UNCG ALUMNI ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Peter Agostini

INTERVIEWER: Trudy Atkins

DATE: 1978

[Editor's note: Joan Gregory, art professor and department head at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro [UNCG] was also present at the interview.]

[Begin Tape 1]

JG: —something about the country air—

TA: What kind of series was this?

PA: This was with the World's Fair, you know, when we did works for the World's Fair. All of us did this—[Andy] Warhol [American artist, director and producer who was a leading figure in the visual art movement known as pop art.] and I and [Roy] Lichtenstein [American pop artist who was a leading figure in the new art movement.]—

TA: I didn't get to the World's Fair. Did you all do sculptures?

PA: Paintings, sculptures—

JG: This was in '64

PA: We had a twenty-foot wall at the New York State Building, which we had to do. We each had a section—it was a big brown rotunda—and we all had to do a piece of it.

TA: Well, I'm sorry I didn't have a chance to see it. You know, one thing I was interested in—I heard that you were involved in the WPA [Works Progress Administration] during the [Great] Depression [severe worldwide economic depression that took place mostly during the 1930s]. How did this experience affect—where did you work, for example?

PA: Well, I started out and what I did was teaching for a while, but then they put me on a special project. It was—they did posters. And that's what all the artists were doing—posters. Then they had the genius department, and I go put in there. There were only about four people in there. And the reason I got put in there was because I had no political affiliations.

TA: And that means you're in the genius department?

PA: Well, no. In that department was Jackson Pollock [American painter and a major figure in the abstract expressionist movement who was well known for his unique style of drip painting.] and Zeron [sp?] and that's where I ran into Jackson Pollock. I was working right next to him. His wife was the head [Lee Krasner was an American abstract expressionist painter in the second half of the 20th century.] of everything, I suppose that's how Jackson got married because of the position! So anyway, the only reason I got in there was because there was a big political thing going on—I have no idea; the WPA was devoted to politics—and I was just neutral. I was affiliated with on one; I was alone so I was picked for everything.

TA: And what did you do in this department?

PA: Well, we had to design store fronts and things like that—But the WPA at that time, the [unclear] was on it and he wasn't, Franz Kline [American painter who was associated with the Abstract Expressionist movement of the 1940s and 1950s.] was on it and he wasn't. I don't know, it's very strange.

TA: Well, a lot of post offices in North Carolina have WPA murals which I think—

PA: Well, the biggest mistake—I'm talking about all the states—is that you could have had all the paintings you wanted, all the sculptures you wanted for nothing, and nobody took it. And they dumped it in canals at five cents a pound. You see, at one time, any school, any university would say, "Well, I would like to take this batch of work." And they gave it to them. No cost. And they gave you everything—drawings, watercolors, lithographs, anything you could have had for nothing.

TA: We had no department of art then, did we? It was started—[Chancellor Walter Clinton] Jackson started it.

JG: I'm not sure. Probably traditionally there weren't that many art departments—

PA: No, but—the post office was a job given to anybody who wanted to try it at no extra money. We were all in the 2180 Club—whether you were a shoemaker or a papermaker, 2180 was a place, you see. But there was the prestige of doing something, and that's what they all worked for. You put in a commission, and they gave you this job. And I hit it at the very end—it had been going since the 1930s—and [unclear] started it before that at the Whitney. Mrs. Whitney [Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney was an American sculptor, art patron and collector, and founder in 1931 of the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.] started it—financing artists—and she gave [unclear] getting fifty dollars a week, which then was like getting two thousand dollars a week now. He was getting fifty dollars a week—you know, do whatever you want to with it. So, then she started it. And it was picked up, you know, with the NRA [The National Recovery Administration was a prime New Deal agency established by United States President

Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933.] and all that business, and it started around 1934. And I hit it around 1939-40, because you had to be out of work before you could get on.

TA: Artists traditionally out of work—

PA: You had to be out of work and you had to be on a relief case. You had to establish that, so, you had to be broke. And then they would let you on. But I know a lot of guys—like Barkerelli [sp?] was a millionaire you know, and he was on it. I don't know how he did it—

JG: Political.

TA: Well, how do you view the arts today? Are they alive and well in America?

PA: Well, let's say that art is alive here—really alive. From what I hear in Europe, art is sort of meandering, walking around, but here, I think, art is really—it's like these trotters you see. Everybody's running, you know. Whether they get there or not doesn't matter, but they are jogging. In America, they are really trying to get what they call a real international [unclear]. You see, they couldn't get because he's around the same time as a man like [unclear]. But today, the American artist in Europe is considered—and Japan as well—I realized I am more appreciated in Japan than I am here.

TA: Well, do you think this new appreciation of American art is attributable to any group of artists? When did this start? In the last ten, twenty, thirty years? Since World War II, certainly—

PA: Yes, now I remember—way back now—Elaine de Kooning [American who was an abstract expressionist and figurative expressionist painter in the post-World War II era.] coming up to us (this was in the 40s) right after the war. This was at the very end, and she and Charlie Eagen who had a gallery and she asked me to show and then de Kooning to show and Pollock was showing, Kline was showing. As a group, we were the elders, you know. We were asked to show in that gallery. I didn't show at the time. And I think that Elaine de Kooning was one of the big powerhouses behind moving America into the sphere of international art.

JG: Except in the past year, there have been those exhibitions—What do they call it—the Tenth Street Gallery?

PA: Yes, the Tenth Street Gallery. Before that, she started this thing with Charlie Eagen because that was the beginning. And then also during that time was a fellow named Philip O'Neill [sp?] and he started a club around 1947, you know, and that's when they all got together. And that's where the critics got involved, like Tom Hess, [Harold] Rosenberg and all these people. Before that there was very—it was helter-skelter. No one was really close. So, it takes somebody who tries to get two people together. You know artists were, at that time—we knew each other but we weren't dealing with each other. We were very

private with what we did and we talked, but we were very private. There was no exchange, really, of idea.

Elaine de Kooning had a lot to do with it. She got that critic Tom Hess who was on *Art News*, and it was through her and Philip O'Neill, and then artists started communicating. You know, the club was the first time they started communicating with each other. Before that, we just met people. You know, like I would go and eat with them, and we'd have dinner, but we never really exchanged ideas like they did at that time. They stopped talking about themselves as an idea.

And I remember that time because Franz Kline told me to come up and look at what he was doing. He said, "What do you think of this? I'm going to have a show. What do you think of this? Well, what do you think of it?" [I said,] "Well, I don't know, I just [unclear] it; I don't know what the heck it means!" He was really, you know—the idea was starting to come open then. And [Willem] de Kooning [Dutch abstract expressionist artist] was, at that time—I remember when I saw what he was doing—he was working on *The Glazier*. You know that word?

JG: *Glazier*?

PA: It was one of his paints—he was working on things like that.

JG: Yes, and I think Trudy would be interested in knowing that Elaine de Kooning is one person, and then he's talking about de Kooning the painter, her husband. Her ex-husband.

TA: Ex?

PA: No, they're still married, because he doesn't want to get sued for marriage stuff.

TA: Well, now she was here at one time about five years ago.

JG: Yes, she came to the [Weatherspoon] Gallery several years ago.

TA: For *Women in Art***.**

PA: Well, she was the prime mover, as I said. She even helped.

TA: She's not an artist—

JG: Yes, she is, and the very interesting thing is I talked with her this summer, asking her to come her on (sic) a visiting artist—position, and she said she didn't want to commit herself to a whole month, you know—several months of work—but she would consider coming down for a short while to give a talk because she's interested in UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] after that one trip. She even bought Robbie Tillotson's work. When she was here, she bought one or two of Robbie's pieces.

PA: She wanted to buy the ones I bought.

TA: Tillotson is very bizarre, isn't it?

PA: Well, he's getting more bizarre now. He's getting more bizarre, and his work is getting a little too located.

TA: Do you think New York is the best place for a young artist today?

PA: One thing you do in New York—you either get killed or you survive.

TA: Well, that's good.

PA: You can play the game, and it can be political—you can gain a political position, you can get a show and it can wipe you out. And that's what happened to Tillotson. He had a show, he sold very well, and then automatically he was finished, because the impact that he had—when he comes in with that kind of an impact, he's going to have to duplicate it in another way. You see what I mean? You see, in New York the one thing you do is show. They go crazy about you. The next year, they'll wipe you right out.

TA: You've got to be always changing, always improving?

PA: No, you've got to be strong. That's all I can say. I've had already sixteen on-man shows, and I always get credit, better than the first. No matter what I do, they know I'm crazy, but they will admit that— "What is he doing now?" That's all they worry about—what am I going to do next? I don't have to worry about what they think. That's the position I take.

JG: You know, I think Trudy might be interested, too, in the ways that you have helped students from here in New York.

PA: Yeah, I tried to set up a whole gallery, which they could never get to show. And we really—you see, I know the people on the magazines and we used to get a review all the time for this same gallery.

JG: We had this gallery for one year. Peter organized that. And students and faculty were poured back in.

PA: I wanted to set up a headquarters. I still may think of doing that again—

JG: But, it worked very well, and it would have continued but—and this is in the area where Elaine de Kooning started those first galleries. That was one of the reasons that it was—It wasn't on the main avenue of galleries or in the main center. It was back on Tenth Street.

PA: But, it did get good reviews and people did sell there, which is rare because a lot of galleries start, they don't get reviewed and they don't sell, you know—

JG: And the other thing you've done that, I think, you know, is very good and very supportive of our program is let students meet at your place, or Peter's had them help him with his work in New York or something to give them a chance—I don't know how many people are up there now. Gary is one that is up there now working—Gary Dodson is up there—

PA: You see, I can give them the show, the place; I can get them seen by, you know *Crafts Horizon,* you know the editor of that—she'll come down, and I could also get the artists to come, because what I was doing with that gallery was a very strange. It got to be so well-liked that the artists wanted in. I'm talking about well-known artists that would show in the galleries, and the very next year, they wanted to show—people who already had some reputation. Because they liked the feel; you know, it's like they felt here is a place where they could let go and be, and not be taught by every type of restriction.

JG: If you wanted it, I'm sure that we could get you a list of the students.

TA: Now this was a year ago.

JG: It was a year ago.

TA: And we've lost it now?

JG: No, the fellow that Peter was working with had brain shock—

PA: He had to get out of there, but he wants to get back into it.

JG: He had to get out of the building.

PA: He wants to get back into it, so I'll help him set it up.

TA: We've thought about having a sort of pad up there for university students to use—the whole campus-wide university. I know [Dean of Students] Cliff Lowery has tried to get this started, and Appalachian [State University in Boone, North Carolina] has a loft—

PA: Yes, well, that's where Robbie is.

TA: And if we could do something of that sort—we might have a loft—I guess you couldn't though, you would have to have it in a certain location. Do certain neighborhoods have the art exhibits?

PA: Did I tell you about that one loft we had? A friend of mine was going to take it, and something happened, but it's a floor that's open. It's 779—

JG: That's a building, Peter?

PA: They're part owners of this building. The rents are going to be high, anywhere from $700, for what you want, to $1,000 a month.

JG: I think that loft idea is very interesting. We could get off on another conversation about that but it's a tremendous amount of responsibility for the students up there because a lot of times, the students go up there and they don't know how to deal with New York City.

TA: And it's getting more difficult—well, not more difficult—

JG: And at first Appalachian had that and art people used it. Then, they let it into the whole colleges university, and then the next thing I heard they were allowing other colleges and universities to rent it.

TA: That's bad.

JG: Robbie's not too happy with it, because he said he's had real difficulties in the students, and most of them came up just for a weekend in New York rather than a—he was very upset because he had arranged trips to artists' places and the students were just—not very—

TA: Serious in purpose—

JG: They were not very serious.

PA: By the way, what are you really interested in?

TA: I'm interested in the student in the liberal arts college and art. How do our students in this college—are they in the art world or are they venturing forth and what is the place—?

PA: Oh, yes. We've had tremendous—a lot of the people are getting into the thing like Gary is going to get a gallery, that I know—and he will sell—and she's going to be with one of the galleries there, the Landmark [Galleries], by the way, is a very—this Landmark is part of—it has something to do with one on my street. It has to do with new ideas. It belongs to OK Harris and he's going to have a show.

JG: Well, Gary Dodson, the student we're talking about, received his MFA last year, and Gary was one of the students who was in this Four by Ten Gallery.

PA: So was Robbie Tillotson.

JG: Yes, he had a show there also. But Gary also worked in the foundry. And then Gary went up to New York, he made contacts by being up there with that gallery, doing things like that, and the work he found was working in a foundry. He's living there, working in a foundry—and doing his work—

PA: He's doing a lot of work, and he's getting reviewed and seeing a lot of people.

JG: But that's just one of quite a few students—oh, Beth Balen and Eric Balen. This is another girl—one of our graduate students who just had an opening the other day, and they're living in New York.

PA: What about that girl—what was her name?

JG: Mildred Stanley.

PA: Yeah. I introduced her to some people there. She may get a big gallery.

TA: The art world is pretty closed, isn't it? Don't you think, unless you have some entrée—

PA: The entrée, if you've got the work, you'll get plenty of people to talk. It's very simple. That's all it is. If you have the work, somebody will back you. Oh, this is what I've been hoping. We have to—you know, this is what I've been talking about to Joan about—the creative world of the kindergarten. Because we're being fed from the high schools is not conducive to what we're trying to teach. Isn't that true?

JG: Probably—I think there's a little bit more now—background—

PA: The background comes in—it's that we have to rehash something that they probably should have known before they walked in. So, it puts us in a position to, you know, treat background again. You're back there, when you can advance them up here. That's what I was talking to you about. Ideas could be advanced more, if we could get the teaching that they get to come in—if we could talk to them. You know, we get them from all various parts.

TA: Might do well to have short course for high school art teachers, wouldn't it?

JG: No, we've done things like that—we've had workshops for them. We are getting a lot of our students back in—

PA: No, but there should be a cycle, see, this is what I was saying. There should be a position for some of the excellent teachers that I've found endeared with. I told you about, like [unclear] should be teaching; he's an excellent teacher. He's an aware guy. And we have to let go, sometimes, of people because the school prods on, you know, taking on people that we feel that have something. Like we couldn't hire a guy like Robbie Tillotson, because, you know, he's somewhere else, right?

JG: You know, of course, those were all—that's something you can't talk about now because it involves positions, money, advertising—the whole hiring thing is so different from the way it used to be, like when you could just bring somebody in for art part-time. You can't do it.

PA: Because when you bring people down, right, you give them a point of view from people who are upper to us—the people in New York, right—and they're supposed to be dealing

with ideas.

JG: That's right.

PA: Now, I know a lot of these people that I said was—I see myself, but I know a few that become like top babies, and those are the ones I think you have to get because when a guy gets that tough, you know, to get there, he's going to really have something back, you know. He's not going to be—he's going to be his own man. That's what I mean. And that's hard to get here, right? Not that—It's just hard to get them because they don't give a damn anymore when they get to that stage, you know—being tough babies.

JG: And you can't afford them. And the other thing is that they really are so involved in their work. It's like Elaine de Kooning. They're working, and that's where all their energy and efforts are going.

PA: Yeah, it's like I was talking to Marisol [Escobar was a French sculptor of Venezuelan heritage who worked in New York City.] She went out to Minnesota and they disrespected her so much that she got very nervous and left, you know, before her time because they made her feel so unacceptable. And this is out in Minnesota. She was telling me the story about it, and she's something like Elaine de Kooning. She believes in right down into the guts of things, you know. I told you another one about the—what's one of those lights?

JG: Prism?

PA: —fantastic woman, you know? I've known her for years, and she once wrote an article how she feels people she one wrote an article how she feels people should profess. And there's a lot of women today in the field that are fantastic people. I mean that I've known from the past that are unbelievable, you see?

TA: Do you think that a woman artist—do you see any difference between any way of classifying male and female artists?

PA: We never did. You see, that is the point people—they all think. You see, I've known Louise Nevelson [American sculptor who was known for her monumental, monochromatic, wooden wall pieces and outdoor sculptures.] since the 40s, you know, and there were women artists and men artists. You know, like [Helen] Frankenthaler [American abstract expressionist painter who was a major contributor to the history of postwar American painting.] and you know—

JG: They were artists.

PA: Yeah. And we never looked at them any different. They were like us—trying to see what they could do. They all came in with us. If you look at that time, you'll find out there was equal male, equal female. Just take a look at that period. The ones that I'm talking about that would be close to my age.

TA: Well, and there's no female word for artist. You don't say artist-woman or artist-man—

PA: No, we never had that. We never had that situation because I don't think we even wondered what we were—whether we were male or female didn't matter. It was like it was a point of view you had.

TA: I'm interested in some of the things you're doing now, though. You're chiefly black and white. You're not using much color in your work, is that correct?

PA: Well, I'm not a painter. I'm a sculptor.

TA: Well, do people not put color in some sculpting—no—well, the reason I asked—

PA: Yes, I did.

JG: Yes, I was going to say he had. You asked a good question, because you are doing some color, aren't you? All those old ladies' pieces—

PA: I started—early pieces. I started way back in the 50s doing it. You know, my *Hurdy Gurdy*, my *Lollipop Rollercoster*. It's all color. And that was on the *U.S. Steel* cover at one time. No, I don't specifically say no color or color. It's just a matter of appeal, you know?

TA: Well, certain forms you think—you use plaster and clay, and I guess those two things—

PA: Yes, have their colors of their own. And I remember I was introducing crazy colors into my bronzes, and people were saying, "Come on, Peter, what are you doing now?—with his blues and his grays, you know." And I was getting them conscious of the variations on that idea because the French idea was, you know, that French brown. And I started introducing blues into my work. I did one in silver, my *Clothesline.* I don't know how it stood up, but I did that in silvers, you know. I don't think of sculptor as a separate idea from painting. It's just that people just don't like sculpture. It's one of the least desired arts. I mean not only here, but in Europe, anywhere.

TA: But it's coming into its own much more now, don't you think?

PA: It has been. A lot of painters, you know, want to get into sculpture. Like de Kooning asked me many years ago, "You want to get into sculpture?" Now he's in it. Barney Newman [American artist who was one of the major figures in abstract expressionism and one of the foremost of the color field painters.]—into sculpture. They love the idea, because they resent color doing the talking. And they want the form. You know, it's like the absence of form creates the need for form. And they love to see what the exploration of what light does itself. The way it breaks open pieces—scintillates—

TA: I remember your show of the inner tubes. You know, all those "swells," you called them. But how did you conceive the idea for that?

PA: I don't know. I never know—I worked with inflation. I was trying to figure how you could bring something up to the explosion point and get so tight that its poof. A couple did! But that' what I was always doing. Then I also wanted to do decadent forms, and [Claes] Oldenburg [American sculptor who is best known for his public art installations typically featuring large replicas of everyday objects.] picked up on that. You know, the way I would collapse a form. And then moving form. I with water, I worked with air and floating. And, in other words—

TA: How did you work with water?

PA: I use to fill things up with water. You know, and shake them, and I would get a different kind of shake. Thick and thin.

JG: Talking about air or water being the inner energy.

PA: Yeah, they are different things. Like, you know, water will throw weights all around. You know, when you touch it—Then I decided to tie things down and make them work. And then I had one where I put it in a cage of pipes, you know, and see the thing come out of a cage. One I did bend the pipes because my pipes couldn't hold the stress, so I quit that one because that could explode and kill me. But I was playing with all these kinds of forces—these natural forces, you see. I tried to do a waterfall once in plaster and it—I'm only interested in movement and natural forces, you see. And that was one of them. And I get on the idea—I told you about the balloon. I was always curious about the balloon, so I decided I would make the American balloon, the American beauty, you know. And I did touch up it. I made the perfect balloon. Nobody could do a balloon again. And it had to be the perfect measurement.

TA: Where is this?

PA: Oh, this is—I have one up in New York. And it's the perfect shape, that's all. The American Beauty, as they call it. And I did the balloon fountain because I was trying to get rid of the base. You know, I don't like bases. I like everything bright and round, you know, like horses, you know. And I did the balloon fountain, and that started me off on this "swell" idea. Actually, I tried every crazy idea—I don't know—putting plaster into things—making it work—

TA: Well, the work with plaster and quantities, the masses that you do, you have to be pretty strong and in good condition. How do you stay in good shape? Do you exercise or jog?

JG: That's what she asked. Of course, I'm going on seventy.

TA: Really, Well, what's your secret?

PA: That's what we're trying to figure out. I always keep going. Like Joan can tell you, I can keep, I can stay up for a week working. Just working.

TA: Well, that's excitement of your work, and then you collapse, and then you rest—

PA: I never collapse, I just—

TA: Well, you go to sleep sometimes—

PA: Yeah, I'm like a horse. I lean against a wall.

JG: Take a cat nap in the middle of the day—

TA: Now, part of that may be hereditary. You might have inherited a very strong body, but you've got to keep your muscles going and you just don't do that—work—I guess you can use your muscles in your work—

PA: You see what I get. I just did almost a life-size horse. And I have to cope with these students. If they can't lift it, I'm going to have to lift it. And I do. And then when they see I do, they have to because—[chuckle]

JG: Sometimes students can't lift or don't have as much—Peter will be working sometimes and the students will be down assisting him and they'll come in just completely worn out and Peter will come walking in [and say], "Ha, they can't keep the hours."

TA: Well, a lot of it's mental, too.

PA: Oh, yeah. I believe in this that you can extend yourself totally, you know. I think our illusion is—the illusion of being tired is just an illusion. I really believe that.

TA: Oh, sure. And lack of success is very tiring, I think. I think disappointment and discouragement—

PA: Yeah, but when I get disappointed, I just go into a rage. I go after something—And I blow my top. As soon as I do that—

TA: Because you're accustomed to success, maybe, you know.

PA: No, I've never been unsuccessful in my life.

TA: That's part of it.

PA: No, I mean unsuccessful—If I want to do something, I'll do it. Whether anybody else accepts it or not, I could care less. I remember even when I had my first show—now nobody had seen my work at all—it was done in lousy little gallery like for prints downstairs.

TA: How old were you?

PA: Forty-six. I refused to show my work before then. Then I just felt like doing it. And I had that show and that made me. But it also—if I had that show and I failed, that was it. I wouldn't be here. See, those are the chances I took.

TA: What would you have done?

PA: Keep doing my work.

TA: But if you had not succeeded at this—

PA: I wasn't looking for success. You see, most people are. I remember the woman coming to it. She said, "I don't particularly care for you as an artist." It's okay; who cares? She wanted a certain guy name Will Horowitz whom she thought was a genius. So, she said—he was only about in his twenties—and she said, "Somebody told me that you do sculpture and I have to have something to fill in my place." And I said, "Well, take it and get out of here." I just gave it to her. I said, "I hate drawings; I'm not showing you any. Take the sculpture and get out." And she put up the show, and you know what she did? She put up plants and she put up my sculpture and she was only advertising French prints, you know? Lithographs and things. And I was on the bottom. "Also, sculpture by A. Peter Agostini" on the bottom in small print. Well, the artists saw that, they looked at the work and they like it. And then they asked her who I was and they told her if she doesn't (sic) take down all the flowers and the prints, they would break her window. That was Franz Kline and all the others. They said, "He gets the show. Get that junk out of here." So, she got scared and she did it. I made it. All the papers wrote about me. I got three pages in *Art News.* Then I also sold out the show.

TA: Well, now you started as an artist. Did you start with drawings and sketches, or did you start with sculpting?

PA: I started out to—no reason whatsoever. I wasn't interested in being an artist; I knew I could do it. I was nine and I could do it, I was ten and I could do it, and after that there was no need to worry about that.

TA: You knew you could do it!

PA: Yes, these drawings I used to do for teachers, I remember I was only eleven, I was in a Catholic school and I used to do these big crucifixions, horses and everything, and give it to them.

TA: Well, all the influences you—you have no particular influence. What artist would you say—one artist—has particularly influenced your work more than the other? [Henri] Matisse [French artist who was known for both his use of color and his fluid and original draughtsmanship.], I know, has been mentioned.

PA: They mention Matisse. Matisse was—I was indifferent to Matisse. [Pablo] Picasso [Spanish artist who was a painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, stage designer, poet

and playwright]. I knew all about them. And the only guy that really bugged me was Michelangelo [Italian artist who was a sculptor, painter, architect, and poet of the High Renaissance.] I just wonder how in the heck he got so good, you know, and that was all that bothered me. And I didn't try to copy him. And I figured, "How do you get that good?" So, I—

TA: Have you ever taken a piece of marble and just gone into it the way he did?

PA: Yes! I did it—in fact, the fellow that gave me the marble said, "Can you carve this?" and I said, "Sure, give me the chisel and hammer. Is that what you carve it with?" In four hours, I finished a piece. I don't believe in—like, you know, they say "How do you get the clay?" I just get it.

JG: I think Peter said something a while ago that is important—that he deals with ideas or he was seeing somebody else that deals with ideas. And we discussed this. A lot of contemporary artists are—not artists—but people involved in—I'm talking about students. They get too caught up in the technique or whether it can or cannot be done. Peter just does it. And if, along the way, it doesn't work the way you started out, you make adjustments. You know, just keep going with it, but there have been times when you have been working alone on a piece of sculpture down there that people say, "Well, you know, it won't stand this weight or plaster won't do what he did with plaster."

TA: Well, look at the waterfall. You know, occasionally things are bound to not work.

JG: Yes, and they don't work, but that's no reason to stop. Just keep trying, keep going.

TA: Is this the message you give kids—to innovate, to try—

PA: No, I try to really be strict and I try to pin them where I wish somebody had pinned me. I resent the fact that I can just float the way I do, because I can never get singular, you know, and I believe in being singular. Isn't that funny? And yet I'll—I don't believe in going here, going there, going rampant. I can stop with it, you know. Which means I've never found anything that's durable enough for my desire to hold. In other words, I'm always on the verge of letting go. I'm not thinking, or on the point of thinking, of getting there. I want to let go. So, when I get an idea, I want to let go of it. I don't want to know about it. Like I wish that anytime I do something, somebody takes it, gets everything done with it, sends me the money and I never see it again. Because I'm not involved with anything I've ever done. I hate it. And I'm loaded with it—I've got 2,000 pieces of sculpture. I don't know that the hell to do with the damn stuff. That's what I'm paying rent for. In New York, I've got to buy a damn building to store the damn stuff. There are two floors of stuff that—piles. And somebody said, "Peter, if you ever were not lazy, you would practically pack the city." And that's true, because that's how fast it comes out of my hand. Don't do that because I could put up that thing in no time. If I think I'm in trouble, I have to be absolutely stupid all the way.

TA: Well, your pieces are emotional, I look at them and I can see the feeling there. And your figures, especially—

JG: —especially these last figures. The old man series. But it's not so different from the other work, and you're talking about the internal forces. And we're talking about the internal forces of the body as its involved with the aging, sagging skin. You know you were talking about that—

PA: Well, somebody told me on the plane that [unclear] the part of Dorian Gray. Maybe—I suppose. But I really believe that—you see, you could see that I'm about—more than I can. I cannot see my work at all. I cannot see its content at all. I just make something and I want to get away from it. You know, it doesn't feed me back. I just want to move on.

TA: Well, when you do something that may have a Chinese influence or something. You know, your horses, the Tang Dynasty, I think you mentioned—or you do something that has a Hindu influence—what causes you, or have you seen something or read something or what suddenly jars your consciousness to produce?

PA: Well, I look at what they did. I realize the kind of innate, inner quality that they keep going. How they approach it with that inner feeling like when I look at the horses of the Chinese—they're superb because they are the horse, you know. I'm not that interested in "a," I'm interested in "the horse." I wondered about making "the," not "a," you see? So, when I did the old man, it was "the" old man. I did an old woman, by the way, that was fantastic. Do you know I sold my edition out? The old woman—everybody bought that instead of the pretty girls.

TA: Speaking of girls, Sharon Mabe works for me and she said that you compared the derriere of a horse to the derriere of a woman. I didn't see the similarity—until I looked at your horse—

PA: There never is. You look at a man and he is the front of a horse. Front legs. You see, like the explicates, you know. The explicates of a man are here.

TA: You never see a female-looking horse, do you? I guess it is masculine-looking.

PA: In the front.

JG: The muscular quality of the upper part of the leg.

PA: That's right, it's like the horse, you know. And the sensuality and the leisureness is in the back.

JG: And the gracefulness.

PA: Yes, all of the beauty.

JG: Because if you see a photograph of a horse running head on, this is real force. But then if you see a side view, it's quite different.

TA: Well, I even asked someone who was born on a farm. I looked up your horses, and I understood what you meant, and I said, "Did you ever see it this way?" And they said, "No, they had never seen that." It takes an artist to notice those things.

PA: Well, I was just talking to a girl who says an artist's position is they say, "If you were to let water, like in a piece of sculpture, go over a rock—they thought that would be realistic." I said, "No." I said, "What you have done—how many people look at a waterfall?" They don't register. But what an artist does—what they call realism, is not realism. They register a point, and they pin you to see that. You see? If an artist were to sculpt a landscape, let's say, he would make you see the tree in the placement of the hill, into the valley which you would be able to know that you were seeing. See what I mean? The artist—they key you in to an experience.

Like [William] Blake said, "A grain of sand is all life. Is the whole world." ["To see a World in a Grain of Sand—"] And that's all an artist can do. He can perceive. Now no perceivement that he makes is real. It's an illusion. Everybody's eyes see it differently. You see an illusion. There's no such thing as realism because if you put ten realistic paintings together, you'll see they're all different, every one of them. If they paint the same thing realistically.

TA: Now you say that you are not interested in the present or the past, but you always look to the future, you paint in the future, you see in the future. I thought this was very interesting, you know, like you're in a car, you're always looking ahead. I think that's very interesting, but for an artist, usually the past is so important, but not for creating.

PA: Every artist has it. In every one of us, we were the artist in the past. Every one of us was somewhere there. See, I believe that we are a continuum of the past, and that we don't have to look at it. We are it.

[End Tape 1—Begin Tape 2]

PA: I'll tell you why people sometimes talk to me. Because I'm very frontal. I have nothing to hide, because I don't give a damn. I have nowhere to go.

TA: Well, you like people, you like people sort of, too.

PA: I love the investigation of every living thing. It's as simple as that. I was watching the Catawba work, figuring out what the devil is he—yesterday, going crazy, trying to stop it. But there were thousands of them, and I couldn't deal with them. I'm involved with—

JG: But we were also talking to you also about those times when you're alone. When you're involved, you're involved. When you're involved with your work, you're involved with your work—

PA: You see I always found out that I want to be alone, but when I'm alone, I hate it. So, I don't know what to do about that. So, there's the confusion. You see? So, then I realized I'm completely chaotic and I'm not going to get myself a reason because I don't care anymore. If I start worrying about what I should be, I am extremely lazy, and I get mad at myself. But If I work hard, I don't believe I've done anything. So, I don't know what to do about it. So, why bother?

JG: Do you think that's the characteristic of ambivalence that's attributed to creative people? It disturbs people because there's not this preciseness, but today it's one thing and tomorrow it's another?

PA: Yeah.

JG: And it not a matter of not having an opinion, but it's taking each thing at the moment and looking at it from all point of view, and then moving on to the next. Just like we were talking about your work.

PA: —once said to me, "Peter, you're so strong." And I said, "Like hell. I'm so damn weak. Let's remember that. What do you mean strong? I could be wiped out in two seconds." And he says, "Oh, come on." And I said, "Come on, examine yourself." And he said, "You know, I think you're right." Well, she felt very weak. You are, you know? And the only thing I think an artist has the advantage—he really knows there's no time when he's going to be with it, you know? He's always floating. He's absolutely lost, and he has the advantage of understanding that, whereas most people wonder about being found. So, he gives up on being found, you see?

TA: You speak as though you write very well. Do you write? Have you ever done any writing?

PA: Oh, yeah. I've written thousands of poems.

TA: Oh, is that, right? Your description of New York City specifically is very poetic.

PA: Yeah, I know. That was in that—

TA: Brochure, "New York is—"

PA: Whenever they asked me to write something, I remember I used to have—I said, "Look, now don't you correct. Now don't try to make me grammatically right." Because she takes grammatics, you know. So, I write. "I bet you try change this. Go ahead. Change this. See what happens. It doesn't would as good. Stick with what I say." See, what I believe in—I once wrote for Hess six essays about wherever I am. And I wrote the

beginning thereabouts 1960, and that's what I wrote. Then thought about a drop of water, and I wrote about that. Then I wrote about the hauntings, and I wrote about that. And then I wrote about—what else did—? The lacing words, you know. You know, in other words, what I'm trying to do is create the illusion by word to word to word. And then drop it. Word to word to word. Slam it together. In other words, exactly what you would do in art. Slam things together. You create—it's drama with words. And the word eventually becomes the image. And then the image becomes the idea. And I've been doing that—it's like that thing I wrote when I was trying to get a—some money here on a horse. You remember the one I sold. "The horses flight, the horse delight—"

JG: That was a research grant—

PA: [unclear]

JG: Did you get the grant?

PA: No.

JG: It wasn't set up scientifically.

PA: Well, you should be surprised what I wrote in when I was trying to get the good one. I said, "You know I write, because I am a sculptor. You know that that is what I am involved with. And you know that I am going to need money and that's the answer."

TA: But you know most of our summer research grants on campus—I've never known one to go to art, come to think of it. It's all going to things like—

JG: Yeah, art—

PA: They should have granted me the money.

JG: [Mark] Gottsegen [artist and UNCG art professor] got one. Those summer grants are for junior faculty.

TA: Oh, is that it.

JG: And he received one.

PA: You see, if I were in a real college with money they would have financed me with a big studio, and in the process, I would fill that studio and that would be relegated to them in the sense that of taking out a piece, you know. And it could have been very lucrative to them, and lucrative to me. You know, like what I did when I did those oxbows. There for two weeks, I knocked off ten pieces, you know, because they gave the space and the financing to just do it, you know.

JG: Let me ask you a question, then. What has kept you here? It certainly hasn't been the money or the financial benefits. Is there some reason why you stay here?

PA: I like it, I like it. You know, because I never heard of Greensboro when I first came here.

TA: How did you happen to come here?

PA: [Bert] Carpenter [artist and UNCG art professor] was chasing me, and I realized he meant—by the way, did you know he made a bet with somebody? And—

JG: He did?

PA: And you know what I was known at that time? Ask him. "Mr. New York" Nobody could get me out of New York. I refused any job I was offered—Oxford, Berkeley, Chicago—no deal. I used to make such fabulous amounts that I wanted, they'd say, "We can't afford it" I said, "Good!" And I quit Columbia. I told them I wanted $50,000 a year; if you can't give it to me, it's finished. And they said, "We can't give it to you." [I said,] "Good, I quit."

JG: So, Bert got you to come down.

PA: You know, he [said,] "I want you to come down here." And I liked it, you know. I don't know why. I sat talking to come kids here. They were really tough. I could have gotten hit with a bunch of [unclear]. They started cussing at me. So, I cussed back at them. I got to like them, you know. And we got a repartee, so I said, "I'll take a chance." I never wanted to teach. That wasn't what I was up at Columbia for. And when I didn't know whether I could teach. That was another problem. Because I never went to school, so how the hell would I know how to teach. See?

And then when I started to teach, I started looking at it and said, "Why do they do what they do?" You know, they start doing all this—that doesn't make sense. And it's something I never found out. And I made them do something that I would never have done, you know—how to key in. It was that keying in that made me start teaching, and everybody got to liking it, I didn't know why. And it got to be an idea—the way I teach, like the way I teach painting, the way I teach sculpture, you know? And, in a way, in New York they think I'm unique, because nobody teaches the way I do. You know, no one.

TA: What is the most important thing, you think, you tell the kids when they get in there so they—?

PA: Well, Joan can tell you more about that. I don't know—How do I get—?

JG: I don't know about an answer to that, but once Peter told me—we were talking about teaching—and he said the most important thing about teaching is making them curious. I thought that was a very interesting, very revealing—

TA: That's certainly true, isn't it? Really.

JG: That—the whole point—the work and the way you approach it was just to make them more curious about it so that they look at that momentum going, so they will continue working.

PA: They'll find out where they're going. But you're always going to get people who will make a mechanistic approach to things, but this is in the world. Some are mechanistic and some are flawed, you see. So, that's the way—but you've got to understand that and not feel it's your teaching. I realize that some people just don't move.

TA: And they don't want to move.

PA: Oh, no. Like somebody said, "Well, how do these people survive?" I said, "They're lucky. They want nothing, and they're fed. That's what television does—ninety percent of the human race is a somnambulistic world. So, sleep on it. But the other reason they're born is because their parents decided the issue. Not because they did. And they just linger on as long as they can and vanish. Well, what else are you going to do?

TA: Of course, I think it hurts a lot at times to create. I mean, you know, you're always up and down, up and down. The creative person—

PA: It's delicious too.

TA: Sure, it is, but that's what living is. If you don't know the pits, how are you going to know the heights?

PA: That's what people should learn to do. Nobody can tell you; you go by your own feelings. You know when you're hurt. You know when you're not hurt. You know when you're happy. I don't think either state is important, as long as you are there the next day, that's okay. And as long as you want to see the next day, that's okay. But how many people want to see the next day? That's the key. And that's why people die. They don't want to see the next day. That's why people die young.

TA: And a lot of people die right after they retire.

PA: Exactly.

TA: —into that routine—

PA: Which is important. People should be kept—you should keep most people in a routine. They love it. They should not get angry and get mad, you know. You know, they shouldn't bitch about it, but that is not important, you see? As long as they can do that, they are alive. But once you cut that away from them, you dismiss them. Well, the government at one time was smart. They don't want to pay these people money. They love to stick to [age] sixty-five, because they figure ninety percent of them would drop

dead and they don't have to give them money. You kidding? You have a ruthless bunch of people in the government. They're always thinking money, they're not thinking people. You see? How to balance the budget, it's not how to balance people.

TA: Well, I think people have ceased to care about people, is one problem, too. They've thrown it all over on the government to take care of all the problems that we used to have.

PA: Exactly.

TA: America's gotten in a mess.

PA: I think eventually you're going to have art in all the universities. Like right now, the central force will be art in everything, you know, because everybody wants to know something about who they are. You know, they really are curious about that now these kids. "What am I? I want to be me." They say, "Well, what does that mean?" Well, I don't know, but I want to be me," you know? But they never recognize it. That's what they won't recognize is what they are. But the only thing they will recognize is that when they feel something else, that's where he is. See? That's not according to protocol.

That's why they had all these crazy things going on in the 60s, you know? And I remember I had a class of queens, you know, SDS [Student for a Democratic Society] students running in my class, "All right, to hell with this teacher! Go out there and do it." They said, "Shut up." And the kids said, "Look, get out of this class. We like it here. We don't need your talk," you know? And the guy said, "What do you need?" They said," If you stay here about one hour, you'll stay in the class too." Because I used to talk with them, give ideas to them. They wouldn't leave the class. And they were raging all over the place, breaking windows and everything.

And I went over to have coffee, I went in the cafeteria and they came running in and I was watching this. And one of the leaders comes over to me and says, "Want a cup of coffee?" And I says, "Yeah." Get me coffee, by the way, a Danish." So, he goes and gets me a Danish. They were wrecking this place. He says, "Well, what do you do?" I says, "I teach." [He says,] "Really? Well, you're okay." And they kept going. But they can't get me, you know. This kind of raging world. You know, the world I was born in, my God. I told you—Hell's Kitchen. I knew all the men Dutch Schultz, Legs Diamond. I knew all the gangsters. I know them personally. And I've known people like this. To me, they're the same guy who goes and breaks the bricks and does all that. So, nobody scares me.

TA: Did you have any art in your family?

PA: Oh, yeah. We had the art both ways. The gangs were on one side, and the artists on the other. My brother was a painter, my cousin was a rum runner. And he got shot and we didn't, that's all.

TA: Agostini is an Italian name.

PA: It's Italian, yeah. And, well, I'm not an Italian.

TA: You're not?

PA: I'm a Dalmatian.

TA: You mean the Dalmatian coast?

PA: Yeah. You ever been there?

TA: No. I know where it is. Well, that's Yugoslavian?

JG: That's very close to Venice—

PA: See, my people came from Venice, went there for political reasons. That was the Switzerland of the old world. You know, if you didn't agree politically—

TA: I think Italian people feel more keenly, you know. There's nothing cold.

JG: But now where is the Irish ancestry? Your mother?

PA: No, no. that's my stepmother. She broke me up when I had a girl over there. I told you when I was young—

TA: Well, now that's a good combination. The Irish are hot-blooded—

PA: And sometimes when I would get very drunk. I could go into there—I could speak with the Irish brogue. I joined the Irish Revolution, you know, in 1914. Sure. I knew O'Flaherty and all the guys that were fighting it out there. The Clancy brothers used to hold meetings in my place. That's because my wife was Irish.

TA: Oh, you married an Irish woman also? Well, tell me about art and religion. Do you feel that there is an alliance there? You know, in the old days, religion was the patron of the arts.

PA: I know, but not anymore.

TA: You think the spirit exits.

PA: In what way?

TA: I was just wondering—well, the most beautiful things of the past were created through the church—

PA: That's right.

TA: —and now, the church has lost its place. I mean it's no longer—

PA: Well, it really doesn't exist as an art patron at all.

TA: The government is more the patron of the arts now, in this last decade?

PA: There is that, but there is also the private market.

JG: Private industry.

PA: Like people who have bought me are billionaires, like Liszt, Albert Liszt and Hirschhorn. These guys are loaded.

TA: He's done a wonderful thing.

JG: When you think about the Dillons, the Rockefellers. And if it's not that, it's the banks or the—well, just take the example of North Carolina—Wachovia [Bank]. The—lately [R.J.] Reynolds [Tobacco Company] has fine work, and NCNB [North Carolina National Bank]—

TA: And Ciba-Geigy [Swiss pharmaceutical company] has certainly done a lot—

PA: Yeah, they've bought a lot of me—

JG: You know, we do have some support now from the government.

PA: But it gets, but you notice, it's predicated, you know. Like North Carolina has a way of seeing things like North Carolina. You go somewhere else, they see differently, you know. And the private interests here has a way of buying certain things which will not attract certain types of people. Like, I could not have done well here, seriously, because I was talking to Joan, I have not sold here at all. Like, no private collector has me here at all.

TA: Had people known you were here—I think we need to—

PA: I've been here twelve years. They know quite will. But no one—

JG: They know. They know Peter but I don't think that he's been known as much about his influence, you know, about the arts, the horses—They have no idea.

PA: I never sold here. I'm serious.

TA: Well, maybe that could change. You know, there is a new interest in sculpture in Greensboro. In Winston-Salem, especially, you go right, everywhere you go—

PA: I gave a lecture there. They drove me out of town. They were ready to tar and feather me.

TA: Really? In Winston?

PA: Yeah, because I—they opposed my religion. I asked them who God was, and they got real mad. And I started perceiving certain things and one guy said, "We should kill you." You know this guy was so quiet, and—

JG: This was at the Arts Council.

PA: Yeah. They really got angry.

JG: Peter's had only two major shows here. He had one—

TA: Maybe that's one of the problems.

JG: One in North Carolina at the Ackland [Museum in Chapel Hill]. You know, at Ackland—

PA: That was the best, right?

JG: —which was a very good show. That was with the Southeastern Art Education Association, who was sponsoring it.

PA: You broke some protocol.

JG: That was the first time that a North Carolina artist had ever been—had a single work there. And then, of course, one show quite some time ago, you know—"Swells"—

PA: Yeah, which I did here.

JG: And yet Peter's had—you've had a major New York show practically every year.

TA: Well, we ought to have one here, very much so.

JG: Well, I think those—

PA: I would do anything for Joan but that's it. You see, that's the way I feel. Like I would have never given that show to anyone but you of the artist, because I didn't like those people at the Mint Museum [Charlotte, North Carolina] or any museum, even the Ackland. Because I had little repercussion with him; remember when we talked? It isn't I—you see, there're some people that really respect you, you know? And I used to talk with Joan before Joan was—you know. We were good friends, you know? I just got to like certain people and other people I just don't like, that's all. That's the way it is. That's the way it'll go.

TA: Well, you know, have you ever been to Yaddo [artists community located on a 400-acre estate in Saratoga Springs, New York]? You know, the Saratoga Springs? Well, David Bass has just gotten back; he's a young—he got him MFA in '75, I think.

JG: You know—

TA: David Bass. You remember David Loren Bass? Well, he just got back from Yaddo and sent me some information about his experience there, but in it he quoted a New York artist who had spent a time there and she said, "At Yaddo the artists are treated in the manner in which they secretly think they deserve to be treated."

PA: Which is very true.

TA: Oh, I think artists—because it is such a special field that so many people don't understand—and writers, too, suffer from this, I think, but there's many grades of writing and there's only one great art—

PA: Oh, I never gave a lecture in my life. When I was at Columbia, I didn't even want that job because I was scared. I ran out of my class because I couldn't cope with it. It scared the hell out of me—all these people, and I ran out. And then I got back to it, and then I was to give a lecture, which I had never done in my life and I just blew it. And I was out in Minnesota in the museum, the biggest museum out there—thousands of people.

JG: Was that at Walker?

PA: And I was so embarrassed that when they asked me, "Mr. Agostini, well, what do you think?" I said, "Well, if you give me a Scotch, I'll find out." So, they gave me a drink, and I says, "I'm sweating, I'm completely stage-struck and I can't say a word." And I sat down. And then the guy said something there, and I resented what he said. Then I forgot my audience, you see? That went on for two solid hours, and they printed it in the *Art News*, first page. I was scared, but then after that I started losing this. You know, stage fright is fantastic. I couldn't even talk to you, you know, I would sweat. Gee, I was lost. I was so used to me, you know? And then I started talking to a lot of schools. I remember I went out to Cincinnati, and I had developed a reputation of being adept—I don't know where they got that—but that started [in] Minnesota.

I spoke to somebody else, and they said, "That guy's adept." And so, the kids said, "We're not going to ask you any questions. We know what you'll do; you'll twist it, you'll turn it—" And I said, "What gave you that idea?" They started—They thought they were going to stop me flat, you know, on stage. Well, I had hecklers for four hours after that remark. And then I got to learn their tricks, you know, how you move in, act lost, you don't know where you're going. Then all of a sudden, you get the lip. They figure they've got you, then you get them. I had fights. I had—There was onetime people were fighting in back, one agreed, one disagreed. And I once had to talk, you know Warren Brandt [acclaimed painter and Greensboro native] was with me—

TA: Oh, you know Warren.

PA: Oh, yeah. He and I are old friends. And he—this was in New York Club of Political Women, the Democrats and everything. We had to do it for radio, you know. So, "Warren," I said, You go up first." So, he started talking, he talked for a while and he said, "Gee, that clinches that." So, I go to talking about life." Gee, did I give them trouble. Everybody was fighting with me at this end, and everybody was agreeing at that

end, and I like it. I realized what I should do is split the audience. Get the enemy and the friends and see what I can do.

TA: You're lucky you can get reaction. I think so often—

PA: Oh, I do, I do. They want to kill me sometimes.

TA: That's great. At least they are responding.

JG: That's another—you see that's another facet of the art department here in the [Weatherspoon Art] Gallery, is that Peter, going around all the country, teaching in the summertime, gong for these lectures. We're known—the art department here—because Peter teaches here or the Gallery's known because of the connections in New York. And that's another thing, you know, like you're saying about Peter—sometimes the things we do here or the people we have here, are more—are better known away from campus than they are her in our area, and I don't know what—

TA: He's an ambassador for us, he represents us—

JG: Peter's a very good ambassador for the art department.

TA: Well, don't you think we have an excellent department here, and our Weatherspoon Gallery—we're very proud of that, and the national—

PA: I was telling Joan—we are known in New York as a—we are known all over. I remember a friend of mine [unclear] Tarkhov [sp?] was teaching at Yale [University] and he said to the kids, "If you really want to learn something about how to be an artist, go to North Carolina—UNCG." And he was teaching at Yale, he was trying to get them out because he figured he gave up the job, it was hopeless. Those schools are locked in, you know, they lock their principles that fade, you know?

And I believe in creating a school that everything is always on the verge of erupting, you see. Never arriving, always erupting, you see. And that's what this school has—to that degree. There's a possibility. Pittsburgh, I remember, was—Oh, my God—Carnegie Tech there—Gee. I tore into them and they're all on way, you know. And then they wanted to criticize, criticize their work. And they just didn't have it. They were like yesterday. So, I asked them, "How do you like being my guests?" I even went down to Georgia, and the guy said I was a—what did he say I was?—yippy [a member of a group of radical, politically active hippies]! Because I was speaking. He said, "You know, you've got to stop this man. He's a yippy." What is a yippy?

JG: Yippy is part of the—

TA: I've forgotten.

PA: Chicago thing.

JG: Well, yeah, the Chicago group, and—

TA: Are they loud hippies? Hippies who yowl?

JG: Hippies, I guess—

PA: No, it's just that if you have a free-flowing mind, you're always going to find people that are in complete disagreement, right? Because, as I said I don't know where I'm at, so I can go anywhere, you see? And that's the point that people don't like. They want you to lock in. You have to be somewhere. And that's the trouble with critics—they go crazy with me, you know? I fight with all the critics in New York, you know—Greenberg, he's afraid to talk to me because he always—we have terrific fights, you know? I'm not liked by them, but they get mad at me but they won't cut me down. If you read a criticism, they very seldom cut me down.

TA: Let me ask you something. Do you think that the critics—the art critics—has the power that the drama critic does?

PA: Oh, he certainly does.

TA: Oh, he does.

PA: When it comes to money, you see. Now I can't complain, you know. Well, I always say I sell practically all my bronzes. And I remember at the gallery, I sold everybody, even with my nasty disposition.

JG: He thinks he's nasty.

PA: But I do exceedingly well, if I wanted to push it that way, because I've been involved with so many worlds. Like, I remember Robert Kennedy [American politician, lawyer, senator, and president candidate] before he got shot, he wanted to meet me, you know. I was supposed to meet him when he came back. He had a piece of my work, which was given to him by Andy Williams [American singer], who is a big dealer of mine. Now nobody realized—

JG: Andy Williams owns a good bit of your work—

PA: Yeah, he has over a hundred thousand dollars' worth. So, and I argued with him and I argued with everybody. I was trying to stop the [Vietnam] War at that time, and I had a beautiful idea—how to stop wars forever.

TA: How?

PA: Very simple. We declare war on somebody, we have so many surpluses—Fridgedaires, chickens—whatever we have a surplus, we dump it on them. Instead of bombs, dump the surplus on them, you know? And then, you create a market really because they're going

to need that stuff, right? Fridgedaires—they're going to have something to put in it, so we give them chickens, eggs. Too many cows? We dump cows on them. But you know what they'd say? And by the way, this sounds—

TA: I mean what's—

PA: I talked to big business men on this. I talked to everybody. They thought it was funny. I was talking about this in 1964 when it was starting. "How to Stop Wars." You know what that would do in Russia? They would have to go into production, not buying or anything. They'd have to make chickens and dump that on—You dump the surplus right on the [unclear] to get rid of the surplus. So why not give it to them. You don't need it.

TA: Might have been a different amount but that could have happened in '64 before Vietnam.

PA: Oh, by the way, when I spoke to Andy Williams about this, he said, "You need to talk to—" That's when I was supposed to speak to—

TA: Bobby Kennedy?

PA: Yes! That was when I did. In fact, many times. That was my idea. And I'm sure he would have accepted it, because that would have been something. Do you realize [unclear] dropping bombs on them? That would drive them crazy! They'd think they were poisoned. But then they'd realize that they're not, you see?

TA: Well, the money—we could easily afford to drop chickens—

PA: Do you realize—I said, "Look, you're a businessman. Look, for every—there's a million dollars. Do you know how many chickens you could get for that?"

TA: And new refrigerators—

PA: —which we don't want. All our old cars, you know, instead of leaving them to rot, dump it on them. You know, just plop! First of all, what could the enemy do? What are they going to do—shoot at them? You going to shoot at a Frigidaire when it's coming down? Do you see what I mean? Surprise is the world. The world has to make a different kind of change, do you see what I mean? Every bomb you drop is nothing. Costs a lot of money to make, exploded, the planes, people killed—you're paying for that. You're not paying for anything this way.

TA: We don't have much surplus now. In'64, surpluses were possible, but I guess now—

PA: You have the possibility of surplus here. We can overproduce, and if you want to create a beautiful market so that we can sell to everybody here, and at the same time if they get a GE electric—where are they going to go, to Russia to get the parts? They're going to come to us. We give it to them, they pay for it. You see? You start giving them the need to buy something. You buy a full belly is not a bad idea. If you throw away billions of

dollars, you know, that's all up in smoke. If you want to produce a lot of radios and televisions—if you want to keep production—do you know if they had produced all the radios and televisions they had to produce to do this, you still would be ahead—for one bomb. For one life lost, what? And nobody gets killed. And you make them miserable because they get hungry, they get fat, they get—you give them all these things—

TA: Try it on [President] Jimmy Carter. He needs something.

PA: There's no war. You know. That's when the war—everybody was frightened. You know, everybody said, "You've got to stop the Vietnam [War]." I had the answer. Drop chickens.

TA: Well, I've never heard that one. That's right. I know [unclear] might have been interested in that.

PA: Do you realize what I mean?

TA: Oh, yes, I do. I think it has—it had real possibilities in '64.

PA: Oh, yes, it certainly did. And you were flabbergasted at North Vietnam. You know how much you spend for war?

TA: Billions and billions—

PA: And Joan, do you realize how little they'd have to spend to get rid of the—you know, the factories all overproduce. But you could get rid of it. Declare war on somebody and get rid of all those Fridgedairs.

TA: We don't have a market for all our products, that's the trouble.

PA: We could if we did that, you see. We would have beat Japan, by the way. The mistake we made—you see, I am, by nature, an extremely good businessman.

TA: That's unusual for an artist.

PA: Oh, yeah. But I'm like what Ernie Shore said, "You have to be—you can afford genius but do it with financial means."

JG: And I was going to tell Trudy not to be swayed by all your talking about the millions you've sold to Andy Williams and all that, because when you really get down to it, the artist gets that much of that money. Because by the time you pay to have the bronze cast, and all that—

PA: Oh, I nearly go broke. I have been able to finagle my way through my existence—I'm in dep up to my ears—but somehow, I slow down. And I know one thing—they have to be nice to me because they want that money, so as long as I survive, they'll get it. So, I

always have that over their heads, you see. That's the same thing as when you drop chickens on somebody. Or Fridgedaires, you know. And this sounds crazy, but it's probably the truth. You see, I believe in the exact truth. And the exact truth is we want a marketplace. If that's what you want, give them what a marketplace should have. You build it for them.

TA: Well, I think Robert Kennedy was that man—far greater—I think history has shown him to be far greater than we realize—

PA: Oh, I would have gotten to him because when I told this to Andy Williams I think he spoke to Robert about it because we were supposed to meet in New York when he got back.

TA: How did you meet Andy Williams?

PA: Oh, I met him way back. He just got keyed in on me, you know. When he first started singing, he just—he was the first one to buy me. In '59. Yeah, he was just crazy about my work. He even said on television that his big thing was collecting Agostinis.

TA: And you did outdoor sculptures as well—?

JG: No, no. Let me ask you—

PA: I'm an unbelievable sculptor because I have no means to say what I am about. Everybody else knows where they belong. I don't. I told you I am lost. I have luck. They're going to have to worry about being found, but I'm lost. But I really enjoy my world because I really want to create a [unclear]. I'm really very serious about this. I'm trying to make everybody a giant, every student. I want them to be absolutely good. Seriously ask Joan—

JG: You are also saying if you might have had the choice, of taking one of the things that you did that was very successful—like the swells—and then just building on that and building on that, doing only that, and maybe making a lot of money. It's possible he could have done just that and been known for that. But because of what Peter is saying in his temperament and change in the way he works, you lose all—And you can say that is one reason why he hasn't gotten the recognition in the same way as another artist. He took one thing. And you can say maybe that is one reason why he hasn't gotten the recognition in the same way as another artist. He took one thing—like that, it was successful—and played it more.

TA: I remember one of your reviewers said something like that.

PA: Yeah, he said I'm a—

TA: Said you had not followed through—

JG: Hess had said that. And this is—

PA: But I'm magnificent!

JG: And this is just for the record—Hess had become curator at the Metropolitan Museum.

PA: Yes—

JG: And had asked Peter—didn't he make a purchase of your work?

PA: Yeah, he did. He bought twelve drawings and he wanted to give me a small show. That's my luck, you know? Amazing.

JG: And this summer, too, the really giants in this field—Hess and Rosenberg died.

PA: I knew them very well.

TA: I knew Rosenberg died.

JG: And Hess died the week before Rosenberg died.

PA: No, the day after. They were close friend.

JG: Oh, right after.

PA: I knew them both, but I used to [unclear] with Rosenberg. But Tom Hess I used to insult him every so often. He used to say, "Oh, come on, Peter." And I'd say, "Come on you." I never would sell myself short. He said, "Why do you always call me?" And I said, "For one reason—money, damn it." What else would I have a reason? I says, "You don't know what I'm about and you never will, but you and always buy me. Give me money—I love it." I need it, you know. But whatever I do with it doesn't matter, but I can't exist without it, you know, so—I'm a realist. But if I have to do without, I can do without it. I don't really care.

I had a talk with Rockefeller, Mrs. [Happy] Rockefeller, and she said, "Well, Peter, suppose people did more? Come to visit me. I'd be glad to have you around." Because I'm so entertaining, wouldn't you? So, I could live that way with all of you. You've got money so I'll stay around for a month and then I'll leave. I don't need money and you know it.

TA: She is quite a patron of the arts, isn't she? I think the two of them—

JG: He is.

PA: And—So he was telling me while he was up there that the kids were up there—the papers, and then you know about that painting, you know I only paid $3,000. You know how many they get for it? $100,000. That's good business. Okay, it is good business.

TA: Oh, this is David [Rockefeller] then?

PA: No, I'm talking about Nelson [Rockefeller]. Nelson is the big collector.

JG: David is the one—and that's where it's been purchased—for the bank.

PA: You see, that's all—which is—for that reason.

TA: One thing that's very popular here—I was wondering how you react to—is the art reproductions. How do you feel about the whole thing of an artist taking his work to a printer, a very fine printer? My own printer does these—Hall Printing Company.

PA: Yeah.

TA: The Timberlakes [Bob Timberlake, American artist], Ward Nichols [American artist] and he can sell them at a number—

PA: Yeah, as long as he signs them.

TA: All right.

PA: It's a means to get wealthy.

TA: And it's not plagiarizing art—I mean—

PA: People have been plagiarizing art forever, you know. That doesn't matter, you know. Raphael plagiarizes Michealangelo. He really did. It's all right, I don't mind art. You see, anybody can copy somebody, but then when you look at a coping of a Rembrandt, Rembrandt still is a giant. The only thing that people is prove how wonderful he really is, you see. So, there is nothing wrong.

TA: Seems to be it spreads the art around, and there's not that much money involved.

JG: The only thing that bothers me about that particular thing is that sometimes people do not understand that this is a mechanical art. The process of reproduction, and they call it a print. And it's not. And a lot of people think they are purchasing a print, not a reproduction of a painting.

PA: You know, like they do with these Norman Rockwells, right? Those are copies made after—And you see, when the Japanese print was made, it was a penny edition, and they used to do them on a woodblock. And they would sell them, hawking them, you know, And I remember in the early 30s.

End of Interview