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"COLLECTIONS TAKE SHAPE WHEN PERSONALITIES ARE ATTACHED"

Beatrice Gersh

Interviewed by George M. Goodwin

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

During the years since this short, sharp oral history was recorded, much occurred on the contemporary art scene both locally and nationally, aesthetically and institutionally. Modern became inarguably a historical term; postmodern, the centerpiece of endless speculation. Figuration became, first, a widely recognized trend and, then, fully respectable once more. These are developments that are neither good nor bad; they just are. Good, however, is the multiplication of gallery space throughout Los Angeles and the swift realization of a new museum of contemporary art downtown. Growing from a bounty of art and a burden of dissatisfaction with existing museum acquisitions and exhibitions, the Museum of Contemporary Art, or MOCA, was a dream within months of the last interview session, a veritable certainty, by the time of this writing. Beatrice Gersh has kept abreast--no, more--has participated in every advance.

I paid her a visit to check some titles of works mentioned in this volume and to ask about her art-related activities since the taping ended (in August 1979). A warm welcome (somewhat in contrast to the reticence I sensed on the telephone when I called to arrange the meeting) was followed immediately by an invitation to tour the Gersh family collection of contemporary and primitive art.

Our first stop was a relatively recent acquisition, Swimmer Reflection, a figurative canvas by Neil Jenney, boldly titled on the frame beneath a portrait of a masked swimmer two-thirds submerged. Second, Mrs. Gersh invited comments on a new Frank Stella, just uncrated. "Say whatever you think," she invited, "I haven't decided to buy it yet." Jenney and Stella: contemporary speculation and modern master.

We sat down to talk. Off the top of her head, Mrs. Gersh was able to recall the names of most of the works I was curious about: an untitled drawing, an early acquisition, a sculpture described in the text but unnamed. Only one stumped her: a Hans Hartung painting, sold out of the collection years earlier.

We discussed MOCA and her role on its board of trustees. She advised me not to write off the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and specifically disabused me of the notion of a schism: MOCA versus LACMA. "MOCA will perpetuate an interest in the art that has exploded in the past ten or fifteen years," she said, while LACMA, despite its construction of a new contemporary-art wing, will probably remain a general museum, partly as a result of its administration.

She pointed out that much of her time is spent "looking, seeing, and trying to keep up with what's going on." The Gershes' most recent purchases, all figurative,

are by young artists: Jenney, David Salle, and Jean-Michel Basquait. (Notably, their exceptionally lovely Willem de Kooning, Two Women, is also figurative.)

At the end of our conversation, the question of the Hartung title remained. The Gersh house is a large house filled with books. Somewhere--in the living room, the foyer, the office, the hall--was a small, white book, an illustrated biography of Hartung; in her mind's eye she pictured it. We searched the ground floor. We searched the second floor. Time after time we gave up, but time and again it was Mrs. Gersh who renewed the search (even though another appointment was imminent); she could not leave a thing less than perfectly done.

Collecting art is more than cash and acquisitiveness. It is taste and courage and, as Mrs. Gersh says in the title of this volume, "Collections take shape when personalities are attached." I see in her and her collection clear, uncompromised statement and an appreciation of the thing perfectly done.

--Mitch Tuchman, June 1982

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: George M. Goodwin, freelance consultant, Oral History Program, UCLA. B.A., Art History, Lake Forest College; M.A., Art History, Columbia University; Ph.D., Art Education, Stanford University.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Gersh's Beverly Hills, California, home.

Dates: July 23, 30, August 27, 1979.

Time of day, length of sessions, total number of recording hours: Each two-hour session was conducted in the afternoon. Four and a half hours of conversation were recorded.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

Prior to contacting Gersh for permission to do this series of interviews, Goodwin was familiar with the Gersh family collection of art.

The interview deals with the development of the collection, with Gersh's participation on the Contemporary Art Council of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and with her views of the potential effects that building a new museum of contemporary art in Los Angeles would have on extant museums.

Goodwin characterizes this as a difficult series of interviews as Gersh appeared to him to be somewhat nervous and laconic; her responses, generally short and understated. However, it seems clear from the transcript that, after getting used to the interview process, especially in the sessions dealing less with aesthetics and more with the local art scene, Gersh spoke with ease, assurance, and authority.

EDITING:

Editing was done by Rebecca Andrade, assistant editor, Oral History Program. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, spelling,

paragraphing, and the verification of proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Gersh reviewed and approved the edited transcript, supplying some supplementary names.

Mitch Tuchman, senior editor, wrote the introduction. It is somewhat unusual for the Oral History Program in that it is based on notes of a brief followup visit with the interviewee (almost three years after the original interview sessions). Tuchman prepared the rest of the front matter and the index.

The original tape recordings and edited transcript of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the University. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JULY 23, 1979

GOODWIN: Mrs. Gersh, first I'd like you to tell me about your family background.

GERSH: Well, I was born in Los Angeles in 1924. I went to school here. At first I started at Stanford University, and then after the war broke out, my parents wanted me to be closer to home, so I transferred to the University of Southern California and graduated there.

GOODWIN: Let's back up a bit. Where did your ancestors come from?

GERSH: My parents were both born in Russia. My father [Benjamin Aberle] and mother [Mary Palmer Aberle] both came to New York when they were quite young, grew up there, and then because my father was not in good health, moved to Los Angeles when he was, oh, quite young.

GOODWIN: What was your father's occupation?

GERSH: He was in the clothing business.

GOODWIN: And did you have brothers and sisters?

GERSH: Yes, two brothers, both younger than I am: one [Charles Aberle], three years younger; one [Leon Aberle], five years younger.

GOODWIN: Where did you live in Los Angeles?

GERSH: We lived in Hermosa Beach. My father was in

business there.

GOODWIN: Did you move there because you liked being at the beach?

GERSH: Well, his business was there; so that's why we lived there. Then he moved into Los Angeles, oh, I guess, when I must have been about fourteen, fifteen, years old. Well, after I graduated high school, I think, he moved into Los Angeles.

GOODWIN: Where did you attend high school?

GERSH: Down at the beach--Redondo Union High School it was called then. Now I think it's a junior college. You know, the whole system has been reorganized and changed. From there I went to Stanford.

GOODWIN: Well, you're getting ahead of ourselves. [laughter] Did you have any particular interests in school, any favorite subjects?

GERSH: Foreign languages, primarily. I took French and Spanish, and I liked history, too.

GOODWIN: Were you a good student?

GERSH: Yes, very good.

GOODWIN: Did you have any particular interests in art as a young person?

GERSH: Not at that time, no.

GOODWIN: Didn't do any drawing or anything like that?

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: Did you study music?

GERSH: Yes. I took piano lessons, played the piano, but never was particularly, you know, involved in art at that point.

GOODWIN: Was there anyone in your family who had an interest?

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: Before you went to college, were you aware of the old county museum [Los Angeles County Museum of History, Science, and Art] in Exposition Park?

GERSH: Oh, I think so, yes. But never, you know, spent much time there, really.

GOODWIN: Did you travel anywhere outside of Southern California?

GERSH: Just to New York to visit my father's family. I used to go different summers, used to spend maybe a month back there with them. I had cousins; my father had nephews and nieces. So I used to go back sometimes in the summer and spend time there.

GOODWIN: Did you see the museums?

GERSH: No, no. I would say my father's family was not in any way interested or involved in art.

GOODWIN: Did they live in the city?

GERSH: Yes, yes.

GOODWIN: How did you happen to pick Stanford?

GERSH: Well, let's see. I just thought it was a fine institution. As a matter of fact, I had a scholarship to USC [University of Southern California] for four years based on my grades. My father just felt that it was not right for me to take the scholarship because he felt in those days when the society was not so affluent, that it would be depriving somebody else of, you know, a four-year education. So I took the admission test to Stanford and passed on the first level, so I was admitted.

GOODWIN: And what did you study there?

GERSH: Well, I was just a freshman there, so I just took the required courses really. I mean, at that point you couldn't really choose.

GOODWIN: So you left school after a while?

GERSH: Well, then the war broke out, and San Francisco was. . . . We were taking finals and everything under blackout curtains, and my parents were a little bit concerned. They wanted me to be at home; so I transferred down to USC.

GOODWIN: And did you earn a degree there?

GERSH: Oh, yes, BA degree.

GOODWIN: And what was your major?

GERSH: I had two majors. I had a major in history and foreign languages. I worked in the history department as a reader, starting, I guess it was, my senior year.

I also used to give lessons to tutor. . . .

GOODWIN: . . . tutor remedial students?

GERSH: Yes, in French and Spanish.

GOODWIN: How'd you like USC?

GERSH: I liked it; I enjoyed it.

GOODWIN: Were you living on campus?

GERSH: No, I lived at home. I did well there, as far as a student. . . .

GOODWIN: Did you take any art at USC?

GERSH: No, no. I really just took the normal required courses, either art or music appreciation, and that's about it. I never really got involved during my college experience in art.

GOODWIN: What were your plans at that time?

GERSH: When I was in school?

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Oh, I wanted to go on and do graduate work. I did actually start working for an MA. Then I got married shortly after I got out of college. But I did some graduate work in history, and I was a teaching assistant in the history department.

GOODWIN: Did you study any particular aspect of history?

GERSH. No. But mostly European history, I would say. I was more interested in that.

GOODWIN: Well, tell us about your husband, how you met

him and his background.

GERSH: Well, Phil was born in New York City, and he came out to go to school and attended UCLA.

GOODWIN: What is his age compared to yours?

GERSH: Phil is about eleven and a half years older than I am. When I met him he was in the army, in the service. He got out of the army maybe nine months after we were married. He's in the motion picture agency business and has been all his working career; he's spent all his time in that.

GOODWIN: Can you tell me a little bit about the business, what it entails?

GERSH: Well, primarily what it is, is they represent writers, directors, producers, actors, actresses, sometimes properties. They secure employment for these people that they represent.

GOODWIN: And who are some of the clients?

GERSH: Today or through the years?

GOODWIN: Yes, through the years.

GERSH: He used to represent Humphrey Bogart; Frederic March; Robert Wise--still does; Arthur Hiller, current client (the latter two are directors); but various people from various fields in the industry.

GOODWIN: Did your husband have any early interest in art?

GERSH: I don't think so. I don't think there was anything specific that he was interested in in terms of art.

GOODWIN: Is there a relationship between his current interests and his business, do you think?

GERSH: Not really.

GOODWIN: He doesn't necessarily view his clients as artists?

GERSH: Well, they're artists certainly. But the only similarity I can make is that I think an actor, an actress, is sometimes very similar to, you know, an artist in terms of their behavior, their temperaments.

GOODWIN: Really.

GERSH: But I don't find this to be too much so with directors or writers. Or, let me say, I don't find it as true with writers and directors.

GOODWIN: What date were you married?

GERSH: March 11, 1945.

GOODWIN: And you have some children?

GERSH: Two sons: [David], thirty-one, and [Robert], twenty-eight.

GOODWIN: Do they live here?

GERSH: They live in Los Angeles, yes.

GOODWIN: What do they do?

GERSH: Well, they're both in the business with my husband. The older one was a lawyer, went through UCLA law school,

and practiced for about three years, and he decided he wanted to go into the agency business. And the younger boy entered the business right after he got out of college.

GOODWIN: You said that your interest in art began to grow when you moved into this home.

GERSH: Right.

GOODWIN: When was that?

GERSH: About twenty-six years ago.

GOODWIN: About 1953.

GERSH: Roughly, yes.

GOODWIN: And how did that interest begin to unfold?

GERSH: Well, I think the first thing that I can remember specifically was somebody telling us about an artist by the name of [Ernst] Kirchner. There was a painting [landscape] that this friend suggested that we look at and buy. We had it sent out through the Curt Valentin Gallery, and we bought it. That was our first major acquisition. Then, from then on, we just started looking and going to galleries.

GOODWIN: Well, you must have been in a favorable position as far as your interest to accept that advice. You must have been thinking about art.

GERSH: Right, right. We'd been looking and going to galleries, and I guess we were ready at that point.

GOODWIN: Were you visiting New York frequently?

GERSH: Not so much in those days. I mean, subsequently. And then after that, after we'd made that first initial purchase, every trip we made we would then start to go to the museums and galleries.

GOODWIN: Which was your favorite museum?

GERSH: Oh, I think in New York the Museum of Modern Art probably is my favorite museum.

GOODWIN: And what do you like there most of all?

GERSH: At the Museum of Modern Art?

GOODWIN: Yes, in the permanent collection?

GERSH: Oh, there are so many things. I love the great masters of the twentieth-century art. I also like the more contemporary things as well. There are so many things that stand out in my . . .

GOODWIN: What are some of them?

GERSH: Oh, the Guernica, I think--Picasso's Guernica. I'm trying to remember. Every time I go, you know, it's something else; so it's hard for me to pinpoint it. But I really just think it's a superb collection and examples of really top quality.

GOODWIN: Do you remember any major exhibitions that have a deep impression on you?

GERSH: Oh, I think the [Mark] Rothko exhibition had a deep effect on us. We've seen so many there through the

years that it's hard to. . . . I think it was the [Alberto] Giacometti exhibition that I loved, the [Willem] de Kooning exhibition I saw there. There are so many it's hard to pinpoint any one particularly. But I think most of them are very well installed, and they're very well done. They all leave a kind of a lasting impression.

GOODWIN: Where did you put the Kirchner?

GERSH: The Kirchner was hanging--at one point it was right there.

GOODWIN: Right here?

GERSH: Yes, where the [Fernand] Léger [La Parade] is now. And then we had it over the mantelpiece in the living room.

GOODWIN: What was the subject of the painting?

GERSH: It was a landscape--mountains and trees--just a landscape really. Very beautiful in the typical purplish hues and greens that Kirchner used.

GOODWIN: So you were most attracted to the color, would you say?

GERSH: About the picture?

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Oh, the color was beautiful. It was also filled with emotion, it was a very moving picture.

GOODWIN: Did you have any reservations about buying it?

GERSH: I don't remember having too many reservations. No.

GOODWIN: Were you or your husband more enthusiastic?

GERSH: Oh, I think we both probably felt equally enthusiastic about that particular painting because it was the first really major painting that we bought.

GOODWIN: What were some of the more modest paintings that you had owned up till that time?

GERSH: I can't even remember. There was nothing of importance and I don't have those today; so I really can't recollect what I had. I don't think they were anything that was terribly good art, what I would call terribly good art.

GOODWIN: How long did you own the Kirchner?

GERSH: Oh, we owned it for quite a number of years, and now it's in a museum in Munich.

GOODWIN: Have you see it since you owned it?

GERSH: No. No. You mean since I sold it? No, no.

GOODWIN: What was the next step in your collecting?

GERSH: Well, as we traveled we bought different pictures, bought quite a few things in London at the time. We bought the Henry Moore [Mother and Child Against Open Wall]. We became friendly with a dealer in London by the name of --well the name of the gallery is Gimpel Fils, and we became quite friendly with Charles and Kay Gimpel. So we used to spend quite a bit of time at their gallery. We bought a few things from them.

GOODWIN: How did you happen to become friendly?

GERSH: Well, actually when we were over there, somebody introduced us, and a relationship started. They came to the United States several times, and we just, you know, hit it off. They were lovely, lovely people. Charles just passed away quite a few years ago. But we used to see them every time we'd go.

GOODWIN: What are some of the pieces you bought there?

GERSH: Well, let's see. I know we bought our [Barbara] Hepworth [Figure-Imprint] from them; we bought a [Ben] Nicholson from them at one time (we don't have it any longer). We bought a Lynn Chadwick, and a Kenneth Armitage.

GOODWIN: All the English artists.

GERSH: A lot of English artists, yes. And a Robert Adams sculpture. He had a marvelous hard-toned drawing or pastel that we owned, or used to own, that came from them. And a [Hans] Hartung oil we bought from them. The only thing that we kept is the Barbara Hepworth.

GOODWIN: And the Moore.

GERSH: The Moore I didn't buy from them. We bought [it] from another dealer in London.

GOODWIN: So you've been interested in sculpture as long as you've been interested in painting.

GERSH: Right, right.

GOODWIN: Do you think that's unusual?

GERSH: Well, I understand that it is, that most people

usually come to sculpture after paintings; but I've always personally been very, very attracted to sculpture. I find that a three-dimensional object is a very exciting thing to live with.

GOODWIN: Well, it sounds like somewhere in your past you've modeled clay. [laughter]

GERSH: No. Well, maybe I did as a child, but not anything seriously.

GOODWIN: You just sound naturally sympathetic to form.

GERSH: I just think sculpture is beautiful. I think most paintings, most of the paintings that we have in the house, have a definite structure and form to them.

GOODWIN: Yes. Except there seems to be a kind of an irony here: that the paintings are mostly abstract, and the sculptures seem both abstract and figurative.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: But, it doesn't seem that the sculpture has grown out of these kinds of paintings.

GERSH: No, you're right. But sculpture, I feel, can be much more representational and evoke an emotion in the same way that an abstract painting will--for me, at least. Outside of [Alexander] Calder, I guess most of the sculpture is pretty much figurative.

GOODWIN: There's the [Hans] Arp [Tête Florale].

GERSH: Yes. Even though it's abstract it's somewhat

figurative and reminiscent of the figure. It's strange. even the [David] Smith [Cubi III], which is abstract in some ways, has a figurative aspect.

GOODWIN: Right, right. It does look . . .

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: . . . kind of human.

GERSH: Right, right. That's interesting.

GOODWIN: Well, actually I haven't really noticed that in most of his work. Most of David Smith's work to me seems purely abstract.

GERSH: Abstract, yes.

GOODWIN: I'm not normally reminded of people.

GERSH: No, no; that's right. Well, I don't think in this particular case it was--I don't think because it was that particular subject matter. I mean, I think if it had been a different shape or a different form, I think we probably would've bought it regardless, because I think the Cubi [series] are just marvelous. Most of them are really much more abstract than this one probably.

GOODWIN: Right. Did you ever reach the point where you consciously wanted to collect art?

GERSH: Oh, yes, yes. I think, say, shortly after we made the first purchase we sort of became involved.

GOODWIN: You started envisioning a group of objects?

GERSH: Right, right.

GOODWIN: And where did you think you were headed when you began?

GERSH: I don't think I had any definite plan or pattern. We really bought what appealed to us at that time. We had no particular idea of any guidelines really in terms of what we wanted to buy or own.

GOODWIN: But until your interest in the primitive art evolved you were focusing on twentieth-century art.

GERSH: Oh, yes.

GOODWIN: Why is that?

GERSH: Why were we focusing on . . .

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Well, actually, when we started, the first few years, we did buy many European artists. Then there was one single incident that I can remember that sort of helped to change our direction.

GOODWIN: What was that?

GERSH: There was a dealer that came to see us from Chicago, and he made a statement to me to the effect that, "What do you have against American art?" I said, "I don't know what you mean. I have nothing against American art." He said, "Well, you have Hartung, you have Ben Nicholson, but you don't have [Franz] Kline and de Kooning"--just to throw out a couple of names.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: He said, "Are you aware that the American artists are much tougher?" I said, "Well, I never really thought of it from that standpoint; but I think you're right, they are tougher. The images are tougher." Suddenly it became a challenge, and our whole focus from that point on really went toward collecting American art. Now, I still have, obviously, some European artists; and those things that we still have by European artists I think we obviously wouldn't get rid of. But I think that our whole emphasis changed. We suddenly felt, well, maybe this man is right. Maybe we should be more involved in American artists. So we really focused on that, and from then on our emphasis has been much more towards collecting American art.

GOODWIN: Who was that dealer?

GERSH: A man by the name of Bud Holland, in Chicago.

GOODWIN: Does he still have a gallery?

GERSH: Oh, yes.

GOODWIN: Are you a patron of his gallery?

GERSH: Yes. We bought from him. He's the dealer. He is, of course, very involved--always has been for many years--with the New York School.

GOODWIN: What was the first New York School painting you ever bought?

GERSH: I think it might have been [Robert] Motherwell.

GOODWIN: What's it called?

GERSH: Still Life, Ochre and Red.

GOODWIN: Do you know the date?

GERSH: It's in the early to mid-forties, I think.

GOODWIN: Where did you see it?

GERSH: I saw it at the Paul Kantor Gallery, and we bought it from Paul.

GOODWIN: How has it grown on you?

GERSH: Well, it's obviously lived very well through the many years because it's . . .

GOODWIN: . . . it's still here.

GERSH: It's still here.

GOODWIN: Right. [laughter]

GERSH: Even though it's early, I still like it very much.

GOODWIN: Do you have different feelings toward it now than when you first . . .

GERSH: I think I like it better.

GOODWIN: What does it do for you?

GERSH: Well, it's hard to explain. I love the colors. It's quite a cerebral painting, actually. I just love looking at it. I can't explain what it does for me, just that I find it interesting. I like the juxtaposition of the colors, the shapes, the forms.

GOODWIN: Well, is it representational?

GERSH: No, I don't think so. In any way.

GOODWIN: You don't think it's literally a still life? Did you mention that was the title?

GERSH: That's the title, Still Life, Ochre and Red.

GOODWIN: Well, I could see it either way. But first, not knowing the name, I thought it was an abstract painting.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: But then I thought, well, maybe there are aspects of it that suggest a still life.

GERSH: Yes. Well, I don't know. To me it's an abstract painting.

GOODWIN: Yes. Is it a tough painting?

GERSH: I think it is, yes.

GOODWIN: Why?

GERSH: I don't think one would call it necessarily pretty.

GOODWIN: No.

GERSH: But it's a very strong picture because it's held up, I think, very well all these years. Sometimes by tough I use that word to denote that something isn't just a pretty picture, is easily digested, let's say, in one viewing.

GOODWIN: Right. Well, could you identify something in this room as being relatively easy compared to the Motherwell?

GERSH: Well, I think maybe the Léger [La Parade] might be

relatively easier.

GOODWIN: Yes, I would think so.

GERSH: There are surface forms, and I think it would be easier maybe. But on the other hand, I don't think that's necessarily a pretty picture either. I mean, I think there's a kind of a--well, I don't want to keep using that word tough. It's [the Léger] not readily assimilated in a fast look. Léger is a complex artist and holds up very well--one of my favorites.

GOODWIN: Is that a watercolor or gouache?

GERSH: Gouache.

GOODWIN: Well, what is a particularly tough painting among the others here?

GERSH: I would say, I suppose, the Kline [Torres] would be a tough painting. Because unless one knows the image or the imagery of Kline, you could look at it and say, "Well, what is that? That's just some lines and some scribbles." But to me, it has a great feeling of strength and structure. I've always felt Kline to embody the strength and guts of America, you know. I don't know if he was consciously painting that when he painted this picture or others that are similar, but that's the message I get; I get a great feeling of strength and a great feeling of structure. Oh, you could read into it: maybe a feeling of city, or a factory, if you want to do that.

I just find it very beautiful. But, again, I think it's a very tough picture; because somebody who's never looked at a Kline just wouldn't know how to react.

GOODWIN: It's really an explosive picture. It seems bigger than it is.

GERSH: Right, right, right.

GOODWIN: Well, how would you compare and contrast the Kline to the Rauschenberg next to it?

GERSH: Well, I think [Robert] Rauschenberg, in a way, is. . . . First of all, the Rauschenberg has to be about two to three times at least the size of this, at least that.

GOODWIN: What's the Rauschenberg called?

GERSH: I don't remember the title [Gate-Spread], if there is one. I'm not sure. I don't want to give you the wrong impression, so I'd have to look it up; I don't remember now. But the Rauschenberg to me is--even though that also has a toughness to it--in a way it's much more palatable, let's say, because of the color, the gentleness, the transfer of images. There's a softness in some way.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: But you don't have [that softness] in Kline, or even the [Ellsworth] Kelly [untitled], although I find the Kelly softer than I do the Kline.

GOODWIN: Yes. I would think the Rauschenberg is a

relatively decorative piece compared to either the Kelly or the Kline.

GERSH: Yes, yes.

GOODWIN: I mean, it's almost kind of "pretty."

GERSH: Yes. I suppose by Rauschenberg's standards you can call it pretty, yes. But I still think there's a certain toughness in it.

GOODWIN: The Rauschenberg is confusing to me. I'm not sure what he's saying.

GERSH: Well, I don't know if anybody can ever really say what Rauschenberg is saying. I think it's his own language.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Well, of course, that's true of any of these artists. But I don't know; I think he's expressing his feelings, maybe on the society of today, commenting on the society today.

GOODWIN: Why do you think that? What leads you to think that he's. . . .

GERSH: Oh, the various images that he's transferred, taking bits and pieces of various things in everyday life and transferring them. He's making a comment, I think, on our society.

GOODWIN: What about that pillow, if that's what it is?

GERSH: Yes, yes. These are found objects that he's done consistently through the years in his paintings. The early

ones were all objects. Some of the early ones all had found objects. So in that sense it's part of his medium --part of his idiom, so to speak. It's not particularly unusual to see found objects in Rauschenberg.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: I like the composition of it. I think if that painting were much tougher, because of the scale of it, it would overpower everything else in this room. I think it's a relatively quiet painting. There is a gentleness, and [it is]--if you want to use the word--decorative; but I find that I like it.

GOODWIN: Well, have you always had that painting in that particular place?

GERSH: It's the only place I've ever had it, the only place . . .

GOODWIN: . . . that would fit.

GERSH: Yes, right.

GOODWIN: What was there previously?

GERSH: We had a group of drawings that I've now put upstairs in my bedroom. We had a Picasso drawing; an [Arshile] Gorky (they call it "ink painting": Nighttime, Enigma, and Nostalgia); we had an early Rauschenberg drawing; and a Giacometti drawing. I moved them upstairs.

GOODWIN: At what point did you decide firmly that you wanted to emphasize the New York School?

GERSH: Well, I think after that man [Bud Holland] made that statement to me, I really focused in.

GOODWIN: You felt challenged.

GERSH: Right. And I focused in on the New York School. At that point I think we decided that's what we wanted our emphasis to be, as much as you can say there's an emphasis. I think this is really kind of a mixture, you know, in terms of a collection. I guess we probably have more of the New York School and continuation thereof than anything else. But basically, most of the pictures in the house, they're all abstract, and they're all of that genre.

GOODWIN: Yes. This is Jim Dine?

GERSH: No, no; that's Jasper Johns.

GOODWIN: That's Jasper Johns. And that's a. . . .

GERSH: That's Pen 1962.

GOODWIN: Well, it certainly relates to the brush in Rauschenberg. [laughter]

GERSH: Right, right. We have a Jim Dine [Self Portrait With Day-Glow #4] in the other room, with the coat hanger in it.

GOODWIN: What's your response to the . . .

GERSH: . . . to the Johns?

GOODWIN: . . . to the Johns?

GERSH: Well, I think it's very painterly, quite beautiful.

GOODWIN: Well, do you think it's humorous?

GERSH: Oh, I think so, yes. Also the idea that he's putting an ordinary object in the painting.

GOODWIN: Well, the frame there seems to have a lot to do with the statement.

GERSH: Yes, yes. It's quite an elaborate frame.

GOODWIN: Right, it's a very eloquent frame.

GERSH: Right, right. For that little. . . .

GOODWIN: Right, for such a mundane object.

GERSH: Well, I think it's the contrast that makes it look interesting.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GOODWIN: I also like the juxtaposition of the [Josef] Albers [Homage to the Square: Four Ochres] and the Sam Francis.

GERSH: Yes. Albers [Blue I] was one of the later pictures that we bought. I remember going to his show at Sidney Janis. When we saw all these Albers I was really very moved by them. Even though I'd seen Albers on and off from time to time, seeing a whole show of those was really quite extraordinary.

GOODWIN: How do you think it holds up to the Sam Francis?

GERSH: For me, it holds up very well; it's held up through the years quite well.

GOODWIN: I think it almost overpowers the Francis. Of

course, we're not looking directly at both paintings.

GERSH: Well, Francis is more lyrical.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Much more lyrical. This particular Francis I haven't had that long. We've had two other little oils on paper that we had for many, many years, and we've been looking for an oil for a long time. Most of them always look like fragments to me, the ones that I'd seen that were offered for sale, or else they were extremely large, which meant we couldn't house them. But when this one became available we liked it very much. I think Albers is much more lyrical than. . . . No! Excuse me, I think Francis--I beg your pardon--is a much more lyrical artist than Albers. Albers is much tougher.

GOODWIN. Right. It's a German versus American.

GERSH: Right, right.

GOODWIN: They seem like two different world views.

GERSH: Yes, absolutely. Well, on the other hand, I think they work well together. Everything can't always be--I think the thing that makes that collection interesting is the variance.

GOODWIN: For sure.

GERSH: And the different kinds of things you can have and how they all work together.

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GOODWIN: As we were thinking about the Albers, I thought now, perhaps, for the first time, that Stella seems to be an outgrowth of Albers.

GERSH: Oh, there's no question about it. Frank Stella was here once, and I asked him what artist he most admired, and he told me that Albers was [his favorite].

GOODWIN: Really?

GERSH: Oh, yes.

GOODWIN: I never knew that.

GERSH: Yes. So I don't think there's any question that he was greatly influenced by Albers.

GOODWIN: How long have you owned the Stella [For Picabia]?

GERSH: We bought it in the sixties, I think, early to mid-sixties. That was the fourth Stella. The first one we owned was a very miniature version of the one we have, the double square. Then we bought a single square [Big Agadir II] with, like, two triangles within the square, and the juxtaposition of the two colors was very optic, and my husband didn't like it. It disturbed him visually. So we sold that, and we bought another one [Untitled] that was an irregular-shaped one. Then we found this one, and we just love this one very much. [We] couldn't house both of them, so we donated the irregular-shaped one to the Los

Angeles County Museum [of Art].

GOODWIN: I think Stella's an exciting artist, but I don't think he's as profound as his elders.

GERSH: Oh, I think he is. I really do. I think he's really one of the young giants.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: I love living with this picture. It's beautiful. But also, I find it--I hate to use that word again--a tough picture. [laughter]

GOODWIN: Well, I haven't seen it for more than a few moments, but it seems to me to be a happy and exuberant picture.

GERSH: Oh, it is.

GOODWIN: At least half of it.

GERSH: Yes, yes. No, I find it is. Yes.

GOODWIN: But, compared to this Morris Louis [Last of a Series] . . .

GERSH: Well, I think probably the Louis has maybe more substance.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Much more substance to it.

GOODWIN: Looking at it now, it seems to be almost tragic. I mean, it's . . .

GERSH: Yes, it's very . . .

GOODWIN: It's a weighty picture.

GERSH: Yes, very weighty, very poignant, moving, but also, I find, very lyrical. Very lyrical. We looked for Louis for a long time, and it was very difficult to find one that would fit. As you can see. . . .

GOODWIN: Right. About how big is that?

GERSH: Oh, it's ninety by--it's somewhere in the nineties --by ninety; it just barely fits. But that's a very moving painting, beautiful painting.

GOODWIN: You seem to be able to move on to other objects rather freely. You don't become so attached that you can't live without your pieces.

GERSH: No, no. Well, I think one of the exciting things about being a collector is to be able not to get hung up on one period, in one area. I think your vision has to, you know, constantly be changing and growing and accepting. For instance, we have some of the pop artists, and we like those very much. I think that they, again, were an expression of the times in which they were painted, and are very much part of our society. I find the [Roy] Lichtenstein [Sleeping Girl] one of the most rewarding paintings to live with in the house.

GOODWIN: In the dining room?

GERSH: Right.

GOODWIN: It doesn't have any words in it.

GERSH: No. I didn't want one with words in it. I probably

picked a very, very lyrical Lichtenstein. The first ones that I saw were the typical comic-strip ones with the words in them. I had seen very few shows; I won't even call them shows. I had seen a few Lichtensteins and I saw one show of [Claes] Oldenburg's at the Dwan Gallery in Westwood many years ago. And, oh, I'd seen the [James] Rosenquist show and some [Andy] Warhols and really didn't take [to] them. We didn't get into pop art, really, until we had made a trip to New York and had seen a great deal of it. At that time we also saw the [Robert] Scull collection, which had some marvelous examples of pop art.

GOODWIN: Was that on public display?

GERSH: No, it was at their apartment.

GOODWIN: Oh.

GERSH: I can't remember how that whole thing ever came about, but they were out here, I know. They visited us, and then when we were in New York--I guess it must have been through a mutual friend, I think, in the art world. But at any rate, when I went to [Leo] Castelli, who had a show of seascapes by Lichtenstein, I was very moved by it. But at the same time, I also knew that the kind I wanted was a figure of a woman. I had told Irving Blum that we wanted one of this type; and when he came across this one, why, he called us, and we bought it right away. It was quite a shock when that picture came into the house,

because it had a completely different aesthetic. I remember it with the De Kooning [Two Women], which I also think is a very strong picture. [It] almost paled, if you were to hang them side by side. The Lichtenstein needs a lot of space and depth and distance, whereas the De Kooning you could be very close to.

GOODWIN: Lichtenstein isn't typically a pop painting, because it's not funny.

GERSH: No, no, no.

GOODWIN: It's not even necessarily satirical, I don't think.

GERSH: That's true, that's true. I guess in terms of pop pictures, I don't know if I could live with the really satirical ones. I think they have to be a little lyrical for me. Even though I accept the imagery of pop painting, I think. . . . This is a very personal feeling, but I mean it determines which example you buy by an artist. I think the Flowers by Warhol are certainly very lyrical and certainly not tough as compared to the Electric Chair or some of the other things that he's done.

GOODWIN: Right, Race Riots.

GERSH: Right. These pictures represent our particular choice in that field. I think, in terms of Oldenburg, there is much more humor always involved. Almost everything that Oldenburg does is humorous, as far as I'm

concerned. Also, it's beautiful in terms of his drawing. It's very lyrical, too.

GOODWIN: Do you have an Oldenburg?

GERSH: Yes, we have a very early one. It's called Vulgar Pie.

GOODWIN: Oh, yes, in the den.

GERSH: Yes, right. We have the Typewriter Eraser, which is in Phil's office--the medium-sized one, not the giant-sized one. To me, it's a very funny piece, but very strong and holds up every time I see it. But I don't see it every day. But whenever I go up to the office and I look at it, I'm always, always drawn to it.

GOODWIN: Well, what do you think of the art system that allows works as simple as some of these to cost so much, or to elevate the makers to such lofty status? Does it make sense?

GERSH: Well, it makes no more sense than paying Steve McQueen $7 million or some ridiculous figure to make a picture. I think that the things actually demand the prices that they do because they can get them. You can get these prices.

GOODWIN: Right. But is it because collectors are perceptive people, or something else?

GERSH: Well, I think a lot of it is the way the art market is structured. I think that if these artists are lucky

enough to get into the hands of a shrewd dealer, he makes a market for his paintings. Each year they keep going up. I think in terms of the pop artists, Castelli did a fantastic job of promoting these people. When we bought them, we certainly didn't pay those kind of prices. They were relatively unknown, and they were very inexpensive at the time we bought it. But today, obviously, people are willing to pay top prices for them. But they're no more out of line than Rothko or de Kooning or Kline or [Jackson] Pollock. It's whatever the market will bear, I suppose.

GOODWIN: Well, is it possible, looking around the living room, to say which has been a particularly good buy? I mean, in terms of the value it's given you, not necessarily financially, but the pleasure and stimulation?

GERSH: Well, I certainly think that the Kline [Torres] was a good buy, so to speak, in that sense, [and] the Giacometti [Diego]. I really would say that most of these things in this room we've had for many, many years. Therefore, they were relatively inexpensive when we bought them. But on the other hand, we bought the Rauschenberg [Gate-Spread] very recently and bought it at today's current market price. I would call any painting a good buy that holds up for years and gives you pleasure.

I don't think there are any bargains in art. I think

at the time that we bought all these other things, even though by comparison to today's market they were reasonable, you pay the regular market price on them. I don't think there is such a thing as a bargain in a painting. I think if you buy a bargain it's a real fluke or very rare. Occasionally, I suppose that happens, but I don't think it's ever really happened to us that we got anything that was under the market price at the time. But they've all turned out, I would say, to be good buys and they have held up, and we've enjoyed them.

GOODWIN: Are there any artists whose work you feel you missed?

GERSH: Yes, there are many, I would say. Rothko is one of them; because today, I would probably say, I doubt whether we could afford to get really fine, first-rate Rothko. We wanted to buy him after that show at the Museum of Modern Art, but either the timing was wrong or the availability; but I'm sorry we don't have one of his. The other one that I would certainly love to have would be Jackson Pollock, but he's way out of the ball park now. But I think he was a very major, very important artist.

GOODWIN: What about sculptors? Anybody in particular?

GERSH: The one artist that I would like to have owned and, again, I don't know if we could ever find one that

would be right. But I think [Mark] di Suvero is a very important artist that we missed the boat on. I'm sorry we don't have him.

GOODWIN: That's kind of sad since he's relatively young. He's become so significant so fast, it seems.

GERSH: Right, right. Clyfford Still is another very important artist, but I never felt badly that I don't have a Clyfford Still, because he doesn't happen to be one of my favorites. But I think he's a very important man with the New York School.

GOODWIN: How did the interest in primitive art evolve?

GERSH: Really very accidentally. There was a friend of mine who was ill, and I was sitting, talking to her. I noticed a work of primitive art that she had bought very recently. It was sitting at one end of a mantelpiece and on the other end was a Giacometti which she owned, that she acquired at about the same time that we acquired ours. I kept looking at these two pieces, and I couldn't take my eyes off them, the primitive art. I mean, I had seen it, I had looked at it--I don't mean that particular piece. But I had seen primitive art. But it never hit me till that moment, and I was really quite taken with that piece.

GOODWIN: What was it?

GERSH: It was a Cameroon mask. Very strong, kind of a rough piece, but high powered. It made a tremendous impact

on me. I asked her where she had gotten it, and she told me. And I went in to see that dealer, oh, maybe within a couple of weeks after that, and talked to him and told him I really would like to learn about African art, or primitive art. I wanted him to show me, you know, good pieces.

GOODWIN: That was Harry Franklin.

GERSH: Right, right. He was very, very nice and very helpful. I mean, he appreciated somebody who had a genuine new interest in the art. So I spent a lot of time going in and out of his gallery. He told me what books to buy, to read, to become familiar with, at least from the textbook point of view, from that end of it. But primitive art is something you have to really not only read about, you have to touch, feel, and smell, and look and live with it. It's a very gratifying experience to live with it. I love the way it works with contemporary art. I think they complement each other tremendously. Of course, there are many great painters that have been greatly influenced by African art.

GOODWIN: Indeed. When did this particular interest in primitive art come about?

GERSH: I would say approximately eight years ago--maybe nine, maybe seven, but I would say approximately eight.

GOODWIN: Well, definitely after the interest in the abstract painting had reached a plateau.

GERSH: Oh, yes, yes. I think one of the reasons perhaps that we were both ready to get involved in a new area was that at that time, I felt there was nothing that was of any great challenge or interest to me in terms of contemporary art. I wasn't that involved with what was happening at that moment in contemporary art. I mean, there was nothing that really moved me. Conceptual art was "in," so to speak, at that point, and I don't relate to conceptual art. In terms of a collector, I don't relate to it, because I don't think it's something that you can live with and have in your home. [laughter] I understand what they're trying to do when they did conceptual art, but it's not for home consumption, so to speak. So, as a collector, there was nothing at that moment that really challenged us. So we got involved in this new art form, which I find very gratifying.

GOODWIN: Do you still feel somewhat disappointed by contemporary art?

GERSH: No. It's not a question of being disappointed, because since our involvement with primitive art we still buy contemporary art or modern art. It just depends on what's available or what happens to hit us and what we happen to be, or what shows or what pieces are available at a given time.

GOODWIN: To me it seems perfectly understandable that

you would move from one sphere to the other, because it seems that abstract painting has about run its course.

GERSH: Well, yes.

GOODWIN: Not too many places where it can go.

GERSH: No, that's true, that's true. I think that's what's going on today. It's a rehashing, really, of things that have already been done, of statements that have already been made. They're just kind of redoing the same thing. So it's not a phenomenological step, I would think.

GOODWIN: Right. Actually, I try to explain to students that the modern European and American art naturally lead to the primitive. It's almost impossible to go directly into the primitive without the previous step.

GERSH: The thing I have found is that because we did collect and do collect modern art, it makes it much easier in terms--you develop an eye. If one has an eye and it gets developed, I think that carries over into the appreciation of primitive art, and it's easier to be discerning and to be attracted to the quality pieces. The refinement is easy to understand and appreciate. I couldn't live with only African art, or primitive art; I would find that very boring.

GOODWIN: Strenuous, too.

GERSH: Right, right. But I find that the juxtaposition of the two is marvelous. It's a relief also in terms of

just looking at contemporary . . . I just think they complement each other so well; they enhance each other tremendously.

GOODWIN: I have the feeling that the primitive sculpture enhances the modern painting, but I'm not sure if the modern sculpture holds up to the primitive sculpture.

GERSH: Well, what we have does. I mean I love the sculpture that we have. It does, because they're two completely different statements. But you're right: there is a greater, for lack of a better word, affinity between the primitive sculpture and modern art than there is, maybe, between primitive sculpture and modern sculpture. But to me, one doesn't take away from the other.

GOODWIN: I'm trying to compare one of the primitive sculptures to the Moore sculpture [Mother and Child Against Open Wall], and although I like Moore I don't think he's as good as the primitives.

GERSH: Really?

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Well. . . .

GOODWIN: Well, I don't think it's really within his powers to be better than he is. I mean, the primitive art is obviously nonpersonal, or even an unartistic statement. I don't think it's made to be artistic. At least in our understanding of what an art context is.

GERSH: Yes. Well, first of all, the thing that makes a piece of primitive art a piece of merit and a piece of value is the fact that it was used for tribal use. Therefore, all of the primitive art was really made not for aesthetic reasons, but for tribal use.

GOODWIN: Right. It means something in the society.

GERSH: Exactly.

GOODWIN: The modern art usually represents the artist's imagination.

GERSH: Right, exactly, exactly. So they really had two different functions.

GOODWIN: Right, and different goals.

GERSH: Completely different goals. The aesthetics come out in primitive art because they're so beautifully done and they have kind of a power and an inner quality that just comes through, which gives them their aesthetic quality. They have a kind of a majesty, you know, all their own.

GOODWIN: Well, I'm personally attracted to the less refined pieces; in fact, the very unrefined pieces. And you seem to also enjoy some of the very polished and delicate sculptures.

GERSH: Well, primarily, our preference has been in terms of Congo art. I think that is the most refined of all of African art. I just feel it's a very highly refined art,

and they are more polished, so to speak. They're not as rough. Aesthetically, I find them much more pleasing.

GOODWIN: There's also a considerable variety of scale in these pieces.

GERSH: Well, the African art--we don't have any of tremendous scale, but there are some that are quite large.

GOODWIN: I'm just looking at the mantel. There are some tiny figures and there are some larger figures.

GERSH: Right, right. Well, in a piece of primitive art, there's much more there than there would be of a little painting or a little piece of sculpture of modern art. It wouldn't hold.

GOODWIN: Right. The funny thing is how easy it is for persons discussing the subject to contradict themselves, in that I find myself going in one direction and then I think of the [Joseph] Cornell sculpture, and then I think, that's the exception. [laughter]

GERSH: Right, right. That's not very large, but it's very engrossing.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: He pulls you into his world.

GOODWIN: It is a distinct world.

GERSH: That's right. He is of course very unique.

GOODWIN: In a way, it is a kind of a fetish.

GERSH: His festishes, yes.

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Absolutely, yes.

GOODWIN: Even the broken elements.

GERSH: Right, right; that's true.

GOODWIN: What's this one called?

GERSH: Naples.

GOODWIN: Naples, oh yes.

GERSH: With the clothesline and the laundry hanging.

GOODWIN: But he never left New York, as far as I know.

GERSH: No, I don't think so either. He did many, though, with the European titles, you know--let's say they alluded to foreign titles, foreign places.

GOODWIN: Yes. And then, of course, there are the parallels between the Léger [La Parade] and these Ibo . . .

GERSH: . . . Ibo carvings. Yes. I call them my African pop art. [laughter]

GOODWIN: When you saw those carvings, did you think of them in relation to the Léger?

GERSH: No, no. I was at Harry Franklin's one day, and I was walking out the back door, and they were in the back. He had just gotten them and hadn't really started to display them, and I just was knocked out by them. I took them home. I just loved them. But when I brought them home, I thought they would look beautiful next to the Léger. And, of course, they've never been moved. I put

them there, and that's where they've been ever since. The only reason I used the [phrase] "my African pop art" is because they happen to have color, as opposed to everything else which doesn't really have much color. But they're very typical of Ibo figures of that period. They were all painted. They were like puppets.

GOODWIN: Like dolls.

GERSH: Yes, yes, right.

GOODWIN: You seem to prefer the full figures--whether they're small or large--to masks.

GERSH: Well, the reason that we don't have too many masks is--it isn't that I prefer the figures, necessarily. I've seen many masks that are beautiful, but it was very difficult housing them here in this house. Because to put a mask on the wall here, it would almost get lost. If you had a group of them, then they'd have some impact. But in this particular house, just to put one little mask on the wall, you wouldn't see it. It's very difficult. That really has influenced the type of pieces that we've bought, because in housing them we already had all the paintings and sculpture. I had many masks. They just didn't hold up. On the other hand, maybe they weren't that good. But some of them really were very good. But they just would get lost; you couldn't see them. So that sort of influenced the direction of the . . .

I can't go out and buy them by the dozen; there aren't that many good ones around. It would take quite a long time to acquire, say, six or eight of them which could be hung properly together and would then be an interesting body in juxtaposition to a picture.

GOODWIN: Like this Cameroon mask.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: It's a sculpture unto itself.

GERSH: Yes, yes. And, of course, the Fang mask is quite beautiful, and I think--because it's on the stand, it kind of floats. But really, if you hang a mask, I don't think they work, because, really, that's not the way they were meant to work. You're really supposed to come in direct confrontation with a mask; and to have it hanging on the wall, it becomes too static. Maybe that's why they never work together. Most people who have masks, and if they're hung, they either have a group of them so that they give each other life and movement, or they have nothing to compete with them, you know, in terms of paintings. Then maybe they show up.

GOODWIN: You have a number of Oceanic sculptures. That's not as common as African art among collectors.

GERSH: No. Certainly out here there are not too many people that collect Oceanic material. I find it equally as exciting. Good Oceanic material is hard to come by,

not too much in Southern California. But when Oceanic is good, it's marvelous.

GOODWIN: Oh, I agree. I love this piece.

GERSH: The Uli piece, yes.

GOODWIN: That's [from] New Ireland?

GERSH: New Ireland, right. That's, oh, maybe [from the] first or second year that we were into this kind of material. I guess we've been at it about a couple of years.

GOODWIN: That's very rare?

GERSH: Well, the Uli figures are quite rare. First of all, [in] New Ireland, once they found tungsten, the people stopped carving. I don't know whether it was just maybe an influx of Europeans there or what happened, but a whole culture kind of began to die out after the discovery of tungsten there, and the whole island, I think, changed. Apparently, it became much more westernized, or Europeanized, or whatever you want to call it. The natives just stopped carving.

GOODWIN: What are the smaller black sculptures?

GERSH: They're canoe prows from the Solomon Islands.

GOODWIN: And they're inlaid with shells?

GERSH: Mother of pearl. Well, yes, shells. They're wonderful objects, they're marvelous.

GOODWIN: They seem a little more comical.

GERSH: Yes, I would say so.

GOODWIN: And then you have a further interest in the Northwest Coast [Indian] art.

GERSH: For me that's the most beautiful of all the material.

GOODWIN: Well, did you come to it after African and Oceanic?

GERSH: We made a trip with the Contemporary Art Council [of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art] to Seattle and Vancouver. The first time that I had even been exposed to any Pacific Northwest Coast material was on that trip. We went to a gallery at Seattle and this man only dealt in that material. He also had some contemporary art which wasn't too good. But his primary interest was in Northwest Coast material.

GOODWIN: Who was that?

GERSH: A man by the name of Michael Johnson, who was a professor at the University of Washington who ultimately became a dealer. He's a very knowledgeable man and a delightful person. We became friendly with him, and most of the pieces came from Mike Johnson. The Northwest Coast pieces are quite extraordinary. And, of course, they're very rare. They're very rare and difficult to come by.

GOODWIN: What is the most unusual of your pieces?

GERSH: Well, I would say probably the Eskimo; the big

Eskimo mask would be the most unusual. It's three-dimensional. Of course, all sculpture is three-dimensional, but I mean this really has a third dimension in the way it's carved or the way it was meant to be carved. I would say probably that's the most unusual and the rarest.

GOODWIN: Where did you get it?

GERSH: From Michael Johnson.

GOODWIN: Then you have the smaller pieces in front of the Stella.

GERSH: Right. The little chieftain's rattle is so beautiful. It's made out of one piece of wood. Beautiful patterns.

GOODWIN: Well, since you've collected, haven't you got the urge to paint or sculpt? [laughter]

GERSH: No, no. Oh, I took some drawing lessons or something. I don't think I really have that tremendous interest in, you know, creating any work myself. I've found that the lessons that I took were rather boring. I don't think I was very talented, so I don't think that helped matters any. But I have no desire to particularly work, you know, as an artist. I find it very exciting to collect, to see it, to be exposed to a different art form.

GOODWIN: When do you like being here with the collection most of all?

GERSH: When do I like?

GOODWIN: Yes, under what circumstances or time of day?

GERSH: Oh, I don't think it really matters terribly much. Whenever I can relax and not be bothered by anything, I love just looking at them and enjoying them. They're so much a part of my daily life. Because this house really isn't so big, I'm getting to enjoy most all of them all the time. In the morning we're in the den, so I see those pieces all the time. The things that are in the hallways --I'm up and down the stairs and looking at those constantly. Dining room, when we eat dinner at night--it's lovely to look at those. And the living room--I sort of like to come in and look at [them], you know, in the evening sometimes.

GOODWIN: You even have some sculpture on your TV set.

GERSH: Oh, yes, yes, some African pieces, right.

GOODWIN: We have a few minutes left. It would seem to me that it's much more enjoyable to have this to oneself, rather than to enjoy it in the presence of company.

GERSH: Well, I tell you, it's nice to share. I'm very pleased when somebody who is knowledgeable and appreciates this and understands the art comes in, and it's very nice to share with another person. Otherwise, if somebody isn't knowledgeable, I, you know. . . .

GOODWIN: There's not too much you can do.

GERSH: No, no. There are many people that come into the house that are not aware of any of these things, and I never get into it. I never discuss it or bring it up. [If] they ask, well, that's something else. But it's always fun to share the collection with people who <u>are</u> knowledgeable; and [to] those who aren't, I guess to them it's like it isn't here.

GOODWIN: I think it would be difficult for a stranger to ignore. . . .

GERSH: You'd be surprised how many people have come in and have not even looked; they're not even aware of what's on the wall. But, you know, art is--you have to want to see. Just as I mentioned earlier, I'd seen African art, but I really hadn't seen it. You have to open your eyes, you know. And you have to open your mind and your soul, so to speak, until you see it--not just at a glance, but to see inwardly or within you. You take it all in.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JULY 30, 1979

GOODWIN: Today I'd like to cover several different topics. Let me start with artists. Last week you mentioned that Frank Stella had been a guest in your home, and we discussed his admiration for Albers. How did he happen to be here?

GERSH: I've really forgotten how he happened to be here. Well, I constantly am getting calls; people want to see the collection--groups and individuals. So I don't remember whether he came with a dealer or came with a friend due to the fact that we owned one of his paintings or just how he happened to be here, but I was delighted to have him come and visit.

GOODWIN: Have you had some other artists here?

GERSH: Oldenburg was here once. Generally speaking, I'm never really terribly keen about getting involved with an artist.

GOODWIN: Why not?

GERSH: Well, for instance, the local artists--if you get involved with them [and] you don't own their work, they feel resentful because you don't. If I own them, then fine. Tom Wudl has been here. As a matter [of fact], he gave a talk here to the Contemporary Art Council, but we bought one of his paintings [Verde] some time ago. I'm

trying to remember what other artists have been here that I can . . . I can't at the moment remember any others. But as I've said, I've never gone out of my way to particularly seek them coming here.

GOODWIN: I suppose it could be a difficult situation.

GERSH: Yes, it can be if you don't own an artist's work. It's very interesting. Well, Mark di Suvero was here once. He wanted to do a piece of sculpture for our out-of-doors, and what he proposed was too vague. I didn't want to just leave it in his hands, so we never pursued that any further. Claire Falkenstein has been here to visit. But I always feel funny when an artist comes over and I don't have their work, because I'm sure they feel, Well, with a houseful of paintings, why don't they have one of mine? It doesn't always coincide with my choices and what we want to buy.

GOODWIN: What kind of a guy is Wudl?

GERSH: He's a very nice young man. Groping, I think, and trying to find himself. He's changed his style several times since we've bought him. Oh, Larry Bell has been here. At one time we were thinking of buying one of his boxes, but they just didn't work in the house. I think he's a good artist, but the sculpture just never worked here for us.

GOODWIN: How did you get interested in Wudl? He's kind of

an offbeat artist.

GERSH: I got interested primarily because I saw a show at Pasadena [Art Museum] quite a number of years ago--that I think Barbara Haskell put together--of young local artists. I think it was either ten local artists or sixteen local artists. We bought the Wudl out of that show. Then he once asked if he could come over and see the collection; so I said, "Yes, I'd be delighted." I don't think I would ever turn an artist down if he wanted to come over and see the collection, but I don't go out of my way to pursue them particularly. I feel, really, that my home is our private world, and I don't--unless I am forced to--like to open it up just to strangers who really don't mean that much to us. I'm delighted to have anybody I know, or that's really truly interested in art, come and see the work, but I don't like to turn it into a museum where it's open to the public. Therefore, I never particularly go out of my way to encourage the artist to call or anything of that sort. We've been very cooperative about lending works all over, so I feel that I don't deprive anybody from seeing it where it's really necessary or it serves a definite function.

GOODWIN: Have you ever been asked to lend a large number of pieces?

GERSH: Yes. Newport Harbor [Art Museum] wanted to do a

show of our whole collection when they opened the new building. At one point we thought about doing it, and then we backed away from it, because I just feel it's too much attention in these times, you know.

GOODWIN: To you? For you?

GERSH: Yes, yes.

GOODWIN: You mean possible security problems?

GERSH: Right. So I just felt it was better not to do it this time. Maybe someday, if things ever get better, we'll think about doing it then. [laughter] But I've had so many groups here at the house, different museum groups, and different people from out of town. If they come in, and if they call, and if it makes any kind of sense, I do it.

GOODWIN: That raises a recurring question about the art world: Why does it seem so small?

GERSH: Well, there really aren't that great a number of collectors, I don't believe, in Los Angeles. I think most collectors, because they share this common interest, are in touch with each other. It varies to a degree as to how close you are to them personally, to the various collectors, but you certainly see them at openings and at functions pertaining to art. Therefore, I think you get to know one another. I would feel no hesitancy about calling a fellow collector to ask a special question or something that I needed to know, or advice, or maybe a concurrence

of opinion on something. If I lack some kind of information, I would not hesitate to call another collector to ask specific information on anything. I think as a result of that, that's why the art world is so small. People are quite friendly in most instances, and they're quite willing to help each other.

GOODWIN: About how many so-called "important" collectors of modern art would you say there are in the greater Los Angeles area?

GERSH: Oh, golly. Well, if you say "important," I take it you mean with good sizeable collections.

GOODWIN: Yes, more than a few pictures.

GERSH: Yes, yes. I would say maybe there are two dozen, if that many. But if I start to name them, I probably won't come up with two dozen. [laughter]

GOODWIN: Well, name some.

GERSH: Well, all right. Certainly Norton Simon, if you want it, but I don't know if you want to call him a [collector]. I mean he goes beyond the field that we're involved in. But I certainly feel that that's his work. He's probably <u>the</u> major collector in the Los Angeles area. There are the Weismans and Bob Rowan and Bob Halff. Now, I'm also going to mention a couple that aren't really involved, so to speak, in the art world, but they do have very good collections: that's Ray Stark, Billy Wilder. The Grinsteins

have a pretty good collection. I think the Blochs have a good collection. (Now, I'm trying to think; I don't know how many I've named.) Then I think you kind of have to drop down to another category, but these are all top collections in the city, and certainly [the collectors] are involved and interested in what's going on. I don't think the Blochs are as involved in terms of the art.

GOODWIN: No, their collection is basically formed.

GERSH: Formed, yes. It's not growing or continuing. But I think they're very interested in what's going on. They don't continue to collect, but they always like to know what's happening and like to keep up with what's being shown currently. Let's see. I'm trying to think of others. I know there are more, but. . . . A lot of the others are quite quiet about it, let's put it that way--or maybe not involved, because I know there are other collections in the city. Well, for instance, another man is Taft Schreiber; he had a great collection.

GOODWIN: Is that still intact?

GERSH: As far as I know it is. I hadn't heard that it was being sold or dismantled. Dolly [Mrs. David E.] Bright certainly had the remains of a great, great collection. A lot of it, of course, went to L. A. County [Museum of Art] and a lot of it went to UCLA. But even with what she still had left, she had some wonderful things.

Again, I've lost track of her. I don't know what's happened, and I don't know whether a lot of it has been sold off or what's happened. So I've named, I don't know, maybe. . . .

GOODWIN: Well, I tried to make a little list. It's a little list.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: Blankforts.

GERSH: Oh, yes. I'm sorry, that I forgot. That's a very good collection.

GOODWIN: The Brodys, at one time, at least.

GERSH: Yes, the Brodys. Of course, it's not contemporary; it's the era just before. But certainly a very, very fine collection. But, again, they're not very active anymore, and they've sold off quite a few pieces. So I don't know what's left there.

GOODWIN: Why does it seem there are so few? I mean why shouldn't there be twice as many, given the enormous size of Los Angeles and its relative affluence, too?

GERSH: Well, there are some that are beginning to start to collect. For instance, Ted Ashley is beginning to collect. He's only bought maybe half a dozen things, but they're all the area of a quarter of a million dollars each, you know, in that area--or let's say upwards of a $100,000 per painting or sculpture. So I think he's

beginning, and I think he will form a wonderful collection if he continues and pursues it.

There are some other fairly good collectors. Doug Kramer has a nice collection. Not a great many major things, but he'll buy some nice things. There was a young man, a young writer, that I knew who was starting to collect. I don't know how much he's pursued it, but Michael Crichton, the author, [has] started to collect; I know he had a major Oldenburg. Well, there's Betty Freeman; I left her out. She has some wonderful things. Now, Michael Crichton, as I said, to my knowledge has a--when I saw the collection he didn't have a great number of things, but they were all nice, nice things of good quality. Collecting takes a lot of guts, and you have to risk; when you go out and you buy something, you're risking whatever you've spent.

GOODWIN: I think that's a good point: it does take a lot of guts.

GERSH: It does. You're putting your money on the line, and there's no guarantee that these things that you buy will have the same value ten years from now or five years from now. I think you have to be terribly involved and interested and really love the work to get involved and to build a collection. You have to really be dedicated. I think that there is the affluence here. Maybe there isn't as much excitement, because there aren't the great shows that we

get in New York or the East. I don't think that our museum particularly does much to foster collections. I think that there is no question that there should be.

GOODWIN: Well, from what I've read and seen, Chicago seems to have a large number of prominent collections.

GERSH: Great collections, yes.

GOODWIN: Well, of course, Chicago's a bigger city than Los Angeles.

GERSH: Well, I think they started collecting many more years ago. That's another thing. Today, if you start collecting anything of any value, or any established artist today, you have to have a lot of capital, because the things are far, far more expensive than they were when we started collecting. We could, you know, buy many wonderful things for, say, under $5,000.

GOODWIN: Could you just give us an example of something whose value has gone way up?

GERSH: Well, right there. The Giacometti [Diego] was under $5,000. God knows what it's worth today. That was a major purchase for us, but it was under $5,000.

GOODWIN: Well, what is it worth, approximately, today?

GERSH: Oh, I would say someplace between maybe $75,000 to $100,000. [The] Henry Moore [Mother and Child Against Open Wall] we bought for $800.

GOODWIN: Wow! That doesn't sound possible.

GERSH: That's right. But that was about twenty-five years ago.

GOODWIN: And now you wish you'd bought more.

GERSH: Oh, indeed I do; indeed I do. But the Kline [Torres], at the time we bought it, was about $7,000. I know it's worth well over $100,000 today. Of course, in those days, $7,000 was a great deal of money. I mean it was more than $7,000 today. I mean it represented a great deal of money for us. So it was a commitment. It was just as much a commitment then as it would be today for us to buy the Rauschenberg [Gate-Spread], which we just bought not too long ago. Maybe it's the cost of individual things. I think even today local artists, young artists, unknown artists, are very expensive today, relatively speaking. I think people maybe are more hesitant.

GOODWIN: Why does it seem that so many people from the entertainment industry--well, not so many, but some of the people you mentioned as collectors, are involved in the entertainment business?

GERSH: There's not that many, really.

GOODWIN: Well, you mentioned Stark and William Wilder.

GERSH: Billy Wilder, yes. Well, I think Billy Wilder started collecting art many, many years ago. I think it's his background. I don't think that it's particularly

anything to do with the entertainment business as such. Certainly, being involved in the entertainment business, there's a high visibility of all the arts, so to speak, perhaps. But I think it's just coincidental.

GOODWIN: Well, actually, if I think of individual performers in movies or whatever, or even singers, I can't think of any important collectors offhand.

GERSH: I've never seen his collection, but I understand Andy Williams has some nice things.

GOODWIN: Really?

GERSH: Yes. Nick Wilder's told me that. I've never seen it.

GOODWIN: He doesn't live here, though.

GERSH: I don't know where he lives now. He used to live out here, I think. But maybe not. I was told that he had some very nice things.

GOODWIN: Well, of course, Edward G. Robinson.

GERSH: Yes. If he'd been anything he would have been a collector, because he just loved the art. Jane Robinson has a very nice collection to this day. All of Edward Robinson's things were sold, and that was according to his will. But she's bought some nice things--not, again, contemporary, but she has a nice collection. But, again, I would imagine that the reason she's probably continued to collect is because of the influence he had on her, and I

think she missed living with the art after he was gone.

GOODWIN: Well, there must be many people who are potential collectors who are collecting boats and cars and homes, and not art.

GERSH: Yes. Well, there's another couple who are starting to collect here in the city, and the pieces they have bought are major pieces. People by the name of Broad, Mr. and Mrs. Eli Broad. They don't have a great many things yet. They have, oh, maybe a dozen, fifteen, important pieces--or major pieces, I should say. I think they ultimately will probably have a very good collection, a very important collection. Richard Sherwood, I think, has a few good things. Oh, and he used to live back of us--Burt Kleiner had a wonderful collection at one time. I'm trying to think of a few more as we're talking. Probably quite a few others that I don't know about that have a couple of dozen good things.

GOODWIN: I have a similar feeling of vibrations that there are people around here you may not know well who have things. In fact, I was surprised to read in the [Los Angeles] Times, perhaps a few months ago, about a local collection that was sold at auction.

GERSH: Oh, yes, in London?

GOODWIN: Yes.

GERSH: Oh, now wait a minute. There's one very, very

fine collection here in this city, Mrs. and Mrs. Nathan Smooke.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Great collection. Great love, great quality, great feeling has gone into that collection.

GOODWIN: You've seen it?

GERSH: Oh, yes. It is beautiful. It, again, is the generation before ours. But it's wonderful, just marvelous. Marvelous collection. They're very quiet.

GOODWIN: Well, how do they remain so anonymous?

GERSH: Well, they're really not anonymous. I mean those that really know, know that they collect.

At one time they were members of the Contemporary Art Council; then they dropped out. But you see them in all the openings--they're really not anonymous, but. . . .

GOODWIN: Quiet.

GERSH: Yes, yes. And they're really not involved with modern art per se. But they go to all the auctions in the area; they've very active, very active.

GOODWIN: I think that they sold . . .

GERSH: No, that's another couple; that's another couple. I can't remember their names [Mr. and Mrs. Sydney R. Barlow], but they sold about two dozen pieces in auction . . .

GOODWIN: . . . and fetched several million dollars.

GERSH: Right, right. That's somebody else, another couple. But the Smookes would certainly fetch more, probably, because they have many, many things.

GOODWIN: What do they have?

GERSH: Oh, Picasso, Léger, Arp, Moore. Quite a bit of sculpture, a lot of Léger, [Amadeo], Modigliani.

GOODWIN: Matisse?

GERSH: Yes, Matisse. I can't remember now all the various different artists, but it's a beautiful, beautiful collection, a beautiful collection. And the quality is superb. It's really put together with a lot of love, which is wonderful.

GOODWIN: How do you account for the large number of Jews who are collectors?

GERSH: I think the Jewish people have always been very interested in all the arts, not just painting. If you go to the [Los Angeles] Music Center, the largest percentage of people there, I think, are Jews, in terms of audience [and] support now. I think there are a tremendous number of Jewish people who support <u>all</u> the arts, not just paintings. But I think it's been part of their background, their culture. It's always been stressed in their lives.

GOODWIN: Well, it seems that they have a particular interest in modern art.

GERSH: Well. . . .

GOODWIN: It could be a coincidence, but . . .

GERSH: Yes, well. . . .

GOODWIN: Of the various collectors we've mentioned, there are many Jews.

GERSH: Yes. I think the only ones that aren't are maybe . . .

GOODWIN: . . . the Phillips.

GERSH: Well, yes. Oh, I forgot the Gifford Phillipses too, on my list; I didn't mean to. But the Phillipses and [Robert] Rowan, yes. But most of the others are Jewish.

GOODWIN: I think it's an intriguing intellectual problem. I don't have any theories.

GERSH: I don't either; I really don't know. But they represent a tremendous percentage as the supporters of all the arts.

Now, for instance, a gal like Margo Leavin, who is a dealer, has a very nice collection. But I say there's a good two dozen at least that I can think of. If you start to kick it around and talk about it, you can come up with a few.

GOODWIN: Well, most of these collectors seem to be living on the west side of Los Angeles, as opposed to Pasadena.

GERSH: Yes. Well, that's why they had a big problem in [the] Pasadena [Art Museum], because all your supporters were out this way. Well, they got a lot of funding from

Pasadena people, [but] most of the people that were involved in the museum were out on the west side.

GOODWIN: Right. But I wonder why there are more collectors there.

GERSH: Well, I think old money in this particular part of the country has just never gotten involved in modern art.

GOODWIN: Or even art in general.

GERSH: That's right. Now, there's another collector, Gary Familian, who's starting to collect and who has some very nice things. So I think it takes a few generations. I mean his parents certainly could afford collecting art, but I don't think they were involved in it. I think maybe it takes the second and third generation of affluence for it to become part of their lives. I don't know; I really don't know. I think in the East, it took two or three generations.

GOODWIN: Yes. Of course, most of the great art collectors in the East, and particularly in the past, didn't collect modern art.

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: But they wanted the status of, I think, European aristocrats . . .

GERSH: Yes, right.

GOODWIN: . . . and collected old masters.

GERSH: I think your cities like Chicago and St. Louis --St. Louis has some very good art collections. Again, there too was a great deal of wealth in these two communities, both Chicago and St. Louis. The people were mostly Jewish people that started collecting, and that sort of set the stage.

GOODWIN: Yes. Well, it's ironic though that traditionally the Jews have been excluded from the boards of museums.

GERSH: That's right.

GOODWIN: . . . and other philanthropic organizations.

GERSH: Well, it's true. But I think the barriers are coming down there as well.

GOODWIN: I understand that many of the Chicago collectors are interested in surrealism.

GERSH: Right, right. I think it's the big, big center of surrealism in this country.

GOODWIN: I wonder why that's so.

GERSH: I don't know. I don't know whether it's maybe when they were starting to collect or the time that they were collecting, that surrealism took hold at that point. I know here, for instance, you see very few surrealist paintings.

GOODWIN: I was just going to mention that.

GERSH: You see very few of them because very few of the

galleries ever have them. If the dealer has a surrealism painting, he'll always take it to Chicago.

GOODWIN: Have you ever owned a [René] Magritte?

GERSH: No, I'd love to own a Magritte. I think he's a wonderful, wonderful artist. But I've never seen any here that I've liked to own, or wanted to own, because they haven't been of top quality. I think now that the time has come where it's too late really. When I [am] in New York, [I see] one or two dealers that carry them or have them, and I always ask. But they either don't have them, or they have one or two, and they're not really top quality. I don't want to pay top dollar for second- and third-quality merchandise, so that's why I've never bought one. But I love Magritte; I think he's wonderful. He's marvelous. Somehow or other even dealers who used to come out here--we just have never been exposed to that much surrealist art here in Southern California.

GOODWIN: Well, I wonder if the nature of Chicago has anything to do with collector interests in surrealism, and for that matter why many Southern California collectors seem to gravitate towards the New York School. I wonder if there's some kind of attraction?

GERSH: Well, there were more New York School paintings shown here. Paul Kantor showed a great many up here. I just think he had them. I just saw more of those. And

Virginia Dwan showed them, and you just saw more of those.

GOODWIN: Do you think Southern California collectors have done justice to Southern California artists?

GERSH: I would say many Southern California collectors collect only--and I didn't include any of those in that group that I mentioned. I mean, not that they don't have some Southern California artists, but generally speaking, there are quite a few collectors that only will collect local artists. I didn't get in any of those names, but I know a great many of those.

GOODWIN: Who are some of those people?

GERSH: They're members on our Contemporary Art Council: people like Nathan Cooper and his wife [Bea]. Right now I'm drawing a blank, but there are a great many that only collect California artists. Now, to each his own. There's nothing wrong with that if that's the emphasis that you want. After all, it's the collector's privilege to collect what he wants and what turns him on. So there are quite a few of those, quite a few. You see, I don't think you could ever build a great collection just based on Southern California artists. Fred Weisman has a whole collection of those just in his office. But I don't think that makes for a great collection.

To answer your question, I feel that if you just collect Southern California artists, my opinion is that I don't

think you can have a great collection. You can have a great collection of Southern California artists, but I don't think it's a great. . . .

GOODWIN: The implication there is that there aren't very many really prominent or important artists working here.

GERSH: Outside of [Richard] Diebenkorn, I don't know any artists from California--not just from Southern California, but California--unless some have moved that I don't know of. I don't know if di Suvero lives here; I understand he had a studio up in Northern California. I don't know if it's where he actually lives, but outside of, say, Di Suvero (if he still lives there) and Diebenkorn, I don't know of any California artist that really has. . . . Well, [Ed] Ruscha.

GOODWIN: How about Sam Francis?

GERSH: Oh, excuse me. Sam Francis. But I never could consider Sam Francis a California artist. I always considered him an international artist before a California artist, because he really made his. . . .

GOODWIN: That's interesting.

GERSH: First of all, he was ill and lived a great deal of the time in Switzerland and Japan. So I really have never put him in a class with the California artists. Although you're right: today it's his home, and he certainly is an international artist. He and Diebenkorn and Di Suvero

--and Ruscha to a certain extent, not to any great extent, I don't think.

GOODWIN: Neither do I.

GERSH: Well, I owned a Ruscha; I no longer have it.

GOODWIN: What was it?

GERSH: It was an oil on canvas. It was good in terms of his work. It was a good example of his work, but it got boring after a while. It didn't hold up well.

GOODWIN: What about [Edward] Kienholz?

GERSH: I think Kienholz is a wonderful artist. I admire his work tremendously, and I think he also has an international reputation. But somehow or other the right one eluded us, and now I don't know. You don't see . . .

GOODWIN: Yes, he's kind of an enigma. He seemed so important at one time; he's kind of faded away.

GERSH: Yes. I think his work is still important as a statement, you know.

GOODWIN: Well, I guess that's the West Coast equivalent of pop.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: I wonder why the local artists tend to be rather shallow.

GERSH: Well, quite a few of them got hung up on the plastic work, number one. Maybe I'm using the wrong word, not plastic. What's the word I want? Oh, Ron Davis worked in

it, Larry Bell . . .

GOODWIN: Resins?

GERSH: Resins, yes. Ron Davis and--who else? Peter Alexander, Fred Eversley, DeWain Valentine. I've tried, because I like all of these people. They're very nice human beings as such and I really wanted to buy one of their works at different times. I tried: I bring them home, and they just didn't hold up for five minutes.

GOODWIN: Really?

GERSH: Not for five minutes here. It looked like something you went and bought in a dimestore, and it just didn't . . .

GOODWIN: Well, I've never been intrigued by that generation of artists. I thought, Well, maybe that's just a weakness on my part.

GERSH: No. We had a Ron Davis here for quite a few years, and I finally sold that when we bought Louis [Last of a Series] and had to do quite a bit of rearranging. That was one of the first things to go. So it just didn't hold up at all. And I think he was the best of those. But the others, I just can't relate to it. I find it very difficult to relate to that kind of work.

GOODWIN: It would seem that there's really only one art center in this country, at least as far as the artists.

GERSH: I'm afraid so; I'm afraid so. There's a young man

here that I bought a drawing of his, and I think he did a wonderful piece for L. A. County Museum. I think it's one of the better pieces they have actually here in terms of the . . .

GOODWIN: What's that?

GERSH: He's a young artist by the name of Loren Madsen. He did that Broken Ring. I have a drawing of that series. I think he's very, very talented and very good. He's moved to New York.

GOODWIN: Oh, I didn't know that.

GERSH: He's been back there maybe two years. I think he's extremely talented--he had a very interesting installation at L. A. County; I don't know if you ever saw it. It was Bricks and Wire--Bricks and Steel, I should say. It was fascinating. I think he's really quite marvelous. Most of his work is commissions, or, I should say, art commissions. [laughter]

GOODWIN: It would seem that life is too easy here for artists.

GERSH: I don't know whether it's too easy or whether they just don't get the stimulation. I really don't know what it is. Certainly, Chicago is no art center. Washington, D.C. doesn't seem to--outside of maybe Louis and [Kenneth] Noland--produce any great artists. Only Chicago artists are--well, of course, Oldenburg. I think Oldenburg really

moved to New York; I don't think he started in Chicago. The only Chicago artist that I know that has any kind of reputation is Richard Hunt, and I think he's kind of secondary.

GOODWIN: I don't think he's a major sculptor.

GERSH: No. I think there is a Los Angeles school, and there is a certain kind of art that comes out of Los Angeles. But for me, it's not tough enough, or it's not strong enough and doesn't really hold up too well. I think some of the works are very nice. I mean Billy Al Bengston, Joe Goode--there's a whole group of them. But I find them mostly decorative. Mostly decorative.

GOODWIN: Right. Pretty. Even silly or sassy.

GERSH: Yes, yes. And if you like that, then that's fine. There's one other artist. Allan Stone handles him. I can't remember the name. He had a show at USC. It was a good show. He lived here at one time. He's a pop artist. I can't remember--what was his name? He was good. Wayne Thiebaud.

GOODWIN: Oh, yes.

GERSH: But, again, I don't think he's in the top echelon, but he's a good, competent artist.

GOODWIN: I think it's fascinating that an artist who has done very clever things in terms of portraying Southern California is [David] Hockney, who's British.

GERSH: Well, but Hockney will go into any area that he visits and suddenly will do a whole series of paintings in that area, which I'm sure you're aware of. He'll work in Paris and do a series on Paris. He'll do a series in Egypt--in Cairo or Alexandria. He loves Southern California and has done some beautiful work here.

GOODWIN: Do you have a Hockney?

GERSH: Yes, a Hockney watercolor--or a drawing, I should say, color drawing [De Longpre].

GOODWIN: Did you buy that here?

GERSH: Yes. But he's done work wherever he's [gone]. He went off on a kind of vacation to Tahiti and did some work there--not a great body of it, but there was some in that last show that Nick Wilder had. He did a series of drawings and paintings, I suppose. He traveled all through the United States and worked wherever he was--some things from Arizona.

GOODWIN: Right. I seem to remember totem poles and that kind of imagery.

GERSH: He's able to work wherever he is and picks up the qualities of that environment and is able to translate those beautifully.

GOODWIN: But he's very clever.

GERSH: Oh, yes. I think he's a fine, fine artist, wonderful artist. So I think he is one of those that's able

to work. I'm sure if you put him down in New York, he'd do a good series on New York. He certainly has done some wonderful things in London. I just think he's extremely talented and therefore is able to do this. But he's able to capture the feeling of whatever place that he's working and translate that onto either the canvas or the paper.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JULY 30, 1979

GOODWIN: Let's talk about dealers for a while. I've heard the criticism frequently that there aren't enough good dealers. In fact, most of them are pretty bad.

GERSH: Well, I think as a collector you have to seek out the material wherever it is. Some dealers will have good material occasionally. A lot of it is luck, you know, and finding . . .

GOODWIN: . . . Timing.

GERSH: Timing, right. On the whole, I think Frank Perls was a marvelous dealer in his day.

GOODWIN: Why?

GERSH: He had wonderful things, he was very helpful, he was very knowledgeable. Number one, he came from a family that was involved with art for many, many years. His mother [Kaethe Perls] was a dealer in Germany, his brother [Klaus Perls] certainly was a top dealer in New York. Frank cared about the art, and he was very knowledgeable.

GOODWIN: What was his specialty?

GERSH: Oh, I think European artists primarily: [Pablo] Picasso. He was interested in the [Georges] Braque school. I think that would be his specialty.

Paul Kantor, when I first knew him, was showing the German expressionists. He certainly was a big booster of

the New York abstract school. He was a very good dealer when he had his gallery both on Beverly Boulevard and on Camden Drive.

GOODWIN: Let's just pause there for a moment. How would you contrast Perls and Kantor?

GERSH: One was European, one was American, number one. Perls was a much more elegant man than Paul Kantor. Paul Kantor was very knowledgeable in his particular field, I felt. I think Frank Perls had a greater love of the art than Paul Kantor had, of the overall art. Well, they were both neurotic, crazy people. [laughter]

But I learned a great deal from Paul Kantor in the early days when I started collecting. He was very nice to us, to me particularly. I used to go in there, oh, several times a week, and he would bring out all kinds of paintings that he knew I never would be able to afford, that were not in my price category. But he knew I was very interested and therefore responded to any interest that was an artist's interest. He would show me good Picassos, bad Picassos, good this, good that. He had a tremendous library of art books, and he would show me the different examples. If he had something he knew was not a great example, he'd show me what was. So I learned an awful lot from him. And I'm very grateful to him for that.

GOODWIN: Did he have better merchandise than Perls?

GERSH: No, they had different kinds.

GOODWIN: Was it comparable?

GERSH: Well, in his field I think he had--I don't think better. I think they both had good material. It's just depending upon your interest.

GOODWIN: Were they really in competition?

GERSH: No. As a matter of fact, they were very friendly. They worked together. They sometimes even bought many things together, owned together. So I don't really think that; I think they complemented each other. I never felt that there was any real competition.

GOODWIN: You didn't feel disloyal to one when you patronized the other?

GERSH: No, not at all.

GOODWIN: Well, Kantor definitely changed.

GERSH: Oh, yes. Well, he changed once he moved out of the gallery space. Once he started to work out of his home, he changed drastically.

GOODWIN: Well, I understand that he wasn't always so tolerant of beginning collectors.

GERSH: Well, let's say this. He was with me. But I think the reason he was, was because he felt I was truly a pristine collector.

GOODWIN: I was never in his gallery, so I don't have any

personal experience with him at that time. But I understand at times he could be very nasty.

GERSH: Yes. So could Perls, too. They both could be. Again, I never had that experience, but I know I've heard stories of terrible things Perls used to do.

GOODWIN: Like what?

GERSH: Oh, I don't know. Somebody would come in and didn't maybe appreciate something. He would say, "Get out of my gallery and don't ever come back again."

GOODWIN: It's something like that that I've heard. A potential customer came in and asked for a painting that would fit a certain space, and [Perls] said, "Go to La Cienega." I've a strange feeling that certain collectors like to be led very strongly or even want to be kind of pushed around.

GERSH: For instance, I know Perls was very helpful with David Bright. He worked with Bright and was very helpful. As a matter of fact, he got that blue Picasso [Portrait of Sebastian Juñer Vidal (1903)] out of Spain for him. And I know he worked with the Brodys a great deal. Paul sold a lot of things to Norton Simon. There's another collector, Sidney Korshak, who is very quiet in terms of the arts and who bought a lot of pictures from Paul Kantor.

GOODWIN: Gifford Phillips did.

GERSH: Yes, oh yes.

GOODWIN: Well, I'm intrigued by Kantor's background.

GERSH: I don't know a great deal about his background. I know he was in the navy. Then, I think, when he got out of the navy he started in the art business, the art gallery business.

GOODWIN: Well, that's true. But he didn't have any formal art training.

GERSH: No, no; I don't think so. I think he is a bright man and a shrewd man. In a business sense, I think that he caught on very quickly. Because he's a smart businessman, he would be able to be successful as an art dealer. I also feel that at the beginning he had a real feeling for the art.

GOODWIN: Well, I know he claims to have a great eye.

GERSH: Well, I think he did have a very good eye.

GOODWIN: I interviewed him, and he's convinced, almost, of his infallibility.

GERSH: Well, listen, I don't think anybody can be infallible. I think every collector has made many, many mistakes. I think a collection changes many times over during the process of collecting till you get it to a point where you say, This is our collection today. I know this is true in our case; I know it was true in the Weismans' case. I know in terms of many, many collectors, you change, you grow, you upgrade. I don't think there's

a collector alive that has the original paintings that he ever had, that he never changed. It's true of Norton Simon.

GOODWIN: I've tried to determine when a person becomes a collector, at what stage or what passage.

GERSH: You can say, well, somebody's a collector from the time they buy their first painting or sculpture or whatever it is they're collecting, the first of anything, in that they seriously intend to pursue it. But I think, really, a collection begins to take shape and form when there is a personality attached to a collection, which reflects the owner's taste, so to speak.

GOODWIN: That's an interesting idea.

GERSH: I think our collection has a definite personality. I think it's a reflection of the kind of things that we like. They're very personal. Very often, each example by that artist has a certain kind of flavor, so to speak, even in relation to the man's work. It could be more lyrical, it could be colder, it could be more severe, depending upon the personality of the people.

GOODWIN: I understand that. I felt that you transmitted that idea last week, especially when you were talking about the Lichtenstein [Sleeping Girl], how you had a particular Lichtenstein in mind, and one that was rather atypical.

GERSH: Right.

GOODWIN: For me, it's a little difficult to focus in on what your or another collector's particular emphasis may be, either because I don't know you, or I may not know the art so thoroughly. But I think there's a temptation, at least among beginning collectors, simply to acquire the best example.

GERSH: Well, I think that's what one should always strive for: to get the best example you can of an artist's work.

GOODWIN: Right. But that may not be as difficult as finding the example that suits the collector's individual taste the best. I can see how that Ellsworth Kelly [untitled] is, as we said last week, a very tough painting. And I usually don't think of Kelly in those terms. I think that Kelly is very much like a Kline in its power.

GERSH: Right, right. Well, at the time we bought Kelly we looked at a lot of different ones; I had seen a lot of different ones. I know there was a very large one that was blue and yellow, and we decided on this one. I think a collection becomes a collection when people sort of have a central core in it, and there's somewhat of a similarity in the work or the examples by different artists and some kind of continuity. I always say the paintings and the sculpture come to live in this house. So they have to fit into this house and become part of

the personality of this house. I refuse to buy a painting just because it's a very good painting, but it's not going to look well in this home, because that's where it's going to be housed. I've missed things, and I've not bought things, because they either were too large or wouldn't show up well or wouldn't work well in this house; so we just didn't get them.

GOODWIN: I asked Al Stendahl, "When does a person become a collector?"

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: And I thought he had a funny answer. He said, "When a person sells his first piece." [laughter]

GERSH: Well, that's interesting, and it's very true. I would agree with that, in a sense, certainly. Because at that point, you are on a certain tack, so to speak, and you obviously don't want that piece, because probably you want something else that you think would work better in your home or collection. So therefore, you're selling it so that you can replace it with something that fits in your collection better for various reasons. Either your tastes have changed or you want a more important example.

GOODWIN: Well, I think this ties into some of the things we were talking about when we started today, and that is, being a collector takes some guts. There are obviously many collectors--well, I don't know how many--who keep

everything they've ever bought.

GERSH: Oh, I think that's a terrible mistake. Well, I also want to be able to hang and have room for what I own. I don't like to put things in closets or store them or put them away. If I can't use them, either I'll sell them or donate them to a museum, if they're good enough. We've given a lot of things through the years to the museum [Los Angeles County Museum of Art]. I had a lot of English [pieces], Armitage and Chadwick. Well, they were very good pieces, and they were good examples by Armitage and Chadwick, but I suddenly realized I didn't want to own an Armitage and Chadwick anymore. I had, as I said earlier, a Ben Nicholson which we sold. It was a very good Ben Nicholson, but I wanted more American artists.

GOODWIN: Have you ever been troubled by the idea that your tastes may be too conservative or too cautious?

GERSH: No, because I don't think they have been.

GOODWIN: Well, that's not a personal criticism, but it's a possible thought: that maybe you feel that you don't want something really offbeat or unproven.

GERSH: Well, personally, we have bought things through the years that were offbeat, so to speak, and unproven. Namely, the pop art was very unproven and offbeat at that time, because they were not that well known or that well established at that point, about the time that we bought them.

The first Oldenburg and Warhol and Lichtenstein--they were not that well established at all. We had a couple of others that I subsequently sold, but none of these artists at that time were proven. Even Henry Moore wasn't that proven at that point.

So I think it's easy today, certainly, to buy a Rauschenberg. But the first Rauschenberg we bought was a drawing, which we bought many, many years ago from Virginia Dwan. At the time we bought that, that wasn't proven. It's easy today to buy them, of course, but I can't really say that was the first time I was interested in Rauschenberg.

GOODWIN: Well, maybe as a collector becomes more experienced, he or she simply raises his or her standards.

GERSH: Well, I think so. I think that if you have the wherewithal to do it, I think you do.

GOODWIN: And generally weed out the . . .

GERSH: Right. Exactly. Certainly. Otherwise, if you hold onto everything. . . . Well, you can hold onto everything, but I think if you display your mistakes with your good things, I think it dilutes the collection.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: One of the ways of strengthening a collection is to get rid of the mistakes, things that you thought you liked or you thought were good, and maybe as you live

with them your taste changed, and finally weren't as good as you thought they were.

I know this is so true of the Weismans; I'm sure Marcia would be the first to admit that. They constantly have upgraded their collection. David Bright did that.

GOODWIN: This suggests further that the California artists are going to be left by the wayside, because the maturer collectors don't want to gamble on the unknowns, in fear that they would dilute the quality of the collection.

GERSH: As I said, we have a few California artists. I would not miss them. Outside of Diebenkorn, I would not miss any of the painters.

GOODWIN: I was just going to say, Diebenkorn must be your favorite.

GERSH: Yes. I would not miss any of the others if I sold them. But I sort of felt I should buy a few of them. [laughter]

GOODWIN: Well, when did you acquire the Diebenkorn?

GERSH: The first Diebenkorn [Number 63] we had goes back to the Berkeley series in the fifties, so that's the first Diebenkorn. And then the Ocean Park one [Number 14] we acquired in the late sixties.

GOODWIN: That's before he became as well known as he is at the moment.

GERSH: Yes, oh, yes.

GOODWIN: But it seems kind of a paradox there that the earlier paintings are, to me, more of a California painting; and this is more of a New York School-California painting.

GERSH: I think Diebenkorn, of course, is--if you ask him who his favorite artist is, he'll probably say Matisse. You could see sort of a quality there.

GOODWIN: Right. Right. Do you think that the Diebenkorn now is as good as, well, the Louis [Last of a Series] or most of the other paintings?

GERSH: It holds up for me; the old Berkeley one held up for us very, very well.

GOODWIN: So you think he's first-rate?

GERSH: Oh, I do. In every way, that Berkeley picture always holds up. It didn't make any difference what room I put it in; it held its own. It worked very, very well.

GOODWIN: Did you buy Diebenkorn from Kantor?

GERSH: No. The first one we bought from Walter Hopps, and the second one we bought from John Berggruen.

GOODWIN: I know Kantor was an early backer.

GERSH: Oh, yes. Definitely. I think he still has quite a few. I don't know. He did at one time. Well, there's another collection--Paul Kantor. There are many things that he owns himself that are on his walls that I don't

think he would ever sell. I know there are several Diebenkorns there.

GOODWIN: When you say you bought a picture from Hopps, you mean from Ferus Gallery?

GERSH: Ferus Gallery, right.

GOODWIN: What kind of impact did . . .

GERSH: . . . Ferus have . . .

GOODWIN: . . . on you and the region?

GERSH: Oh, I think it had a tremendous impact on the region. I think a great many people were influenced by it, by the Ferus Gallery.

GOODWIN: Well, I can see how it was very important in its day, but in retrospect it doesn't seem that its artists have survived.

GERSH: They had all the pop artists. They had Warhol, they had . . .

GOODWIN: Yes. Well, I was thinking specifically of the local artists. They still show and sell, I guess, but they haven't achieved the standing of the East Coasters.

GERSH: I only remember the blockbusters that they had.

GOODWIN: Like what?

GERSH: Well, I remember the Warhols, and I remember he had an Albers show, and he had a Cornell show. He had Diebenkorn, I know, at one time.

GOODWIN: Hmm. I didn't know that.

GERSH: Yes, he had a few paintings there. I'm trying to remember some of the other shows that they had. Well, of course, he had Lichtenstein; he had Kelly. Oh, he had a lot of the pop artists.

GOODWIN: What was the atmosphere of the gallery?

GERSH: Oh, excuse me, he also had Frank Stella. He showed Stella.

GOODWIN: I didn't realize there were so many Eastern artists, New York artists.

GERSH: Yes. Well, because he represented them on the West Coast. The atmosphere of the gallery, that's a good question.

GOODWIN: I've heard stories.

GERSH: Well, let me put it this way: I, for one, never had a great rapport with either Walter or Irving [Blum]. I had a respect for Walter Hopps because I think he certainly had a great eye and great knowledge of the art. I think Irving was a salesman, so to speak. He's learned a great deal because he's been involved in it and he's a man of good taste, so therefore it's rubbed off on him. (They also had [Jasper] Johns, incidentally.) Now, Irving--let me put it this way: anything I bought at the Ferus Gallery I bought despite Irving. Now, when I say that, to give you a perfect example: I had been in his gallery and admired the Stella [Cinema Di Pepsi V] that

hangs in our entry hall. He said, "Oh, I'm afraid that's sold." I said, "Oh." He said, "It's going to the Greenbergs' house [Bernard and Lennie]." I said, "Where in the world are they ever going to put that Stella? They don't have room in their house for that." He said, "Well, she was going to cover up her fireplace." So I said, "Well, that's fine. If anything happens, and she should not keep it for some reason or other, I would love to try it in my house and see if it'll work," because I did love the painting very much. About a month went by, and my husband was out at the studio [Universal Studios] and ran into Taft [Schreiber] and said, "Say, I heard your daughter bought a beautiful Stella." He says, "Oh, no, she sent it back. It didn't fit." Now, I didn't hear from Irving. So I went over there, like, the next day. I said, "Irving." And he said, "Oh, yes, I forgot about calling you." He brought it over, like, a couple of days later, and it's never moved. As far as I was concerned, I never felt that he followed through on things. On the Lichtenstein [Sleeping Girl], which I did buy from him, I pursued him about that painting, because I wanted a particular kind of Lichtenstein. I told him I wanted a Louis, and he presented several that never would have fit, and he knew all the dimensions. I mean, he just, you know, was very la-di-da about the whole thing.

GOODWIN: He sounds irresponsible.

GERSH: Yes, I would say to a certain extent he was. You know, he's a personable guy, and I like him. He's pleasant. But I wouldn't say he's one of the great dealers. Also, he's a bit of an opportunist, I think, in that if he knows somebody has a great deal of money to spend, he will pursue that person.

GOODWIN: Well, for some reason I have an image of the Ferus Gallery as being a particularly fun, lively place.

GERSH: Yes, yes, yes. They had wonderful shows. They showed marvelous artists. We personally never had a great rapport with him, but I certainly admired some of the things he did.

GOODWIN: How about some of the more recent dealers?

GERSH: Well, I think probably the most reputable dealer today who is very hard working and has done a very good job in terms of the community is Margo Leavin, who's a good, sound dealer, has good shows, and I think has done a good job for the community in bringing the best that she can here. I think she's very knowledgeable and has a good feeling about art and cares about it, and I think she's of the new school, so to speak. She's very good.

Nick Wilder is a very bright guy. But he's another one that's kind of flip and hard to pin down. Not difficult, but I mean, he's--I like Nick very much, and he's

done some good shows.

GOODWIN: But many of these dealers don't seem to be very straightforward.

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: Why is that?

GERSH: Well, I think they have a tough time here, number one, as far as making good here. I just think it's difficult for a lot of them. There is a limited market here. There are important works. Now, there's a new gallery that just opened called Asher-Faure [Gallery]. I don't know how that gallery's going to survive, because right now, really, what she is, is an outlet so far for David McKee and André Emmerich. I don't know. She was supposed to have a show with Pace's work, Pace's artists. I don't know how one can function on that level; it's pretty difficult.

GOODWIN: Most galleries in Southern California seem to last at the most a few years and are gone. It seems to be a very risky business.

GERSH: I think so, yes. Well, if they deal in Southern California artists, it's difficult. If they deal in important art works, before one buys an important art work, usually those people can travel and go East and see what else is available, so it makes it very difficult. That isn't to say that they couldn't get some very good things,

but you have to know what you're doing.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: You're buying an important work from one of these places.

GOODWIN: Well, how do the prices compare?

GERSH: Oh, I think the prices would be the same. I don't think that's a big consideration. They would be no different than buying in New York. The only thing is if the dealer out here gets something from a New York dealer, they're splitting their commission; therefore, I think you can do better buying in New York when you're only dealing with one dealer as opposed to two dealers.

GOODWIN: Are you bothered by the secrecy or the shenanigans of dealers?

GERSH: No, because I'm so used to it now. I think the longer you collect. . . . Let's say it this way: when you've collected as long as we have, you're so aware of the shenanigans of the dealers that it's par for the course.

GOODWIN: How do you like to purchase a picture?

GERSH: How do I?

GOODWIN: Yes. How do you relate to the dealer? What instructions do you give him or her?

GERSH: What are you referring to exactly? Maybe I don't understand the question.

GOODWIN: I'm not referring to anything specific, but do you play along with dealers and try and make, let's say, a package of deals?

GERSH: No, no. We've never done that. Phil always feels that--for instance, in terms of trading, or. . . . I never do that, because you never come out well that way. If we wanted to sell something, we sell it outright. We don't necessarily tie that in with a purchase. I think if we want something we buy it; and then if we want to sell something subsequently because we've purchased that, we do that. I don't ever tie, we never tie, one into the other. Only in one instance have we done that, and that was with the Rauschenberg, because it was the same dealer, and it was a question just of buying a more important one. But outside of that, we've never done that. If we've bought anything, we've bought it so that it's never been through the same source.

GOODWIN: Have you ever had problems with returning works that you didn't like?

GERSH: No, because whenever I've bought anything I've always wanted to see it in my house; I want to live with it. No, I've never had any trouble, because I won't buy unless I have that understanding. Oh, if it's a minor thing, a small picture, that I know I can place any place, I don't put that prerequisite on it. But if it's a major

oil, I usually want the right to live with it at home. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, you know. But in most instances I'm pretty sure that I like a piece. Oh, I've tried a lot of things at home that I've returned, but we hadn't gotten any negotiations at that point; it was just to see what it would hold up for me. So I felt no reluctance about it, or had any problem with returning something. I've even sent some things back to London that weren't right. So I think that most galleries will extend that courtesy to a collector if you've done business with him and they know you're a serious collector. I don't think that's anything unusual to ask. I certainly wouldn't do it on a minor little thing; but I think [with] anything that's of major importance, I think one is foolish if you don't bring it home first.

GOODWIN: Well, how do the dealers in primitive art compare to the dealers in modern?

GERSH: Well, Harry Franklin, we had that same agreement with him. I always said, "Look, Harry, I'd like to live with it and try it." He was always very pleasant about that. Unfortunately, in primitive art, there are not too many galleries out here, so it's a whole different system. They come out, the dealers come out, and they spend a few days here, and you're really pressured. Now, I've bought things from Herbert Baker, who's out here now, too. So

I could have the same agreement with him, so there's no problem. But a great many things we have acquired were acquired on a--we had to make a decision within a few days. A couple of things I've gotten stuck on, and one was quite a serious problem.

GOODWIN: Was it a fake?

GERSH: Yes. Yes. Now, a lot of our Pacific Northwest Coast material we bought from a dealer in Seattle who couldn't be nicer. He'll ship things down and let us live with it and I, of course, have had no problem. Then I bought a few things in New York from a dealer who's now retired, J. J. Klejman--great things--and I sent six things home and kept three. I don't think he was terribly happy about it, but nonetheless, that was the agreement. So that was no problem. But I did get stuck; we did get stuck with two things that were both fakes.

GOODWIN: How did you discover they were fakes?

GERSH: Through other dealers. And thank goodness. One was an expensive purchase I had, and we bought it from a very reputable dealer in London; he was here visiting. Our friend Michael Johnson, who is in Seattle, was down, oh, quite a few months after we had this piece. He looked at it, and he said, "Do you mind if I take this up to Bill Holm in Seattle"--who is one of the foremost authorities on this type of art--"and let him look at it."

Immediately I knew why, because obviously nobody's going to suggest that unless there is a doubt. I'm just glad that I had the relationship with Johnson so that he could point this out to me.

GOODWIN: What bothered him about the piece?

GERSH: Just the way it was done. He's far more knowledgeable about it than I am. He's spent his whole adult life in this. And Bill Holm has worked at the University of Washington and has been involved with this kind of art for I don't know how many years. Bill Holm wrote me a long, long, single-spaced typed letter indicating why and so on and so forth, unequivocally stating it was a fake. And it was difficult returning it. We finally did and got our money back. It was a real hassle and a very unpleasant situation. The piece was just recently put up in auction in Paris, estimated at someplace between 5,000 and 7,000 francs. I don't know what it finally sold for, but obviously, it was sold (if it did sell) for somewhere around $1,000 or $1,200. The original asking price was about $12,500. So it took about six months to get out of that, and a lot of unpleasantness. It was a nasty situation. The other fake was not as costly, but when the dealer came to town again, he always said that I could always exchange anything I bought from him for anything else. So I picked the least expensive thing that I could

live with, that I knew was real, and merely gave him a check for the difference.

GOODWIN: Do you ever see runners?

GERSH: I used to at the beginning. But first of all, they don't come through much anymore, and I don't see them. They don't have any great material. It's junk, mostly it's all junk. I think in the early days of collecting, they had good pieces, but I had already started too late, really, to get material from runners. But they did used to have some marvelous things, apparently, in the early days. But by the time I got into it, it was already too late for the runners. I got one or two things from runners that were very nice. But basically, I've dealt with galleries. With a runner you really have no recourse. Forget it.

GOODWIN: Russian roulette.

GERSH: Absolutely. It's tough enough with good dealers.

GOODWIN: You have a daughter-in-law [Susan] who's a dealer.

GERSH: Right, right.

GOODWIN: How did she get into the business?

GERSH: Well, she worked for a couple of dealers and then decided to go into her own. She worked as an assistant and learned the business that way. Now she's on her own, and she deals strictly on consignment. That means she doesn't have shows. So if somebody wants to sell a piece, they can give it to her; she'll sell it. Of course, if she has

clients that are looking for a specific kind of object or painting, she will try to secure this through another dealer, a private collector.

GOODWIN: How's she doing?

GERSH: She's doing fine. Her overhead's very low, and she operates on a very small scale, so she doesn't have to make too many deals, really, to keep going. But I think she has very little investments. I mean, she doesn't really buy or own anything, like the galleries.

GOODWIN: What kinds of things has she sold?

GERSH: Oh, she's sold a [Paul] Cézanne watercolor. For her clients, she has sold a Léger and Braques. She has one client from the East that's very fond of her. He's an elderly retired man, has some very nice things, and she's been able to get these things from him on consignment and will sell one or two a year for him. She handles some local people. It's a potpourri, really, of things.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

AUGUST 27, 1979

GOODWIN: Last session we discussed collectors and dealers, and tonight we're going to discuss museums. Let's first talk about the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of Art]. When did you join the Contemporary Art Council?

GERSH: Just about a year after it was first formed. So it's probably close to fifteen, twenty years--something of that sort. I've forgotten myself how long it's been in existence, but if it's been in existence twenty years, we joined it, say, nineteen years ago. Whatever it is, I know we joined about a year after it was formed.

GOODWIN: What led you to join?

GERSH: Well, most of the people that we knew at that time were getting involved with this Contemporary Art Council. They were all very avid, serious collectors and interested in the same kind of art, and we had many similar interests, and that was a good group of people.

GOODWIN: Who were some of these collectors?

GERSH: Gifford Phillips was the first chairman and one of the founders of the group; the Sperlings, Milton and Betty Sperling; Harry and Phyllis Sherwood. I think Betty Asher was one of the early members. Pauli and Mel Hirsch. I can't remember all of the original members at that time, but I know those were some of the early, early ones.

GOODWIN: What was the purpose of the group?

GERSH: The purpose of the group was to foster and to promote contemporary art at the Los Angeles County Museum.

GOODWIN: Did that mean specifically to help build the permanent collection?

GERSH: I think, first of all, they wanted to create an interest in contemporary art because up to that point I don't think the museum really even knew modern art existed. [laughter] Of course, it's still a general museum. They wanted to have an education program, which they've had; they wanted to have modern art exhibitions; they wanted to also raise money so it could be the beginning of a permanent modern art collection. I mean, in other words, the original fee--and it still is about the same--was $500 to join, and that money went primarily at that time for the purchase of modern contemporary art, because the expenses at that time for operating were really quite minimal. Now it's all been changed because the expenses in terms of operating a council are much greater, so that a lesser percentage of the money now goes for acquisitions. But at that point, the majority of the funds did go for acquisitions.

GOODWIN: Was the council patterned after any particular group?

GERSH: Well, only in so far as it was another council.

But outside of that it really had its own bylaws. I don't think it was really patterned after anything, though. You're talking in terms of the L. A. County Museum?

GOODWIN: Well, that museum or any other museum.

GERSH: Well, I don't really know whether it may have been patterned after other similar groups that are affiliated with other museums, but that I really don't know.

GOODWIN: Was there any problem in defining what was the focus of the group's interest, whether it was contemporary art as opposed to earlier modern art or even late nineteenth century?

GERSH: No. I think the focus primarily was, I would say, modern art and contemporary. I mean, they were interested in local artists as well as established modern artists. I think now the focus is more toward the contemporary than it was in the past. But I think one of the reasons was, originally, when they made some acquisitions--for instance, one of the acquisitions they made was a David Smith, the Cubi [XXIII] which they have now. At that time it took them four years to pay for this. So they decided that from that point on that they would focus in more on California artists because the prices were not as high; they felt they could get at least good California artists. With the limited funds that they had, it was very tough to go into the market and buy top-rate modern artists or established artists.

GOODWIN: Who made the decision to buy this Smith?

GERSH: Well, we had an acquisitions committee. That was a few years after we were members. At that time, I think Gifford was the chairman of acquisitions, and the whole group went along with the committee's wishes.

GOODWIN: Was there anybody in particular who was pushing for that acquisition?

GERSH: I think Gifford at that point wanted that, and I think everybody went along with it. I was chairman of acquisitions once, and I know I was responsible for the Sam Francis [Blue Ball] that they have. Maurice Tuchman wanted to buy some other local artist, but I didn't think too much. I can never remember his name anymore. He's faded from the scene. But I was very much opposed to that, so I said, "Look, rather than settle for a lesser artist, let's wait and not buy anything this year, and save our money." As it turned out, it was a wise decision because Sam Francis was in a very good position taxwise; so we not only got a very good early Francis at a very good price--because part of it was in the form of a donation, and the rest we paid for from acquisitions funds--but he also gave us one of the late ones as a gift. So we got two for the price of one, so to speak.

GOODWIN: Did you personally approach him?

GERSH: I think one of the people in the curatorial staff

did. Then I went down, I remember, with Jane Livingston, who picked it out. We went to his studio, and we picked the one that we have now.

GOODWIN: About how much money was available to spend each year?

GERSH: I hope I'm accurate on this, but it seems to me that we had somewhere in the area of about--when we bought the Francis, I think we paid something like $16,000 for it. (I hope I'm right; my memory could be all off.) [That] represented two years of funds. And if I remember correctly, the Smith was about $40,000, so they took five years to pay for it: they made one payment of $8,000 and then had to spread the other over four more years. But I think it varied from year to year. You see, if they had more members, they had more money for acquisitions. I know now we have maybe something like about $20,000 a year, but we have more members now. But they have had about $16,000; they have averaged about $16,000 a year.

GOODWIN: What are some of the other notable purchases by the council?

GERSH: I don't remember now. George, right now I'm drawing a blank. I'm sorry. I know we made quite a few purchases throughout the years, but my mind is at a blank as far as acquisitions. I know one thing [the Council] bought was the Joseph Beuys [Suit of Clothes]. I think that was one

thing. We bought a lot of Carl André, Sol Lewitt. You see, the reason that my mind is fuzzy on it is they also have this New Talent grant, so a lot of the things have come through that. Then a lot of things that they've acquired --like they acquired an Ellsworth Kelly, but I think that was with funds from maybe de-accessioning. The Diebenkorn also, I think, came from funds from de-accessioning. We had an auction; we raised money specifically for acquisitions. So it's hard for me to remember which came from what sources. Sometimes we got things with money plus a gift, or a special donation that went toward a specific purchase. So it's hard for me to recollect which things came which way.

GOODWIN: Well, did the council support any particular exhibitions?

GERSH: Oh, well, they support all the modern artists. For instance, the Kline show right now is sponsored by--when you say support, I think they support it if they need additional money for a catalog or additional money because they don't quite have enough in the museum budget. They don't actually put up all the money for an exhibition, but all of our exhibitions are done under the sponsorship of the Contemporary Art Council.

GOODWIN: Is that kind of a problem to allocate money toward an exhibition and at the same time acquisitions?

GERSH: Well, no. There are budgets. The council is divided into these various committees: there's acquisitions, there's education, there's exhibitions. Theoretically, the exhibitions are really funded by the museum. Any money that we give to exhibitions are for little mini-exhibitions, which they've done through the years. At one time they were taking one room of the Ahmanson [wing]. For instance, they had a Chuck Close exhibition; they had just a few things. Well, that kind of money came from our exhibitions fund. But, generally, any major exhibition that the museum puts on is paid for by the museum. It's done through the sponsorship of the modern art council but, as I said, we'll give money for a catalog or something of that sort paid for in that way. But on the whole we've never really paid for any major exhibition. We don't have enough money; a major exhibition is very costly.

GOODWIN: Well, it would seem that it would be a distraction.

GERSH: Yes. I would say the major purpose is threefold, really. It's an education process; the new talents award thing is very important. They visit somewhere in the area of between 100 and 200 artists. Either they will go to their studios or sometimes the artists bring the work to the museum. They give this award of either two

or three prizes, and in so doing they also are entitled to receive a work of art by the artist.

GOODWIN: Have you ever been on that committee?

GERSH: Twice. I was on the original one, and then I was on one about five or six years ago.

GOODWIN: And which artists were recognized?

GERSH: When I was chairman of it, there were three artists: it was Judd Fine, Anne McCoy--I'm trying to remember the third one. Let me think of them a minute. Right now I can't think of it. Oh, gosh, my mind isn't functioning. I'm a poor subject tonight, I'm afraid. Well, maybe before the evening's over I'll think of it [Tom Wudl].

GOODWIN: So the entire committee visits the artists?

GERSH: Yes. Artists submit their names if they want to be seen. We submit them to the museum who then turns it over to the committee. We saw about, oh, I guess close to 200 artists' work. Then we narrow it down to about twelve. Then we present a list of, I think, about eight with our recommendations. If the curatorial staff agrees with our three choices, fine; if not, they can pick from the eight. That's the way it works. I mean, if they don't agree with our three, they can pick from the eight.

GOODWIN: Do the committee members feel confident about their task?

GERSH: Well, I was lucky. The year that I was chairman of it, we had a pretty good committee. Gifford Phillips was on it; I think Dorothy Blankfort was on it; Katherine White was on it. These were pretty experienced people; they all collect, and they all have pretty good eyes. We also had two or three of the younger members, but these were nonvoting members. In other words, they went for the experience of learning. I think they did learn; they worked as hard as anybody else. It's interesting how [the artists] weed themselves out; it ends up being, say, ten or twelve out of the whole group.

GOODWIN: You think it's fairly easy?

GERSH: Yes, yes. Because usually it's not difficult to pick 10 out of 200. I mean, most of the lesser ones are the ones that are not highly developed.

GOODWIN: But all the artists are under thirty-five?

GERSH: They're all under thirty-five. They have to live in Los Angeles County, and theoretically, they haven't had that much gallery exposure.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: But some, I think, are just more talented than others.

GOODWIN: It must be embarrassing to visit an artist whose work is obviously inferior to the others.

GERSH: But on the other hand, you can't refuse to visit

them, because if they had been working for a while, you. . . . Sometimes, actually, you see several artists several years in a row, and you can see a maturity take place; they do develop. I've seen that happen with several of them. I remember we visited several artists who subsequently won the award. But at the time that we saw them, they were really still kind of floundering.

GOODWIN: About how big is the membership of the council now?

GERSH: Oh, now they have about seventy-five members. Originally it was about thirty, so it's more than doubled. There's been some turnover. Some people have dropped out; new ones have come in. The whole character of the membership has changed though. There are not too many collectors.

GOODWIN: Really?

GERSH: Yes, very few collectors.

GOODWIN: If they're not collectors, what are they?

GERSH: Well, I would say out of the seventy-five members that we have, if a third of them are collectors, that's a lot.

GOODWIN: Really?

GERSH: Yes, yes. Some of the members are dealers. That we didn't have at first, but now we permitted them to join. A lot of people join because they want to learn about modern art; some join for social reasons. But it's changed a great deal. You don't have that nucleus that are really--

when we first joined, everybody at that time really was serious about collecting. Now times have changed. It's more difficult to collect good things today. It's more costly; it's just harder, I think--unless you want to just buy California artists.

There was one man I remember we saw, Brian Hunt. He's a sculptor. Irving Blum is showing him now in New York, and Daniel Weinberg is showing him in San Francisco. He's going to have a show, I think, at Margo Leavin's gallery. So enough developed. And they do. It's amazing to see them over a period of several years. Some of them have evolved, and some of them don't. But I know at the time we saw him, he was one of the ones that we didn't consider.

GOODWIN: Do you think the award is substantial enough?

GERSH: Oh, I don't think it's the money. The award originally was $1,200. Now it's, I think, $3,000. They only give two; if they're $3,000 each, I don't think it's the money. It's the question that they're recognized, It's good for the local artists. There's no question about it. Gives them some sort of prestige to have won this award.

GOODWIN: What are some of the educational activities?

GERSH: Well, they've had all kinds of speakers. We've had different artists that have come out, different art

critics that have come out--oh, any interesting speaker pertaining to art. They had some lecture series that have been pretty good. We've had really a good array of speakers through the years.

GOODWIN: How about art trips?

GERSH: Yes, they've done some art trips. Yes. Recently they went to Texas; they're going to New York, I think, in the spring. They went to Europe one year. We went up to Seattle one year, and that was interesting. I saw Ginny [Mrs. Bagley] Wright's collection; it's very good. We saw the other collections. That's when I happened to buy my first piece of Pacific Northwest Coast material; it was while I was up there. The trips have been good trips.

GOODWIN: What is the relationship between the council and the museum staff?

GERSH: Well, there's Maurice Tuchman, and there's Stephanie Barron, who's the associate curator, and they're very close to the council naturally. They're involved with all the council's activities and they're in on all the council's activities. They work very closely with the council.

GOODWIN: Do you think it's difficult for a curator to work with a group of collectors or interested lay people?

GERSH: On the whole, I think they're usually very supportive of what the curator wants. On the whole, I think he more or less kind of influences the group.

GOODWIN: Well, if he wants to make an addition to the permanent collection, does he automatically come to the Contemporary Art Council looking for a donation of funds?

GERSH: He can do that if he wants to. Usually when he wants some sort of acquisition, it's done through the acquisitions committee. I've been on that committee several times. What happens is we meet, and we decide what are some of the artists that we would like to have represented in the museum. Through efforts on his part and through various people on the committee, they will go after or try to find out what's available by these various artists. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't.

GOODWIN: What are Maurice Tuchman's particular interests?

GERSH: Well, he always goes for the big show; like he's doing the avant-garde Russian show. He likes the big shows. He did the big sculpture show ["American Sculpture of the Sixties"]; he did the Israeli Show ["Seven Artists in Israel: 1948-1978"].

GOODWIN: What did you think of that show?

GERSH: I didn't like it at all.

GOODWIN: Why not?

GERSH: I just thought the art was terrible. I can't believe there aren't better artists working in Israel. [laughter]

GOODWIN: I had the same feeling. It was a bomb.

But he hustled money for it.

GERSH: I thought it was dreadful, just dreadful.

GOODWIN: Well, did the Contemporary Art Council bear any responsibility for the quality of that show?

GERSH: No. These were all his choices. He picked that whole show. You see, the Jewish community was approached, and the bulk of the money was given by the Jewish community rather than by the council. I mean, those people in the council who wanted to give did. This was done separately. Money was not given from the council per se. He needed money to fund the show for some reason, or I don't know what.

GOODWIN: It sounds very questionable to begin with, that he would go outside of his natural constituency.

GERSH: Yes. Well, he did because they needed quite a bit of money.

GOODWIN: For what?

GERSH: Apparently the museum couldn't fund the show. It was right after Proposition 13. They just didn't have the money to fund it, and obviously the Israeli government didn't. So they had to go out into the community to get it, and they did. They raised money, as I said, not necessarily from people involved with the museum or with the council. I mean, some of the council members did give money to it on a personal basis. But that's how most of the money was raised for it.

GOODWIN: What are some of Tuchman's other interests?

GERSH: Well, I know he did a whole thing on [Chaim] Soutine; he did a book on him. I think his interests are Maurice Tuchman. [laughter] This is my own personal feeling. I'm being very open. I don't necessarily agree with a lot of his tastes, nor do I always agree with his choices in what he wants to acquire for the museum.

GOODWIN: Well, he seems generally to be more interested in organizing exhibitions than acquisitions.

GERSH: Yes, where he will come off as the big hero, because he will go for a big exhibition rather than--he did a show that was another disaster, too--some European artists.

GOODWIN: "European Painting in the Seventies."

GERSH: Yes. Just terrible, just terrible. Bad exhibit. I mean there were a few good pieces in the show, but generally I thought the quality was terrible.

GOODWIN: Do you think he's outworn his welcome at the County Museum?

GERSH: A lot of people like him. A lot of people like him. I think he has the ability to fool a lot of people. My own feeling is I don't think his sense of aesthetics is good. I just don't think he genuinely will pick the best example of something. I mean, if you give him a roomful of things, and you give Martin Friedman, who's at the

Walker [Art Center] the same roomful of things, Martin Friedman will come up with the best, and Maurice will not. His sense of aesthetics I just don't think is what it should be for a museum curator. I think Stephanie has a better eye.

GOODWIN: Why do you think so?

GERSH: Well, I just think she does.

GOODWIN: She was involved in the Israeli art show.

GERSH: But I think this is something that he pushed and I think she had to go along with. Unfortunately, she hadn't been there that long, and I think she had to go along with it. She has to work with him; I mean, she can't fight him, you know. I mean, Jane Livingston left, and she's at the Corcoran [Gallery of Art]. I think she had a far better eye.

GOODWIN: Than Tuchman?

GERSH: Yes. You know, I think if Maurice Tuchman could get a job someplace else, he'd do it fast; but I don't think anybody is waiting in line to employ him. Boy, if this ever gets out, I'm in trouble. [laughter]

GOODWIN: What you've said is very mild compared to what some other people have said.

GERSH: Oh, really?

GOODWIN: You've mentioned that there are some people who like him, but there are a lot of people who don't like

him. I think it's surprising that his longevity is. . . . He's permanent.

GERSH: He has tenure. Yes. I mean, he's secure in that sense.

GOODWIN: Yes, but there must be a way to encourage him to leave.

GERSH: Well, unfortunately, right now the leadership of the Contemporary Art Council now is in the hands of people [who] really don't know. I mean they're charming, delightful people. The chairman right now is a man by the name of Gil Alkire, who is a professor at Occidental College, who is a very charming, very nice man. He knows foreign languages, but he doesn't know about art. He's personable and he's pleasant. Maurice can tell him what he wants to do, and he'll do it.

I was supposed to be the chairman. I was vice-chairman and was supposed to be chairman--you know, that's the normal course of events--and I wouldn't take it. I just didn't want to hassle with him for two years. I know it would be a very unpleasant kind of task. They were very upset when I wouldn't take it, but I just didn't want to. I don't have enough respect for him to put two years of my life into being chairman of that, because that's a very time-consuming job. I don't necessarily agree with everything he wants to do and how he does it, and so I just wouldn't

take it.

GOODWIN: Well, have a large number of serious collectors left the council over the years?

GERSH: Quite a few.

GOODWIN: Is that because of disillusionment?

GERSH: Some have left, I think, because of that. I know Katherine White, for one, left because she couldn't stand him. I mean, I know specifically that's why she left, because she told me so. But various other collectors maybe have dropped out for one reason or another. I don't know. Some maybe ceased to be avid about their collecting, so they just dropped out for that reason. But I think it's important that there be a contemporary council, modern council. Listen, I'd love to see a new museum here.

GOODWIN: We'll talk about that in a minute. Has Kenneth Donahue had any relationship with the council?

GERSH: Not really, no. He's never really been involved.

GOODWIN: You never felt that he was concerned or that he wanted to help promote modern art?

GERSH: No, no, I don't think he knows it exists. Listen, I don't think he's a very good director, period. So, you know, I think he knows maybe one area of art, like Venetian art or that very classical period of art, but I don't think he's been a distinguished director by any means.

GOODWIN: Why do you think he's been allowed to hold such

a key position so long?

GERSH: Very simply. I think the board of trustees really wants to control the museum. They don't really want a strong director. That's why Ric Brown left. He's a pretty good director. He certainly has done a great job with the Kimbell [Art Museum], but there he was given free reign. He could buy and acquire and run that museum, build it. I mean, now it's come out in the paper: he wanted to help build this museum, and we ended up with [William] Pereira.

GOODWIN: It was a disaster, still is a disaster.

GERSH: Now they ask Pereira where to put the new wing.

GOODWIN: Was Brown involved with the Contemporary Art Council while still director?

GERSH: No. At that time the person that was involved with the Contemporary Art Council was Jim Elliott, who is now at Berkeley [University Art Museum] and who left to go to the Wadsworth Atheneum, I believe. Then we got Tuchman.

GOODWIN: Well, did the Contemporary Art Council have any say in hiring a curator of modern art?

GERSH: I've forgotten how that all came about, whether he was just hired or whether we had anything to say or not. I really don't remember.

GOODWIN: What about Stephanie Barron?

GERSH: I think, again, we had nothing to say about it.

But I think she's good. If she could really function on her own, I think she would be very good. I wouldn't be surprised, and I have no reason for saying this, but I have a feeling that in time, if she gets a good offer, she'll leave, because I think she's very capable.

GOODWIN: Well, if the director's not running the museum, that leaves the board. Obviously some trustees are more influential than others.

GERSH: That's right. You've got Ed Carter; Franklin Murphy's been very active. At the time they were building the museum, David Bright was very active. You always have two or three that are involved really very actively, and the rest are just sort of fill-ins. Anna Bing Arnold is certainly very active in that whenever they need money, they go to her, and she's been wonderful.

GOODWIN: Well, other than Bright there's been no trustee who's been particularly interested in modern art.

GERSH: That's right. Well, I think Taft Schreiber was on the board, and [Frederick] Weisman is on the board.

GOODWIN: Right, he is now.

GERSH: Mike Blankfort.

GOODWIN: That's right.

GERSH: But most of the people that are on the board are not interested in modern art.

GOODWIN: Do you think they're interested in art? [laughter]

GERSH: Well, that's a good question. Very few of them collect--I mean percentagewise. But I guess that's not unusual in museums. I think you have to have business people and people who are able to run a museum.

GOODWIN: That makes sense, except the County Museum is such an unusual museum in that it's both publicly and privately supported. But it's run on a private basis--I mean by a self-perpetuating board of trustees--so there's no direct input from anybody else.

GERSH: Yes, that's true. I think it'd be great if they would have a director who could really artistically run the museum and would have complete carte blanche too. . . . In other words, if they would hire somebody that they felt was a top person and give that man the freedom to do as he wants, then I think it would be very, very helpful. Let him worry about the finances and all that business. But I don't know, the way it's really set up. I don't know how much the director has to get involved with all that kind of business. Donahue--I just never felt he was a strong leader in any way. I always felt that he was kind of a puppet for the board, and that's why they picked this kind of a man.

GOODWIN: Right. And that's how he remained director for fourteen years. Do any of these complaints arise at the meetings of the Contemporary Art Council? Are these

problems more or less accepted?

GERSH: Well, I think the Contemporary Art Council is aware that the big board is not certainly--let's say they're not that heavily interested in modern art. I think right now the big board is interested in Dr. [Pratapaditya] Pal's area [East Indian and Islamic Art] because they've gotten some major gifts in that area, so they're far more interested in that part of the museum. They got Joan Palevsky to buy the Heeramaneck collection. I think it's wonderful; I'm not belittling that. But they are more interested in that area because their holdings are important in that area. I think, though, that we have had some very good shows, considering the fact that the board really is not slanted in that direction. I think we've had some damn good shows.

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GOODWIN: Do you think, though, that even the era of good shows is coming to an end?

GERSH: Well, only insofar as it will be coming to an end generally. Maybe you can say if it's coming to an end, they're going to come to an end in all museums. I saw in the New York Times yesterday the shows that are coming up this fall all over the country; and outside of maybe the Toulouse-Lautrec show, there was nothing that I found that exciting. I mean there was nothing at the [Museum of] Modern [Art] that really--what I saw of the program was nothing that excited me that much.

GOODWIN: Do you have a feeling that the County Museum made considerable progress in the first few years of its life and then more recently has fallen apart?

GERSH: They probably think they've done some fantastic shows. Probably their membership has certainly gone way up. They've had the Tut exhibit ["Treasures of Tutankhamen"], which has been a big prestigious show. They had the gold show.

GOODWIN: Scythian gold show.

GERSH: Scythian gold show from the Hermitage. I think that Armand Hammer's Faberge show--I think they're thrilled about it. It's a very, very tiny show. It's a very minute, little

show. I think they've missed the boat on a lot of modern shows that I think they should have had, [shows that] have gone to San Francisco, prestigious shows. For instance, for San Francisco [Museum of Art] to have had the [Jasper] Johns show instead of L.A. County . . . even this [Isamu] Noguchi show, which I flew up to see the other day.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Noguchi's from this area. That certainly should have been in Los Angeles. I think they missed out on all those Clyfford Stills. I think Henry Hopkins has done a fantastic job in San Francisco. Now, it's true: that is strictly a museum of modern art, and ours is not. Therefore, you have to have room for all the shows. I mean, you can't just have modern art shows here. So they have to have a general program, you know.

GOODWIN: I have the feeling that you're defending the museum; it's not part of your personal feelings.

GERSH: I think you have to be fair in that it is a general museum. Because it is a general museum, they can't just have shows that, for instance, I would just be interested in.

GOODWIN: Yes. Except when I evaluate the County Museum, I tend to think, first of all, of the permanent collection as opposed to the changing exhibitions. And the permanent collection--with the exception of the East Indian art

and the Islamic art and a few small areas--remains mostly undistinguished, and even in the modern area.

GERSH: Yes, outside of a few of the paintings that David Bright did.

GOODWIN: Right. And that was twelve years or more ago. So it seems that the museum is losing ground even in an area where it could be fairly effective.

GERSH: Well, I don't think their acquisitions are particularly--I don't understand the way they buy. They'll buy an African piece--Anna Bing Arnold gave money for that--then they'll buy something else from left field. There doesn't seem to be a cohesiveness about anything they're collecting. As I said, the reason I am not critical of it is because I don't know how a general museum could be directed better. I mean, I know they can be, but I don't know--you see, I don't think they have the money to go out and buy, for instance, like Ric Brown goes out and buys. I mean, he's not limited. He can buy anything from any period, any era that he wants, but they have a great deal of money for it. But Ric Brown has one criterion: it has to be tops in its field.

GOODWIN: But isn't there enough money in this city to build a good general art collection if people wanted to do that?

GERSH: Well, I think they'd have to go out and raise a lot

more money, and I don't think they've done that.

GOODWIN: Yes. So evidently the trustees really don't care about doing that or are giving in their own way.

GERSH: No. Well, they haven't. The trustees have not been very generous. For instance, the Brodys--I don't know what they've given to the museum, if anything.

GOODWIN: Were they ever in the Contemporary Art Council?

GERSH: No, no. Outside of Anna Bing Arnold, who I know is constantly giving things, I don't know what some of these trustees have given to that museum, or if they ever will give, or what their intentions are.

GOODWIN: I thought it was shocking that the Brodys sold their collection.

GERSH: What is even more shocking is having been with the museum as long as they were that they didn't allocate some things to go to the museum.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Now, I think they still have some things, and whether those will go, I don't know. But you see, the other thing is, I don't think that the board or the museum--for instance, Donahue, who is the head of the museum--I don't think they've ever gone out of their way to court any of the collectors particularly, except Norton Simon. They did everything for him: they cataloged his work, they cleaned it, they restored it; they did everything in the hopes that they

would get his collection.

GOODWIN: Do you have any idea of what happened that made him leave?

GERSH: I don't know what made him leave. I just know he used the museum while it was to his advantage to use it and got a lot of services from them. When the Pasadena thing [Pasadena Museum of Art takeover] came up, he just said, thank you and left. So I don't know if there was ever any, you know, rift or any problem.

GOODWIN: Or any falling out?

GERSH: That I don't know; I really don't.

GOODWIN: What's your opinion of the former Pasadena Museum [of Art]?

GERSH: Oh, I loved that museum. I just thought it was wonderful. But, unfortunately, they didn't have enough money to keep it going. It was a great museum; it should have been on the west side of town because the people who really supported it were all in this area. The locals didn't understand the shows, the exhibitions, and I don't think appreciated what they had there.

GOODWIN: Did you used to visit there frequently?

GERSH: Oh, yes, yes. They had some of the great shows.

GOODWIN: What were some of your favorites?

GERSH: Well, they had a Stella show, they had a Warhol show, they had a marvelous Joseph Cornell show. (This is

even in the little old museum.) Golly, they had all the modern people that were coming up. Barbara Haskell did a wonderful show there. All the New York painters. They had a lot of wonderful exhibitions there, marvelous exhibitions.

GOODWIN: Do you think it was a mistake to build the new museum?

GERSH: It obviously was a mistake in that they couldn't make a go of it, and they didn't have enough money to keep it going. I love the museum; I still think it's a wonderful place to display art. I love the way it works; I love the flow of the museum. I was not one of those people who ever had any problems with the building or the way the art was displayed. I thought it was marvelous. I loved to go there. We used to go out quite a bit. I even loved the old museum; I thought that had a lot of charm, although it was difficult to display art out there. It was kind of cut up, and some of the space was very large; it was hard. I don't think it was a mistake. I just thought that they should have had a larger endowment to keep it going, or more funds. They should have prepared for it more.

GOODWIN: Again, do you think that was primarily a problem of leadership as far as the board of trustees?

GERSH: I was never involved in the inner workings of that museum, so I don't know what their particular problems

were. Whether the board was at fault or not, I don't know; this I can't tell you.

GOODWIN: When Robert Rowan was the central figure, did some people give him a great deal of credit for supporting the museum?

GERSH: Yes, but he didn't support it enough financially.

GOODWIN: Right. And other people say that he's to blame for not doing more.

GERSH: I don't blame him. I think he was a big voice there. Again, he's another one that used the museum a great deal to his advantage. He was certainly generous of his time and his efforts. Nobody can really make a judgment on what somebody should or shouldn't give, but it seems to me that he probably could have given more money to that museum.

GOODWIN: Right. I know that it's been said that if he pledged more of his collection, that would have motivated other collectors to give art.

GERSH: It might have.

GOODWIN: As far as I know, he still has a majority of his collection.

GERSH: Yes. Since his divorce some of it's been dispersed. What he had after that, I don't think he's given any of that away. He loans it out, or he has it here, there, and various places. But, you know, for a while his daughter

[Mrs. Robert Warner] had some in Santa Barbara. I've had a lot of discussions with Rowan in terms of the way he collects because he never had room in his house to really hang the majority of his pictures. So the museum was very good; in that sense it was a good storage place.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: But he used to always say, well, if he likes something, he'd buy it even if he couldn't hang it. If he had to store it at the Cart and Crate, he'd go and visit it once a month. [laughter] I don't believe in that. It's not my theory, the way I want to collect something.

GOODWIN: Do you think the Los Angeles County [Museum] should have come to the rescue of the old Pasadena Museum?

GERSH: I'm not so sure that that's the right location for a modern [-art] museum. I was very upset at the demise of it and the form as I knew it as a modern-art museum. But I'm delighted that the Norton Simon collection is there, and I think that it's the right place for it. I think it looks beautiful there. He's renovated it, and he's improved it. Whatever problems there were with the building, he's fixed, and his collection looks lovely there.

GOODWIN: Of course, it's now more of a one-man show than ever.

GERSH: Oh, sure, sure. There's one little room where he has to show part of the permanent collection, because

I think that's part of an arrangement: they have to show a certain percentage of that.

GOODWIN: But the hours are so limited.

GERSH: Oh, so very limited. It's like Thursday through Sunday.

GOODWIN: And he charges admission, which seems questionable.

GERSH: I know, I know.

GOODWIN: There's no noticeable membership program or other public activities.

GERSH: No. It's definitely a one-man operation. But, nonetheless, it's better that it's there than Fullerton or someplace like that.

GOODWIN: Do you think LAICA [Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art] has filled that gap left by the Pasadena Museum?

GERSH: Not really, not on the same level. It's filled a gap for the young artists, the unknown artists, the ones that have no platform to show their art. But I don't think it's really filled the gap, because they don't have any major shows. I don't think they have money to put on a major show, and that was never their aim.

GOODWIN: Do you think it's a constructive, worthwhile institution?

GERSH: Well, to a certain extent, yes. I think it's good for any artists to have a place where he can show his work. I think it serves a need for those artists that normally wouldn't get to show. I'm not sure they're all worthwhile paintings.

GOODWIN: Right. Well, that's a question.

GERSH: But I don't like to pass judgment. I mean, very few of the things that they have there are of interest to me. It's interesting: they had a symposium about a year ago in Santa Monica of all these alternate-space groups, and I went there. They feel that LAICA, as well as a lot of others, have become very establishment, and I find them far from establishment.

GOODWIN: Yes, so do I. [laughter]

GERSH: I think almost anybody can show their work there. I'm not sure it's all worth showing, but it's served a purpose. But it has not filled the gap Pasadena left. No question of that. There are a lot of alternate spaces now in this city, but I haven't followed them all.

GOODWIN: Well, the art that is displayed or performed in these places isn't really attractive to a collector.

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: It's not even necessarily possible to collect it.

GERSH: I think if the artists are good, they do find galleries, and they ultimately end up in shows, either here or in New York.

GOODWIN: Do you have any contact with the [Los Angeles] Municipal Art Gallery?

GERSH: No, no. I've seen a few good things, a few good shows. I belong to it, and I was supportive; but I won't give or loan.

GOODWIN: Well, my general feeling is that the art world is terribly fragmented in this area.

GERSH: It is.

GOODWIN: And no institution is serving a leadership role.

GERSH: No, it's true.

GOODWIN: And it's sad.

GERSH: Yes, yes. Well, I don't know what the answer is to that either.

GOODWIN: There was talk for awhile about the County Museum building more space or getting involved in the Prudential [building expansion].

GERSH: Yes. See, I think that went by the boards when Proposition 13 came out.

GOODWIN: Do you think it was a good idea?

GERSH: Oh, I would have liked to have seen that. That would have been wonderful, I think, because it was adjacent to the County [Museum] and they were going to take that over for modern art and for curatorial offices. They desperately need more space at County; they really don't have the space. They have more things in storage, you know, that they can't

show. I'm not sure it's all worth showing, but I know that they're very proud of it. They don't have enough space for all the different areas in which they're involved. It was really too small almost immediately.

GOODWIN: It seems that the design of the Ahmanson building was a flaw.

GERSH: Yes, wasted space, a lot of wasted space.

GOODWIN: Well, I think the basic problem is--at least as far as the County Museum is concerned--whether the County Museum should remain a general history-of-art museum encompassing the twentieth century, or whether the County Museum should let some other institution take over in the area of modern art. I think arguments can be made on either side.

GERSH: Well, right now, as you know, they have $3 million from Atlantic Richfield, which is supposed to be matched by $3 million. I don't know what kind of a building you can build today for $6 million. Not much, I don't think. With building costs today, a house can cost over $1 million to build. So, you know, I think they're kidding themselves when they think they can build a modern-art museum for $6 million. I think it's going to have to be closer to four or five times that amount, at least. At least.

GOODWIN: But it wouldn't be very large either.

GERSH: Well, listen, they don't have that big a permanent collection to house there.

GOODWIN: Yes, but I think the proposed ARCO building would be something like 40,000 square feet, which is not a big building.

GERSH: No, it's a small building, a small building.

GOODWIN: But then there's a question as to its use: whether its first priority would be the display of a permanent collection or the display of changing exhibitions.

GERSH: I think it's a little bit of both, I think.

GOODWIN: I don't know.

GERSH: That's my interpretation, but I may be wrong again.

GOODWIN: Who is helping solve these problems?

GERSH: I really don't know. I really don't know. I think they've appointed a group that is going to try to do the fund raising. Ed Carter is in charge of trying to pick the new architect. They're going to have to go out into the community and raise some money.

GOODWIN: But the Contemporary Art Council hasn't been kept well informed as to the progress of this project?

GERSH: No, no.

GOODWIN: That seems like a mistake.

GERSH: They're not very active. During the summer, everything kind of is at a standstill, so they don't have any meetings. They don't really resume until September. So

maybe at that point there will be some information, hopefully. But I don't think anything can happen until they match that money, number one. Then I think they're going to have to--I know one of the things that they have in mind is a fund-raising event, is they want to have a big dinner which would raise money for the new building. And they have that "Avant-Garde [in] Russia, [1910-1930: New Perspectives]" show.

GOODWIN: When will that be?

GERSH: That's supposed to be either late spring or summer. I think late spring is the opening-night show, maybe next summer [due to open July 8, 1980]. But that move--we're trying to make plans to do something about that and have that a big, major fund raiser.

GOODWIN: Can a dinner bring in . . .

GERSH: No. It's not going to bring that much in. If it's successful they could raise maybe $50,000, $100,000. But no, it's not going to bring in a million or anything of that sort. I think it would be a good thing in the community to have it. I mean, it'll stir up interest, and through that it would pave the way for major contributions, some other major contributions.

GOODWIN: But now there's a new project.

GERSH: That's right. It's either feast or famine. I don't think we could have two in this city.

GOODWIN: Neither do I.

GERSH: I don't think there's enough art to support it, nor are there enough collectors to support it.

GOODWIN: Or benefactors.

GERSH: No, no, not at all. And the group downtown, as I understand it, has something like $20 million to build the art structure. It's part of a whole complex of buildings --office buildings, condominiums--and apparently $20 million has been set aside for the museum itself, which is better than six.

GOODWIN: Twenty million dollars in funds?

GERSH: Just funds to build the museum, as I understand it. I may be wrong, but that's the information I was [given].

GOODWIN: Are you involved?

GERSH: I'm only involved insofar as Marcia Weisman has had a couple of meetings at her house, where she's trying to get various collectors in the city to pledge either part of their collection or money to this. At the time she called the meeting, they didn't have this; this was not set. They were thinking of maybe taking over the Pan-Pacific Auditorium, redoing that into a modern-art museum. Then subsequently, this other thing came up. Apparently, when she called the first meeting, the plans for the downtown thing were sort of brewing, and nothing was definite. But apparently now it's been in the papers

so apparently it's set, that they're definitely going to build it.

GOODWIN: Well, she's the leader of the project.

GERSH: Yes, yes. She's gotten various civic people to go along with her, like Mayor [Tom] Bradley, Bill Norris; and as far as the city is concerned, they're all for it. Then, of course, the museum came out with their announcement.

GOODWIN: It seems that the Weismans are dividing themselves between a new museum and the County Museum. Fred Weisman's on the board of trustees.

GERSH: Yes, yes. And [Marcia's] on the board of San Francisco [Museum of Art].

GOODWIN: Right, right. Of course, there's the connection with Norton Simon.

GERSH: Yes. Well, I don't think that has anything to do . . .

GOODWIN: You don't think there could ever be a Weisman Wing at the [Norton] Simon Museum?

GERSH: Well, it could happen. I'm not saying it's impossible, but at the moment I think she wants her own identity. They want their own identity. She doesn't like it when she's referred to as Norton Simon's sister, you know. At this moment I would say no.

GOODWIN: Why can't the Weismans get behind the County Museum?

GERSH: I know for one thing, they don't like Maurice Tuchman. I mean, she's adamant about that.

GOODWIN: If she's adamant about it, aren't the Weismans more important to the museum than Tuchman? I mean, can't an arrangement be made to make him a research curator and . . . ?

GERSH: Obviously not. Unless they would come out and say "Look, we'll give you our collection; we want him out."

GOODWIN: Well, it could come to that, couldn't it?

GERSH: Yes, it could, but I don't think they want to . . .

GOODWIN: . . . force the issue?

GERSH: I don't think so at this point.

GOODWIN: I just find that fantastic, that they can't have their way.

GERSH: I don't think they're that--I think there are too many people on the board that are more powerful.

GOODWIN: And frankly don't care if the Weismans do their own thing.

GERSH: Right. But it really would be a shame, because I certainly want to see a new museum of modern art here, but I hate to think that there's going to be friction between one side and the other side.

GOODWIN: I think it would be inevitable.

GERSH: it would be inevitable. No question about that. But it's a shame that it's come to this.

GOODWIN: Right. But not only is the County Museum put in a peculiar situation but I think Barnsdall, too, because it is already supported by the city. It would lose its purpose, and LAICA could probably disappear, and it wouldn't make much difference.

GERSH: No, that's right.

GOODWIN: There's still other smaller institutions that show modern art. UCLA [Franklin D. Murphy Sculpture Garden] still has the sculpture collection.

GERSH: UCLA really isn't in competition. I think UCLA could continue, because that's a university. I don't know if they've gotten a new director or not; so they're not doing too much of anything.

GOODWIN: That gallery [Frederick S. Wight Art Gallery] is drifting with all the others.

GERSH: Right. So nothing is happening there. I've never found UCLA really in competition to the others. I mean, I think they could coexist. That never has bothered me. I think they can make a contribution, and it wouldn't jeopardize the . . .

GOODWIN: Right, I agree.

GERSH: . . . other institutions. I mean, they can function side by side. They can complement each other. But I don't think UCLA has done anything that's terribly exciting for a long time. They've had a few good shows, but

nothing that's that extraordinary. And since they don't have a director, I don't know. [Charles] Speroni is leaving; he's retiring. And this new person that's coming--I've forgotten his name now. . . .

GOODWIN: I don't remember. [Robert Gray]

GERSH: But he [Speroni] is really head of the fine arts department.

GOODWIN: Right, right.

GERSH: I don't know. They just can't seem to get a curator there. I guess they're still looking.

GOODWIN: Well, it's been a few years.

GERSH: Well, no, Gerry Nordland just left, what, a year or so ago?

GOODWIN: At least two years ago.

GERSH: Is it two years?

GOODWIN: I think the result is I can't figure out why the city needs a new museum of modern art, or an independent museum of modern art. I don't see how that's going to solve any problems.

GERSH: Well, I would like to see that happen, a museum of modern art. There's no reason why they can't have one. I don't know if that would, as you say, solve any problems. I don't know exactly what you mean.

GOODWIN: The basic problem to me seems that there will always be a County Museum, and they will always collect

twentieth-century art. So if there's a separate museum of modern art, the two will be in competition with one another.

GERSH: Oh! Well, to have two different ones--yes, that I agree. I think probably [Marcia] Weisman hopes that the efforts in terms of modern art be [that of] this new museum, and maybe L.A. County should just forget about collecting modern art and just should, you know, stick to . . .

GOODWIN: . . . Indian and Islamic. [laughter]

GERSH: That's right. And not have to worry about it. I mean, that's their thinking. There's no question about that.

GOODWIN: But there are some nice things in the County Museum's collection.

GERSH: Yes, right.

GOODWIN: And I'm not sure they can be duplicated.

GERSH: No, no. I don't know. I don't know what one does. If L.A. County stopped collecting modern art, maybe they would be better off to de-acquisition these things and stick to more classical art forms and put these on the market.

GOODWIN: Sounds awfully risky. But it seems that twentieth-century art belongs in the general history-of-art museum.

GERSH: No question.

GOODWIN: Because the twentieth century enhances the older

art and the older art enhances the twentieth century.

GERSH: I agree, I agree. But unless L.A. County can do this on a fairly stronger basis than the way they're intending to go about it, I don't see the solution. And this new museum, unless there is enough funds to endow that, could go the same route as the Pasadena Art Museum.

GOODWIN: I think that's the precedent for an independent museum of modern art: that the Pasadena museum couldn't survive, so why would another museum be able to survive?

GERSH: The Modern [Museum of Modern Art] is having trouble surviving! I mean, they're building condominiums in order to have more money to survive. They're going in the hole every year.

GOODWIN: That's right.

GERSH: So unless both proposed museums are thought out very carefully, they could both be disasters. I mean just because L.A. County can raise $6 million and build a structure, unless they're going to have a permanent collection to put in it, unless they can continue to acquire art, what's the point of having a building? Obviously, what they are hoping is that people will give their collections to them, but unless the whole setup of the museum improves, I don't see it happening.

GOODWIN: Neither do I.

GERSH: I know [Robert] Rowan is very frightened; he's been

burnt once. He says, "Unless you can show me that there's going to be an adequate endowment. . . ." He'd like to see this happen, but I know he's frightened of it.

GOODWIN: Has he been involved?

GERSH: I know Marcia has contacted him. The big thing with him is he wants to make sure it's not just a question of putting up a building: what are you going to put in it, and how are you going to maintain it?

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: I think with the County there's a certain amount of funds that would be available. Again, unless there's good leadership, unless they have a vital acquisitions program--and not just from the Contemporary Art Council, but from the overall board--I don't see it being a big success. They better go out into the community and really go after people that will really work for it. They've got a lot of deadwood on that board, a lot of deadwood, and that's one of the major flaws. Unless they can get some more active, vital people that really care about the collection and really just won't play lip service, I don't see anything happening there.

GOODWIN: Meanwhile, the County Museum needs a director.

GERSH: Oh, yes, yes. Well, I'm not sure, but I was told that they're going to make an announcement the beginning of next month. They think they've got somebody, <u>if</u> he

takes it. Apparently he's from Detroit.

GOODWIN: Obviously, it's a very difficult process to find a new director, but I can't understand why the job would be attractive to anybody, because there seems to be so many problems, and now there are more problems than ever.

GERSH: Yes. Well, maybe this man feels it's a challenge to him and he can do something. But unless they let him function. . . .

GOODWIN: Right, it'll be terribly frustrating.

GERSH: Yes. Donahue I don't think was frustrated because he didn't care. He functioned in his own way, and that was it.

GOODWIN: It seems to me, unfortunately, that the County Museum is the key institution as far as the health of the contemporary art scene is concerned.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: And if the County Museum at least can't offer a certain amount of goodwill--let alone expertise and leadership--then the scene will tend to disintegrate.

GERSH: Yes.

GOODWIN: And the artists and the collectors and students and faculty and so on are just left . . .

GERSH: . . . high and dry.

GOODWIN: Right.

GERSH: Sure, it's good to have the supporting museum.

There's no question about it. But collectors, if they're interested in seeing art, will go--I mean, most collectors have the opportunity to travel, so they will get to see the good shows; they'll make a point to go see the good shows. For instance, I wanted to see the Noguchi show, so I went up to San Francisco. Now, it's true everybody can't do that, but I think your big collectors here, your prominent collectors, will go and see the shows they want to see.

GOODWIN: It would be a nice feeling among collectors to want these particular pieces, this group of pieces, to go to the County Museum because it belongs there, and it will have a positive impact on the people that live in the area. But it doesn't seem to be that tradition or even responsibility.

GERSH: Well, the collectors don't have that much to say, generally. For instance, I know at the Walker--I visited that institution a few years ago, and it's marvelous, because there they have a superb collection, number one. I mean, the quality, the level of quality, is very high. Martin Friedman goes out and gets what he wants. But he's got a very active board. They support him wholeheartedly. They listen to him, and he's instigated some very, very good shows. They go along with him; so they support him. I think it stems from their leader. Then if you get a

viable group of people who will serve on your board and be active and go stand behind you, then you have the makings of a good museum. But first you have to get a leader that you can respect. Here, the board wants to dominate the director, and when you have that you can't really have an outstanding institution. I think it's very difficult, also, in a general museum. That's another big problem.

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