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Oral history interview with Robert Moskowitz,
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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 Robert Moskowitz on 2010 Apr. 26-27. The interview took place at the Moskowitz's home and studio New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Robert Moskowitz and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets. 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

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 26, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

Good morning.

ROBERT MOSKOWITZ: Good morning.

MS. RICHARDS: I want to start by asking you about your family background, your grandparents, where they were from, whether you knew them, all that, to your parents, to yourself.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay so I don't know [anything] beyond my grandparents, my father's parents were born in Romania and they came here—to American around 1904 when my father was born.

MS. RICHARDS: Was their name Moskowitz?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yes, their name was Moskowitz. I don't know what their name was before that because I imagine Moskowitz might have been given to them at Ellis Island. I'm not sure [but] I don't know too many Moskowitzes [in] Europe but there are lots of Moskowitzes in New York.

Well, their name was Moskowitz. I'm not sure what it was before that. I would like to find that out. It'd be interesting. But anyway, so my father's parents are from Romania and my father was born—the story is he was born on the way over here, in England. Maybe they had to stop off in England.

MS. RICHARDS: What are your grandparents' first names?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My grandfather's name was Gustave and I'm not sure what my grandmother's name is. I can't remember. Esther maybe. I know it was an Old Testament type name, I have really fond memories of my grandmother.

She seemed to be a very loving person. I remember her—of all that family, of all my father's family, I think was most attracted to my grandmother.

MS. RICHARDS: He had a big family here?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He had a brother and his brother had two children, two daughters. I have two siblings and so it wasn't a big family.

MS. RICHARDS: So your grandfather's name was Gustave and he and his wife, Esther, probably had your father while they were in England.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think he might have been conceived in Romania and he was born—in England but I don't think they really lived there for any length of time.

My grandfather was a tailor.

MS. RICHARDS: Gustave, and he was a tailor once he came to New York as well?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My father at one time, he was in a dry-cleaning business and he had a store and my grandfather worked in.

MS. RICHARDS: You were starting to talk about your mother's family.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My mother's family. That's kind of a story, more of a story that I would know about, we saw

them more often than we saw my father's parents.

My grandmother was born in Russia. She was born in Russia. I'm not sure when she came here. She probably came here around the same time my father's family came here, probably the early 1900s.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name, your grandmother?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Jenny.

MS. RICHARDS: Jenny?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, Jenny.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Jenny, J-E-N-N-Y, I'm not sure of—[the spelling]

MS. RICHARDS: And her last name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Sandman, S-A-N-D-M-A-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know where in Russia she came from?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I do not know. My grandfather, his name was Henry. He was born in the United States [U.S.]. His parents [were] from Holland. That's what I heard.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Henry.

MS. RICHARDS: No, his last name.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Sandman.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I'm sorry, what was Jenny's maiden name? Do you know that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know what her maiden name was.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My grandmother, ever since I could remember, she was this invalid, she was in bed. And they must have—she and Henry had a kind of crazy relationship. I don't think—I can't imagine they had sex at all as when I knew them because he slept in another room.

And they used to have this person that was—he wasn't a blood relative but he lived with them and he basically kind of—he was a furrier and he took care of my grandmother.

But I remember him serving my grandmother in return for staying in [their] house. He was like an adopted child in a way. It [was] a very strange kind of thing going on, you know. I never quite understood the whole thing because he slept in the same room as my grandfather. My grandfather was in the trucking business. He was this gruff old guy.

I remember this man served him and he would make his dinners for him, come home, and he sat at this little table, not at the big table in the kitchen but a little table having this meal and there were like two quarts of beer. He'd have like two quarts of beer every night with his supper.

My mother had one brother and two sisters, so four children in that family.

And my Uncle Irving, he was in business with my grandfather. But it was a very tumultuous relationship. I remember my grandmother was always very concerned about what was going on between her son and her husband and they were fighting all the time [about] this and that. They were not speaking to each other and it was very strange, very emotional.

And my grandmother had this heart condition. That's why I guess she was in bed all the time. She used to have these heart attacks, I remember. Every once in a while she'd have a heart attack and everybody would be really worried and Dr. Haas would come and do his numbers, whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: You remember his name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I guess he was an important person in the family, you know, because at that time doctors made house calls. It was a very different time—

MS. RICHARDS: Were both sets of your grandparents living in Brooklyn [NY]?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. My father's parents lived in—oh gosh, East New York I think it was called. I don't know what it's called now. But it was I guess there were a lot of Jews living in that area.

Maybe it was kind of close to Williamsburg. I don't think it was quite Williamsburg, maybe Brownsville. Is there a place called Brownsville, I think, Brooklyn?

MS. RICHARDS: Brownsville?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Brownsville, I think it was something like that. But I know it was called East New York and I remember my grandfather, he used to read the *Jewish Daily Forward*, I remember that, which was in Hebrew.

MS. RICHARDS: Yiddish.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yiddish, yeah it was in Yiddish. But the calligraphy was the same as Hebrew letters. He used to read that they spoke Yiddish. I remember my father when we'd go to visit, he would speak Yiddish at my grandparents' and my mother would speak Yiddish to her mother too.

I have memories of my grandfather, my mother's father, coming to visit us, oh gosh, and he'd smoke these cigarettes, these—I think maybe their company is still going—it's called [Nat] Sherman. Did you ever hear of that place?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, the dark coated paper?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, the dark coated paper. I don't know if he smoked dark coated paper but I think they came in this box, "Sherman" on it, and he smoked a lot and he just keeled over one day.

I guess he was about my age now and he just dropped dead. I guess he had a stroke or something and he was never sick a day in his life, not a bad way of going, but it just like, "I'm out of here," boom [laughs], you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Where did they live, the Sandmans?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: They lived in Bensonhurst.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's say when and where you were born.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: When and where I was born? I was born—I think I might have been born in a Manhattan hospital but we lived in Brooklyn and we lived in Williamsburg at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the address?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You know, it's interesting because I just visited an artist out there fairly recently.

Oh, Metropolitan Avenue and at that time there were trolley cars, and I remember Metropolitan Avenue as being very, very wide and then I went to visit an artist out there and the street is not as wide as I thought.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find your house?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think I might have, or I found a house just like it because I remember these big staircases going up, you know, into this building where I lived and I remember these big concrete pillars on both sides of the staircase and sure enough, I found buildings just like that there and I'm almost sure I found my house or something very close to it and very close to where it was too.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the cross street near your house?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know, maybe Leonard Street.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were born in—what's your exact birth date?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: June 20, 1935, which is getting to be very ancient at this time [laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: So you said that one of your grandfathers was in the trucking business and the other one was a tailor.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Was a tailor.

MS. RICHARDS: Who eventually worked with your uncle, oh, with your father in a dry cleaning store.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, my grandfather, yeah, he did. He was a tailor.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were growing up—and you have an older sister and a younger sister?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your experience in elementary school and which school did you go to?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I went to public schools all the time. I went to P.S. 205 and then I went to Seth Low Junior High School.

MS. RICHARDS: Seth Lloyd?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: S-E-T-H, L-O-W, Seth Low Junior High School, the seventh, eighth and ninth grade. Then I went to Lafayette High School, and Lafayette High School just closed. They just closed about maybe a year ago. I guess they're cutting back and [Mayor Michael] Bloomberg is closing up schools.

MS. RICHARDS: Low performing schools I think.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Or the neighborhoods change, the population.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, when I was going there it was all Jewish and Italians and I was very—I wasn't very good at academics.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to elementary school—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall how you felt about school and what you were most excited about?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I remember not wanting to go to school. I never really liked school that much.

MS. RICHARDS: The academic part or the social part?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I didn't like the academic or social part.

MS. RICHARDS: Both?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I really—I liked to—I think I liked to draw. So it was very easy for me to do assignments, like draw a map of the United States or whatever.

That was really easy to do that or just I loved to do stuff like that and I'd do it very fast and then of course I'd bring it in, the teacher would put these things up, and criticize them, like she'd always say, this one is really nice, blah, blah, blah.

It was very natural for me to [draw]. I don't know where that came from.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get special assignments because you were the artist?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really. In fact I tried taking—I tried taking a major art in high school and they wouldn't let me do it. You had to be facile—I didn't have the facilities. I mean, they were looking for illustrators. That's what they thought was art. So it was very, very different.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were growing up, at a young age, did your family or did you have certain favorite afterschool activities? I wanted to ask you about that, as well as what you did in the summers when you were young, before high school.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My family was very dysfunctional.

MS. RICHARDS: How is that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, my father was not really there a lot of the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Because he was at the store?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, he was just playing around, whatever, you know. He wasn't—my father was basically absent for most of the time I was growing up and so it was very stressful in a way for me. My mother—I don't think she ever really grew up herself and in fact—

MS. RICHARDS: Was she very young when she married?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not really sure. I don't think she—yeah, she was probably—I think people married relatively young. I don't think she was 18 but maybe she was [in her] early 20s.

Yeah, and so it was difficult and my father—you know, he wasn't giving that much money to my mom to manage the household, you know, and I remember it was really difficult for me buying school supplies. [Laughs.] It was difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever do anything when you were young for pocket money, sell newspapers or—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did actually. This was in high school. In high school I had a job working for the five and dime, Woolworths, as a stock boy and then after that I got a job in this luncheonette. People would come there for sodas, ice cream sundaes and then they also had sandwiches and local people would hang out at the store.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your neighborhood like? All this time in elementary school, junior high and senior you still lived in the same place in Bensonhurst?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, we moved to Bensonhurst from Williamsburg. I was born in Williamsburg and then we moved to Bensonhurst when I was probably maybe—let's see, when I was in the third grade maybe we moved there, yeah.

So I was going to say something. I forget. Oh, I was going to say something, getting back to, you know, all my friends—okay, this is like a lower middle class neighborhood that we lived in in Bensonhurst.

And all my friends, like all my Jewish friends, their parents wanted them to go to college and become professional people, stuff like that, of course my family was very dysfunctional and I never really had the tools. I didn't do very well in school. I didn't go to college.

And I was very attracted to—it's interesting because the Jewish families, they wanted their kids to be doctors, lawyers, stuff like that. I was more attracted to the Italian families and Italian kids. Matter of fact, I had some friends, Italian friends, at that time and they didn't look down upon working-class people.

I'm not sure the Jews looked down upon it but they wanted their kids to be higher up, like on the scale, like money probably and whatever, living a more clean life, you know. But I was always attracted to shop classes and people that made things with their hands.

So that was a really big difference for me and my friends. I thought I should go to college too and I should become a doctor or something like that, but it never happened and it couldn't happen because I just didn't have the equipment to do it.

I think I would have loved to have been a carpenter I had fantasies being a carpenter or [working with my hands.]

MS. RICHARDS: How early are you talking about these fantasies?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Very early I think. Probably—well maybe—

MS. RICHARDS: You mean when you were 10 or 12?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably around—yeah, well maybe 12, 13, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: You said that your family was dysfunctional. Did you—and you didn't like school much—did you have an escape like drawing or reading or these things that kids seem to do when they need to get away?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I probably didn't have—I probably—you know, I'd hang out with friends to a certain extent. But I can't think of any really big escapes. I think I thought that at one time—I don't know, I can't remember exactly when this happened—but I had fantasies of traveling.

But I didn't really travel. I think I was into my mind a lot of the time, I wasn't a good reader and I'm still not a great reader, although I'm getting better and [enjoying it more].

When I got into high school, I guess these fantasies became even more predominant and—I don't know when this happened—but I think I had this fantasy of maybe becoming an artist possibly, maybe I could do that.

MS. RICHARDS: You said you even asked if there was an art major.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that mean that you started to go to museums and see what real art was like?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I started going to museums mostly after I got out of high school.

MS. RICHARDS: But not in high school. So you had the idea that you wanted to be an artist maybe or major in art.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I thought I could do that.

MS. RICHARDS: But you hadn't really started looking at art.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably not. I think—I don't know. I probably looked at art but maybe not fine arts.

MS. RICHARDS: You might not have gone to Brooklyn Museum?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I can't remember. I might have gone to the Brooklyn Museum once or twice but not really. I mean, I don't have real memories of going to the Brooklyn Museum, although I think I would be interested in it if I did go there and I probably did go there once or twice. But somehow I never got back there.

MS. RICHARDS: What age were you when your father left for good?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably around 14.

MS. RICHARDS: And then how did your family survive economically?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was really difficult. What happened is my father had two dry cleaning stores and my mother got one of the stores, so she took care of that. But it wasn't doing very well and I used to work there after school too helping her out. But it was a struggle.

MS. RICHARDS: Did your older sister also help out?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: My older sister, I can't remember. I know there was always a lot of friction in my family, you know, with my older sister helping out and it was difficult. It was difficult times, really difficult. [Laughs.] It was tough.

MS. RICHARDS: And then I read that your mother would go to Florida from time to time.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That's right.

MS. RICHARDS: And leave you in charge or your sister?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, my younger sister—I'm 10 years older than my younger sister. So like I was—I worked—after high school, I went to this school called Mechanics Institute, I think it might still be in existence.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was on 44th Street in Manhattan [New York City].

MS. RICHARDS: How did you pick that place?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, my older sister worked in some kind of engineering company and they had draftsmen there and they told her—because I was thinking, well, maybe I could become a draftsman because I liked to draw, and so my older sister told me about this school that these people who worked at her company knew about and so I went there and I registered.

It was a free school. It was supported by mostly engineering companies who wanted draftsmen, who needed draftsmen and this is one way, of training draftsmen. So I took mechanical drafting there. It was a three year school I think, two or three years, and I went there for about two years and they had an employment agency there.

And there were other people that I got friendly with at the school who worked for this company, Sperry

Gyroscope Company, and they told me that I should try to come out to Sperry's, try to get this employment agency at the school to send me out there because they were still going to school there. And they had jobs there doing electrical drafting and tech illustration, which is you take a blueprint and you make it into a three-dimensional drawing, all done mechanically.

And so they said, you should try to come out here, get them to send you out here. They'll probably hire you. I was desperate to get work at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: This is after about two years of going to school in the daytime?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: High school.

MS. RICHARDS: After high school you went to the technical school.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: For about two years before you were sent to Sperry.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, but before that, while I was—before I went to that technical school, what did I do—I can't remember what kind of work. I had all sorts of odd jobs. I worked for [Gimbel's] as a salesman selling socks. [Laughs.] You know, I mean, I didn't care what I did. Selling socks and I can't remember what other jobs.

I had a job setting type. This was after I started going to this [mechanics institute]. I met a teacher there he did drafting and at that time all the letters, like sizes and things on these blueprints, were done in set type and he had me there setting type. All these people working there were Russians. So they all spoke Russian and I was 18 or 19. It was really weird.

But soon after high school I did go to this Mechanics Institute and it was great and then what happened is they set me up. They said, "Well, we'll send you out to Sperry if you think you can get a job out there."

So I went there and what happened is—this is really wild—I went there and there was a strike going on at the Sperry Gyroscope Company.

MS. RICHARDS: This is where, Sperry Gyroscope?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Lake Success, New York. It was the old U.N. [United Nations] building that they took over. The U.N. was out there in Lake Success before they moved to New York City. It was this huge building and this huge parking lot and I remember—I went out there and the engineers were on strike and actually my sister had a car then and she worked and the car would be—the car was parked on the street in New York, where we lived in Brooklyn. She was living at home then and the car was parked there and she'd go to work in Manhattan and I took the car.

I didn't have a license or anything and I drove out to Lake Success for this interview and I thought if I saw cops along the way I would stop and ask them directions because then they wouldn't be asking me for my license or stopping me because I looked too young to be driving. Well I was—I was about 18 at that time. I was able to get a license but I didn't get one at that point yet.

Anyway, so I got out there and these guys were picketing and—I said, I'm going to the personnel department here and they said, "Oh, are you applying for a job as a"—it was not the engineering part of the company. They had machinists out there. They thought I was going to be applying for a job as a machinist. I said yes because otherwise I'd be crossing this picket.

But anyway, so I said yes and I got in there and I got to see the head of the department, Mr. Johansson, Gustave Johanssen, and he hardly spoke English. He did speak English actually but with a very strong Swedish accent and he asked me—so he brought out these publications they did and he unfolded it. There was nobody there—nobody working in this office. It was an office, [for] 50 people. It was totally empty and he said, can you do this, and I said, sure. I said yes to everything and he said, well, can you start work on Monday. This was on a Friday and I said, sure. I was desperate.

I got there Monday and the strike was over luckily because I was thinking I'm going to have to cross this picket line. I didn't have to do that and it was great and I worked there for five years.

MS. RICHARDS: Full-time?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Full-time.

MS. RICHARDS: So that was five years from—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I worked there.

MS. RICHARDS: From what years?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was like—I think I left in '59.

MS. RICHARDS: So '54 to '59.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Fifty-four to '59.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were 19?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was around 19. I left there when I was 23, 24 and while I was working there—I'm not sure if this is like going too far into the story, if we should have more background first?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, let's stay. Fill in the gaps that you have in your mind.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, oh the gaps, I'm not sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, let me just ask you a quick question. Your grandfather was reading the Daily Forward. Were there strong political opinions in your family on either side?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't remember that. Although I do—I think they were Democrats, you know. I remember—in fact I was just watching this program on Pete Seeger and he was talking about when [Henry A.] Wallace ran for [vice] president [in the progressive party in '48] of the United States and they were calling him a communist.

I do remember a next door neighbor of mine campaigning for Wallace and I remember people saying "that this guy campaigning for Wallace, that he's a communist, it was scary times, not that times now are not scary. [Laughs.]

I don't think my family was too political.

MS. RICHARDS: And religious?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really religious either. Secular, although that's—you know, it was kind of weird, like they weren't religious — my father did not go to synagogue on the high holy days either, whereas my friends did, a lot of my friends did.

I think I felt kind of alien in many ways, you know, at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: So you didn't go to Hebrew school? You didn't do any of that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did go to Hebrew school.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did. I went to Hebrew school I didn't like it much. It was this dusty synagogue you went to.

MS. RICHARDS: So going back to studying and getting this job, at some point—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Studying? What do you mean by studying?

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, studying at the technical school in the evenings.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh right.

MS. RICHARDS: And at some point I believe you decided you wanted—or there was someone you were speaking to who encouraged you to study fine art. There was a transition when you started at the Pratt Institute [Brooklyn, New York].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, what happened was while I was working at Sperry, I was very interested in graphic design and there was another friend of mine, a person that worked there who I became very friendly with and I'm still very friendly with this person.

MS. RICHARDS: And his name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Tom Russell and he lives in Vermont and he worked at Sperry at that time too and we were both interested in graphic design. We thought maybe we could become graphic designers and so we—Sperry

had this program, if you went to school and it was related to your work, they would pay for it and all your supplies and everything.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a great program.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it was good. It was pretty good. So we registered at Pratt night school.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so you met him at Sperry, Tom?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, right. We were both—

MS. RICHARDS: Were you commuting, still living in Brooklyn commuting to Success, Lake Success?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, so you and he registered at Pratt.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, so we registered at Pratt. [Tom] had gone to Farmingdale, it was a technical college. So he was able to just get into [the] graphic design [program]

I had to make a portfolio up to get into the school, to get into the night school. I mean, I was in the night school but I had to do this portfolio before I could start. Would that be co-matriculation or something? Anyway, okay, before I could start taking real classes and I took this class with Robert Richenburg, who's—I don't know if you've ever heard of him. You have?

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

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, well he was a great teacher. He was a fine artist and we would just do fine arts things in his class. So that was really great and so I took his class and I did very well in that class. I really liked doing that.

MS. RICHARDS: And you made your portfolio in that class?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I made a portfolio. Basically it was just being in his class and then you were able to start taking other classes after that. I guess if you got a passing grade, that was like your portfolio. You didn't have to show anybody anything. And I started taking all these technical classes, before I could even start taking graphic design.

I'd have to take perspective and, whatever, they were all technical.

MS. RICHARDS: Drawing classes?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The only thing I remember was perspective, which I knew a little bit about because I was working as a tech illustrator and perspective came into that to a certain extent. But it was very technical and these teachers were really boring teaching these classes.

But there was this class going on in the school taught by Adolph Gottlieb.

MS. RICHARDS: Who you'd heard of?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'd never heard of him. Maybe, well let's see. At this point, after I met Tom Russell, even before I think we started taking these classes, I think before we started going to Pratt, I think we started going to museums together. So that was the beginning. So maybe I did know Gottlieb. I really don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: What museums were you going to?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, the Museum of Modern Art [New York City], the Whitney Museum [of American Art, New York City]. It's a little mixed up now. I'm not sure exactly when. But I know I went to all those museums when I was really young, later after I started working at Sperry, after meeting Tom and we were listening to music together.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of music?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, you know, American, classical music like Roger Sessions [and Henry Brant, Aaron Copland and others].

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, and jazz?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Jazz? No, Tom and I really weren't into jazz, although when I started going to the Five Spot, I can't remember when I started doing that, but I was kind of interested in that because probably it was after I started painting.

When I was in Gottlieb's class I started getting interested in the abstract expressionists and they were into jazz.

MS. RICHARDS: So at the start, you got in Gottlieb's class.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, so what happened was while I was taking these other classes, these technical classes, which I found really boring and I didn't like doing them. I don't even think I did well on them because I wasn't interested in it and there was this other class going on, Gottlieb's class, and I probably didn't even know who he was. Maybe we were going to museums but I wasn't really hooking things up. So I saw this class going on and I thought this class is amazing. [Laughs.] These people are having a lot of fun here and it looked like something that I would like to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it especially the expressive aspect versus the technical and [the] feeling of being free?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it was very free, it was really free. I mean, Gottlieb—anyway, that was quite something. So the thing is—but I don't—I couldn't get in. This was called advanced painting, even though I thought it was like kindergarten. This is where I wanted to be.

So what happened is they said, "well, we can't really"—so I went down to the office. I said, I'd like to sign up for this class. They said, "well this is advanced painting class." [Laughs.] "So we can't really let you into this class," you know," but if Mr. Gottlieb thinks it's okay, we'll let you try it." So I went up to see him and he said, sure, you could try it if you like.

So I got—and actually I was telling Tom Russell about this too because he was taking all these other graphic design classes and so anyway, he said—so Tom wanted to get in there so he got in there because he was able to get in there because he was more advanced and then they let me in. Gottlieb let me in there and of course that was it.

It was like—[laughs] it was a whole other world once I—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, did you feel that ah-ha! This is right for me moment?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Definitely, oh yeah, that was great.

MS. RICHARDS: And that was the first time you were using oils?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, first time I used oil paint.

MS. RICHARDS: It must have been challenging to figure out. That's a complicated body of knowledge, how to use the oil paint.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, God, I didn't know how. I was just putting it down. I wasn't worried about anything. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Just went out and bought your supplies?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I would just go and buy these—at that time there was this place called Bahlen's.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: B-A-H-L-E-N-S and I knew that a lot of these abstract expressionists bought their paint there.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that in Brooklyn near Pratt or in Manhattan?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was in Manhattan and what they did is they sold artist oil paint in cans. So you could buy a big can of this and it wasn't anywhere near as expensive as it is now. Now you buy a little tube and it's like \$20 . But then you could buy this whole can of paint for very little money.

I was just thinking back. There was this other friend of mine that I met in that class. There were some people in that class that were in the day school too that they knew about Gottlieb's reputation and they took this class and I became friends with these people.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember their—any of the names?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Jim Starrett. Jim Starrett is somebody I shared this studio with actually. This floor, we rented

this floor together. This was much later. There was another guy, Lynn Leland, who was in the day school, L-E-L-A-N-D, and I actually, after going to Europe—this is a little further on in the story—coming back, I shared a place with Lynn. But they were in that class.

MS. RICHARDS: Any women in that class?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: There was this woman. Her last name was Starr, S-T-A-R-R, and she was in the class and she was doing—she was working with a roller I remember and I guess—and then Adolph Gottlieb was one of the jurors on this—it was a big kind of show.

It was called "Art USA" or something like that. That's probably not it but it was at Madison Square Garden or someplace like that and he told us, [we] said we should try to get into this show because he's going to be on the jury [but] I don't think I ever did try to get in.

But this woman did. I can't remember her first name. But she got in and she won a prize. He gave her a prize.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you're in that class and is Gottlieb teaching everyone to be an abstract expressionist?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well yeah, this is the thing about Gottlieb is he did not like—he used to say things like, you know, "I used to do realistic paintings, you know, and I used to be in the art show. I remember being in the Washington Square art show. My paintings [were] so realistic [that] dogs will come and pee on the trees." That's what he thought about work that was based on images—I'm not sure about images but realistic artwork.

He was very tough and if he thought the work was commercial at all, he would be very adamant about it. He'd get angry. I remember there was this one kid in the class who was doing this work. Basically they were illustrations and he didn't like it and he just told him, "it's a lot of bullshit what you're doing."

MS. RICHARDS: Because there was nothing personal in it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not really sure how that would translate. But it was kind of slick and this guy—he was full of himself and Gottlieb took him down. But Gottlieb hardly taught.

I mean, he was in [the] class and he'd be reading the *New York Post*. The first assignment—he gave us an assignment at the very beginning. He said, "I'd like you to just do a painting using letters, numbers or a grid pattern, just putting things in a grid and then he let us go from there."

MS. RICHARDS: Did he give you any examples?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He didn't give us any examples but I think they related to his pictograms that he did or pictographs. They were like that. He wanted us to do things like that, start out like that, yeah. But he wasn't doing that at the time. He was doing something else.

He was doing those bursts and I remember he had a show at the [1957 retrospective] Jewish Museum [New York City] and he let us—he said, well, I can get someone to teach this class. The opening was on a Wednesday night. "I'm having a show at the Jewish Museum and the opening is on Wednesday night and I can get someone here to teach the class or you guys can all come to the opening." [Laughs.]

So you know what we did [go to the show in 1957] and that was a show that Clement Greenberg curated and that's the first time I really saw his work. Maybe I saw reproductions before that but there were these huge paintings of his in there.

It was really quite extraordinary to be able to go to an opening, a real opening. I'd never been to an opening before.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point did you know the work of the other prominent abstract expressionists?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think I started looking into it. Not only [Abstract Expressionists] but other people too, like Bob [Robert] Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns .

MS. RICHARDS: In magazines or going to gallery shows?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I went to shows. I started going to shows.

[END CD 1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 26, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So where were we now?

MS. RICHARDS: Talking about Rauschenberg and other artists whose work you had seen and I asked if it was in art magazines or gallery shows.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh right. No, I started to go see gallery shows at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it by then when you were in the class at Pratt with Gottlieb that you could say that you were going to be an artist or that you were an artist?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I thought there was that possibility, you know, and yeah, that's what I really wanted to do. This was the love of my life.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have in mind how you would support yourself?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I was still working at that time at Sperry while I was in school in Gottlieb's class. So I was supporting myself that way.

But I wasn't thinking too far in the future. But what happened after—I think at a certain point I decided, yes, I could do this. Yes, I did decide that because what happened is then I quit my job.

MS. RICHARDS: This is during the Gottlieb class?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, after the Gottlieb class. The Gottlieb class ended maybe around '57 or '58 or something, '57, '58 and then I got a studio in New York in the same building that Mark Rothko was in.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the address?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was 222 Bowery or 333 Bowery, I'm not sure.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you got that studio, you moved from—you'd been living in Brooklyn?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Wait a second—I still might have been living in Brooklyn when I got that studio. Yeah, there's this other guy—there's this guy in the class, Alan Fenton, F-E-N-T-O-N, and he was in—I think he had gone to the day school. He was also in Gottlieb's class in the evening and he was a little bit older.

And he got the studio. It was through James Brooks. James Brooks was in this building. There were other people, other artists, fairly well-known. I can't think of this other person's name. It wasn't as known as like, say, Rothko. Maybe I'll think about it later and I can give you his name. He was a very sweet man and he was in this building too.

So I got a studio there with Alan Fenton and Tom Russell. The three of us had this studio. We shared it.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were living in Brooklyn?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was living in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: With Lynn Leland?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no, no I think when I came—because I had gone to Europe in like around '59.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh are you talking about after Europe [that] all this [is] happening?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no this is before Europe.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh okay.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: This is before Europe.

MS. RICHARDS: Good.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I think I was living at home and I had the studio in Manhattan. I was still living at home.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you were doing your work, you were going to Sperry in the daytime, you were going to Pratt in the evening and all the work you were doing painting-wise was in the classroom at Pratt.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, that's right. That's right and then I got the studio after that class was over. I took that class for two years.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was two years.

MS. RICHARDS: Not two semesters? Two whole years?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it was probably maybe just two semesters. I think it was maybe two semesters. I can't remember. I can't remember but I know it was probably two classes, one class and then took it again. So that was over. I think that was expected. You were expected to take two [in two years or two semesters].

But it was a good amount of time. It was a good amount of time and after that—I think after that class, I thought—yes, I came to the decision that this is possible. I could do this and Gottlieb was very encouraging. He gave me a really good grade, you know, and I was able—this was something—this was like the first time in my life where I was able to [do] something very easy and love it and other people related to what I was doing too.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you drawing, sketching?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Just painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Just painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Just painting.

MS. RICHARDS: So you made a commitment and shared a studio, got an actual studio.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When you went back to Pratt the next year, so let's say in the fall of '58, is that when you studied with Bradley Walker Tomlin?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I never studied with Bradley Walker Tomlin.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I liked his work a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Who else did you study with at Pratt?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No one, just Gottlieb.

MS. RICHARDS: So you took night classes?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I mean, I studied with—I said Robert Richenburg. That class was great because—oh yeah, well he was very encouraging too, Robert Richenburg because I think once I took that class I thought possibly I could become a fine artist as opposed to a graphic designer.

Even though I love graphic design, I still do it, and I think my work even now relates to graphic design to a certain extent.

But I asked—I remember asking Richenburg, I said to him—because I wasn't very good at drawing the figure and he said—and I said, you know, "Do you think I can become a fine artist, even though I'm not very good with figure?" And he said, "Well, you know, there's so many different aspects to art."

So there it was. [Laughs.] So he was quite amazing, very encouraging, just that one sentence, saying, yes you can become a fine artist.

MS. RICHARDS: So was there anyone else you studied with at Pratt?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I mean, there were other people I studied those technical classes with but I wouldn't call that—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh I see, but in terms of fine art it was just Gottlieb.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was just Gottlieb and Richenburg.

MS. RICHARDS: So where does Bradley Walker Tomlin fit in?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was just somebody when I started looking at art, I saw his work and I was attracted to his

work.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. Did you keep in touch with Gottlieb at all after studying with him?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You know, well, I saw his wife actually.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think her name was Esther.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh that's it, yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think.

MS. RICHARDS: You're right.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And what happened is I was in this show—I can't remember. It was a big show I was in, a museum show, but very early in my career and I remember sitting next to her [at the dinner] and I had a show—this must have been the '70s when I had a show in New York and my work had changed from the first work I did, that I was known for, to this other work.

I sent them an announcement and I guess they went to see it and they didn't like the second show that much and they said, why did you stop doing these other things that I did before. But that was about the only contact I remember having.

MS. RICHARDS: So after you finished taking the night classes at Pratt, you decided to go to Europe.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Quit your job at Sperry.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: You kept the studio on Bowery even while you were away?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I didn't keep it.

MS. RICHARDS: So you made a break.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, right.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was your idea? Why did you want to go to Europe and where did you imagine going at first when you were planning the trip?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I didn't plan too much, you know. I thought I would go to—you know, probably I had this very romantic idea and I thought I would probably go to Paris because I thought there were many artists in Paris and that would be a great place to go.

But I got to England and there was a Gottlieb show on at the ICA, the Institute of Contemporary Art [1959], there and I went to see that show and I got talking to the guy at the desk and I asked him if he knew of any studios.

MS. RICHARDS: So your idea of going to Europe was actually [to] live and work there, not as a tourist to see fine art.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, I had \$1,000 and that was 1959 and I thought I could live on this money for a long time because \$1,000 is a lot of money then.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, Europe on \$5 a day. It was even before that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So a year, a year of living with \$1,000.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That's right, \$5 a day. What would that be in terms of time?

MS. RICHARDS: For \$1,000?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: \$1,500 or so for a year. But you could live cheaper than that if you weren't traveling around.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. Well, it was difficult actually. I mean, when I first got there I thought, oh wow, I have all this money and but when I spent some of it, not that much, but I did spend some of it. I wasn't that frugal with it. But what happened was—so I went to England. I mean, that's where—that was the cheapest flight.

MS. RICHARDS: You flew?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I flew. At that time you could have taken a freighter but somehow I—I don't know, it was really complicated getting a freighter. So I just thought I would fly.

I think I got a pretty good price on the flight there and actually, oh I know, the other reason is I met some guy in New York who was going to—he had a job. He got a job in England. He was an engineer and he got a job there and he said I could stay with him when I first came so I thought that's a perfect place to be. I'd go to England first and stay there.

MS. RICHARDS: And then go to Paris.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, yes, that was in the back of my mind someplace.

MS. RICHARDS: You knew that there were lots of artists, American artists in Paris.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I didn't know that. I really—I was thinking more like from the Picasso era down, like I was thinking just the—I think thinking of the artists there and also the whole milieu of the way artists like to live and it was a whole—only from books I got this.

There's a whole surface in Paris that I wanted to experience. So that's where—but I kind of got that out of my mind. I mean, I couldn't—I wasn't thinking of two things at the same time. So I really thought oh well—also when I got to England, this was amazing because I had never really left Brooklyn before. [Laughs.]

So this was like, whoa! This was like amazing. This was like, whoa! This was like a dream come true, you know. I don't know. I was very naive about everything.

MS. RICHARDS: So you started out staying with this person.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, in Putney.

In Putney and he was gone all day and most night. It was kind of lonely there but I did go to see this Gottlieb show and I got to talking to this guy at the desk there and I just said, do you know of any studios, I'm an artist. That's what I would say, I was an artist. Why not?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So I asked him if he knew of any studios and he said—he was really nice and he said, "Would you mind not being in the center of London because I know somebody that lives—that has a studio in Bushey and it's possible that maybe you can get something out there."

So what happened was he put me in contact with this person, Gwyther Irwin. I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

MS. RICHARDS: Not before I started reading about you. [Laughs.]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. Right, okay, so you know this. Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: But let's go over it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, so—

MS. RICHARDS: He was an artist.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was an artist, had a studio out there. He lived in London, central London, but he had this studio in Bushey and he was—I called him up and he said, "Well," he said, "I can take you out there and we can look at these studios, see what you think."

So he picked me up on his motorcycle. We went out there and I just fell in love with this place. It was just great. It was built by this German artist Herkomer who came there [from Germany with the was 8 years old.] He built this.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what Herkomer first name was?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know but I'm sure you could find it out very easily because he's a fairly well-known artist. [Hubert von Herkomer]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: His name keeps coming up and his name was in the Linda Nochlin book too. She speaks about his work I think. Anyway, so there were these studios built in 1890 and they were a mess. They were falling down.

But they were great and he said, "There's a studio I know that's available"—not available but he said this man Mr. Teasdale who studied with Herkomer who was in his late 80s at this time, maybe 90, and he said, "Well, we can track him down where he lives and what you could do it tell him you're here from America and that you want to rent it and that we should make something up like you're here on some kind of grant or something." [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So the guy at the ICA told you about this place and he told you to contact Gwyther.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, Gwyther.

MS. RICHARDS: And gave you his phone number.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, something like that.

And Gwyther took me out there and I liked these studios.

MS. RICHARDS: How many studios where there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: There must have been like—well, there were all sorts of eccentric people living there. There must have been I'd say maybe 10 people out there but not all of them were artists.

There was only Gwyther was basically—oh, there was another guy, Graham Boyd, who was an artist too out there, an English artist. So there's just three of us. The other people were just very eccentric weird people just living there.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm trying to picture this place. You said Herkomer built it. What did he build it as?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: As a school. [Herkomer's Art School, founded 1883]

MS. RICHARDS: So it's one big building?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, what it is, it's like there are these two buildings and there was this corridor running along each building and there must have been maybe seven studios in each building, each had their own door that ran along this corridor, onto this corridor and each studio was 20 by 30 feet, with this huge skylight.

MS. RICHARDS: So they were built as studios but they weren't being mostly used as studios or mostly being lived in by non-artists?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: They were built as classrooms probably for learning how to paint or something. But when I got there, there were people living in these studios, not Gwyther. Gwyther was just working there but there were other people living there.

I became friendly with the other—this other artist, Graham Boyd, and then there's another guy out there, Brian Tuck, who was just living there and —he was a mechanic.

[Brian] had about [five] cars, all Austin Sevens, which were I related to Model T Fords and he kept these going. It was amazing. He was great and he had a couple of motorcycles too. So I became friends with him too and then but the person I was most friendly with was Gwyther.

MS. RICHARDS: So he contacted Teasdale?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So right, we went to the public library and got Mr. Teasdale's address, where he lived. At that time I guess things were really small, like we'd go to a library and get addresses for people. So we went to see him and Gwyther said, "Well, I think you should tell him you're here on some kind of grant, you know."

So I said I was there on a "Winston Churchill." [Laughs.] I thought that was really wild. He was a very nice old

man. He'd grown up in India. His parents were colonialists I guess and he said he wasn't interested in renting it but he'd be interested in selling it.

So I asked him how much he wanted [and he said] \$75. You didn't own the land but you had the studio that was attached to these other studios. So anyway, so this gave me—[an opportunity to live there rent free].

And so I got this place and I also told him—he had some stuff there and I told him he could store this stuff there for as long as he likes. He had like these tiger rugs and stuff like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, from India?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, anyway, so I got this studio and I was in seventh heaven. So there was no [heat]—there was a potbellied stove there. There's no electric. It was gas light.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And there was only one water tap.

MS. RICHARDS: One water tap in the complex or in—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: In the complex—for everyone.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so no hot water.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hot water, forget about hot water. Well, let's see, there was a gas stove there because you did have gas.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had a stove in your own space?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I had my own stove, no refrigeration or anything like that, although it was so cold there you didn't need refrigeration, because I spent the whole winter there. In the morning I'd wake up and this bucket of water was ice cubes.

But it was great. I[t] was really great because I was young and I was able to do all this stuff very easily and to take baths I'd go to the next town, which is Watford. They had a public bath there. I'd take baths there.

But anyway, I was able to do my art there, whatever I wanted to do. I had all this time, very luxurious in many ways.

MS. RICHARDS: Where were you conceptually with your work at the start of that time?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was doing abstract work and I started doing collages at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: With what kind of material?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Fabrics and stuff. I'd glue it down.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something in particular that inspired you to use those fabrics in collage versus paper or objects or something else, some materials you may have found?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Found materials, things that I just found around but they were very abstract [and had a patina].

I put this stuff down and then rip off some of it, the stuff that came off and then the images that—they were abstract but the forms that came out of ripping off the [fabric] that wasn't glued on right. So that became the painting and they were very monochromatic.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you getting to see what was going on in England at that point artistically, in London?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, but at that time I knew of [Marcel] Duchamp's work. I think, like maybe people like that were more interesting to me than even like what was going on, although I think there probably—I'm sure there was an influence, just being in England, being in London and the kind of surfaces that you saw there—very old surfaces and the monochromatic is related to the weather there.

It isn't a bright place, you know, and so I think that was a big influence on me. But I mean, I knew Ben Nicholson's work—but I was more interested in somebody like Peter Blake. You know his work?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I was more interested in that than like Ben Nicholson.

MS. RICHARDS: What about Art Brut and the other—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I wasn't that involved with that. That was more out of Europe, Art Brut?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was more out of Holland.

MS. RICHARDS: France?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: France, oh yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking of the torn, the monochromatic, and the fabric and it started to bring images to my mind.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, Art Brut, that would be—yeah, I don't think I was into that tortured look or like—I think a lot of that stuff is about very—I think of it as being tortured to a certain—not really, but to a certain extent.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, from World War II.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, from World War II. So I guess I was a little away from World War II, although some of the most amazing—like Henry Moore's drawings, those drawings he did, I don't know if I'd call them Art Brut but those drawings he did, like during World War II, they were quite amazing and you would still see characters like that around, like people, just homeless people that kind of looked like Henry Moore's drawings and that was—I was really startled by that.

Seeing all those drawings and all of a sudden, this was actually—actually this happened to me much later than even when I was living in London. Like I was in London not that long ago, maybe—well, it is a long time, maybe 15 years ago I was there and I came across this guy in the street and I couldn't believe it.

All of a sudden I recalled this Henry Moore. I was thinking my god, this is very real. These people exist, people like those drawings that he made.

MS. RICHARDS: So you started to make collages you were saying, with torn canvas and looking at Duchamp.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I was very involved with his lifestyle in a way, the fact that he was saying that he never worked and he'd play chess all day and stuff like that was really interesting for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you playing chess?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Actually I did. I used to play chess with Gwyther. He was like really into chess and Duchamp to a certain extent too and he would play blind, like I'd be on the board and he'd be working on this huge mural [laughs] he was doing something and he'd beat me every time.

He would play for money too. He would like go to—well, he lived in London and would go to places where people just played chess. They have that here in New York too.

MS. RICHARDS: Chess club?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Chess clubs, right, and he would play for—he was a gambler. He liked to gamble and so he would do that. But he was really good. He would play like—he'd play against like this guy who wrote for the *London Times*, the chess column there and stuff like that, yeah.

So but I was really interested in—I was interested in Duchamp and I was also interested because I had seen Rauschenberg and Johns' work before I went there and I was still interested in that.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're using the materials you found and at some point you discovered or you thought about using the shade.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, so there was a shade in the studio on this skylight and it was all ripped and torn. It wasn't really useful anymore and I took it down because it had a lot of really—and then I put it into—I used it. I glued it down onto canvas and that was like the beginning of the window shades.

MS. RICHARDS: [Were] there any pigments in those works, that [is, were] you using paint as well?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: In the one that I did in London, it was just glued down with rabbit's skin glue and then when I

came back to New York, when I was using the window shades, I did. I put—I was gluing the shades down with rabbit's skin glue and pigment in the glue.

MS. RICHARDS: So the one you did in London was just the shade?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Rabbit's skin glue and the shade and the ones in New York when I came back, rabbit's skin glue and burnt green earth was the pigment that I used and I got it—it came in a pound form and I'd dump it into the rabbit skin glue and it was like one process. I'd glue the shade down and then the raw canvas would get this pigment on it that would be related to the shade pigment. It was a brownish color.

MS. RICHARDS: Why, a year after you started, [did] you decide to leave London?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I ran out of money.

MS. RICHARDS: And you didn't have the option or didn't think of earning money there and staying?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The government asked me to leave. I had already gotten like two visas, like I went to Amsterdam and Belgium when I was there.

MS. RICHARDS: After you left London?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, just went there for a trip and then came back to London because if you left, then you could come back and then stay another three months before you needed a visa. So I think I did that twice, where I left London and then came back.

MS. RICHARDS: Both times going to the Netherlands?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I can't remember. I know I went there once, to the Netherlands, but I can't remember if—I don't know. Anyway, I extended it to one year. I can't remember how but it was extended to a year, just about a year I extended it.

MS. RICHARDS: On those trips, why did you decide to go to Amsterdam?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I knew—there was a friend that I had met in New York that was English, before I went there. I met this friend in New York and I would kind of see him every once in a while and he said he wanted to go there to Belgium and Amsterdam.

So I thought it was a perfect time for me to go because I could get this stay, this visa stay. So we went together and then I came back because I had the studio set up there. As long as I was living there, I didn't want to just leave at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something [in]particular that you got to see art-wise?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: We went to see art there.

MS. RICHARDS: In Amsterdam.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I can't remember if there was a [Vincent] Van Gogh museum then, at that time, probably not.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: But I did see a lot of his work and also there was a lot of work there to see there. I think there was a lot of hard-edge painting, you know, at that time. I mean, early, I'm talking about early works, the De Stijl group. So I was able to see a lot of stuff there. That was great.

MS. RICHARDS: When you finally had to leave England, did you sell that studio?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did, I sold it to the same person I [traveled to Amsterdam with.] I gave it to him for the same price I paid because he was doing commercial art then and he said, "if you sell me this place, I can quit my job". So I gave him the place, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Great, you didn't have to spend anything.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You sold it for the same [piece] that you bought it for.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, exactly, it all evened out perfect. It was right back to zero again. [They laugh.] It was

great.

MS. RICHARDS: What happened when you came back to New York? Where did you land?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, so I came back to New York and then I got a—I shared an apartment with Lynn Leland who I met in Gottlieb's class.

MS. RICHARDS: Was this in early 1960?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: This was 1960.

MS. RICHARDS: In the beginning of the year? Did you come back in winter, in the summer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm trying to think. It might have been—I think it might have been in the springtime. I think it was like after the winter because I remember the winter as really brutal staying in these studios. It was pretty tough because I ran out of coal. Although I don't know, somehow I survived it. It was okay. But I think it was after—it must have been in the springtime, sometime in the spring. .

MS. RICHARDS: You have this memory of surviving the whole winter. So it had to be after that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it was very damp and kind of cold. It was great if I had enough coal there. It was great. But then I got there. I had a lot of money when I first got there. I had this \$1,000 and I bought a lot of coal and everybody else was taking coal. [Laughs.] You know, they'd say, "oh can I borrow a bucket of coal from you?".

So it was going pretty fast and I was known—when I first got there I bought these really beautiful shoes there, these nine—I paid nine guineas for them. I was really proud because they were like very simple shoes that you couldn't get here and I really loved seeing these shoes and wow, I bought these shoes and then I remember meeting people. I'd go to a party in London and someone would say, "oh yeah, you're the guy that bought the nine guinea shoes, aren't you?"

MS. RICHARDS: How did they all know?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, these friends of mine out at the studios were very impressed that I had gotten nine guinea shoes. That would be like spending maybe \$400 for a pair of shoes now or something. It was like ridiculous.

But anyway, I was pretty destitute by the time I left, although I did take work there. I did have one job there. These people, they made cork type and they wanted to do something with the type, make some kind of picture with it.

So I just glued them down on a board and gave it to them and they were very happy with it. It was kind of like this type, just like spreading out on this Masonite board and I put a frame around it. They liked it. So I made—I don't know how much. It wasn't that much but it got me going. It gave me some money to keep going. It was good.

MS. RICHARDS: So when you came back to New York, you said you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So I shared this place with Lynn Leland around Pratt Institute. He was still living around there.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the address?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was Clinton Avenue. It's real interesting because—oh, I just went to this party, this brunch yesterday that Ellen Lanyon['s], do you know her?

MS. RICHARDS: Not personally but I know who she is.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: She's a really wonderful person. She's like 86 years old now, just really amazing, and anyway, she had this little brunch and she invited several people over, one was Bob Yasuda and he's an artist. He shows at—I don't know, [Sundaram] Tagore Gallery [New York City] I think it's called, Tagore. Do you ever hear of that gallery?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Something like Tagore and he was somebody that I knew when I shared that apartment with Lynn Leland because he had gone to Pratt and we're going over old times, but he was there and he's an artist now, Bob Yasuda and who else did I know.

Oh gosh, there were other people that aren't artists. But anyway, it was hysterical thinking back at those times, but yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So you found an apartment on Clinton.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So we found an apartment on Clinton Avenue and it was a big apartment house and [we] had three rooms.

Lynn had a room and I had a room and then there was a kitchen that we shared and Lynn was an artist, and

I don't know why Lynn was living there. I guess he was still involved with Pratt or something because he had gone there. So he found an apartment there and—so he found an apartment there and I shared it with him and then okay, so he was doing his art and trying to get a show in New York and he—

MS. RICHARDS: And did you set up a studio in your bedroom there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I was working there, right. It was like I had a cot there to sleep on and I was doing those window shade paintings there and so what happened is Lynn—Lynn had gone up to the Castelli Gallery with his slides and I guess Ivan Karp was interested in it and he came to see his work and then he came to see my work too.

I asked Lynn if it would be okay if I showed him my stuff too since he was coming there and he said sure. Then he got interested in my work and I started showing there.

MS. RICHARDS: So Ivan just asked you to show there in terms of just a few paintings?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I guess what happened was he—let's see, how did this work. He brought some other people over. He brought Henry Geldzahler over to see the work and Henry was very taken with the work and then there was this show at the Museum of Modern Art.

He brought Bill Seitz over and Bill Seitz wanted me to put me in this show, "The Art of Assemblage," [Museum of Modern Art, New York City, 1961]. Gwyther was in [it] too.

MS. RICHARDS: I have that catalogue. I have to go pull it out.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah I can't remember if there's a reproduction of Gwyther's work or not. But that was 1961 I think that show was.

MS. RICHARDS: Correct.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Anyway, that was an important show and I had a little piece in there that they bought.

MS. RICHARDS: So you must have felt incredibly excited by all these things.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I think it was really exciting being in a gallery with Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg because they were heroes of mine in a way. So that was very, very exciting. Yeah, that was very exciting.

I mean, everybody Leo [Castelli] showed, they were really good artists and it was before pop art, but a lot of people he showed I was really interested in. So that was really great, I was very young at the time, yeah.

It was really great and Henry became a friend, a pretty good friend of mine. So it was really fun. Henry was a very brilliant guy. It was great hanging out with him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel that your work was connected in some way connected in some way to what Rauschenberg and other artists were doing at that moment?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it was, yeah. I think it was. Yeah, I think it was. It was definitely connected. I'm not sure how but I know it was. Yes, it would be.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, visually it certainly looked connected and conceptually.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it was.

MS. RICHARDS: It was a combination of the real and the abstract, both of those things, which is something that you've [done] from very early on.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, yeah, I think it was that, yeah. Yeah, I think that's definitely—

MS. RICHARDS: It was very radical to put the everyday object into the artwork.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: A little different, a little different.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have the sense that you wanted to break new ground artistically? Was that a conscious goal?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think that—I think what I did—I think a lot of it was just based on feeling, just totally like what feels good for me to do. I don't think it was like about trying to do anything like that.

MS. RICHARDS: As those works were evolving, I think around '62, you made a tear or a cut in the shade on the canvas, exposing what were behind it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that's—I think a lot of those window shades just came as they came. The tear was probably there. I didn't do it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So that's how that happened. It was really like—I was interested in, as you say, the abstraction of it and the content. But I didn't really know what the content really was, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So it was in a way, a chance occurrence that these cuts, these tears would be there and you would use them.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I really wasn't conscious of using them. I was more conscious of the shade itself and I guess the implication of the shade, there's something behind it that you really can't see I think was that implication.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you start attaching other things? There's one I know, a paper bag, what was—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not really sure why. I'm not really sure. It's really difficult to—I think it's mostly very like feeling what I wanted to do with this. I didn't really know exactly what the implication was, the literal implication.

MS. RICHARDS: So intuition, that kind of feeling, played a huge role in the evolution of the work at that point.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, definitely, definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: You did one with that bag and another then with a manila envelope. [Both *Untitled*, 1963]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: At one point I read that you talked about the bag being like the body—these are two different works—the envelope being more the spiritual or the soul. Is that correct?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Did I ever say that? I don't know if I ever said—

MS. RICHARDS: It might have been some art historian conjecturing. You're right.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't think I ever said that. But the envelope does relate to other works that I did after that, like the corner pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to that paper bag, after you made it, if this is correct, you started thinking about what could that mean, why would you use that form in a work of art?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, obviously, [it] could be a figure. It was wrinkled and brown. [Laughs.]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you end up with an answer to why you used it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really. I could only—why I used it, I think there's a kind of attraction to the material more than anything else. But I'm sure other people probably—you could put all sorts of literal significance on it. But I think a lot of my work, I really don't know what the significance of it is until after it's done and even then I'm not really sure.

But while I'm doing it, I don't really have a very strong feeling. I don't know what it's going to end up—what the

literalness is going to end up until after it's finished and then people say things, which is great. It's kind of nice hearing all these different things but I don't start out with this specific idea, although—

MS. RICHARDS: Is it—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Some of my later works I think what happens later on you might have some ideas about certain things like that.

MS. RICHARDS: In those early years, it must have been freeing to not want to stop and think what does this mean.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, oh yeah, I think so. I think that can get you in trouble, a lot of trouble, thinking what things mean.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you can edit yourself.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think the best art actually is art where you can't put one thing on it because if you can, it's almost—it becomes an illustration and it's not about that. It's kind of like you don't really know. It's very difficult to come to term[s] with anything, like life, and I think art is the closest to that.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're saying that you actually then you started using envelopes and then you made a work in '63 that was actually a painted envelope.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And could you talk about that moment? There was a transition in your work and there was a change?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, that's interesting. I never thought of that. Well, I think it might have had something to do with conserving—like working—like for instance the one with the bag and this stick, the bag hanging off the stick, like that's kind of a storage problem and I thought—

MS. RICHARDS: Because you couldn't bring that to Castelli. I mean, would have thought about bringing that to the gallery?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think that might have been done after—did that come after I left Castelli? What year was that? I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: That was '63.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, I was still with Castelli at that time. I don't think I ever showed that at Castelli, that picture.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, it was an issue. I can imagine

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It wasn't an issue about bringing it up to Castelli. It was an issue about just storing it, not only storing it, I think it was like getting things you don't need out of it, like minimalizing things.

Like if I could do that with just pure paint, that's better than finding an object there too. I could do the whole thing in my studio. Also I think that it was about basically—yeah, getting rid of stuff—I'm not very good with words to be honest. There is a word for it but just streaming it down, streamlining it to a certain extent.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: If I could do it all with paint, why should I use something else.

MS. RICHARDS: Simplifying.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I'm sure the window shades could not be done with all paint and that bag could not be done with all paint. But I think after that—

MS. RICHARDS: You could imagine painting an envelope

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, an envelope could be because it's flat and also I would work with—you know, I wasn't interested so much in the surface of the envelope. The air mail envelope had a design to it that I could paint whereas the window shades, I could never paint those because it was involved with the surface, the visceral surface. Would that be using that word right, visceral? I'm not sure, touchy?

MS. RICHARDS: Tactile.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Tactile, yeah it had a tactile feeling to it where you couldn't do it with paint, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When you painted the painting of the envelope, then you continued to paint other paintings with representational elements in them.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, let's see. What were those? I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: There were a couple of interiors. There's an interior with a sofa with a strange painting above the sofa that included kind of biomorphic forms.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that a moment when you became more involved in painting techniques?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, I was trying to learn how to paint then. That's what that was about because I had never really painted like that. I mean, I had painted in Gottlieb's class but that was a different kind of painting. I started to use identifiable images but put into another category.

You can't paint it the same way you'd paint an abstract painting, abstract expressionist painting. So I was like learning how to paint.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you using actual objects and drawing from life, or using photographs of a sofa, or was it entirely from your imagination?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well at that time I think it might have been from my imagination. I think I made that sofa up and the painting on top of it—that I put on top of the sofa was related to art.

I don't know why it was related to looking at something else, like appropriating somebody else's art.

But it wasn't really appropriating. I made it up but it related to an art painting for me anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a comment about abstraction?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It might have been. It might have been. But I'm not sure what that would be. See, I think like when you say it was a comment, yeah, it was something to do with that but I'm not sure if I could be specific

MS. RICHARDS: Whether you were being critical or ironic or paying homage to it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it might have all those things in [it].

[END CD 2.]

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 26, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

So we were talking about needing to learn to use paint in a different way.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, yeah, learn how to paint.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you learn?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: By just putting the paint down. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have chats with other artists who were working in the way that you wanted to work and ask for their suggestions?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really. I can't remember. Let's see. You know, it takes a really long time to learn the vocabulary of oil paint, what you can do with it because it is very messy. So I was trying to learn [about] oil paint. It was very difficult.

MS. RICHARDS: Books from the library?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no, not that way. I think I was only—I was trying to—at the surface of paint to make it very believable. And I wanted it to be—I wanted to paint so you really weren't thinking of the surface. It was just

there. And that is very difficult to do because, you know, what happens is you—I think you pick at things that aren't quite right—now, aren't quite right—that is a whole category in itself. But, you know, I didn't want people to be distracted by me, you know, by the struggle of the paint. I wanted the paint just to sit there. And that is really difficult to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there artists who achieved the kind of surface that you were aiming [for], that you were looking at?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Every artist I liked.

MS. RICHARDS: Who are they in the early '60s?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Any artist I like. Well, Jasper Johns could do that, you know. And then you can go into the past, you know. You know, Bob did that, Bob Rauschenberg did that, even though he used collage, a lot of collage and different elements. He did that in his early works, I should say. And then there were so many artists in the past that were able to do that, you know.

Picasso is a great example of that, you know, where, you know, everything he does is just perfect.

MS. RICHARDS: At that moment when you were starting to incorporate images of recognizable objects, were you looking at early modernists, American modernists, particularly?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: When I was trying to do what? Say that again.

MS. RICHARDS: At that time in '63, when you were starting to paint these simple objects, representational [objects], were you looking at American modernists or European modernism?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: What would that be?

MS. RICHARDS: I am thinking of someone like [Charles] Sheeler or [Georgia] O'Keeffe or [Arthur] Dove, people who had that kind of—a sense of abstraction with representation.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I like their work a lot. And I did look at those works, yeah. I love those works. Yeah, they are beautiful. They are really beautiful. They are great. They all knew how to do that. They all knew how to put the paint down, where you were interested in it. But, you know, and then there was this content there, too, in their work. But I think the content is always there, you know, whatever you do, whatever—because you are living in a certain time, where I think, you know, it comes out of like what is going on in the world, no matter what. So you don't have to worry about that, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: You left the Castelli Gallery during this period. I think you said '64. How did that come about and why?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I think I was trying to learn how to paint. And it probably wasn't a place to do that. So it was fine, you know—

MS. RICHARDS: He would have expected you to continue making the same kind of paintings?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know if he expected that. No, I don't think he expected that. But my work was in transition.

MS. RICHARDS: You had a show—right, a one-person show [1962] at Castelli?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And it did well?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It did okay. Yeah, it did very well. I mean, at that time, when I had that show, it was the show right after Roy Lichtenstein. And so that was hitting a big boom, you know. So even though the show did well, that was really what was going on in the art world. And that is what people were getting interested in. So yeah, that was happening then.

But all my work was in transition then, too.

And also, there is, another thing is I think that I needed—I am trying to put this—but I think I needed not to be there. I don't think I wanted to be there in a way. And I think—I mean, I also think that Leo was probably relieved that I didn't want to be there, too. I think it was a combination of the two because he was getting interested in, you know, Roy Lichtenstein and it was a different time. Yeah, it was kind of a mutual thing. It was very mutual.

Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Having been in the show at MoMA in '61, and then having a show at Castelli in '62, about the most prominent gallery and the most prominent museum, did you feel a kind of an unwanted pressure from those things? They [say that] having success too early isn't a good thing for [some] artists.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, maybe. The thing is—I don't know—maybe I sabotaged my own career in a way, you know. But I think—there is this other thing, too. I don't know if I really wanted to be there. But the other thing is I needed this time to work on my own, too. So it was a combination of those two things.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't feel free to go in the direction you wanted to go if you were in that gallery?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think maybe that was part of—maybe that wasn't the place to experiment. Also, I am kind of a private person. And that is not really a place to be if you are really private. I am not sure how I can put that. I think these words are inadequate. But anyway, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: There is a kind of spotlight shining on that gallery and everyone in it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I think there is that. But—

MS. RICHARDS: Critically, and as well as popular—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: —and a lot of things are about words and I am not very good with words, too.

But I think I needed time knowing that I wasn't with the gallery, you know. So I did—there was a long time I was just working without showing at all.

MS. RICHARDS: The same time, '64, is when you and Hermine [Ford] got married.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's go back a couple years and talk about how you met.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: At the Castelli Gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: Really?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yes. Well, it was through Henry Geldzahler actually. Hermine was friends with Henry. And I was friends with Henry. And let's see. I was in a group show at Castelli. And I went up there to see [my] painting. And Hermine and Henry were spending the afternoon together. And this was—yeah—and he introduced me to her. And then he was going on to see—they were both going on it to see Alex Katz's work. And Henry said why don't you come along with us? So I did. And that is how we met.

MS. RICHARDS: And you started going together?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, we—Henry—oh, I know what it was. Henry was going to have dinner with her the following night. And he kind of said to her, "Why don't we invite Bob to dinner with us, too?" So Henry invited—so anyway, Hermine said sure, you know. So that was it. I went over to her house with Henry. We had supper there, you know. We had a really good time. And then Henry said something like, "why don't you invite Hermine to go to the 'Art of Assemblage' show with you?"

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] He was really the matchmaker, huh?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was, he was. Anyway, so then we did that and then we started going together. Yeah, that was great.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you meet her father, Jack Tworkov, at the very beginning?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I didn't because they were away I think in Provincetown [MA]. He was showing at Castelli. But I didn't really know him. But I met him later, yeah. I met him after. They came back from Provincetown that fall. And Hermine was working—she was still going to school. She was at Antioch College. She had one quarter off to work in New York. She was working in New York. So she [was] in New York at that time.

And then her father came back in the fall. And then Hermine went back to college. So I did meet him in the fall very briefly a little bit. And then I went to visit Hermine out in Ohio. And yeah, we were together for—yeah, we were a couple since then.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you begin to have a relationship at all with her father? Was it before you were

married?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I met Hermine in 1962, probably '61, late '61, maybe. We were married in '64. So I am trying to think. It was kind of like maybe—you know, at first, it was like distant, you know, because I didn't see him that much. But then when I got to be really close to Hermine, I would see him, you know, really not that much, but, you know, going over there for dinner or whatever. And so I think my relationship started with him in '63, getting closer, spend[ing] more time with Hermine.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find him supportive of your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was very supportive.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you talk about oil painting techniques?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really. Well, he did. He would talk about his own work. I really didn't talk to him about what I was trying to do because I think it was a little different than what he was trying to do.

And also, artists that he liked or disliked probably had a different take on what I would feel. He was kind of in a different place than I was in terms of likes and dislikes. We agree on certain artists. But for the most part, I think—you know, he is much older than me. And, you know, I think what happens is, you know, your age has a lot to do with what you are attracted to.

So I think it is all okay, but it is just very different, you know, very different.

MS. RICHARDS: At one point in the '60s, I think you did a piece after JFK's [John Fitzgerald Kennedy] assassination that included a kind of—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Rocking chair?

MS. RICHARDS: Rocking chair for him. [*Untitled*, 1964]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you see that piece as a little bit of your past collage [work] mixed with the paintings that you were doing and also [connected to] the corners that you were doing?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The corners were done after that piece.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. I mean, as a transition.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, right.

MS. RICHARDS: The corners started in '65, I think—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: That was done in '64, [and] you had an object [in the work], a rocking chair.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: But yet, you also had a structure on a painted surface that could imply a space.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. Well, I never lent that to the corners, you know. They were related as a transitional piece. I think that is a very sentimental piece actually, that rocking chair piece. It is kind of like—well, I think it relates to some of [my] work. A lot of [my] work relates to, you know, something there and not there. And I think that piece does relate to—

MS. RICHARDS: The presence and absence.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, presence and absence. So I think that—kind of, you know, content wise, I think it relates, you know, to that. Presence and absence.

MS. RICHARDS: [Can you] talk about how you came to the idea of painting that series of works of the interior in the corner, the very simple, minimal representation of that space.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That came about—I was looking in an architecture book. And that was the space they used for maybe interior design or something. They were using a very simple space. They had put things in it. You know, where to place things in a room, something like that. And I was very attracted to just the room itself. So I started

painting this room. And then they got more and more minimal.

I think that kind of relates to painting what I was saying, getting rid of objects and just doing the paint. Well, this is I was doing paint with paint. I was even trying to get rid of, you know, minimalizing something, clarifying it more and more. And it ended up with this room, a corner of a room. You know, even featuring the painting upside down, it would still be the same painting.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the palette?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, there were two colors. I was using blue and violet. And blue, I thought, related to physical and a violet was kind of like more of a head kind of color.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think about these paintings as relating to minimal art and the kind of work that—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: As relating to what?

MS. RICHARDS: Minimalism.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think they did relate, except there was a big difference. Like I was working with an image and most minimalism—[if not] all minimalism was abstract. But I think it did relate to minimalism and trying to get rid of things, simplifying things. But I was doing it in a totally different way.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know what attracted you to the idea of using this empty space? Was it kind of a meditative space? Did you come to read something into the idea of using that space?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was about—I liked what I was doing, you know, just visually, I liked it. And I also think it was almost like just coasting in a way. Kind of—you know—

MS. RICHARDS: When you say coasting, I get the feeling you mean something that is—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was almost like putting it on hold.

MS. RICHARDS: [A space] that is safe—not in a negative way.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But it is enveloping.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was like how much can you take out of a picture and [it] still remains an image. That is what I was trying to do.

But specifically, it was about trying to—how much can you take out and it still is an image? And I think a lot of my work is still about that, but in a different way. And I can't think of what the different way is right now. But I know it is—it will come to me.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the scale of those paintings? I think some started out very small. But then they were very large, eight feet—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, nine feet—

MS. RICHARDS: How did you come to determine what the size would be of those paintings, the large ones?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, on the corners, I started to do [them] as large as I can work and it was determined by the doorway, what painting could I get out the doorway.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the actual physical relationship between you and the painting? If it is your size, you could actually envision being inside of that corner.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that is very true. It relates to a person. And almost where you forget that it is a painting, too. That is what those are about. [And a doorway relates to a body.] Yeah, definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: The blue color just as much as the purple, both of them have a kind of a dreamlike, twilight sort of quality, and actually the paintings got darker and darker. Is that right? Or maybe they just ended—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I started—well, what happened with those paintings is I would send it out to a show or something and they would get damaged because they were so pristinely painted. And then I started—well, I figured out maybe I could just violate these surfaces myself instead of having them violated by other people, which is weird.

But anyway, so I started putting marks on—and also, then we got into—it was the sort of thing that happened with those paintings after I started marking them. It was almost like two paintings. There were these marks and there were these rooms, corners. And they were like two different planes, two different surfaces almost, two different planes. And I thought that was real interesting.

And then what happened is I started marking them more and more. And then images started coming back into these paintings, the violations or these markings. I started seeing images in there. And then I started doing these black and white—black corners with white images on it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did those images come from sketches that you were making?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. There was one I know that—one image—well, some of the images before that came out of the painting, just painting it. But then I remember once I started to draw this chair. Actually I still have it. It is that chair in the corner over there. It is a tubular chair. And I just started drawing it. And then I decided to put that on the canvas. And then it was a whole different thing. It was like less coming out of the paint. Then I started putting images on there like a chair, horse— a falling leaf—

MS. RICHARDS: A duck.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: A duck, right, right.

MS. RICHARDS: And the happy face.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The happy face was—

MS. RICHARDS: Or that is what we call it now.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: A happy face and a mark like that. You know, and I came to like sort of reading into what these things meant after the painting was done. But it is still basically, I think, the most important thing about all my work is I put this thing down not knowing what it means and then maybe you can come to some kind of. Meaning afterwards, literal meaning afterwards.

But I don't think I ever start out with that, you know. Maybe now more to a certain extent, but maybe more knowing certain things that. I am just attracted to, you know, objects, images. I don't really know exactly what they mean. And that is the fun. But like a lot of the images that I use are images that I—like for instance, the images that I have been attracted to all my life, I am putting it down and, you know, it is transformed—

MS. RICHARDS: So even though they were readable to the public, anyone could identify what they were, they had a personal meaning to you. Even though you might not know what they were, they felt connected.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, just an object or an image that I am attracted to. But when you say the public knowing what it was.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I meant that [one] could identify that [it] is a duck. That is a chair.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: That is a hat.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, like for instance, the duck seemed to be about maybe vulnerability. It is a very vulnerable creature, you know. And that was like—

MS. RICHARDS: You mean because it could be hunted?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hunted and just vulnerable, yeah, in many ways.

And then I started putting lines on the side kind of like a thing—almost like protection lines, like entering into the picture in a certain way. But I think Tibetan thangkas are related to that, you know, where you went through the picture a certain way, you know. I mean, I didn't do it at that time related to Tibetan thangkas, but then I found out later that, you know, they do that.

MS. RICHARDS: You were keeping a sketchbook, drawing in it and coming up with these images in that way?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I don't have a sketchbook. But I come up with an image like oh, I really like that image and then I start making drawings. Like if it is for a painting, I will start making drawings, you know, isometric type drawings, drawings that are just for the painting, but lately, since I've been going to Rome the last 10 years, I didn't want to paint there. And so I started doing drawings related to paintings that I have done in the

past.

MS. RICHARDS: When [did] you began your involvement with Zen practice? Was that the [late] '60s or is that the early '70s that we are talking about right now?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it would be the late '60s, maybe, very late '60s.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that start?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, god. I think it started—I have a friend that was involved with that. And so just talking to him about things—

MS. RICHARDS: An artist friend?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, [he still males—but only for himself]. In fact—that must have been the early '70s then because that is when I met Jack. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What was his name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Jack Spillman. And he lives [in] upstate New York now. And he is married to Marilyn Lenkowsky. Do you ever know her work? She used to show at Paula Cooper—

MS. RICHARDS: Can you say her last name again?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Lenkowsky.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that is right. Okay.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: She showed at Paula Cooper. I think she had some—she was in some group shows there. And then they were a couple. And then they moved to upstate New York. And she has become a nurse now. I think she still does some drawings and so does Jack. He works a little bit. But he is a very close friend of mine. I still see him and, you know—and he was very involved with Buddhist philosophies. And I think I got involved probably—we were at a men's group together, Jack and I. And what happened is this men's group split up and we continued meeting just the two of us.

And, you know, we would do different practices together, some of them related to Zen practice. And then there was a zendo down here. And I joined the zendo. And so I got to know a real teacher, an enlightened person, supposedly. And that was interesting getting to know him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you arrive quickly at the practice—the kind of Zen practice that you would continue—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I don't think I had ever—I still don't think I have arrived at it.

MS. RICHARDS: How would you describe your involvement?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I think it is very simple. It is a very simple thing. And it is just paying attention is basically what it is and forgetting about yourself, which is very difficult to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Putting aside your ego.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, put your ego aside, you know. I think that is—but you can't put your ego aside completely, you know. Even the original Buddha couldn't do that. You know, I mean, he got fucked up like everybody else. He suffered when his people were being attacked [by] another village, attacking his village. You know, his karma is still there, you know. And so it is almost impossible. It is impossible, I think, to do it completely.

I mean, I don't know. The Dalai Lama seems to be the perfect man for me. But he probably has things going that I don't know about, you know, whatever. But he is as close as you are going to get to whatever it is.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that your practice of Zen Buddhism has impacted your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I really have no idea. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: But it is an important aspect of your life?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think everything you do—I don't know if I would say it is important. I guess it is. There are lots of important things, yeah. That is one of the—but it is like a contradiction, you know, because if you say—if you are thinking about it, it is like not the thing to do. [Laughs.]

So, you know, like to get to this other state, which you can't get to completely, as I said before, but I think the thing that I would say gives me the most pleasure because it is not about pleasure. The state I really like being in is the state that is like totally, you know, away from thinking of where you are or what you are doing. So that is what I would like to be—and that is where I would like to go.

And art actually—whether you are actually doing art and you are making something, art is like—like when you see musicians, the expression on their face when they are playing, well, that is the expression on artists' faces, too, when they are making things. [Laughs.] So, you know, it is really difficult to talk about it. But yeah, that is the place to be, I think.

But you can't say that is the place to be, so I am contradicting myself by even saying that, you know. But yeah, it is the place to be. And I would like to be there, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: We are talking about the early '70s when you were doing these paintings, I guess around '70 to '75. And each of these—you said they are mostly black. You said they were still the corner? Did that gradually become indecipherable and it was a more or less monochromatic black and white?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I ended up with this symmetrical corner. And then I put these other images on top of that in the center, small images in the center.

MS. RICHARDS: Eye level?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Some of them are eye level. Some of them weren't—yeah. Some of them would be eye level if you were sitting on the floor would be eye level, you know. But some of them were standing up. A lot of them were eye level standing up, yeah. Did I answer your—I am not sure that answers your question. I can't remember what your question—

MS. RICHARDS: When you did the paintings, let's say, with the duck, it is a white line.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: I haven't seen the painting in a long time, [but] from reproduction, it looks like it is a solid black background.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It is not solid black, the corner [is] there.

MS. RICHARDS: That is what I am asking about.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That corner—I kind of thought of the corner as almost like a tape recorder going or something that is always there. That is the way I thought of the corner.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were making those corners, did you think about [Ad] Reinhardt and—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Only in the surface. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: But in the closeness of—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, in the surface and closeness of color, one black to another black. Yeah. I think in that way. But I think the imagery and the content would be different than Reinhardt's.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, totally. Were you aware of other artists at that time who were using this kind of imagery? Later they were identified as "new image" [painters]. But Jonathan Borofsky or any other people at that point in '74, '75?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, my good friend, Michael Hurson, you know. I was very close to Michael for really a long time. And he was a new image painter. But I think those new image painters are very, very different really. It is sort of the same as like when you ask abstract expressionists, you know, when you really look at their work, it is all very, very different, even though they fall under a certain category. But I was aware of—yes, I knew Jonathan Borofsky's work.

Let's see. Susan Rothenberg, I think I knew all those people that were in the New Image show ["New Image Painting, Whitney Museum, 1978"]. Yeah. And Joel Shapiro's sculpture at that time, which is different from what he is doing now. Michael's work, of course, I knew him, his work. I was very close to Michael. I would see his work all the time. Who else was in that show? I can't remember—the "New Image" show, I'm talking about.

I was pretty good friends with Elizabeth Murray, even though I don't think she would be a new image painter. Oh, gosh. I went to see lots of show, too. I was very familiar with most people working. You know, Neil Jenney

and stuff like that.

MS. RICHARDS: We are up to about 1975. After you met Hermine and you got married, where were you living?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. We were living uptown on Third Avenue between 94th and 95th Street. [After] that, we were living in Westbeth. So we lived at Westbeth—oh, wow. We must have moved into Westbeth in the '60s, late '60s, very late '60s. And then what happened is I didn't really like working there, so I found this place here with Jim Starrett.

MS. RICHARDS: On Leonard Street?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: On Leonard Street, where you are sitting right now. And Jimmy had a studio on that side. I had this side. And then the living area we rented out to one of the garment people. And so we were able to afford this place, Jimmy and I. And yeah, so I was living in Westbeth for a long time. We lived there from late '60s to '74, '75, maybe—'74, I would say. And then what happened is this building came up for sale. At that time, actually, Jimmy had left. He went out to California to teach. And there was another person there, Michael McClard, who I shared this loft with. And he bought Jimmy's fixtures from him.

And Michael was living there. And I was still living in Westbeth. Then what happened is the building came up for sale. And Michael didn't want to buy into it. And I bought [this floor]. And Hermine and I were living here ever since. Yeah. And that must have been around '74, something like that, '73, maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: At the moment, we were talking about the corner paintings. Can you talk about the evolution of your work after that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: After the corner pictures.

MS. RICHARDS: [Was there an important] transitional painting, called *Skyline*, that was '74 that opened to the next period of your—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that kind of opened up the whole—let's see—*Skyline* is kind of a generic skyline of New York City. So that opened up a whole thing about buildings.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember how that painting came to be?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was just attracted to images like that on trucks, you would see New York, like the skyline of New York. I guess it has to do with probably being attracted to the city, you know. I mean, I love New York City.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, there is a symbolic quality to it. And it is kind of like a pictograph in the sense that it means something. You can just take it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Take it where would you say?

MS. RICHARDS: From popular culture, from what you were looking at from a side of a truck and use it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, you mean I could use it. Right, right, right. I thought you were saying just anybody taking it and using it in their head. But yeah, right. Yeah, and I was using it in my head, too, really, about New York City. I think it was that. But yeah, it is pop in that way, too, very simplified. Something very flat kind.

I keep coming back to this. It is just that I was attracted to it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, there is a strong graphic quality. You have always been interested in graphic design. It works as a silhouette in [a] very simple black and white context.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, of course. And there is the skyline at the bottom of the canvas just going across, relating to the canvas itself physically.

And then what happened is I put this brushy thing on the upper right. And that is like kind of another element coming into the picture. So that was real important, that other part, too. So it wasn't just like necessarily pop, although it related to—it definitely related to pop in a way, the simplification of it. But then there was this other thing coming in that makes it more complicated.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point in the process of painting that picture did [the marks up on the top right] come into it? .

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably right after I did [the] silhouette [of the skyline] and then I thought it needed something else.

MS. RICHARDS: [So] each piece is going in, one after the next, intuitively, not planned beforehand.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, it wasn't planned beforehand. And I always think of that like talking about that painting with my friend, Michael Hurson, after it was first finished. [He] came over—I don't know if I came to this conclusion. We both came to this conclusion. It was a disaster coming in from Queens. [Laughs][inaudible.] But there was just a disaster coming in—

MS. RICHARDS: From the East.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, from the East, right. Yeah, I think a lot of my work has that, like something else happening and some of it is dark. You know, even though you could laugh at the darkest things or the most laughable things, too. I mean, we turn that into like—oh, yeah, from the East. [Laughs] [inaudible.]

Yeah, I think I relate that to, you know, other things I did much later with buildings in New York, with spray paint on it. And the spray could be smoke or whatever, clouds or something like that. So it is never—I wouldn't say never, but a lot of my pictures are never just like this happy kind of go lucky, beautiful painting. I mean, the surfaces, I think, might be beautiful, but yet, there is this other element there that is like life, you know, really tough and, you know, other things coming into the picture. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Is beauty something that you are always striving for as one element?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Beauty in a certain way, you know, like what I think of as beauty, like I mean, the way a Ralston Crawford painting or Charles Sheeler painting would be painted, I think of that as beauty, but not necessarily the kind of beauty I am doing. But yeah, there is like—I think maybe things have to be beautiful and believable in certain ways before you enter into it. Like when you are looking at a painting, I think, like I was saying before about, you know, how I just want you to kind of look at it and not start picking out things, you know, like just looking at it without— just a really easy feeling. And I think the beauty gives you that, that you could do that through beauty.

You will say oh, that is so beautiful. Like what is that? What is beautiful? You know, it is maybe a wave, maybe—I don't know what it is. It is probably different for different people.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds, [from] the way you are speaking about it, [that it's] something that holds you there and keeps you looking.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I think it is that. I think like art that I love, you know, every time you see it, it is different. And you want to see it and you never can really hold it either. You forget it until you see it again. And then you see something else in it, you know. It is kind of like this, you know, like everything we are looking at right now holds you, you know. And that is what you try to get. I think that is what I am trying to get. But I am not sure what it all means except that it holds you. And it is kind of like—I think one of the great things about art is it takes you away from, you know, like how difficult life is, even though it is life. It is about life. But it is like a story. Telling a story. You are taken with storytellers, you know, how good they tell stories. And it is a relief. It takes you away from the reality.

And that is the way—I think that relates to, you know, what I was saying before about, you know, forgetting about yourself. If you can forget about yourself, you know, it is great to do that. And I think by forgetting about yourself, you are helping other people. Like you are not thinking about just yourself. You are in the world. But then time goes by really fast. If you get to that state, you know, your life is going to go by like a shot.

And maybe that is the reason why people don't want to forget about themselves, so their own anxiety is a way of prolonging, you are here. You're anxious. Oh, I'm scared—you know, whereas if you just go on and do things, things are going to go by really fast.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about experiencing the work of art. There is also that element that you mentioned before, which is a duality that you want to have an ambiguity. So on the one hand, it is a kind of experience that takes you out of yourself. On the other hand, there is something connecting it to you personally.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You are saying I wanted ambiguity. I don't know if I want it.

MS. RICHARDS: I think you were talking about that—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think there is that ambiguity. It is related—

MS. RICHARDS: [Perhaps] in every—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think in art, there is that.

MS. RICHARDS: —work of art that has an enduring power, there is an ambiguity.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, something that you can't put your finger on. Is that what you mean by ambiguity?

MS. RICHARDS: It could mean a lot of different things. It could be something that connects to everyone and yet connects to you personally. A skyline is a very simple image. You can describe the painting that you were just describing in a very straightforward way and see the beauty and get caught up into it. You take something away from it, [but].each person would take something somewhat a little different away from—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think so. I think that is the beauty of art. Like when I have people come here, other artists come to my studio, it is really interesting what they are going to be seeing in the work. I think everybody sees it differently.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you happy when people have different readings of your work, different interpretations? [Or] is there a sense, oh, that is wrong? Is that disturbing to you?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Sometimes it puts me uptight, like about readings. They are seeing things that I might not want to see in it. But it is probably there. So I am not always just necessarily happy. But most of the times I really like what people are saying about it. You know, it gives me an insight into what this might be about.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the painting *Skyline* and the bottom line. [That] gives you a sense of being above. Obviously, you did that very consciously.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not at all. I did it because I wanted to end it with a straight line. So it ended—like the straight line was at the bottom.

MS. RICHARDS: At the sidewalk.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: At the sidewalk or—well—

MS. RICHARDS: Above.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Whatever, above the sidewalk or I don't know. But that line related to the structure—like how I was going to structure it. But it wasn't—I mean, it is the obvious place to put the skyline down there. So, I mean, maybe you could say yes, I planned it that way. But like there is no other place I could put it.

And a lot of my pictures relate to edges. I notice that a lot, especially in a lot of my new work. It is all about edges and stuff running to the edge.

[END CD 3.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 27, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

Bob, before we proceed chronologically from where we left off yesterday, I wanted to pick up a few threads. First of all, the whole area of how you supported yourself as an artist, starting maybe around the time you and Hermine were married in 1964, starting with teaching, which I think started that year.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, maybe we should start a little earlier, even than that, when I first came back from Europe, which is 1960. I got a job doing freelance technical illustration. So I was doing that. And also, I did some graphic design, too. Book covers, stuff like that. Then, let's see, after that—

MS. RICHARDS: Would you have wanted to continue that? Either of those?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I'd rather, well continue it—

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, if you had to earn money some other way.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Actually, I forgot this: The other thing is I drove a taxi for a long time. And that was the most interesting job, I thought. Much more interesting than technical illustration or teaching—because I did start teaching. And of course, designing book jackets, that was kind of fun to do. I enjoyed doing that. But it still wasn't as interesting as driving a taxi.

MS. RICHARDS: When did you start driving a taxi?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I must have started around the time Erik was born.

MS. RICHARDS: Your son, Erik.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Maybe a little later. Let's see, he was born in 1966. Somewhere around that time. Also, I made stretchers for artists. I did that, and drove a taxi at the same time. Then I got teaching work in around 19— I can't remember what year it was.

MS. RICHARDS: I think I saw that you taught in Baltimore [MD] starting before Erik was born—1964.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, well, yeah. That's right. Erik was born in '66 so yeah, I started teaching around 1964 at the Maryland Institute.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that come about?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, Jack Tworokov helped me with that. He knew the president of the Maryland Institute and he thought I'd make a good teacher and he recommended me to Bud Leake, the guy who was president. And I had an interview with him and he said—what happened there is he was interviewing two people for the same job—me and Babe Shapiro—and he couldn't decide who to hire, so he hired us both for one day a week.

And then what happened was—let's see, I was teaching this class in painting and it was kind of interesting. There was a few people that I kind of was interested in. It was really difficult for me to get interested in people who didn't really want to do anything, who were just there to get a degree and stuff like that. And I kind of lost interest in, like, keeping attendance up.

MS. RICHARDS: This was undergraduate painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Undergraduate. But it was kind of, supposedly, advanced painting undergraduate. And, let's see, what happened was—gradually what happened was, you know, a lot of students that really I wasn't interested in and they didn't seem to be interested in painting started dropping out of class. And I ended up with—well, actually, it started getting a little better at the end for some reason. I don't know why, but it did start getting a little better. But what happened was Babe Shapiro, I used to see him coming and going to all—

MS. RICHARDS: What was his proper first name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It [is] Seymour but he goes by Babe Shapiro. He likes Babe. He's had several shows. He's a painter in New York. Actually, one of his first shows was with Eleanor Ward at the Stable Gallery. He showed there for a while. Then he showed with [A.M.] Sachs' Gallery.

Anyway, I still see him every once and a while. But he started working his way up in the school system. And we would talk about students here and there, about certain students that I liked. And sometimes, he had the same students.

And what happened was, finally, I was kind of let go because of the attendance. It was not very good in my class. And I guess schools have to keep up the attendance to pay bills. And so he—when I was let go, he said to me, "If I could ever get you back here, I'm going to really try and do that."

So he worked his way up to forming a graduate school at the Maryland Institute of Art. There are two graduate schools there. One, Babe had. There was another—an older one that Grace Hartigan ran.

And anyway, so at a certain point, he asked me to come back [and I did come back for about 2 semesters in the graduate department]. But at [some] point, I was selling work. I can't remember—was it '64 that I started there? That was in the undergraduate department.

Then, when I went back, he said to me [I don't have to grade the students]—and the other thing is, the grading system was [0-100%]. I remember giving all the people that I liked 100 percent and the people that I didn't like a zero; people that I thought just didn't really want to [paint]. And maybe that's one of the reasons why I was fired, too. [Laughs.] I don't know.

But anyway, I did—so anyway, so after leaving there, I guess in '64—I'm trying to think of where [I] was at, what I was doing in '64. I guess I wasn't really selling much work then. But I taught there and then I started doing these stretchers—I can't remember what time—the stretchers were done in the late '60s. I think I was doing stretchers maybe [late '60s]

MS. RICHARDS: At some point, you taught at SVA [School of Visual Art, New York City]. When was that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I taught at SVA during 1970.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And that was a really weird story, too, because I was interviewed by the president of SVA,

Silas Rhodes. And what happened was he couldn't find my resume. I sent him my resume and he couldn't find it. So I said to him—and actually, Paul Waldman asked me—he wanted me to teach there. And he said, "It's a very simple thing; you just have to see Silas Rhoads and I'm sure you'll get the job. He just wants to have a short interview with you. It's nothing; don't worry about it; everything will be fine."

And so I went in there and he couldn't find my resume. And I said to him, "Why don't we just rehearse this and then I'll come back after you find my résumé?" And the next day, I found out from Paul that I didn't get the job. [Laughs.]

Anyway, so that was around 1970. Oh, then Paul called me back. That's right—this must have been maybe '69. And then Paul called me back the next year or a couple years later and he said, "We really still want you to teach here and you won't have to have an interview or anything like that. I just want you come and teach here." So I did teach there for a couple years. And then what happened was—

MS. RICHARDS: Painting? Undergraduate?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it was undergraduate painting. And there were a couple of kids there that I thought could be artists and I was interested in them. And most of the other kids, I wasn't that interested. At that time, it was very druggy and it was a whole other art scene there. But I did meet some interesting people there.

MS. RICHARDS: Other teachers, artists?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, students I'm talking about. I did meet a couple of students. I can't remember their names now but there was this one kid who was doing a lot of photography and he was interested in what I had to say about stuff and he was kind of serious even though he was a heavy drug dealer.

Well, finally, I met him about—oh, god, maybe 10 or 15 years after I taught there. I met him on the street once and I said—well, we had some coffee together and he told me—I said, "Are you still dealing drugs?" He was dealing mostly marijuana. And he said, "No, no, I stopped doing that." He said, "I was doing it with a friend and these guys came in with sawed-off shotguns one day and I thought I was going to get killed." And I'm not sure if his friend was killed, actually. So anyway, he straightened up—[Laughs]—after that.

So that was teaching at Visual Arts and then what happened is—

MS. RICHARDS: But, did you meet any other teachers at SVA that became friends? Was that a positive aspect of teaching there, the other faculty?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really. I'd be in and out of that place pretty fast. I'd go there to teach and then—although, I did know people that taught there. Like, John Torreano taught there; let's see, Marilyn Lenkowsky taught there.

And then what happened, let's see, so that was 1970, maybe '71. I'm trying to think where my work was at that time because I could remember from what I was doing what was—oh, yeah. So that was '70, '71. I guess the work was in kind of a transitional period then.

MS. RICHARDS: You just starting the corner pieces in '70. You had a show at French & Company in 1970.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, that was the corner pictures. But I started doing them in the '60s; in the late '60s, I started doing those corner pictures. And I guess I was still—I was doing these—in 1970, I was kind of doing—maybe around 1970, '71, I started violating the surfaces of the corner pictures.

So let's see, so I had this show at French & Company of just pure corners. And then what happened at French & Company—I think I only had one show there.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the experience of having that show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was great. I loved those pictures and I thought that they were really wonderful paintings. I really liked them a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get a positive response from other artists, from—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it did happen in '67—I must have started those around the late '60s, '70s.

MS. RICHARDS: Might have been '66.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I did get a Guggenheim grant in '67.

MS. RICHARDS: In '68.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: In '68? Not earlier?

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you about that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I thought it was '67. You sure it was '68? Anyway—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, what was the impact of having that grant?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, that was great because I got in my car and I drove across the country. I'd never done that before. And that was very impressive.

MS. RICHARDS: On your own?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Well, Erik was really young then. I'm pretty sure he was only a year old, so this—well, he could have been 2 years old. But I was planning on going across and then maybe Erik and Hermine would come join me. But that never happened. I never really found a place. And it would have been a lot of traveling.

MS. RICHARDS: How long were you planning on traveling, on driving? Or being away?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think I took about a month off. Well, it was five days across, five days back, and then saw lots of things. Like, the Southwest—I just couldn't believe how amazing it was. I never realized that this country is kind of based on that kind of landscape. A lot of this country is based on that. And it was just amazing.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take photographs?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did. But what happened was I left this thing—kind of like a cap on the lens. Not really a cap—a shade on the lens. You screwed it on. And I didn't realize all these pictures are coming out with this, like, circle around it. Which was okay. I mean, I saw the pictures. And the pictures are okay. I mean, I didn't take that many.

MS. RICHARDS: Those were memory aids for future work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Maybe, maybe not. Yeah, I mean, I did some pictures based on the Southwest but I'm not sure if those were—I probably would have done them anyway without those pictures because it was in my head, what I wanted to do.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to Los Angeles?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did. I went to Los Angeles and I went to San Francisco [too].

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have artists to see or museums or galleries?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, well, of course, I went to see shows then in San Francisco. But I must have seen shows in Los Angeles, too.

MS. RICHARDS: And friends?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I did have a friend who I stayed with in San Francisco, Jack Marshall, who is a poet who I've known since the first grade. And he was married to Kathleen Fraser, who is a poet. Do you know her work at all? Maybe not.

Anyway, so I stayed with them. And they had lived in New York. Jack is from Brooklyn. He just wrote this amazing book about his childhood, which is kind of about my childhood, too; growing up in Brooklyn. His father and mom—his father came from Baghdad and his mother came from Syria. They were Sephardic Jews and this book he wrote was just amazing about growing up in Brooklyn and being from that heritage.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of the book?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It's called *From Baghdad to Brooklyn* [Canada, Coffeehouse Press. 2005]. It's an amazing book.

Anyway, Jack used to come here and visit his folks here, his parents, his brother, a couple of brothers here. And he doesn't come anymore because he has really bad glaucoma. The only way I'll see him now is to go out there, which I may do because I love him and I like seeing him.

But anyway, that trip was really great. It was a great trip —

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take that trip—I wanted to ask you—that you worked for Walker Evans. Was that before or after that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, that was way before. Well, not really. Wait a second—I worked for Walker in '67, so it must have been—could it have been the same—

MS. RICHARDS: Or '66?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, or maybe '69? Is that possible. I don't know. Anyway, I did work for Walker but it wasn't the same trip. The trip that Walker asked me to work on with him, and that I got through—actually, I was working for Alexander Liberman.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, doing what?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was a Sunday painter, literally. He painted on Sundays because he had this job at the magazine. And he needed somebody to stretch his canvases for him and get everything set up so he could just come in and work.

And so I worked for him for a while. And I got that job through Calvert Coggeshall, who [was] a painter—do you remember him? Come across his name?

MS. RICHARDS: Sounds familiar, yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Anyway, he saw me on the street one day and I didn't get the job working for Alexander Liberman through Calvert, but I got the job working for Walker through Calvert because they were friends. And also, Calvert was a very good friend of Jack Tworkov's. And so I met Calvert one day on Lexington Avenue. I was going to lunch or something, you know, like, in between stretching Alexander Liberman's canvasses.

And he said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I'm working for Alexander Liberman." And he said, "Oh, you know, Walker needs somebody to work for him now." And the thing with Alexander Liberman was very tenuous, you know, it was like here and there. So he said, you know—and I thought, Walker, god, you know, like—I mean, I always loved his work. I thought that would be a great experience.

So I worked for him in spring and this was a job that he had gotten from the *Time* magazine. He had worked for *Time* magazine as a photographer. And he was getting old at this time. He was in his [late] '60s. And so he was working at Yale [University, School of Art, New Haven, CT]. Actually, Jack [had hired him to] Yale at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Jack had invited him?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Jack was head of the art department there and he invited Walker to come and teach there. And so I spent a whole month together with Walker just traveling with him. It was a thing that *Time* was doing on the Hudson River Valley. And I carried his cameras around, loaded his cameras; basically, I took care of him, really took care of him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he talk to you about what he was thinking?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: All the time. Yeah, all the time. He was real interested in me too because he was interested in painting, you know, painters and he wanted to know all about what the art scene was like.

He loved synthetic cubism. You know, he loved [Georges] Braque. He thought Braque was a great artist and stuff like that. He also thought that Ben Shahn was a great artist. He was friends with Ben Shahn and in his house, there was a painting of Walker that Ben Shahn had done. It was a watercolor.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was Walker's house?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was in Old Lyme, Connecticut. And we'd go there, back there on weekends. And Isabelle—his wife, Isabelle—he was married to a much younger woman, very beautiful woman, at that time. She must have been half his age. And I was half his age too. I was around the same age as Isabelle. And '67, so that—I was like 38 at the time or something. And—no—

MS. RICHARDS: Thirty-three, 32.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Wait a second—32, yeah. Probably more like that. Well, yeah, it was the same time that Erik was born. I remember hearing that Hermine was pregnant; I was on this trip with Walker at that time. So it was great working for him. He was very—I learned a lot about being very direct.

You know, what he would do—you know, he was a writer. He wanted to be a writer at one time. And he had gone to Havana [Cuba] and he had met [Ernest] Hemingway there, stuff like that. So he was a very erudite and very wordy and he was a very natty dresser. He dressed in tweeds. He was a club guy. You know, he belonged to the men's clubs. He kind of liked those things.

But we would go places and I'd be this fly on the wall, which is great. Like we'd go see these houses. You know, we'd be shooting architecture and be shooting the people that lived there. And we'd be visiting very prominent families along the Hudson River. And we'd get there and Walker would be—you know, sometimes we'd have lunch with these people at their house. And Walker would be very—

MS. RICHARDS: So they were expecting him.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah. I would make—what I would do is I'd be like a secretary, you know, and he'd say, oh, let's go see blah, blah, blah. And so I would call them and make a date and then we'd drive up in this—we had this convertible, this Ford convertible, brand new—you know, that we rented. *Time* paid for it. And he was making a lot of money on this and I was making a little money, which was fine for me because I really enjoyed being with Walker. It was real fun.

And he had just gotten off of—you know, he was an alcoholic at one time and he decided to go to—I guess he got into therapy and this doctor he was seeing said—she said that she couldn't see him unless he stopped drinking. So he had this beautiful sterling silver cigarette case filled with pills that he took. And he just, I guess, I don't know what they were for—probably just tranquilizers, you know, just—not heavy duty. But anyway, because he couldn't drink, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: So he succeeded in quitting.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Drinking. Yeah, he did. He succeeded. So we would go out to these places and he'd be just—basically, he was there to take pictures. But he'd have to talk to these people. And when we would leave, he would say things like, "Oh, I think he must have just picked her up at Saks Fifth Avenue. She's just like a sales girl." You know and stuff like that. You know, and this is a very, very prominent family. He said, "It's just sex between those two, you know." [Laughs.] He was wild. He was pretty wild. And very accurate too about things, amazingly accurate. So that was great.

But I did learn. We'd go someplace to shoot. And some drunk would come in front of the camera and want to be shot, you know, and say, oh, take my picture. And Walker would be really accommodating and take this picture and be really nice with the guy. And then the guy would leave and then we'd get this picture.

And he would basically—what we would do is we'd go some place and wait for the light to be right. And once the light was right he shot tons of pictures. And I learned that about him, just the kind of economy—you know, waiting for things to be right and then acting. You know, so that was quite amazing.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you talk about his vision, what kinds of forms and what kind of light he was looking for, formal qualities?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He was looking for light on the subject, light on the subject. Whatever it was, whether a building—

MS. RICHARDS: A kind of flattening or defining—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not sure if it was flattening. [But I knew it was light] he wanted the subject.

MS. RICHARDS: So that lasted a month.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Maybe a little more. Spring time. And he wanted me to continue working with him. But I had other things to do.

MS. RICHARDS: While it was going on it was full time?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. It was every day.

MS. RICHARDS: So you couldn't be painting if—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Just being with him completely. Yeah. And oh he was a very wild guy. He would say things like—you know, because he wanted me to stay with him and he would say things like, "We'll get Allen Ginsberg and Robert Frank and they'll be in the front of the car driving. We could be in the back and I'll get lots of work, you know, keep us going." [Laughs.] So he was kind of a cool—you know, I mean, he loved—he did like Robert Frank's work a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he treat you in a kind of paternal way?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yes, definitely. I was kind of this young, younger person. Maybe like a son. He was telling me things where it was [at]. But then he was also so interested in what I had to say about a painting and stuff. He was really interested in that. That was good. That was a good experience.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you were driving a taxi.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I drove a taxi for a long time. While I was doing the stretchers, I think it was around the same—I know it was while I was teaching. I was driving a taxi. I got invited back to the Maryland Institute. Babe Shapiro invited me back to take somebody's job that was on a sabbatical. And then he wanted me to stay on after that too. But I didn't really want to.

But I think around the same time that he hired me back, I think I was making stretchers then too. So I was, like, teaching. Maybe it was a little before I was making stretchers. It's very difficult to put all this in exactly the right year. But I was making stretchers and doing other things, like teaching too. And then Babe invited me back to teach—I can't remember if that was the time I was making stretchers or—but let's see.

And then after I was there for a whole year teaching there—this person was on a sabbatical. And then what happened is he wanted me to continue teaching there. But at that time, I started selling work. So that must have been around '74, '75, maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find teaching satisfying? Did you enjoy it or did you just—?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, Babe said—yeah. Well, Babe said when I went back there to teach in the graduate school, I found that much more rewarding because he said to me, he said, you don't have to grade them—because he knew I had graded them and I got fired for giving people 100 and zero. So he said, "You don't have to do that."

He said, "You don't even have to talk to anyone if you don't want to," because these kids all have their own studios. He said, "You can walk around. You don't have to say anything"—because I guess he believed in me as a teacher from just our talk about students that we both shared. He knew that I was very—trying to be very supportive to people that I really felt were doing things.

So anyway, he said, "You just have to come back, come up, walk around and if you feel like talking to somebody, you can do that. If you don't, you don't have to do that." So yes, it was more rewarding that way. I didn't have any pressure about anything, like having to get them there; they were just there working. They wanted to work.

And people that I really—that I could not say too much about their work—I just tried supporting them, just talking around their work, trying to get them involved with it, you know, if I thought they really weren't doing anything. [. . .]

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking of exhibitions, we were talking about the fact you had the show at French & Company, 1970. And that was important. It was the first show you had since Castelli—I mean, [first] solo show in New York.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Eight years, I think.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. And you said that was a positive experience. It was exciting seeing all those works together?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I don't think I sold that much, but it was real exciting having the show. And then I got that grant—maybe I got the grant before the Guggenheim, before I had that show there. But I know it was related because I showed the work—to get that grant, I was showing those corner pictures to the jury.

MS. RICHARDS: And just then you had a museum show ["Recent Paintings," Hayden Gallery, 1971] at MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology] shortly after—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, of the corner pictures. Judith Wechsler wrote the catalogue for that. And that was basically similar to the show that I had at French & Company. She saw that show and she wanted me to show at MIT.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you did the body of work we had talked about yesterday with the doodles and the—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And those are the paintings that you showed when you had two shows at Nancy Hoffman [Gallery, New York City] in '73, ["4 New Paintings by Robert Moskowitz"] '74.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, it was '73 that I showed—like, leading up to those kind of doodles, as you call it—because I think there were some pure corners in that show and then there were markings on top of the corners too. It was like kind of a retrospective of the corners. That was '73. And then in '74, I had it evolved into the corner with these images on the corner.

MS. RICHARDS: I meant to ask you, how did you first get connected to French & Company?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Nancy Hoffman.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet her?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: She worked at—oh, how did I get to French & Company?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. There was this guy who called me one day. He was an old friend of mine: Russell Ryan. And I remember him as like just babysitting on the Lower East Side and stuff like that. And he was around and he—

MS. RICHARDS: Babysitting Erik, you mean?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not Eric, but a friend of mine had a young child and he would take care of [him]. And Russell was like this loose person, just this person around, you know. And somehow he had made this connection with Ivan Karp. I don't know what—they must have had some kind of an art connection. And Russell did these kind of cartoons. I think they were cartoons. And he had a very interesting background—oh my god, you know, I could go into his background.

Anyway, he was an orphan and what happened to him was, you know, he was just, like, this kind of street person. And anyway, he noticed these people that were wearing suits and they seemed to be living a good life, and he was wondering how they got to be that way. And I guess he went back to his orphanage and he said, you know, "I've seen all these guys with suits around and I want to be like that, too." And they said, "well, you probably have to go to college to do that."

So he took this entrance exam to Swarthmore [College, Swarthmore, PA] and he got the highest grade ever. And he went to Swarthmore and then I met him after Swarthmore. And he was just fooling around on the Lower East Side and stuff like that. And then, one day, he called me—well, he made this connection with Ivan Karp. I'm not sure what it was—some kind of art connection. I'm not sure what he did. Maybe he did some work for Ivan? I can't remember what it was.

And then what happened is, I guess Sam—somehow, I think it was Sam Hunter who was looking for someone to be the director of French & Company. This is after—you know, French & Company—you know, they showed abstract expressionists at one point. And this is after that.

MS. RICHARDS: So that's the connection with Sam Hunter.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So Sam Hunter—I'm not sure—I'm not positive about this, but I think Sam Hunter had something to do with—maybe Sam Hunter—anyway, French & Company asked Sam Hunter to choose somebody.

Oh yeah, there was this other guy who was the president. He had bought French & Company. And then somehow, maybe, he asked Sam Hunter. Somehow, maybe, he became friends with Sam Hunter. But anyway, Russell ended up being the director of French & Company. And he called me and he said, I was just appointed director of French & Company.

And he knew I was an artist and he kind of liked my work, I guess. He'd heard about my work. And he said, "Would you be interested in showing there?" He said, "Of course, we can only give you a small stipend and this," and I said, "Wow, that's amazing." [Laughs.]

So I went up there and I saw the space and it was a pretty space, and I thought, yeah, this is good. I'm going to do this. Because I had this body of work that I really liked a lot.

So yeah, I did that. I had that show there, and that was, like—and then what happened is, Nancy—they got rid of Ryan. Russell Ryan was fired because he was kind of off into space a lot of the time. He was great, but he was, like—wasn't exactly the right person to do that. So they got Nancy Hoffman there, and that's how I met Nancy, up there, and then she left and got her own gallery. And I had a couple of shows there.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative]. Why did you not continue showing at her gallery?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I thought—I don't know. When was the museum? I'm not really sure exactly what it was, but I guess I didn't think it was right for me. You know, I didn't have another gallery to go to, or anything, but I felt that it wasn't quite right—the direction, maybe, my work was taking.

MS. RICHARDS: So at this point, after you had the show at Nancy's in '73 and then also in '74, where was your work at? I know you did a painting called *Cadillac/Chopsticks* in 1975 and a few others at that period—that seemed to be significant for you.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Let's see, I had the show at Nancy's and the work was still developing. It wasn't—and then I guess what happened—let's see. Oh, well, it developed into pictures like *Cadillac/Chopsticks* and—there were a whole bunch—there must have been like 10 pictures that were related to *Cadillac/Chopsticks*. And there was this—let's see—there was a new—and that was around '77, so I was asked to be in this new image show.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, the one—yeah, yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, wait a second. Before that show, I had a show at the [Institute for Art and Urban Resources] Clocktower [Gallery, New York City 1977].

MS. RICHARDS: I think that's where Richard Marshall saw your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, exactly. And that was really a beautiful show. I really liked that show a lot. And so that was '77.

MS. RICHARDS: And the paintings you were doing at the time was what you had in that show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I remember, I guess, maybe the last painting I'd done just before that show opened might have been the swimmer painting, *Swimmer*.

MS. RICHARDS: I think that was after—the *Swimmer* was '77.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, it was?

MS. RICHARDS: There was a painting.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Wait a second. The *Swimmer* was in that show. I'm sure of it.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe there was another swimmer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Nope, it was that one.

MS. RICHARDS: In the Clocktower, or in the "New Image" show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Clocktower. It was in the—maybe I should look that up, fast?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

[Audio break.] [*Swimmer 77* was shown at the Clocktower in '77]

So at the Clocktower show, then, that was when Richard Marshall saw your work.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you ever met him before?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No. He introduced himself to me and said he was doing this show at the Whitney [Museum], and he would be interested in including my work in it. And I said, but, you know—because it was soon after that—the Whitney show—and I said, "But you know, you'd probably want new work for that." And he said, "No, no, no. Totally different people see a work up there than down here." Well, I didn't know that. You know, I thought it would be, like, showing the same work again, and that doesn't make sense to me.

But anyway, that was good. That was a big success, that show. I enjoyed that show. Well, I enjoyed the Clocktower show a lot. That was great, because I love that space. And it also had a whole history of—you know, who had been there, shown there before and it was really great.

And then Richard put me in the show at the Whitney, which was really significant. And then—

MS. RICHARDS: That was called "New Image Painting" [1978]. [(This is the Whitney show.)]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you feel about having your work seen in the context of his curatorial idea?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I really—I thought it was a great idea, you know, because at that time, works were coming off of—there was virtually no—people were not working with images, you know, that way, anyway. Because I think a lot of people worked with images at the "New Image" [show] knew abstract painting really well and they were people that came out of abstract painting. And that was very clear in the show, you know, the way people used imagery in that show.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you known all that work was going on and felt that you were part of that—those new developments?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, yeah. I knew what I was trying to do, and I knew that I had come out of abstract expressionism, myself. I thought other people—I mean, I did, from the show. Whether I thought that about them—how they came to it—I'm not sure, but I sure did come out of an abstract background.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, were you friends with any of those artists?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, Michael Hurson was a very good friend of mine. And I'm trying to think of other people that were in that show. Jennifer Bartlett was a friend of mine, too, yeah. I can't remember all the people in that show. Susan Rothenberg was in that show. I was kind of—I knew her, you know, and I knew her work and I liked her work. Let's see, I should probably get the catalog out and see who's in there.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you to go back to *Swimmer*, which you said was not in the "New Image" show, even though it was painted before that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was—but that was in the Whitney show, right?

MS. RICHARDS: It was—*Swimmer*.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was in the "New Image" show. I think it was, wasn't it? I'm pretty sure on that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, when was—I'm sorry—but when was the show at the Whitney?

MS. RICHARDS: That was '78, '79, so *Swimmer* could have been in it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, yeah, it was then. It definitely was, definitely was. And maybe that's where I'm getting mixed up. Maybe somebody touched a painting at the Whitney and, you know, wiped their fingers—although now, I'm not sure. Now, I'm beginning to think it's all a fantasy in my part. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: But talk about *Swimmer*—the genesis of that image and the painting itself.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: How did I come about—

MS. RICHARDS: That was unusual for many reasons. I mean, you had a figure, and the color, and—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I guess I liked the idea of a swimmer, you know, and I thought of it as kind of like—I don't know how to say this—I was thinking of it as a kind of—I don't know, like a—I keep saying this: I was thinking of it as—I know what I want to—I mean, I don't know what I want to—I know what I want to project, but I can't really put it into words.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it, in a way, a self-portrait? I mean, is it an artist swimming in—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was thinking of it as a self-portrait, in a way. But I also was thinking of it as, like, endures—somebody that endures, you know, like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Survives.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, like survival. I was thinking about survival. That was kind of after—I think it might have been after I had made the painting. But the other thing that came to me, you know, was that, actually, it doesn't look like this person is surviving. It's kind of, this person is, like, drowning, too. It almost looked like a hand up there waving.

MS. RICHARDS: It was ambiguous, for sure.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, there was some ambiguousness about it. And I didn't realize there was this other part. You know, I thought it was just, like, this other thing—this survival, you know, surviving and—a long-distance swimmer, is what I was trying to think of, even though I'm a really bad swimmer. So that really does look like me swimming. So I'm kind of half-drowning, half-swimming.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the blue?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, well the other thing about that painting—I think I mentioned this somewhere else or you probably read this—is, like, I put it on with my hands—the blue. It was pure pigment. And I bought this pure pigment—I saw it; I didn't know it was going to be for that painting. I bought it maybe several years before I made the painting. But it was so beautiful, looking into that blue—that jar of blue pigment.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of blue was it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Was it Prussian blue? I'm not sure exactly what color it was.

MS. RICHARDS: You had never put pigment on that way before?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Nope.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're not mixing it with oil or with any medium?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, just with—you know, it's kind of—what I did is, I painted something—I printed, first, and then this pigment went on after, just basically holding it together with, maybe—I can't remember it, but it wasn't oil that I held it together with. It was almost like just putting it on pure. And that's why if you touched it, it would come off, you know?

But anyway, halfway through it—putting this on with my hands—it was kind of like putting—kind of like rubbing your hands on sandpaper. The pigment is almost just like a sand, you know. So it started getting, like wow! This isn't too comfortable, but anyway, I decided to finish it, you know, and work that really well.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever feel like you were swimming?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Moving your hands, rubbing, dog paddle? [Laughs.]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I do the dog paddle, but I don't think I was doing it over there—anyway, just, like, covering it up and—

MS. RICHARDS: You were looking for kind of a tactile quality for the surface, and you intuitively felt that was an approach that could work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was more, like, the color was so amazing, this blue—more than tactile.

MS. RICHARDS: The color—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Of the pigment.

MS. RICHARDS: The quality of the color in the pigment caused you to put it on in that manner?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I couldn't put it on in any other manner—

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, you could have mixed it with some medium, right—ground it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I wanted to maintain the way it looked in the jar. I wanted to have that. So there might have been some water, probably, that I used with it. I'm not sure, now.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find a way to fix it so that it wouldn't rub off?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I didn't fix it. I didn't want to fix it. I don't fix my drawings, now, too. I do drawings—like pastel drawings—and I don't want to fix them because I know they're going to lose something.

MS. RICHARDS: But [your] pastels normally [go] under glass, or framed?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: If they're sold, they do.

MS. RICHARDS: But the painting would never be put under glass.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I guess it could be, but no. I don't know—I guess the Whitney has these guards there, if they ever show it, you know, or wherever it's shown.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it purchased by the Whitney?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, actually, I traded Jennifer—Jennifer wanted it. She loved the painting and she wanted it. And so she got it and I traded her a piece for it. And then what happened was, it got damaged in her house and she could not fix it, or—the Whitney wanted it and she couldn't fix it. I guess she promised it to the Whitney.

And then what happened is, when it got damaged, the Whitney said if she gives it to them sooner, they'll fix the damage. So that's what—they wouldn't fix it and leave it in her house, you know. So anyway, that's what happened there.

[END CD 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 27, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc five.

After you did the *Swimmer*, what paintings came up next? I think there was a group of skyscrapers?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I guess—I'm not—

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe. *Swimmer* was '77 and then there was a painting, *Empire State* in '78.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: And *Stack*, more importantly, not *Skyscraper* [1996], but *Stack* in '79.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. So those pictures came out of—I think they're related. They didn't really—well, they're related to the *Skyscraper* that was done in '73 or something—'74?

MS. RICHARDS: The *Skyline*?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: *Skyline*.

MS. RICHARDS: Seventy-four.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: *Skyline*, right, '74. Okay. Yeah, I think they're related to that. That's how that kind of happened. I guess. Also, you know, in a funny way, I think it relates to the corner pictures, too. My concern was architecture, you know, I mean those pictures definitely—something about architecture. And so I think there's that relationship. Let's see—

MS. RICHARDS: The corner pictures were squares?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The corner pictures—they're just like if—two walls.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean the dimension of the canvas.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, no, it wasn't square. It was 75-by-90 inches, 90-by-75.

MS. RICHARDS: Then the next group of paintings we were talking about—those were distinctly vertical.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think they were 90-by-75. No, the ones after the corner pictures were like *Cadillac/Chopsticks* and stuff like that. And they were all—I think they were all 90-by-75.

MS. RICHARDS: And then the paintings you started doing after the *Swimmer*?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, then I got involved with the architectural elements, you know, the Empire State Building and the World Trade Center, *Skyscraper*, yeah. And I thought of—I did think of—well, after I did the *Empire State*, and I guess I did—yeah, that's right, I did *Stacks* at that time, too—smokestacks. And then I can't remember *World Trade Center*, exactly what the dates are of that, but that—those pictures—let's see—

MS. RICHARDS: Late '70s. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative].

Late '70s. I guess I really liked the World Trade Center. I just loved the way it looked and I liked there were two of the same—I thought that was really cool.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a symbolic element in that as you saw them?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I saw them as two people. I mean, not completely—I mean not—I mean I can see it as different things, too. I mean, I saw it as a building, too. But I can see the metaphor between two, you know, like being two people, possibly the same sex, you know. And so anyway, I was very—I thought it was a really terrific image and then I started doing lots of—I did maybe three or four paintings based on the World Trade Center.

And then I did many, many drawings, you know, pastel drawings based on the World Trade Center. Yeah, and—but I was—I was just totally enamored, how beautiful it was. And then what happened was before the World Trade Center was attacked, I was doing these pastels and a lot of the marks—the pastels—looked like the building is like, you know, like was—I don't know, these marks—like exploding, the building was exploding in these drawings that I was doing.

And when I was into the metaphor between that and America, you know, was happening. There were lots of really weird things happening when I saw that as this, you know. I mean I was just doing these drawings. I didn't—I wasn't trying to make these explosive marks. It's just like the fingerprints from pastel—just kind of looked a little like that, you know? So it was really weird when it was attacked. I felt really strange about that. It was almost like, you know, like these drawings preceded that, it's very weird. [Laughs.]

And of course, nobody wants to look at those drawings anymore since, you know, because I think it recalls, you know—I don't think the paintings as much, although I did a painting where there's a lot of red around it, you know, and that was kind of, probably related to—I mean, I got that idea, probably, related to the drawings that I made.

MS. RICHARDS: Somewhere, I read that in one of the paintings, it was remarked how the brushwork on the towers was horizontal, whereas you might imagine it might be vertical strokes and that the relatively [horizontal] spaces around each tower were painted vertically.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: If I said that correctly. [Laughs.]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, you did.

MS. RICHARDS: How was the paint application—relating to the forms, creating the image and the impact that you wanted to achieve?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not sure what impact I wanted to achieve, but I think the one—I know the one you're talking about. It's only one—there are like three or four altogether. I think it's only one painting that has strokes that go horizontally. And then that's the one that's kind of reddish, actually, kind of darkish, horizontal strokes and kind of a reddish—kind of almost on fire. I was thinking of New York like being on fire, actually, at that point.

But the way it's done—I mean, I don't know why—I guess maybe—I'm not sure why that one worked out horizontally because the others, I think, the strokes are probably vertical and vertical on the sides too. But that one, I would—I don't know, I guess doing the sides vertical seems to be—it's natural because there were these long expanses of verticality there.

And so maybe the separation of the building and the—like doing the building was kind of like slowing down, doing these horizontals, you know, because that was done probably with a brush. And then the sides were done just like—also, with my hands, but putting, you know, using rags just to—I didn't use a brush on that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that the way you often [worked]? Without a brush?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I—you know, is that the way I worked often, with a brush? Is that—

MS. RICHARDS: Without a brush—did you apply the paint [with] the rag?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Without a brush, yeah, yeah. I do that a lot. I do it a lot. I like the feeling that it's very loose, you know and it has the gesture of a hand. That's related, probably, to the *Swimmer* painting, too. You know, except I'm not putting pigment there—I'm not putting paint there, but using, yeah, rags, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall when you started doing that? Is that something that you've been doing for ages? Or did it actually start with the *Swimmer*?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think I might have done it before that. I think some of those paintings, you know, like *Cadillac/Chopsticks* might have been done that way. I'm not sure, but I think they might have been. The [technique] isn't just kind of brushing, but very nuanced too. Like I would use like—sometimes I'd put like a flat color down first, maybe two coats of flat. And then with the same color, I would put the strokes with—

MS. RICHARDS: Starting with a layer of gesso? Or more than one layer of gesso?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, starting with gesso. And then the last coat might be with a cloth and paint and—but it would be the same color as what was put on before, but maybe before it was done with acrylic and maybe house paint, even, maybe latex. And the last coat or maybe the last two coats would be done with oil paint or just oil on top of that, to build up a density. And so it was very subtle, the kind of brushstrokes, you know. Yeah, brushstrokes with the cloth.

MS. RICHARDS: Strokes. [Laughs.] Cloth strokes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Strokes. [Laughs.] Who knows what it is called. I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you often use that combination of acrylic with oil on top? Most of your paintings just say they're oil on canvas, although there are some that say latex.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, well. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there a certain—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it's the last coat.

MS. RICHARDS: —a sort of a steady evolution?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It's kind of—yeah, it's like they evolved into oil, yeah. I would build it up. I still do that.

MS. RICHARDS: So they still begin with latex?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not necessarily.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean with acrylic.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: They will—acrylic or latex, probably. And then oil [is] usually [the last layer or the last 2 or 3 layers].

MS. RICHARDS: Are you involved in ever layering glazes through oil painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No. Well, I mean this is kind of a glaze, but I don't like the word "glaze", you know? It sounds so—like you're turning—I mean I don't know what I'm getting half the time, you know? It just—it evolves by itself. Glazing, you know, it's like you're after something and I find it's very—my work is very, you know, makes me crazy, you know, because I don't know where it's going, and I have to take it one step at a time.

MS. RICHARDS: At one point, I'm not sure when, you decided to always do a pastel or a drawing after a painting, to continue working with the image.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: There was a period of years when you made a decision [to do that], I suppose.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I make this decision—

MS. RICHARDS: To launch into that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I made this decision to try to make drawings of a certain period—probably from maybe 19—I don't know, maybe '75? Or—

MS. RICHARDS: At least at this time, as you said, you did a number of pastel and even graphite—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think they were a little later.

MS. RICHARDS: Studies.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think they were a little—well, the studies I did before were just basically studies for paintings. Then, at a certain point, I thought this would be cool to make drawings the same size as the paintings

in pastel. I made—and I did that.

MS. RICHARDS: So that might have been in the '70s.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That must have been around—that might have been around '80 or '83 I made that decision.

MS. RICHARDS: Of course, it's less common to do the painting first and then—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, well, but these are finished drawings, so yeah. Most people will do drawings first and then they make—I don't know how that works. I mean I don't think a painting is any more significant than a drawing, really.

MS. RICHARDS: [In] the drawings you had a freer approach to the imagery that you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: With drawings?

MS. RICHARDS: The drawings that you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, drawing's like a—was a one-step thing. You know, the pastel drawings. I mean, I did other drawings, oil drawings. I kind of call them oil—it's oil on paper. I call them drawings, you know, they're small. But sometimes with those, I would—more like working the surface. But with the pastels, it would be a one-step thing.

Whatever happened, happened. And I may put two or three coats of pastel on to get a density, but they were very physical things whereas the paintings and some of these other drawings I made are, you know, you do it and you look at it, whereas the pastels, you just lay it out and do it, you know? And whatever happens, happens. Yeah. And it's a different process between doing a painting and drawing, for me, anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you find that [it] was important to do [the] full-sized pastel drawing after the painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I thought it would be cool to do with pastel that same size. I'm not sure why.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you envision—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I have that much pastel. For one thing—I mean, and the color of the pastel was kind of related, the way I felt about the pigment on the, you know, *Swimmer*. There was something that I just sunk into. You know, like it pulls you in. And the kind of pastels I use are—they have very little—you know, pastel is basically pigment and a little oil holding it together. It could be a lot of oil—

MS. RICHARDS: Oil pastels, you mean?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: All pastels are oil. All pastels are oil. That's what binds it together.

MS. RICHARDS: There's some that are more of a chalk?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Like what people refer to as oil pastels, it's like a big chunk of chalk, like kind of—and that's held together with a lot of oil. It's very greasy. But then there are other pastels—the pastel I use is held together with a very little bit oil. And I like that—just that seeping into the paper, kind of. And that's related to the *Swimmer* in the way that I saw the *Swimmer* as being very seductive, you know? That the pigment—and I find the pastel I use is very seductive too.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you envision wanting to present the painting and the pastel together in an exhibition or exhibitions?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I've done it. No, no, no. I never thought of that. But they have been shown together, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: They weren't necessary companions?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, the image might be the same, but they're different. You feel different when they—I have a different feeling about it.

MS. RICHARDS: You did that for 10 years, where you consistently made a full-size pastel.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I guess so. From '80—I don't know, I think started on the '80s. I can't remember. You know, now I haven't done them—well, yeah. Wait, what was your question, again? [Laughs.] I forget. I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: I said, you did them for that 10-year period.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, well, I might do it now. I mean I don't know, it's still a possibility.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you also—you've also done drawings as finished works of art, on their own, separated from painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, right. I've done these drawings—oil painting on paper. They're small. You know, usually—well, I had some that are larger, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And you were talking about preparatory drawings—I think I recall seeing charcoal drawings of the Twin Towers [World Trade Center], a whole series.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I have done some. Richard Marshall asked me to do a cover for the *Paris Review* and I did a World Trade Center pastel, a small one—same size as the cover of *Paris Review*.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was a long time ago. It must have been around the time of the "New Image" show—maybe a little—a couple years after or something. I can't remember. And so that was a drawing done, not, you know, not the same size as the *World Trade Center* [painting].

MS. RICHARDS: When you think about—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I can't remember if I did any World Trade Centers, same size. I did other things—I did the *Thinker* [1982].

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, we haven't gotten to those paintings yet.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I know we haven't gotten there. That's why I hadn't mentioned it.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were starting out using pastel, did you have any particular artists from the past, who were masters at pastel, that you had looked at?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really. I mean, like—I've always liked pastel.

MS. RICHARDS: Something that excited you about the material?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I love pastel. I think it's amazing because it's so seductive. But I don't think I've ever seen pastels actually done the way I do it. I think this came out of my own kind of memory.

MS. RICHARDS: Pastels can be toxic, can't they? Certain pastels?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably. I am dying right now, you know. [Laughs.] I'm sure they've—maybe they—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, the kind that are dusty are supposed to be dangerous in some way.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I haven't done a really large one for a very long time.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, when you use a lot.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I would probably wear a mask now, if I did it, you know. But yeah, I'm more careful now with certain things. But yeah, I guess it can be—you know, when you're young, you just do what you want to do. You know, you don't really care about whether it's going to last or whatever. I mean, that's—

MS. RICHARDS: You weren't thinking about any archival issues?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think about that now?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, actually, you know, Terrence Mahon, who's a restorer, told me that he thought my paintings were put together really well.

MS. RICHARDS: What's his last name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: M-A-H-O-N. He's a really great [conservator]. I met him at the museum—he was working for the Museum of Modern Art and I'd shown a painting there and it was coming from some other place and it was damaged and he was great, the way he treated this painting. I couldn't believe it.

There's a scratch [on] it and what he did was he said, you know, it's just a mark—I don't know if it was a scratch. I don't know if it penetrated the surface, but there was mark on it. And what he said he was going to do was going to use water, but not take the whole mark out, just take out part of the line, leave it, take out another part of it, [break up the line].

And it just disappeared. It was like magic. So he was my man for restoring stuff. And he told me at one point that he thought my works were put together really well. But nothing is going to last forever. We all know that. So no matter how, you know, but you know, and so I mean I'm still working the same way, basically, that I've always worked.

So I guess there—you know, you can't—you know you can't put—what you can't do if you're working with paint—you can't put acrylic or latex paint on top of an oil. You probably know that from your own experience. You know, and that's why a lot of Ad Reinhardt's, I think, are falling apart. He didn't adhere to that completely, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about these tall, vertical paintings, [during] that period [when] you did *Flatiron* [1980] and *Empire State*, et cetera, how did you plan the composition ahead? Or did you just actually walk up to the canvas and start painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Wait, are you talking about the paintings, now?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I'm sorry—switching back to paintings.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Late '70s.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Could be any time, but thinking about those paintings—did you just walk to the painting, the stretched canvas—I mean, you already know the size, you had the stretcher made or you made it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Then you had an image in mind or you had done a sketch?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I made a study of, you know, on tracing paper to put onto the canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: Squared off?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not squared off. They're very linear. It's real easy—well, maybe I square it—no, once I put it on, like, the tracing paper, then—

MS. RICHARDS: A piece of tracing paper the size of the canvas?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. That might be squared off from a little smaller drawing. Once I did that, then I would just trace it on in pencil and start painting. And it was pretty simple, really. You know, place it. Well, I wanted—I want there to be just one image, you know. That was a given for me.

I wanted to work with just a single image. Now, I mean, if you see some of these paintings, they don't look as—for me, that looked very radical because I didn't think there were people doing that and I thought it was a good idea and I liked it. And so basically, just putting it in the middle of the canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you find the image of that lighthouse, I think it's called *Eddystone* [2001]. Where did that come from? We all know the other images from New York.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That year, I lived in England for a year. I spoke about that earlier, right?

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

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. And I always wanted to do a lighthouse. And so I researched pictures of lighthouses and then I came across this lighthouse. It's a very important lighthouse. It's still there. It was built a long time ago, [around] 1890, maybe before even that, I don't know.

And I decided to use that lighthouse. I liked it. And then I realized it was almost like a homage to the English for letting me come there for a year and giving me that opportunity to stay there, you know? So I saw it as that on the one hand and also what a lighthouse does.

MS. RICHARDS: Helps you find your way?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Helps you find your way. [They laugh.] Right.

MS. RICHARDS: That's what they did for you.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And there's a security that you get from a lighthouse, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think of the Empire State Building that way too?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really. Even though the Empire State has a light, too. But I did, yeah. I do think of it a little bit that way, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Like a light going towards a light, yeah. It was that light there. And a lot of my—the paintings of the Empire State were kind of dark and the light was kind of predominant, a kind of a marker, maybe? Yeah, I guess so. I guess a little that way, yeah. But not as much—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, you think of them as authority figures, too. They've been called totemic. They're singular, strong, verticals.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Phallic, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I thought of—I mean, that's definitely there, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: When, moving into the '80s, at the end of that, you did—a very large horizontal, [a] change of direction, after all the verticals, called *Big Picture* [1979-80].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: It reminds me of the trip you took across the country.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. It is.

MS. RICHARDS: It is?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I kind of think of—

MS. RICHARDS: Hollywood [CA] on the left and—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, I kind of think of it as Hollywood. I also think of it as like World War II.

MS. RICHARDS: Battlefield, you mean?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Like lights, looking for airplanes in the sky. So it's kind of like that. Also it has the Hollywood element, too. So that's on the left. It's kind of like a map; I thought it was a map. And the right side, I think, it was the Empire State. Did you read that? Did [you see] that?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, I think so.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, okay, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: You can't tell from the painting what it is. You know it's a structure or a manmade something.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: On the right, right. Yeah. And yeah, that's—yeah, it's big picture, big country.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about the process and what happens when you think something isn't succeeding, what do you do? And that brings to mind a painting I read about—you tried to paint a huge horizontal tidal wave.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And apparently, it didn't work.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no, no. It didn't feel right to me.

MS. RICHARDS: And you abandoned it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did. Although I painted one later called *Tsunami* [1994] and I did a large one of that and very simple, like the first one was really complicated, like trying to relate this to, you know, the ocean or whatever, water. And I couldn't make it work and it was—that was [under] *Big Picture*. It was before—before it

became the *Big Picture*, it was this tidal wave I was trying to paint, a tsunami, that I couldn't make work and it turned into the *Big Picture*.

MS. RICHARDS: Have there been other instances where just in terms of your working process something, [as] you envision it, doesn't work and you just—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, just about every time.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You start again, something else.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it's like—maybe not starting again, but having to do something else on it to make—or to put down first and taking things out, you know, putting other things in and—

MS. RICHARDS: Do you mind the visible residue?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, this painting I'm working on right now, I do mind it, you know. This one has a slight residue on it and it's really making me crazy.

MS. RICHARDS: And you can't sand it down because it's acrylic?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I tried doing that. I tried sanding it. I sanded it down. I thought it was out and then I put [several] coats of paint on top of it and it's still coming through. It's like this pentimento. You can never get rid of—you never can get rid of what happened in your life.

MS. RICHARDS: So is that good?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it's—I think if you use it, it's good. But you know, I'm so freaked out. I just feel—I don't want anybody knowing that or I don't want that there.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, if it is distracting, then.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, if you saw it, I can show it to you. It probably wouldn't be distracting to you, but there are a lot—the thing is, everything you put down is noticed at one point or another. Somebody's going to see it, you know. So you have to come to terms with it and that's probably like life, you know? Like somebody's going to see what you are, like you're masking things all the time and somebody's going to see through that because there's this pentimento there. So it's real interesting, I think, how that relates [to life.] [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah. When you were continuing on in the '80s, you came upon the image of the windmill.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, how did that come to your—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it kind of—that one kind of came out of [Piet] Mondrian, you know? I saw his windmills and I really liked them a lot. And it was a homage to Mondrian.

MS. RICHARDS: A softer sort of central image, in a way.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The pastels you're talking about, or—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I'm kind of picturing the shape of a windmill.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, softer than Mondrian, you mean?

MS. RICHARDS: No, softer than the Empire State Building or the Twin Towers or—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Softer in the way it was done or just the imagery, you're talking about?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I guess the imagery, the fact that you know a windmill moves and there's a certain rhythm and—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: You might say there's a kind of poetic quality to it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: More than an office tower.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I like the structure of it. I really like the structure, the cross. And you know, the fact that windmills are related to energy, you know. I like that. But I started it, basically, thinking of Mondrian and I wanted to do something related to—like his windmill, not so much related to his windmills, but just—it was a homage to Mondrian because he had done them. So that's kind of how it started. But then there's all this other psychology behind it that you just mentioned, you know, like whatever, softer or—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you start it with the painting first or the black—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The painting.

MS. RICHARDS: The black windmill, was that—or the red—the red one was the pastel, I think?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I did a red painting too. I did a black one and a red one. And then the pastels always came after the [paintings].

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about you're [involvement] with black and white. I mean the black windmill is a black-and-white painting. You've used colors wonderfully in many instances, but you do also often create black-and-white paintings or drawings.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: What is your attachment—your attraction to black and white?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The simplification—very simple, you know? But the black mill was not black and white. That was black and black. I also did—excuse me—I also did some World Trade Centers [paintings], black on black, you know? And that's kind of like—that's so weird too because that's kind like memorial. And then I did some white on black. Well, we can get into that a little later. We're not into that yet, are we? Or—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, you're right, you're right.

[Audio break.]

We're talking about black and white, I think.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. What I was going to say is like—I started using white. Well, first, there were lots of black and black, I don't know why, but I did some World Trade Centers and the black mill was black on black. And then—and I did some black-on-white World Trade Centers. And then I did some white-on-black World Trade Centers. And I thought of those as kind of like a bomb going off, like you know, you get this flash of light.

That's what I was trying to do with some of the World Trade Centers. You know, I've done it with other images, too, just with—oh gosh. Let's see, I did it with the World Trade Center, probably Empire State, too and I think I did it with a lot of images that I was working with. But it haunts me that I did it with the World Trade Center, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: [The] kind of a flash that is so bright it takes out all the details of the form?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, exactly, exactly. And I also—I just saw that as a metaphor. You know, and then—because it was done before the World Trade Center went down. So it was really weird. I have a very large one—a large painting like that that's kind of startling, looking at it after [the] World Trade Center went down.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you, when it went down, were you here?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I was up in Canada.

MS. RICHARDS: When you came back, could you live here for a while?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I was—yeah, we came back maybe a month after that happened. It was like less than a month when that happened, we came back. It was pretty awful. It was really awful. You know, I mean you had to show identification to get into this area.

MS. RICHARDS: And to you, personally, since they were an image in your work and an important image, there was that additional sense of absence—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, I could have lost—I lost that image, really. I haven't done a World Trade Center since then. And I just loved working with that image, really. It was so great.

MS. RICHARDS: Let's see what goes up in its place.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. [Laughs]—I'm not sure I'm going to be that involved with it from some of the pictures I've seen, what might go up. It looks pretty—

MS. RICHARDS: Whenever that is every going to happen. Going back to the '80s, you talked about Mondrian. Then you proceeded to work with a number of major iconic images, all of sculptural works.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, like the *Thinker*.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, [Auguste] Rodin and there's [Constantin] Brancusi.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Brancusi. I was interested in taking [sculpture] and flattening it out.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there also the [idea of] working from a photograph, an already flattened [image], possibly [a] black-and-white photograph of a three-dimensional object and then creating a painting from it? Or is a photograph just a simple device that was in between the three dimensional and your painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it's just—if I used a photograph, which I probably did, it was just like I flattened it out. I mean, not a big deal, or just like—I was interested in—well, it relates kind of to the corner pictures, again. The corner pictures were putting something down and how much can you take out of it.

[Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: We're talking about you're looking at those major iconic pieces of 20th-century sculpture.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So I'm saying it relates back to the corner pictures in—putting something down, taking everything out and you know, just—how much can you take out and still recognize it as an image—identify it. And I think with the—with the *Thinker*, a lot of people, you know, would—did not know what that image was.

I think, now, it's very—once you get it, once somebody says, oh, it's the thinker, you could see it. But when I first did it, you know, people would look at it and say, "What is that? What's the image there?" So that was interesting, too. I was doing—I mean, I didn't necessarily—I don't know. I mean it is the outline, the silhouette of the *Thinker*, but I guess I could take liberties with it because it's all made of straight lines, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So I was trying to like get it really flat and maybe an image that you had to really look at for a while to get what it was, the image was, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: So it flipped between abstract and representational?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it did, in a way, yeah. That one, in particular, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the first one of these that you did?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think so, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then came Brancusi?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The Brancusi piece [*Blackbird*, 1982] is kind of—of course, again, flattening it out. And I think that one is the least successful of all those images, the sculpture images I made.

MS. RICHARDS: Why would you say that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Sometimes, for me, it doesn't seem to—it seems to always stay just representation of the Brancusi Bird [in *Space*, series, 1923], you know. And—

MS. RICHARDS: It's such a simple form, you didn't have much to work with.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Maybe. I'm not really sure what the reason is. I don't really know. I mean, I like it. I do like it. But it just doesn't—it doesn't—some of the others have more a transformation, psychologically about them—for instance, like the discus bowler. I think there's a whole history behind that that you think of.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you pick that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, for the history behind it, I think somewhat. It's such a—

MS. RICHARDS: That's work called *Bowler* [1982-1984], right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: *Bowler*, right. Discus bowler. That whole generic thing about you know, physicality, you know, men's bodies, stuff like that. I think that enters into it. [Laughs.] You know, whenever you see those things, it's kind of hysterical. They're kind of a cliché—so I think I wanted to get that. And then there's a heaviness about it too.

I think I got that. The *Bird*, I'm not sure, you know? The Brancusi *Bird*, I'm not sure you get beyond just like the Brancusi—I mean, I love. It's a homage to Brancusi. I mean, I love his work and there's great, great, great stuff he did, you know? But anyway, so there were those.

MS. RICHARDS: And Giacometti [*Giacometti Piece (for Bob Holman) 1984*].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, the Giacometti piece is really interesting. I think that one kind of turned into—that one—I kind of think of it as maybe—like turning into a negative, you know? And that was real interesting to me.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the references to the "zip" ?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: [Barnett] Newman, you mean?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't think that one as much as the World Trade Centers or—well, not so much the World Trade Centers, but the *Stacks*, smokestacks. I think those relate to Newman, yeah, yeah. But I think there's a whole thing about smokestacks, too. It's not just Newman, you know, this whole psychology about what smokestacks do, you know?

Well, the phallic image of it, I like that. And also surfaces being like the atmosphere around it or what was going on. And those are all, again, just like I never knew how they were going to turn out, you know, like how the stack would relate to the surface and the atmosphere around it or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were doing the Giacometti, they're dark, or at least some of them are very dark, were you consciously uniting that darkness with the kind of angst that you'd read into the Giacometti and that he was absorbed by that kind of—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really. I wasn't thinking of—

MS. RICHARDS: Philosophical—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I mean I was—I really love his work, you know, but I wasn't, you'd say, personally of his angst?

MS. RICHARDS: Of his—of the period of time when he was working and the sense of humanity that you get when you look at his work.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not sure if I was specifically thinking that way.

MS. RICHARDS: The most prominent [element] then is the formal quality?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, also—I mean I love those works, you know. I understand what they're saying—I think—to a certain degree. I mean I love them. I think they're amazing pieces. But I'm not sure if I can, you know, identify—put into words what I like about it. I can't. I mean I just think they're just fascinating pieces. And also, yeah, they are very human.

Everything you say is true. I'm not sure if that's on my mind. But I didn't know how they were going work out. But I did like the form of it, [and] that I could use that form, I thought. You know, and taking it down to its barest. I did some studies for this painting before I made the painting.

And some of them have pedestals made into the work. And at first, I was working with that, the image and the pedestal. So it kind of evolved into this—not just this kind of slick, you know, this kind of—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you also do the same thing with the Brancusi?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: With Brancusi, I have something on there holding it up.

MS. RICHARDS: Which is something he made, right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, yeah. I'm sure he did. Yeah, he used to make all his own pedestals.

MS. RICHARDS: So you started out with that approach with the Giacometti but then eliminated the pedestal.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I was just doing a drawing, a small drawing, you know. But I mean that was on me—you're asking me about the psychology of it, if I saw that. No, I was looking at it in terms of structure, although I've realized the psychology of his work. I guess that comes through, maybe. And he's involvement with women, too, you know? And I think that comes through in my work.

MS. RICHARDS: In what respect?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think you can see it as a female form, you know. [Laughs.] Yeah. I think that's very—I think it's kind of obvious for me. There are so many things that are obvious to me that, but I think people have to come to things themselves. I don't like, really, talking too much about stuff, although I have been talking a lot about it here.

But I'd rather—you know, I really feel like the whole story about, like, you know, things speak for themselves—art, you know, you can't really talk about it. It is what it is and you know, like the whole thing about criticism. I guess criticism—art criticism, maybe that's something itself and people are beginning to realize that and critics are becoming artists at this point, too.

But that's okay, let them do their thing. I think docents in museums—I hate it. I think people can do that if they want to do it, but I really hate going there and hearing. It's like an interruption, you know, when I'm going to look at art and I have to hear this, these people speaking about stuff. And it's fairly easy—mostly superficial stuff they're talking about. But I guess they can't just tell people, why don't you just look at [the art].

MS. RICHARDS: How do you feel when critics or art historians create interpretations of your work that weren't you thought about at all? Are they helpful, interesting, irritating?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it can be good, yeah. I think it can be good. But it's not the work. It's certainly not the work.

MS. RICHARDS: It's the critics' work, not your work, then, you're saying?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know. It's interesting. I mean like I really enjoyed reading Ned's description of my work.

MS. RICHARDS: Ned Rifkin.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: In the catalogue.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: In the catalogue. I really enjoyed it. But I really like that. I wouldn't say he shouldn't do that, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: It isn't necessarily correct—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think getting down to bare bones, the work is the work and this is Ned's interpretation of it and everybody feels differently about things.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you ever prompted to respond to what you think is an incorrect interpretation, in an instance when someone's written about your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, you mean like writing them a letter or something?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, or calling.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: [Laughs.] Probably not. I'll let it be—let it be. Well, for one thing, I'm not very good with words. You know, I mean, I don't think of myself as a wordy person. You know, I think I—you know, so that's one aspect of it. I'm not very good words.

MS. RICHARDS: Have there been things written about your work that really bother you and you want to take this moment to correct the record?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: [Laughs.] No, I can't think of anything, really. I mean maybe there were, but I can't think of any.

MS. RICHARDS: So they haven't lingered in your mind.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, you know, I mean you kind of want a good review, you know, like when things are

getting reviewed, you have a show. And you know, you'd like to get a good review. It might help, you know? But it's still like—it's not the work, really. It's not the work. But it helps. It helps maybe explain it to other people, but it might not be my explanation of it.

MS. RICHARDS: What I think you're saying is, you couldn't call it wrong if it's not your explanation. It's an attempt to bring people to your work—a review—whatever the person says.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I guess that's good.

MS. RICHARDS: It's positive.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. You want positive stuff, you know. But still, it's like some other thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you deeply affected when there are negative reviews?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I am, actually. I am affected. I've been trying not to be. Like the thing is, this is the old story. The good reviews, you know, don't take them seriously. So then don't take the bad reviews seriously. Now, I'm not to that point yet, but I'm working at it.

MS. RICHARDS: That's kind of a point of [enlightenment]. [Laughs.]

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. It's a very enlightened state to be in.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you found that your work has been shown in Europe as well as the U.S.?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hardly. I only had one show—no, that's not true. I showed in Basel [Switzerland] a long time ago—19[81]—

: and then I had another show in London—the Grob Gallery ["Oils on Paper," 1990]—much later.

MS. RICHARDS: I was just wondering if you had noticed a difference in interpretation and critical approach to your work there versus here. But if there haven't been enough instances—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, there hasn't been enough. I've been trying to—I had three, , false starts with Italy. I really wanted a show there, you know, because I've spent time there and that never happened. But I've always wanted a show in Europe and it just never happened.

[END CD 5.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 27, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc six.

We were talking about the works you did in the mid-'80s and skipping a little bit to 1989, I wanted to talk about that retrospective that you had that Ned Rifkin, organized and for the Hirshhorn and it [traveled] to a few institutions including the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Having a retrospective is an enormous event in an artist's life, sometimes positive, sometimes negative. How did having the show [impact you]?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I loved having the show. It was really very positive for me, especially the Museum of Modern Art, wow!

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, was that something you had dreamed about and this was the realization of that dream?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it's every artist's dream to have a show there and it was great because—anyway, it was good. It was really great. I enjoyed it.

That show—so that show [1989] started in Washington [DC] at the Smithsonian, the Hirshhorn [Museum and Sculpture Garden], which is part of the Smithsonian, which is great because the Smithsonian, they had the money to do—to put the catalog—well, they were going to put the catalog out if Thames & Hudson [Publishers] didn't.

So it was very easy and I loved that catalogue.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you take part in deciding what would be in that catalog?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, Ned and I—he's great to work with. I love Ned. He's like a pure spirit. Do you know him at all?

MS. RICHARDS: A little.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He's great. He's really an amazing person. So it was really fun hanging out with him and in fact I think the same time we're putting the show together, maybe it was after—I don't know, we were in Japan together. I was working there. I did some prints there.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about your trip to Japan. Do you want to talk about it now or after we finish?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: We'll talk about it after or now, I don't care.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, let's finish talking about the retrospective.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So you and he decided there'd be an essay, his essay and then you did the interview with Linda Shearer.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, yeah, that's right and Linda was great because I knew her for a long time. She used to work at the Guggenheim and then she was working at the Modern, yeah. So she was great.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the installation of the paintings?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, they had this model, the Museum of Modern Art, they put all these little paintings—

MS. RICHARDS: Same as at the Hirshhorn?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The Hirshhorn? No, the Hirshhorn I don't think had a model. Let's see. I can't remember but I always like—everybody was very open. It was really easy and I love Linda. I mean, she's an amazing person. So it was really great.

The only thing that's very difficult for me [is] I could have probably done more socially in conjunction with the shows.

So I have a tendency to say no to this and no to that. I don't want to do this. So that wasn't very good for me.

MS. RICHARDS: What kinds of things do you mean?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, I don't know, like can you come and talk about paintings, just giving talks, just general talks.

MS. RICHARDS: So not parties, you were saying social [situations].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So just trying to thank people.

MS. RICHARDS: There were certain social demands that you felt were opportunities.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, like a party for you, a dinner party in conjunction with the shows and things like that and I don't think I—I think I'm probably a little better now. I think I'm less nervous maybe and would be a little bit better.

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, your work was represented—you were showing at Blum Helman [gallery, New York City]?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: When I had the show at the museum, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they help you or were they involved at all in this—in the retrospective?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, they would do whatever I wanted them to do but there was really no need for them to do too much.

MS. RICHARDS: Help you deal with the demands?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I think those are just things I had to deal with myself, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Some artists talk about a kind of sensation when they're standing amidst a retrospective—and

of course you weren't that old when you had this retrospective.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't your life's work but having a feeling standing in the midst of it and looking back thinking, oh my god, what am I going to do in the future—kind of a paralysis or a temporary paralysis to go along with the elation?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm not sure what happened to my work after that—'89, '90, I can't remember what I was doing, '90, '91, '92. I can't remember what the images were like after that.

MS. RICHARDS: Does that make you think that maybe you did have a moment of pause after that retrospective and took you a while to get back into the studio and get back to concentrating?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, gosh, I can't remember. I might have been doing—I remember I ended up that show the last painting I did for that show was this bowling pins being hit with this big ball, where these pins are flying in all directions and I thought it was really great. It was very appropriate for the last painting in the show.

MS. RICHARDS: A strike.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know if it was a strike. Well, I didn't think of it as a strike as much as just things flying all over the place, something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Something very heavy hitting.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, like a breakup of things, a breakup. That's the way I kind of thought of that painting. But then after that I think I did some really paintings that I liked a lot but I can't remember what they are now and there's—well, let's see. I had several shows at Blum Helman.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, in '92 you had a show and—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: What was the images there? Do you remember? Do you have that written down?

MS. RICHARDS: There was a black longhorn steer's head [c 1992].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh right, yeah, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know if that was just one painting [of that] or a number of paintings.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It was one painting, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And a chain link fence [c 1992] against—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right—

MS. RICHARDS: So those were both a little—well no, the chain link isn't Western. You can think of the bull's head as Western.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The bull's head were related. It was on a side kind of. It wasn't like coming—it wasn't like that but the horns were like that and there were—

MS. RICHARDS: Vertical instead of horizontal.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah it was a vertical. I can't remember if there's a painting. Was that a painting or a drawing in that show?

MS. RICHARDS: I believe it was a painting.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay, right, okay, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, still in the retrospective you had that painting with the broad horizontal, the painting with the red bird and the black birds, a little bit of an Asian feeling to it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: With the branch.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, and that one actually—that was in my show.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did that lead anywhere, using those motifs?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well,—

MS. RICHARDS: That was around the time you went to Japan.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, right I made the—I made a print of that painting.

MS. RICHARDS: So tell me about the trip to Japan. That was your first and only trip to Japan?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I've been there three times.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the first?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I don't think it was the first. Let me think.

MS. RICHARDS: That was in the late '80s?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that might have been the last actually. I think the first time I went there I just went by myself actually. Gosh, I know I went there three times. I know I went by myself the first time, just traveling around and it was great. It was really wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: Just your own itinerary?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, just get on—I mean, I would just go wherever I wanted, very loose. I didn't know where I was going to be going —

MS. RICHARDS: What was it that you were wanting to see in Japan?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Nothing in particular, just the culture I guess. I loved being there. It was amazing, great place.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you both in the city and in the country?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I took these trains into the country and I can't—you know, I get the three trips mixed up but let me see, the first time I went there—so I had friends there, Japanese friends and so they gave me a place to stay actually in Tokyo and they were taking me around and I was fascinated. The food there was amazing and god, I wish I could remember more specifically.

MS. RICHARDS: Are those friends that you still are in touch with?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Actually it's real interesting. I haven't seen them for a long time but somebody was over last night who just saw them.

MS. RICHARDS: What are their names?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, Hiroshi Kawanishi, who I made prints with actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Hiroshi, and tell me his last name again.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Kawanishi, K-A-W-A-N-I -S-H-I, yeah I think so. He ran Simca Press.

MS. RICHARDS: Simca?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: S-I-M-C-A, Press.

MS. RICHARDS: In Tokyo?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, he had a place in New York. Anyway, he had a place in New York that I made prints with.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of prints?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did the swimmer print I think.

MS. RICHARDS: What medium, print medium?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, silk screen. He did all those Jasper Johns American flag prints. They're great prints that he made. Anyway, I didn't see him—now I'm getting mixed up because I didn't see him in Tokyo. I saw this other friend of mine, Marcia Iwatate.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you stay—when you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: When I stayed, Marcia had a boyfriend there and they had a place to stay and they had two places and anyway, she gave me one place to stay and it was great in Tokyo. It was really great and what did I do there, I guess would just walk around.

MS. RICHARDS: That was the first trip.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah just see things and—oh, we went to Kyoto. That's right. She wanted me to go to Kyoto with—Kyoto and I stayed at this inn there called the Tawaraya which is a very famous [inn.]

MS. RICHARDS: The what?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It's called the Tawaraya Inn, which is a very fancy place, I think over the top because then I went there again to make prints there and Kathan Brown wanted to put people up at the Tawaraya which she did.

I mean, I wouldn't have not stayed there if it was my only choice but I did stay there again. It's kind of like there are other inns in Japan that are more down to earth. This is like high end and it's more like a tourist attraction now I think and it's amazingly expensive.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were doing prints for Crown Point Press [San Francisco, CA] with Kathan Brown?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, and that was really a great trip too, working with [Tadashi Toda].

MS. RICHARDS: And what print medium did you use then?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Woodblocks. [Tadashi Toda was] a third generation printer and he was amazing. He was really great. He actually questioned the print I was making at one point.

He said that—because it was very loose, kind of almost like drippy and you don't associate that with woodblocks and he said, "I don't think you really want to make a woodblock. I think you want to make lithograph." And I said, no, no, no, I want to make a woodblock that might look like a lithograph and he liked that a lot.

So anyway, that, since—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you succeed?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I made—I love this print I made. It's a really great print. He's a great—he's great, just a great cutter, you know and it's amazing. There were seven blocks and he only had one registration mark on there and it was just amazing how it came together. We got this kind of drippy area.

Prints are really interesting in the sense that they're compromises in the end because it's like usually a print is like something maybe a painting that you've done or some drawing that you've done where the painting and drawing is all spontaneous that you can get that you can't really—it's all an illusion with a print and at a certain point you have to stop, that's as far as you can go.

If you go any further you might overwork it. That's the other thing. You're constantly—there are constant choices you have to make along the way and that gets really complicated too. But at a certain point you have to stop. That's as far as you can go. That's as best as you can do. But this print that he made—

MS. RICHARDS: What is it called, the one that you love?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: *The Red and the Black* [1987], it's like those two blackbirds and a red bird.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: [Like a painting] in my catalog.

MS. RICHARDS: And the print is a similar image?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, exactly the same and I think of that print as actually this print I think of it as just as good as any painting or drawing I made in a sense of what a print can do, not so much like playing with the print medium and I'm trying—well, yeah, I mean the fact that he was able to do this thing, like transform this

woodblock into a very loose surface and I thought that was really cool and I thought it was fun in a way to see this illusion.

So he was able to do it. He was able to do this but the thing is it's still not exactly, if you compare the print to some drawings that I did, like oil drawings—the thing about oil, like the thing about the whole thing, art, paintings, drawings, whatever you do, it's all about—a lot of it is about transformation, like being startled by what this is and he was able to do that in that print. So like for me that print was as good as anything else.

MS. RICHARDS: You went back for a second time to this same printer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I only worked there once. I only worked there once. Then I went to Japan with Hermine. We traveled there together.

MS. RICHARDS: When was that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I can't remember what date.

MS. RICHARDS: The '90s, vaguely?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, it wasn't—it was like a long time ago. I think the last time I was there in Japan was probably '88 or something.

MS. RICHARDS: To do this print.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: [Yes].

MS. RICHARDS: Because the painting was '87, *The Red and the Black*.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, so I did it in '88. But I'm not sure if that was—that must have been the last—that might have been the last [time] I was there.

But I was there two previous times, one by myself and then once with Hermine and then a third time to make the print and Ned was there that time. He was doing something there and we were there together and that was really fun to be with him, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you done other prints, since we're talking about prints?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'm sure I have. I don't remember. Well, the *Cadillac/Chopsticks* was a print. That was done before. That was done in ['85]. I was with Vermillion Press. I liked that print a lot too. That was pretty good.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it the same title, the print? It was Vermillion Press in New York?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Minneapolis, and I did make prints with Jennifer Malby. I just actually finished a print with her, four prints.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the name of that press or just her name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It's just Jennifer Malby. I think so. She's in Brooklyn. She's great.

MS. RICHARDS: And is that—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Etchings.

MS. RICHARDS: Etching.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I made a whole series of other prints. I was commissioned to do this print for Business for the Arts [Toronto, ON, Canada] I think it's called. Did you ever hear of that?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And they commissioned artists to do a print and I did the lighthouse and that's—yeah, that's—

MS. RICHARDS: A number of years ago?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was done with Jennifer, yeah, probably six or seven years ago maybe. I'm not sure. I did that and then I did this image of Atlas.

MS. RICHARDS: Like in front of Rockefeller Center?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, like that. That was like that, yeah. In fact I was trying to base it on that. It's a little related to that except it's [more] geometric.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean simplified the way you simplified the Rodin?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, very simplified. Well, different than Rodin. You kind of know this immediately is Atlas. A Rodin, you hesitate before you know. So yeah, Jennifer was great. She's an amazing printmaker. Yeah, I really love working with her.

MS. RICHARDS: You said she's in Brooklyn?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: She's in Brooklyn.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds—from what you've been saying, it sounds like the times you made prints was when you were invited by a print shop to create a print but have there been other times when [it was] important to you that you do a print and then you sought out the opportunity?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, well with Jennifer, yeah, I was asked to do this print and then I chose Jennifer because I've known her prints.

But then when I made lighthouse [*Eddystone*] we decided to do other prints too, other editions like the Atlas and then what happened—I had this show at the D'Amelio Terras Gallery [New York City] and I wanted to do four prints of images out of that show. So I asked Jennifer if she wanted to do it.

MS. RICHARDS: You wanted to do etchings?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Etchings, yeah. I love etchings. That's my favorite printmaking. It's very [tact]—is it—

MS. RICHARDS: Tactile.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Tactile, it is.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yeah, I can see that—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah it could relate to my work.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you [just] do those four?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yes, I did just recently. I just finished it maybe six months ago.

MS. RICHARDS: When you do prints, do you decide or does the shop decide how big the edition will be?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I let them decide it.

MS. RICHARDS: What about selling it? Normally, artist galleries don't sell prints.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, with Jennifer, what I do with her is she gets half the prints and I get half the prints, which is very—it's not normal. Usually you get somebody to produce it and I don't like that and I asked Jennifer if she would do it this way and she said yes.

So we both paid for the supplies and I put my time in and she puts her time in and she gets half and I get half and she sells her half through—did you ever hear of her Diane Villani?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: So they're sold through Diane Villani, her part, and then my part I just keep. I never sell them. Well, I started making prints I guess with Jennifer anyway, I thought people asked me to contribute [art] and I thought I [could do prints]. So now the prints are there and I like having them.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the wonderful woodcut that you loved so much. Did you get copies of what, the one you made in Japan?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I did. I got maybe—maybe I got—well there are two prints I made there. There was that, there was the birds and then I did this howling dog too.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I did get maybe 10 of each or something, like that and I've been giving them away,

mostly giving them—like I don't think I ever sold any prints. I might have sold—the person downstairs wanted to buy some[thing] from me.

So I showed her these prints and she bought two prints that Jennifer Malby made. But for the most part I keep them. I don't know, people—like Hermine thinks I'm really crazy.

But I just like having them and like they're great for gifts, although I haven't really been giving too many gifts out lately. But anyway, I do have a lot of prints, which I feel good about. [Laughs.] I like having them. I'm like this squirrel, you know, hoarding, I mean, not that anybody wants them. If they wanted them, that'd be great. It's kind of like—

MS. RICHARDS: You said you did four prints based on images in that show. Would it be interesting to you to have an opportunity to show the painting and the print that relates to it together?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, not really. I mean, I might just show the prints alone, but no, that doesn't really interest me too much.

MS. RICHARDS: Going back to the evolution of your work, we were talking about the paintings you did right after the retrospective, trying to bring that back to mind.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Actually, let me—I might want to do that some time, a print and the painting. I don't know. I mean, if it came up at a certain time, yes. I [wouldn't] say no.

MS. RICHARDS: You'd think about it.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I would think about it, yeah, depending on where it would be shown and how it would be shown. That might, yeah, that's probably a good idea. I'm sorry, I interrupted you. Go ahead.

MS. RICHARDS: It's fine. You were thinking about what your work looked like right after the retrospective in the early '90s and we were talking about the longhorn steer's head and the chain link fence.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: I think you did some World Trade Center images.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yes I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Some pastels.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah I did lots of pastels and I did a very large black and white one that I was talking about earlier. That was in '95. Also I did the tsunami. I did the tidal wave. I did a large painting and two smaller paintings of that.

MS. RICHARDS: What attracted you to that subject?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was about feeling overwhelmed maybe, you know. It's real interesting because that picture [was] shown at Blum Helman, numerous shows at Blum Helman and this critic wrote—I don't know—I got a very bad review on that show.

Then Joe told me that this guy thought my work was gimmicky. I said, really? and he told me about the tsunami painting because I had—it's very simple now. It was just black and white and then there's this white across the top, like that would be like the water coming in. I kind of signed it in this very bubbly way. It says, "Bob."

So I'm at the bottom of this wave. So I think it's funny but I also think it's very serious. It's about being overwhelmed and this is the painting that he thought was gimmicky. I said, fuck, like this is my life. This guy thinks it's gimmicky.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you often or rarely have critics who want to talk to you about the work before they write the review, [to] get your viewpoint?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, usually in a paper or something?

MS. RICHARDS: Or a magazine.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Or even in a magazine, I don't think so and sometimes you'll get an intelligent review. There are intelligent reviews. But the thing is, it's good to get a good review because you might make some sales. People really follow that. Very few people really, really look at the work.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean they're buying with their ears, as they say, and not their eyes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, well Jasper Johns did that early great sculpture, *The Critic Sees* [1961], you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I love that piece. That's great. But you know, and then the people that are interested in art, for the most part, don't buy art. I mean, other painters, I've traded works here and there, but anyway. But most people that are really interested in the work, it's not about buying. But it's nice to sell stuff. It really—it helps.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel emotionally that it gives you a sense of appreciation, kind of a boost?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it does, yeah. It gives you a sense of—yeah, like it puts you in the world to a certain extent.

MS. RICHARDS: Just a few questions about [the studio.] Are you usually working at one painting at a time?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah I usually do that.

MS. RICHARDS: If you had the option of having earlier work around-- right now I don't see any earlier work-- would you like [that], I mean just the previous body of work, not older, to reference as you're doing your work, or do you prefer not to have anything from the past?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I might look at something but usually I'm just working on the painting I'm working on, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you do if you don't know which way to go, that no ideas are coming to you, that you have kind of a—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That's tough.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you work through those moments?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It's very painful, yeah, but that's even—I mean, it's that and even working on something can be very painful too, like it's not going exactly the way you thought it would, you know. Yeah, that's the life of the artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Self-doubt.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Self-doubt, yeah, and that's what you're saddled with being an artist. That's the—what is it—that's the plight of the artist, you know, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you find that, as the years go by, to the present, that it takes longer to do each piece or are you working more quickly? Is there any change in that regard?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I seem to be putting less down. They're getting very minimal and so if the painting goes really well, it could be going really fast. But if it doesn't, then it gets kind of complicated. It could be drawn out, not necessarily with a lot of stuff down there but just drawn out in time, like trying to figure out what to do and how to do it, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: What about titling works? What has been your approach and has that changed?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: A lot of my works are untitled. I will title some. If it's really obvious, I will title it. But sometimes—I'm not even sure of this.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever want to put a title on just because it's hard to remember what a work is if it's called untitled?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that's a problem. That is a problem. But I can't put a title on without reason. I don't do that. But yeah, you're right. If I'm looking for a work, sometimes I can't find it because I don't have a title on it or if it's categorized in the computer.

MS. RICHARDS: It gets a nickname? Untitled, [laughs] that pink one.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That's one of the problems with untitled and then you put like something like what it is next to it and what happens is sooner or later what happens is people start calling it that and that's the title. So I try—when I do untitled I try not to put something in parenthesis next to it unless I don't mind that happening, yeah. It's amazing how things have a life of their own. I mean, that's what we're talking about, like pentimento, like

working over something and you don't really like it there.

You work over it but you can see some of it. Sooner or later somebody's going to see it and it's going to come out and then there's going to be a whole thing about that, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: More recently, haven't you been using untitled less frequently?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I'd say it's more untitled than titled.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. But I will title things, like I just did this fairly recent image of St. Sebastian.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I called it *St. Sebastian* [2007] because I thought, it's obvious that it is St. Sebastian. So yeah, it had to be St. Sebastian. I mean, like it's not really pointing the way at anything but—

MS. RICHARDS: So if it's a very straightforward title. It's not functioning like some other title would be to give clues. Because it's so obvious, it's not a clue. It's just stating the obvious.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, right, right, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: If you want something to be ambiguous, that's more of a reason to call it untitled?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Or I want—yeah, I want it to be where people like bring their own thing. But then some people don't get it and then you kind of feel, well maybe I should have titled it, like given them more of a hint. But I look at the work and I think this is really obvious what it is. But then people don't see it the way I do.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you gone back and re-titled something because of that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I've never done that, no and I used to—the thing is this titling, it's interesting you should ask this because this is more like recently the way I feel about titling.

At one point I did title things, like everything seemed to be titled like in the '80s maybe, like *Thinker* for instance. You know I like the idea of people not seeing immediately. Like maybe I wouldn't title anymore but at that time I did title it.

So you know, the *Red Cross*, *Red Cross* [1987]. *Red Cross*, *White on Black* [1987], I don't know, like *Skyscraper*, instead of World Trade Center, call it skyscraper. I like that reference to some old kind of term, that they used to call big buildings skyscrapers, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, the titles are—I don't think I'm too good at it probably.

MS. RICHARDS: In the studio, do you use assistants at all?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I don't.

MS. RICHARDS: You just have your canvases made by somebody?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The stretchers are made by somebody, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And they also stretch the canvas?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I do the stretching and I like to stretch it. I like priming it. I really love to prime canvas. It's kind of fun to do. It's kind of mindless.

MS. RICHARDS: You use acrylic gesso?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]. It's mindless and it's great. I mean, I love to paint. So it's painting. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: In the studio here, you have north light and you also use other lights.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you try to maintain an even light as you're working or a light that's like a gallery light?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Just a light I can see what I'm doing.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you sensitive to whether it's warm or cool or consistent throughout the day?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no, none of that. I'm just totally, totally—if I can see it. I mean, [laughs] like there are some areas that are very precise maybe, precise, so I want to see that and be able to do that. But no, I think that if the painting is interesting, it's going to come across whether it's in a—

MS. RICHARDS: [Thinking of the] color, if you were to do a painting -- you've done bright green paintings or paintings with a prominent color -- it could look very different in a different light.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, oh yeah, so yeah, when I hang them say in a gallery, we play with the light, yeah, a little bit.

MS. RICHARDS: What about music or sound when you're working?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I like to listen to stuff.

MS. RICHARDS: Music or talk radio?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Mostly music, but I do like talk too and the computer, I listen to radio over the computer. So I can get India, live stream Indian music, classical Indian music and listen to that you can go any place in the world or you can do all piano music. So I like music a lot. Music, I love music.

MS. RICHARDS: Have you always had music in the studio?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Pretty much. I like listening to stuff and also I like interviews with writers and other artists. Mostly I think writers are more interesting actually than—

MS. RICHARDS: Well, they're certainly guaranteed to be articulate, hopefully.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Actually the artists are good too. I shouldn't say that.

MS. RICHARDS: Where do you find those interviews?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, this is also through the computer. I mean, you can listen to NPR [National Public Radio] and like, what's her name, Gross—

MS. RICHARDS: Terry.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Terry Gross, she does really great interviews. But there are these interviews from Canada that I listen to in the summertime.

There's two shows that I really like a lot. One is like interviewing writers and the other is this program about spiritual kind of stuff, like she might have like some monk, some enlightened monk being interviewed. So those are the two programs I like to listen to a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of Canada, I wanted to go back to how you ended up going there, when did that start, and where do you go, that other side of your life that happens in the summer.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, let's see. There were friends of mine went up there first and got a place up there.

MS. RICHARDS: Where exactly is there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: In Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and so I went up there and then Hermine's sister had the same friends that went up there and her sister was living in Montreal because her husband didn't want to go into the Army during the Vietnam War.

So they went up there and they bought a place up there and then we went up to see them and we just fell in love with the place. It's really beautiful.

MS. RICHARDS: How long ago did you start going there every summer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh maybe, I'd say at least 30 years, 35 years.

MS. RICHARDS: You have a studio set up there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, when we first went up there we camped. We bought this land actually and we camped on it. We had a series of tents and Erik had his own tent, my son Erik, his own tent and we had a tent and then there was this kitchen area with a tarp. It was looking at the Boy Scout handbook, figuring it out.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you done camping before in your life?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hardly any, just a little bit. I was in the Boy Scouts. I remember there was a five-day camping trip and I got terribly sick. It was awful. But anyway, going up there, we decided to do this and we bought this land and—

MS. RICHARDS: Because you really wanted to get out of the city in the summer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, the city was really tough, you know? But we'd only go there for a month then and so we didn't have enough money to build a house and so we put these tents up and we had that for a really long time, maybe—I can't remember, but then in 1988, yeah, '88, this house came up for sale 10 miles down the road and we bought this house and a barn.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry? A house and?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: A barn, we both actually worked in the barn. Hermine worked on one end and I'd work on the other end of the barn and we did that for a long time and then this house—there was an abandoned house up the road from us and people up there—they know how to move houses. It's amazing.

So I bought this house for very little money and we moved it onto our land and what I did was I just—it's a very small place, like maybe 22 by 24 feet and I took out all the walls and I put a skylight in up there. We had to put a new roof on anyway. So I put a new roof and a skylight [in].

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do all these things yourself physically?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I didn't. I have done carpentry, but—

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like a lot of work.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it's a lot of work. We had people do that for us.

MS. RICHARDS: So the place you have now is this place that's about 22 by 20?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Twenty-two by twenty-four maybe, at most, or something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it have a second floor?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I took out the second floor. So it's very high. I could do very large paintings there.

MS. RICHARDS: Is this just a studio or you live there too?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Just a studio and then the house we bought is an old farmhouse built in 1910 and that's really pretty. It's really all wood, like wood walls and stuff like that.

MS. RICHARDS: Is the studio on the same land as the house?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. The studio is like into the trees, lots of trees there, and Hermine's studio is in the barn away from the house too and then, yeah, so that's worked out really well.

MS. RICHARDS: So do you go there for just a month now or the whole summer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh no, now we go there for the whole summer. We've been doing that, yeah, we're there for four months. It's great. It's really very beautiful and very desolate and pretty wild I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you feel that you want to be socially alone or are there other people there [who] you know and you can see from time to time?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, there are people we see from time to time. But I like being alone. I really like long stretches of time being alone. I think it's really amazing to do that and it really [is] great. When we were camping, that was even—like we didn't hardly see people.

I mean very difficult inviting people over for dinner. But at that time, that was amazing. Then you go to a house—when you're a month outside, you go to a house and you start getting claustrophobic. So it's great, this air all the time. MS. RICHARDS: The weather must be pretty [cold].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it could be difficult. It's getting warmer and warmer now with global warming.

MS. RICHARDS: You've noticed that there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh yeah, yeah, and I don't know, maybe yeah, it's getting warmer I think. There can be stretches of a lot of heat. But it's really great because even if it's warm, in the evenings it cools down. Our house is very ventilated, windows, a lot of windows and we're kind of high up on a hill kind of and then there's the water.

We're on the water so we just go down to the water, take a swim or something, cool off. So it's great.

MS. RICHARDS: If you took a swim in those waters you would definitely cool off, wouldn't you?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, you know it's interesting. But it's warmer than Maine.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, because of the Gulf Stream?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think because it's shallow. Well, a lot of people think it's the Gulf Stream but I have a friend who's a scientist and he goes up there too and he says it's like a lot of people think it's the Gulf Stream. It's not the Gulf Stream. It's the shallow water. It's not that deep and it just gets warmed up. But it's not warm but it's warmer than the ocean in Maine and warmer than the ocean in Cape Cod too, yeah, yeah. So it's pretty good.

MS. RICHARDS: Switching gears significantly, talking about relationships with galleries, so you showed with Blum Helman. How did that affiliation begin, I think in '83?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Let me see. How did that happen?

MS. RICHARDS: There had been a long period of time since the show with Nancy Hoffman in '74. Maybe there were other shows I didn't [note].

MR. MOSKOWITZ: There were other shows.

MS. RICHARDS: But you weren't—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Daniel Weinberg [Gallery, Los Angeles, CA], I showed with him on the West Coast. I showed with, god, let's see, Daniel Weinberg came to see the "New Image" show and he liked it and then I had a show with him and then the show with Margo Leavin [Gallery, Los Angeles, CA]. So Margo Leavin and Daniel Weinberg were dealers of mine at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your approach to getting represented, getting affiliated? Did you reach out to them?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You know it's really interesting. But I think what happens is you have to wait for an opening. You can't just—I think it's very rare that you go—well, with Castelli, he basically, I guess you could say I reached out. I don't know. Did I?

No, there was an opening. He was coming to see my friend and I said would you mind if he comes. But usually—but that was different because he didn't know my work or anything. I was like—

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, your reputation didn't precede you because you were too young.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Or like, yeah there's no reputation and also—yeah, the work wasn't being out there, shown out there. But with other galleries I find is like I would never just ask somebody—I mean, you can ask people to come to your studio but it's very difficult to get them here number one and I find that they don't really like that.

So the thing to do is to wait for the opportune time, like you might meet a dealer someplace.

MS. RICHARDS: So [Dan] Weinberg saw your painting—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, he saw my paintings at the "New Image" show and he wanted to do something with them, yeah, and then he was in San Francisco at that time and I said to him, you know, I really don't want to just show in San Francisco. I think I need more than that and he said, well I work with Margo Leavin and I think I can get you a show there.

So I said, great, and that's the way that happened and then I had a long relationship. I had two or three shows with Dan and Margo I had many more shows I think and let's see, and who else—okay, so I'm trying to think of—oh yeah, so I did have the show with Blum Helman and that happened—I think they had seen my work. They knew my work from being around.

MS. RICHARDS: So they contacted you?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: They did, yeah. I'm not sure how that worked.

MS. RICHARDS: Joe Helman?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was Irving [Blum] actually who saw a picture of mine in a show that—maybe at P.S. 1. There was a May show. They used to do a painting show every May and I think Irving saw the painting and he probably contacted me. Yeah, he probably contacted me.

[END CD 7.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Robert Moskowitz on April 27, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc seven.

So you were talking about how these various gallery affiliations came to be. And maybe you were up to the connection with Blum Helman.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Blum Helman and I think that came to be—did I say how that came to be? I think it was possibly—well, I think what kind of—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I am sorry. You did say that Irving Blum saw your work.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: At P.S.1 [gallery, New York City], a show at P.S.1, a May show.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. I guess that started things off, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: You knew the gallery and were interested in the possibility of showing there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I guess I decided to do that. I thought the space was really beautiful, you know, just an exquisite space. So I was pleased to show there. I was, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Was part of it the other artists they were showing?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, they were showing some good artists. Yeah, I liked that, too.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you also feel comfortable with Irving and with Joe?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, I did. I felt very comfortable with them, yeah. Well, I mostly dealt with Joe for some reason, and even though Irving was the person that initiated the whole thing. But then, I don't know. I found that Joe was able to make decisions, you know, like about certain things on the spot—not that Irving couldn't, but somehow if you could deal with one person, that is great. So that is what eventually happened. I mostly dealt with Joe. I think I always dealt with Joe.

And it worked out really well because, as I say, the gallery was really beautiful and I guess it got people in. And the '80s were like really boom time in terms of selling work. People were like—I had a waiting list of people that wanted to buy my work. And they weren't too cheap, although I could have gotten even more money, but I didn't really want to just go crazy with that.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that your decision, the price?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think it was both of our decision. I tried keeping it down. I really tried keeping it down. I didn't want to—although I thought it was a lot of money anyway. So anyway, that worked out really well. I didn't have to worry about money.

MS. RICHARDS: Did Joe come to you and say it was time to think about a show? Or did you go to him and say, you know, I would like to plan the next show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He would always—he would probably usually say to me like why don't we do another show? So I mean he probably would initiate it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he also come to the studio and decide which paintings would be in the show? Or did you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He would come to the studio. You know, I don't do that many works, you know. So it is pretty

much showing whatever I did in the last two years maybe.

MS. RICHARDS: As you were painting, were you thinking of painting a show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You would be working in your studio and do what—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I think it is nice to know that you could have a show.

MS. RICHARDS: But you weren't painting a show?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, no, not at all, not at all. I don't know what the painting is going to look like. You know, so I don't think I was painting a show.

MS. RICHARDS: When it came to installing, did you have a big part in where the paintings would be placed or did you trust that he would know how to do that best?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, what happened—Joe loves to do that, install the work, you know, place it. So he would always place them before I would get there. But they weren't up on the wall. They weren't hanging.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And I would want to make one or two changes. But he had pretty good taste, I think, in terms of where to put things. And it gave him a lot of satisfaction to do that, too. So I kind of went along with that for the most part. Yeah. It is pretty good. I like really sparse shows. And a lot of people like—I mean, maybe his shows would have been a little sparser if I hung them. But I was happy with Joe's, you know—he was good. He had really good taste in that. You know, it was good.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you want to have any part to play in the whole promotional side, deciding what image would be on the announcement, whether there would be a card or a postcard, what the catalog look—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: They asked me—I think they would ask me about the cards, the invitations to the show, announcing the show. I think they would definitely—if I didn't want something, they would probably not do it. The catalog—I can't remember how many catalogs. I think I only did one catalog with him, right?

MS. RICHARDS: There were at least two. I saw two.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh. There was one—really? Two catalogs? Okay. I can't remember. I know one catalog was a white-covered catalog. And it had an iceberg, an image of an iceberg, a drawing of an iceberg on the front cover on tissue paper.

MS. RICHARDS: I don't remember that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That was one catalog. But I don't remember another catalog. Do you have it written down?

MS. RICHARDS: I had it somewhere. But I don't have it at hand.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That is all right. Whatever. It doesn't matter.

MS. RICHARDS: I thought I found two catalogs.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Okay. But there was a catalog—you might have found a catalog that was from my London show, too. Do you remember that one?

MS. RICHARDS: Which gallery? Where was that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: At the Grob Gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: I had missed that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Oh, okay. But you are sure both of those catalogs were Blum Helman? They probably were.

MS. RICHARDS: I could look it up later.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, it is okay. It doesn't really matter. Anyway, yeah, I worked with a designer usually and they had very good people.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, with your background in graphic design, too.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Yeah, I really—oh, yeah, that is right. There were two people I remember working with. But I can't remember—I worked with a person by the name of [Karen] Davidson.

MS. RICHARDS: That was [the] name?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: And then I worked with another person called [Katy] Homans. Did you ever run across her?

MS. RICHARDS: [Katy] Homans?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Homans, H-O-M-A-N-S. Yeah. And yeah, there must have been two catalogs. Right. But I can't remember. I only have one in my mind right now, the white one. But anyway, yeah, I mean, they were basically—the catalog was just like the pictures from the show. It was real simple, you know. They laid them out really well.

MS. RICHARDS: There were writers, weren't there?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. Well, there was another catalog from a show that I had at MIT with Judith Shea, a two-person show. And there was a catalog for that. And I think they used that essay in there. Katy Kline—

MS. RICHARDS: Correct, I saw that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Do you have any with Katy Kline? You know her.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: She is great. She was really great. I am very lucky in working with really good people.

MS. RICHARDS: When the gallery did the press release—I guess they had a press release—did they pass [it] by you first, what it said about your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think they would. I don't think—I don't think there were press releases in those days, in the '80s. Now—

MS. RICHARDS: I don't remember that.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Now it is, you know. Like now, it is all a lot of words now all the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved at all in issues of who would buy work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I would pretty much leave that up to them, you know, whoever they wanted to sell it to was fine.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever want to put any restrictions on the sale or control the inclusion of your work in an exhibition? Let's say you thought the context was wrong. It was a show of blah-blah paintings and you thought that wasn't right. You didn't want your work to be seen. Did you get involved in those kinds of issues at all?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You know, I mean, artists like—they are just like trying to survive for the most part. And, you know, there is never—very little attention given to them. And then there is somebody that comes along, somebody out there throw you a crumb. And you snap at it. And you are happy, too. You are really happy for, you know, whatever amount, short amount of time. And so I hardly like rejected anything. And I am still that way. I am pleased that somebody is interested. But I think there are probably people that are very calculating. And I'm probably calculating to a certain extent.

I mean, I am not an angel, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, some artists feel that once the work is out of the studio, they don't want to have any control over it. And other artists feel strongly about the way they want their work to be read. And if they feel that correct reading is threatened by the work being in a show, even though, perhaps, they do want to accept any invitation, they—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I am talking about group shows mostly.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, yeah, thematic exhibitions, where they think the theme doesn't—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I remember Gottlieb was asked to be in the show, "art and abstraction." And he did not want to be in it.

MS. RICHARDS: That kind of thing, yeah.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Something in abstraction—not art and abstraction, but "[Nature] and Abstraction." And he said he is not a [nature] painter. And there is a big to do about that. Maybe a lot of people dropped out of that show. They wrote back or something when they found out what the title was. I don't know. That was at [the] Whitney.

But anyway, yeah, I mean, that could happen where I wouldn't want to be in a show.

MS. RICHARDS: But not yet—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: But I can't think of any.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had many—well, a good number of exhibitions at Blum Helman. Did you also at some point show in that space they had in Soho? Or did you want to? I mean, maybe it wasn't something—because you said you loved the space on 57th Street.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, that was a beautiful space. I think I did show—I am not sure. Maybe—I remember there was a World Trade Center painting hanging down there. But I can't remember if it was in a show or maybe they just put it up to take a photograph of it. I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: Obviously, you stopped showing there when they closed the gallery. I think the last show was in '95. That must have been a difficult time for you.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know how difficult it was.

MS. RICHARDS: You were ready for a change?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably. I don't know. I am not sure if I was ready for a change. But it wasn't—well, there were other galleries that were [interested in] me actually. And, you know, the thing about me—probably I tried to—I stay with things, you know and probably to my detriment, too, you know. But I felt like everybody was telling me that that gallery was closing, you know. And the writing is on the wall. And they are going out of business, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean they were telling you at the point where you didn't have any recognition of that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I didn't really know that. Well, the thing is they broke up, you know. So then it was just Joe Helman's gallery. And I think—I don't know. There is a lot of like shaking ground or something. And they are losing a lot—well, they started losing a lot of, you know, credibility in the art world, I think. And so there were other places I could have gone to, you know. But I didn't really want to initiate that for some reason. I don't know. I didn't really feel—you know I've been married to Hermine for 50 years now or something, you know, 45 years or something.

MS. RICHARDS: In other words, it was a sense of disloyalty if you were to seek out other dealers while he was still in business?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know if it is disloyalty or I just get involved with something and I don't think it is going to be better any other place, even though this thing is crumbling. [Laughs.] I'm not seeing things clearly. I think that is a better way of putting it. And so I did stay with Joe until he finally just left. I mean, closed the place up.

But everybody was telling me things are bad there, you know—

MS. RICHARDS: Did he make efforts to place the artists in his gallery with other galleries?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not with me, I don't think. The thing is I don't think he could really do that anyway. You know, like some of his heavy-duty hitters—I think a lot of those guys actually left. And I think the people that stayed on were probably like—they didn't have any other places to go to. But I did have places to go to, which was really interesting, you know. I just thought—it didn't feel right to me.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean people had reached out to you?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. And—

MS. RICHARDS: Could you then go to them once he was completely closed?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, but there was a whole different game going on at that point. I can't remember. Maybe I did and it didn't work out or something. I can't remember.

MS. RICHARDS: You next showed with Lawrence Markey.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I showed with Lawrence like when I was still with Joe. I had shows with Lawrence. You know, Lawrence showed my work when I was showing with Joe, you know. And we had a show—I had one or two shows.

MS. RICHARDS: That was okay with Joe that you had shows in another gallery?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, it is never okay with dealers. They want you to themselves, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you want to have a show at a different gallery then?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I kind of liked some of the people Lawrence was dealing with. And I liked Lawrence. It was really low key, you know, kind of out of the way. I liked that. I don't know. I liked it. I liked it a lot. It wasn't a big show. It was a real—you know, Lawrence usually just deals with drawings. That is his main thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so it wasn't taking so much away from Joe?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No. It wasn't taking that much away. But still, I remember, you know, there was some friction there. I mean, dealers do not want—they want you all to themselves. And I actually—when I first established a relationship with Joe, I wanted it to be like "you are not my sole representative." And that is what we established from the very beginning. I want to be able to do whatever I want with my work. If you want to show it, that is great. If you don't want to show it, that is fine, you know, too. You know, so it kind of started out like that.

You know, I was showing with Margo still when I was showing with Joe. And none of those people had total representation of Robert Moskowitz's work.

MS. RICHARDS: So when Joe closed then, you had a show at Lawrence Markey?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: A few shows.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And then that ended because he closed?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Lawrence? I am having a show with Lawrence in about three weeks.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, sorry.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: He did close. He went to San Antonio [TX]. That is where he is now.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see. So you are having a show in San Antonio.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Closed in New York.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, he closed in New York. But he has been ongoing for a long time.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you had some shows with Peter Blum.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, two shows.

MS. RICHARDS: And how did that come about?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, one thing is when I had a show at the Kunsthalle in Basel, Peter was a young man there. And he wrote something about my work in the catalog.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I did read that. Yes, it was a very interesting piece.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. So there was an establishment with him. So he has this gallery at 99 Wooster Street. And I used to have this studio at 100 Wooster Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you had this studio?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yes, way before. Yeah. It was in the '60s, late '60s. And I always loved that space. [Laughs.] Even though it was like disco at one time. It is an old firehouse.

MS. RICHARDS: One hundred Wooster?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, 100. Oh, that is his address. Is that Peter's?

MS. RICHARDS: No, I think you said it was 90.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Ninety-nine. But I had a studio at 100, right across the street.

MS. RICHARDS: So this space you really loved was 100, where your studio was?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not where my studio was, but his gallery, where the gallery is now. It wasn't a gallery then. But I always thought this would make a really great gallery, you know. And then I guess—and it went through different incarnations, that space. It was like—I don't know—a dance place, like a bar. I think it was a gay disco at one time, something like that, disco, anyway, a bar. Anyway, but I loved the space. I thought it was really great.

And what happened was Marian Goodman, I think, took that space and renovated it. It was Marian Goodman or—it was a gallery—a woman's name gallery. I am not sure if it was Marian Goodman or someone else, someone of that stature. And anyway, they took it and they fixed it up. And it was exquisite. It is like what it is now.

MS. RICHARDS: It wasn't Paula Cooper?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, it wasn't Paula Cooper. Paula Cooper used to be on Prince Street and then she was on Wooster Street. Then she moved to uptown. But anyway, I loved that space. That space and the Blum Helman space I think are the most beautiful spaces in New York. And anyway, so let's see, how did the show come about with him? Maybe he said I would like to come see your work sometime. And he came. I had all these drawings up. Did you any of my shows there? No.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw one, at least.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The second one with the paintings or—you would have remembered the first one. It was all drawings.

MS. RICHARDS: I think I saw all drawings.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Blue, it was all blue drawings. ["Blue," 2000-2001].

MS. RICHARDS: That was in 2000?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Probably, yeah. That makes sense. Okay. So it was all drawings on one wall. And then there was one painting in the back [wall], the [*The Razor's Edge*]. I thought that show was really pretty. It was really very chill. I really loved that. And I just loved that space. And that is one of the reasons why I wanted to show there. And I loved that it was out of the way. I like that. Although maybe it is too out of the way sometimes for me. Now I am showing you know, Chelsea, which is like right in the middle of things.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, Peter Blum now has the other space in Chelsea, right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: On 29th Street.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, but I never showed there, speaking of another place.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, in Soho.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, his space in Soho and then I went to—I had two shows there. I had a painting show the second time.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you went to D'Amelio Terras?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, and then D'Amelio Terras came along.

MS. RICHARDS: He contacted you?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, what happened is—I should preface this where D'Amelio Terras came along, yes.

But before that, I decided it really wasn't going right with Peter. It just wasn't going right with us. And I think he realized that and he wanted out. And I think I wanted out. And I kind of—you know, so I kind of, you know, we did away with that, you know, my relationship with him.

MS. RICHARDS: You came to an agreement to part?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it is over, to part. And I think we were both happy with that. And then D'Amelio Terras always liked my work. He is very aware of my work. And he actually asked me—he was kind of interested in my work for quite a long time because they had a group show there of '70s artists. So I met him on the street one day. This is after Peter Blum, maybe a year, I don't know. And he said he would like to come to my studio. He was interested. I knew he was. So he came and that was it.

And then I decided to have a show there. I liked the idea of being with a lot of younger people. That was kind of interesting to try out. And they are really great. I really like working with them. They are very open to suggestions. You know, they are young. They are great. They are really good. So that worked out really well.

MS. RICHARDS: I think you have just had one show there so far. But do you have also the same input as you did when you were at Blum Helman about the announcements and things like that?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, they don't really hardly—they don't really do catalogs or—they don't do that. The announcement they do is very—things are different.

MS. RICHARDS: It is very simple. It is just text, right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, they will do an image, but not necessarily your image, which is really wild. You know, they are new. They are like—well, they are not that new because they have been around. Both of those guys worked for Paula Cooper, so they have a good base to work on. But the announcement they did for me was just like this page, folded in four places, and then like it was just half black and half white. It wasn't even my image, you know, but it looked like an image could be mine.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you like it?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. I thought it was cool. I thought it was really great.

MS. RICHARDS: Did they talk about it? Get your permission in advance or feel that that was just their province?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I pretty much let them do what they wanted. Maybe they said oh, yeah, we are going to do this thing. It is going to be just black and white, you know, because I said do you need an image to work with? They said no, no, no, we usually don't do that. We will just do like—but they do sometimes, they do images of their artists now that I think of it. But I thought it was really cool just wanting to do this "graphic" thing, you know. That was nice. And they are very—you know, I take the whole thing with a grain of salt at this point. You know, anything could happen.

Our relationship could turn real fast, you know. Now I am very happy, you know. But I really like them a lot. And I kind of wanted more, you know—I wanted more people to see my work. And this is the place to do it. Peter's place. It was a beautiful space. I loved the space. But I don't think a lot of people were seeing it. So I traded that in for now. I have this whole thing—I don't know what is going to happen.

MS. RICHARDS: Getting back to your work, in the last 10 years, there is a show—in 2003, probably at Blum Helman. You had two different bodies of work, one series had a diver that I think you took from an ancient—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, that is out of Rome.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide to use that image? What was your approach to that composition?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, I think it was like a very startling image, you know. And I am not sure other than that.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that the first time you used an image—well, you used the discus thrower directly from the time you are spending in Rome?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right. It came about from being in Rome [Paestum].

MS. RICHARDS: Which you have been doing for the past—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Since 2001. I was invited to go to the [American] Academy. And that was really great. I had never really—I mean, I have been to Rome really a long time when I was really young. I couldn't remember it. You know, it was really wet and rainy. So anyway, so being in Rome, there were two images I chose to work

with. One was the diver. And the other was the Michelangelo hands, you know, but pulling them apart. Instead of being that close, I was pulling and sometimes putting just one hand—just using one hand. So those were images related to being in Italy.

MS. RICHARDS: Does St. Sebastian relate to that, too?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, definitely. Yeah, the Perugino, St. Sebastian. That was based on that. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: And the horse rearing up that—does that come from—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know. That came about—just I wanted to do a rearing horse like a horse that got away kind of, you know. But that image is more Western. I think of it as being American. I also think of it as like, you know—that image I think of as a—I don't want to be tied up.

MS. RICHARDS: This is the same as the eagle you did, [*Landing Eagle*, 2007]? In terms of being tied up, a wild creature?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think the horse was about breaking away. That is what that is about. And the eagle—the eagle is about, I think—I think it is about, you know, Iraq, the Americans landing in Iraq. Yeah, that is what I think that is about. Yeah. They are different.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other paintings that touched on current politic[al] issues?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Hmm, I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you thinking at that time that this was an unusual step for you, to comment on current—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I think I wanted to do an eagle's wing.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, and then secondarily, you realized it connects to the—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah. And there is some spray on it that could be smoke or could be cloud. I think it is like—I think it relates to America's imperialism, I think. Yeah. That is the way I saw it probably after I made it. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That cloud on the left, did you spray that on?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah. That is the other thing that is really fun to do, getting into spray paint, you know. And that is like something that you can't control at all. And I like that idea like there is this eagle that is very hard edge and then this uncontrolled thing, you know, on the same surface.

MS. RICHARDS: It reads like smoke, right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, it is like smoke or a cloud or I don't know, atmosphere, because I use the spray with like doing the stacks. I used it with the—and also with buildings, Flatiron building The Empire State. I started using it with recycling images *The Thinker*. I have spray paint on that, too—on drawings, smaller drawings.

MS. RICHARDS: Actually using something you buy, spray paint, or you are putting something into your own—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, buy it. Like what the kids do. It is kind of like—

MS. RICHARDS: You can control it enough, that sprayer?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Not really. You can't control it at all. That is what I like about it. It is like [imitation of explosion noise]—god, shit. [Laughs.] No, it is good because it is this very hard-edged thing, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever feel like, oh my god, I ruined my painting, because it didn't behave the way—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, you could. But I go to the point where I just accept what is going to happen and try not to—sometimes it gets crazy. I put some on when I need a little more, a little more. And then it gets like ah, how am I going to get it out of here? So that is dangerous that way. So now what I do is I put—I just give it one shot and however it lands, that is it, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: What are you working on right now, since that exhibition in 2008?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Since—

MS. RICHARDS: The last year or two.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: What am I working on? Oh, yes, since the D'Amelio Terras exhibitions. Let's see, what can I show you?

MS. RICHARDS: Or you can just talk about in words since we are doing an audio recording—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Right, okay. The most recent painting I am doing is a hat. I made a hat painting a long time ago.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw it yesterday—top hats. There were images of two top hats.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: We went to Brooklyn to see a show there. And you go through the Jewish section. And this is a hat—it is those hats the Hassidic people wear. That is what the hat is. And I really don't know. But I kind of think of it as like in between the hat and not necessarily a top hat, but like the kinds of hats that Mennonites wear. They wear the same kind of hats. Anyway, I saw one in a window there where they sell these hats.

I was really taken with it.

MS. RICHARDS: By the form.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: The form. And I said I really want to use this, you know. Anyway, so that is kind of the most recent painting.

MS. RICHARDS: That painting that I saw yesterday, those hats are on a very strong yellow ground. Why yellow?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: You mean the yellow—

MS. RICHARDS: Paint.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know. It is really difficult. I don't want to come up with—I don't want to talk about like what I think about it, you know. I feel like I would rather let people come up with their own—

MS. RICHARDS: And you don't yet have other elements in the painting. Is [it] still developing?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: That one you saw. I have another one that I did. This is unusual, too. There is the second hat painting I've done. I did one that I finished and one—it has a lot of yellow in it and spray paint, too. Anyway, that is kind of the most recent one.

And the painting before that I did was—I did these three paintings last summer actually. One is a screen door, a summer screen door. And looking through the door, there is an owl looking through. So that is going back to—

MS. RICHARDS: Is that a horizontal also?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It is a vertical. It is a vertical. So it is the owl and then I did a TV, an image of a TV set, like a flat-screen TV. It is just like—I don't know. I think you would know it is a flat-screen TV—

MS. RICHARDS: Because of the proportion?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It would take a while.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it have a little base like a flat-screen? Or could it be mounted on the wall?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It is mounted on the wall. But it is resting on the bottom of the horizontal of the stretcher bar.

MS. RICHARDS: It is blank, the TV?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: It is just the gesso, you know. I've been leaving things just primed, putting in black on there with a little white.

So yeah, it just like in the center. It is like a fairly large screen, you know, and just white. And it is kind of mesmerizing. Oh, yeah, then the side is sort of like kind of grayish, almost like a wallpaper. I mean, that worked out, you know. The one I did is like—I just wanted to put gray around it so the white would be very kind of predominant, almost like a white light coming at you. Yeah. So that is a painting I finished. That is a fairly recent one.

MS. RICHARDS: When you are in the city in the winter in the eight months, do you regularly go to galleries and museums to see work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I like to go around and see stuff. I pretty much keep track of what is going on. I like to

do that. I will probably see most shows in museums and then Chelsea, I like to go there, too. But that can be—I don't know. I try to go there like on rainy days, or early on when nobody is around.

MS. RICHARDS: There are more and more days with few people around.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I know. I hate bumping into people when I am at shows, too, because I just don't like—you know, lots of my friends call me. Let's go see the show. What I will do is I might go see the show with them after I have seen it. I don't like to go first with people, you know, because then they yakety yak—more talk, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: And you don't really see the show.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Well, they influence the way you look at it. I would rather see it with my own eyes.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think is your greatest challenge now in terms of your work?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Keep doing it.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean physically or mentally?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Both. Mostly mental at this point. Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Your studio practices haven't changed too much. I mean, you continue to use the same—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, I try to work. I have periods where I don't work. I am not like an everyday kind of worker.

MS. RICHARDS: You are not?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: No, I am not. Once I start a painting, then it is on my mind constantly. They are on my mind all the time like whether I am physically doing it doesn't matter. They are on my mind like what am I going to do? What should I do? And if I start, what am I going to do after I start, you know? How does this image relate to—I don't know—whatever? Yeah, that is—

MS. RICHARDS: So if you are not here every day, what other kinds of activities are you involved in that take up a good amount of your time when you are not painting?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Worrying about painting. [They laugh.]

MS. RICHARDS: Are you doing that while you are reading or while you are bicycling?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I probably do too much because I am very distracted. You know, I think of something, like I am trying to read, but I am distracted. And I think the distraction is like the painting, you know, like are you going to be able to do this painting or like what should you do with this painting? Maybe it is not even that specific. But I know that is what back there. And how can I make it a really good painting? How can this be a transformative experience? And the only way you can do that is by doing it.

But then you are thinking like what is your next step. What physically are you going to put down? So it is kind of like that. And it is tough. It is much tougher now than when I was younger because when I was younger—

MS. RICHARDS: The bar is higher, would you say?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I don't know if the bar is higher. The kind of energy it takes to do it. I am not sure why it is more difficult. It is just more difficult. Yeah, maybe I am expecting more.

And [the idea of] more. That is very difficult, too, because as soon as you put something down, you associate it with something. And when you are younger, you are just doing it and it is easier, you know. You are not as psychologically wrapped up in it. Yeah, maybe you could say that the bar is higher. I don't think the bar is higher. It is something else, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, your expectations of yourself, you have your whole history in your mind.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, maybe that is it. Which is a fucked up way.

MS. RICHARDS: Because you don't want to repeat yourself, but you—

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Yeah, you don't want to repeat—I don't know. Yeah, I don't think I can repeat myself. That is one thing I don't think I can do because that is one of the things about me is I never really learned how to do it right. So there is no way of doing it again. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Doing what right?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Painting, doing it like to get—you know, every painting I do is like—I never really learned how to do it. So you know, I am learning—I am learning it as I am doing it. It is another experience. I don't know if you would call it learning. I don't know what. But anyway, the paint is never the same. And it all comes out of just like me putting this brush on this canvas or this rag on this canvas or whatever and not knowing—not only not knowing. I mean, you know it is not that, but trying to repeat a brushstroke or trying to repeat the surface. I don't seem to do that.

So it is not where, I think what the corners pictures say, those things are—yeah, you kind of knew what you were getting, you know. You just change the structure of the corner or something. But basically, the paint is put on the same way, you know. And you knew you were going to get this really beautiful surface, this patterned surface and very close atmosphere kind of built up because of everything being so close in value. But now it is a different story. And it has been a different story for a long time since the—since the '70s, I guess. When I got away from that, and being in transition.

And then I think like '75 was the start of—well, no, maybe '73, '72, I don't know.

But, you know, it is like you are looking at this picture. The corner pictures are more like just you are doing it and you kind of pretty much know what you are going to get, you know, whereas the paintings after that were different and the paintings before the corners were different, too.

But after the window shades, like learning how to paint, going back to what I was talking about earlier, learning how to paint those paintings, they are okay, but they don't have that real transformative quality that I have in my other works. I think I really started picking up on that like in '75, you know, '73, '74, '75, you know, where it had to happen while you are working if it was going to be a good painting. You had to see when to stop.

What I was talking about earlier about like when you look at a painting, it is just there. See, I think a lot of people fool themselves—it is really easy to say—you have put a mark there. You say oh, that is really great, you know. That is really great. And I think a lot of people do that. And, you know, maybe it is great. But I can't do that. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Is there anything else you want to add before we end?

MR. MOSKOWITZ: I think this is good.

MS. RICHARDS: Great. Thank you.

MR. MOSKOWITZ: Thank you.

[END CD 7.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]