



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Interview with Olin Orr

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

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: [Begins in middle of sentence] 4th, 1968.

Mr. Orr, of course, the reason I have become interested in doing this interview is because of seeing the work that you've just completed for the Provincetown Museum. Which is now installed in front of the museum on their lawn.

And I thought we might begin by having you describe for the tape what's involved with that work, the medium, and how you think of it.

OLIN ORR: Well, in this case the bags that I have done out there are production because I have them different than before production.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, first of all, they are paper bags, right?

OLIN ORR: Yes, they're paper bags and I coated them with the plastic, the liquid plastic polyester resin, using primarily brown bags and using now, also, colored bags with them. Instead of having to paint the bags, I used bags that are already colored. Sometimes for special color, I find the paper and make a bag out of that color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then, they're rather tall. Roughly, would you give us an idea of the dimension?

OLIN ORR: The dimension I don't really know because I can't find the tape to measure it, but it's about, it looks six, seven, eight, nine, it must be nine feet high, maybe 10. No, I think about nine-feet high.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's several different complexes on them.

OLIN ORR: Yes, there's two main groups, and in each group there are separate peaks which are like apexes to little groups within the group. The one on the left is rather dominated by one huge group and it rather says the whole thing with that, and the other part of that same pile or group of bags is purely background for this strong one.

On the other side, the bags are more equally divided into smaller groups or peaks, or so forth, and there is no particularly dominant one. There's one slightly more dominant, but not enough so to say that it is as strong as the other.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hold on just a minute now.

[Audio break.]

Olin, you told me last night that, when you were working on these, you did not work according to a predetermined plan. Would you like to talk a little bit about how the idea developed or what kinds of decisions you would have been making as you worked toward the apex, let's say, of the group that you were just discussing?

OLIN ORR: Well, there are sculptors and perhaps other designers who cut away for their piece, and then, there are the others who add on for their piece, such as the chisellers and modelers. And this is probably more like modeling in that it's adding on.

And I just start with a few bags, just to give me an idea. I knew that they were each going to be two gigantic piles of bags, and mostly standing upright and mostly coming one out of the other. But I put many bags down as a base and a few different bags. And from that, I got other ideas and went on.

During the televising of it, it was sort of fun and I wanted it to be more fun, you see. I wanted it to be interesting. And I had saved some of the bigger bags for that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was actually recorded for a television program?

OLIN ORR: Yes, it was recorded first for Channel 4 in Boston in black and white, and then, they came the next day and recorded in color for network television, which I don't know whether they'll use or not. Perhaps; perhaps not.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: So, it could be anywhere between now and another year or two, I'm told, that they might choose to use it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: But, when they were there with the cameras, I had to work fast and I had an assistant who was helping to put the plastic on the bags. And I would take the plastic, the plasticized or laminated bag and crumple it however I wanted it, because I wanted it to look like a used bag because the more used the bag is, and the more brown a bag is, the more baggy it is, as far as I'm concerned. Even though sometimes I do have straight lines in the bags and sometimes they are color, the main point is that they be used brown bags.

And when they were photographing, I took one of the bigger bags and tied it at the top with a string, and I already had a high part, one long tubular bag sticking up. And I took the little ladder and I went and got as high as I could and slammed this huge bag on top of it squarely. And it was very good for the production, and it was fun.

After I had gotten it done, I looked at it and thought, my God, I'm really going to have to work on that because I sort of liked it, but it was terribly unbalanced. It was top-heavy and it wouldn't last that way because, for one thing, the wind would come along and blow it off. So, I had to make it stronger and, also, balance it aesthetically, and I did that.

And this big bag that I put up on the top, purely then for the show I could have placed it any place, but I chose to put it on the very top, and the most fun to me, as far as I was concerned, had a great deal to do with that whole group. Because by placing that huge bag at the top, I had to add many others to balance it, and then, I had to add others to make it a strong structure. And then, I had to balance the rest of the group to go with this huge, dominating piece. And so, it was by chance that

the piece is as it is now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: And much of it is by chance. I choosed where I would put some of the bags, such as it's not necessary to have more bags here or it's not necessary to have a piece of color here or a piece of light bag. But, mostly, the lighter bags or the colored bags tend to give a spark of life, and the darkness of the bags. Then, sometimes it's necessary to have a little point of interest to keep you there, to find something there.

And sometimes when I do the bags, I do them with things inside of them, and sometimes I do them just closed in that there is a partial mystery. You can look at a bag and you don't know whether it has something in it until you look inside. And it might be anything inside of it. And so, in a way, the bags have also a mystery. And when they are closed, you will never know that mystery.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What sort of things do you put inside when you do fill them?

OLIN ORR: Well, humorous things generally to make a nickel bag, I don't use pot; I simply put a nickel in it and call it a nickel bag. Or, for a handbag, I take a mannequin's hand and I put the mannequin's hand inside the bag, and there it is with the nail polish and the surreal skin tone, and so forth. And then, I have a handbag. And it's the same with many other kinds of bags. There's a list I've made over the months. There's so many kinds of bags, laundry bags, grocery bags. A bag goes along with so many things. It is really a very day-to-day thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you happen to begin using this particular medium?

OLIN ORR: Well, I thought of when I would be on this and that show on television at night, and someone would say, "Well, how did you come to be using the bag?" And I would have all these fun things to say which wouldn't at all be true, because the fun things would probably be much more fun than the true things.

And one of the things I thought I might say was that walking in the rain I saw the muddy, crumpled bag someone had thrown down empty. They'd used it and taken whatever it was out of it and thrown it in the street. And someone had stepped on it, and I saw it lying there, partially raised. Then, I took it home and washed it off and set it up to dry. And naturally, once it dried, it was a little stiff and it had kept its shape, and I decided I liked that shape and I coated it with plastic. And, of course, it lost its shape all over again because it was wet all over again.

But, then, I tried to get that shape back, and, of course, I wasn't able to get that shape back. You just can't. But I got another shape, you see. And the other shape was different and not necessarily better or worse, but just as good probably. And I liked that. Therefore, I had taken the lowly disposed bag and resurrected it and elevated it. Once I solidified it, I went to laminating it with the polyester.

Then, I placed it on a base and placed the base on a pedestal and covered it with glass. And so, there I had a common, ordinary brown paper bag signed by Orr '68, vitrined and hallowed in a museum. And that's the end of the bag.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a very nice fantasy to say the least. Is the truth less interesting? I don't know.

OLIN ORR: No, not really. But, then, I've heard the truth before, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you rather let that one stand?

OLIN ORR: It's so similar, that it's all—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, this would relate your work to the kind of romanticism that prevailed with junk sculpture that was popular in the '50s, perhaps rather than to current attitudes of some of the younger people working who are less involved with, you know, the used quality, you know, the humanity soaked into used things, and so on, which it really is closer to your actual attitude.

OLIN ORR: Well, there is a similarity between this and junk sculpture, and the junk sculpture is something that's been had—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a derelict thing.

OLIN ORR: —and no longer wanted, and someone takes it and elevates it all over again and calls it something else, art in my case.

Just ordinary junk sculpture, I wouldn't be that interested, and I've seen it, friends of mine do dada-esque things. Sometimes the bags are terribly dada-esque, as a handbag is terribly surreal or dada-esque in a way. But I think the bags are much more than just junk sculpture. They have many more facets, you see. With those many more facets, the interest can last longer and there are more things for me to catch onto and develop, such as the bag is the container. The bag is more symbolic than anything else I can think of, of the most basic and ordinary used object in our life. We use it absolutely every day. We see it every day. We use it and dispose it every day.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you said you had seen some of your friends do dada things with discarded things, were you influenced by groups of artists who were working in that direction or were some of your friends more or less working in the lines established by Rauschenberg or by Pop art? Or what stylistic grouping was interesting to you when you first, you know, became an artist?

OLIN ORR: I can't say that I was really crazy for pop art when I was doing the bags. Much of Pop art was dada-esque, anyway, and I liked that. But some of it was a big con, I thought, and that is sort of the puritanical Olin speaking there and believing that it's a con. And I haven't been able to shake the puritanical Olin. But there's the other Olin that's not so puritanical and that's the one who can make bags.

I wasn't particularly influenced, I don't think, by the pop art. The bags were beautiful, you see, and pop art most often is not. Well, I don't find it still today beauty in pop art. It's interesting and satisfying in ways, but the bags actually do have a beauty, and particularly with light coming through them and the translucency, and so forth.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I was interested in what you told me before about your earlier work with creatures or beasts made of torn paper. There seemed to be some kind of carry-through from one idea to the other.

OLIN ORR: Well, there could be, but, actually, I have been doing beasts for years and years and years, and the torn paper things actually came after the bags. They sort of came in the middle of bags. I was doing bags first in wax. I live in New York, have for the last seven or eight years, and I was in New York and I was doing the bags and I wasn't getting anywhere with the bags. I had showed them around.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were waxing paper bags? You were making bags?

OLIN ORR: I was putting wax on the bags.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes.

OLIN ORR: And they were thicker then, and I used brown wax. It's a casting wax. And I would sometimes put pigment in the wax, but I could only use colors that would get darker. I couldn't make it any lighter. And I tried paraffin, and paraffin, it's so brittle, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: You can start with a lighter color and use lighter colors that way, but it is so brittle that it doesn't bend and it cracks off.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: So, I didn't make many of those.

But I got sort of fed up with New York and I left New York, unfortunately, or else I might be, I can think, rich and famous already. But I gave up the bags and I went to Europe and I stayed there for nine or ten months, traveling around, and just thinking, well, I'd never come back to New York because I sold my place; I said goodbye to everyone, and I never intended to come back.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where were you in Europe?

OLIN ORR: France, Spain, and England.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did that relate to your ideas/work at all or was it just an interlude from—

OLIN ORR: It was more of an interlude. It didn't relate to—I did bags there, but, actually, I tried in England and France to find a plastic that I could use. I couldn't find it. I didn't know where I could get it. I searched every place. They were even having a plastics fair in London, and I went there and I couldn't find what I wanted. And no one seemed to understand.

And so, now and then, as fun, I would take a crumpled-up bag or take a regular bag, but generally it was a crumpled-up bag, and I would sort of step on it or kick it or mash it a little bit and sign it and give it to somebody. And it was fun. And then, to make it more fun, well, they took it and they put it on the wall. And so, they went along with the joke that way. So, those were things I was doing in Europe.

I did also things such as I've been doing for years and will continue to do because I find them interesting. There are things in plaster or wax, or whatever.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But, so far, you had not done any beasts? You were just doing bags?

OLIN ORR: Right, I was just doing bags. And I came back to New York and I did a few bags in wax, and I didn't like that. Then, I took the plastic and I covered a few bags in plastic, but I still wasn't getting anywhere. I don't hustle them enough.

Before I had gone away, I had taken them and I had shown them to Ivan Karp at Castelli and Eleanore Ward at—

DOROTHY SECKLER: The Stable?

OLIN ORR: —the Stable Gallery. And Eleanor Ward liked them, and she said, "Leave me one. I'm going to show it and I'm going to sell it for you, or I'll see who's interested."

Ivan Karp liked it. Well, he didn't forget over the years. And so, through him, I've had two or three successes. I've never shown there. I was told that I could the bags in a group, show them, but that wasn't enough. I was showing them, I was saying, "If you want to give me a show, I'll stay in New York." And nobody offered me a show. They offered me a group show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And I, Lordly Olin said, "That's not enough to keep me in New York." And so, I left and I lost out a lot, you see. So, I had to start all over again when I came back to New York.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year was that that you left?

OLIN ORR: That was '65, I think. I'm not really sure. '65, yes, '65, in the spring.

And so, I sort of lost a lot by not continuing that. I came back to New York. I finally found a place. I couldn't find a huge place. I was sick of living in a loft. I didn't want to live in another loft because they have rats and you have hellacious landlords and you don't have heat, and you go through hell, you know. And the inspector is always coming; you have to pretend you're not there. So, I wanted a studio and an apartment together. So, I found this place that had a huge garden with a studio in the front and a place to live. So, I took that place.

But, then, I had to acclimate myself to it being smaller, and I couldn't do big things, as I had done before in a bigger place.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: So, I started doing these things that went on the wall, so they didn't take as much space and they just hung on all the walls.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Bags? Or these were beasts?

OLIN ORR: These were the torn paper things that—

DOROTHY SECKLER: The beasts, yes.

OLIN ORR: —were beasts.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: And the big torn paper things were, and still are, though I haven't done any since December, seamless paper that I just used in displays oftentimes or in photography. I used great rolls of seamless tape or no seam, whatever.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: People say the different words. And it's heavy to begin with. And I take it and I tear it into irregular shapes, and it has a very torn edge. Sometimes when I tear straight, I have to force it to tear crookedly. And I get the shape that I like that would be a great plane for the beasts to be seen on, to be lighted upon or found upon. You know what I say? They are to me, as are most of the things that are most basic, that I think of, but I like the idea of reducing things. And I can reduce

life in this way or a man to a beast. And so, I take these torn pieces that I have left over from the great piece and I see if any of them work on the great piece. If they don't, then I tear special pieces or I might change them with more tears. And I use them. I use sometimes just the shapes that I have torn off and I find ideas from how it happens to look, you see, without knowing what I am going to tear already.

DOROTHY SECKLER: These are superimposed, then, on the first one that you started with—

OLIN ORR: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —the large creature?

OLIN ORR: I glue them on, on edge generally. They are very raised from the background. They are not as a collage flat upon it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, I see.

OLIN ORR: And they are like that, almost perpendicular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Don't they, then, turn another corner and become parallel a few inches away?

OLIN ORR: Yes, sometimes, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you mean there are some that are just at right angles to the supporting page.

OLIN ORR: Like this [demonstrating].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Only it won't show on tape.

OLIN ORR: Like that. Well, you can describe it more.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

OLIN ORR: Perhaps like that [demonstrating].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: Or perhaps like that [demonstrating].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I see. It rises at an oblique angle—

OLIN ORR: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —from the supporting surface—

OLIN ORR: Not perpendicular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —we might say. And it can take on a curving as well as a rigid, an angular—

OLIN ORR: Right. It almost has to have a curve to make it strong for one thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, yes.

OLIN ORR: And also, in my work nothing is straight, and I wouldn't be interested if it was. Fortunately, that word is becoming broader. And now, like such as hippies use it mostly. They ask you if you're straight. And what a hippie means when he says, "Are you straight?" is do you smoke or not or do you shoot up or do you use acid or anything like that. And if you smoke or use acid, then you're not straight.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And if you don't do anything like that, if you don't do anything irregular, then you're straight, you see. And I sort of like that and I like the trend.

See, going back to the beasts, well, I have the beasts that I can have doing anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Are they, by the way, in colored paper or—

OLIN ORR: Just in colored paper and sometimes in white paper and sometimes in black paper.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does the color play an important part or is it rather incidental? I mean, contrasts of one against another, actually.

OLIN ORR: Sometimes I use different colors upon a different colored background. But most of the time I prefer them to be just one color, though. And I prefer them to be darker colors than bright colors, such as a dark blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: Or a deep red, actually.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you indicate with paint or by tearing anything that might be, let's say, an eye or a border or a jaw or something like that?

OLIN ORR: How do I indicate it?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you indicate anything?

OLIN ORR: With tears only or pieces added—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: —such as I might add an extra piece and call it a leg or add another piece and call it a head or a tail or anything like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: Not all of them have heads or tails or arms or legs, and some of the beasts are beasts of the water or beasts of the air or beasts of the earth. And they do all that we do, only they do it in a less-complex way. They birth. They die. They fight. They eat.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Are they complexes then? I mean, since they fight, would two beasts be juxtaposed to each other on the same support?

OLIN ORR: If they're fighting, you say?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: Yes. Yes, I would say so. If they would be fighting, there would be a—I don't know if I could say it, but I could show you—there would be the strength you would be able to see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And the antagonism you would be able to see of one to the other. And sometimes one might be overcoming another or perhaps there would be only a challenge, and it would be preceding whether one would be stronger than the other. Or perhaps there would be one dead and one victor.

This is rather limiting, and I give you this. When you see them, you don't feel completely caught this way. They're not that graphic as I have just worded them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm. You leave a certain amount of ambiguity—

OLIN ORR: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —when you finish it, more than you have in your own mind actually? I mean, there's more of a narrative association in your own imagination than is explicit.

OLIN ORR: Right. Well, I can find sometimes one or two things in it, and it may be one or it might be another. Some people might say that's not valid. I don't really care.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: Valid is only someone else's judgment, you see. As far as I'm concerned, everyone should begin to judge and it should be their own judgment. Sometimes their own judgment is not particularly just or most correct, but, then, there are degrees to all that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Olin, how did you develop as an artist? Did you have any formal schooling?

OLIN ORR: Mostly no. I went to the Art Students League for a while just to prove to myself that I could copy a model in clay, literally copy it. And that was difficult. I almost always went off into some design. But, generally, I finished it first, and then, I would begin to change it. And when I was convinced that I could copy both man and a woman in clay exactly as they were, then I stopped. I wasn't interested in carving stone, and I had already studied some composition. I work for money oftentimes in display work. In display you learn much of composition and color. And so, display is in a way very horrible, and I can't stand it sometimes. It should be much better. It should be a great outlet to art, I think, but it's not, because you generally have to work down to the client. And if you're not working down to the client, then the client insists that you work down for his customers, you see?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: Because the point is if the client isn't ready for it or his customers aren't ready for it. So, you couldn't do anything too daring. There's some people, though, that like daring things and will let you do them once. And then, it might happen, such as I did some bags once for Delman's windows, the absolute nth degree of commercialism. And I thought, well, if I'm going to do the bags for windows, I'll use your bags, because if it's going to be, it should be all the way. And so, I used Delman's shoe bags. Delman's is that very large department right now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And I made all kinds of fun things out of the bags. And the man who owns Bergdorf saw them in the windows and wanted to know what was that awful mess in his windows. And so, they weren't able to use any more of my rough things. And I prefer to do things in the rough, and they prefer a more finished object.

I was going to put the torn paper things in there, and they said, "No, I don't think that they'd go," because they have torn edges, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And they didn't like that. They would think that was trash. The bags looked like trash. They were crumpled-up bags.

And through display, I learned a lot. I learned much of techniques through display because in display houses there are different materials that you learn from other people who work in display how to use different materials. Most display materials are rather ephemeral in that they're only meant to—the pieces on display aren't meant to last forever. So, there's never any thought of this being art, that it's going to last forever, and it's going to wind up being in bronze, and that a collector is going to take it.

In a way, display is free from many things that an artist really can't help but think about, such as galleries and collectors and immortality, and all that stuff that's really sort of horrible.

Education is rather nil. I prefer education from people that have lived longer and in great variations, and they have collected or grown wise from their experiences. And I like to listen to them, to where they've been and to what they've done and to things that have happened to them, and judgments that they had to make and why they made them. And then, I gain wisdom in that way and knowledge in that way.

Also, it leaves it open. In an academic education of an institution you are taken and placed there, and the instructor says, "This is the way it is. This is the way that it will be. Know it. Believe it and do it." So, I don't like that and I disagree with that.

If someone is sitting with me or I'm sitting with someone and he's telling me some things or showing me some things. It's not a dogmatic way. He's not saying, "This is it." Or I'm not thinking that, anyway. And if he is saying it, it doesn't affect me. So, I just sort of take that with a grain of salt and I say, "Well, perhaps this is the way." And I'll try it. If it's not, then I shan't use that way. And sometimes I say, "Oh, no, this can't be because I can see holes in it already." And so, I know not to use that way. I think that the institutional learning is generally a drawback, actually, from the experience I've seen of how it's affected others. Perhaps they had nothing to begin with.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: Perhaps a few were exceptional to begin with; it can't hurt them. But most of the people I see—

DOROTHY SECKLER: As a child, were you involved in some kind of making things and thinking of yourself somewhat as an artist?

OLIN ORR: Yes. Probably most kids when they're in school, there's always one in the class who can

draw, and everyone says, "Oh, he can draw." And there's respect and mystery to this person who can draw. And they think, "Oh, I wish I could draw," and things like that.

Of course, I would wish that I could do other things the way they were doing, too. Whenever things were to be drawn or something like that or made with the hands that might be arty, they'd ask me to do them. I think that was fun.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where was this?

OLIN ORR: And sometimes I could and sometimes I couldn't do it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now in New York, right?

OLIN ORR: Oh, no. No, in Louisiana, and mostly small towns in Louisiana. I always thought of myself as an artist. Once when I was still in school, I partially took one of those correspondence courses in art because my school didn't have an art class.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did that work?

OLIN ORR: I learned a few techniques and a few things on composition that were interesting rules that you can use or break. And that was all right. I wasn't very good at it because I'm not the most disciplined person. And discipline I think is fine, but—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But those courses are very expensive.

OLIN ORR: Yes. I never had lots of money, but I always worked. And so, I thought, well, since I had the money, it's mine to do as I please.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: And so, I spent it on that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It takes a good bit of discipline, I should think, to carry on consistently through the whole thing. So, it certainly is admirable that you did. So, that took you through high school. And then, when you got out of high school, did you come to New York then?

OLIN ORR: No, I sort of fooled around. I wanted to make money and I wanted to be an artist. And as I say, I didn't know what kind of artist I wanted to be, and I didn't know exactly how I wanted to make money.

So, I went to LSU at night, thinking that since I don't know what I'm going to do, there's no sense in my going and starting on something that might be the wrong direction.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What's LSU?

OLIN ORR: Louisiana State University.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: It's in Baton Rouge.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: I lived in Plaquemine and it was near to that. So, I just went there. And I took a few classes in business administration and real estate things and stuff like that, you know, ways of making money. And I took a few classes in art, sketching and photography; no painting classes. I don't know why particularly, but I just didn't. Maybe I was too late or something. I'm always too late for something. And so, I fooled around with those, and then, I sort of let them go. I wasn't very good at it, going every night. It wasn't even every night, but every class I didn't go to. And after you miss a few classes, you must know how difficult it is to go back after you've missed a few.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm.

OLIN ORR: So, my friend said, "Why don't you go into the army with me?", into the ASA, and the ASA is purported to be, by the Army, to be the top 10 of the Army.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What does ASA stand for?

OLIN ORR: Army Security Agency.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh-huh.

OLIN ORR: And so, he convinced me that I should go with him. And so, I did, and I went to—well, part of it was that, well, I went down to New Orleans a couple of times and they paid my way and took care of me while I was there and tried to convince me that I should join. And so, that was fun. And so, I didn't join right away because, you know, they'd invite me back a few more times and I'd be their guest in New Orleans a few more times. And that was fun.

Finally, I decided to sign, you know, give that oath, and so forth. And then, I went to New England. And from New England, I had expected to go to California and didn't. I wound up going to, when I finished a school in Massachusetts, I went to Turkey. I had a choice of Japan for two years or Turkey for one year, and then, perhaps a choice of Germany. And everyone hated Turkey and said, "Oh, my God, don't go to Turkey. It's really horrible." But the thought of going anyplace for two years I didn't think was so good, either.

So, I went to Turkey for a year. And it was horrible in ways, but it was fascinating also. It is like going back in time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What part of Turkey?

OLIN ORR: On the North Sea.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You weren't in the big cities, anyway?

OLIN ORR: No, they were very small cities and they were older than Christ and things like that. One, Sinop, on the Black Sea. And I was there for a year and I got to know some of the Turks, and I traveled around some. I traveled to North Africa once or twice and I went into Greece and Italy, those things.

And then, I went to Germany. From Germany, I went to a few countries from there.

[END TAPE 1.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you were traveling, were you having a chance, you know, to look at museums like [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: Oh, yes. Yes, I went to see museums.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it's seemingly not particularly related to what you were involved in?

OLIN ORR: In the army, it was nothing that I was involved in. While I was in the army, [inaudible]. Eventually, [inaudible], and they decided that I was a bad risk because I was emotionally [inaudible].

But, see, now I'm emotionally [inaudible]. But I just wanted so badly to get out of what I was doing, that I allowed myself to be emotional upset. [Inaudible.] So, for that reason, I was supposed to stay in Europe, but, then, after I did that, they decided that, no, I can't stay in Europe, that I would be better off nearer to home and that I should go back home. And so, when I got out of Germany, I came to New York, and I wasn't about to go back home to Louisiana. I would have been so bored. So, I got off the boat in New York and stayed and expected to be there for about a year. [Inaudible], three or four years later I was still there. Every time the summer would come around, I would think, oh, my God, another year in New York and I'm not getting anywhere. So, finally, I got out.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You went back to Europe on your own?

OLIN ORR: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But this time, of course, you [inaudible]?

OLIN ORR: Right. In Europe I decided, the second time I went, I [inaudible]. It was so fantastic in Barcelona. Have you been in Barcelona?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm, yes.

OLIN ORR: I loved Barcelona as much as any city in America, partially because, well, when you have a good time in a city, you like that city.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

OLIN ORR: I found a love. [Inaudible] stayed with her [inaudible] that I wouldn't have otherwise. [Inaudible.]

Then, I went to the [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible] is pretty nice.

OLIN ORR: Oh, yes, if they have [inaudible]. They had just one [inaudible] the contemporary one [inaudible] it was on contemporary art in [inaudible]. Just because you've seen it all two years ago right here in the U.S. I get bored with [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you didn't get any [inaudible] out of the [inaudible] all the [inaudible]. That was there [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: A bit [inaudible] for someone who's not very [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: But did you go? The one in [inaudible] you'd have remembered it.

OLIN ORR: I surely would. Well there was one there that was [inaudible] that they'd form within the park [inaudible]. I don't know what it is [inaudible] you can only take one, one a day. And I went there, and I looked all around, and I saw [inaudible] and my contemporary [inaudible] I found this in Madrid

[inaudible] it was so fascinating, I had never seen --

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

OLIN ORR: The Goyas mostly. I've been, before in the Army I was [inaudible] museum in Austria, in Vienna, on a holiday. And they had hundreds of lithographs or whatever they were, and they were all so grotesque, and I really liked that [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where the blood [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: Yes, and I discovered also, I didn't really know that Goya had such a [inaudible] and I loved the [inaudible]. I think it's rather interesting [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: The [inaudible] were earlier and [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: I don't really mean the [inaudible] I mean the paintings, and there are paintings of horrible things and then there are paintings of noble people and children of noble people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes.

OLIN ORR: And here are all these [inaudible] and if he did that and he did the others perhaps it's the way Eleanor does the clay working in those other [inaudible]. I'd hate to think anybody else had to go through that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, did you get in touch and [inaudible] artists who are [inaudible].
OLIN ORR: No, I didn't. I met in Madrid a few artists, and there were people there from all over the world [inaudible]. One in particular I remember that [inaudible] I saw him copying [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, yes.

OLIN ORR: It was amazing because we had everything there except for the [inaudible]. It was exactly like what he was talking, he [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

OLIN ORR: Isn't it? It's really a challenge.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's right.

OLIN ORR: And then there's other people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

OLIN ORR: No, it's not. [Inaudible] sometimes I think I miss out [inaudible]. Oftentimes I don't meet the artiest people where I go [inaudible]. And I think I've not met the arty people [inaudible]. Alvin [inaudible] I used a model from [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

OLIN ORR: In that way I know you also [inaudible] otherwise you [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: That may be so. I don't know. I hope that it's better for me if I don't then to think that I don't [inaudible]. You know, most of my friends aren't artists, they're [inaudible] there's artists who make art for galleries and to sell [inaudible] they might be artists but they don't have the [inaudible] in that mode [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: What is your [inaudible]? In terms, what would you like to have happen [inaudible] when you go back to New York, you know, ideally, what line of [inaudible]?

OLIN ORR: Would I go back to New York? I think it would be awfully nice if somebody would like to get me a show. I started working on that last year. I never ran into anybody who really genuinely wanted to get me a show. Some of the [inaudible] other galleries, private [inaudible] open gallery, it turned out that [inaudible] fantastic [inaudible]. And the show there was a success in that it was [inaudible] with a front window, a window on the street, and people pass and there were always cars backed up, they were slowing to see the bags. I had a few of the bags, or a group of bags, in the window, and people were always gathering in front of the window, and it was [inaudible]. I didn't get reviews from it unfortunately. I'm not really very good at, on time thinking, you know, who do I know who will do something with it and so after it's all over, someone said well why didn't you call so-and-so or why didn't you call me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you're [inaudible] to see that I've got this intermediate [inaudible]?

OLIN ORR: As far as Olin Orr the artist, I confess it concerns Olin Orr the artist, quote unquote. I will [inaudible]. I've given up the bags more than once. Bags are not the most saleable object [inaudible] people have great difficulty getting over [inaudible] not only are they not in bronze but they're very fragile, and so they're really not the most saleable art. It's awful extravagant of me to be doing things like paper bags and torn paper things. I'm not rich and probably never will be, and I try to not make much money off of them, but I have tried and tired, and I would like to have some sort of success with the bags and I put the bags down and then someone comes along and offers me some other little thing, like someone offered me a private show last year in December.

And so I did more bags than I'd ever done and it was fantastic because with an end in sight I can work much better if I know that they're going to be a part of [inaudible] and perhaps they won't come back. Well most of them came back, and—

DOROTHY SECKLER: [inaudible] is it possible [inaudible]?

OLIN ORR: Well, many are being stored in a gallery on Long Island, and it's storing purely because they haven't sold one yet. And they weren't intended to be stored, I mean as far as they're concerned, but I knew that quite well from [inaudible] because I didn't have room to bring them back because when I finished getting ready for the show I had to sort of step over and around them. I couldn't move. And I don't know really. I'll give the bags some more [inaudible] and I'll try to [inaudible] up here. It's about time I learned how to handle those things.

Something that I would really hate is that, I've always dreaded is becoming known as purely the bag man, and being limited to that [inaudible]. I see artists who do the same thing over and over and over and over and over, and [inaudible] I don't know how he keeps doing it [inaudible]. And if I have to keep doing bags over and over and over and over, I'm going to get sick of it. This, that I've done here for this [inaudible] was a new thing for the production and they were bigger than I had ever done before, and they were for outside. I've only done them once for outside, and they're rather

super-colossal bags, and I've never done that with the bags before, and so it's a new thing, so I like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you had that—

[Cross talk.]

OLIN ORR: But you can run out of things to do with bags, for sure. There were other things I wanted to do [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: What other things, could you describe any off-hand? Would they be [inaudible] some kind of sculpture with cast-off materials?

OLIN ORR: Well, yes, cast-off materials that [inaudible] garbage in that it rots more quickly, wood is decaying and rotting and changing. There are little bacteria or fungus or whatever living off the wood. They are growing, and the wood is shrinking. It's changing right before your eyes if you could photograph it and then speed it up, then you would be able to see the growth. As one shrinks, the other gets larger. The things that I'm doing now that I've made little beginnings at, they're all in glass jars [inaudible] actually more legitimizing [inaudible]—

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now are you—

OLIN ORR: Otherwise the jars are—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —on the one hand it was garbage [inaudible] and then you saw the wood?

OLIN ORR: Well this, the garbage changes more quickly, so I use garbage.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In the plexiglass [inaudible]?

OLIN ORR: No, in jars right now. They will be in plexiglass containers [inaudible]. The problem in that I have to, I don't know how I will be able to ship them because they might fall apart because they're going to be so fragile.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Will they be laminated in the same way that—

[Cross talk.]

OLIN ORR: No, they won't be laminated [inaudible] stop the growth.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But that would certainly fall apart on the road, wouldn't it?

OLIN ORR: Pardon me?

DOROTHY SECKLER: I mean if you don't treat the garbage along the way [inaudible] sometimes—

[Cross talk.]

OLIN ORR: Well some of it I will slow down, some of it I will stop completely simply to make changes in color and in shape, such as that this part will rot more quickly than that part, and so it will either expand or shrink or change color or not change color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Will there be some way of recording the shape that the changes have taken, in other words if you were to cast some garbage and then if you take out of the cast, there would be a way of comparing the present state with yesterday's state. I mean something like that?

OLIN ORR: That's an interesting thought, and I hadn't thought of it either.

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I won't even charge you for it.

[Cross talk.]

OLIN ORR: —in the difference of comparing it from what it was—

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I just thought that since the—

[Cross talk.]

OLIN ORR: There's an idea, maybe I'll do it.

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: —appeal to you. I mean the change that is going on in all [inaudible] seems to be something [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: Yes, and I like the idea that I control it to a point and to another point it's out of my control. In the past I would have controlled it [inaudible] it would be there, and that would be it. And, of course, plaster would also be [inaudible] or even if it's bronze it'll be [inaudible] to some point, but so slowly that it would take eons to know it. So I have to get a little faster on that. [Inaudible] little thing with my [inaudible] I like to work fast and [inaudible]. I would like to do those things aside from bags. I would hate to see the torn paper thing [inaudible] die with never having been exposed. I would like to expose them. It would be very difficult [inaudible] part of the art world in New York [inaudible] favoritism [inaudible] like that [inaudible] more quickly [inaudible] a few people I know that I think [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you're very young yet.

OLIN ORR: Oh, but I don't think I'm—

[Cross talk.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

OLIN ORR: It's fascinating [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: You [inaudible].

OLIN ORR: I have a recorder at home that I make little productions on [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]