Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Interview with Shirley Gorelick

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: This is Dorothy Seckler conducing an interview with Shirley S. Gorelick in Provincetown on August 20, 1968.

Shirley, I don't know anything about your early life, where you grew up or what influences in your childhood may have had something to do with your becoming an artist.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I grew up in Brooklyn and I was influenced very early when I as a child in kindergarten painted a picture of Lindbergh crossing the Atlantic and was awarded a prize at Wannamaker which of course gave me an image of myself as an artist. And I think that really was a very important little incident.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's an unusual age at which to have completed a figure and all of that. It was a recognizable figure.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think I believe I probably copied it. My own image is that I copied it from an illustration on a cigar box.

[They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that would be what most children do.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Or many do at least at that age. So you achieved fame in kindergarten.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That's right.

[They laugh.]

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Which I proceeded to lose in a sewer a year or two later. But I did always feel —From that period on, I felt that that was my area.

And then I always pursued it at school in the way a child does, just loving the colors and playing with it. I don't think I was especially talented in the early stages of elementary school.

But when I got to high school, I was very involved in the Abraham Lincoln High School where we used to have to get to school at 6:30 in the morning and really train on an art squad where the demands were extremely high.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Why did you have to go at 6:30 a.m.?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, Lyon Friend was the head of the art department there and he required

very strict regulations for those people who were voted into this squad. And we really had to compete more or less in a commercial art field, but all the competitions, every competition. And we had to win. It was that type of thing.

He got for us scholarships in that period where I worked with Chaim Gross. I think I was his first student, sculptor student. And I worked with the Soyers. And we—

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were all teachers on staff at the school.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No. They used to come. He had meetings in the evenings where he invited artists in the community. And they offered the kids from the high school scholarships.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then the competitions that you were speaking of, were they competitions within the school system or what?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Mostly they were in the school system. For example, the Macy's Parade, the Thanksgiving Parade, now we were in the competition to win the design—to win actually. That was the intention.

We had to design floats or balloons. And I remember that I had designed the dinosaur that they use now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, and won third prize.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hmm.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Primarily the young men in the group became the top, would train so well that they graduated and went into the field immediately without going on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Into the design field mainly.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Commercial art and became very prominent designers, all of them. And they brought with them the people that graduated following the—Well, not following. I would say immediately after school, after they finished school.

I was one of the first who did not go into the commercial art field.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where did you get the strength to resist and to keep on with your figure work?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, summers and Saturdays I went—I took advantage of the scholarships and went to the art school that Chaim and the Soyers had. I also—There is still a remnant of the WPA days where we had models. And I worked whenever I could. I always worked. We had excellent teachers in the schools.

But I never wanted to go into the commercial art field. I found it painful. The discipline that was expected of me by the group I think was extremely helpful. But I found it terribly painful, the lettering and all the things that we had to do and do well in order to stay and be accepted by what they called the Lincoln Art School.

And it still exists today. It's actually my last show—When I had my show in Silvermont all the ex-art

student leaders contributed. Not art school, I'm sorry. Art squad people contributed their services to the catalog and gave it to me as a gift.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Shirley, when you were studying with Chaim Gross and the Soyers what of their point of view seemed important to you at that time?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: It was a long time ago and I must have been about 12 or 13.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: So I was very young. I found that the painting class didn't interest me. It was too crowded and I couldn't see. And I felt I had to be right up front to see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: So I found myself drawing to Chaim. And I think I was the only student he had. So he would talk to me at that time. And I don't remember what he said. I can't only remember what I did for him.

I did a semi—a kind of cubist reclining figure. And that was what I made in clay.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That must have surprised him.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I don't know. I don't remember. He just encouraged me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He must have been quite a young man at that time.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: He was. He was a young man. I know that we were aware of the cubist movement. And I did a kind of an Archipenko type of Cubism I remember. That was the only thing I recall.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where had you seen the work of Archipenko? Well, you probably don't remember.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I don't remember. Well, we were very familiar with any art magazines. I mean we had a real intense and interest.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And even at that time we had gone to whatever museums were available to us and reading, seeing pictures. I mean cubism was a very—In fact it was distilled into the teaching of the young teachers.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In your school too?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's interesting. So the people at that time took off into commercial art as well as into other areas from this kind of discipline.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That surprises me.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And they were invented designers for record covers and the commercial art. They were considered very, very good, very creative.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So this was going on—Both things were going on during your high school years, the classes outside and this intensive competitive thing inside.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: By the time you graduated from high school, had anything changed in the way you were thinking about your work?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think that I was very open to and hungry for really dramatic teaching. I felt that the teachers at the high school were primarily interested in the commercial field. And the work done by the fine arts department was kind of pseudo-social realists. They were influenced by the Mexican school.

And that was the extent of it which didn't satisfy me because I had discovered Picasso and Van Gogh and people like that who really moved me. So when I got into Brooklyn College, I was very anxious for exciting teaching. And the first year we had Professor Brenner and it was a very deadly experience.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Professor Brenner, what's the first name?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I don't remember.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a man.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: A woman.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A woman, oh.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: A woman and it was very as I said deadly because there was no stimulation, no excited, no ferment. And she was replaced because of that. And she had been at Brooklyn College for many years by Chermayeff in '41.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And he brought with him a group of very exciting people. And then I got all the excitement that I could hope for.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was a Bauhaus man to some extent, although I mean he wasn't part of that institution. But what was the main impact of what he was contributing at that point outside of just questioning everything I imagine? [Laughs.]

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, he brought in people who, for example, turned the whole program upside down. I studied photography with Bernie Savage and industrial design. We were given problems. I mean what he did actually was to relate of seeing and all of learning—he tried to. He related it with the process of art. He gave the whole subject a different meaning.

He himself was an architect. And so he taught—I remember he taught the history of art from the aesthetics, his own concept of aesthetics and functionalism.

He was not a rigid teacher. He had a great deal of compassion and involvement with other things.

He could enjoy a Leonardo. He tried to have a very strict point of view about painting, but I don't think he really did. He permitted other things to go on. He wasn't a strict by the house approach.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you—Of course, each class had its own discipline and things that you did on your own. What was interesting you at that time?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I extremely rebellious at that time. And I remember that I think I felt I had a pit myself against Chermayeff's ideas. So that when he said the surface should be flat and a brush stroke should not be observed and there should be no falling back from the edge of the canvas, I went in the opposite direction. So I was painting literally like Van Gogh with thick paint right out of the tube.

We used to fight a good deal. But he showed it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was from the model or?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: From memory. From memory a good deal. I would draw anything I could, but I was painting in this very expressionistic way.

For example, I remember the first painting I did. I was reading *Zola* and I did an impression of the young girl who died in the strike. And so her face became coal like. I mean it was all that kind of romanticism and fervor in this death of this young girl with red eyes. I still have it.

[They laugh.]

But Chermayeff insisted for example that it be hung in an absolutely crisp, clean frame. And I felt the frame had to conform to the painting. So I textured it. And we had a big fight. And he said if you don't take the frame off, you can't hang it. And I refused. You know that type of thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But later you did become his assistant. So you must have worked out something.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, we always fought. And I think he liked that. He enjoyed that. And I think I sensed that, too. I mean I hung the shows because I was very involved in the art program.

I didn't fight on every level. I mean I was a student. I had to—For example, we had some wood craving where we learned how to make you know the handies. Are you familiar with that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I know what you mean.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I mean I did the problem set for us in class. I wasn't all that rebellious that I didn't do them. I learned a great deal from him. I designed lamps and we built or designed houses. It was a good training.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just for the record, we ought to say what handies are I suppose. I know, but the tape doesn't know.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I forgot. Handies were forms that were created where we— amorphous shapes which were interesting to feel and to see which we felt had an organic life to them. So we were involved with forms like that, similar to Arp's shapes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Like organic.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And Chermayeff introduced us to Mondrian. I remember going to see the Mondrian show with the John Flannagan show somewhere else in the building. And we were made aware of the current aesthetic value. It was interesting because the flatness of the picture playing was something that Chermayeff introduced to me. And he analyzed paintings with that specific viewpoint.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you rebel against this at that time?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I was interested in hearing how he saw. You know how one saw this painting, but I always had questions about it. And I was interested in volume painting and how one could achieve it and also be true to the picture plane. I realize that this was just one point of view. And I wasn't quite convinced, but it was interesting nonetheless.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you were working in this manner rather like Van Gogh, were you using opposing colors to give modeling to a form? Or were you working quite flat?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, actually the Van Gogh things were things I did on my own. When in class we were given problems, I did what the teacher expected. But my own painting, what I consider my own work, was influenced by Van Gogh.

I don't think there was a direct carryover in the information that I got at school because we used primary colors yellow, blue and red. We were very limited by Mondrian's concepts in the class. However, concepts of space through line were discussed, transparency, Albers's color theories and so on. So we were made aware of different kinds of ideas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you did work from a model, too.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Not in class. I don't remember having models. We worked from nature. I know that we did drawings for instance of a shell that we had to take six months and be meticulous and perfect renderings in terms of eye, you know, learning to use our eye and having the discipline to execute it perfectly. That was part of it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That sounds like the Bauhaus' program in Germany.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: They did that sort of thing, too. Well, I suppose if you were doing a still life or did you work from still life?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: We didn't paint. I mean I don't recall doing painting in class.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, I see.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: We did drawing. That was drawing. The painting class was primarily color theory and exercises.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I would say that most of the college curriculum at that time were primarily exercises. I had a need to do more than that. And so I did work on my own.

I found photography fascinating. And we did photo montages, photograms. We drew on glass and

photographed that. I got a lot out of the use of the photographic image plus the accidental and the controlled image with light. And that was a wonderful experience.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were getting a lot out of that program. Through how many years at Brooklyn?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: He came in '41. I think I got three years of that. And the last two years I was primarily majored in art and took everything that there was there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you intending to be a painter or a teacher of art?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I always thought I'd be both. I felt that I would be a teacher in order to have make a living. I mean always my interest was to be a painter if I ever could be. But it never occurred to me that I could ever spend full time at it because I'd always had to work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We all had that feeling I think at that time.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I suppose the next question is after that then into teaching or further graduate work and education.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I went to—I got a job immediately afterwards in Elizabeth, New Jersey where they were doing an experimental program in teaching art to the elementary on the elementary level where there was no job available in New York on this level and they were not teaching in this way. The job was under the supervision of Marian Quinn who was an important educator in progressive ideas. And I got into this program. It was difficult to get into it, but I got into it and had many difficulties because I was taking on a new idea where I taught children who had only been taught by pattern making.

And I remember my first experience where they wept because they did not know how to handle the freedom that I was encouraging them to use. I would say that I spent about I think four years there and saw classes progress over this period of time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was the main purpose? Or what was her departure that she was innovating at this time, this Marian Quinn?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, the program was to overhaul and reeducate the perception of the art student, not the art student, but of the student.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The younger group.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. It started—

DOROTHY SECKLER: What age level were they?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, we started in kindergarten and we went up to the 8th grade. And then some of us worked in the junior high school. There were some junior high schools there and high school level. But the initial experience was to integrate the art experience with all the total program.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have called this activity program?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: We didn't call it that. Actually, then we tried to integrate the art with let's say

the subject matter of the level of the education. We even did math programs in three dimensions or the experiences that they had in reading were translated in art. However, the thing that was radical was that it had never been done in this program before. And I was allowed to introduce the Bauhaus background in the use of the materials that we used, the problems that we had. They made mobiles. Then they were permitted to bring in all kinds of materials. And they had I remember clothes hangers and we used to make tremendous constructions with cords and all kinds of inventive things that we brought as problems. So it wasn't only related to the curriculum.

I really started when they became a little older with problems in line and space and form and amorphous form. I felt that it was important to give them a kind of vocabulary, an aesthetic vocabulary, as part of their education and experience.

We did things where we used the eye as well in terms of the self-portrait or learning how to use line, translating the visual experience.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But these students were not intending to be specialists or artists.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, but I felt—

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were just students, a sampling of the school system.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It wasn't being used throughout the Elizabeth.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: We tried whenever we could get teachers. There were not people equipped to do this. And so little by little they were put in all the schools.

But I was fortunate to have two very diverse experiences. One was in a ghetto school and the other was in the richest school. And they were two totally different experiences. Very different.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is there something that you could say about the way each group responded?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, the freedom and the spontaneous joy in the whole creative experience that the ghetto kids had was unbelievable. They were not articulate. They were not as articulate as the other children.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: The school was completely transformed after the first few years. Everything was used, the cards, the windows, everything to transform their environment. And there was an abandonment and a joy that the richer kids didn't. Either the school was too controlling. I don't really know why it happened. But also the teachers in the ghetto schools were very cooperative and got great pleasure from this.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Has anything happened as far as you know since then in evaluating that program?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I think that program is the program that's used now all over. I mean I have a friend who teaches locally and this is the program she uses. It's really become a way of teaching and an attitude amplified.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would that have been related to the sort of Victor D'Amico program.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Oh yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At Teachers College. I assume it had.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, he was very interested in what we were doing and in all the conventions we had to speak on the material. We showed the progress of particular groups. And I think Viktor Lowenfeld was also interested.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I think I remember his name. He was responsible I think for some psychological emphasis, wasn't he?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. And we were encouraged to do that. And I think erroneously. We were not prepared.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: We were not equipped.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were not experienced psychologically to evaluate.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That's right. And we were in a sense pressured to do it because it was a field that there was not enough material on. But even though I majored, I got my masters simultaneously with this experience. I went to Columbia in the evening and although I majored in psych I don't think we were equipped at all to handle this. And I think it was a little presumptuous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I seem to remember vaguely that he put great emphasis on let's say the exaggeration of certain parts of forms by children.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Didn't he use the terms haptic and [inaudible] or something of the sort?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I don't think he did. It was somebody else who used it at a different time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't want to confuse this.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I'm not sure myself. I'm not sure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I'm just remembering it without any real precision at all. But then were you having a chance to do any painting during these years or?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, I went to Columbia. Of course, they were depleted also of their good teachers in this period.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now where are we in time? After the war?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: This is between '44 and '47 I got my degree.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had the war affected in any direct way?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Do you mean in terms of my attitude toward art?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, in any way. I mean actually of course I suppose you couldn't have been too directly affected by it since you couldn't be drafted or something. But I was just trying to think of the war years in general and the outlook and so on.

I know most artists had—First of all of course, you had come out of the Depression as a young person.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Although it was probably pretty well over by the time you were coming in to —

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, I was very much touched by it. My father was never able from the time I was about nine or so able to support us. And so we all had to work. I was very touched by the Depression and it altered my social point of view. I never got over the humiliation that he suffered by not being able to hold a job and support his family properly.

Certainly, it affected me till this day. So that affected me. The war affected me. Of course, my friends went and some got killed. And I was very moved by the whole fearfulness of the situation.

I had great hopes and great exaggerated hopes after the war as I think most people did. And they were to be sadly disappointed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you affected by this sort of conflict that affected many artists around this time that is between art as a pure activity which is centered on its own development or the idea of using it in some sense as a weapon affecting the social scene in some way?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, I was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I mean I was very caught up in it. And art as communication I remember in high school with my art professors writing a paper comparing Marx with Freud and the absolutes versus the relatives. But I always felt that any—The way I answered it for myself was that any human activity that was profound and meaningful was communication.

So I never felt that I had to be an absolute, photographic realist. It's ironic that I'm becoming that. [Laughs.] But I didn't feel that I had to. I felt that Picasso was saying something very important in the *Guernica*. And I did not feel that one had to be rigid, although I was very aware of the conflict.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you belonged to any of the artists' organizations? I suppose you were too young to have been involved with the Artists' Congress.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I belonged to peripheral groups and I mean I was involved in the activities. But I never was involved with artists who pressured me to be something that I wasn't.

At that time I didn't regard myself as a profession painter. I felt very much a student and an explorer and felt I had a long way to go before I arrived at anything. And so it was primarily an experimental period where I painted—I remember Arpian shapes. I was always fascinated with the volume in painting. And I painted kind of three-dimensional shapes in the old masters' techniques with the glazes, flowing forms that had humanistic—a human associations. In fact they got to be very visceral and horrible.

But I did go through a period of exploring all kinds of ways of painting. I remember right before I would say in 1944 I did a thing on the famine in India. And it was very influenced by the distortions of Picasso. And I had great conflict about far he went because I felt that his very way out distortions or what I considered arbitrary distortions did not have the quality of the human being that I wanted him. And that was my great conflict. I went very far with the distortions, but I could never feel free to what I consider mutilation of the human body. And I felt for many years it was my lack. It wasn't that I couldn't do it. It didn't have any belief. So this was a big problem.

I knew that I wanted to do the human figure and I just couldn't find a style or I would say the forms which did it for me. I was searching for a long time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you wanting a model?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I was taking my masters at Columbia. So I did have a model. We did a lot of different things. And as I say it was an exploratory period where I tried a lot of different things. At the tail end, of course I started coming up to Provincetown. I was very influenced by what I saw here. I saw the Art Association. I went to the Hofmann's Criticisms.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When did you start coming up here? What year?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think we came up in '46 because I was trying to recall. I think I studied with Hofmann in '47. I remember that and how difficult it was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Up here?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, for a couple of weeks. But I always felt I was part of it because I was with the young people who were working on it, the GIs that came out and also attended almost all the criticisms whenever I could.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did the criticisms make sense to you?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I found it very difficult to understand Hofmann. I think he was an excellent teacher in his ability to pick visually the same—He'd group his paintings by their successes in a certain area or their failures in a certain area. And I think in this way I could visually understand, not intellectually, but visually. And if he felt the painting was garish in color and arbitrary in terms of where the color was placed. The group of paintings that had the same problem, it was visible. You could see it if you were sensitive to what he was pointing at.

But I could not find his articulation easy to understand. But I found the work fascinating.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did it seem to relate to you some of the things that had been incomprehensible in Picasso perhaps or?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, it was never incomprehensible. I just didn't feel that I wanted to go in that direction. I would go as far as the *Guernica*, but not beyond that. The *Guernica* I loved.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Maybe you felt that it was purposeful distortion.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Always, purposeful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it was a distortion simply to see how far one could take a special gambit you felt it was—

SHIRLEY GORELICK: A formal playfulness, it was not the area I went. I loved it. I loved looking at it and I enjoyed it. But I didn't want to go in that direction. I fought it.

With Hofmann what I found interesting of course was also his absolute opposite point of view about space from Chermayeff's. Chermayeff felt that the space had to be absolutely flat and discussed Mondrian in its flatness. Hofmann discussed it on its push and pull. So I learned a great deal how one could see a variety of ways of seeing space and color.

But I think I may have gotten from Hofmann the sense that color should not be arbitrary. It had to play a physical role in a painting. And one had to be very aware of it whether it opened a space or closed a space, whether it radiated light. I know that I've lived with that idea for a long time and it may have been through him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That's a very basic understanding and it should have been—Did you work then following that period? Were you painting now in oils with Ms. McFairmont [ph] color and drawing?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. And when I went to Hofmann for the very brief time that I was with him here, the criticism of me was that I was using too much color, it was too arbitrary and it was garish in the sense that I could have taken any color out and it wouldn't have made any difference. I mean I would have to change the whole concept.

But by that time I was already a cubist, full-fledged cubist, painter. And I avoided because of the figure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How do you mean when you say you're a full-fledged cubist painter? How would you proceed in the beginning of painting?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I would study structures, architectural structures. In Provincetown, for instance, the buildings, the stairs, the changes as a form turned. And I became very involved with structural geometric things. But they were not nonobjective.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you go out, for instance, and do a landscape in Provincetown but do it entirely in terms of the structure of the buildings and the space around them?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And that sort of thing?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In rather high-key color or?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. High-key color, flattening of the space, but still back and forth, some overlapping. The stairs, I remember doing a whole series of paintings of staircases in Provincetown which were influenced by people like Feininger and Sheeler and that school.

But I was not really satisfied. I felt there was a greater avoidance of what I was interested in in the end. But I didn't know how to get to the end. And so I just kept painting more and more. The work started to get more free in the sense that the cubist in me became more amorphised and the paint became thicker. The overlapping became more extensive. So the expressionism entered into it.

I responded very much to the radiance of Hofmann's color. When I'd go into the art center—the Art Association—and see his paintings and its radiation, it's very beautiful. I was extremely moved by that kind of color which was alien to everything else around it. Nobody else had that. Everything was muted.

This was an influence. And I continued in that vein for many years until I got into great—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Meanwhile had you married?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I had married right before I entered Columbia and just, well immediately after I started teaching. It was very early that I married.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you didn't have a family right away.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No. No, I had my first job in 1950. And I was painting and doing sculpture, began to do sculpture in that period.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In what medium?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I was working in plasticine and then casting it in plaster and hydrostone. I studied with Aaron Goodelman at the Jefferson School and I found him painful also. [Laughs.] And I really didn't feel he was a very good teacher. But it was convenient. It was near where we lived when I first went. And I thought perhaps he might have the answer in terms of how one distorts and uses the human image and says something with the distortion. At this time, I still believed that distortion was essential and that one had to leave the photographic image. I really felt that that was dead.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was the next big turning point then because obviously you changed from that position?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, the big turning point and I remember it very well. When I moved to Great Neck we had all the New York painters teaching there and giving criticisms. And there was Larry Rivers.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was a school?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: In the adult education program.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Most of the New York school painters came and taught classes. We had Al Leslie, Grace Hartigan, Helen Frankenthaler and so on.

I went to the criticism as an artist. They have a criticism for working artists. And we brought three months of work. And you were given a critique. And three artists or teachers discussed your work.

And I brought these cubist paintings which consisted of structures primarily, bridges into New York. And one had—it's Provincetown again—Provincetown shacks and I put in a child, very distorted, using the same kind of distortion that I did in the building and used it in the figure and not quite being happy with it. It worked very well in the environment. And there proceeded a very interesting fight between the three critics. One was Saul Levine who now is at Columbia. He felt they were all very successful and he felt I should go immediately and look for a show. He didn't understand why I

was even asking for criticism. He loved them.

Grace Hartigan caught the message right away, criticized the color in the same way as Hofmann had because there was just almost too much color without it working. And she felt that there was no question that I was very involved with the figure and my only answer was to really distort it even more and go in the way she did when she took the work to use the figure as an element in the work as any other element. But it was no different and to use it formally in that way.

And this is where I met Betty Holliday Deckoff who said, "I disagree with you. I think if she wants the figure she's got to find it from her own observation and really knowing and then decide what should be done."

And I was most impressed with what she had to say. And so that I think was the turning point. I really felt that I had to abandon everything and start from scratch and find a way of approaching the figure from my knowledge of reality and nature. And that started a whole period of really painting weights, painting rocks, and getting them heavy and weighty and ugly paintings really. They were horrors.

And I went through that. First, the rocks and then I did the same with trees and really from observation bringing it in, abstracting more and more. But always being aware of it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were these tunnel paintings or were you still dealing with this full rich palette?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No. I felt I had to start from scratch and I gave myself very serious limitations. I went step by step. They were monochromatic paintings, very little color. I was interested in the form. And I really felt I had to pursue the form and find out what said something and what didn't. And I was willing to really just explore the most difficult things for me to paint in order to get a vocabulary for myself with which I could approach the figure. I did still life. I did many things and exercises. I regarded them as exercises, collages, monoprints, always exploring form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you completely given up your cubist sense of space?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Oh yes. I just felt that I had to really start from scratch and whatever was valuable for me to me would come and I would use it eventually. But right now, I had to—I mean if I ever was going to do anything of significance, I had to really weigh it carefully.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, then the means you were using to create solidity was modeling with chiaroscuro—

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, sorry. That wasn't clear. I was not interested in being a photographic realist. I was trying to use painterly means to create weight first and then light. Then one object in a space.

They were abstractions. They were not—I never went to reality until later. I observed let's say a tree form or bushes and I abstracted the rhythms that I found pertinent to that object and then created a painting out of it.

But I was dependent on the observation of what I was painting. And I did it with everything that I could find that I could use to find my own forms in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What medium was this in?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: First, it started with drawings, collage. Eventually I used enamels which I took monoprints off of. And then charcoal, lots of charcoal and erasing and working through the form. And I found in that that the solving of the problem created a work. But you had no—what would be the word—preconceived notion of.

But in the process, it's a very interesting experience. The process became very important. And I could tell when I was getting something when I worked and that was great. Always before I felt I was much too much in control of it and I knew what I wanted in the end. But I didn't know what I wanted. So it was all a big search and it was a marvelous experience. And Betty was extremely important in this because she was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Betty Holliday?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Deckoff.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Deckoff.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And she was—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was she a teacher at the—

SHIRLEY GORELICK: She gave us critique and then she had criticisms, her own studio every two weeks and then eventually she started teaching in her own, new studio that was built and started giving problems in the class which was similar to the way I had been taught before except that her criticisms were ruthless and very—

[End of tape 1]

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I know a little bit, of course, about her ideas and her own work. Could you give an example of the kind of things you'd be criticized for?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, she would—For example, most of my work was really done at home. I mean I was a disciplined painter who worked every day. And I really came to the class which I found impossible to work in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: She had a model there.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, we never did the figure there. She would set up let's say a still life and she would have you interpret it, let's say, using all the space around it.

Her criticism would be on the level of whether it worked in terms of the color, whether the form was original. Clichés, sentimentality were jumped on. Her own predisposition at that time was for highly abstract work, you know, the things that she enjoyed and involved people in.

She introduced problems that were part of the art scene, collage elements where she helped us to understand the overlapping of forms, the volume of forms in space, the use of line from the very thin charcoal line to the very weighty line and form making line that Kline used.

She was a highly articulate woman and she presented many, many exciting ideas around the work that existed in New York, the abstract expression.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now this was as you say the period of abstract expressionism.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the period in which many artists were just beginning to create a painting by putting down in the beginning just some calligraphic element or a few brushstrokes and reacting to that and so on. Did she take her experimentation that far at that time?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. Well, you see mostly the people in the class were people who worked on their own and brought work in. And that triggered off the work, the discussion. The collage, the use of collage, in her criticism, the use of papers overlapping, taking out, putting back, the freedom to explore space and shape and color was something that she worked with. But I think she keyed it primarily on what people brought in in the beginning.

She sometimes made setups which she gave particular problems, spatial problems, color problems.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of color problems?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, she would say, "I'd like you to take a canvas and saturate it and then begin to put forms on it." Never spelled out exactly because she didn't believe in it. "Put forms on it which make the color extremely important in the painting, never losing that as the key color." And she'd have us explore the same family of colors for example to see what one color did to the other and that kind of problem.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So this was a time, of course, in which paint surface was very important to artists. And I know in her own work she has used sometimes a very free surface in the sense that strokes or even the paint line and so on. In your own work, had you been very much involved with really the quality of surface, what paint does?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. See Betty didn't work—The work you saw in her studio was not the way she worked when she taught.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Okay.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: When she was—At that time, she was very influenced by Larry Rivers and was drawing without using details. He was interested in the expanse of the figure in a chair, but it would be the abstract elements and the cascading from the shoulders down to the lap. And she, it involved mostly exploring line herself.

But I at that time had a need to know what paint would do in terms of what I was learning. And I was using oil at the time and was deeply involved with the thickness of the paint and the creaminess of it. I had always used palette knives I was only using brushes here. I incorporated line with the charcoal in this. And I was very interested—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Charcoal into the oil paint.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Into the paint, yes. And I was very involved with the linear image and the painted image working together, but not just outlining it. It had to work as an element in it. And then I began to use India ink and that changed the whole sense of calligraphy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean you departed from calligraphy or became more calligraphic?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Became more calligraphic, but a different kind of calligraphy. More to Japanese brushes and became very involved with the gesture and the excitement of the calligraphic line which was very different than the drawn line and the smudged line of charcoal.

At that time, we decided to share a model, Betty and another student and myself, and we began working in her studio. And I found that I was very influenced by her thinking and the way she worked. She set up the model and I found that very bad for me. I was aware that I responded to her work and it entered into my own way of thinking.

I felt it was not good to me. And there were other reasons, but it only lasted for a short time.

This was sort of a period at which I realized that I had gone through the exploration of all the form. And I had gotten everything I could. So I hired a model who came every day and I worked every day from this model. I got people in to share, but mostly I painted and they drew.

They were not the people who could influence me. I didn't want that. That was the beginning of trying to incorporate what I had got from my other work into the figure. And then I was doing kind of fragmentation.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Where are we now in time roughly?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: This is now we're in 1958 or '59. '59 I guess. '58 to 1959. And I began to do the figures in the same way that I did free landscape images. They were Baroque. They were multi-faceted, many, many forms. I still hadn't—Color was only monochromatic on the whole. I felt that I couldn't handle all that form and the ambiguous nature of the figure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As you shifted from plane to plane what indicated that change, dark and light changes?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, no. For example, if you used red and you used a lisen [ph] red and a cadmium red and an orange, it wasn't only the lightness or the darkness, but also the brilliance and the hue. It's placement in relation to other colors. It's whether it overlapped or whether it sat underneath. All of these things.

But I simplified. They were rather simple colors statements. And I was interested in saturated color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I recall the first exhibition that I saw they were still canvases in which you would think of mainly a blue plane or red plane.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you hadn't shown yet at this time.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, because I still was very influenced by Betty and I felt that I was not an independent worker and I felt that only when I did work without a teacher's criticism that I was not ready. When I finished studying with her, I mean for the last criticism I would say in June of '59.

And then from that point on, I regarded myself as an independent entity or tried to be. And my show came up that fall. Angeleski wrote to me. She had seen my painting at the Pennsylvania Academy and asked me if I wanted to have a show. And I felt I wasn't ready. And then about January or

February—it was interesting. It was just a very short time and I don't know what changed my attitude. But I wanted to get a reaction. And so I brought the work to Show Car [ph] who was then with Zabriskie and asked him whether he felt I was ready. And I really wasn't—I don't think I was secure enough then to know myself.

And he felt I was. I took his word for it and then went to Angeleski and that's how it happened. In retrospect, I really—It was much too soon and I really wasn't prepared for it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I wouldn't feel that way myself. I did see that show, didn't I?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. That was that show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I thought it was a show in which your paintings had breadth and there was assuredness and vigor and a clear conception, although I don't want to impose onto the tape my own criticism of it. But it certainly didn't seem like someone who had recently emerged from a student study. It was a statement that was full.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I can only tell you that I took—I mean I felt that two of the paintings for instance when I got them back I destroyed them immediately because in seeing them over and over that I'd gone into an area in which I wasn't controlling. Many of those paintings have still held up for me. But I just feel when one shows although it's important to see the work on the wall it was very important for me. I did get a sense of my direction and what I wanted and didn't want.

I learned from it. But well I—

DOROTHY SECKLER: They were fairly large canvases.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Very large and the big ones were too big to hang. So they were six feet, 72 inches.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some of the figures were perhaps even larger than life size.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: They were all larger. The fragments were larger than the corresponding life size and they were calligraphic in the sense that the black line was used as a descriptive energy in the figure and was very necessary for me in the conception. And where it expanded it became a black form.

But the figures were not contained. They were figures which were ambiguous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And which went back and forth into the—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I recall very distinctly that it was a sense of they're weaving back and forth in that space rather ambiguously. And it was quite appealing I felt that they did. And yet there were always clearly figures present. You were aware that it was a canvas with figures and not simply an abstraction.

Well, I think [inaudible] and described them further. The color, as I mentioned before, I do remember those color saturation more. Some almost all cool. Some almost lighter and warmer and so on.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: All blue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't recall any in which there would have been for instance a palette of strongly opposed blues and oranges or violets or greens or anything of that sort.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I had two still life. I had two floral based on nature actually. They were composites of things. And they began using other colors and opposite colors and colors that were a little acid. And the use of color became more important there.

I also had paintings which I didn't show in that which were done at the same time where much more color was used. But I didn't quite trust them. I thought perhaps they might be too sentimental. And so later on, I found that they were very important to me and I began to show them. My second show had them. But I had been thinking of them and working with them, although I didn't accept them yet. They were not the image that I had wanted. So I just let them gel.

I lived with them for a long time and found that really I was interested in color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In what direction did these take you in your period following the Angeleski show?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I found that I had done the figure as landscape where the images were landscaped images. And the figures were either earth figures as I call them or the sun figures where I began to get very brilliant color which began to radiate.

And little by little I found that I wanted to isolate the figure from the environment more and more. And the use of color then of course did that and the use of stopping the edge. So I found that I was becoming more and more involved with the total figure and getting away from the fragmentation.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you have any idea of how that aspect of your thinking developed of why you would have felt the need to enclose the figure and to keep it from slipping into the background area and so on? I'm interested because of course I do think that that's been one of the things that has happened in recent years and it's always fascinating to find out what's in the air at that time to promote it.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I think in that very first show I had two figures which were cold and closed figures. They were—The whole figure bunched up like a Maillol sculpture. And they began to have a weight of their own which could not include the environment. So they were cold, a red enclosed figure, and the blue enclosed figure. But of course that enclosed figure was the shape of the canvas. Now what do you do with a figure that's spooled out and still keep it enclosed. And then I began to try doing it, of course. I was always afraid of getting too detailed and realistic so that the spooled out figure would be too closely defined. And I found—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Too closely defined in what sense?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I was afraid at that point of handling detailed hands, detailed feet, faces. I wanted a monumental figure that was not any specific thing, but rather a symbol of a gesture or a movement, very much like Maillol's River Gods and Goddesses except that they're specific. But I didn't feel like I could handle the specific and get what I was after. So I began at that time to do very large, single figures.

DOROTHY SECKLER: From the model?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: From the model. Always from the model which there was no question that it was now an enclosed figure. There was a background. There was a plane that had to support the

figure in space.

There was a lot of calligraphy in the figure still so that I had this baroque movement going through the figure. But the background began getting quieter and quieter.

And then I found that I started to portraits, people with faces and clothes. I did a Japanese robe theory first by posing the model so that the face wasn't on these. And then I began to evolve with the face and the hands and little by little began to get more and more involved with the specific. But I always wanted to maintain this kind of monumental figure without becoming saccharine or corny or having it look like an overblown thing. And this was the big struggle.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As you work toward more of the specific and somewhat descriptive, were you still using this full palette or were you now narrowing it down and using a more dark and light conception?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: In my second show, they were still a pink nude would be on a red background. The green nude would be blues and greens and blacks. But I began to have paintings where opposite colors were going to be used. I'd have a pink figure in a green ground. Or a portrait where the costumes would be obviously different colors.

And so I began changing the palette. But it wasn't—Only if I wanted the color to do something in the painting. It wasn't just to use the color. Very often I would start with a lot of color and eliminate it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Your second show was at what gallery?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: The second show was at Merrill Gallery.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's in?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: '63 I think it was.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And that show consisted of all enclosed figures and two figures, for example, I had. Some of them were fragmented, but they were figures in space. In specific space most of them I would say. There were some double figures which were still in the old style.

But I was involved with volume. I started doing sculpture again from the figure as stud for the painting and worked around the model with the wax on my hand and studying the flickering forms and found that I was very influenced by Rodin and loved his work. And this was the kind of thing I wanted to get into painting.

I did a lot of studies from the wax with the wax and was involved with them for some time. And they influenced the paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you wanted to interpret this kind of solidity in the painting didn't you have to resort then to a much more dark and light modeling?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I would say that I did. But I tried not to model in a direct chiaroscuro. I was interested primarily in the forms that the darks and the lights made. And the volume was achieved often by the opposite. I mean where you think a dark would turn the form often the light turned the

form.

I still had this calligraphic line which I used to keep it from getting too much volume. I found that whenever I did something which separated itself so much from the ground that a line, the line, held it back. It always stopped the volume. So I used it. I wanted volume, but not that much. I didn't want it walking right off the painting.

And then I continued in that direction and getting more and more specific and handling faces and hands and becoming very involved with how one can do a large figure because I wanted largeness for some very special reason. Whenever I did it small, it never pleased me. The scale had to be over life size and handle the face, the hands, the feet and everything else and color.

And I think for the last three years I found that I tried to incorporate many problems that I had been avoiding. I found that Giorgione the painting of his figures on the grass had a lot of elements that fascinated me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I remember seeing among the photographs of your recent work. Would it help if we were to look at those now, Shirley?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Naturally.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think it would be good idea.

[Audio break]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Shirley, in looking over some of the photographs, we remembered that we had forgotten to mention certain exhibitions. And we might as well as keep some trace of the chronology. The show that you had in Provincetown, at what gallery was that in Provincetown?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That was in Doris Weiner's gallery.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In Doris Weiner's gallery in 1962.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think it was the summer of 1961. And that show consisted of some of the paintings that were in the first show and many of the large ones which were too large for the gallery in New York.

For the catalogue, I had one of my first— just a large calligraphic drawing on a canvas of six feet which showed the corrections in the drawing. It showed the gesture of my total arm which I was at that time very involved with which is of course part of the entire thinking.

And I felt for the first time that what I had on that canvas was enough. It was a very simple calligraphic drawing which I think influenced the rest of my work after that. That was the catalogue.

This other catalogue is from Silvermine Guild in 1962. And the catalogue as I mentioned before was made and given to me by the early members of the Lincoln Art Squad.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And it's a very beautiful catalogue, very beautifully designed. And it allows us to recapitulate some of this development that we've just touched on from certain painting which still keep the sense of rather cubist kind of space with forms weaving in and out between the background and the suggestion of something moving forward but in an ambiguous way. Particularly, that's true of one called *Geraniums* and another one called *Weed*. They're a very beautiful handling

of the surface in both cases.

And then I gather this was a very important development, the double figure painting, which seems to be a rather large one. It's called *Ochre Double Figure* that occupies the center double spread of the catalogue. Would you want to say anything about how that development came about and you probably felt a new freedom as a result of it?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, I felt that that incorporated all the forms that I had found in my way of seeing nature. This had been my search to find my own personal forms which I could use to say something about the figure that hadn't been said.

And my sculpture was important because it also helped to define the areas that I wasn't quite sure of visually in a two dimensional sense. It helped me doing it three dimensional.

Now you see as you're looking at them, they're not really modeled in a renaissance way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The forms seem to be picked out of a field of dark and light and they have some of the same quality as you noticed of the kind of surface strokes and so on in more abstract ones. How did you actually proceed in this case? Did you work against the light field, the dark field or both at the same time?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think a lot of it came out of rejection of what I had underneath. Very often I would start with a drawing and then I would obliterate it with a field of color and then initiate the drawing again and then eliminate parts of the drawing. It was a question of really searching on the canvas.

And the color really was to put the proper area. For example, if I wanted a belly to stick out I didn't only use a light color. I'd often use a black gesture line which described the curve of the belly in a linear way. I was trying to incorporate whatever ways I knew to describe what I saw, not only the photographic ways.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is apparently as if it were a male and a female figure, just the torso area.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, actually it was the front and the back of a single figure. But a lot of people have interpreted that because the hips are small.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. This has such an enormously vigorous rib cage when seen from the back.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I tended to try to look for that even if the model didn't have it. It was very important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So this felt like a sort of breakthrough.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, I felt that was really what I was after in my work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now this would have not been very much color I assume.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Monochromatic because here I felt the color wouldn't work. I couldn't get it to work. It isn't that I didn't try. I tried and I found that it didn't or couldn't work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because you were really relying on this very lively contrast of darks and lights. Although as you say, it's not a chiaroscuro where there's a slowing turning shadow at all, but a constantly refracted, broken pattern of darks and lights.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And I'm very glad that you brought up my cubist background. I forgot to mention it, but I really feel it's essential in everything I do. It's certainly important in all the collages and in the overlay of forms. And I think the sense of space is very similar.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Here is a seated figure collage which is very attractive just as an abstraction and then of course one can see the figure volumes and space occupying aspects of a figure. And it must have been a marvelous discipline at the same time and finally in the beginning again a front view which seems related somewhat to the pair in the center.

Well, what was your feeling at—This show was held at the Silvermine Guild of Artisans in Newcane in Connecticut in May 1962. Did you feel as a result of the exhibition that you were pretty firmly then on your own set on your own development? You know you had plenty to develop out of this in the immediate future.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. This was a very important show only because it had a tremendous amount of room for me to put my work in and I saw the development. I saw 37 paintings. And it's a very interesting experience. It was extremely important to me. And I did feel that this show showed me where I came from. Sometimes you don't even know until you see it.

I hadn't gotten to the really specific in this show. And I think the show helped me to see that this is really where I wanted to go. And I began to go in that direction.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you have reactions that were notable among your associates or anyone? I wondered at this time if you felt you were beginning to work along a more lonely road in a sense in which you were off by yourself. Or whether people that you had worked with before felt you were turning away in a different direction?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think that when I first started to work from the figure friends, artist friends, who were not part of the influence of Betty Holliday thought it was ridiculous, old-fashioned and old hat and really could get me nowhere and that it was a dead end for any discoveries.

I don't think that they ever thought that I achieved anything that was a new statement for them. I mean I don't believe that they responded to the figure at all.

On the other hand, the people who were interested in the figure from the group I would say who had been influenced by Betty they responded.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was Betty's reaction?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, she hadn't seen the first show or the Silvermine show. She saw the show I think it was the last show at '63. She saw the show at Merrill.

She didn't like the direction of getting more specific. She felt that I should have stayed within the figure as a landscape. I think she was against becoming more—well, the word would be specific. She felt—

DOROTHY SECKLER: And more closed?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, she never really said anything about the closed. She liked the sculpture very much and she liked the drawings. There was a lot of work in that show. But she felt that the specific—She always felt—And most things that were specific verged on sentimentality. And I think that she was very afraid of that in her own work.

And I didn't agree with her. We had a real difference of opinion. She felt that the large figures which were mostly abstract and not specific in any way or very generalized abstract forms were the statement that I could make best. And it was a disagreement that we had.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But in any case following the Silvermine show what was the next stage or do we have some photographs here that would help us individualize that?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, the next stage were experiments, yes, with how I could introduce color, how I could leave out line which I went into. Now here's one which is very colorful and I left out most of the lines. This would be orange, pink, purple, kelly green, cadmium red. Very beautiful color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I remember that one. Was this the one you had in your home over one end wall?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, I don't think you ever saw this one. The one you saw was a red reclining. This is—

DOROTHY SECKLER: What's the title of this one?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: That's *Reclining*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It looks to be very strong and the patterns are very simple and direct.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: There is another one where I tried color and line, arbitrary color. And I found that it just didn't work. It became too complex. And black and white, of course, it looks much better if I can find it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But you felt this one did with all the opposing colors.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I loved it, but I felt it was a dead end. I thought I had said it in just that painting and I had no reason to go further. It's very interesting. It's the only time I've ever just done just one painting and felt that was it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Let me see that one.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I have that at home. I like it. I'm not that I reject it as a painting. I think it's very good, but I—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Another thing I like about it is the enormous space in the front which is largely dark as a foil to the broken forms and the figures. It seems to me that's very successful.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Well, it is one of the few paintings that really looks much better because of the color. This is a photograph of one with much color. And again it just—the color is extreme I think in a sense that makes it dishonest. So I don't find that successful.

I still was doing studies within my parametric color trying to correct the specifics and to learn about how to get the volume back in planes and so on and to create the space around. This is a

photograph of an earlier. You wanted to see what the still life things were.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh yeah.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: They're very large.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And what year was that roughly?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: It would be the '60s, early '60s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Early '60s.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: But you see there again this is pure cubism.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And I could not introduce a real figure in there. And then after going through these experiments with what I wanted to do and getting everything into the canvas, I decided studying Giorgione and seeing how the pattern which I was interested in, the space for all the figures, the environment radiating and holding the figures and so on, the problems of shadow and light, the psychological elements. I mean I felt that he had dealt with these and tried to cope with everything that I was interested in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is this oil painting?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: No, by this time I had already—By my '63 show, a good deal of it was already in acrylic. And I found the acrylic then quite dissatisfying because it had no juice. It wasn't juicy. It was just too matte.

[Side conversation]

And I had done a lot of experimenting. When I was experimenting with the kinds of things I could do with the figure to be specific, I also was exploring the acrylics. And I found every way of using them so that they do look very much like oils. These are extremely juicy and blacks.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It almost looks like water color in some areas and such a delicious change of going from black into blending into light grays in an area like this.

Now, of course, you've taken the positions of some of the figures in his *Country Concert* [*Pastoral Concert*].

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And yet you've given them different kinds of clothes and this one has a long robe instead of being nude. And I assume that you've set up your modeling studio in somewhat similar poses to work from.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, I felt I was interested in really coping with his concept of space so that I could use it for myself. And I didn't really want to copy him. That wasn't it. The space is much flatter and the color was used to give you air and distance rather than the scale of objects.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's also a very nice psychological quality I think in the faces and the glance direction on some of them.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: This was very important to me and this came as a surprise because I didn't realize that I was involved with it. I kept changing faces over and over and over again until they seemed just right. And I found that making the middle figure a silhouette against the light first I was doing that to eliminate it. And I found it just worked so beautifully in catching light and being a foil for the opposite.

I am interested in opposites. I had done—You know if a figure is light, I like playing it against a dark. If one is enclosed, I like opening up the other. In this sense, I took the two nude figures and I dressed them in the two dressed male figures and made them female nudes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's the first version.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes, and that is full of color. It has very brilliant greens and each of the pattern dresses are opposite in color, brilliant red against a flowered dress in this first one.

Now the second one was a variation where I felt freer now that I understood the space to alter the figures to get the kind of psychological quality I started to get in this one and really use it in that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's such a commanding presence in this standing figure as if the figure just looked up and there's a provocative expression. I don't know whether it was from the model or what. But they work in that sense very beautifully I think.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I found I had to remove one of the central figures in the second groups because there was no room. And I wanted the atmosphere of this beach quality, misty beach, to pervade.

And that's done very thinly for me. Most of the paintings they were quite thick. But I found that the thinness gave the atmosphere. I didn't want the juicy paint. It's very dry.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I like the way the figures are all related to a kind of dark area which holds them together in one area of the canvas toward the bottom against a large field of lighter color.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I found I became very involved with shadows and part of that came from seeing a very early Bonnard in Paris where he used a shadow on a reclining nude and the shadow in the nude and the side of the nude were the same color. And the only way he defined the side of the plane of the body was with a line, that fascinated me how he could take a single, flat plane of color and make it read as a turned form and flattened out by a line.

And I had this recline in here which I had done at the same time. Here. This is the way I start to draw this abstraction of line is this painting. No, it's this painting. In other words, I go from the abstract to the specific. And this is that painting, beginning where I'm doing these two nudes on a bed using the shadow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh yes.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: And I became involved in shadows as accessory forms and as a foil against the body. They became important as these two paintings developed. And now I'm very involved with all the elements of the environment and the figures, the psychological meaning of them, the scale and the shadows as well. Would you like to see them?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. If we take this recent self-portrait of yourself in your studio wearing your winter clothes because it's cold and rather looking very Russian with the fur hat on, what

change in position would that reflect as compared to the ones we were just discussing?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: I think it's come out of them and I am not afraid now to be very specific because I wanted it as a quick gesture image of myself. What I mean by quick gesture is I'm not specific. Every figure isn't specific, but you sense the movement of that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, absolutely.

SHIRLEY GORELICK: The intensity of the look in the face is gotten very quickly. I want that sense of a speed in that because I felt that it was important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you able to get that directly, you know, painting directly from a mirror?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. Oh, I looked exactly like that. The mirror was slanted which gives me this disdainful look because I'm looking out at an angle. But it's exactly as I saw myself. And it has a lot of color in it. The background is brilliant red because I felt it needed the luminosity of the color to hold that kind of thinking.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now how about let's perhaps—the one with the three—Since you were so interested in the one of the three young girls and that represents your very recent one. Would you like to say anything more about that? And then I think the one with Michelle might—

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Yes. Well, I have been very interested in the total human form and its environments. And up until recently I have been deeply involved with mostly middle-aged women with a great excitement in the internal form because they were very heavy. They were not thin, live women. They were women who represented people who lived in a sense. And they had a monument weight to them, much more than the physical weight because that's what I was interested in, not in specific.

When I did the Three Graces as a young girl, as young women I should say, it became a totally different experience. And there again the gesture, the moment, as in my self portrait was what I wanted contrasted to the immobility of some of the figures and the psychological meaning of the heads became important.

The scale of this one is extremely important to me. And I don't know if it's communicated in these, but this is about eight feet tall. And there's much more complexity in the painting, but it's thinner in mine.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is this oil or acrylic?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: All acrylics from hereon in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What is the advantage there?

SHIRLEY GORELICK: Many advantages. I changed whole figures radically from start to today. And I find that oils I couldn't possibly do—

[END OF INTERVIEW.]