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Interview with Elise Asher

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Transcript

Preface

This interview is part of the *Dorothy Gees Seckler collection of sound recordings relating to art and artists, 1962-1976*. The following verbatim transcription was produced in 2015, with funding from Jamie S. Gorelick.

Interview

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'm just getting this machine ready to take with me for a taping with Elise Asher Kunitz on August 17, 1976.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: We're speaking now about the Sun Gallery?

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: I don't think, when it came to the first part of the H.C.E. Gallery—I mean the beginning of it, when Nat [Nathan Halper] had inherited it and called it the H.C.E. Gallery after Sam Kootz had it [originally Samuel M. Kootz Gallery, H.C. Gallery, the Sun Gallery, and then the H.C.E. Gallery, in Provincetown, MA], it wasn't that we said, could we be in shows. I think it was assumed. It was more an assumption of, that this is part of the establishment.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Now, some of those people are a lot younger than I am, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: And some of them are a little younger, you know, than we all are. But if I remember when the Hansa [Gallery, New York, NY] people, like Wolf Kahn and then, and you know [John] Grillo and—well, Grillo and I are about the same age, you know. We're all not young, [laughs] as we know.

But I think it was considered. And even those at the Tanager [Gallery, New York, NY]— I remember that Nat did more or less ask Angelo [Ippolito] for work because Angelo was then attended to. And, you know, like certain people are picked up and they're asked that in a certain way, and they're picked up. And then it's, you know, it's like a pair, then, you know,—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —with Nat. Then anything that impresses both somebody else, or Jack Tworkov said something then, then Angelo would be. But I think it was presumed, not only in— certainly in my experience, I don't have a great deal of the woman-rejected feeling, but I think the combine of being both a woman and not, in parentheses, making it—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: —in that other sense. First of all, I wasn't a New York painter. I wasn't a New Yorker to begin with. But the point is I wouldn't have even dreamed of asking.

Now, I'm not so sure, I shouldn't be presumptuous about Wolf Kahn. He did eventually, so did I, show at Nat's eventually. But I never liked the attitude. And so the strange thing is I showed, I remember —I can only speak for myself now—I showed at the Sun Gallery more or less with a feeling of a rather feeling of a little bit of haughty disgust for the H.C.E.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Because I was, I was able to show there. Not in a one-man show, I wouldn't have done, I mean I didn't have the material. That wasn't a thought. But to be, I was included in those large shows.

But strangely enough I always had the feeling—and I assumed that it was partly other people's feelings—not only were we doing a little different, because even linear things were not as acceptable as the abstract so-called what I thought was, you know, then to me sort of marvelous image, push/pull—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The [Hans] Hofmannesque thing was really—

ELISE ASHER: And Bill [Willem de Kooning] too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: It was de Kooning/Hofmannesque—don't you—you know what I mean.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But would it have been as much de Kooning up here as it was in New York?

ELISE ASHER: Well no, those New Yorkers—don't forget, when they were imported, the Kootz Gallery—I would say that was a combine of everything. I mean, don't forget there was [Robert] Motherwell, there was, it wasn't but—

DOROTHY SECKLER: When was there Motherwell? When were you first aware of Motherwell being around?

ELISE ASHER: Not in Provincetown, you're not speaking of.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Not in Provincetown.

ELISE ASHER: Provincetown he really didn't come till about '56. The truth is that Marilyn [ph] and I tried to encourage him to come.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he was supposed to—

ELISE ASHER: Fifty-five.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —have been here so many times earlier.

ELISE ASHER: He never came here to stay. I know he didn't. Because how could we all have been here that long?

DOROTHY SECKLER: The theory is that he, the year that [Jackson] Pollock came, in 1944—

ELISE ASHER: He may have been here for two days and said he didn't like it—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and he came and encouraged Pollock to—he kept saying this is a marvelous place and we must settle here.

ELISE ASHER: Because he wanted to be in East Hampton without Pollock, that's why. Because they hated each other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well that, you know, everyone tells me a different story about this.

ELISE ASHER: No, but this is really true.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Fritz] Bultman says they weren't friends for very long but they were friends that summer and that actually Motherwell got a stove for Pollock that summer in 1944.

ELISE ASHER: He may have [cross talk].

DOROTHY SECKLER: And tried to, tried to persuade him to buy a house here. But he didn't, of course. But that he was very enthusiastic about Provincetown.

ELISE ASHER: But Motherwell was still in East Hampton and did not get to Provincetown. It doesn't matter. I mean those are personal things, so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he in East Hampton a number of years before he came here?

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I heard that he was in Wellesley then in Boston and in other places?

ELISE ASHER: No. You heard that from Motherwell probably.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I haven't talked to him.

ELISE ASHER: Oh. Because Bob does create lists all over. You know this part of the story, I mean, part of it is [cross talk].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, this is Bultman. And Judith Rothschild.

ELISE ASHER: Well, I think that, I really think that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah, it's going to fall over into the [Lee] Krasner school.

ELISE ASHER: I think Fritz is exaggerating, to tell the truth. I think he—

ELISE ASHER: The Krasner theory is that Motherwell didn't exist in Pollock's world. [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: Well, I'm trying to be a little honest—I think they all are—so I have no investment in any of that stuff.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah, yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Because I am not one of these people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But I think in a way each one's exaggerating a little bit. I do know that Bob, I know this from the whole, that whole [Clement] Greenberg stage and everything, where Bob really couldn't stand East Hampton, as is each one was a prima donna. But Bob and Pollock never got along. And I think, after all they're all egomaniacal, as you know, and I—and Bob has a different kind of vanity and it's very precious.

But I do think that Lee [Krasner] was probably exaggerating the other way. But I, but Lee strangely enough was always business. And I don't even think, you know, she isn't particularly affectionate with me. She's the most honest one.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She has more invested, however, so you must be always very careful where she is directly involved.

ELISE ASHER: I know but she's always personally really quite honest.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: For instance she was terribly pissed off on Bob Friedman for the book on Pollock.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I don't know why because I thought he was rather—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I haven't read it.

ELISE ASHER: —I thought it was rather generous—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Though what was it about it?

ELISE ASHER: —about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: He was very modest about himself and his role in it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Okay. I just want to say this to show her honesty. But she will never be dishonest about Bob's relationship with Pollock. I mean in other words, Lee has no imagination. She has rage but she's so honest she—that even the investment and the part of—the historical part Lee is very accurate about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. Well, at this moment I—

ELISE ASHER: I really think—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —have five conflicting stories—

ELISE ASHER: I think you're dealing with two people. Okay.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —about Pollock and Bob Motherwell.

ELISE ASHER: I would be inclined to believe less of Bob Motherwell and Fritz.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I haven't talked to him.

ELISE ASHER: Fritz is accurate about certain things. On the other hand, if someone's helped him or something he—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think I will have to take Motherwell out of the picture until I—

ELISE ASHER: Okay, take him out because he's not a—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —actually document it.

ELISE ASHER: —real [-stonian] anyway.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because, yeah, and a long—

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, he's a friend, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —in a long tape that he did for an educational institution he once said that he and Pollock had experimented with automatism and when Pollock was on the WPA –

ELISE ASHER: And, you know, that may have been so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and that he and Pollock were—the whole thing, this was the days of the Peggy Guggenheim *Art of This Century*. And they were—

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I know it. I know it. And they were her boys. Sure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And they were, that was when they were really, you know, the first collages that Pollock did he did with him there and he talked—

ELISE ASHER: I'm sure that's true.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —clearly about Pollock burning his—he got upset with the thing and couldn't make it work so he burned it and it looked great. [Laughs.] He poured whiskey over it.

ELISE ASHER: Well no, I imagine that's true.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But I can't—

ELISE ASHER: But in terms of Provincetown—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —verify it because I can't see Motherwell—

ELISE ASHER: Listen, I'm sure that's true. But it was very strange because one, for instance, when people were going to East Hampton like those early days when I got this—I know because someone was going with Clem [Clement Greenburg] who at that time was very homely. I can't stand what Clem has stood for and what he's done. But at that time, if you know, he did fight

singlehanded for Pollock and, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: And he also admired Motherwell's things. And also all that Motherwell was—is very intelligent and is much more of a philosopher really then, you know, and he was doing much more writing. He was more intellectual than Pollock was.

So I remember that so much, those visits that I had when I first came to New York in '48. But it had to be almost divided because you couldn't go to both places at once.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In '48.

ELISE ASHER: Because they didn't like each other—

DOROTHY SECKLER: In '48.

ELISE ASHER: —in East Hampton. Do you know what I mean? They didn't like each other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were both in East Hampton at this time. I see.

Well, '44 was the only time that I have the, I have the word of Bultman and Judith Rothschild that they were friends at that time. And I have the word of Krasner—

ELISE ASHER: They may have been here. I wasn't here then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: They may have been shortly here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: But I know—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It didn't last a long apparently. Anyway, it isn't that important.

ELISE ASHER: No. No, but the important thing is that—and Bob though since '56 has worked here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Since '56. Well, it's interesting to have that on the record because no one else seems to know for sure.

ELISE ASHER: Because his first—but he says like, you know, like he said in the newspaper article to someone, it was in '42 because he exaggerates. It's like well now we'll know he will be in some place for two weeks and he'll say, "I've worked here since '42." You know,—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —for some strange reason. He's like a child, that's all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: And he builds up, he makes his own history.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was certainly around in the year in '49. Were you here that year?

ELISE ASHER: In New York he was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, here.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, well that was, now was that in the early '50s?

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was '49. That was why it was called *Four in '49*—

ELISE ASHER: Oh yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —because the year was '49.

ELISE ASHER: Yes. No, I heard about it but I wasn't—I was here but—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, apparently Motherwell was here for that because he—

ELISE ASHER: Yes, he was. You know why? It was one of the Kootz things. See, you forget Motherwell was at Kootz quite a lot and he was one of the Kootz boys.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was a Kootz boy from the beginning up here? Was he in the Kootz Gallery from its earliest year, do you remember? I don't recall.

ELISE ASHER: The Kootz Gallery, as I remember correctly, I think only lasted—I think Sam only was here for about—oh, he was in Provincetown for long but I think the Kootz Gallery was really only from—I would judge now,—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —I would judge from about '49 through—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't think it started until after '49.

ELISE ASHER: Maybe '50.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Maybe '50. Fifty, '51 maybe.

ELISE ASHER: Fifty, '51, '52.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't think it was that long, Elise.

ELISE ASHER: It may have been two years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Maybe at the most.

ELISE ASHER: Yes, it was. You know why? For two years he pushed his boys on me, which we always thought, you know, was marvelous to have a dealer who said, "You take none or all." That's was, that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's what he said to the art show, wasn't it? That's interesting.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. Now that's something interesting for you.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: It is in a way because it shows a little bit the, a little bit the authority and the nerdiness and the pomp that in New York—the attitude, the New York attitude.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Which would not have happened if it had been Chicago painters or Philadelphia. I think it's interesting because there's sort of a brass, a brassiness.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I wonder what the Art Association's reaction to that thought was? Probably indignant.

ELISE ASHER: They did it. They did take it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But they were indignant about it though?

ELISE ASHER: And how—I don't know. I don't think so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No?

ELISE ASHER: Because don't forget, Hans [Hofmann] liked the idea. He could do his criticizing with such as [William] Baziotes and all those people right there. He was sort of—he'd say, "Now look at that." I remember he said to Nanno [de Groot], "Look at that." There was a first Barney Newman that was hung the wrong way and no one knew it. And Hans said, "There's a reason that the line goes this way." And there was a lot of applesauce because the painting was hung the wrong way. And—

DOROTHY SECKLER: And Hofmann didn't know it?

ELISE ASHER: No. No, you can over intellectualize, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh.

ELISE ASHER: Especially with Barney Newman.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: You know?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, Barney wasn't someone that I guess he was very close to in any case. Was he?

ELISE ASHER: No, he wasn't close to him. But Hans was—also he liked his—But I think the interesting thing about these things are the gradual changes in, in a different kind of unswinging youth. You know, the swinging youth in the '60s was very different from the very serious people who really stuck to their guns.

I mean you think of John Grillo doing those little things. Remember? Those little, those little almost sensuous Mondrian things?

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I'm trying to picture what John would have done—

ELISE ASHER: And tacking them on trees because he wasn't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He did?

ELISE ASHER: He was tacking his things all over. It was a darling idea.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How large were they then?

ELISE ASHER: He's not, his are no longer as nice as far as I'm concerned. It's different, it's a different thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well how large were the things he was tacking on trees?

ELISE ASHER: Small. You know who, but you know who was a big influence here in the Sun Gallery and everything else, not in my case because I was older, Jan Muller.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I had a lot of—

ELISE ASHER: You know that, don't you.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he was the exceptional one to some extent.

ELISE ASHER: He was a tremendous influence. Grillo, everyone was influenced of that group. Even though Grillo wasn't a young—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. In what way would Grillo have been influenced by him?

ELISE ASHER: The little——

DOROTHY SECKLER: The mosaic things?

ELISE ASHER: The little mosaic things. Very much. And Jan Muller's were very beautiful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But didn't Grillo also—

ELISE ASHER: And Grillo's mosaic ones were lovely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Grillo also studied with Hofmann so why did he have to get it from Jan?

ELISE ASHER: I think that it was like—Jan—because it was a friend. I think there was more camaraderie—I think they were always moved by Hofmann but they wouldn't have—it was a second influence. I mean it was a—it covered more when it was through Jan.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But did Grillo's mosaics ever get special in that way that Jan Muller's were—

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —or did they stay flat?

ELISE ASHER: They stayed—

DOROTHY SECKLER: They stayed flat, didn't they?

ELISE ASHER: They also stayed very knit and purl, very, I mean very tight.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Well, Jan's were tight at one point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well—

ELISE ASHER: Weren't they?

DOROTHY SECKLER: —they tightened up at the end and got more hieratic, but—

ELISE ASHER: Yes, you're right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —at the period when he was flowing, was moving away from the Hofmann thing and getting into Sun I think—well, I can't honestly [cross talk].

ELISE ASHER: But Jan was such a real German expressionist really.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But I think that he was exceptional in that group in many ways, and I could be wrong.

ELISE ASHER: He was exceptional in that he made—he was exceptional and I think a tremendous influence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was the most single, the one single figure—as you think of the Sun Gallery you think of Jan Muller more than anyone else.

ELISE ASHER: You are so right. Oh, there's no question about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No doubt about it.

ELISE ASHER: And not Wolf so much because he could have been anyplace.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Wolf didn't even come into it except the first year.

ELISE ASHER: He came into it I remember in, which was also what was it, in fifty—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was before [cross talk].

ELISE ASHER: —'55 that we worked there on different shows if I remember correctly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't know what Wolf did at the Sun Gallery.

ELISE ASHER: Wolf was always making his [Vincent] van Gogh-ish things.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he?

ELISE ASHER: Do you remember those?

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I don't. I don't remember his color being that high colored. I thought it was more sober.

ELISE ASHER: They were—the fierceness. They, where they had very much van Gogh quality then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Blazing oranges and blues and that sort of thing?

ELISE ASHER: No, they had the blazing lines, you know. I mean they had very dramatic, wind-blown lines, you know, stormy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where they split the—

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the kind of, I remember the lines—

ELISE ASHER: And some of the color was. Some of the yellows.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The color, the obvious color or the lines.

ELISE ASHER: Some of the yellows were.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Some of the yellows.

ELISE ASHER: Yes. Yes, he—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It wasn't silver at any rate.

ELISE ASHER: No. It was—oh no, that was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Silvery.

ELISE ASHER: You know, it became very distilled and generalized.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But it was—

ELISE ASHER: And generalized, wispy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But it was not generalized [cross talk].

ELISE ASHER: Oh no, there was nothing wispy about it. In fact, they were very, they were very van Gogh-ish at one time. [Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were representational to a certain extent then. Or were they abstract?

ELISE ASHER: They were representational and sort of wild. But they, they were—they always seemed you could have—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Landscapes?

ELISE ASHER: Yes. You could have said, in some portrait you could have said it was a sort of a young Dutch painter almost.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I felt that, well Nanno felt that way. I know he was very, he—they were really, they were quite strong. I wish Wolf, I wonder—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He sent me two photographs of things that he had done for the show and they're wispy. They're very wispy.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, now they're sending you later ones.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They're very wispy.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I don't mean they're not lovely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I love them but they're both—

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I don't mean that. I meant they're not—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'd love to see one of them.

ELISE ASHER: —but they're not represent—I wish, I wish he had a gold catalogue. I wish we had a first Hansa catalogue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I bet he does have. Of course he does.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But—

ELISE ASHER: Ask for it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the funny thing is when I got the list of people from Yvonne Anderson I don't think she mentioned Wolf. And of course—

ELISE ASHER: Maybe he doesn't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —he was the first year before Yvonne took it over.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, Yvonne didn't take it over till towards the end.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, she took it over—-

ELISE ASHER: When did she take it over?

DOROTHY SECKLER: —'55 to '59. But the first year was when the other—

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I didn't know about '59. I didn't think it lasted till '59.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It did, yes. And he was there the year before.

ELISE ASHER: I was sure, I was more inclined—[cross talk]. Not as a member I don't mean, I wasn't. But I remember showing in there some things in '55 and '56, maybe fifty—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then you would have been rather early in the whole thing.

ELISE ASHER: Well, I, I guess at that time I was. Because it seemed to me that the store Oldenburg's was after.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was after because it had been sold by Yvonne. It was like—

ELISE ASHER: When was it, '58?

DOROTHY SECKLER: It must have been '60.

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I think so.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, that was quite a bit after. I think we were—

DOROTHY SECKLER: She said hers lasted until '59. And he did not come until [Bill] Barrell took it over. I've talked about it with several people now.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I think you're right, yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But, you know—

ELISE ASHER: Isn't that funny, because my time—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —that Red Grooms was there. How did you react to all this activism of a person like Red Grooms?

ELISE ASHER: That was later.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well it came in pretty early in the whole business. You know, the "Happenings" thing and all.

ELISE ASHER: How early did you say? How early do you feel? I think it was about '60.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, it wasn't. It was about '57, '58.

ELISE ASHER: It was? Red Grooms?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Anyway, let me get the first. This is the first page. Just a second now.

One of the things that came just as a kind of indication of their attitude of there being public art, which was their attitude, you know, as a great difference from the abstract expressionists who said the public be damned—except for Hofmann and—

ELISE ASHER: Oh, you, the "Happening" thing was ultimately a performance.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, everything was people coming in and sitting on the floor and watching them paint. People being invited in in all stages of the work of art being completed.

ELISE ASHER: Not when I was there though.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No?

ELISE ASHER: That was after.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it was like everyone emphasized it a great deal on that. That beginning —

ELISE ASHER: My emphasis there was that we were sort of mavericks a little bit. We didn't quite fit.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, mavericks, yeah, yeah, mavericks is a very good word.

ELISE ASHER: I would say, I don't know, I would say that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was very early in the game apparently. She couldn't, she couldn't remember right.

ELISE ASHER: Do you need a pencil for any of this?

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, because I'll have it on here I hope.

ELISE ASHER: Oh yes. Is it working?

DOROTHY SECKLER: But, you know, that, they left these three signs in a place called Salisbury. Yvonne Anderson, Lester Johnson and Red Grooms took that—

ELISE ASHER: Oh, Lester Johnson, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Remember that?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. But I thought that was later.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Three signs. No, she thinks it was '57 or '58. Nobody knows—

ELISE ASHER: I would say '58. I would say.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And—

ELISE ASHER: I would say '58.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the year that Earl—that Wolf Kahn was there was Earl Pilgrim, a jeweler and friend of many of the younger artists invited Wolf Kahn—he was the single first one to show in that space.

ELISE ASHER: I didn't know him. Earl Pilgrim?

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't know him?

ELISE ASHER: I remember some Earl but I didn't know him personally. And that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that was before the first time around.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, I remember the name now but I don't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah, I don't remember that one either. But many people have mentioned him.

ELISE ASHER: But I don't quite remember that. I remember the talk about him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Fifty-five Yvonne Anderson was joined, and Dominic Falcone—

ELISE ASHER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —for young innovating artists and so forth. He was washing dishes at the Moore's place out there, you know, the restaurant.

ELISE ASHER: Who was?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Falcone was washing dishes to support the gallery.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, I'd heard that before. Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And Red Grooms was also washing dishes out there. [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Isn't that interesting.

But did you know about things like that? I mean the fact that these people were so committed to showing young artists that they were willing to work this hard to support the gallery?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, there was a—I was. And I think that did come a little later, that commitment to that, that real marvelous, well it was sort of a, again, a what years ago we would have said was sort of a real bohemian attitude. [Laughs.] And I said because it did start a little bit more with a maverick attitude, they didn't belong, they weren't—you know, and still they, we liked each other's things, you know,—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you all—Really? That's interesting because I was wondering how you could have gotten along with everybody else.

ELISE ASHER: Well, no, we didn't—the funny thing is I wasn't with them as much as at the same time they were the ones that asked. It was the artists that asked artists—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. Oh really? It wasn't Yvonne and Dominic going out and asking?

ELISE ASHER: No. In fact, I remember one, the last year I think Yvonne, or in '56 when she came to see the—I remember when I was at Fritz Bultman's studio when I lived there, in that little studio he had, she said something like—I don't think she was as interested in me as the artists were before that. Do you know what I mean?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But she was nice. She said, "Well, yeah, I think they're sort of interesting. I'll take two," or something. But she was a nice person. But I think the interest, the artists' attitude—

DOROTHY SECKLER: She took the advice of her artists in other words?

ELISE ASHER: You know what the attitude was like? It was really a little bit more like a Hansa and the Tanager. It wasn't a co-op but it was, it had that, it had that sphere of artists actually—and this wasn't a feeling of reject then. I mean that isn't what I associated with this feeling that you didn't fit. But it was actually a genuinely happy attitude about somebody else that wasn't, that wasn't in the establishment.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was the establishment considered at that time to be Abstract Expressionism and—

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the Hofmann Group? You weren't, you don't—

ELISE ASHER: No, not the Hofmann Group.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Not the Hofmann Group?

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's a distinction—

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —then?

ELISE ASHER: No. Definitely. Definitely. Because Abstract Expressionism was associated with those people already—the Betty Parsons set, Kootz and Egan.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: And Hofmann had much more to do with something more youthful, even a little bit more provincial, more Germanic. And Hofmann himself transcending all that as a person. It had to do with communication with Hans. Isn't that funny?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: It even, it even didn't have so much to do with what you were doing. And it had to do with even though Hans was also showing, don't forget, first at Betty's and then at Kootz's.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But Hans was like the grandpa who was also, well, the character. He wasn't always —I mean people always, you know, everybody'd say, well, they're a little too, you know, they didn't believe in the push and pull. They were doing a little bit themselves but he wasn't quite refined enough as the abstract. I mean his things, the feeling was heavy and Germanic and romantic. Even Muller—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Who would have been saying that at that time?

ELISE ASHER: I think, I think more of the, of people like [Bradley Walker] Tomlin, Baziotes and, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Baziotes would have felt that way you think?

ELISE ASHER: Oh yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you know Baziotes fairly well?

ELISE ASHER: Yes, I knew him fairly well. He's sort of a nice guy. I liked his work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was he doing up here?

ELISE ASHER: I didn't know him up here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you think he was doing his typical things up here?

ELISE ASHER: I didn't know him up here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You didn't. You knew him in New York only.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Adolf [Fleischmann] of course up here but I told you he never worked up here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he did actually I understand.

ELISE ASHER: He must have done drawings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He did. Not only drawings but—

ELISE ASHER: He used to always say very proudly, like if there's—we used to kid about everybody, that he's a businessman came up here for his vacation and his boat.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he may not have wanted to admit it but he loved Judith Rothschild.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I think he did. But he didn't do big things, he didn't do—When was Judith talking about though? Because I have a feeling she was a little later.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She remembers being asked over to his studio to see things. And he was just getting from the pictographs into the large horizon things with the big spots—

ELISE ASHER: When she was with Anton Myrer?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. I guess she was just talking about it, yeah. But she's not the only one that thinks he worked.

ELISE ASHER: No, I think she may be right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think Nat also thought he worked at—

ELISE ASHER: Who did?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Nat Halper says he worked here.

ELISE ASHER: Oh. Because Matt I always think of as—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Everybody else said he only was sailing. And see, there are these two images. [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: Well, I don't think, I really don't think he did make it.

[Cross talk.]

ELISE ASHER: I think even I remember a conversation with Hans and Miz [Maria Hofmann], and Hans and Miz used to—and Miz used to sort of kid about it, "Oh, Adolf, he's on his vacation." You know, how she'd talk in that low voice.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I don't think—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Wait a minute. Wait a minute.

[Audio break.]

ELISE ASHER: —may have made some drawings and maybe did small things. But he did not seriously—he did consider this his boat vacation place. And we used to say he's like a shoe salesman and we used to kid about it.

Now, you don't get that from nothing. You can like a—you know, it wasn't that we didn't like him. You know, it had nothing to do with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But why was that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Maybe it depends on the year, I don't know. Because it may be that in some years he didn't paint and in other years he did paint. Some people, two people at least think he did large paintings and that he was moving here from the pictographs into the large things—

ELISE ASHER: He never did large paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —with the horizons.

ELISE ASHER: I don't think so. Where did he do them?

DOROTHY SECKLER: In that place that I took over after he left. There was plenty of room in there to paint big things.

ELISE ASHER: I never saw a large painting in there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well I mean large not in terms of what we later thought were large.

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But in meaning, you know—

ELISE ASHER: I mean this isn't considered large now at all. And something like this?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, he was doing things like this size.

ELISE ASHER: Because I never saw anything that large. And that's small, you know, that thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: I saw maybe more just small what we really call small.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it isn't the end of the world.

ELISE ASHER: No, it isn't. But it's interesting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I guess I'll be careful not to commit myself that it was one or the other because it was just about half and half.

ELISE ASHER: I think it's a good thing to put that it isn't certain. And I think because Adolph was important here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: You know what I mean? So why not?

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did, how did people react to Adolph? He must have—you know, he had already said some very—things that were rather apt to irritate people, like certainly all the art association people and probably a few others too.

ELISE ASHER: Adolph was always like that. I don't ever, I never felt that Adolph was, you know, he was very likeable. But I just, I—he was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he so likeable?

ELISE ASHER: —he never really never was like an artist to me. I mean I always thought—I don't, I really, really never felt—I think his attitude was always a little, um, like it was a business. I don't mean so much insulting, I mean just like this is what he did. This was his career. I never felt great sensitivity.

In fact, he once told me to—if I remember correctly, you know, to make and cut them out where it looked good. I mean it seemed to me that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He had a very mechanical attitude toward how you could—

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —succeed without even trying. [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: No that—because I don't, I think that he loved doing what he was doing and it wasn't as mechanical, say, as Helen Frankenthaler's who just does this tie-dies and no matter how big and they happen to be—to me you could do them forever and then cut out the most beautiful part on primed Belgian linen or unprimed or anything. He didn't have that attitude where you could make a million a day. But he had a mechanical attitude. That is the word.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] He once told me he could teach—

ELISE ASHER: He never have a sensitivity.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —students how do be good painters in one night. He just showed them how to divide up the space and make three big circles in it.

ELISE ASHER: See, that's what I'm saying.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, but that's what I'm talking about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That appalled me.

ELISE ASHER: That's what I'm talking about. Adolph did not have an artist's soul.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: He did not have the soul of an artist. He was a perfectly nice guy but he was—you know, in all honesty that toupee was sort of—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was going through—

ELISE ASHER: He was really very dull.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —five or six years before—

[END OF CASSETE SIDE 1]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now what you were talking about that was so interesting here was that one of the things that everyone sort of took for granted that roughness was in or was—

ELISE ASHER: A little bit of crudeness.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A little bit of crudeness was the thing, you know.

ELISE ASHER: Rough stuff was power.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Rough stuff was power. That's very good. Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Sort of representative, yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now this of course had come from Abstract Expressionism really, hadn't it? I mean you wouldn't have had that attitude before?

ELISE ASHER: What are you—I'm just curious now what you would think about Dubuffet, do you think underneath someone like that—do you think it did sort of in a circuitous way come from the French?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, could be of course.

ELISE ASHER: You know, you know Motherwell was, you know, even you know that gaucheness that you do purposefully that the ball is this way and then that and then you do black and yellow. And I mean I think he thought that was very French.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I think he—no, I'm wrong. I think crudeness was—what we were talking about before. But the, but the gaucheness came from French. It had to be a little gauche—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —from Dubuffet and Picasso in a way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But more Dubuffet I would think because Picasso—

ELISE ASHER: Do you think that? I never thought of that. But I think Dubuffet did really.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah, I think it was Dubuffet.

ELISE ASHER: By gum, I think Dubuffet did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Even though people reject and don't like, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I have to think of a time slot that Dubuffet would fit into.

ELISE ASHER: He fit into a very modern thing at that time. Very modern.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, let's say in the year 1944—

ELISE ASHER: Uh-huh.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —what was Dubuffet doing? Was he already doing those, those women, those funny women—

ELISE ASHER: I think so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —you know, that were all like primitive?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't think it was that early.

ELISE ASHER: Well, they weren't that early.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No?

ELISE ASHER: No, no. I think the truth is that Dubuffet was starting at just about the time that—I think that he was doing that in about '47 or '48. Nobody was doing the Abstract Expressionism before that. It was the early '50s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I really think, I was just thinking my first Dubuffet show that just knocked me over was when I was at *ARTnews*. And I didn't go to *ARTnews* until 1950. And it would have been around '52 that the first Dubuffet—

ELISE ASHER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And it was at Pierre Matisse; right?

ELISE ASHER: Sure. Well, what do you think of the abstract expressionists, when do you think they were blooming? It wasn't the WPA days.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's supposed to have been from '47 to '54—

ELISE ASHER: It really wasn't. It wasn't.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —roughly that they were getting into stride.

ELISE ASHER: It was really not '47 at all. It was about '50. I could swear on that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, with [Franz] Kline it was certainly '50 but with—well, let's see, I don't know. I have to go back.

ELISE ASHER: No, let me tell you, because—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Pollock. Let's just take Pollock.

ELISE ASHER: The first show at Betty Parson's and Pollock wasn't even that expressionist. I mean that I saw. And I didn't move, I didn't see it till '50.

ELISE ASHER: But Pollock was at The Art of This Century [Gallery, first solo show 1943] he was already showing, wasn't he showing drip things in The Art of This Century?

ELISE ASHER: Drip but not expressionist. That's probably some of his method he was starting with but remember the *She Wolf* [1943] and things?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh. Now *She Wolf*, *She Wolf* would have been—

ELISE ASHER: That was not—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —in '47 or—

ELISE ASHER: That was about '49 I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: '49.

ELISE ASHER: That was not really completely out there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, you're right. It was expressionist. Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: See, I think we're getting confused with the Picasso influence—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah, yeah.

ELISE ASHER: —that people rejected very quickly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: And the French influence then rejected because they had come by accident. It was the emphasis on the accident and then making use of the accident. You know what I mean? I think they really did that in '51 and '52 and '53 much more. I think there's a little telescoping.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I think, I think the credit was not quite that long ago. And Motherwell was doing his—his influence was directly Picasso. And those things, if you saw some of those things you wouldn't even know the difference in some of these more abstract works.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: And they weren't, they weren't '50s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You know, I have a visual picture of the way the wall looked up here at Forum 49 when they had the show. And they were all really abstract, like Picasso abstract.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And really no,—

ELISE ASHER: That was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —no images.

ELISE ASHER: —they were not that expressionistic.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, they were not.

ELISE ASHER: They were not spinach [ph] yet. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, not at all. You're right. No spinach [ph] yet.

ELISE ASHER: The spinach [ph] started in about '51, '52, '53, '54.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah. That's very good to remember it that way because I—it certainly could get lost.

ELISE ASHER: Jack, even Jack Tworkov's things were, you know, when he was so much influenced by Bill.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Remember?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: He worked in fifty—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Fifty-five almost. Yeah, '54, '55.

ELISE ASHER: They'd never even do a Provincetown then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, he wasn't here. I mean unfortunately. He comes into the story in 1924 and then he goes out and until—

ELISE ASHER: Well, well that's good.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —1955, you know.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So I had to drag him in by the ears really.

ELISE ASHER: Well, Giorgio [Cavallon] was here very much earlier, around in the '30s too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But he didn't seem to—well, yes, he did. He was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: He studied with [Charles] Hawthorne.

ELISE ASHER: Yes, he did. I remember. Isn't that funny.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.] So strange he studied with both of them.

ELISE ASHER: Yes, he did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And later on with Hofmann of course.

ELISE ASHER: Yes, he did study.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I don't know what years because I—

ELISE ASHER: I don't either because he just discarded, he became such a different animal. So, you know, so—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you see the—

ELISE ASHER: —so Venetian to me, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Fill me a little bit if you can on Cavallon, when you first remember his getting close to anything like he's doing now and when he studied with Hofmann because I don't think I have a really—

ELISE ASHER: You know, actually Giorgio is in—Giorgio, you know, I think his big thing down deep was because he really didn't want to do figurative and he always had this artisan thing. So it was more like Mondrian by accident but I think it was what he, again, did best and found out he did best. Because he was always so—it was a combination of very profound, lovely taste.

Giorgio really has great taste. And I don't mean the Motherwell taste which is the *de gout* which is a different kind of taste. Giorgio had a great sense of exquisite something that must have been a little Venetian in him because he was born in Venice.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: You know? And I think he really never was Hofmann. I think he did it because he wanted to be American.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. I don't think he really, he never, as a matter of fact, he never really cared about it except when Hofmann was early up there. He loved Hans. Hans was an institution. A lot of people thought they should come to him because they were beginning to be part of the boys and part of the American scene.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Don't you suppose the Cubist thing was—he might have gotten that from Hans—

ELISE ASHER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and making the picture into a kind of grid, however much larger a grid than —

ELISE ASHER: I don't really think so. I think Giorgio came upon it on his own.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

ELISE ASHER: I don't think he could understand that well. I think Giorgio was a very instinctive painter and very strict with himself. And I think he never even liked sloppy edges until he became a little more romantic and did, you know, he's really a very fastidious—even now—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: —they're very beautiful. They were romantic, a fastidious romanticism if there is such a thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Abstract. An abstract fastidious romanticism.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, and you can't get him to talk much about it.

ELISE ASHER: No. Giorgio isn't that articulate.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He really doesn't—

ELISE ASHER: He's terribly, he's terribly instinctual. And he also is—and he's shy about his language too because he doesn't have a big vocabulary. But he always hits it. It's always *le mot juste* with Giorgio.

Giorgio always—he has more insight into other people's work. He really is very perceptive in a funny, seemingly simple way. But he can hit things.

In fact he said such interesting things sometimes—though I'll never forget it, that sort of soft shell that Philip had at Janis's [Sydney Janis Gallery], Philip Guston at Janis's when they were up. Giorgio said they looked like larger worms.

You know, and he, and that was his way of saying they were soft, they weren't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: Giorgio has, Giorgio is very critical and actually likes very little. And it used to make Linda [Lindeberg] so mad because he wouldn't be polite. He never used to say a word when he went—you know, had a hard time expressing anything: at Jet's [ph], at Claus's [ph], at Fritz's [ph]. Linda would say, "So be polite." Afterwards, "Can't you say it?" Giorgio would kind of shrug and say, "Well, what do you want me to say?" [Laughs.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was an odd combination in some ways.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, it was always odd. But Linda loved Giorgio.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She did indeed. And she loved him and—

ELISE ASHER: You know, and he loved her but they fought. She used to be angry at him all the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did she really?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And she would go fishing down in front of their place there.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, she loved fishing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She would look down and say, "Isn't he adorable." [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. She'd say that but then even when she was angry she'd say, "Oh, you little darling." Afterwards she'd say, "You're such a bastard, you little darling."

DOROTHY SECKLER: She did, yes. That was an odd relationship.

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. She was very unique.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And he loved her too, didn't he?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. But he, but they, I've never seen a couple—never known a couple to be so fighting so much.

They shouldn't have—their backgrounds were too different. I mean it was hard. Linda liked to read a lot. And Giorgio got restless and then he'd ask too many people and he'd cook too much. And he was always—he was just grinding his Viridian Green right into her own studio. She'd say, "Giorgio, I can use the tool. Get out of the away." He would do, you know, he had to make it like he, like he had to start from the beginning with pasta. He had to have all these machines and—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: He was in love with the machines. But it's very funny. It's a very funny story but it wasn't always so comfortable.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I thought he was so charming. And she too in a way; right?

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I loved Linda, was really my best friend I mean.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Southern. I don't know, did she come from the south?

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She must have, didn't she?

ELISE ASHER: No, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She always seemed to me like a southern belle somehow. [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: No. That was part of it, part of it was that her father was part of a Swedish lilt that she got from her father who never spoke English without the—you know, he spoke with quite an accent really. She was American through and through.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And he was Swedish?

ELISE ASHER: Yes. He never got over it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course, Linda—right.

ELISE ASHER: And Linda was a little bit, that lilt she was brought up with. And it was mixed in with a little affectation that began to be a part of her up in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: She was born and brought up in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that softness, that, you know, that—

ELISE ASHER: I loved it. She could barely go, "Hello, you little darling." Then Peggy got some of it from Linda.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which Peggy?

ELISE ASHER: Peggy Burlin.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, did she?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, she'd call and she'd say, "Elise, dear."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Wasn't that sort of like her?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, but Peggy was always so quiet-voiced.

ELISE ASHER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] She was a masochist though. Boy, they fought.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really? I never could figure that out.

ELISE ASHER: When I was at my most troubled he was happy. There was that old Paul [Burlin] just rubbing his hands. He was a mean guy, you know, very bitter.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Certainly seemed—

ELISE ASHER: Very cultivated, very interesting. But terribly cruel, unkind.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And she was so devoted all those years.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, she was a beautiful person.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

ELISE ASHER: She was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And so into all the oriental mysticism too that would make it possible perhaps for her to live that way.

ELISE ASHER: To be a—yeah, you're right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: To be above it in some way. Otherwise how could she possibly.

ELISE ASHER: She would have committed suicide.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But what has she done now?

ELISE ASHER: She's dying.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She is?

ELISE ASHER: Well, she's down in the hospital. She isn't painting any more to me. She had, it's terribly complicated, she had leukemia for a long time that she didn't tell people about. But it isn't leukemia, you know, usually you die of pneumonia, you don't really ever die of, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But she got, she was ill. And I saw her, and I'm not sure, she had the flu and then it went into shingles. And it went into her brain and it went into encephalitis. And she's down south in sort of a nursing home.

It's so terrible because I wish she died because this isn't Peggy. She would die of mortification if she knew. She's like a vegetable. She shouldn't be alive, not that beautiful, fastidious woman. That's it. That's the story.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What a terrible thing. What a terrible story. I often thought of her.

ELISE ASHER: A nightmare.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Seems to me it was only a year ago or so.

ELISE ASHER: No, this has only been a year.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Has it really?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. And so you're right. It's only been, uh-huh.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, so much for digression anyway.

ELISE ASHER: So that's the Giorgio thing. Now what else?

DOROTHY SECKLER: So this is very interesting they way you pull, pull that time slot thing around. So, you know, it helps me very much in seeing things like this.

ELISE ASHER: Well, even things that I'm thinking that I may be wrong but I'm sure I'm not. I mean, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you were closer to it than I was at that time.

ELISE ASHER: I think we forget that Abstract Expressionism was really in the early '50s. It was not '49 and '48 and '47.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: Actually, I mean Gorky and Bill influenced—Gorky, Bill and Matta were doing things exactly alike for a while. And Pollock even. They were doing—

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean automatist things?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah. I mean it began to look alike I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh.

ELISE ASHER: At the beginning.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And Motherwell was not in that from your point of view?

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you think so?

ELISE ASHER: Oh, I think he thinks he was in the sense that it was an intellectual attitude. And he may have been. I would never, I mean I would never be that presumptuous. I don't know what earlier—I only get it from the reactions of his being more of a philosopher and being always influenced by the French. And still refining it in one way and cruding it up the other way so because he is was still always on it because he's remaking history, he's always said that.

I mean he was—did you ever read David Hare, David Hare's article in *ARTnews*? So devastating. He was so indignant about Motherwell.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, was he indignant about Motherwell's panning Pollock?

ELISE ASHER: Motherwell's lying all the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh yes. Now I heard about it because I was visiting—

ELISE ASHER: Very cruel.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —Lee Krasner at that time and as a matter of fact—

ELISE ASHER: She probably loved every word of it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She adored it.

ELISE ASHER: Because she's a bitch too. But she was right; she loved it because she hated Motherwell.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I never saw the article though. I always meant to see it and I didn't for some reason or other.

ELISE ASHER: They've always been an enemies. You know, these people are so narcissistic. These people are so—it's so ridiculous that whole New York thing—they're really, you know, you can hardly say egocentric, they're just—well even Franz [Kline] used to laugh about it. I mean he just laughed because—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were they, in the late '40s and early '50s were they that catty and mean about each other then do you think?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, in the early '50s they were.

DOROTHY SECKLER: By the early '50s.

ELISE ASHER: They were trying to get attention I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I sort of wondered if there wasn't a kind of golden period between '47 and '52 perhaps?

ELISE ASHER: Yeah, there was kind of, when the Eighth Street Club.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When—in Provincetown when they were—

ELISE ASHER: No, it was more the Eighth Street Club that drew them together in New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, when they might have been less competitive. And they later were—then when they began to sell they were certainly competitive.

ELISE ASHER: I don't think they were ever less competitive after they became abstract. Those who weren't abstract before. I don't think Baziotes was ever that competitive because he was sort of his own, again, influence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You think you remember—

ELISE ASHER: I think they were all friends as people, not as artists.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: And down deep they thought if you can't beat them join them ideas. You know, I think they were all friends. Because they were, as Franz used to say, "The poor bastards. If you can't, if you can't be friends, do things for your friends, who can you do things for?" You know, it's the loneliest of artists that's really the egotism.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You think Franz was not as competitive as some of the others?

ELISE ASHER: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was young. A younger—

ELISE ASHER: No, he wasn't really. No, he wasn't younger in age.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He hadn't been a part of the WPA of course.

ELISE ASHER: No, he wasn't.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He came into it later.

ELISE ASHER: He was more eager.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Huh?

ELISE ASHER: He was more innocent because he was just like from a very coarse sort of, I think sort of Pennsylvania Dutch family but it was, you know. Have you ever met his mother?

DOROTHY SECKLER: No.

ELISE ASHER: Well, I have. She was the toughest thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really? No kidding.

ELISE ASHER: And she used to say, You know, he just got famous on those un-understandable, or whatever she'd say, those black and white poles that he was doing, wasn't it lucky, or something. But she loved him. She adored him. But she was a really tough cookie. Just she was like a barmaid only older.

And Franz, you know—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he was, he had a certain air of—

ELISE ASHER: He loved his family.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He had a certain air of elegance after he became successful.

ELISE ASHER: Franz was made—Franz was elegant anyway.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I loved Franz—

ELISE ASHER: I think Franz had a strange, I think Franz had an aristocracy of the soul a little bit. First of all he loved, I think he told you, he loved the English. And he—

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did he get to England and how was that whole thing brought about?

ELISE ASHER: I don't know. But he always had a romanticism about going to England.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know it.

ELISE ASHER: And meeting an English love.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this girl he met, was she an honest girl?

ELISE ASHER: She had a breakdown, that's all. Remember, she was put away before—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I know. But they were, they were married some years before it happened.

ELISE ASHER: I don't think they had too many happy whole years together.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Okay. But it was such a terrible struggle I understand and he felt guilty about her breakdown.

ELISE ASHER: He went there every Sunday.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because it happened because they had no money. I mean they were so poor.

ELISE ASHER: Well, people that were just as poor or much poorer. I don't think so. I think she—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he thought that she was—

ELISE ASHER: I think she was absolutely had a breakdown. Period. Just like my daughter did. I mean I don't think you can translate that as—it seemed to me that maybe it was because she wasn't American, maladjusted. How can you know what's chemical now and what isn't. It certainly wasn't because they were any poorer than anybody else. He didn't even need that money.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I mean—

ELISE ASHER: I mean look at all these other people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —if he, if he was so poor that he was making portraits in bars to get a few dollars.

ELISE ASHER: Oh, but that wasn't that. He wanted to become an artist. This was his—cute and naive way, he didn't know that you weren't supposed to show in Washington Square. These other people were much more sophisticated. You just didn't show—I wouldn't have shown in Washington Square. I would have been much too snobbish. I would have known better.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Don't forget what year it was: '37.

ELISE ASHER: I loved the idea that Franz did that. And I loved it because it was something innocent with all of it. There was always something inno—even his admiration for the English and English speaking and speaking well and coming from certain kinds of families. Franz was such a marvelous snob. He really was. What do you think he loved in Betsy? The *Harper's Bazaar* thing, he loved that. He loved that business.

I think he was, that he was so naive he was like a child. He really was. When he began collecting antiques he was like a child.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And he'd get all dressed up in white to play tennis.

ELISE ASHER: Just adorable.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He liked English clothes.

ELISE ASHER: Isn't that darling? I know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He came up to me once and started talking about the suit that I had on. Incredible.

ELISE ASHER: Wasn't that cute? He could think better in Burberry coats and—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: —he was just so darling and funny that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Why he never got into commercial art where he might, you know,—

ELISE ASHER: He was very tempted I think. I think what he thought at the beginning he would do well was those fire things. It was always because he was so broke. He did thousands of things, just like everybody else. He wanted to become an artist like the English did. Or the—not like the French, because he stood in, but he had something about England because they spoke so well, because they had English accents. All those little kids had English accents.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

ELISE ASHER: He was just a kid. Franz, he was just so complicated and so simple, you know. You know, he was so delightful. He could become the elegant bum—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was he always a heavy drinker?

ELISE ASHER: I, certainly when I knew. I mean I never knew him not to be. But don't forget, I came upon that in '49, '50. I didn't know that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Umm. I was wondering if maybe it was the whole tension of being with this group of people who were so much more sophisticated and in some ways knew a lot of things that he hadn't been up for.

ELISE ASHER: They were immigrants compared to him. He was one of the few Americans. Milton Resnik and all those people were really immigrants and they came from very immigrant families. And Franz just came from lower class America. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: But he was Jewish?

ELISE ASHER: No!

DOROTHY SECKLER: No? No?

ELISE ASHER: No!

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well what kind of a name is Kline for a person who isn't Jewish?

ELISE ASHER: K-L-I-N-E, no, that's German. That means—how do you think people whose name is Small, Little, John Little. He wasn't Jewish. That's just a translation that means "small." Franz wasn't Jewish.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I kept wondering how that would work.

ELISE ASHER: No. That's interesting. Just like people thought Pollock was Jewish.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I never thought—well, I—

ELISE ASHER: Well, Pollock is a Polish name. But you know what, he's Polack. But there's a Scot, there was a very close Scotsman who was a minister whose name was Pollock. And that's just a Scotch name.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I never thought of Pollock as being Jewish.

[Cross talk.]

ELISE ASHER: No, but Franz Kline wasn't Jewish. Whoever told you that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: But Kline, I thought the name Kline was Jewish.

ELISE ASHER: Whoever gave you that feeling because Jews always think that Pollock is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Nobody ever gave me that feeling. It was just the name. I just thought, you

know, it doesn't, it didn't—there was nothing about him that seemed Jewish but then he was after this English thing, so lots of Jewish people want to lose their Jewish ancestry.

ELISE ASHER: I know, you're right. But Franz, Franz was German.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was Pennsylvania Dutch.

ELISE ASHER: I imagine so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Okay.

ELISE ASHER: I imagine that's where Kline came from.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Okay.

ELISE ASHER: I mean I imagine that's where his name came from. It was probably Plattdeutsch really.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh.

ELISE ASHER: Like Nanno came from Friesland almost. And he used to say very scornfully, Well, Bill is from—that's Plattdeutsch, Holland is where, you know—not that Bill was Jewish but I mean it was that same feeling about—see, there are lots of dialects in Holland and Nanno's was almost English. And his looks were if you remember. And all these short, sawed-off people who spoke of "dese and dose," those were the Plattdeutsch people from—

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

ELISE ASHER: —from Holland—yeah, from, you know, Amsterdam. And many of them were diamond cutters and things and some of them were Jew, well, most of them were Jews. But they came from there. But then Nanno, Nanno's was a Dutch, it didn't have anything to do with English.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there any prestige actually in being American born among this group?

ELISE ASHER: Look at the way Bob Motherwell swings it. Every chance he gets it's just, oh, you know, old California, it's really just Gold Coast Russian almost. He's so marvelous. But he's, when he gets down he gets very snobbish about the, you know, the Scotch thing. Depending upon who he was talking to. Then I think he became with professional Jews because he kept, you know, being best friends with her but—because the artists were where he wanted to be—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Right, I felt, I always felt that it was, it was against them to be—

[Cross talk.]

ELISE ASHER: I think, I think a lot of these people, really all those people aren't they really funny when you think of it?

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's funny with Franz.

ELISE ASHER: It's an interesting mix though.

No, but Franz is interesting because people, many people because of Kline, especially if it's K-L-E-I-N. But, you know, many of them probably changed it to K-L-I-N-E. But if you know, I mean, German

after all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't know German.

ELISE ASHER: Well, you see I, my grandfather was German and I, and he lived with us.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] It's just like *eine kleine nacht*?

ELISE ASHER: See, it means "little," it means "small."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Little. Oh, I see.

ELISE ASHER: So when you translate it it was like John Little in East Hampton.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see.

ELISE ASHER: And so-and-so Small.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh.

ELISE ASHER: Or "smaller." It's just the same name but people don't think. It's like Smith in Germany.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: But it also happens it also is a German Jewish name.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

ELISE ASHER: I suppose it's also a Russian Jewish came in, coming from Prussia. Who knows? From East Prussia, you know. A lot of those names like Gross. Well, look at Nanno's name was Nanno de Groot. It really meant Nanno de Gross, Nanno the Large, Nanno the Big.

VOICE: We can eat any time.

ELISE ASHER: Okay. Aren't you hungry? Don't you think it would be sort of fun to eat?

DOROTHY SECKLER: It is time. It think it would be great.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]