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Oral history interview with Lee Hoffman, 1977 June 1-15

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Transcript

Interview

LA: LINDA ABRAMSKY
LH: LEE HOFFMAN

LA: This is Linda Abramsky interviewing Lee Hoffman for the Archives of American Art. Lee, can you tell me a little bit about your background? Where were you born?

LH: I was born on Jefferson Avenue in Detroit.

LA: And what kind of environment did you live in? What was your early childhood like?

LH: Well, specifically, what do you mean?

LA: Tell me a little bit about your family. Did you come from a large family? Small family?

LH: There was just my brother and myself. I am the oldest. My brother is eighteen months younger than I am. Both my parents were immigrants.

LA: From what country?

LH: Russia. It was a very, very difficult existence. A very hard working family; poor, poor. They were all starting at the very bottom. It was an economic struggle. Of course, as a child, I don't think those things were important.

LA: You weren't aware of it?

LH: No; well, we were aware of it. It really didn't have an effect upon us. We always knew that there would be a roof over our head and food. I was part of that whole Depression era, too. But when you ask about "what was your background?", I would say that my family was very politically oriented. They were a very political family. And they were very involved in culture. So it was a combination of politics and culture.

LA: And those are the things that they passed on to you?

LH: I think so.

LA: What profession . . . ?

LH: My father worked at the Chrysler auto factory. He was some kind of mechanical engineer. My mother was a dressmaker; and even to this day she is still dressmaking. She was very interested in choral singing; would belong to a choral group. And we come from a tradition of reading poetry. There used to be musicales at our home. I remember groups of people coming with their guitars and playing Russian gypsy music. I remember sitting on the periphery listening. I think one of my fondest memories is that of my father coming home every Saturday with a load of books from the main branch of the public library. There were so many books they were tied with a rope. He would do this rain or shine, snow or ice. Those where the things that I looked forward to very much.

LA: So those are the outstanding memories that you have as a child?

LH: Well, outstanding memories if you're talking about the ambience or environment, you know, the kind of things that might have influenced me. I think I was a very introverted child. I think those kinds of children do lose themselves in books and fantasy things like that.

LA: Is this where you think you became interested in art?

LH: I think it's very difficult to say, you know, to pinpoint and say this time, this place. I think we lay the foundations of our life haphazardly; or maybe it's not haphazard. I do have a memory of my father taking me to the studio of Samuel Cashwan, the sculptor, when I was, I think, about four and a half or five years old. If you're talking specifically about an art memory, that probably would be the first memory I have.

LA: And what were your feelings? Do you remember what impressed you?

LH: I was holding onto my father's hand. I just remember being overawed by the whole scene. I can't remember anything specific, but I remember I stood there with a tremendous sense of awe.

LA: You were in awe of Samuel Cashwan? Or in awe of his work?

LH: No -- the whole -- I can't specifically . . . . Not certainly of the sculpture. I don't remember it as being a, you know, the kind of personality. Just the whole environment. That would be my earliest memory of a specific art event.

LA: What about your family? Did you come from an artistic family?

LH: No, no. As I said, my mother was very involved with singing, with choral groups. We would all have books around and poetry. As I said before, there would be groups of people coming to our home. There would be intense discussions about politics. They were socialistically oriented. But we also had a great feeling not only for culture per se but a great emphasis on Jewish culture. I was made to go to Jewish school three times a week right after school where I had to learn the language, to learn to speak it and to read and write it although I protested very heavily. This was part of the thing that my parents insisted on. They were not religious, but they insisted on what I call the cultural side.

LA: So those where the things they emphasized?

LH: Yes.

LA: So you really didn't come from a family where there were painters or sculptors or craftsmen?

LH: No.

LA: What would you say were your chief interests when you were young, when you were growing up? Would you say that politics was something that also was very important to you?

LH: Yes. We were always involved with politics. I don't know whether I was interested. It was part of the background. Well, yes, I was interested because I used to be on the debating teams at school. One of my favorite subjects always was history. During school I was always involved in current events. I was captain of the debating team. So, yes, that was a very big part of my life. No question about it.

LA: So as far as your art memory is concerned, you remember this visit to Samuel Cashwan's studio. Were there any other outstanding memories that you have as a child?

LH: Yes. I remember my father taking me to see the Diego Rivera murals in the Detroit Institute of Arts. I remember the whole controversy about them. There is one other memory that I can pinpoint. You remember I spoke to you about my father's trip to the Soviet Union?

LA: Yes.

LH: He went with a group of engineers from either Ford Motor or Chrysler --

LA: Your father's job at Chrysler was an engineer?

LH: You know, I don't remember specifically -- it had something to do with the mechanical part. Mechanical engineering, yes. It's funny, I think of him as a humanist; I don't think of him as a mechanical kind of person. He left this country for a period of a few years to go to Russia with this group. When he returned, the gift that he brought from the Soviet Union was a big album -- rather a portfolio. They were probably reproductions. I remember sitting on his lap and leafing through these.

LA: About how old were you at this time?

LH: I think I was probably ten or eleven, somewhere around there.

LA: What were your interests in school when you were going to elementary school and junior high school?

LH: Debating and reading. I always felt that I was singled out for reading and current events, things like that. That's why I think history and literature became my favorite subjects. I didn't like at all anything dealing with sciences or math. But I was very, very interested in literature and in history.

LA: Do you remember reading much about art at this point?

LH: No, I don't remember it. Oh, when we talk about reading, the *Book of Knowledge* comes very specifically to my mind. I literally nourished myself on the *Book of Knowledge*; especially the fairy tales and the folk tales. Anything that had to do with fantasy I would really become very submerged in.

LA: Fantasy has been a very important part of your life, has it not?

LH: Yes, that's right. It wasn't until later years that architecture and all these things came into play. But in childhood, it was anything that I could lay my hands on that had to do with fiction or fantasy; but nothing really specific.

LA: And, of course, your parents encouraged you to read everything that you could?

LH: I don't think it was an overt kind of thing. Except that even as a child I used to wonder how my father could take two busses in all kinds of weather -- I remember snowstorms all the time -- I remember being curled up on the couch and saying: oh, I can't wait until six or seven o'clock; I know he is not going to fail me; he's going to walk in with that big bundle of books tied up with a rope. And he always did. There might be nine or ten books, and these would last me a week or two. That is a very outstanding memory of my childhood.

LA: So you were a young child growing up during the Depression, years but you don't remember the effects of the Depression?

LH: I do remember a lot being spoken in the house about it because my father lost his job. When he came back from the Soviet Union he never did get a job again. So that the entire responsibility of the family fell on my mother's shoulders. She was the sole support. And although in the background we would hear all this about the Depression and about how they were going to make ends meet -- it was part of the background music -- but I can't remember ever being that worried about it.

LA: Why did your father go to the Soviet Union -- why did he go back?

LH: Why did he go to the Soviet Union? Well, first of all, there was the opportunity. It was during the time of the Depression. There were no jobs. And I think also he was politically influenced.

LA: After the Russian Revolution?

LH: Right. Both my parents had come from Russia. Both of them had very strong Socialist leanings; I think my mother probably more than my father. And the idea of his going was to establish a base and take the family over. I do recall being terrified at the thought that we would have to pull up roots and I remember being very grateful to my father for coming back.

LA: So he went looking for a house and looking to settle there?

LH: In the back of his mind . . . . It was my mother's urging that he was to look for a permanent place for us because she felt that everything was over in this country. But my father began to write letters back saying that the Soviet Union was no place to raise American children.

LA: Why? Did he express his reasons?

LH: He felt the hardships were enormous. He never would spell it out. But instinctively I felt that somewhere in his bones -- even though he wouldn't really spell it out -- that he just felt it was not the kind of environment he wanted his kids to be raised in.

LA: Would you say he was a bit disillusioned?

LH: Yes.

LA: And did he transmit that to you when he came back?

LH: I don't know. I just know that my feelings were of such great gratitude that I didn't have to go. I don't think that he transmitted feelings of disillusionment. I just remember being elated.

LA: That you weren't going to Russia?

LH: Right.

LA: All right, getting back onto your art background -- did you have any formal or informal training as far as painting or sculpture is concerned?

LH: No.

LA: None of that. Then when you went on to high school, what was the curriculum which you took up there?

LH: Well, I did a very radical thing for those days. I attended Hutchins Intermediate School. All my friends went on to Central High School. That was the thing to do then: I mean they all went from intermediate school to

Central High School. And I think that, in a way, I was already starting to rebel against a typical existence. Central High probably epitomized for me at that time everything that was, by our terms, we would call it middle class. I had just read *Arrowsmith* and I was determined that I was going to do something with my life, something nobler than going to Central High School. I went to Cass Technical High School. Now, to be perfectly honest, that might have just been irrational. And who knows what the irrational forces were? Maybe I felt that I couldn't compete with that kind of environment -- I don't know. Probably it was a combination of things. But I enrolled in Cass Tech. I was the only girl in a sea of boys. I really felt terribly uncomfortable and I . . . .

LA: This is a technical high school.

LH: Yes. And I enrolled in a science course. I was going to become a bacteriologist.

LA: This, of course, at that time was very unusual, wasn't it?

LH: It was. Now that I think about it, I was always doing the unusual. It was probably a combination of the fact that I had to be different and not go the same route. You know, I'm beginning to think about these things for the first time. It was both things: the fact that I was not going to go the route the way all the other girls were going to go. And the second thing, it might have been a sense of fright, too, of having to cope socially with what I felt maybe I couldn't cope with. Or maybe it was not my interest. And the third thing: the simmering of this idealism had already begun; maybe the political idealism was being translated in other directions. That book *Arrowsmith* changed my life for four years.

LA: What exactly were those changes?

LH: Well, the fact that I went to Cass Tech, enrolled in a science course and that I was going to become a bacteriologist. I did not particularly enjoy Cass Tech. The only thing that sustained me there was that that was the time when I became immersed in debating. I did become captain of the debating team, and we used to debate other high schools at that time.

LA: What about your science curriculum?

LH: I hated every minute of it. Well, I shouldn't say that. I hated physics and math. And there was a dichotomy because I couldn't cope with the physics and mathematics part. But in biology and bacteriology I was an A student. With the other subjects -- chemistry, physics, math -- I could barely make the C. As a matter of fact, when they interviewed me they said they had never seen a student like that that was so split between . . . . But I was still determined to go on with it. Now at this point you're supposed to ask me the crucial question: what happened afterward?

LA: Well, what followed that?

LH: Well, I entered Wayne State University. And it was a blow to me to find that after three years at Cass Tech with chemistry and all those science courses that when I tried to take the science courses at Wayne that I couldn't cope with them.

LA: Why couldn't you?

LH: I honestly don't know whether it was a different level, whether I could only go up to a certain level and couldn't go beyond that. And then I really began reevaluating my interests. I realized that basically I was more tuned into the humanistic subjects.

LA: Had you taken any liberal arts courses at Cass Tech?

LH: Well, at Cass it was at a minimal. But, again, it was the English, the history that I was very good at and really very interested in. In fact, there was one teacher there, an English teacher -- Mr. Beltray [phon. sp.] -- who I think I looked up to as a wonderful cultured person and who really sustained me during those years at Cass. They were not happy years. And at Wayne I realized that I really had to come to a decision that basically I was not a science person and after one year at Wayne I gave up the whole idea of science.

LA: And you transferred into liberal arts?

LH: I transferred into liberal arts and into the only thing that at that time one went into, which was teaching.

LA: This of course meant changing from a curriculum which was male oriented, male dominated, into now a career which is very much female dominated?

LH: Right. There was one point when I graduated from Cass Tech where I still toyed with the idea of going into medicine. Medicine had always fascinated me. I remember that my father went down and interviewed the dean

of the medical school. He just went down without my knowledge. He came back and told me that he had had this interview and the dean said absolutely that it would be idiotic; what he said was, "if I had a daughter, I would never want her to go through the grueling education, which he doubted I would ever use, that I would probably get married." I do recall being disappointed. I've probably overemphasized -- I did graduate from Cass Tech with pretty good marks. And I think that if I had gotten into medicine I might have rallied my forces and gone through with it, even though it was such a shock to find out when I went to Wayne University that I really couldn't cope with it. But I think the motivation was so strong. . . But at this point when I saw that medicine was out, I figured -- well, bacteriology really didn't interest me. Then I began thinking of other alternatives. And at that time what else was there? You went into teaching.

LA: And you wanted to get your teaching degree from Wayne State?

LH: Right.

LA: All right, during those years, I should say your high school and college years, can you think of any memories or any experiences that were very outstanding for you that were very influential on your life then that would carry through in your career later on?

LH: Yes. As I look back, there was one important -- I don't know whether you'd call it event or whole idea that I became submerged in -- and that was the dance. I think I must have been about three years old when I was taken to the first performance of Isadora Duncan and being so overwhelmed by what I saw as a child. So actually what I'm saying is that there were two events: there was the Samuel Cashwan event and then there was the Isadora Duncan event. Somewhere buried in the recesses of my memory I think it was Isadora Duncan I saw as a child. I also remember being taken to see Irma Duncan who was the sister of Isadora. It was called the Three Duncan Dancers. This was held at Symphony Hall. I remember sitting in the center balcony first row. And when I saw the performance I was so overwhelmed with what I saw that I was determined to become a dancer.

LA: Oh, really?

LH: Yes. And now that I think about it, from the age of about seven to thirteen I was enrolled in the Department of Parks and Recreation's after school program. At that time they would have programs twice a week after school from three-thirty to five-thirty o'clock. One day it would be drama on the stage, and the other day would be dancing. I adored every moment of that. And not only did I dance on the one day a week but at home I used to lock myself in my room, put on the victrola, and start doing an Irma Duncan number for hours on end.

LA: You were very inspired by that?

LH: Yes. I was very inspired by the dance. At that time everybody was taking ballet dancing. It was the first time that what we call "natural" dancing --

LA: Into more like modern dancing --

LH: Yes. Right. I think I attended the program for years. One of the most gratifying moments came when the director of the program -- I can even remember her name -- Miss _____ -- felt that I was so talented that she wanted to take me to New York to continue a career in dancing. I must have been about twelve or thirteen -- well, no, it was earlier, probably ten or eleven. At that time I was taking piano lessons. Everybody just automatically took piano lessons. I begged my mother; I said "I'd much rather take dancing lessons." Of course she thought I was crazy, you know, to go off to New York and things like that. But the dance figures in my early childhood as being a high point in my life.

LA: Now why didn't you pursue it? Was it because your parents didn't want you to? Or --

LH: No, I think by the time I got into high school. . . That was the interest until middle intermediate school. Then by that time I think my energies were being focussed into something more practical.

LA: Like bacteriology or -- ?

LH: Right. Obviously I knew I was not going to become a dancer. I don't know. I knew that I was not going to be a professional dancer. But I do remember that the happiest moments of my childhood would be when I was dancing. I think that as a child you're happy with what you do well and I was always sought out and praised for my grace and for my ability. And I was (quote) the "teacher's pet" because of that. So, yes, I was very involved with dance. But as far as specifically art, no, I can't say --

LA: I was going to ask if there was any particular individual at this time during high school and college years that you met that would be come an inspiration to you for your career later on as director of an art gallery?

LH: No, I cannot think of anything specific.

LA: So that interest really was not developed until much later?

LH: Right. Yes.

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: That was significant to you?

LH: No. I just remember reading fairy tales avidly. And my imagination. I love the -- I read everything. I still read. To this day I'm a voracious reader.

LA: So then we were talking about your interests in high school which were in terms of science and engineering.

LH: Not engineering; really science.

LA: Science and bacteriology?

LH: Yes.

LA: But then you went on to college and you changed your curriculum?

LH: I think it was during my first year at college when I really began to reassess my interests and I thought: what am I going into science for ; I'm basically a humanist; I'm interested in history, in those courses that dealt with literature or history. Actually I did liked science courses like physics or chemistry. I did like certain courses - biology and, as I said before, bacteriology. And I came to a very serious conclusion that it was ridiculous for me to pursue science when my interests were more on a humanistic basis.

LA: So then when did you make he switch?

LH: During my second year at Wayne I went into teaching. When I look back and think of what was available to women at that time. . . I graduated in 1940. Everybody I knew went into. . . What did women do in those days? I'm hard put to think of something else. I think we went into teaching not that we loved teaching but simply because that was the thing to do in those days. That was the only career that women thought of in terms of a career.

LA: So your degree actually is in eduction, in a liberal arts background?

LH: Yes, it's in education. A liberal arts background.

LA: So after college then you went on -- ?

LH: After college I got a job teaching. My first assignment was in a school that was seventy per cent black.

LA: Where was this?

LH: It was the Smith School.

LA: Is that on the east side of the city?

LH: East side around Vernor. I was to teach first grade. I remember walking into my classroom and there was a note on the desk from the previous teacher. It said, "Don't feel badly. There have been seven teachers before you and nobody can handle this class." That was my first -- no, I'm sorry -- I've made a mistake -- that was not my first assignment. My first assignment was a school around the State Fair grounds. I taught there, oh, I think about a year. And then I got married. That was it. After that World War II broke out a month after we were married -- no, the war broke out several months before we were married. We immediately went to the West Coast, stayed there for a year, then my husband went overseas.

LA: How did you meet your husband?

LH: How did I meet my husband? My very best friend at Wayne University was getting married after graduation. Her brother's best friend was my husband -- Harry Hoffman. And yet we had never met. We met at my friend's wedding.

LA: And, of course, at that time he had already received his degree in medicine?

LH: Yes, he had just received his degree. I have to laugh because I always used to tell my children when they were little -- it was one of the truly romantic things -- they always wanted to know the story of "Mommy, how did you meet Daddy?" The moment I met him I knew this was the man I was going to marry.

LA: Oh, really!

LH: Yes. I was sitting at a table. He was not supposed to be at the dinner. I was. He took a look at me and went up to his best friend and said, "I'm staying for dinner because I've met somebody I want to take to dinner." I remember sitting there and thinking: well, this is it; this is the man I'm going to marry.

LA: That's really very interesting. Before you were married?

LH: Well, five or six months.

LA: So then you married and then you went to the West Coast?

LH: Yes, a month after we were married he was inducted into the Navy. We lived in Palo Alto, California.

LA: This was in -- what? 194_?

LH: It was about 1942 or 1943, somewhere around there. He was supposed to have gone overseas immediately but we had nine months grace. We lived in San Jose and is Palo Alto. Which was a marvelous experience. We's go to San Francisco every weekend.

LA: Were you working here at all?

LH: You mean was I working when I met my husband?

LA: No, when you went to California.

LH: Yes, I was teaching.

LA: You were teaching in California?

LH: No -- you mean in California? No, I didn't teach there at all. He was very fortunate. He worked half a day in the Navy and then had the rest of the day off. We explored the whole California. . . It was such a marvelous place to live. We were always in San Francisco. But always living on the edge of the abyss. We never knew when the orders would come through. So it was like living every day that this was going to be your last. We thought originally it was only going to be like a month or two. It lasted for nine months I think before he was sent overseas.

LA: Good. So you'd go into San Francisco quite often?

LH: Yes, we went every weekend. At that time I had never been to Europe but in my visual fantasy I imagined that Europe must be very much like this. Europe began to play a very important part in my -- I don't know if you'd call it my fantasy life or what. And I was determined that I was going to get to Europe.

LA: Now was this because of things that you had read about Europe? Or because of things that people had told you?

LH: It was because of things I had been reading all my life about Europe, the culture and history. And any time I met a European person I always felt that I was basically more European than American. I had a great affinity for European people.

LA: Their life-style?

LH: Their life-style, their whole philosophical approach to life. As a matter of fact, I've always had a feeling of being alienated __ ____ American life and I think I still feel it to this point.

LA: Now I have to ask the question: what about the artistic side? At this point were you at all influenced?

LH: At this point I became very interested in architecture. And to this day I am intensely interested in architecture.

LA: Now again this was just on your own personal -- ?

LH: Yes. Looking, observing and so forth.

LA: Exactly what style of architecture? Or is there anything that anything that you could single out that is significant?

LH: No. I think everything dealing with. . . When I thought of Europe and of going to Europe I probably was very

attracted to the architecture. It would be so totally different from what we had in America. And I think Europe appealed to me not only from a human point of view -- the kind of people -- but visually. I had a tremendous desire to get to Europe, and not necessarily to the museums. But just the ambience.

LA: Any one particular country?

LH: You mean any one particular country that I was drawn to?

LA: That you were fascinated with?

LH: No, I can't think of any particular country. Probably France, Italy. I don't think of the Norwegian [Scandinavian] countries at all. For some reason or other. Maybe it has to do with their more natural phenomena, with mountains and so forth. I was interested in cities, in buildings. In fact, as I talk about it -- I haven't been to Europe now for about twelve years -- and I'm getting that yen to go back. I think as I look back now that San Francisco activated whatever I had been reading in the past because it looked European to me.

LA: The narrow streets?

LH: The streets, the architecture, the whole ambience of the city, the mixture of people. And of course I do remember going to the museum there -- is it the de Young Museum? They have a fantastic Chinese museum -- collections there. But anything visual always appealed to me. I was a very visual person.

LA: But you liked the feeling of the streets themselves and walking through the streets?

LH: Right. Again, I've spoken of my interest in history. When I think of buildings or of cities I'm always tying it up with the historical. I haven't for a long time. But as a young person I think that was the excitement that was created inside of me -- the historical alongside with the visual. And I remember I used to say I think I do believe in reincarnation because when I did go to Europe for the first time -- I know I'm digressing -- but the thought hit me I had the feeling of deja vu, that I must have lived here at one time in my life, maybe centuries ago. I would go through certain parts and it was as if I had been _____ _____ before.

LA: When did you go to Europe for the first time?

LH: For the first time when the children were -- let's see, Carla must have been about nine or ten or eleven -- probably in about 1955 or 1956.

LA: So this was quite a few years later that you went to Europe?

LH: Yes. Europe figured a great deal -- it must have been in my fantasy life, too.

LA: What about your husband? Of course, you were concerned about his wellbeing. Was he stationed in Europe?

LH: No, he was stationed in the Pacific, in the New Hebrides. I came back to Detroit. That was when I went to teach at the Smith School. I taught for three or four years.

LA: While your husband was overseas?

LH: Yes. It was a terrible time in my life, really one of the blackest periods.

LA: Because of the separation?

LH: Yes. And the fear that, you know, that you'd read in the papers. There were several people at the school that were in the same situation. We would talk about if we would get home and if we would see that letter. That was the most important thing in our life: would we see that blue envelope when we got home. That was all we lived for -- at least that was all I lived for -- was for those letters. It was a bad time. I started teaching at the Smith School. I was very successful there as a teacher.

LA: Did you try to lose yourself in your work at that point?

LH: I don't remember what I tried to do. You just tried to do the best job you could. We had the first race riots in Detroit at that time. I remember being warned about being careful walking the streets around the school. I never had any fears, though. I felt very comfortable at the school and I was very comfortable with the children there. But I knew that teaching was not what I was going to end up doing. I did the job well and I liked teaching. But I missed adult -- I missed the stimulation of speaking with adults. I knew at that point that that was not what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.

LA: And you made that -- ?

LH: Well, I made it one part of my mind. I didn't consciously sit down and say it. At that point I didn't know what was going to happen in my life. All I wanted was for my husband to come back home and just life a normal life. The thing that sustained me a great deal was that during the evenings we had a group of about ten women whose husbands were all overseas. At that time we had the Cass Theater in Detroit. And we were very involved in going to the theater and to concerts and reading books and discussing them. Those were the things that really sustained me.

LA: So that really goes back to your family background again, doesn't it -- intellectuals getting together and discussing books?

LH: Right. I have always been into theater and dance and things like that, and it kind of sustained me I think for about three or four years.

LA: And so then your husband returned in -- was it 1945?

LH: He came back in, I guess, it was 1945 and was stationed at San Diego. I flew to San Diego. Contrary to what everybody said, to this day I dislike San Diego. To me it was a small hick town. I wasn't particularly happy with San Diego.

LA: Culturally deprived?

LH: Yes, that's a very good word for it. I felt out of the main stream of what was happening. But it was a nice easy existence. But the city itself held no interest for me. I thought it was just a small provincial town. And then I got pregnant. My husband was switched to Farragut, Idaho. I was in my ninth month and I was petrified at the thought of going to Farragut, Idaho.

LA: It brought back memories of going to the Soviet Union?

LH: I never thought of that. Could be. Anyway I felt very frightened. I was in the ninth month when my husband got the orders and he was going to Farragut, Idaho. I felt that I had to come back to Detroit to have my baby.

LA: Your family was still here?

LH: My family was here. It was very important. So in my ninth month I took the train back across the U.S.A.

LA: With your husband?

LH: No, alone. He was going on to Farragut. I had a small compartment on the train and during those three nights and two days I never knew when I might have my baby. I do remember with gratitude that my father came because we had to change _____ _____ and he did meet me in Chicago. And we came back to Detroit.

LA: By train

LH: Yes. And then I had my first baby Carla.

LA: So your husband wasn't here when Carla was born?

LH: No. Two days after he flew to Detroit. I was living with my parents. And then when Carla was three months old, on the worst night of the year with two or three feet of snow , tat ten o'clock at night we got on the plane, my father following me onto the plane with bottles and everything, and we flew to Farragut, Idaho. And I think the only thing that sustained me in Farragut, Idaho was the Sunday edition of the *New York Times*.

LA: So I take it again that you were not happy there?

LH: No. It also was a time when the war was over. All the friends were coming back and getting established. My husband had transferred to the regular Navy before he left. Supposedly the people that would transfer to the regular Navy would be able to get out, resign, whenever they wanted to. That was one of the advantages; also you had professional advantages. But it didn't work out that way. We couldn't wait to get out and get on with the business of living. And here we were stuck in Farragut, Idaho. The only diversion was going to the officers' club and getting drunk and playing cards. Neither of which I indulged in. I literally had nobody to talk to. I felt completely alienated, completely foreign to any of these people around me. I get the daily and Sunday *New York Times* to this day. Out there I got only the Sunday *New York Times*. And I literally mean it; it was the only thing that kept my sanity.

LA: That was the only intellectual _____ books

LH: Right. But living out West I think the experience that I had. . . My husband really wanted to settle in

California. He too out his license and it is very difficult to get your license there, but during the war --

LA: Wanted to live in San Diego?

LH: Yes. He loved that life-style. And yet I always felt too far from the source -- I felt that the West was another world. We were like never really into. . . It was too far from what was really happening. It was too far from the East, too far from the real nitty-gritty of what was happening in the country where decisions were being make like, say, Washington. I think already twenty-five years ago I sense that that was the hedonistic life; whereas I was more involved with --

LA: Did you ever have a desire to live in New York City?

LH: No. That is the other extreme. I like going there and I like talking with the kind of people that I meet and so forth. But I do have a love-hate relationship with New York. I hate it and I love it. I confess that there are things about it that I hate.

LA: Then what is it? You were born in Detroit, have lived in Detroit all your life -- ?

LH: Yes. Doesn't that sound -- ?

LA: No, but what is it about Detroit? Why Detroit?

LH: In those days. . . You see, now you have tremendous mobility. In those days nobody thought of getting up and leaving the city. After the war everybody came back. Detroit was a very nice place to live in those days. We raised our families in lovely neighborhoods. We went about the business of living and never even questioned whether we wanted to live in any other place.

LA: So when you made the decision that you weren't going to live on the West Coast there was no real choice to be made?

LH: Right. There was no choice. First of all, my husband's professional affiliations and so forth were in Detroit. And one of the reasons that we made the decision to come back rather than live in California. . . My husband really wanted to live in California. I admit that he liked the life-style there.

LA: So you were really the main reason why you came back?

LH: Yes. I kept saying that I felt that it was very important for children to have a sense of rootedness and family and tradition. I think there are two sides to my personality. I am a person who is very rebellious in many aspects but intellectual ideas and in many things that go on. At the same time I have a very deep foundation of what I think are important --

LA: Family and roots.

LH: Roots and family and so forth.

LA: So you came back to live in Detroit when Carla was how old?

LH: She must have been about almost going on two. After Farragut we were transferred to Seattle, Washington and then to Portland, Oregon.

LA: Oh, so you made two more stops.

LH: We made two more stops on the way.

LA: And how did those places appeal to you?

LH: Seattle, again, is beautiful. My husband loved the life-style. I felt deprived. I could not -- the intellectual stimulation was too much a part of me. It was all boating and skiing. I guess I never was an athlete. Well, I was at Hutchin Intermediate. I was captain of the basketball team and captain of the baseball team. But I think my interests were always more inward. And at that time I couldn't meet people that I could relate to.

LA: Were you living on a military base at the time?

LH: Being an officer's wife you didn't have to live on the base. In Seattle we had our own place. I loved the environment but I couldn't see staying there just purely for the physical part of it.

LA: So it was the isolation?

LH: Right. Then from there we moved to Portland. Which was a disaster because that was on a base and we lived literally in -- it was like a camp -- in one room. It was the only base they had whether it was officers or anybody's. I remember it rained for five months in Portland. I understand that now it is a place where a lot of young people want to go. When I hear "Portland" I only think of rain, rain, rain. Twenty-five or thirty years ago it was really a provincial place. It has probably changed now. But culture was always very important to me.

LA: And because you felt deprived you were very unhappy at the time?

LH: Yes.

LA: I can't help but wonder what was happening in terms of your artistic leanings during these periods?

LH: I am sure they were very latent. At this point I was only interested in getting back home and getting on with the business of living. I wanted to have my children, I wanted to raise a family. And in those days -- in the fifties -- as we look back now we think -- both myself and my friends -- we think that we lived through the most glorious years, the golden years.

LA: Why would you say that?

LH: Well, coming out of the Depression, my husband, my friends and so forth, you had nowhere to go but up, up.

LA: In terms of acquisitions?

LH: In terms of the material life, in terms of the opportunities, in terms of education. Our parents came here and had nothing. They were not particularly successful materially, neither my husband's nor mine. There was this whole big world open -- the good life.

LA: Was it the good life?

LH: Was it the good life? There are two ways of looking at it. While you're living it you're plagued with the same kind of problems that everybody is plagued with all the time. As you look back at it and compare it with what is going on now, we look upon it as the golden years. They were living it on a day to day basis -- no, hey weren't because I think I was beset by having to fit into a typical middle-class kind of existence.

LA: That you really didn't feel -- ?

LH: That I really didn't feel comfortable about. But these were my own personal problems. I was always in conflict with my. . . When I say I was "always in conflict" probably nobody ever knew it because, you know, I had everything. But internally I was always conflicted. Part of me wanted these things.

LA: Material things you mean?

LH: Yes. I always wanted a beautiful home. I was always dreaming about designing my own home. I think again that had to do with a feeling that was architectural and artistic. It wasn't the idea of having it because my neighbors had it or because I wanted a big home to live a certain way. It was like it would be an expression, an extension of my own self. I would design my own home. Or I was very interested in building design. Again, I think that was where my artistic expression would come out. Not to have it to be like all the others but to be uniquely my own thing. That was why it was so important. But I was conflicted because if your husband is a professional and if you do want to get to a certain point, you know, careerwise, you would probably have to belong to country clubs and do things like that which everybody else did. And I just would not do. And it presented problems. It was like always being on the periphery, always being on the outside. Everybody else was doing one thing and looking happy doing it. And why am I so miserable? Why do I have to be different?

LA: Did you feel in a sense stifled because you were kind of put into that mold so to speak? I mean did you, in fact, want a career, for example?

LH: No, I never thought of a career at that time. But I felt uncomfortable because I didn't fit the image. I didn't know who I was or where I was. I couldn't fit into any kind of. . . I felt uncomfortable with women. At that time you had your home; I had steady help. What did women do?

LA: What did women do?

LH: What did women do? Well, you played bridge. I could never learn how to play bridge and I felt very inadequate because I couldn't learn how to do the things that other women could do so easily. I didn't play golf I didn't go to luncheons. I'm not saying this with pride and I'm not putting them down for it. I just felt this was not what I was really interested in. But I was groping. I think at that period -- I was in my thirties -- I was kind of an unhappy person.

LA: Was there anyone that you could relate to?

LH: Oh, yes. I did find a few friends. Thank God, I think that's how everyone eventually works out these dilemmas: you do kind of gravitate to a few people who have the same ideas that you have. Not all doctors were materially minded; not all doctors belonged to country clubs. We found our own niche. So what we did was we built a cottage. That was not the popular thing to do. Instead of going to camp, our kinds went to the cottage. You look for alternate life-styles. I don't think you fall into them. You literally have to create them almost in order to keep your sanity.

LA: So what exactly did you do? What kind of things -- ?

LH: You see, in the fifties the intense emphasis on materialism was really very great. Now you have alternatives. But in that time all middle-class people lived the same way. There really weren't any alternatives then.

LA: So you had to really build your own world then?

LH: Yes. And it was not easy. Everything came with a struggle. God, it's not easy at any time. It's still hard.

LA: What did you do in order to find yourself? You say you were groping. What did you do?

LH: What did I do? I've never met anybody who's asked such pertinent questions. You really come right into the. . . What did I do? Again, I did an enormous amount of reading. I got into a philosophical state. It was like I was reading everything. I had to find the answers to things in my thirties. I was reading -- who is that philosopher -- Walter? I was reading everything: philosophy, religion, everything I could lay my hands on. We had just moved into Roslyn Road and it was during that time I bought my first work of art.

LA: Now this is in the northwest section of Detroit?

LH: Yes.

LA: And it was here that you bought your first work of art?

LH: No -- come to think of it, it wasn't. I was still living on Woodingham near Puritan in a little tiny house. Here were all the doctors living in these -- where was that? In the Detroit Golf Club section. And we were living in this little tiny house. Again, I was not going to be like all the others. That was when I bought my first work of art. Let's see, what was the first thing? I started to read about art.

LA: So it was during this time when you were in your thirties?

LH: Yes. Carla was, I think, about three years. old. I'd had my Danny. I had full time help. I wasn't about to go to luncheons and so all these other things. This is the first time I'm thinking very consciously about the development. I did belong to a few groups called social legislative groups that were interested in politics and in what was going on in the legislature either on the state level or the national level. But at the same time I began to subscribe to art magazines. Oh, another thing that occurs to me: my father took me to the Detroit Institute of Arts to see the Diego Rivera murals. I used to visit the Art Institute. I remember the whole hubbub about the Diego Rivera murals. I remember going back a few times with my father and looking at these.

LA: So your father really took you there not so much out of an appreciation for artistic style but more because of the political -- ?

LH: Probably, yes. And I can't remember if I actually saw Diego Rivera working there one time. Somehow in my memory I do have a memory of a man on a scaffold. I can't remember whether it was an actual thing that I saw or whether I saw a picture of it, but I remember --

LA: Do you remember the controversy at the time, or is it only in retrospect?

LH: Yes, I remember the controversy at the time.

LA: And you remember discussing that with your family?

LH: Yes. I think the first thing I ever bought was a Philip Evergood oil.

LA: Really?

LH: And bringing it home. You know, at that time you made dinner parties and all that. I've forgotten the name of the painting but the imagery was of a very old woman, her face was white and her hair was white, and there were these beautiful flowers in the back. It was a very typical Evergood. And I remember being raked over the

coals by all my friends; you know "who'd put anything like that in the house?" And, of course, being a rebel by nature and never listening to anybody. . . I always want my own way. The second thing I bought was a Ben Shahn water color. I put it over my couch. It was of a young boy with an ice cream cone. My husband thought it was ridiculous. My children thought it was ridiculous. And it was the first time I was influenced and I did return it. This water color was ninety dollars.

LA: Did you buy it in New York or here?

LH: I think I might have bought that at the Garelick Gallery.

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: This is a continuation of an interview with Lee Hoffman for the Archives of American Art on June I, 1977. Lee, I'd like to ask you how and when in your life did you really become very involved with the art world? Or when would you say was your early interest in art?

LH: Well, I am a great believer in a sense of continuity. I don't think that you can ever say: well, it was at this point that this happened. I do believe that we lay down in our lifetime -- at least in my own lifetime -- but specifically I think it was when I was in my early thirties. I had been doing a great deal of reading, was subscribing to a lot of magazines and was doing a lot of looking. And I think the purchase of the Evergood painting activated a really active rather than a dormant interest. And once you start in with a good work of art has a lot of meaning to you, you just don't hang it on the wall and forget about it. One thing leads to another.

LA: Can you remember anything specifically about that painting that was so meaningful to you? How did you come by it?

LH: Well, I went to see an Evergood show. Although I think the first -- did I speak about the Ben Shahn water color?

LA: Yes.

LH: Which was the first time and the only time that I ever returned anything because of the pressure that was put on me by the family and by friends and so forth. After I returned it, I remember thinking to myself that I was sorry I had returned it and I made a conscious decision that from then on I would not be influenced by other people, that I was just going to go my own way.

LA: Was this an interest that you developed purely on your own? Or were there any individuals that were influential?

LH: No, it was just purely on my own. I mean how can we account for. . . It's so hard to pinpoint, you know, what activates these interests. As I've said before, I think the amount of reading that I did as a child and as a young person which feeds the fantasy life. . . I think fantasy does -- did play a great part in my life.

LA: Was it the fantasy that also appealed to you that you discovered in paintings?

LH: Right. Exactly. Because that is an externalized example of fantasy and I think when you look at paintings you begin, in a certain way, you start fantasizing a great deal. There is also an intellectual process that goes on. The only way I can explain it is that these visual things would just delight me and excite me tremendously just looking at paintings.

LA: Can you remember any significant artist during the period that influenced you, that you admired greatly? Were there any particular schools or style?

LH: Well, at that time the interest came about in direct proportion to what was available in Detroit. At that time I think the only gallery was the Garelick Gallery. I would go there and look at things. Afterward there were the Werbe Gallery and then the Donald Morris Gallery. So that the exposure that I received was tin direct proportion to what was available at that particular time.

LA: What about the Detroit Institute of Arts? Did that play a significant role in your early interest?

LH: I used to visit the Detroit institute of Arts frequently. But I was really more interested in contemporary art. And at the time i was going there I don't think there was that much available. So I can't honestly say that there was anything there specifically. The general ambience of museums would always interest me. But my interest me. But my interest began to focus more and more on contemporary art. I think there's another reason why, too, because at that time --

LA: Exactly what time are we talking about now?

LH: All right, the early 1950s. And I think, too, at that time art intellectuals were very involved with art in a way, and -- this is maybe saying it in a very trite manner -- art almost became like a new religion.

LA: This was the age of the beatniks and --

LH: No, it was before that. The early fifties I think was a time of expanding. The old philosophies were dead. The war had finished. It was a time when I think people were looking for new horizons and new answers. Not that art was going to give it to them. But somehow intellectuals I think were drawn at that time --

LA: Now during the early part of the fifties, of course, was when the abstract expressionists were very active -- Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline.

LH: Right.

LA: Were you very much influenced by or interested in this particular school?

LH: No, because I didn't have access to it. I would read about it and I was very fascinated with it. But at that time I was not making frequent trips as a homemaker. In fact, my primary interest was raising the two children. So this was -- I don't know what you would call it -- it was just a very intense, avid interest and inclination. And, as I said before, instead of going with my friends to what their social life consisted of, I think I branched off into this.

LA: And you would go to the various galleries?

LH: Right.

LA: What kind of imagery -- you say that you were interested in contemporary art -- can you describe the imagery?

LH: The only thing I can think of at that time -- I saw Ben Shahn, I saw Philip Evergood simply because that was what was available. You asked me before why I bought that particular Evergood. It had a woman's face on it which was very, very significant to Evergood's style. He had a very distinct style. It's very difficult to cope with. Most people didn't respond to it. Maybe that was an added challenge to me.

LA: "Why do you want to hang this in your house?"

LH: Right. I hated questions like that. I found it very provocative, very fascinating.

LA: Did you find that you were very isolated in your viewpoint about the fact that it was very difficult?

LH: Oh, yes, very, very. I mean from then on everything that I brought home -- I was literally mocked for it. As I recall, one thing that probably made the greatest impression was acquiring my first Milton Avery. That was in the middle fifties. That, of course, was getting to a more abstract feeling. I tended to go more and more into the more abstract.

LA: But still it was recognizable imagery.

LH: Yes. I remember seeing the first Milton Avery show and I was smitten with it.

LA: Where was this?

LH: This was the first year that Donald Morris opened up; it was years ago, it was in a little house. I wanted to buy half the show. My husband would barely consent to buying one.

LA: Have you since become friends with Donald Morris?

LH: Oh, yes, we've been friends for many years.

LA: So your husband at this time really wasn't -- ?

LH: No, he just couldn't see it at all. It was at a time, too, when we were just getting started as far as home and his clinic and all these different expenditures and this was just kind of an added extra that he wasn't prepared to go along with. And besides which to him looking at an Avery water color just didn't make any sense. I'm trying to think of some of the other things. Well then, gradually, as I say, I began to buy. Then I did buy a Ben Shahn water color from the Werbe Gallery.

LA: Did you take back that painting? Do you still have it?

LH: No, I sold it. It was three figures sitting on a couch, each looking in a different direction, each person very isolated; a very typical Shahn, very strong, brilliant colors, flat shape. And, again, people coming in would just absolutely make very derogatory remarks about all this. But that never bothered me; after that first experience of returning a purchase from then on those things never bothered me. Then all during the fifties it was not only acquiring things; it was doing a tremendous amount of reading art magazines, and being very excited about the whole bursting forth of American art. I was very into European architecture and the European way of life and the ambience. But when it came to art I was more into what was happening in America.

LA: And was there one particular style or were there any particular artists that fascinated you?

LH: No. That didn't come until the sixties I think. But in the fifties it was just what was available to be seen in Detroit. At that time I was not going to New York very often. It was what I would call a general excitement and a general enthusiasm for art with a capital A.

LA: And, of course, this led on to an increased interest. So when did you become active professionally?

LH: Professionally? Well, I think this story is so marvelous that I must tell you about it. I often tell it to you people when they get a little discouraged. I think it was in 1962. My children were grown; my daughter was away at college; and Danny was in high school. In the back of my mind I was beginning to think: my God, what am I going to do with my life now. Sort of a nagging concern. I never verbalized it but it was hovering over me.

LA: Because your children had grown and you -- ?

LH: Right. I was very satisfied staying home. I enjoyed raising my children. Now as my friends and I look back, we think those were the golden years. But, anyway, entering into the sixties I began to see that I was a little different from most women and that I'd have to kind of ____ my own path.

LA: You were different because -- ?

LH: Of my interests. But I didn't consciously seek anything out. What happened was that I had gone to New York with my husband to a medical convention. The only reason I wanted to go along was because there was a Francis Bacon show at the Guggenheim Museum. I recall seeing the show and being absolutely bowled over by it. I had never seen such strong paintings. And going down the ramp of the Guggenheim, at the very bottom were huge paintings with drip -- not drip but stained edges -- the first time I had ever seen Morris Louis paintings. And I could not understand what was happening. All I remember is being in complete awe and not knowing what was happening here. It was mind boggling. I didn't know whether I liked it, I didn't know whether I hated it.

LA: But were you impressed by the mystique? by the color?

LH: Tremendously. By the size and the total. . . Well, you can imagine the contrast to Francis Bacon and then to come upon Morris Louis. My husband was raving and ranting against the Louis's. He thought the Bacons were fantastic. At that time I said, "Let's go to see the Bacon dealer." I've forgotten the dealer's name. He was upstairs somewhere on 57th Street. There were only two Bacon paintings. One was that very famous one of the pope enclosed in his box. It was $15,000. I begged my husband to buy the painting. Now in 1962, $15,000 was like $100,000 now. I remember it to this day. It was a navy blue painting and the figure encased, and of course the drama and the power. My husband was impressed with the painting but he felt it was insanity to pay $15,000 for a painting. We came back home on a Sunday night. I had forgotten to cancel the *FreePress* and the *News* and there were fourteen newspapers on the porch. I'm a compulsive reader. My husband wanted to throw out the fourteen newspapers. I said, "No, I've got to read everything that's going on in these papers." So it was Sunday night and by three o'clock in the morning I got to the last paper which was the *Detroit News*, the Sunday edition. On the art page there was a black box and there was an ad that said, "Wanted -- pleasant, mature woman for art gallery. Box 2223." And at three o'clock in the morning I sat down and wrote a chatty little letter. I remember writing that "I had been a housewife for eighteen years, that I had always had a very intense interest in art, that I liked to travel." I just casually mentioned my interests. At the very end I put "P.S. I have just come back from the Guggenheim show where I saw the Francis Bacon show and I thought it was great!" (exclamation point). Tuesday morning I got a call and they said it was Mr. Albert Landry from the J. L. Hudson Company Gallery and would I like to come down for an interview. I had had no idea what that box number was. I remembered reading something about a gallery going to open. I went down to J. L. Hudson's. The gallery was about three-quarters done. I was very impressed with the gallery. I walked into this gorgeous office and here was --

LA: This, of course, was in the downtown store.

LH: Yes. And here was this very sophisticated man. I looked around. We started to talk. I looked at the wall and I said, "Is that a Ben Nicholson?" He said, "No, but it looks like it." It was -- I can't remember the name -- a Re. . . --

anyway I really can't remember the name. We were together only fifteen minutes. He said, "Well, as far as I'm concerned, Mrs. Hoffman, you can have the job. But you will have to come back and be interviewed by Mr. J. L. Hudson, Jr;, by Mr. Simmons, the vice-president; by Mr. Brown, the head of personnel; and by Mr. Marakis, the head of this. . ." Now this was on a Friday and I wasn't going to be interviewed until Monday morning. And I did not sleep for two days. I was very, very impressed with the gallery. Mr. Landry told me the direction they wanted for the gallery, that they wanted to establish a gallery that would be on the par of a New York gallery. So I was very, very nervous. But when I got to my first interview with Mr. Simmons, after five minutes I felt. . . I can still remember that feeling of tremendous elation because I realized that here were all these top executives and I knew something that these people just didn't know anything about, and that was modern art.

LA: And you think this is what impressed them?

LH: I don't know what impressed them. I was just what I felt internally. No, they didn't ask me specific questions about modern art. They were not interested; they were more interested in me as a person. But I sensed that -- well, I was almost euphoric because I realized that there was an _____ that I had -- what's the word -- "staked out" for myself in my life. The interviews lasted for about three or four hours with each one of them. I felt very confident, very confident. The executive suites are on the eleventh floor. By the time I came down to the seventh floor and walked into the gallery, Mr. Landry said, "Well, you have the job."

LA: That must have been quite a milestone for you.

LH: I was very, very elated. When I got home the first thing I said to my husband was, "You see, all those years of paying for the art magazine subscriptions has finally paid off." He used to be so resentful that I was subscribing to every art magazine there was and he would say, "Well, how many does one person need?" But the justification. . . But there is an ending to that. And this is what I think is the punch line. After a few months I happened to come across a folder that was labelled "personnel". I looked through the folder. There must have been two hundred letters of application for this job. Most of them very fine typewritten resumes, master's degrees, television experience. I kept reading all of those resumes. Then I came across my little chatty handwritten letter. On top of the letter -- I can still remember it to this day -- was written, "This one looks like what we want."

LA: So what was it? The personal -- ?

LH: I walked into Mr. Landry's office and said, "How did they pick this letter?" He said, "They knew exactly what they wanted. They did not want just somebody with degrees; they wanted somebody who was enthusiastic, who could relate to people, and who has an interest in art. And this came out in the letter."

LA: Your enthusiasm particularly -- ?

LH: Yes. He said, "that little p.s. was what got to them."

LA: Now you say "they" -- who are you referring to? Who was most responsible?

LH: Probably a combination of Mr. Brown, who was head of personnel, and Mr. Simmons, the vice-president of J. L. Hudson's. This gallery was their baby. They were determined to make it into a very, very important gallery.

LA: So then you were really there in on the ground floor?

LH: Right.

LA: There was no predecessor? [machine turned off]

LH: The reason why I like to tell this story is because young people coming in today with the kind of resumes that they have to present feel so discouraged. There are hundreds of applicants for every job. I try to show young people that sometimes acting spontaneously and just following your instincts rather than doing the proper thing, that many times by not following the rules you will catch the attention. There are so many qualified people today for every job that handing in the typical kind of resume becomes very discouraging. And that's why it's sometimes better if you just act spontaneously rather than intellectualize everything. This is a perfect example. This letter was just a very spontaneous thing. It happened at the end of my trip. I was highly excited about it putting in that last comment. And there it was over two hundred letters of application with all these degrees and all the accouterments that I had none of. And I think it's just as applicable now as it was in those days. What I'm trying to say is? if people would just act more spontaneously -- everybody is so cool now and so controlled. . . This is just one bit of advice that I like to pass on. And whenever I tell this story people just love it, especially the young people.

LA: I enjoyed it. It's really a fascinating story.

LH: And then you wonder what in life. . . I would think about it afterward: my God, to me it seemed that I had in a way prepared myself for this.

LA: Well, when you think of all the events -- if you had stopped your paper service and you hadn't fourteen papers on your doorstep you might not have ever seen that advertisement.

LH: Right. It's just incredible. And really out of my whole life those ten years at the J. L. Hudson Gallery were the most exciting, the most rewarding, the most fantastic decade.

LA: Let's talk about that. Again, you were there on the ground floor.

LA: Right.

LA: What really at the _____ _____ what kind of gallery did they want to create?

LH: They wanted to create a gallery that would show the best in contemporary art. Part of it was a service to the public. They wanted to do an educational job. During the sixties there was the beginning of a big explosion of American art. I don't know if you can recall, but it was art with a capital A. That was one of the most exciting things that was happening. You had it also in other forms like rock music and so forth. The explosion of American art, you know, the whole abstract movement, was late in the fifties, but it was in the sixties when it began to be marketed.

LA: So in the sixties then it began to filter down to other areas?

LH: To the middle class, right. And there was a group of men at J. L. Hudson's that were determined to have a first-class, to gallery.

LA: And these were: Mr. Simmons -- ?

LH: Mr. Simmons, Mr. J. L. Hudson, Jr., _____ and Mr. Brown. Now this didn't come easy. I found afterward that they met with tremendous _____ resistance.

LA: From whom?

LH: From other Hudson executives. It was not a unanimous decision. But they won out. They spent a great deal of time researching this. They went to New York to get the director.

LA: Who was the director?

LH: Mr. Albert landry was the first director of the gallery. And the plans and what happened, as i look back on it, were just really incredible.

LA: What were the artistic priorities there? In other words, at the beginning when you first came, who were the artists that were shown? And what was the particular artistic style that -- ?

LH: I think they started with the more or less tried -- I remember the opening; I think it was a salute to Valentiner, the director of the Detroit Institute of Arts. There were some very fine things there -- Nolde water colors. When I think of them now I could just. . . Especially the German expressionists -- Nolde water colors. We had Giacomettis, we had Calders in a little room off Mr. Landry's office. We had some of the finest things. The first year there we had a show of Picasso linocuts. We had Dubuffet shows; surrealist shows; and then into the color field paintings; and abstract expressionists -- Hans Hofmann.

LA: So then you started out really with more of what would have been the more traditional Europeans?

LH: I don't know; I think that we did both side by side. I don't think it was predetermined at the beginning that we were going to do it this way and then branch out. Intermittently, we would have shows of European maters and then shows of American artists. We went back and forth. The whole idea was to make it first quality. Quality was very important.

LA: So that really was the priority rather than having any specific direction where you would show exclusively one particular style or school?

LH: Right. It was quality. But more and more we were geared toward the contemporary American art scene -- abstract expressionism and color field painting.

LA: And that then became the direction as the years went on?

LH: Right, Probably in the middle or late sixties we had a show of surrealists where paintings came from Europe.

LA: Who would decide the shows that would be -- ?

LH: That was why it was so exciting because I really was never in the role of an employee.

LA: Exactly what were your duties then?

LH: I started out I think it was two days a week; then very quickly it ran up to three, and afterward to four and then five. Although I didn't get the title of assistant director until about four years afterward, but that was literally what happened fright from the beginning.

LA: Really?

LH: I did a lot of selling. Both directors -- Mr. Landry and later Mr. _____ -- were very unusual in the sense that it was not a question of rank. I was consulted on all the shows. They, of course, made the final decision. What was really exciting was not only selling the art, educating the public, but also sitting in and discussing things with Mr. Landry or Mr. Piagantini. They would go to New York on the average of twice a month. When they came back they would ask me, "What do you think of this?" or "What do you think of that?" While my opinions were not always acted upon, they were always considered, given very top consideration. Everything was done together.

LA: So you would get together and throw ideas back and forth?

LH: Right. And that was exciting -- that interchange of ideas.

LA: Now was Mr. Piagentini there at the same time -- ?

LH: No. Mr. Albert Landry was there, I think, for about the first six years. He had some great ideas for where he wanted this gallery to go.

LA: What were some of those ideas? What was the physical setting like?

LH: Beautiful. It was probably larger than any gallery in New York. It was very elegant.

LA: Modern? Or was it -- ?

LH: Oh, very modern, yes. Except that Mr. Landry's office was very European in a sense, a combination of contemporary. . . He was basically European, a combination of Italian and French, was educated in Europe and had spent a great deal of time there. He was an artist when he was young. He was very grounded not only in European art but in the whole European ambience. So his private office reflected a certain European elegance. I do want to say here what a very important part of my duties was talking to people going through the gallery. There were hundreds of people going through and I enjoyed tremendously the interaction and the educating. I would spend hours talking to people.

LA: So the gallery wasn't and exclusive gallery where people would come simply because they were there to purchase?

LH: No.

LA: These were people who would be in the store shopping for their clothes and so on?

LH: Many of them, yes. We would meet some people with very negative comments. I mean constantly we were being bombarded with negative comments about the art. You had to learn to handle that without hostility because it was a public store and the average person looking at contemporary art was mystified, horrified, and could get very mad.

LA: So in that way it made for a very, very unique sort of gallery?

LH: Right. It was very unique. Having a gallery like that in a department store was truly a very, very unique concept.

LA: I remember in the latter part of the sixties there was always an interest on the part of many of the contemporary museums around the country to open up store front galleries. But actually in a sense you had this built in having a gallery such as this in a large department store?

LH: That's right. I remember Mr. Landry's comment to me about the second day I was there. He said "What do

you think are the possibilities of selling good art?" And by "good" I assume he meant not only good but expensive because art prices were starting to climb. And I said, "Well, frankly, Mr. Landry, Detroit is a five-hundred dollar town." He said, "We expect to change that." And he did: the kind of shows that we would have, the kind of brochures ____ would send out. People would come from all areas; they would come from Flint; they came from Ohio. And, of course, a great part of the professionals -- doctors, lawyers -- became interested and started to buy. It was a very exciting kind of an experience because these people were buying not only a work of art; they were buying more, they were buying part of the excitement of that time, the excitement of modern art, the excitement of American art.

LA: What about the gallery's ambience? Can you describe what the aura was like there? What the atmosphere was like? And also your approach as the assistant director? You said that you were interested in educating as well as selling/

LH: Well, as I mentioned before, visually it was a very, very elegant gallery. Both directors were sticklers on the way a show should be hung. There is an art to hanging pictures. I learned a great deal about this from them. When we had shows the gallery would be closed for two days, literally closed; the doors closed, locked to the public. And one of the most exciting things was putting the show together. It could be nerve wracking. Many times you'd be going around in circles for them. And then at the last moment the whole thing would come together. And it was a creative act in itself hanging shows.

LA: Deciding where --

LH: Right. Physically the gallery was beautiful, elegant, very spacious. A tremendous amount of footage. And yet we had a very relaxed, very casual atmosphere there. It was not to be intimidating at all.

LA: And this, of course, was the goal at the outset?

LH: I don't know if it was the goal. But with the kind of people they hired it automatically fell into place that way. Well, I shouldn't say that. With Mr. Landry I think at the beginning they did want a person that was maybe not quite as accessible. maybe that was my role. He functioned in a different way.

LA: You mean not as accessible to everybody. And I mean that's the way it should be. Otherwise he could never do all the myriad details that had to be taken care of. But I think also for another reason: that, very honestly, there had to be a certain mystique too. And he had it.

LA: For the gallery?

LH: Yes. But the people that were up front. . . At least it was my aim never to make it an intimidating experience. Anybody was free to ask. We were always willing to answer. We tried to be as giving with a nobody as with a somebody.

LA: And when the gallery was started was it the idea, was it the goal to be an educational experience?

LH: I think so. I think that J. L. Hudson's in addition to having it as a commercial venture -- I think that part of their aim was to -- I'm trying to think of the right word -- I don't know whether you'd call it a "service" exactly.

LA: Essentially they wanted to encourage community involvement with the arts?

LH: Well, I keep using the word "educational". I think they wanted this gallery to be an important part of the community and they were doing it -- their involvement in the community was going to be through the arts.

LA: So they really anticipated people who were shopping in the store to come and talk -- ?

LH: Oh, yes. And we would get a lot of abuse. To be very specific, we did a Pittsburgh Carnegie show. Are you familiar with that one?

LA: Yes.

LH: That would be an invitational show. It was the first time that it had ever gone outside of Pittsburgh. We did it in two parts. Part I and Part II. We didn't have the entire show but we had a great part of it. But can you imagine the average person walking in there and relating to a Marisol sculpture? I even recall the sculpture. It was a family of two or three figures. For that time, 1964-65, they were pretty wild, far out things.

LA: And these are Pop artists.

LH: A lot of it was Pop art. And people would come in and generally come in with their fists up. But by the time we got through with them we felt most of the time that we had disarmed them and that they were looking at

things a little differently. I recall only one time in the whole time I was there where a woman said, "I will never cross this threshold again. I'm going to write a letter to Mr. Hudson telling him that this is awful stuff." But, as I say, most of the time, in some way or other, we were able to dissipate that kind of hostility.

LA: And then part of your job was to educate people and talk about art -- ?

LH: Yes. Maybe it wasn't spelled out. We were never told what we had to do. But it was an automatic thing. If you were confronting hundreds of people a day and wanted to do a good job you literally had to do an educational job. In the sixties people weren't as aware of modern art as they are today. It was very draining. I mean it wasn't always wine and roses. I'd come home at the and of a day and many times my social life suffered. Everything suffered because it was a very intense experience. It was like being on a "high" all the time.

LA: How?

LH: But I don't want to mislead you and say that there weren't problems too. Whenever you deal with the public, when you're with the public all the time, you're going to have problems, too. It was intense in every way. But I think when you have a job the most exciting thing is the people you're working with.

LA: Now did you agree most of the time with Mr. Landry and with Mr. Piagentini.

LH: Right. That's why it was so marvelous. It was that our tastes --

LA: You were compatible?

LH: Not only our personalities but our taste in art. Now whether we influenced one another -- we probably did influence one another.

LA: So would you say then that the main direction of the gallery was leaning toward the contemporary American art, color field artists?

LH: Right. Pop art, abstract expressionism.

LA: The New York School which came afterward in the sixties?

LH: Right.

LA: When did Mr. Piagentini become director of the J. L. Hudson Gallery?

LH: I don't know exactly. I would imagine it was somewhere around -- oh, when were the riots in Detroit? Was it in 1967?

LA: 1967.

LH: He came in just the day of the riots and spent his first four days as director holed up in the Fort Shelby Hotel. That was his introduction to Detroit. I just want to go back for one moment. You asked me a question: what were some of the grandiose ideas that Albert Landry had? I remember one in particular. He used to have a great time sitting in the office and dreaming up these fantasies. Again, I use the word "fantasy". I think there's a pragmatic day to day problem in running a gallery and if you don't have that other side of you, it can become just a routine thing. And I think you do have to have that sense of fantasy and think up whole new projects. He was very aware of the social situation in Detroit.

LA: How do you mean?

LH: I mean about the whole black situation. I remember his saying right at the beginning, "If the power structure doesn't do something about this problem, within eight or ten years there will be no downtown." He was a very intelligent, very bright person.

LA: And you felt that that showed a great deal of insight at the time?

LH: Right. He was aware right from the beginning that something had to be done about the whole situation.

LA: Did he feel that there was anything that could be done in the way of the arts in order to somehow break down the kind of social -- ?

LH: No, I think he really felt it was all an economic and political thing. I don't think he felt that it could be done through that way. It had to be done economically and socially. And, frankly, I think he felt that the power structure in Detroit either wasn't aware of it, of they didn't have the ideas --

LA: How would you characterize the patronage at the J. L. Hudson Gallery at that time?

LH: A great number of professional people -- a lot of doctors, a lot of lawyers, business people.

LA: So they were basically more middle class than upper middle class?

LH: More middle class. Well, it depends on how you define "upper middle class".

LA: Well you were talking more about professionals than those people who are -- ?

LH: Right. There were some wealthy business people. But the average person buying -- I think most of them came from the professions.

LA: Was there ever a time when you did not agree with Mr. Landry when there was a sense of friction or dissension that you had on a major show?

LH: You use the word "friction" or "dissension" -- no. In my mind I might have thought that this was not what I would put on or exactly what I liked, but there was never any friction.

LA: So it was really a very compatible relationship that you had?

LH: Very. Very. Oh, one other thing I forgot to mention: we were talking about some of the ideas Mr. Landry had. One time he sat down and wrote a memorandum to Mr. J. L. Hudson, Jr. He had an idea that one of the ways to save downtown was to make it an exciting place to come to, and that was to do exciting things downtown to make people come down. He wrote a memorandum to Mr. Hudson recommending that they take the top floor of the store and build a penthouse and put a theater, a restaurant and a gallery on that top floor.

LA: And he sent the memorandum to Mr. Hudson and what was the reaction?

LH: Well, we knew even before. . . But it came back with the notation, "Wonderful idea but can't be done now" or something to that effect.

LA: It would have been a wonderful idea.

LH: The idea was to have very fine food, a fine legitimate theater -- a small playhouse, and an art gallery. We were constantly trying to think of ways to do something to the downtown to make it exciting for people to come down. He was very sensitive and he could see the handwriting on the wall. It didn't come until later. But he was aware of the direction in which the city was moving.

LA: So this was an attempt to save the downtown area and to encourage people to come downtown?

LH: Right. Would you say he had a strong commitment to the city per se? Or was this more a commitment to the J. L. Hudson Gallery which happens to be in downtown Detroit?

LH: I wouldn't say it was a strong commitment to the city. I think being a sensitive, intelligent, aware person, he was aware of the factors that were involved that were making the city a place where more and more people were leaving the city instead of coming into it. Not that other cities weren't being plagued with the same problems. But he felt that Detroit's problems were more intense and that less was being done about it in the way of imaginative thinking about solutions. We used to discuss this a great deal of the time because we began to sense what was occurring.

LA: Why did he leave the Hudson Gallery?

LH: Well, you know, I'd rather not go into it because I think there were numerous factors, probably some personal. I think he was a man that liked challenges. And there may have been some other personal reasons.

LA: So Mr. Piagentini became director in what year?

LH: 1967.

LA: And can you describe the differences between Mr. Landry and mr. Piagentini and how that was reflected in the direction of the gallery?

LH: Yes. Well, to talk about personalities, let me start right away by saying that only a person like Mr. Landry with his kind of personality and his approach to the whole idea of marketing art could have successfully launched the gallery. But I think it took a person like Mr. Piagentini to continue it. He was an entirely different kind of person. He was a lot more open, a lot more accessible to people. Interestingly enough, he also was an artist

when he was young. Also he had been to Europe.

LA: Was he a painter?

LH: Yes, a painter. I think he was more into the color field painting too, more excited about it. I think Mr. Landry was probably a little bit more standoffish about it, not as willing to plunge as Mr. Piagentini was.

LA: But there were similarities in that they were both painters?

LH: They were both painters. Both had a very fine eye, an excellent eye. And both had high standards, very high standards.

LA: And, of course, this was an on-going quality of the J. L. Hudson Gallery?

LH: Right. It took a long time to find Mr. Piagentini. I think it took them, oh, four, five, six months before they found the right person. That's how important it was to have the right person.

LA: Where did he come from?

LH: New York. And I also felt very good about the fact that when Mr. Landry came back he said, "I think I've found the person that you will like, Lee, and that you will be able to get along with." It was very important to him that I be able to get along with the new director. He said that was uppermost in his mind when he did look.

LA: And you were also able to get along very well with Mr. Piagentini?

LH: Wonderfully. They both were fantastic people, wonderful people to work with, exciting.

LA: Did you, again, have these meetings for throwing ideas back and forth for ideas for shows?

LH: Oh, yes. And I was always treated with the utmost consideration. I mean my opinions were taken very seriously. And there never was anything like "this is my idea" or "this is your idea". It was always worked together. There never was a definition. I knew that in the long run it was his decision, but I doubt that they ever did anything if I would object to it strongly.

LA: Can you remember any one significant exhibition or show while Mr. Piagentini was director and you were assistant director that stands out in your mind that was particularly significant for you?

LH: Well, the Hans Hofmann show.

LA: That was in what year?

LH: I really can't remember. I think it was in 1969 or 1970. I remember six slab paintings hanging on that wall and out of the whole show I think we sold only two paintings.

LA: Only two. Did you buy any?

LH: You shouldn't have asked that question. When I think of the things that I should have bought at that time and couldn't!. Even at that time they were expensive but nothing compared to what they are now. I remember a de Kooning show. A Dubuffet show.

LA: These were all under Mr. Piagentini?

LH: Right.

LA: Did your job responsibility change -- did it undergo any significant changes as the years went on and when Mr. Piagentini was director?

LH: I never really had a defined job. I just went in and did what came naturally I think. I was very involved with the public selling, educating, and also very involved in the back scenes too.

LA: Did you take more trips to New York then?

LH: No. That was done mostly by Mr. Landry and Mr. Piagentini. But sitting at the desk in Detroit I did more and more reading all the time suggesting. At that time there was an official -- I realized that even though I might have been doing the duties of assistant director that for reasons of pay you had to start giving yourself a title, so that was done officially for me.

LA: Under Mr. Piagentini?

LH: No, it was done under Mr. Landry.

LA: And did you also have accompanying lecture series? Did you very often have the artist whose show was being held?

LH: No. We would have openings, wonderful, splendid openings with wonderful food and champagne. Sometimes the artists would come; many times they would. Many times they wouldn't; you know, if you had a de Kooning of a Dubuffet show of something like that. . . But the openings tapered off after a while. We found that less and less people were coming downtown. You see, when you do something every month or every other month it's too expected. If we did maybe two or three openings a year they knew that they were sensational things. That was what happened after a while.

LA: Did you initiate any significant changes in the gallery when you were responsible?

LH: It's a hard thing to answer because these things were done so subtly. It was never that I sat down and said, "Look. . ." It was always this interchange.

LA: It was a joint effort?

LH: It was a joint thing. So that I don't even know how many shows it was that I proposed; or vice versa. It was never really a clearly. . . There was never a clear line. Everything was so much a part of discussion and interplay of ideas. It was never consciously. . . I do remember one thing: I said to Mr. Landry, "I think we ought to get this young man Frank Stella." He said, "But I don't like him." That was the first time I had (quote) a "knockdown drag out" fight with him. I said, "You get to look at his things; I think he's an important artist." I was quite emphatic about Stella. That was in about 1964 or 1965.

LA: Did he take your advice?

LH: And he did. He brought in some huge, enormous Stellas.

LA: Can you describe them?

LH: They were his shape canvases, enormous. And then we started to get some of the protractor. And, again, they were too big for me to buy to put in my home. But when I think of what those paintings -- we were selling large Stellas for $6,000 and $7,000. So that is one time when I remember being quite emphatic, you know, about an artist. And then when Mr. Piagentini _____ he was so into Stella, you know, and things like that.

LA: More into American art? He was really more in admiration and support of American artists of the sixties than Mr. Landry was?

LH: Yes. Well, more into the new ones that were coming in. I think Mr. Landry was very much into the art that was done in the fifties -- the abstract expressionists school; but I don't think as much into the color field artists or like Warhols and Pop art, that kind of artists.

LA: Was there any other director besides Mr. Landry and mr. Piagentini while you were assistant director?

LH: Yes, there was one other director that came. I think he was there for only a year. Frankly, I don't think that he was capable -- [tape is running off reel]

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: This is a continuation of an interview with Lee Hoffman for the Archives of American Art on June 1, 1977. We were talking about the directorship of the J. L. Hudson Gallery after Mr. Piagentini left in - what year did he leave?

LH: I think it was 1969 or 1970.

LA: So he was there for two? Three? Years?

LH: He was there about four years I think -- from 1967. Then he must have left in 1971.

LA: And then what happened after Mr. Piagentini left?

LH: There was one other director that came in --

LA: You were offered the directorship?

LH: Yes, at this point I was offered the directorship. I turned it down for several reasons. The first one probably

being the fact that I did not want to take over the entire responsibility. It would mean not a sixty-hour week but a one hundred and twenty-hour week. Which meant you would have to be totally committed. And it involved a lot of paper work, a lot of charting -- in business you chart -- I forget the word -- "projection" -- all of those kinds of things that are involved with bureaucratic paper work. Which did not appeal to me at all.

LA: This, of course, was also because it was in connection with a very large department store?

LH: Right. It involved going to New York at least twice a month. I think all that responsibility would have taken away the enjoyment. I would have gotten bogged down in detail. Which was not what I wanted. And I think there was another level, too, that began to worry me. I could see what was happening as far as the political and social structure of downtown. The middle class was leaving the city. The gallery was finding it harder and harder to attract people to come into the city. We would have wonderful shows. But the attendance started to drop. I think that deep in my bones I sensed that there would come a point at which this gallery would have to close. And I didn't want to take over -- i didn't want to be in the position of closing the gallery. After being there at the beginning and riding it through such a successful, wonderful ten years, I did not want to preside over its closing.

LA: You were there for ten years in total?

LH: Yes. And although nothing was said, there was a certain -- you could just sense the direction in which things were happening. Anyway, those are the two principal reasons why I turned down the directorship. I don't think I ever told my superiors why. I just simply turned it down. And then there was one other director that came in. I think he was there for one year. It was not a successful relationship. I don't think he was the man for the job. I didn't think that he was qualified. And, as things turned out, he wasn't. And then he left, or rather he was asked to leave, after one year. And again I was asked --

LA: Can you just briefly tell me about what these differences were? Was it in terms of your artistic considerations?

LH: Fundamentally, I think it was a difference in personalities. I think the other two directors were totally different personalities. They were very involved in art as art. And by this time I think the kind of director they wanted was somebody that was involved more with credit and balance sheets.

LA: More business oriented?

LH: More business oriented kind of personality. I don't think that he had the strength of character nor the sophistication that was necessary.

LA: What about the aesthetic sensibility?

LH: It was all so much a business kind of thing that I could never really -- let's put it this way: basically I was never in tune with this person as a personality, or with his aims or his taste or anything. I don't remember whether I resigned --no -- it was after he left. I stayed on for a while and then I resigned. It was too painful for me to visualize what was going to happen in the immediate future.

LA: You could see the closing of the gallery?

LH: Yes, I could see that that was going to occur within a year or two. And an experience after being through those glorious years. I decided to leave. I decided to become a private dealer out of my apartment.

LA: Looking in retrospect at the ten years that you were so involved and you were the assistant director of the J. L. Hudson Gallery, can you describe or define the most significant aspects of the job? Can you talk about some of the major influences and the major artists that were shown and that which was most significant to you during that ten-year period?

LH: I don't think i can pinpoint it. I think when you have shows of artists, like, say, a complete show of Dubuffet, or a surrealist show, or of Picasso, or Hans Hofmann, or de Kooning, or Franz Kline, you are talking about the major figures in art. Or when you get in a nine-foot Giacometti that was purchased by Mr. Landry that was standing right behind his office door as you'd open the door. .. It was purchased for somebody here. Two days afterward Giacometti died. And the whole timing of this, not only from the point of view of getting a Giacometti into the city in a private collection, but then what would go on with the whole structure of prices, and how we had to fight to keep that particular price that was quoted. All these exciting things. So far I've talked only about the aesthetic parts of the job. I did learn an awful lot about the business end.

LA: That's an aspect we haven't even touched on.

LH: Yes.

LA: And that was exciting to you too?

LH: It was. It was both exciting and also a little repellent because the art world is like no other business. It is a very unique business; a very small group - you might call it an art Mafia. And especially in the sixties I think if you were a sensitive person you were a little upset by a lot of the things that went on.

LA: The competition between galleries?

LH: The competition, the manipulative things that went on. Unfortunately, art became a product, a commodity. And they used the media, they used everything that they could to sell art as a commodity. And what often happens is it's the American way of promotion, the American way of success. And these are the things that always trouble me about the art market.

LA: And it was that way also at J. L. Hudson Gallery?

LH: It's that if you're part of the art world you can't help but be aware. .. Of course the art world was New York. I mean the gossip. That, of course, was part of the enjoyable part. I mean the gossip in the art world too is like in no other business because it's really so small and so controlled.

LA: So it was a mixture of a lot of things that made it very exciting to you?

LH: Yes. I must admit that many times when I did have doubts about the whole art world it always was because of the business end of it, and the fact that I was concerned about what was being done to art. And, of course, it did reflect as to what happened in the seventies. There was a dramatic drop in the art market because it had become so over-inflated during the sixties. But that's a whole different story. But in addition to the other things that I learned, there is no question that I learned a great deal about the business end of it too.

LA: Was there a challenge to you, again, to be able to sell a painting, or sell a piece of sculpture?

LH: Was it a challenge? Yes, it was, of course.

LA: And that was also part of what made it exciting?

LH: Yes. Right. It is a challenge because you are selling not a necessity; you are selling something that has to do almost with the spirit. It's so entirely the opposite of a piece of furniture or a dress. It's really a nebulous thing that you're selling. So you have to be committed and you have to really love that object in order to give it over to the person. Unfortunately, you did have many people -- well, I don't know whether you'd call it fortunately or unfortunately -- but the idea of art as status in the sixties I think was very. . . You can't deny it. But I think Detroiters were less prone to that kind of thing than what happened in other cities. I can't remember ever selling anything to anybody -- they might have purchased these things for investment in the back of their minds, but they truly loved what they bought. It was not just buying something to turn over.

LA: Was that important to you?

LH: Oh, yes, it was very important.

LA: What would you say was the effect of the gallery on the community? Did you think that it had a wide-ranging effect? What was the importance -- ?

LH: Yes, I did. I do. First of all, I think, in a sense, it was a tastemaker. When I say "tastemaker" I don't mean it in the sense that we established the only taste. But we did establish a taste for modern art which was not there before Hudson's came in.

LA: And this was not an interest that you saw in any other local gallery in the Detroit area?

LH: I think when Hudson's first came in some of the local galleries were a little frightened by this big company, a big corporation, and here were these little private dealers and i think at the beginning they were concerned and frightened. And when I expressed that to Mr. Landry -- because some of these dealers were my friends and I had purchased from them and I could sympathize with that -- I recall mr. Landry saying, "That will be no problem. Hudson's will only stimulate and everybody will benefit." And that's what happened. I think that the good galleries in the area -- the Donald Morris Gallery and the Gertrude Kasle Gallery -- probably had some of their finest years. What happens is that you create a demand you create an excitement about art. The more art you bring to a city, the more you can educate, the more that people see good things, the more they're going to want them. That's what made New York a fantastic city; that made them the center because there are so many there.

LA: A snowballing kind of thing.

LH: Exactly.

LA: So you would say then that that was the major contribution? In the ten years that you worked and the existence of the j. L. Hudson Gallery you would say that that was its main contribution to the city - the exposure to modern art, the trends that were going on in New York, contemporary trends going on in Europe and in New York?

LH: Right. I think it took a big organization with lots of money behind it to do that kind of job. I don't think it could have been solely by small galleries. They just didn't have the werewithal. Having shows every month was a very expensive thing in those days. Just the freight bills, creating, shipping air freight, those were some of the factors that made galleries go under in the early seventies.

LA: So it took a large corporation such as Hudson's department store to do that?

LH: That's right.

LA: Did the gallery work in close association with any other cultural institution or with any other private gallery? Was there any collaboration going on during the time that you were there?

LH: The only thing that I recall that was a big disappointment was the fact that neither director could get to what we call the automotive industry or to the big industrial giants. No matter how much they tried they could not get those people involved.

LA: A lack of receptiveness to contemporary art?

LH: Right. And that was a big disappointment -- the fact that we couldn't get corporations interested. Because at that time in New York you had corporations buying art, buying very good art. They would build up collections. There was just no response to that here.

LA: And you approached all the automobile companies?

LH: Well, it wasn't done directly. But Mr. Landry was very, very good at that kind of thing. And I think that was a major disappointment that he could never really get it out into the community, into corporate quarters.

LA: How would you account for that? Do you think that it says something about Detroit?

LH: I was hoping you wouldn't ask me that question. Yes, I do think it says something.

LA: Well, let's talk about that a little bit. Exactly what in your judgment does our community lack? What does the community in terms of the city of Detroit lack?

LH: I put it down as bluntly as saying that our power structure in Detroit is made up mostly of the automotive industry. These are the executives and the corporate headquarters. Or maybe I should say we don't have old wealth in this town. The automotive industry is comparatively new. They are not particularly interested in culture in the sense that you have families. . . Well, let me put it this way: you don't have a family, except the Ford family perhaps, the way you have in Boston or Philadelphia or Chicago -- wealth from several generations that are committed to the city. Your executives come in from all parts of America so that you don't have as big a committed, wealthy class going back several generations that want to put their money back into the city. We would talk about this frequently.

LA: You and Mr. Landry and Mr. Piagentini?

LH: Yes. I think that was one of the basic differences between Detroit and the other cities.

LA: There wasn't really a --

LH: A commitment. You have isolated instances, you know, contributions to the Art Institute and so forth but certainly you don't have an automobile industry. . . Really when you think of Detroit what do you think about?

LA: You think about automobiles.

LH: That's right.

LA: And what about those who would patronize the J. L. Hudson Gallery? Generally speaking, did you feel that there was a lack of sophistication? Would you say that that was true?

LH: No. I think perhaps at the beginning that might have been true. But I think that we began to get people who

were interested in collecting fine art. These people started to go to New York. No, I wouldn't say that they were unsophisticated at all. I think that they made an effort because of their interest to really stay on top of things. They started to travel_____ a great deal. I do feel that there is a difference between the collectors of the sixties and of the seventies.

LA: How would you define that difference?

LH: Well, in the sixties I think there was an intellectual fermentation and the people that came to the gallery would spend hours discussing the art and were really interested in the intellectual, the theoretical and all of this. It was not only a response to the art. There was a great deal of thinking about the art. The people that are buying art now are very impatient with the written word and very impatient with the spoken word.

LA: So their reaction is purely one of impact?

LH: Impact. And it has to be quickly. They are bored with the idea of being educated about it.

LA: Is this a particular age group?

LH: Yes.

LA: Younger people? Middle-aged people?

LH: Younger people. The people that are ready to become serious about. . . Well, even those that aren't serious, even those that are just buying art for their home. Maybe it's because -- I just happen to think of this idea: maybe it's because so much has been written about it already and it is so much a part of their lives maybe all they have to do is respond to it. I've never thought of that. Maybe it was more of an innovative thing in the sixties. That could possibly be. That could possibly explain it.

LA: Do you find that the collectors now are younger in age? Money is more available now to people at a younger age.

LH: Well, it is and it isn't. The professional that has to go out and buy art also has to pay a lot more for his home. I think inflation is eating away at that extra money that could ordinarily be spent on art. I think the cost of educating his youngsters is more. Every think has become more expensive. From what I can sense I don't think that people are as free now about purchasing. And it isn't that I question it. It's just that I'm looking around and I'm thinking: my goodness, if you have to pay that much for a house or for educating the children or for travel, there isn't that extra kind of money around. Now that's from the economic point of view. I think the economics has changed dramatically from the sixties. I think there was a lot more money around in the sense of free money to spend in the sixties. They may be making more money now but it's costing a lot more money --

LA: Inflation --

LH: Right, I also feel that, let's say, the people in their middle thirties that are buying don't have the intellectual commitment to the art. What appeals to them -- and maybe it's a better thing, I don't know, I don't want to make a value judgment at this point -- I'm just noting the difference.

LA: So you feel that your role as an educator has become much more -- well, not minimized but diminished because of lack of -- ?

LH: Yes. There's an impatience. And the more I'm out here in Birmingham, I think that is tied up with a certain life-style.

LA: I want to get into that later talking about your physical locality in your own gallery now. But if we can back up a bit --

LH: Okay.

LA: I'd like to talk a little bit more chronologically about what happened to you after you left, after you resigned your position as assistant director of J. L. Hudson gallery. I believe that was in 1974 -- is that right?

LH: I think it was in 1972. I was there for ten years from 1962 to 1972.

LA: So then there was a period of five years before you -- ?

LH: Four years.

LA: There was a period of four years between the time that you resigned from J. L. Hudson gallery and opened

your own gallery in Birmingham?

LH: Right.

LA: What did you do during those years?

LH: Immediately after I resigned I became a private dealer dealing out of my home. I had collected paintings during my ten years not with the idea of selling them. I had just collected pictures for my own collection. After ten years of activity the idea of just stopping and doing nothing was very hard. There was a trend at that time in New York, too, for dealers: to go private -- the expression was to "go private." It wasn't entirely an original idea with me. It was just that I had heard of other dealers in New York doing it. They did it because the expense, the upkeep of a gallery was very high. It was a form of being able to operate much easier. I did it because there was no alternative at the time. I had access to many of the New York galleries; they all knew me. I began selling out of my home which was in Sherwood Forest.

LA: And what were some of your experiences as a private dealer? Did you have any significant experiences?

LH: There were a few instances then where people would come to me. At the time the shift of population was beginning. People that had lived in bigger homes were now moving into apartments and condominiums. People who had never thought of contemporary art because they were moving into new places kind of wanted to update themselves and they wanted something fresh and new. They had never purchased any contemporary art but their whole way of living was changing. They were leaving the large homes in Palmer Woods and Sherwood Forest -- the big English manors with the traditional furniture -- moving into smaller places; as the expression was, "going contemporary". And they wanted to come to somebody that they had confidence in that could _____ them in the proper direction. I didn't look down upon it; I felt that these people sincerely. . . These were not people that were collectors.

LA: Were many of these people that you knew -- had known for years because you lived in the same neighborhood?

LH: No. They really came through recommendations. I rarely sold contemporary art to my friends. For some reason or other, you find that if you're very friendly with people that what you believe in and what you're intensely involved with is something that they will reject. It was never to my friends, no; it was just through recommendations. Because of my affiliation with the J. L. Hudson gallery I had a big following. I think people trusted me. I was not in the business in the sense of being in the *business* part of it.

LA: It was important to you that -- ?

LH: What I put into peoples' homes was very important to me. Selling was not the most important thing. My reputation was very important to me. It was very important to me that when leave a home or house that it was a reflection of me.

LA: So then you made it very personalized?

LH: It was a very personalized service. And it was very gratifying, very gratifying. At that time I did more of actually going into the houses, into the homes. And I think that women appreciated that. Up until then it was considered kind of a dirty word, you know, to have your art fit into your home. But I don't see it that way. There's nothing wrong with people who are totally unacquainted with contemporary art and who want to start living with it but they want it to fit into their homes. They don't want it to be a museum. They want to feel comfortable with it. And if you go to the typical dealer he is taken aback by that.

LA: Takes a much more snobbish attitude?

LH: Yes. And I'm willing to recognize that these are legitimate needs. And I think I'm prone to be a little bit more sympathetic toward these kinds of things.

LA: And it was appreciated?

LH: I think so. I think people felt at ease and comfortable about it. Everyone wants to make sure that what they have is. . . There is an insecurity about putting modern art on their walls.

LA: You were dealing now entirely, exclusively with modern art as opposed to -- ?

LH: Right. But then in addition I would have things like African art and Pre-Columbian art, antiquities of that nature. But the art was generally mostly contemporary art. I think you have to give confidence to people. The fact that they knew I had been with the Hudson gallery I guess gave them a feeling of confidence about my taste and about my ability; and he fact that I was not going to -- the word is "take" them. That's a big fear on the

part of people when they're first starting with contemporary art.

LA: Was this an easy transition for you to make -- going from Lee Hoffman, the assistant director with administrative responsibilities -- ?

LH: That's a very pertinent question. I had what is known in psychological terms as "separation anxiety". This was ten years of my life. And I remember relating my dreams; I had the most fantastic dreams about separating. It was very traumatic, very traumatic. Traumatic for two reasons: for ten years you are disciplined; there is a rhythm to your life.

LA: You get up in the morning and you know you have to be --

LH: Right. There is a rhythm that becomes second nature to you. All of a sudden you're flung out without that discipline and rhythm. Besides which you are separating from something that was a wonderful thing; it was not a negative thing.

LA: It was a part of your life.

LH: Right. I suffered. But I felt that there was no other way; that I had to do it. It did not come easy.

LA: Did you have the desire to work in any other gallery?

LH: No.

LA: That would have been too difficult for you at that point?

LH: Yes. I was used to a kind of ambience and a kind of responsibility and a kind of general atmosphere that I don't think could have been duplicated in any other gallery.

LA: So for four years then you worked as a private dealer. Again, can you talk a little bit more about that transition? You did go from a job where, as you say, you had this rhythm and a tremendous sense of administrative responsibility, now to becoming a free-lance private dealer and to a life-style which was very, very different.

LH: It was difficult. But I think I was very fortunate because I didn't have to wait around long. I began to get a lot of clients. In fact, I recall right at the beginning I had a big factory to do. So the slack was taken up.

LA: And you became very busy very quickly?

LH: Yes. Which surprised me. But that I think was due to two things. It was due to the fact that a lot of people were moving. I mean I'm being very practical about it. You had this group of people that were moving. You had collectors who were still involved with collecting. I had various elements. There were still the collectors who were still into collecting who trusted my eye, trusted my judgment where I could find something and call them up and say "I just came into this; this is available" and they would respond to it. So at the beginning there was a great deal of activity. The transition was better than what I had imagined it would be. The anxieties really that I had about it didn't materialize as much as I thought they would. Leaving the J. L. Hudson gallery was traumatic, very traumatic. At this time I had a big home in Sherwood Forest. The house was big and spacious and I could accommodate a lot of art work.

LA: Did your home become a kind of gallery that people could come in and -- ?

LH: Right. Well, my home really was always that way. I always forgot to furnish the house; it was the walls that were being accommodated; not the rest of the house. But after working, I think, a year privately I could not get insurance on my art in Sherwood Forest. And as a dealer it was very important in my business. By that time both children had left home. I was in a large home. There was the hardship of getting insurance because it was within the city of Detroit. Although I never had any qualms about the art because to me it was the last thing in the world that people would take if they had broken into the home. Personally I never had these fears. But the insurance companies were adamant. Because of that and the fact that we had outgrown the house, we decided to move.

LA: And was it at this point that you entertained the idea of opening your own gallery?

LH: No, I still didn't. I just looked for an apartment that had big enough walls to accommodate the art. I was still very deeply involved with dealing privately. We found an apartment that had unusual wall space, more so than in my large four-bedroom English home: most unusual. So I continued for another three years out of the apartment.

LA: Dealing privately?

LH: Yes.

LA: And so after four years of dealing privately -- ?

LH: My goodness, the crucial questions!

LA: What prompted you to open the Lee Hoffman Gallery?

LH: That's a hard question to answer in a way. One of the words that I used before in the tape was this word "fantasy". I think there are certain people that live by fantasy. Gradually this fantasy of opening my own small place began to develop.

LA: This was a fantasy that you had for many years? Or was it just evolving at this time?

LH: It was evolving at that time. I had never considered it before. Then living out in the North Woodward area -- I don't want to go into that right now about suburbia -- but I would go into Birmingham quite often. I think at different times in your life you go back and forth. Private dealing was a way of getting away from the tumultuous nature of being out in the public. It's like wanting to retreat. You retreat for a while. And then you kind of want to go out again.

LA: So it was a withdrawal and then -- ?

LH: Right. And then it's a challenge. It's a fantasy. The practical nature became a little too much, the intrusion into the private home. And the space. My apartment became cluttered; the hallways were being stacked, the bedroom was being stacked with art. But I can't ever say that it was one thing. It was a combination of those things. After a while I began to feel that I wanted that I wanted that bustle and the contacts. Essentially I do like people very much. There's a great deal of aggravation in it, but on the other hand there is also the gratification. I think I spent about a year and a half looking for a particular location. I didn't want it to become too big. I didn't want it too big because it was a little bit scary. I wanted to do it on just a small basis.

LA: Did you want to in some way duplicate the kind of feeling that the J. L. Hudson gallery had?

LH: Well, in a minuscule way, yes. In no way could you do the Hudson thing; I mean it was just so big. My original idea really was to combine a kind of eating place with a gallery.

LA: Oh, really! That's interesting. Is that still a fantasy?

LH: And maybe that's going to be my next step. Yes, that's my second fantasy. I feel that I have about three or four to go through: and that's my second fantasy.

LA: Well, has this transition been an easy one or a difficult one? You've gone now from the transition of being administrator in a rather large gallery with a lot of financial backing to that of a private dealer. And now you're back into your own gallery; you are the director with all of the administrative responsibilities. Has this transition been an easy one for you?

LH: No. Every transition is difficult.

LA: What are some of the experiences that you had?

LH: I don't think I realized. . . I was very thrilled at the way the gallery came out because it was exactly. . . Most of the time you have a vision and you are very lucky if that vision materializes. Most of the time it doesn't. And I was amazed that it came out exactly the way I had dreamed it would be as far as the visual kind of thing was concerned. I wanted to create a small, warm, intimate kind of gallery where it would not be a gallery in the sense of a gallery like the sixties. I wanted it to be --

LA: "A gallery like the sixties" -- what do you mean?

LH: I mean large, intimidating. I wanted it to be small. I hate to use the word "cosy". But it would be like entering into my living room. I wanted to give it a warm feel so that people would feel comfortable about opening the door and coming in. It was, I think, trying to recreate what I did at my home, in a sense, like a large living room.

LA: And what about your role as the educator as well as an administrator?

LH: There were a few things that were different from what I anticipated. The physical part came out exactly like my fantasy.

LA: Because of the small, intimate nature -- ?

LH: Yes. And we did completely redo the place. I mean everything was knocked down to the bare walls and I recreated my own --

LA: What kind of changes exactly did you initiate?

LH: From ceiling to floor. . . This had been a dress shop with twenty fitting rooms with red flocked wallpaper and chintz on the walls of the dressing rooms. So we just took it apart to the stud work -- everything, the walls the floor; I mean nothing was left of the original. And that was very exciting to me -- the creation of something. And I think for people who are not creative, who do not paint, in a way that's a very exciting thing is the creation of this. I found that I had five months of just the greatest, grandest time in creating it. And I didn't have one headache.

LA: It was a challenge?

LH: It was a challenge. And it was a creative thing on my part. It was a creation. Despite what everybody said about, you know, the aggravating things about building, it was incredible that I didn't have one moment's aggravation with this place.

LA: Of course this is a throwback to your early interest in architecture and design and your wanting to create?

LH: Yes. I could do this every six months. And that's why I'm already into it. I love the excitement of creating places.

LA: What about some of the differences, some of the things that now, being the gallery owner, being the director, that you have to _____ that you did not have to confront when you were -- ?

LH: There are some very, very profound differences.

LA: What are some of those?

LH: Some of which I did not anticipate and I think I was a little naive about I projected that I would simply transfer the ambience of my apartment and the operation from my apartment and just transfer it into a public setting. By that meaning it would be a very personalized kind of thing. I was aware of the dangers of doing shows every month: that is is very, very costly, very time consuming. It's a horrendous task. And most of your energies are taken up with the administration of these shows.

LA: Paper work again?

LH: The paper work, the organization, the getting out of the brochures, the mailing lists. And, of course, when I went around telling the different dealers that I was going into this business they all thought that I was insane.

LA: Why?

LH: The whole marketing aspects have changed. It's a much rougher business to be in now. It's really a tough business to make a go of it.

LA: Because of the huge expense?

LH: Because of the economy, the way the economy is going, the expenses and so forth. They kept saying, "But, Lee, you've got it, you've got the perfect setup, you are operating out of your home, you've got a clientele. Why would you want to get into this mess where you have to worry about your overhead and you have to worry about this and about that?"

LA: What was your response to that?

LH: Well, everybody has to do their thing. You listen but yet you don't listen because there is something fermenting inside of you.

LA: What was your response to that?

LH: Well, everybody has to do their thing. You listen but yet you don't listen because there is something fermenting inside of you.

LA: And that fantasy is still there?

LH: Right. So you listen and yet you don't listen. I felt that I had an advantage in that I didn't have to live off of

this. I was very fortunate.

LA: And that was a big consideration?

LH: That was a big consideration. The other thing: I knew from the statistics that if you could. . . You generally don't make a profit in this kind of business until you've been in it for at least three years. But I felt I could handle it because I didn't have to make the living; I didn't have to put what is known as the "bread" on the table. I felt that my survival risks were minimized because I didn't have to do this.

LA: Now are you saying that you didn't really go into it to make a profit?

LH: Right. My motives were different too. So that when I would hear, you know, about all this I shrugged it off. So that when I would hear, you know, about all this I shrugged it off. I said: look, if I can just make it, just stay even, I'll be very happy; I'm not in this to make money. Because realistically speaking, I know you can't make huge amounts now unless. . . Probably it is possible if you have tremendous amounts of money that you can put into it, a lot of backing; or if you want to go into it in a big way. But I was not going to be involved on that level.

LA: Was the J. L. Hudson Gallery financially successful?

LH: It was up to a point. I think it was very successful the first seven or eight years. Then there came a point where the tremendous costs of insurance, freight, inventory buildup, and many other factors -- then it became a problem. Alsom at that time the whole country was going through what we called a "recession". And I think art was affected by it. No question about it.

LA: Because it was a luxury?

LH: Sure.

LA: So then you think now -- jumping ahead again to the Lee Hoffman Gallery -- ?

LH: There were areas that I was not aware of that I think became a problem. That was the tremendous responsibility. You are at it six days a week from morning until night.

LA: You can't leave it behind you when you go home?

LH: No. I'm summing up the plusses and the minuses and I'm starting with the minuses. I didn't realize that I could not have the same kind of operation that I had in my home, that you cannot be in a public area and just bring your things in the way I was used to at home. I would go to New York and if I saw something that I liked, or if I knew a certain collector, I would buy it and it would come into the home. You really have to have some kind of a program of shows. This is something that dealers went through several years ago. It's a problem that all dealers have. The cost, the effort of those shows is tremendous. However, you do have to have some kind of a program in order to get people to come into the gallery. And that's the difference between dealing privately and dealing publicly.

LA: Now you say this is a disadvantage? Or do you say that there are advantages to it and disadvantages?

LH: Well, it was different than what I predicted. I didn't think it would be as much work. I realized that you do have to have shows but I didn't expect to have them every month. It's far more involved and takes far more of my energies than what I had anticipated. The ideal thing -- I'm talking very, very frankly now -- the ideal thing would have been had I gotten somebody in with me to do it, to share the responsibilities and to share the decision-making. You have to _____, you have to get things organized. But more than anything else, you are responsible for every decision.

LA: And that's very rigorous?

LH: Yes. I think I've been very fortunate so far because I'm still in the black. I'm in the black which is incredible; I mean from that point of view. But there's no doubt that you worry about are my bank balances okay; you are in charge of an overhead; you are in charge of making decisions; is this a show that's going to sell or not. I find, though, that in my direction I don't think so much about are the shows going to sell. I'm doing what I want to do. The kind of shows that I'll talk about in a little while. What's happening is that I've had to readjust my thinking about a lot of things. And the other thing is that physically it is a lot more demanding. To have to get up every morning and know that you have the responsibility is -- well, it's quite a responsibility.

LA: It's very demanding.

LH: Very, very demanding.

LA: Of course the financial consideration was not something that you had to really worry about as assistant director of the J. L. Hudson Gallery?

LH: Right. Now when I buy something it is my responsibility and it's my money that's going out for it.

LA: So it's no longer just your aesthetic consideration?

LH: Right. Although most of the time I simply will not buy anything or I won't do anything unless I do like it. And that's a hassle, too, because you find you're putting yourself more and more in a bind, you back yourself into a corner. I could sell triple what I sell here if I wanted to _____ to the kind of taste that I see. You know, people come in and want this or that. It would be much simpler to give them what they want.

LA: From a convenience point of view?

LH: Yes, you could make much more --

LA: But of course that's not something that you would do?

LH: Right. You know it's like anything; once you go into anything in real seriousness it's like a love-hate relationship sort of thing. You hate it because of the time, the energy, the emotion, everything. And yet you can't let go of it because there's something in it that you love about it, too, and it's part of your life.

LA: And that's really where all of your energies should be directed?

LH: Yes. And then really when you come right down to it there aren't too many alternatives in life after a while. And what I'm saying is this: you have to make choices and then it come down to alternatives.

LA: Do you feel you've made the right choice?

LH: I feel that for this time in my live I've made the right choice. But when I went into it my relatives, my friends, were very upset. This is the way I sized it up. I said, "I've got a three-year lease. The worst thing that can happen is that I fail. I can face failure. What is the worst thing that could happen? The worst thing that could happen is that it's too much for me, or it isn't going to work. So I'll sublease it and I'll leave.____ And I think if you can face the very worst and say I can stand up to it so you go ahead and do it.

LA: And so far what are your feelings about it?

LH: I have mixed feelings. It's almost a year since I started. Again, it's elation. But there are times when I think: what the hell did I do? What am I doing?

LA: So it's a combination?

LH: There is no such thing as just unmitigated pleasure and joy. Especially when you are out in business you have to take. . . The physical aspect -- the wear and tear -- is a very important one, too. I'm very fortunate now that I have good help. But that was a problem, too.

LA: You made this statement before about the pluses and minuses of going into your gallery. What are some of the pluses that you can think of?

LH: Well, it's a challenge. It's like learning all different, new things. And it's wonderful when you continue in life and you learn. It's another experience. For example, this Tantric Art show -- it's very gratifying to me to have people come in and say, "Thank you. . ." Well, I'll come back to the Tantric Art show. When I first opened, during the first two months people would come in and say, "Thank you for just being here. It's so wonderful that we can have a place like yours." Well, that can give you a lot of satisfaction.

LA: Again, the role of the educator.

LH: Well, whether it's the educator or whether they have a place where they can visually feast their eyes, whatever it is, it's a great deal of satisfaction knowing that you're fulfilling some need that people have. Can you imagine if eight or ten times during a week people come in and say, "Gee, Lee, thank you for being here." Well, that's very. . .

LA: It gives you a purpose.

LH: That's right. Yes. And a show like Tantric Art and having people come in and say, "Isn't it marvelous. We never would have seen this. It's a whole new thing."

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: This is a continuation of an interview with Lee Hoffman for the Archives of American Art on June 15, 1977. Okay, Lee, when last we met we were talking about your career as a private dealer. Now I'd like to get into the transition that you made from working as assistant director at the J. L. Hudson gallery to becoming a private dealer and then eventually opening your own gallery.

LH: Going public.

LA: What prompted you to open your own gallery? What was going through your mind? Why did you decide to open your own gallery?

LH: Well, there never is one clear reason. I think it's a combination of things. I may have spoken about this before -- I'm not sure -- but I think in peoples' lives there are points of what I call an exterior and an interior kind of thing going on. I had been in the outside world for ten years coping with all the problems on an everyday level. And I think working privately was a retreat, a getting away from (quote) "the whole scene". And in a way it kind of gets your energies together. You can relax. You have time to think about what your next goals are. At that particular time in my life it was the right thing for me to do. And then after a period of four years . . . There were many reasons: one, the apartment became too small really to cope with the kind of things that I was handling. It was interfering with my private life. More than that, I began to miss the sense of that excitement of the daily contact with people. And, as I said previously, anybody who is involved in art as a dealer or in any capacity I think has a strong fantasy life. I literally began to fantasize about what I would do if I were going to go public. It doesn't mean that the fantasy matches exactly. But you begin to build up a fantasy of what you want to do next in your life.

LA: And that fantasy for you was -- ?

LH: To get into a public place where I could meet people. People are very important to me. Selling art purely as a financial kind of thing or simply as an act of turning over a piece of merchandise is not the most important thing to me. The creative part is working with people. I enjoy very much either opening up whole new realms, you know, educating them, or even it it's just using a picture as a decorative thing in a home. It's not only a challenge but I find it a very joyous experience. It's like I want to leave that person with a feeling of joy. And that to me is a challenge whether I do it with art or with anything. And I did miss that public contact. When you're dealing privately you have to take the initiative, you have to call people. And I'm not very good at that. I don't like getting on the phone and calling people and saying, "Look, I have this, this and this."

LA: You'd rather have your own gallery and have people coming to you?

LH: Right.

LA: What about working with the artists? What about that aspect of it?

LH: To be totally honest, that is not the most positive thing. You have various experiences. The initial experience is always exhilarating. Many times you meet artists that are very exciting, you do like their work. I become very high about this. But it does present terrific problems afterward. And I think, to be perfectly honest, I prefer not working with the artists.

LA: You mean because of all the technical problems that you become involved in?

LH: Well, there also is a fantasy on the artist's part that every dealer is going to be lady bountiful or mother earth, is going to provide them finally with fame, fortune and so forth. And when they meet somebody that is receptive and tends to be emotional about these things -- I'm not a cool one, I don't react cooly -- so that I tend to, I think, inadvertently give them the feeling that because I think they're so great that they're projecting into the future. I think many artists have a very childlike nature, too. They become dependent on you in many emotional ways. After a while it becomes -- there's a draining process that goes on. Which doesn't mean to say that I haven't met some very, very interesting people that are artists. And I do enjoy that contact. Even now when I travel I find that very exciting. But I find that I get -- I don't want to use the word "sucked in" because it's as if they're doing something to me; I'm doing it to myself. I find that I do get a lot of problems. So that, frankly, I prefer not dealing with the artists.

LA: So your real sense of exhilaration in having your own gallery is your contact with the public?

LH: Contact with the public, and doing certain kinds of unique shows that I probably would never be able to do out of my home.

LA: Now exactly what do you mean?

LH: Well, when I started I really didn't want to do a schedule of shows. But I'll go into that when you ask me what are some of the problems. I'll save that for later. I don't know whether I'm going to go through with these but these are ideas that I have for shows: for example, a portrait show, or rather a show on heads starting with ancient times and taking it on up, and in all forms -- three dimensional, pictures, and so forth. The idea of heads has always intrigued me. Another idea would have been to do a show on the horse starting from ancient times.

LA: So it's the conception of ideas for shows that stimulates you?

LH: Right. That's very exciting. Now that I'm into it I see how difficult it is to go through with it. But that to me was the creative thing. I have a whole list of things that I would love to do. In my mind when I think about them they become a very exciting project. I don't know whether I'll ever be able to go through with them. So it was that kind of thinking, too, that acted as a stimulus for me to get out to the public.

LA: Why did you decide to open a gallery in Birmingham?

LH: For very practical reasons. The only way I decided I would go ahead: I wanted to start out small where the rental, the overhead would not be too high. I wanted it to be very convenient for myself so that it wouldn't become a hassle for me. And then, very practically speaking, the city of Detroit was gone as far as opening up there. I felt that Birmingham was going to become the center of whatever kind of center we were going to have, whether it was galleries or bookstores. I've always wanted to be in the center of things, not on the periphery.

LA: You feel that Birmingham is going to be the art center of the Detroit area?

LH: Right now I don feel that. There is no question about it. And I can even see how the reception that I got -- people would come in and say to me, "Thank you for being here". That was a very gratifying kind of experience to have people be grateful. And it's worked out in a practical way because now that we do have three or four important galleries there is such a thing as gallery hopping. It's a very, very practical answer people who live in the suburbs. They park their car perhaps on a Saturday and will do all the galleries.

LA: So it's always in close proximity.

LH: Right.

LA: But for many years you focussed in the downtown Detroit area. Now you are out in an affluent suburb of Detroit. There must be some differences. Can you articulate some of those differences?

LH: Yes. I opened up in Birmingham because it was a practical thing to do. However, there is a big difference between selling art in suburbia and what want on in the sixties downtown.

LA: What are those differences?

LH: To be very blunt about it, when people buy art in the suburbs it seems to me they use the gallery or anything else they do as just a landing place to go on to something else. I don't know if that sounds clear. Well, maybe I can make it clearer if I tell you what would happen downtown. The people that were interested in buying art would park their car at a parking lot and they knew that they were going to be downtown for a period of two or three hours so that psychologically they were set to come up to the gallery to look at the art and spend time talking about the art. Which was a very, very satisfying experience. I find it's completely different out in the suburbs.

LA: How is it different?

LH: In the suburbs people live in their cars. They never alight at any place. In the suburbs every place is a stopping off place to get to the next place. So they don't literally -- I'm using the word "alight" any place; they don't stop anywhere and say "this is it".

LA: "I'm going to be here."

LH: Right. This is sandwiched in between picking up the children, doing a tennis lesson, and shopping at Saks Fifth Avenue. When they went downtown psychologically they knew that was their afternoon to go look at whatever it was and to come up to the gallery. So that the tension wasn't there. That afternoon was devoted to this. Whereas here in Birmingham it's like people are doing everything hopping on one foot, they never rest with two feet on the ground. And therefore I find that selling art has become a totally different way of selling too.

LA: You don't have the time to really sit down and educate the people?

LH: Right. Now whether it's only that -- it may sound farfetched -- but it isn't. To me it's a very real thing.

LA: How do you react to that?

LH: It's been a stunning blow to me. By "stunning" I mean I've been stunned by it. I think I can explain it not only from a sociological point of view but from another point of view: I find that there is another generation that is buying and these people are not as involved with the word or with books or with the need to know that much about art. They simply want to be struck by that picture and they want to be told about it in three or four sentences and they don't want to go into a big deal about it. I've been thinking about it and I can't quite come up with the answer. It may be that art doesn't have the kind of status that it had in the sixties. Maybe that generation has been brought up on television more than on the book so that we're seeing a little of the result. They are not as intellectually curious about this. It's been quite a revelation to me.

LA: So you find that the younger patrons who patronize your gallery are not as intellectually oriented? They're more interested in an emotional kind of impact of a work of art?

LA: And how do you respond to that?

LH: Well, it's been a shock maybe because my entire life has been spent -- even at the present time I'm always reading and always into -- well, reading. There are all the art magazines, anything that comes out; I'm still immersed in it. Maybe because I am that kind of personality that it's a shock to me.

LA: Do you think it has something to do with the fact that you're in Birmingham? Does that have any influence? Or does that account for that particular kind of climate?

LH: No. I still haven't cracked Birmingham and I don't think anybody ever will. Birmingham and BLoomfield Hills people as a whole -- now I'm just talking from my gallery point of view -- I'm sure that there are galleries that they do support. . . But when it comes to contemporary art I find that we seldom sell to Birmingham people. The same thing happened when I was downtown.

LA: So that the people that come to your gallery now are people who would come to you if you were in downtown Detroit?

LH: No. They are people of comparable class and so forth -- the doctors, the lawyers, and business people -- that if downtown Detroit was a viable city they would be. But, no, they wouldn't go downtown.

LA: What is it like being in Birmingham? What are some of the differences let's say in contrast to when you were at Hudson"s downtown? Is there anything that is particularly characteristic of being -- ?

LH: The first thing, of course, is the kind of clientele that I've talked about, the difference in the way they buy art: it's very fast; it has to appeal to them right away; it's not the intellectual experience it was. I do like being what I call "out on the street" in the sense that I have a glass window and that I interact with what's happening on the street. I like the fact that I'm not in a place, in a building where it's like an ivory tower. I like the fact that people peer into my windows. I Love to see their expression. I like the interaction between the street life and the gallery. I love that part of it. In fact, I don't think I could ever go back to working or being in a building without having access to the street.

LA: Well, what is the reaction? You say that you don't really sell a lot to people who live in the Birmingham area?

LH: Oh, but there are a lot of people that do come into Birmingham from other places. The other thing -- it sounds trivial but it is so important -- is the parking. The fact that people can park their cars and come right in is a very, very important thing right now. Toward the very end being downtown we used to get a lot of complaints about the fact that they had to park their cars and pay fees for parking and then come up. It was beginning to annoy people. And this is just a very practical thing I'm talking about. That, again, is part of living in suburbia. You're in your car all the time. You've got to have access to parking. So that it doesn't become the big thing to buy art. Now what may be happening is this: the big thing now may be to go back to New York. And that I'm finding.

LA: You mean people will go to New York to purchase?

LH: Right. I think since the J. L. Hudson gallery closed down and since it was no longer viable going downtown it's becoming a status thing to go to New York. I hear of more and come people who are doing it. And there are difficulties about it. I've heard of people who buy and when they come back home it's not the thing they thought. . . When people are traveling they're on a euphoric "high", they tend to spend more money and spend it more easily. And then they bring it back here and it isn't quite what it looked like in New York. So there are

hazards to that. But that is occurring.

LA: Again, I'd like to, if you can, focus on what it sis like now being in Birmingham? What is your general feeling about being here?

LH: Well, is there a particular reason why you say Birmingham, or being in the public, or just being in Birmingham?

LA: What is the environment like being here in Birmingham? And how is it different from downtown? What are some of the advantages of being here and what are some of the disadvantages in contrast to being downtown?

LH: It's a much easier and much more peasant kind of environment. I live close by. It's a pleasant thing to be able to park my car across the street and just walk in. Like I said before, it's pleasant -- I like having people walking up and down the street and just looking into the windows and coming in. I'm also situated with two other galleries on the block -- the Yaw Gallery and the Halsted 831. It's very pleasant having other gallery dealers on the block so that you become like a little community. The three of us the other night went to Flint and we spoke at the museum there. They did a special on the three galleries on the block in Birmingham.

LA: Oh!

LH: So that was very nice. We brought our things there and spoke to the Friends of Modern Art there. That's the positive part of it. I do miss -- there is something about being in a downtown area where you get the hustle and the bustle of people. You get a lot of people on their lunch hour -- the lawyers and the business people. We used to get a lot more diverse kind of clientele. They each have their advantages and their disadvantages. It's much easier being in Birmingham from a practical point of view. As I've said, I live eight or ten minutes away. It somebody wants to see me in the evening there's no problem. I can go home and then come back. I can open the gallery on a Sunday to accommodate someone. So it's easier.

LA: What is your impression of the community in general?

LH: From an art point of view, they always were conservative and I still find them a very conservative community.

LA: What effect do you think your gallery has on the community?

LH: The only thing is I do get people coming in who don't buy but who are very complimentary and very grateful that I am here. The press, the Birmingham Eccentric has been very, very good. They will come out at a moment's notice and really do an in-depth kind of reporting on any shows that are unusual.

LA: What is the response, say, from the average person who come in off the street?

LH: Most people that come in off the street are not as verbal in their antagonism as they were at Hudson's. At Hudson's they would think nothing of just lashing out. Here they are a lot more contained. You can tell from looking at their faces that they are kind of bewildered, they don't know how to cope with it but they try to be polite about it.

LA: Do you try to educate them?

LH: Do I try to educate them? No, not unless they make the preliminary advances. Then I will. But otherwise I do want people to feel comfortable about walking in not having anybody bother them. It's a small place, it's an intimate place and I want them to feel comfortable about coming back without being bothered.

LA: Are there any significant changes in terms of your artistic concerns that you've had to make here in your own gallery?

LH: Well, no, there hasn't been and that's because of my own stubborn feeling about it. I'm just going to show what I want to show. If I were to tailor my sales to the community I probably would change the whole operation of the gallery.

LA: But you are not going to?

LH: No. The only thing that I have been thinking about is maybe one or two shows that would appeal to a more conservative type clientele but it would still have to be within the realm of fine art. One of them is going to be the American folk art show which I think Birmingham and Bloomfield people could identify with. Another one might be to do a landscape show.

LA: So would this be something that you would do ordinarily? I mean tailoring it in order to -- ?

LH: The folk art I probably would have done anyway. But a landscape show I think is not something that I would rush out do to, and it's probably a very difficult show to do. I'm going to do a very exciting show in the spring on horses -- probably not the kind of horses that Birmingham people would community.

LA: Lee, what would you say are your major objectives here for your gallery?

LH: Well, you know, I'm not the kind of person that thingks in terms of objectives. I just plunge in and I do it. And I never think in terms of what the -- the objective is just to keep going, if you really want to know the truth. One of the major differences when you're public. You haven't asked me this but I'm going to bring it up: when you're working privately, whatever happens, happens. But when you're out with overhead and working on a day to day basis you are concerned about keeping that gallery going. I find that a lot of my time now is concerned with bookkeeping, with worrying about whether the overhead is going to be met. So that a lot of the energy is drained into these very practical considerations.

LA: And these, of course, were things you didn't have to think about when you were assistant director at Hudson's?

LH: Right. And it's a very important factor. You find that the time that was left over to think about the creative part is definitely cut down, definitely cut down.

LA: But you have stated in press releases and in various written materials about your concept -- [click of machine]

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: Lee, you were talking about the transition you made from that of a private dealer to opening your own gallery. Why did you choose to open your gallery in the Birmingham area? For many years you focussed on downtown Detroit. Why then would you decide to move to Birmingham?

LH: Well, for the very reasons that I decided to leave the gallery downtown. I felt the city was no longer a viable place where people would come down to buy art. It was simply a question of practical solutions. Most of the middle class live in the suburbs now and it's mostly the middle class that's buying art. It is very convenient to where I live. I still like being centrally located. And Birmingham to me is a little bit of a downtown. I like the action; I like people walking down the street. I think it is the only center there is left now outside of downtown. I live in the suburbs now. It just fell right into place. I didn't want to be in a suburban location in a mall or anything. I wanted to be located in a little bit of a downtown area. So the only alternative would have been Birmingham.

LA: What would you say are some of the advantages and some of the disadvantages?

LH: The advantages: it's very pleasant, it's very easy, it's easy to park the car and just walk across the street, open the door right on the street level and be right in my gallery. It makes it a very pleasant way of working. I like being (quote) "out on the street". I like having a big plate glass window where I can interact with people, where people can peer in, where I'm part of the life that's going on. I prefer that much more than to being stuck up in a building somewhere. In fact, having had this experience I don't think I could ever go back to the other.

LA: You talked a little bit about a sense of community that you felt.

LH: Yes. During the first two, three, four months after the gallery opened people would walk in and literally thank me for opening the doors. They went out of their way to say that "maybe we'll never buy but we do want to tell you how happy we are that you're here, and that you have come here with this caliber of art and even though I don't understand it, we know that you have a fine reputation and so forth and we're happy to have you here." So that the reception from the community has been very good. Also the reception from the Birmingham press has been excellent. I like being on a block with two other dealers. We establish a little are community. A good example of what transpired: just the other week the three of us went together to Flint to the museum there. We each gave our own individual speeches to the Friends of Modern Art about our galleries. So the block itself is becoming known as a sort of little art block.

LA: And that's important?

LH: It is. It does add a certain kind of image -- well, I don't know if the word is image -- but it focusses peoples' attention onto our location. The fact that they can come to the Yaw Gallery and to the Thinks Gallery and then to the Lee Hoffman Gallery becomes a little bit of what New Yorkers are used to -- the idea of gallery hopping. And we do find that when one gallery does have an opening it does affect the others. People will come in because they're at the other place. They tend to go up and down the block.

LA: So you've started working together then?

LH: We're still talking about it. Actually we can't seem to get the same kind of a date for all of our openings. But it's in the back of our minds. Those things do take time to work out.

LA: Do you think this is a quality that is unique to the Birmingham suburb?

LH: I can't think of any other suburb that has it right now. Since I've opened there have been one or two other major galleries. Actually Birmingham is now the center of the art scene except for the Fisher Building. I think these are the two viable places now where the art galleries are located.

LA: And you want to be in the center?

LH: Yes. You asked: what are the advantages of being in Birmingham -- is that the way the question was worded?

LA: Well, the advantages and the disadvantages.

LH: The disadvantages: I do miss the extreme hustle and bustle of downtown. You had a lot of lawyers, a lot of businessmen who used to come into the gallery on their lunch hours. And of course we had a lot more traffic then. And there's a certain atmosphere that you get downtown in a big city -- well, there was in the sixties. Obviously, I left there because that was no longer happening. But that is one of the things that I do miss. On the other hand, it's very interesting -- I've gotten a few artists from New York and a few very sophisticated dealers and they. . . One from Chicago walked in here and said, "Oh, this is so nice! It's like being in a small town." Somehow the contrast between the busyness of New York and so on they found very delightful.

LA: Refreshing.

LH: Yes. So there is that to be said about it. It is easier; I think it is just an easier way of coping with traffic and with parking and so forth. And again I reiterate I find this idea of being on a street level very important. I find it just marvelous -- just opening the door and being there.

LA: You've talked about the fact that your concept of the gallery you wanted it to be different from the traditional gallery concept. In your press release you said that you wanted to do things differently. What exactly did you mean by that? How are you going to do things differently? How have you done things differently.

LH: I wanted to try to recreate publicly what I had privately, which was a more intimate kind of gallery rather than the typical gallery that you find in big cities, say, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles. It would be more like almost inviting people into my living room, like a salon kind of thing. That was what used to happen when I dealt privately. People would come in and it would be a very intimate kind of gallery. And the shows that I had in mind were not the typical kind of shows that galleries do. And truthfully speaking, I'm still looking for *the* formula. I haven't attained it yet. Dealing in America has been one kind of dealing.

LA: As opposed to dealing in Europe?

LH: I think in Europe years ago. . . Maybe it's just a nostalgic kind of thing on my part but I've always had a very personal relationship with my clients and I wanted to continue that in a public way so that instead of appealing to -- it may sound like a contradiction going public and yet having a very private feeling about it. But that's what I was trying to accomplish.

LA: You said that you want to have a very personal relationship with your clients and yet you also want to have contact with the public. But --

LH: Yes. I don't see any contradiction in that. Once a person does come in here it does become a very personal kind of thing. Many times I go out to the homes. I want to see how these people live. It's not just a question of buying a painting for decoration. I want to see the actual home and try to fit the painting. Many people -- it's not only a question of collectors, you have all kinds of people that are buying. There are many people that want to buy some very nice pictures just to hang on their wall and then they're set; that's it. So that it's not just selling them a picture; it's selling them an experience; it's selling them an excitement. I like to get them excited about what they're purchasing, not just to have something that's going to hang on their wall and become a decorative object. And I find that by doing that -- well, it's the only way I can operate -- they will come back for more. The whole experience changes. It's no longer putting a few pictures on the wall -- something over the sofa, something over the buffet; but they really get into it.

LA: Well, how do you view your role here in the gallery then? On the one hand, you want to have a very personal relationship with your clientele. On the other hand, you say you like to be educator, you like to be --

LH: That's no contradiction.

LA: Oh, no, no, I'm not saying it is. I'm trying to establish how you view yourself and the function and the role of your gallery in the community.

LH: For example, the Tantric Art show that I brought down. . . There are certain things that I'd like to do that Detroit has not been exposed to, may not work out from the point of view of financial gain; but because I'm so interested in it and so excited about it I like to bring these kinds of shows down, too. I hope to do that kind of thing. If I were really to think about it, I think I want to do what I myself am interested in. It is not purely a commercial kind of thing. If it were, the whole nature of this gallery would be different. You can always sell six times as much (quote) "borax" -- just plain decorative stuff to put on the walls. So if you're opening a gallery just as a commercial venture this is not the way to do it. I'm just doing what I myself am interested in. And I hope I get out what I should say is that it is an extension of my own interest and of my own taste.

LA: Has the fantasy measured up to what you thought it would be?

LH: The creation of the gallery -- the physical aspect of the gallery -- which that is most unusual because when I think back on my life I imagined certain things; usually the reality never quite came up to that. But in this instance it was totally amazing to me how the planning, the months of planning -- it looks like a very simple thing -- but it took a great deal of thought even to get the simplicity within the confines of 1200 feet. It was astounding to me that it came out exactly. So if you're talking about the physical aspects, yes, the fantasy did come out exactly.

LA: And what about the concept of the intimate salon? In that sense in terms of working with people and the whole concept, is that something that also was realized?

LH: The answer to that I think is "No and yes." You notice that I didn't say "Yes and no." I said "No and yes." The most startling discovery to me is the different buying patterns of suburbia. When I was located in the gallery downtown I think people parked their cars, came up to the gallery and they knew they were spending several hours for the purpose of looking at art, and learning about it. They were very avid for information and for knowledge. It was not merely buying a picture to hang on the wall but they wanted to know the historical, the philosophical -- there was a keen desire to get into things verbally and through books, being educated.

LA: And this you would something that was, generally speaking, an aspect of the clientele in general that patronized the J. L. Hudson Gallery?

LH: Yes, and also when I was dealing privately. Now as far as I am concerned, there is a distinct change in buying patterns. I think it's due to two things: the nature of life in suburbia; and the younger generation which has different interests. Whether these are people that are the result of the television age, they are not -- I don't want to use the word "intellectual" -- maybe I should use that word. They react more emotionally to art. And I'm not passing judgment whether it's good or bad, but they are really not involved in intellectual pursuits. They simply want a painting that will bowl them over, knock them over, that they like.

LA: You're talking now of your clientele that you find in the Lee Hoffman Gallery?

LH: At the present time. Right. They are on the same economic level, the same kind of people that I was dealing with ten years ago, but they are a new generation.

LA: What about the socio-economic -- or the occupations?

LH: The same. I find that most of the clients that come in here are either doctors, lawyers, business people -- the same kind of social economic level.

LA: But now you find these different attitudes?

LH: Yes.

LA: Do you attribute that to the fact that you are now in a suburb? Or do you attribute that to the fact that it's another generation and that the values are different? Or both?

LH: I think both. From a practical point of view living in suburbia you're living in a car and you never alight at any one place. Everything is done in between doing other things. As I've mentioned before, when you went downtown when you were looking at a picture you were mentally prepared to spend the afternoon. In the suburbs I think you check off the things to do and visiting a gallery and looking at a picture is between tennis lessons and going to Saks and picking up the children. So that at certain levels in these buying patterns. So that those people don't have the patience, they don't have the time. While you're talking with them they're already looking at their wrist watch.

LA: Is this disillusioning to you?

LH: Yes. It was quite a shock. And then I think there is such a thing as a difference, a ten-year whether you want to call it a generation difference. I don't think that these kinds of buyers are into the intellectual and philosophical basis of art as much as they used to be. I don't think they read as much. I think probably they're more preoccupied maybe with tennis, with a lot of other things that have come on the scene. And I think by nature they are -- I use the word "television generation" -- they are more visual and more --

LA: Instant gratification.

LH: That's an excellent word for it; that is the word -- "instant gratification". They don't have the patience to really talk about and investigate things. And the curiosity is not there; that's another word -- the "curiosity" is not there. Now maybe it's because they have already been brought up -- I'm trying to look at it from different points of view -- maybe it's that contemporary art is already part of their lives so that they don't need to question as much. That could be, too. I just thought about that.

LA: So you think that when you were working at Hudson's, for example, the contemporary art thing was so new that people were grasping to find out about it?

LH: Yes. Right. It could be that contemporary art is so much a part of the lives of this generation that they don't have to question it as much or understand it as much. But personally speaking, it's been a little shocking to me because that's not the kind of order under which I grew up or which I was involved with.

LA: Would you say that this is something that characterizes the clientele that you've got now?

LH: Very definitely. Very definitely.

LA: So in this way you were not able perhaps to realize that fantasy that you had for the intimate salon?

LH: Right. Now I said "no and yes." On the other hand, I do find that at certain times, for example, on Saturday afternoons -- again, this must be a pattern of life -- there are moments when people do want to relax and they do want to come and talk. And not necessarily only about art. So that the gallery does become a place where they come in and relax. Usually I find this on a Saturday afternoon or on Wednesday afternoons and then they'll stay longer than six o'clock. And not necessarily talk only about art.

LA: Is this something that you would like to promote?

LH: Oh, yes. I definitely would.

LA: This gets into another fantasy.

LH: The ultimate fantasy, yes. This is only stage one. I don't think I'm going to reveal all my fantasies. I am going to say something very revealing: even though art has always been a very important part of my life, I still don't feel that art is the most important thing in life. So that when I talk about what I would like to do -- the ultimate -- it probably would be a gathering place for people who have similar interests, a meeting place for people who would talk on everything -- life, philosophy, books, art, movies. I happen to enjoy that kind of thing. That's where I get my "high". Other people get it in other ways. I find that a very exciting concept.

LA: And can you describe a little bit more specifically what this place would be like?

LH: I'd rather not go into it. But the aesthetics of the place I would have would be very important to me.

LA: And you eventually would like to open a place -- ?

LH: Yes. There would also be food involved but not on a major scale, but a very simple kind of thing. So that we would get away from parking the car and hopping in. But it would be not only for art -- of course, art would be a very major part of it -- but to me again what I want to get away from is making art separate from life. I like the idea of making art only a casual part of life.

LA: So it's intertwined -- ?

LH: Exactly. When I said that I'd like to evolve a different way of selling art that's one of the things I'm talking about; that it's not just art with a capital A. It's to provide an ambience and an environment where people take it casually.

LA: Of course that has been one of your objectives for the Lee Hoffman Gallery -- to create a kind of relaxed atmosphere.

LH: Right.

LA: How would you accomplish this?

LH: Well, I really am very gratified about that because time and time again people have said that they enjoy coming here because -- they use that very word -- it's a very "relaxed" place to come to. I don't know how I've done it. But it's there. Whether they feel, you know, it in myself, or whether it's the physical aspect of the gallery. . . But I've had this even from people who don't buy who tell me this.

LA: It's a very open, very airy kind of environment where you really can look at the paintings on the wall.

LH: Right. And yet it isn't austere, it isn't forbidding. I did want to have a warmth to it. And I think it must have been accomplished because I've had innumerable people tell me this. Then I think it's important how people relate to you if you don't breathe down their back, if you make it a very casual kind of thing. They're just entering the place, looking around, if they don't want to talk about it's fine, they leave. If they want to talk about it they feel they can.

LA: But you're very accessible to the public?

LH: Right.

LA: And that's part of creating that kind of relaxed atmosphere?

LH: Right. You've said that coming to the Lee Hoffman Gallery should be like a part of the creative exploration. You've also said that you would hope that one would discover more about oneself in coming to the gallery. How does one discover oneself by coming to your gallery? Well, you open up new areas, areas that maybe you were not aware of. I've had the experience of young women walking in who are just coming to find a few nice paintings for their home. After being around and being exposed to the books, to the magazines, one thing leads to another. We start talking. It's what we call an educational process. They begin thinking also in terms of things they've never thought about. Art is not only a visual experience. That artist that is making that picture is saying something, too, because I think artists are the antennae of our society. So that in some way or other sometimes it becomes a provocative statement even though these people are still thinking in terms of the decoration. But many times it leads to some very provocative thinking about the kind of life that we're living in this twentieth century. I'm very into antiquities. Those are things that a great many people would have no interest in. But deals with history, deals with archaeology, deals with different ways of life. You open up whole new interests that way.

LA: So people do discover things about themselves when you -- ?

LH: Yes. Right.

LA: You've also said that it's been your desire to show discovered and undiscovered art from world-wide sources.

LH: That was quite a statement. I think, again, I was referring to the word (quote) "antiquities" -- artifacts from different cultures that I've always been interested in. But the vast majority of people buying art when they buy contemporary art they're not used to thinking in terms of these kinds of things. They're used to thinking in terms of a piece of modern sculpture or a modern painting; and that's it. If I had the space -- which I do find an advantage and at times a disadvantage because there are many things that I come across like "found" objects which to me are marvelous works of art and it's hard to have the space to show it all.

LA: Have your attitudes changed at all since you have left J. L. Hudson's and now opened your own gallery in terms of your artistic concerns? You're interested in antiquities now. Is this a new direction for you? Or is this something that has always been -- ?

LH: No, probably it was always very latent. It was always one of my interests. I always had it in my home. Yes, it would be new in the fact that we never stressed it that much. At the Hudson gallery I did start African art and Pre-Columbian art. I don't mean I started it but I urged the directors to go into that direction. So I think because it was part of my interest even then and I'm pushing that more -- the unique kind of object rather than decorate, than bring things into their homes that are what I call just decorative objects.

LA: Have there been any radical changes in the attitudes that you've had over these last fifteen years from the time you were at the J. L. Hudson gallery?

LH: Well, perhaps not "attitudes" but in terms of artistic styles that you encourage and promote, has there been a change in terms of your own aesthetic preferences?

LH: I think it's impossible at whatever stage you're at not to change. It's just a natural phenomenon that occurs.

Things just are not static. The more you are involved with art, the more you're going to see and the more you're going to respond to . And I do feel that taste does change. You start at one point -- not necessarily an upward kind of thing -- it's just a natural part of living.

LA: Would you say that there are any major artistic styles or specific artists that you want to promote and encourage at the Lee Hoffman Gallery now?

LH: No. I don't want to talk about specific styles or anything specific. That's one of the things that I object to in most galleries -- that they stick to one specific kind of thing.

LA: And you can label the gallery as such?

LH: Right. To me a work of art can be a very, very contemporary kind of painting. Of course I will feature the kinds of things that I am familiar with and that I have access to. And that is contemporary painting. But I don't want to limit myself to that. As I've said before, I feel that we define ourselves too much by periods -- that only a modern painting is good or only a modern piece of sculpture is good. That's what I hope to change. I hope that by bringing in these antiquities and artifacts and even certain "found" objects that people will look upon these as a work of art.

LA: So this idea of diversity is very important to you?

LH: Very important. I remember that during Christmas time I had on the floor four Killam rugs that to me were like paintings. I never would have thought of selling Killam rugs. I got just as excited about selling these things. . . They were literally works of art. I think this gallery in contrast to other galleries will have more freedom in defining what is a work of art. Not that I want to make a definition but, again, it will be by my standards. And I feel that aesthetically it will be an extension of myself. It will be what I would like in my home.

LA: You said that the shows, the exhibitions that you have here are really an extension of your own interests. But do you feel a certain responsibility to the public, to your public?

LH: When you say "responsibility to the public" do you mean in the sense of selling them what they want? or responsibility as far as the quality goes? What do you mean by responsibility?

LA: Well, I guess I'm also getting at what your definition of responsibility to the public would be.

LH: I don't think you can separate the idea of responsibility to the public. It's responsibility to yourself. I never separate whether it's the public or myself. I probably would do a lot better commercially if I focussed it purely on the public. It's always easier to sell commercial kind of art. You could sell triple what you do the other kind of art. It's always harder to sell -- well, what I consider fine art. A great many people do come into the gallery _____ _____ the galleries down the street, they'll open the door, will come in and they want just a pretty scene. I can tell that they walk out disappointed that they haven't found that pretty little picture that's going to go up on the wall. So when you go into a commercial venture like this. . . Let me put it bluntly: I didn't go into this to make money.

LA: So then your responsibility would be to create an environment, as you say, a relaxed environment where one can see quality?

LH: Right.

LA: Lee, I know that diversity is very important to you in terms of not stereotyping your gallery, or promoting a particular style, but isn't there a phase or a style that is important to you that you lean toward?

LH: Oh, yes, there's no question about it. I think it is the whole American contemporary art. To me the fifties and the sixties was one of the most exciting periods -- the whole explosion of the American contemporary art scene. I still feel that America is the center in mid-century -- well, it's really three quarters of the century. It is my basic interest.

LA: So you would say that beginning, let's say, with the abstract expressionists up to today -- ?

LH: Yes. Exactly. And I'm always on the lookout for new artists. I have found some that I think are very exciting. I'm always open to new artists. In fact, I may be flying to Albuquerque, New Mexico, next week to look at somebody's art in their studio, a former New Yorker who is now living in Albuquerque.

LA: What about your commitment to the local artists or to Michigan artists?

LH: When I started the gallery I knew that that would be a question that would be asked. It isn't that I would automatically say that because he's local he's out; but on the other hand I do not concentrate on local artists. I

do have one or two: George Vihos whom I'm going to be giving a one-man show this fall. Michelle Doner is in the gallery. But because there are other galleries in the community that are tuned into the local scene, I don't see any point in repeating it. And then I'm doing what come naturally to me. At the Hudson gallery I was used to working primarily with New York artists. That's what I feel comfortable with. But in my travels whether it's in the Midwest or in California if I see something that's interesting of course I will show them or buy their art. But I find that it's in the Midwest or in California if I see something that's interesting of course I will sow them or buy their art. But I find that it's a natural pattern. The people that I've been dealing with, the clients, know that I deal with, the clients, know that I deal with the American New York artists and that's what they kind of look to this gallery for.

LA: So you really don't feel the need or the responsibility to promote local artists?

LH: No, I don't.

LA: Why have you selected someone like Michelle Doner? OR what is your involvement in terms of your commitment to her work?

LH: Very honestly, before I opened the gallery she came to my house. She asked to come to see me. I think I knew her -- yes, my daughter had gone to school with her -- I knew the name. She merely asked to come up to show her work. I've never refused anybody when they, you know, ask to show their work. I had seen her things before and in the past I didn't feel an empathy for them. I felt that she was very talented but that the talent was raw yet. When she came and showed me what she was doing I was excited about the work. But I made it very plain that whatever kind of relationship we had. . . Because it was a new venture I didn't want to make any promises. She seemed like a mature enough person that could accept this kind of arrangement. It's a very easy kind of thing. You can't do that with all artists. I had been showing George Vihos' work as a private dealer for about three or four years before I opened my gallery because, again, I had seen his work years ago. I wasn't tuned in to it but then in the last four or five years I've responded to what he was doing and I've dealt with his work.

LA: So what would you say is the status of communication between the Lee Hoffman Gallery and local or Michigan artists?

LH: I'm deluged with requests every day. I've never really said, "I won't do it." I think that once there's a glimmer of hope the artists will try. I try to look at everybody's work. I've never turned anybody down as far as looking at their work goes. And I have handled -- I have taken in the work of some artists. There was a man from the state university; there are a few others that I keep for a certain period of time. I try to sell them because they appeal to me. After that amount of time -- because I don't have the facilities here -- they will come and pick up the work. So it isn't as if it's a closed door; it's not.

LA: But you're not really interested in promoting -- is that not right?

LH: The word "promoting" -- I guess it would mean. . . Outside of the two that I've mentioned before there isn't that much of a commitment. I would see possibilities in the work of these artists and I would say, "I think you have possibilities and let me try to do something with it." But unfortunately it has not worked out.

LA: And you're more comfortable dealing with artists that you've been dealing with?

LH: I think so. Yes. It becomes hard, too, for me to. . . I think art dealing is very much like the medical profession. Certain people will go to certain dealers the way certain people go to certain doctors. In the back of their mind they're aware that that particular dealer carries this kind of work that they naturally gravitate to. That is an aspect of art dealing. Now I don't want to get into it, but there is one Michigan artist that I became very, very interested in but it's already too late because he has gone to New York. But we still may have some kind of a working relationship.

LA: What is your perception of the Michigan Artists Shows that are shown at the Detroit Institute of Arts each year? Do you go down there perhaps looking for new artists that you can -- ?

LH: I don't go down every year but I do go down occasionally. I think the of it is bad. It's the same thing that happens in New York: seven-eighths of the art there is just junk. Every once in a while there may be one or two out of a show that I think has possibilities. I probably don't go to New York as often now as I used to. Once you are in a gallery your time is a lot more precious; you just can't take the time out. But generally I find it comes through recommendation. Other artists will say to me, "You should see this and this artist." It applies not only in Michigan; it applies in New York; it applies everywhere. Sometimes your best artists are found through the recommendation of other artists.

LA: So you use that rather than -- ?

LH: I use that as a criterion, yes.

LA: What has been the extent of your gallery's involvement with other galleries and other institutions? Is there a close relationship?

LH: You mean with other galleries outside of Detroit?

LA: You are close with the two galleries that are down the street -- right?

LH: Oh, yes.

LA: What about other galleries either in Birmingham or other institutions around the Detroit area?

LH: Well, I don't know whether this applies but one thing comes to mind. I remember a year ago visiting Grand Rapids in connection with the Friends of Modern Art. There was a tour of all the great things that they've been doing. And I saw Joe Kinnebrew's *Fish Ladder*. Now as a result of that I am now presenting his name. . . There's a big project going on in the heart of Detroit, a big hospital, and he is an artist that I have now presented to the hospital board. We're working very closely. I feel very excited about his concept and it could be a marvelous kind of creative object that he's going to be doing. We're not sure yet. But that definitely was a result of my going on this trip to Grand Rapids, seeing his work there, and being in a position. . . As a matter of fact, I'm very close with the kind of thing he's doing and in two weeks I'm going to be presenting his name to the committee.

LA: But you wouldn't say that it's part of your style to go out searching or to go out looking for Michigan artists in general?

LH: No. To be perfectly honest, it isn't. It's just artists or art. I don't tend to say that because it's local it's bad, or because it's local it's good. I just never have had that division in my mind.

LA: What about your involvement with other state institutions? Or, your relationship, let's say, with the Detroit Institute of Arts? Is there a close communication there?

LH: No.

LA: So, again, you're pretty much contained in terms of keeping up with all the things that you have to be involved with in running a gallery?

LH: Right. It's very, very time-consuming. You really never have enough time for the other things in the community. I did appear for the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Triangle. I spent a whole day when they had their session in Troy. I try to become involved on a community level. It does take a lot of time and a lot of energy. And you do it really as a gesture of good will. You don't know whether anything really comes of it but every once in a while I do feel that it has to be done as gesture of good will.

LA: So you do feel that there is a commitment -- that there should be a commitment there?

LH: Oh, yes. And if it works in with my kind of outlook, and if it's convenient, I'm more than happy. And there are groups that come into the gallery. I get calls from various community groups wanting to know. . . For example, a group of thirty women came from Ann Arbor and they wanted a talk on contemporary art. I've forgotten the show that was up at the time. We get many requests of that nature.

LA: So then you do see yourselves in the role very much an educator?

LH: Yes.

LA: That is very much a part of your whole feeling about what art is and what your role is?

LH: Right. Maybe it stems from the fact that I was a teacher at one time. I don't know.

LA: How would you appraise the artistic climate here now, say, as compared to the sixties?

LH: It's an entirely different thing now. I think that it's different on two levels: it's different on an economic level and it's different on a psychological level. As I've mentioned before, I think the period of the sixties was a bursting forth of American art. Unfortunately, in America we do use everything as a product to be marketed. During the sixties art was a very _____ kind of thing. It was promoted, it was a very "in" thing to buy. And Americans are very influenced by that. Whether it would have. We're that kind of a people. We grab on to something and it becomes the thing and five or ten years later something else takes its place. I'm being very brutally honest about it. That, coupled with the fact that since the seventies there has been an economic change. I think with inflation, and we did go through a recession. . . I think art prices were away too high. They

had gotten out of hand and I think a readjustment was in order. But I think that nowadays people just don't have that extra money floating around that they had years ago. For example, a doctor or a lawyer or a professional has to think now in terms of their home costs more, the education of their children, everything costs more. Now I don't think they sit down and literally. . . This is the way I view it: there isn't that amount of loose money around the way there was in the sixties. And dealer who is honest will tell you that. It's a whole rearranging. And in the sixties they were buying the idea of investment. *The* thing was to buy something and then boast about the fact that you had a terrific investment. Of course it can be a very tricky thing. But it was true that if you bought very fine things, almost automatically. . . When I think back on what I sold -- Caldera and Dubuffets and Stellas and Matisses -- it is mind boggling what people have in their homes here in Detroit and at what prices they got them for. I don't think we can expect the same thing in the seventies. It isn't the same way.

LA: But you had that kind of clientele --

LH: You had the economy, you clientele, and you had the ambience from which to launch this. American art was taking off.

LA: And that same climate doesn't exist today?

LH: I don't think so.

LA: Lee, what has been the extent of your gallery's involvement with other galleries around Michigan, not just Detroit?

LH: Well, really not too much. I'm just starting some groundwork with a gallery in Ann Arbor. We may be doing something together. But on the whole there hasn't been too much of a reciprocal kind of thing back and forth.

LA: Joint shows or -- ?

LH: No, not to date. But I am thinking of one in the future with a particular gallery in Ann Arbor.

LA: What would that show be?

LH: Well, I'd rather not talk about it now. I think it would be out of turn for me to talk about it before we've even. . . Or maybe I'm thinking that it probably won't be --

LA: Come about?

LH: It would have to do with the George Vihos show. I may do a combination thing with one of the galleries in Ann Arbor. He is from the area here.

LA: Looking ahead to the future, are there any specific important exhibitions or programs that you plan? Or maybe you can talk a little bit about the nature of planning an exhibition and what it consists of?

LH: I was hoping that that question wouldn't come up. I think one of the differences of this gallery --for myself I can't operate under programs. I have to operate very spontaneously. When I first opened the gallery and somebody would say, "Well, what is the direction. . ." all these words ___ ___ ____ I flinch when I hear those words. In a sense there is a direction, but in a sense it is direction less. I never know that I'm going to encounter. I go to San Francisco or to Chicago or to New York and maybe I'll be smitten with something. I cannot operate on too organized a level. And I know that that is essential for a gallery. But at the same time I've got to do it my way. It's harder to do it my way. It's much easier to say: I've got ten shows for the next year and this is what it's going to be. But I don't want to get into that rat race of a show a month which is one of the negative qualities about being out in the public. And if I do have to get involved in shows I want to do it my way.

LA: By that you mean the public expects a different show each month?

LH: Yes. I think that that was a shocking thing to me. Be fore I opened my gallery I thought I was just going to transfer, you know, my private operation and go public. But it has not worked out that way. You cannot just sit in a gallery and just do a private kind of thing. You do have to do a public thing in order to get people to come in. Most galleries in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles are set up on a show-a-month basis. Which is very, very hard to do both financially and from an energy point of view. So again I'm going to have to do my own thing, probably maybe five or six shows a year rather than ten or twelve. I don't want to project too much into the future. I think art now is in a very. . . It's not as static as it was years ago. There are an awful lot of things happening now, different kinds of things. It's both a freedom and it's also the opposite of freedom; it's a strait jacket. It operates both ways: to have the freedom of saying -- "Well, I don't know what I'm going to be doing four months from now" and just doing it spontaneously. But it also creates a lot of problems because then if you do find something there is a last minute skirmish and so forth. But I'm just not -- I've always said I didn't want to be that typical gallery kind of thing. I've got to do it on my own terms.

LA: So then this also fits in with a kind of -- ?

LH: I know in the back of my mind what I want to do. As I've said earlier, I'd love to do a show on heads. I'd love to do a show on -- we were talking about the horse. But I didn't realize the amount of research and, you know, getting all these different things. So my sights may have to go lower. In New York I have seen the work of a few artists that I like very much and which I'm looking into. I would like to bring their work to Detroit, to Birmingham.

LA: How does an idea hit you? Is it something that -- ?

LH: Well, you just think about these things. Again, nobody ever knows the sources. Probably in my case it's the creative aspect. This is the creativity for me: is the idea the unusual, you know, putting it together. I'd love to do a show on calligraphy.

LA: Were these plans a pattern that was set when you were at Hudson's?

LH: No. We would talk about these things. And this is what I liked but we never really got around to doing them. And I imagine one of the reasons was -- well, they are twofold: at Hudson's you couldn't do quite that esoteric kind of thing; and it _____ take a lot of work.

LA: Did they have a schedule of a certain number of shows that they were going to show every year?

LH: Oh, yes. Every month. There would probably be at least ten or eleven shows a year. And there is a reason for it. You send out a mailing. It creates interest. But there came a point -- I think it happened to all the dealers in the late sixties and early seventies -- where a tremendous amount of money was going out for this kind of thing. The economy was changing. Dealers were trying to think of a different way and many dealers either went private or else they did cut down on their shows. Some of them are still operating that way. Other dealers have found that they've got to keep up with shows. Each dealer really does their own thing. But I would say that in the major cities like Chicago, New York and Los Angeles there is a show a month. But you have to have a staff and you have to have the financial resources. To me the burdens would far outweigh the positive aspects of it.

LA: So then your idea is to do maybe five or six shows a year on things that really interest you as ideas germinate and then you follow -- ?

LH: Right. I mean this is my ideal. Again, I'm realistic enough to know. . . This is what I'd like to do. I'm still feeling my way. It's been eight months since I opened the gallery. If it's not practical I may have to compromise. I mean these are the things I'd like to do. It's very possible that I can't do it.

LA: What would you say your effect has been on the community, on your local community and also on the Detroit community in terms of the opening of the Lee Hoffman Gallery?

LH: That's a little hard for me to evaluate. I can only say that if you would ask me directly "how is the gallery doing?" Which is not a question that you would ask, but a lot of people will ask me this, and I answer that: the gallery has been in existence for eight months; that the way I had projected that if I would come out even after two or three years -- the general sequence is that you're lucky if you meet your expense in two or three years; and using that as a basis I think the gallery is doing well.

LA: Financially?

LH: Yes. But again this is a unique kind of business. You cannot project they way you can in food or clothing or other businesses. You can be doing great for six months and then. . . I was talking to a dealer on the phone just a few minutes ago when we were interrupted. It's a very cyclical kind of business and you can't account for the cycles.

LA: Also in terms of -- you've talked about the financial end, but in other respects how would you say the effects have been of your gallery?

LH: On the public? It's hard for me to evaluate it. I don't know. I have new clients in addition to the old clients that I've had and still have. It's very gratifying because you feel: my God, you know, you've filled up their houses; what more could they want. But they still come around and are very receptive. But there is a whole new group coming up and --

[BREAK IN TAPING]

LA: This is a continuation of an interview with Lee Hoffman for the Archives of American Art. Lee, can you tell me some of the dimensions involved in being a gallery owner, in being a woman now owning your own gallery, being the director?

LH: Well, I'd rather answer that question a little differently; I'd rather it were stated a little differently.

LA: How would you like me to say it?

LH: Sitting from the vantage point that I am now and looking back on just how I feel about that fifteen-year period, I have very strong feelings about the word "career". I don't think I came into this with the idea that this was going to be my career. As I look back it's like an unfolding process.

LA: Now you're talking about how you became involved with the J. L. Hudson gallery?

LH: Yes. And I feel the same way about how I became involved in my gallery and -- who knows -- about the future, too, of what will happen in the future. I have very strong feeling when I see young girls today and they ask me questions, you know, about galleries and so forth. I almost sense -- I don't want to use the word "frenzy" but it's like everybody wants everything clear-cut: how do you get into this career; what do you do/ And I have a feeling that many times in life if we let things unfold and gradually happen. . . And as I look back on my fifteen years I think that's how things happened. It wasn't that I went out and said "I'm going to do this"; it's like you set the groundwork. Just as I think back to the early years of my marriage I set the groundwork of reading all the magazines. That kind of set the groundwork for my job at Hudson's. And I've often wondered if we do things in life that set the groundwork for things that are going to happen later on. So that many times you can't go out and say "I'm going to do it this way." I don't look upon those fifteen years -- I don't think of in terms of a career. I just think of it in terms of an unfolding process.

LA: But in essence, however, it has been a career. You have been involved ___ ____ fifteen years, you've had the job as assistant director with administrative responsibilities, you are administrator now in your own gallery. It is a career.

LH: It is a career and yet I've never -- that's what's interesting: the outsider looking at it looks upon it as a career. And yet in my mind I've never had a. . . That word is alien to me.

LA: So what are your feelings about it? Exactly how do you view it?

LH: Well, just the way I said before: it's an unfolding process. Just as I am now in my gallery operating and yet I feel that somewhere there are ideas beginning to germinate about what will be the next step. I just have never viewed it as a career. It's just part of my life. Maybe because when I think of the word "career" I think of studying for, or taking courses. A career means a program that you "embark" on; that's the word; that's what I'm thinking of. A career to me implies that somebody "embarks" on a program with an aim at the end of that program. In my life there were no programs. I just did things and it just evolved.

LA: What about the fact that you are a woman? Does this play a role in your activities as assistant director, as a gallery owner owning your own gallery, owning your own business?

LH: I think there is no question about it that as a woman there is a direct connection. As my children were growing up I must have felt deep in my bones -- without pinpointing what was going to happen, buried somewhere there must have been a simmering idea about: what am I going to be doing once the children grow up and leave. And I think that now getting in a gallery per se is probably part two of that problem of: what do you do with your life afterward?

LA: And this is something that you've struggled with for a long time?

LH: Well, the word "struggle" -- I don't know whether I struggled with it as much as women are struggling with it now. It probably was in the background of my mind, yes. But I don't know whether you'd use the word "struggle" -- that may be a little harsh. But I'm sure it was there; no question it was there.

LA: You've expressed to me that you feel that you're unique in your situation as a gallery owner, that for a very special reason you're unique in contrast to other gallery owners. Can you explain some of those feelings?

LH: Well, maybe one of the reasons is because I don't have definite goals and ambitions. I just go ahead and do it. And one of the other reasons I feel that I'm unique is that I'm viewing the gallery scene the way it presently is in America as a thing of the past. I have very strong ideas. . . I don't know exactly how art will be sold in the future, but I think the way it has been sold in the past fifteen years -- I think the whole (quote) "gallery scene" is obsolete.

LA: What is the (quote unquote) "gallery scene"?

LH: The way it operates now.

LA: Isolated galleries -- ?

LH: Isolated galleries where people come in, see things on the wall, the whole ritual of bringing in the shows, the contracts with the artists, people stopping by for fifteen, thirty minutes making decisions about whether they want that piece of art. To me this is an obsolete way.

LA: Looking ahead to the future what is the way that you -- ?

LH: Well, I know what I would like to do. I don't know the way because I could express what my ideas are and somebody else would say, you know, "it's absolutely foolish." I only know how I feel about it. I don't like to see art isolated from life. I think it's a very isolating way the way we have the gallery scene. I'd like to see it as part of many things, not just on the periphery or just a decorative thing to be hung on the wall. My last fantasy would be to have a gathering place where there would be all the arts -- art, food, conversation, music -- a center for enjoying all the senses really.

LA: But where one could purchase a work of art?

LH: Right. So it wouldn't be that -- I don't know whether I want to use the word "obvious" but it would be part of a total thing, the way we live. We don't isolate our art. We live with art when we dine, when we have music. A more natural way of doing it.

LA: So you want a more integrated -- ?

LH: More integrated. When people come to my gallery I don't like to talk only about art. I like to talk about a lot of other things. I feel that art is not the most important thing in life. It's just part of living. So what I want to do is just create that environment where, yes, there will be art just the way there is art in our homes, and we'll talk about it and we'll enjoy it; but also we're going to talk about a lot of other things. There are a lot of other things in life. I don't want to see art with a capital A.

LA: You want to see it welded into -- ? Our lives?

LH: Right.

LA: So what kind of tangible things do you think one can do, you can do in order to create this?

LH: The first thing is I would love to find a place that would be large enough to handle this kind of a situation. And I'd like to find a benefactor, somebody with imagination and with the wherewithal to do it. I think it would be very important to a city like Detroit. It would be a shot, a stimulus, where interesting people could gather.

LA: So I take it you would like to focus this perhaps in a downtown area? Or Detroit area?

LH: Any place where I could. . . I probably would prefer it downtown but I would do it in any place that would be available. That's how important I think it is. And again the idea of getting art -- I think the way we're selling now is archaic; it's a thing of the past. And I think the young people, without knowing it, feel it in their bones now. It's something that they're not consciously. . . It has just occurred to me: maybe the reason is that modern art has been part of their growing up experience so that they don't have to come into a gallery and go, you know "Oh!" and stare at it and talk about it and so forth. They've grown up with it so it's an integral part of their lives. Or maybe this whole idea is just a very personalized vision of the way I see art and the way I see life.

LA: So this is a direction now that you're going to concentrate your energies on?

LH: Well, you've really elicited. . . It was supposed to be a deep, dark secret but it's out in the open now. Yes, I would like to do it what way. I almost feel as if this gallery is a temporary holding place for the next step.

LA: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]