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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Leo Castelli, 1997
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Contact Information

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

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Leo Castelli, joined by his daughter, Nina Sundell, on May 22 and September 2, 1997. The interview took place in New York, N.Y., and was conducted by Andrew Decker for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

In 2016, staff at the Archives of American Art reviewed this transcript to make corrections. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ANDREW DECKER: So, today's date is May 22, 1997. I am Andrew Decker and I am in the gallery of Leo Castelli, who has graciously agreed to be interviewed for the Archives of American Art. Some years ago you provided a great deal of information to the Archives about your work in the fifties and sixties, and I'm hoping to talk to you also about the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

LEO CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: The last interviews ended with your great interest in Minimal art—

MR. CASTELLI: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. DECKER: And Conceptual art, which you continued with for a number of years.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: Were there developments in that area that you found enjoyable or surprising?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, things went on and, well, you will have to ask more specific questions for me to tell you of my experience since those days.

MR. DECKER: Yes, well for instance, with Dan Flavin and Donald Judd.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah. Well, yes, they are, yes, Conceptual artists par excellence. Both no longer with us. Now Judd was sort of a difficult man. It was not easy to get along with him, but a very important artist in that particular field, and so I put up with some of his ways of doing, and I'm happy that I was able to show his work in New York and elsewhere. So that was good. Flavin, on the other hand, was also a difficult character, but more amiable and with a great sense of humor, which Judd didn't have. And I enjoyed showing them.

MR. DECKER: With artists like Carl Andre—

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, Carl Andre was part of that group, and he was, perhaps, the ringleader in a sense. Everybody deferred to him. And I didn't show him. I think he was with Paula Cooper.

MR. DECKER: Did you have a wish to show him?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes, I like his work very much. But, well, anyway, he was with another gallery so—perhaps I did show him in some group situation. I don't remember now, but I certainly did show some of his work on one occasion or the other.

MR. DECKER: So with the 1960s, you had very appealing artists like—

MR. CASTELLI: Very—

MR. DECKER: Appealing artists, artists whose paintings were simply beautiful to look at, and there was a great deal of excitement around people like Andy Warhol, for instance.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, Andy Warhol certainly was an exciting artist to have. Unfortunately, he died very young so I didn't have the occasion of showing him as often as I should have liked to show him, but—well, there was Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, all these artists whom I have shown through the years on various occasions.

MR. DECKER: But was there the same sense of excitement around the work of Flavin and Judd as there was around Warhol?

MR. CASTELLI: No, the group of aficionados around them was much more restricted. Warhol, as you probably

know, was a very special phenomenon and seemed for one reason or another—one doesn't quite understand why—appealed to a great number of people. He was sort of unique in that way.

MR. DECKER: Were there many collectors who were very seriously interested in the work of Judd and Flavin?

MR. CASTELLI: No, actually, there weren't many collectors interested in their work. Their audience was more limited. Not to be compared with the audience that Andy Warhol had. Well, Andy Warhol—as I said before—was a special person, and so the way people reacted to him was quite special.

MR. DECKER: I know that Count Panza was one of the people who was so interested in Flavin.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, he was very interested in Flavin, and in Judd, and Conceptual artists. He was not interested, for instance, in Andy Warhol. Or Lichtenstein, for that matter. So he was a great collector of Conceptual art rather than those other things that I showed.

MR. DECKER: He developed, I think, an enormous collection.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, it's absolutely sensational. He was there right at the beginning and understood the importance of the artists, not later on when everybody was after them and then they became expensive. He got them when they didn't cost very much, so he put together an incredible collection of American artists—especially American artists, because there were many Italian or French or artists of other countries that he was interested in.

MR. DECKER: And did he continue to collect even as the artists became more accepted?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, obviously he couldn't go on collecting the way he did in the beginning because these artists became much too expensive for him to buy, so his collecting activity—or this activity of collecting [those] artists that he did buy in the beginning diminished very much, but he is still very interested and buys lots of younger artists who aren't highly priced. Sometimes his choices are good, sometimes they're not. But, anyway, he's still very, very involved but can afford only to buy younger artists who haven't reached the prices of the ones that he collected in the early days.

MR. DECKER: I see that in various exhibitions in the early seventies, you had, obviously, Lichtenstein and Warhol and Rauschenberg and Johns—and also Bruce Nauman.

MR. CASTELLI: Bruce Nauman is among the younger people. He's not so young any more, but he is, perhaps, as far as I can judge, the best artist of the younger generation—the generation succeeding Warhol and Johns and Rauschenberg.

MR. DECKER: Was he friendly with those artists?

MR. CASTELLI: They liked him, yes. They didn't know him very well. He appeared much later. But they all liked him; they all thought very highly of him.

MR. DECKER: Because I was wondering whether there was really any connection between Jasper Johns and the work of Bruce Nauman.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, as you know, the work of Jasper Johns and Rauschenberg was very influential, and all the younger generation certainly looked to these earlier masters, and were influenced by them. That's quite obvious. But then the better ones like Nauman, obviously then got started flying their own wings after a while.

MR. DECKER: One of the things that Jasper Johns did in the seventies was the cross-hatching.

MR. CASTELLI: The what?

MR. DECKER: They call it in the Museum of Modern Art the cross-hatching, in the flagstone motifs. If I may try to find it in your catalog—well, this is not a great picture [Untitled, 1972].

MR. CASTELLI: That was an important picture, yes. Let me see. I had this at 4 East 77th.

MR. DECKER: That was something fairly new for him, where he had these kind of—

MR. CASTELLI: Well, people are used to his flags and targets and things. When he sort of adopted other images and painted other paintings, they were sort of disappointed that he didn't go on painting flags.

MR. DECKER: Was it difficult to find people who accepted the work with the flagstone imagery, for instance?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, people get used rapidly to changes in an artist's work, so I didn't have too much trouble with people buying him and continuing their interest in him. But, of course, they would have wished him to go on painting flags and targets forever.

MR. DECKER: As he developed, were there different collectors and different museums who became interested in his work?

MR. CASTELLI: I would say, naturally, new collectors, perhaps new museums, added to their earlier ones but, all in all, I think the interest in Johns was general. Museums all over the country, collectors all over the country, and also abroad, are very interested in his work and sometimes were a bit disappointed that he didn't go on painting flags [laughs], but I think that he continued to be considered as one of the most important artists of his time.

MR. DECKER: I remember that people like Robert and Ethel Scull and the Tremaines [Burton and Nancy]—I think early on—were great fans of his.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, they were. They actually dropped out for various reasons before Johns started changing too much, so they didn't get a chance of getting disappointed in what he was doing. [Laughter.]

MR. DECKER: When did other collectors become more interested? People like the Newhouses [S. I., Jr., and Victoria], for instance?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, the Newhouses had been always watching what was going on, and they got interested in Johns and kept their interest in him through the years. But Newhouse—who, by the way, I just saw today at the restaurant where I had lunch—is not very active these days—as active as he used to be.

MR. DECKER: And people like Peter Brandt, I think, were also-

MR. CASTELLI: Peter Brandt was interested, yes, but he was one of the more unreliable, I should say, type of collector, not one who seriously concentrated on a few artists and went on buying them. But he's been a great help, too.

MR. DECKER: Who were some of the people who were Johns' strongest supporters?

MR. CASTELLI: Hmm?

MR. DECKER: Who are some of the people who followed Jasper Johns and his work in the seventies?

MR. CASTELLI: I would say all of the initial collectors followed him. I can't say that anybody of the early collectors dropped out. Maybe they were no longer able to afford to buy the paintings because they got to be too expensive. It's a tragedy that we have in art. If it becomes very successful, it gets also to be very expensive and the original collectors cannot afford to go on buying him. So we have to find new collectors.

MR. DECKER: How was business in the seventies? I know that in the 1980s that there were many people who had made a lot of money who—

MR. CASTELLI: If people ask me this question, I have always trouble answering it, because, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't notice great differences through the years. Things went well or not so well, but I can't say that I noticed that suddenly nothing happened anymore. People went on buying the good artists even in sort of periods when the activity was much diminished.

MR. DECKER: And when you had somebody like Jasper Johns where else were you showing him?

MR. CASTELLI: Would I show him?

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: There were many, many galleries all over America and elsewhere who wanted to show his work, so there was no problem finding venues, as they call them, for him. Actually, I could never satisfy the demand—which, in the case of Johns, you know, since he painted relatively little, that was quite a problem.

MR. DECKER: I would think so. Because, as you say, there are many places that would love to see his work.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: So how did you decide—

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, one does one's best, and, if you cannot satisfy everybody, people, generally

speaking, do understand what the situation is. They're all professionals. But, anyway, in one way or another, you can always do something for everybody, although sometimes it's pretty difficult.

MR. DECKER: Robert Rauschenberg, I guess, fell in love with the idea of traveling the world.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, yes. He had this show-how did he call it now?

MR. DECKER: Wasn't it the *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange*?

MR. CASTELLI: That's right. He did put together a show that then traveled all over the world. But I was not in charge of it. That's something that he did on his own.

MR. DECKER: My recollection is that he took his paintings around the world and would leave something off in each country but put something different in.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, he did. It was a very complex enterprise, and he found all kinds of solutions to problems of paintings that he couldn't get any more. He just got them from other sources and so on, but he did a very good job.

MR. DECKER: Now he was doing fairly complicated work all along—

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: In terms of layers and imagery. And were there works of his that you wanted to keep but were unable to?

MR. CASTELLI: That I wanted to keep?

MR. DECKER: Yes .

MR. CASTELLI: Well, there are lots of things that I would like to keep if I could afford it, but it is not possible for somebody in my position to be selfish. I have to let things go, let them travel the world.

MR. DECKER: I remember you had kept his painting, *Bed*, I think [1955]. Or *Mattress*.

MR. CASTELLI: I kept the *Bed*, yes, for a long, long time, till finally even the *Bed* went by board, yes. [Laughs.] The Museum of Modern Art wanted it very badly, as one of the most important examples of the time, so I gave it to them. The *Bed* was a gift from me to the Modern.

MR. DECKER: I hope that you've kept something for yourself though, as well.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, there is always current things that I have at home. Sometimes I keep them longer; sometimes they go rapidly. But I keep things for myself, too, yes. Especially drawings. Smaller things, not really too important paintings. Those have to go into the world.

MR. DECKER: Getting back for a second to the ROCI show-

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MR. DECKER: The Rauschenberg overseas thing.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: I may not be remembering this correctly, but my understanding was that he needed to do this big traveling show.

MR. CASTELLI: He needed to do it?

MR. DECKER: Well, for personal reasons.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, every artist wants as much exposure as possible, and perhaps Rauschenberg felt that urge more than other artists. But every artist wants that.

MR. DECKER: Yeah. But he had some help getting into Russia, I think, from Armand Hammer.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, Armand Hammer was helpful, I remember. Lots of people were helpful. He seemed, was, well, the way he acted was sort of a little bit like his paintings—very expansive, yes.

MR. DECKER: Well, was it unpleasant or uncomfortable to see him go off and do these other things?

MR. CASTELLI: Was it comfortable? In what sense?

MR. DECKER: Well, was it uncomfortable to see someone you had been so close with-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, well, no, not at all. I'm not at all jealous of the artists. If they have a chance to travel to be seen by more people, I feel very happy about that. I'm not somebody who would sort of feel neglected.

MR. DECKER: On Roy Lichtenstein-

MR. CASTELLI: Hmm?

MR. DECKER: Roy Lichtenstein, I believe, set himself the ambitious goal of deliberately changing his works every couple of years.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I don't know whether it's deliberate. Of course, like many other artists he likes to change, to add new ideas, and perhaps he does more so than some others, but every artist doesn't want to stick to some kind of a way.

MR. DECKER: But I remember the works that refer to other artists. Then there were works, I think, in his studio. And certainly some interiors.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: And more recently the Japanese influenced paintings-

MR. CASTELLI: Very nice, yes.

MR. DECKER: Which seemed incredibly successful. I mean, just beautiful.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, people often were surprised and disappointed when he changed his images, but then, generally speaking, they got rapidly used to the new imagery and did understand that the artist cannot go on painting the same painting all his life. But that's a general phenomenon.

MR. DECKER: Were you ever surprised to go to his studio and see new images?

MR. CASTELLI: Was I surprised?

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: To go where?

MR. DECKER: To Mr. Lichtenstein's studio.

MR. CASTELLI: To the studio, you mean?

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, sometimes I was, when something new came up that I hadn't seen because I hadn't been to the studio for a while. Yes, he is probably the artist that surprised me most with new inventions and new images.

MR. DECKER: Did you discuss the new inventions with him?

MR. CASTELLI: No, I never discussed really the contents of the paintings. I take it for granted that artists will change, and sometimes I may be disappointed or I may not understand what they're doing, and probably they'll understand that I'm a little bit out of focus there, but that's as it should be. They can't-as we said before-go on painting the same painting all their life.

MR. DECKER: Well, did Lichtenstein ever notice that you were surprised by something and offer to talk about what he was doing?

MR. CASTELLI: It certainly happened. And he certainly expected me to be surprised, perhaps disappointed, but then it's not for me to suggest to him what to do.

MR. DECKER: Oh, no, I don't mean to even imply that you would suggest what to do.

MR. CASTELLI: No, but sometimes, obviously, it so happens that they do something new that I don't like to

understand right away because it's a big change from what they were doing. And they may notice-although I try not to show it-they may notice that I'm a bit surprised and perhaps disappointed. But, no, I got used to the fact that artists do have to change and so I expect it.

MR. DECKER: Were there any particular artists who enjoyed talking about their paintings with you?

MR. CASTELLI: I don't think that any artists like to talk about their paintings in - no, nobody. No, they don't do that. There is not really very much to say. There's a lot to feel about a painting-when you see them for the first time, especially-but your comments on those occasions are necessarily general. Well, generally speaking, if what they do is interesting and new. They have to feel that I like it. I can always say something, but probably if I don't like what they're doing so much, they will understand that I don't. It's like that.

MR. DECKER: Yes. I've always disliked talking with artists about their art because it is-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, generally speaking, I don't think that - one doesn't do it.

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: You have feelings about it, and you convey those feelings, but not in so many words.

MR. DECKER: So in the eighties with the Expressionist painting-or Neo-Expressionism-what was your first reaction to that?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I'm really not much in favor of the wild expressionist painting. I do favor restraint and a classical kind of approach to painting. So I may have been disappointed at what some of the artists are doing. But then also something that seems very expressionist to begin with, or disheveled, then after a while one comes to Pop Art like Rauschenberg. You get used to it, and you see the result, and there is order in their madness.

MR. DECKER: Because I know that you came to be a great fan - that you came to very much enjoy the work of Julian Schnabel.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, I think he was very, very good at one time. I haven't followed what he's been doing recently so much. But in the beginning I liked what he was doing very much.

MR. DECKER: And also David Salle, I believe.

MR. CASTELLI: David Salle, that group of artists. As a matter of fact, of the two I did like David better than Julian because there was greater restraint there.

MR. DECKER: In showing those artists, you were working with Mary Boone, I believe.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, mm-hmm.

MR. DECKER: And throughout your life you have worked with a number of dealers.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh yes, one always does work with other galleries. One can't live in an isolated world where you jealously defend your artists from inroads coming from other galleries. So I've been always happy to work with other galleries.

MR. DECKER: Did you ever work with Pace [Pace Gallery, New York, NY]?

MR. CASTELLI: Not much, but if the occasion arose I certainly did, too, yes.

MR. DECKER: I thought of them because they tend to be very protective of their artists.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. But then when it came for them to show-one conflict or another-one of my artists, I was always more than ready to assist them.

MR. DECKER: And, of course, you worked also with Larry Gagosian for some time.

MR. CASTELLI: Larry Gagosian, yes I certainly did lots of things with him.

MR. DECKER: I was thinking that there could not be two people who are more different in some ways and more similar in others than Mary Boone and Larry Gagosian.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, you're probably right in saying that. [Laughs.] They're both very intense about what they're doing.

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: And they have very personal feelings about the artists that they handle, that they're showing. It's not just merchandise. [Laughs.]

MR. DECKER: One of the things that has struck me about them-and they are part of the younger generation-is that they are both known for being aggressive, but, at the same time, they both have very, very strong feelings about the art that they show.

MR. CASTELLI: Aggressive? They are sort of naturally - very convinced about what they're doing, and therefore it may seem aggressive but it's just conviction. Well, they're doing-both of them-a very good job.

MR. DECKER: Yes. I noticed that maybe seven, six years ago-I'm not sure of the date-but you sent an exhibition of works by Roy Lichtenstein to Austria to the Galerie Ulysses. I think they were works on paper.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: And I learned at the time that that was the first gallery exhibition of Mr. Lichtenstein's works in Vienna.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. I remember that, yes.

MR. DECKER: It was remarkable to me that no one in Vienna had come to you before and said -

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, those countries are sometimes quite active and sometimes they're not. For instance, France sometimes isn't active at all-Paris and-on the other hand, then, Vienna or some galleries in Germany, like Cologne, are active. So it depends very much on who's in charge there. But, generally speaking, Germany has been active in a good way through the years, yes.

MR. DECKER: Why is that, do you think? That Germany has been so active, so consistently?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, the Germans are very thorough people. They explore things. They don't do things casually, perhaps, as the French do. So they take what they're doing-art-I mean contemporary art-very seriously. But you can see the results.

MR. DECKER: I think along with America, they have the best group of collectors who are very serious about-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. Happily, they've been very good, yes.

MR. DECKER: I understand that you have known Peter Ludwig-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes, Peter Ludwig, who I wanted to mention, who was a great collector. Actually, German collecting was Peter Ludwig. [Laughs.] Yes, it's a pity that he died so young and stupidly. What they decided is nobody should die of [inaudible] these days. But he was a very good collector, a very good one. Put together a great group of paintings for Germany.

MR. DECKER: Were there other collectors in Germany who have come along well and developed seriously?

MR. CASTELLI: After Ludwig there hasn't been anybody of that caliber. There are several collectors-museums and so on-but it's not the same thing. Ludwig was a fantastic operation. It's a shame that he died so young.

MR. DECKER: And there has been that recent thing in England, where it seems that there are some collectors, and the biggest among them is Charles Saatchi.

MR. CASTELLI: Saatchi, yes.

MR. DECKER: Who has been around for some years.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. But Saatchi is sort of irregular. Sometimes he's caught by great enthusiasm, and then the next thing is he's senseless. He-poof-and changes his interest. So he's not very reliable.

MR. DECKER: Have you been following the work of people like Damien Hirst?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I've been following it, of course, yes. Not going specially to England to see what he is doing, but whatever appeared here, of course, was interesting.

MR. DECKER: Did you have strong feelings about the work?

MR. CASTELLI: Of Damien's?

MR. DECKER: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: I thought he was sort of overdoing it a little bit, but then, you know, you expect that from a young artist. I think that it's a good thing.

MR. DECKER: And you've been showing, yourself, James Rosenquist for a while.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, for quite a while. Since the beginning of time, yes. [Laughs.] And he's never disappointed me. He's been always inventive and he's always doing good new things.

MR. DECKER: Why is it that he has never been quite as widely admired as some of the other Pop artists? Do you have any idea why?

MR. CASTELLI: It's sort of a mysterious kind of thing. There must be something inherently not there that makes an artist less interesting to the general public than another. Difficult to say.

MR. DECKER: Yes, because his work seems very serious.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh yes, it's very good, very inventive. And the fact that he hasn't been as successful as some other artists of his generation is difficult to explain.

MR. DECKER: And understand.

MR. CASTELLI: And understand.

MR. DECKER: If I may, for one second-

MR. CASTELLI: What does the machine say?

[Audio break.]

MR. DECKER: I noticed that last fall-I think-the Museum of Modern Art acquired the painting F-111 [James Rosenquist, 1965].

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, that was a great event. It's something that once one has bought it and shown it, you don't really know what to do with it because it's so big.

MR. DECKER: Well, the Museum of Modern Art will solve that problem by building a new building.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I don't think that even the Museum of Modern Art can do a thing like that. It's something that, obviously, is difficult to handle.

MR. DECKER: Now my understanding is that that was painted to go inside your gallery on 77th Street.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, it was just a - if you went all around the room, the front room was exactly 84 feet long, so that painting is 84 feet, and you could show it. In my case it was shown on four sides, but it could be shown stretched out completely, and it was shown that way at the Metropolitan. But I didn't like it. I think it was conceived for that room, for the room of the gallery, and stretched out it didn't have the same kind of strength. That was my impression.

MR. DECKER: Yes, it's an overwhelming piece, almost-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: When you're in the middle of it.

MR. CASTELLI: But I still think that - yeah, I think of this event as a great event, showing that 84-foot painting.

MR. DECKER: What was the response at the time?

MR. CASTELLI: My response?

MR. DECKER: The response of other people at the time?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, well, you know, there was a group of people who followed the career of this artist, and they were quite enthusiastic about a feat like that one. And other people, of course, didn't quite get it or felt that it

was not practical to do an 84-foot painting. But then the idea that what artists are doing should be practical is just a wrong idea. They should do whatever they feel like doing.

MR. DECKER: So what work in the past ten years or so has been interesting to you-along with that of David Salle? Has there been-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, all the artists that I have shown-

MR. DECKER: Well, yeah.

MR. CASTELLI: I suppose, and perhaps a few others that I did not show, but perhaps Mary Boone showed or Pace or some other gallery-and Larry Gagosian. But, all in all, these galleries that I've mentioned, and myself, have been pursuing the same kind of thing, the same kind of approach.

MR. DECKER: When you had your space on Green Street, it was big enough to handle-

MR. CASTELLI: Anything, practically.

MR. DECKER: Yes. [Laughs.] Do you miss having that kind of space? You had some wonderful things by Richard Serra.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. That was a wonderful space to have but, of course, I couldn't afford to keep it. Because it then, of course, demanded always big shows and those are usually quite expensive.

MR. DECKER: Are there sculptors that you would like to be showing now?

MR. CASTELLI: Sculptors?

MR. DECKER: Yeah.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, who is there?

MR. DECKER: Well, Serra.

MR. CASTELLI: You have a list there?

MR. DECKER: Not in front me. But if it's okay I could come back with a list; if you were willing to speak again in a week or two.

MR. CASTELLI: Hmm?

MR. DECKER: If you're willing to speak again in a week or two, I can bring some more information.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I'll be more than happy to speak again, sure.

MR. DECKER: Would that be okay?

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, absolutely.

MR. DECKER: That would be a great pleasure for me.

MR. CASTELLI: It would be a pleasure.

[Tape 1, Side B.]

[Mr. Castelli and Andrew Decker are joined by Nina Sundell, Mr. Castelli's daughter.]

MR. DECKER: [In progress.] 1997, Andrew Decker with Nina Sundell and Leo Castelli, in an interview for the Archives of American Art. When I spoke to you, Mr. Castelli, before we talked a little bit about the sixties and a little bit about the 1970s and [maybe] changes in the artists - or the additions of new artists that Mr. Castelli was working with. And I'm not quite sure why we started there, but we did.

NINA SUNDELL: Well, perhaps that's the most interesting place to begin, but it isn't the beginning.

MR. DECKER: No. The earlier interview was transcribed. It's about a hundred and thirty pages long, which inadequately covers Mr. Castelli's life from birth until 1970. There were some things that were talked about-you know, your participation, I think, in the group.

MR. CASTELLI: What?

MR. DECKER: Your participation with a group of artists and other people. As well as early exhibitions of Roy Lichtenstein-the late Roy Lichtenstein-Jasper Johns-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, you mean the first show that I had?

MR. DECKER: Yeah.

MR. CASTELLI: It was the Ninth Street Show, as we called it because it took place in a space on Ninth Street, and well, maybe you remember better who was included in it.

MS. SUNDELL: Well, Bob was included. Bob Rauschenberg-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, Rauschenberg was included.

MS. SUNDELL: [Inaudible] was included in it with the Black Painting-

MR. CASTELLI: Wasn't Jasper included?

MS. SUNDELL: I don't think that you had met Jasper at that time.

MR. CASTELLI: I don't think so, no.

MS. SUNDELL: And a lot of Abstract Expressionists-junior-and I don't really-I mostly remember that Bob's painting was so strange that it dominated the exhibition. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTELLI: Well-

MS. SUNDELL: Did you talk about - this wasn't your first experience with doing things with art. Apart from the gallery in Paris, I felt that your interest in contemporary art just increased continuously from soon after we arrived here. I remember-

MR. CASTELLI: From when?

MS. SUNDELL: From soon after we arrived. I remember in 1215 Fifth Avenue-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: So that must have been quite early on that you-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah. We had an apartment there on 1215 Fifth Avenue.

MS. SUNDELL: Brought a Kandinsky-a beautiful Kandinsky-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Back from Europe with a sort of a wonderful Prussian blue in it shaped like a cherry pie, that was very splendid and quite different from all the Victorian furniture and Piranesi prints that were in that apartment. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. Well, the furniture was Victorian. [Laughs.] At least it had some character.

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, it was very nice.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: I never really understood how you started bringing those paintings back. I know that you were representing Nina Kandinsky at some time?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, Nina Kandinsky-whom I knew from Paris-well, had some confidence in me and asked me to, well, to take care of Kandinsky's work-which I certainly was not in a position to do. I didn't have a gallery at the time, and, let's say, the only contribution that I could make was the fact that I was involved with contemporary art and therefore could be of some help to her to introduce Kandinsky to, well, to the circles of contemporary art instead of relegating him somewhere as a classic that nobody looked at anymore.

MS. SUNDELL: I know that, especially after we moved to 77th Street, there were a lot of European artists coming to visit us, as well as the appearance of many European paintings on the wall.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. Whom do you remember then?

MS. SUNDELL: I especially remember the Dubuffets.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes, Dubuffet was an artist I was very involved with, first of all because he really was perhaps the most original and important artist in France at that time, and he was handled by the gallery that I was associated with, René Drouin Gallery. So I had a real interest, also-a real stake in his work. So that's certainly one of the artists that I had around, and who was on my walls.

MS. SUNDELL: And I remember that Hans [Jean] Arp came. I don't think you had anything of his, but I remember that he visited.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, I must have had something or other. I remember I had-

MS. SUNDELL: Maybe. A blue thing with a kind of a [watch, rock] shape-

MR. CASTELLI: Arp, yes, was one of the artists that I was interested in. And that reminds me of a friend of those times, Frederick Kiesler, who was an architect and painter, a man of all trades, and who said this word about Arp: "This is Arp, not art." [Laughs.] He always had sort of witty comments of that type, Kiesler. He was very small, very lively, and wanted to be involved in everything that was going on at the time; also with the younger generation. He liked what Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were doing very much, so he wanted always to be young and present. So that was Kiesler.

MR. DECKER: When Arp and Dubuffet came over here, did you introduce them to other artists who were American?

MR. CASTELLI: I had a - yes, let me see. I had some kind of party, but I can't think exactly where, and I introduced him to various artists. Notably, I remember Rauschenberg who was very interested in what Dubuffet was doing. So I can't remember exactly. Perhaps there was no party. Perhaps he just met all these people at the gallery.

MS. SUNDELL: You were very friendly with Matta, I remember.

MR. CASTELLI: At that time-

MS. SUNDELL: At that time, before gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, at that time I was very friendly with Matta, and he was very active, very busy, and always wanted to run the show. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: I remember that you and my mother usually had rather sharp things to say about the Surrealists, but many of them were around, and I remember meeting Max Ernst and [inaudible].

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, Max Ernst was around at that time and we were friends. At least, I saw him pretty often. I had also known him in Paris, and I don't know whether I had shown him in the gallery in Paris, which was of a very short duration, but he was part of my group. And I certainly did see him and [you would] see him when he was in New York. And who else was around? [Roberto] Matta, Max Ernst-

MS. SUNDELL: Bob Motherwell at that time, [inaudible].

MR. CASTELLI: Bob Motherwell was pretty much involved in it.

MS. SUNDELL: [Richard] Huelsenbeck, the Dada?

MR. CASTELLI: What?

MS. SUNDELL: Huelsenbeck-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: The German Dada artist, who wasn't very clever.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, well, he was sort of a bit of a pedantic kind of guy. [Laughs.] Huelsenbeck, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: What I was wondering was, when you started selling things and becoming interested in American galleries, how did that begin?

MR. CASTELLI: How?

MS. SUNDELL: Well, I know that you were doing business with Sidney Janis, I think, before the [inaudible] show, and-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, I was quite involved with Sidney Janis, who actually was not handling the younger generation of painters and was very interested in my involvement with them, so I had lunch with him almost every day and kept him abreast of what was going on among the younger painters, and tried to convince him also, and sometimes succeeded, to show some of them like-I can't remember-Matta-no-

MS. SUNDELL: I remember there was a group show of American artists and European artists-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, there was a [inaudible] Paris-

MS. SUNDELL: Sort of teamed up, which-

MR. CASTELLI: A show that I invented.

MS. SUNDELL: It was mostly Abstract Expressionists-Americans, I think.

MR. CASTELLI: No.

MS. SUNDELL: No?

MR. CASTELLI: I don't think so. Not specifically. There may have been some Abstract Expressionists included. I remember [inaudible].

MS. SUNDELL: No, I don't-

MR. CASTELLI: But Giorgio Cavallon-

MS. SUNDELL: Yes, abstract and not very expressive.

MR. CASTELLI: Not very expressive. But, anyway, I did sort of do quite a number of things with Sidney Janis, who trusted my judgment as far as the younger generation was concerned. He was, naturally, very experienced with the older people. So I did see him, I remember, very often-practically every day to discuss events and developments that were going on at that time.

MR. DECKER: Were there particular artists that he personally-

MR. CASTELLI: What?

MR. DECKER: Were there some particular artists that he was fond of himself?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, he had those old classics like - Picasso was already a bit too far away but also difficult to handle, but he had Arp, I remember. And who else did he have? MS. SUNDELL: I was not very old at the time. I know he had [Andre] Masson.

MR. CASTELLI: But, anyway, quite a number of the younger generation-after Picasso.

MR. DECKER: Among the artists who you were interested in, were there artists that he thought especially interesting?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, whatever I was interested in he sort of followed my advice and we shared our taste. So we did - although it's nothing very specific that I can say about it, I think the fact that we saw each other so very often, and discussed the situation practically every day, was very important at that time for the development of interest in the younger generation of artists.

MS. SUNDELL: Did you meet the museum people early on? Alfred Barr and Dorothy Miller and those people?

MR. CASTELLI: I did know the museum people quite well. Alfred Barr was sort of a bit unapproachable, but in spite of that I did see him. And, well, Dorothy Miller, his chief assistant, was very approachable, and I did see her very often. We discussed events and developments of the time. So it was a - well, it's now forgotten, and perhaps there were no tangible results, but there was a current there, and perhaps the results did come a little later.

MR. DECKER: How many people were interested in art? I mean, if you had-

MR. CASTELLI: A very limited number in contemporary. There were lots of people interested in art at that time, but the museum-Alfred Barr, especially-did a very good job of awakening interest in also the real

contemporaries, so I think that Alfred did a very good job there. He was a great authority, and whatever he said was the gospel. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: There were very few galleries.

MR. CASTELLI: There were few galleries at the time, yes. There was - galleries that I can remember at that time: Betty Parsons, who showed some of the younger generation, especially Pollock. And there was - Betty Parsons. Who else? Julien Levy.

MS. SUNDELL: Julien Levy, Charlie Egan.

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MS. SUNDELL: Egan.

MR. CASTELLI: Charlie Egan was there. He was around-

MS. SUNDELL: He was quite a character

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, he was quite a character.

MS. SUNDELL: Did Johnny Meyers have a gallery then?

MR. CASTELLI: Johnny Meyers had a gallery, too. Johnny Meyers. Didn't he work with Egan?

MS. SUNDELL: No, I don't think so. I mean, maybe he did. I was not aware of it.

MR. CASTELLI: But I was fairly certain he did.

MS. SUNDELL: Well, I was aware of him as a separate gallery. MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: You know, I was not really a precocious kid, so I didn't know everything. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTELLI: These were three or four galleries and some individuals like myself, museum directors, who were very active, and whatever was happening at that time was not generally accepted. We had an uphill fight to get those people recognized.

MR. DECKER: When you opened your gallery, how many people would come in during a day?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, not many. [Laughs.] First of all, the location was not very good. It was not in the center of things, which was 57th Street. It was up on 77th Street. Also, difficult to access because it was on the fourth floor of a building, and a very small elevator took the visitors to the fourth floor where the gallery was. But, you know, the enthusiasts-and there were quite a number of them-did come and I think that you may remember, too, that it was very lively around there.

MS. SUNDELL: I thought that rather a lot of people came. I mean, I think probably it was no more people than come here in the middle of the week in the middle of an exhibition. But the place was so much smaller that it felt very animated, and everybody had friends who would come and hang out a lot. I remember that Ilsa [Goetz]-

MR. CASTELLI: Ilsa Goetz, yes. She was my-

MS. SUNDELL: Who was your first-

MR. CASTELLI: My assistant, my secretary.

MS. SUNDELL: And she had lots of friends.

MR. CASTELLI: She had, I don't know, worked with somebody-some gallery-and so she knew her way around, and she brought in quite a number of people that otherwise wouldn't have come. But very soon, in spite of, let's say, logistical difficulties, there was a great activity going on there.

MS. SUNDELL: I don't remember the first shows, before Johns. I remember the very first show, which had [inaudible].

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, there were some older artists that disappeared. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: Cavallon. It wasn't really very indicative that it was going to be a particularly interesting gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, no-

MS. SUNDELL: I mean, it seemed as though it would be nice and good but not revolutionary.

MR. CASTELLI: No, I think there was already sort of some idea that I would try to and succeed in trying to find good new artists. I think that the gallery right from the beginning acquired that reputation. And so in spite of, as I said, the logistical difficulties people would come to see the shows.

MS. SUNDELL: Was Eleanor Ward up on 74th by then? The Stable [The Stable Gallery]?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, she was. Shortly thereafter, yes. Eleanor Ward was one of the real interesting dealers of that time, had a gallery, I don't know, around 59th Street-

MS. SUNDELL: No, I think it was further up. Well, that's easy to find out.

MR. CASTELLI: I don't know. Anyway, it was called The Stable because it was in an ancient stable. If you went in there, there was still the smell of horses. And then she moved out to another location. And she, you must remember, was very, very active-one of the real pioneers, superior.

MR. DECKER: Who did she exhibit?

MS. SUNDELL: Well, she had a sort of infamous Rauschenberg show. I mean, infamous because she didn't treat him well. She had a show of the White paintings.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, she tried to show all the younger upstarts, yes. She felt that that was her mission. Sometimes her choices were not perfect but, anyway, she was the one who did it. Nobody else.

MR. DECKER: And that was after you had opened the gallery? Or before?

MR. CASTELLI: After what?

MR. DECKER: That you had opened your gallery?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah. Well, before I opened my gallery she was, I think, the only one who really-

MS. SUNDELL: I think she was the only one who was doing really crazy things.

MR. CASTELLI: Who was interested-yes. And then I opened the gallery. My gallery, again, was logistically sort of difficult access but still known to a small group of people who faithfully attended my openings and came frequently to talk to me about things, about developments. Yes, those were really heroic times. One can't even quite imagine how little that's now normal went on at the time.

MR. DECKER: Did artists like de Kooning-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: Or [Barnett] Newman come to your exhibitions?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes. We were very good friends, and they showed in different galleries because they started out before I opened my gallery. Actually, I did advise them-since I didn't have a gallery-to choose this or that gallery that seemed to me the best for them. Like, for instance, de Kooning was at a gallery that he didn't particularly care for, so I recommended him to Janis [Sidney Janis Gallery]. At that time Janis said, "Well, yes, I do appreciate his work. It's indeed very good, but then I'm quite sure I'd have difficulties with the man." So I said, "Well, perhaps those difficulties were worth the while submitting to, because he was about the most important artist around." So he did take him on and then it turned out that he was not difficult at all and everything went very well.

MR. DECKER: How did you come to know de Kooning? Just from-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, Nina will perhaps be able to tell you better how-

MS. SUNDELL: I think we were friendly with Motherwell first.

MR. CASTELLI: [Inaudible] I think that the important thing there was the fact that we had that house in East

Hampton.

MS. SUNDELL: Well, you must have been friendly with him beforehand, because I don't think my mother would have invited someone that you didn't know at all to come spend the summer.

MR. CASTELLI: I was very interested in what was going on and, of course, went to see these various artists like de Kooning in their studios. Then we became friends and they-for instance, de Kooning did spend something like two summers at the house that I had with Ileana Sonnabend in East Hampton. So we got to know him really well, not only as an artist but as a human being, which is a very-and you got to know him very well.

MS. SUNDELL: The way I remember the East Hampton connection was that you were very friendly with Pierre Charon, the French architect-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, and he-

MS. SUNDELL: And Pierre Charon was very friendly with Motherwell-

MR. CASTELLI: With Motherwell, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And he was the architect of Motherwell's house in East Hampton.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: And he had a little house that he made for himself.

MR. CASTELLI: Just across the street from ours.

MS. SUNDELL: Well, I thought we got the house in East Hampton because we already knew those people who were in East Hampton. You know, I think it was because you enjoyed being with Charon and Motherwell, and other people-Pollock-was there--

MR. CASTELLI: Charon, by the way, perhaps you don't know who he was. He was a French architect, wasn't he?

MS. SUNDELL: He was an architect. There was a pretty good article in *The New Yorker* about him a couple of years ago.

MR. CASTELLI: Quite wonderful.

MS. SUNDELL: He was a wonderful character.

MR. CASTELLI: Apart from the fact that he was a pioneer in contemporary architecture, he was a wonderful man and a very good friend of ours and he spent, well, months with us in East Hampton, especially. So we got to know him very well. So that was a little center where people of all kinds did meet.

MS. SUNDELL: And you were going to the Club, of course, which must have started before East Hampton.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah. Apart from East Hampton, there was the thing that we called The Club-the 9th Street Club-a space that I rented for, I don't know, a very small sum, on the fourth floor or fifth floor of the building.

MS. SUNDELL: Did you actually have the lease for that?

MR. CASTELLI: What?

MS. SUNDELL: Was it you who rented that space?

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Over the Cedar Bar? I never knew that.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: I knew you were involved but I didn't realize that you were-

MR. CASTELLI: That was basically-it cost something like-which was a considerable sum, some two hundred dollars a month. And there I, well, I had shows of these young new artists, and people did gather to discuss the trends of the moment.

MS. SUNDELL: They had these very wild round-table discussions where everybody would get very passionate.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, it was a-yeah, I had almost forgotten it. It was a wonderful time. Now everything seems so sedate by comparison.

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, I think it is.

MR. CASTELLI: You think it is?

MS. SUNDELL: Sedate by comparison. Or at least what's not sedate is much less upfront than it used to be. They were very expressive. They were Expressionist.

MR. CASTELLI: Tell him about those early heroic days. What comes to mind?

MS. SUNDELL: Anything else come to mind? You see, there are so many things that I don't know, like I didn't know that you rented The Club.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I paid for it.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes, well, you paid for it.

MR. CASTELLI: You know, I don't know what was done practically, but I had to pay for it because nobody had a dollar. Remember that ten dollars for de Kooning was a big sum of money at that time.

MR. DECKER: Were there other artists working who were not involved in The Club in New York?

MR. CASTELLI: Other artists? Well, there was a whole group of artists around de Kooning. De Kooning was a sort of a leader then. Wasn't he? Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: Definitely. But then the intellectual leader, really, was Barney Newman.

MS. SUNDELL: And Ad Reinhardt, too.

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MS. SUNDELL: Ad Reinhardt, wasn't he?

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MS. SUNDELL: Reinhardt. The Black Paintings. Ad Reinhardt?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, Ad Reinhardt, yes. But he was a bit too rigid, so the real leaders were de Kooning, and in spite of the fact that Barney Newman was very precise he was somebody that had some-great deal of [inaudible], and so everybody followed him, listened to his advice. Who else was there?

MS. SUNDELL: Hal Rosenberg was there a lot?

MR. CASTELLI: Harold Rosenberg was a great influence. Harold Rosenberg, the critic who wrote for *ArtNews* at the time and-what else did he do?

MS. SUNDELL: I don't really remember.

MR. CASTELLI: He didn't do much writing, but he was around and a great influence. He talked a great deal, and his ideas were all very fresh, and he put things into perspective, things that were a little bit sort of vague. He understood what they were about, how one thing connected with the next. He was a real influence, Harold Rosenberg.

MS. SUNDELL: And [Nicolas] Calas, wasn't he-

MR. CASTELLI: Niko Calas was an influence, too, but Niko didn't understand American artists as well as Harold Rosenberg did. He was more, you know, European-oriented.

MR. DECKER: So aside from those people were there other artists who were significant or considered-like I can't imagine that Thomas Hart Benton ever came to The Club.

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MR. DECKER: Thomas Hart Benton.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, no, no, no. That's a different kind of world. They were not part of the world that we lived in. But there was some-

MS. SUNDELL: Well, that was-

MR. CASTELLI: Some connection with some other spheres, but I don't remember who they would be.

MS. SUNDELL: I don't remember. I think you had absolutely no use for any of the Socialist Realism [Social Realism] in there.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, Nick had a thing, of course-

MS. SUNDELL: I think he really hated it.

MR. CASTELLI: That kind of thing was sort of sinister.

MS. SUNDELL: So it was almost as if it just didn't exist or it was by wallpaper designers or some other thing completely. Magazine illustrators. Of course, that's quite unfair, and I think they had a fairly lively art life of their own, but we were not-

MR. CASTELLI: Who can you think of that group?

MS. SUNDELL: Well, I particularly think that you hated Ben Shahn.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I'm reasonable. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: He was a part of-he had a sort of a center of his own admirers and people who tried to paint like him, most of whom, of course, I don't remember because I didn't think they were particularly interesting either. But there was somebody who was a crossover person and that was Philip Guston-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Who had been a sort of a-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, he was a-

MS. SUNDELL: A WPA [Works Progress Administration] realist. Not really a realist but representational abstract painter.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, he was very much part of the de Kooning group, but perhaps with a foot in the other camp.

MS. SUNDELL: If we had been interested in the other camp, he could have told us more about it. We could have found out from Philip if we had any interest in finding out anything about those who were not part of The Club. And there was-I'm sorry, I will take a pause while I remember what I was going to say, because there were other people who were part of The Club that we haven't mentioned but who seemed to be-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, who would they be? We mentioned [Cavallon], who was not a very important painter but influential otherwise-

MS. SUNDELL: He was a good painter.

MR. CASTELLI: And he was with the group, too.

MS. SUNDELL: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. CASTELLI: And who else was there? Everybody of that pioneering generation was part of that club, and it was very lively. We met there, and then just downstairs, across the street practically, was the Cedar Bar, where you would always find Franz Kline drinking beer. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: That's who we forgot to say. Franz Kline.

MR. CASTELLI: He also came up, but then he was mostly interested in having his beer so he would go down and drink beer at the Cedar Bar, which I think still exists.

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, yes, it's really quite awful.

MR. CASTELLI: Not as it was at the time, but there's a bar called Cedar Bar in the same location on University-is it University Place, yes?

MS. SUNDELL: It's University Place, yes. And it's a misery. [Laughs.]

MR. DECKER: How many women were involved?

MR. CASTELLI: How many?

MR. DECKER: Women?

MR. CASTELLI: Women? There were a number of women around, but let's try to remember who they were. Really there were all those hangers-on, of course, various girlfriends of-

MS. SUNDELL: Of the Ruth Kligman. [Laughs.] There was Buffy. Did Buffy Johnson participate?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, she was around, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And did Grace Hartigan?

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MS. SUNDELL: Grace Hartigan. She was younger.

MR. CASTELLI: Grace Hartigan, yes, was a part of the scheme, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Was Larry Rivers? Were Larry Rivers and Frank O'Hara and all those people?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: Did they come to The Club, too? They were a real generation younger.

MR. CASTELLI: They came, too, later on. They were the younger generation, but they also joined later on.

MS. SUNDELL: Were there people like Louise Nevelson, for instance, who-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, Louise Nevelson was sympathetic, but I don't think of her as having been very involved with us. She was a bit remote.

MR. DECKER: What about Lee Krasner?

MR. CASTELLI: Who?

MR. DECKER: Lee Krasner.

MR. CASTELLI: Lee Krasner was very much involved because of Pollock, and Pollock really was one of the great promoters there, in his fashion.

MR. DECKER: How would you characterize his fashion?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, very boisterous as he was. [Laughs.] But he could also-I don't know whether you remember that-be very sweet.

MS. SUNDELL: He really could. MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, he could be very good, very friendly, full of understanding for problems of other people, and he was not just-

MS. SUNDELL: Well, he'd get very angry and insult people, but he always insulted people for an attribute that they didn't have. [Laughs.] He would make anti-Semitic remarks to homosexuals and always anti-homosexual remarks to Jews, and, in general, whatever it was, it was just an expression of hostility, but he seemed to have a real instinct for not really saying dreadful things. The only really dreadful things, I think, were about people being bad artists which-

MR. CASTELLI: Really bad artists.

MS. SUNDELL: [Laughs.] Really bad artists. Must have been very painful. There were so many really-

MR. CASTELLI: All in all, he could be surprisingly sweet and full of understanding-something that nobody would believe. But you experienced his-

MS. SUNDELL: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: Kindness and his sweetness.

MS. SUNDELL: A little. I generally was rather scared of him.

MR. DECKER: So these are all people who you didn't really work with so much?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, I didn't really have a gallery, so I was in the sense that I tried to get them into good galleries, recommend them to other dealers who had galleries, since at that time I didn't feel like opening one of my own, but just act as an intermediary. But I certainly tried to help.

MR. DECKER: So what was it that convinced you to open your own gallery?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, it was a little bit-well, it seemed to me that I had not enough practical experience-you know, real practical nuts and bolts experience to run a gallery, and also there was very little money around at that time, and it seemed to me that a gallery would be a costly affair-the rent and all that. So perhaps I hesitated much too long before opening one. But I finally did.

MS. SUNDELL: It would have been a different gallery, a complete parallel reality, if you had opened your gallery and all the abstract artists who were involved at The Club had been in your gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, it would have been very different.

MS. SUNDELL: Unthinkable.

MR. CASTELLI: Actually, my gallery became the gallery of the new generation. A lot of my friends with whom I had sort of shared all those years, they said [that they] actually expected me to really do something for them, but then to their great surprise I chose younger people.

MR. DECKER: How did you support yourself before your gallery?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, my family-or the family of my wife, Ileana-was a wealthy family, and so there was always some money for her available. And I myself, well, tried to sell paintings, you know, in the secondary market. Tried to sell them for-do that kind of business.

MR. DECKER: So did the paintings that you sold on the secondary market, were they mostly European?

MR. CASTELLI: There were Europeans, yes, to whom I had really more access and whom I knew more about than my colleagues here in New York. But also Americans, especially, as we have been saying all along, people like de Kooning and Newman and that group.

MS. SUNDELL: We had in our apartment wonderful paintings. Two wonderful paintings by Léger, and two wonderful paintings by Paul Klee, and a wonderful, wonderful Miró, and an extraordinary Mondrian, a nice Picabia, and they all slowly disappeared.

MR. CASTELLI: They all went, all bought to-

MS. SUNDELL: And then you were buying Pollock and things like that, with, you know-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, well, I had all these-

MS. SUNDELL: And then the Pollocks disappeared and they were replaced by people who were in the gallery like Rauschenberg and Johns at the beginning. So it was kind of a great evolution not only of perhaps of taste but also kind of recycling of how he made good choices, so that you could make other good choices on the proceeds.

MR. CASTELLI: So, anyway, there was a transition from European artists-good ones that I was involved with-and then the Americans, after a while, and all the Europeans, little by little, disappeared. So that was the story, roughly.

MR. DECKER: And then you opened your gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: And then I opened my gallery. First, I mean-I must have had a gallery on the fourth floor.

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, downstairs there are a lot of the best things. Don't you remember? You opened the gallery as soon as I went to college, because then you could use my bedroom as an office.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes. You vacated-she vacated her bedroom.

MS. SUNDELL: And they moved to a much smaller apartment, so that when that when I left I had a place, and when I came back there was a gallery, which I must say, was much more exciting.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, just to think that, really, the first gallery was her bedroom, so that's-

MS. SUNDELL: [Laughs.] And then you moved downstairs for a long time.

MR. CASTELLI: Then I moved downstairs, and the space downstairs was and is a very good space with high ceilings and well-proportioned. And that's a gallery that I wouldn't mind having today.

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, yeah, it would be great to have that. And then you didn't move down to Broadway-to West Broadway-for many years.

MR. CASTELLI: For quite a long time, yes.

MR. DECKER: That must have been in the mid-seventies that you-

MS. SUNDELL: Early seventies.

MR. DECKER: Early?

MS. SUNDELL: 1972?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, those things happen. You're not planning them. When the right moment seems to appear then you do it. But it's not that I did plan, "Well, I'll do that and next I'm going to do that." It just happened in a rather casual way. And now, here we are.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes.

MR. DECKER: So all those exhibitions during the sixties were up on 77th Street.

MR. CASTELLI: Many, many-multiple exhibitions were there, yes. And that's a very beautiful space.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes, that was a beautiful gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: And yet, maybe it was too small.

MR. CASTELLI: And it what?

MS. SUNDELL: In the end, maybe it was not quite big enough, when people started making such big work.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, we always showed just a few. There was enough space for one or, let's say, three large paintings. But, of course, it doesn't look like enough. You need sort of a supporting space, and there was not enough of that there.

MR. DECKER: I'm wondering if we should continue now or another time. What are your schedules like?

MR. CASTELLI: Well-

MS. SUNDELL: Want to stop?

MR. CASTELLI: Let's see. It's a quarter of five. I don't know. What else can I tell you? I'll be happy to go on talking if you wish.

MR. DECKER: Okay. How are you? [Addressing Nina.]

MS. SUNDELL: Oh, I'm fine.

[Tape 2, Side A.]

MR. CASTELLI: Well, let me see, what happened, really, why we sort of felt that the spaces uptown were not sufficient. To begin with, I never considered the 77th Street location as a very good one, because at that time 57th Street was really the center. And then, little by little, Soho opened up, I didn't choose to go to 57th Street, but moved to that new area, which seemed more interesting and more promising and also, well, cheaper. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: People are under the general impression that you opened up Soho, but I thought at that time that Soho was really much livelier even though a lot of it was not very commercial, but, as well as Paula [Cooper], there was the Green Gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, that was-

MS. SUNDELL: The Green Gallery, that was Richard Bellamy, wasn't it?

MR. CASTELLI: Richard Bellamy was on 57th Street, I think.

MS. SUNDELL: No, I think that was the gallery that was downtown already.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes?

MS. SUNDELL: Not quite as far down as Soho. Well, maybe I don't remember right. I expect it must have been more about finding it stuffy as well as physically constraining uptown, and wanting to move downtown. By then lots of artists lived downtown.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: And, of course, it was cheaper. It was cheap, an incredibly good time to get real estate down here.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, those things do happen in sort of a natural way. It's not that we were planning Soho. Soho just happened little by little. And now, perhaps, it will have filled its mission and we are going to move somewhere else. Although moving to Chelsea, what is it, 22nd?

MS. SUNDELL: Chelsea. That seems quite out of the way.

MR. CASTELLI: 22nd Street doesn't seem to be the right new location, so we are going to stick to Soho for a while longer.

MR. DECKER: Had your artists talked to you about moving down to Soho?

MR. CASTELLI: Had they what?

MR. DECKER: Had your artists talked to you about moving down to Soho? About finding a place where they could show more canvases?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, most of them, I think, liked the idea of Soho, yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Wait a minute. You had the [Leo] Castelli Warehouse, which was on 125th Street, I'm remembering.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And I remember that you had a terrific show there.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, well, I had a warehouse space.

MS. SUNDELL: You had several shows there, and I think Dorothy Lichtenstein was overseeing that.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: And those shows were so incredible.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, they were. The space was just wonderful. It was a storage space, but I developed it into a good exhibition space and, had it been around here or in a better location, it probably would have become the main gallery, but then it seems that that location was just impossible.

MS. SUNDELL: As I remember it, they were doing completely impossible work, as people did in the late sixties and early seventies, that you couldn't possibly do in a gallery with a parquet floor. You remember that Richard Serra did that "Splash" lead piece [1969]-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: That was splashing lead on the intersection of the wall and floor. There were other things that were very big and very messy, very-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, but here we have a very genteel parquet floor. [Laughter.]

MS. SUNDELL: That's true. But I think that you opened downtown after you had had two or three shows on 125th

Street that the artists were very happy with, especially as your newer artists were not Pop artists any longer but more Minimalists and Anti-Form, they now call them.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: I think when you added those artists to the gallery that it became more fun to have a really big space where they could do grandiose projects.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, you know, things develop in that way according to the various circumstances and the plan, of course. Also, the demands of the artists for a space that's-they do need. If you can't give it to them, then they move to galleries that have that space. So that's how it is.

MS. SUNDELL: Do you remember-well, it's probably certainly documented, but I don't remember what show you opened with here at 420.

MR. CASTELLI: I don't-well, it's easy to find out, of course. Just have to go-

MS. SUNDELL: I thought you might have all kinds of wonderful memories attached to it, which I don't have because I think I wasn't-I think I was in France when it opened, or something.

MR. CASTELLI: You were where?

MS. SUNDELL: I think I was in Paris.

MR. CASTELLI: I don't know. Maybe in college, or in Paris. I don't know.

MS. SUNDELL: I was in Paris. So-

MR. CASTELLI: Anyway now, well, things developed from there, and then things also, well, disappear. Now, for instance, something that will have an important impact is the fact that Roy Lichtenstein died, and therefore he won't be able to continue new paintings, new ideas. But-

MR. DECKER: Now he was very active until very recently.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. Well, definitely he did-

MS. SUNDELL: I think until the day they took him to hospital. From what I hear he was just painting every day.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, he was very productive and full of fresh ideas all the time. But there are others, too, of course. He was not by far the only one. So the gallery will go on after adjusting to this loss, which is, of course, a very severe one. The gallery, after all, is not just a place where you hang paintings. It's a living organism, you know.

MR. DECKER: Well, that is something that you talked about in the earlier interview, that-

MR. CASTELLI: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MR. DECKER: In your earlier interview, 27 years ago-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MR. DECKER: You talked about a gallery being a living organism-

MR. CASTELLI: Did I?

MR. DECKER: And how there were some people who were in the gallery, but you could see, almost from the beginning, that they wouldn't stay in the gallery because of how they related to other people.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes. It's a complex thing as to how-it's not just that you show one artist, that each artist is an isolated phenomenon. They have to interact in some way. You can't suddenly show artists that don't relate at all to the others. So that whole thing is adjustments. Now that Roy died, there'll be adjustments to be made. MR. DECKER: In the '70's, did Bruce Nauman come in to work within the gallery comfortably?

MR. CASTELLI: To? What?

MR. DECKER: When you first started working with Bruce Nauman?

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, Bruce Nauman fitted in right away. Yeah, he was a natural.

MS. SUNDELL: The first show was uptown, the first show of Bruce's.

MR. CASTELLI: Was it? Do you remember what I showed?

MS. SUNDELL: All the best stuff. [Laughs.]

MR. CASTELLI: All the best stuff?

MS. SUNDELL: You know, Henry Moore, *Bound to Fail* [1967], and-

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes. Some great things-

MS. SUNDELL: All those beautiful wax pieces, and casts. *From Hand to Mouth* [1967] was in that show. And some rather mysterious wax things that were casts of his leg extended over space. No, I remember feeling that was such a wonderful show.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, that was really-

MS. SUNDELL: I really walked into that show and felt, "Ah, now the world was changed." It was so completely not like anything else.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And yet so accomplished and so-

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah. Certainly is a great artist.

MR. DECKER: Well, what made it so easy for him to fit in?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, because, actually, the key figure in my gallery is somebody that I never showed and that died, well, soon after I opened the gallery. That was [Marcel] Duchamp. He was the great influence on all the younger-on all the painters, all the [inaudible]. Painters who are not influenced by Duchamp just don't belong here. [Laughs.]

MR. DECKER: Right.

MR. CASTELLI: So that he is the godfather. And probably all the painters will tell you that he is the godfather.

MR. DECKER: So was he an important centerpiece of conversation at different times?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, there's not much to say about Duchamp, because he was there monumentally, and one just didn't have to talk about him. His presence was so great that we didn't talk about him.

MR. DECKER: Who else fit in very comfortably into the gallery after Bruce Nauman?

MR. CASTELLI: Who else?

MS. SUNDELL: After Bruce. Who came to the gallery after Bruce?

MR. CASTELLI: Who did? Can you think of the-

MR. DECKER: Who fit in very easily?

MS. SUNDELL: That everybody liked. I don't know. I should have my chronology with me, because I'm not sure who came before and after.

MR. CASTELLI: Bruce was really the last one, I think.

MS. SUNDELL: Bruce-didn't Keith Sonnier come after?

MR. CASTELLI: No.

MS. SUNDELL: No? Okay, that's right. Well, he was in the warehouse shows.

MR. CASTELLI: Keith Sonnier. There's Bob Morris, but Bruce is really the last one that came in importantly.

MS. SUNDELL: Well, but yet you had a whole-

MR. CASTELLI: Well, there are the Starn twins [Douglas and Michael], who are-

MS. SUNDELL: You know, you skip over a whole ten-year period in the gallery when you were showing boring Conceptual artists. And I think that for younger people like people Margaret's age-my daughter's age-that artists like Joseph Kosuth-

MR. CASTELLI: Like who?

MS. SUNDELL: Joseph Kosuth.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: That Joseph was tremendously influential and important.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And he certainly came after Bruce.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: Then you had Lawrence Weiner, and, oh, somebody whose work I never really connected with who just died recently. But you had a certain number of conceptual artists; Hanna Darboven. And I think that, showing all that, this gallery was historically important and it did fit in, in a way. As you say, they were all people who admired Duchamp, and I think that everybody tends to underrate that phase of the gallery.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: It wasn't flashy but it was-

MR. DECKER: Did those artists have much to do with people like Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein socially?

MR. CASTELLI: Not very much, no. Some of them they liked more than others, but I think they all liked Nauman.

MS. SUNDELL: Yes.

MR. CASTELLI: But others they never got much closer to.

MS. SUNDELL: Were they friendly with people like Judd and Flavin, who also showed at the gallery for some time?

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah.

MS. SUNDELL: Did Jasper and-

MR. CASTELLI: No, there was not much of a relationship between Judd, Flavin, and Jasper Johns, and Rauschenberg.

MS. SUNDELL: Of course, Johns didn't have much of a - very close relationships with many artists after his first friends.

MR. CASTELLI: Which?

MS. SUNDELL: Jasper. His friendships were more in other fields, like dance and music and literature.

MR. CASTELLI: Oh, yes. I think that-let's see. Does he like any other painters particularly?

MS. SUNDELL: I haven't had a conversation with him about that for years.

MR. CASTELLI: He certainly does-

MS. SUNDELL: But he's nice with people. I think Gary Steffan was his assistant, and he had nice words to say about Gary.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, but Gary remains sort of a secondary figure.

MR. CASTELLI: I think that, generally speaking, the important artists never will pick an artist that's their equal. [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: Unless they knew them when they were very young.

MR. DECKER: Did you feel that you were running a business from the beginning?

MR. CASTELLI: Did I what?

MR. DECKER: Did you feel that you were running a business?

MR. CASTELLI: Frankly, not. No. I was running a gallery, and financial considerations played a secondary role. They were a necessary evil. The gallery had to be supported somehow. So money was needed, but it was never a consideration. I never considered the gallery as a business.

MS. SUNDELL: [Leo] is the most completely optimistic person I ever met. You were always convinced that if you did the right thing, which sometimes was quite expensive, that if you did it right, something would turn up. And, in your case, unlike in the case of most other people, something always did turn up.

MR. CASTELLI: For 40 years now, something always turned up. And, obviously, a gallery like mine with artists of such magnitude probably should have been financially a better kind of enterprise. But since I didn't really care very much about the financial aspects of my activity, it didn't become the wealthy gallery that some other galleries [inaudible] with lesser artists-

MS. SUNDELL: Well, you wanted to make a gallery. You weren't in it to make money. You were in it to make a gallery, and you did.

MR. CASTELLI: Yeah, the money. I did want to make money. I suppose most people in the art world-good galleries are not there to make money, but still they probably had a greater interest in it than I had.

MS. SUNDELL: I never heard anything about money until the eighties. I mean, if people-certainly there were serious galleries to whom it was very important to make money, but they didn't talk about that.

MR. CASTELLI: No, you didn't talk about that.

MS. SUNDELL: It just wasn't what people talked about, because it wasn't that kind of business.

MR. CASTELLI: The fact is that, obviously, money is essential, because you have to support the artist, and as they develop and become important they expect more and more. So it's certainly an aspect of my activity that I cannot neglect. But it's not the main thing.

MR. DECKER: There were a lot of very high prices in the 1980s.

MR. CASTELLI: High prices?

MR. DECKER: Yeah. Things started selling for a great deal of money.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, very high prices came really much later, when artists like Johns or Rauschenberg and others became important figures in the sales. Their prices-high prices-were established, and then people became accustomed to the fact that you couldn't have a painting by Jasper Johns for \$1,200 anymore. [Laughs.]

MR. DECKER: Did that make any sense to you? Or was that kind of a strange thing-to see paintings that you had known and lived with for many years suddenly become these objects of desire for a lot of people you didn't know or had never heard of?

MR. CASTELLI: No. I really was never surprised. For me they were, right from the beginning, obvious desire for a smaller group. And then, of course, with what the auctions and other events-museum shows and so on-well, the money aspect became increasingly important. So that developed very slowly and gradually, so that I never suddenly woke up one morning and said to myself, "What the hell's going on here?" [Laughs.]

MS. SUNDELL: I think he had something like a kind of point system where an artist would score a point by having a one-man show or being in a very prestigious group show, and they would also score a point by selling a painting for more money than they had ever sold a painting for. And that you seemed almost to regard it as a matter of prestige-

MR. CASTELLI: Yes.

MS. SUNDELL: And instead of sitting there and saying, "Why did I sell all things for a thousand two hundred dollars?" you were just delighted that they were reaching a level where everybody understood, as you had always understood, that these artists were close to priceless.

MR. CASTELLI: Well, that's so, really, yes. So it goes on.

MR. DECKER: I remember going to Christie's one night in 1988 when *White Flag* [Jasper Johns, 1955] was up for

auction from the Tremaine collection, and thinking, "This is a divine painting. It's quite remarkable," and being quite surprised to see it sell for six and a half or seven million dollars. And then the next night going to Sotheby's and seeing *False Start* [Jasper Johns, 1959] sell for \$17 million.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, that was the highest price ever.

MR. DECKER: Yes, but that was like such a huge leap.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes, it was a huge leap. But it was a little bit of a freak, I would say. Yes. It was a sudden jump and the fantastic figure never occurred again. Generally speaking, increases like that happen gradually. But the 17 million was a surprise, yes. [Laughs.]

MR. DECKER: Do you think that there is a connection between the beauty or importance of an object, and what people are willing to pay for it?

MR. CASTELLI: What do you mean exactly?

MR. DECKER: Well, do people who have money recognize quality?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, some. Very few obviously, not something that is generally the case, but there are a few people who are really good collectors and connoisseurs who have the money to satisfy their tastes. But very few. Most people who have money don't have the taste. [Laughs.] Or to a limited degree, anyway.

MR. DECKER: Or people who have taste don't have money.

MR. CASTELLI: Yes. Of those there are many more.

MR. DECKER: Yes. So will you have an exhibition remembering Roy Lichtenstein?

MR. CASTELLI: Well, it's a little bit too soon to see what kind of memorial show I'm going to put together. But I will, yes. I want to do that. Perhaps soon. You have to do it very properly, sort of show his most important works. The development of his art through the years, that would be one way of doing it. Or then showing the last painting. I don't know yet what we can do about this. But I certainly want to commemorate his long companionship.

MR. DECKER: Would it be okay if we ended for the moment?

MR. CASTELLI: If what?

MR. DECKER: Would it be okay if we stopped here for the moment?

MR. CASTELLI: It's [inaudible] for the moment, and then we're always happy to go on talking.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]