMAN: I think '60.

RICHARD HAAS: Sixty, '61, was it? Probably summer of '61. Does that make sense?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I have 1960 here on the chronology. But it could be—

RICHARD HAAS: I guess, it might have been '61.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: That I'd have to double check.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: But he was like a real breath of fresh air coming through. I mean, bringing the news as it were. And I took to him, and I think he took to me. And I was one of the bright lights in his class of 15 or 20. And I started painting under his instruction on oil paper. Big broad brush directly from the figure. And I have some of those back there, too, that I did. And they became obviously [Willem] de Kooning-esque in their feel, if nothing else.

AVIS BERMAN: But it was helpful to you?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yeah, yeah. And we talked a lot, and he was just very informative. Such a different approach than what I had been getting, say, from the other teachers, you know, up 'til then.

AVIS BERMAN: The main differences being?

RICHARD HAAS: His whole attitude toward drawing, toward history, toward experimentation, etc. was just much broader and [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Do you think he gave you an idea of how to be an artist or how an artist was or lived?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if he really did that per se. But I was certainly getting more and more intrigued by the whole thing. And I was starting to come to New York on visits. I mean, I would take off on spring break and the winter break, I would take off with a couple of other guys who were interested in Broadway plays. We'd come to New York and stay at a cheap hotel about three blocks from here. And we would do the Broadway plays, and I would go off during the day to Tenth Street and start looking for those places I'd seen in the magazines. I'd go to the Cedar Bar because I'd heard about it. And I'd go to the museums. And some of those galleries on Fifty-seventh, the ones I could find. So I was getting my legs for what the art situation was really about here.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I'm sure you went to the [Museum of] Modern [Art, New York City, NY], you would've gone to the Whitney [Museum of American Art, New York City, NY].

RICHARD HAAS: The Modern, the Whitney. Of course the Whitney and the Modern were right there together.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. That was helpful.

RICHARD HAAS: Certainly the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, NY]. Though, even then it was overwhelming. The Guggenheim [Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, NY].

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was built by then, of course.

RICHARD HAAS: The Guggenheim was there. I went and saw it. That was an interesting experience because I had seen it underway in the drawings and the models beforehand. To see it fleshed out was interesting, yes. And it was a big controversial thing at that time. What about those hangings? Who was the director then?

AVIS BERMAN: James Johnson Sweeney?

RICHARD HAAS: Sweeney, yes. And he had this whole thing about how you present paintings, you know, by sticking them out from the wall on those pins or whatever he had because he didn't like those flat walls and so on. So I had to look at that, think about that, remember some of the stuff I'd heard about how it might be seen. And did I like it? Yes. I thought it was fabulous. It was the talk of the town, and I had felt connected to it. I know they're going to have a big retrospective of Wright this spring, though I'm sure I won't be invited to the opening ["Frank Lloyd Wright From Within Outward," 2009, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York City, NY]. Because even though I know the new director [Richard Armstrong], he won't remember; they never do. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: I think he's from Kansas City.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Well, he's another story [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Right. You came with Ted Dickerson.

RICHARD HAAS: [Edward] Ted Dickerson, who invented the Dickerson [Combination] Press, one copy of which I have in the other room, happened to have gone to UWM [University of Wisconsin-Madison], and Patricia Muschinski was his best friend in school. I didn't know Patty in Milwaukee. She graduated I think the year before I got there maybe. But anyway, we came to New York, stayed at her place, which was also Claes Oldenburg's—this other guy whom I knew nothing about—his place. And we set up the press at the Pratt Center [for Community Development, New York City] which was on Broadway and Tenth I think then. And of course, started to see a little bit of that. And it was interesting because—I don't know if I explained this, that [Barnett] Barney Newman was there when we were setting it up?

AVIS BERMAN: No.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, yes. I was helping Ted, you know, we're screwing it together and trying it and so on. And standing over with his monocle was this guy in a nice two- or three-piece suit. I thought he was a businessman. And he would be asking very intense questions about how it worked and what it was going to do and so on and so forth. And afterwards, when he left, I said, "Who was that guy?" She said, "Well, that's Barney Newman, the painter."

"Who is he?" You know. So I had looked into him, found out more about what he was about. Always thought that was interesting. I met him a few times later, but he had this strange demeanor [Laughs.] for an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, he was certainly in the dandiacal tradition.

RICHARD HAAS: He was definitely what [Clement] Greenberg used to call later the "pants presser group." [They laugh.] He and [Adolph] Gottlieb, a pants presser, too, as I recall [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: So this was I guess in '61 because I think by '62 you might have heard of Oldenburg by then possibly, but I'm not sure.

RICHARD HAAS: Not on that trip.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. But that's what I'm saying, it was probably before '60; so it would've been '61.

RICHARD HAAS: Definitely before I knew anything about him at all. Very little recall even of what I saw of his in her place.

AVIS BERMAN: And was Pat a painter?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, she was a painter. She had a lot of drawings around. She was actually earning the living then as a model for the Art Students League [New York City, NY].

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. And, anyway, you were there. You were making more friends or more contacts in New York.

RICHARD HAAS: More contacts. Some loose and not so loose contacts in New York, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: But you still really weren't quite ready yet.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, I was not even close to ready to make that big jump, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Was it something that you were longing for? Would you have liked to have stayed there?

RICHARD HAAS: I knew almost on first contact with the city that this was where I had to land somehow, somewhere, someday.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: I had no interest in the West Coast. A lot of my friends were going out to San Francisco [CA] at that time. I just really never got there, for whatever reason, didn't really have the intensity—once I had discovered New York—of thinking of going there as the alternate.

AVIS BERMAN: So you went to graduate school.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, then, when I decided I had to get out of teaching high school and get out of Milwaukee and get away from the whole family connection and so on, I decided to apply, and I applied primarily to Madison [University of Wisconsin] and to Minneapolis [University of Minnesota] because Jack Tworkov actually had suggested that to me, because he had been there, and he said I should write to Malcolm Myers, who was this friend of his up there. And that's kind of how I managed to apply to UW—I mean, UM—instead of to—And I got a scholarship to Madison that was better than the one that I was offered by Malcolm up in Minneapolis. But I just drove up there, spent a day talking to him, looking around the city, coming back, and sitting and saying, "Do I really want to go to Madison where I've been a thousand times? Or do I want to just escape?" So I said, "I think I'll take the offer, even though it's not as good a one, to go to Minneapolis." And it seemed like a more vital place to me at that time. More with it, as it were.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So this is the University of Minnesota.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were there for?

RICHARD HAAS: Four years almost—three and a half years, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: And were you concentrating on printmaking there?

RICHARD HAAS: No, that was the kind of entry. But I really I think became totally immersed in painting. I did both.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because Malcolm Myers was a graphics professor, correct?

RICHARD HAAS: Right. And so I was his assistant. So I kept my hand in printmaking. But I went away from etching for a while, even though that was his main thing. I did mostly woodcuts. Got pretty immersed in those woodcuts which—a lot of people who have looked at them since have said maybe that was where I should've stayed. But I don't know [Laughs.]. I mean, they, you know, they were intense. And I was liking it.

AVIS BERMAN: Were they expressionistic?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. Like the figures, you know, and the head. I called them the "Famous Heads" [series]. And the figures in the field. Really immersed with the California School.

AVIS BERMAN: So figure/ground?

RICHARD HAAS: Figure/ground, California School. Figure/ground. And the paintings were going exactly that way as well at that time.

AVIS BERMAN: You didn't go to San Francisco, but you took note of what was going on in the Bay Area.

RICHARD HAAS: Exactly. Yes, the Bay Area guys really influenced us, especially in the Midwest, a lot. And [Richard] Diebenkorn was probably the super-hero, and then the other guys were also there. And I was looking a lot of German Expressionism. I was looking a lot at [Edvard] Munch. I was looking, at all that stuff. And of course Minneapolis has just terrific collections of that stuff. They had all that Norwegian and Scandinavian influence, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: So I saw a lot of that. And I wrote about it because you had to write papers, because that was part of what you had to do at Minnesota. You had to get the equivalent of a master's degree in art history as well. So I wrote several papers.

AVIS BERMAN: Did that serve you well, to learn all that art history?

RICHARD HAAS: I think it was a very lucky—again, one of those accidental things that really, I think, was tremendously influential with me. I took a course in 18th century painting and history, art history, that got me into Piranesi and Canaletto and all that stuff. [Giovanni Battista] Tiepolo, the ceilings and so on. And we had a fabulous teacher at that, Hilton Thomas. He was a really major guy. And he would bring in original drawings, and he would sell them to us, drawings and prints. He would go to New York—I bought a couple of prints from him, I think at the time. Even then I was too stupid to—but they were cheap, and some students could buy an original—wasn't maybe not Tiepolo, but one of those Tiepolo-period drawings, for less than a hundred bucks—50 bucks, 60 bucks, 70 bucks. Prints for 25 to 50. That kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, absolutely.

RICHARD HAAS: They were just all over the place like that. And then this guy from Baltimore would come.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes! Ferdinand somebody. He's so well known because he used to go—I heard this—he went to Ohio. He went all over. He was based in Baltimore. His first name was Ferdinand Somebody. And he would travel around with these really good prints.

RICHARD HAAS: Original prints.

AVIS BERMAN: And sell them.

RICHARD HAAS: And I would buy from him. You know I bought a Cézanne restrike. I think I still have it here. I bought a little Picasso, which left me in my divorce, I think. I bought a couple of other School of Paris pieces. And I don't think I bought any of the more early—yes, I bought a [James] Ensor, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Yes. I will come up with that last name. But I know exactly who you're—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. He was a pretty important guy. The Midwest, let's face it, was very important to the history of printmaking in this country. And without that keeping the flame and torch burning, printmaking might have died as a professional artist thing.

AVIS BERMAN: He went to Oberlin [OH], and Oberlin got some. And Columbus [OH] and Cleveland [OH]. He went—so he made these trips.

RICHARD HAAS: And the schools and the museums.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Definitely.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think Gil Epstein—what's his name?—the print dealer here did some of that to this day almost.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, I don't know—

RICHARD HAAS: Epstein. Isn't that his name? He was—where John Szoke is now, he had a place there for years. And I know he travels around a lot to those small museums all over the country and sells them things today. Drawings and things.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I know several private print dealers who do that. Now also while you were in graduate school, is this how you—is that when Peter Busa was there?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, Peter came the same day as I did to Minneapolis [University of Minnesota, MN]. We walked into the office at the same time. He was checking in, driving from Provincetown [MA]. And I had just driven up from Milwaukee. And for some reason we converged right there at the office. And I remember he was there with sandals and this kind of torn suit. [They laugh.] And disheveled hair. And I said, "Who are you?" And he said, "I'm Peter Busa. I'm your new art teacher—painter—here." Painter-in-residence. I said, "Oh, well, I'm Richard Haas, and I'm one of the new graduate students here." "Oh, well, why don't we go have a cup of coffee and talk?" So I got to know him right away. And we became pretty close friends.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you take courses with him?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I took at least two courses with Peter. And really hung out with him probably more than I hung out with Malcolm or any of the other teachers there. Peter was just one of those guys that was always out and about. He was a New Yorker.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, I think he was pretty charismatic.

RICHARD HAAS: He was a pretty interesting guy, he really was. I mean, the stories about him are endless. And I experienced some of that myself. [They laugh.] So I can testify to a few things, yeah. But he was great. And he had this kind of very handsome Italian—southern Italian—kind of face. People said in his younger years he looked exactly like one of those famous movie stars, I can't remember, of that period. And he had many affairs and drove his wife completely to drink; I know that. And his kids, I think, were all a mess, as I recall. [They laugh.] But Peter was just somebody who really got me going in a lot of directions.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Now also you—this I would find interesting because I don't think we've discussed this before—is that James Rosenquist was also there.

RICHARD HAAS: Where I met James the first time is he came up to Malcolm's studio when I was assisting Malcolm. He was sitting in—he occupied my chair [Laughs.] because Malcolm always sat in the corner in his

rocker, you know, and there was always somebody sitting there. And Malcom was smoking his pipe, and there was always endless conversation. And then this young guy was there, and he was talking, and I came over, and he started talking about what he was doing. And he was there to visit Cameron Booth; Cam was this great old teacher of his, and he had to come back, and he'd been a student there. Left a couple of years earlier. Malcolm didn't really know him as a student very well. But certainly he had heard about him and knew Cam real well and talked to him about him. And Cam sent him over to do a print because he was interested because I think he was there, his mother was sick or something; he had a long stay there. And he wanted to do a print. So Malcolm said, well, do it here in my studio. Have my assistant help you, and blah blah blah.

So I did. I helped him, and we started to talk. And even then—I've talked to him many times since, not a lot, but you know. Especially in the early years when I came to New York, I saw him more because his studio was around the corner. And we'd see each other at Fanelli's [New York City, NY]. But he had this way of being almost, you know, talking in this kind of surrealist language. You know, everything was kind of clipped, but it was like a story, he was telling stories. And he was saying—one of his stories he told then, he said, there's this collector, he's an interesting guy. He's got a bunch—a fleet of taxicabs. His name is [Robert] Bob Scull. And me and the other guys, we all got to know him. And we were invited over to his apartment one night to see him. So we're all there sitting around. He said it's me and this guy—and they're named like [Roy] Lichtenstein and all these other guys, none of whom I would have known at the time. And he said, suddenly the doorbell rings, and Scull gets up, and he goes to the door. He opens it up, and there stands de Kooning. [They laugh.] Of course, everybody, you know, de Kooning, right? And Scull says, "This isn't Abstract Expressionist night, Will. This is for the new guys." And he slams the door. And all these guys look at each other. He slammed the door on de Kooning! [They laugh.] He couldn't get over that.

AVIS BERMAN: Nobody could, I'm sure. Slamming it on God.

RICHARD HAAS: Right. But Scull was apparently somebody who compartmentalized everything. He was kind of wiping his hands off the AE [Abstract Expressionist] guys whom he owned a lot of. Now he's going with the new guys.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly. Well, what was this print that Rosenquist—

RICHARD HAAS: Okay. He did a little print. I think it's known—

AVIS BERMAN: A little one!

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. It's his first print. It's in the catalogue raisonné. It's in there on the first page. It was this big.

AVIS BERMAN: What would you say, about three by three?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, three by four. Now, maybe as little—three by five maybe.

AVIS BERMAN: Three by five inches.

RICHARD HAAS: And I went with him to the newspaper in town, the *Minneapolis* [*Star*] *Tribune*, and we went through all of these plates, and he finally saw the plate he liked. And it had a basketball player on it with this arm. And he said, "Ah! This is what I want." I said, "Oh, that one? [Laughs.] You sure you don't want to take some more with you?" [They laugh.] That kind of thing. He said, "No, no, no. This is what I want." Okay. So we go back, and he draws a line around it. You know, I was doing a lot of drypoint then, you know, it was kind of asked, what is that? I said, "Well, you know, you can make a mark real quick just like with scratching into it." And he said, "Oh, well, you draw an outline of the basketball player's arm like this." And he said, "Now I want to get rid of everything else." And I said, "Oh, well, that means we have to scrape it." And he said, "Okay. Well, let's scrape it." I would scrape and then burnish everything but this square in the center that he had that indicated for the arm.

Then he said, "Well now, I want to put a lot of hair around that." Oh, okay. "Well, we should put a ground on it, and then you can draw the hairs in." He said, "All right." So I showed him how to put a ground on it, and he drew all the hairs. And then I did it, and came back, and proofed it and so on. And now he had this hairy square. [Laughs.] And I proofed it a few other times and had him make some more adjustments and get the burnishing right and so on. And then it was done. I said, "Well, now do you want me to edition it?" Or Malcolm asked him, "Do you want me to edition this?" He said, "You know, Richard—" and the other guy—I can't remember his name, "—they can edition it for you." He said, "No, no. I don't think so. I talked to a guy in New York, and he said I should send it to Paris [France]. That's where they edition it." Oh. And Malcolm said, "Well, Paris, huh?" [They laugh.] So he said, "But I have to have a box." So then we spent about several days making this box with lining in it and inserting this piece in the box. So it was just a very funny experience. And then there were some conversations that we had back and forth during that time that were interesting.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: And he talked about what he did, and I started—I actually went with him over to Cameron Booth's place one time, where the back and forth was getting going and talking about all this stuff. And he showed pictures to Cameron of his work. And I look at this and like what's this all about? And he mentioned that the company across the river, literally, from the school, where he worked doing those first big signs. And so he said, "You ought to go over there." I had said that he took me over there. He didn't. He just sent me over there. And I went over, and I saw them doing all these paintings on billboards. And also they had all this billboard material because that's how they would put it up, right? And I started rummaging through all that stuff and started picking out all these materials because it was like throwaway material. And that became what I used for making collage paintings for a couple of years after that.

AVIS BERMAN: When you say material, you mean, color, sheets of color?

RICHARD HAAS: Sheets of color. Like a Coca-Cola ad would produce maybe a dozen sheets of big red. And then a green pea ad would have green and yellow. Or corn.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Corn yellow and pea green, you know, red. And I just went bananas.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, well, those are the Pop Art colors, of course.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. But I wasn't doing Pop.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no.

RICHARD HAAS: I was doing my version of Abstract Expressionism now using collage.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And using a different kind of palette.

RICHARD HAAS: But they became very linear and crisp, and that started to move me toward the whole interest in what we call "hard edge" painting, in effect.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's fascinating with Rosenquist with these enormous paintings, that he was making a microscopic print. It's such a contrast.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah. I don't know where he was coming from and how he decided to do that and certainly in what he did later as a printmaker.

AVIS BERMAN: Certainly.

RICHARD HAAS: There's no connection whatsoever to me.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. He went bigger—that was something more united with what he did.

RICHARD HAAS: I think it—if you want to look at all of his work even in those early years especially, which I think is his most interesting period—he was always a proto-Surrealist. And that was a proto-Surrealist object that he was working on. It was really an object. And he was into object-making on a big scale. I mean, I think he took off from [Robert] Rauschenberg on that level.

AVIS BERMAN: And it's very interesting also—well, you know, he was from North Dakota.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Like Clyfford Still. But I find it very typical and touching that he came back to see Cameron Booth because later on, when he went to the Art Students League [of New York], his instructor was Will Barnet. And he always goes to all of Will's shows. He goes to Will's birthday. He's extremely loyal and close.

RICHARD HAAS: I didn't see him at the last party for Will.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe he was—if he's not in Florida, he always—he comes to things.

RICHARD HAAS: I see. Hah!

AVIS BERMAN: All the time. He's intensely loyal and grateful to Will.

RICHARD HAAS: He certainly was loyal and grateful to Cameron Booth, who hasn't been given a lot of attention

really. There was a show called "Got Cow? [Cattle in American Art,

1820-2000, 2006] up at the Hudson River [Museum, Yonkers, NY] that I was sort of talking to the curators about. And I said, "You've got to get some of those paintings by Cameron Booth of cows because his last period was cow paintings." And they just couldn't get behind that at all.

AVIS BERMAN: Because they didn't know the name.

RICHARD HAAS: And I called Rosenquist's studio trying to get his ad—some idea where it is. [Telephone rings.] But I didn't get—[Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: Now through Peter Busa you went to Provincetown [MA] for the first time. Is that correct?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, that was summer of '62, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, that's correct.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Because, I guess, I became one of Peter's more favored people. And Peter, as I described and, I think, he probably hated me for it when he read it in my book, that book—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, *An Architecture of Illusion* [Richard Haas; New York, Rizzoli: 1981.]

RICHARD HAAS: I described it as trying to pick up the pieces after Peter as he made a mess of things going across the country. Which I think was not totally inaccurate. But it was not something he would like to have had me say. [They laugh.] It should be an essay as a kind of a history of Peter a little bit. Because I did go through a lot of his past and a lot of interesting experiences along the way as we kind of move across the country. We stopped in Pittsburgh and stayed with his brother, so I saw his roots in Pittsburgh. We stopped here in New York and stayed at some flea-bitten place; I don't remember where it was. And we went to the Cedar Bar and saw who was hanging out in the middle of summer there, you know. The leftovers, as it were. Which included [Ruth] Ruthie Kligman and included what's her name who started the school on Eighth Street [New York Studio School, New York City, NY]?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Mercedes Matter.

RICHARD HAAS: Mercedes Matter and Landes Lewitin and two or three other people like that. And so, you know, interesting conversations were had with all those people. I was the fly on the wall through all of that. And even going over with Ruthie Kligman and Peter to Franz Kline's studio, which she was then living in postmortem.

AVIS BERMAN: He must have just—I was going to say, because he had died in what, about May '62 or so?

RICHARD HAAS: he probably died a month or two earlier, three months earlier.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And how and why she was staying there, I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: I think, she still has that studio.

RICHARD HAAS: Is that right?

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, she has a studio on 14th Street.

RICHARD HAAS: That would be it.

AVIS BERMAN: So maybe she just took it over.

RICHARD HAAS: Wow. That's amazing. Well, I haven't seen her since. Or maybe once, I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. So you saw Franz—essentially you saw Franz Kline's studio.

RICHARD HAAS: Essentially I saw Franz Kline's studio, yes. With the ghost of Franz Kline being very evident. Yes. And—

AVIS BERMAN: Because his stuff would have been in there probably.

RICHARD HAAS: Pardon? His stuff was—I didn't remember seeing any paintings there. but I saw some of that stuff he did on the walls. You know, he did paintings on the walls, moving right past the paintings, I guess.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And making those incredible black marks on the walls. And there were ghosts of paintings around. So that was kind of interesting, to stare at that as I was sitting there having beers. And I was really interested in Franz Kline before then as well. And he had been somebody I was, some said, imitating in my figurative work.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah, it's very clear if you look at one of those books I have there.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But I'm just thinking about Franz Kline's early figurative work, too.

RICHARD HAAS: No, it wasn't his early figurative work, although I knew that, too. It was more the abstract work, but I was sort designing my concepts and shapes based on that and even using the phonebook drawings with the black ink.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: You know.

AVIS BERMAN: I see.

RICHARD HAAS: That kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, with putting a little more gestures here and there to indicate a figure.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, the heads—and, I mean, I could trace that just very clearly—came through that process. I would take a photograph of, say, whether it was [Claude] Monet or [Vincent] van Gogh, and I would start with the actual rendition of the head. And then I would gradually—and I was doing it all with Chinese brush and ink. And then I would tear out pieces of it and collage it until I got it into a roughly abstract shape. That was mighty like Kline.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Right. And so the head was a point of departure, and they never eventually looked like Monet or anything like that.

RICHARD HAAS: No. I mean, it's more clearly seen in my catalogue raisonné of prints. There were some reproductions in there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. So anyway, so on - you went to Provincetown and after New York.

RICHARD HAAS: And, yes, we somehow got to Provincetown. [They laugh.] Barely. Because we had to stop in New Rochelle [NY] on the way. The car died.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. [Laughs.]

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, as we left New York, this car that we'd gotten from Sam Saliterman, which was a beat-up old Buick, and he got it probably for a hundred dollars. And it just died. It died about a mile and a half from where I now live, though I didn't know it at the time. And so it was towed then over to New Rochelle and to the garage of his brother-in-law—no, his wife's brother-in-law. And we spent two and a half days or more—or three days—in New Rochelle tearing this motor apart. Don't ask me why. But it was like an attempt to do home mechanics because the brother-in-law imagined himself as a mechanic even though he was an announcer for NBC radio [National Broadcast Company] and was living in one of these bigger houses in the nice part of New Rochelle. I had no idea where I was. But finally we couldn't put it back together. We put all the loose pieces in the trunk. We rolled it down the driveway. We went to downtown New Rochelle, bought another car identical to it, a blue '52 Buick, and that guy towed away the other car and gave us this car. Unbeknownst to us, it was in about the same shape as the one we had just torn apart.

So then we pile all the stuff [Laughs.] back in the car. We had a lot of paintings we got from another circumstance here in New York. It was what we call a Peter-type circumstance. And we piled all of these things back on the roof as well as into the trunk, and all our stuff, and started heading up the road again toward Provincetown. And then a hurricane was coming up the coast and went along the Connecticut coast. And the car overheated. And as the car would overheat, we'd slow down, and the water and the heat and the rain kept cooling it. And of course all the paintings on the top, who could say what was happening to them? Even though we had a loose tarp over them. But we made it all the way to Provincetown to almost within a block or two of his house when it finally died. And then [Laughs.] carted these things into his house where the roof was leaking and everything was kind of damp and in bad condition. And that's where I spent the next two months helping put

that back together.

AVIS BERMAN: And did you paint? Or did you work?

RICHARD HAAS: I did a little bit of that. I was discovering junk, and I was, of course, enamored at that time with some of those early Rauschenberg collages. Collage was my thing. That was what I was doing back in Minneapolis. And so I would do things out in the garage as I found elements and lay them out on the floor. And then nail them together, set them up. But none of that got kept. You know, I left it all there. But I—

AVIS BERMAN: And, I guess, Hans Hofmann had stopped teaching just by the time—

RICHARD HAAS: He was there, but I saw him but once, I think. And his school was being run by Leo Manso I think at that time, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because I think—

RICHARD HAAS: I went by there once just to look at it.

AVIS BERMAN: Because I think just really about that time he had finally decided he wasn't going to—

RICHARD HAAS: He wasn't teaching, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, he really was just going to paint.

RICHARD HAAS: Because, I mean, Peter had been involved with that school, too. I think he had taught for him once or assisted him or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Knew him certainly.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Oh, and also if you were doing collage, I don't know if you sought him out or you met, but [Robert] Motherwell would have been—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, he was next door to Peter—or two doors down. And, yes, we went over to Motherwell to visit one time, had lunch, I mean, through Peter. And, of course, that's where I met David Smith who was there staying with them. [Helen] Frankenthaler was living with Motherwell at the time. [Kenneth] Ken Noland was also there, although I didn't know who he was. But I remember primarily Smith at that time. And I remember that Motherwell invited me to go look at his studio where he was doing all these one mark on the page kind of paintings, that were laid out all the way across the studio. I remember those. And I've seen those in shows since. But I did sit there with—Smith was in the living room, and he was showing his photographs from where he had just come from, Voltri [Italy] and passing them around. And I to this day think that was a pretty transforming experience in terms of sculpture. I'd never seen anything like it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, absolutely. I would've guessed it would've been Motherwell collages. But, I guess, you were familiar with them already.

RICHARD HAAS: To some extent, yes. No, I certainly—The early work, yes. But, I mean, that I hadn't seen much of. But he was throwing gauloises, you know, the cigarette wrappers. And then doing a quick mark. Did that influence me? Yes. I think I did some things like that afterwards when I got back to Minneapolis.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, you were still a graduate student. So people probably accepted you as a student; you weren't competition, shall we say. So it was probably fairly open.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I was not competition. I was a nobody, period.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were helping Peter, so—

RICHARD HAAS: And I was helping Peter. And I was just this wide-eyed, interested guy who sat around taking it in. And they were nice. They didn't treat me like dirt or anything. If I asked what I thought was an intelligent question to David Smith, he would answer it. [They laugh.] He might have wondered, what the hell is this guy doing here talking to me. But anyway, that's what he was about.

AVIS BERMAN: How about Rothko? Was he around?

RICHARD HAAS: I never met Rothko. I saw him at that time, but I never met him.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: He was a presence.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Why don't we just do your first marriage? Cynthia Louise Dickman. And you met her, I guess, around '62 or '63?

RICHARD HAAS: I met her in Minneapolis, I guess within a year of when I got up there, maybe less than a year, through a friend of mine whose name is—what was his name now? He was a Hawaiian artist [Roger Crowell]. I'll remember it. But I hung out with him and his wife in their house. He knew Cindy who—there was a party that we all went to, and he introduced me to her. And she was a very engaging and interesting Norwegian girl primarily. She had a past already, and she was only 20 or 21 when I met her. I think she was just 21, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Was she a college student?

RICHARD HAAS: No. She was not a college student. Her father had been a politician and introduced the vice president—what's his name?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Hubert Humphrey?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, he started Hubert Humphrey in politics.

AVIS BERMAN: This is Mr. Dickman.

RICHARD HAAS: Mr. Dickman had gotten—was the head of the Democratic Farmer Labor Party in Minneapolis. And he found this young guy named Hubert Humphrey and got him elected mayor. Then he died, Dickman died. And there was a park that Hubert Humphrey named after him. So that was her father. Her mother then remarried after several years. She had two kids, her younger brother and her. Her mother remarried Olmsted of that family, and his name was John Olmsted. And he was a mathematician at the university [University of Minnesota]. And he had several kids because—and he had been married to a Mercer, who was—what's her name?—the famous Mercer's sister.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Lucy Mercer, [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt's secretary.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, that was her sister. She was dead already. I didn't meet her. But I met her other sister because we stayed with her up in Poughkeepsie at Vassar [College, Poughkeepsie, NY]. Anyway, that's just a side thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But, you know. So she had come from this rather interesting background. But she was totally messed up about all of it because she had really been raised by her mother who was a really strict—had a strict kind of Norwegian background, and didn't really know how to raise her kids in that environment. But John Olmsted, who had also had a difficult time raising kids because both them had lost their spouses young with all these kids, and were trying to get this dysfunctional family together somehow. [Laughs.] And it wasn't really working too well apparently.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, the Brady Bunch meets Lake Woebegone Norwegian bachelors? [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: I have no idea. Long before that time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: Anyway, Cindy Lou really had, because of the way she grew up, had a lot of problems. And the other thing is that as a young kid she had fallen off of a railroad trestle and hit herself on the head. And that's probably what precipitated her becoming an epileptic.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, for sure.

RICHARD HAAS: So epilepsy became a big thing in her life.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's very difficult.

RICHARD HAAS: It dominated. She was already taking medicine when I met her, but it was under control, and it wasn't something I knew anything about. But it got much worse later.

AVIS BERMAN: It always gets—unfortunately.

RICHARD HAAS: It just keeps growing worse and worse?

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: It was horrible, yes. And it ultimately killed her. And it leads to all kinds of emotional problems that you just can't even get your hands around. And of course she couldn't drive, and had terrific up and down weight problems that were just uncontrollable. And all kinds of emotional problems that were uncontrollable. And it goes on and on and on. She finally ended up almost as a ward of the state after we had split.

AVIS BERMAN: It's almost like Leonard Woolf marrying Virginia [Woolf] and not knowing about—

RICHARD HAAS: What happened there? [Laughs.] I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, she was mentally ill, Virginia Woolf, and always subject to real depressions. And he didn't know that she had had all of this until after they were married, and she had her first mental breakdown. And they sort of said to him, "Oh, didn't you know Virginia's mad?" And he had to spend years and years caring for her. And she did commit suicide eventually because he wasn't around.

RICHARD HAAS: I guess, I've repressed most of those horrendous experiences, but they were pretty ongoing. And yet she was very bright, and she was very engaging and very open and interested and interesting. And all those things.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, who knows what she would've been like had she not had the illness?

RICHARD HAAS: That's true.

AVIS BERMAN: That's what's very sad. You don't really even know the person she might have been.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I had glimpses of it, I guess I could say, and that's probably why we somehow got together in this dysfunctional arrangement [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Were you still a practicing Catholic? Or had you been questioning it?

RICHARD HAAS: No. I left Catholicism in gradual stages, probably beginning even when I was in college but then it was hidden. And by the time I left Milwaukee, it just dropped off the face of the earth pretty much. I had made my decision, and that was it.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that something—

RICHARD HAAS: But I still hiding it from my family to some extent.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Until I got married, and then it was very clear. We were getting married in a Unitarian Church. We went to the Catholic priest in the university, and that was a bad day. And I knew it was over. I just had to figure out how I was going to deal with the family. And letters were passed between us and so on.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. You were in your late '20s. You were no longer a—

RICHARD HAAS: I was in my mid-'30s, I guess, when I went there.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I'm looking—I'm thinking 1963 you were 27.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, in '63, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: When you were married.

RICHARD HAAS: When I was married, yes. And I hadn't really tidied up my life vis-à-vis my

family at all. So there was tension there. And my mother was alive then, and she was much more religious than my father even, though he was religious enough certainly. But she was one of those obsessively religious people who went to church every day in her later life.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And your brother had been ordained a priest by then.

RICHARD HAAS: And my brother was a priest, and he was obviously very—though my

relationship with my brother was always very easy and continues to this day to be the easiest of all my relationships. And we talk more openly about stuff than with anyone else in the family really.

AVIS BERMAN: And I see you went to Mexico for your honeymoon.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. That's because John Olmsted had one of those grants that took him

down there to do who knows what. And so they put us up, interestingly enough, in a hotel that we're going to go in a couple of weeks to.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: [Laughs.] Because for whatever reason, that hotel has been redone. It's now

a fancy hotel. And at that time it was considered one of the better hotels in the Pink Zone. So we went there and stayed there.

AVIS BERMAN: Zona Rosa.

RICHARD HAAS: Zona Rosa.

AVIS BERMAN: So you went to Mexico City.

RICHARD HAAS: We went to Mexico City, which was a quite lovely, wonderful, exotic, incredible experience at that time. And Mexico City was probably in its prime then before it had become this monster that it became later, as I kept seeing it later. It was beautiful. And it was sunny, and it was bright, and we went off to see the ruins around Mexico City. We didn't travel much out of that area, but we did see a lot in that belt.

AVIS BERMAN: So you would've seen Teotihuacán?

RICHARD HAAS: Teotihuacán. Oaxaca—no, we didn't go to Oaxaca. We went to

Cuernavaca. Those were the two out-of-town visits we made, I think. Maybe Taxco. I think we went to Taxco. Yes, we did go to Taxco. So those were the—they were the only other excursions. Down to Taxco and then up to Teotihuacán. It was harder traveling. The roads were pretty bad then. But what did I get out of all that? I mean, I don't know [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: I assume, whether you liked it or not because this wasn't

what you were interested in, you couldn't have been there without seeing—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I was into the early pre-Columbian stuff because they had a museum.

AVIS BERMAN: The archaeology museum [The National Museum of Anthropology, Mexico City, Mexico].

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Not the new one, the old one, which was in the Zócalo area. But it was pretty intense to see all that stuff, knowing nothing about it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you would've seen those "Los Tres Grandes," too, of course.

RICHARD HAAS: I saw a lot of the [Diego] Riveras . A lot of Rivera.

AVIS BERMAN: [José Clemente] Orozco.

RICHARD HAAS: I saw—yes, in the what do you call it?

AVIS BERMAN: The Palacio de las Artes [Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico].

RICHARD HAAS: Right, right. I saw what was there. And didn't always sort it all out. Went to the university [National Autonomous University of Mexico, Mexico City, Mexico] that was new and fresh and wonderful. Saw that big mosaic by [Juan] O'Gorman. Went down to Cuernavaca and saw the Riveras there. And, yeah, it was a first exposure of any sort.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess you saw [David Alfaro] Siqueiros.

RICHARD HAAS: I did see a couple of Siqueiros, too, up at the palace on the hill.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: There was another one, I think, on the street that I saw. And they were just building the one, you know, that—what is that one that has the three-dimensional mosaics?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, that's near the government—it's a government building.

RICHARD HAAS: Went to see—saw those. And it was all like so bright and so fresh and so utterly different from North American—Midwestern especially—kind of stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: But were you—could you relate it to some of the roots of the abstract artists at all?

RICHARD HAAS: No. [They laugh.] In a word. I didn't make that connection really. I learned later how it all connects. But, no, it fitted into its own place, made total sense in this environment that I saw it in, down there first. And probably it stays that way for me in many ways in my head. When I saw the roots—I mean, the extension of it like in San Francisco [CA] at Coit Tower [murals depicting "Aspects of California Life," 1934] and all that sort of thing—it seems less at home in those environments than it did down there. And I think that is something that has to be said about that kind of work. It does really relate to a temperate zone, indoor-outdoor kind of culture that needs and relates to very bright and almost overwhelmingly dominant kinds of images in and outside of buildings. And that's the kind of architecture that happens to happen more in those areas than not.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Of course.

RICHARD HAAS: The Europeans never really managed to do it as well as they moved north, for some reason [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: True. Well, obviously this light is—

RICHARD HAAS: It's also the weather, I mean, let's face it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay, I think this is a good place to quit for today. So thank you very much.

[END OF TRACK 1.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Richard Haas on January 25, 2009, for the Archives of American Art and the GSA Oral History Project.

When we left off last time, it was about 1964, and you had been to Mexico. You were hired as an assistant professor at Michigan State University [East Lansing, MI]. And, I think, at that point Charles Pollock was an influence on you?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Charles was one of the professors there, and, you know, probably the grand old man at that time. He had a lot of influence at that time also in getting a lot of his friends, through Clement Greenberg, a lot of artists to come to Michigan State. So it was quite a vital place for that period. An almost - an accidental good fortune for me to meet them.

AVIS BERMAN: Now did he have an aura as an artist in his own right? Or was it because he was Jackson Pollock's brother?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I would say Charles probably was not the kind of person that would ever be seen to have had an aura. He was a really humble guy and a somewhat shy individual in many ways. But he had a presence, and he had a very strong kind of opinion about just about everything. And it was that he—when he came in the room, things usually kind of go silent and wait for Charles to say something. That was the way it was around there when he was holding forth.

AVIS BERMAN: And so he was respected as an artist?

RICHARD HAAS: He was respected definitely as an artist. And you can't help but think that there's always been that connection. Although I think Charles fought it much of his life from the few things he said about it. And he said very little about it, by the way. But also what I read about Charles and how he changed his name at one point so that he wouldn't be connected to or confused with his brother.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Yes, and some of the family went to McCoy—there's Jason McCoy and all of that family branch.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. But Charles called himself Charles Pima, which I think had something to do with an Indian name based on the Indians that lived out in the Southwest. But I just enjoyed Charles on so many levels. And Sylvia also was a very strong-willed person, and she became very friendly with my wife, Cynthia. So we would be invited out to their kind of ritualistic four-to-five-o'clock cocktail hour, which happened at least twice a week.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that because things were kind of bleak there in East Lansing?

RICHARD HAAS: I think Lansing was one of the more bleak places I spent time in my life at. [They laugh.] And the weather was not much help either. And it was a time when there wasn't a lot of money around. And the first place we lived at was this really quite beat-up little bungalow, and I had a Ford that kept breaking down, as I remember. And occasionally I had to have it fixed in the backyard by this Mexican guy. But then I got a house almost across the street from the art building on campus, and that made things just a little more interesting. And then I could even entertain to some extent.

AVIS BERMAN: Now it was Charles and these other people that you met there—like, let's say, Tom Wallace and Robert Cronin. Now how was this influencing your art, if at all? How was your art developing at the time?

RICHARD HAAS: All right. When I arrived there, of course, I had come out of Minnesota where I had almost at the very end of my time at Minnesota achieved kind of a major success. I won the top prize at the Walker Art Center [Minneapolis, MN] for their biennial. I had already left Minnesota at that time. But that got everyone's attention at Michigan State that I was this artist who they had hired as an unknown person, upon the recommendation of Walter Quirt, who was my teacher at Minnesota. And then suddenly I was this artist who was a prize-winner. I think I started to change almost immediately upon arriving. A move is always a break. And I threw away all of my collage materials. And I started to use a lot of tape and paint these very geometric paintings utilizing very strong color. Of course, the influence at that time in terms of color was [Josef] Albers, and we all looked at Albers and some of the other sort of color theory books. And I was also beginning to be influenced by Ken Noland and some of the other Color-Field painters.

AVIS BERMAN: And was that through books, or were you seeing them somewhere at—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, certainly magazines were always our main source of instant information. But there were some exhibitions I had gotten to, both in Chicago and also at Detroit [MI]. There were a couple of galleries in Detroit that were showing this stuff. The Detroit Art Institute [Detroit Institute of Arts], I don't think actually had any shows of them. But there were some lectures I attended there—like one of them was actually by Clement Greenberg—and I went down there with my friends: Tom Wallace was one of them, and I think Charles also came. And we all after the talk were invited across the street to a bar with Clem, as it were, and could sit there in his presence and listen to the chatter.

AVIS BERMAN: When you were looking at the Color-Field painting, did that also change—I mean, besides the taping—were you doing stripes or shapes?

RICHARD HAAS: I was working on shaped canvas a lot. I wasn't necessarily ever into what I

would call the stripes per se. But there certainly were some of those in these more complex paintings that I started to do at that time. And I also started a series of prints again, using wood as I had at [University of Minnesota]. But they were the figure and the portrait, facial portraits of famous people was my subject matter. When I got to Michigan State, I would cut up the plywood pieces into shapes and then reassemble them as these kind of echoes of my painting in color field.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because I think before the paintings and the prints were a little

bit bifurcated, and here they're beginning to coalesce, is that correct?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if I'd describe it that way exactly [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I just meant the subject—the theme and the subject.

RICHARD HAAS: I know what you're alluding to. Well, there were times when the painting

and the prints came together; and then there were other times where they went apart again. Yeah, at this time I was pretty well-focused totally on those paintings and prints of the geometric and shaped-canvas variety.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But it was very shortly after that that I started what I call the "quiet

closet life of making my Boxes."

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, I think those Boxes were—maybe at the time your

real art—but not that the others weren't—but the development that might take you the farthest.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah. I don't know why I never managed to completely understand why there was always that dichotomy in my work. But a lot of it had to do with the fact that I was a real bookworm, and I was always going to the library. And there were libraries, fortunately, in Lansing that I could get to—both at the university and at the state library, which was excellent, by the way. Where I could start to kind of do that open bookshelf, deep search that I always enjoyed. And I found, for instance, *The Banquet Years* [Roger Shattuck; New York, Harcourt, Brace: 1958].

AVIS BERMAN: Roger Shattuck.

RICHARD HAAS: Roger Shattuck, right. And *The* [*A*] *Moveable Feast* [Ernest

Hemingway; New York, Scribner: 1964], of course. And various other books that intrigued me about that period in French history, early 20th century French—Parisian—art history. And I had to do something about it. So then I started to make drawings and then eventually make these very elaborate interior Boxes that would try to capture a moment of that history.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you made one on Gertrude Stein.

RICHARD HAAS: I did [Guillaume] Apollinaire in his bedroom, too. I got into

[Henri] Matisse a lot, especially his cut-out pieces, because there was a lot of talk amongst the artists who came to Michigan State—Jack Bush, Piero Dorazio, even—I don't remember Newman saying anything about it. But Matisse's cutout period was a very exciting period for a lot of these artists. And I began to look pretty intently at that aspect of Matisse.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, right. And those prints you were making sounded as if they—

RICHARD HAAS: They were part of that, sure. Yes. And then also I would get to Chicago

where there were these wonderful Matisse paintings, especially that very large bathing scene[*Bathers by a River*, 1909, 1913, and 1916] that they own. And that really intrigued me. And, I think, I even made a print or two based on that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I think it's *The Bather*s, the Matisse *Bathers*.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it's a terrific painting. And some of these artists who had never been to Chicago would come back talking—having just been there, saying how incredibly amazing that painting was. So I had to get to see it right away.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But then you also went back to things that you knew

in American architecture like Wright—Frank Lloyd Wright—and [Louis] Sullivan and all.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, there was a funny connection to East Lansing and Frank Lloyd

Wright, in that the chairman of the art department there had a Frank Lloyd Wright house [Erling Brauner House, 1948, Okemos, MI]. His name was—can't remember it now. But anyway—Erling Brauner, that was his name. And there was also Alma Goetsch and Katherine Winckler, and they had the Goetsch-Winckler House [1939] which was out in Okemos. That was one of the most famous houses of the '30s by Wright. So he had a presence there in Michigan. And I having had my background with Wright, of course, intrigued them. And I was invited to a lot of their places as well for either supper and/or cocktails, etc.

AVIS BERMAN: Who was seeing these Boxes?

RICHARD HAAS: Who was seeing these Boxes? Well, the first commission was by Angelo

Ippolito because Angelo was a teacher there, and we got along very well, he and I. And he was a very lively guy, and I liked him. And he was another connection to New York. And I would latch onto almost anyone who was a New York connection. Obviously my eyeballs were set here by then. But Angelo said he wanted to first of all

commission me to do his family, a family portrait. And so I went out to his house in Okemos and did this portrait where he, his wife, and their kids were sitting in the foreground, and there was a verandah that opened out to a garden in the background, and I lit it and so on. And that was one of the Boxes that got me going. I was studying *The Arnolfini Wedding* [1434], and I did a box about that.

I was looking a lot at [Jan] Vermeer and studying a lot about Vermeer's interiors. And I did a

box about Vermeer. And so I think Angelo's portrait was a little bit about capturing that kind of interior. Then I did *Matisse in Nice* [1966-1967]. He said he wanted me to do a box about Matisse. So I did that for him. So he commissioned me for a a few hundred dollars, to do these Boxes which was terrific of him. And he also then arranged for a trip to go back out to Provincetown. I had been there, of course, with Peter Busa a couple of years earlier—maybe four years earlier. So I did go out with Angelo to Provincetown. And that reconnected me to the whole Eastern and New York art scene.

AVIS BERMAN: And they were shown in Provincetown?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Angelo had a little connection to the HCE Gallery [Provincetown, MA] which I can't remember the name of the individual who ran it. But he was kind of a fixture in the Provincetown area. Showed most of the artists who were still there. And set up this little show which was quite crude and primitive the way we set it up. And I had my exhibition ["Richard Haas," 1967]. Nothing sold. But a lot of people saw it. And there was some interest there. And then also the [Donald and Florence] Morrises always came to East Lansing because they were friendly with some of the people there. And they saw the Boxes, and they got very excited, and they took some of them to their gallery [Donald Morris Gallery] in Detroit [MI]. So I was getting them out in little quiet ways.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Were there ever any reviews?

RICHARD HAAS: No. Nothing.

AVIS BERMAN: Were they ever shown again later on in your career?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yes. I mean, I showed them certainly when I got to New York in several places, and there was a lot of interest in them here. But in Michigan State it was more this kind of little touches of stuff here and there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, right. How long did you continue making the Boxes?

RICHARD HAAS: I think I continued to make them for the first two years I was in New York, from '68—'69 and '70. And it fell off somewhere around 1970-ish, when I got much more involved in the prints and the architecture as such. I mean, the last Boxes were boxes of the streets of SoHo [NY] and the areas around SoHo. And that led to my first exhibition actually in New York as part of my first exhibition was the Boxes. Or first solo exhibition ["Richard Haas," 1972, Hundred Acres Gallery, New York City, NY]. I was in group shows both with Boxes and with other things up until then.

AVIS BERMAN: And do you have the Boxes? I mean, were you able to preserve them?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, there are quite a few still here in the studio. I can't remember how

many. Actually only a few went out, and I never knew what their life was like once they left here because they're fragile.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And lights burn out and so on. And then I have actually spent some time

recently restoring some of them and putting them in new boxes that made them a little more viewer-friendly, as I would call it. I mean, I never solved the problem of really how they should be seen and displayed. And I revisit that constantly in a way. I have ideas in my head always swirling around about ones that I would like to do. But it gets harder and harder to get into that mode.

AVIS BERMAN: Why is that?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, you really have to reorient your whole life around doing those things. You collect things, and you cut out little things, and you have to get into the carpentry and the design of them and the electrification of them and so on. [They laugh.] It's very different.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Right. It would be almost like—it's like going to carpentry and

sculpture.

RICHARD HAAS: It is. And I rely on other people's talents, like I had this kid [James Keul] for a while here who was terrific at making things. He's still around. I might want to bring him in again for some ideas that I have floating around in my head. But he did a beautiful job at remaking some of the boxes.

AVIS BERMAN: How did you decide to leave Michigan State, which was, I

think, was in '68?

RICHARD HAAS: Sixty-eight was a kind of watershed year for—well, for everybody.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Nationwide, worldwide, and certainly in my little world out there in

Michigan. And a lot of it precipitated around the fact that my marriage was falling apart. And we were definitely heading to a split. And I was reaching my end in terms of wanting to be in Michigan State in that area. And my wife, Cindy Lou, was getting more and more involved in the psychology department there, and was becoming kind of a fixture in that area. And so there was just a complete parting of the ways at that point. I also got involved with another girl who was much older, as a student—she was a student. She had two kids of her own. And she was also wanting to leave Michigan for all kinds of reasons as well, and was a very adventurous person on several other fronts.

So, I think, it was, you know, the thing that tipped me over into making a decision. I have to admit that making these kinds of decisions is not the easiest thing for me. I wasn't that impulsive. But it just seemed like the right time. And then I did it in that cautious way that I often would do things then and maybe even up 'til now to some extent. I got a leave-of-absence. I said to Erling, who was becoming a pretty good friend by then, I said I wanted a year off. I want to go to New York. I want to get a studio. And I gave them some of the actual reasons which he—he was a kind of a Midwestern cracker Protestant type. He blinked a little, took that in. And he gave me the year off. So I said, good. Now I've got an escape.

AVIS BERMAN: But you also had your safety if you had to come back.

RICHARD HAAS: If I had to come back, right. It was a kind of a jump off the cliff that landed

on a platform, just slightly out of sight, like they do in the movies. So I came to New York in the summer with Dawn.

AVIS BERMAN: Dawn Andrews.

RICHARD HAAS: Dawn Andrews. And Charles and Sylvia [Pollock] were moving to New York, and they gave me their apartment on 86th Street to camp in while I was kind of getting my feet wet and trying to find my way around the city, which I knew very little about at that time. And I can remember camping in this apartment which had no furniture. It had a TV and some mattresses and a chair and a table, and that was it. And one morning in whatever month—that must have been July?—I wake up, I turn the TV on, and there's this picture flickering away with this body, lying in the kitchen, of Robert Kennedy.

AVIS BERMAN: June of 1968.

RICHARD HAAS: June, okay.

AVIS BERMAN: I want to say something like June 5th [6th]. But it's definitely June, I think.

RICHARD HAAS: That sounds about right.

AVIS BERMAN: June.

RICHARD HAAS: So I was in this almost déjà vu mode, trying to understand: Were they reenacting another Kennedy death, or what was going on here? And the whole city was in a state of trauma.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that was only—after all, Martin Luther King had been assassinated on April 4, 1968.

RICHARD HAAS: That was part of that whole crazy year, which was happening, and all the

riots were happening. The riot in Detroit [July 1967] had already happened. I had seen that. I had actually managed to go into town to the Gertrude Castle Gallery, I think, that day. Or maybe it was the Morris Gallery and

the Gertrude Castle Gallery. And came out when that riot was just starting. So I had the experience of that riot also in Michigan in my head. And so I saw that. And then I get a phone call because I had contacted my friend Robert Cronin who, I guess, we didn't talk too much about. But Robert Cronin had left Michigan State in 1966. He's a very interesting kind of guy and kind of a lyrical Irish person who seems to have the luck of the Irish from time to time. He drove out on Charles's recommendation, because he was a very good painter. And he somehow landed at Kenneth Noland's house with all the artists sitting around; a scene I knew better later. And one of them there was [Eugene] Gene Goossen, I believe, and he said that since [Paul] Feeley had died, they were looking for a painter. And somehow he sent him over to see Tony Smith, and Tony Smith took a liking to Bob. And between Goossen and Smith and another person I can't remember the name of, they all decided to hire Bob and give him a painting job, replacing Paul Feeley. And, of course, when Cronin came back to East Lansing and told us all about it, jaws just dropped, including Charles's, by the way.

So he had become my contact in the East. I had driven out in the interim between

'66 and '68 when I left East Lansing. I had driven out and stayed with Bob and met some of these people, and I even went over to the Noland house and so on and so forth. And also ran into [Vincent] Vinnie Longo. And I had my prints in my trunk. I always had something in my trunk because I had a couple of places in New York that I was showing them by that time. And Vinnie took a liking to these prints and said, "I want to put a show up here in Bennington of these prints." ["Richard Haas," 1968, Bennington College, Bennington, VT.]So I was known to Vinnie, who had already left the school by then, and his wife was Pat Adams at that time. But Pat, of course, and Vinnie split. But when my name came up by Cronin, some people up there remembered vaguely that there was this guy who did this stuff. And so they invited me on that very day that Bobby Kennedy was shot to drive up to Bennington. And I had my car in New York, and I said, "Well, how far is it?" And they said, "Well, from New York it should be four and a half hours, but we'd like to see you this afternoon at four o'clock." [Laughs.] So I drove that day all the way up to Vermont.

AVIS BERMAN: That must have been surreal with this scene.

RICHARD HAAS: It was. It was just—everyone was quite crazed and dazed. And

yet this was going on. And the meeting was the most discombobulated meeting that I ever had as an interview. I came out of it and said to Bob, "This is crazy. This is a waste of time. But there it is. And I drove back to New York. And then the next day he calls up and said I have the job if I want it. Which meant I had to ride back to Bennington and meet the president. So that was what was going on in my first visit in June: trying to find a place to live in New York.

AVIS BERMAN: So you were going to have a part-time commute to Bennington?

RICHARD HAAS: It was a one-year deal. So I said, great. I don't have to quit my job at

Michigan. I have now—not only can I go to New York for the year, but I can also have a job teaching at the same time. The pay was—this is slightly hilarious—was slightly more than what I was making as an assistant professor.

AVIS BERMAN: What was—can you remember the salary?

RICHARD HAAS: I think it was $8,900 maybe, something in that neighborhood.

Maybe it was not. It might even have been less than that as I think about it. Probably $7,900.

AVIS BERMAN: You had to drive up there "X" number of times a week, twice, three

times?

RICHARD HAAS: I drove up just once a week and came back.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that was good. Just like a seminar, or was it all day?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, what it was, what the arrangement was, because Sidney

Tillim was there as well—Sidney loved the idea of somebody riding with him and he getting a free ride in other words—I arranged my schedule around his. And I would come up Tuesday morning, teach a class at noon on Tuesday 'til six at night. The next morning teach another class, Wednesday, from like eight to twelve. There would be a faculty meeting all afternoon Wednesday, both the art faculty and the regular faculty would meet on Wednesday afternoons; that was sacred on the campus. And then I would teach all day Thursday, and then drive back Thursday night. So it was eight a.m. Tuesday morning 'til whenever I got back Thursday night. That was the commitment. And also the other good thing about it was that it started early to mid September, and it ended early to mid December. And it started up again in early March and went to mid June.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's great.

RICHARD HAAS: So I could be in New York for that winter period as well. And I stayed in

New York in the summer, which was what I did because I didn't have to be in the country all the time. And that's kind of what I did, off and on, for the next ten years practically.

AVIS BERMAN: Did they just keep extending you by one year over and over or did

you—

RICHARD HAAS: No. After the first year, I gave them a kind of an ultimatum. I had made my inroads. I had become quite friendly with Sidney. He loved that ride, by the way. And I knew Isaac [Witkin] very well. And a couple of other artists there thought I was doing okay. A lot of the students were very excited by anybody young. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Pat was against it of course, totally. And she would have her group against

it because I was an interloper and a commuter and so on and so forth. The president at that time was very friendly toward me. I knew him quite well. And so I said I need a three-year commitment or I can't stay. And they gave me a three-year commitment. Then I could go and send my letter in to Michigan State and say, thank you, but I'm out of here.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Right. And meanwhile you found a place to live?

RICHARD HAAS: That was pretty complicated.

AVIS BERMAN: As usual, it's harder to find a place to live in New York—

RICHARD HAAS: It was very hard.

AVIS BERMAN: —than a job.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: It always is.

RICHARD HAAS: And I was quite stupid about all of that stuff. I think we moved about six

times in the first four months in New York—or three months, three and a half months. Until finally somewhere around the Christmas break, I was in Max's [Kansas City], and across the street, the Annex, which was going on at that time, and I ran into some people I knew. And I said, "I've got to find a place. I'm just going nuts. I'm in these temporary—one month here and one month there kinds of places." And they were all pretty gringy—grungy. So they said, "Well, why don't you go see Joanna?" And I said, "Who?" "Joanna Pousette-Dart." She has a loft, and she was living with her boyfriend, and they were going to get a bigger place. And so I was to go down and look at it. It looked like a pretty good deal, and I said, "How much? A hundred dollars a month. That was the going rate. What about fixtures? Well, probably $1500. I said, "That's a little steep." And then when I went down to look at it, it was real steep because there was nothing there, you know. There wasn't even a bathroom, just a little kind of closet in the corner. And I got her down to I think $1200 for the fixtures. And I took the place and transformed it in a matter of two or three weeks into a loft. And it was on Broome Street, right on the second floor, on the corner of Wooster. I was there for three years.

AVIS BERMAN: And obviously that really began to—what you began to see out the

window began to shape—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. That was like a platform to see all of the cast-iron, practically the best

cast-iron in New York really, up and down Broome Street and on every street around it. And I certainly took that in, and it became, you know, this place that really started to focus me, I think, on the architecture more than anything else. And I continued to make some Boxes there. But I also was doing these large canvases. All of the artists at that time were doing large canvases. Some painted on the floor in the great Bennington tradition, of course. And some of them were just like using snap lines and a lot of chalk and lot of acrylic wash. These huge gridded paintings. And, in fact, they were quite interesting. I still have some of them in the back here. And I got a lot of the gallery people because at that time gallery people were visiting artists' studios constantly. And I

don't know how many gallery people trooped through my studio at that time, but quite a few. And I managed to get several group shows going because of that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Now at this point it seems to me that you meet, among other

people, Sol LeWitt.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. What happened is that there was always a request up at Bennington for ideas about exhibitions. And I'd had a lot of experience at that at Michigan State already. I had been on a committee that was organizing shows, and I had organized a show of Michigan artists that was quite successful. I even wrote for the Lansing paper about exhibitions that we had put on there. And I had just organized a show of Arthur Dove, which I could never actually see because I left town before it went up. But it was quite a venture finding Arthur Doves in Michigan, which we did. We found most of them except for the ones in Massachusetts that my colleague went to see and got from that foundation where there were just a dozen or so Doves.

AVIS BERMAN: William Lane?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, the Lane Foundation. How I heard about it, I have no idea. But I found out about it and he went out and got several of those paintings; and there, I guess, some of the best at that time to be found.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But when I got to Bennington, I started to come up with ideas for shows.

One idea I had, I ran into [Robert] Bob Hughes, who was at the bar every night where I went, and I got to talking to Bob and Bob said, "Well, I have all of his prisons." I said, "Wow! There's a show." And I asked him about Piranesi, if I could borrow all of them, and he said sure. So I put up a show of the 16 prisons by Piranesi as one show. I did a show of Diebenkorn drawings. I would go up to a gallery and talk to them, and they would loan them to me. I think it was Poindexter [Gallery, New York City, NY]. And she said, "Oh, Bennington, of course." You know. That's how much clout Bennington had at that time. I did another show of Charles Cajori, which was kind of interesting because I've known Charles since. And then I made a bigger suggestion: I said—Oh, yes, we showed my Boxes there, too, by the way, in a show. I made a bigger suggestion: I said I want to—I had a thematic idea—I want to do "Painting Without Supports" [1970] because that was something I'd begun to see around in SoHo area.

And so Sidney backed it 100 percent. And I first decided to go to see Sol LeWitt because

he said, "I went to school with Sol. I know him." So he called up Sol, and I went over to his place, and Sol is such an open and friendly and so informative on so many levels, that we took a liking to each other. And he started to advise me about going to other places. He said, "Oh, you should see Dorothea Rockburne." You should see so-and-so, you know. So that kind of opened it up. And I also went to see Richard Tuttle because I had heard about him, and I liked what he did. And in that we put together this show which was really quite successful. And I drove Sol up to Bennington, and he and I and a couple of students did a whole wall. I think it was—if it was not his first wall, it was one of the first very few that he did. And we stayed in touch for quite a long time after that. We traded prints. He would say, one for one, whatever you want.

AVIS BERMAN: He evidently was the most extraordinarily generous person.

RICHARD HAAS: He absolutely was, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I've never heard of a person who didn't like him; who met him,

wasn't touched by him or somehow he didn't help them.

RICHARD HAAS: It's something that I think was in his nature. He was—he was very

neutral, which is interesting. He wasn't the kind of person who would get into fights about—as so many of his colleagues and, you know, people did. I mean, [Robert] Smithson was a very snarly guy. I didn't like him at all. Carl Andre, well, we don't have to go there. [They laugh.] Who else was? Donald Judd I didn't know really except on a couple of occasions, and he was a feisty individual, difficult individual in many ways. So there, among his colleagues, you didn't have that. But with Sol, he took it all in. He was like the overviewer of things. And he had this historical knowledge that was just amazing. I said I was going to, that summer, go over to Europe, and I thought I wanted to get to Holland [Netherlands] because I'd never been. And he said, well, I had to do this, this, and this. And see so-and-so and so-and-so. And really set me up to see some wonderful things in Holland because he was very familiar with the people there. And that was the kind of thing he was doing all the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Didn't he help you get a show with John Weber?

RICHARD HAAS: He introduced John Weber to me, and John Weber took a liking to me and

my work. And I put—it was a group show—I put in a couple of my early prints. I think the Flatiron print [*Flatiron Building*, 1973] and maybe even the first Haughwout print [*Haughwout Building I*, 1970] print and a couple of others. And that was in an exhibition in John's gallery [John Weber Gallery, 1970, New York City, NY]. And he was married at that time to what's her name? Who's had the gallery since. Who started *Basquet*—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh—

RICHARD HAAS: She's Italian.

AVIS BERMAN: I want to say Sperone but I think that's wrong.

RICHARD HAAS: No, not her.

AVIS BERMAN: No, okay.

RICHARD HAAS: But anyway, she was also very helpful and very friendly with me at that

time. But who wasn't friendly, of course, was Smithson, who was in the gallery, and he came in, and he just got irate that John was going to put that kind of work up in his gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: What was his objection to it?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, that it was retrograde.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

RICHARD HAAS: It was retrograde, of course. And he had a little—I mean, Sol didn't argue

with him. But he calmed him down and suggested that maybe he wasn't looking at it in the right way, and so on and so forth. But there was always that dichotomy in my work amongst the other artists and the critics. I'd say the artists less so than the critics. Most artists, I think, were very intrigued by and interested in it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, right. Well, it is certainly—it's your environment. But

architecture is actually quite abstract, as you well know. And it's so geometric.

RICHARD HAAS: It started as an extension of my grids, as I often said.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But, you know, it quickly went in so many other directions beyond that,

that I knew that it was taking me just down a totally different path than I had been on for so long. And it was exciting.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But the historical side of it, is what held you? What made you know that this was really something to keep exploring?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, a lot of things [Laughs.]. I suppose the success they had and the feedback that they had gotten was very important. We all want that; whether we say we don't or not, that's definitely very important. And it brought me to another world of people. I mean, more architects than non-architects. More architectural critics than art critics, etc., etc. Whether it was Paul Goldberger or it was any number of other people, there was a tremendous interest in them on that level. And I, of course, was discovering—rediscovering—architecture almost incrementally as I was doing them moving myself a little bit through the American history of architecture. And it was reconnecting all those wires that had been slightly frayed from my past, too. Because all that stuff had been fed into me, whether it was Sullivan or [Henry Hobson] Richardson, along with Wright.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think also what you're saying is—when you say in your work or people digesting it—whenever you seem to be straddling more than one world, when the category begins to blur, and you don't know—if it's harder to pigeonhole someone, that's always—

RICHARD HAAS: That was a very, very tough and hard to deal with thing at that time. Artists were looked at as being those who would do series of things. And you were always—what is the word, branded? Today they use that word a lot. You were branded as the artist who did "X." And to go even slightly to the left or right of that simply did not fit into most people's mentality. So, I guess, I hadn't been branded as anything at that time. But once I started to do the prints, that was a branding feature.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Because it seemed to be—he used the word retrograde—but it was a little contrarian perhaps, too.

RICHARD HAAS: It was a lot of things. [They laugh.] And it was history. And I had this

tremendous interest in and really background in a certain portion of art and architectural history that I brought to it.

AVIS BERMAN: Also just going back to the project that you did with LeWitt, the wall

drawing—was there a muralist stirring when that occurred?

RICHARD HAAS: Not really. No, no. Murals and muralism was still something that was in the back of my mind but never front and center. Remember I'd lived around Detroit, so I had a tremendous feel for those terrific Riveras in Detroit [*Detroit Industry*, 1932-33, Garden Court, Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI]. And I had this kind of connection to Benton—or interest in Benton that had come and gone along the way. But to say that I was really focused on that, no. What I was getting more and more focused on, of course, being in SoHo and around that area and seeing all those walls and starting to see the supergraphics, that work that went on on them, that got me interested.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I guess, it was—was it City Walls [consolidated into Public Art Fund, New York City, NY] in which artists were doing the geometric—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it started before City Walls. Really, Doris [Freedman] caught onto something that had already started earlier. I think Allan D'Arcangelo was one of the very first.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And there were a couple of others, whose names I don't remember, who

just did it. It was an underground thing that started to happen.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: As was all of that stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I think Mel Pekarsky did one.

RICHARD HAAS: Mel was there in the beginning, yes. And what's her name, the woman who did the big one?

AVIS BERMAN: Tania.

RICHARD HAAS: Tania.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Whom I never knew. But I liked her work. And then who did the one over on the West Side that's still there? Knox Martin.

AVIS BERMAN: Knox Martin.

RICHARD HAAS: That I think might have happened even before City Walls.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because this was in the early '70s. And the real estate was such that it was possible to do it; nobody cared.

RICHARD HAAS: There was no real estate [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Exactly. Nobody cared.

RICHARD HAAS: In a word.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. There was just a lot of empty space outside and inside. And that was

an interesting moment for New York, that we may be reaching again soon. But it was where artists could find spaces inside of any proportion they wanted to do their thing. And buildings were just crying for something to

happen to them because they couldn't even afford to tear them down anymore.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It enhanced the bleakness of the urban environment. And also at that time, because of Battery Park [New York City, NY], there was the landfill over there. Artists of the '70s were using Battery Park. They were—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, Katherine got her start there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. You could put—and what's her name, Agnes Denes? Remember she planted a wheat field there? [Agnes Denes, *Wheatfield - A Confrontation*, Battery Park Landfill, NY, 1982].

RICHARD HAAS: Well, that was—She was—what was that? Art on the Beach [a public art project from 1978-1985 organized by Creative Time.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, right.

RICHARD HAAS: Katherine was part of that movement. That's how she got to know Kippy [Stroud] down in Philadelphia [PA], because she did her printing there. But I remember a lot of contact with all those artists who were working out there in Art on the Beach at that time. And, there was so much stuff going on that way that all the artists kind of knew each other. There was Gordon Matta-Clark, for instance, doing his guerilla movement of slicing up buildings. And we all knew about that. We were pretty intrigued by that as well.

AVIS BERMAN: And that was the time when people just also wanted to

move away from just a traditional object, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, there was experiment. I would say it was one of the early super, major experimental periods. I think that the show that we did up at the National Academy that was done by David Reed and the curator I don't remember ["High Times, Hard Times: New York Paintings, 1967-1975," 2007] that kind of brought back into focus how multi-varied that period really was in SoHo in the early '70s. And how so much of what has gone on in the last few years is really a retread of the kind of experimental works that were being done then. And people who had forgotten that there were actual names connected to some of these things, which always seems to happen. I mean, it seems that the memory bank of art is much shorter than we thought.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Of everything else too. Well, indeed. That's why we do interviews

like this and try to save archives and papers.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And I find it interesting now that there is an interest again in street art—though I'm not being connected to it as one of those who seems to have been there. There's more interest in the guerilla movements again, whether it's through Banksy and friends and various others I don't know where it—whether revivalism occurs exactly. But there is a tremendous interest in the more guerilla-esque nature of the whole street art movement.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, also in the mid-'80s before they got famous, [Jean-Michel] Basquiat and Keith Haring did the street art, too.

RICHARD HAAS: And I certainly knew about both of them very early on. Haring more so

than Basquiat. Basquiat was more anonymous as a street artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. And that was sort of a—that was a phase until he—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. He would—I didn't know the code of who was what. But Haring had his identity very clearly. And every time we went in the subway, we saw his work.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. The Radiant Baby. You always saw that. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: And I met Keith a little bit later once; we were on a panel together once in

Pennsylvania. That was the only time I actually talked to him.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that at Kutztown [PA] where he was born? Because they used to have seminars there, and he was from there.

RICHARD HAAS: It was somewhere out there. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Never mind. You're doing your printmaking. I think we should talk about how you came to get

this idea of I want to paint a wall, and I want it to be different—it's not going to be what went before.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it built, it was built around two things: one, seeing what was

happening in those supergraphic murals. And being intrigued and disturbed at the same time by what was happening in those. It built around the absolute excitement that I was enjoying studying architecture—restudying those buildings, and all that they represented and where they came from, you know, both in history and in the New York fabric. And seeing all that empty space, those chops, those cuts, those things that were happening in our environment in the city, which was much less serious than what was happening in the rest of the country. But I've always traveled, so I knew what was going on in Detroit, and I knew what was going on in Chicago, I knew what was going on in numbers of places. And I saw how we were losing touch with something very vital. And then I got to Europe. And I started to reconnect that whole history. It started in southern Germany, and it moved south into Italy. That's how I experienced it. And then began to put together the ideas that eventually led to my mural. That is, that there was a great architecture, painted architecture, tradition. That it had potential on the spaces and in the urban fabric here in New York. And that it was just an extension of my prints.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, but your prints weren't trompe l'oeil.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, trompe l'oeil was not a word I ever liked then nor do I like now, you

see. That got attached to it because obviously it borrows from the whole of what I call the painted architecture tradition that comes out of Greco-Roman Italian history.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Right, right. I guess, a different kind of illusionism, I guess.

RICHARD HAAS: To a large extent. I mean, it's-trompe l'oeil brings with it too much baggage. And, yes, I liked [John Frederick] Peto and [William Michael] Harnett; I knew about them. And that was the American connection really if nothing else, those few American paintings that were always on the wall somewhere between the rest of the portraits and so on. But trompe l'oeil was there as an entry, but not like the Italian architectural painters who were the ones that regenerated all that and reconnected all of that strain of history that I consider almost central to Western art if you start looking at it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, not the kind of illusionism [Andrea] Mantegna and his

Occulus [Ceiling Fresco, 1465-74, Palazzo Ducale, Camera degli Sposi, Mantua, Italy] or something like that.

RICHARD HAAS: Just starting to see those few classic examples, [Paolo] Veronese's, not Villa [dell] Emo, but the other one, really got me going I think. Both on my interior stuff and my exterior stuff at the same time. And it really happened all at once. The interiors maybe preceded the exteriors. I don't honestly remember if they were simultaneous or if the one I was doing in my loft was earlier or not. But it was all jelling all at the same time.

AVIS BERMAN: It was a great idea. I just want to ask you: What disturbed you about the supergraphics?

RICHARD HAAS: That they seemed out of touch with the city and its architectural fabric. And it was even clearer to me once I saw what their roots were like over in Europe. It just seemed to me that they didn't fit into this older, decaying, urban fabric where they were mostly put. Had I lived in Los Angeles, [CA], I probably would have had a different idea entirely. And I even talked to some of the LA guys later about that, because they did come from a very different place.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. In LA, but they were also doing the community murals, too, the

more—the difference of someone like [Judith Francisca] Judy Baca was working.

RICHARD HAAS: She wasn't there yet.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, she wasn't?

RICHARD HAAS: No.

AVIS BERMAN: I thought she was about '74.

RICHARD HAAS: She might have been, but she was below the radar screen. The LA Arts

Squad [Los Angeles Fine Art Squads, Los Angeles, CA] and Terry Schoonhoven was the guy I knew. And also who's the guy who did the big portraits [Kent Twitchell]? Hundred-foot-high portraits and so on. I met him. Those are the guys I knew more. And then in Paris there was Fabio Rieti, who I knew. He preceded me maybe by a year

and did that one at the [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: But his was a very subtle and quiet approach, which I liked.

Whereas Terry's of course was a much more bombastic approach—but intrigued me as well. So that gave me kind of credit. I mean, I could say, oh, there's this guy here, and there's this guy there. And I'm doing this. And even though we all came from different places and didn't really know each other when we were starting to do it, it kind of reinforces our own effort.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It was part of a movement or a Zeitgeist or something.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. That's kind of what it was. And it was a Zeitgeist in a funny way.

And the architects picked up on it almost more rapidly than anyone. Although the artists picked up on it almost immediately. I can remember going into Fanelli's when I was just starting to do my one on—112 Prince [Street, 1975, New York City, NY]. And Alex [Katz], whom I had a talking relationship with at that point—Katz—Alex said to me, he said, "This is like day one, isn't it?" You know, he got it. [Laughs.] He was completely entranced by it. And there were, you know, dozens of other stories like that that came in, some firsthand, some secondhand. Even the great Clement himself was said to have said to several that he saw it that way.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that we should talk about how you got that wall to paint;

and that you looked at it and you thought, this is what I want to do. In other words, you had more than one idea, more than one—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, we're leading into the first one now?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes, yes, we are.

RICHARD HAAS: Okay. So it was all jelling in my head. And I was good friends of

Swiss artist at that time and his brother who was a photographer. And I'm trying to remember his name [laughs.] [Pierre Haubensack]. And he was a very close friend, too. But when we would walk around together, the three of us, he would say, "Well, I'll take photographs of all these walls for you, and, you know, then you can work on them." And I said, "Great!" Because I had no photography experience or background. He made nice, beautiful, blow-up drawings—I mean, photographs—of the walls that I pointed to. I said, Do this one and do that one. And so on and so forth. And so with those in hand, then I could start to really see what they would look like. And I started to do the paintings on the photographs and so on. And I think because I was in fairly good touch at that time with Paul Goldberger. He and I had traveled up to the Bronx [NY] a couple of times to look at Art Deco buildings. And I'd been to a couple of parties of his, and he had written on me, I think by then, about the prints and the Boxes. And Bob Hughes and I were fairly close in talking. And there were some others: John Loring was one I remember who had written about me as well. That was before he became Mr. Tiffany. [John Loring was the design director for Tiffany & Co.]

Anyway, I was sitting in the bar with Paul Goldberger one time, and I brought along my little packet of pictures, you know. And I pointed to some walls. "See that one there, Paul? And this one over here?" I said, "I have this idea." And I described it. And I said, "But I don't know how to get from A to B." And he said, "Well"—he looked at them, and he said, "Yes, this is terrific! This should happen." And he said, "Call this number." And he gave me Doris's number.

AVIS BERMAN: Doris C. Freedman?

RICHARD HAAS: Doris C. Freedman. And so I took that in hand. I was very ambitious. And I never let too much grass grow between me and the phone numbers. I went, and I called immediately. And I got a kind of run-around by Doris—or maybe her secretary. I probably never got to Doris. And I called again and didn't get there. I called Paul again, and I told him that. He called her, and then she called me. That's how it happened. So it finally—she said, Come at such-and-such a time. I haven't much time, but come up to my offices at the Majestic Building. And I went there and went into her tower [Laughs.]. She had a little office in the tower. The building, of course, was done by her father, and I didn't know that at the time. But her father was Irwin Chanin. And of course I knew nothing about that. But that became something important later.

AVIS BERMAN: I had no idea of that myself.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And so she—that's why she was in the Majestic, because the family all lived there. So I show these to her, and she just stared at them on the table, about the size of the one we're sitting at here. And I

had before, after; before, after; before after. I had five of them. And she said, "Well! Which one do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, I think the biggest one." [They laugh.] And she looked at that, and that happened to be actually on Broadway at that time. And she said, "Well, that's a little too much to bite off." It was a whole block. And she said, "What about this one?" And that was the second biggest one, which was 112 Prince. And I said, "Great!" And I said, "And I want to include that little piece of the building on the side." And she said, "Oh, fine, fine. We'll do that. Don't worry." And she said, "I'll take care of it." And I said, "Well, okay." And she said, "I'll get back to you." She cobbled together I think it was a $1500 fee to do it. And she said to me at that time, she said, "Now all you have to do is make a drawing." I said, "What kind of drawing?" She said, "A scale drawing." I said, "How big?" She said, "Well, let me call." And she called Van Wagner Outdoor [Advertising], and she said, "What do you really like to see." And they said, "Oh, half-inch to a foot would be terrific. But you don't have to make it that big." I said, "I'll do a half-inch to a foot."

So then I started my drawing, which took me forever. And I'd go over to the building

with this young kid who was just one of those interns. And I sent him out on the verandah. He was a lot younger than me. And he would measure all the elements. And I'd photograph them and measure them and draw them and so on. And made it as accurate as I could at that time. And then took that to her, and then she in turn took it to the painters who were from this outdoor advertising company. And it started in like December, I think, '74 and was finished in January '75. It was over a three or four-week period about this time of the year. And it was done. And it went very fast once they got going. And, of course, it was something to behold because in January of '75 there was probably nobody who didn't pass that corner who was of any importance or interested in art. And so everybody saw it happening as it was happening.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. From top to bottom.

RICHARD HAAS: From top to bottom in three different drops with this rickety scaffold. And

these guys with rather large brushes doing stuff that looked so intriguingly detailed but was crude as hell when you compare it to what we've done since.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there any sense of you ever wanting to paint on it yourself?

RICHARD HAAS: Not really. No, I would've been scared to death. I mean, I had just finished

at the time the one in my studio. So I was getting comfortable with that scale, but not comfortable with what they have to go through up there, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So we should say that with the mural in your studio, you were you robbed? And then was that the—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. That's what was the precipitator. Somebody broke through my wall coming up the stairs and just chopped a hole in it. And I said, this was disgusting. And they took away my TV and a couple of other things, all of which were important [they laugh] to my life. They didn't take my stove which was really important because it was a great old stove. But they took a few things—not much, but enough to get me upset. And I said, well, I'm going to fix this wall, but because it was all home made (everything was home made at that time). I said, "I'm going to paint a door." I don't know why. [Telephone rings.]

[Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. We were, I guess, talking about the painting of 112 Prince Street and the artists watching it. And that sense of I think something's happening.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, we were also doing the one in the studio.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, right! The robbery, right.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And so I started piecemeal thinking, well, I have to paint a door here. Well, what door am I going to paint? Well, then I started thinking about Veronese's wonderful Palladio villas, and those [fresco] paintings of the doorways, and how people are seen peeking through a sequence of doorways . And I could do that. And then I looked on the other side, and I thought of Peruzzi's [frescos in] Villa Farnesina, [Rome, Italy] and how he opened up that room and saw Rome outside of it because it was blocked by other buildings. And I said, I have the same problem here. I mean, I have this brick wall, and I have a wonderful view of SoHo behind it. But I can't see it because I'm in this very confined area and very narrow. So I said, I will do my Villa Farnesina piece there. And I did the balcony overlooking SoHo. I went up on the roof, took the pictures, made the balcony, painted it, put it on canvas because I knew life is temporary. And it's still around here somewhere. [They laugh.]

And I painted that piece there. And then I said, well now, wait a minute. This is over

here, and that's over there. There's nothing to connect these two. And I said, Well, I'll do a frieze. And I did a frieze that went all the way around the room to connect them. And then I said, Wait! This is—there's this fireplace here—or it used to be there. It's blocked up. So I'll put the fireplace back. So I did a canvas fireplace, a box. And then in the middle I went over to Ivan's [Karp] because I knew Ivan. And I said, "Can I get one of those —? I need a tondo." And he had the, what do you call it? The Architectural Arch Wrecking Company or whatever. Retrieval.

AVIS BERMAN: Irreplaceable Artifacts [New York City, NY], right?

RICHARD HAAS: Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: So I went down in his basement. He had them all in the basement at that

time. And I picked a tondo that I liked, a terracotta tondo. And I took that out, and I put that up there as well. So it kind of became an ensemble then. I painted some marble underneath my bookshelf. And suddenly I had a room. I had an actual kind of Renaissance Revival room created in this hilariously not Renaissance Revival loft. And then friends and others came to see it, of course. And it got that excitement and interest going.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, certainly, because it would've been the antithesis of the loft

aesthetic as we knew it [Laughs.].

RICHARD HAAS: It was definitely the antithesis. I also had some pipe furniture that was

shown in—I can't remember her name either; but she did a section in the *New York Times* of what's new in furniture [Laughs.]. I had these pieces that I had made out of pipe and canvas. And they didn't fit at all with the rest of it. But it was quite interesting. I even did one of the first rollaway things with wheels and had a glass top, the wire glass, as a coffee table. So it was a real mishmash is what I'm saying, my loft was. But it did lead some other friends to want to commission me to do their loft. And I had—now I had a budget—of almost $10,000, I believe, to do a really serious loft environment. And they had a much more serious loft. When that one was finished, that got front-page news, so to speak.

AVIS BERMAN: That was the Nelson loft [Nelson residence, Atrium, 1976, New York City]?

RICHARD HAAS: The Nelson loft. And because, you know, Peter was an architect—

Somewhat insane. And his wife was working for the gallery that showed architectural drawings that started to show Frank Lloyd Wright and so on.

AVIS BERMAN: Max Protetch, [now known as Meulensteen, New York City]?

RICHARD HAAS: Max, yes. She worked with Max. I knew Max pretty well, too, at that time.

And so between the two of them, there was a whole kind of genre of people that got involved and interested in that project. And I pulled together all my various talents. One guy who did silkscreen. Another guy who got some furniture for me. We went out and bought that Empire furniture you could get for nothing then and stuff of that nature. And some columns that we managed to improve and paint. And we made a really major environment out of it. We did the floor, painted the floor with—they had laid down a new floor; we made a marble floor out of it. I can't remember what magazines and/or newspapers that picked it up. But I always like to say that that probably started that whole movement that ends up with three or four hundred thousand people around the world doing it.

AVIS BERMAN: Especially the columns—that would just be a trademark after a while.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it really did. And there was some of it happening. But only in nooks

and crannies. A little English guy was doing something over here, and another frustrated stage designer was doing something there, but nothing that became kind of like front and center news in the new environment that was loft living in New York.

AVIS BERMAN: Absolutely.

RICHARD HAAS: And it did, I think, have its impact, and nobody's really traced it

thoroughly. But it was the beginning of something.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Your loft and the Nelson loft really were the birth of it here.

RICHARD HAAS: It was, I think. And every architect and his or her brother came to see it.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes, yes. Okay. Well, what I want to do is save some works until we begin a discussion of public art. We'll save some of your other chronological projects for later. We still have a long way to go. But I wonder in general, though, are architects often the villains in public art projects for artists?

RICHARD HAAS: I wouldn't put them on the first rank. They can be obstructionist and difficult in many cases, yes. They can also be your best ally. I've had both instances. So I'm not going to go there and say they were often my biggest obstructionist individuals. Committees are, and that's a whole other story.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I guess, what we're talking about is maybe when the artist is

allowed to come in: if the artist comes in in the beginning or is later on to apply the band-aid with 1 percent of the budget.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. You're talking about when Percent for Art came into being?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I'm thinking about public art. There are also corporate projects which might be easier because they're simpler, and the apparatus isn't as cumbersome.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think it moves in very strange waves historically. And there was,

when I started to do it, a wave that was combining the architects who were interested in reviving certain historical incidents into their architecture, and there was a culture of corporations that were intrigued and interested in incorporating art as a significant portion of their budget—1/2 of 1 percent to 1 percent. And there were artists who were starting to get very intrigued and involved in what they call big projects. All of that was coming together at one time.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, in the '80s?

RICHARD HAAS: It was, I think, really starting in the late '70s more than in the '80s.

But it took off primarily, yes, in the '80s. And, I guess, came to a screeching halt at various times. But the last one—the first screeching halt was around '90-'91. And then it picked up again in a different way in the '90s. And I'm afraid to say that I think it's pretty much dead now. So I don't know where the next movement is going to take it.

AVIS BERMAN: In public art, what do you think makes it public? Its essence, its location, its patrons, or—?

RICHARD HAAS: When you do something where the initial discussions and the ultimate

intention is that it be out in a public space, as opposed to when it's painted on the easels behind me and it will or will not have a public life, that's what sets it off. And so the whole orientation and discussion and thought process has to be different at the outset for such a piece. Probably, though, I mean, most artists bring their private art to the public realm at some point; and it is really private art enlarged into a public space. That was one of the problems I was having with it at the outset. That's why I didn't like, as I said earlier, many of those blown-up abstract paintings that occurred on walls. That's what they were. They were large easel paintings blown up and then put on walls.

AVIS BERMAN: And not having, you felt, a relationship to the environment.

RICHARD HAAS: The edges didn't connect to anything that occurred beyond its edge. I was

very—and I think continue to be in anything that I consider my public work—very conscious of the edges of the work and how it must meld itself over to whatever it is attached to and obviously surrounded by. And those are the things that I think are important to my own area of art. It's not everybody's idea necessarily. But it certainly is one that I've always thought a lot about and still consider pretty important. You look at the decoration of buildings and interiors through history, and you can't help but be interested in how things come together at certain moments and fall out at others.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that's, of course, what you would've seen in Europe, that

architecture, painting, and sculpture were melding or intimately—

RICHARD HAAS: Had in the past.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: I think Europe produced some of the worst modern architecture of all time [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: The other question is, how democratic can art be?

RICHARD HAAS: Where do the words democratic and art necessarily connect?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, okay. If it's going to be for the public is it supposed to have some sort of community input?

RICHARD HAAS: That's an idea that evolved during the time that I started—after the time I

started to do my work. And it came into play in that interim period over the next 20 years or so, where, I guess, because of the great *Tilted Arc* [Richard Serra, 1981] situation and a few other things like that, that became the center of a conversation. It wasn't at all there when I started; there was still an elitist community and an elitist body of people who sat on various boards and committees, sometimes even lorded over them, that basically made the decisions that were in fact what was to occur in the public realm. And that's how the GSA started.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. One could say that like anything else, you need some experts and some training on what to decide.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, self-appointed mostly they were. But there was at that time just some, I think, people who were very gutsy and had some wild ideas and probably saw themselves as more powerful than they might have even been, who managed to get things done through. They saw an opening, a crack, in the system, and they said, I'm going to go there and take this thing and run with it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, like Doris Freedman, I suppose.

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely. She was someone who understood politics and had an affinity for artists. And that's unusual.

AVIS BERMAN: She was a real pioneer.

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely. No, she was terrific. I mean, she did have her shortcomings on some levels, as everyone who dealt with her probably had to ultimately come up against. But she was also open. If something didn't work, and it seemed like it was going nowhere, she'd go over here and start something else. Which I think is very, very unusual. And she just had this positivist attitude toward what could happen out there. The naysayers are always in the forefront.

AVIS BERMAN: And they're always the most vocal.

RICHARD HAAS: They're usually the most vocal. And if they're politically connected, they're usually the most frightened of what's going to happen. Right? I've never seen it any different. But when a politician starts out being your best friend, and something hits the media that's in the slightest negative, they become if not your worst enemy, somebody that will never answer the phone. And that's what a politician usually is about—unfortunately. So these people exist somewhere outside of that immediate realm of politician, but certainly no bureaucracy in all of its little nooks and crannies, and can get through that. Because bureaucracy rules in the end, more than even politics. And you do have to find your way through that, too, to a large extent to get anything done. The private commissions were great when these people saw it in their best interest to do it because they are emperors mostly. And they can just get things through that are far more creative and more intriguing than most of the public ones.

AVIS BERMAN: When you say that, would that be corporate and would that also be real estate developers?

RICHARD HAAS: Developers probably were in the forefront, yeah. And certain corporate

people along the way.

AVIS BERMAN: Also with developers maybe some of them say, hey, this guy did it, and

it was good, and—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. They have their own, I guess, pecking order of how they get to art. And it comes and goes very quickly in their minds, too. But if they see a possibility to make a buck [Laughs.] and art is part of that, they're in the forefront.

AVIS BERMAN: You had said just briefly—I think I said,

oh, we were going to talk about just a couple of larger questions in public art—and you had—did you say the last time that you thought that a lot of it, in the last 20 years was pretty bad?

RICHARD HAAS: Public art?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: I'd say that almost all the time [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, if wondered if you could elaborate that—be less vague.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it's pretty complicated to probably narrow down to why this happens

to be so. Because it's a big subject, I think, why it tends almost always to end up that way. Part of it is in the nature of the process, where people who are going to agree to want these things are often in a committee mode, and are often looking to their, left, their right, and behind their back. And in many decision-making processes that occurs that way, it's a watering-down process that almost invariably occurs.

Secondly, you have the artist realm: those people who have figured out a system. And the system automatically says: this is what they need. This is what I'm going to give them. And I'm going to give it to them in exactly the way that they will want it. See what I'm saying? And so you have two watering-down mechanisms, both in art land and in public and/or corporate land that are working to modify and really dull the product. And this is mostly what you get in the product in the end.

And then you have the architects, as we said earlier, who don't want to really defile their

buildings too much. [They laugh.] And who are always intrigued when something can happen that will simply embellish their own idea without necessarily attacking it. And so that's another modifier. So now we have three modifiers coming into the center of this story. And it leads to what you would call almost a packaging. There are certain artists who are almost always picked to do what they are expected to do, and they ultimately do exactly what they're expected to do.

AVIS BERMAN: Is there a way that the artist cannot self-censor in this way for

expediencey? Or is it just because the artist has gotten knocked around so much for trying to do something different, then he or she says, "Well, the hell with it."

RICHARD HAAS: Well, some artists love that milieu, and other artists hate it. And

occasionally the people who are on these various committees, someone new comes in and knocks some things around, and something new happens, and it comes in. Then it starts the process again, you see.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: So good things come in. But usually they come in in almost that accidental way. And the artist, I've heard all kinds of stories. Almost every artist has sometime, who's been in the public art realm for a period of time, gotten so beaten up that they are a lot like the prizefighter after 20 years in the ring. [They laugh.] I was just watching TV the other day when there was some famous prizefighter who won the—and somebody was saying, "Well, why don't you retire? You look like you still have half your brains." [They laugh.] And he was saying—oh, [Evander] Holyfield, he said, "Well, no, I think I can do one more round." And that's probably what keeps artists going in some ways.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, it's like that. He doesn't want to retire just as you may not want to retire. But because of the body he's got—there are all of these dancers. They're forced to leave what they love much earlier than mentally they want to.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, prizefighting is notorious, but—

RICHARD HAAS: Whereas retreating back into the studio is always that option. You don't have that in sports [Laughs.].

AVIS BERMAN: No.

RICHARD HAAS: But in artists' lives you have that. So this is, I think, what ultimately does

occur. But sometimes you're offered something that you can't refuse [Laughs.]. That's usually how it goes back into becoming something you do again.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Or there's always, I guess, the triumph of hope over experience?

You think, oh, this time it's going to be different?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, you always think the next one is going to be the one. I think that goes

on as well. Although you get a better sense of like going into the process what the other players are about. And you know almost in advance of whether or not there's a shot at this thing really taking off and being something good. You could tell pretty early on that it's not going to happen here with these players, or it is possibly going to happen.

AVIS BERMAN: So you can have a sense of pulling out early?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And then there's the self-fulfilling prophecy that they're usually going on to find new flavors of the month anyway, and you're usually left out. You know that other story that we often like to hear about the great San Rocco commission when Veronese was the one who was the new flavor of the month and was going to be given the commission. And this old guy, [Jacopo] Tintoretto, who was washed up anyway, was going to be brought into the process to just be a token presenter. And, of course, the old crafty guy figured it out and managed to get the commission anyway because he outsmarted them, right? That's how it works as things move along.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also I guess, as you become more of a veteran, you can argue for

more control in the process.

RICHARD HAAS: No, I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: No, okay [Laughs.].

RICHARD HAAS: No, I don't think so. Maybe in a few cases, yes, although I think

those days are over now, too. But, yeah, there were some of those things going on. And sometimes artists, as architects, did as well, made pretty big fools of themselves when they got too much control. Another interesting issue: are controls, and parameters bad, see? I mean, there were some cases where all controls were removed from the process, and the monster came in the room and was indeed a monster [Laughs.]. There's a place called Dubai, isn't there?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: The monster city.

AVIS BERMAN: True, true. But I have no sense that an artist, any artist, touched that city.

RICHARD HAAS: They don't seem to like artists all that much there. No, that's true. Architects have certainly had their field day there, though.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And, I think, that's headed for—I think, that's crashed already.

RICHARD HAAS: I kind of hope so. But I don't know. But I know what I've seen—

because I do go there on the Internet every now and then—and my mouth just drops open as I see some of these things that are proposed. It is true that some of these architects just went right off the rails in their fantasies.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: And artists I think, too, in some of the projects that they've proposed along the way, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly. No, I think—and there were some very well-meaning people, people who want to give artists freedom. They're usually outnumbered. But there are some.

RICHARD HAAS: No, there are - some good projects occurring because there was just this kind of—I hate the word serendipitous because I was once on a panel where everybody was serendipitous but me. [They laugh.] With my little cynical remarks. But there is that moment sometimes. I think it happened in some instances to me. One of them, one of my favorite examples, of that was the one [Edison Brothers Stores, Inc, 1984, in St.

Louis, [MO], where this family called the Edison Brothers sat in a room and said, "Make it a gift to the city." And they didn't give me a completely open budget. But they gave me a pretty darned good shot at it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's very enlightened—very enlightened.

RICHARD HAAS: It was a moment. They went belly-up, of course. [They laugh.] And as

happened to almost every—I once did a talk up in Maine, and there were a few people in the room, too, where I described each of my projects and what happened to the people who commissioned me afterwards. And in each case something bad happened to them. [They laugh.] And it was a history of my projects vis-à-vis what bad things happened to those who commissioned me.

AVIS BERMAN: I did know a well-known artist who—he used to always say he had a way of closing galleries whenever he showed there. [They laugh.] And he hadn't been asked in quite a while.

RICHARD HAAS: In my case it doesn't quite play with the galleries. But it

certainly played with those guys—those people. I felt sorry for some of them, what happened to them. And I don't think it was because of me. I tried not to think it was because of me. But maybe I had something to do with it in some cases.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, maybe some of them were good people, and that was their

problem in the business world.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it probably is true, that there was—they didn't fit the mold.

There was a missing cog. Why is it that I flew with The Donald [Trump], but I didn't do a project? Or met with Leona [Helmsley] and didn't do a project [Laughs.]. There was something mutually beneficial there that it didn't happen because these were not the kinds of people that would go for it, right?

AVIS BERMAN: Or if they did, you either wouldn't have been paid,

RICHARD HAAS: That, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Or that you would've been so psychologically tortured that—

RICHARD HAAS: That, too. I managed to find some of those anyway. But in both cases it was automatically expected that I was—I was just the voyeur at the moment in their room.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Yes. It's their world; we're just living in it.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: I think that we should probably stop for this time, and

we'll get to the GSA and other projects at our next meeting. So thank you very much.

[END OF TRACK 2.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Richard Haas for the Archives of American Art, GSA Oral History Project, on March 5, 2009, in his studio on West 36th Street.

And I am going to concentrate on your two GSA commissions today. But as preamble, because the last time we spoke we had pretty much left off at 112 Prince Street. What I'd like to start with is when did you formulate—realize—that you were a muralist or a public artist? Because what you had done really hadn't been done before. So I'd like to talk about the evolution of how you placed yourself.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it evolved in a very slow, methodical, logical way in my head. But it seemed probably like a jump to other people. I had this long experience—not terribly long, but quite long—of concentrating on the architectural façades. And they began in SoHo with those cast-iron buildings. And that, of course, evolved out of my interest in grid painting and so on before that. I saw that, to some degree, as an extension of that. But once I got involved in the architecture, it just took off on its own and re-ignited my obsession with architecture in general. And so I started to see the streets differently as I walked them every day. And I started to, of course, notice the blank walls. But also up on the corner of Houston [New York City, NY], were those murals that had already been painted by—we mentioned some of the artists the last time.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, [Forrest] Frosty Myers.

RICHARD HAAS: Frosty hadn't happened yet. Who was it?

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, there was—Well, in the supergraphics there were like Hugh Kepets; but that was on 27th Street.

RICHARD HAAS: No, Hugh hadn't happened. He came after me.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Knox Martin?

RICHARD HAAS: Knox's was on the other side of town. There's a guy who I know teaches out in the University of Long Island [Riverhead, NY].

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's Mel Pekarsky.

RICHARD HAAS: Mel Pekarsky was one.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]

RICHARD HAAS: The woman who had a single name.

AVIS BERMAN: Tania.

RICHARD HAAS: Tania.

AVIS BERMAN: And [Robert] Bob Wiegand.

RICHARD HAAS: Wiegand, right. Whom, I actually knew beforehand. And I think Allan D'arcangelo had been one also. But it was those supergraphics works that I had noticed. And had somehow they had disturbed me. They gritted me to a large extent because they felt so out of place with the architecture they were being placed on. And I was getting much more into the fabric of that architecture and the old streetscapes from New York and how they were being chopped into and somewhat destroyed at the same time as there was an integrity to that area. So that combined also with my trips that were beginning to happen in Germany and Italy, and seeing all that wonderful painted architecture that was still evident from that long history. And so, I think, I just put the three things together, as I said. And it merged in one lightbulb moment. And then with a photographer friend we went around taking those photographs, identifying them. He blew them up on larger black-and-white format photographs. And I painted directly on each one that I identified as a possibility in the area. And, of course, that before and after effect was already there, even in those drawings.

That's when I took those to Paul Goldberger who I had an ongoing conversation with at that time, and talked to him about it. And he suggested I get in touch with Doris Freedman, and I did after several phone calls finally managed to get her attention. And then made—had the meeting with her, had those photographs, laid them out on her desk just like this, before and after, before and after, before and after, and I said, "This is what I want to do." And she had an equal lightbulb moment when she saw them. And said, "Let's do it." [Laughs.] And that's how it happened.

AVIS BERMAN: And what was it like to go from being—even though you were looking at architecture and were absorbing it—going from being a studio person to a public art person? That didn't happen overnight.

RICHARD HAAS: No, it didn't happen overnight.

AVIS BERMAN: But that's a very different mentality.

RICHARD HAAS: It certainly is, yes. And it takes you to people you don't normally contact—have contact with. I can say that I was thinking a lot about it before that all happened. And it was kind of a building up of my own long interest in what I used to call "total trip architecture and art." And having looked a lot at, say, those wonderful sibling teams in Germany like the Zimmerman Brothers and the Azam Brothers and Balthasar Neumann, etc. where you saw how that all combined in one or two personages who were both artist and architect, sculptor and painter, all combined. And the fact that there was this possibility more and more. And, of course, [Gian Lorenzo] Bernini, who was a hero of mine.

AVIS BERMAN: [Buonarroti] Michelangelo.

RICHARD HAAS: Michelangelo, yes. But, you know, he—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, since he could do everything—

RICHARD HAAS: He could do everything [laughs.] I guess, he was on such a different wavelength that I didn't

even focus as much on him as I did on those later people who evolved really out of it. So I said to myself, this is something that has to be revisited somehow today. And I think that fed me. And then these other things fell into place. And I said, this is where I want to start.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think in this vein maybe then what I also want to talk about was the Boston Architectural Center commission, [a mural on west façade of the building, 1977, Boston, MA] because I think that was very important. And we can explore from it.

RICHARD HAAS: It was.

AVIS BERMAN: Because the architectural world essentially was saying—they were saying yes to you.

RICHARD HAAS: Also it was a convergence of something that was really saying you're sometimes only as good as your patron. And Peter Blake, who is a very knowledgeable guy on many levels, and he was thinking on some of the same tracks that I was, and he was even writing that book which I had actually seen I think before I met with Peter [*Form Follows Fiasco: Why Modern Architecture Hasn't Worked*, Peter Blake]—what was that book about? It was an attack on contemporary architecture more or less.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, and he was a modernist, too, I believe.

RICHARD HAAS: He was a modernist, yes. But he was also a very naughty modernist, you know what I mean? [They laugh.] He was really also someone who really converged a lot with artists and enjoyed that—you know, that famous collaboration he did with Jackson Pollock and so on, which I knew nothing about at that time. But anyway, Peter challenged me and said, "Here's a wall. I was going to have it be a—I was going to work with this Swiss geometric artist [Max Bill] and have him do something on it. But decided when I saw your thing in SoHo that we should go a different way."

AVIS BERMAN: Now, he said that.

RICHARD HAAS: He said that. And so he challenged me to deal with that wall. And then I looked at the building, I said, well, it's a challenge [Laughs.]. There's no question, this is a challenge. And so I started just fooling with it, and I kept—first it was, oh, we're going to paint a façade on here, aren't we? That didn't feel right. It was just something that gritted me wrong. And there were those blocked grids in the back of the building anyway that pretty much looked like a building that was just chopped. So I started—as I always said—being bored at meetings in Bennington making many drawings and flipping my little gridded notebook and making one after the other. And eventually starting to carve like into the building. And once I started to do that, things shifted and changed. But also the early ones were not as ambitious as the last one. I think, there's another book I have that shows that. [Long pause.] Because this was a time when there was a real interaction between me and Peter.

AVIS BERMAN: He was the director [chairman] of the [Boston Architectural] Center then. And then to look at this sort of building which we would probably call—it was probably called then "new borderless art architecture."

RICHARD HAAS: See, you have this drawing here.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Which was my first presentation to Peter. And he said, "I like where it's going. But it's too busy, and it needs to be something more dramatic, I think." And I said, "Hmmm. Okay." And he said, "You're probably too stuck on respecting all of those squares." And once I decided that he had a very good point and I could ignore those squares, then I opened it up and created the big rotunda. And, I think, that was a major move. And, I think, I have to credit him for that. And, of course, I looked at some other examples of how rotundas had historically been buried in square buildings and so on. [They laugh.] And I had all kinds of justifications that I'd had to talk to myself about, as well as sort of pitch the project when I did that.

I even connected it to an architectural statement about Boston, [MA]. I said, "This building is on an axis directly to [Charles] Bulfinch's [Massachusetts State House] dome, [1798] in front of you, and directly laterally to the Christian Science [Church Center] dome, [1894] on your left. And way over across the river to the dome of MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1913]." So I said, "I'm really creating a cross, the center of a cross here with this dome." That got some people interested as well. But it really was Peter who was pushing it. And Doris got interested in it, very much so, and helped. And we had a terrible time getting it done because the painter walked off with the money. So we had to start over again. And it took an extra year to do it when it could've been done in three months. But it took a year and three months. So I learned also about the terrible problems of getting things done out there on the street. And that's something I have continued to visit on a hundred or so more occasions. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, also I think this was an interesting idea because, of course, this as well—this was

functioning as a critique of what was done to the fabric of the city.

RICHARD HAAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: Did that set off ripples in Boston?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it certainly did in the architecture community. I don't know how it did with the more general population. I think over the years it's become such an icon that even Mayor [Thomas] Menino said some very nice words about it a couple of years ago when I went back for a signing. But it did at the time, I think, strike a real note. And, of course, being on the cover of *Architecture Magazine* didn't hurt it any. So it was, with that photograph of the whole city behind it and that thing sitting square in the center, I think, it told it all [Laughs.], really. And it says what an instant kind of alteration of a city can be like.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I guess, this was also different for you. I'm making a generalization. But by and large in the studio doing easel pictures often you can't tell, unless you're [Marcel] Duchamp and have your urinal, that you're having a social or political effect on anything.

RICHARD HAAS: Hmmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: And suddenly you had a—I don't know if artists can believe they can never have an effect on society at all.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, we talked about that—I did with several people at that time. And I was very much involved in what I thought was a disturbing direction that American cities were taking. And, there was a lot of that in the Zeitgeist, I guess, you could say in that period. And so I had conversations with a lot of the name-brand individuals who were interested in that. Colin Rowe, who I had probably more ongoing conversations about the city than many. I had a day with [Robert] Venturi and that was kind of interesting. But I don't think it was, you know—I think he was so full of himself that we didn't have a great conversation. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: That's funny because you would seem to be working on parallel paths.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, there was a lot of respect that I had for what he was thinking and talking about. And that book again—what's the name of it?—that was on everybody's lips [*Learning from Las Vegas*]. And I think he saw something in my work that was obviously talking to the same thing. So there was that going on. And, yes, I was definitely part of the chatter of probably more the architectural world than the art world in some ways. They do have short memories, though. I don't want to go on about that. [They laugh.] And I remember Philip Johnson at some party coming up to me and saying some thing about, oh, how wonderful that was, what I did, was doing, and so on. So it went all over the place.

AVIS BERMAN: And Johnson changed, too.

RICHARD HAAS: I always attributed the top of the AT&T [Building, 1984, New York City, NY] to something that he saw here.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, the Chippendale Tower.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. When I saw the Chippendale Tower—and two or three people called me that very day when I saw it—and said, don't you think that's a little connected with what you did there in Boston? You know. Oh, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, good. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, but you know—

AVIS BERMAN: That was still different, right. This was more successful. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: So, yes, I think, I was part of the conversation at that moment.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because certainly these works really did change the look of the urban fabric in many cities, especially where they're still kept up.

RICHARD HAAS: And like anything you do that sticks itself out there, it has both good and bad ramifications. And I've always had, you know—I had a hard time with some of the bad imitations that quickly followed it. I said, they don't get it! You know, that kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: So that bothered me a lot. But it led to—can I just take one minute?

AVIS BERMAN: Sure. Let me pause this. [Audio Break.] We were talking about the dimensions of working in public art and indeed the opportunity to effect some sort of change.

RICHARD HAAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: But, I think, what I want to do now is talk about the GSA commissions—

RICHARD HAAS: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: —and apply some of those questions to them. And the first one that we'll do is the one in [Kansas City] Kansas because it's early. And in your book it's just the Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse. But it became the Robert J. Dole Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse. Is that how you—?

RICHARD HAAS: It was—that was later. Before I started it wasn't that yet.

AVIS BERMAN: And 1994 is the date. So I assume that was when it was finished. Do you remember—how did this start, and how did this come about?

RICHARD HAAS: It started in what year, '92?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, '94 is I think when it was finished.

RICHARD HAAS: Finished, yes. Well, my first meeting was probably two years before that or so with the architects [Gossen Livingston Associates, Inc], and they were located in Wichita, Kansas, as I remember. That was my only trip there, meeting with them, and discussing the space, the building, etc. Looking at the drawings for the space, which I probably didn't understand in the drawings as well as one should, because it was pretty hard to comprehend what that was going to feel like. But what I did sense was that those two curved walls were the ideal sort of spot for something to happen in that lobby. And I think they were very territorially conscious of trying to preserve as much as the rest of that space as they could. So they were going to allow me those two inserts. And then I started to research and try to come up with something that I felt would make sense in this kind of space.

It was a very kind of sheer modern building. The exterior, however, was a little more of a throwback to some what I would call a historicist's postmodern touches, as opposed to the interior. I didn't really know quite how I was going to sort of find the subject that I wanted until I visited the site, talked to some of the historical people in Kansas City. Oh, by the way, I always thought at first this was going to be in Kansas City, Missouri. That was a shock when I arrived in Kansas City, Kansas, which is one of those—there's nothing there-there type towns. There is really nothing there. [They laugh.] So I had to make that adjustment, and that this was Kansas. This was not Missouri.

AVIS BERMAN: I bet you had some preconceived ideas if it had been in Missouri about what you were going to do.

RICHARD HAAS: It would've been a different place entirely.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: But it was Kansas, and that was another history.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: It was going to have to make a different focus entirely. And that's when I got into the prairie and history. And of course I had written a paper once on Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, [Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co: 1927]. So I had that in my head as well as [Ole Edvart] Rølvaag's [*Giants in the Earth*; New York, Harper: 1927] book on the prairie.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't think—Willa Cather wasn't from Kansas, though.

RICHARD HAAS: Nebraska.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: That came up later.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. [Laughs.]

RICHARD HAAS: And Ole Rølvagg is, of course, Minnesota. But I lived up there and my prairie was up there anyway, not down in Kansas. So I had that sense in my head always of those stories about how these sod-busters went out there into the impossible place and did what they did. And that was the beginning of how I wanted to go at this subject. But the building was really in a Black neighborhood on the edge of the downtown. It was also very close to that bend in the river, which was very—where the rivers connected, the Missouri River, and what is the other river that comes in there? Is it the Kansas?

AVIS BERMAN: I've never been to Kansas, so I don't know.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it all congealed. It's an historically important spot in the founding of the West and how the trails moved out and so on. And the wagon trails went out from Independence [MO] right over on the other side. And really kind of created that whole development of the West in that zone. And, of course, there were the Native Americans who were very much attached to that area historically as well. And there was even this Indian chief buried on the grounds.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh!

RICHARD HAAS: That was literally the site of a burial of the brother of Tecumseh, whom I include in my mural.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: So there were a lot of things I was juggling. I'd also just come back from Portugal. And I was in love with azulejos.

AVIS BERMAN: Those tiles?

RICHARD HAAS: Those tiled buildings. You know, these whole exteriors and interiors of buildings that were storyboards in ceramic.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: I loved them. And I said, how am I going to put all this together? [They laugh.] And it seemed to me that blue-and-white tile was something that made sense in putting a hard material in what would be a very hard material interior space., but a hard material that had a much more romantic softening effect. And that's why I arrived at wanting to make this statement a full ceramic tile azulejos piece with sculptural attachments. [They laugh.] And as I studied the history and heard about the Black settlers after the Civil War who were bamboozled basically and given land out on those railroad tracks. And what they went through to settle there. And then many of them retreated back to this area because it was so impossible to do it out there. So I thought, well, I'm going to focus more on them as well. And then I said, and then there's the Native American story, which I had always been very interested in. And I said, what did they feel about all this? And I started to read about what the chief of the Oglala Sioux had said and so on and so forth; and basically how absolutely sure he was that this area would be destroyed by the new people. And so there was the hostility and the tension going on in several communities.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And also Kansas, of course, used to be called Bleeding Kansas because it was a border state in the Civil War.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, before.

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know if you, how much—

RICHARD HAAS: I didn't really focus on that. I knew it in the back of my head. But I didn't—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: But, you know, it created even tension as I presented the piece, of course.

AVIS BERMAN: It's called *Justice in the Prairie*, whereas it sounds as if you were doing injustice in the prairie.

RICHARD HAAS: A lot of injustice.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And it was right at that time when I was becoming more and more conscious of all of these switches of interest in public art to more testy issues. And so I was reacting to that as well in my own more, I guess, you would say, subtle way. Right? So I think it was a crossroads piece for me in many ways. And, of course, putting Justice there is always sort of a no-brainer in some—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: I had the two children, of course, sitting there. At first they were in a much more—what would you call it?—subservient position.

AVIS BERMAN: You're talking about these two children at the left of Justice. Or at the right hand of Justice, I guess.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. It kind of became that thing that often was seen in, you know, turn-of-the-century art in the [Edwin Howland] Blashfield period I call it. Where there were always these very dominant female figures. And then two subservient probably servant types on either side of her. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: And I had some conversations about that. And one of the most interesting things that came up in my first presentation was the people who were of the neighborhood said, "Well, you know, this was initially a Croatian neighborhood. And what are you going to do about the white settler, i.e., the Croatians?" And I said, "Well, those two kids could be Croatian, couldn't they?" [They laugh.] And that got a laugh out of several people.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I think it's very interesting that you have these nice encapsulated neighborhoods whichever—I don't know what—

RICHARD HAAS: Behind there?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: That's directly behind the building.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so that's actually what's there now—was there in 1994.

RICHARD HAAS: That was in '92 what's there now.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And then to purposely have the oppressed groups, the Native Americans and the African—they're outside the frame.

RICHARD HAAS: But you see where they come from. They are taken out of the story on the opposite side, and they're made into sculptural friezes. So they are literally freeze-framed in a kind of sculpture. And so they become—on the other side just part of that ongoing story in the mid-19th century. And now they are being edified and—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, highlighted.

RICHARD HAAS: Highlighted as any other group that would be honored for what they did.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Now how were you originally selected? Was it someone at GSA? Was it someone like Donald Thalacker? Or did you have to submit—?

RICHARD HAAS: I think he was long gone. I remember him. But I never dealt with him.

AVIS BERMAN: I think you're right. I think he would've been gone by then.

RICHARD HAAS: I can't remember if it was a competition or not. Or if I was just selected. I think there was a preliminary competition, and I was picked out of that group; that's probably how it happened. Because I remember in the group that I met with, one of the individuals was from the museum [Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art], in Kansas City, Missouri; and the other was from the [Spencer] Museum in Lawrence [KS]. Those were two of the art people who were in the group. And then there were the local politics, etc., etc. The usual group that was made up at that time. And, I guess, I was selected out of whatever other submissions that were given. But I wasn't told. When I first met with them, I had the commission, which is different than some of these other proposals that they have; where they have finalists who make their own proposals for $3.98, and then meet all in a room, one after the other, sitting nervously outside waiting to go in. I mean, I hate those. But anyway, this one was run, I think, in a much more professional way really. And in general, I think, the GSA did that on both instances where I worked with them—or the three times.

AVIS BERMAN: But they had selected you, not the architects. Were they involved?

RICHARD HAAS: I'm sure they were involved in the group that probably looked at the submissions. It's preliminary thing that I'm not a part of.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But it sounds as if they had an awful lot of control about trying to dictate what you would do. Whereas I assume you might have submitted these maquettes or some kind of sketch to get the commission.

RICHARD HAAS: Beforehand, you mean?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: No. Not really. No, the input there is—it was never that oppressive or demanding on any level on either of those projects. There was some of that—a little more of that in the West Virginia one [*Justice in West Virginia*, Robert C. Byrd U.S. Courthouse and Federal Building, Beckley, West, Virginia]. But not serious either. The architects [SOM, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill], I don't remember them doing anything that, you know, that elicited any demands or mandates on their part.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there anything unusual that you hadn't really done before in terms of artistic elements?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, yes. The way I handled those materials in those spaces I thought was something that was different. I didn't want just a pictorial thing to happen. I didn't want just an architectural thing to happen. I wanted to tell a multi-layered story with multi-layered material. And that I thought was a challenge. And, of course, the color was another issue, because I wanted to warm that space up, which I felt was just too cold and unfriendly. And that kind of evolved almost by accident. When it finally went in the spaces, the very first time I saw the space in conjunction with my work. My work was being painted up in Providence, Rhode Island, in several parts. And then it all arrived, and we put it up. And I said, "It clicks. The color's right, the light's right. You know, it's working in this space.

AVIS BERMAN: Would you go up to Providence occasionally to look and see?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I would drive up there on quite a few trips. I had a guy—Harley Bartlett was his name—who helped me on the big project just before that out there in Portland, Oregon. He did those big 40, 50-foot figures. And I said, I've got to have Harley on this. And Harley had his own studio and his own crew, and he wanted to work up there. So I just had to adjust to him doing it there. And it worked out fine. He was a terrific painter, and one who could take my drawings and take them to another level I felt.

AVIS BERMAN: As you say, what's interesting is that it was a painting that had sculpture, that had ceramics, and had paint quality in it. So that was—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And had a story to tell, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: And the verbiage, of course, was a big part of it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, who was responsible for the inscriptions, the quotations? Were those ones you—?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, that's a whole evolution. I started by saying I want to have an author who is important in the history of the prairie, and that should be Willa Cather. And then I said, on the other side, I want something from a Native American chief or person. And I got some books I have here, the various quotes. And I came up with the one of the Oglala Sioux chief, where he basically says they're going to screw it up. [They laugh.] And Willa Cather's talking about the brown earth and the richness and whole almost romantic idea of this. And I felt there's so much irony in all this too. [Telephone rings.] And then down below—

AVIS BERMAN: Let me just pause this.

[Audio Break.]

And you were mentioning the inscription down below.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, the inscriptions down below came because of my conversations with Robert Dole's secretary. Never talked to him. But Robert Dole's secretary said, "We need a Kansan voice in this Kansas mural." That was his mandate. And then I communicated back through this person. I said, "If you can find a Kansan voice and she is as good as Willa Cather, I'll use it." And this woman did some research [Laughs.], and came up with this other one who I thought was a weak third, a Kansan author who wrote in a similar way to Willa Cather. And I said, well, it really weakens the whole effect by putting this person up there and on the main board. But I said maybe I can include her as well. And then we decided to add the various statements on the lower parts. And so it extended the story a little more, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I am looking here on the quotations I have from the GSA material that was sent to me. And there's one—there's only one quote having to do with justice, and this was David Josiah Brewer, Justice of the

[U.S.] Supreme Court. ["The utmost possible liberty to the individual and the fullest protection to him and property, is both the limitation and the duty of the government."]

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, that was something, I think, that they started to talk about. This was after the fact when I made my first presentation and they started to add their voices to it. And they were saying you should bring in the history of justice in the state of Kansas. And so this was somebody I think that Dole must have admired. And he—

AVIS BERMAN: So this was a justice who was from Kansas possibly?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. And someone who had some influence on him, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: So I didn't feel that was too bad a compromise, either, and it balances off some of the other statements. I mean, it's interesting. When you do something that's pictorial primarily—right?—you're telling a story through pictures. When you start to add verbiage, it has a positive effect as well. [Telephone rings.] [Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: You were saying when you add words.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, yes. Okay. When you have the addition of words, and the committee is composed of people who are not necessarily visual, what happens is they throw all their weight into the words. And you dodge around any visual criticisms through that method. And I've done that before and found that it almost invariably works that way. And so then you can compromise on the words without compromising on the visuals. And they feel like they've made a big input, which is always important in these arguments when they get down to that. So that's what happened here. And it obviously got his attention. And he felt he had some powerful input being the powerful man he obviously feels he was—is. Was. [They laugh.] Certainly then he was. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. It is interesting because inscriptions can be so important. For example over at Rockefeller Center [New York City] they're enormously important. And they're all over the place.

RICHARD HAAS: They're all over the place. But do we remember them?

AVIS BERMAN: Probably not. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: I mean, I have a fairly clear opinion about a lot of that—that they are not necessarily that memorable, and yet there was probably more ink spilled and more words spilled about those than anything else. So this is what happens constantly. Maybe a little more so in some of those carved inscriptions around buildings.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, the post office. Or the *Lincoln Memorial* [1922, Washington, D.C.]; it makes a lot of sense there.

RICHARD HAAS: No, there I think it's very important. And on the exteriors and carved buildings, yes. But I feel more and more that when words become part of the visual message, that that gets into a more transitory sort of thing, to me.

AVIS BERMAN: You think art should be seen but not heard? [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think the crossing over of those two art forms doesn't always work as well as it should. That's probably what I would say.

AVIS BERMAN: And plus what you have to do with the inscriptions or the quotations is you have to make them—you have to integrate them, and you have to make them visually attractive, too. It isn't just typing or something. So that's the other—

RICHARD HAAS: And then here was my way of putting in the plaques meaning—it's another way to draw people in and maybe give them an opportunity to think. I don't think anybody that passes this is going to get it first time around anyway. And I don't even know how many have gotten it on any level. But at least it allows them to have a constant kind of dialogue with the work. And that's another thing I like to think should be important in works that are telling stories on more than one level. I certainly felt that as I was looking at all those murals down there. I mean, my God!

AVIS BERMAN: Now just to say for the tape, in Mexico.

RICHARD HAAS: In Mexico. The density of, complexity of some of the stories that, say, Rivera was trying to impart, you could say it was visual overload on many levels. But once you started to pick at it and so on, you

realized that he was a master at composition that way.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, he could do anything. He was extraordinary. As was Orozco obviously. But to be able to—because you can see in his imitators in this country, School of Rivera, it's just crowding. Whereas, his murals flow and move. They have all sorts of intermingling.

RICHARD HAAS: It's amazing. It's just amazing what he put together. I mean, it used to really jar me when I first saw them. But then as I started to go back to them and look at them more and more. I mean, I realized that he went off the tracks quite a bit. But he got it on so many levels.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, he was such a genius.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, he was amazing. And, I think, he's still been totally under-appreciated and was not understood.

AVIS BERMAN: Now under-appreciated again because of the deification of Frida

[Kahlo].

RICHARD HAAS: She distracted a lot of people.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But you go to any town now in Mexico, and in the museum stores, there are a million books on her, even if she had nothing to do with the town or never painted—

RICHARD HAAS: I call it St. Frida. And why, I guess, the Lady of Guadalupe fades as St. Frida comes to the fore, right? [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. So, I mean, I was astonished when I was there. I went to all these places that had nothing—and in Guanajuato, [Mexico]—Diego Rivera was born in Guanajuato. I went to the Diego Rivera Museum [Guanajuato, Mexico]. In the bookstore there's hardly anything about him. It's all Frida.

RICHARD HAAS: I didn't even go in the bookstore.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, it's also kind of silly because he moved from Guanajuato when he was five.

RICHARD HAAS: I remember being told that, yes. And he never went back until they put a plaque on it. And, I guess, he didn't even want to go in. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: It's about a year before he died he went and stood in front of the house.

RICHARD HAAS: That old "you can't go back," you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Nor did he want to. But anyway, but it was all Frida in there. Frida shopping bags.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, her house is quite charming [Frida Kahlo Museum, Mexico City, Mexico].

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Yes, it is.

RICHARD HAAS: I enjoyed it.

AVIS BERMAN: I agree. But it's what sells.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So therefore his lack of appreciation is due to her super-popularity.

Because, I guess, he has to look like a [male chauvinist] pig. [Laughs.]

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. Did you go to the house [Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo House-Studio, San Ángel, Mexico] the two that they have there?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, when I was in Mexico City a couple of years ago.

RICHARD HAAS: Because I found that kind of intriguing, too. He gave her a terrific little place there, you know, to work with. I mean, it was obviously a totally insane relationship, but I don't think it could have been anything else but, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Without a doubt. Without a doubt.

RICHARD HAAS: And the opposite. I went to Orozco's house [José Clemente Orozco House-Workshop, Guadalajara, Mexico], too, which I found quite beautiful actually.

AVIS BERMAN: Where's his?

RICHARD HAAS: It's on the outskirts of Guadalajara.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

RICHARD HAAS: He only lived in it two years. Less than two years.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

RICHARD HAAS: And it was done by Juan O'Gorman.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh! Oh, that's interesting. Well, next time we'll go there. [They laugh.] Back to the GSA.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, bringing in the Rivera connection and so on isn't totally out of place, because I was growing more and more interested in the stories that that artists told. I had avoided that for many years up to that, and really had almost an animosity toward trying to get involved in the sort of subtleties of politics, etc., etc., on whatever level you're having to deal with them. It probably comes out of my formalist training, as it were, from Greenberg.

AVIS BERMAN: Certainly in the earlier murals, you've done more architecture, less story, less figuration. There are figures, but it's different from what is obviously going on here.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, they were just little injections. And then it became more and more about including them in a more serious way. But always deferring more toward the architectural nature of the piece and how it relates to that space it's in as being the most dominant thing that I'm trying to say.

AVIS BERMAN: When people were looking at this clearly, as you say, you were making criticisms of how people had been treated. It wasn't an unalloyed celebration of history. Were there objections to that?

RICHARD HAAS: I can't remember any. So I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Let's just stop for a minute.

RICHARD HAAS: Okay.

[Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I had asked you about criticism, and you had said that you didn't think there had been any. So to go over your process, you see the space, and, I guess, you take pictures or you get—and then you begin to read or you interview people for this?

RICHARD HAAS: I did some research and some reading. I talked to some historical people in the city there. And they always lead you to something you don't know anything about, which is very important. That's how I found out about the burial of the brother of Tecumseh. I forget the name of him. Is that written down anywhere?

AVIS BERMAN: Let me see.

RICHARD HAAS: He was a shaman; he wasn't a chief.

AVIS BERMAN: No, it doesn't have that here. And the two that are quoted—was that Satanta [Tenskwatawa]. Was that him?

RICHARD HAAS: That might be right. Let's see what I can find in here.

AVIS BERMAN: And there's [Chief] Luther [Standing Bear] standing there. Those are the two that you mentioned.

RICHARD HAAS: I think it was interesting that he was the brother of Tecumseh [inaudible] from Indiana to there.

AVIS BERMAN: Were there any special considerations that you had to think about because the federal government was your patron or your client?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I knew what the building was probably going to be used for. And so that always made me curious. And I always wondered who's going to pass this thing going in and out. I didn't let that sway me to a

large extent. But I feel that the people who'd probably see it most are the people that are going to work in the building. And those are the ones I'm talking more about—desk clerks, the judges, etc.

AVIS BERMAN: And how do you measure, in retrospect and it's been there a while, the work's success or effectiveness?

RICHARD HAAS: How do I measure it?

AVIS BERMAN: If one can.

RICHARD HAAS: One of the problems is I hardly ever go back. This is one I've always wanted to go back to over time and see what it's like. Because when I left it it's kind of like I'm there, and my installer who knows my work is there, and a couple of other assistants, and we look at it. We say: Okay. I think it's fine now. And we leave, and then it's gone out of my memory bank. Not memory bank, but it's gone from my experience. And I always wonder what is that work's life like after I've left it. And it is interesting to go back over time because my attitudes change pretty drastically when I go back. More in a positive way, I think, than a negative way because I've forgotten all the bad experience. [Laughs.] And I've had some pleasant encounters going back to works that I've felt bad about when I left because I was having so many fights with so many people.

AVIS BERMAN: Were there ever any reviews of this or letters or people's comments that were ever forwarded to you?

RICHARD HAAS: There were possibly—I'm not sure if there was ever an article about it. I don't remember any. I had it photographed by this guy, and I was very upset by how he came and photographed it. I asked the architect, who's a good architectural photographer that would do the service to it? And they mentioned this individual. And they said, "He's the best in the business. You'll love him." Et cetera, et cetera. And I said, "The name sounds familiar." And I said, "I think he took some photographs for me down in Dallas—in Fort Worth, which I wasn't terribly excited about." And it's true. He had no sense of my work at all. All he was interested in was all that architecture. And he just blew it.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, I'm just going to say for the tape that we're looking at the photographs in your book *The City Is My Canvas*, [Richard Haas; Munich, Prestel: 2001]. So if anyone wants to look.

RICHARD HAAS: And when Jürgen Tesch from Prestel did the book, he said, "Oh, that's junk! That's garbage!" Those photographs. He didn't like them either. [They laugh.] So it's too bad. It hasn't been reproduced very well.

AVIS BERMAN: What's the difference—I don't know exactly how to formulate this—of how an indoor mural is for you versus an outdoor mural.

RICHARD HAAS: Very different. There's no question that the two are quite, separate. The indoor mural has to be painted in a much more intense way. The work on it is much more involved. Even though the effect in the end is that probably outdoor mural gets four or five times as much attention, the actual input and concern bothered by the artist is probably weighted very much towards the interior works. And there's that other secret knowledge that they're probably going to be there longer. So there is another lifespan for them. And that's another slightly ironic factor that the outdoor ones get all the buzz, and the indoor ones are probably the ones that will remain in some way. So I have to take, that into consideration.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. But are the solutions different?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, the solutions in how they're painted? Definitely different. It's about how close your nose is going to get to the work is how I like to describe it. If your nose is never going to get more than 30 feet from the work, you can do a lot of—you can get away with a lot of stuff. Whereas if your work is going to be seen by somebody nosing right up to it, you've got to be much more concerned about the minutiae in the painting and drawing and so on.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. I guess, also the shapes and the sizes of the spaces are clearly going to be a lot different, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah. But that's not that different a problem. Because when you're working on it, it's this size, right? And as it expands, it's a different thing. Now, how it reaches the edges, the light control and all of that that goes on outdoors versus indoors, that's another issue. So lighting is a big issue. Artificial lighting is a big issue on the interior ones, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Were there any budgetary problems on this commission?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't remember any. That's one of the other nice qualities about working with the GSA is they seem to tell you what your budget is, and you either make it fit or you don't. And cost overruns, etc., only occur

with architects, not with artists.

AVIS BERMAN: So is it simpler by and large to work for a corporation than a federal or a city entity?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think the corporation or the corporate work that I had a lot of success with was a very brief period in time—and I think that's pretty well disappeared. Whereas the governmental works, like so much about government, gets written in stone, and continues beyond sometimes what would be their normal lifespan. It's a hard one to describe entirely. But in other words, there was that moment in time when we became more interested again in public art as being a percent of every project.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And [Donald] Don Thalacker and whoever else put that in place, and it became—and Doris was involved as well—put that in place, and that then became an ongoing way in which public art came back into the fore. And it stays even in these impossible economic times as part of the art of the public realm. Whereas the corporate stuff just comes and goes at whim. [They laugh.] Banks aren't going to do any public art anymore, let's face it.

AVIS BERMAN: No, and they're all—

RICHARD HAAS: General Motors isn't going to do any public art. [Laughs.] And you can go on from there.

AVIS BERMAN: And in the past ten years or so they've all sold their collections, too.

RICHARD HAAS: That's true, too. Their collections—that was a whim as well, for the most part. Whereas there's more discussion about selling off the public realm, the artworks in Albany, for instance, the discussion. Now, at Lincoln Center [New York City, NY] there's discussion, right? They're visiting the same thing. But it's a much slower and much more difficult thing to decouple.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Whereas IBM, [International Business Machines], when they wanted to sell off their art collection, they did.

RICHARD HAAS: They've done it.

AVIS BERMAN: They did it. They can.

RICHARD HAAS: They've done it. I mean, practically every major corporation has sort of decoupled, right? I guess, Chase is still probably there, for the most part.

AVIS BERMAN: And, I guess, Equitable or AXA still has a bunch of it.

RICHARD HAAS: Equitable? Probably, yes. Yes. Now I was in the Lehman Collection [Lehman Brothers] with five or six works. [They laugh.] So who knows what happened to that?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Transitory—the transitory nature of any public work is part of your story that you have to be involved in. But I don't think it's all that different from the transitory nature of art in general, though. It's just that it has a much more acute kind of life, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Was this unusual in that, in talking about the prairie, you have a little bit of your personal history in it?

RICHARD HAAS: My interest in *My Ántonia* and all that?

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But Minnesota or just being part of—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it got my attention. I mean, there's something in the process when you're trying to relate to a project where you have to have that moment, I think, where you get infused and excited and involved in some level like that to make the work take off. And I think I did that when—I was very, very intrigued by *My Ántonia* when I read it, as I was with *Giants in the Earth*.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And, I guess, it's a part—it's an extended part of my own story growing up on the prairie.

AVIS BERMAN: Because it just didn't occur to me because you were really much more interested in the Midwest as a region than in singling out Kansas.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Although, of course, you had to when you did. But the idea of the prairie was the larger concept here.

RICHARD HAAS: The idea of the prairie and the sodbusters and, just in general, immigrants, that, too. It was really a lot about immigrants who were displaced and sent out to godforsaken places to make it go.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And then there's the Native Americans and how they were just wiped off the face of the earth. And how they had lived on that land for thousands of years.

AVIS BERMAN: Did John Steuart Curry enter into the mix at all to you? I only say that—

RICHARD HAAS: No. Yes, only in that when we passed through Topeka, I said, "I said I've got to see those Currys." So we stopped off, and we looked at them. That was it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because certainly the windmill could be in there for anything. But you know that famous picture, *Baptism in Kansas* [1928]. You're familiar—

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, yes. I'm very familiar with that. I guess it was in the back of my mind to some extent. And certainly because he did live in Madison, I always knew about him.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Well, some of his things are just spectacular. But they're very dramatic. John Brown [*Tragic Prelude*, 1935] and the *Corn* [1935] and all of those. But that's not the prairie. But that's the part of Kansas that you—

RICHARD HAAS: I guess I always related a little more to what's his name up there in Iowa?

AVIS BERMAN: Grant Wood.

RICHARD HAAS: Grant Wood. Even though now I'm less interested in him. Benton, of course. And Benton's Kansas City [MO].

AVIS BERMAN: That's what I thought of, if that had been Missouri, that—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, but Benton to me—Kansas City, Missouri, whatever. I visited his house when I was doing this project. And went back to that house and saw that studio and so on. So it was part of what I was intrigued by there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Absolutely. Okay. Any other thoughts about this particular mural?

RICHARD HAAS: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well then, let's now go on to the second GSA commission, which is—let me pull this out. These are very nice photocopies, by the way, if you would like them.

RICHARD HAAS: Where did they come from? My photos?

AVIS BERMAN: The GSA sent them to me.

RICHARD HAAS: Well. So this is stuff I don't have, I guess. They really don't document as well as they should. Is this a GSA photo?

AVIS BERMAN: No, I think that might be—this is what they sent me.

RICHARD HAAS: This looks like something I might have taken.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: See, that's one that at least takes it in better than these.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. So these are copies of what the GSA has. So they may have gone back later on.

RICHARD HAAS: Could've been taken like—no, it must have been after I left there.

AVIS BERMAN: So they never had an opening or anything or a party.

RICHARD HAAS: No, they did not. I was surprised. Or maybe they did, and I didn't go.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: That might be it. It was like if you're invited to fly down at your own expense for the following [inaudible]. I tend to avoid those because what happens is that you're just one of the crowd.

AVIS BERMAN: Absolutely. Okay. We're going to now talk about *Justice in West Virginia* which was done in 1999. And I will begin with asking you about the genesis of the commission and what was supposed to happen.

RICHARD HAAS: Well again, I must have been in some kind of competition, which I was not a participant of, but which ultimately was thrown my way. And, of course, the architect probably had some sway there. We, I think, had worked on—no, I think this was the first commission I worked with Bob and his group on.

AVIS BERMAN: Who is Bob?

RICHARD HAAS: Robert A. M. Stern.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, this is a Stern building?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. I didn't know somehow—

RICHARD HAAS: Grant Marani was the architect in charge, and I worked mostly with Grant Marani. Very nice guy. It was a strange project,[They laugh], and a strange building in many ways in a strange town. I had no idea where Beckley [WV] was until I looked on a map and found it was there. And didn't understand why Beckley was there or why this building was going to be there or anything. And the fact is that at the same time as this building was being built, there was another Robert Byrd [United States] Courthouse—Federal Courthouse—being built in Charleston. Quite a serious-looking building. And I thought why are they building two federal courthouses at the same time? Well, of course, once you understand Robert Byrd, you know why they do anything. [Laughs.] So first thing I had to do was fly down with Grant to Charleston and meet with the judge. There was only going to be one judge, and it was a woman, and she was the person who was going to spend half a week here and half a week in Charleston, where there was another—there were one and a half judges in Charleston, and half a judge in Beckley. [They laugh.] And here they are building this monolithic building in Beckley. But it was going to double as two different things. It had a dual function. One side was for [the] Internal Revenue [Service] and FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and all that. The other side was the Justice. So this was the center hall between two parts. The third thing that was important there was they were trying to redo the downtown. And this was going to be the centerpiece of a renewal of the downtown. Whether that ever happened or not, I have no idea. You're done already?

MR. HAAS' STUDIO ASSISTANT: No, but I have a question about these ones.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, let me just pause this. [Audio Break.]

RICHARD HAAS: Let's get back to where I was. Okay, yes. The multiple nature of the function of this building was what got me started in part. The other thing is that I had not known West Virginia at all. And as I got down to West Virginia and we started driving between Charleston and Beckley, I started to discover that incredible landscape. West Virginia is just a gorgeous part of the United States that is being ravaged bit by bit. And just north of there is that amazing gorge [New River Gorge], which has that incredible bridge [New River Gorge Bridge, 1977] that I included in the mural somewhere. And the state's known for—what are these plants again? [Laughs.] Magnolias? Is it magnolias that—no? They come out in early spring up in the mountains.

AVIS BERMAN: Mountain laurel?

RICHARD HAAS: Is it mountain laurel?

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know.

RICHARD HAAS: But it was the state flower [Rhododendron, common name, Great Laurel]. So I had to think about putting that in there. And what I wanted to do, because of the building and the nature of the space, is I wanted to open up that flora and fauna of the region. Because the city is very small, and the mountains just kind of encroach on all sides and become more dominant than anything in that area. And so I thought, how can I get in this formal building something about the nature that really dominates this area? And that's kind of where I took that. And yet at the same time, how do I keep the integrity of this space of the building and carve into that space, finding the forest kind of peeking out at different places. And that was what I was trying to redo. And, of course, also the budget was not very high. And I had a complete space to try to transform in the most minimal

way I could. So it was challenging on that level. It's small interventions that would alter the space but still retain basically the straightforward nature of that long, tall alley-like entrance. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: So this was a new building, but you were finding the space problematic?

RICHARD HAAS: I was finding many of the ways in which that building was being made problematic. There was no entrance that was clear. You entered it from the front, and came down a long allée, and then cut in right here. And then you were faced with that wall. And then there were these two other ends—one going to the money people, and one going to the justice people. So that's why the money people have this, you see.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that the old 20-dollar [Augustus] Saint-Gaudens gold piece?

RICHARD HAAS: Twenty-dollar gold piece on that side. And on the other side you have the first two [Chief] Justices: John Jay on the left and [John] Marshall on the right.

AVIS BERMAN: But neither of whom were from West Virginia.

RICHARD HAAS: Neither of whom were from West Virginia.

AVIS BERMAN: Was there any sense of wanting to get West Virginia personages or figures in there?

RICHARD HAAS: No discussion about that, I think. As far as I remember, no. The biggest discussion was when she said, "You have to include Justice." The judge. I can't remember her name now. She was very determined about that: "It's a federal building, and I want something about federal justice when you come in." So that's why Justice was in front of you, and the Supreme Court building was there.

AVIS BERMAN: Was that something you would've chosen to do?

RICHARD HAAS: Good question. I needed a centerpiece that faced opposite the entrance; and it was probably not a bad choice. I would probably—I might have deferred to something a little more about West Virginia.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: I certainly wouldn't put Mr. Byrd there. But West Virginia doesn't have an identity like most states do. It's a very funny place.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was carved out of I think Virginia and Maryland originally.

RICHARD HAAS: Exactly. And these guys—now this guy's Virginian all the way.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, John Marshall.

RICHARD HAAS: That's right. And he was the justice of that area for like six—many years. So he made sense. John Jay, well, he's Westchester [NY]. Anyway—[They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Why were they having these two courthouses when you say you understand about Robert Byrd?

RICHARD HAAS: I think it was a way of probably Byrd justifying getting that building built in the first place down there—and getting some jobs. He's all about jobs.

AVIS BERMAN: Bringing home the bacon.

RICHARD HAAS: Bringing home the bacon. And you've got to hand it to the guy. I mean, he has taken a state that probably would've just gone down the tubes, and single-handedly he's General Motors and General Electric and everything else for them.

AVIS BERMAN: He brings huge everything to West Virginia.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Well, that's over now. But, I mean he certainly kept that state alive single-handedly.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: And he gave the dedicatory talk—dedication talk—and I found him just fascinating. I didn't have any conversation with him. But I sent my son Gregory up, and he shook his hand, and he handed him a card and said, "You're going to vote for me, son, aren't you?" That sort of thing. I thought that was interesting. [They laugh.] I caught a lot of little conversation between him and the justice. She was obviously a Republican, and he was a Democrat. So there was some funny back and forth between the two. I liked her, too. She was a nice, interesting lady, the judge.

AVIS BERMAN: Did Byrd have any input into this about what was going to happen?

RICHARD HAAS: Not really, no. I think he was too busy on too many other things to even bother. And he had this other building going on up the street.

AVIS BERMAN: And was there in Charleston, was there an artist in that building, too?

RICHARD HAAS: There was a glass artist [David Wilson] they picked. As you go in, there's a huge kind of stained glass—not stained glass, but a glass thing. And it was all right. I mean, it was a nice building. And in a way it was—it got a more together building and serious building. I don't know who the architect was.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Did you discuss with Grant Marani that this hall, this space was rather unpromising? Or was there any explanation about why it was the way it was?

RICHARD HAAS: We didn't discuss the architecture that much. I mostly tried to understand what they were trying to accomplish there. And it was a very difficult site, and I understood—we talked a lot about the site, how difficult it was. The main street would go like this, and it was very short main street. And then it ended right in front of what would be the front of this building which is not really the front. And then the main street went to the side and went around the building on one side, and the other main street went around the other. So this building was on a downhill slope between these two split main streets. And, I guess, they were really trying to just struggle in fitting such a building on such a site.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So that's why it all was a little peculiar, the challenges.

RICHARD HAAS: It was, yeah. I have a Stern book here somewhere, I think, that shows this building in more detail, because it is a complicated building.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And it makes sort of references to his Neoclassicism, etc., etc. But not very much. It's definitely a bare-bones version of it. Probably more money was spent on the wood interiors of the justice halls than anything else. And those privates chambers; they spent a lot of money on those, by the way, those bathrooms and all that. Tremendous amount of money spent there. [They laugh.] They do like to live.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, versus, as you say, the general people passing through the hall.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, they had to, they had to get something in that space that told you this was going to be a serious federal building. I understood that aspect of it to some degree because you wouldn't get that from the outside of the building until you really got into the space. I never got too many comments from it by the people when I was there at the dedication. But then that was probably because it was a Byrd Day. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So there was one there, I guess, because of him.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, that I went to. I took Katherine [Haas] and Gregory [Haas] down there, and it was a nice event because they'd never been in that area either. And it gave us an excuse to do some traveling in that region.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. No, it is a beautiful—besides the building, which was this space which was big, were there any other formal considerations here that were important?

RICHARD HAAS: No. I think the biggest consideration was how to alter that space in the most minimal way possible, with all the budgetary considerations as well. And to focus on the three points: the two entrances there and the wall opposite the main entrance. That would be the focal aspect of it. So the rest was softening up. I could've gone much further with the space had I been allowed a proper budget. But we had to really do implants.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. As you say, there are just three areas that have the painting on it from what I can see here.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, three areas. Yes. And the surround—I think, there's a fourth area over here. So it goes here, here, there, and there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So it would be, just for the tape, it would be the doorways on either side, and then the central panel with the figure of Justice, and then opposite probably to balance it, there probably is something else on there.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, there was one. And then each one focused on a different sort of glimpse into some

element of that region. One had the famous bridge. One had a waterfall that's nearby. One had a center—there's an art center near there that's quite lovely for crafts, things of that nature. And then the various animals that I also got into.

AVIS BERMAN: So there was nothing really about mining, shall we say?

RICHARD HAAS: No, nothing. As I recall, no. It was all about nature. And, you know, some of the attractions of the immediate area.

AVIS BERMAN: And in terms of your own work, does this represent any kind of different direction or something like that?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think it was a stab at trying to deal—it was the first one really trying to deal with the federal project on a level that didn't necessarily tell a story, but just altered a space. And it gave you these symbolic elements. I knew that the space was too broken up to have a big kind of continuum of a story to tell. And so it was really—I don't know how I would characterize it. I liked probably more than anything dealing with the animals and with the nature. I mean, I could've done a jungle in there of that area and made it a very happy experience. But I had too many other things to have to include as well. And I think everyone agreed that these came out probably better than anything.

AVIS BERMAN: The [inaudible]. The gold pieces.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, the gold pieces. They just really draw you right in, and they are very successful pieces. And that was a happy accident. There's always something of that going on in any of one's works.

AVIS BERMAN: How did you decide to use those, in other words? But you made the choice. The judge didn't say, you pick this?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no, nothing was said about that at all. And I know it even had some—I can't remember what—something other than that to start with. And then I suddenly stared at the Saint-Gaudens. I said, this is perfect. And had a guy helping me here, and we just really worked those coins, too. They were jumping off the wall.

AVIS BERMAN: Especially they're a nice parallel to the justices in the round frames, too, and the rondelles.

RICHARD HAAS: But they really do draw—they're a magnet in that space that take you right into there. And that was the secondary space that nobody would go to otherwise.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I'm sure the workers in those departments liked it. The color looks very warm and inviting and gold and—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Again, they chose this off-cream interior. Everything was almost the same kind of bland cream. And I wanted to jolt it with more color, as I did with the other building even more so. And I think that's always been a challenge in these buildings to give you something that just warms your heart a little more when you go in. [They laugh.] Because it's probably for most people - going in there is a pretty cold experience.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Exactly.

RICHARD HAAS: And maybe unfriendly. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, especially if you're going to the IRS part. [Laughs.]

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think that both sides—what are a lot of the people doing there? Drugs are probably dealt with there, too, that's probably what so much of it is.

AVIS BERMAN: You can't really do anything that topical. It occurs to me, just jumping back to the Kansas commission, showing the neighborhood like that—was probably those neighborhoods as they were in '92—was probably more topical than you've probably—than you've been able to get in some of these federal commissions. I mean, mostly they've been historical.

RICHARD HAAS: Right. Yes. No, that one pushed it pretty far, I thought.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: And it was charged with a lot of concern, especially because of the Black neighborhood that it was in. And how was I going to get them involved in this story?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and then with Kansas it was their only objection: Oh, you didn't put the most beautiful part

of our prettiest neighborhood. Or you didn't do the Fifth Avenue of Kansas City.

RICHARD HAAS: There was no Fifth Avenue. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: You know what I mean. Actually it may be more suburban. Who knows?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. It's a pretty pathetic place, Kansas City, Kansas. It really is. And I think that's why they deferred right past Kansas City to their great state out there, and all the Kansas voices.

AVIS BERMAN: Just the voice of, yes, Kansas the state.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. But, I mean, it's one of those states that—I guess, it was always transitory, wasn't it? It was never—

AVIS BERMAN: People were moving through. And then in Kansas they have the cattle moving through and beef and all sorts of things.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, always. And it was never a natural place. That's what I mostly say. There's beauty there. Everyone tells you that it's there. There's even a mountainous area that I didn't know about. But it's a tough place to deal with, those prairie states. [Laughs.] Whereas West Virginia is a gorgeous place that doesn't get its due either.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That would be very tough to deal with, too. Because again, this is a cliché, but we mostly heard about—non-natives here—heard about it first through poverty and Appalachia and mining.

RICHARD HAAS: Sure, sure. And that's the absolute dead center of it, Beckley. And all those mining wars and everything all went on around that area. But I certainly wasn't going to tell that story in these pieces. It might have been—if it had been in another kind of building, it would have made some sense. It wouldn't have made sense here to do it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: I remember in Byrd's speech, he said something interesting. He said, referring to the Bible where they say they made the crooked straight, and they laid the hills low. Remember there's something like that? And he said, "That's what I did in West Virginia." And everyone stopped and took that in. [Laughs.] Yes, he did. He cuts off the mountains, and he fills in the valleys, right? [Laughs.] I mean, wow!

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I guess—any other thoughts or difficulties or reflections on this particular one?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: And again, this was—

RICHARD HAAS: The third one that never happened, of course, was in Savannah [GA], but I don't think they want to talk about that one.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. This was a GSA—

RICHARD HAAS: A GSA project, Robert Stern again doing a large courthouse in the middle of Savannah right there in Telfair Square. And they designed the whole thing. I did the maquettes for it. I did the models for it. I did the studies for it. It was approved. And then they killed the project. And it was going to be a mosaic porte-cochère. So I was very upset about that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that would've been a real departure. That would have been fascinating.

RICHARD HAAS: I was just really upset about that.

AVIS BERMAN: And when would that have happened?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't remember the exact dates. I think it was after this one. So it would be maybe—this is when, '99? It's probably about 2001 maybe, right in there. No, 2000 because [President William Jefferson] Clinton was still in office. And there was something going on between him and [Newt] Gingrich. So it was right in that period.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. So do you think it was killed—?

RICHARD HAAS: Might've been even earlier, '96, '98. It was killed because—that was the story I got. There was a battle going on, not necessarily between those guys, although they were part of the deal. But, yes, they killed it,

politically killed it.

AVIS BERMAN: So that was killed essentially because of a political vendetta, not for budgetary reasons.

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely not. The line of budget was there, and they killed it.

AVIS BERMAN: The entire building and all, the courthouse?

RICHARD HAAS: The whole thing was killed, yes. It was going to be a huge project.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's too bad—for everyone.

RICHARD HAAS: Several artists were involved already and had made proposals. I was one of three or four artists. And mine was this big, long, 30-foot-long arched drum where I took the famous plan of Savannah and created a kind of a structure that made a perfect ribbed event where each square was in line from one end of the piece to the other. And then as it came down on each side, there were openings that had famous people from Savannah history in it.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that would've been great.

RICHARD HAAS: It was fun, yes. And it would've made perfect sense. I would've gone over to Italy and spent a month or so there.

AVIS BERMAN: A dirty job, but someone would have to do it. Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I know. But that was a bad loss. And it was fated. Even when I went down to make a presentation, it was fated. The plane didn't take off. [They laugh.] The weather was terrible. And I knew something was going wrong from the get-go on that project.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that wasn't the GSA's fault per se. That was the overlords' fault.

RICHARD HAAS: Exactly. Yes. Right. They were fine. Everybody was fine. And, I think, the architects were really excited because it was such a dramatic location.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Just on this West Virginia mural again, besides stipulating that there had to be a figure of Justice, did the judge say anything else in terms of what she wanted to see on the wall that had to be followed?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. She just kept emphasizing that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Very good. And I guess—did she say a seated female figure?

RICHARD HAAS: No.

AVIS BERMAN: No?

RICHARD HAAS: No, she did not.

AVIS BERMAN: But that's probably what she meant.

RICHARD HAAS: I don't think so. I don't think she even got to that point. She just said, we need it to be a federal building and the symbol of Justice. Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: I mean, it was not a mandate in specific terms. But it was definitely clear that she had that in her head.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Very good. Well, thank you very much for today and all your patience.

[END OF TRACK 3.]

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Richard Haas on March 16, 2009, in his studio for the Archives of American Art and GSA Oral History Project.

And I think today for our last interview what I want to start with is asking you a few more questions having to do with some of the public art commissions and specifically the concerns that you've had. Were you involved in any—saving any landmark buildings or any landmarking disputes because of your study and interest in the city fabric?

RICHARD HAAS: I'm trying to think of—I was asked to sign petitions from time to time. For instance, in the city here, there were one or two cases where it was not as easy for me to do as it was in others; for instance, the one on 59th Street on Columbus Circle, where I had mixed feelings about whether or not I wanted to go with the desire to save that building. In retrospect, I think, it probably would have been a good idea to maybe sign that at least.

AVIS BERMAN: That was the Edward Durrell Stone building?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. But generally speaking I don't think I've been as involved in that process as others might be. Except maybe when I was on the Art Commission [now known as the Design Commission, New York City], there were some things that came up.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, in terms of being on the City Art Commission, what do you think you might have been most influential on or what were most important to you?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know how influential I was. There were only two or three times where we weighed in and really managed to actually change a project or stop a project—because I was there during a period that is not totally unlike the period we're in right now. There was no money. There were few projects realized of the many projects that were presented; at the end of the presentation, they said, and now we're going to put it back in the box, and it'll never get built. So that was that kind of a period, the early [Mayor Edward "Ed"] Koch era. But I do remember, for instance, a sculpture [bronze portrait bust] of Richard Tucker [by Milton Hebald, 1979] in Verdi Square [New York City] that we had some input on, saying that it was a less than admirable piece, with a base that overwhelmed it to some extent. And we ended up going up and making some changes. Unfortunately to this day when I pass that, I cringe and look the other way. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, that's a little bust on a big stone plinth.

RICHARD HAAS: Exactly. And I feel somewhat guilty about having probably been involved in the committee that decided to chop him off at the waist—or before the waist.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: And put this rather ominous-looking base on it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: I'm not sure it would've looked any better had we left the body full. But that certainly didn't help it any.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I don't know what someone would have—I can't—

RICHARD HAAS: It was a terrible piece. I don't remember who the sculptor was [Milton Hebald].

AVIS BERMAN: I have no idea.

RICHARD HAAS: Maybe it was that he didn't have a subject to work with. Tucker was already gone, and I don't know what he was dealing with, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: He had a short, squat—it was sort of like a [Mayor Fiorello] LaGuardia kind of body.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. Well, that apparently, having seen Tucker once live, I remembered that. He had a short, squat body that was all head. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And a big diaphragm, too.

RICHARD HAAS: So that was one. And then there was another decision. It was really more of a learning period for me than it was one where I could really hold forth. I mean, I learned a lot about how architects think. I learned how city planners were thinking. I learned how people who were simply interested in the arts but were really amateurs, like a couple of people from the library group—a wonderful guy who owned the Eighth Street Bookstore, [Theodore] Wilentz?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, Wilentz.

RICHARD HAAS: And he was just a joy to know as a person. And that kind of thing. And I got to know Sidney Simon and many other people on that board.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That leads me into my next question actually, which I was going to ask you, about working

with some of the components and essentially the learning curve of working with architects. So maybe the way to frame this is: What was your best experience working with an architect? And what was your worst experience? Or if there was any best.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, gosh. I do have a way of kind of forgetting a lot of the worst experiences, I'll say that much. I had some very friendly collaborations along the way with different architects, who really kind of came into my corner and helped me on some of these projects. And other ones where they left me enough on my own to be able to change and alter a space that I felt really wasn't designed well enough. And there was a case of that out in California, the first building that I did for Home Savings [of America Corporate Headquarters], the downtown LA [Los Angeles, CA] space. The architect for it was the son of—who is the most famous fashion person in New York? Where the Metropolitan is named after, the space?

AVIS BERMAN: Not Diana Vreeland?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, Tim Vreeland was the architect.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

RICHARD HAAS: And he came up with a building that was very much in the mode of what you'd call the revivalist '80s period. But he had a sky lobby that I felt just really wasn't working. He had these big portholes all the way around and a flat ceiling and a very busy floor and a lot of things that I felt were very hard to deal with. So I redesigned a little bit, and he went along with that. And, I think, we improved that space quite considerably. And he was very open-ended and cooperative in dealing with me on that. So that's one case. I had another case in the one [Merrimac Lobby, 1990] in Boston [MA] where I did 101 Merrimac, the interior, where I had a lot of input in the design. And we actually were able to make some of the physical elements in that space to copy the design that I had already put into the painting.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, 101 Merrimac—I think that's in the book—but that seems to be—

RICHARD HAAS: That's on the back cover.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. I think it's an enormous painting with plants and almost like a greenhouse. It looks as if it would cover up the architecture.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, the architecture had a lot of problems in it. It was a big atrium space inside a building. I think the building is about 12 floors, and the atrium is about six floors so it had a ceiling. It didn't go all the way up, as you might expect an atrium to do. And there was one blank wall and one side. Initially the windows areas were right in the center. And I was supposed to treat the two sides. And I got the architects to move the elevators to the center so that we could move the windows to the side and give me a more complete centered space.

AVIS BERMAN: And they were—and you were in the project early enough that they were able to do that.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. I met up with [The] Architects' Collaborative, I think it was, up in Boston. And I had that kind of input. Also in the ceiling I was able to have them drop the ceiling about 12 inches so that I could recess a disc and light it to give more lightness to that very flat ceiling that was up at the sixth-floor level.

AVIS BERMAN: This is amazing because I can see they also integrated real plants into these paintings—the painting of plants. And it really looks like it's an enormous light-filled greenhouse.

RICHARD HAAS: And we just made up the plants as we went along. And then they found some plants that they felt fit the painting area, so that came later. And they did actually build the little fountain attached to the wall where I had the painted waterfall. And so that was another little element that I felt worked very successfully.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And this was done in 1990, yes. And, I guess, the developer [H.N. Gorin Associates, Inc.] was involved?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it was a woman and I can't remember her name either [Rosalind Gorin]. And she was very cooperative. In the beginning we talked a lot. We ran into some snags along the way, mostly having to do with budgets and not wanting to pay for everything as we might have agreed to. And so there were some issues there. But basically it all ended amicably. And, I think, I even went to the cocktail party, if I'm not mistaken. [They laugh.] The famous cocktail party that always occurs at the end of any project where, as you said earlier, everyone congratulates themselves. And, oh, by the way, here's the architect and the artist, kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, well, even, by the way, in the *New York Times*, every once in a while or any newspaper sometimes they'll have something, a project like this, half the time when they show a work of art, they never give the artist's name. It drives me crazy.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, really!

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. You're shocked, shocked!

RICHARD HAAS: You mean, a public work more or less?

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. In the newspaper you never see it.

RICHARD HAAS: Huh! [Affirmative.] It's a background thing primarily, is it?

AVIS BERMAN: No. I just think sometimes you look and you want to know, oh, what's that? Who did that? The artist's name isn't on there.

RICHARD HAAS: My goodness. I guess, unless they're selling it at Sotheby's, they [inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Yes. Exactly.

RICHARD HAAS: And that happens all the time. When you try to find the name of an architect on a building that you find interesting, it's very hard—impossible almost.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Or murals. You're sitting there, and it's only a hundred years later that they sometimes manage to actually name the artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly. Well, do you—and is this signed by the way? Are you allowed to sign it?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I signed it. I don't know where I signed. Oh, yes, I have a little what do you call it?—plaque, painted version of a plaque. They like plaques. [Laughs.] They sometimes want to spend as much money for the plaque as they do for the art. But they do like plaques. So I paint my plaques then, saving them all that money that they can throw into, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: The cocktail party.

RICHARD HAAS: Right. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: And is this still extant, in good shape?

RICHARD HAAS: I was there less than a year ago, and it looked just fine. For a while, it was kind of grungy-looking in this space. But they seemed to keep it fairly clean. And there's a restaurant that spills over into it for lunch. It's a small space. It does not look as small as it really is when you see these photographs here

AVIS BERMAN: Because that's also very interesting that the architects were responsive instead of becoming very insecure or defensive or hostile about wanting a change. Someone is essentially saying, "I don't think you designed this very well." I don't know how one says that tactfully.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it's hard to say exactly, too. But I do think—I was in a sort of time frame where a lot of architects, who have trained primarily as contemporary or modernist architects, were jumping over to what was now the acceptable mode of design and didn't know a thing about it. And so they were really like babes in the water when it came to what should this historicist kind of building look like anyway. They had no background for it. You see the results all over; they're terrible for the most part. So it was almost a flat out bad period. But, I guess, they saw me as someone who had a little more understanding of what those periods might have looked like and what the proportions might have looked like and so on. Of course, I was making it up as well, but that's another issue.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.] Okay. Is there anything else that you would like to say about working with architects?

RICHARD HAAS: I think there's never going to be a perfect fit between the artist and the architect. They really are like somewhat parallel trains running on tracks adjacent to each other that occasionally collide. That's the best way I would put it. Because the signals could cross. And the architects are probably more, if they're hostile, usually it's because they're jealous of the fact that they—most of their creative juices have been squeezed out of them by the time they get to working with the artists on these projects. But having said that, I think they can be your best ally because they're more sympathetic in many ways than the people who are commissioning the works. So there is that, too.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. It would seem that of the many architects—and since you've done several projects with him—that Bob Stern would be more simpatico than some of the other ones.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, Bob, because he deals with the more historicist kind of architecture, at least in the bottom half of his office, [Laughs.], is definitely—he understands and has a great sense and knowledge of history there, right?—he understands the need for all this. To say whether or not he has more true knowledge of it, I can't say. But he does have a terrific kind of interaction with artists and has had from day one. So he's an exception. I've never worked with [Frank] Gehry except in one small incident which never happened. He also is a person who has a tremendous amount of interaction with artists from the get-go. Malcolm Holtzman is somebody who I always had—though I never worked with him—always had very good relations as an architect who understood artists, I think more than most. And I don't know what that led to in that firm, but he did try to integrate art into his work projects quite a bit.

There were those architects who I sort of saw on the sideline of projects—like I worked in I. M. Pei's office on a project, but it was a very sideline kind of project that I. M. Pei wasn't really involved in on that one. But I could see that there was more of a dictatorial attitude toward how the art fitted into the architect's scheme of things. And it seems to me in most cases architects like to work with those people who they're friendly with and have had a long relationship. And probably feel they aren't going to overstep their boundaries very much. And boundaries are definitely what it's all about. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Pei also comes from an older school in which you just have the plunk art or that the objects don't have to integrate. You have an occasion—

RICHARD HAAS: As did [Phillip] Johnson—he came from that school as well.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And I think, you know, [Eero] Saarinen's partner, what was his name?

AVIS BERMAN: [James Stewart] Polshek? No.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. I never dealt with—Polshek's before my time really. No, he's still around. The guy who did the Metropolitan Museum.

AVIS BERMAN: Not [Kevin] Roche **& [John] Dinkeloo.**

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, Roche.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: Kevin Roche is friendly but probably not that involved in working with artists on a one-to-one basis, of that older school, in other words.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Polshek might have been a more interesting case because, I think, he is someone who has always allowed in more latitude than most architects of that period.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, and I did work [Cityscape, 1981] with—I forgot—[Ulrich Joseph] Ricky Franzen. That was quite a major involvement. That was with Philip Morris [Headquarters, New York City, NY].

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And there I was given quite a bit of latitude by Franzen. And by the owner—or the CEO.

AVIS BERMAN: Of course, Philip Morris historically has had a long involvement in art patronage.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, they were at the peak of that when I was working with them. And it was a very discombobulated and conflicting moment for me because I was giving up smoking. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Was that because you were there, or just serendipitous?

RICHARD HAAS: It was just by chance that that project and my giving up smoking converged exactly at the same moment. The meetings were difficult, let's put it that way.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Oh, that's funny. Okay. Well, let's go on to this project that you did, the Gateway for Yonkers [*Gateway to the Waterfront*, 1997, Yonkers, NY], which is probably near where you live. And how that came about.

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if you can record all that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. [They laugh.]

RICHARD HAAS: It is Yonkers, after all.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, it's just such a—it just is spread over several buildings.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it really started as a conversation with a guy named Jim Sordoval. Now Jim somehow I knew from the neighborhood. He was from the neighborhood and a close friend of another individual who lived about a block away from me. So I'd had conversations with Jim before the projects even were anymore than something in his head. And he was the one who was also involved in the local politics to such an extent than he literally got the whole thing started. The whole revival of central Yonkers was his idea. And I participated in several meetings even before I was part of the idea of the project: about what are we going to do down here anyway? That kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: And so there were what I call charrettes I participated in way back ten years before the project happened. It took forever. There was a lot of backroom political stuff that went on. Jim kept it alive and kept me in the story of how he wanted to do that.

AVIS BERMAN: *Gateway to the Waterfront*.

RICHARD HAAS: *Gateway to the Waterfront*. And so it was always going to be my space to deal with, even though the project lived and died several times over. But they got matching monies; I think federal monies, maybe state monies, as well as city money to do it. And so I was given pretty wide latitude as to what to do there. And it took off, and we did it without much of a hitch. I made a lot of sort of demands to the city about how they prepare those walls and so on. [Telephone rings.] A lot of promises were made.

AVIS BERMAN: Shall I pause that?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I'd better—

[Audio Break.]

AVIS BERMAN: We were on Yonkers, and you were saying a lot of promises were made, and you had made demands on the city.

RICHARD HAAS: I made demands on the city about how the walls and everything could be prepped, etc. There were a few conditions that they put on me that I went along with: like they wanted to keep the surface space open for a restaurant. Never happened. Most of the things that they were preparing for never happened. Much of what's gone on in the area never happened. It's a half-finished redevelopment, Although it's gone much further than some people might have expected, it's unfortunately not taken off in any great manner. And what I was very concerned about was that I didn't want my painting to be the excuse to light the fires of redevelopment. Because I'd been there before, and I find that is not a very good tool or means by which any city or any development tries to kind of make something happen. You can't paint your way into success. That's the answer right there. And they do do that. And this was one case where I was very worried about that. And in fact, my work sort of stayed there for about five years before anything really started to happen down the street, and that worried me, of course. That was the one concern I had.

But because I was very close to and friendly with the person who was in charge of the development project I decided to go ahead on the promise that this wouldn't be the case. He got fired shortly after that. We won't go into the reasons. But then things changed. The project has stayed there and done very well. And it's never been defiled, which I find—everyone is amazed about the fact that it's in a pretty rough neighborhood, and it hasn't been attacked.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Because it really also looks terrific. I mean, the scope, it really spreads out. The other question is, when you were saying, oh, that you couldn't paint because there would be a restaurant, what would you have done in other words—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, not much different. I mean, what I actually tried to do in the project anyway was to keep the lower parts as free of as much detail as possible, expecting there were going to be a lot of attacks. Because when I started—I don't know if that's shown; no it doesn't show already—this was all graffiti, the bottom was all graffiti.

AVIS BERMAN: These pictures are them preparing these very plain walls that got—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, it was a totally nonexistent park. It was like a paved-over piece of nothing that they called a little insert park. They've since then made it a more elaborate piece of nothing, and it's still not doing very well as a park.

AVIS BERMAN: But now the paintings are all sorts of—

RICHARD HAAS: I also thought of it as a gateway when—I literally felt as you came down from upper Main to lower Main, you would see this on both sides of the street. That's why I insisted on jumping over to the other side of the street. Their initial intention was only that I treat the two walls on the left side. And I said, "No, I want to go on the other side of the street and treat that building as well because it really is a part of the whole way in which you approach that area."

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And you've given them rustication. You've given them all sorts of stone treatment and materials that are never used—and would never have been used on the back of even a Beaux-Arts building.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. They knew my previous work because I had already done quite a few major projects before I got to that one.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And so I was known to a lot of the locals there. I was already on the board of the Hudson River Museum [Yonkers, NY], for instance. But they really didn't know what I was going to do. [They laugh.] And they let go. I had a little hard time, too, to try to figure out how I would unify and at the same time separate these different façades.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think it's tremendously successful, and I hope they thought so.

RICHARD HAAS: They're very pleased. I get more compliments probably because I hear more people who see it than in other cities. See, I don't know what happens in most cities. When I do something, I leave, and that's the end of it. There's literally no connection to the work after I leave. But here, I constantly run into friends, neighbors, and otherwise, people who see it every day. And that's rewarding in a way, to know what the post-painted life is really like in one of these projects.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right.

RICHARD HAAS: I think that is probably the most important thing for keeping on, going on, as it were.

AVIS BERMAN: Also by now you probably knew all about, as you say, preparation of the walls and resistant kinds of paints and all. The craft aspect is probably honed by now.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, we were better at it by then. There are still some problems with this wall. I had some problems, too, in the painting of it. I felt that some hands were better than others, and I had to jump in one case and say, "Let So-and-so do that part of it, please." Because it wasn't all that I wanted it to be in that regard. But that's like so many projects, if the paintings, the boards as I call them, the boards are complete enough and tight enough, you can go wrong but only to a certain extent. So I don't feel it compromised the piece in a big way. It just annoys the hell out of me because I have to see it everyday. [They laugh.] Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. This is in 1997. I saw on your website a terrific-looking mural [*The Communications Mural*, 1997] that was done for the A. H. Belo. B-E-L-O—Corporation, in Dallas [Texas].

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if that's in this book somewhere.

AVIS BERMAN: And it looked like it was about, for lack of a better word, past-times of Dallas. Or Dallas at work or play—or Texas.

RICHARD HAAS: No. It wasn't totally that. I just remind myself of it. It was a company that had been around for a long time. And they had already had a mural painted in the space that was really not painted for that particular space but was painted, I think, for the great state fair of the 1930s. They had a hundredth anniversary of Texas, I think, the year I was born, to be exact, 1936. So they did the most fantastic Art Deco park that's still there, 100 percent there today, about two miles west of the site where I did my painting. And the artist—I can't even remember for sure what his name was; he was one of those 30s painters.

AVIS BERMAN: Tom Lea, L-E-A?

RICHARD HAAS: No, it wasn't that.

AVIS BERMAN: Because he did a lot of work in Texas.

RICHARD HAAS: And I was thinking Sample or something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Paul Sample.

RICHARD HAAS: Maybe Paul Sample. He was an artist that I didn't really have much familiarity with. But he did a great job. He did frescoes. They were frescoes, and they were beautifully painted. And somehow they were preserved, and they were put back up in those spaces, and they were large. And so he told the story from 1836 to 1936, I think, or 1940 it might have even been; he added a piece. So I saw that the story was complete up 'til then. And it was really the story of this Belo Company and how they came into the prairie and brought the newspaper industry to Texas.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh! Is it a newspaper company or printing?

RICHARD HAAS: Belo was the *Dallas Morning News*.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

RICHARD HAAS: And that was their main business. And there was a long history of that shown there. Then they took over, and they started radio. And then they started television. So that was the continuation of the story. Well, they showed a little about radio in his mural, but they certainly didn't talk about television. So I decided, well, the newspaper was still flourishing at the time I was doing that mural. And TV was becoming the more dominant of the things they had. And they didn't just own one now; they owned like 15 stations all through the West. They also owned a dozen newspapers all through the West. So it was a holding company. So I thought I would first of all show the newspaper business, and I had in mind that fairly interesting mural out there in Detroit done by that guy from Mexico. What's his name? [Reference to *Detroit Industry*, 1933, Detroit Institute of Art by Diego Rivera.]

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, him. And so they took me through the printing plant with a hardhat. And I was really taken by the whole experience of how those machines are two blocks long. And the stuff comes up from the basement, these huge rolls, and they go on there, and they just go all the way through. And at the end it's chop, chop, chop, bundled and ready to go into the truck. The system is so complete and so automated, so that's what I featured on one of my murals is newspapers today from computer screen to the truck and its delivery system out into the city of Dallas. So that's one. That was 30 feet by 12 feet.

Then I said, well, I've got to deal now with the other side, which is what I call the electronic information. And there, I went into the TV station. And you don't see a lot. I mean, what do you see there? Some people sitting around in front of blue screens and not much else. So I had a little more difficult of a time. So I decided to say, what are they talking about? They're talking about sports—always important, right? Sports is very important. Weather, that's very important. Those are the anchors. And then in between is the news, which, of course, is constantly churning. And the news also involves arts and entertainments and so on and so forth.

So that's how that mural evolved. And I had to unify it through the building it was in. It was a modern building, so it had a modern feel to the whole thing. And it ended up on the right-hand side with a satellite going up. And, of course, some of those—what do they call them?—which everything is controlled by today. Yes, the satellite system.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, all right. Oh, in the sky.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. So I had several of those—information satellites as the end of the piece: the stars, the heavens, the stars and satellites floating around. So it went from that Dallas and Houston city events, things happening in the city, to these things that are transmitting it all out in space.

AVIS BERMAN: That's interesting because when I saw those murals on the website, I thought they had a real New Deal quality to them. [They laugh.] You were telling a certain kind of story, the history of communication. But I didn't realize that elsewhere in the—now, how close were your murals to—

RICHARD HAAS: A few feet.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you trying to integrate it stylistically or more through subject?

RICHARD HAAS: I was trying to keep them separate in that really difficult space. It's a difficult building, which I incorporated in one of the murals. And so they had me put them on these marble walls, floating on these walls. So they really are separated from the early murals—I guess, the whole building is an octagon. So there were two parts of the octagon on two sides. And then where the elevator shafts were, they were covered with marble. And my murals were facing outward toward the other murals but pretty far away from them.

AVIS BERMAN: Were they painted on site, or were they painted here?

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. They were painted here, right here in the studio. And then they were transported and put on a stretcher and bolted into the walls down there. And then we did some touch-up on the walls where they had to be bolted in. We did a little fussing with the lighting, which I had never felt was quite right anyway. So they're pretty much attached. They look like they're attached and permanent, as do the earlier murals. But none of it was permanent. All of this was brought from other places. There's not a lot of public that gets to see them, although they can stare in a little bit to the space.

AVIS BERMAN: It's mostly the members of—the employees see it.

RICHARD HAAS: It's mostly the employees that see it. I was playing to them, and I would go up and down and take some shots, you know, in different offices. Hopefully even get a face or two in, that might look familiar, without getting anybody important because they'd all be fired anyway. [They laugh.] No, it was—I liked it. I liked the process. There was a woman I was working with who was their arts person, who was very cooperative and very helpful and knew a lot of art. And another—Murray Smither was kind of the coordinator of it all; and Murray was an old friend from Dallas, who was a great art patron, dealer, whatever. He is just an important art personage in Texas.

AVIS BERMAN: So do you think he was who got you in there?

RICHARD HAAS: I do, yes. I think she—I can't remember her name now; she has a Spanish name—called Murray and said, "You know, I've got this mural project." Because Murray helped her save the old murals. He helps do everything like that in Texas. And she said, "Who might it be?" And he suggested my name because I had done some work with Murray a long time ago. And so then we had the meeting, the three of us. I think they came up here actually and had the meeting. And it went forward right away.

AVIS BERMAN: Just out of curiosity, is Murray Smither still alive?

RICHARD HAAS: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: It sounds like he should be interviewed.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, Murray knows a lot about a lot of things. And Murray's greatest contribution is outsider art. He has probably identified and found more outsider artists than anyone else in the United States, period. I don't know if some of the household name ones were his discovery, but they probably were. His family, his cousins had one of the largest collections in the country of that stuff. And they live in Huntsville [Texas]. I worked with his cousin in Huntsville on that project, too. So I had several crossovers with Murray over the years.

AVIS BERMAN: He just sounds like an art figure who should be maybe—

RICHARD HAAS: He's a very interesting guy. Yes, he really would be. You ever hear of Laura Carpenter? That was his partner for a while in a [Delahunty] Gallery in Dallas [TX] way back, and I showed there ["Richard Haas," 1976]. Laura Carpenter was part of the Carpenter family, [inaudible] Carpenter; there's a whole city named after her father, and I can't remember—it's one of those kinds of Texas families.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: But she went off and became an art dealer here in New York and then out on Long Island. She may still be out in the Hamptons, as a matter of fact. She was Murray's partner. But Murray is really his own person and knew every artist whoever lived, I think, or came through Texas certainly. And when I first met him in 1974, he gave me a credit card and his old beat-up Volkswagen, and I went out and looked at all these county courthouses in the state, and did a series of prints about courthouses and houses and buildings of Texas and published it through his gallery. And I remember when we met in Houston [TX]—because he flew down and wanted me to meet some people. He said, "Oh, there's this guy I want you to meet. His name is Julian Schnabel. He's just a kid. He's kind of a punk, but we'll go see him." And I went to meet Julian when he was an 18, 19 year-old artist living in a little loft in Houston. But I knew Julian a little bit later after that, too, for a brief moment. But he was that kind of guy that would know everybody before they even knew about themselves.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. And saw that there was something—yes. And saw that there was something there.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, yes. Very key guy in a region, you know. Not known to New York so much, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, that's why I'm just saying this is the kind of person who's had a lot of influence, but because not known to provincial East Coasters should be—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And you wouldn't see anyone who's been around Texas art for long who wouldn't know

Murray.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And at the company they gave you free rein with the idea? Or did they have any idea and you said, I want to do this instead?

RICHARD HAAS: They pretty much gave me free rein as I recall.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: I think because of this—Judith Seguro was her name now, I think. She was very helpful as a go-between. And they had dealt with a couple of other artists on projects up until then. I might bring up the point it's very important to have a person like that in between you and any project and they don't often exist. But if they do, things can usually happen in a more positive way. And without those people, forget about it.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, I should ask a more general question—what are the big risks of doing these public commissions? The worst risk is that after you get it—it doesn't survive. But maybe up to this—before it's done.

RICHARD HAAS: You mean, it never gets started in the first place? Or it doesn't last once you leave it? [Laughs.] Both sides are risk factors. But the biggest risk factor is going into any community cold and not having a person who's going to be your advocate. If you go in a community cold and meet with whoever the players might be, and there isn't somebody there who will be your personal advocate while you're there and after you leave, then it's not going to happen. The project is just going to fall apart without that person.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But presumably you went to the community because there was someone or some entity that wanted the project.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: So wouldn't there be a built-in advocate?

RICHARD HAAS: Not always. Because wanting something can come in many different forms. Maybe they open a book and say, we want one of these. Closed. [They laugh.] Or it may be that someone like a visiting fireman, like a Bob Stern, will say, you should have one of these. Closed. Or whatever. But unless there's someone in and of that immediate surrounding, that community, that is willing to take it on as a project for themselves as much as for you, it's not going to happen. And I've found that over and over again.

AVIS BERMAN: What would be a couple of examples of when it didn't happen or it collapsed because there was nobody?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I can do two comparisons: One is Huntsville, where Linda Pease is hired by the city of Huntsville to be their arts person. She calls me in 1990 and says, with that wonderful Texas accent, "We've got a little city down here that needs a lot of help." And it took off from there. And that was a ten, eleven year relationship, projects where she—it started, it stopped, it started again, it stopped. You know what I mean? It was something she kept going when—

AVIS BERMAN: But it got done?

RICHARD HAAS: It got done—enough of it got done. We were very ambitious there. I did a whole downtown plan the size of this table with buildings, you know, of all sorts in different places. And we did maybe over 50 percent of what I had initially proposed. And she also brought in a city planner, what do they call them? A landscape architect and planner type person. And he worked with me, sometimes for, sometimes against. But he was at least part of my team. So that was also, I thought, intelligent on her part. And even now, I'm in phone conversation with her. She wants me to come down and do a little show in a little community museum she helped start. There were a lot of little things that came together that she nursed through the process. And, as I said, if she weren't there, this thing couldn't have happened in a million years.

Another community, Troy, had somebody who moved from Huntsville to a town called Troy, Alabama, a town about two-thirds the size of Huntsville—maybe even half the size. But with some similarities—a lot of similarities, actually. And they had a downtown that was as dead as a doornail, just like Huntsville was. They had a university attached to it, as Huntsville did. They didn't have the prison, thank God. But they had a lot of the same elements. And there were a couple of people that brought me down and got me to walk through the town and talk about what I could do and come up with a proposal. But they never got it to stage two because the woman who was in charge was, well, maybe she was a little too old. She was a terrific lady. But she didn't have that staying power that got it to second base. She took it—one time I gave her a long written thing that I wanted to do. She didn't understand it totally, but she took it anyway to the state government to see if she could get a little grant. They nixed it. It died. So, in other words, she didn't have the full deck of cards that would allow

something like that to go.

Linda would take it to the state; they would give a little money. She took it to get a federal grant; they gave a little money. The city gave some money. Some local merchants got involved; they gave some money. That kind of thing has to happen in a project, especially one that has some complex parts, like redoing a downtown of a dying little city. So those are—those are kind of two examples that—I mean, each one is a story unto itself. So I could go on and on ad infinitum about these different projects.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. The energy of your champion is pivotal.

RICHARD HAAS: It is pivotal. And their knowledge base is pivotal. And how they are able to field all the complex stuff that goes on in any project. I mean, I hand it to Christo and Jeanne-Claude who have to do their own what I call Über Dog and Pony Show. [They laugh.] But that's a rarity. And in most cases if you're working all over the map, and I certainly was at the peak of working all over the map, you can't handle each of those places very well. So there are a lot of people who are advocates and, whatever you want to call them, arts-persons who work with you.

AVIS BERMAN: It's also, depending on when something gets proposed and when it's done, you can have these overlaps. Because you can't work on too many per year. But now you're more experienced. You probably know the arc of how long something is going to take.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, you don't know the arc—ever. [They laugh.] You never know how long this is going to take—or whether it's going to take or if it's going to have to take two or three starts to actually happen. You don't know. Nor do you even know what the impact might be of something you're going to do, relative impact. Like when I walked down the street in Miami Beach [FL] and looked at that godawful wall on the back of the Fontainebleau [Hilton Hotel, 1986] I said, this? And then, of course, we had some very strange encounters with the owner of that. But when it finally happened, I had no idea of the impact it would have. And probably of all the things I did, it had probably more impact for its life than anything else.

AVIS BERMAN: We should say that this project eventually was torn down.

RICHARD HAAS: That was torn down, I don't know, four years ago? Something like that.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, and what kind of impact did it have?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it had a physical impact on the community. There's nobody that could possibly exist in that town that didn't have some encounter with that piece. So it was the right piece at the right time in the right place. That's, I guess, what you would say the virtual equivalent of location, location, location is all about. So that's a very important aspect: location. And then there's the type of community it was, you know. It was a community that was reinventing itself—against its own will, I might add, by the way. [They laugh.] That's a whole other story. But it was right—just like SoHo earlier on was the right piece at the right time in the right place. Unbeknownst to itself as well. You didn't know where this community was going to take off and go to. You didn't know where Miami Beach was going to take off and go to when I did that piece. It was dying, it was sleeping, it was not happening.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, just to talk about something with an impact, what about—this is a much earlier piece—do you feel the Peck Slip, the power station [*Peck Slip, South Street Seaport*, New York City, NY, 1978]—did that have a lot of impact on the community?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think that was a fortunate piece that happened in another way that probably I would not have identified as being an important location when I first encountered it. And that area was definitely a sleeping area as well. But there were a lot of eyeballs looking at it at that time. I knew that. There was a lot of stuff that was starting to happen. And, of course, Doris Freedman was around, and she was involved in that, and she was someone who understood these things far better than I did at that time certainly. She understood the politics that was always behind any project.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Exactly.

RICHARD HAAS: I think politics is behind all public art in one way or another, whether it's self-involved or whether it's a commission coming from an outside group. But politics is such a volatile and changing thing that it can have a terrifically bad effect in a matter of seconds when things don't align correctly. And that piece I did down at the Tombs is probably one of the more flagrant examples of that, another case where I didn't know what was coming. The train was coming around the corner, and they were about to hit me. I had no idea.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Is that something you want to go into, that piece?

RICHARD HAAS: We could, if you want to.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, sure. Let's get the right title on that, just so I can have it on the tape. Because I know that was probably the most controversial piece, as it ended up.

RICHARD HAAS: I guess it was. Certainly in the New York area.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Is it in here?

AVIS BERMAN: I think so. Yes, I think so. Oh, did you just pass it?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, because I would forget the dates if I didn't. Oh, there it is. It's *White Street Detention Center*, completed 1997, and it's on two or three streets—or two streets actually. White Street is a street that is blocked, and there is a bridge that goes from the detention center to the courthouse. And that was one of the sites I dealt with. And then on the back of it, there is—is it Dyer Avenue? The street behind. There were seven blank spaces that were indented in a long wall on the second-story level. And that was where the gymnasium for the jail was, behind those. So I really saw it as two projects. And there were really two artists. It was a collaboration to some extent in that Kit-Yin Snyder was the other artist who was chosen along with me to do this Percent for Art project. Kit-Yin chose to do the Judgment of Solomon, and she did a piece that was on top of the bridge, just like a chair that had steps going up to it. So we did talk about a collaboration on that particular one. And I did two matching pairs of reliefs on both sides, which was a combination of the Judgment of Pao Kung and the Judgment of Solomon. Kit-Yin was helpful in finding out about this story. She had a husband who did some history and study and brought that idea. Because I started with the Judgment of Solomon. And then we talked about how are we going to get the Chinese community involved in this?

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And we found that there was this matching story, which was absolutely terrific. Then I said, how am I going to do this? Well, then I had to do sculptural reliefs. Well, I don't know sculptural reliefs. So then I came to my friend Jonathan Shahn, who I'd worked with on another project. And Jonathan took it on as a challenge, and we worked together, literally making those reliefs. Six foot-by-six foot, a thousand pounds each, and painted them and stuck them up on the wall. That was, I think, just very successful in how it all came together. On the back, I said I wanted to do something about the local, Lower East Side communities where you get more than anything a chockablock, really the history of immigration. And so I said, wait, there's these two panels on either side: one could be the immigrants coming off the ship; the other is the immigrants coming off the plane. That's the bracket. And then in between there are five other spaces. And I said, well, we would feature the Chinese community here and the Lower East Side Italian community, and the Lower East Side Jewish community. And one was a sweatshop where they all had to work together.

And then finally there was the one—I said, well, then there's today. And today at that time was a very dismal community. And I didn't see it as the Hispanic community at all when I dealt with it. I saw it as the Lower East Side as it is today. But I put the word in there "bodega," and that blew the whistle, and literally blew the thing apart because it had some negative aspects to the way the street looked. It had a bum. It had a hooker. It had a beat-up, burnt-out car. What I had seen on the streets at that time. So they said, "why are you doing a positive story about all the others—a sweatshop is positive?—etc., and doing a negative story about the Hispanic mural?" And I said, "What do you mean the Hispanic mural?" And they pointed to it, and they said, "The one that says bodega, that's a Hispanic mural." So they co-opted me basically by calling it a Hispanic mural. Okay. I started to kind of do a double-take and look at it from their perspective. And as I looked at it more and more from their perspective with conversations with these guys—and these guys were interesting. The Hispanic guards of the jail were on the case. And they took it to the press and the Hispanic media. I said, Well, I think, I have to deal with this now that it's been co-opted and adopted as their mural. There was another guy named Tom Finkelpearl who was involved in this somehow.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, a Public Art Fund [Cultural Affairs Department] person.

RICHARD HAAS: Tom had a rather strange attitude, I thought, at the time. He said, "Well, it's a perfect opportunity for a confrontation." Thank you, Tom. Okay. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: It's a typical art world response.

RICHARD HAAS: All right. Yes, yes. Well, Tom was on his way to try to be somebody, but I won't go into that. Anyway, then there was Luis Cancel, who was then the—

AVIS BERMAN: Cancel.

RICHARD HAAS: Cancel. The Commissioner [of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs] under [Mayor David] Dinkins. He, of course, was pretty much coming at it from both sides. More from the side of the Hispanic group than not. So I listened to all of this and to several others, some who came to my studio, huffing and puffing. And I sat them down, and we had conversation. And in one case there was a young gal who was from the Spanish press and after our conversation she got up, and she said, "Gee! I don't know what I'm going to write about after this. Because, you know, you've made me think about some things I hadn't thought about." Duh! [They laugh.] Like one of the things I said, "Why are you people so antagonistic? Is there something in the community itself that is bothering you?" That kind of thing. Sort of taking it both ways.

Then by chance Luis Cancel and his wife are sitting in a restaurant up near our house, and I come in with Gregory. He was four years old then. And they literally saw that we have an adopted son who is probably Hispanic, which confused the hell out of them, the whole thing. So then he took my side of the whole story. And I said, "Louis," I said, "let's sit down and really—why don't we have a meeting with the community and see where we can go with this?" I'm willing - I said, "I don't want to compromise 90 percent of a project that I think is working for this protest that is based-"

AVIS BERMAN: For one panel.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, for one panel. I said, "I am willing if you're willing to find the funds to rethink and redo that panel, and take it through another process all by itself with the Hispanic community." So whatever it was, we went back to the Art Commission, and they were in their own state of strangeness at that time, under a certain head. So they agreed to review the piece that I offered. So I did a new piece. And that piece had in it a baseball player who looked a lot like Clemente; I had two guys playing checkers, one of whom happened to look like Dinkins; that was accidental, of course. In the foreground I had two young kids, one of whom was my son, going to school. And I did that piece. And even then there were some protests—[They laugh.]—which I thought was hilarious—by one of the members of the Art Commission who was Hispanic. But the rest of them were totally in favor of it, as was everyone else in the loop. So we redid the piece, and it's lived on ever since.

AVIS BERMAN: So it was completed in '97. When did it start?

RICHARD HAAS: Probably '90.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Maybe even '89. It certainly started long before my son was around, which I thought was interesting. It was a way of getting back at the whole process and incorporating him as part of the piece. That's how I saw it, anyway. It was also a learning experience because during that process, from '89 to '97, everything was happening in public art to turn itself upside down, literally, during that process. So this piece was part of that whole turning over of the soil, as it were.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right, for including the community. But also a lot more artists were making places as opposed to discrete objects. That happened a lot, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Everything was changing. I could go on about it, and any number of artists could. And [Richard] Serra was having his difficulties around the corner.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: Literally. So that was all going on. And that's the only time I had conversations with Richard about anything. But we did have some conversations.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what was your—That would be interesting if you could recall what the two of you said.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, he called, and he wanted me to support going down to the GSA and talking about everything. And we talked about what was happening in the community, what was happening in general. How is art, public art, going to get through this one? And so on and so forth. And so we just had a general conversation about the whole thing, and what are the parameters? And I came up with the story, and he loved it, and he used it. And I said, "You know, the story about Michelangelo and the Last Supper [*The Last Judgment* 1537-41, Sistine Chapel, Vatican], right?" And he said, "No." "Well," I said, "after Michelangelo dies, there is the pope who wants to destroy things, right? And then the most important thing is he wanted to cover up all the genitalia." So he hires an artist to go in and literally repaint much of that mural." But I said, "There were two things that were going on: One is the artist likes Michelangelo and really wasn't that happy doing this. So he worked very slowly. And secondly, the Pope was very old and about to die. So the two things were converging." [They laugh.] And I said, "Maybe this is not unlike that." And he thought that was terrific. So he used that. [Laughs.]

But his story, of course, became a world-class story, and mine was just a little footnote in the end. And then John

Ahearn was involved in his piece. And that became a Jane Kramer story. She mostly focused on John, but she did interview me for a couple of hours and included my piece as a part of what was going on at the time as a *New Yorker* article. I think that won an award actually. A lot was going on around that piece, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Let's see. Oh, I wanted to ask you, there was something in [Lodi], Italy in 2005, an International Mural Festival [International Trompe l'oeil Festival]?

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, right.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were—What was that?

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know how they got my name. I guess, they looked at a book. And apparently it had been going on three or four times before. But this town—beautiful little town—Lodi, every year used the main square. They put up a tent. And they brought in about 50 artists from all over the world, mostly from Italy and that area but some from New York, some from Chicago—one from South America, one from Mexico. And they were given a theme. They were given a panel, a square, 50 inches by 50 inches, I think. What would be the equivalent of 2 meters by 2 meters. Then at noon on Friday, told to start. And then on noon on Sunday, they were told to stop. And they had to execute a sort of miniature mural in that time with that theme that they were given. They were given the theme about a week in advance. And so we would just walk around, have some good pasta, look at these things. Then at the end—we were a jury of five people.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so you didn't paint one.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no, no. I was a juror—I was the juror.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, you were the juror.

RICHARD HAAS: I had a little show in the little community gallery there. I gave a talk which went, as all Italian talks, went nowhere. And then on the jury were these two wonderful people; they were the chief designers for the opera in Milan, [Italy].

AVIS BERMAN: La Scala [The Theatre on the Steps].

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And they took me on a tour of their facilities, which blew my mind. But none of them spoke English very well. The woman who was my translator didn't speak English very well. So it was a little complicated. [They laugh.] But it all worked out. And, I think, we gave out pretty good awards. We all ended up agreeing on everything but one. And I brought in an American they didn't like. And I let them have a certain local artist they liked. And it worked out. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: It seems a funny thing because, of course, the mural has to have—one thinks of a mural having an architectural setting and a subject that would go with it.

RICHARD HAAS: No, it was more trompe l'oeil than it was Muralism. So the theme was basically—these are artists who I suppose most of them made their living decorating homes for that whole industry that I feel I had a little something to do with. But—

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. I can tell you from my mural research on New York murals in the '80s. In the 1880s, 95 percent of the commissions were for homes of robber barons.

RICHARD HAAS: Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: But they had [John] La Farge and [Edwin Howland] Blashfield and Frederic Leighton. So they were pretty high-quality artists.

RICHARD HAAS: They would do these private commissions.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: True.

AVIS BERMAN: That was the only way to—

RICHARD HAAS: And that hasn't been very well documented, though. It hasn't been saved very well.

AVIS BERMAN: I'm trying. [They laugh.] So, yes, most of them were destroyed. But that was a fantastic—

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. As most of those kinds of things always are, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, because of the public, they're—New York didn't, for example, didn't have many public buildings.

RICHARD HAAS: Restaurants. A lot of restaurants even then.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Of course. Yes. Hotels.

RICHARD HAAS: Hotels, yes. It's about the same today—

AVIS BERMAN: Theaters.

RICHARD HAAS: —pretty much.

AVIS BERMAN: I asked that question because I thought you were involved in painting a mural there.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Then in 2006 to 2007, you had a commission for 110 Livingston Street. And is that Brooklyn [NY]?

RICHARD HAAS: In Brooklyn, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And was that a city or a private—?

RICHARD HAAS: No, that was Walentas, my old friend David—friend, adversary, whatever you want to call him.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, I don't know who he is.

RICHARD HAAS: David Walentas started Two Trees, [Brooklyn, NY] way back, and I did several projects with him in the late '70s, early '80s. Like Alwyn Court [1982, New York City, NY] was his.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, right.

RICHARD HAAS: The Silk Building was his. And I did the lobby for One Main Street when he bought DUMBO [Down under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass]. He bought DUMBO around 1980. And he stayed there in DUMBO and developed it, of course. And now it is quite successful.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: But then he decided to expand over to 110 Livingston when, you know, [Mayor Rudolph] Giuliani was selling it, along with [Mayor Bloomberg] Bloomberg, I think.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And so he bought the thing and turned it into 400 apartments. And they had a big outdoor/indoor courtyard. Same architect as I dealt with in Alwyn Court, Beyer Blinder Belle, Jack Beyer. Although Beyer never does much when he's working with Walentas because Walentas has his own group. But when I looked at it, it was an impossible space basically. So I came up with a model, and worked on trying to make it all come together. And even redesigned their floor tiles in the outdoor courtyard. Not unlike what I did in Alwyn Court, really. But on a bigger outdoor scale. And we did it. And they loved it. And, I guess, they rented or sold all their apartments. I don't know. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: They got in under the wire with that.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Exactly. If it was 2006, yes. Because I remember 110 Livingston Street—was that the old Board of Education [building]?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, that one. Yes. And it's a McKim, Mead & *White* building. But a very late one. Not a very interesting one. So I used the McKim, Mead & White theme to some extent. It was not what I would call a totally organized space. So you can't say it was a totally organized singular kind of mural. It was pieces.

AVIS BERMAN: You redid the walls and windows? Or you gave it—

RICHARD HAAS: I redid the walls pretty much. And sort of reconfigured that courtyard area which was pretty discombobulated. I think for the people in the building, it's probably at plus plus. It's not really a public space, so you don't see it.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, that's what I didn't realize, is that it was 110 Livingston.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I still thought it was a municipal building, but it's not.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no. It's an apartment house.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, or lofts or whatever.

RICHARD HAAS: He was clever enough to have figured out how to do it. He added on the top in a pretty ugly way. But that's what they do [Laughs.]. When they look at a building, they say: How are we going to make money on this one?

AVIS BERMAN: Right. How are we going to get the most out of it?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. So they had to get 400 apartments to make it work.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Well, it's still unusual. This is relatively late in the real estate development moment that actually someone would still consider having an artist come in and making something.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Because it was David, and because I had worked with him in the past, and because he had an historic building, and he worked with his historical buildings before and after, and saw the benefit of my doing it. I'm sure it would never have happened if there hadn't been that past history between us. Because, yes, it's not something architects think about today.

AVIS BERMAN: When did that begin to decrease?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think it's a—I don't know what the bell curve is exactly—but it probably peaks somewhere in the late '80s, and then it slides back down after that slope.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I thought into the mid-'90s. I thought in the '90s it was going on.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it probably was. But maybe not in quite as interesting a way as it was in the late'80s, mid- to late '80s.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: Somewhere right around that 1988 to '90 period things, I think, started to turn the other way. And new ideas were coming into the fore in all kinds of ways.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think there was a return to an idea of Modernism. But also—

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely. That's true.

AVIS BERMAN: Just looking at New York, not the rest of the country—if you're building an all-glass building, that's—

RICHARD HAAS: Right.

AVIS BERMAN: —there's so much more glass in these new buildings—

RICHARD HAAS: True.

AVIS BERMAN: That makes a big difference. They don't have a wall.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, the walls, fewer walls. There was much less going on in redoing old buildings. And if they were being redone, there was not as much space given over to some kind of treatment. It was all always, let's put a glass thing here, and a shiny metal thing there. I call it the materialization of murals. In other words, what really happens is that the material becomes the paint.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Or the luxury items or the—or they consider it the artistic item?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Where there are seductive new materials that you can combine in different ways to make a material-esque kind of space. Not materialistic, material-esque kind of space. Okay?

AVIS BERMAN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: And that becomes then what architects are totally interested in. And that excludes the artist and the paint as a way to go.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: If they use artists and paint, they use them to enhance that effect. So I think that's been an ongoing thing. The historicist stuff continues to happen, but more peripherally now than in the so-called center of an action. And what is sort of interesting is I find contemporary architecture quite fascinating, and I paint them as paintings now rather than—[Laughs.] that's my interest there. I do see some windows of opportunity through the utilization of technology and how you can do some interesting things with it. I like, for instance, what [Pierre] de Meuron and [Jacques] Herzog did in a few cases where they actually used ways of etching glass, for instance, and telling stories through material—that is a possibility. I like the way you can now enhance with combines of photographs and/or paintings whole walls and attach things that way. I think there are a lot of potential things that really haven't been exploited.

AVIS BERMAN: Have you been to Millennium Park in Chicago where there are those big murals [Jaume Plensa, *The Crown Fountain*, 2004]?

RICHARD HAAS: Absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: These were done with computers.

RICHARD HAAS: That's called the LED [Light Emitting Diode] method .

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, I think LED is another very interesting way to go, where you can change façades on a constant basis. Fascinating.

AVIS BERMAN: That artist—

RICHARD HAAS: Goes right back to what I was thinking about in 1975, by the way, when I did this thing called the Chameleon Theater, where I, in the primitive time of that, I had them on three different—you could keep changing the façade. Like goes umph, and it'd be three different façades instead of one. With LED, forget about it. You can do that—you can do a hundred façades. [Laughs.] You can do whatever you want. And I find that totally fascinating. I find Times Square [New York City, NY] totally fascinating and what the LED has done to Times Square.

AVIS BERMAN: And you can project things all the time, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

AVIS BERMAN: So is a little—

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know if it's projection as much as it's electronic.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. LED is electronic. Those two artists who did with light restored the Twin Towers [*Tribute in Light*]—that kind of thing.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, that one, yes.

AVIS BERMAN: That's not a mural, but a way of using the light was—

RICHARD HAAS: Right. It's a way of using that, yes. Too expensive to do all the time, though. [Laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: They do it only once a year.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Then you have to think about is it green enough, and all that stuff. Another issue, another problem. But there's still a lot of stuff happening that has potential. But I do think that to do anything today, one has to plug into some way or another to that technology, to really make it go in a more interesting direction, so to speak.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And have that champion who would take you—would be interested in that medium, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And, I guess, some of them are. I mean, there was a [Comcast Center] building I saw in Philadelphia [PA]; it's one of the new telephone company people. First they hired Jonathan Borofsky to do these things that stick up [*Humanity in Motion*, 2008]. And then in the wall, as you go into the actual space, they have

a huge LED wall. It's actually a Robert A. M. Stern building, by the way. And that wall captures 90 percent of the people coming in, and they're just entranced by it. And less than 10 percent ever look up and see the Borofsky. So that's the one they got their Percent for Art on, up there. [They laugh.] And the wall was something the technology guy said, let's do this. And it wins nine out of ten times, that one, over the other. So there's an important story right there.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I want to finish today with a little discussion of the commission you're working on now, which is in New Jersey; it's a Transit [Sub] station in Monmouth [Bayonne]. Is it the New Jersey—is it the Transit? I mean, is it a train or a—

RICHARD HAAS: Well, it's another case of retro redo. Retro redo. They took a station, destroyed it, and made a Burger King 30 years ago. And it was a favorite station of that community. It was built around 1900 and another was there even before that. And now they're putting the light rail back, and that becomes the last stop. So what they're doing is doing a reconfiguration of that building. And so I'm brought in to enhance the—there is no inside; it's really an outside/inside thing—the inside wall of that open framed recapitulation of that station. And it's a five-sectioned piece I'm doing.

AVIS BERMAN: And what is the theme?

RICHARD HAAS: Well, because there are some arches all the way around, I start with the arch, which gives me a kind of a repetition of arches. I see through the arches, and I see a kind of a reconstruction of the community that I drove every street of and saw what all the different kinds of domestic architecture looks like there primarily. Because it is almost a museum of architecture from, say, 1850 to 1980. And I combine all that.

AVIS BERMAN: Is Monmouth—is that on the beach?

RICHARD HAAS: Bayonne? No.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, that's where you—Oh, that's where this—

RICHARD HAAS: This is in Bayonne.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Bayonne! Oh.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. Bayonne is this weird little place.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Which is not in Monmouth County.

RICHARD HAAS: No, no, no. Bayonne. It's right down—right over there.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I know. You know, why? Because it said "Monmouth" on the website.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh!?

AVIS BERMAN: So it's Bayonne.

RICHARD HAAS: Bayonne.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, a lot of other artists have done stuff there, and this is the last stop. And so—and the town is a little like Yonkers. It's got a little bit of everything. And yet it's freeze-framed. It stops in time. Because it's boxed in on all sides. And then, of course, there's the wonderful port situation. So above the arches I have a continuous line of water and then all kinds of little port things happen. So it's a two-part story. I always try to do more than one story and one situation if I can get it somehow in there in a logical way.

AVIS BERMAN: And is that a Percent for Art program as well?

RICHARD HAAS: Yes, I think Jersey Transit has a percent. It's not an outrageously large percent. But at least they're doing it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. They're doing it.

RICHARD HAAS: Yes. And I'm only half of the deal. There's a sculpture out front. The sculpture usually eats up more than a painting. [They laugh.] And we won't go into that. But, you know, they like it. We hope they'll like it when it's done.

AVIS BERMAN: But if it's going to be outside, is it a mosaic?

RICHARD HAAS: It's not out—no, it's not outside.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

RICHARD HAAS: It's under—it's inside/outside is how I would describe it. It's literally protected from the elements except some rain might hit it on the sides and some sun will hit it, but not—We'll do it in Keim, I think. We'll use Keimpaint.

AVIS BERMAN: What is that?

RICHARD HAAS: Keim is the paint I use outdoors.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. Is that C-H—?

RICHARD HAAS: K-E-I-M.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

RICHARD HAAS: I discovered Keim in 1978 in Munich [Germany], the wall I went to see destroyed last summer. And Keim is manufactured near Munich. It was started as a company in 1888 by Dr. Adolf Wilhelm Keim, who was hired by [King] Ludwig II [I of Bavaria] to do his palaces. He wanted to do all murals outdoors. And so he had Dr. Keim come up with the paint that would be the equivalent of outdoor fresco, and it would last out in the weather. And the formula is the same as they used then. But it's the best paint of its type for outdoor painting because it's not paint. It's actually silicate and powder, natural powder. So it doesn't fade, and it doesn't do all that stuff that paints do otherwise. So I've been using it since 1978 whenever I can. A lot of other people have latched onto it since then.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's amazing that the company's still in business.

RICHARD HAAS: The company's still there, yes. I don't know if they're flourishing. But they're still there.

AVIS BERMAN: They lasted through all those wars and everything.

RICHARD HAAS: Everything, everything, yes. And they kept the formula like Coca-Cola. [They laugh.] And they've had their imitators. But nothing comes close to it as far as I'm concerned. And I've proven that now in some that are 40 years almost. And the color of the acrylic is like here. When I start it's like this. The acrylic goes—fades to gray, and it stays right there. It's just amazing what happens in that period. And I recommended it, and they never gave me a dime. Well, well. [They laugh.]

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. This is terrific. Anything else you'd like to say at the moment?

RICHARD HAAS: No.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

RICHARD HAAS: I don't know what you're going to do with it all.

AVIS BERMAN: I guess, I meant also about the current commission.

RICHARD HAAS: Oh, the one out there.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, my worry is that we can get it done, because by the time I have to paint it, I don't know if my painters will still be around. Well, we're looking a year down the road at least.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

RICHARD HAAS: It'll be a year from now that they'll start painting. More than a year. A year and three months.

AVIS BERMAN: Do you think they'll disperse to different places?

RICHARD HAAS: Who knows, in this environment? Who knows, what'll be left a year from now? And that's a worry. Putting a crew together, that might be a worry.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I hope things get better in that, but they may not be working. That may be their own job, too.

RICHARD HAAS: Well, the company may not be there; that's my big worry. See, it's Evergreene [Painting Studios, New York City, NY], and I've done Evergreene all the way through.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

RICHARD HAAS: And to not have Evergreene there, and try to get this project done a year and three months from now, is scary.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, right. Okay. Great. Very good. Thank you very much.

[END OF TRACK 4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]