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Oral history interview with Peggy deSalle,
1975 January 27-July 16

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Peggy De Salle on 1975 Jan. 27, July 10, and July 16. The interview was conducted by Dennis Barrie for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. PEGGY DE SALLE and DENNIS BARRIE have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations.

Interview

[SIDE 1]

DENNIS BARRIE: My name is Dennis Barrie and we're going to talk a little today about Peggy de Salle's background and her work in the Detroit art scene, the people she knows, her gallery, and just about anything else we can think of. We've been talking before so some of these things may be a little repetitious, but I think they're important. Peggy, you have one of the oldest art galleries in the Detroit area. How long has it been in business?

PEGGY DE SALLE: Well, Dennis, it is not one of the oldest galleries, it is "the" oldest gallery. I consider myself grandmother to the whole cause of contemporary art where showing it is concerned. My gallery was the first one to be started. It started in Birmingham on East Maple where it is now. This was in 1949. Actually, it was not started in 1949; the building was purchased and had to be refurbished. But by May 1950 the gallery was well on its way. It got its start really in a most interesting manner. I had done a very great favor for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. At that time the large Symphony had folded because of the economy of the day and a Little Symphony had been started. The little Symphony was well on its way to going under and they needed money desperately so I undertook to have two concerts which I sponsored as far as work was concerned. I gave my time and all my efforts and so forth to getting these two concerts organized. Both concerts were relatively successful and gave the Little Symphony an opportunity to continue on for a little while. Now, since I had done this service for the Detroit Symphony, they in turn wanted to do me a service so a quintet was offered as a kind of compensation when I started my gallery. I don't think there has ever been a gallery which began with this kind of musical sponsorship.

MR. BARRIE: No, I don't think so.

MS. DE SALLE: So it opened with a very beautiful concert. Five musicians devoted their time, efforts and their abilities to performing a concert for my exhibition. This was in the early part of May 1950. It was a beautiful time. It was spring and the gallery was clean and virginal. There were beautiful clean rugs on the floor. The ladies arrived in bouffant skirts and the big beautiful flowery hats worn at that time. As they came in and realized that there was going to be a musical concert, they sat down on the clean, clean floors. Suddenly the place was filled with all sorts of people. The concert started. We heard Mozart, Brahms and Bach. Hardly anybody looked at the paintings on the walls because they were so consumed with the beauty of the concert. Eventually, of course, when the concert was over they focused on the exhibition at the gallery.

MR. BARRIE: What was that first exhibition?

MS. DE SALLE: The first exhibition was a sort of potpourri of many of the local painters and sculptors, among them the works of Zoltan Sepeshy. Oh, dear, I can't remember the names of the people who were included. There were really quite a few. Some of the artists were from Ann Arbor, Flint, and other areas around Detroit. It was a long list and I would rather not refer to names at this point because I want to be sure...I've had so many different artists at so many different times that I can't recall the names of the people who were in that first exhibition. It was a really beautiful show. I recall one person in particular whose works were shown-Richard Wilt from Ann Arbor. He had a magnificent painting of a Mother and Child which was right at the entrance as you came into the gallery. I recall this only because at that time Richard Wilt was painting relatively realistically but sort of in the manner of one of the old masters. The Madonna's face was green and the Child's hands were a foot long. Whoever came into the gallery at that time was just struck by the horror of the painting and the color of the face. I almost had to have a quarrel with each person who came in. I had to keep referring to the fact that every artist had a right to depict the Mother and Child as he wished. Richard Wilt called his painting Madonna and Child and I referred to it as Madonna and Child. Of course, people who were accustomed to seeing the Madonna and Child of Botticelli couldn't possibly regard this painting as a Madonna and Child. But this was it. It was my first real contact with the public where I had to explain the fact that the artist has his right to depict Mother and Child or Madonna and Child the way he sees fit.

MR. BARRIE: You had a gallery before this?

MS. DE SALLE: No, I did not.

MR. BARRIE: Did you deal in art before at all?

MS. DE SALLE: I dealt in art in a very specialized way many years before my gallery started, perhaps ten years before. I fondly remember its having been dubbed by the newspapers "Articles of distinction shown by Peggy de Salle's gallery." Now Peggy de Salle never had had a gallery but somehow or other the newspapers seemed to have decided that this was Peggy de Salle's gallery. It was in my home in Detroit where works of art were collected. These works had been brought over by the German political refugees of that period. They had brought with them beautiful things, paintings, sculpture, ceramics, silver, or whatever they had. These refugees needed money so they took these works to the Museum. Most of the people who were at the Museum at that time referred the refugees to other people, principally to me; or eventually the other people referred them to me because I knew so many people from all walks of life. So they came to my doorstep, rang my bell, and asked me if I could help them. Now fortunately or unfortunately, as the case may be, I do know a little bit of German. Most of the refugees were people who spoke only German. So I struggled with my little knowledge of German. I realized these people had no place to go except to someone who had contact with people who could buy what they had brought over. By that time the refugees were not able to bring any money from their country. They could bring out their worldly goods so many of them turned their money into goods to bring to this country.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, because they couldn't take out cash.

MS. DE SALLE: They couldn't bring cash. Eventually I decided that my gesture toward this refugee group should be an exhibition and sale of these works. This took a great deal of research because I didn't know enough about pricing these things. I went to the staff of the Museum and requested information about costs and prices and tried to relate them to the present-day market. And I read and read and did a great, great, deal of inquiring of various people. Eventually I had perhaps two hundred pieces in my book belonging to various people for sale. The day that I was to open was on a Sunday afternoon, a cocktail party. I thought that if I had these pieces for two weeks it would be sufficient and I would have done my share, my bit, toward the refugee problem and that would be that. But the Sunday afternoon that I was to open the gallery, I mean what they called my "galleries," I had to go out to Mount Clemens to look at somebody else's treasures. I didn't get back until very late in the morning. By the time I got back at almost eleven-thirty or twelve o'clock, people were standing outside of my house. The Detroit News, the Detroit Free Press and The Detroit Times had given the project a tremendous send-off. The week before they had sent photographers and so on to talk about the articles that Peggy de Salle was going to show. So at eleven-thirty and twelve o'clock there were people waiting to get in. The cocktail party wasn't to start until three in the afternoon. By five-thirty that afternoon I had sold two-thirds of what was in the house. It was a great beginning.

MR. BARRIE: What types of things were there?

MS. DE SALLE: The types of things were mostly antiquities, things which had to do with Napoleonic silver, beautiful, beautiful goblets and bowls and kettles. There were beautiful paintings. At one time I had five Teniers paintings, a whole collection that belonged to one of the refugees. There were many small pieces of carved furniture from the Renaissance, antiquities of every type. There was old Meissen, beautiful, fine old things, a whole collection of Nymphenburg. Quite a few pieces of bronze sculpture. Some absolutely fabulous antique rugs, Oriental rugs. Name it and I had it. Beautiful wine decanters. I mean just gorgeous things which were impossible to get here except perhaps in the finest antiques shops in New York. And here I had assembled all these thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars worth of antiquities which the refugees just gave me and said, "Do what you can." And of course this started the whole ball rolling. Now the newspapers dubbed it "Peggy de Salle's Gallery" without consulting me at all. But there it was; I became "Peggy de Salle's Gallery." I had intended this to go on for no longer than two weeks. At that time I was photographing--I was very busy with museum work for the Detroit Institute of Arts. I thought, "I'll devote two weeks of my time to helping the refugees and then I'll go on peacefully with my photographic work at the Museum." But this did not happen because, as soon as other refugees learned of my activity, I began receiving more and more and more telephone calls. So instead of doing this for two weeks, I was at it for two and a half years. In the two and a half years I sold a great, great amount of refugee art, I mean the works that belonged to them. They were very grateful to have cash to do things with. Sometimes I would be called in the middle of the night to find out if I knew of a doctor who could fix somebody's ingrown toenail. So I became mother and grandmother and father and brother and sister and everything to some of these people who just didn't know which way to turn; plus the fact that I was able to give them money. I worked on a ridiculously low commission. I was not doing this for commercial purposes and I felt that, as long as I could cover my expenses of telephone and an assistant who had to be there every minute of the time, I would take a ten percent commission. Which is what I did. That simply covered my expenses. Otherwise, everything belonged to the refugees. Of course, as soon as that got around, it became almost like a business. Even though I did go on with my photography, I certainly was

curtailed to a very great extent where time was concerned. Sometimes, instead of working on my photographs in the daytime or in the evening, I had to work on them in the wee small hours of the morning. I was still doing photography for William Suhr who was the restorer of paintings at the Detroit Institute of Arts and who had employed me to do certain things for him which had to be done at a given time.

MR. BARRIE: Did you find the gallery aspect, the selling of art, fascinating and interesting and enjoyable?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, I did. Yes, I did. I found it extremely interesting and enjoyable, particularly because it brought me in closer contact with many people, not only at the Museum but with antique dealers and people who knew much more about those things than I did at the time. And so I was fascinated in learning about the periods that I had to attribute various things to, and which I never could have done had I not had professional help. Mrs. Weibel at the Detroit Institute of Arts was a great source of information. Dr. Scheyer was another one. And of course they were both dear friends and they devoted as much time as they possibly could to my needs. I really have great gratitude for what they taught me and what they helped me with. Otherwise it would just have been impossible for me. I wouldn't have known how to price things, or what year, what century, to attribute some of these things to. I just did not have that much knowledge. There were sixty refugees involved from all over the globe. Some had a great many beautiful things; some had maybe no more than two or three or four pieces. But I was able to determine what I could show and what I wanted to show in that first exhibition.

MR. BARRIE: Now you did this for two and half years and you say this is ten years before you actually opened your gallery in Birmingham?

MS. DE SALLE: No, it wasn't ten years because the moment we moved from Detroit and came out to Birmingham I cut it off completely. So it wasn't ten years. It went on for two and a half years and then we came to Birmingham. I continued my photography at that time. Eventually I opened the gallery.

MR. BARRIE: Now tell me: what motivated you to open the gallery? You were doing your photography, which we'll talk about on another day I hope....

MS. DE SALLE: Yes.

MR. BARRIE: What motivated you to open The Little Gallery in Birmingham which you now still own?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, when you talk about ten years, I had been talking about opening a gallery for ten years previous to our coming to Birmingham to live. In the ten years it just wasn't feasible. For more than one reason I was not able to open a gallery in Detroit, largely because it took funds to open a gallery. First of all, you had to have some kind of nucleus, a place in which to show, and then you have the things to show. It took a great deal of cash to do this, which I just didn't have at the time. But the hope and the wish and the desire and the ambition and the vitality and the interest were all there for ten whole years before I was able to start the gallery. About the time I started the gallery, I saw this funny, funny ad in the Birmingham Eccentric. I always looked through ads in the Birmingham Eccentric because I thought eventually I would find the right place for the right price and that I would be able to start a gallery. Well, one day I saw this ad which gave a description of a house that sounded absolutely fabulous; it had everything that anybody could possibly want in terms of space and glamour and--what do I want to say?--address and so forth. It had everything. So one morning I took my husband to the train depot. I thought, it's awfully early to stop by to see this fantastic place but if I don't do it now, maybe it will be gone by the time I'll think about doing it again so I'd better do it this morning. So at eight o'clock I looked at the outside of this great edifice which had been advertised. Much to my surprise and slight disappointment, I saw an old house which was quite dilapidated. The exterior was made of stucco. It had these old-fashioned porch posts which started narrow at the top and came down wider at the bottom. There were two of these posts. On one post was tied a big sign which read "For Rent," and on the other there was the same kind of big sign which read "For Sale." These signs were made out of cardboard and were tied with a rope. I'm sure they had been there for a number of months because the cardboard was sopping wet and the rope had broken the cardboard and the signs came out into a kind of circular, half circle thing. And they were practically begging, like, you know, with open arms, saying, "Come, somebody, please take me." Well, this is what I encountered. I rang the doorbell at eight o'clock in the morning. I rang and rang. Finally, somebody shuffled to the door, opened it, peeked out at me and asked, "What do you want?" I said, "Excuse me for coming so early but I would like very much, if it's possible this morning, to see the interior of this house. Reluctantly, the elderly lady let me in. She was all of fifty. I thought; "The poor thing, I got her out of herbed." I went in and took a look at the interior. It was in terrible shape. I don't want to elaborate on this story too much, but it was in terrible shape. I learned later from next-door neighbors that the windows had not been cleaned for seven years. I thought, "Well, I don't care anyhow, because if I took it on as a gallery I'd board up the windows and never have them cleaned." But the space was marvelous. You could hardly see space because five members of this family had died within the previous eleven years and all members had left all their furniture to these people who owned the building. I guess they never sold any of it because everything was jam-packed into this space. As I recall, there were three pianos and our big couches. The tiny little library which is now my office--and it's hardly big enough for an office--was so jam-

packed with bookshelves and two couches that you could hardly see space. But somehow I got the impression that if I cleared out that whole thing and pulled down a couple of walls and made two rooms into one or something that it would work very well. It was in a beautiful location on East Maple. At that time nobody had a place of business on East Maple.

MR. BARRIE: Let me talk about that for one minute. The Little Gallery is located in suburban Detroit--in Birmingham, Michigan. In 1949 when you opened the gallery, was this a radical change to open a gallery? Were there galleries at all in suburban Detroit?

MS. DE SALLE: It was not only radical; it had never ever happened before, ever. Not in a shop or store or in a private house were there any galleries. There were no galleries in Detroit. The gallery in Detroit would be the Hanna-Thompson Gallery which was in the David Whitney Building in downtown Detroit. The J. L. Hudson Company had a picture department but there were no galleries as such. Particularly there were no contemporary galleries.

MR. BARRIE: What made you decide on suburban Detroit as opposed to...?

MS. DE SALLE: I had no alternative because we were living out here. We had decided on building out here in Birmingham. My husband - Albert de Salle--had a background that was particularly Birmingham. His relatives, the Peabody family, owned a great, great deal of property outside of Birmingham, country Birmingham, but still Birmingham. They had apple orchards. As a child and as a young boy he used to come out to Birmingham with his family and spend Saturdays or Sundays or whatever. It took them a day to come out from Detroit by streetcar and have lunch and spend part of an afternoon and then go back by streetcar and by the time they got back to Detroit; it was nighttime. He remembered Birmingham with pleasure from his childhood. He thought it would be a beautiful place for us to live if and when we could.

MR. BARRIE: So you did come out here to live and it was convenient to living. But you've mentioned that in Detroit in 1949 there were no galleries especially....

MS. DE SALLE: No, there were no galleries.

MR. BARRIE: And there were no galleries aside from the two you mentioned--Hanna and J. L. Hudson's--there were no galleries dealing with contemporary art.

MS. DE SALLE: There were no galleries, period. Even Hudson's was not dealing with contemporary art. And the Hanna-Thompson Gallery, or Thompson-Hanna or whatever the name was, was not dealing in contemporary art at all. There were no contemporary galleries.

MR. BARRIE: Now was this a concept behind your gallery; that you would deal with current, with contemporary artists?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Then, too, I started with the idea of dealing with contemporary art, not any other kind of art. And my original concept in starting the gallery was to show the work of young artists, not students, artists, but people who were more than students, who already had a basis that they wanted to go on, and people who were not able to show their works in large cities which were already oriented to contemporary art. Detroit was not so oriented at all. When I started my gallery, the original basis was to show the works of young artists who had not been shown before, and who would be given an opportunity to show in this new gallery and then take flight and go elsewhere once they were established.

MR. BARRIE: Originally did you just show Detroit artists? I mean Detroit was a general area.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, originally. Originally I showed the art of some of the Cranbrook people who were associate teachers; people from Ann Arbor who were students and yet who were more than students, that is, they were not beginner students but were already established in their art ideals. I started with these young people. The idea was to show the work of young people who did not have the opportunity of showing in galleries outside like New York, Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, or whatever. I thought that this was a tribute to the young people who were proficient enough to have their work shown and be represented by an authentic and energetic gallery, where at least they would have some kind of publicity through our newspapers and eventually go from here to someplace else. There are some very interesting names on my roster who have become very well-known people, whether it be in so-called fine art--painting, sculpture--or weaving, ceramics, jewelry-making, metal-craft, rug weaving, design; I mean all sorts of things.

MR. BARRIE: I think that's an important point. You drew mostly from local artists. But how did you choose? I imagine that in 1949 Detroit had a great number of artists, not as many as it has today but it had--I don't know--maybe at least a thousand, or five hundred. How did you choose from that group? What were you looking for?

MS. DE SALLE: In my particular case it was relatively easy because I was already established as the wife of a painter. As the wife of a very excellent painter....

MR. BARRIE: You're talking about Zoltan Sepeshy?

MS. DESALLE: Yes. As the wife of a painter who already was established and whose work was known and whose name was known and whose integrity was known; the very fact that I was established as someone who knew artists made it relatively easy for me to begin with artists who I knew personally and socially. To choose among them was relatively easy because I had known them long before I had a gallery and I knew about their work. All I had to do was to choose what I thought was acceptable and good. And of course I always had the help of Zoltan who, being a very fine artist and a teacher of art, certainly would have the ability to pick and choose better than I could at that time. I was able to accumulate a group of artists whose works I thought were good enough to show; not only good enough to show but good enough to sponsor. Just showing a group of paintings was hardly enough. I didn't want to do it that way. I wanted to believe in everything I showed, right or wrong. There's a beginning for everybody. I'm sure that I made some mistakes and errors of judgment. Eventually I learned to be more discriminating and my eye became better and better and eventually I formulated what I thought was what I wanted.

MR. BARRIE: What was the public reaction to your early shows? Was Detroit ready for contemporary art? Was it ready for...?

MS. DE ALLE: No. As a matter of fact, I think I mentioned to you earlier that I showed a painting that the artist referred to as Madonna and Child. One very wealthy client, who really never became a client where paintings were concerned, came in one day. I was sitting on my couch looking at my beautiful gallery and saying to myself, "Nobody has ever had such beautiful gallery." I was looking at this Madonna and Child by the Ann Arbor artist Richard Wilt. This is the painting with a long green-faced Madonna and the child's hands about a foot long. I thought that Richard Wilt was a very fine painter and I had quite a few of his paintings. But among them was this one that really struck the eye with immediacy because, as you opened the door of the gallery, this is what your eye landed on. This lady was shocked and she said, "How dare you call this a Madonna and Child?" I tried to explain to her that the artist had the right to call it anything he wanted to call it and that just because she was not accustomed to seeing this kind of art did not mean that it didn't exist. I asked her. "Have you ever seen an El Greco?" She said, "Who is he?" I said, "Well, he isn't 'is' but he was 'was?'" Please sit down and I'll show you some paintings which El Greco painted and then you will realize that this was a great master who also painted Madonna and Child with green faces and long hands." She said, "I'm so shocked to see anything like this." I said, "Well, look, my dear, I don't know who you are and I really don't care. My gallery is for the public. I didn't ask you to come and I'm not going to ask you to leave but you're welcome to leave at any time that you choose. This is not only meant for you. It's meant for anyone who wants to see it. You're free to leave if you don't like what you see." She looked at me in a puzzled way and said, "But I don't want to leave." I said, "Okay. In that case I'm going to get that book for you and I'm going to show you that there was a great master by the name of El Greco who painted in a somewhat similar style; of course he was the originator. But this man has every right to paint a Madonna with a green face and paint a baby wino..." But she said, "If that baby got out of her lap it would strike the ceiling." I said, "Well, that's his prerogative." So she began to come to the gallery frequently. And every time she came she brought somebody with her. She would point to me and say, "You know, Peggy insulted me the first time I came in here but I'm glad she did." So you asked me, was Birmingham ready for contemporary art? I can only tell you: no, it was not. This kind of thing went on and on and on for several years. Some people came in and thought it was interesting but it certainly did not sell.

MR. BARRIE: That's what I want to ask you; did these people sell?

MS. DE SALLE: No, they did not sell. In order to keep my gallery from folding I started a picture framing gallery in the basement of the building. For a long time picture framing really contributed to paying at least part of the rent. Originally, jewelry was something that I had not sold. I realized that jewelry was something that everybody wanted. Picture framing was something that everybody needed but jewelry was something that everybody wanted. I began to have a few things in silver jewelry; not gold but silver. The designs were always very contemporary. That again was something nobody had shown in this area. Nobody had contemporary jewelry. And by "contemporary" I mean simple, polished beautiful surfaces, some of it, some of it architectural. Nobody had ever shown this type of jewelry. So I started with maybe twenty or thirty pieces of silver jewelry. It sold so rapidly that I had to reorder other pieces and eventually, instead of having one case it became two cases, and from two cases to three cases and then on and on. And then of course jewelry became an integral part of the gallery because it was by special order.

MR. BARRIE: So in the early days of the gallery the way the gallery sustained itself was through jewelry and through picture framing, and that really "contemporary art" (in quotation marks) was not purchased much?

MS. DE SALLE: Not immediately.

MR. BARRIE: Not enough to sustain it.

MS. DE SALLE: Actually, the gallery was maintained first by the picture framing and then by the jewelry. And eventually I took on pottery and people like the Natzlers, whose work I showed you before and, although they were not inexpensive pieces, they were so beautiful that people just had no feelings about price; that they couldn't help themselves. Of course, now the Natzler pottery pieces are considered great works of art and are in practically every museum in our country, to say nothing of the museums in Europe.

MR. BARRIE: Earlier in our conversation you mentioned that you never drew a distinction between crafts and art. I think this is a good point to elaborate on. Was this the case in the beginning of your gallery? And how did that concept go over at first?

MS. DE SALLE: It was almost immediate. Long before I ever had a gallery I had had conversations with Zoltan and with other artists. We had not just conversations but discussions about art versus craft. And we all agreed--at least those of us who did agree--that no artist could be an artist without being also a craftsman. Consequently, I couldn't see drawing a line between somebody who took a piece of canvas and painted on it, or somebody who would take a piece of putty or clay and make up a clay form. I could see no distinction between those two and someone who worked in wax and made a beautiful piece of jewelry, or took material and did a fabulous piece of weaving, or blew a piece of glass, or anything else. There was no difference unless it was a production thing. I'm not talking about production things. I'm not talking about plates and mugs and that sort of thing. I'm talking about individual things which an artist developed whether it was out of clay or canvas or wool or gold or silver. Wherein lays the difference? And I still feel the same way about it. If they are good, if they are not only technically able but if they are able design-wise. I don't say that all jewelers are artists. But if they have the capacity for design, for color, for balance, for whatever it takes to be all one thing, they are artists. And the material is not the important thing. It's the concept which is the important thing.

MR. BARRIE: In the beginning of the gallery, what do you feel were your most avant garde shows, and why? What do you think really were the shockers?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I remember one exhibition many, many years ago of Paul Klee. I had original drawings by Paul Klee and also I had many prints, actually many reproductions as well as signed lithographs and so on. In Birmingham at that time practically nobody knew anything about Paul Klee. They knew the reproductions which could be had for ten or fifteen dollars but they had never seen--I say "they"--most everybody who came into the gallery, few and far between--had never seen the original work of Paul Klee. I had a hell of a lot of nerve to show Paul Klee. And I probably never would have, had it not been for the fact that I knew someone in Switzerland who had a whole collection of Paul Klee drawings and gouaches and a few watercolors which I borrowed to be shown. The man I'm referring to is a man by the name of Spiller (S-p-i-l-l-e-r) who had become very well-known. He was a painter himself and he was also a friend of Paul Klee. Some years ago, he wrote a book on Paul Klee which to my knowledge had never been translated into English. It was written in German. It's a fantastic book. Spiller grew up with Paul Klee. Being a painter himself he was so impressed with Paul Klee, and also so influenced by him, that he acquired a great many of Klee's works, so many that, when he became in need of money, he decided that perhaps he could part with some of them. I was fortunate enough to have been the one who was able to borrow them. Well, I had this exhibition. It didn't raise anybody's blood pressure except for two people, one a pro, a real pro--Lydia Winston, at that time. She was just thrilled to see that Paul Klee had been brought to Birmingham. But, unfortunately, she did not purchase any Paul Klees. I was sad and disappointed because I really had hoped that at least she would support the Paul Klee exhibition. But no. However, I had one young man, a student seventeen years old. Are you really interested in this?

MR. BARRIE: Sure.

MS. DE SALLE: ...who came into the gallery had never seen this young man in my life before. He was sort of strange; he had a saber cut across his cheek.

MR. BARRIE: Sounds like Heidelberg.

MS. DE SALLE: And he was kind of weird. He came into the gallery for the first time and asked me if it was okay for him to look around. I said, "Of course, please." Just a young student of seventeen. He looked around and all of a sudden his eyes lit up. They were glued on to one of the Paul Klee drawings. He turned to me and said, "Mrs. de Salle, this is a marvelous thing. I don't know what makes me so responsive to this. I have to have it." There were no prices on these things; nothing was marked. His first name was Bill. He told me his last name too but I won't mention it now. He said, "Mrs. De Salle, this is absolutely marvelous. I don't care what it costs, but I have to have it." I said, "Well, Bill, this is very expensive. You're young, you're a student. I don't know if you can afford this. If you turn it around, you can see that this little drawing is \$250." For a moment he stopped. Then he said, "Well, I can't help it. Still have to have it." So I said, "Well, you give me your name and address and telephone number and, if you don't mind I will consult with your parents." He said, "I don't have any parents. I'm a student

at Wayne State University. I'm my own man. I don't have much money but I do work. If I can come in here and pay you five dollars every week and perhaps some weeks even fifteen dollars, will you reserve this for me?" And, believe it or not, within six months he had it paid for. That was the first Paul Klee drawing I ever sold. So that was perhaps the most spectacular thing in my mind that I can think of. It was so beautiful. Here was this young kid, you know, who never had heard of Paul Klee; he didn't know who Paul Klee was until I explained to him that even at that time Paul Klee was a very famous artist and his works were very expensive--\$250. You can imagine what that would be worth now. I never had these to sell as an investment. And he did not buy it as an investment. It just struck him as--I don't know....

MR. BARRIE: Something he had to have, something he had to live with.

MS. DE SALLE: Maybe something jovial. It was very jovial. As you know, Paul Klee is jovial.

MR. BARRIE: So essentially avant garde shows did not go over?

MS. DE SALLE: They went over only in terms of--I'm talking about the first years--they went over only in the point of view of being different and something that nobody else showed. But they did not sell. So as an artistic endeavor, I would say that they did go over because everybody came to look and everybody came to see this "screwy" kind of art which is what they called it; but not to buy it. They came because it was interesting and exciting and colorful and different and unusual. So they looked at it with interest.

MR. BARRIE: What artists did you introduce to Detroit? Let's take those early years now. Just name a few of the artists, local or otherwise.

MS. DE SALLE: I introduced a Frenchman by the name of Lamoureux. I introduced McChesney who was a Wayne University student. I introduced many West Coast artists whose names I could give you but it wouldn't make any difference because very few people know them. I introduced the works of quite a few Ann Arbor artists. And local artists from the Society of Arts & Crafts and from Cranbrook. I introduced weavers like Jack Larson; he showed his first works at my gallery. I introduced Robert Knipschild who eventually became quite well-known in New York. Later on I introduced Glen Michael, who had never been shown before. I introduced....I

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

[TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

MR. BARRIE: Okay. We were talking about the people you introduced.

MS. DE SALLE: I introduced Charles Culver. Although he had been a teacher at the Society of Arts & Crafts, but outside of Arts & Crafts he had not exhibited previously so I would say that I introduced him to a larger public. I introduced Francis de Erdely, who is a very, very fine artist and who became a very integral part of the art picture in Detroit' when I started my gallery I showed his work as well. Other than the local scene, which I think was very important and still is, I feel that another phase of what I did, which I don't think too many contemporary galleries have done, was to introduce the works of many outstanding European and Oriental artists. Everywhere I went on trips, whether they were simply trips to see another country, I invariably brought back the art of that country. Sometimes it was Japan. If you've noticed that red and gray painting in the dining room...

MR. BARRIE: Yes.

MS. DE SALLE: ...which at that time was very avant garde. Nobody in this area had ever heard about D'Orazio and this preceded the D'Orazio kind of painting. I remember that people were shocked when they saw these things in the gallery. They were Oriental and yet they were not. They were so stark and so simplified that they took nothing but color and either plaster or concrete. And that's what that painting is. That painting is concrete with color. And of course that was so way out that, you know, it was very difficult to show and not have people say, "Ha, ha, ha! That's a funny one. What are you trying to do? Pull the wool over our eyes?" I said, "No, not at all." So I would say that very often it had nothing to do with contemporary art of this country only, but also with contemporary art of any country to which I traveled. In many of these countries it was almost impossible to find things contemporary, things which fitted into the gallery curriculum, let's say. When I couldn't find anything contemporary I purchased things which were not contemporary. Take that weaving right there. This is finger weaving and it's probably two hundred years old. In my opinion, it's one of the most beautiful things of its kind of thing that I've seen anywhere. It's beautiful.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, it is a very beautiful piece.

MS. DE SALLE: It's meticulously done and it's done with such fine thread you can hardly believe that it's hand woven. Then some of my travels took me to places where I saw African art so I became very much involved with

African art long before anybody was showing it here. My interest in African art dates back to a period long before I had a gallery. It dates back to a time when I went with friends--as a matter of fact, with William Suhr and his wife and sister-in-law--the four of us took a trip to the East one summer. William Suhr had been invited to the home of Dr. Albert Barnes in Merion, Pennsylvania. As you know, Dr. Barnes has a world famous collection of art, not only contemporary, but every kind of art you can think of; and particularly of African art, which at that time--and this is all of forty-five years ago. I had never seen the quality of African art that Dr. Barnes had in his collection. Now everybody knows that Dr. Barnes was a very eccentric gentleman who did not permit people to even enter his home or to see his world famous collection. He was a very strange man until you got to know him. Well, I had the good fortune to have an entrée and I also had the good fortune to have an immediate rapport with Dr. Barnes, and vice versa. While Mr. Suhr was cleaning paintings and doing the restoration on some of the things that he had been invited to work on, I went around with Dr. Barnes and reviewed his collection. We were guests in his house--which also didn't happen very often. This was a miracle as far as I was concerned. You know, I had nothing to do with it; I had just gone along for the ride. He invited us all to stay at his house. Which we did for about four days. Then we all decided that he was like an octopus, you know, he just got hold of you and squeezed you dry. We decided that we didn't want to stay in that house any longer. We wanted to be free to do things in Philadelphia, to go to museums, to go out to dinner, to go to a theater once in a while, and so on. We wanted a little freedom. And here we were, stuck at Dr. Barnes's house in Merion. Even though we had the privilege of having his chauffeur take us into Philadelphia on occasion, we didn't feel that we could get away easily. So we begged off and said that we'd like to stay at a hotel. I'm sure that he didn't mind either after four days. So we had an apartment at this beautiful hotel or inn or whatever it was. It was the first time in my life that I ever saw a hotel which had an indoor swimming pool. At that age it was a very impressive thing. Anyway, we had an apartment there and we came and went as we pleased. We always spent our days at the Dr. Barnes Foundation. I learned my first great, great lesson about African art from Dr. Barnes. He'd take me to look at a painting of the Renaissance period and he would say, "Now, look, I have this piece of African art next to it and can't you see the way the one relates to the other?" Well, of course, in the beginning I couldn't see that at all but, through his interpretation and through his teaching, eventually I saw what it was he was talking about. We were there in Merion for ten days and every day of my life I learned something new.

MR. BARRIE: That's incredible.

MS. DE SALLE: It was incredible. But as a result he asked me if I would like to join his staff at the Barnes Foundation. He thought I had a very good eye. He liked my audacity or whatever it was. He said, "I want you to learn about X-ray photography." This was after I had already been photographing. I had told him that I was a photographer. He asked, "Have you ever done any X-ray work of paintings?" I said, "No," So he said, "I would like you to join my staff but you will have to learn about X-ray photography." He gave me half a dozen letters of introduction to various museums in Europe, particularly in Germany. And together with the marvelous photographic artists with whom I had worked in Berlin, we went off on a gorgeous holiday sponsored by Dr. Barnes. We went to places like the Pinakothek in Munich, we went to Dresden, to Dusseldorf, to Berlin, to half a dozen cities to which we had been given letters of introduction. We X-ray photographed some of the paintings which he had requested. They permitted us to do it at that time.

MR. BARRIE: That's incredible.

MS. DE SALLE: The lady's name was Greta Karpless (sp). I will never forget her because she was absolutely marvelous. She was a friend of Billy Suhr's and was introduced to me by Billy. She was the one who really gave me a marvelous foundation in photographing paintings and learning to differentiate in terms of filters for color gradations. So I mean the background has been a very interesting and a very exciting one. You know I don't just look at a painting from scratch, just by what the Germans call an augenblick--just a kind of cursory look. But I dated back with this kind of background including X-ray photography. It's true that when I came back I did not join the Barnes Foundation staff because by that time I was beholden to Sapesky and he persuaded me not to go. It would have meant my having to leave Detroit and go to Merion, Pennsylvania to live and to join the staff there. But I never got there. But the learning was there and the knowledge became an integral part of my background.

MR. BARRIE: So you used the knowledge of the Barnes situation with your gallery then?

MS. DE SALLE: Of course.

MR. BARRIE: And as an example you just mentioned you showed the first African pieces in the gallery?

MS. DE SALLE: Absolutely. It started with that as a basis. But, you know, the wonderful thing was that instead of seeing just icky little African things in the beginning, I saw the most beautiful and the most qualitative African art that anybody could possibly have possessed because Dr. Barnes had nothing but the best. So my eye level and my knowledge level started with the best. Instead of working up from the bottom, I worked from the top.

MR. BARRIE: You can't always do that.

MS. DE SALLE: No. So it was not learning the hard way. It was learning the easiest and the most beautiful way.

MR. BARRIE: When did you show your African pieces here? When was the first time you showed any African work in Detroit?

MS. DE SALLE: Not too long ago. I think I showed my first exhibition of African art about twelve years ago, maybe a little longer; yes, longer, fifteen years ago. I have to date everything back to Albert's death and Albert died ten years ago. This dates back much, much farther than ten years ago. It could have been eighteen years ago.

MR. BARRIE: The late Fifties or early Sixties, somewhere in there?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Apropos of Paul Klee, I don't want to forget this because I think it's very funny and interesting. I had these Paul Klee drawings for something like five years. After that I thought I'd better give them back because they'd gone up in price and they were rare now and I'd better return them to the man in Switzerland who had loaned them to me in the first place. He had never asked for them but I was going to Europe and I thought: "I'm going to take them along with me just in case he wants them back." It was too late to write to him to ask. So I tucked them into the flat bottom of my suitcase, you know, they weren't very big. They were just in little mats so they could be wrapped and put into the suitcase. So I took them back with me. Now on that particular trip we went to Europe together with Harry and Lydia Winston. We were in Paris in a marvelous hotel--the Berkeley. One evening we were going out to dinner. Lydia had no idea I had these Klee things with me. All of a sudden out of a clear, blue sky she said to me, "Peggy, whatever did you do with those Paul Klee drawings that you had?" I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I have them with me to give back to Spiller." She said, "Would you mind if I look at them again?" I said, "No, not at all." So she said, "Can I see them tomorrow morning?" I said, "Yes, of course. I haven't been able to get hold of Spiller. I don't know where he is and I may not even be able to return them to him." She looked them over and said, "Don't give these two back to him. I want to buy them." And she bought them in Paris after all these years. Now isn't that a funny story?

MR. BARRIE: Yes, it is. That's beautiful.

MS. DE SALLE: Now what was your next question?

MR. BARRIE: I was going to say, of the artists that you've shown, that you've introduced to Detroit, which seem to be the most successful and why; I mean successful as far as Detroit is concerned?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I don't show all artists; works consistently. I have a few artists whose work I show maybe once every two years. Among them is Lamoureux who came to us about fifteen years ago. I think he was twenty-four years old then. In my opinion and in Albert's opinion he was a very excellent academic painter at that time and he has been developing more and more and more and is becoming more abstract as the years have gone by. Now I mention him only because I have consistently shown his work every two years. He has had seven one-man exhibitions in the past fourteen years and I'm about to have another exhibition of his work next year. He's a very serious young artist, he's a very colorful young artist, he's influenced by nobody but mostly he's a painter's painter. Painters regard him with great, great favor. For instance, Joan Mitchell, who is very well known in Paris, she's known all over the world but I don't think she's as well known here in Detroit as she is in New York and abroad, and Joan has greater admiration for his work than anybody I have ever known. Soulages thinks Lamoureux is the greatest thing that has ever lived as far as young artists are concerned. And Jean Paul - what is his last name? I can't remember, also living in Paris -I can't remember his last name offhand but he's not only a well-known but a very highly regarded artist, thinks Jean Lamoureux is a very great young painter. There's one man, an architect and a connoisseur of paintings who has ninety-two of Lamoureux's paintings. He has collected his work for the last fifteen years. He gives Lamoureux a monthly stipend to paint whatever he chooses and whatever the price of the painting is this man just pays off on a monthly basis. Now two years ago when I was in Paris I was curious to see why anybody would want one man's work to that a degree, I said, "Please let me see them." This man is a very famous architect whom I have gotten to know. So he invited me to come to his apartment where he has three or four Lamoureuxs hanging. The other things were down in the basement put into storage. We had an exhibition of the ninety-two paintings, which are absolutely marvelous. Eventually there will be a retrospective show of his work. But he's only forty now.

MR. BARRIE: Yes. So Lamoureux is one of the major figures?

MS. DE SALLE: Lamoureux is one of my major....

MR. BARRIE: And he's been successful with the Detroit audience and so on?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, he's been successful. I wouldn't say his paintings sold like hot cakes but they sell because there's an enormous amount of integrity there which even people who have no knowledge whatsoever of art

feel. You know, you can feel that. If you walk into Lydia Winston's house and if you hated the guts of all the paintings that hang there you can't help but feel there's some kind of quality that just takes hold of you. At least I feel that.

MR. BARRIE: I do too.

MS. DE SALLE: But there's quality and you can say, "My God, how can you live with that!" And yet you can't help but say that whatever it is, it has great quality and you have to respond to the quality instead of to the thing.

MR. BARRIE: What sells in Detroit? What types of things sell?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, there was a time--and I don't think that that time is quite as prevalent as it was--when prints sold; by that I mean serigraphs and lithographs and limited editions and etchings, and so on. But it seems to be dying down, this urge for having prints. And in a way I'm glad that it is, because I think that people largely bought name things. They just didn't buy serigraphs because they loved them. They bought serigraphs if they had a signature on them. A signature of, say, a Calder or a Miro or a Renoir or a Modigliani--well, no, not Modigliani because I don't know of any.... But anyway, signatures--Chagal, Picasso. They bought them not because they loved them but because they were investments. Now I have never sold anything in my life as an investment. Investments come and investments go where art is concerned and I'm not going to be caught dead saying that "two years from Tuesday you're going to get fifty percent more than you paid for it," because nobody really knows. If investment is what they want, then they can go to some dealer who sells investments and not art works which you love and which you feel you cannot live without.

MR. BARRIE: How do you think the art-buying public of Detroit has changed in the twenty-six years you've had the gallery? Let's take the public that walked in, in 1950 and the public that walks in in 1975. How have they changed?

MS. DE SALLE: They've changed to a very great extent, I think, because, in the beginning there was a fear; they literally feared to come into a place--even though my place was not a formal kind of gallery, yet they feared even coming into a house which had warmth. Originally I had an open fireplace so that it would make the coming of guests more personal. I would light the fire and keep it burning all through the day. Maybe three people would come in but they always felt very comfortable when they did. The Germans have a word for it; there was great Gemutlichkeit. They'd sit down on the couch and chatter for an hour or two and have a glass of wine and there was the open fire and they felt good. And maybe they bought and maybe they didn't buy anything. But eventually if they wanted something they would come back because it was pleasant to be there. Today this is no longer necessary because the public has become accustomed to walking into all kinds of galleries. Fortunately, I think that the best galleries don't make a point of trying to sell people immediately. They let them come in and wander. They open up personalized conversations with the people who come in, so that they feel a little bit more relaxed and don't feel that they have to buy or need to apologize; they don't have to say, "Oh, but I'm so sorry I didn't come in to buy; I came in to look." They can walk out without having to say that. I think that the best galleries give the public this feeling. Consequently the change that has occurred between the "then" when you had to have an open fireplace to make people feel at home, and now--the public has no reluctance to walk into galleries. Of course you still have some reluctant people, but then, there's always going to be some because there's a beginning.

MR. BARRIE: When for example, would you say The Little Gallery became a financial and artistic success? I shouldn't say "artistic"--that's too nebulous.

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I don't mind telling you that it was a struggle for the first ten years.

MR. BARRIE: For the first ten years it was really a close operation? So we're talking about the late Fifties?

MS. DE SALLE: It was a struggle for the first ten years. And this was only because I was, more or less, one of the few who showed contemporary art. Of course, after I started my gallery, there were other galleries started. Mrs. Werbe started a gallery. Robert Garelick started a gallery. Lester Arwin started a gallery. Donald Morris started a gallery. But this was all afterward; not too long afterward, but afterward. I really started the ball rolling. And of course Birmingham was much more difficult than Detroit ever could be because it was a suburb and the people in Birmingham were not oriented to contemporary art.

MR. BARRIE: You've mentioned all these other galleries, some of which are still with us and some are now gone. Werbe is gone. But Morris is here and so is Garelick. Did you sense them as competition? Did they copy your style?

MS. DE SALLE: No.

MR. BARRIE: Not at all?

MS. DE SALLE: No. I certainly never felt that--I don't think that any of them made any effort to be competitive as such. They did their own thing. And they must have been successful at it or they wouldn't be alive. Of course I think Gertrude Kasle has done an absolutely fabulous job of conducting her gallery and trying to teach people. Actually, she's done more than most of the younger ones have because she's with it. She's gotten people to give lectures. She shows films. She has a very young and a very admirable attitude, I think, toward teaching the public about art in general. I can't say that I'm crazy about everything she shows but I'm sure she's not crazy about everything I show. But that isn't the point. The point is that she's done more for the public at large who need teaching than any other gallery I know of. I have great admiration for her and I have great faith in what she will do in the future.

MR. BARRIE: In the main Gertrude Kasle shows a great many New York artists.

MS. DE SALLE: That's what she shows almost entirely.

MR. BARRIE: You never took that direction?

MS. DE SALLE: No. I have never taken any direction. I don't even believe in one kind of... you know, that we've got to hold on to a particular kind of school. I just don't think this way. As a matter of fact, maybe my gallery is not quite so highly professional in this respect, and I'd be the first one to admit it. I don't think this way. But I want to do what I want to do and when I want to do it. In a sense it's wrong but on the other hand I can't do what somebody else thinks is right. I've got to be and do what I want to do and what I want to think is right. And for me this is right. Now I operate alone. While Albert was alive it was a slightly different thing because he could take over a hell of a lot of what I have to do now myself and I have had to do in the past ten years. The first seven years I did it alone anyhow. But by the time the first seven years had gone by I could no longer do it by myself because, little by little it became more and more important and maybe more and more difficult to operate it from the standpoint of the jewelry and the fine art paintings and everything else. And also the brochures and the publicity and the handling of all sorts of things which go hand in hand with gallery operation that one person just simply can't do totally adequately. So Albert without even discussing it took over things which I could no longer do by myself. And he did a fantastic job of it all of the years that he was in the gallery. When he died his death came so suddenly that there was hardly time to turn around. Suddenly everything that he had done fell into my lap. So my job became twice as difficult as it had been and already it was very difficult because the jewelry end of it took up more and more and more of my time, not just selling it but having a hand in the designing of it, thinking up ideas of what I would like to have somebody do. This takes time and it requires peace and quiet and being away from everything else. You can't do it while you're selling and you're operating and, you know, giving people chores to do in the gallery and so on. You can't do it that way. So I had to do it while I had peace and quiet. You see, while Albert was with me, I had ample time to concentrate on these other things. Then suddenly he was gone and I suddenly had all these things to do which he had been doing.

MR. BARRIE: Who would you like to have shown that you haven't shown, or have you attempted to show? Now you mentioned earlier in a conversation that you showed Harry Bertioia's drawings but you never had a chance to show his sculpture.

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I would like to have shown his sculpture. I still could. It's not a matter of not being able to. It's just a question of its being so forbidding. You know, the idea of having these things crated and shipped would be impossible.

MR. BARRIE: Are there any other artists that stand out in your mind that you think were really important to show but you haven't shown for one reason or another?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, I could think of many that I might like to have shown but there's no point in even mentioning them because I could have shown them had I gone after them. Whoever I haven't shown I haven't shown because I haven't sought to show them. At one point I was given the opportunity of showing Picasso and I turned it down.

MR. BARRIE: Why?

MS. DE SALLE: Because my gallery is not set up for showing Picasso. Number one, I have no feeling against Picasso but I have a feeling that monetarily Picasso is so overrated that I'm not on that kind of a bandwagon. There was a time when Otto Gerson, who was a very dear friend of ours--as a matter of fact, I helped him start his gallery in New York--offered to let me have any number of things he had in his gallery and show them here. He had quite a few clients in this area that I had introduced him to long before I had my gallery; such as Mary Booth, you know, people of that financial caliber. Any number of times he said 'Peggy, for heaven's sake, why don't you take these paintings and these drawings and these lithographs and so forth and show them in your gallery and I'll get these clients to come into your gallery.' I turned him down. Not monetarily I probably could have sold one and it would have meant as much as I could sell in six months of these smaller fry. But concept of the gallery would have had to change. I couldn't show Picasso one month and show, say, Leonard Zilch the next

month, the young artist who was not known. It was a totally different concept. I would have had to keep up that kind of art strata or have a reputation for, "Oh, boy, she's gone to town this month and the next month and the next month and the next month for three years she's not showing Picasso or artists of that caliber."

MR. BARRIE: Yes. Very uneven.

MS. DE SALLE: Uneven. I didn't like that dealing nor did I like the idea of showing somebody who was so overrated monetarily and whose works were being bought mainly for investments. Long ago I made up my mind that I was not going to sell anything in terms of investment. I was oriented toward the love of the art, the love of the piece, the love of the color, the love of the balance in a painting or in a piece of sculpture, a hunk of jewelry, or a piece of ceramics; love not investment. Now you can also love an investment but it's not primary. I'm not against the investment but I'm not going to go hog wild and say that if you buy a Lamoureux or a Sepechy that ten years from Tuesday you're going to get fifty times as much for it. Who the hell knows?

MR. BARRIE: Yes. In the twenty-six years how has the gallery changed? I don't mean physically. But has the concept changed?

MS. DE SALLE: No.

MR. BARRIE: And what you will show, has it changed?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, of course it changes from exhibition to exhibition but basically it hasn't changed because the fundamental principles are still there. Now it's true that I no longer show only young people who have not had an opportunity to show. By this time, you know I've been at it for twenty-six years--it'll be twenty-six years in May--and only a fool doesn't change his mind. My mind has not basically changed but it has been upgraded. So it's no longer only the guy who hasn't ever had a show and I'm being big-hearted and want to do something great for this young person. I still do it but I don't do it consistently. Otherwise I wouldn't, for instance, have Lamoureux every two years. I would have long ago discarded him, not because he's not any good but for somebody new. Oh, my God!

MR. BARRIE: You're on tape.

MS. DESALLE: Oh, my Lord, I forgot the tape. That's good.

MR. BARRIE: That is good. Just two more questions. We're almost out of tape. I'd like to ask you two very diverse questions. The first one: what role did Zoltan Sepeshy play in the gallery; what role did Albert de Salle play in the gallery? Now you've mentioned, you've alluded to both people. How did they fit into what you picked, how you ran the gallery, and so forth?

MS. DESALLE: For the first seven years I had absolutely no assistance from either Albert de Salle or Sepeshy. Beyond the first seven years Albert was an enormous help. As I told you before, by that time I just couldn't handle it alone. To have gotten anybody like Albert into the gallery who had the knowledge, who had the superior quality, who had the integrity, the honesty, the tremendous background that he had.... You see, he had not only been with the J. L. Hudson Gallery but previously all along the way he wrote articles about art. He wrote for the Detroit News and every article he ever wrote was accepted by the paper. When we were away on trips and he would send in these articles, Florence Davies accepted them every time: there was no question about it. He was voted in as honorary secretary of the Scarab Club for years and years and years. It was not a paid job, it was an honorary job but he was so good at it that they didn't want to relinquish his services. And then he became interested in the Bloomfield Art Association. He was their first president. So his affiliation with the gallery was always very, very deep. The first seven years I did it on my own. And then when he came in, my God, you know. I just can't begin to tell you how my life changed because he was so good at it. He took over all the correspondence, all the publicity, all the jobs that the girls in the gallery had to do; everything. He relieved me of everything except my interest in jewelry and the suggested designs for jewelry, which left me free with what I had learned to love, what I knew how to do, as well as he knew how to do the other. So he was of enormous assistance. As far as Sepeshy was concerned, he never ever, ever tried to interfere in any way. He gave beautiful advice, particularly after Albert's death. As you know, Zoltan has always been a very dear and very close friend and Dorothy Sepeshy has worked in the gallery for fourteen years. This could never have happened had it not been for this marvelous friendly association that we have had. If I ever had any questions he was always there to give me advice. Other than having excellent discussions and conversation I never tried to pin him down to give me advice as such, but if I ever wanted it, he was always happy and willing to give it. And of course my affiliation with Cranbrook has been very close. In fact, Cranbrook is giving me an exhibition of jewelry, which is a beautiful gesture on their part. It's a great feather in my cap. It starts on March 16 and will run through April 20. It's a very exciting thing to look forward to.

MR. BARRIE: Oh, great. It sounds good; it really does.

MS. DE ALLE: There will be probably about three hundred pieces in the exhibition and it will be in one single room along with a metal craft exhibition, an invited show from all over the country; but mine will be the only jewelry shown in this exhibition. I think it's a very beautiful gesture.

MR. BARRIE: It's quite an honor; it really is. The final question on the gallery and then we'll end for tonight. What impact do you think the gallery has had on the community? I don't mean just Birmingham, I mean the larger community of Detroit.

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I'm not the best person to be able to answer that, but if I judge I by what I hear from people--and I don't know whether they are making an effort to be kind or whether they are just simply pro-Peggy--but if I were to repeat the things

that I have heard hundreds and hundreds of times I would say that The little Gallery has made quite a sizable impact. It has not only taught the older people, you know, but it's taught the younger people. You see, I've been in it now for twenty-six years come this May and in twenty-six years you have not only taken care of the art needs of the people twenty-six years ago but their children have grown up. Some of the children have had children and they have come back. I'm amazed at the repetition of the names which come back, which means that three generations have returned. If there was no impact, then these second and third generations would not have come to the gallery.

MR. BARRIE: Do you think that Detroiters and Birminghamites, suburbanite Detroit, have learned to accept many of the local artists you've shown and so forth? Is there acceptance now that maybe there wasn't twenty-six years ago?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. And there are people who are followers of certain artists who will come back every two years, and even if they don't purchase something every time, they come back with great interest when I have an exhibition of these names that they're familiar with. This is very gratifying. Now last night I attended a party and there was a local artist there who was telling somebody else--not me, but I happened to have one ear open--that she has an exhibition at a certain place every two years and the reason that she ups her prices all the time is because when people who have purchased her paintings ten years back return to this gallery they want to see their paintings now have become--I don't know--two hundred dollars more or something. I don't go along with that at all. I don't up prices because I want to please the public who has already bought. I up the price because the quality of the painting has become greater. If the quality has not become greater the prices are not going to be up just because somebody is coming in and saying, "Oh, you know, last year I bought thus and so and it was fifty dollars less." How can you relate fine art to that kind of thinking? I can't; can you?

MR. BARRIE: No, not very easily.

MS. DE SALLE: So I got into that argument.

MR. BARRIE: So if you had to sum it up, you'd say that the gallery has at least made the local artists known to Detroiters...?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes, I would say that.

MR. BARRIE: ... and made them marketable in other cities?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, I would say that. I don't say that my gallery made them marketable in other cities. I think that the quality of the work that I chose made it possible for that artist to show elsewhere, where that quality was also acceptable. And I think I've done as much as I possibly could to further the artist's being shown in other places. I don't even make any effort to do that, you know; I don't say that because I've shown it I'm going to send it to Boston and Philadelphia and so on. This is up to the artist, not up to me. I'm not set up that way. You see, it's not that commercial. They come to me and I'm delighted to show them if the quality is right and from there on out they can take the publicity that I have been able to get for them and with that publicity they can go on to other places. I don't tie them down unless they want to be tied down. If they are successful--I don't mean necessarily monetarily--but if they are successful to the point where people come in and show interest.... They can't necessarily be successful immediately; it takes time to develop the art, to develop the sensitivity of the person who looks at it. They come back two years later and see it again. I whip up enthusiasm for the work that I feel strongly about. And maybe the fourth year the public will buy and not buy at all the first of second or third year. How do I know? All I can do is do the best that I know how to do to imbue them with the same kind of enthusiasm that I have for what I show. And believe me I don't lie. This is why I don't have exhibitions every three weeks.

MR. BARRIE: Yes. Very good .We're just about out of tape.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2]

DENNSI BARRIE: Today is July 10, 1975. My name is Dennis Barrie. I am again in the home of Peggy de Salle. We're going to do Part Two of an interview. In the first part we talked about Peggy's gallery--The Little Gallery, in Birmingham which is the oldest gallery in Detroit devoted to local art and contemporary art. What I'd like to talk about in this interview.... I'd like to go a little further back and talk about the art scene when you first arrived in Detroit, or first became involved in it. I think that's what we'll do today. So I guess the logical question is: when did you first become involved with the art community in Detroit?

PEGGY DE SALLE: I became involved in the art community from the time that I met Zoltan Sepeshy and I daresay from the time I met Albert de Salle because it was almost simultaneous, since we all three of us had a sort of affiliation with Paul Honore's studio. Paul Honore was at that time a very well-known muralist who did many murals throughout the State of Michigan, including the post office at Midland and post offices in various other small communities. He was a person of great knowledge, particularly where mural art was concerned. At the time I met Zoltan Sepeshy and Albert de Salle, Paul Honore had a studio in Detroit I think somewhere on Third Avenue where he had what he lovingly called "The Thousand and One Nights of Honore." This was a meeting place for a great many of the artists of Detroit's art world, where one met with all sorts of knowns and unknowns and all of them interested primarily in art, not necessarily painting only, but sculpture, art history, and whatever was really in association with the arts in Michigan. Now I say "Michigan" because many people came from outside Detroit, people who later became known to Paul Honore. But Paul seemed to be the nucleus, the person who could involve the artists in Michigan. He was a very lovable personality, a very human, humane type of guy who really wanted to involve all of the artists, good or--well, I don't want to say bad, because he certainly didn't want to involve the bad artists--but he wanted to involve anybody who had artistic integrity in his scope and give them fatherly advice and fatherly training. He was a very, very integral part of the art life in this area. The studio was on Forest Avenue, as I remember, and every Thursday night it was open session to anybody who wanted to come. Doughnuts and coffee were served. There was never any hard liquor. But it was always a free-for-all kind of meeting where art and its problems and artists and their problems were discussed. It was a very beautiful attitude on the part of Paul Honore and his wife; I think her name was Edith or Edna, whatever. All kinds of people came, people who had beautiful ideas, sophisticated ideas, and very idealistic ideas. And all of these artists and craftsmen met at Paul Honore's Thursday night sessions, which he called "The Thousand and One Nights."

MR. BARRIE: Honore's reputation had already been established at this point?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, Honore was already established. Now there's something very exciting I think and very interesting about Honore and, if I may, I would like to put on record something about him which perhaps very few people know.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, go ahead. I'd be very curious.

MS. DE SALLE: Albert was always a very close friend of Honore. As a matter of fact, when Paul Honore did these important murals throughout Michigan he employed Albert as a secretary. Now "secretary" in Albert's case implied that he was almost the business manager of this very--at that time--great Michigan artist, muralist. There was a father-and-son kind of relationship between the two. Paul took a great fatherly interest in Albert, whose integrity he never questioned. Albert's father died when Albert was about one and a half years old. Consequently, in all these years he never really had a male affinity like a father image and he took on Paul Honore as a kind of father image. Paul used him as a model in his books and he has written quite a few books. At that time he had already written quite a few; they never became world-wide in fashion or in popularity but they always related to art and they were very important at that stage of the game. Now what I wanted to talk about is that in Paul Honore's maybe fiftieth or sixtieth year, after he had had great success in this area and other areas of the United States, he and his wife and family--I don't know how many children he had, maybe four and they were relatively grown, adult--they decided that Michigan and the Detroit vicinity no longer interested them to the degree that it had previously. They took a map of the United States--something which I'm sure nobody in the world has ever done--and spread it out on a table. All of the family came and decided where they would like to be in these United States. They took a yardstick and each one pointed to a place on the map where he or she would like to live and said, "I would like to live in Wilmington, Delaware!" Another, "I would like to be in Oshkosh." Paul said wherever the yardstick crossed most often, "We are going to head for that spot!" So it came to pass that they sold their house in Royal Oak, they sold their furniture and all their material possessions and headed out in their old jalopy with their clothes and all of their little treasures - "little" treasures because the jalopy couldn't hold everything. They headed out toward a place somewhere in the vicinity of Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, I cannot remember the name of the town but it had a very romantic sounding name. They all applauded the fact that they were going to make their home in this place with the wonderful name. They drove across the country to Washington, D.C. Outside of Washington was this little town, whatever it was called. It was a community which was solid black. Well, of course, they didn't care anymore that I would have cared, but it was a beautiful thing for them to behold, because it was something so totally unexpected it was almost like a fairy tale.

MR. BARRIE: It does sound like it.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. They began to look around to find a spot in which to settle. They found a beautiful farm in rolling hills, such as one finds in Maryland and the area surrounding Washington. This farm had many, many, many acres, I can't remember how many, but the farm was run down, the houses on it were dilapidated. There were seven buildings on this farm. Paul and his wife Edith decided that this was the place where they would like to be. They had a little money because they had sold everything that they had in Royal Oak. They were able to buy this land for very little and began to settle there. Their idea, particularly Paul's idea, was to start an art colony in that area. It was very fascinating because Albert de Salle, who was almost accepted as a son, was one of the integral parts of what was going to be this art colony. As I said before, the farm was very beautiful but it was very run down and the community was totally black. The Negroes had an immediate rapport with this wonderful white family, and the white family had an immediate rapport with the black community, and they began to work hand-in-hand. This farm that they had bought belonged to a Negro family, who had given it up many years before. All of the kids decided that this was the right place for the whole family. The children were relatively young at that time but they all thought that this was beautiful country with marvelous people and they really wanted to integrate with the people of this area. And, you know, this was many years ago, maybe forty-five or fifty years. And, my God, today we talk about integration. That family was probably the first to make an effort to integrate with a black community. And it ran just like a song. Everybody of that all black community came to their assistance. They knew that the farm was dilapidated. They all came asking, "What can we do?" "What can we do?" And everybody began to work on all of these seven little buildings outside of the big building which was the farmhouse. Eventually the farmhouse was restored; the seven small buildings were restored. And Paul Honore began to collect artists from any community in the country who wanted to come. Of course he didn't have a voice that sounded all over the country, but whoever knew would tell somebody else and that person would tell somebody else. Eventually, they became a community of artists, sculptors, writers, and musicians. They could be anything at all which had anything to do with the arts. They became a kind of communal thing. We were supposed to be a part of that community.

MR. BARRIE: "We" meaning you and Albert?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Albert and I. And so in May of the following year we went out there to see what this was all going to be about. Albert and I had already gotten married and we both had some kind of an ideal as to what we wanted to do and where we wanted to be. We went there to take a look at the already set up community on this farm which I think had maybe twenty-five, thirty-five acres, or something like that. Already most all of these little buildings were filled with very interesting, young, potential artists whom Paul Honore had collected from the New York community and from the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Washington, Boston areas.

MR. BARRIE: What about Detroit? Were there any from Detroit?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, many people in Detroit knew about it but Detroit was pretty far away and because Albert was so close to Paul he was probably one of the very, very few who knew about it and who wanted to investigate what it was all about. Paul had kept a little cottage which was to be ours. It was a charming, charming cottage with a fireplace and all that sort of thing. What was marvelous about this farm and this community was the fact that everybody who lived on that estate had to chip in not only their artistic ability but their human ability. They had to till the soil, raise the vegetables, milk the cows. They learned how to do all kinds of things that anybody would have to learn if they lived on a farm. Right? At that particular point there was something like thirty people already integrated and living on that farm. They would get together evenings, not every evening but whenever they felt like it, and maybe they would build a bonfire and sit around and discuss art and life and philosophy. It was a fabulous idea and an ideal kind of thing for young people to associate themselves with. Albert was already employed by the J. L. Hudson Company. He had a mother to support. I had a mother to support. And as ideal and as wonderful as it was to contemplate such a thing, it just turned out not to be for us. So we observed it, we loved it, we associated with it. We stayed there for a week or two and then divorced ourselves from it because it just wasn't for us. We came back to Detroit. The community went on for--I don't know-- something like thirteen or fourteen years.

MR. BARRIE: That's a long time.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, it's a long time. Many beautiful, beautiful things came from it. But unfortunately, there was a fire which broke out in the big house, the farmhouse, and the sparks flew all over the place and everything, the whole estate burned down to the ground. So it was destroyed. Eventually, Paul died. His wife died. I don't know what happened to the children and that was the end of that epic. It was a very beautiful idealistic effort.

MR. BARRIE: Oh, yes, very idealistic. At this point I did not know of Paul Honore's importance to the art community. But I had heard his name before, and on. Okay. When Paul picked up his goods and left Detroit what did that do to the Detroit art scene?

MS. DE SALLE: Nothing. Nothing. It didn't make any kind of an indentation because Paul's work, Paul's moralistic work, was mainly confined to smaller towns around Detroit so his departure from Detroit didn't leave any kind of void, because his artistic impact and importance was never really experienced in Detroit itself. The importance of Paul Honore was in his books and his pamphlets and his influence on individuals rather than on the total picture of the art scene in Detroit.

MR. BARRIE: Then who was it in Detroit who had this influence? Paul seems to have had a social influence, also an artistic one, but a social influence in which you could gather. What other major figures seem to stand out in that period?

MS. DE SALLE: I think that Paul's influence was more humane than social.

MR. BARRIE: Okay.

MS. DE SALLE: Now another person who really stood out at that particular time was somebody by the name of Ivan Swift.

MR. BARRIE: Okay, yes, I know Ivan Swift; I know of him.

MS. DE SALLE: Ivan Swift was a very romantic figure, you know, beautiful to look at, marvelous in concept, linguistic in words. He was an ideal where romanticism was concerned. Another person, as I remember, who was kind of outstanding at that particular point was a Russian by the name of--oh, I'm sorry, I can't remember--he lived on East Jefferson Avenue when Zoltan had a studio....

MR. BARRIE: Not Chrisanofsky?

MS. DE SALLE: Chrisanofsky!

MR. BARRIE: Roman Chrisanofsky. Right.

MS. DESALLE: Roman Chrisanofsky! Roman Chrisanofsky was another outstanding personality, a marvelous illustrator as well as a beautiful painter, quite romantic in feeling. He made a nucleus in that particular world that I remember was in the same building where Zoltan has his studio. It was out on East Jefferson and they called it "the haunted house" because every once in a while a chandelier would fall. Zoltan had a little teensy weensy room somewhere in the back of the building. They used to call Zoltan the "silent Hungarian" because he never uttered a word; he couldn't speak English; he was very reluctant to talk to any of them. He was younger than all of the other people there in that building and little by little they kind of drew him in and with him I was drawn in. Of course, I was so young at that time that I didn't know whether these guys were thugs or whether they were artists. I didn't know what it was all about. And they put on all sorts of what I thought weird exhibitions, dancing. Roman Chrisanofsky had a wife. I cannot remember her name but she was a really terrific human being and a beautiful person, voluptuous as I am now, not beautiful but voluptuous and she was a taxi cab driver. In order to support Roman, she drove a taxi cab mostly at night. Sometimes she would bring home her passengers, and at three o'clock in the morning they would rap on Zoltan's door and say, "Come on, join the party" and, you know, this big-eyed, silent Hungarian would go out there and be absolutely petrified joining this group. But getting back to Ivan Swift, Ivan was a very ethereal person, a very sensitive person. At one point his artist friends referred to him as "Ivan the Great" because he really was great. If I remember correctly, at one time he had a studio directly across from what then became the Masonic Temple. Although he was a very poor man monetarily, he had such great drawing power, because of his intellect and his poetic nature and his sensitivity that he began to draw people into his aura. Before he died I think that he was relatively well-to-do. Now this is only my memory.

MR. BARRIE: He was poet laureate of Michigan.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, he was. And rightly so because, oh, his poems were as great as Walt Whitman's. He was a beautiful poet. He loved Zoltan like a brother, like a father. Of course, I was drawn into this whole atmosphere. I was considerably younger than the others and my eyes were just popping open with all these beautiful words that Ivan Swift uttered. I do think that he influenced me in my great regard and great respect and great love for poetry, which eventually became part of my life.

MR. BARRIE: So we're talking about Ivan Swift and Roman Chrisanofsky and Paul Honore. These were the figures that the Detroit scene evolved around?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes, yes.

MR. BARRIE: What sort of scene was it? I mean, when we talk about the art scene in Detroit in, let's say, the Nineteen-Twenties and Thirties, are we talking about a lot of people? Ten people? Was it a very small, very

compact community?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, it didn't seem to be very small in my opinion but that may have been because I was so young and I thought, you know, that ten or fifteen people were a lot of people. I know that at Paul Honore's Thursday night session there were many more than ten or fifteen people. Maybe there were thirty or forty or fifty people. They weren't always there at the same time; they came and went. There was always such a beautiful atmosphere, such a beautiful rapport. It had absolutely nothing to do with alcohol or with the dope scene and all that. They served apple cider and coffee and doughnuts and that sort of thing. But largely, and more importantly, the scene was centered around what we called at that time "intellectual conversation"-- world affairs, artistic affairs, in written affairs, and in particular the world of artistry and intellectualism. Nobody thought in terms of being the big shot. Everybody participated with what they had to offer. There were the listeners and there were the talkers. It was always what we later termed a "happening;" every Thursday night was a happening.

MR. BARRIE: Now in these discussions on Thursday nights I have several questions I can think of. First of all, you say some people participated and some people didn't. Was it sexually an equal sort of situation? Were men and women there and did they act as equals or speak as equals?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, absolutely! There was no division whatsoever. Nobody ever talked about how many women were there or how many men were there. There was never any reference to invitations to women or invitations to men. Whoever wanted to participate came. Some men brought women. Some women brought men. Some women brought women. Some men brought men. I mean there was absolutely no question about who participated. The only thing that was really important was interest.

MR. BARRIE: I see. In this small art community were there many practicing women artists?

MS. DE SALLE: No.

MR. BARRIE: Not very many?

MS. DE SALLE: No. No. There were relatively very few. I would almost be unable to mention which were the women and which were the men in that particular era. I don't think I know; I've never thought about it. There was never any kind of direction which would lead me to that idea that this was a woman and this was a man. They just came and they all participated or they listened or whatever. But there were men and there were women.

MR. BARRIE: Now did this group, when they talked about artistic topics, did they talk about the various movements of the day such as--well, I don't know--Cubism, or Dada, or whatever it was? Was this a subject area?

MS. DE SALLE: Very often, yes. I wouldn't say that it was the main subject. Not at all. But somehow every kind of art endeavor came into the conversation at one time or another. But nobody ever concentrated on one particular form of art. It was just a sort of give-and-take. Somebody would mention one thing and somebody would mention another thing and, if someone had a very smashing thing to add to what the question was, they would add it; if they didn't, they didn't and were silent. But I don't think that any art form or art endeavor was ever excluded. It just sort of happened that it came up. I don't think that I was very conscious, is what I'm trying to say. It was just natural. It wasn't consciously; "I'm coming tonight because I want to talk about such and such a thing." As I remember, it was just never like that.

MR. BARRIE: Would you say that this group was very aware of the movements going on in the art world of that time?

MS. DE SALLE: There wasn't that much to be concerned about at that time. Now you're asking me questions which date back forty or fifty years and I'm trying to answer quite honestly and honorably about what I remember. My memory may not be that good. As I recall--and I'm very visual--when you ask me a question I really not only think it, I visualize it. And I visualize that there wasn't that much going on in terms of art movements in this area. Most of the artists who were involved were much more concerned about what was going on here and now rather than there and then. I don't think that they really even know very much about it. This is only my memory of it.

MR. BARRIE: Your impression of it, yes. Where was Detroit art at in, let's say, the late Twenties and early Thirties? What types of things were being done by everyone from Zoltan to Paul Honore? Very realistic? Very representational types of things?

MS. DE SALLE: I would say not very, but I certainly would say that they were representational, but they certainly were not "very" because when you say "very" I picture something extraordinarily realistic. Now this was not the

case. They were more impressionistic than realistic. I don't even remember anybody who painted in a truly realistic style with the possible exception of someone who did portraiture, and I can't remember his name. He had been a student of Robert Henri (H-e-n-r-i). I can't remember who this person was but give me time and I'll remember.

MR. BARRIE: Not John Coppin?

MS. DE SALLE: No. I'm sorry--I didn't regard John Coppin perhaps because of influence. You know, to me, because of influence and perhaps because of my own interpretation, John Coppin, though he was a very good artist, was never considered in that world the punchy artist. He was better considered as a very excellent...he was an excellent draftsman but he was also an excellent person who interpreted; maybe you'd call him an illustrator of the day. In my opinion--not too humble--I don't think that it is fair, you know, to the artist to divide him down the middle and say: this one is an interpreter and an illustrator and that one is an artist. I think they're both artists. And I could never quite understand why the division was made because somebody interpreted an expression of something which has activity and so forth. Let's say it's a bicycle rider. Now who says that the guy who interprets a bicycle rider is purely an illustrator, and another guy who interprets a bicycle rider is a great artist because somebody else says he's not an illustrator. What's the difference? It's the same kind of difference. I never drew the line between the artist and the craftsman. If he's an artist, he must be both; he's got to be on both sides of the fence. And the illustrator, just because he depicts a certain kind of atmosphere and an attitude of a group of people when they're, let's say, at a trial and, in particular the guy on the stand, why can he not be called an artist in the same way as anybody who interprets a portrait? I never could get the relationship.

MR. BARRIE: It is a very arbitrary division. Yes.

MS. DE SALLE: It's ridiculous. It's ridiculous. Daumier is a perfect example. We call him a great artist and he certainly was. There's no question about it. But he was also an illustrator. My God, when you remember Daumier's paintings and drawings and you see these enormously effective faces depicting all kinds of attitudes and so on, how does he differ from the guys who do it today, except that, of course, he was a greater artist. But the guy who depicts the same kind of facial expressions, who is just as great an artist, why can't this guy be called an artist rather than an illustrator?

MR. BARRIE: Yes. It's such a fine line; Daumier was a good example.

MS. DE SALLE: These are the nuances which I just cannot agree with.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, I agree it's a very fine line. I definitely agree.

MS. DE SALLE: Coming back to that time, there were many people who were marvelous with pen and ink drawings and sketches and very quick realizations of aspects of human life, and so forth, and they were called illustrators and were kind of pushed off the beam. It was never right; it was never fair; it was never just. But that's the way it was and that's the way the world is.

MR. BARRIE: So in that very small community there was a division between (quote) "the fine artist:" and the illustrator?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Oh, of course. And between the craftsman and the artist. Now from the very beginning of my adulthood, long before I ever had the gallery, and long before I was ever influenced by anybody except through reading and conversation, I think it boiled down to my own interpretation. I couldn't divide the artist from the craftsman. I repeated over and over again, "an artist cannot be an artist without craft;" if he wasn't a craftsman, a good craftsman, he couldn't possibly be a good artist because it didn't all come from--I don't know--some ethereal way down there, you know; it had to come from something much more qualitative than just saying "I feel." Which I have never really believed in. What is feeling? Feeling has to come from somewhere. You can't just pull it out of the air like you pull an air bubble. It has to come from somewhere, much more vital and more gutsy than just words. And so an artist has also to be a craftsman, simultaneously, not before or after, but simultaneously. He has to be a craftsman if he's an artist. I've had this discussion and argument over and over and over again. Some artists will say, "Don't call me a craftsman. I'm not a craftsman, I'm an artist." And I say, "You're absolutely out of your mind because you can't be an artist without being a craftsman."

MR. BARRIE: The basis of skill.

MS. DE SALLE: But, you know, there's some kind of onus attached to the word "craftsman."

MR. BARRIE: Yes, there is; there really is.

MS. DE SALLE: When I started my showing of pottery and jewelry twenty-seven years ago, none of it was for sale. The only reason that I showed it--and I have never changed my opinion--twenty-seven years ago when I

started my gallery I said, "I want to show my public that a pot is a work of art just as much as a painting or a piece of sculpture or whatever you want to call art." A piece of jewelry is a piece of art because the craftsmanship has to be there, the artistry has to be there, the design quality has to be there. So what the hell is the difference? A piece of jewelry is that big, and a piece of sculpture could be that big or that big or that big or, you know, the size of a house. Well, what difference does it make? A piece of jewelry has to be like a miniature sculpture.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, it does.

MS. DE SALLE: A pot has to be a miniature house, or whatever. I do not take in necessarily pottery which is utilitarian. I'm not talking about mugs and bowls and ash trays and whatever. And even they can be very artistically done, but I don't think they are in quite the same community with what I call fine art in clay or fine art in metal. This is my opinion, right or wrong.

MR. BARRIE: I think it's an important idea. It really is. Were the artists in this group that centered in Detroit, were they craftsmen? I mean did they have technical ability? Were these good people we're talking about as far as ability as an artist is concerned?

MS. DE SALLE: I think much more so than today.

MR. BARRIE: Really?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes. I do.

MR. BARRIE: Was their training local, or European, or...?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I think very often quite local. There was a local art school called--was it Meinzinger?

MR. BARRIE: Yes, it was Meinzinger. I think it was Meinzinger.

MS. DESALLE: I don't really know who taught at that art school. All I can tell you is that whoever came out of that art school had a very good basic training. Now when I say "good basic training," this is true of any art school. If the basic training is good, the artist can go on to wherever he wants to go on to. I mean he can become good, he can become mediocre. It depends so much upon the mentality and the heart and soul and the whole endeavor of the individual. But, by and large, a great, great many that I knew at the time from that school--and I cannot give you names--but many of the people I knew went on to much more important things than did many from the other local art schools. The School of Arts & Crafts had very good people and they taught fine arts like painting, and so on. Zoltan Sepechy was one of the first directors of that school; I think he was maybe the second director. Unfortunately, he didn't hit it off very well with the local authorities there because he was a very individualistic guy who refused positive areas that the art schools of the time almost insisted upon because they were trying to get students, lots of students, irrespective of anything. And Zoltan's attitude was never get more and more and more but get them when they were better and better and better.

MR. BARRIE: Yes. Quality.

MS. DE SALLE: Sepeshy's ideals were for quality; the school's ideas were for quantity. At that time I don't think that "arts & crafts" was really quite as qualitative as it is today. I think that the same thing applied to other schools of art, including the colleges and universities. I think that they were seeking more instead of better.

MR. BARRIE: I've notice there was a great European influence in Detroit art circles like Zoltan who was Hungarian, and Roman Chrisanofsky who was Russian, and Sarkis Sarkisian who was Armenian. There's a list.... Was it dominated by Europeans? I say "Europeans" meaning European-born who immigrated over.

MS. DE SALLE: I don't think it had anything to do with concentrated dominion of foreign artists. I think that they were either good or they were not so good and it just so happened that Zoltan Sepeshy was a good artist, and Sarkis was a good artist, and Chrisanofsky was a good artist. It had nothing really to do with the domination of European artists. Don't ever forget that in all of life--and I don't care which section of life you talk about--certain aspects and certain elements of foreign qualities like--what do I want to say?--accents, okay? All through life in these United States or anywhere else where foreign accents are concerned--all through our lives you've got to admit that when you have a foreign accent, say, a French accent, a Hungarian accent, a Russian accent, a German accent, I don't give a damn what kind of accent, there s always some kind of a plus appeal. Right?

MR. BARRIE: Okay, yes.

MS. DE SALLE: If Zsa Zsa Gabor talked to you with a Hungarian accent and said something which I might say in exactly the same words, you would have a greater reaction to Zsa Zsa Gabor than you would to me; you would interpret as some kind of a sexy something or other, which is phony on her part but it makes an impression. And

the same thing has applied to--I don't say that Sarkis and Zoltan and Christanofsky wouldn't have been just as good artists as they were but there was a plus where their accents were concerned. And I cannot kid myself about that.

MR. BARRIE: That's very interesting.

MS. DE SALLE: Very interesting. And this is my point of view. Now it has nothing to do with them because they had not changed and they would not change. They could not help the fact that they were born in another country. But, believe me, the public reacted to them much more favorably because they were different, just a little bit different in terms of their expressions. And they would be applauded. Somebody would say, "Oh, isn't that charming! Now what was that you said? Did you mean such and such?" "No, I mean such and such." And people would howl and laugh, you know, and absorb and love and kiss and lap it up, and so forth. Don't ever tell me that there wasn't a plus where the accent was concerned. Believe me, there are very few people in the world I know who would admit that this is the case, but it is. There's a plus where an accent is concerned, but it has nothing to do with their art. It has nothing to do with being more favored or more sponsored because they were foreign; it was just a little plus, just that little PLUS.

MR. BARRIE: Well then, tell me, how did the community, I mean the general community, react to this art circle? Did Zoltan Sepeshy sell paintings in 1930? Did Sarkis sell paintings? I mean, was there a market? Did the local community support them?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Yes. I don't think the local community really supported them as such. I mean, it didn't support them to the extent that they could live on their art. They had to have some kind of a supplement. They had to have some ability to teach. But there was enough so that the public bought their art. Now I can remember some years ago, long before Zoltan was teaching at Cranbrook, I can remember going to places like Cleveland, which is just across the Lake, and taking his paintings wrapped in butcher paper and because he had absorbed everything possible in this area and I thought that maybe Cleveland would be a relatively good area. It was close enough that it wouldn't take too much money to take his paintings to Cleveland. Also, Cleveland is close enough so that the public there would have heard a little bit about his work. So I would go to Cleveland; I would take the night boat and get off with a great big package of paintings and struggle through lines and lines of people, dragging my package of paintings because I couldn't afford to have a bellhop, or whatever they call them. I can remember being absolutely exhausted when I'd get off that boat. But, by God, I'd take a taxi cab for fifty cents and I'd go to the most prominent art gallery in Cleveland. By the time I got there, my huffing and puffing was over and I would present these fabulous paintings of this Hungarian genius, you know, and I was successful in getting an exhibition at an art gallery.

[TAPE IS RUNNING OFF REEL.]

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 1.]

[SIDE 1]

[Note: There is no sound until about number 406 on the Tandberg scale.]

MS. PEGGY DE SALLE: ...the formality that the general staff presented which I personally did not want to be involved in and I think that a great many people that I knew felt the same way about the atmosphere at Cranbrook.

MR. DENNIS BARRIE: We've sort of gone off a little bit but it's an interesting area to talk about. Cranbrook has been criticized on some of the very ideas that you've mentioned. There was talk in the Nineteen-thirties that Cranbrook had a sort of pro-Nazi feeling to it. Did you ever sense that?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, I did. As a matter of fact, at that particular period we were invited to participate in a dinner party. And the word "participate" is very funny in this connection because Zoltan and I had volunteered to cook the dinner. It was one of the homes--I'd rather not mention names at this point--in one of the homes of the faculty. Zoltan and I cooked a beautiful Hungarian dinner with chicken Paprikash and all the rest of it. We were mostly confined in the kitchen for quite some time. I think there were perhaps fourteen people sitting around at the dinner table. It so happened that my dinner partner, who is no longer alive and therefore I will keep his name concealed, began to talk to me about all these wonderful things that the Nazis were doing, or the Germans; he didn't call them Nazis, he called them Germans. And it was a very, very pro-German, one-sided conversation. He was just enthralled with the idea that Germany was doing such a great job. And then he began talking about Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt and Negroes and those various people that I was very positively pro. And, being the kind of person that I am, and probably was, I just decided that this guy was just absolutely impossible. I had cooked the dinner, at least partially so, and here I was in between two people. This man I'm talking about was particularly talkative. The other man was constantly saying, "Yes, yes, yes" to everything the first man said. I'm in the middle saying, "Well, this is ridiculous. I think you're wrong and I think the Germans are behaving like

butchers." You know, exactly the opposite of what they were yessing each other about. As a result, I got so sick and tired of listening to all this.... And then other people joined in and they were laughing and talking and saying what an S.O.B. Roosevelt was and all the rest of it. I decided I couldn't stand it any longer so I got up and walked out of the dinner party. Of course, I was reprimanded very bitterly because I did it rather--well, more than obviously. I just simply left and walked out and wouldn't go back into that house again. There was a very great feeling of pro-Germanism. And when I said "Nazi," "Oh, no, no"--none of them was pro-Nazi. Not at all; they were pro-German. I said, "What the hell is the difference?" The Nazis are the German s and the Germans are the Nazis and they're doing terrible things, terrible things, horrible things." I happened to know a little bit more about it than most of them did because I had gone to Germany to study a few years before.

MR. BARRIE: Was this the trip from the Barnes Foundation?

MS. DE SALLE: No, this was another trip. This was even pre-Barnes. The trip that I'm talking about. At that time Nazism had really begun. They didn't call it a name but I recall too many incidents to interrupt what you're interested in. Perhaps at another time we could go into this. But very interesting episodes in my life at that time. And this was pre-Hitler, you know, but just pre-Hitler, you know, a very short period before Hitler. And then I hear all this pro-German conversation and I obviously thought that this was pro-Nazi. But oh, no, they refused that word. They all said, oh, no, it was not pro-Nazi; they were not pro-Hitler; they were pro-German.

MR. BARRIE: Prior to this discussion on Cranbrook's political-social attitude, you mentioned that in the late Twenties and Thirties Cranbrook didn't have a great deal of influence on the art community, but was there a communication between people like Milles and Saarinen and the people in Detroit? I mean communication in the sense that was there inter-action?

MS. DE SALLE: I think at that time Cranbrook was such an isolated island. It was almost as though they were surrounded by water or whatever like an island which was complete within itself. I don't think that they had a great deal of communication with other schools or with individual artists at that particular time. Now this attitude that I've just discussed and related about the pro-German attitude was not a very lasting thing; it was a very short-lived thing. The moment there was the invasion into Sweden and Finland and, you know, when the Germans took hold in so many various directions that attitude stopped as though an iceberg had hit it, and there was no more pro-Germanism. So that attitude was a very short-lived one, as I recall. I wanted to finish off with that because I didn't want to give the impression that this was an influence into Nazism. I don't think it was. But I had had it. I had had a bellyful of that at the time and I really didn't want to live on those premises. However, even if it had been a totally different situation, I would still not have wanted to live on the premises of an organized school like that because I didn't want to have to look next door to see what somebody's table had on it; I didn't like that kind of close living. I didn't then and I don't now and I think this is one of the reasons why I enjoy living in the country the way I do, not because I'm a hermit but because I do enjoy isolation of a certain kind. I want to be with the people I want to be with, not with those and surrounded by...whether I had anything to say about it or not.

MR. BARRIE: You were sort of forced into a situation, yes.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. And this was a very, very small community and they all kind of bitched about each other at that time. I don't know how it is now. But maybe it's the same thing wherever you go.

MR. BARRIE: Well, Zoltan eventually came out to Cranbrook to teach painting. All right, how was he drawn into it? I've heard several versions from a number of sources and I'm sort of curious as to how he was brought out to Cranbrook?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I think it's very simple. At least I can tell the story that I know because "I was there, Charlie." The person who really had the greatest amount to do with it was Florence Davies. Florence was a dear friend of Zoltan's and a dear friend of mine.

MR. BARRIE: Was she the art critic at that time?

MS. DE SALLE: She was the art critic of the Detroit News. She was very, very much impressed with Zoltan's work, his painting, and impressed with him as a human being and as a person and as a personality. And knowing that we were in pretty sore need of livelihood, plus the fact that he was so adequate as a teacher, as an instructor, as a painter, I think she was the one who had more influence in getting him into Cranbrook than any other one single person. I know that when he went out there for an interview, he was already quite favorably accepted even before he got there because of all the beautiful attributes that Florence had preceded him with. And of course he certainly was a very, very fine teacher--instructor at first, then became professor, then became head of the Fine Arts Department, then educational director, and eventually the president of the school. It was a very believable and acceptable situation that he should have acquired.

MR. BARRIE: Did he follow Giza Maroti out there?

MS. DE SALLE: No.

MR. BARRIE: Do you know Meroti (M-e-r-o t i)?

MS. DE SALLE: I remember Giza Meroti but I don't think that Meroti was at Cranbrook for a very long period of time.

MR. BARRIE: Was there a tie with Meroti and Zoltan?

MS. DE SALLE: No. No.

MR. BARRIE: That has been brought up that there was a tie.

MS. DE SALLE: No. Certainly not to my knowledge and I think I would have known, at least I would have had an inkling.

MR. BARRIE: About Meroti, did you know him at all?

MS. DE SALLE: Not very well.

MR. BARRIE: He wasn't here for very long?

MS. DE SALLE: No, he wasn't. And at that particular time, as I mentioned before, I was, as the kids would call it today, "real cool" about the whole situation and I....

MR. BARRIE: About Cranbrook?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. And I didn't want to know most of the people there.

MR. BARRIE: Getting back to a more general topic, Zoltan went to Cranbrook I think in 1933, somewhere in that period?

MS. DE SALLE: It must have been earlier.

MR. BARRIE: Earlier?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. It had to be earlier, in the very early Thirties.

MR. BARRIE: Well, what I'm trying to get at is, Zoltan took a job at Cranbrook as an instructor in the Thirties. What I would like to know is: what did Detroit artists do to survive with the onset of the Depression and even before then? First of all, before the Depression, did the Detroit artists sell? Could they survive on their painting and on their sculpture?

MS. DE SALLE: No. We discussed this before. No, they could not survive. They had to teach and they also had to do many other types of things, whatever they were fitted for. I know that some year before any of the periods that we've been talking about, when Zoltan first appeared on the Detroit scene, I remember that my father who was involved in the real estate business had subdivisions out here north or west or whatever, of Pontiac. In order to survive at that time, Zoltan painted the numbers on the stakes on the property. Actually Zoltan was very proud of this. He said, "I know how to paint these numbers. Why shouldn't I take on the job of painting them?" so he painted individual lot stakes, whatever you call them, on the subdivisions, and painted street signs in the subdivisions. And eventually, when my father acquired a larger piece of property out here at Wiggins Lake, and he and his brother, who had a very important real estate firm at that time, built a beautiful big clubhouse. They had a big, big ballroom, fifty-foot ballroom, and I don't know what all, a poolroom. It was a typical country club but a country club for the people, not for the elite. And whoever heard of a country club for the people which had these gorgeous murals on the walls? Zoltan was employed to put murals on the walls.

MR. BARRIE: I didn't know that.

MS. DE SALLE: You didn't know that? Oh, well, I could present a whole, big, long story about that because he had the most beautiful murals on all of these walls. The ballroom itself was fifty feet long--I don't mean fifty--I mean a hundred and fifty feet long and fifty feet wide, a big beautiful ballroom. All four walls, with the exception of the cutouts where the windows were, were filled with murals of Sepeshy. Each wall depicted a certain time of year--spring, summer, autumn and winter. I remember these murals to be so magnificent in color. The one wall which depicted winter had sleighs drawn by horses and people sitting in the sleighs having a gay time. All of these various walls had depicted the fun things of the season. And then all through the entire building in the recreation rooms, like the poolroom which was upstairs...it was a big beautiful poolroom.... And the dining room was spectacular. Every one of these rooms was decorated with murals by Sepeshy.

MR. BARRIE: That's amazing.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. This is a part of his life that I don't think very many people know about because you would have to have gone out there to see it. It was in the late Twenties I guess. or early Thirties, when transportation was almost impossible unless you had your own car because there were no vehicles to transport you except vehicles, which they called jitneys at the time, from our real estate company. These would take groups of people out to the country club to eat the gorgeous dinners and eventuate by selling them a lake lot or something. Zoltan was very much involved in that. As a matter of fact, he even lived out there for quite some time during the winter when transportation was so impossible and he had to paint these murals at a certain time because there was a deadline.

MR. BARRIE: The building is gone?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Unfortunately. Again another fire destroyed the building but completely.

MR. BARRIE: So Zoltan was relatively lucky then to have such a commission like that because it was probably a good commission?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes. They kept him working for about a year.

MR. BARRIE: But this was more atypical than typical, not only for Zoltan but for anybody we could name in the community?

MS. DE SALLE: That's right. There were very few such occasions where....

MR. BARRIE: In that period, would you say that local patrons looked to local artists. All right, Zoltan did these murals. Were other artists hired to do murals for, say, a downtown office building or whatever? Local artists now.

MS. DE SALLE: Well, as I recall, Paul Honore was involved in some of the murals. And there was someone else, someone by the name of John Pappas was involved in some of these murals in industrial buildings. Offhand, I can't remember anyone else. I don't think that Sarkis ever did large mural paintings, although Sarkis was responsible for having done a whole series of relatively large paintings; they must have been about four by six in size. These were for Lester Gruber who owns the London Chop House, as you know. I don't remember in which buildings Sarkis painted these paintings but I know that there were twelve or fourteen of these large paintings which he was commissioned to paint for Lester. The reason I remember it so well is that because at the time I started my gallery, which is now twenty-seven years ago, these paintings had been in a fire and it was one of the first commissions I had to have these paintings cleaned and restored. Lester gave them to me to do through The Little Gallery.

MR. BARRIE: They're still around somewhere today?

MS. DE SALLE: They are; yes; they must be. I know that we did a good job of cleaning and restoring them and reframing them. I think I had my first real lesson in picture framing from Lester Gruber. He had told me in advance that he didn't want to spend a fortune on these paintings. And I took him at his word. So, instead of asking me to let him see what I wanted to do, he kind of frightened me about price and he said, "I don't want you to go overboard." Those were the words he used. So in order not to go overboard I think I went underboard and I had these paintings cleaned and restored and framed. When they were finished and Lester saw them he scolded me because he didn't think that I had done a beautiful enough job of framing these paintings. I said, "Well, but, you know, you told me that I wasn't to go overboard, that I was to be conservative. It was your money and I wanted to do the best I could for as little as I could. But from now on, baby, I'll never listen to that kind of advice. I'm going to frame them the way I think they should be framed instead of being afraid that it's going to cost too much. Now I did it adequately. I didn't do it in a simple way; you asked me to do it adequately." So I learned my lesson from Lester and very often since that time we've laughed about it because I point out that I learned so many years ago that I shouldn't listen to this kind of request but that I should do a job the way it's supposed to be done, not the way that somebody requested it be done.

MR. BARRIE: That's a very good point, especially with framing. Getting back, so there were some jobs available...?

MS. DE SALLE: You see how I get carried away and one thought brings on another thought and brings in all kinds of other people.

MR. BARRIE: I don't mind at all because in that way we learn a lot.

MS. DE SALLE: Just give me a good swift kick and pull me back.

MR. BARRIE: Okay. But we are getting out a point. And getting back to the point of artists' survival in the

Twenties and Thirties.... Did anybody attempt to set up galleries for the artists, let's say, in the late Nineteen-twenties or early Thirties?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh no. Definitely not. Nobody had a gallery. In fact, the only gallery I can remember of that period was Hanna-Thompson Gallery in the David Whitney Building. And that was really not a gallery for local artists, nor was it a gallery for contemporary art. There were no galleries, period. My gallery was really the first gallery which was set up for young, budding artists as gifted as I knew how to recognized gifted artists. And there just wasn't anything else.

MR. BARRIE: What about the Artists Market? What function did that perform?

MS. DE SALLE: The Artists Market functioned with local artists and they were doing a beautiful job of showing the local art scene. But of course they were set up in a totally different way. They were a non-profit organization and as such they presented the local scene as they could. At that time they maintained a small gallery and it was the one and only one. I said "no" before because I thought you were referring to galleries which were privately owned.

MR. BARRIE: Yes, there is a difference between the Artists Market and--it is a non-profit institution almost rather than....

MS. DE SALLE: Yes.

MR. BARRIE: So if you were a Detroit artist you sold your paintings where? If you sold your paintings, you sold them possibly at the Artists Market?

MS. DE SALLE: Possibly at the Artists Market. And previous to my getting into it you sold them privately or you sold them through decorators if you were lucky enough to find one who was contemporary-minded.

MR. BARRIE: What about the Michigan Artists Show? What did that do for artists in town?

MS. DE SALLE: By the way, I've just thought of another artist of that period--Julius Rolshoven. He was quite influential in a certain direction, very highly realistic. I never knew him personally; I knew him slightly socially but never knew him well enough to be able to tell you anything about him.

MR. BARRIE: For a while he was highly thought of.

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes.

MR. BARRIE: His things are still around. They're hard to find but they're still around.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. What was your next question?

MR. BARRIE: How did the Michigan Artists Show function as an outlet? Was that a place to sell? I mean was that looked upon as a place where you could get the exposure and you could sell?

MS. DE SALLE: Exposure, yes. To sell I'm not so sure. Selling art, Dennis, is not the easiest thing in the world. Most people don't buy art; they buy pictures. And that's not the same thing. They buy pictures. At that time, too, the public bought pictures to decorate with, not art and beauty to live with. They wanted a pretty picture on their wall. So the young artists who really had something exciting and interesting and new and revolutionary to say was not the person whose art was purchased whether it was from the Michigan art exhibition or from anywhere else. They wanted exposure which they did get and of course even at the Michigan art shows it just depended upon who the judges were and how much exposure the judges wanted to give to revolutionary young artists. Of course it was ever thus and still is.

MR. BARRIE: Do you think the judges were conservative in those days?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, I do.

MR. BARRIE: Would they pass over quite a few...?

MS. DE SALLE: You know, in my opinion judges are either too conservative or they are too avant garde; there doesn't seem to be a happy medium between them. My God, some of the things which are exhibited today judged by famous-name people are not fit to be in the henhouse.

MR. BARRIE: Were there a lot of local artists passed over as being too avant garde in the Nineteen-thirties?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, there were and it was always a very unfortunate thing to hear discussions and conversations

about because it was like cold water being spilled on the enthusiasm of the person who tried to present something which was new and different and exciting. And very often these works of art were just pushed right out of the Michigan shows and other local shows and Ann Arbor shows and university shows. I'm sure that if I had been an artist of that day instead of just being an observer I would have felt very unhappy about the situation and certainly, to say the least, frustrated because of this was my way of expression to be more avant garde and they wouldn't let me in to show what I was doing I would feel very unhappy and very mistreated; as they did feel.

MR. BARRIE: Can you think of anybody who was considered avant garde--a typical example at that time? Just to get an idea of what...from hindsight now?

MS. DE SALLE: No, I don't think I could give you any particular person because it's a jumble in my memory. I mean there were so many paintings that I saw. I had access to the museum at that time....

MR. BARRIE: That's another area that I want to talk about. But go ahead.

MS. DE SALLE: I had such a constant access to the museum that whenever there were these exhibitions I saw the paintings long before the judges saw them, in many cases. And I saw so many that I just passed over them lightly, never recognizing any name. But I remember the paintings and it's like a kaleidoscope in my memory, you know, one right after another, and I'd go through them like--well, like a cyclone...

MR. BARRIE: That's a good one; I was just trying to think of a word myself. That's a good one.

MS. DE SALLE: ...and look at them from my own personal standpoint and I would see beautiful color, beautiful design and very strong technique. I didn't look for a meaning; I didn't turn the painting upside down and wonder what it was supposed to be, like so many people did, and do. Rather than that I just looked at them from the standpoint of design and color and beauty of attitude. I think that was at the time when abstract art was just beginning to be shown in this area. But so much of that was just tossed right out on its behind.

MR. BARRIE: Before we get into the museum, which I think we'll save for the next time, I want to talk about your whole role at the museum....

MS. DE SALLE: You mean there's going to be a next time?

MR. BARRIE: I think there'll be one more.

MS. DE SALLE: You know, each time you come you make me feel more and more important but I really don't think that I'm that important to the art scene.

MR. BARRIE: I think you are. But let's finish today with the artist and his struggle in Detroit at that period. When the Depression hit Detroit what happened to Detroit art?

[END OF TAPE 3 - SIDE 1]

[TAPE 3 - SIDE 2]

MR. BARRIE: So, as I was saying before we switched sides, how did the Depression affect the Detroit artists that you knew?

MS. DE SALLE: I think the Depression hit the artists very vitally because up until that time they were able at least to get along by selling a few things and teaching. But then everything was cut back. Many of them had families to support and they had to do something. Quite a number of them, particularly those who had lesser recognition, had to go into other fields. Then came this--what was it called?

MR. BARRIE: The Federal Art Project--the WPA.

MS. DE SALLE: The WPA. Of course that absorbed a great many of the artists. It was a very good thing because the artists could really rely on a certain amount of work and a certain amount of income.

MR. BARRIE: Were many of your artist friends employed by the WPA?

MS. DE SALLE: I remember quite a few, yes. People like--oh, dear--well, Guy Palazzolo for one. And, oh, I'm so sorry I don't remember the name of the wonderful artist who went out to Ann Arbor to teach; he did watercolors....

MR. BARRIE: Jean Paul Slusser?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, no. Not Slusser. It was Carlos Lopez. He did that beautiful watercolor of mine in the living room.

MR. BARRIE: I've seen it; it's very beautiful.

MS. DE SALLE: And drawings. He was a beautiful, marvelous draftsman. He did quite a few things during the WPA era. And of course Zoltan was involved himself. Sarkis was involved.

MR. BARRIE: When you say "involved," what kind of thing would Zoltan have been involved in; what kind of a project?

MS. DE SALLE: Particularly in the sketching of murals. I don't know that he ever did any murals as such. I don't remember any during that period. He did a mural in the Rackham Building in Detroit but I don't remember whether or not that was for the WPA Project. I don't think so.

MR. BARRIE: I don't really know.

MS. DE SALLE: I'd have to remember some of the artists before I could say that they were involved in the WPA projects. I only recall certain pictures of murals but I don't remember the people who executed them.

MR. BARRIE: Was the program very active here? Do you recall a lot of WPA activity for artists?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, there was. There was quite a bit of activity.

MR. BARRIE: Was it just murals, or were they doing oils and prints and things of that nature?

MS. DE SALLE: Mostly I remember the murals.

MR. BARRIE: You don't recall too much easel work being done?

MS. DE SALLE: No.

MR. BARRIE: That's interesting. Did the great local patrons still back the artists in the Thirties? I'm thinking of people like the Kampermans, for example, who seem to have always supported local artists. Were they still buying people like Sarkis and Zoltan and Palazzolo?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, for course, the Kampermans are gone.

MR. BARRIE: But were they buying in the Thirties?

MS. DE SALLE: They went right on supporting the artists in one way or another.

MR. BARRIE: So you were saying that the Kampermans supported the artists in many ways?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes. Dr. and Mrs. Kamperman were wonderful human beings to begin with. When they supported somebody they never stopped supporting them, and in various ways. It didn't necessarily mean that they had to buy a picture. They supported them in different ways. I know, for instance, that George Kamperman never charged for medical care. He had a real deep interest in the artist and in the artist's family in a humane way. When there were children he brought the babies into the world. He supported them in that way. And then of course very often the Kampermans would buy paintings and give them to members of their family or friends in order to envelop other people in art. It was a very beautiful relationship they had with the artists they supported. This was true not only with paintings and sculpture but also with the crafts, with pottery, glassblowing and weaving. Their house was always full of these beautiful things.

MR. BARRIE: Who else was like that locally that you can think of, again during that period?

MS. DE SALLE: They were so exceptional that it's impossible to recall anybody else on that scale.

MR. BARRIE: In the Thirties--and maybe we'll end with this for today--I believe that in 1932 Edsel Ford hired Diego Rivera to paint murals in the Detroit Institute of Arts. How did the local artists respond to this idea, number one; and number two: what sort of relationship did Rivera have with local artists?

MS. DE SALLE: The number one question is a little difficult to answer because I think there were two schools of thought on the part of the artists that I knew, as well as on the part of the public. One school of thought felt a resentment that someone had to be brought in from elsewhere when there were so many local artists who thought of themselves as muralists, whose names perhaps were not as well known as Rivera's but who certainly thought of themselves as being felt they were able to depict whatever concept was desired.

MR. BARRIE: The industrial concept, yes.

MS. DE SALLE: The public had the same thought. Then there was another school of thought, felt that the Detroit Art Institute couldn't possibly employ just a local person to cover the walls, as it were, because it was for posterity and it should be somebody who was already famous. There were many people on that side of the fence. Then of course there was another reaction which came up after the murals were painted--at least after some of them were painted--again there was controversy because of the thinking behind the scene and the idea that as a communist, Rivera was painting communistic ideas and ideals. So there were two more controversies on that score. I'm sure you know a great deal about that.

MR. BARRIE: Yes.

MS. DE SALLE: I remember that Zoltan and I used to go down to the Art Institute and watch Rivera at work. We had met him before he came here to paint the murals. Zoltan was very much interested in the painting of murals and in the technique involved. We spent a great, great deal of time--and I'm sure that I went there without being the artist. I went just out of interest and curiosity and spent a great deal of time watching him. It was most interesting and most exciting. Sometimes people came in and watched him for a few minutes, only people who were permitted, because it wasn't open to the public.

MR. BARRIE: I was going to ask you if it was open to the public.

MS. DE SALLE: No, it wasn't. But there were people who were permitted in. Some were on the staff of the Art Institute, others were people who had access to the Museum and could go in for a few minutes at a time. But there was always controversy, always controversy. This was particularly because he was an outsider, and an outsider who was communistically involved.

MR. BARRIE: Was there much contact with local artists--between Rivera and local artists?

MS. DE SALLE: Really I think very little. As I recall, I was present at a few parties where Rivera was invited. Now whether that was because he was invited and didn't come, or whether he was invited and did come, I don't know to what degree. But I don't think he was very seriously involved with very many local artists.

MR. BARRIE: Do you think that Rivera had influence locally? You say that Zoltan watched him for days on end.

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, I think he had some influence; indeed I do. He was much too powerful not to have had an influence of some kind. What it would be I can't pinpoint but certainly he had influence. Perhaps not verbally.

MR. BARRIE: There was no contact with dialogue at all?

MS. DE SALLE: No. To begin with, I don't think he spoke English. So, you know, they could raise their eyebrows to each other but they couldn't do very much talking. His wife, Frida, appeared on the scene at various times and she spoke English. She was a painter, a very interesting painter. Someday I would like to tell you about my contact with her as a painter.

MR. BARRIE: Do we have time?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, I have time but I don't know that you have time.

MR. BARRIE: Go ahead.

MS. DE SALLE: One of my recollections of being in Mexico with the Rivera's--Albert and I--not Zoltan--this was after my marriage to Albert--and Parker Leslie whom you may or may not have heard of....

MR. BARRIE: Yes, I've heard of him.

MS. DE SALLE: Parker was an art historian and a very interesting personality with a brilliant, brilliant mind. The three of us drove down to Mexico City on one occasion. We met the Rivera's on many occasions there. I remember that Frida had had a very bad automobile accident. This was after the murals were painted here. She was in a very bad psychological state. She painted quite a few easel paintings on tin like some of the -what are they called--these tin paintings which were given to the church like votive paintings?

MR. BARRIE: You're talking about triptychs?

MS. DE SALLE: No. I think they're called votive paintings. They were mostly very small paintings done on tin and they were presented to the saints--the individual saints of the individual. I recall a series of paintings which Frida did that were, in a sense, very gruesome. One in particular was done shortly after her accident and after she had come out of the hospital. It showed a series of attitudes of a woman leaping through the air, falling and

somersaulting once and again and then smashing down to the ground level. These were the types of things that she was doing at the time. I was very deeply impressed by these paintings, not because I liked them but because of the conception. I had never seen anything like them.

MR. BARRIE: Did you ask her about them?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes, we talked about it. Of course I could understand that she was suicidal at the time because she was in a terrible frame of mind and all these paintings were recollections of dreams that she had had which affected her.

MR. BARRIE: She was basically, though, a very strong woman, wasn't she?

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, yes, she was.

MR. BARRIE: So this was just a period of depression?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. It was a period of depression after the episode of the accident. I think she was at Ford Hospital for I don't know how many months and they had practically given her up for dead. But she survived. And the incident was shortly after she went back to Mexico.

MR. BARRIE: So the accident happened here?

MS. DE SALLE: Somewhere in the vicinity. I don't know that it happened in Detroit but I think it was en route from somewhere. I remember that when we arrived in Mexico City she and Diego came to pick us up at a hotel to take us out to their house. They came in a station wagon. Oh, it was a run-down, dilapidated station wagon and Diego was a big man, very tall and husky. It was the first time in my life that I had ever seen somebody who reminded me of Pancho Villa. You know, he had this strap around his belly and a pistol in the back....

MR. BARRIE: Rivera had a pistol!

MS. DE SALLE: Yes! And a pistol in front. We drove out to their home in Sonomgil (?), which is quite a distance from Mexico City. This was many years ago and, of course, at that time it wasn't built up the way it is today and there were areas where "banditos" might come, you know. So there he was, driving the station wagon with revolvers both front and back. Frida was a very strong, attractive, voluptuous woman and, again, it was the first time I had ever had contact with somebody who was of this quality and who ran around bare-footed. Her toenails were painted brilliant red but her feet were dirty from going barefoot in the garden and on the street. When you looked at her head she was a beautiful, statuesque woman and her hair was combed with big, fat braids across the top of her head and into these braids were woven heavy woolen hanks of color. It was very picturesque. When you looked at her head and then down at her feet it created quite a contrast.

MR. BARRIE: What did you do with the Rivera's? Why did you go down there? Was it just because of the association that, while they were here, you became friends.

MS. DE SALLE: h, yes, we were quite friendly. There was no reason not to look them up. They asked to be looked up. When we said that we were going to Mexico, they said, "By all means be sure to come and visit us. We can have some exciting times together and we we'll go to the theater together and Diego knows all these interesting people and we'd like to have you meet them." And they certainly did. They took us everywhere. They were wonderful to us. We met Amalia, a dancer--what was her name? Amalia?

MR. BARRIE: That I wouldn't know.

MS. DE SALLE: Oh, she was very famous at that time, a very beautiful dancer who had her own company; apparently they were all her cousins--I don't know. The Rivera's took us to see the first performance I ever saw of Amalia before she became really famous and started to go out into the world. At that time she was famous only in Mexico but then somebody from the United States got hold of her and put her on the entertainment circuit and she became positively one of the most famous Mexican dancers of our time. She came to Detroit very often. I don't know that I saw her last here. I also recall parties that the Rivera's gave. I remember particularly how Diego never drank tequila out of a normal glass. He always had a great big water glass, a tumbler, and would drink straight tequila down as though it was just a glass of water. We often wondered why he wasn't drunk but he never seemed to get beyond a certain limit and yet he could drink all this heavy tequila and not show it at all.

MR. BARRIE: Was he working when you visited him?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes.

MR. BARRIE: Just doing small...?

MS. DE SALLE: He was doing easel paintings, but he was also involved in several industrial buildings in Mexico City,. He had a fantastic collection of Mayan sculpture in his back yard, everything was outside. Inside, too, but outside it was just like a fence of sculpture. Probably much of it is now in the archaeological museum in Mexico City. As I recall, it was the first time that I had seen that kind of sculpture in a private collection treated with such disdain, seemingly.

MR. BARRIE: Did he ever talk about his time in Detroit with you?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, he referred to it, to the controversies. I don't think that most of it impressed him very deeply.

MR. BARRIE: You mean the controversies?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes.

MR. BARRIE: He thought it was foolish?

MS. DE SALLE: Well, he had been involved in so many controversies before, that the Detroit controversy wasn't that much of an event.

MR. BARRIE: did he think favorably of the community?

MS. DE SALLE: I think, yes. My impression is that he thought of it favorably. He felt that it was pretty conservative. But I think that unless something was very revolutionary he wouldn't have been very deeply impressed. I'm sure one city was the same as another city as far as he was concerned, because most of the cities and most of the reactions of the public were fairly similar.

MR. BARRIE: Did he ever mention William Valentiner or Edsel Ford?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes, he did. He mentioned Valentiner particularly. I never knew Edsel Ford except for just an occasional meeting but I did know Valentiner very well, consequently I was much more interested in talking about somebody I knew than somebody I didn't know. I think Rivera had a very, very great respect for Valentiner and a very warm feeling for him. Everything I have ever heard him express has given me that impression.

MR. BARRIE: Frida the same?

MS. DE SALLE: Frida the same.

MR. BARRIE: Frida spoke English, right?

MS. DE SALLE: Yes. Diego spoke some English but not fluently. She was more fluent.

MR. BARRIE: That's fascinating. I didn't realize you knew the Rivera's.

MS. DE SALLE: Well, Zoltan was quite well known. Albert's writing was quite well known. In his way he was as much of an entity as Zoltan was in his way. And Albert was a great conversationalist and with a linguistic ability that was like that of no other person I ever knew. That was more or less within his realm of interest because he had formerly been associated with the theater. He was just linguistically inclined anyhow, just naturally. But his ability to express himself--I'm sure he wouldn't have had the difficulties I sometimes have trying to find the right word while being taped. He had the right word at any time. So he was always brought into discussions and conversations, particularly with artists and people of the theater and the literary public, because he was literary and with the theater and with the arts. It was an interesting exposure that he had with the so-called celebrities who came here. Then of course Rivera knew Zoltan and knew of our affiliation. It went kind of hand-in-hand. And I was no slouch, I mean I wasn't....

MR. BARRIE: That's just what I was going to say. You were there somewhere.

MS. DE SALLE: I put in my two cents' worth every once in a while.

MR. BARRIE: I'm sure you did. We'd better stop but I think...well, we'll stop for today.

[END OF TAPE 3 - SIDE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

