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Oral history interview with Elinor F.
Poindexter, 1970 Sept. 9

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Elinor Poindexter on September 9, 1970. The interview was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Mrs. Poindexter is with the Poindexter Gallery

PAUL CUMMINGS: Paul Cummings talking to Elinor Poindexter.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Let's say many years ago I did study art history at Finch. There was a wonderful woman, I still remember her name, Miss Dickinson, who took us around to the Contemporary Art Gallery. And I always remember now the looks on the peoples' faces when we went in because of all the little girls.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were you interested in Art before that, at home?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: My sister is a painter. We had been in Paris together. I didn't paint myself, but I was around it and I knew a lot of artists personally, but not the New York ones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get to Finch? - because you were born in Montreal.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, yes, I was born in Montreal but I came to this country when I was seven. I boarded at Finch. We lived on Staten Island. Well then, several years after that - I can't quite remember when - I went to work for the Weyhe Gallery with Carl Zigrosser. I liked it so much that I think I probably had a kind of nostalgia for art galleries. But then I got married and moved to the country.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you work with Weyhe?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It was in the 1930s. As I remember now during that time there was very little business really.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Prints were five and ten dollars.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. And the paintings were just to be looked at. Although probably there were some collectors that I didn't even know about because I was just an underling. So then I got married and moved to the country. And years later when the children were of college age and so on my husband, George, was studying with Jack Tworokov because he wanted to find out what modern art was all about. He thought it was crazy. Tworokov was with the Egan Gallery. After a while he got talking to my husband about how Egan needed some help, actual help and some financial help. So he came home and told me all about it and he said, "How about you?" So I guess the whole thing had been sort of ---

PAUL CUMMINGS: Had you maintained your interest in art during those years?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, but not in a practical way. I hadn't been doing anything about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You hadn't gone to museum shows?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes, I had done that all the time. I mean I wasn't very aware of contemporary art. I just went back to where I was before in school and was interested in that kind of thing. Then when I went to Egan it was a very interesting experience.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you get involved with him?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: That was in 1953.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's when all the abstract expressionists were around.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Well, then I met Kline and Tworokov and Guston and de Kooning, Vicente, Rauschenberg. Some of them weren't actually showing -- yes, Rauschenberg had a show there. de Kooning had been having shows but wasn't with the gallery then. Then of course I got more and more interested.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it like working with Egan? Because I hear he's such an extraordinary character, or

was in those days even more so than he is now.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it was kind of impossible. I tell you what I really think; I think he just is a lone wolf kind of person. He tried working with people and it didn't pan out. Maybe he has somebody now. I don't know though. He either seemed to give me too much responsibility or not enough. And I was pretty green. So it got non-workable, let's say. After two years I decided I was either going to abandon that or go in for myself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had gotten sufficiently interested - to reach that decision?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I almost didn't think about not doing it because I really was interested. I had some sense of how a gallery is run. So then I went in for myself in 1955. Egan got out entirely for several years I guess. Since I was paying the rent I took over that place for one year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where was that?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It was 41 East 57th Street I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was he there?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: He was there; he had moved from across the street when I went with him. That was only for one year. After that we got the place at 21 West 56th Street. I was there for fourteen years. I started out again with some of the Egan Artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who did you keep of his group?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, they were all getting quite well known. They either went to Janis...Rauschenberg went with Castelli.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Sam Kootz had a couple, didn't he?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Cavallon went to Kootz. That's right. I had Resnick. And generally abstract expressionists at first. I should have thought about the list. But abstract expressionism began to weaken and except for the established ones it seems as if the rest were just following along. So I gradually -- well, I just really went by what I thought was good whether it was representational even. Although with Egan there wasn't any such thing. I really had to adjust, I mean from before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He had the sculptor Nakian all the time in the gallery, didn't he?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. He was doing abstract things, too, I mean the former things were. Yes, and I think he had Spaventa. But mostly it was abstract expressionists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. What were the signs that made you feel abstract expressionism was weakening?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, the artists who came in to show me their work were still following the school.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was very obviously another generation?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. It just didn't seem as if they were doing their own kind of work. I mean some looked like Pollocks. Some looked like de Koonings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And Kline and everybody else.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, that's right. I think that was even before everybody was writing about how abstract expressionism was dead.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When you started your own gallery did you find that you immediately got a lot of coverage because of the artists? As far as the critics or the magazines go, or the museums? Or did it take a long time to build up a following?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No, I think at that time - that was 1956 - people were interested in the new gallery. It went right along very nicely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was there a great deal of selling at that time?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No, not by me. Well, really I was thinking that it's a strange mixture running a gallery because if you go into it purely on a commercial basis the art is not going to be much good. So you have this combination of trying to keep your finances going and still show people that may not sell for two or three shows. Unless you are absolutely following a fashion (which I have not) I didn't have any Pop Artists. I didn't particularly

try to have color ground painters (although I have one or two). I went on by just if I was interested in people's photographs and slides, going to studios and gradually building up a group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you have such great variety, I mean you have figurative painters and abstract and sculpture, you know, an enormous range of things.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I know I do. It's because I like both kinds. One of my artists, Richard Diebenkorn, has been both. I first showed him in 1955, he was abstract then. Then for ten years he was figurative. The last two shows he's been abstract again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find him? - because he's in California.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I saw a painting of his at the Guggenheim. I liked it. And heard something more about him from my other artists. So I wrote him. I didn't get any reply. (Well, I know now that he doesn't answer letters much, anyway) But he didn't know anything about me. I asked Franz Kline, who was a friend of ours, to write him because he knew him and tell him about me. And then I telephoned him and he said, "Why sure, I'd like to." I never met him until after his first show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Then, you see, what happens - I guess it happens in every gallery - you ask the artists that you have faith in, if they happen to know somebody they think should be looked at. It doesn't always work by any means. At least it's better than listening to the critics I think.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very interesting. I would say almost every dealer I've interviewed has said that their best suggestions have come from other artists rather than from museum people or critics or collectors, anybody.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: The critics so often have to have something to write about so they write about what is the most different or startling or has an angle of some kind. I think most of the artists are really anxious to have good people in the same gallery with them. Of course they can make mistakes by being too involved with them in a friendly way. But then between the two, you know, it sometimes works out very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get many artists who came in just off the street to show you things? Were there many artists that you took into the gallery from just slides and photographs?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, not from that, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I mean was it the first introductions?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, I remember one - Robert Natkin, who was from Chicago. He came in with photographs. I liked them. I went to his studio and probably went two or three more times. In this case I hadn't heard anything about him before that. Then he told me about somebody we just showed - Ernest Derringer. Lots of times they will ask artists to come in and then they tell you about it when they don't know that you really can't do anything about them. So now I say, "Please ask me first." We have sculpture also.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've shown a lot of sculpture.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, not a lot. We showed David Anisley from the Waddington Gallery. And we just recently showed Paul Brown, a piece of his. And George Spavents (who hasn't shown recently). Do you want a whole list of the artists?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, I mean just talk about them.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Because I wasn't going to mention any names. Nell Blaine is an artist I've shown since the beginning of the gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find dealing in both painting and sculpture? - because so many dealers find it difficult to deal in both. They find their collectors are interested in one and not the other. Or do you have two lines of collectors?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No, I don't think that's the difficulty with sculpture. For us the difficulty is handling it physically; what to do with it afterwards - storage if it doesn't sell; and just the space. But I think many collectors will collect both sculpture and painting if they like it. Especially if it's not too large. That is a problem. Because then you have to go into public buildings or something. I think that is a different area.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Did you find that a problem with the abstract expressionists who did large canvases? I know Resnick has done enormous canvases.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: People come in and they say, "I like that but what do I do with it?"

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, I find that there are only a few people that are real collectors that will make space or they'll do something if they want the painting badly enough. Then there are people that really think about the size and where they're going to put it. I imagine some people buy a painting and lend it to a museum. I think if the artist is good enough and well enough known the size -- well, if it's really outrageous of course -- but otherwise with a medium big painting it doesn't make too much difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think in 1960 or so there was a great shift in the activity of the art market. Did you find that to be so? Or later as far as activity goes?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. I felt it's changed very much since I first went into it. It's become much more immediate and commercial. I mean now there are some artists that will make a name in their twenties. And that didn't happen before. It seems to me that the fashions have more impact now. There's more activity. Of course there are lots more galleries. I think some of them are making more of a success financially because they are doing what the museums want at the moment, you know, the new things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that doing what the museums want has become an enormous influence in the artists the gallery will take in, or what the galleries will even do?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, I think it must have, yes. I find something that I didn't know before I got into it: The museums are always historical. You know, like they have ancient art, some ancient art, some Greek, all the way through the ages. And then when they come to this era they want something that's super-new.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. It's always been a curious thing. I think there's been a shift in the sense that for years it was the art dealer who discovered the new artists and went to the studios and did the groundwork; and now the curators seem to be competing with the dealers. And I just wonder if from the dealer's point of view you feel it's rather difficult for a young artist who's in his twenties and has already had a museum show, you know, if he wants a gallery because they do show people who don't have a dealer.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: The Museums?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I mean, do you feel that the museums are competing with you in that way?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I haven't thought about competing but sometimes I see something in a museum and I wonder how they found it. I don't necessarily agree. Perhaps the museums are being less cautious; usually you think of museums only taking art that is very, very proven. I didn't like the kind of thing they were doing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The one Geldzahler did, the survey show?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. It seemed too soon. It seemed more like a gallery - well, just what you were saying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Even like the Museum of Modern Art almost or the Whitney, what they're supposed to be doing.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you found, say, between the mid and late fifties a shift in the use of the critics? Or do you find that the press doesn't really have a great deal of influence on shows? Or if the Times reviews a show well does that mean that you have more activity?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I find that the ordinary review, the small one that comes out every Saturday, has very little impact. But, however, if it's headlined and comes out in the Sunday paper maybe with a reproduction it does make a great deal of difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It brings in more people

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. They notice it. I don't suppose people half read those little reviews. We use them but the people that like the work if it's a bad review don't pay attention to it anyway. If it's a good review and they don't like it I think they're pretty independent. But if it's currently a great big thing and very authoritative at least they come in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. So it affects the traffic rather than the sales?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes - no, I think it affects both. But usually, you see, this person is already very well

known. I've never had a review that will suddenly acclaim somebody that they hadn't known before, or that nobody had known before. So I think the big review is sort of added confidence more than actually making sales - new sales I mean.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. Well, speaking about sort of public things, what about museum exhibitions? - because some of your artists have had retrospective, large museum shows. Do you find that makes a difference in their acceptance in the market?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes. Yes. I think the whole selling end of it is a matter of confidence. People are afraid of making mistakes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Just as in any other activity.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. And having their friends say, "Where did you get that?" If it's well known they can show them all the critical acclaim.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. The museum label.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. I don't blame them. Sometimes it must be very confusing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it's difficult if you have very avant garde art.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And conservative people coming in.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: The funny part is that when I was with Egan, people would come in and say, "don't you have anything representational? I don't understand this kind of art." Then later, when the figure sort of came back and I was showing like a Diebenkorn figure show people would come in and say, "Don't you have anything abstract?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: So the public is always a little behind! Well, what kind of changes have you seen in the market over the years? Prices seem to have changed radically.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Prices have gone up, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they seem to start higher for a younger artist now than five or ten years ago.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: The artist's prices really go by the other artists. It's very hard to influence them, I find, because they'd rather not sell at all than sell for what they call peanuts. It's an ego thing I think. Although they do realize that they have to be moderate and not put their prices up for the same size painting as somebody that's really well known. But I think there's a lot more interest in art on the part of the general public.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are numerically more people involved.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, that's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think has developed that? Do you think the museums with the enormous amounts of publicity they've been getting and their big shows have done a great deal? Because the circulation of the art magazines has not really increased that much over the last ten years, some of them have gone up a little bit but not, say, beyond the percentage of the population.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I think it's just general exposure. The newspapers, the fashion, maybe more leisure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. More education.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: More education, yes. More time. At least it could be a longer weekend.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find the collectors are interested in a given artist and each artist has his own group? Or do you have some collectors who've bought frequently from you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, we do. But usually it goes by the artist. If we didn't have that particular artist they're interested in they would go to where they were interested in the artist. It's what you represent; it's not yourself. Although I imagine they feel at home in certain galleries more than they do in others. That only means that sometimes they come in and look. That's a start.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I was just thinking back to Diebenkorn for a minute. He was one of the first West Coast people to be shown here, wasn't he, at that time?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I think so, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the art world react to an "intruder," you might say?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, you know, a lot of the artists happened to know him because he spent, oh, about six months in New York one time. He had quite a lot of background in the West so some of the collectors had heard about him. But not a great deal happened at that first show; we made some sales. The next show was figurative. A funny thing happened then. Some of the artists felt he had sort of deserted the cause and were quite angry with him. But this last time when he turned back they were used to it. But the general public was much more excited about and interested in the figure paintings. They could relate to them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find generally that they're more interested in figurative things?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, except for a few people that perhaps know more and follow the scene more. I mean I think generally people that are not really esoteric like something that they can recognize. But they get used to the other gradually.

PAUL CUMMINGS: As I remember offhand, you've shown a number of artists from California and around the country.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. I showed James Weeks, who's a friend of Diebenkorn's. We've had several Paul Warner shows, but he's now with Landau because Landau came to New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Harris is from there, isn't he?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: He is now but when I first showed him he was living in New Jersey.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, he was? I thought he'd been in California for a long time.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, he has been for quite a while. He's in Salinas. Oh, I did have a show of California painters, a group show. But that was only one time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that work? What kind of reaction was there?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: They were all new, really, to New York so it didn't mean a great deal.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very interesting that you find New York is really smaller than you think sometimes when you do a show like that.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Oh, well, the art world is very small.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Do you have collectors come from all across the country? Or are most of your collectors Eastern seaboard?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No, I have people from the West a lot. Because we have the artists they've heard about from there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So they track you down?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Diebenkorn doesn't have any other gallery so far and he just sends people here. Very often they're people on their way to Europe. (Although they can fly now the other way around) Let's see, I don't think we have hardly anybody from Europe or South America. I imagine they have their own people they're interested in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did an exhibition about the thirties?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. That was just an idea of gathering some of them together. Pat Passloff who was married to Resnick talked to me about it and she helped me make the catalogue. It was very good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was early and late painting, wasn't it?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. It started with Arthur B. Carles. I have a copy of the catalogue somewhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you get a lot of people in to see that show?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, we did. And the catalogues are still selling.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Every once in a while some student will write and ask for one. Colleges. It's in the Library of Congress.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, do you think shows like that do something for a gallery?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I think for reputation. Most of these paintings were owned. I don't think it's doing much for us now because that was all abstract expressionism. But, still it helps to make your name known.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I just wanted to ask you about your own collecting. You've collected through this whole time, haven't you since you started with Egan?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, we have. Oh, yes, that's something I was going to tell you about. My husband, George, comes from Montana and he wanted to do something for the state, which is very poor in art except for sort of Western style painting. So all through the years I've bought paintings from the artists in almost every show; or sometimes they'd give me a painting in exchange for expenses sort of. So we collected - I don't know how many - about a hundred, I think. And those are at the Montana Historical Association in Helena, Montana and also at the State College of Art in Missoula, Montana. And so it's very various. We have a Resnick, Diebenkorn, Kline, I think a Gorky that we happened to have acquired, a de Kooning, and then various contemporary artists that I represent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's a good cross section.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. It's very nice. It's a good collection.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you still have things every year?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, we do. It's somewhat of a puzzle to most of the people there. Montana!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. I'd heard about it one time and I couldn't understand how this enormous collection kept growing way out there in the mountains. That explains it. How do the people out there like it? Does it get shown or exhibited?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It gets shown. George was just out there for the official acceptance of the collection in a new wing. I didn't go this time. He said really most of the people didn't like it. But they've never seen much of that kind of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's still new.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. What my gallery is about is an interest in art and what's going on that I personally can have my heart in. And I'm interested in promoting the artists. And I'm interested in the financial end only to keep going and make some money, you know, so that I'm paid back for the work. But I'm not interested in having individual pictures come in. Trading and that kind of thing. I don't think I'm a dealer. Once in a while it's nice to have something like that just to help support the rest of it. But it's not my business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. You really don't deal in all kinds of other back room pictures.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No. Well, for instance, I have a friend who has a Chagall that she wants me to sell and I have it for sale. But that's only because it's a personal thing. What I mean is I'm more interested in the whole work of the artist rather than individual merchandise to sell.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's really a whole concept rather than individual objects?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. I think most of the contemporary galleries are like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that taste in collecting has changed or improved a great deal over the years, that collectors are becoming more knowledgeable or are they just investing?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It's hard to answer because I think some people are really just interested in buying low and selling high just like the stock market only that it's gotten into the art market. Well, there are two other kinds: the people that want something they'd like to look at and who will buy at a fairly moderate price and then get interested and buy more paintings for their apartment or home; and then there's really the kind of professional collector who wants to have a good collection that museums will show perhaps. It's more than a hobby; it's an avocation with quite a few people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find more of those people growing?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, I think so. I don't know exactly who they are now, the ones that are interested in very

new trends. Although I have some of those people. I believe that there are some in Europe, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you sell very many of your people in Europe? Have many of them been shown there?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes - well, there are only two. Diebenkorn showed in London and Natkin showed in Paris. Otherwise it's more all across the country in group shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't show many Europeans either, do you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No. Only one. And that's because we got to know Waddington. He had the Diebenkorn show and he kept telling us about ---

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did they like Diebenkorn in London?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Very much. We got wonderful reviews. And we sold quite a lot, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: But we don't know who to. I think a lot of them were Americans.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who happened to be going through.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's amazing how many Americans will buy American painting in Europe.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, they're more in the mood for buying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I hear that the art business in London is very sparse right now. Maybe it is here, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well - I don't know - it all depends on what area one talks about I guess.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I notice there's more figurative art going on these days. You said you weren't interested in Pop art and various things like that? In the things that you look at do you see more figurative work? Or is there an area of abstraction, too, that interests you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, there are several kinds of figurative work: the very photographic, the new realism; and Pop is sometimes called figurative.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. You've never been interested in Pop, have you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Not very, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You didn't really have any Op artists as I remember, did you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Not really, no. Well, I don't know, I probably don't react quickly enough because there are a few of them that I might be interested in now but they're already settled. I think in every movement there may be one or two that are really interesting; but the whole movements don't interest me. I guess that's true also of abstract expressionism except that I think there were more that were good in that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had Olitake for a while, didn't you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. For a long time. Yes, we took him after he'd first showed at French & Company.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Clem Greenbert.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, that's right. But his painting was different then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was very impasto.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: He changed radically in a short space of time, didn't he?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: He changed radically, oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have many of your artists done that?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No, I wouldn't say so. I mean Diebenkorn changed the kind of thing he was doing but it still looks like Diebenkorn. I don't think of anybody else. But I think Olitski will stay the way he is now. We had a show of that kind of thing, the color painting. But that was the last show. I find - one thing I guess everybody is telling you is about the aggressiveness of the art galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, I mean there are a lot of people, there seem to be a lot of art galleries that have money to guarantee artists. When I first started there were so few galleries that every artist was very glad to be where he was. And there wasn't much business either. But now it's a kind of merry-go-round.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. It really is. I think more and more galleries are giving stipends or some kind of support to the artists in their gallery.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Guarantees.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes, guarantees. They don't always do it with the youngest ones but sometimes they do.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The European dealing style is becoming apparent again.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, don't you think, though, the European galleries don't seem to hang on to one person as much as even we do?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but they deal in a very different way.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: They deal in the paintings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They'll sell off sections of the contract to four or five other dealers in four or five other cities. Very few Americans will do that. They want a national exclusive.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes, I see.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, selling practices are ---

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes. You'll see one artist in Paris showing in five or six places.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's right.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I think that's because we've always been more personal here. We keep track of the people and know them. I think it would be very hard to take care of anybody properly if they had ---

PAUL CUMMINGS: --- they were split up into different ---

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Then it becomes more the paintings I guess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it's something I couldn't do. I know that. Although lots of the artists have a gallery in another part of the country.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. They'll have a dealer in Chicago or in California, or Texas or something.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, probably one other anyway. You asked me something I didn't answer I guess - did I find a change in the galleries? Yes, I guess I have. Yes. I guess it's becoming more of a business than it was. For instance, Marlborough-Gerson I think is very big business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's like a department store.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. But they often have very good people, because they don't care whether they show them first. They have no sentiment. Which is putting it mildly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's true. Or their sentiment is not with the art. Have you been involved with the Art Dealers Association? You're a member of that aren't you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that's accomplishing anything? Or is it really still too quiet a group? Every so often they seem to do something.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I think it's very good. They've been fighting for the tax business, for instance, without complete success. I mean the tax laws have changed a little bit. This was about giving paintings to museums and taking a deduction. And, I think it's nice to know young people. I mean at least to know what they look like. And there's always a great deal to talk about.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It always interests me that so many dealers don't know other dealers.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I know. Even with the Art Dealers Association you sometimes don't even talk to them because the business meeting is on and then you leave. I think it's because everybody gets so involved they can hardly leave -- I mean physically they have to stay in the gallery an awful lot. But I know quite a few.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To go back to the European thing, there's so little activity between dealers here the way there is in Europe; and England particularly. There's an enormous amount of activity between dealers. Pictures go back and forth. Many collectors will buy from only one or two dealers. If they want something from a third dealer they will go to their own dealer and say "will you get me a painting by so and so from that gallery."

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I guess it may develop into that more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find the shift into concept art and all of these things. Has that affected you? Is it an area that interests you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it doesn't seem to have affected me because I don't think the people that are interested in that ever did come here. As far as my own opinion goes, I don't really know enough about it. I've read about it. I don't understand how it can be dealt with. It's more of an idea, isn't it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Still, yes. You've been here - what? - about a year now?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, a year.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's really difficult to tell how your move has affected things because it's a different kind of location. It's in an entirely different part of the art world than 56th Street.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it hasn't affected it. The same people come. I think we get a little more traffic here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It's more residential. People are out walking. 56th Street was all business and restaurants. People would just drop in on their lunch hour; that was about all; I mean people that were just lookers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You had a few galleries there. The Willard was there for a while. And a few others.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that brought people? Or the different galleries don't make any difference?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes. I think it's a good thing to be with other galleries. But we're near enough here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you've got the museums and galleries and auction houses and everything up here.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, you might want to ask about prints.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Have you done anything in prints?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: We only show prints of the artists that are already with the gallery. I don't think in that kind of way they do sell very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They really have to have a print gallery.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, I think so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How about drawings? Do you sell drawings?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, drawings. I have lots of drawings. Yes, I think they're very interesting to people.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do people buy them much?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, if they like the artist. I think it's a wonderful field because it's unique. A good drawing is just as important really as a painting. And it can be put somewhere where it doesn't interfere with the furniture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you collected very many artists outside the gallery in your own collection?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: No. I did get a few things when I knew the people: like Kline, Guston, a little de Kooning. The reason is really because you know these people in the gallery and if you're going to buy anything, after all you're committed to them. It's much more natural. And you can't always do both.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Are there any artists who have become particularly good friends of yours, who are very close to you, I mean gallery artists?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, the gallery ones I know very well. But I wouldn't say we go around together socially all the time, that way. But outside of the gallery, no, I really - except people I knew before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From the Egan period?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. I visit people when I go West. I stay with the Diebenkorns and the Harrises. I hope this goes not on tape.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: It's so wandering.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's all right. It always gets itself put together.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: As far as I'm concerned I really think the business is very fascinating and becomes really a very important part of you life. And I'm awfully glad that I'm in it, with all the struggle.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you've stayed involved with it for quite a while.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, I have. It's amazing. I'm surprised when I think back that it was been that long.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have moments when you wondered whether you could keep it going?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh, yes! And you know we bought this building and that's been a struggle because the remodeling is so difficult and expensive. So we're looking forward to when that's all finished and we can forget it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Those things always seem to be so difficult.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Oh! Just a mess. People that just carry out rubbish get four dollars an hour.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. But you live upstairs now, don't you?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes, we have a little apartment on the third floor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you like living over the gallery?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I like it. I did it before on 56th Street. It's a different kind of thing because then you go out for walks. For a while I did commute because I changed the apartment there. By the time you get home it's a long way and you just don't have much time to do other things. I guess we've covered most everything. I think it's perfectly natural that an artist should like the gallery, stay with it. And everything is going fine except maybe there aren't enough sales. Well, then they begin to get known and the sales become more numerous and the artist becomes more successful. Then somebody else wants them. And this is a problem as far as I'm concerned because I don't have enough to guarantee all the artists so I don't guarantee any of them. I don't know how people do it. And you can't rely on sentiment and I wouldn't want them to. I want them to be successful. I think other galleries of my kind have this problem, too. and I don't know what the answer is except more and more money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. The endless answer. Well, you have had a number of artists who've either left you or have been taken by other galleries haven't you? - a few of them.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Sometimes it works out mutually: it just doesn't work and you're both glad. But sometimes somebody offers them more, that's all. You can't help it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because most of them have lots of problems and expenses. and they have to think about that.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Oh, I know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But don't you think in a way that that's almost a kind of healthy thing as long as that goes on that it keeps the business anyway a more vital kind of activity when they get personal problems?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it's a hard question to answer. I think it's healthy financially for the artist. The other way the ethics I think are very puzzling. But then what can you do. You do the best you can and that's all you can do. If it doesn't work you can't blame people for trying something else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. There are some artists who seem to constantly shift, you know, two years here, two or three years there. They go from place to place.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Yes. Oh, one thing I didn't mention was that practically all my artists have first shows here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you prefer that rather than picking up somebody who's moved around?

ELINOR POINDEXTER: Well, it just seems to be the way it happens. There are a couple of exceptions. But mostly it has been their first one-man show in New York. I think perhaps very often unless there's a good reason I feel those people might just be shifting around. But sometimes there's an illness in the gallery or something like that then it's all right: you know, or if they're giving up the business entirely. And I mean if it's a case where somebody is being sort of secretive about it I don't like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. That's true.

ELINOR POINDEXTER: I wish I could be more brilliant, but I can't think of anything more.

END OF INTERVIEW

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