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Oral history interview with Mary Fuller McChesney, 1994 Sept. 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Mary Fuller [McChesney] on September 28, 1994. The interview took place on Sonoma Mountain, CA, and was conducted by Susan Landauer for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

SUSAN LANDAUER: All right. The date is September 28, 1994. And this is Susan Landauer interviewing Mary Fuller at her house on Sonoma Mountain, California, which she shares with her husband, painter Robert McChesney. So I'd like to start with some basic biographical information. You know, where you came from, where you grew up and so forth.

MARY FULLER: OK. Well, I was-- I was born in Wichita, Kansas in 1922, October. My parents-- My father was a Kansan, was from Kansas. And he had left Kansas and gone to Canada in WWI and joined the Canadian army. And so he had gone to Europe and was in the war. And he had been gassed and he was in the trenches for a long time. And was very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He had been gassed you say?

MARY FULLER: He had been gassed with mustard gas. And he was blinded actually, although he recovered his sight. And he met my mother in London. And she was a nurse, but not an army nurse. She was a nurse with the children's hospital. And I think they met in a park somewhere. But he was at that time an invalid and I guess in a wheelchair and blind. Whatever. The romance began. And so they married in England and they went and came to Kansas I guess right after the war, probably 1919, 1918.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, what brought them to Kansas?

MARY FULLER: My father was from-- He was born in Hartford, Kansas.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, I see.

MARY FULLER: And so his father was a doctor and he was the only son of this small town doctor. And my mother didn't know until she got here that he had been previously married and had 3 kids by a previous wife. So when she came to Kansas, she had a bit of a surprise. Whatever. Anyway, so they immediately started having children. And so my older sister was born in 1920. And I think my mom said she had 6 kids in 8 years. So she was kind of unconscious the entire time she was having these kids. [laughter] And one child died so there were 5 of us. When I was 2, my mother and father went up to Canada and then came to California because my dad had a little bit of money and wanted to start as a rancher. He built actually one of the first RV vehicles. He built this wonderful car with beds on it that spread out. And they called it the sunshine wagon. And they came across the country.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Too bad he didn't patent that. He could have made some money.

MARY FULLER: Really. He didn't have any photos of it. Or we had some, but they burned up when my mother had a fire. But anyway, so they came to Central Valley, California and my dad first had a ranch, an almond orchard east of Lockeford. And that didn't last very long. Went broke on that. And then we had a vineyard near Micke Grove over in the Valley and went broke on that. And the third place we had in the Valley was around that Lodi area was in Live Oak and was a chicken ranch. And at that time was the height of the Depression. And his parents were still living in Kansas. His mother and his stepfather came out to live with us. So, we lived into this little, tiny ranch house. There were 5 kids and the 2 grandparents and my parents. There were 9 of us in this little ranch house.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, now, how old were you when you came to Live Oak?

MARY FULLER: I was 2. I remember the Valley very well. I remember that part of the Valley very-- I remember marvelous Italian families with bootleg joints. And we'd go out where they had Greyhounds. And the kids were just crazy about it because it was wonder-- They raised Greyhound dogs to race. I remember the Greyhound dog place very well. And I remember the Valley. And the chicken ranch especially, because it bordered on a creek, Bear Creek. It's all gone now. It's under a freeway. I went back there and I couldn't believe it. There's just a big, huge freeway overpass where this whole town used to be.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh my god.

MARY FULLER: It was a little tiny town, just a crossroads. But anyway, so-- And the creek was in the back of the property. And so we used to, you know, hang out there a lot. And then down the road, there was an encampment of people who came from the dustbowl. There were about 100 people living in the--

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's what I was going to ask you.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, right.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was that time.

MARY FULLER: It was that time. And the kids were in school with us. They went to the same school. And I remember the kids really well because they were fierce children, I mean, absolutely amazing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: In what way?

MARY FULLER: Oh, well, if you give them a penny, they'd eat worms. Stuff like that. [laughter] I mean, just like, it would just amaze us the small amount of money to do the things that they would do.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh my god. That's too much.

MARY FULLER: They were kind of amazing. Anyway, that was the Valley. And then the big thing for me when I was a kid was we had a wonderful neighbor named Mr. Cheatham, who was an experimental farmer. My dad couldn't stand him. I think because he was very successful and my father wasn't. But anyway-- As a farmer. So this guy had all kinds of experimental things. He'd raise peanuts and stuff that nobody else would grow in the Valley. And at one time at one of the local fairs, he won first prize for this huge sweet potato that he'd grown. And I remember being at the fair and seeing him there and I just admired it so much. Maybe that's how I became a sculptor. He gave it to me.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh my god. [laughter]

MARY FULLER: After the fair was over, he came out with this gigantic thing, which I ate for about 3 months and kept in bed with me until the thing rotted away and my father took it. It was like my boo or something, you know, like my blanket or a teddy bear, this great big sweet potato. [laughter] It was really extraordinary. I think that was my first contact with sculpture, the first idea of somebody having some sort of an incredible achievement, you know, something that they'd done and achieved and that they-- It was just an-- It was awfully-- Looking back on it, it was really nice of him to have given it to me. It was--

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was your first exposure to art?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, that's right. A big sweet potato. Anyway, so that-- We went-- But then my step-grandfather was out from Kansas. And he was running a chicken ranch and the chickens all died so that was the end of that. Then my father moved us all into Stockton. And he got a job with the PG&E and worked for them for 18 years or so. And bought a little house. It was in town. That's where I really grew up. So the grammar school and high school were in Stockton until, let's see, 1940 I graduated from high school. And when I was in high school, I was sort of a-- I was straight-A. I was going to be valedictorian, but I didn't get to be that. But the school was an interesting place because it was the only high school in town then. And this was like '36 to '40. There were 3000 kids in the high school, so it was a really big one. I worked for the school paper. I wrote a column. And-- Called The Stocktonian. And was elected to school office and all that. And it was-- Looking back on it, it was a very sophisticated school. We had wonderful teachers. And when I went to Berkeley--I had a scholarship to Berkeley--I had already accumulated about a semester's work.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, did you take any art classes then?

MARY FULLER: No. No, I didn't.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, so--

MARY FULLER: I took-- Maybe took one drawing class. I think. I vaguely remember taking a drawing class and wanting to do the edge of a building and not do the landscape, the whole thing. And the teacher said, "You can't do that. You can't just do one section." And being very upset about that. Whatever, it seemed like such a-- I think we drew a little-- I did take an art class. I remember that. We drew little plaster cubes and stuff to do shading. But it wasn't anything I was interested in or I wasn't any good at it. So I was really interested in literature. At that time I thought I'd be a writer. I was very interested in writing. But not--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Which of course you did later.

MARY FULLER: Yes, I did later.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: But I didn't know anything about women writers then, which is interesting. So, the people I admired most were people like Bernard Shaw. My high-- And the Russians. I read all the Russians. I was crazy about them: Dostoevski and Tolstoy and those people. I read them in high school. I think Russians more than Shaw.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you were interested in maybe writing fiction? Is that what you mean?

MARY FULLER: Yes, I think so, although it wasn't really clear. As I said, I wrote for the paper and published this column, which I wrote for at least a year (maybe longer). And we had a group of kids who kind of ran the paper, kind of ran the school government. And because the school was the only one in town, it was a very class situation. I mean, there was a-- They divided on IQ. Of course they don't--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, on IQ figures on IQ tests.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Can't imagine. Maybe they had a track system then?

MARY FULLER: Absolutely. It was college prep and then there was the rest of the guys. And they had this huge shop, manual training shop. Because of the nature of the town--it was an agricultural town--quite a few minority people-- Of course it ended up being a very class division, so the IQ-- The higher IQ kids were usually the kids of the middle class, whose parents had gone to college and encouraged their children to go to college and read books to them or whatever. And so the kids who went into manual training were the minority.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's really interesting.

MARY FULLER: Yes. It was very, very-- And then there were a few, of course, exceptions. We lived in the southern part of town, which was on the wrong side of the tracks, so it was a very mixed neighborhood. We had a lot of Italian people there, Greek people. And in fact, one of my best friends in high school was a guy named Cristopoulos, Paul Cristopoulos, who edited the paper. And he was from our part of town. So, the Greek kids and some of the Oriental kids from our part of town were higher IQ kids and went into the college track school system. But other than that it was a very definite class kind of division. But we sort of made a little group of our own. We considered ourselves Stockton intellectuals, ran the paper, ran the high school government. At that time we had rather marvelous connections with Berkeley, because people came and talked to us from Berkeley. When I was writing the column for the paper, I remember that I corresponded with a guy who worked for the Daily Cal. Yeah, he came and talked to us and you know, it was a very-- Actually, it was a very progressive high school, Stockton was. So, anyway, got a scholarship, went to Berkeley. Then I was, like, 17. That was in 1940.

SUSAN LANDAUER: In 1940. So the war-- This country hadn't entered the war.

MARY FULLER: No.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you got a scholarship based on your journalism experience?

MARY FULLER: No. My grades. I was straight-A. Not only was straight-A, but I didn't miss a day of school. I can't believe it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What did you major in at Berkeley?

MARY FULLER: I was an English major for the first semester, then I changed it to philosophy. I became a philosophy major. And I stayed at Berkeley 2-1/2 years. And at that time, the philosophy department-- I was sort of reading logic for Marhenke, the philosophy professor. And I was pretty determined to go into philosophy. Anyway, so I was very interested in it, I think because I had been rather religious as a kid. Had been in the church and interested in questions like, What's it all about and what does it mean and stuff like that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Berkeley is a good place to study philosophy.

MARY FULLER: When I decided to major as a junior, there were only 8 of us, 8 majors, so it was very good. You know, it was very intellectually concentrated.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, what was the campus like then?

MARY FULLER: Well, like it is now. There were-- Oh, well, Bancroft was--moved over a block I guess. But physically it's very much like it is now.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But I mean the atmosphere.

MARY FULLER: It was very political. It was political, intensely political.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It was really? Then?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, what were some of the issues that were being debated then?

MARY FULLER: Well, the war. Let's see. Well, my sense of history is terrible. But I remember Charles Lindbergh and there was a group called America First, which was an anti-war, anti-intervention, anti-involvement group. And then there was the Bundles for Britain groups that-- And I remember we'd go to meetings to Bundles for Britain one night and go over to visit America First the next night to see what was going on. It was a very intense political interest. And then, when did France fall? Well, France was invaded.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Let's see. Was that '41? Although I'm not absolutely positive about that.

MARY FULLER: OK. That was-- I remember the invasion of France was just like a day of death in Berkeley.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Really?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I didn't realize Berkeley was such a political place back then.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. In fact, I belonged to a group-- I was sort of a half-assed pacifist. I didn't know what I was. I belonged to the Gold Star Mothers of Future wars. [laughter]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh really.

MARY FULLER: Which was a group that started in Oxford. It was a pacifist group. And we were anti-war.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You didn't demonstrate though?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. The guy I was with then, Charlie Off, was with a group called the Over the Hill of October Club. And they were going to walk out of the draft-- Guys were being drafted then out of the campus. So the draft became a big thing. You know, so most of the men that I knew--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, this had to have been after '41.

MARY FULLER: After France fell. I remember being-- I remember the students on the campus when France fell, like it was just the end of the world. Really horrified. Somehow-- Not that we were particularly Francophiles, but that represented Europe, the defeat of Europe, and the end of Europe.

SUSAN LANDAUER: France invaded.

MARY FULLER: It was. And it had a symbolic quality, that somehow the British never really got. I mean, Britain was already being attacked I think. Of course it was. I remember the Bundles for Britain and that sort of thing. But somehow, I guess it was because of the cultural connection, whatever, I wasn't that aware of it at the time. I do remember the day that that came out. And this feeling--

SUSAN LANDAUER: A pall over the campus?

MARY FULLER: It was like everyone was in mourning. It was incredible. Classes stopped. Nobody went to class and just were hanging out, walking around. It was a small school compared to what it is now of course. And at that time, too, I think people were already starting to leave. Then it got very intense, the leaving. The draft came on. Guys that I knew were mainly divided. I mean, I remember one guy that I knew went off and joined the Canadian army to get into the Air Corps right away. I think he was Jewish. I'm not sure. I'm really not sure. But even Jewish guys seemed very ambivalent. The stuff about the camps hadn't come out so much. I mean, people didn't-- People knew-- You know, there were refugees from Hitler in Berkeley. The political--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Of course, a lot of the professors had, you know, come from Europe, to flee Hitler.

MARY FULLER: Well, I didn't meet any of those people. The people I met who were refugees were my age. There was a group, a family, 2 psychiatrists named Phillipsborne. And they had come. And their daughters-- They had 3 daughters and they were students that I knew. And through them I met their parents, who were both shrinks and really great people. We used to go there for kind of parties. A very big German kind of breakfast. Everybody

came, a lot of students came.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, so in other words, you were against war in general, but didn't you feel that this particular war had meaning, the cause was very important, to stop Hitler?

MARY FULLER: It was a very mixed, ambivalent feeling. Some people that I knew were very passionately against Hitler. I felt very ambivalent about it because it was the time of the Japanese re-location. The people that I knew here in California, kids I'd grown up with.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: And that professor Obata--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Chiura Obata.

MARY FULLER: Was taken out and put in a camp. I remember going to International House for a sale of paintings of his. It was the first time I had ever bought a painting. I was working as a waitress part time then. I bought a painting, a watercolor of Mt. Tamalpals. I mean, it was a very intense and very ambivalent thing about it I think. Then when Russia was invaded, there was a big move against the war from people who had been sort of ambivalent up to that point. They were more left-wing politically. I wasn't that involved one way or the other. I-- How old was I then? Twenty two? In '42, twenty?

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, but you would you preferred to see America not get involved in the war at all?

MARY FULLER: You know, I felt that-- If somebody had asked me, I wouldn't have been able to give a position, to really say one way or the other. I hadn't really thought it through. It was this very strong-- You know I had a very strong anti-war feeling because of my father, who was really injured for life because of the first world war. In fact, when I worked as a draft counselor during the Vietnam War, people would say to me, "Why do you care?" And I said, "Listen. I lived with somebody who was a victim of war." And our whole family suffered because of his mental illness--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: --as a result. And I think whether it was triggered by the war experience, or if it was something that would have happened without that. I really don't-- I think he would have been a lot better off if he hadn't had those 4 years in the trenches and gone through the traumas of the war. And he wasn't a strong person mentally. And it really triggered him all the way over into a manic-depressive psychosis, which I grew up with. And it's no fun to have this. It's no fun being around somebody who's that mentally ill. So, anyway, so I had a very-- Even though it wasn't thought through, I think there was a strong feeling that war was a really dangerous and horrible thing, and to be avoided. But I guess if it came to a question after France had fallen, if somebody had said, "Well, do you think we should go to help?" I probably would have said yes. But, again, it's really hard to say. Then when-- And the thing with the Japan thing was always very ambivalent because, being on the West Coast, we had grown up with Japanese kids. The Japanese were very successful people in California. I mean, they were the best farmers, things like that. And it was like, so, the professor being taken away, the camps being set up. And people I knew at Berkeley were actually working in the camps. Rockefeller set up a foundation to study the people in the camps. And I knew people who were going there to write papers on them. Morton Grodzins, who became head of the University of Chicago Press, was a friend of mine. And he was doing a study of the economic re-location of the Japanese. And it was so cynical, the way they took their property. It was just outrageous, the scam that was pulled. And then--

SUSAN LANDAUER: The profits that were made.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I wonder whether that was part of it.

MARY FULLER: Well, that's what Grodzins was saying and that was when I was at Berkeley. And then there was the anti-Japanese propaganda that came out that was outrageous. The people with buck teeth. The chauvinism, the anti-Oriental chauvinism was extreme in California.

SUSAN LANDAUER: A lot of--

MARY FULLER: A lot of people reacted against that, you know. But people that I knew who came--who were refugees from Europe, like Matt Pollock was a good friend of mine. He was a Dutch Jew. And he had left with his family. And the Phillipsbornes and there was another guy. See, in Berkeley also they put a curfew on those people. So, they'd have to be back in their houses by 8:00. I remember we had a sit in. Yeah, they could only travel 8 miles distance from where they lived because they were under curfew. And these were Jewish refugees.

So, this was fairly ambivalent, too. So, a fairly young person would go, "Hey, what's going on here?" We had a professor at Berkeley. And I've forgotten his name. It began with an "L". And he was a young guy. And he was a refugee. And he organized a sit-in to protest the curfew. And we all went down to Edie's Ice Cream Store, which is still there, and ate ice cream after 8:00, when they were supposed to be back home. And called the papers and announced to the papers and everything. I think that was the first time I ever did actually a political action. And it was to challenge the curfew.

SUSAN LANDAUER: How long did that curfew last?

MARY FULLER: My sense of time and history is-- Yeah, it was very-- And I heard there was group of people, some Belgian Jews, the Franks. And they were funny people. They had this apartment full of Persian rugs they had somehow smuggled out. And they had them stacked up this high. And you'd walk in there and walk on this huge amount of Persian rugs. How they ever got them out-- You know, the only people who could get out were people who had some money or some assets. When Pollock left--

SUSAN LANDAUER: You had to have a sponsor, too. His family-- Holland never believed that they would take them, because they had become Christians. And his father was some kind of big shot in the government. But they had one cousin according to his story that never believed that. And he kept a lifeboat ready. At the last moment 40 of them fled in the afternoon and took a lifeboat over to England. It was a horror story. People were living in these-- All I can say is that it was a very confusing time. And because we were so close, it was right in our faces, up front, the individual stories that were not clear. And then these people came here, they were put under curfew. They were our fellow students, so-- And people being put in concentration camps here, Japanese people. It was pretty ambivalent. And then when Pearl Harbor happened. I didn't know. It was crazy. This guy I was living with, Charlie and I just went on this hitchhiking trip. We just decided to screw it. So, we just went hitchhiking down to El Paso. Why we did that? I think it was just a reaction to, let's get out of here because we can't handle it. And he had been a conscientious objector. And guys who I knew were getting married and having kids, joining Jehovah Witnesses, or trying to become Quakers to become c.o.'s. And Charlie had tried to become a c.o. And then he went to work in the shipyard, so he got a draft extension that way. Then finally moved out to the East Coast.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Was he an artist?

MARY FULLER: No, he was a fellow student. Anyway, so that was that period. Then I went to work in the shipyard when the war really got going. And, again, I wouldn't say I was particularly gung ho on the war one way or the other. But everybody was leaving the campus. The campus was getting deserted. Professors were leaving. And at one point I was talking to Marhenke (I think I told you this story) what I should do. I mean, I really felt very, very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Excuse me. Who were you talking to?

MARY FULLER: Professor Marhenke, he was the guy, I was reading logic for him. And so I was going to see him and saying, "What do you think? What's going to happen?" And he said, "I think what's going to happen is that you're going to get a Ph.D. in philosophy and you'll get a job teaching in some girl's school back East. And that'll be your life." And I somehow-- Later I thought maybe he did that on purpose to say, "Watch out. Don't--"

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, that's something you didn't want to do?

MARY FULLER: No, I didn't. I thought, hey, this is not what I want to do. And by that time I think I already had pretty much filled up with philosophy and the academic world enough.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you never got your degree from Berkeley?

MARY FULLER: No.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I see.

MARY FULLER: I spent 2-1/2 or 3 years.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And you went straight to the shipyards you say?

MARY FULLER: Right. I went over to the shipyards and became a welder.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Really?

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was an unusual thing for a woman, wasn't it?

MARY FULLER: No, they were training lots and lots of women to be welders. Yes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes, that's right. Rosie the Riveter.

MARY FULLER: Rosie the Riveter. Riveters were aircraft, but welders were--

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK.

MARY FULLER: But that was a very unusual experience. So at that time-- By this time I was living with Bill Rubenstein. And we'd been together for a couple years. And so both of us worked in the shipyards. And we had an apartment on Regent street in Berkeley. And I was interested in getting into-- About this time I got into ceramics. And that was-- I just sort of decided I would--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Was there a connection between the welding and your ceramics?

MARY FULLER: No, that started before the welding, actually.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Because what happened was that I-- After the conversation with Marhenke, as I recall I was just really through with philosophy. It seemed like it was really more and more confusing and more and more esoteric and removed from any reality. And with the war thing, it seemed like it became more and more ridiculous for me to be studying philosophy and reading Hume and Kant and people like that and saying, "What has this got to do with the world falling apart," which it seemed to be doing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, it was no longer relevant.

MARY FULLER: It was no longer relevant. And also at that time there was a lot of talk about the development of the bomb. And we saw Oppenheimer around Berkeley. He would walk the streets of Berkeley. We would see him all the time, you know, Oppenheimer walking along with 2 guys right behind him in camel hair coats and snap-brim hats. The FBI guys were following him around.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh my god.

MARY FULLER: I knew people, physicist guys, who were young physicists who were working with him. And there was a lot of talk about the development of the bomb. And so people knew that that was-- That added a dimension I think of uneasiness, certainly. Nobody knew exactly what-- But they knew how big it was going to be. That was already known in Berkeley, for sure, that it was so serious, too. And then there was talk about the Germans developing it and the missiles they were developing that they were dropping on England. It was a very uncertain and nervous time. And then on top of that, I mean, in your early twenties is a time when you're nervous and uncertain anyway. So, then your hormones are going in all crazy directions, and your mind is going all crazy, too. It's a wonder any of us survived it. So, about that time I thought, "I have to get out of this philosophy thing." And I thought-- I was reading a lot of Hemingway. I never read women writers. And I said, well, if I got something where I'd work with my hands at something simple. A simple life like the Big Two-Hearted River Story, go fishing and eat onion sandwiches. You know, live a simple life. And so I think Charlie and I kind of tried to do that. And so I thought it was very romantic. Anyway, so I thought if I get something like that, I'll be OK. So I thought, why not something like sculpture? And I had thought of it, I think, as a kid. Because I remember doing little mud things and loving to do that, just making clay mud stuff. And I remember when I was in high school reading James Branch Cabell. And one of his books is called Figures of Earth. And it's about a guy who makes sculpture out of mud. And that was about my only interest in art. And I think I'd seen one art show of Diego Rivera drawings at the museum in Stockton. And that was about all. And when I attended Berkeley, I never went to--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Which museum in Stockton was that?

MARY FULLER: The DeYoung Museum, the Haggin-DeYoung Museum. There's only one I think in Stockton. I think that was the only art show I ever saw. And then I went to see the Obata show at I-house.

SUSAN LANDAUER: The Obata show did you say? Chiura Obata?

MARY FULLER: Right.

SUSAN LANDAUER: The Japanese--

MARY FULLER: Right. That's where I bought one of his paintings. And I think that was, again, I never went to museums and never thought about them. And the people that I knew in Berkeley weren't interested in art. So, there was no art thing going; we were mainly writers. And in fact I worked for a little magazine that published a

couple of my poems called New Rejections. And Circle magazine was starting then.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right. George Leite--

MARY FULLER: Right. George Leite and Nancy. I knew them in Berkeley. They kind of hung out around. So, it was more of a--if anything--a literary, philosophical orientation.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was a surrealist magazine, wasn't it?

MARY FULLER: It was everything. Henry Miller-- We put quite a bit of artists in there--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Jean Varda, Clay Spohn?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, right.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you meet Clay Spohn at that time?

MARY FULLER: No. I didn't meet any artists at all. And then Bill and I were together. And Bill had been a painter, Bill Rubenstein. But he was sort of a Sunday painter. But he was actually a mathematics major at Berkeley. I think he graduated in math. And I think-- He was about 3 years older than I was and I think at that time he was getting a teaching credential in math. But I'm not sure. Anyway, we got together and we both worked in the shipyards. Then we-- Oh, before that, I decided OK. I've got to do something with my hands, get my sanity. I felt I'm getting crazy. So, I went around to different places that made sculpture. I went to stone carving places. The only ones were cemeteries where they carved gravestones. I contacted Ralph Stackpole's place in San Fran-- It was really hard. There were no sculptors. There was nothing you do.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Ralph Stackpole was it called?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, right. Like, I called this--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Peter is the son.

MARY FULLER: Right. And Ruth Cravath. I think I talked to them on the phone. And they were not encouraging. And then I went to a couple of stone carving places where they made gravestones. And I just sort of walked in and said I'm looking for--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Isn't that interesting?

MARY FULLER: --I want to be a sculptor. And then the most extraordinary thing happened. There's this California Faience company in south Berkeley. And somehow I looked them up in the phone book and I went there. And I remember so well meeting this guy outside as I was walking along the street. I was going to go there and he came out. It was Bill Bragdon, William Bragdon who ran it. And I started-- You know, he was an older guy. And I said, "I really want to get into sculpture." And I said, "I'm a philosophy major and I'm really unhappy with that and blah, blah, blah." And just poured the whole thing out. And he said, "Come on in and sit down and have a cup of coffee." It's unbelievable. That's how it all started. And he was Bill Bragdon, who had a-- He'd gone to Alfred's College in the East. And he'd been a very successful architectural potter in the '20s and '30s. He did all the tile at San Simeon, fired them all for Julia Morgan. And he was at one time making those great big huge orange and turquoise bright-colored vases that they always had in front of the house, on the balcony of the house. And he had a huge kiln. At this time, when I was there, he was kind of not doing too well. And he was firing stuff for the schools, all the school ceramic classes, and selling the materials. He was making low-fire glazes and clay. And he had about 3 or 4 people working there at the shop who made their own line of stuff, who paid him to use his materials. So, that's how I got started in the pottery.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you knew you wanted to do sculpture from the beginning? You didn't consider painting?

MARY FULLER: No, I was a painter. I had a show of painting.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, you did?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, Bill and I-- When Bill and I started living together, Bill was painting. And I started painting too. So, I painted. And I had a show of paintings, mainly paintings, at the Artists' Guild Gallery in San Francisco, which was the kind of artists' union--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: --building at 473 Jackson Street. That was the first show that I had. It was mainly painting and a few clay sculptures.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What year was that? Do you remember?

MARY FULLER: In '47. Anyway, that's--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So you were self-taught?

MARY FULLER: Yes. I never did have any art classes. Later on, years later I decided to go back to Berkeley and finish up. And I can't remember when that was. I enrolled and lasted about 3 weeks in the art department [inaudible]. Ridiculous. I mean, you're too old for it then. I'd already-- You know, I'd already been a practicing artist and I said, well, it'll be easier to get a job teaching. I was teaching adult education. But I thought I'd get a better job teaching if I had a regular credential.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You sort of apprenticed at the California Faience Company?

MARY FULLER: Right. And that's where I sort of learned-- And then I started doing clay sculpture there, too, and firing it there at Bragdon's place. He was as wonderful guy. Then Bill Rubenstein got interested in it, so we started a ceramics business together. And this is still during the war. We were selling at Gump's.

MARY FULLER: Oh, is that right?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes. We made dishes and I made a lot of figurines and some pretty fun stuff. We made a living together. Then we started teaching. I got a teaching, adult education credential. And started teaching. And we decided at this point to save up our money and start a pottery of our own. We had The Two Fish Pottery, a Chinese logo. Anyway, so we were doing pretty well. We were making a living at it. We worked in the shipyards for a year and saved our money. And we had saved up about $3000, which, now at ten times is about $30,000.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you're still talking about during the war?
MARY FULLER: Yeah. My sense of time is terrible. Bill and I had saved up this amount of money. Then we started looking for a place to buy. We went all over California. We hitchhiked and we didn't have a car. And we almost bought a lot of places I'm glad we didn't.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You mean a kiln? You were looking for a kiln?

MARY FULLER: We were looking for a place in the country where we could have a kiln, set up a pottery shop. Then we got involved in the Artists' Guild. And I'm not sure exactly how that happened, because it was San Francisco and we didn't hang out much in San Francisco at the time. Well, Bill was from San Francisco. His family lived in San Francisco. So that must have been it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, the Guild was operating in the late '40s, is that right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Because George Stillman had a show there in 1947.

MARY FULLER: OK.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And Hassel Smith.

MARY FULLER: Hassel, Ed Corbett.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, did you meet any of those people?

MARY FULLER: Oh sure. That's when I met them. Through the Artists' Guild Gallery.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I see.

MARY FULLER: And Bill and I joined the Artists' Guild Gallery.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Who ran that gallery? Do you remember?

MARY FULLER: It was a co-op. Emy Lou Packard, Robert McChesney, was in it, George Goya, John Hultbert, Stillman. It was kind like--

SUSAN LANDAUER: The artists associated with the California School of Fine Arts?

MARY FULLER: Byron Randall. Well, you know, because Metart was more--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Metart was later. That was 1950.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, it was later. It was people connected with the School of Fine Arts and just artists in San Francisco. Because there were no galleries. I mean, there was Lebaut gallery and Raymond + Raymond and that was about it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right.

MARY FULLER: So, they started this cooperative gallery. It was a co-op. And I've forgotten how we ran it. Whatever. Anyway, I had my first one-person show and Corbett, I knew Corbett by then. He brought Clyfford Still to the opening.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, is that right?

MARY FULLER: Yes. And they were on their way to a prize fight or something. I remember he had-- We already knew who Clyfford Still was. He had become a person that, you know, and so-- This guy shows up with-- You know, this is really weird, because my work was very amateurish, kind of strange painting, expressionistic kind of thing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What was your first impression of Clyfford Still?

MARY FULLER: Well, he was very polite and very embarrassed and very sweet.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was embarrassed or you were?

MARY FULLER: He seemed embarrassed. I think he was embarrassed that Ed had dragged him to this thing. I don't know what was in Corbett's mind.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, "sweet" is not an adjective I've heard applied to Clyfford Still.

MARY FULLER: And when I saw him later, I never would have used that expression for him. But I remember him-- Ed sort of said come and look at this. And Ed was kind of enthusiastic. And I remember that he was coming in. And he said, "Hum." You know, he didn't say anything except, like, "Well. Yeah." And he probably was just embarrassed like hell. And with Ed and me and trying to be nice. [laughter]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, maybe this was before he developed his fearsome public persona.

MARY FULLER: I think he was on his way to developing that way, because a few of the times we saw him later, he was very different: very removed and very haughty and all that stuff.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, he and Ed Corbett were good friends.

MARY FULLER: They were good friends.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Close friends.

MARY FULLER: But they had this sports thing together. Ed was in sports. He was a track star.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right. At Richmond High.

MARY FULLER: So, they went to prize fights and baseball games together. And most of the other artists I knew weren't at all interested in sports. You know, Hassel thought they were ridiculous and I thought they were ridiculous, Mac thought they were ridiculous. I mean, most artists, their position was "this is ridiculous." So for an artist to be interested in sports was kind of freaky. And so they had that in common.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's funny. It's hard to imagine Clyfford Still liking baseball, but I guess he really did.

MARY FULLER: He really did. And he didn't seem like an athletic person at all; Ed was.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right.

MARY FULLER: Or had been. Water exercise was lifting a glass for him. Although I must say Ed was amazing. He was extremely strong. I mean, he was really. When we lived in Point Richmond, I mean, he had never done anything, I mean, in the way of exercise, but he was so strong. He would pick up these great big timbers from the beach and haul them across the road.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He didn't look strong; he looked almost frail.

MARY FULLER: Later, of course, yeah, he was thin. Very wiry.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Wiry, yes.

MARY FULLER: And tough, yeah. Anyway, so-- That's why-- Still didn't drink. Clyfford Still did not drink, as far as I know. I suppose he didn't-- We never saw him in that situation. In fact, the only time I ever saw him at a party was at Hassel Smith's house when we lived in Point Richmond.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, there must have been a lot of people there.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, but he was just sitting there kind of removed and making--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Watching everybody.

MARY FULLER: No. It's more as having people come to him. He was always like-- You know, very theatrical, like on stage. Not like watching everybody-- Like, Ad Reinhardt was always watching everybody.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, yes, that's right. [laughter]

MARY FULLER: But still he was always posing, like, ready to be photographed. [laughter] They were very different kinds of guys.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes, Still was very photogenic.

MARY FULLER: And very conscious of that. And very conscious of the impression he made on other people.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Reinhardt didn't drink either, did he?

MARY FULLER: No. Oh, very moderately. No, he was not a-- He never joined the party. But he was always liked-- And Hassel would get really pissed off when he'd go and buy more drinks for other people.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Reinhardt would go buy drinks?

MARY FULLER: Yes, and Hassel, would say, "He's a spy. Why are you trying to get us all drunk? You go out and get another bottle." [laughter] Hassel was so crazy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's really funny. That's when you were living in Point Richmond?

MARY FULLER: That was at Point Richmond, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, how did you meet Reinhardt?

MARY FULLER: Oh my. Well, Bill and I saved up our money and we got this house in Point Richmond. We looked all over. We finally bought this three-apartment house, which is still there.

SUSAN LANDAUER: On Western Drive.

MARY FULLER: On Western Drive, yeah. And I-- Oh, a year or so earlier, through the Artists' Guild Gallery, art shows-- I had met-- We had both met the McChesneys, Pat and Mac. And we had become friends with them. And so something was developing between Mac and me. And that did develop and dis-developed with Bill. So after we had moved into Point Richmond, not very long. I mean, it was not a big disaster. I mean, but we were really splitting up. And it was weird looking back on it. We'd already made this big commitment to a place and then split up.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But you never did get married?

MARY FULLER: No, we were together 5 years and we never married. And I didn't really believe in marriage. I had this kind of anarchist position on that. But then it was so ridiculous. We had bought the house together. We had a car we bought together. And it was my money. I'd worked in the shipyards and it was half mine. I earned as much as he did. And then when we started to split up, Bill said, "You're not getting anything. I'm taking everything. I've got an attorney." So we ended up both getting attorneys.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh no.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. It was gross, man. He had all these classic lines like, "You should go see a psychiatrist." And I said, well-- "You must be crazy. You don't love me anymore." And to Mac, "Get lost and get out of her life." And all this. We were doing this big drama thing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But now you wound up with the house as I recall.

MARY FULLER: Well, what happened was, we both got attorneys. And so one of our really good friends at Berkeley, Lantzmann, became Bill's attorney. And I remember being really angry that he did that. And I didn't know anybody. So Mac had a friend in San Francisco. I remember Mac said then. He said Barney Dreyfus, who apparently was this little hot dog, left wing attorney, who really became quite famous. And so-- He was with Charles Gary and those guys who became famous left wing attorneys. Anyway, so Mac would just speak to Barney. And I told him the story. And I said, "You know, I'm not married to this guy. And the house was in Rubenstein, which isn't even my name." You know, what's going to happen? So, Barney said, "Don't worry. I'll take care of it." There was a common law marriage law in California, which I think no longer exists. But there was then.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think now there is ; it's 7 years.

MARY FULLER: Well, then it was 5 or something. Then Barney said, "Well, so you can prove that you didn't take this money from him, that you worked and put the money down on the house, so it's half yours, so don't worry about it. We'll do it." And so then he started negotiating with Bill's lawyer and Bill. And looking backwards, it's ridiculous because we had bought this brand new yellow jeep with an extension on it. And we'd been in some parades with it. And Bill just loved this car. I mean, I don't think he ever had a car before. And it was this bright chrome yellow. And he just was crazy about this car. And then Barney said, "OK, we'll just split it down the middle. You know, you've got a certain amount of equity in the house and you've got the car. So, split it." And Bill says, like, "I can't give up the car." And so he said, "I want the car." And so Barney says to me, "Take the house." [laughter] He said, "A car depreciates and houses appreciate." And we settled for that. Well, it was actually almost an equal amount of money, but it was ridic-- I mean, it didn't make any sense at all. Poor Bill. But he did it. I think one of the reasons he's really been pissed off at me ever since is that about 5 years later he probably woke up and said, "Oh my god. I really made a mistake." [laughter] Well, he hated the house. He just hated the house because--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Why?

MARY FULLER: Well, it was this big, you know, white stucco 3-apartment house. And it had had a fire in it and it had been remodeled. And it was an insurance job and it was a terrible job. They had put a hardwood floor over a concrete floor. And it was just all buckled and rotten. We moved in there and the front stairs fell in because they'd left burned wood in there.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Great location, though.

MARY FULLER: Oh, it was a wonderful place. And then-- And then also, I think we were there, Bill and I, about a month, and the sewer backed up with blackberry bushes and then the sewer stuff came out of the bathtub and all over the floor. I remember Bill just sitting out in the vacant lot next door not doing anything. He was big at pouting. And about that time I thought this guy and I are not going to make it because his attitude was whatever. It was not my attitude. We weren't getting along at all well. And I think that was kind of the end, when I thought, hey, I'm not going to make it with this guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And around this time you met Mac, right?

MARY FULLER: Well, we had met earlier, yeah. So then Bill and I split up and I moved in to Berkeley into my sister's place. And we went through all this stuff with the attorneys and made this settlement. And then Mac and I moved into Point Richmond.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Point Richmond was something of an artists' colony, wasn't it?

MARY FULLER: Yes, it was. People from the University of California lived out there. Haley, John Haley lived there. And across the street from us, Ella Alluisi, who's a painter. Her husband, the French guy, Jean Alluisi. And let's see. Walter Horn in art history was down the street.

SUSAN LANDAUER: A professor at Berkeley, yes.

MARY FULLER: Architect Ed Sweeting down the street. So, anyway, Mac and I moved in. And, let's see, in '49 we got married. I've forgotten how it all came down. But then the other apartments became vacant and so Hassel Smith and his wife, June, and their kid moved into the top floor. And Corbett moved into the bottom and Mac and I moved in the center. And we kind of moved around. And for a while Ed Corbett lived upstairs. Then Weldon Kees and Ann moved in the middle apartment.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, Weldon Kees, the poet?

MARY FULLER: Right. And painter.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And painter, that's right.

MARY FULLER: He and his wife lived there in the center and then Corbett moved upstairs for awhile. He was there I guess about 2 years. And that was about the time that Ed Corbett got fired from the art school. And Mac had been teaching there part time, silk screening and set up the silk screen department at the California School of Fine Arts. And Hassel, of course, we saw a lot of those people. And the Temkos were there.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Allan Temko.

MARY FULLER: Right.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Those must have been interesting years.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, they were. They were very traumatic. It always seemed like a really hard trauma, looking back on it. It was-- Oh.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, what were the traumas about.

MARY FULLER: Well, I think, you know, politically, I think there was the McCarthy thing coming down. And there was that reaction to-- I mean, I think there was a fantastic optimism about the end of the war. And then there was the bombing of Japan and that was kind of horrendous. And then the United Nations thing. And there was this sort of optimism. And then there was this reaction, a political reaction in the United States that was just fantastic, a right wing reaction that started about then with the McCarthy thing. And people having to sign the loyalty oath and all that stuff coming down.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, Corbett-- Did you know that-- I mean I'm sure you do know that Corbett refused to sign the loyalty oath at Berkeley.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, well, I refused and lost my teaching job in Richmond the same night.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, is that right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I was teaching in the adult education in Richmond and I refused to sign the oath and then so did Mac and both of us lost our jobs.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Where were you teaching?

MARY FULLER: Adult education. I'd been teaching adult education in the Richmond school system.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, really? I didn't realize that.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I taught at-- I had been teaching adult education for about 3 or 4 years then. I taught watercolor and ceramics. And the Loyalty Oath Act, when it was passed in California, we had both taught at the California Labor School. Now, that was sort of a left wing operation. That was a left wing operation. Right. And at that time, they had what's called this attorney general's list of organizations. And it was, like, 100 organizations. I mean, you could not work at the Civil Liberties Union and all kinds of things that you would consider more liberal than anything. In fact, there were hundreds of them. And off the top, there was, of course, the Communist Party, there were 3 or 4 others, and then the California Labor School.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Were you ever affiliated with the Communist Party?

MARY FULLER: Is this on record? Yes, I was. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: And Mac too?

MARY FULLER: Yes, but differently.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think it's OK to say this now.

MARY FULLER: Yes, but in 'Frisco. Well, Mac was shipping out in the South Pacific and reading and painting when I was a student. When Bill and I were together, we were--I don't know if Bill was--but I was much more active than he. We were really--I was especially, not Bill so much--very much involved in integrating Berkeley of all things. We integrated bowling alleys and bars--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Is that right?

MARY FULLER: Isn't that amazing?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes.

MARY FULLER: And that's why we loved the town. [laughs] We had a picket--

SUSAN LANDAUER: This was in the early '40s?

MARY FULLER: Middle '40s. We had a picket line at Safeway stores that went on for a year and a half in Berkeley and West Oakland for them to hire black people. It's amazing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: And that was a Party operation. It was a lot of fun actually. It was a very exciting time. It was students mainly, you know, it was a student group and yeah we were hot. And we went down and got arrested and went to go to jail. I didn't actually go to jail, but went through all that court thing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But you did actually succeed in integrating the bowling alleys, was that right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, the bowling alleys. And there was a group called the Congress of Racial Equality. And mostly there was a group in Berkeley called the Berkeley Interracial Committee. And that was a big group of half black and half white. And it was always kind of superleftists who were up against the Berkeley liberals. I mean, Berkeley was tense like it is now. It was the same kind of town, you know, hot bed of all kinds of political action. And the Party was very much involved in that. That's how I got into the Party, was through that kind of action.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes, that's interesting.

MARY FULLER: Yes. Well, we also petitioned to get the Fair Employment Act passed, which never-- I guess that started, you know, in the War under Roosevelt. They did have a fair employment act in the war industries. And then the effort was to extend that out to make it a law so that there had to be equal hiring. It's true now, but it wasn't then.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Henry Wallace ran for President.

MARY FULLER: That's right, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So that was Wallace in '48. That's '48, OK. Yeah, there was a lot of--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He didn't make it to the final, though?

MARY FULLER: I think so, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, now were Asians discriminated against as well at this time? I mean, in other words, they were in concentration camps.

MARY FULLER: No, not in the shipyards, because my boss, for sure was a Chinese guy. Asian people could-- No, that's interesting. No, I don't think they could. There were a lot of Chinese people working in the shipyards. In fact, I remember that something-- There were a lot of midwestern kind Okie types and Arkie-- Arkies and Oakies worked in the shipyard. And after I was a welder I got a much better job as a checker, a steel checker. So I worked with a crew. And what I just did was order, you know, when the ships needed big bulkheads and I was in charge of ordering the transportation for getting it together, sort of the "expediter" they called us. Anyway, so I had a crew I worked with. You know, and these guys were from Texas and the Midwest. Really prejudiced. And they always said they're not going to-- If any blacks ever came to work, they'd quit, you know. And so they did. A couple black guys came and worked on our crew and they didn't quit. Then the next thing, some American Indians came. Oh, they're going to quit if that happens, you know. They didn't even then. But the Chinese were always-- Like, our boss was a Chinese guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I would have thought that the war would have whipped up some anti-Asian sentiment. I mean, obviously toward the Japanese, but toward even Chinese as well.

MARY FULLER: Not to the Chinese, no. Well, of course there were so many more of them. There weren't many-- Chinese people always outnumbered Japanese people by a large number in the Bay Area, because there was a big Chinatown. And Japanese were mainly out in the Valley I guess in ranches and farms. There were a lot of them up around here. Not a lot, but some up around--

SUSAN LANDAUER: There was Japantown, though. That existed.

MARY FULLER: But it was small compared to Chinatown.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh of course that's true.

MARY FULLER: There had never been big, mass, waves of immigrations of Japanese people like there were Chinese who came to work, you know, on the railroads and everything and in the mines. And the Japanese never did that. So they came, I think, probably as more middle-class people. They never seemed to be poor the way that Chinese people were poor in California.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's true. They did prosper in agriculture.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. They were terrific farmers, too.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Because they had to learn how to get as much as they could out of the land in Japan, they really knew how to work the fields.

MARY FULLER: Probably, yeah. Well, when I was in high school, a lot of the Ja-- There weren't that many Japanese kids, but they were always the star students, too, even then.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What were the attitudes towards the Japanese after the war? Did the discrimination persist? The hostility?

MARY FULLER: I don't really remember. That's interesting. I didn't know any Japanese people then and I'd just take a wild guess and say probably not. I think probably the bomb really on a very fundamental level really horrified people.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It must have been a tremendous burden of guilt.

MARY FULLER: I think-- I think yeah. Because everybody really knew it was over. I mean, the Japanese had really sued for peace and it was-- I mean, there was no doubt that the war-- Even people who had fought in the war, you know, like painters. I knew Charlie Safford who was in the Pacific area thought that it was clear that it wasn't a necessary move. And that they would never have dropped it on the Europeans. I mean, that was a strong feeling at least among the people I knew. I don't know how prevalent that was. But, you know, interestingly enough, people talk about how there was such a gung-ho attitude towards the war, but in the shipyards, there wasn't that kind of an attitude. Most of the people that I knew from the middle west who worked there and were sort of anti-war, if anything. You know, they weren't-- They didn't really give a damn. If anything, they were isolationists. They were sort of dragged into it. And it was a good way to make some money working in the shipyards. But I never heard anybody flag wave or jumping up and down or getting excited about-- We were, if anything, the people from Berkeley were more excited politically than the people I worked with in the shipyards.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's really interesting.

MARY FULLER: Who were kind of phlegmatic about it if anything. You know, they'd say, "Oh well who gives a--" You know, who cares?

SUSAN LANDAUER: It seems to be that the artists connected with the California School of Fine Arts, or I should say the San Francisco abstract expressionists were more political than their counterparts in New York.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I mean in the late '40s.

MARY FULLER: I think a lot of those guys in New York were party guys. I heard de Kooning and those guys. I had heard that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah, yeah. And I think there were others, too. I've forgotten. You know, when they were on the Projects-- Well there was Ribak, Louis Ribak was involved with the left.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was earlier. I mean after the war in the late '40s. The story goes that they became politically disenfranchised as a group, apolitical.

MARY FULLER: I heard that Reinhardt was a very political, left guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was a Marxist. That's true.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, yeah. Well, I really can't say. I don't know. Because most of the people that we knew, most of the artists out here were pretty political and they were pretty left. In fact, I think in a certain sense the Artists' Guild was sort of left wing more than Metart, although some of those guys in Metart, they were pretty left.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. Did you ever talk with Clyfford Still about politics?

MARY FULLER: No. In fact, I never had a conversation with him. I never knew him that well, and he wasn't a person that socialized with any of the people that I knew. And so no. As I said Hassel at that one party I remember seeing him there, but it was a big party and he was sort of not a friendly person-- So, no. I never had a conversation with him. And actually he was a part of the painting that was evolving at that time. People talked about it a lot. [pause] Well, Ed Corbett was a very verbal person. He talked a lot about art and a lot about painting. And Hassel of course did too. So there was a lot of conversation about what art was happening. I can't remember what it was, the thrust of it except that people just felt that what had been happening in the past is not what they wanted to do. And they were very anti-European, anti-European painting. So that was much discussed. It was hated.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Why?

MARY FULLER: Well, we called it the "piss pot and the pepper mill school of painting." [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was supposed to be the School of Paris?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Well, Corbett said, you know, "They're painting interiors and little bourgeoisie--" Well, particularly some of them like Bonnard, he just couldn't stand him. God, you know, the Impressionists. These nice little paintings of little middle class people, the bourgeoisie and-- And Picasso, he rather liked Cubism of course, but Picasso would enrage him for one reason or another.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's interesting.

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, I guess Picasso was doing still lifes occasionally.

MARY FULLER: Well, the piss pot and the pepper mill was the Impressionists. That's the interior-- And in a certain sense I think he was right. It was a romanticizing of the bourgeoisie-- Some of them are marvelous paintings, but that's what it's really all about: the wonderful still lifes and the women sitting around knitting or whatever. And then it carried on into the Bischoff kind of thing or the Diebenkorn, if you will, sitting and weaving. You know, there was this very middle class kind of bourgeoisie interiors.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Wait. I missed it. What did you say about Bischoff?

MARY FULLER: Well, some of the paintings that he did for a while were sort of--and Diebenkorn--women sitting at windows. And there was this sort of carry over from that French bourgeois interior kind of school feeling about it, that they were painting middle class interiors and Corbett just couldn't stand that. Our-- What did he used to say, "Our totems are not those. Our totem is the iron lung and the airplane and the bomb," and stuff like that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So Bischoff was painting Picasso-like canvases in the early '40s I guess when he started teaching. Or the mid '40s when taught at the California-- Started teaching at the California School of Fine Arts. He had studied with Margaret Petersen. Do you remember Margaret Petersen at all?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

SUSAN LANDAUER: [tape begins mid-sentence]--Petersen's politics were left of center, but she was painting in that sort of piss pot pepper mill school style.

MARY FULLER: Well, I was only acquainted with her work-- Our neighbor, Ella Alluisi, was a friend of her's, painted in a similar manner actually. And Ed didn't like her stuff.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, but by the late '40s, everybody was painting abstractly, weren't they?

MARY FULLER: Well, there were still guys at--

SUSAN LANDAUER: The California School of Fine Arts?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. And then it was at the university, the Berkeley thing. And they were still doing, like, Cubist. And there were some landscape painters that were still there. One guy was really pretty good, Ward Lockwood.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Ward Lockwood. That name is very--

MARY FULLER: He did sort of small impasto, heavy impasto landscapes. He was in New Mexico too.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's how I know him, yes.

MARY FULLER: I remember he was painting such interesting little paintings and good. He's a good painter.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What were the attitudes toward the Berkeley school at the California School of Fine Arts? Were they seen as competitors?

MARY FULLER: No, I wouldn't think they were considered really competitors. I mean, I think Ed taught there, didn't he? It was kind of a connection.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, for a couple semesters I think.

MARY FULLER: Then they were positions that people I think would like to have had. They were good jobs so I don't think there was any particular-- Well, there were some people there that were considered sort of really old hatters.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You mean people like Erle Loran?

MARY FULLER: Alexander Nepote and people like that who were always sort of the prize winners for any of, you know-- Hassel would take off on them. And when Hassel was painting his landscapes, he was painting kind of fantastic, wonderful paintings of American Indians--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, yes. Of course.

MARY FULLER: --with ice cream cones and gas tanks in the back.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure. Sort of proto-pop.

MARY FULLER: Exactly, exactly. And his imagery was totally different from what they would call the, you know, the interior, the French interiors. I mean, what he was representing--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Although he did paint the Black Cat Cafe.

MARY FULLER: Oh yes. And then later he painted some very, very interior kinds of paintings.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes.

MARY FULLER: That's right. But they were more like bar scenes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right.

MARY FULLER: They were rougher. The didn't have that kind of middle class look to them.

SUSAN LANDAUER: No, they were crude.

MARY FULLER: They were, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Intentionally crude.

MARY FULLER: I think so. He was a very charismatic and energetic and influential person because he was so verbal, he and Corbett both. But they disliked each other very much.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, is that right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. No, there was always kind of this type of rivalry there between them. Even though we lived all in the same house. I mean, Hassel and June had a kid then. Well, they were living a different kind of life. They had a kid then. And so they were kind of making-- They had to because of their responsibilities have a more subdued and ordered existence. It always was. And I think Hassel's wife always thought we were kind of too wild. [laughs] Maybe we were. We were pretty loud in those days, yeah. But the school was a wonderful place. It was-- You know, great parties there and a lot of-- We always use the term "energy". There was a lot of energy in that place.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Douglas MacAgy was the director at that time.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. He was a wonderful guy, very accessible to everybody and very friendly and very open and very cheerful, very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Do you think he had much to do with the vitality of the school?

MARY FULLER: Oh sure. I'm sure he did. I really do. Because he was kind of one of these-- How would you describe him like that? Very intelligent, but very outgoing. He was one of these intellectual guys who didn't have any kind of pretensions about his intellectualism. So he seemed very open, like he could talk to anybody about anything kind of thing. He was a very curious, lively kind of a wonderful guy I think. And I think that attitude that he had was sort of unusual, maybe it was a Canadian kind of thing. It was really kind of extraordinary. And so he was open to a lot of stuff and willing to-- And a very friendly man.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He played drums in the band didn't he?

MARY FULLER: Yes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: The Studio 13 Jazz Band.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. So he had big, horn-rimmed spectacles. And he used to laugh a kind of laugh that was cheerful. You know, you-- He wasn't all the academician that you'd expect. It wasn't like guys from Berkeley. He was totally different, a much more interesting kind of person, a much livelier kind of person intellectually and in other ways I think too.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you know his wife Jermayne?

MARY FULLER: No. I met her a couple of times at parties and she was always sort of off in another world. She didn't seem to be hanging out-- Well, she never hung out with him much you know.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh. I didn't-- I thought they did hang out together. I mean--

MARY FULLER: Well, not when we were around. He did all the parties and all the big things and that-- She'd come and go. And Corbett knew her and Hassel knew her but she was really I think much more aloof and much more the professional museum woman than-- And she didn't have the same-- She wasn't a mixer the way Douglas-- He was a big drinker too. So he was a party guy. And I sensed the impression that she was--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right. Well, it's something that women did less of I think. Drinking.

MARY FULLER: It depended on the women. [laughs] Wow. Because some of them were pretty heavy into it. Pretty enthusiastic. Well Weldon-- Weldon, when he-- In fact he was a bit like Doug MacAgy. That's interesting. Weldon Kees and Doug were kind of the same types of guy. Both very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did they know each other?

MARY FULLER: They must have. Both very intellectual guys. Both very knowledgeable men. Both very cheerful, very, you know, big smile. That Weldon killed himself just blew me out that he ever actually did--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Of course we don't know that he did.

MARY FULLER: We don't know that he did. He may be in Mexico right now. [laughs] I just recently got his novel. It's been republished.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Which novel is that?

MARY FULLER: Fall Quarter, it's called. Well he wrote it and never got published and he was struggling along. Anyway, he was again, Weldon was a really charming man, very open and friendly and like very New York, which was kind of amazing too, because some of these people out here had a real strong distrust of quote New York attitudes and Weldon wasn't I think like what they expected him to be. You know, like, he wasn't-- He was just a really nice guy and really liked fun. And his wife was-- They lived at our place and I can tell you it was so-- Ann was this very removed, strange little pale person who was always doing handiwork--knitting or something like that. Never talked. She was very kind of marvelous looking. Had this kind of long, kind of round face, kind of--a very white face. But she was a pretty thing. And then one time Hassel said, "Do you notice the number of whisky bottles that are in our garbage can?" And it just amazed me. And she was a real, heavy alcoholic, which I found out later. And now Weldon was a party drinker. We were all sort of party drinkers. But-- And I noticed once going down to use the phone or something and she was knitting away. And she sort of pushed this glass down behind her chair and it was-- I mean, the concealed alcoholic. And it turned out later that was one of Weldon's heavy duty problems, was that Ann was this severe alcoholic. But amazing enough, you'd never know. Isn't that weird? And we're talking maybe a bottle a day of whisky.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh my god.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Amazing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Were they married when Weldon disappeared?

MARY FULLER: No, they'd split up. In fact, they split up shortly after-- They left Point Richmond and moved to Berkeley and they were having a lot of problems then. And then they split up or whatever. No, they weren't together. And then she lived quite a bit longer as a real recluse in Berkeley. But he was a really wonderful guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. He wrote criticism, too, didn't he?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. He worked for The New York Times. Yeah. And in fact in the Turning Point [by April Kingsley], he's mentioned quite a bit. And Hassel used to always-- Hassel couldn't stand him. "The triple threat man," he'd say. "Painter, writer and musician." He was all three. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was so good at everything.

MARY FULLER: That's right. Hassel was sort of a rascal and competitive. He was amazing. God. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: I'm surprised that Hassel and Ed didn't get along very well. Their politics were so similar. Well, it seems as if everybody who lived in Point Richmond in that house had left wing politics.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. I don't think that Weldon-- Well, I'm sure he was. Yeah. Or at least certainly a pretty left liberal.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: Maybe even more than that. I'm not too-- But I think so. In fact, in his book-- There's a book about Weldon.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. Did you know Richard Diebenkorn?

MARY FULLER: Well, I didn't know him well, but we knew him. Yeah. He was-- Well, he was always sort of more aloof than the other guys. He was--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Quiet.

MARY FULLER: And he and Phyllis were married and they had a couple of kids. So, again, they were leading a more--I don't know--middle class life than most of the other people.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Traditional?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. And he had money. So, I remember going to the apartment in Sausalito. They had a very elegant apartment. And it just seemed like it was different from the way most of the other artists lived. Phyllis was always rather a conventional kind of a person I thought. So we saw him and he'd be at parties alone. We saw them in New Mexico when he was living in Albuquerque. Dick was teaching there. And I remember going down there with Corbett; his friendship with Ed was quite strong, and Clay Spohn. So we knew them, but Dick wasn't a very communicative guy. And we had parties at Point Richmond he wasn't particularly close I don't think. I don't remember. He was a-- I mean, people knew him, but he wasn't a guy that they really hung out with. Like, Hassel didn't hang out with him too much and-- I think they knew him more at school through the teaching thing, you know--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He had--

MARY FULLER: --he had the other studio.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He and Bischoff and Park were close.

MARY FULLER: I remember when Hassel had parties at Point Richmond, Bischoff and Park would be there, but I don't think Dick was there. Although maybe he was and I don't remember it. He was always a very-- You know, he was a very charming guy, but very sort of, kind of a big, tall guy, kind of hung out in the background, kind of smiled, "Hi." Drank a lot. But, you know, wasn't a verbal participant in what was going on. So, he was sort of a cipher in a certain sense. Everybody was interested in his painting. People talked about his painting, whereas--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was well respected at the time.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: His work.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. And people were interested in what he was doing. But as I said, like the other guys, in the sense that they were kind of into this verbal stuff all the time. And Dick wasn't like that. But I do-- I get a very strong sense that when he showed and when he was in shows, the other painters were very interested in what he was doing and respected it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Do you think they were influenced by him?

MARY FULLER: Oh, it's hard to say. I think everybody influences everybody else. Whatever you saw, if you saw a good idea, you know, you were influenced by that. I don't know specifically. I mean, Diebenkorn's work comes from a lot of other places, too, so--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: And nobody could say the sources were different sources that they-- They were responding to the same sources he was responding to. It's hard to tell. But I don't think he was like a big influence as a painter. Still was. And I think Still some ways was more important as a painter and as a person. But he was really--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, yes.

MARY FULLER: What a contradiction, you know, between a-- What a strange person the way he played the persona of being the anti-establishment, but in the mean time working like mad to be the success in the museums and all. And he was really amazing. I mean, really amazing. Talk about a manipulator. Agnes Martin was like that. And she'd done the same sort of a trip. It just amazes me. When I first met Aggie Martin in New York--I mean, New Mexico, boy, in 1950. She was painting these kinds of funky surrealist paintings. And she said, "I'm going to make it. I am going to make it. And I don't care who I have to fuck or how I have to do it. I'm going to make it in the--" And she was not kidding. And she was a real drinker, too. And she was so curious. I liked her a lot. She was very interesting, very strange. She was in love with Ed, but she was kind of gay I think. I never knew where she was coming from or-- She was very ambivalent on lots of levels. And at that time she was extremely handsome. And she had been an Olympic swimmer in the-- And now all these things of New York are totally, totally different from the stories Aggie told us about her background.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, you mean in the profile?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. She's re-writing this whole history. [laughs] Why not? But looking back on her, you know, she and Clyfford Still, the same sort of incredible ambition to make it, man, and hey. And the kind of intelligence or cunning or whatever it takes to plan it, which is very unusual in artists. I think artists usually, the ones that I've known, just kind of flop around. And if it happens, it happens. And they try to do the best they can for themselves in their careers, quote unquote, but to have this kind of orientation toward the career that these two had that early is really I think amazing. Because artists at that time-- I think they do more now, but at that time, artists hardly ever even thought about art I think in terms of a quote career.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think Rothko did. Rothko and Still shared that.

MARY FULLER: That's probably true. Of course we never knew him. I met him once years later.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, you never met him when he was in San Francisco?

MARY FULLER: No. I met him when I--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I guess he was just there for those 2 summers, '47 and '49. He stayed at--

MARY FULLER: Yeah, people talked about him. Yeah, right. People talked about him. We saw his paintings. I think Ed knew him. But he wasn't, like, around on the scene that I was on, so. But there were lots of certain levels of the scene.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh sure.

MARY FULLER: A lot of stuff was going on that I had no contact with whatsoever.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think Rothko was very important to Still's career.

MARY FULLER: From everything I read, he was. Yeah, in fact, he tried to introduce Still to the New York art world. Yeah, he turned him onto it, yeah. And was very helpful.

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was very shrewd, too. Rothko.

MARY FULLER: And apparently he liked Still, or liked his work enough to be really very helpful.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Something happened though. They had a terrible falling out once Still got to New York.

MARY FULLER: Like, he fell out with everybody, didn't he?

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think he did.

MARY FULLER: I mean Clyfford? He and Ed had a big falling out and Ed was talking about it when we were in Washington--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, I didn't know about that.

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: When did they have a falling out?

MARY FULLER: Well, I remember Ed talking about it when we were in Washington, which is in, like, '66. And I've forgotten what it was all about. It seemed to me--and this is really vague--it was something where Ed had asked him to do something for him. And I've forgotten what it was. It wasn't anything-- It wasn't a big deal. It wasn't like writing a thing for a catalog or something. It was some minor little favor like recommending him for something. I think. I think, but I'm not too sure. And Clyfford just blew up and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's very odd because I know that Still wrote letters for a lot of people. He wrote one for Walter Kuhlman, for example.

MARY FULLER: Really? Well, maybe that was earlier.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It seemed to me that--

MARY FULLER: [inaudible] No, it was earlier. Well, I think it's like, this was '66 and it seemed it was something of that nature. And Ed said he just couldn't believe that Still was so irascible and angry.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's strange.

MARY FULLER: And saying all you guys are trying to-- I remember Ed saying-- He said, "All you guys are trying to hang on to me and hang on my fame." And, "Make it on your own." And, you know, "Leave me alone and get off my back." I remember Ed was really kind of surprised and amazed. He said the guy's losing it. He's going nuts that he was so--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Because they had been such close friends.

MARY FULLER: --hostile. Yeah, well, Ed was getting pretty funny then, too. So it's hard to tell--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was an alcoholic.

MARY FULLER: He was really into alcohol very, very severely then. And he was hallucinating a lot, so-- I mean he really was.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, that was shor-- Let's see. He died in, what, '71?

MARY FULLER: He'd already had his leg amputated when we were in New York.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. And he did have--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He had diabetes and he was drinking.

MARY FULLER: And what is that? Phlebitis--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Which is terrible.

MARY FULLER: It was terrible. Yeah, it was terrible. It was really suicidal.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Diabetes foot. That's why they amputated.

MARY FULLER: Or phlebitis or something. I don't know. And he slept a lot, too. He took all kinds of pills. Well, anyway.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What was his problem? Why was he so--

MARY FULLER: Well--

SUSAN LANDAUER: --self-destructive?

MARY FULLER: I don't know. I really don't know. He was such a wonderful guy and so--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Everybody loved him. That's--

MARY FULLER: He was wonderful. And he was so talented. And, again, such a marvelous person, such a marvelous personality. And he really, again, was an extraordinary person. He had a unique quality of, again, this intelligence, which just was amazing without any pretensions involved in it. It was such a sharing and-- He was such a great wit and funny. He was really a marvelous-- He was a marvelous companion. Really fun to be around. Everybody was crazy about him. And I don't know whether the-- You know, when I look back on it, why was Ed so hung up on all these weird things that didn't seem that important at the time, but apparently were. I don't know. I really--

SUSAN LANDAUER: It seems to me he was something--

MARY FULLER: Maybe--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was something of a martyr.

MARY FULLER: Mac thinks he never should have left the West. If he hadn't gone back East, he would have been OK. But I don't-- It was probably something more profound than that. But then you know there's a certain-- Maybe it was a physical thing like some mental illnesses. I mean I think there's a point where in his case it was true that there was a point where the alcohol, you know, took over the body. And so he-- There was no way he could ever get back out of that. It was like a dependency, chemical or physical. That's a chemical dependency of some kind. And maybe it had to do with the diabetes. I don't really know enough about alcoholism to know, but when he got into it, he was just like a gonner. I mean, John Hultberg really pulled himself out of it, which was amazing. John was out here to lunch and he hasn't had a drink in 3, 4, 5 years, whatever, you know. And he was like getting to be the same place Ed was, where he had been hospitalized for it, you know. And I think Ed tried, but I don't know. I really don't know.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Alcoholism ran in his family. You know, his relatives were all alcoholics.

MARY FULLER: Right. Well, maybe's there's something to that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: His mother and his father I think.

MARY FULLER: That could be it. There's something really--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And his brothers.

MARY FULLER: --some chemical thing. People said that about Pollock. One doctor said this is actually poison to you. It's poison because of your chemical make-up, your biological make-up and maybe that's-- I don't know. I thought-- I don't know. It was always-- I felt it was always shocking to me the way he acted. He seemed so-- You know, in some ways, Ed was so tough. He was really tough. He was tough intellectually. He was tough as a painter. And he had fantastic integrity as a person that you just would think this guy is a real survivor because he's a person that whatever--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. That's really sad.

MARY FULLER: It is sad. And, you see, the other thing about Ed that always sort of blew me out was that he always seemed to be having a good time. He wasn't like a morose person at all. He was very, you know-- Until the very last year or so. Then he became quite depressed and morose. But when he was really younger, he always had a terrific feeling of life about him. And a lot of energy and spirit. Not at all melancholy kind of guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But his paintings, I mean, the paintings that he did at Point Richmond are-- You might even call them morose, those black paintings.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. They are. There's a quality there. But I thought that it has that sort of romantic-- I don't know. It's not quite real.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Idealistic? No, that's not the word.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Well, you know, actually Ed always seemed so much a part of his paintings that it's hard for me to separate them in my mind, him from his own work, because even though he certainly seemed a really upbeat guy and he was. And strong. The paintings were very close to Ed's personality. In a certain way it was kind of hard to express verbally. But they seemed a very integral part of him. Not at all-- Like some artists, I see their work and I think, my god, did they do that. Or it doesn't seem to jibe with their personality, where Ed's always did. It seemed to kind of flow together both to himself as a person and the painting. And I think to me it was because the paintings always seemed to me so extremely sensitive and intelligent. I mean, he had that quality, besides being a very, you know, lively and funny, interesting, with-it kind of a person. There was always this extreme feeling of sensitiv-- I think vulnerability is the word. Maybe that was it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh yeah.

MARY FULLER: That was in his personality and when you knew him, within the feeling when you were with him that there was this--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh definitely.

MARY FULLER: And I think that was part of his attraction to people, was that he had this kind of--it was kind of a live vulnerability. Well, he was so good-looking, too. He wasn't a handsome guy, like Mac is a handsome man, Ed wasn't handsome. But he was just-- Because he was so intelligent and so alive that he had a wonderful attractability to him that people really responded to.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You know, he wasn't photogenic.

MARY FULLER: No.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Because looking at the photographs of him, he really doesn't look like he was a handsome man. And yet I've heard from so many people how good-looking he was.

MARY FULLER: It was in his life. And like he had these glittering eyes. And he was so funny. You know, he told these marvelous stories. He loved to be an entertainer. He was like a joker guy. But it seems like, again, does that go with the paintings, you know?

SUSAN LANDAUER: No. I don't think that does.

MARY FULLER: But he loved to tell these long, shaggy dog stories. And I wrote that first thing that was published in Artforum about him. And in the original version, I wrote a lot about his humor. And these long-- He used to put a dishcloth around his head and be a Russian peasant and go on and on. And Ed said take it all out. And I did. And I said, "Why?" And he said, "I don't want to have to prove this to anybody." [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: I'd love to see it. Do you have the transcript? Not the transcript, I mean the manuscript?

MARY FULLER: I don't-- The original, I don't have it. Herb Crehan was the guy who was editor then. That's how that happened. And Ed said, "I don't want to have to prove it to anybody that I'm so funny." But I thought that was really important that it be in there because that was so much a part of his personality. And that doesn't come up. But in some of the drawings and in some of the--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, that's right. He did do a lot of humorous drawings.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, he did.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Some of them were really slightly pornographic.

MARY FULLER: That's right. Yeah. He would have been a great cartoonist. He had a wonderful eye and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And a unique style, too.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. He was a great artist. He could. Yeah. No doubt about that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Clay Spohn was also an entertainer, wasn't he?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, but they were very different. Clay was kind of, well-- [laughs] Clay had routines that he did. And they were funny as hell. He did them over and over again, whereas Ed was a lot more spontaneous and smarter sort of. So he would, like-- He was a stand-up comic at times. He'd just start going and just kept going. And with certain people-- maybe it was Clay--they'd kind of wind off one another. And so it was-- Oh, Ad Reinhardt. Ad Reinhardt and Ed were a perfect pair because they'd just verbally would wind off one another and they could go for hours being hysterically funny, really, really funny. Yeah, Clay was-- He was an entertainer,

too.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What were some of his routines?

MARY FULLER: Oh, he did the horse thing. Where he would do the horse's whinny and stomp and-- He wrote a song called the "Louse of Taos" and sang that out. [laughs] I can't remember. Some pretty vulgar lines. Oh, he was so crazy, too. I mean, he-- When we were in Taos, he'd sworn he'd found this egg on its end in the desert all by itself. And he had everybody driving around all over the desert looking for this egg. [laughs] Whether it existed or not we never knew. But Clay was intense about it. He was intense, that guy. Very intense. [laughs] [tape turned off] Is it working?

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK. I want to ask you about David Park. Did you know him?

MARY FULLER: Yes, I did. I knew David. He played the piano with the band.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK.

MARY FULLER: And was around at the parties. And as I said, when we had the house in Point Richmond and Hassel and June lived upstairs. Hassel gave barbecue parties. And we sort of had a backyard area. And then David and Lydia (I think her name was Lydia) would be at those parties. But he was sort of like Diebenkorn. He was-- He was a-- Dick-- No, they weren't alike. Dick was always kind of like he seemed embarrassed and kind of shy and kind of a self-effacing kind of dude. And Park was not like that at all. Very outgoing. He was real smiley, cheerful kind of open man. But on the other hand, he wasn't really a kind of guy who was much of a mixer. He seemed to be-- He played the piano a lot. He was always grinning and laughing. He was sort of like-- And Flo Allen used to hang all over the top of the piano.

SUSAN LANDAUER: She was the model, right?

MARY FULLER: She was this wonderful black woman who was a model at the school. And it was sort of like they were kind of making a New Orleans whorehouse scene or something. But he was always kind of a small, chain-smoking and real quite little guy. He was small and dapper kind of guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Do you think he was much of an intellectual?

MARY FULLER: I never got that impression, but I never really talked to him much. He was never much of a talker as far as I'm concerned. And I never got the impression that anybody else ever particularly thought of him that way.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Nor Diebenkorn?

MARY FULLER: [Meows in background] I don't know about this. Is this going to be on the tape recorder? The cat from hell. He's 20 years old and he really-- He's too old. You're too old, Pickle. [laughs] Anyway. Well, Dick wasn't-- Neither of them were very verbal men, at least in conversations under the circumstances where I saw them. So I think that if that is what you're going to judge it on, they didn't seem to be. But I really don't know. I think Diebenkorn's paintings reflect an intellectual attitude. I mean it's very almost in a sense self-consciously intellectual painting. Park's not as much, more emotional. Diebenkorn's paintings, though certainly they vary, were very rational and kind of intellectualized, academic almost at times. After all, he taught for years so I'm sure he was and probably much more academic and that sort of thing. I think that-- You know, whatever that means. Yeah, they weren't very verbal, though. But then a lot of painters weren't particularly, you know?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right. What about Elmer Bischoff?

MARY FULLER: I think he was more so. More verbal. He was at the parties more. I never knew Elmer well at all. He was-- Again, he was sort of a reserved person. Well, when Hassel gave-- Hassel dominated the scene. Hassel would be the star, so he dominated the scene. You met him. You know what he's like.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh sure.

MARY FULLER: He was even more so then. Totally Mr. On Stage, you know? So he dominated the scene. And it seemed to me those 3 guys were more retiring than the other-- Some of the other-- Some of the younger artists were more sort of--

SUSAN LANDAUER: They were family men.

MARY FULLER: Family. They were family men and they were more conservative I think in their--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Their politics were more conservative, too. I think they were-- Well, I think they were just--

They were liberals, but they weren't--

MARY FULLER: Weren't lefties. Yeah, I think so. Although Diebenkorn may have been. No, I don't really-- No, I don't think so. I think he was more liberal than left.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: Of course Clay, I don't think Clay was ever very left. He was sort of a-- Well, he was really more, if anything, an anarchist and apolitical. So that more anarchistic I think in many things.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. Right. OK. Well, let's get back to you because we really haven't talked about you that much.

MARY FULLER: OK.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Let's see. You moved to--is it Mexico--in 1950?

MARY FULLER: No, '51. Fifty one. We left-- Let's see. We were living at Point Richmond, Mac and I. We'd gotten married in '49. And then the McCarthy thing came along. We both lost our jobs. We both refused to sign the loyalty oath and we lost our jobs. And the thing at the school was happening and Ed lost his job. And Ed moved to New Mexico to go to Taos Valley Art School that Louis Ribak ran. I don't know how he heard about that, but he did. And at that time he was involved with Roosevelt, Diana Roosevelt Jaicks. And she had a car. And she gave Ed her car. And Ed took off in this big convertible that Diana gave him for New Mexico. And I don't-- It was, like, again, everything was kind of falling apart. You know, it's like here Hassel, June had left. Weldon and Ann had left. Ed left. And I don't know. We just-- Oh, I guess Stillman had moved to Mexico.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yes, that's right.

MARY FULLER: We were corresponding with him. And then Sue Goya, George Goya's first or second wife had moved to Mexico or was on her way. And George Abend was going to Mexico.

SUSAN LANDAUER: There were a lot of people going to New Mexico, too.

MARY FULLER: Right, yeah. And so it was sort of like people leaving the Bay Area. I guess people were going to France, too. Temko went to-- They went to Paris.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So did Frank Lobdell and Walter Kuhlman.

MARY FULLER: Right. OK. It was sort of that people were just leaving. Maybe it was this McCarthy thing. Interesting. I didn't really know for sure. So there was that-- Had a big a-- Well, there was a lot of nervousness--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, the school had changed.

MARY FULLER: The school had changed. And there was a lot of, you know, nervousness going on at that time. And-- When wasn't there? [laughs] But maybe it was because we were young. We were reacting more violently to it or whatever. But I think I was uptight about moving as I remember then. And I thought--we'd bought the house in Point Richmond-- OK. I'm going to set up a pottery and I've got-- That's what I'm going to do. And I always had this sort of-- Had some primitive idea that you'd get a place and then you'd be OK. You'd just have a homebase, a place, you know. Which I did. But that was really unconsciously or semi-consciously a really important factor in my thinking about life, about how to be an artist and survive and not have to-- I mean, I was always very aware when I decided to do this and not be in the academic world. But I was deciding on a very marginal kind of existence. So that was what it was going to be, a way to have to look at life, to have to-- We used to-- We used to tell jokes about it: We can't raise the river, lower the bridge. If we can't lower the bridge, raise the river. Something like that. The idea was that you would make it a more marginal existence for yourself, a more minimal existence and survive as an artist. And so-- But that was-- A lot of people were doing that. I mean, it wasn't unusual because I think artists think in those terms. But hardly anybody thought about making it or being a success or ever getting any money out of art. The best thing to think of was maybe getting a teaching job that would be a survival teaching job. But the idea of being middle class or even affluent was pretty far-fetched for an artist at that time.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. So--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So what was there in Mexico for you?

MARY FULLER: We moved to Mexico and we went to Guadalajara where Sue was and stayed with her in

Guadalajara for a while. And George and Lillian were living in--

SUSAN LANDAUER: This is Sue Goya and George Stillman.

MARY FULLER: Right. And the Stillmans were living in a suburb of Guadalajara. In fact, we drove a show of George's down to Mexico City. And we had a Model A truck and we went down in the Model A truck and we took George's show down to Mexico City in the truck. And in Mexico City Jim Weeks was living.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, I didn't realize that.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. And in Culiacan, Jim and Lynn Weeks and we were visiting them out there. And then kind of getting into the Mexico-- Then there were a lot of-- Well, the Dugmores were there from New York.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Ed and Eadie Dugmore.

MARY FULLER: Edward and Eadie Dugmore were there. And Ernest Alexander was at the Scorpion Club. And George Abend was a painter from the Bay Area and he--

SUSAN LANDAUER: The Scorpion Club was the artists' hangout in Guadalajara?

MARY FULLER: In Ajijic which was out on the lake. But these guys were-- They were going to the University of Guadalajara on the G.I. Bill. So-- And some of them lived in Ajijic and they would go into Guadalajara once a week to pick up their checks and go in to school and that was about it. Oh, and Crehan was down there, Hub Crehan. And Alicia his wife at that time.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Boy, I didn't realize there were so many people down there at once.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. It was kind of lively bit.

SUSAN LANDAUER: You said George Abend-- Ernest who, did you say?

MARY FULLER: Ernest Alexander was this black guy from Chicago who ran the Scorpion Club. He was an artist, a painter. And then in Ajijic there were a bunch of writers, too. Some of them from New York. Some people who ran a bookstore. And they were published writers. And there was a mystery writer down there.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, were you writing at this time?

MARY FULLER: That's when I started. I had been writing off and on, maybe short stories. I had a short story published. Well, I was in college, a little poetry club. But I had a short story published in a magazine that was published in Paris that was called-- I forget what it was called. ["New Story" July 1951]. And then when we were living in Point Richmond, I had actually bought a typewriter. It was a big deal; I bought my first typewriter. And I really decided I was going to do some writing. And so Corbett really encouraged me a lot to do that. He thought it was a good idea. And Weldon was living there then. And Weldon was wonderfully sympathetic. He was writing himself. And he was working on a novel that a friend of his from Carmel or Big Sur had written--

SUSAN LANDAUER: What about--

MARY FULLER: --which was rather a famous cult novel. I think he was working on the manuscript of it. I remember reading it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you know Henry Miller?

MARY FULLER: No. The Moreaus knew him. We knew the Moreaus and they knew him, but we didn't know him. And Mac knew.

SUSAN LANDAUER: The Moreaus. That's An--

MARY FULLER: Andre and Margaret Moreau. And Andre was a painter in Monterey. And we used to go down to--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Varda knew Miller.

MARY FULLER: Miller, yeah. We used to go down to Big Sur with Corbett, and Corbett and a guy a sculptor from Berkeley named Sandow, Paco Sandow, Paco Sandow. I knew Robert Duncan. Anyway, Weldon was very encouraging to me. He said, "I have a literary agent in New York named Diarmuid Russell who, you know, is really interested in anything kind of off-beat, experimental, whatever." So, he gave me his name and I sent him a couple of short stories and he actually took me on as an agent. He was the one who sold the mystery stories. Then we went to Mexico. I'd been writing short stories but never getting anywhere. So I thought well maybe I

could do something commercial, you know, to make a living. And when we were in Mexico I wrote a mystery and finished it and I've forgotten-- I sent that to Russell. Didn't sell. He sent it back and said it's OK, but we're not going to be able to make it. We better try again. And the second one I wrote that he had, Scribner's published it. So that was published in '53 maybe. Whatever. And amazing enough it made a lot of money. I mean I couldn't believe it. Compared to-- I mean, I made maybe $3,000 on it, but if you, say, multiply it by 10, that'd be, like, $30,000. That seemed like a lot of money.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It sure was.

MARY FULLER: I thought wow, this is a lot-- I mean, the house in Point Richmond only cost $9,000. So, $3,000, hey, I'm rich, you know.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: It was amazing. So I thought, well, hey, this is it. So I wrote 2 more, both of which got published. And then I-- I don't know. I met Russell in New York. We went to New York and I met Russell, which was very interesting. He was the son of A.E., the famous Irish poet. And he was a wonderful man. In fact, Henry Miller was his client. He had Eudora Welty. In fact, there's a book out now about Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell. And Russell was absolutely marvelous, intellectual and kind of far out guy. They handled a lot of writers who never-- Who were kind of off beat writers who weren't making it. I remember we had this long, drunk lunch where he had about 20 martinis. He could barely get in the cab when he finally-- He was as drunk as I was. He was a wonderful guy. God. And he lived at-- He had this fancy office in this high-- Well, New York uptown great big huge office, but he was in this little corner with all these plants hanging around. They were half dead and that's where Russell had his desk. And I saw these half-dead plants and I said, "OK. I think I can relate to this fellow. We already know where we're coming from. And we had had about 3 drinks and the first thing-- And then he said, "You know, I really am interested in, like, what do you do in an average day? Like when you get up, what do you have for breakfast?" I said, "Who is this guy?" [laughs] But that's the kind of person he was. He was just marvelous. We had such a good time together. And we got so drunk. Oh god. And he kept ordering these exotic foods. And he said, "I know you're from the West Coast and this is your first trip to New York. And I bet you've never had shad roe." Well, he'd order it and we're just pushing it around on the plate because we were too drunk to eat it. You know, just bizarre. [laughs] It must have cost a fortune in this really fancy restaurant. [laughs] Oh god. How weird. Anyway, he was wonderful. And he really hung in with me for a long time. Anyway, after the 3 mysteries got published, and I talked to Russell. And he was so interesting. And he kept saying, "You know, you have a bigger talent"--I should have never listened to that--"If you could only understand the inner meaning of the novel, you'd write a great novel." I thought, hey. I got really fired up: write a great novel. So I came back to California and wrote I think 6 full-length novels, none of which ever got out of their manuscript form. [laughs] Oh dear. That's a lot of time I spent on that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But you were writing some art criticism, too, weren't you?

MARY FULLER: Yes, I started that-- Well, Crehan. The first thing I think I did was to-- Hub Crehan was editor of Artforum then was he?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Crehan was at Art Digest I think.

MARY FULLER: OK. Art Digest.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Or ArtNews.

MARY FULLER: It was Art Digest. And the first one I published was the one on Ed that Crehan asked me to write.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK. Now, Artforum started in San Francisco in the '60s, right?

MARY FULLER: Yes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you-- And you wrote for Artforum. Did you know the guys who were in charge of that?

MARY FULLER: Right. Yeah, I did. And I've forgotten how I met them. There was one man who had the money. Phil Leider was the editor. He was also earlier at the Boulles Gallery, was Boulles' Gallery director.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK.

MARY FULLER: And who the other guy was, I can't even remember what he looked like.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, let's see.

MARY FULLER: And he wasn't an artist, but he was the money man. Or something. I think I was more compatible

with him than with Phil. Anyway, he pretty much commissioned me to do-- I forget what the other articles were. But--

SUSAN LANDAUER: John Coplans?

MARY FULLER: No, it wasn't Coplans. I remember him. We met him through Hassel. Before Coplans, it was the other guy who was there before then. Anyway.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I don't know.

MARY FULLER: He asked me to do a couple of pieces. I've forgotten what the sequence was. Then I did one on the W.P.A.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, that's right.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. In fact, he asked me--

SUSAN LANDAUER: [inaudible].

MARY FULLER: That's right. In fact, he was going to ask me to do that. And that's how I got the job with the Archives of American Art.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh.

MARY FULLER: Because, yeah, Paul Mills was the director of the Oakland Art Museum. And it was still that little kind of adjunct to the auditorium there.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: And who was the guy who was the head of the Archives? Wolf something?

SUSAN LANDAUER: I don't know.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. He was the head of the Archives of American Art in Detroit or New York. And they were starting-- At that time they were starting the oral history of the project. And he apparently came-- He flew out to see Paul. And got off the plane. And he had a copy of my article. The way the story went. And he said, "Who is this person?" And that's how Mills called me and said that, "This guy's out. He wants to meet you. And they're doing-- They're going to start this oral history." And I thought, gee, fantastic. So I was hired by them and--who was the guy--? Oh, my mind is gone. What's that great line of Saul Bellow? My mind has turned to farina. And he says, "Is it raw or cooked?" [laughs] Boiled or fried. Whatever. There was a man at the Oakland Museum whose name I can't remember now, who had run a-- He had a gallery in San Francisco, early California art. Oh boy. Anyway, he was my boss, a big, heavy-set guy with a limp who worked in with the Spanish Civil War. Wonderful guy. Crazy guy. Anyway, he was the one I worked with through-- He was at the Oakland Museum for years.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I'm sure I probably know his name.

MARY FULLER: I know you do. Well, anyway, he was an interesting guy. We were very compatible. He had fought in the Spanish Civil War and I think he'd been actually injured because he had a bad limp. He was a big, heavy-set man. And he was married to a big, heavy-set woman. And they were like a couple of tubs when they were together. It was so funny. And didn't know what they--how they looked when they were making out. [laughs] Ferbrache, Lewis Ferbrache. He had run a-- He was sort of an expert on early California painting. And he was at the Oakland Museum sort of in that capacity. So that's kind of how he got the Archives thing, because they were doing the research on the project. Anyway, so, it was a really wonderful job. I got very well paid it seemed to me. And it was kind of like being a detective, because you had to look up all these little--find these people, locate them--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: It was something that hadn't happened in, what, 30 or 40 years. And we did it in the '60s, so it was going way back. And it was the first time I'd done tape recording and interviewing people. And I've forgotten how long I did that. A few years. And I really liked it a lot. And then they closed the project down. And that's when I got the idea of oral history of the--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Period of exploration.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Of the school, thinking, hey, we're doing this thing of these people of so long ago. It would be better idea to catch them sooner, you know, where they're-- Because I'd heard all these contradictory stories.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: I mean, it's amazing. You interview 3 people about the same incident and then you'd get 3 versions of what happened, especially the destruction of the paintings. It was fascinating because you'd hear totally different stories. And people who'd got fired and said they weren't fired. And on and on and on. So I thought, hey, the thing to do-- Anyway, so I thought, OK, good idea. And I applied for a Ford Foundation Grant and actually got one. I had gotten I think a National Endowment small grant, but earlier than that, for art criticism, for some of the articles I wrote. And then I got the Ford Foundation grant. And that's--

SUSAN LANDAUER: A lot of those murals and easel paintings from that period-- Well, not the murals so much as the easel paintings, seem to have disappeared.

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Do you know what happened to them? Do you think-- Were they destroyed shortly after the Project?

MARY FULLER: I think they were burned in the-- Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: They were burned?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Really?

MARY FULLER: Oh, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Where were they burned and how did that come about?

MARY FULLER: I interviewed this woman, in Tiberon, who was one of the honchos in the project. And at the time I interviewed her, she told me that she had actually taken them to the dump and burned them in-- Yeah. And then the next day she called up and said, "I've got to talk to you immediately." And she wanted all the tape back.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Is that right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, she was told by a superior that she could not--

MARY FULLER: I don't know. But I've forgotten her name. It was one of those dramatic things and I thought, well, hey, you know.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, I wonder why they were destroyed. Was it because--

MARY FULLER: Well it was a complicated--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Is it cheaper to destroy them than to have to store them, take care of them?

MARY FULLER: I think it was a complicated legal issue because they were government property. And there was some legal thing where they couldn't be given to the general public or back to the artist. They'd have to be given to public institutions. Something of that nature.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh.

MARY FULLER: And then they'd have to find some public institutions that would take them like schools or hospitals or something.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And so it was too much trouble.

MARY FULLER: It was too much trouble. I think that was it. And then the war came along. And all of a sudden, here they were with this warehouse of paintings and what the hell to do with them? And so they just put them in the dump and burned them. And I think she was telling the truth. I think probably not only here, but probably New York, too. In fact, somebody-- Somebody in New York told me some-- I remember telling the story there and someone said, well, hey, there was this little short guy who went out there grabbed a couple of Gorkys and de Koonings out of the pile and made a fortune later. I don't know whether this is true or not true. It's not unlikely. I think that's probably what came down. This was, again, a pretty hysterical period. And I think there was nothing really sure about how it should be handled. And also, you know, there was no respect for the paintings I don't think. No respect for the artist. They weren't established artists. They weren't well known. Nobody knew they

were going to become famous or anything like that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, most of them didn't.

MARY FULLER: Most of them didn't. That's right. And the value of-- Even the historic value of the work wasn't something that they were very hip to.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Probably a lot of it was mediocre.

MARY FULLER: Was what?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Mediocre.

MARY FULLER: I'm sure it was. Of course it was. Yeah, but still, just the historic value of it would be--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, I know.

MARY FULLER: Hey. But that idea, that sense of history, the sense of the value of the past is very hard for Americans at times to-- I mean, our neighbor's father saved Ghiradelli Square. They were going to tear that down. And he started a revival of saving older buildings in California. There's a block of iron fronts in Petaluma. The only block left in California of iron front buildings. And they were going to tear that down at one time. I mean, the whole idea of even the value of architectural history is something that Americans have a problem--or did have a problem--appreciating I think. And somehow there's an attitude of the newness, the newness. Screw the past. Let's have the new stuff on the table and forget all that stuff. So there's that reluctance. On the other hand, there's this very ambivalent nostalgia, yearning for the past, a sentimental idea of the American West and the pioneers coming over here and that sort of thing. It's all so strange-- It's such a-- I think intellectually and culturally, this is a confused country in a lot of ways. It's confused ideologically, that there's a-- If there is such a thing as a mass psyche that we all pick up from our culture, there's a lot of confusions about attitudes that people all kind of pick up and don't know exactly where they're coming from. So. If we're screwed up, hey. [laughs] And I think it's reflected in the sort of-- For example-- Well, I don't know about other cultures, but the idea of destroying art in that way is something that I think other cultures would at least think twice about.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. But I think artists' rights are more protected now than they ever were.

MARY FULLER: They are now, but they weren't then. That's true.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I mean, now it's become a legal question.

MARY FULLER: That's true. Yeah. Really can't do that. Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It's just that our society's become so litiginous that--

MARY FULLER: Yeah. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: --nobody wants to do anything--

MARY FULLER: They'd be afraid to.

SUSAN LANDAUER: --that might get them in trouble. But anyhow, why don't we go back to Mexico and finish that up? Did you-- You then moved to New Mexico, is that right, after that? How long were you in Mexico?

MARY FULLER: We never-- Well, we lived in New Mexico for a short period of time. But actually the summer-- The first time we went to-- We were on our way to Mexico when we left Point Richmond. We'd sold the house. We had the Model A truck, put everything in the Model A truck and took off. We went to see Ed in New Mexico. So that was the first time we were there--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So this was Taos?

MARY FULLER: In Taos. And we stayed there for--I've forgotten--I think 2 months or so. We had thought that he would go with us down to Mexico.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK.

MARY FULLER: That's where we met the Ribak's (Bea, Louis) [Beatrice Mandelman and Louis Ribak], and Clay was there. Clay Spohn was there, had a house there. And met Agnes Martin then and a bunch of other artists.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh yeah. Let's get back to Agnes Martin. [laughter] Do you have any stories to tell about Agnes Martin?

MARY FULLER: About Agnes Martin. Well, she was an extraordinary lady. I already told you, didn't I?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. You gave me your impression of her, but I was just wondering if you had any anecdotes or any kind of stories to tell about her.

MARY FULLER: But we knew her-- Well, we really didn't know her for a long period of time. But she was absolutely amazing and-- As I said, she was a real athlete. She'd been on the Olympic swimming--diving team I think. And she was from the Northwest. And she used to run--make her living running pack trips in the Canadian Rockies. I remember her telling stories about William O. Douglass, the Supreme Court judge, taking him into the Canadian pack trips for, you know, months. And she said, "The big thing, when you've got William Douglass on, you have to take 3 extra burros to carry the alcohol." Because he was such a drinker. Aggie was pretty good at that, too, I'll tell you. We'd go hiking-- I remember one time we were at the Ribak's at this big party and everybody got absolutely loaded. And we were supposed to go on a hike with her early the next morning, Mac and I. Really early the next morning, we were going to hike up to Mount Wheeler, which at that time, there was no ski resort, so it was really a wilderness area. I think it's the highest mountain in New Mexico. It's a beautiful thing. So, we were going to drive up and then hike up. And she knew the way and everything. And the deal was, we were going to leave the next morning. Well, everybody got so loaded that we thought well-- We slept there at the Ribaks'. And we get up the next-- We were awakened the next morning by Aggie pounding on the door. And she had slept right outside the door in the hollyhock bed, hadn't even made it back to her place, which was about a block away. And she was ready to go. And go we did. It was absolutely amazing. And I remember this horrible hangover going up this trail just like that. And I remember these waterfalls. And then when we got up to the top, it was the 3 of us. And she had brought this coffee and a coffee pot. But I don't know how she ever got in her gear, but it all unfolded. And she's got a fire going and she's making coffee. It was weird. [laughs] She was amazing. I was impressed with her. I thought she was amazing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you stay in contact with her after she moved. She went to New York, right? Or, no--

MARY FULLER: Shortly after--

SUSAN LANDAUER: No, I guess--

MARY FULLER: No, we never did. No, we never did, even after Mexico. In fact, I don't know if we ever saw-- We used to hear about her through the Ribaks because she hung out around Taos. And after she got famous, we'd hear about her from Bea occasionally, or Louis. Or we'd go to-- But I never saw her. I never saw her when she really got to the top. We'd hear about her from New York and that was about all, but never--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Never stayed in contact? Somebody was telling me she had a history of mental illness. Do you know about that?

MARY FULLER: No, I really don't. She was a person that would be-- I could believe that about her. But she-- I think the thing that amazed me most about Aggie was this-- Aggie had this incredible ambition. It was just incredible. It was-- I mean, everybody's ambitious in a certain sense in what they want to do, but most people are sort of mellowed out. But she was really intense. Man, she was intense. And I had a feeling-- Well, she did. She made it. But it was, like, I remember her using that expression, "I'm going to make it." And she wasn't fooling around about what she meant. I mean, she didn't mean-- I don't know what she meant-- What she got I guess. What did Bernard Shaw say: Be careful what you want out of life because you're liable to get it. [laughs] I think Aggie got what she wanted and it wasn't that hot. In fact, I did hear that she had a breakdown in New York and Bea had seen her in New York and said she was living in this white cave, all painted white and seeing a shrink and all her money was going to a psychiatrist and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. What I had heard was that she was--she had pills she was taking that were making her sort of pumped up.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Well, I think she had a-- I think she suffered a sexual ambiguity, whatever that means. She was madly in love with Corbett. That was so obvious. And she was a very attractive woman. And she seemed-- Although she was very rangy and big, she was really a beautiful person. And guys were attracted to her. She wasn't at all a kind of, you know, unattractive, gay person. But I think she was already sort of ambivalent sexually.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It seems that a lot of men were attracted to Corbett, too.

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. I think that's true. Yeah. But I don't think he was gay at all.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Phil Roeber and Corbett were very close. Did you know Phil Roeber?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. He was a sad guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, he became a very serious alcoholic, but he's actually kicked the habit. He's OK.

MARY FULLER: Is he still--? Oh really? Oh, yeah, I like him. He was an interesting painter. He did some interesting work. Really.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Very interesting.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I saw some when we were doing that Oakland show that Bill Roth had some really early work. He had a couple. They were fine, quite fine paintings, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: We're putting one in the show at San Francisco.

MARY FULLER: Where's Phil? Back in--?

SUSAN LANDAUER: He's in Maine.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. OK. Say hello. He was the one that called and told us that Ed had died. So they were close, very close.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And they remained close.

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

[End of tape 1, side 2]

SUSAN LANDAUER: [tape begins mid-sentence] --that's the book that you did for the Oakland Museum's exhibition in 1973. How-- You described what the origins of that project were. Do you want to talk about it at all? About, you know, the process of putting it together?

MARY FULLER: Well, I could say I'd never been to New York until my husband had an exhibition there in 196-- OK. Boy. Four years before the period thing, which is '60. So it's '62. He was at John Bolles gallery in San Francisco. And John opened a branch in New York. So Mac was asked to show there. And I don't know. I think it really reflects on my generation, my period, and perhaps my socioeconomic background, but the idea of going to New York was just so exciting. I mean it was like the-- I think it's well like a French person going to Paris, man, because that's where it's at, man, New York was where it's at for an artist.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, it certainly was in the '60s, yeah.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. And I think-- I don't think it is now, but it just seemed like the cultural center of America was New York. So, for a long time I thought, you know, sort of I guess peripherally loud: New York. And in a certain sense, because I was writing murder mysteries and dealing through an agent in New York, I was like working in New York or working through New York and so I had, like, a New York connection. So, to go to New York and meet my agent, Diarmuid Russell, and, you know, it's like make it, man. Anyway. So we had this wonderful old car that Mac had bought from Charlie Safford the painter. And Charlie had a real, heavy duty psychological problem. His shrink had told him and he should stop wearing out pairs of shoes and get to do something more creative, like repair cars when he wasn't painting for his--to ease his anxiety. So he started working on cars. And he got this [old Ford coupe (1940)]-- I'm not about to remember, but here was a marvel classic. And so the motor was all redone and it was just a terrific charger car. So, off to New York we go. And Ed Corbett's ex-wife, Stephanie Tartarsky, was living in New York then on 18th Street. And Steph, who was always marvelously generous as far as [pause]--stop--as far as her favors were concerned. [laughs] That sounds really bitchy and I take it back. But she was. Stephanie was a wonderful woman in many, many ways. And she was marvelously generous and really so great to us. And we were really-- You know, in a certain sense had a lot of respect for one another, but in a strange way. But, anyway, so off to New York and to Steph's place on 18th street. And at that time Stephanie was involved with Sal Scarpita, the Italian painter. And she was working at Castelli gallery. So Steph knew-- You know, she kind of knew a lot of people in the New York scene. And, you know, it was absolutely extraordinary for me to go there. And I think that first or second night, Steph took us to the Cedar Bar and there we were in the Cedar Bar. And I'm like a little groupie saying, "Oh, my god, is that really David Smith?" Or, "My god, is that really--"

SUSAN LANDAUER: What year was this?

MARY FULLER: This is '62. And they were just all there and Franz Kline was supposed to come in and, you know, and so on and so forth. And with Stephanie, during that time that we stayed with her, which was about 3 weeks for that show, we had dinner at a Chinese restaurant with Willem de Kooning and Conrad Marca-Relli, the 4 of us. And I remember it so well that De Kooning was such a modest and unassuming, wonderful, charming guy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. He was famous by then.

MARY FULLER: He was very famous by then. And he had no--no bullshit, no big shot kind of an attitude. He was just really a sweetheart.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, I would have thought that he'd have groupies hanging all over him by then.

MARY FULLER: In fact, at the Bar, I remember at the Cedar Bar, it was just jammed with people. And I noticed a sort of enthusiastic kind of camaraderie quality. And--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, he didn't mind having a lot of younger artists around him?

MARY FULLER: I don't think he did. He seemed very interested in what other people were doing. He seemed like a very unassuming, very self-confident kind of tough guy. He didn't-- I remember being very impressed with Marca-Relli, who seemed very intellectual. And I saw a show of his in New York, and I was very impressed with his paintings. I'm not quite sure why now, but it was something about his color that was very strange and mysterious and the way he fitted things together in almost this-- The form within his painting had a real sculptural kind of fitting-together quality that was very-- And that some of them, there was kind of something very emotional about them, which is curious, because I frankly find a lot of abstract painting that people find very emotional, I don't find that emotional. Like, I never could really see Rothko the way some of the people I know see Rothkos and get so emotionally moved by them. Whereas the Marca-Rellis really had a quality that I thought was very emotionally moving. And in New York, we went to the Guggenheim with Steph. The first time we'd been there. And we saw the Philip Guston show. So that was '62. And, again, I remember thinking--or feeling Guston's paintings, abstractions, they were those sort of dense little interior things, where he was shoving everything into the center of the canvas in these strange kind of almost corny colors. I mean, they were kind of romantic, pinky, kind of sentimental colors. But there was something fierce about them, too. I was very moved by those paintings. I thought they were very moving, emotionally moving. What else did we see in New York? Well, we saw the Museum of Modern Art for the first time, all that stuff, you know. When we were--

SUSAN LANDAUER: For the first time? Really?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. Since--

SUSAN LANDAUER: You'd been there before to meet with your agent?

MARY FULLER: I had never been there before. Mac had been there, but I had never been there until '62. So '62 was the first New York thing. And it was not disappointing. I must say that. [laughs] And the New York artists were great. It was really interesting, very exciting.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, did you meet David Smith?

MARY FULLER: No. I saw him but I didn't meet him. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: How about Franz Kline?

MARY FULLER: He was supposed to be coming in any minute and he didn't come in in any minute. So I didn't get to see him. We went over to Max's of Kansas City and I think I met Harold Rosenberg as a matter of fact, very briefly. I remember being at the Guggenheim. It must have been the Guston show with Stephanie, who was always spectacular. She was wearing green chiffon and looking absolutely spectacular. And she said let's go up to the very top of this great spiral, because then you can watch everything. So, she and I go up to the very top and Rosenberg came in at the top. And Steph said, "Watch this. As he goes down this spiral, you'll see every important person in the New York art world being picked out." And Rosenberg was a huge guy. He was about 6' 4". And he was really-- He had a big head. He was a big man. And he had on, I think, a black black coat. But maybe not. I don't know. But somehow very dramatic. And you could see him in this spiral, all these people clustered around him and here goes Rosenberg down and he kind of, you know, gives a little wave or a little nod and then he'd stop. And Steph'd say, "Uh oh. That must be--" [laughter] And then she'd identify them. Some fear of the New York art world, it was the most important person. Oh, it was-- She was wonderful.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's great.

MARY FULLER: Stephanie was wonderful I must say that for her. She had a marvelous quality. And it was-- She was so much fun. And she had that kind of wit and humor that, you know, was--that was--that made things fun.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: I mean, how many people are going to do that kind of stuff?

SUSAN LANDAUER: No.

MARY FULLER: Stephie would, yeah. [laughs] When she wasn't bitchy, she was marvelous. [laughter]

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK. So, let's see. Now, this was just a visit to New York then?

MARY FULLER: It was Mac's show at the Bolles Gallery, which-- Let's see. It got, I don't know, terrible reviews. It was just sort of nothing. And it was a really good show.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Mac did well-- He--

MARY FULLER: I've forgotten what he showed now.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Mac did well at the Whitney, though, hadn't-- Didn't he win the purchase prize?

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: For one of his "mountain" things.

MARY FULLER: And also-- What was this guy's name? Oh, I can't remember it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Lloyd Goodrich.

MARY FULLER: He wrote a really nice thing about Mac's work and did select one for a prize, a prize winner. Was that when-- No, then we didn't go to New York for 4 years. And then-- Then I started doing work for the Archives and then got into doing the thing about the Period of Exploration. And then we went to New York in '66 to do work on that. And I had heard about the Chelsea Hotel and I'd written to them. I'd heard that they had special rates if you stayed for a month or so. And we were going to be in New York for over a month, two months, to do the research on this--interview all these guys and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Was Mac involved with the interviewing?

MARY FULLER: He went and really was wonderful. Yeah, he sat around, you know, getting drunk.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. I heard on the tape of the interview you did with Madeleine [Dimond Martin], I could hear the ice cubes--

MARY FULLER: Ice cubes clinking. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: --jangling around in the glass.

MARY FULLER: Well, a lot of the-- Well, hers was at her place, but the other people we interviewed at the Chelsea Hotel in the rooms, so we drank a lot of--everybody was drinking rye whisky, which nobody'd ever heard of out here, that rye or scotch. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. And we took the train back to the-- In '66 we took the train back, which was really interesting. So we stayed at the Chelsea. And we saw Madeleine and Peter living there and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Madeleine Martin?

MARY FULLER: Madeleine Martin and, oh, went up to the Springs and saw Pollock's grave and went with, oh god, what was her name? Zogbaum. We met Wilfred Zogbaum and Marta out here in San Francisco. Wilfred was teaching at the Art Institute I think through Norman Kantor, who was a friend of Bob Loberg's, we had met the Zogbaums. And they'd been up here a couple of times and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: A friend of whose did you say? I'm sorry.

MARY FULLER: Norman Kantor, who is a New York painter. And Robert Loberg. Anyway, and so we met Wilfred and Marta when they were out here, when Zog was teaching out here and became friends. And they came up a couple of times or whatever. And we saw them. And then, Zog died. You know, I think-- He had a terrible cancer and, like, he died. He was sick-- It seems to me he got sick here. Yeah. I'm pretty sure of that. And Marta was much younger than he. She had a kid, really a little boy. And Zog got this terrible cancer. And he knew he was dying. And he wanted to drive across the United States and go see all these great public art things he'd never seen before. Like he wanted to go see that--old Presidents' heads.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh. Mount Rushmore.

MARY FULLER: Mount Rushmore. And there were a couple of other places. Anyway, so he was really dying. And Marta was fantastic. She arranged to have blood transfusions set up all the way across the country as they drove across.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Wow.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. She was a pretty amazing lady. Anyway, he didn't-- He made it to New York and died shortly after that. So, at that time, in '66, she was living up at their house in the Springs. And she came down to New York and we saw her and she invited us up for the weekend. So we went up and that was when we went to de Kooning's house. And he wasn't there, but we went to visit his house.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you meet Elaine?

MARY FULLER: No, we didn't. No. So, let's see. New York '66.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: That was about that for that.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So that was the height of Pop art then?

MARY FULLER: Pardon?

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was the height of the Pop--of Pop art.

MARY FULLER: That was a period of great, great bitterness in New York. We saw Doug MacAgy. I went to talk to him and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: What was he doing then?

MARY FULLER: He was with a--managing a gallery, this little New York gallery. I think he died shortly after that. He had a terrible heart attack or something, didn't he?

SUSAN LANDAUER: I don't--

MARY FULLER: He was really-- He was so different and cranky and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Really?

MARY FULLER: Oh yes. And that was when I did the interview with him.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, he was in his '40s at that time, right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah, well he had a short--he didn't live much longer than that, did he? He-- Everybody was so pissed off at Doug because they-- He had-- You know, the American-- The San Francisco guys had gone to New York. Doug was running some gallery there, some important gallery. And he was showing their work and all of a sudden he just dumped them overnight. And they were all saying, you know, "He sold us out. We're through with him."

SUSAN LANDAUER: You know, he didn't ever promote the California artists much.

MARY FULLER: No, I don't think he did. And I don't think that was-- And when I interviewed him, I remember him saying, you know, that it was one of those things. I forgot what he said in the interview. It was sort of like, he didn't think it was important. He wasn't interested in it. He was much more interested in Op art at that time. He was talking about Op art. And he had a lot of Op art in his apartment. That sort of stuff. And he just seemed like a totally different kind of person, very-- And I remember leaving the apartment and saying, "Boy, New York ruins people. I'm going to stay out West." [laughs] Go East and get ruined. And it was something-- He was, like, a different guy. And I don't know whether it was-- We went to that big gallery he was running downtown. I think somebody we knew had a show there. It was a big, fancy gallery.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you think his memories of the California School of Fine Arts were on target then? The ones that--

MARY FULLER: I can't really remember the interview that well.

SUSAN LANDAUER: But he wasn't himself then. He wasn't quite what he was when--

MARY FULLER: He was a very different person, very different. And he was married to a woman I didn't know. They had a couple of little, smallish kids and I didn't know what this was all about. Yeah. We went into this fancy apartment and it was like they'd been having a big fight or something. It was like one of those situations where you say, "Oh god. What am I doing interviewing in this situation?" You know, go in and she sort of, like, flounced out and said, "So you won't be at the PTA meeting after all." You know, going, "Oh!" You know. And it was all

very off key and strange. And then after the interview, Doug, I think called me or wrote and said, "I must see that tape before you publish it." Or, "I must go over it before something is done." And it was very uncomfortable and unpleasant and had a very bad sense about it. And then the thing of it was that was among the artists in New York, everybody that we talked to was pissed off about the horrible commercialism and Andy Warhol and all these creeps taking over the art world. And may I say the word "faggots" taking over? They were really saying it's all gone to those guys and the whole thing has changed. And I was getting the sense that it had changed. I don't know whether-- What the source of the change was, but there was a big change. And they were dumped. I mean, they were dumped. And so they were feeling this extreme bitterness.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Who were some of these people who resented this?

MARY FULLER: Well, I'd say Grillo, Dugmore--

SUSAN LANDAUER: John Grillo.

MARY FULLER: Briggs.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Ernest Briggs.

MARY FULLER: Boy, George Goya and everybody I talked to. It was like-- Everybody you talked to was saying, hey, like, you know, we really got dumped, man. I've forgotten. I interviewed-- I guess I interviewed Hultberg. I must have. And there was old Reinhardt saying I told you so. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: He hadn't been dumped though?

MARY FULLER: Oh no. He never got dumped. Well, Ad had-- You know, in fact he hadn't really gotten famous then, but he was always sort of very secure in his academic position I think. And he didn't have any--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Let's see. Where was he teaching?

MARY FULLER: He taught in Brooklyn forever, didn't he? I mean--

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's right.

MARY FULLER: We met-- Mac's nephew is married to a woman who took one of his classes and said he was the worse teacher she'd ever had. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, do you have any anecdotes to tell about Ad?

MARY FULLER: About Ad Reinhardt? Well, he was one of the funniest people I've ever known, but he was also a-- Yeah. [pause] OK. Ad Reinhardt. Really interesting. We went to his studio and I interviewed him on Broadway. And he was painting the black paintings then. And as we left, he had this small black painting and he said, "This one's been scuffed." And it had a little tiny scuff like that. "I gave it to CORE, the Congress of Racial Equality." He said, "I don't think it's quite black enough for them, do you?" And I go, "Oh Ad," you know. And I think I said-- Mac hates it when I say this, but I always thought he was half putting people on with the black paintings. And I think Ad-- You know, I really can believe that if he'd lived longer and he were alive now 20 or 30 years later, he'd be sitting here saying, "Hey, didn't you guys get the Zen Buddhist joke?" [laughs] That he might well intellectually have figured, OK, this is what, you know, this whole scene of American painting is leading to. Let's go all the way, put it out there, do it, see it, and say, in effect, "Dead end, pals. Dead end, pals." And I'm not really sure that, like, it seemed to me that-- And I think he could have been doing 2 things. It could be a Zen Buddhist joke. It could also be a real statement of himself as an artist, because I think he was a very untalented artist. And I think he was a verbally talented person with extraordinary intelligence, but the guy just really didn't have a visual sense. And I think that shows in his work. It-- Even his earlier abstract paintings, that they-- I mean, I don't know if other people see--get hummed about them, but I'll tell you, the guy just didn't have it. He just didn't have that whatever it takes to make a visual artist, that certain touch that they've got. I mean, I'm not crazy about Rothko, but I look at his work and this guy's got it, you know? You know these guys have got it. And Reinhardt's clumsy, you know, and kind of, you know, overly intellectualized or sort of academic. And you look at the paintings and you think, "Shit, man, this guy never got it." And somehow here's this really, really bright guy, which he certainly was verbally incredibly intelligent. And that's where his ability lay in that direction I think. And somehow I don't think visually or as a plastic artist Reinhardt ever-- OK. I'm going ahead and say, "Got it." I don't think he ever got it or didn't have that certain manual skill that a visual artist has to have or whatever it takes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So you think that may have been part of why he settled on a formula?

MARY FULLER: I think that was part of the joke. I think it was-- I think he would say-- That Reinhardt was saying, you know, "OK. This is it. This is where I get in, where I get in as an artist and you dead end as an art history

direction. So I'm saying to both things, OK, here's the finger for this and here's the finger for that in this dead end game." I saw him as a very kind of Samuel Beckett kind of guy. And he and Corbett would get together--

MARY FULLER: Oh yes.

MARY FULLER: --and they would play this dead beat, dead end. And at the same time just enjoying the hell out of it with all this energy. So here are these guys in this contradictory position of saying no, no, no, and enjoying saying no, no, no so much that he kept--all you do is get a charge out of it, which is true of Beckett, right? I mean, he's saying, "No, no, no. It's hopeless. It's hopeless. But boy, what a kick it is--

SUSAN LANDAUER: It's funny--

MARY FULLER: --to say it's hopeless."

SUSAN LANDAUER: I've got a very close friend who wrote a paper on--comparing Beckett to Reinhardt.

MARY FULLER: Really! [laughs] OK. Well, maybe. I don't know. Well, but he as a person, he had that quality. He was such an ironic person. He was so-- I remember-- Well, this is the New York gang. OK. We got Rose Slivka-- We knew David and Rose Slivka. Mac knew Dave Slivka from way back on the Projects and Rose was editor of Craft Horizons. And they'd been up here and we met them a couple of times. And I really thought they were great. And she was wonderful. I mean, she was so New York, New York I couldn't believe. And when I first got-- I said, "New York. Gee Rose. What about New York?" She said it's simple, Mary. There's uptown and there's downtown. No problem." I said, "Oh, alright." So, they lived on Bank Street. Well, anyway, we went to the White Horse Tavern with them where Dylan Thomas used to hang out and all that stuff, you know. So, this was the first time in New York staying at Stephanie's. And Rose said, "I'm going to arrange for you to get to meet Esteban Vicente." Well, I hardly knew who he was and I had to look that all up and found out who Esteban Vicente was. So, and then she called and said, "I've arranged it." And like-- And just like excitement in her voice, I knew it was a big deal. "At the cocktail hour." I said fantastic. She said it's 11:00 at night. I said cocktails at 11:00? I'm really, like, provincial. What, from Petaluma. I can't believe this shit. You know so she said, "Yes. Yes, Mary." So that day, oh it was horrible. Stephanie and Scarpita had this gigantic fight. I mean, he was an opera singer and they had these break-down fights where he'd have to sing opera and she'd be throwing the dishes around. So finally Mac and I were getting out of there. We left the apartment, took the Staten Island ferry back and forth, back and forth all day long because we didn't know what else to do in New York and where to go. So we come home just exhausted. And they've had a horizontal reconciliation. And we're supposed to go to this 11:00 at night cocktail party. No way. So I call Rose and I said, "Rose, I just can't make it. What's happened is this blah, blah, blah." And she said, "You cannot not make it." I'll never forget that sentence, "You cannot not make it." Oh, OK. We're really in New York now: You cannot not make it. OK! OK. So, god, we go there and at 11:00 at night, uptown, Lexington Avenue, this guarded apartment with gates and, you know, bells to ring. And so go up the elevator. The elevator opens and my god. It's a museum. There's Picasso, there's Miro, there's Rothko. There's everybody in this hallway. And then you go into this-- Everything's white of course. And you go into another huge white room, there's, god, I can't believe it. There's Stamos, there's Pollock. And who's sitting on the little white couch but Ad Reinhardt. Thank god! [laughs] And the first thing he said to me, "I hope you got your knife out tonight!" [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now who-- This was Esteban Vicente's--

MARY FULLER: Vicente's. Yes.

SUSAN LANDAUER: --apartment?

MARY FULLER: Yes it was. And his wife was there--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I interviewed him, you know. He's very sophisticated.

MARY FULLER: --a very aristocratic, socialite, rich lady, right? I don't know if she is, but she's just--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I never saw his house; I just interviewed him in his studio.

MARY FULLER: Well, you know, she just struck me as, well, you know, like the kind of women, they've got their white gloves on whether they're in the garden or not and they're very rich and, you know, they're very elegant and they're very whatever. It was a very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you need your knife?

MARY FULLER: Well, it was strange because it was just the 4 of us: Rose and David and Mac and I and Ad. The 5 of us. And Esteban and his wife. And I think what had really-- She had arranged a special meeting because Mac was having a show and it was kind of to show off the West Coast artists to the East Coast patrons or--

SUSAN LANDAUER: East meets West.

MARY FULLER: --the rich people or something. And neither Mac nor I really got it until it was all over. And I think Reinhardt was sort of there-- I don't know why he was there. For the joke or--

SUSAN LANDAUER: He was the joker, yeah. [laughs]

MARY FULLER: --in the deck. You know, the knife out. And when he said that to me, "I hope you've got your knife out tonight," well, I thought this guy is really weird. Reinhardt, you're weird! [laughs] But he was always doing things like that to me. Like, I remember when I left the studio, he handed me a copy of George Kubler's Shape of Time and said, "If you want to understand modern art, read this." You know. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, Esteban Vicente always struck me as a very elegant man.

MARY FULLER: He was very elegant. And the paintings were, too. He had--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh very.

MARY FULLER: Very, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, they could have been School of Paris.

MARY FULLER: So that was-- That's about it for New York.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK. Well, let's turn it off for a minute. [tape turned off] OK. So why don't we turn to talking about your work. I guess we-- You were doing ceramics last time we--

MARY FULLER: Right. That's cool. OK. Yeah, I was as a matter of fact and then I began doing ceramic sculpture and then began doing a bit larger sculpture. And when I moved to Point Richmond I got a kiln and had my own kiln there just set up. And I was doing sculpture of, you know, like, just this piece out here is a foot, a foot and a half, whatever. I was very influenced by Henry Moore, whom I really admired a great deal.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I can really see that in your present work.

MARY FULLER: Right, yeah. Then we went to Mexico. So I wrote for a year. So-- And we came back here. Came up here to Sonoma Mountain. And we had known Andre and Margaret Moreau in the past. And they had bought a ranch up here. And so they wanted to start an artists' colony.

SUSAN LANDAUER: OK. Now, when was this?

MARY FULLER: Well, Mac and I had known the Moreaus in the late '40s. And we used to come-- In fact, there's that photograph in the Period of Exploration of Reinhardt and Corbett and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: You were having a picnic or something.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Over at their place. So they had come up here, like, in the late '40s. And we would come up to visit them from Point Richmond and they'd come down to visit us. So when we'd gone to Mexico and after a year we decided we had sort of thought we'd live in Mexico. We saw we couldn't make it in Mexico. It was impossible financially and impossible for other reasons. So when we came back to the States, where to go? Because we had sold our house. So we wrote to the Moreaus and we thought about-- There's an old schoolhouse down the road here that Morelli, a rancher, used to rent. And we thought OK maybe we could live where Leopold lived and--temporarily until we could get ourselves together.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Leopold who?

MARY FULLER: God, what was his first--? Warren. Warren Leopold. He was an artist from Big Sur that Andre had known in Monterey. And he was in the old schoolhouse down the road here. So we wrote the Moreaus and said what about coming back up. And they said OK. So we came to San Francisco. Stayed with Hassel and June in Potrers Hill for about a week. And after about a week Mac said, "I've got to get out of the city. I can't stand it." I was sort of thinking of going back to the city actually because I'd kind of had it with rural areas after a year in rural Mexico. And then I-- But Mac said no, no. The city just-- He really didn't like it. And San Francisco was kind of his home base earlier. So I said-- Well, anyway, so we came up here. The schoolhouse was out. The guy who owned it had moved it and didn't want any artists there. So Andre said, "OK. Why don't you guys come and live in the studio and stay here for a while?" So we did. And then he said, "If you stay, I'll give you an acre of land to start an artists' colony." So we started this idea of the artists' colony. And I think I told you that-- I think we brought up 10 different artists to give them an acre of land! And everybody thought we were absolutely crazy. Ed Dugmore-David Morrie refused--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, you're kidding?

MARY FULLER: No, I'm not kidding! I mean, one after another they come up, they'd take a look at that and you guys think-- Well 101 was a 2-lane road going up. And there was nothing on it but lumber trucks. And it took about 3 hours to get down to San Francisco. It was like going to the total boondocks, you know. And Petaluma was this little, tiny,, you know, provincial town--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Small town.

MARY FULLER: A lot of people'd say, "What are you doing up here? This is crazy." Anyway--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And this road here is pretty narrow and windy.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. It still is. But 101 was like this road.

SUSAN LANDAUER: God.

MARY FULLER: With these huge lumber trucks roaring back and forth.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Wow.

MARY FULLER: No shit. We're talking 42 years ago. I can't believe it. Long before you were born, sweetie. [laughs] Anyway, but it seemed like a-- I don't know I was ambiv-- I had very ambivalent feelings when we first decided, you know-- I thought it was temporary. I thought, "OK. This is temporary. We'll be here temporarily. Or maybe we'll have a place here and do a city thing, too." Because I was really into doing a city thing after doing a year in rural Mexico. I thought, hey, I'd had that. Well, anyway, it worked out. We've been in the rural area of Petaluma ever since. This has been OK. [laughs] It's been really, really good.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So what happened to the Moreaus?

MARY FULLER: Well, they were here until-- Wow. My sense of time is just hopeless. I think the '60s--

SUSAN LANDAUER: A year?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah. Until the '60s or '70s.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. We had a really good thing going, a very good-- We were very compatible with them. So--

SUSAN LANDAUER: The 4 of you built this house then?

MARY FULLER: Well An-- No. We-- We-- Andre-- Actually Andre designed the house and Mac and I built it pretty much. Yeah, yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: It's a beautiful design.

MARY FULLER: It is a beautiful design. Andre's very good--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And he'd--

MARY FULLER: He was building houses--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, he had been an architect then?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Well, he had built houses in Monterey. And that's how he was making his living as sort of a speculation builder. He was a painter, but he had built houses and then made enough money to move on and get enough capital to buy another and he was kind of a business head. He was kind of a wonderful guy in lots of ways. Again, another complicated person. He committed suicide in Mexico. Just kind of heartbreaking, too.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh. I didn't know.

MARY FULLER: Never could figure out-- It's like Corbett. You try to figure out what goes wrong in people's lives that makes them so they can't-- I mean, you can see the bind they're in and how that can be a desperate situation. But I always figure you can always say, "Shit," and walk away from it no matter how bad it is. I always think-- Why-- I don't know why I think that, but I always said, "Hey. Get a bus out of town." I mean, try it again or go someplace or try some new relationship or there's always another possibility. The idea that you're trapped totally to the point where you have to kill yourself is just remarkable to me. And really heartbreaking that people

get in such terrible binds that they can't just walk away from it and say, "Hey. Let's try some other ball game." There're a lot of ball games out there, pal. [laughs] Anyway. So then we get-- Then I had been doing--

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]

MARY FULLER: --going around?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: OK. I had had a kiln in Point Richmond and was doing clay sculpture. Then I came back here and as I said I had been writing in Mexico, not doing sculpture. And I don't know how-- After we built the house I kind of, you know, felt, that'd it be good to do it again. I really had a very strong-- I really enjoy it very, very much. So-- But I didn't know quite what to do, what kind of material to get into. So I did a redwood piece. I have that big wood piece out there, the saxophone player. I worked in wood and I thought, well, I had done some stone pieces years ago. I thought maybe stone. Feeling out different ideas about how to get into a material. And this friend of mine in Santa Cruz, Ella Alluisi, who is a painter and had been our neighbor in Point Richmond, somehow or other it was either I saw her or she wrote me or something. And she said, "Hey. There's this guy down here is working in this lightweight concrete that you can carve." You use zonolite for the aggregate and sand, sand, cement and zonolite. And if you pour at the right time and figure the time it'll set, you can carve it, like directly carve it, like you carve a clay that's still soft. It sounded crazy.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Wow. That's interesting.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. But she was putting-- They were putting plaster in it. Anyway, so I got this formula from her. And I started putting-- I eliminated the plaster to make it more waterproof and fooled around with for some time for the right kind of mix and came out with a mix that I really am happy with, that I worked with for quite a long time. So it has a--depending on the weather--about an 8-hour set time. So you pour late at night, carve first thing in the morning. Or when it's hot, pour first thing in the morning, carve about 8 hours later. So I started doing this directly-carved concrete sculpture.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What do you use to do the carving?

MARY FULLER: You know, the roughing out can be done with knives, just regular cannery knives. And then that's the roughing out, the main roughing out process. Then the-- Then I'd have to leave it. It's sort of an interesting process in the sense that it's a direct carving, a cutting into-- You can't build up like clay.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: There's no way to repair. Once you've done it, you've done it, man.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So it's a matter of reduction.

MARY FULLER: It's a matter of reduction. So it is like a direct carving. It is a direct carving. But you do the first roughing out and then you'd have to leave it because you can't do finishing up because it sags and falls apart. So you have to leave it until it makes a second set. And then I use wood rasps, heavy rasps, and heavy carving tools to roundout and clean up--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And then you do a lot of insetting of materials.

MARY FULLER: Some of that, yeah. Quite a bit actually. Anyway, I started doing that and I really liked it as a material because I think I've always been a pretty fast carver, fast sculptor. I remember years ago working with Blanch Phillips who was married to John Langley Howard. Later on Blanch told me she just couldn't stand my arrogance as an young artist because I said I could never work in stone or--like she did, because I couldn't have that much patience to work that long. So I worked in clay because it was a faster material. And she said, "You know, you were such a young, arrogant puke." [laughs] I would say, like, "I have so many ideas. I can't--" [laughs] Wonderful. Here's to youth. But that aside, I do work fast. I like to work fast. I'm not a person who goes over a lot. Like McChesney. His work, I can't believe the work, the time that guy spends on painting is just unbelievable. He goes over and over and one little change. And Corbett worked that way. Just one little change, you know, it's just absolutely amazing. Anyway, it's not my--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Dick Diebenkorn does, too.

MARY FULLER: Prob-- I think a lot of-- What-- It's a whole different way of looking it, looking at art and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: De Kooning probably does, too, you know--

MARY FULLER: Probably.

SUSAN LANDAUER: --even though his works are so spontaneous, I think he really re-works them a lot.

MARY FULLER: I'm sure. Yeah. There's a lot of-- Well, whatever that means. I don't know. And somehow I thought maybe I should have paid more attention, come back, and thought more about what I was doing.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, do you do sketches before working?

MARY FULLER: No, I don't. Except--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Really?

MARY FULLER: No, I never do. Except, well, for--sometimes for public art projects or I usually do models or sketches depending-- So anyway, the public art thing started with-- They had the art festivals in San Francisco every fall. And Elio Benvenuto was head of the San Francisco Art Commission.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What's the name?

MARY FULLER: Elio Benvenuto, who was the head of the San Francisco Art Commission. And I used to haul concrete down there for a couple of--what is it?--3 or 4 days in September they'd have the art festival. And sometimes at the beginning, Mac was showing paintings there, I think. Then he stopped doing that. And I kept on hauling the concrete down there and said, "Why am I doing this?" And then--pardon me--at one point Elio said, "Would you be interested in a public art commission?" And I said, "I don't know. What do you think?" He said there's something in Salinas (I think it was) for a sculpture park or something. And so anyway I did. I submitted and got that job.

SUSAN LANDAUER: And when was this?

MARY FULLER: Oh boy. My sense of time is horrible. In the '60s? I'd have-- I'd have to look it up. I really-- It seemed like a long, long time ago.

SUSAN LANDAUER: In the '60s? Before you went to New York, I mean, the second time?

MARY FULLER: I'd just have to look it up. I can't-- I remember the sequence of the public art jobs, but I don't remember the time of the other stuff. I really don't. Anyway, I did the Salinas project. And it was a whole new ball game. It was very interesting. I found it extremely interesting to be for the first time working as an artist with other people who were going to be the sort of, you know, consumers of the art. It was a completely different kind of relationship. I mean, previously you'd just do something and then you'd send it out to a show and maybe somebody buys it and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: You're sort of working in a vacuum.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. But this way, you're working with these people, you know, with their approval, disapproval or whatever. That relationship with you as an artist. It was a totally different thing. And the Salinas job was that type. But then I did the San Francisco General Hospital. after that I started entering contests because there were a lot of them around. I entered contests for a high school in San Jose, which was kind of interesting because the kids, the high school kids, selected the artist. Artists submitted and then the kids selected the artist they wanted to do the project. So I did--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh that's nice.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. It was kind of funny. It was a good thing. It was a falcon for the Andrew Hill High School in San Jose, California. Yeah. It was kind of a kick. We took it down there. It was a good piece. They were going to put it down in the football field because it was their school motto was--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Perfect.

MARY FULLER: --a 6 foot high falcon, you know. And we took it down there. And I was so amazed. And it was really, again, a sort of beautiful experience where you don't usually get it as an artist, the immediate feedback. We put it up, Mac and I, and he's saying, "Wow!" You know, the kids started going, "Wow!" And I don't know what they had in their mind or what they expected (whatever), they were just so delighted. And then they said, "We can't leave it out here, out in the open. We'll put it in the library." And so they did. And so, like, you know, it was just one of these-- Oh, very heart warming and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: --fantastic experiences as an artist, where you get this immediate feedback from somebody from your audience that are really appreciative and really dig it. So that was great.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you decided from then on that you wanted to do public commissions whenever possible?

MARY FULLER: Whenever possible. Yeah, I really did. I-- And then the other incentive is that the money is so much better than it is for, you know-- I have-- What? I have a gallery in San Diego and Berkeley (that's just sort of closing out) and Oregon and Carmel. And, you know, at the end of the year if you do your income tax, oh, you've got $5,000. That's a good year. Public art, that's a hell of a lot better if you get a good commission. I have never gotten a big, heavy duty commission, but the L.A. job was $70,000, which is not so sleazy, considering all-- Even when you figure all your expenses and everything, that's not too sleazy. And it took a long time. It's always a long time going through all the processes--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Plus it's a lot of money.

MARY FULLER: It's a lot of money. It certainly is for me, yeah. I even bought a truck, right? [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, you only need a commission a year then?

MARY FULLER: Oh, if I could get one a year. I'll never get one like that a year. That was a long time ago. I haven't had anything that good. Oh, but the sewer plant in San Francisco was forty. So that was good. So I've had a couple of good ones. Those are two good ones. And the last--

SUSAN LANDAUER: A sewer plant? What did you say?

MARY FULLER: Oh, I have a couple of sculptures out on the Great Highway. It's the waste water treatment plant.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Why would they want sculpture there?

MARY FULLER: Well, they have to. It's one percent for art. I mean, they don't particularly want art, but they passed the law in all these different cities, this one percent for public art. So if they have a certain amount of money they spend on a project, the project has to include one percent for art. So that's why there's public art around. That all started under Johnson when he was President of the United States. So, the Vietnam War and all, he-- The artists were in favor--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Does anybody go to the sewer to see Mary Fuller? [laughs]

MARY FULLER: No. It's out on the Great Highway at the entrance to the zoo, actually. But it is a sewer project. Or, it's called The Clean Water Project, but it's the sewer treatment plant. And it's right at the-- It's on the Great Highway and Sloat Boulevard the Great Highway. Anyway. And I did that project down in San Francisco. But-- But they're getting slimmer and slimmer. So this last year, I did the one in Walnut Creek. So that was fourteen. And that's not too bad. And the one in Dublin is going to be fifteen. So, you know, you're not going to be retiring to the Bahamas. [laughs] I'm not Mark di Suvero, who does make a lot of money.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So let's see. Now, what are your motifs?

MARY FULLER: Pardon?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Your motifs?

MARY FULLER: What about them?

SUSAN LANDAUER: When did you start-- I guess you do a lot of animals and things.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I started doing animals pretty early I guess. I think-- I think one of the first pieces I showed, a clay piece, was photographed in the Chronicle was a cat. And that's really-- At the-- They used to have a thing in San Francisco called the City of Paris. And they had an annual show. And they had a ceramics show.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh yeah. Beatrice Judd Ryan ran that.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, exactly. OK.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you know her?

MARY FULLER: Yes I did. And I--

SUSAN LANDAUER: She was quite a dynamo I understand.

MARY FULLER: She was. She was incredible. Great, dyed red hair. A fantastic- looking lady.

SUSAN LANDAUER: "Dyed" you said?

MARY FULLER: Well, it looked, you know, really brilliantly red and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I don't think it was dyed.

MARY FULLER: It was really red?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: She was a very theatrical lady and wonderful. And she produced this ceramics show. And I won a couple of prizes there, which consisted mainly of cases of wine, which is OK, you know. Hey. [laughs] And I think one other prize I won was for a ceramic cat that I did. And then one--a couple of other sort of African-looking sculptures and--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So this is in the late '40s, right?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Let's see. I had the show at the Rotunda Gallery in--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Forty seven or so?

MARY FULLER: Something like that. So, it was probably about that time, yeah. And actually I won prizes there. And then I had a couple of paintings in the San Francisco Annuals, the watercolor annuals. I was doing some watercolor paintings. And I think I had one or two of those, yeah, in it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Did you show at the Richmond Art Center?

MARY FULLER: No.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, OK.

MARY FULLER: I never did. In fact, that wasn't even in existence, I think, when we lived in Richmond.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. That was 1949.

MARY FULLER: It was? It start-- Yeah. I didn't even know-- I didn't even know about it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That's surprising, really.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I never even heard about it.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh. Hazel Salmi or-- I think that was the woman who ran the Richmond Art-- They had annuals there.

MARY FULLER: Really?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: No. And we were there-- But then we were there, yeah, about 2 years at the most so we kind of really didn't get settled into Richmond.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right. Your orientation was to San Francisco?

MARY FULLER: I think it was, yeah. Yeah. And so public art is great. I really think it's very problematic. There're a couple of interesting books by Harriet Sinie on public art. And I'm just repairing a playground that was vandalized in San Francisco, which is really traumatic, I'll tell you, to go see your stuff vandalized.

SUSAN LANDAUER: What? Really?

MARY FULLER: Oh yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Where?

MARY FULLER: It's in Chinatown on-- It's on Portsmouth Square.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Portsmouth Square.

MARY FULLER: Yeah.

SUSAN LANDAUER: That was one of your major commissions.

MARY FULLER: It was a pretty big one, yeah. It was done 10 years ago. But it's been severely vandalized. They are taking out a couple of pieces I'm going to re-do, repair and re-do. That's a pain in the neck.

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, somebody came along and spray painted them?

MARY FULLER: No, they'd been hammered--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Hammered!

MARY FULLER: Yeah, yeah. They'd been really-- They really had at it. It's interesting. You know, you look at it--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Oh, how strange! Why would anybody do that? I can't imagine.

MARY FULLER: I don't know. It's hard to think about it too much. I mean, god, do they hate them? Are they that ugly? You know, I said, "Shit, man," did I do that? You know, it's like--like Larry Rivers' autobiography, What Did I Do?, I'm going to write one called Did I Do That?. [laughs] Ask me another question.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Usually it's a question of gangs, you know, putting their signature on things.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. That was true in Salinas. We had some stuff vandalized there and it was just spray paint, which was taken off. But this was really gone after. I don't know. Whatever. So we're repairing. [tape turned off]

SUSAN LANDAUER: So have you found that being a woman has worked to your disadvantage, you know, in terms of finding commissions?

MARY FULLER: Hum.

SUSAN LANDAUER: I've spoken to a number of artists who feel that public art commissions tend to go to men. I just was wondering whether you agree that it's kind of a male-dominated field.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. You know, I haven't really been aware of that. I actually-- I think to a certain degree, the fact that I've been able to get commissions is because of the affirmative action and the feminist movement. I think that there's been a--

SUSAN LANDAUER: So, yeah, in other words--

MARY FULLER: I think it's worked the other way, actually.

SUSAN LANDAUER: To your advantage?

MARY FULLER: I think so. I think there's been a feeling that because of affirmative action and the feminist movement, that there's been a necessity for public art to find women artists and put them up when they possibly can into positions where they might not have even had that much of a chance if it hadn't been for that. So I think, yeah-- The big commissions, well, you know, it's really a curious--the whole attitude about art and men and women is really a very curious problem. And I think it-- You know that woman, Nochlin, who wrote "Why Are There No--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Linda Nochlin?

MARY FULLER: Yeah. "Why Are There No Great Women Artists?"

SUSAN LANDAUER: Right.

MARY FULLER: Am I'm not really sure I understood what she meant, but my feeling is that one of the reasons that-- Like, in the abstract expressionist movement, why were they all guys? It has a lot to do with the way women are socialized or the way we're brought up, the way we expect certain things of ourselves and the way society expects certain things of us. So that other things that are expected of guys are not even expected of us, but if we do them, they're considered extremely negative. And there're certain attitudes that art-- I think being an artist necessitates certain attitudes in a person, male or female, that are not very much in sync with our society's attitude with what a woman should be. And those attitudes are to be very aggressive, to be very dangerous in a certain way, to take risks, to be a kind of person who's willing to do that, to put themselves out on a line--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Those women are criticized. Look at Hillary Clinton.

MARY FULLER: Exactly, exactly. And I think that goes through the art history, so that women who wanted--who are that way for one reason or another, or who want to be that way, either conceal it or--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. If a woman is smart, she's seen as cunning.

MARY FULLER: Yeah, that's right. Yeah. So that's why there have been no great women artists, because all these things that they really need to do are put down. I think one of the main problems in our culture is the socialization or the training of women to be certain kinds of people, which is not necessarily what their natural impulses or their natural strengths truly are. So that our culture tends to be one that binds people into certain limiting categories. And when people break out of those categories (or make an effort to) they put themselves in a rather dangerous position and sometimes psychologically also I think. And I think that's the reason that we haven't had the kinds of women artists of quality that I think that we're going to have, that are going to come out of this culture. To take on the responsibility that these guys say-- Talk about the abstract expressionist painters. Talk about a guy like Clyfford Still. Egomaniacal or whatever, the guy decided himself as one individual person to take on the responsibility of being this sort of, you know, guy who's a Nietzschean man who has a zeitgeist of this century, who speaks for-- You know, this kind of a trip, man, hey, this is very Wagnerian, it's very grand. How many women would ever conceive of themselves as being able to do this, or be allowed to do this? Or even if they had the ambition, dare to step forward in such a way? And not to be humiliated and called lesbians or whatever. You know, they'd be-- You know, it would be-- It's a horrendous step for women to take in this culture. And so I think so there's the explanation right there. When she says, "Why have there been no great women artists," it's because women have been socialized not to be able to-- Not that they don't have the ability or the strength or the talent or whatever else it takes to make great artists. They have all that stuff. There's no doubt about that. And I think there's going to be a change to come and it's very possible that in the next, you know, few years, the great artists of our country are going to be women artists. So far it hasn't developed and I'm kind of disappointed, frankly, that it hasn't.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, why do you think that? Because I would think that the competition is going to get more fierce.

MARY FULLER: You mean competition among women? Or how?
SUSAN LANDAUER: Among artists in general.
MARY FULLER: You know, that's an interesting--a very interesting thing to say. I don't think it makes that much difference. I mean--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I think it does.

MARY FULLER: You think it does?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah, I do. Anytime commodities are scarce--

MARY FULLER: I-- You know--

SUSAN LANDAUER: --the tough get going.

MARY FULLER: Isn't that interesting? That's so curious. Yeah, OK. I think the thing that motivates artists is so different from the commodity production that it just happens differently. I-- OK. I'll tell you what I really, truly do think the neurosis, the fundamental, psychological neurosis that motivates art--I'm sorry to say that, pals--is so profound that commodities have very little to do with the motivation that makes people need to--

SUSAN LANDAUER: I'm not talking about motivation; I'm talking about success.

MARY FULLER: Success? Well, hey, if they produce good art, great art, you know, I really think that comes through. If it's hot, it'll be hot. If it has the passion and the meaning that they can put into it, there's nothing that stops it. I don't believe it. I really don't. [laughs] How naive! How romantic! I can see you saying that. How generational! [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: Why do you think Reinhardt made it, but Corbett didn't?

MARY FULLER: I don't agree with you. I think Corbett made it and Reinhardt didn't. Corbett produced a great art and Reinhardt didn't. Oh, you know, OK. So there's the market and there's the success thing, but when it comes right down to it-- OK. Look at it from an historical point of view. I mean, Corbett produced a great art and Reinhardt didn't. And so I think in terms of making it, it depends on who's going to be the person judging it. And I would say that Corbett made it and Reinhardt didn't. And I really do think, I'll tell you that in a certain sense, probably as people, Corbett made it for all the tragedy of his life in a sense that Ad never did, because I think Corbett really, you know, knew he was making terrific paintings.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Corbett will never be as famous as Reinhardt.

MARY FULLER: Well, they're both dead so who gives a shit? [laughs] Oh, I don't agree with you. I don't think

that's necessarily true at all. I think everything that-- History is constantly being revised. A few years from now, who knows? There's going to be another look at it all and say, "Hey, how come we missed this guy?" Or, "How come this guy got the show at the museum and this guy didn't?" You know, that sort of stuff. So, it's very fluid. I wouldn't say that--

SUSAN LANDAUER: You're talking to an art historian who believes in Corbett firmly.

MARY FULLER: I know that, but also-- But also the tastemakers, the tastemakers change and they-- I mean, aren't there artists that even in art history in our time that were neglected, and somebody says, "Hey, look at-- Did you see this?" I mean, I think one of the things that the feminist movement has done that's absolutely radical is to re-evaluate the history of women. It's just amazing the talent that was totally ignored or forgotten or put aside, and all of a sudden you read about these people. As I told you, when I was a kid growing up, and I think I was an early, you know, woman's liberation sort of feminist, but the role models that I had as a high school student in Stockton were Amelia Earhart and literarily or artistically nothing. All guys: Hemingway and Bernard Shaw. That's a weird-- And Mae West. OK, you've got Amelia Earhart and Mae West, George Bernard Shaw and Ernest Hemingway. My god, no wonder I'm a mess. But what I'm saying in effect is that women artists who were really important women, I had never heard of them. And those women were writers who published and they were known, they were known in a very peripheral way. When I got to college, all of a sudden, hey, here's Amy Lowell, hey, here's all these other people that had been not paid attention to in my education. But I think now, through the women's studies programs, they are. So I think younger women are getting a look at a hell of a lot of stuff that's really good stuff.

SUSAN LANDAUER: The only problem is, you know, I just finished a project on women artists of the West, from 1890 to 1945. And I, you know, what we've done is resurrected a lot of artists who were well-known in their day, but who've since, you know, slipped through the cracks of history. And the West was sort of a wide open place back in the 1890s. And, of course, the suffragettes were really strong back then and women were really making in roads. But anyway the point is Mary Richardson, Ann Bremer, Alice Chittenden these were artists who were well-known in the 1890s-1910s. I mean, you know, in the time period that I covered in my essay. But the work has disappeared. A lot of it has disappeared. There really isn't that much information to go by. And so, therefore, with the work having disappeared and the lack of information, it's really hard to--to, you know, to make a place for these women. So, you know, yes, of course, history can be revised, but you really have to have-- You have to have the concern in the artist's own lifetime to make sure that the work gets preserved.

MARY FULLER: I think you're absolutely right. And that's the responsibility of the museums to do that, as preservationists, to keep that--

SUSAN LANDAUER: And, you know, of course, they don't. They're constantly deaccessioning. And they deaccession work by unknown artists.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. I've been hoping-- I hope that that National Museum of Women in the Arts might take on that kind of responsibility, but I don't think they're going to.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Well, they only have so much space.

MARY FULLER: Yeah. Are we on or off?

SUSAN LANDAUER: On.

MARY FULLER: We're on?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah.

MARY FULLER: Oh, OK. Well, let's see. [inaudible] laughs. I don't think there's room.

SUSAN LANDAUER: Now, I was going to say that your work has certainly by-passed artistic trends. Have you been able to derive sustenance from, you know, contemporary art? It seems like your work reaches back to tribal sources.

MARY FULLER: Well, I think it does definitely. Yeah. Or maybe, like the abstract expressionists, some of those guys, go back to the primitive unconscious and the Jungian whatever, the myth making sort of segment we all have in us. As a beginning sculptor, I was very interested by Henry Moore, but Moore's work kind of took off in a certain direction I wasn't too pleased with. I like his earlier work better than his later work. And he seemed to be, as an artist, kind of dead-ending and stopped being interesting. And there really wasn't a hell of a lot in contemporary sculpture that I found extremely interesting. So that I did find more and more that I was attracted to the earlier work of-- Well, there's like stuff of the Africans and pre-Columbian people, the Mexican stuff that's just amazing I think. Very moving and beautiful sculpturally. There's stuff in the museum of anthropology in

Mexico City that's just astounding. There's stuff in the L.A. museum basement. They have one of those African nail fetishes. I don't know if you've ever seen that guy?

SUSAN LANDAUER: Sure.

MARY FULLER: Unbelievable. And then right next to it, when I was there, they had this Assyrian carving this deep--was it relief?--or this incredible deep back-carving that gives a shadow that's just incredible! You look at that and you know that's where the Egyptians learned everything about the deep shadow.

SUSAN LANDAUER: My god.

MARY FULLER: Incredible stuff. And right next to this African thing, they had this alabaster, white--whatever--maybe it was a slab--but this white stone carving. It was wonderful. Anyway. I really love sculpture a lot. I'm very--

SUSAN LANDAUER: But minimalism didn't touch you, for example, at all. Did it?

MARY FULLER: No. Actually it never did. And I never really appreciated it. I don't think I aesthetically ever really appreciated it. I looked at it and I could see what they were trying to get at, but it seemed too-- And I think it was true of painting. And painting the same way. I could see what Rothko was trying to do. I could see what the Field painters were trying to do, but it didn't really grab me aesthetically or emotionally or turned me on. Actually, it was-- Even the paintings that now, because we've seen so much of them (we've seen them reproduced so many times, they seem like cliches), the Pollocks, when you see them again, they're kind of to me amazing. I look at it and, my god, this guy did that? That's amazing. And I don't feel the same with most of the Color Field or Minimalists and the same for the sculpture. It's too simple-minded, I don't know. And a reductionist point of view, but-- And I don't think it works for public art particularly either. I don't think it-- It seems to-- They think-- You used to be able to put a metal cube that worked in those big, monolithic concrete slab buildings, but in a certain sense, I think it's too much all the same. Noguchi was really good at that. He was hot at times. And he could do some-- Like those big stone, circle things that he made. But, again, there's an intricacy part of the--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Of course Richard Serra has been controversial recently. Somebody called his, you know, his proposed project for the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, his menacing vision of a lunch bag. [laughter] Do you have any opinion of his work?

MARY FULLER: I think he says what he means. And I've read what he said. And he really means to threaten people. He means to make people uncomfortable and means to make them unhappy. And that's his ambition. And he thinks that's an important role for the artist to play-that role.

SUSAN LANDAUER: There aren't many women who would play that role, though. Isn't that true?

MARY FULLER: Well, I'm not sure it's such a hot thing to want to be. I think it's fascist art. As simple as that. I think when you want to make people unhappy in public art--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Yeah. It seems to be--

MARY FULLER: You're in the wrong field, man. You ought to be doing private art. If you want to be unhappy, do it there. But I don't think when public people pay their money to be--to commission an artist, that's what they're asking for or what they deserve to get. I think maybe-- This woman, Harriet Senlie, says that maybe gardens are the final greatest public art. And I think maybe they are. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: So what have you been working on recently?

MARY FULLER: I've been doing a project for the city of Dublin, which is down near Livermore. I did a totem about 8 feet tall for Walnut Creek. And it's flanked by 2 smaller sculptures. And I put them in about 2 years ago. And the people of Dublin want one similar to that for a park, Colby Park. And they have a really neat project. Dublin's a new city. It was built in--I think incorporated in 1981. And it's, you know, slowburbia, 90 percent gringo and whatever, you know. They have 8 parks in town and, as this woman told me, they're all exactly alike. So they're hoping to put--

SUSAN LANDAUER: Are you kidding me?

MARY FULLER: That's what she said. She said, "We're hoping to put sculptures in each park so we can identify the parks." You'd say, "Oh, that's the one with the totem. That's the one with the bull. Because that's the one with the Beasley. That's the one with--"

SUSAN LANDAUER: They have different names, don't they?

MARY FULLER: They have different names. The fact of the matter is that they're identical. [laughs]

SUSAN LANDAUER: After the city's founding fathers, right?

MARY FULLER: Anyway, so I made one for that. And there were 3 finalists for the project. I'm doing a model. And they're going to put it in the Civic Center and then people look at it and make a decision. But when I talked to them I think I got the job. I think it's also possible that--
[End of interview with Mary Fuller]

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