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Oral history interview with Joy
Hakanson Colby, 1977 February 14

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Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Joy Hakanson Colby on February 14, 1977. The interview took place in Detroit, Michigan, and was conducted by Cynthia Newman Helms for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information from the original transcript has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution

Interview

[00:00:04.92]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: [Inaudible].

[00:00:06.64]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Well, if it does, we'll just go ahead and just shut it off.

[00:00:08.95]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Oh, okay.

[00:00:09.51]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: In between—it's no problem. Okay. This is February 14, 1977 and I'm in the offices of Kastle/Colby Associates. Is that right?

[00:00:25.03]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:00:25.31]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I'm going to talk to Joy Hakanson Colby, who has been active in the Detroit art scene for a number of years—starting in 1950, '51—as a critic.

[00:00:38.76]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: '47.

[00:00:39.52]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: '47, earlier than that— as a critic with the *Detroit News*, and who is active on a number of advisory panels and things in the area. I'm going to just talk about her impressions of the Detroit art scene over the past, well, 25 or so years—25, almost 30, if it's '47, isn't it? It's almost 30. So to start then, I had down—Dennis [Barrie -Ed.] had told me that you started at the news in, I think, '50. But you say you started—

[00:01:08.62]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: In '47.

[00:01:09.52]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: —actually in '47. But you were really a product of Detroit anyway, I mean, in other senses, you were born here.

[00:01:16.67]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:01:17.12]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And you went to school where?

[00:01:18.89]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: At Wayne State.

[00:01:19.73]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: At Wayne State.

[00:01:20.75]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: It was Wayne University in those days, though.

[00:01:23.24]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And you got—at that time you got a Fine Arts degree then, right?

[00:01:27.35]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, I majored in painting and drawing and had some experience with the crafts. We had to in those days have everything in the art department, not just our own specialty.

[00:01:39.44]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And you took classes then also at Arts and Crafts. Is that correct?

[00:01:43.64]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I took some classes at Arts and Crafts earlier.

[00:01:46.65]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Earlier. Because at one point the Arts and Crafts did do some things where students from Wayne did go over and take things at Arts and Crafts or was that later on? This wasn't—your experience at Arts and Crafts wasn't a part of the Wayne thing.

[00:02:01.19]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: No, it wasn't a part of the Wayne thing. It was entirely separate. It was before I enrolled at Wayne, really when I was in high school and then after I graduated from high school—summer school. I took some drawing with Sarkis [Sarkisian -Ed.], and a little painting.

[00:02:17.18]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Right. How did you get into newspaper work, then? How did you get—you obviously got a Fine Arts degree—did you at one point intend to paint or to do something like that, or were you always aimed perhaps at more at writing, or scholarship, or —

[00:02:38.33]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: No, I had never written. I had a minor in English, but I didn't do anything about it. And the reason I got into the news was because of my predecessor, Florence Davies, who wrote art for [the *News* -Ed.] for many, many years. And she lived in a marvelous old house on Frederick Street. Dr. Valentin [of the Detroit Institute of Art -Ed.] lived there for a while, and many art people in the area lived in this house with Florence when they came to town, either for a few years, or perhaps they had homes elsewhere.

[00:03:12.02]

And in those days, Wayne Claxton was the Chairman of the Art Department at Wayne. And

he had a home in Wisconsin, and he lived there summers with his wife, Margaret Doubler Claxton, who is considered to be the mother of modern dance education in this country. And she had founded this marvelous dance department at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he came from.

[00:03:39.56]

He came to Detroit and really founded the Wayne Art Department. When he got here in the '30s, it was—consisted of two maiden ladies and one easel or something like that. [Cynthia laughs.] And he stayed at Florence Davies' house on Frederick Street during the winter. And knowing Wayne, we were very friendly, he was probably the greatest influence in my early life. As students, we would go over to this marvelous house and we all knew Florence—Flossie, as we called her. And she knew that she was going to retire shortly from the *News*.

[00:04:24.60]

So when I couldn't get a job in art—I was not trained in commercial art, although I'd had a few courses—I took my portfolio from door to door and everyone said I was overqualified, in a sense, and underexperienced. And so Wayne Claxton said to me, "Why, I think Florence always needs a girl or two in the society department [of the *News* -Ed.], why don't you go down and try out?" Well, I went to the *News*, and did try out and was absolutely captivated by the business, and I just stayed.

[00:04:59.87]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Well, that's great because at that time, though, you mentioned something that's interesting, that the art department would have been under society news. Was that usual in those days that art—the art doings were probably done always under the society pages?

[00:05:18.87]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: No, I didn't mean to imply that. I went to the *News* as a society reporter—

[00:05:23.89]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh, I see.

[00:05:24.51]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —just the youngest, greenest kind of person. And Florence Davies was, at that time, women's editor and art editor.

[00:05:36.00]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh, she did both.

[00:05:36.84]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: She did both. And at that time, during the '40s, the space had been cut down to about two columns a week. Before that, she had a whole page while George Booth was alive. And he was, of course, very interested in art and he gave a whole page to it. But after he died, there wasn't all that much activity. The war had come, and people were cutting back.

[00:06:06.27]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Right.

[00:06:06.74]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And there just wasn't that kind of activity. So Florence wrote an art column and it was indeed put in the women's department in those days—or not in the department, but in the women's section. And it shared a page with books. And it just happened to be physically in that part of the paper.

[00:06:27.62]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah, it wasn't then sort of a department decision. It was just more of a space consideration and a person—they were short personnel, kind of.

[00:06:35.00]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:06:35.51]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: They grouped because of those reasons.

[00:06:37.46]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: She made space for it in her section is what happened, and later on it went on like that for a few years. And then it was placed in other areas of the paper.

[00:06:48.80]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: So you started out in the society department. At what point did you become, say, the art critic, or you got into writing about art events in specific?

[00:07:00.61]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, a few months after I came, Florence retired, and I just got the job. It was funny because my qualifications were complete inexperience in the newspaper business. But I did have some training in art. And it was like the music critic in newspapers in those days would give that job to a man who had a tuxedo and could wear it to opening concerts. [They laugh.]

[00:07:33.19]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN HELMS: As your major qualification.

[00:07:35.14]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yeah, but it was—I was certainly inexperienced, and terribly, terribly young, and just as green as anyone could be. And I can remember staying down at night and slaving over these little epics that I wrote, and it was very, very painful. And there were always wonderful night people around in the newspaper business who either worked nights or stayed all night because they loved it so much. And so they used to help me with my grammar, and syntax, and whatever.

[00:08:11.94]

And, at the time, I worked only two days a week, I think, on art, maybe less. And the rest of the time I did women's features. I wrote a beauty column, and I did general features. I wrote a beauty column under the pen name of Lucy Carroll. And it was really awfully wild because I had a lot of different things going on. There were people in and out of the office—artists and beauty people—and it was just a very crazy kind of situation.

[00:08:47.26]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It sounds very exciting, though. It must have been a great way to really get to know the trade—the newspaper trade, especially—doing a little bit of everything in that way.

[00:08:57.80]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, it was.

[00:08:59.39]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Who was your competition? I mean, there were, at that time, how many, say, daily newspapers in Detroit? Was there just the *Free Press* and the *News* at that time? There would have been the *Times*, perhaps.

[00:09:09.53]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: The *Times*. There were three papers.

[00:09:11.60]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah.

[00:09:11.87]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And the *Free Press* didn't assign anyone to it regularly. They had a man named Art Dorazio, who did it part-time. Again, he worked full-time for the *Free Press*, but wrote art on a part-time basis. It was a labor of love for him. He liked it, he enjoyed it, and he did it. And then there was a marvelous woman on *The Times*, a very sensitive woman named Evelyn Ono.

[00:09:41.46]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah, neither of those names was I at all familiar with, but I just wondered who was—who were you—did you see these people in the course of your work at all? Did you ever—I imagine you might bump into them in the galleries, or things and—or did you have any contact with the other people who were writing?

[00:10:00.49]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Occasionally, but the *News* was giving more space to it. It wasn't much space, but it was more than the other papers were giving. And it was—we did it on a more regular basis, really. An interesting thing about Evelyn Ono, to show you how the generations perpetuate themselves—her daughter-in-law is one of the six women who are operating this new contemporary gallery—

[00:10:32.41]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Contemporary Crafts.

[00:10:33.09]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —contemporary—Gallery of Contemporary Crafts.

[00:10:37.08]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yes, right here in the Fisher Building.

[00:10:39.21]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, in the Fisher Building.

[00:10:39.66]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh, that's great. Yeah.

[00:10:40.92]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:10:41.28]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And it is sort of a heritage then, yeah.

[00:10:43.95]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:10:44.16]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: That is—that's very interesting.

[00:10:45.97]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And then Bob Broner, the very distinguished printmaker, wrote art news for the *Times* for a while and he did a marvelous job.

[00:10:54.57]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I've read some of his—a few—we have his papers.

[00:10:57.03]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:10:57.21]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I've read a few, yeah.

[00:10:58.50]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And he—his family—his father-in-law was on the *Times*. And I think a brother, also, so that was a family thing too.

[00:11:09.42]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: [Inaudible]. What was the art scene like then? For instance, thinking of now, how many galleries were there? What was the size of the field that you had to cover as far as art news would be concerned?

[00:11:26.05]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: It was really very meager compared to today. We have about—today there are about 30, maybe 35 stops on a gallery beat. And in those days, there were very few. I think most of the activity centered around the Detroit Artists Market, which had the most prestigious one-man shows that's—they did introduce most of Detroit artists to Detroit galleries, or the Detroit gallery audience, I mean. And then Anna Werbe had a gallery out on Livernois during the '50s and she did a very splendid job.

[00:12:07.83]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Did she show local people—

[00:12:09.60]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: She showed—

[00:12:10.14]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: —or was she showing everything? Was she showing other things as well or primarily local?

[00:12:15.19]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: She showed a lot of local people. She showed Zubel Kachadoorian. She showed Marjorie Hecht. She showed some of the other names will come to me later on. But she did a kind of balance of local and national artists. And some of her people came from Chicago. She had some connections with Chicago and brought in some people, some painters working in Chicago. Her—she was a—really a splendid, very eccentric woman. She cared. And she also was a very gifted miniaturist in her own right. And she did exhibit her miniature paintings around the country and won prizes for them. She was very gifted in that way. And then Bob Garelick was operating a gallery farther on down Livernois. He started around 1950, I think.

[00:13:25.95]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Was it Garelick who did the Regionalists? Did he get into the American scene painters and things? What was he dealing with at that time? Was—

[00:13:39.01]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, Bob Garelick dealt with what he called "humanism." And I've

never been too sure of exactly what he meant by that, because I think that art itself is a very human activity, no matter what you're painting or how. He had William Gropper. He had the Soyers— Raphael and Moses. He had Philip Evergood. He had a couple of Epstein shows.

[00:14:16.49]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And his emphasis would have been more than a national rather than, say, local as Anna Werbe's would have been?

[00:14:27.15]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, he did he did show some local people. Carol Wald was one of the artists that he showed. And he showed Evelyn Brackett Raskin while she was Evelyn Brackett—won several prizes in the Michigan artist show. I think she won three in one year. She did figurative things, mostly drawings, and they were very sensitive. And he had a marvelous primitive painter called Grace McArthur, who lives in Rosebush, Michigan. She's still very much alive and painting.

[00:15:06.53]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh, I never—I don't think I've heard that name. I'll have to put that in my file. McArthur?

[00:15:12.05]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: McArthur.

[00:15:12.77]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Okay, very interesting. When did—I'm trying to think of other names that I know of in galleries—and sometimes I'm not always in the time span—but was Hanna Thompson is it—was it Hanna-Thompson—still around in the early '50s?

[00:15:28.70]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, it was Jay Hanna, at—

[00:15:30.16]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Jay Hanna [inaudible].

[00:15:31.39]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —at J.L. Hudson's. He ran a gallery on the eighth floor of the J.L. Hudson Company. But he had a—he came from a family of gallery people. I believe it was his uncle, whose name was also Hannah, who had a gallery in the David Whitney Building. Now, I really don't remember that gallery.

[00:15:53.77]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: ell, that might have been—that might have been just at the end of that particular gallery's time slot because I was just trying to get some idea of who was around. And the other name that came to mind is Peggy deSalle's—would be the Little Gallery. Didn't she start in the '50s?

[00:16:12.36]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yeah, she started in the early '50s and she got this house that she's still in today at 915 East Maple, [Birmingham, Michigan -Ed.]. She bought the house and turned it into a gallery. And it was terribly interesting because that area of Birmingham was considered somehow beyond the pale. It wasn't being used at all in those days. And she opened this gallery, and after a year or so created a great interest. The street underwent a renaissance and revival. And some of the houses were torn down, and now there are shopping centers in there. And the street is pretty—getting pretty prosperous again.

[00:17:02.63]

But at that time—at the time Peggy opened her gallery—people would say to her, "What on Earth are you doing over here? Why aren't you on the west side of Woodward [Avenue - Ed.]" But she had great faith in the neighborhood, and she wanted a gallery that would have a homelike kind of atmosphere. And it looked pretty much as it does today. She used to use the garden for outdoor shows.

[00:17:31.61]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Attractive. It's—that's rather far out. It isn't now; there's a whole cluster of galleries. But at that time, it must have been actually a little bit out of the way for people. I would think that Birmingham would have been a bit far out for—at that time, things were much closer in, or wasn't that true? Was there a suburban market for—that she was perhaps trying to capture, or—

[00:17:55.69]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, Peggy was always very strong in crafts and jewelry. She—in her first show, she had Gertrude and Otto Natzler, the potters—these very beautiful, thin wares. And she began the gallery with her own jewelry, of course—designing it, and finding artists to design. So it was a different kind of operation. It actually had a crafts orientation. And then her husband, Albert deSalle, who was the gifts buyer at the J.L. Hudson Company, retired from Hudson and began concentrating on the gallery, or the painting and sculpture side of it. And that was his thing to do. And they worked at this together until Albert died in the, was it early '60s or late '50s? I'm not really sure, but he has been dead for a number of years.

[00:19:00.28]

It would have been far out, except for Cranbrook. And that was the whole—Cranbrook had made that North Woodward area a center in itself. So there was some interest. And then people were forming the Birmingham Art Center, which is now the Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Center. And that, in the beginning, was on Woodward Avenue, very close to the Hunter Intersection. It was an old house. So there was a great deal of community interest in that. And between Cranbrook, and Peggy deSalle, and the Birmingham Arts Center, it was an area that was exhibiting some interest in art.

[00:19:48.95]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: So it was beginning a new center beyond the new center. I think we've talked a little bit about what kinds of things they were showing. Was any one gallery particularly influential, or would stand out in your mind as maybe the major gallery for, I don't know, whether people were buying more from one particular one, or can you make that kind of a judgement?

[00:20:17.05]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, I want to say one thing first. Bob Hanamura, who had been an interior—who had had some architectural training, and had done both architectural work and interior designs—opened a shop out on—or a gallery out on Grand River and Hubbell. And it was kind of a gallery shop. He had in it very fine homewares. He had ceramics; he had flatware; he had textiles of all sorts. He had paint—but he did conduct a gallery in this setting. And he had paintings and sculpture. He did a lot with Murray Jones, who was in the Art department at Michigan State, and a very fine painter. Also, Bob's mother—her name was Midori Hanamura—painted in a traditional Japanese fashion—charming woman. And Bob really had a great deal of impact on Detroit's art community.

[00:21:33.12]

He moved later to Birmingham, interestingly enough, into an old house and he continued the same kind of operation with the crafts, and in the homewares—some very fine mass-produced objects—and the gallery. And there was another gallery on Baltimore, near Woodward, and that was run by Morris and Gail Barazani, who were students at Cranbrook. And they brought in mostly local things, but work by Cranbrook students. And it really was a very fine, kind of avant-garde operation.

[00:22:14.08]

And the Barazanis and Bob Hanamura were very close, and they were very aware of Abstract Expressionism, and what it meant to the country, to American art. And they did their best to show the things that they really believed in. And they both operated strictly from a point of view of faith in art, and in bringing something very fine. They didn't show things that they didn't believe in. So they had a great impact.

[00:22:48.67]

Now, as for local artists, the Detroit Artists Market was still the place to show. And they kept a continuing schedule of shows each year, changing them about every three weeks. And the market did a great job in those days of educating what they called a lay jury. I can remember that Florence Davies insisted that I be on their jury for a while as a learning experience for me. And in those days Josephine Ford, Mrs. Walter Buell Ford, and all the Ford women, in fact—Mrs. Edsel Ford and Mrs. William Clay Ford—they were all involved with that jury.

[00:23:36.89]

And most of the young women in Detroit who were fairly affluent and interested were down at the Artists Market working and serving on the jury, in order to educate their own eye about art. And I think that was a very important thing to be doing. Robert Tannahill was terribly active in the Artists Market. That was after the gallery that he ran for the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. And the market was his love, and his outlet. And he saw to it that the Artists Market had all the support that the J. L. Hudson Company could give them.

[00:24:20.93]

When they had a garden sale, there would be trucks arrived from Hudson's, and men and packers, and everything they needed to be able to take the art from downtown out to the suburbs to the particular garden that it would be shown in that year. And it was a very healthy, good kind of organization. And then Robert Tannahill's friend, David Hamilton, also was very active in the market.

[00:24:50.90]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And what were the local artists—what sort of style were they—you mentioned that the Hanamuras—or Bob Hanamura brought in the Abstract Expressionists. Were the local artists following in that line yet? I suppose that was maybe a bit early for them to be—what was the style, or the general—was there a general feeling of the kinds of things that local people were doing?

[00:25:14.75]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, Murray Jones was a fine Abstract Expressionist. He worked in automotive lacquers. Again, he was ahead of his time. He was very much ahead of his time in using that kind of material. But he was a gesture painter. He also was a collage maker of great, great ability. And there was a fine show—I'm trying to remember the name of a gallery—it only lasted for about a year, and I can't remember the name of the man who ran it, but he had a beautiful show of Hans Hofmann's work.

[00:25:55.13]

And in those years, people like David Mitchell, Wallace Mitchell's brother—David taught and still does teach at Wayne State University—he would go east and study with Hans Hofmann. There were a number of people in this area who did study with Hofmann, and studied with other people in the east. So it wasn't completely a backwater, although certainly we didn't have the kind of communication—the kind of instant communication that we have today. I mean New York was a more separate place, really and what happened on this side of the Hudson was more provincial.

[00:26:38.28]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: But at least the artists were very aware, then, of the movements that were going on, if perhaps maybe the public wasn't quite so aware. I would imagine that Hanamura might have had a little trouble selling. Did he did he sell much Abstract Expressionism, or maybe you wouldn't know. But you—

[00:26:56.73]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I don't know. I really can't answer that. But one of the very important things that we did have educationally, was a series of shows that William Woolfenden put together for the Art Institute. They were called "works in progress." And he brought in a splendid Jackson Pollock show. He had Motherwell. He had—I'm not sure about de Kooning. I don't remember de Kooning, but I remember a marvelous group of Motherwells and a tremendous group of Pollocks. And he had—there were sculptors. I think that was the area that the archives is in today, wasn't it, up in that—no, it was right outside of your door up in a balcony gallery on the second floor.

[00:27:48.66]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Could be. Yeah.

[00:27:49.35]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And the problem with that was that it's never been very well-traveled space.

[00:27:56.46]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It is up in a corner.

[00:27:58.11]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: The public didn't move up there to see these shows, but they were perfectly splendid. And I think that Bill Woolfenden did a very important job of education in the '50s with these shows.

[00:28:12.68]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yes, that would seem—that sort of carried on the tradition of the Society of Arts and Crafts and their modern interest.

[00:28:20.52]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:28:20.85]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It just was a continuation. That's interesting, I didn't know about those particular shows myself.

[00:28:29.36]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, he would get very good things from New York galleries. And I'm sure that he hand-picked them. The shows, as I recall them, were really awfully good, and they looked as if someone hand-picked them. They just didn't hang up what dealers from New York sent.

[00:28:48.56]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh, good.

[00:28:49.73]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And then, of course, Lydia Winston Malbin was very active with her own collection. She was building her Futurist core in that collection. And I can remember being out at her home when she would get a Severini, or a Boccioni, or something that she had selected in Europe the year before. And it really was an awfully exciting thing. She cared very much, and she worked very hard. And she was very intent on seeing that people in this area would educate their eyes.

[00:29:25.94]

She had on Sunday afternoons, kind of open houses where she would invite people to see her paintings, and very often they wouldn't be understood. And people would say, "Lydia is

such a darling, but she has such awful taste in art." [Cynthia laughs.] Which was to me very significant at the time because she bought what she loved and what she believed in, and she never traded or sold a thing. She still has what she—if she made any mistakes—

[00:30:01.77]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: She's just kept them.

[00:30:03.76]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I don't think she did make mistakes really, as I recall, because the things that I would see there in the early years, she still has every one of them.

[00:30:14.55]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: That's amazing. Were there other big collectors? I, of course, know the name Malbin, but who else—was there anyone else who had a big collection, either of local people, American, or even otherwise? What were some—what was the art community—were there just a few people that were sort of the core of that kind of thing?

[00:30:39.52]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, in the late '40s—of course, there were the great collections like Robert Tannahill's.

[00:30:48.22]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Right.

[00:30:48.63]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I say great collections "like"—there was no other collection like that. But Mr. Tannahill was very private about his art, and he did not want people to come in and look at it. And—this was his experience. These were the things that he lived with and he loved. And he didn't want people trailing through his house, and looking at them, and making it a public kind of experience.

[00:31:15.88]

There was Lillian Henkel Haass, who, by that time—that was another generation, though, really. Mrs. Haass, she was very active in the museum and at the Arts and Crafts. And she gave many things to the museum. She worked very closely with Dr. Valentiner and with Edgar Richardson to see that the museum would have whatever it wanted in various areas of the collection. There was Mrs. Ralph Harman Booth, and, of course, that was a very, very—I don't know what word to use, but it's a very sad thing for Detroit, really because she had this marvelous art collection and she gave it to the National Gallery in Washington.

[00:32:08.05]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Mm. We lost that one almost like we lost to the Freer, with—

[00:32:12.13]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:32:12.91]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: —with—

[00:32:13.81]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, I think it's the same kind of thing.

[00:32:14.95]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Why does his name escape me? But the same kind of thing. What was the community like then? Would you say that it was sort of a small group of art connoisseurs? What sort of an audience did the galleries have at that time? I would think

that perhaps the boom in galleries came a bit later than the '50s. Were they struggling at that—

[00:32:38.47]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, they were struggling. And the most activity, of course, centered around the Detroit Institute of Arts. That was the place in those days. Now, later on, Hugo Rodriguez had a gallery on Livernois, and Donald Morris later moved into the same space. But they're almost—they come a bit later.

[00:33:05.89]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Morris—

[00:33:06.14]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Donald was in '57. That was about—was it '57? Somewhere around there.

[00:33:10.64]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: '57 or '58, I would think.

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: But the galleries—now, the Artists Market always had a very loyal following, and it was at once a social thing, and a community effort, and it was something that revolved around art, also. But they always had very well-filled, well-attended openings, and people did attend their shows. They made their own audience. They educated and made their own audience. The other galleries—it was—they did very well, or they did well enough, I guess. I don't remember them ever complaining.

[00:33:53.88]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But there weren't a lot at that point.

[00:33:56.03]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: There weren't a lot.

[00:33:57.00]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It wasn't enough.

[00:33:57.41]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And they worked—Jessie Forsythe in Ann Arbor had a gallery that many people from Detroit went to. And then there was a rather active program under Charles Sawyer, and Jean Paul Slusser before that, at the University of Michigan Museum. And it was all kind of one big community.

[00:34:24.99]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: So you would be covering—did you cover things, then, I would assume, in Ann Arbor? Was that part of your—that was part of your beat, too? Did you get out that far?

[00:34:33.11]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Oh, yes. Yes, I did a lot more with Ann Arbor in those days than I do today, because they really have less space and there's so many more galleries—

[00:34:42.26]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Here—

[00:34:42.71]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —and there's so much more activity here. So, yes, more with Ann Arbor, and more with Toledo, and it was a whole area that we were covering.

[00:34:54.40]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: [Inaudible]. Let's see. I don't know—how close were you or—if at all—Were the schools doing many exhibits at that time? Society of Arts and Crafts, of course, had phased out its gallery and was concentrating on its school. But other than student shows, did Wayne do shows? And did you go out—of course, Oakland [University -Ed.] wasn't in existence yet. And what about Cranbrook, did they still have their gallery?

[00:35:26.19]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Cranbrook had their gallery, yes. The Cranbrook gallery was quite active. And they did a number of shows. Wayne did not. Wayne didn't have their Community Arts Building until the mid—was it the mid or late '50s—so they did nothing outside of their annual student show, which they had at the Art Institute. The Arts and Crafts didn't do anything either with exhibitions, except their annual student show. And it was down on Watson Street, the old building, and they simply emptied it once a year and hung it with student work. And it was a very, very pleasant experience.

[00:36:14.26]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: A lot of their students, though, I would assume even sometimes when they were still students, had connections with the Detroit Artists Market, that wasn't there always sort of a close connection between the Artists Market and the Society of Arts and Crafts? That's the feeling you get sometimes when you go through, and you see the names always seem to be the same people.

[00:36:33.31]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: There was. Actually, the Artists Market was founded by Mrs. H. Lee Simpson to give—to provide a place for young students at the Arts and Crafts to sell their work during the Depression. And it was called, in those days, the Young Artists Market. But by the '40s, it became a professional exhibition situation. And there was a great difference in those days, a great division, I should say, between professional artists and student artists. And student artists really weren't showing there that much.

[00:37:13.12]

They didn't have the space, for one thing. The Artists Market was up in a third floor gallery on Madison, overlooking the park. And it was a fairly small headquarters. And they had a number of artists that they specialized in, people like Fred Papsdorf—he's a kind of naïve painter, and John Pappas, and Edgar Yaeger. And everyone else showed there. I mean Walter Midener had his first one-man show in Detroit at the Artists Market. And Sarkis always showed there. And Richard Kozlow had his first show at the Artists Market. And the Mitchell brothers, David and Wallace, both showed at the Artists Market. But that really was the place for local artists to show.

[00:38:15.93]

And then later on, only when the students got so terrific—but this is more recent, this is in the late '60s—were they able to exhibit as professionals. They really were very—they were doing work of a professional quality. And then they began getting a different kind of exposure in the galleries. But during the '40s and early '50s, students were students. And there was a division.

[00:38:44.82]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah, it had—the line has sort of fuzzed up a bit now.

[00:38:47.79]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:38:47.91]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: You do see sometimes very young people who are sometimes very, very good, but much younger than perhaps they would have been at one time. Thinking of patronage, I was interested to see that—when did sculpture in public places—when was the

phenomenon in the Eastland, Northland, all the outdoor public—the sculpture, and the murals and things—is that '50s, or is that already in the '60s, that kind of thing?

[00:39:25.19]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Now, Eastland—it must have been in the mid '50s, because Eastland opened about—I think about '58, '59, and Northland, of course, was older than that. And that was due, as I recall, to a concept of shopping centers by Victor Gruen, who had an office in Detroit in those days, in the '50s, while those shopping centers were being built. And it was an absolutely revolutionary kind of concept, and people were just simply fascinated. Marshall Fredericks worked on that, and Lily Swann Saarinen at Northland. And a man named Malcolm Moran, who did things on—mobile, things on wires. And Richard Jennings—

[00:40:22.55]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Is it Morris Brose—or one of the others, has something?

[00:40:26.93]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, I think Morris has something at Eastland, but it was very exciting, and it gave artists the idea that there was someplace for them to work, some area where their work could be used, and seen, and appreciated. And until that time, it had been pretty much of a theoretical thing.

[00:40:50.06]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Well, there was always—I think of the WPA and they did schools and post offices. But it was—to me it was interesting that it was really one of the first instances of a very public—commercial—a public and a commercial place, that kind of atmosphere. I just thought it was very interesting, because there seemed to be a whole surge of that kind of activity at that point. And then it seemed to have tapered off again until recently, when there has perhaps been some more—

[00:41:18.54]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:41:19.02]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And I just—Victor Gruen—who I didn't know—who was responsible for those commissions, or if it was a group of people, or what. But that—I just thought that was a very interesting phenomenon.

[00:41:31.14]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, it was. I think Victor Gruen was from the West Coast. But he did establish an office in Detroit during the '50s because of all of that activity, and that was part of his concept that there be sculpture used in those malls. And then of course Louis Redstone was working at the same time with the same idea of art in public spaces. I can remember meeting Lou shortly after I went to the *News*, and he was just absolutely dedicated to the idea of using art in architecture. And most people didn't know what he was talking about, and could care less.

[00:42:14.16]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: He wrote a book, didn't he?

[00:42:16.35]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: *Art in Architecture*.

[00:42:17.21]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: *Art in Architecture*.

[00:42:17.58]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes. That's the title of it.

[00:42:19.44]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I thought I recognized the name on it in that connection. You mentioned that the DIA, of course, was the center of everything at that time. Of course, they were doing the Michigan Artist Show. And was that the biggest thing in the area? I mean, as far as local artists were concerned, was that probably the event of the year? How did they view that, or did you get trickles of opinion on that kind of thing?

[00:42:48.72]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: It was absolutely the biggest thing. And the Founders Prize was very much sought after. And there was a lot of—there was a lot of suspense, and a lot of gossip, and a lot of keeping secrets, and not keeping secrets. And everyone was terribly interested in that show. And they always had a varnishing day preview, which was a day or so before the show opened. And all of the artists would absolutely jam the galleries, seeing if their work was entered; if it wasn't. And it created a good deal of excitement. And that lasted until the '60s, when everything changed very drastically, and the show—we had jurors in who wanted the show to look very different.

[00:43:39.93]

Until that time, it was a very predictable show. It was an annual exhibition, and you could almost tell who would be up—who would win the Founders Prize this year, or who would be—win the other big prizes, or who would be in, or who would be out. It was very—it was a very predictable show. And then all of a sudden, I'm trying—I'm groping for a date here, but before Frank Page left, as Curator of Contemporary Art. He was the first Curator of Modern Art at the Art Institute. And before he left there was a jury—it was Marisol—it included Marisol and Anuszkiewicz.

[00:44:27.86]

And I'm trying to think of the museum director. There were three people or four on that jury. And they threw just about everything out. And they just—the show became a very different thing. And after that, it was in trouble, as far as the artists were concerned. And everyone was thinking about how you could do a show like the Michigan Artists Show, and represent what was going on, and still have a show that would stand up anywhere in the country. Before that, people didn't worry about that. It was our Michigan Artists Show. It was a very local and, as I think of it, a really very provincial kind of show. But then all of a sudden there was the problem of getting a show that would stand up aesthetically anywhere. And I must say there was a good deal of resentment among the artists. They felt that if they had worked here, and they had worked here for years, and how could someone come in from outside and just simply throw their work out? They took it very, very badly.

[00:45:41.40]

And then also, it was very difficult, because this was at the time, in the '60s, when the students were beginning to emerge, or younger people were beginning to emerge. And some very exciting talent in this area, people like David Barr and Jim Pallas. And they would walk in, and their work would be accepted. And I think that David was probably still in school when he had his first work accepted in the Michigan Artists Show. And that naturally didn't sit well with a lot of older painters who felt that they had paid their dues, and they deserved a place in a publicly-owned institution. This is what they thought. And there were meetings—artists would get meetings with the director of the museum, and really express themselves very strongly. It was just different, and it was hard for people to understand how the change came about, and where this show would go, and the rest of it. It was a very traumatic period.

[00:46:55.92]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I think some of the effects might—probably still linger on. I think there's still a certain percentage of people that are a little bit resentful of the direction, maybe, that things have taken. At the present time they're not really doing it in the format of a Michigan Artists Show. They didn't do one this year at all. They just did the series of "works in progress" things.

[00:47:20.23]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:47:20.91]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: They didn't. They just have sort of dropped the—maybe just temporarily—but at least for now they didn't do that. So—and there seems to have been some bad feedback on that score.

[00:47:36.12]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, I think people are getting used to change. And, in my opinion, this series of "work in progress" shows that John Neff organized was really a tremendous breakthrough. And it was just the right thing to do at that time. I think the Michigan Artists Show—you could say that it paralleled the whole art situation in America. It just reflected the great changes in American art, in people's attitudes, in the way artists work, and in the way they wanted to be represented, in the way they wanted to get their work out in front of the public. And I think the show—I think it would be a marvelous thing to write a history of that show, because I think it would be a microcosm of what's happened to art in this country in the last 20 years.

[00:48:34.30]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It just does seem to be the one—whenever you speak of Michigan artists, you have to speak of the Michigan show. And people came from all over. I mean, it wasn't just a Detroit phenomenon, correct? I mean, people from Ann Arbor, obviously—that was a big thing for them. Charles Sawyer has mentioned that they used to come in by the busloads—people to see it. But then also for the artists, it was a big—it was perhaps the only—at that time, was it the only outlet? Now—at that time, was the Flint—some of those museums weren't even in operation—was there any other comparable outlet?

[00:49:09.81]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: No, there wasn't, because Flint did pick it up, but I think it was only about five or six years ago that Flint began doing that all-Michigan show, which offered another opportunity. And then there was no activity in Grand Rapids in those days, and very little in Kalamazoo. All of the action centered in Detroit, centered at the Art Institute. And for local artists, it was in the Michigan Artists Show. If you didn't make that show, you just might as well hang up your paintbrush for the year.

[00:49:44.98]

You know, it really was a very serious critical problem with them. It affected their livelihoods; it affected their relationships with their students. It was something that they just had to get in that show in order to survive, they thought. Really, they didn't, because everything changed so much that in the later years of the Michigan show, I think that people began to realize that this was not a show that rewarded a painter for achievement, but it became a vehicle for discovering fresh, young talent. And it became a whole other kind of thing. And many of the instructors and the painters, who were very successful as exhibitors, just ceased to enter. They would encourage their students to do it, but they didn't want to compete with them. So the show was just different.

[00:50:40.93]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah, I can see where the exposure—at one point it was sort of perhaps a stamp of approval of people who were already—perhaps already had audiences, if it was the same people, year after year, after year, who were winning. It was just sort of an official stamp that they were in fact successful.

[00:51:01.51]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes. Yes, you could say—how many times did Sarkis win it? Three times at least. Well, it's Sarkis' turn again. I think they had to have a five-year interval before they could compete for the Founders Prize. Some of the people have done very well like Sarkis, and Hughie Lee-Smith, painters like that. There's no question about it. But others you

never hear from again—they would just win the prize and then sort of disappear.

[00:51:30.35]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yes, when you go through the list, you see lots of names that—that's the only time you ever see them, and in no other connection.

[00:51:36.83]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:51:38.00]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: What other sorts of things was—to get away from the local scene a bit—what other sorts of things was the museum doing? What other kinds of shows, things that were perhaps very important in the community? What kind—other shows did they do, say, in the '50s, anything that comes to mind that was that outstanding?

[00:51:58.63]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, there were two men at the museum in those days who had two very special fields of interest. One, of course, was the director, Edgar P. Richardson, who was deeply involved with American art. And he gave us a very valuable exposure to American art of—from 19th century, for example, before it became a field of interest in the rest of the country. Detroit really had a good ground floor on that, just as we had a very good basic exposure to the German Expressionists before other people were interested in those.

[00:52:43.12]

And the second man during the '50s was Paul Grigaut, who was assistant director, and he adored decorative arts. That was his field—French, and Italian, and English. And he did a series of marvelous shows. He did Ming china; he did English ceramics; he did French decorative arts; marvelous silver. And all the time he was acquiring pieces in the various fields. He bought some beautiful works of French silver.

[00:53:18.40]

And then after Paul left this area, he was Curator at the University of Michigan Museum before he died. And it just escapes me at the moment where he went between Detroit and Ann Arbor. After he died, we kind of put the decorative arts away, and nobody was much interested in them. And when Bill Woods came, the museum was building two wings, and it was a very different kind of time. And we were concentrating on building the museum in another physical kind of way, and all of Paul's decorative arts just got kind of put away and forgotten about. There wasn't any curator who especially pushed them at the time.

[00:54:08.66]

Now, Sheila Tabakoff, when she came in last year, was thrilled with what Paul had done with the decorative arts that had been collected. And other younger staff members are rediscovering Paul Grigaut and his decorative arts, and they're going to bring these collections out. Some of them have been brought out in the new Italian wing, and I'm sure that others will be rediscovered and brought to light. Unfortunately, I wish Sheila had stayed, because I think we would have been in for a great flowering of decorative arts in this community. But those two areas were very important during the '50s, because I can remember feeling at times a bit impatient, because there wasn't more contemporary art showing at the museum.

[00:55:11.27]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But still we—that's another instance of where Detroit has been a little bit ahead. I guess sometimes we get criticized—they say, oh, Detroit, we don't get mentioned. Recently, when *Art in America* did their regional study, Detroit didn't even get—got bypassed. But not only on a local level, but on a national level, I think we've always had things that—we really were a bit ahead sometimes. And I think it's valuable to know when we were.

[00:55:40.70]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: We're very often ahead, and it's marvelous to look back on all of that, and find that other areas of the country are just catching up in places that we've been ahead for so many years. And all of these contributions by the various curators of the museum have been so important.

[00:56:04.43]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It is. It's very interesting when you go back. It's just extremely interesting. We're almost to the end of the tape. So why don't we take a break for a minute and—

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[00:00:09.34]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Start again— I wanted to ask a little bit about Cranbrook, then, and what sorts of things they were doing, particularly in reference to their museum and their gallery at that time.

[00:00:25.27]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Cranbrook had an extensive permanent collection that was formed by George Booth. And they kept the permanent collection at most times out in front of the public. They would vary it and change it. And they had decorative arts, many fine decorative arts. They had antiquities. They had sculpture, of course. And they would make exhibitions drawn from the permanent collections. They had some special shows. I can't remember too much about them, other than the fact that they would bring in a few things during the season from New York galleries. I can remember seeing, during the '50s, a sculpture show that had a number of Louise Nevelson pieces in it. And it was really tremendously exciting.

[00:01:18.35]

They also—one of their traditions was to make a very big point of their annual student exhibition. And their own resident designers, one being Ted Luderowski, did perfectly fabulous things in staging the show. There was, in those days, a great interest in the crafts, in textiles. Marianne Strengell was teaching there at the time in ceramics, with Maija Grotell and her students in design, in the Eames and Saarinen tradition. And they would open these shows in the spring and keep them traditionally—and still do—until Labor Day. And they were a very large attraction.

[00:02:10.49]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: And one other thing about Cranbrook was that, at points in their tradition, they've been really rather isolated. Did they make overtures to the community, or did they become involved in the North Woodward-Birmingham area, out in that direction?

[00:02:28.82]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: They began doing that in the late 1950s with a children's program of classes. And one of the first instructors—in fact, he headed the program—was Glen Michaels, the Birmingham artist. And he was very successful. He was just marvelous with children. And he emphasized drawing, and brought in dancers and musicians, and so it was a complete experience. He did a lot with the kinesthetics of drawing a figure, and music, and collage, and all sorts of experiences. This is the first thing—this is the first real overture that I recall Cranbrook making to the community. And they were extremely successful with this program.

[00:03:22.37]

Now, Cranbrook is working with public schools in the Birmingham-Bloomfield area and, I'm sure, in other areas too. But their Science Institute actually has a seminar kind of situation every winter for elementary schools. And they take various classes. And the children just go there for a week at a time. And their women's committee—they formed a women's committee sometime in the late '50s or early '60s. And they've been very active and successful. They developed a docent's program. And there is a great deal more community involvement now with Cranbrook.

[00:04:15.30]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Speaking of the community in general, what would you say, at that period—were there any particular weaknesses? I mean, we mentioned that there were perhaps only a few galleries. But there seemed to be outlets for most things. I mean, there did seem to be an outlet for crafts. And people were showing different things. There was an outlet for local artists, and there were things brought in from New York. Was there any conspicuous need that a critic could put your finger on, or not? Was there a range of things being shown and talked about?

[00:04:51.75]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, I think one of the problems has always been Detroit's inferiority complex. And this, of course, extended to their artists, too. And it seems very strange to me, and it did at the time, that more artists weren't involved with Detroit as an industrial subject, that they weren't really moved by the city for what it was, instead of for what they thought it ought to be. There were a lot of people complaining about a lack of interest in Detroit, a lack of culture, if you will. And this was always somehow justified by saying, well, this is a blue-collar town. It's a lunch bucket town. No wonder nobody's interested in art. And now we have a whole new generation of people who just delight in Detroit's grittiness, in its honesty. And we're making some of the most exciting art in the country here now. And I think that we could have done that during the '50s had we not had such a kind of inferiority complex about what Detroit lacked, instead of what it did represent.

[00:06:05.07]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It's sort of a negative attitude that they could have done without.

[00:06:08.61]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:06:09.21]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Somewhere, Donald Morris mentioned that, when he opened a gallery, he made overtures to local artists. And they were hostile, was what he thought. And he couldn't put his finger on why, except perhaps they had their own audiences, and they had the Detroit Artists Market. But I wonder if—did they feel that maybe their market wasn't in Detroit? Were they that anti the community?

[00:06:37.88]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, I think they wanted to show in New York. There was this feeling about you didn't make it or couldn't make it unless you were showing in New York. That was the place to be. And, in some senses, that hasn't changed a great deal. However, I think there's a lot more awareness now, and particularly among the younger artists who are going to New York, that their experience here, their growing and learning experience was exceedingly valuable. Of course, this is a much different time. The schools seem to be giving something that's very special today. And I don't know that—well, I can't quite figure that out. We have good schools here. And they're just turning out a different kind of product now.

[00:07:32.87]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Would it be perhaps because they have maybe immersed themselves more in the whole industrial thing? I mean, there's been a growth in design programs, and things like that. Is it just that they've come to appreciate the technology more? I mean, like you say, we are in the middle of the most industrialized—or in a very technological center. So we really have a great basis for much of the—many of the things that are going on now. It's hard to say what—

[00:08:08.18]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. There didn't—in the '50s, there didn't seem to be much awareness that art and industry had anything to do with each other. And I think that this has changed tremendously, not that our artists are doing industrial subjects, really. But it's the whole—what young painters and sculptors tell me they're excited about today is

the openness of Detroit and the kind of—it's a gritty city. It's honest. And it's down to Earth. It's very different than New York, say.

[00:08:50.64]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Or even than the West Coast would be an entirely different—

[00:08:53.04]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: The West Coast, yes. But artists seem to be appreciating Detroit for what it does have to offer, although there could be a lot more opportunities here. Still, there's an awareness of what an important learning experience Detroit is. And I think, certainly, that we are sending some of the most exciting young talents into New York right now.

[00:09:19.89]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Do you think some of them will continue to keep one foot in this? I think of Brenda Goodman, who has just left, and Aris Koutroulis who commutes, and people like that. Do you think they'll retain their ties to here? Do you think that that's important enough to them, that they'll perhaps keep one foot in each camp, or is that—

[00:09:40.08]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, a lot of them are teaching in Michigan and living in New York. Ellen Phelan did a stint of teaching at Michigan State. And Carol Stein was teaching at the University of Michigan while she was living in New York. And Aris—yes, I think Aris will always be a part of Detroit. And John Haggerty is living in New York and teaching in Detroit. So I think it's a whole new kind of pattern. It isn't all that great a thing to get back and forth to New York anymore.

[00:10:18.84]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Right. It's just a short hop by plane, not overnight, like on the train. Getting back a little bit to the '50s period—we've gotten a little bit out of our time span. But who were the names as far as artists? Is that possible to say, who were some of the names in the news at that time amongst—first maybe amongst local people, and then, say, national names that were big in this area? Is it possible to do that?

[00:10:52.17]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: You mean the national artists that people—

[00:10:54.90]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah, was there a particular group that, say, was shown, or individuals that were shown more than others? And were there—what were the local people who were in the "in" people?

[00:11:07.59]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, now, the local people who were important were Sarkis, of course, and Walter Midener, Murray Jones of Michigan State. Richard Kozlow was starting then and doing some very strong work when he began.

[00:11:35.74]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Was Bob Broner, is he—was he starting—was he working in the—starting in the '50s?

[00:11:38.80]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, Bob Broner was working, and doing some very beautiful things. He didn't come to mind immediately, because he had done—he was living in New York for a while, and then he would come back and forth—

[00:11:54.57]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Come in—

[00:11:55.15]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —to Detroit. And there are a number of people, Thomas McClure, from University of Michigan. Gerome Kamrowski was doing some very dynamic and interesting things. And Gerry Kamrowski had a group in those days called the Hylozoists. And they included women. The group included women like Mildred Friedman and, I think, Mary Beard was a part of that. And there were five or six of them. And they would show together. Every once in a while they'd go over and show at Scarab Club. They would rattle up that old establishment and hang their very contemporary pictures. And it involved gestural painting, some of it drip, and some of them constructions. And it was a very interesting kind of energy that was given off by this group.

[00:12:58.55]

And then, when Bob Wilbert got to town—now, this was in the late '50s. Bob had come out of Chicago via Flint. And he was teaching—he had come, of course, to teach at Wayne State. And he operated for a time a gallery down on Grand River [Avenue -Ed] known as the—it was called the Triple-A Gallery and Frame Shop. And the man who ran the frame shop wanted a gallery. And Bob had become friendly with him in some way. And the man said, "Would you run this gallery?" And Bob did. And he did it very successfully. It was a very plain old building with wooden floors. And it was kind of messy. But Bob cleaned out a room, and brought in some very good shows.

[00:13:50.27]

He brought in a marvelous show by Gerry Kamrowski. He brought in—a dozen people I could think of. But, anyway, he kept up a very consistent run of shows. Some of the work was very experimental. And others was just good. And, as a matter of fact, Bob made his own debut in this gallery with a group of object paintings, and they were very interesting early Wilbert paintings. And I think he did this for three or four years outside of his university duties. It wasn't a thing of profit. He used the gallery primarily for education. And he had a few performances, a few happenings. And this was in the late '50s. And this was a very—

[00:14:45.35]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Very "with it."

[00:14:45.56]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: —very advanced kind of thing to do.

[00:14:49.39]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yes, really, because that's very early on for anything outside Detroit to be—outside Detroit, outside New York—to be into that sort of thing.

[00:15:00.61]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Bob did this strictly as a labor of love. And he was very, very successful at it, because he just had such great energy, and charm, and talent. He was just great at it. And then, he also was very, very helpful. Anna Werbe was getting quite old. And he was very helpful to Anna Werbe. He would help her with the gallery, again, as a labor of love. He was just an all-around nice guy aside from his talent.

[00:15:32.48]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: So he was really, really into things as far as—artists like that, that get so involved in other things besides their own work, galleries, and whatever. What about artists groups or associations? Were there—I think, in later times, of the Common Ground Group. Were there things in the '50s comparable to that? Were there any little movements here and there or little groups that got together? You just mentioned the Holozoas?

[00:16:03.49]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Hylozoists. Whatever that means.

[00:16:04.30]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Yeah.

[00:16:06.04]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: We had clubs during the '50s. We had the Detroit Society of Women Painters. That, of course, was a women's group. We had the Pen and Palette Club. We had the Scarab Club, which staged an annual gold medal show. And the Scarab Club was kind of misplaced Bohemia. It was out of its depth. And nobody could understand why there was no more Bohemia. [Laughs.] So the Scarab Club did its best.

But I'm afraid the shows there weren't a very good quality. I think the best art critic around in those days was a dog named Billy that belonged to the cook and her husband at Scarab Club. And Billy would inevitably find the worst painting in the room and raise his leg on it. [Cynthia laughs.] It was so terribly funny. But he always did it to the worst painting in the show.

[00:17:09.88]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: They should have had an honorary mention or—[Laughs.]

[00:17:12.75]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:17:14.95]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: "Billy's Blue Ribbon," or something.

[00:17:17.32]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: The women tended—I must try to phrase this tactfully. But the women tended to be political, and a little bit narrow about who showed what where. And I think that it was a mistake, because the energy was kind of ingrown. There could have been energy there. This was the day before women's rights and women's liberation. And so, they went about it in a kind of "tea and crumpet" way. And I think they weren't as effective as they could have been. And this was true of the smaller art clubs too. They were clubs rather than organizations that neither did much about educating or lifting the standards in the community. And this was too bad, I think.

[00:18:11.36]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Because you mentioned women, you think of—what women that are still active, perhaps, were around in the '50s? Like you say, the women's group was, really, in some cases, a kind of closed affair. Or they didn't seem to—didn't seem to sometimes appear in other places that they might have. But were there women that were very active or —

[00:18:35.39]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Oh, I've forgotten something. And I think this is one of the most important things about the '50s. And that was the Michigan Watercolor Society. And speaking of women, it's just a great powerhouse of a woman, Mary Jane Bigler, who was very instrumental in founding that Society. Some of the other members—founders were Kingsley Calkins, Eddie [ph], and you [ph], and Wayne Claxton, who was a chairman of Wayne's Art department then. But Jane Bigler is the kind of person who can always get things done. And she had so much faith in that organization and felt so strongly about watercolor as a medium. There was a tendency in those days to say that watercolor was not as important a medium as oil, was not—and, as a matter of fact, I think which still enrages Jane, no matter how far we've come, paintings are still described as "paintings," meaning oil or acrylic, and "watercolors." And that still infuriates Jane.

[00:19:57.62]

Another person, another woman who was terribly active was Louise Jansson Nobili, also at Wayne. And these two women have—I think are really almost solely responsible for the

caliber of teaching that has gone on in watercolor. And we'd have one jury after another come into the Michigan artist show after the Michigan Watercolor Society was formed, and remark at what wonderful watercolors Michigan was producing. And this was very, very exciting and very positive. Now, the Michigan Watercolor Society was never a social group, never a political group. It was always meant to raise standards, and to get the most out of the watercolor medium, and to rally around it, painters of ability. And that's all they were interested in. And they've really done a spectacular job.

[00:21:05.08]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: What were their outlets for exhibition? They did some at—did they do them at the Institute, or what was their major—where was their major exhibition place, or did they have one?

[00:21:17.32]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: They moved around. They had a couple of shows at the museum. Their 30th exhibition, of course, last year was at the museum, in 1976. They showed at the University of Michigan Museum. They showed at the Birmingham-Bloomfield Art Center. They showed at—I think they showed at Scarab Club. But they would move around the community. And then they would pick a group of watercolors for a traveling show, and they would send those around the state. So, you see, watercolor had really a very good exposure. And, all the while, the Wayne Art department was churning out these excellent watercolorists who just would join the Society, and then keep on perpetuating. And the whole thing grew enormously.

[00:22:11.06]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Because both women are still at Wayne is that—they're both still there?

[00:22:13.31]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: They are both still at Wayne, and they're both still doing an incredible job.

[00:22:18.74]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: So that's sort of a local phenomenon then, the watercolor?

[00:22:22.94]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, it really is. And, I must say, that there was a time, oh, five or so years ago, when I said, "Bury the Watercolor Society. Stop it. It's lived—it's served its purpose. It's like beating a dead horse. The issues aren't valid anymore. Everybody knows that watercolors can be as good as oils in the right hands, and so forth." But I really changed my mind about that when I saw the show last year at the museum, because it was such an interesting show. Sometimes they aren't—they haven't always been that good. In recent years, there have been shows that have been rather dull. But the show at the Museum was picked by John Neff, who decided to stick his chin way out. And it really was an incredibly successful show. And it generated a lot of interest. And it was very worthy of the gallery and the museum.

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Really, for an organization to be viable for 20 years, is probably—or almost 20 years now—

[00:23:29.42]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Thirty.

[00:23:29.93]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Thirty—

[00:23:31.04]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: It was formed in '46.

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It's a real accomplishment to still be—

[00:23:35.75]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yeah.

[00:23:36.10]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: —on top of things, is great. Let's see, I think I already passed that. This is sort of a general question. But how has the critical coverage changed? Do you think that the media gives more coverage to the arts now? Or I know we still don't get, I don't think, in either paper, a full page like they do in some places. Some papers still have a full page for the arts. But has critical coverage sort of gone through a series of phases, or is it the same as it was in the '50s, or—

[00:24:21.24]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, when you're talking about criticism, the newspaper criticism is, and always has been, and probably always will be, very, very different from art journal coverage, art journal criticism. Newspapers are businesses. They are becoming more so businesses. And we do not—we're very low—art is very low on the reader interest survey.

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Secondly, it does not produce advertising. There's really only one paper in the country that can match its space with ads, and that's the *New York Times*. And New York, of course, is the art marketplace. Now, the space is getting worse, and it doesn't promise to get any better. It's always been a fight, all these years, to get any sort of space at all, and to get it regularly and to keep it. And one of the things that I've always done—I've written art columns when I've had babies. I've written them in hospitals. I've written them—I have never missed an issue, because I've been afraid that suddenly the space would all be withdrawn and disappear if I should just miss it for one week.

[00:25:48.97]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Oh.

[00:25:49.36]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: And the newspaper coverage is a very—it's a very difficult thing to do for this reason. Because you have an editor saying it to you, "Every 12-year-old child who picks up this paper is supposed to know what you mean." Now, this is very difficult because, in an art journal situation, you assume that all the people who are picking that up have some background, a point of reference. And there are only about two artists that you don't have to explain. One is Picasso and one is Alexander Calder. You don't have to explain who they are. Maybe Rembrandt is the third. You might get into that.

[00:26:34.37]

But outside of that, you're in the position in this very limited space of telling people who these artists are, and what their goals are, and trying to make it, God help you, so that a 12-year-old child can read it. And it's very, very difficult. It's a matter of digesting, and chewing, and simplifying, and all the rest. I don't know, I have some very ambiguous feelings about that. I think it's important to do, in this sense, that people ought to know where things are, where they can see them, and what's available to them. Otherwise, they have to go up—go out and make up their own minds about it. They really must do that. But if you're working for a newspaper anywhere, you're a reporter first.

[00:27:31.82]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I know when I go back and go through papers and things, quite often the emphasis at one time—and perhaps this was true all over the country—was extremely social. When they would have the Detroit Artists Market Garden Party, it made the society

page. Today, when the Archives of American Art gives a benefit, it makes the society page, which in a case of a fundraising event, is probably where it belongs.

[00:27:58.67]

But is it true that sometimes it was too often tied to a—I know your column isn't. You're strictly aimed at giving reviews of shows, and things. But I'm thinking of papers sometimes that do a full page, what they essentially do is a couple of columns of criticism and the rest is social: who went to what opening; who was seen at such and such affair.

[00:28:29.78]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I think they're in two very different sections of the paper. If it's a fundraiser, or benefit, or an opening, or something like that, it appears in a society section, one that is about people rather than art, because you could be raising—you could probably get the same coverage on anything that you were raising funds for—hospital coverage, or something of that sort.

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But there are papers who have consistently given a lot of space to the arts. The *Milwaukee Journal* is one, and the national—or *Christian Science Monitor*. And the Washington papers are getting better about it. But there are papers who have consistently given quite a generous space to the arts, for what reason, I don't know. Perhaps their publishers are interested, just as in the days of George Booth. Then there was a whole ad-free page. And it was what is called a sacred cow.

[00:29:46.36]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It didn't matter if it made any money. It was—[laughs].

[00:29:48.85]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, because George Booth thought that that was a very important thing to do. And he went—everything that he did was done with the idea of educating the community. And he honestly sincerely believed that organizations like the Arts and Crafts would make such a difference in this community that it would reflect the best, and that people, by being exposed to beautiful things, that it would mean more to their lives, that it would turn things around and change them. I have an enormous admiration for George Booth. I never met him. But, in my research, he's an extraordinary man.

[00:30:38.83]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Well, he certainly left some lasting monuments to these efforts at Cranbrook—

[00:30:45.13]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes.

[00:30:45.43]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: —and things like that. So he certainly did manage to accomplish a great deal. What about other publications? Has there ever been—now there's the *Michigan Art Journal*. But, at one time, wasn't there something called the *Midwest Art*, I think, was the name of it. Were you ever familiar with that? It was sort of a Chicago, Detroit thing.

[00:31:16.16]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes. Was it *Midwest Art Scene*?

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I think it was, *Midwest Art Scene*. I know it had "Midwest Art" in the title. And I don't think it lasted very long.

[00:31:25.80]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: No, it lasted a very, very short time. And I wrote a few articles for them. I never met the man—the editor of it. His name was—was it Dennis something? I can't remember. But he seemed to be very devoted to what he was doing. But, again, it was very, very hard to get that kind of thing off the ground and to get it moving. And I assume he just gave up on it.

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Because I wondered—I thought you had written—I think I read—I think it was in that, a piece on Morris Brose. I think—

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JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, I did write a piece on Morris for that.

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: But I wondered—I know the University of Michigan, I think, had one full volume of four issues, and then maybe two more. So it must have only lasted—I think it was a year and a half, or maybe it was two and a half years.

[00:32:15.92]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Couldn't have been longer than that, no.

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: But it was not very long. But I just wondered, do you feel—like, for instance, the *Michigan Art Journal*, do you think that will go? Is there a market for that kind journalistic endeavor? Obviously the—I'm not sure on the dates with the *Midwest Art Scene*, but it must have been late '50s, early '60s.

[00:32:45.68]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I'm not sure either. It was late '50s or early '60s. I'd like to see the journal—the *Michigan Art Journal* edited much better than it is. I'd like to see a better magazine. I really was very disappointed in the product. I think that it's—[pause] I think the *Detroit Artists Monthly*, which has just come out. It's in its—

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CYNTHIA NEWMAN: I think it's fourth issue.

[00:33:24.86]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I think this is a more needed kind of vehicle to be published at this time, because it gives people the news of current shows. And it gives some insight into the artists. And it gives interviews with the artists, letting them speak for themselves. And I think that it's covering a smaller territory. I think that it's more—it's reaching a larger audience and doing them more good.

[00:34:01.43]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: The focuses are really quite different in both. But I had just become familiar with the *Detroit Artists Monthly* also and had gotten some favorable comment. I just wondered what your feeling was as to the market for that kind of thing. It's an extremely difficult thing to publish anything these days.

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JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, it is.

[00:34:23.67]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: But particularly something that regional in orientation?

[00:34:27.45]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Well, I'd like to see a much tighter job of editing done on the *Art Monthly*. And I'd also like to see the stories there—it's a clip and paste kind of news release thing that they seem to print. And it's a matter of emphasis and design, and all the rest of it. I must say, I'm a little critical of that endeavor. And I would hope that it would improve. I think it's very important to have people with some sort of background in journalism do a job like this. I just don't think anyone can come in and, off the top of their head, put out a magazine. I think it's a very difficult job to do well.

[00:35:19.36]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: It takes a rare combination of talents, I suppose.

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JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Oh, yes. It takes editorial judgment. It takes the ability to write. It takes some experience. And I think that's what they both lacked.

[00:35:34.27]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: While we're speaking of publications, you have functioned as the Detroit correspondent for *ARTnews*, also. We don't get a great deal of coverage in *ARTnews*. Is that—I know you don't think it's justified. I'm sure you think that there's more going on here that would justify a bit more coverage. Why is the rest of the country sort of—not too interested in Detroit? Do we still suffer from a negative image? I wonder sometimes why we don't get as much coverage as some places.

[00:36:15.64]

JOY HAKANSON COLBY: I don't know. I've had very little luck with national magazines. And I think this new—or this business with *ARTnews* is really very discouraging. Milton Esterow had called me up a number of years ago and asked me if I'd be their Detroit correspondent. And I was delighted at the idea that we could do this. Well, I send them things, and I never hear from them. It's just a very—[laughs]— And I think they keep my name on the masthead just to take the heat off them. They don't really intend to use it.

Yes, it's very disappointing. I wish I could find a way to work with New York publications. I never have, and I've tried to work with a number of them. I think that publishing is terribly expensive. Most magazines are right on the brink of disaster all the time. And it's difficult for them to pay. It's difficult—it's impossible for them to pay. Even if you leave that aside, I really—I think that, very often, their material has to be chosen on the basis of advertising, or how it pulls, or how it draws, or I really am not sure. But I've been very unsuccessful at dealing with them.

[00:37:36.73]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: Because it just seems like, even when *Art in America*, as I mentioned before, did their—they did a regional study in Texas. And, I mean, not just California and the West Coast, but a lot of places, and I think a lot of people in Detroit were miffed, because I think they feel that we have an art scene here that's worthy of notice, and that we can't get anybody to notice. And I just wondered, your feelings on your experience with *ARTnews*, that it is interesting to find out that they just sort of—that they feel the need to mention us, at least. But—

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JOY HAKANSON COLBY: Yes, I think that's too bad, because they either ought to do it or not do it, and not just let us hang there in limbo. And it—I had felt, for example, that the John Neff series of shows that had been—the Michigan shows, the "works in progress," were terribly important. And I wrote a lot on that. And I never heard a word from them.

[00:38:41.59]

CYNTHIA NEWMAN: That's very, very strange. Well, I think perhaps we could quit for today. It's been about two hours. So I won't keep you all afternoon. And we'll stop for now. Thank you very much.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]