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Oral history interview with Helen Lundeberg, 1980 July 19-Aug. 29

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Helen Lundeberg on July 19 and August 29, 1980. The interview was conducted at Helen Lundeberg's studio by Jan Butterfield for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We were talking about women at the Eleventh International Sculpture Conference in Washington. Some of the strongest pieces in that show were by women; Alice Aycock, Mary Meiss, Nancy Graves. A lot more women are taking permission to be serious artists in a way that they had not before. At the same time gallery dealers are not as concerned as they were at one time. Very often they would look at strong work and say, “Oh well, she’s just a woman, she’s going to get married,” or, “I don’t want to handle a woman.”

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That’s what needs to happen, [gallery dealers to not be as concerned about whether the artist is a woman.]

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I’m sure in the beginning days that must have been a very serious part of—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It never occurred to me that I couldn’t be an artist if I wanted to be.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Isn’t that interesting.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Two things I remember reading before I went to art school which interested me. They were biographies in the *Saturday Evening Post* of two women, Janet Scudder, who worked with MacMonnies. She did commissions on her own, and she was featured in a full-length article. I’m not sure, but what it went on to more than one number of the magazine. Then, because at that time I didn’t know art from illustration, there was an article about Neysa McMein. She was a very successful and well thought of illustrator. These articles go back to the twenties.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Isn’t that interesting to see what they have done.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Nobody told me that a woman couldn’t be an artist. I took it for granted.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Were there painters in your family?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not really. My father, when he was about twenty, took some painting lessons and produced a couple of little paintings, one of which always hung over our piano at home. It was well done. It must have been a copy of some painting of the period.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That would make sense. Your mother didn’t paint, and you didn’t have a female member of the family that painted?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: How early in your own life did you decide that was something you wanted to do?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Both my sister and I made drawings and stuff when we were kids as all children do. I never got over liking to draw. I took a couple of high school art courses which weren’t very satisfactory or exciting. I kept fiddling around with things, making little drawings. I even made some soap sculptures.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I remember those.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I never entered a competition, but I got into carving.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We used to make them out of Ivory Soap.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, I did other silly things.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you take any other art courses when you were in high school, on Saturdays, or was there anybody around that—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No. Well, I had one teacher in high school who was encouraging, and after we got through rendering the cubes and the spheres and so forth, we were allowed to draw fruits and flowers and things of that

kind.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you draw plaster casts?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, this was in high school. We drew from—maybe they were plaster, or wood, geometric solid shapes.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Everybody had to do that. I guess it's all right, it's certainly about seeing and understanding volume in space.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was all right. I even sent for one or two catalogs of art schools. But they were too far away so nothing came of that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Where were you born?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In Chicago.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: And how old were you when you came out here?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Four and a half.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Oh, very young. So you're pretty much a Californian born and bred.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm a Californian. I don't have any Chicago roots.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Your family lived in Pasadena from the time you were about four? When you were through with high school, what was your inclination in relation to your art?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I went to junior college as an English major. I was more involved with the idea of literature, writing. Being a painter sounded like something only remotely possible, for various practical reasons. And there wasn't any tradition in the family. But everyone can read and everyone can write. I belonged to a little creative writing group when I was in junior college, and had a few little things published in their little yearly book.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There are some very interesting things to think about in relation to all of that. Because I have taught for a long time in an art school. I obviously agonized over the whole attitude of art education. I mean, philosophically, how do you educate an artist, and can you, even? There are days when I'm deeply committed to the attitude of a hard art school like the San Francisco Art Institute, or like the Chicago Art Institute. And there are other times when I think it's not nearly enough. That all of that richness and joy of literature, and understanding history and curiosity about the world around you, they are part of the life of any serious artist, who don't read or who are not involved with humanities in some fashion. So in some ways I think maybe you were quite fortunate to have that dual...

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't think that I was missing anything at that point. I enjoyed my zoology class.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's interesting. I can see where that might be—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You can see? I also took an astronomy course. I could take these things as electives. When I finished the zoology course, my teacher said, "You could go into biological research, you know." She said, "You have that—" I was always the last one out of the lab, and I enjoyed doing my notebook.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You drew well.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Even in beginning college zoology I enjoyed the dissections and making drawings of what I saw.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Oh, you probably loved doing those plates. I loved my biology classes. They have essentially nothing to do with what I do. I can't draw, and I used to go through just the agony of hell because I so cared about those classes. I simply don't have the hand-eye coordination. I would do these terribly labored, just pitifully labored plates. I've had such a respect ever since for medical illustrators.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: About that time I had read a story about a woman who had gone on some scientific expedition into, I think, the South Pacific, in the area of Java. She was the scientific illustrator for this expedition. Her job was to draw and do in watercolor these marvelous creatures which they drew up from the sea before they could lose their color.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's extraordinary.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: When they're brought up to the surface—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —the oxygen changes them.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I thought that would be an interesting career.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Oh, I guess. All of those wonderful watercolors which were part of the push westward. Every single major expedition that pushed from the middle of the country out to the West sent major watercolorists along with the explorers to document all that. What a fascinating thing that was. Too bad that artists don't have —there've been some things, that wonderful bicentennial show that was done, sending artists to all parts of the country. Earlier in the sixties, sending Rauschenberg to Cape Canaveral with the moon shot. It would be nice to see more of that. There's no reason the artist's vision can't be extended that way. We haven't thought of it very much. I would love to see some more forays. Because I really thought a lot of the works in that bicentennial show were very interesting. Some were not. The artists had the option to go wherever they wanted to go. It didn't always work that way. But if one chose, for example, Joseph Raphael, with all those incredible water paintings, had always wanted to spend real time in Hawaii. The most extraordinary painting he's done to date is the one he did as a result of that trip. Incredible opulent jungle, rich. He loved that. Bill Allen from the Bay Area, who had been doing those water and sky with a much purer, softer – always wanted to go to Alaska. He had fantasies since he was a kid that he would be dropped in the middle of nowhere, and he convinced them to do that. Vija Celmins went to Alaska too. It would be interesting to see more of that happen, where the artist has the opportunity to do what he or she might not—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Sometimes it's stimulating to be asked to do something you would never think of doing otherwise.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's a matter of plucking you out of your own sphere of vision. It's refreshing to have to deal with it in another way. When did you first take serious art classes?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In 1930. I was finished with junior college. I had my certificate. I was all ready to go on. Those were difficult times.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Oh my, yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I couldn't afford to go away somewhere to college, like Stanford University or U.C. Berkeley. I could have gone to U.C.L.A. but it was too close to think of living there, and yet too far to go. While I was sort of in limbo as it were, a friend of the family who thought my little drawings were wonderful said, "Why don't you send her to the local art school? I'll give her a scholarship." That was how I went to Stickney. Physically it was located where Lincoln Avenue branched off from Fair Oaks. A few blocks above Colorado Street, in Pasadena. There's a triangular area there. The building is gone now, but it looked like a "Shakespearean clubhouse." It was a wonderful old building, covered with ivy. There was a big fireplace in the main painting studio. I'll never forget that mingled smell of the fireplace and turpentine. In the morning this wonderful fragrance greeted you. The building is gone now. The school was a small school. It was privately funded. I've forgotten how.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Had it been there some time?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I suppose it was given to the city by someone named Stickney as a memorial. It was called the Stickney Memorial School of Art. It was meant to serve cultural purposes for the city.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Was it strictly a studio school, or were there other activities, such as theatrical presentations?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not during the time I was there, which was about three years.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I think about art schools today, at least in terms of the schools that I'm familiar with. We tend to ask students to make a decision fairly quickly. What is it you want to do? Do you want to be a printmaker, do you want to be a photographer, do you want to be a painter, do you want to be a sculptor?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: This was a very small and informal art school.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: When really what they should say is, I want to be an artist.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: When I came in there, it was life drawing. I began drawing from the figure. Lawrence Murphy was the instructor. He's considered one of the early moderns of the Los Angeles area. But I must tell you he taught a Bridgman method of life drawing. I'm glad I didn't have more than three months of that. You know, the boxes?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes, of course.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And if you become too addicted to that way of drawing, your figure drawing always looks like that, so many boxes and lumps. But I learned proportion and the axes of the figure.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There's some validity to that, cubes in space.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well now, I learned some basic useful things. We also had a little composition class on Saturdays which was pointed toward illustration. I went to that on Saturday morning.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I'm looking at a little catalog called, *Arts of Southern California: The Early Moderns*.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Long Beach Museum put that out.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There's an entry here: "Lawrence Murphy, born 1872 in Denver, Colorado, died in 1948. Studied in New York with Bridgman and Du Monde and later in Paris with Laurens and Casteluccio. After studying abroad and exhibitions in Paris, Murphy returned to the United States to take up residence in the West. His work appeared in one-man exhibitions at the Jepson Art Institute in Los Angeles, and the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum. He taught in Denver and for twenty-two years at Chouinard Art Institute until his death in 1948."

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I never saw any examples of his own work during the first three months when I was in the school. That was in the spring. I never learned anything about composition from him, by the way.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Why?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, it was funny. We would bring in our little drawings, whatever we wanted to. They would be put up on a screen, and he would look at them. Then he would sort of mumble and so on and say, "Now that's very nice and that's not so good,' and never say why.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's awful.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I swear to God I never knew what he was talking about. He never explained or analyzed anything. He just said, "This is good, this is not good."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The capacity to do face-to-face criticism is a difficult thing to do. Many good teachers can't do that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They shouldn't try, then. They shouldn't do it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: They shouldn't teach.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: At the end of that, about three months, summer came on and Murphy went off to Mexico on vacation. Lorser Feitelson took over his classes. That's 1930. What a revelation. All sorts of lights dawned on me because Lorser analyzed paintings for us, and graphically, too. Besides explaining verbally what it was all about.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In a way you could really see.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I still have some little notes I made of his analyses of old masters. Different composition from the Early Renaissance to the Baroque, Cezanne, etc.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's so important.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I began to understand what was meant when he said, "This is wrong because—" So that was my great departure.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You must have become aware that you and Lorser were seeing in a not dissimilar fashion. The capacity to share life has an awful lot to do with seeing the same way. Because if you place a great priority on those things, it's such a joy to find somebody who also holds things the way you do, and so frustrating when you don't. You go mad. This is an exhibition that H.J. Weeks did. A small red cover, *Arts of Southern California No. 14: Early Moderns*.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: 1963, I think. I know that I have one more copy of that. Perhaps I can loan you one. It was part of a program they did on the "Arts of Southern California."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Throughout all of the work that Henry Hopkins and Walter Hopps and I did on the California show, that's not a name I remember popping up. If he taught at Chouinard for some time, I see some relation to the work of a number of early people.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I never knew what he did in other schools. All I ever knew was that three months. He had a

wonderful Irish gift of gab. After Saturday morning class, some of the ladies would bring food. There was a dining room with a long table where some of us had lunch after class. Mr. Murphy sat at the head of the table and held forth, and the ladies were enchanted.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You began in 1931. You were involved with mural painting, were you not?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not that early. In 1931 I exhibited my first painting in a regional show in San Diego. In 1933 I had that painting [pointing to painting] accepted for the L.A. County Museum.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What's the title of that painting?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Mountain

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The Mountain. That's the one we looked at. And in your retrospective exhibition at the San Francisco Museum, is Henry Hopkins going to include that painting?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, we decided that it takes up a lot of room, and for a first painting of importance we're going to use the self portrait.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That makes sense.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I hadn't become involved with murals until 1935 or 1936, when I was assistant on a mural that Lorser was doing for the Art Project. I was involved with the Art Project, with the first one, for which I did easel paintings. The one that began in late 1933, and went on to about the middle of 1934, that first P.W.A.P. project, it didn't last very long.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I told you when they sent me a set of slides from the W.P.A. exhibition at the de Sasset gallery at Santa Clara, that there were some slides of your easel paintings in there. It was nice to see that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know if I would wish to see them or not.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Figurative still life. In fact, it wasn't a painting, it was a drawing.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I did make some quite nice drawings.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: And this was an oval or round table with three feet, and little lions or little ball feet, and a very simple still life of some sort on the table.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It sounds rather like this painting.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's that table!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I used that table many times, although I never had or saw a table like that. It's a funny little table, and it appears in quite a number of my paintings.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's a very surreal table, a Post-Surreal table.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Post-Surreal table, let's call it that. I really don't know what that was.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: All right. I got that early mural date of 1933 from Henry Seldis. Maybe we should do a little bit of date checking here. In Henry Seldis's introduction to your catalog...

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, Henry Seldis got a little mixed up about the sequence of events in that article. I didn't see the article or have a chance to correct his misconceptions before it was published. I think it's rather confused. It gives false impressions.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We're talking about the Seldis article in the Helen Lundeberg retrospective catalog from the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in 1972. In the introduction to that, Henry says that "her deep involvement in her study of the Italian Renaissance painters is also reflected in a number of murals she designed and supervised at the Los Angeles Hall of Records, Venice High School, and Centinella Park in Los Angeles from 1933 to 1941."

HELEN LUNDEBERG: My first mural for the P.W., W.P.A./F.A.P. was done in 1937. It was dedicated in 1938 or 1939 for the Hall of Records. There were two panels to that. Before that, the only mural work I had done was as an assistant to Lorser Feitelson on his mural for Edison High School.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: So it was dedicated in 1938, and it was the Los Angeles Hall of Records. Prior work was as assistant to Lorser Feitelson, which work was that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Edison mural.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Edison mural located—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: —Thomas Edison High School. I don't know whether it's still there or not. Bad things have happened to a lot of murals that were done for schools.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: And what year?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It must have been completed by 1936 or 1937. I could look up these dates. I have material, but I don't remember them off hand.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The 1933 date would have you working on murals the minute you got out of school which is awfully early.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh, no. What occupied me right after school was Post-Surrealism.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's crucial that we get that date correct. It's extremely important that critics and curators and art writers in general collaborate on manuscripts. I see no reason not to do it. There's always a fear that the artist is going to argue with you.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I was so disappointed that Peter Plagens didn't ask any questions for his book. Not from us, but there's considerable misinformation there, that is unnecessary, because although he asked us for photographs of paintings to reproduce, he didn't check any of the information. Anyway, Henry Seldis was outraged when my work became hard-edged, because he had liked what I was doing before. He thought that I had sort of betrayed myself, as it were. He didn't see at first what qualities carried right over into the new things I was doing. He was rather reluctant to—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There is a date in one of these catalogs. I'm sorry it's not sticking in my head, but there was a very particular pivotal turning point which you mentioned the other day, which had to do with one painting which suddenly became essentially non-objective.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That's the one that Henry Seldis mentions here.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: 1950.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: A Quiet Place. I have to get a new frame for it for the retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. I don't know whether it was a turning point or not. The real pivotal point was late 1958, and 1959 because that's when I began a series of— Well, I went from that, which is 1958—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: *Studio Night*, which was done in 1958.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: —which is almost reduced to hard-edge except for this shadow on the portrait, on the canvas, on the easel, and this little fruit. Otherwise, it's pretty flat. But from that to this, *Sunny Corridor* in 1959. There's a jump, and yet those flat, geometric areas are in that earlier painting. Here I had no idea of doing a non-objective painting.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In *Sunny Corridor.*

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I gave titles to those earlier paintings deliberately to indicate that I had three-dimensional intentions related to what we call reality. I wanted you to go back here and look out this door—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —and not be stopped by this pattern.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I was interested both in the pattern and the three-dimensional illusion created by these very flat geometric forms. At first I confined myself to angles and straight lines. Then I got a little tired of that and began getting some curves.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We haven't talked about space in your work, specifically architectural space. It's an extremely important aspect of your work. You know the *Four Abstract Classicists* catalog? That little black and white one? In that catalog there is a very good statement about Abstract Classicism. On page nine of Jules Langsner's newest essay, there's a quote which says, "the classical artist's preoccupation with form transcends passing fancy with any attractions he might find in particular shape. Form in classical art is articulated in an orderly relation to every other form in the same work. That is to say, forms are structured in accordance with some unifying concept or organizational plan. Moreover, the unifying concept in a classical work is not simply an invisible skeleton supporting forms that otherwise might fall apart. The relation of form to form, the construction of the work constitutes a raison d'etre in itself. Our pleasure, our satisfaction in response to a classical work of

art derives in no small degree from an awareness of the work's configuration and the clarity and coherence of the structure." Then he goes on to talk about Classicism coming out of the Greek spirit. That statement is peculiarly applicable to your work, because there is a major difference between the work we generally associate with European Surrealists, and the Post-Surrealism which you and Lorser were about.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That statement is applicable to my work.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Which has to do with the intellectual clarity and logical structure, rather than a simply autonomous—It strikes me that this particular definition is important in relation to your work. I'm not sure I fully understand exactly what the initial impulse was behind the formation of Post-Surrealism.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lorser formed this idea in two ways. It was the last painting of what he called his "peasant series," the one which belongs to the Los Angeles County Museum, which gives one clue. There's a diagram which he made to hang beside that painting on some occasion to show the directional organization of the painting. [break in tape] This painting is called Maternity. It is organized not merely by the disposition of the forms as depicted objects or people, but by the way in which this great gulf here, in the middle of the painting, is bridged by the child and the dog looking at each other, all these people on the road looking across at the child. In fact, the child is the center of interest. The attention of the two figures trained on the mother. It was a psychological organization rather than—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —then the diagram says, "Unity attained through direction," so you have this rather compelling – the force lines are all going to slightly left, off center, the figure of the child. That's interesting.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's not a device that doesn't occur in some of the old masters. Giotto, for instance. But it was something that interested Lorser very much at that time. This is also one which he diagrammed, but the really interesting one is that one [Maternity]. This one is a diagram of the organization of rhythms of movement.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —in a different painting. That's fascinating to see that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember the date of this painting. It's about 1932. I found a couple of little drawings which he had made as early as that, playing around with ideas which later turned up in Post-Surrealist paintings.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Was there a conscious determination to develop Post Surrealism?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, there was not. That's the funny thing. Of course, the other thing I was going to speak of, which led to this, was his interest in European Surrealism.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Who among the Surrealists was he particularly drawn to?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Off hand, I can't say. But it was an idea in the air, and Lorser was always interested in everything going on. He wanted the utilization of association, the unconscious, to make a rational use of these subjective elements. Nothing of automatism about it. The name he had for this idea at first was "New Classicism," or "Subjective Classicism."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I like that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: But it got this title, which was supposed to be a subtitle, of "Post-Surrealism."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's like Post-Impressionism. It doesn't define, but it certainly has a date. I like "Subjective Classicism" because that is an attitude of mind.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That is a real metaphor, but everybody latched on to Post-Surrealism as the name for it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's like all of the names or the New York School, and how that actually got stuck as Abstract Expressionism, which is an odd title. New York School was even better, but it wasn't even a school.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course it wasn't. If you look at reproductions of the people who were joined under that title, it's cuckoo.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I've never been able to define that —Ad Reinhardt and DeKooning in the same net. When you and Lorser were involved with "Subjective Classicism," or "Post-Surrealism," how many others did you find sympathetic? Were there practitioners at the time?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, Post-Surrealism was really Lorser's brainchild. I got involved from the beginning. I wrote some of the early brochures explaining what it was for an early exhibition, in 1934.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You don't still have that around, do you? Can you easily put your hands on it?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think so. As I was saying, Lorser's manuscript or typescript to correct was much fatter than mine, and the conversation ranged all over the map of art in Southern California and all over time. Lorser would jump from one thing to another, which was all right as far as Fidel was concerned. He knew what he was talking about, but what came out in the typescript! A typescript made, I'm sure, by some innocent student who had never heard of most of the people mentioned. The mistakes and the wrong under standings were just hilarious. It took us so long to try to make sense of things. Lorser said, "Never again."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Do you generally feel that the material there is satisfactory in terms of information and so on?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: After we went through that, at least the information there is okay.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's important.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: But, as I say, the whole U.C.L.A. Oral History tape was rather disjointed.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You were saying that this folder of very early material which we are looking through is comprised of newspaper clippings from the early thirties and is in the Archives.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: [There are a number of articles here. There's a pamphlet called, *New Classicism* that Helen Lundeberg wrote.]

HELEN LUNDEBERG: *New Classicism* is there, too, I'm sure. We gave material of which we had more than one copy. Because we needed to have these things for our own reference.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Do you remember, was it a one-page statement from a brochure, for what?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was a brochure for probably the first exhibition of Post-Surrealist work at a little gallery called The Centaur, on Selma, in Hollywood.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: How long lived was that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It didn't last very long. A man named Murray Youlin, really, I think he was a bookshop man, and he was a friend and perhaps partner in this new little place with Stanley Rose.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Aha. So that was the beginning of the Stanley Rose involvement.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lorser had already arranged shows for a little gallery that Stanley Rose had on a mezzanine in his Vine Street store. Before he moved to Hollywood Boulevard, when he was next door to Al Levy's. It was a great location. There was a door cut through. You could go right from the restaurant into the bookshop.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's wonderful.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was a hangout for a lot of Hollywood people, the "industry." I think that Stanley Rose was a partner with Murray Youlin. I had the impression the Centaur was also a bookshop, but it had much larger space for a gallery.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I will read one quote from a newspaper article from the L.A. Evening Herald dated October 2, 1935. It's an article headed "Post-Surrealists exhibit Art in Hollywood Gallery," by Alma May Cook. "Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg are leaders in the Post-Surrealist field. While they include the work of some of the Surrealists in this exhibition, their own work is of the newer phase. Let's have an authentic description of Post-Surrealism in the words of Mr. Feitelson: "Post-Surrealism is a 'subjective' art which is classic in its ultimate aim. The esthetic integrity is attained through the 'subjective order' of the forms and their psychological character. This new classicism is distinctly cerebral and intellectual in its methods. Such rational formalism is directly opposed to the 'automatic' and subconscious recordings of Dali and his Surrealist colleagues. Post-Surrealism endeavors to attain an expression that is firmly rooted in permanent and constant psychological phenomena. Such expression is classic and deathless." And then another quote from Lorser Feitelson, "The method in which these are subjectively related," (speaking of the forms within a painting he was talking about) "creates the esthetic pattern which is classic. And because this classicism is introspectively subjective, I call this form of art 'New Classicism,' or 'Post-Surrealism.'" If you will, read the statement you wrote, called "New Classicism," which was from that little brochure we were talking about, because it's a good definition.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'll begin at the second paragraph. "Whereas the traditional mechanisms of esthetic

organization in painting have been based upon the limitations of normal visual perception, the mechanisms of New Classicism are based upon the normal functioning of the mind, its meanderings, logical in sequence, though not in ensemble, its perceptions of analogy and idea content in forms and groups of forms unrelated in size, time or space. The new esthetic form is subjective, an ordered, pleasurable introspective activity, an arrangement of emotions or ideas. Pictorial elements function only to create the subjective form, either emotional or mood entity, or intellectual or idea entity. It should be understood that New Classicism differs not only from Expressionist Surrealism, but also from that Surrealism which, possessing an esthetic appeal, arranges subjective material in accordance with the traditional principles of objective surface organization. The esthetic structure in the works of Lurcat, Pierre Roy, Di Chirico, Severini, Dali and Max Ernst is of no historical significance, since it is still imitative and manneristic in its faithful mimicry of the essential principles of pictorial pattern to be found in Renaissance painting. In New Classicism alone do we find an esthetic which departs from the principles of the decorative graphic arts to found a unique order, an integrity of subject matter and pictorial structure unprecedented in the history of art." How's that for a manifesto?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I wondered if there was a manifesto. If there was some specific piece of information.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, as nearly as there was one, I guess that was it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That clarifies things a lot. The problem in the title, "Post-Surrealism," is that it is mushy. That's why I like "New Classicism" better, or "Subjective Classicism."

HELEN LUNDEBERG: "Subjective Classicism" is the best of all, I think.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Because that's quite specific as a term. It enables you to see there are both things going on with the structure. Essentially, the structure is classical, ordered and rational.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In the sense that it is ordered.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: But the impulse and the mood and the emotion are intuitive and/or subjective. But is some of the structure subjective as well?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, this is very hard to talk about. Where's a good example. Yes, I suppose in one way you could say it is. Now in this painting, Plant and Animal Analogies—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Is that reproduced in either of these catalogs?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don think so.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: This is the painting that is very diagrammatic, which relates parts of the human body to vegetables.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It uses two analogies, of shape and of function. The analogy between the cut pepper, the cross section of the green pepper, to a cross section of the embryonic brain is only of appearance. When you come to the analogy of the cross section of the cherry, and the cross section of a uterus with the fetus in place, you have a functional analogy, in the ideas of reproduction, and of the seed. Of course this is a hint: the torso, with the uterus diagram strategically placed. And these dotted lines and arrows point to enlargements of parts of this intrauterine structure.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Aha, I see.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's probably clearer in the painting itself. Then of course there is another visual, and functional, analogy between this network of placental veins, I've forgotten what these structures should be called, and the branching tree. The whole thing goes around in a circle. That is the subjective, or formal structure of the painting. Certain things are here to give you little hints as to what happened. The cherries realistically shown, the knife which has cut one in two. This cross-section is in black and white. These two diagrammatic forms are in black and white grays, as if they were plates in a book.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There is that love of drawing biology plates we were talking about earlier!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I fell right into Post-Surrealism, and all the things I had been interested in while I was going to school contributed to it. Also the rational structure.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Aha, aha. You were saying that the problem with the 1933 – 1941 date of mural painting was that during the beginning part of that period you were involved with Post-Surrealism, and that's how we got on this discussion, and that's important to clear up.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: With Post-Surrealism, from late in 1933 through 1934 through 1937, even while I was

already working for the Federal Art Project and beginning to do murals. I did a couple of Post-Surrealist lithographs for the project, based on paintings which I had already done.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: At what point did you consider that you had ceased to be a Post-Surrealist, and had become something else. Or do you still in some ways consider yourself a Post-Surrealist?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In some ways, yes. There's a subjective element in my paintings. I'm not interested in merely a fine arrangement of shapes on the canvas. But as the activity of Post-Surrealism pretty much fell apart – The art projects absorbed a lot of time. Then, of course, the war came along. The last thing of mine that was more or less labeled Post— Surrealist was a little painting called, Micro-Macro Cosmic Landscape, which was invited to that Abstract Surrealist show at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1946. I don't consider that a true Post-Surrealist painting because it has a strange landscape where unusual objects do strange things, a depiction of the division of the cell, I think its called mytosis, appears in the sky like a heavenly body. I've forgotten what the forms in that painting are! I would say it's a little more surreal than Post-Surreal. But perhaps the last one that really qualifies, that I can remember at the moment, is a painting called *The Tree*. It was in the "Americans of 1942" exhibition at MOMA. It was a part of the group of paintings I had there. It depicts a tree which on one side looks dead, on a wedge of earth so you see the roots coming out from either side. Its cut down, standing in a gulf. On one side it's very dark, and you see only stones and a few tree branches. On the other side the tree has leaves. You see some landscape which looks like farmland and the sky is blue. It's a life and death painting.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In what way is your current work not Post-Surrealist? Why do you say it is not Post-Surrealist?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know. I'll make a stab at this. I've never thought about this before. The structure in this Plant and Animal Analogy depends on a certain sequence.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Not just interrelationships of sequences.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It creates an idea or attitude, and that's true of some of the other paintings of that period. My real difficulty was that I found it was hard, even in doing this kind of painting, not to consider traditional visual compositional principles. Because if you look at this, it may look crazy to you because of the conglomeration of objects in it, but nevertheless there's a vertical effect here and vertical here. It makes an "H" composition.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The space can be diagrammed.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's not unpleasant to look at on the face of it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's not a total disregard for system and structure.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's very hard to get away from it. Anyway, that's one thing which bothered me from time to time.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The difficulty in letting go of --

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course, Post-Surrealism didn't enter into most of my work for the W.P.A. project. The murals I was asked to do usually had to do with a subject. The Centinella Wall was about the history of the development of transportation. So we started out with wagon wheels and ended with the passenger planes. It goes all around this 240 feet of wall. I did not try to do anything that could be called Post Surrealism. I simply made a procession—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —straightforward story-telling.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Which tells a story, and it's decorative at the same time.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you like working on murals?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I liked designing them and I liked the research. I am a little bit of a researcher. Some of the petrachrome murals, I made the large cartoons for. But then I had nothing more to do with the actual construction of them except for okaying the cement and aggregate colors.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: A completely different way of working.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course artists have been doing that lately, making designs and giving them out to commercial firms to execute.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There's a loss in that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, well—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Most of them agree that that's so.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It doesn't interest me today at all. But I had no choice in this. There was a whole petrachrome crew who laid down the drawings in big sheets of masonite, and blocked off, with plastilene or something like that, the different areas, and poured the cement with the stone in it. It's like terrazzo.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you like the feeling of that large a canvas? Or did you find it a complex business with the subject matter?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, I didn't get much sense of it with those petrachrome things, but I did other murals that were done right on the wall. But that too was a rather impersonal work, because I had to have usually three, four, five assistants who did most of the painting. I spent most of my time watching them, telling them what to do. One day, one fellow ran a color right down a wall. He got so interested in putting a beautiful coat of paint on that he forgot where he was going, so it didn't stop where it should have. You always had to keep an eye out.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: One of the most difficult things about that mural project for a lot of artists, must have been that problem of subject matter. Because I know as a writer, it's extremely difficult for me to work on an assignment out of my own area of interest. While I can do it, I never feel I do my best work. It's highly instinctive. Being handed a subject is a really hard thing to do. "The History of Transportation!" Would you normally have done that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course not.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Not in a million years.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course not, but it's being – given an assignment to do a job, and you do it as best you can.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I suppose there's some real learning in that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I thought it was a very good experience. I did things I would have never dreamed of doing. I hadn't thought about doing murals before. By the time the project closed—except that there wasn't any market for murals. I felt I could have done anything, handled the whole thing myself.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Based on the size of that one particular painting in the studio, you were already comfortable with scale.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I was comfortable with that. But I'll tell you something, when the project finally closed down, after we'd finished all the commitments, the end of 1942, I was already beginning to do my postcard size pictures. I was so anxious to do something I would have all to myself, under my own hand. I did an awful lot of small paintings for a long time.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Working on the scale that murals demand is a problem, a loss of intimacy.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was also a loss of work. I wasn't actually doing it myself. I was just working with a crew. Which is different from taking your time and doing the whole thing yourself.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You haven't done very many small paintings since then?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Every once in a while I do a series of small ones. I did a number of small paintings around 1973, 1974, 1975.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Those were still lifes. I liked those.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Still lifes, and some little architectural ones.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There must be times when you would take pleasure in just simply doing a small work which had an immediacy, which might be about something, and there is a difference in feeling in those little works. Are you conscious of a need to do that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I like doing them. I like to work with still life. But at the same time I like a lot of things. I want to have my cake and eat it. I like the feeling of a canvas at least the size of the one behind you. I like working on that scale. I no longer much like working on the middle scale. It's got to either be very big or very small.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Why is that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know. I feel better. It seems to me it suits better what I want to do, the effects I want to make. Only once in my life have I been "painterly" on a canvas as big as that, (*Moon, Sea & Mist*) and that was an experiment. It was about 1953.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What's the size of this one?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: 60" x 50".

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What is your working time on a painting, bearing in mind that you do other things as well?

HL It all depends on how well it goes. I spent a lot of time on this particular canvas. It started out looking quite different. I had in mind a painting based on varieties of orange. When I got to a certain point I cou1dn do any thing more with it and didn't like it, so I put it away. I'd worked on it for maybe a couple of weeks. I don't work eight hours a day. I work off and on and do other things too. That was several months ago that I worked on the canvas.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You put it away.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Because sometimes I find the answer if I put it away for a while. I brought it back, and it went through a complete change except for certain basic structural elements which
I couldn't change.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's a fairly unusual example, but generally there's a prolonged period of involvement with one painting.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. I'm not really terribly prolific. I'm not a fast worker.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: From the looks of that studio, it looks as if you are. It's pretty organized.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, but this is the result of the number of years that have gone by. That's not the whole production because some things are gone.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Do you work on more than one painting at once, or is that confusing?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not usually.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's interesting, the differences. Some people never do, and some always do. Because I don't paint, the only parallels I have are my own work. One of the problems with critics is that very few of them do studio work, and so one is never sure whether the instinctive sense or the impulse is quite the same. I find intrusions into a body of work I am doing unacceptable and completely confusing. I can only work on one thing at once. I sometimes work on more than one, but it's usually to the detriment of all of them.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That would be true of my work.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I like to keep the movie running without—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You really must get into that one thing completely.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That must be true in painting with you.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It is, really. The only time I might have two paintings going, is if I get into a terrible difficulty with one and think, well, I will turn and do something else and put this aside. But I'm not working on both of them at once.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Maybe it is because it is ordered, because it isn't simply a cathartic phenomenon of just allowing whatever to bubble up. The painters I know who work on several things at once have work diametrically opposed to yours. I can think of four or five examples. They are all functioning out of a very different attitudinal basis. That may have a lot to do with it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's a very different temperament. You asked me in what sense or to what extent I think of myself as a Post-Surrealist. What applied to the things I did at that time in the early thirties is "mood entity." That is the sense in which you might still call it Post-Surrealist. I want the painting, as a whole, to have a subjective entity. It has to have some magic for me. Sometimes it works for other people. I'm not interested in merely a fine, formal visual arrangement. I want something more to happen.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It makes a lot of sense. Define the difference between mood entity and idea entity.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I call fundamental analogies an idea entity. Everything here is intellectually—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: — in a very cerebral way. The implied presence of a landscape or architectural space is really subjective, and not an idea, in the more recent works.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Whether they are architectural or landscape-like, whatever the reference is. I've never worked from landscape. I've never worked from actual architecture. These are invented things. I'm equally interested in the visual effect of the thing and the subjective impact.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: When we were talking the other day, I asked if you have ever been a photographer. You said that wasn't an involvement. I'm thinking of Scheeler in particular, and some of the other people who came out of Stieglitz's Gallery 291. In many cases there was a rather concentrated and certainly serious involvement with photography. It's interesting to me that you have always had what I consider a very photographic eye. You see like a photographer.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Really?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes. I was really surprised to find out you don't photograph.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I dislike monkeying with cameras.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Is it the mechanics of it that don't appeal to you?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Perhaps because I've never taken the time to get more experience with a camera.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It doesn't interest you. When you are traveling or when you are out on a given day, are you conscious of using yourself as a camera? Are there certain things you go back to look at? Will you suddenly see a quarter of an archway, or a particular thing, and stop and go back to use yourself as a camera?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I will be a camera most of the time.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: All right, touche!

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Even when I was a kid, the family went out on Sunday drives. My sister and I would sit in the back seat. I was all eyes wherever we went. If I take a plane trip, I can't bear not to be in the window seat because I like to look. It isn't as much fun looking out a plane window as it used to be, because they fly higher.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The trip I took last summer to Italy was a trip for my eyes, and for my soul. It wasn't so much to look at art. Only half of it had to do with looking at hard art per se, much of it had to do with looking at architecture, but not in the sense of doing it with a guidebook or in an art historical sense. I was dealing with light and space in a very particular way. My goodness, what a difference it made.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Did you make photographs?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I did, yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Did you find they were satisfactory?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: No, they never are. They're always a terrible disappointment.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I look as hard as I can. But I don't want to take photographs.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You know that recent Susan Sontag book, *On Photography*. She's extraordinary as a writer. The philosophical reasons for not photographing, which is the premise she has developed, that Americans have substituted, they don't experience anymore, they just do it with a Brownie. How tragic that is.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You have a strong point there.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: People sometimes take their whole vacation through a camera. They never, in the phenomenological or sensate realm, experience for themselves.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I would hate to be tied to a thing like that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It makes you ashamed of shooting. I've had a couple of real experiences recently that made me embarrassed, yet I had to do it. Certainly there is that problem that in an experiential sense a camera just simply doesn't do it. And those things are always interesting to me, because it's hard to understand what

somebody else's eye is about. I don't know whether that ever can be communicated verbally, but there are artists I have known for a long time whose work I under stand very well, who I can walk down the street with, and see the way they're seeing. Because it's sometimes a very different way from the way I see.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: If you're looking for camera subjects all the time, you're missing an awful lot. What's more, the camera lies.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Well, that's another crucial point of Susan Sontag's. A photograph only documents a millimeter of a second, for one thing.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm glad you brought that up. It's never the same thing. It's a distraction from really looking at things.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Has architecture ever been particularly compelling to you?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not really. I began to do the arches series because I loved the shapes. I began to want to use some curves instead of simply the straight lines and angles. I'm crazy about that shape, and this one. This one is very strongly illusionistic. I have a photograph of that one taken out of doors, with greenery behind it. You'd swear it was a building standing there. But it doesn't have anything to do with architecture with a capital "A".

JAN BUTTERFIELD: So again it really is an intellectual and structural phenomenon. It's a matter of making intelligent use of a form that provides you with a visual—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It gives me an opportunity to use certain forms I thought were very handsome. That's one of the early ones, 1959. See The Road, 1958. It's completely without a curve or without much illusion.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's really non-referential until you begin to look at that X in the back.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that is supposed to give you an in. Here is the first of a new Arches series, Kurigaizu's Arch, named for an ancient king of Assyria. This actually was inspired by a photograph. Of course, it comes out different and very clean and geometric in form. You know that international historical series that began in the sixties. I don't know whether it continued or not. I have two volumes of it. It's supposed to be an international scholars' project.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: No, I don't know.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Anyway, that was the source. The photograph was labeled, "[Kurigal]zu's Arch".

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Very icon-like.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: One critic who came to our house, and who had never paid much attention to my work—he was interested in Lorser's, and he was a hard-edged painter himself. This painting was new, and it was standing up. He had to pass it as he went out. He looked at it and said, "Oh, very nice 'emblem'." That was the fashionable thing at the time, but not what I had in mind!

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Oh my, yes. I was looking at the date, 1964. You said that particular painting came essentially from the photograph. Have there been other photographic sources for your work, where you were reasonably literal on their transmogrification? I really like that one, *Cobalt Sky*, 1973.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Now, this one – I could show you the photograph, but I don't know where to find it right now. You would not recognize the derivation, but it was inspired by a photograph in some book we have here.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's usually not a literal transmogrification, but something that sets you off.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was something that suggested this strange form here. Then I was fascinated by some aperture which had light going through it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: This is beautiful. It's very Grecian, in terms of the blue and white and the highlight, high, hard, white light. You must like Gerald Murphy's work.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I've seen a few reproductions.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Every once in a while I get a little bit of a flash of it. Not in terms of visual similarity, but in terms of an intelligent balance. There's a clarity. I like his work.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'll have to look at Murphy again.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We did that show at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. There are only eight extant paintings. He probably only did fourteen in his lifetime. It's pretty amazing. A real special pocket of work. And how odd to get a full-scale retrospective with only eight extant pictures. There is a book called, Living Well is the Best Revenge which Calvin Tomkins did. It's about Gerald Murphy. He was the inheritor of the Mark Cross fortune. There were terrible family disasters. He had to leave painting behind. It nearly destroyed him. He cared too much about it to pursue in a half-baked fashion. It's a very wonderful, dramatic pocket of work. He was really quite important. He was doing works equally as strong as Stuart Davis in a given period of time, and really proto-pop, and then American Cubist. It's pretty nice stuff. But there wasn't enough, nor was it known.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I must have seen some reproductions. Was he in that Delaware show, "The Avant-Garde in America"?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I think he was in that one. How long ago was that show?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: 1974—5.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I'm not sure. There was a recent survey in the catalog which just came in which he was included.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: "Arcanum #1", the first of six or seven, I think. I love these shapes. All this is an excuse to do them. The thing as a whole has a mysterious quality. I never expected this one to be reproduced. It's a very soft and delicate painting. I was never able to get a decent black and white reproduction.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Anytime anything is that soft it's almost impossible.[pause in tape] I'm interested in knowing how accepted Post-Surrealism was as an attitude, in terms of the people who worked on it? How much writing was there about it, and how much support?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In 1935 and 1936 there were two large shows, pretty much the same show. But maybe not all the same paintings, which were shown first at the San Francisco Museum of Art. Lorser gave a lecture on the subject at the museum, to what kind of group I don't know. I don't remember what was said in San Francisco, as far as the press was concerned. Arthur Millier had written quite a lot. He got interested in talking about this and wrote articles in the *Los Angeles Times*.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What was the title of that show?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: "The Post-Surrealists." That show was expanded, went to the Brooklyn Museum, and was held there for five months. Possibly a summer show. It got a lot of popular notice. It was reviewed by Edward Alden Jewell in the *New York Times* while it was there.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Here is a cartoon from the *New York Times* for Sunday, December 20, 1936. It's labeled, "The Post-Surrealists." It's a studio spoof. An artist is putting an utterly ridiculous fantasy, chimerical creatures on a painting. But he's working blindfolded, and his wife and somebody else are shooting with a mixture of cocaine and laughing gas. It's incredible. Now here's a serious review in the *Sunday New York Times* for May 17, 1936 by the critic, Edward Alden Jewell. This is the show that went to the Metropolitan, Brooklyn, Whitney and the Museum of Modern Art. Let's see where we are. "Upstairs in the top floor of the museum you encounter art antipodal in most respects to that of the fifteenth century. It brings us a message from California of the year 1936. Watercolors and oils, the latter addressing themselves to what must needs be esteemed the most up-to-date cerebral gymnastics, post-surrealisme. Arthur Millier informs us that Lorser Feitelson is the originator of this new movement, and if in truth post-surrealisme seems scarcely other than a backwash from the Surrealist cult itself, that may be because these 'apprehended thoughts which total up to a universal idea,' are a trifle too profound for this time of year. Several of California's universal thinkers, at any rate, know how to paint. Both Mr. Feitelson and Miss Helen Lundeberg handle their brushes with cosmic authority." At what point did the critic Jules Langsner get involved with your work?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Jules Langsner was a very young man then.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: He was quite young.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Twenty-one or so. A very intelligent and—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I only met him a couple of times. I'm sorry I didn't know him better.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: For a while, possibly during the war, he got involved in some psychological or sociological work and we lost sight of him. Then later, he turned up again. He was writing criticism or reviews for *Art News* magazine. Later he conducted an art lecture program which was supported by the Ford Foundation. That was in the early sixties. He did the catalog for the "Abstract Classicist" show. In the year or two before his death we saw

a lot of him because he was involved in plans and sketches and synopses for a history of world art from certain points of view. He involved Lorser in at least—every Thursday evening Jules came over here. They talked and went through reproductions. He died suddenly. There's material relating to it which I think will go to the Archives. Some of it is here, but it would go as the gift of his widow. She's already given some material to either the Archives of American Art or to U.C.L.A.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Maybe the Oral History Program. I don't know how archival their program is, but I'm glad to hear some plans are being made.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Nothing is being just thrown away, but it's in an unorganized state, and she didn't feel that she could finish it properly.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's hard.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was Jules' project rather than Lorser's. But they were very much involved in conversations about that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In terms of the various writing, whether it was catalogs, publications, or critical articles—. There was so little writing in that early period. How much did Jules do in terms of your involvement and Lorser's?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not much was published. He wrote a foreword for our announcement of the show, "Post-Surrealists and Others." His writing was about what the Post-Surrealists were all about. But it was very short, very small.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Were there others other than Jules?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Aside from the reviews Arthur Millier wrote—. You see, it was so short as far as being an exhibition project, it was three years, something like that. There's the 1941 article Lorser wrote for a San Diego publication, What is Post—Surrealism Buckley McGurrin wrote some stuff for Script. Nothing of a very serious nature. Everyone got caught up in the art project, and the war. Before the war was over, Lorser was doing a series of "romantic" paintings, which were exhibited here at the County Museum and at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. He began the "Magical Form" series which led into the "Magical Space Forms." That was all going off on another tack.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I'd like to go back to something we were talking about earlier. In a very real way, your work is still Post- Surreal in terms of your definition of what Post-Surrealism is about. Even though the high period of that involvement was a more interal, figurative period. It seems that there is really a great deal of continuity in terms of feeling and sensibility.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The only time I was what you might call a programmatic painter during that prime period of Post-Surrealism.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I was going to read you this quote from Henry Seldis, because it's related to what we talked about before. This is from the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art catalog. He said, "It was the importance of the subjective element that continued to set her apart from the intellectual formal exercises that engaged a good many of the geometric abstractionists." Because we have been talking about the structure and the intellectual, the rationalism and the intellectual clarity, I think it's important to underscore the subjective aspect of it at the same time.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that's a difficult thing to talk about.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It is a lot harder to talk about it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I battered my brains considerably to produce a little column of print myself for a magazine that wanted some material on Lorser's work and on mine. Lorser's article was done by someone else, but I did my own, which again insists on the subjective as well as the formal. Of course, they're not to be separated. They can't be, because the subjective depends on the structure, on the formal elements. It's very hard to talk about.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I want to be careful we don't place too much of an emphasis on the intellectual, or the structure or the rational part in an unclear fashion. I don't want to establish a premise which indicates there wasn't also a great deal of subjectivity.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: All the way through.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I have been thinking about the difference between the work you do, and the hard-edge and color field paintings which came before the sixties. It's extremely important that we correct that sensibility with the differences, because the differences lie not in the structure, because there was certainly structure in the

hard-edge paintings of the sixties, right? But the differences lie in the subjective grounding and attitude, which is really crucial.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The fact that I don't consider any of my work to be non-objective is one of them. I'm not a hard-edge purist, beginning right there.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You are really not pure.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm not pure at all.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's a funny thing to say about you, but yes, that's right. You already drop out of that category very quickly.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No matter how flat and hard-edge in appearance it is, I want to suggest or evoke some reference to reality, and with subjective flavor, as it were.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Plus it's also much more curvilinear. More sensuous and curvilinear. Your concern with tonalities is not a non objective involvement. It's completely separate. In a coloristic sense, it's a completely separate involvement. All that softness and undulating line quality is certainly not non-objective and purist in relation to the really hard-core definition. That's important to understand because you are not one of the four Abstract Classicists. You're not the fifth Abstract Classicist either.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, at that time, when that show was being got together, we had many meetings here in this studio, of Jules and the four Abstract Classicists. Because I was here and fed them and watered them. Although I was beginning to do those flat areas, Jules Langsner did not, quite rightly, according to his definition, consider me suitable for that Abstract Classicist category because Lorser's paintings were mostly geometric, occasionally curvilinear. The flat areas were in a way equal in value. They fluctuated as to which was the ground, which was the form, and that was part of it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There are some very definite interchanges.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That was very important, the positive and negative aspects.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The red painting of Lorser's at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art is a good example of that painting, the one with the pale blue line. That really reverses in and out.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it can. Many of the line paintings do that. There's another one that the L.A. County Museum owns, a blue and brownish black painting, *Geomorphic Metaphor*.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That was in the California show. "Painting & Sculpture in California: The Modern Era," at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in 1976.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Which is also a positive-negative reversal. It is a much better example than the line painting.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Does it have a lot of triangulated areas?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's the one that was in the California show.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I guess it was.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Blue and black.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: And it's not perfectly square.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, somewhat horizontal. I was fascinated by what happened in those things. But that was not what I wanted it to end in, as far as I was concerned. I really didn't fit that Abstract Classicist show. But later on, Jules included me in a California hard-edge show.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You certainly were hard-edged. But you were not a Classicist by his definition.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: His definition of hard-edge at that time relaxed or enlarged by 1964. Because by that time, he thought I was suitable to include. I'm not sure what paintings I had in that. I know I had some which were not non-objective reversable images by any chance. They suggested landscape mostly, of one kind or another.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I'm trying to think of New York painters in the sixties, hard-edge painters who had any referential figurative material. Kelly's line drawings of leaves really were a separate breed of cat from his other paintings. He's the only one I can think of off-hand who had figurative elements. But they weren't in his hard-edge paintings. They were part of a body that were done at that time.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't think I know those drawings.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Very large sheets of hand-made paper, and simple outlines of drawings of three leaves and two lemons.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That sounds like Matisse.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: A little like that. But not as decorative. Although they had those edges, and the image filled the page. There was certainly some relation. But they were much looser, and they were obviously referential anyway. They were looser, and they tended to divide space in somewhat the same ways as other—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Did they fit a hard-edge category?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: No, that was what I was saying. It was only the drawings that I've ever seen like that. Your hard-edge painting isn't hard-edged nominally, because there is always that referential aspect which alludes to, or invests it with a subjective element.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Even if it alludes to fantastic or unreal structures, like the Arcanum series, or those free-form space things that came a bit after.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I don't think it's necessary that those structures really exist.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No. I was always interested in preserving some reference to our illusion of a third dimension, and usually not interchangeable.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: At what point was there some decision, and when was it made a conscious decision, to keep a referential element of some sort in your work? Sometimes it's very subtle. Perhaps without the titles, one wouldn't know in some cases.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I've found that no matter what I think I'm looking at, sometimes some other people don't see it. And it's in different works at different times, it's more and less. There are a few things that are quite illusionistic, almost flat realistic. There are others which I really had to put titles on to make sure that everybody knew, like some of those things that came right after Kurigaizu's Arch. There are others in which there's a central space that's curved, as if on the side, or just the beginning of arches and then straight down. I've found that many people look at these things, and they're afraid to see what I want them to see. They think they should be seeing something completely non-objective or non-referential. I don't want that. I want both this interesting shape or assembly of shapes and whatever subjective impact the referential aspect has. Does that make sense?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes. There can also be a subjective impact in the non objective works of Kandinsky. What is the difference between your interest in the referential, in relation to your desire to keep a subjective base for the work, and the subjective impact that totally non-objective work can have? I don't really mean what is the difference. I mean, in what way did you decide that was more interesting for you?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's something which simply "growed like Topsy," as it were, which came natural. It wasn't "shall I do this or shall I do that?"

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Have you done works that are totally non-referential?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't really think so. There are one or two that come about as near to being non-referential as anything I've done, and yet—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Untitled, 1970 and Cloud Shadows, 1966, are both in—That, [referring to Cloud Shadows] very definitely if you see it in color, is referential. These are blues and greens in here. These are very delicate tones which suggest that this might be another hillside, sky with clouds. Once you saw that in color you could probably—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You've seen these things on the hills. It's quite non-realistic and designed with interest in the patterns. But nevertheless it's not meant to be non-referential.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's there to see. Well, you're talking about the Untitled, 1970 in particular as being very close to it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I was thinking about a mountain and a fiery light that you see sometimes between the hilltops and clouds that are hanging over them. But it came out to be very, very abstract. This, [inaudible] is a very bad color reproduction. It doesn't reproduce well because these tones are very delicate. This is more rosy, and this is a little more orangey. There's a streak of red that goes right through, a dark red. It's not a very colorful painting. It was done the same year as this one.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You can see what a difference the color makes because that's very clearly a particular – landscape in Icarus Bay we're talking about 1970. After that one came out in an essentially non-objective way, did you desire to set that as a test for yourself?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not especially. This is a 1971 painting which is derived from the big diptych. It doesn't represent anything any one ever saw on God's earth or in the sky. But nonetheless, they are unreal. They're forms floating in space. Then you come to this, 1973—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Aegean Light

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It got its name not because I was thinking about Greece when I painted it, but because two different people came in at different times and looked at it hanging on the wall there and said, "Oh, it's like the light of Greece." So I thought "Aegean Light" sounded like a good title for it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: How well do you know the room environment works of Robert Irwin, and Maria Nordman, and a number of the younger artists who are working with space in an environmental sense?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I've seen some photographs of them in magazines, but I haven't seen the actual things themselves. I just haven't gotten around to look at them.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I wondered if you felt in any way kinship with them. You are their ancestor in a number of ways. I wondered if that linkage is something you see.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That never occurred to me.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There was a piece Maria Nordland did at Washington and Beethoven last summer, which was a white room environment. Pure white space in a storefront, which was one of those special pieces which was just quite unforgettable, and I think one of the most powerful pieces she's done to date.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Whose is that?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Maria Nordman, who is the only woman in the group environmental situational non-object people. But her works are created primarily with light. Robert Irwin's are created with light and with scrim. But there is a particular sense of the presence of the space itself, and of the spill and fall of light and the manner in which a corner meets another corner. Or certain arches are cut into that space. It's a very particular way of seeing.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm sorry I haven't seen those because I feel sympathetic to what it sounds like.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: When I get the material all together for that book, I will show you the photographs because one of the things I'm dealing with is the impact of a sense of place on people and the information from a shared community. One of the things that bothers me about the rigidity of art history as it has been taught, especially contemporary art history, is that it tends to make very clear linear progressions for people. Very often artists don't learn that way. A number of the people here in California, I'm very convinced, the younger generation, learned their clean, hard edges, their light and space, from a number of the senior figures whose work had a reference for light, for space, and for a certain edge. The very clear thinking that's happening now.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, that might be. And then from seeing certain paintings you might get the idea of actually constructing things.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's a similar reverence for space, and a certain way of looking at it and an attitudinal base for it. The only colored photograph of Maria Nordman's work that was in a small article Peter Plagens did five years ago in Artforum which was blue and white, and is an outdoor piece in which the sun hits a particular indented section of a wall at a particular time of day. That has a certain totally abstract configuration which is very powerful. It feels like some of the spaces in your paintings. The one with the two portholes, and that ziggy shape off to the right in particular.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Which one?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's much more a subjective or philosophical link. You get so much of that sun and sand and sea and surf laid on Southern California by outside writers. Oh well, it's all those hedonists with their studios in

Venice dangling their toes in the water, and seeing pretty things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm very annoyed by some of the stuff like that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There's a big difference in the big, heavy brutal grey work done in New York, and the easier, lighter, highly colored, rather ethereal and ephemeral work done out here. A lot of it is sense of place.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know what's going on in Chicago now, but in the fifties work was coming out of Chicago which was noticeable when it came out here. It had a character that one didn't see in work in Southern California. The difference between the art being produced in the Bay Area and the art being produced in Southern California is so radically different. You could line them up, and I could tell you the difference and not be wrong very much of the time. Yet this is a state that's easy to travel up and down. You can get back and forth all the time in terms of cross referencing with materials and information. But they don't. There's very little cross information in the work. Where there has been, it's something like Peter Voulkos has taught down here, and then gone up there. But for the most part, that very brash and erratic and high in color and funky and figurative and literal and fetishistic Bay Area art have no parallels in Los Angeles. And vice versa. There's no hard-edge work being done up there, for all practical purposes. Obviously that's an oversimplification. There are people like David Simpson who have been doing it for a long time. But that's a real exception rather than the rule. As a matter of fact, a show that the Janus Gallery has up. There is a big show of contemporary Constructivists, which is a companion show for the L.A. County Museum show. I went to see it in Venice yesterday. It's Ed Moses and people that we know, who are working in a very particular way. And a lot of people I didn't know, two of whom were hard-edge people from the Bay Area. Generally you don't find them, they were two youngsters, I don't know who they are. So then you have to say, yes, if there is a group of artists living by the water's edge with all the sun and sea and surf, yes, that has had some effect. You have to be careful, it drives me crazy. I have to say that because I know it has changed the work. That's a part of it, but to try to ground that in a very serious fashion – Fidel Danieli's project when he began to do those tapes for the U.C.L.A. Oral History Program had to do with the influence of the Southern California environment on the artists who lived and worked there.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That would be a very interesting thing just to pursue as an attitude.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know that he has.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You were saying Post-Surrealism had its attitudes in terms of what specifically?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That teeny weeny manifesto, that was printed in 1934 under my name, was really the result of Lorser's ideas and our discussions. That was a theory or a doctrine for Post- Surrealists to follow. But I think Lorser and I were the only ones of the group who really produced some things which conformed to that idea.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Who did you consider part of the group?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lucien Labaudt got interested in this, idea, exhibited with us, and produced a few things which could be called Post-Surrealist. Knud Merrild was interested, but his things always leaned toward Abstract Surrealism. He was a very individualist artist.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Those flux paintings I know.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The flux paintings come a little later, the very early forties. I won't mention any specific dates. I have one here which is dated 1943, and you see that it preceded the fortuitous paint-poured paintings of Jackson Pollock. But Merrild, I think, used a different method. He worked on boards. He set it up in a frame. He was quite secretive about it.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I understand that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He poured paint, and poured other paint into it. He didn't work on a large scale like Pollock. In some way paint dropped into liquid paint until it made beautiful—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: —marbleized—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Apparently he had some way, when he got something he wanted, of stopping the process. It's like the process of making marbleized paper, which used to be used in books.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It feels like Italian made papers.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Except that he managed to isolate certain particular con figurations and then stop it. I don't know any more about it than that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There was that Knud Merrild show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, in the middle sixties. I can't remember the earliest paintings. I don't remember whether in that show there were pre-1940 paintings or not. For some reason they don't stick in my mind.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I have a catalog of that show. I think it was organized after Merrild died in Denmark, about 1954.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes it was. Bill Osmun organized it.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Mrs. Merrild was here. It was actually Jules Langsner who organized and wrote the catalog for the show.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It went up to the wooden constructions which were somewhat de Stiji-like. I don't remember the earliest things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember anything not pretty abstract. I think there's a reproduction somewhere of a tennis player or something like that. But it's done with cubistically angular shapes. [Merrild]

JAN BUTTERFIELD: So Lucien Labaudt was interested in Post-Surrealist, Knud Merrild, who else?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There were other people who exhibited with us. But they were more Surreal than not. A woman named Ethel Evans produced some Post-Surrealist paintings. She dropped out of sight as an exhibited painter after that very short period. Elizabeth Mills had had some of her things re produced in one of those spreads on the Post-Surrealists in the Los Angeles newspapers in 1938.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Ethel Evans and Elizabeth Mills.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Grace Clements.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We found Grace Clements when we were doing the California show. She did some rather remarkable things. We know nothing about her. What do you know about her?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: She was a rebel daughter of a conservative, well-off family in Northern California. She was interested in left politics when we knew her. She was very intelligent, but she had this great need for something almost like a religion. So for a while it was Communist ideas.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It was the era, certainly.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The last thing I heard was that she was involved in some theosophical—Grace Clements was working more or less in a Surrealist mode. She came to a lecture which Lorser gave around 1934-5. A gallery talk. She stood up and gave him an argument. I'm not sure what her work was like before that. It was somewhat abstracted, but not completely abstract. She was always interested in social problems. After arguing against Post-Surrealism, she got very interested. It appealed to her intellectually.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I can see where there would be some real linkage there. I would never have associated her with Post-Surrealism.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: The Post-Surrealists were just as buried in their real tendencies and interests as the Abstract Expressionists. Like most of Lorser's and most of my Post-Surrealist paintings, if you are going to construct a painting on these ideas or principles where the identity of objects is important, or where associational values and their relationships to each other are essential, you can't be a sloppy or a loose painter.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Not at all.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You need to define everything quite clearly so you can work from whatever ideas these forms suggest.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We're looking at a painting by Lorser Feitelson, *Genesis No. 2*, from 1934.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You need to be able to identify a light bulb, and this cord with little seed-like ending, and relate that to the cut melon with the seeds spilling out.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The openness of that shell and egg.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And the sexual implications of that form. If this were painted illusionistically, or expressionistically, it would not be as clear.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It wouldn't be clear at all.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That accounts to some extent for the precision of these paintings. It wasn't intended to be magic Realism.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Who else, in terms of people who were interested?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I see that Jeffrey Wechsler mentions Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish in a list of people who were involved. They both got interested in the ideas and produced some things that were obviously influenced. They exhibited on some occasion with us, but then they were off to Mexico and off to New York. I never felt they were really part of the group.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: This was the time that Philip Guston was in Southern California before he left for New York? We're looking at a catalog called Surrealism and American Art 1931-1947 by Jeffrey Wechsler. It's an exhibition at Rutgers University Art Gallery, March 5 to April 24, 1977.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: You don't have this catalog?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The museum may have it. Philip Guston mentioned a number of times, both to Henry Hopkins and myself, that there were very important things he had learned from Lorser. But he specifically talked really about his Renaissance attitudes, and his love of Piero and Uccello.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That is true.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: He really felt that his love for what he called his pantheon of great masters came from intellectual opening up he had learned from Lorser. I didn't talk to him about Post-Surrealism. I didn't talk to him about that linkage.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There was one little exhibition. A little announcement folder, I think it's dated 1935. The show was "Post Surrealists and Other Moderns," and the names of Guston and Kadish --

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's interesting. They were the "other moderns."

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I think Arp was in that show. Feitelson and Lundeberg, of course. And a French painter who was out here, who to my mind was one of the "other moderns," certainly didn't fit into Post-Surrealism. What was his name, Etienne Ray?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I don't know anything about him at all. Where was that show?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: At the Stanley Rose Gallery on Hollywood Boulevard.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There was a fold-over, but not a brochure. There weren't catalogs in those times. It makes documentation terrible.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Many shows were put on, and announcements were sent out. Maybe just a postcard, and the show went off and nobody thought—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: No checklist.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Really, no record.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I keep every scrap now. I keep all show mailers on all artists whom I watch.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Now, I keep everything.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It makes history.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, it does. It's been very difficult to trace things in the past because memory is so unreliable.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Most artists aren't that interested in their own documentation. They tend not to keep those things as they go. You two have been amazing in relation to your documentation. It's terribly important.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: We may have more than some artists. But in the beginning—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Who thinks that they're going to be important in the beginning, or thinks of it in that way? I better keep this because some day it might be—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Well, no, we did. There are other kinds of documenting other than we did with these shows.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You should think of the art first.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It's often fortunate that even the checklist existed for these early shows.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: We all say that. Because very often there's a great deal of information to be gained from checklists. Strangely enough, because there's a pattern of exhibiting.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh yes, and place of exhibitions.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Sometimes they're important in relation to other artists. It's important to me to know who saw what paintings at what time.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: What was visible.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Exactly. There were a number of artists in Southern California influenced by both exhibitions of Morandi and Surealism which took place in Los Angeles in the fifties and sixties. Philip Guston is the one Abstract Expressionist whom the younger group of Los Angeles artists had a close contact with. They were aware of Still up north. It would be interesting to me to know your exhibition pattern, in terms of what was available for people to see here. Because of the importance of the influence of your work and Lorser's work on a whole generation of Los Angeles artists. You had a one-person show in 1958 at the Pasadena Museum. You had one at Scripps College in 1958, and in 1958 you had one at the Santa Barbara Museum. In 1959 and 1960 and 1961 and 1962 you had exhibitions at Paul Rivas Gallery in Los Angeles, and 1962 and 1964 at Ankrum Gallery in Los Angeles. 1963 at Long Beach Museum of Art, and 1965 Occidental College. 1970 and 1971 David Stuart Gallery, and in 1970 at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art. I'm looking at a list in the back of a catalog, *Helen Lundeberg*, a Retrospective Exhibition which was organized by the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art in December, 1971 to February, 1972. That's twelve shows. There's a thirteen year period of reasonable visibility in terms of your work.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That date for the Pasadena Art Museum should have been 1953.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In 1953, your first one-person show was at the Pasadena Art Museum.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was a small retrospective in 1953 while John Palmer Leeper was still director. It wasn't the first one I ever had, but we decided there had to be a cut-off place some where.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: A number of major Southern California artists, by 1960, were beginning to make some real forays into hard-edged work. It's important to know they could have known about your work for some period of time. That the first exhibition of work was 1953, and then the next one was 1958. It's correct in the catalog that was done by Diane Moran. Lorser had taught for a long time, but teaching did not interest you. Who were your colleagues in the Los Angeles area in the fifties and early sixties? Were there people independent of styles, movements or attitudes, not necessarily Post-Surrealists. Were there artists, older and younger, who were friends, acquaintances?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Many acquaintances, of course.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Who might have been in and out of your studio, so that there was a real crossover of information?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That would go back to the fifties. One person we saw quite frequently in the early fifties was Elise Cavanna. Elise Cavanna had been known as Elise Seeds, the name Cavanna came from some other family. Her mother was known as Mrs. Something-or-other Seeds. Flora, her stepmother, lived with Elise until her death. There was a little book on Elise by Merle Armitage. He was a great producer of books on art and designer of books. He's one of the historical figures of Los Angeles art history. There probably is various material on him. And of course, Jake Zaitlin. Merle Armitage produced a book on Elise's work. Her work was completely abstract at that time, the 1930s and 1940s.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's early.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes, she was an abstract artist in Los Angeles when there weren't too many. At the time I knew her, she was very much interested in those first Magical Space Forms which Lorser exhibited in 1952. The first large group at the Pasadena Art Museum, in the big retrospective. That was probably the reason for our getting better acquainted and for her expanding her canvases in size and becoming more hard-edge. We lost touch with her in the mid-fifties.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did she stay in Los Angeles?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There was a blow-up about some art political matter. So we were no longer on such good terms.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Always those things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lorser and I were a self-contained society. When the "Four Abstract Classicists" show was being planned, we got better acquainted with John McLaughlin, Karl Benjamin, Jules Langsner and Frederick Hammersley. Some of the meetings with Jules Langsner at the time of the show took place here in our studio. I was seeing those people. I was not considered by them, and I did not consider myself at that time, to be an Abstract Classicist. The ideas which they discussed, and which Jules formulated, for the purposes of that catalog were about a completely abstract and non-objective painting. I don't think I've ever done a non-objective painting. The most geometric, flat, hard-edged things I have done are still intended to create some three-dimensional illusion, which is referential to streets, buildings, landscape and what have you. There wasn't any question in my mind, even though I had done a few things like *The Road* and even the one called *A Quiet Place* long before that. They still were not hard-edge painting or Abstract Classicism in that sense.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You were happy in your own mind at the time. You didn't feel uncomfortable, or you didn't feel at the time the show was being organized that you were being excluded.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh no.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It was clear from the beginning.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It was perfectly clear that I was doing something with unmodulated flat areas and geometric forms which had nothing to do with what they were doing.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I heard a feminist at one point give a lecture in which she used that exhibition as a classic example of excluding a female who should be included. I thought at the time she misunderstood the sense of the show. She said, "Now there you are—." You have to be careful about those things.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: There wasn't any question of that at all, of my being female.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It made me go back and read the essay again.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: This had to do with my different ends. After a while perhaps Jules Langsner's ideas about hard-edge softened a little, or became more flexible. Because by about 1963 he came down to the studio and looked at a new painting of mine that was on the wall and said, "Now, that's hard-edge." The painting in question is Desert View and it is an area of colored shapes surrounded by the white of the unpainted primed canvas. It is somewhat ambiguous because you can see this area of color jutting into the white, almost like a banner or part of a shield. But the white is so shaped. My intention was that you should see it as part of a white pillar and floor. As part of an arcade through which you were looking at desert landscape.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: And that grounds you, as it were.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Yes. But it is somewhat ambiguous, and maybe that's what inspired him to say, "Now, that's hard-edge." In 1964 he included me in "California Hard-Edge Painting," at the Balboa Pavilion.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I would have to read the catalog essay in order to determine whether or not he had stretched his premise.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Now hard-edge has become a much more general term for any thing which is clean edged, with flat areas.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes, and you certainly have all of those. I'd have to read his definition in that catalog. My own sense of it is essentially confirmed by what you're saying. At the time that he did the "Four Abstract Classicists" exhibition, in 1959 he signed the essay. When was the show you just mentioned, "California Hard-Edged Painting"?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: 1964.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There's only five years difference. "Four Abstract Classicists" as an exhibition had such a very specific tack. It's very possible for things to grow beyond, plus work develops and critics sometimes, who are deeply involved grow and change as well. I admire a critic who is not afraid to extend the parameters of his own premises in print. You were saying that some of the artists in the California hard-edge show were not included in the "Four Abstract Classicists." We have people in here such as Florence Arnold, John Barbour, and here is Larry Bell in this show in 1964 when Larry was doing hard-edge painting. Paintings such as Old Cotton Fields Back Home, which had areas of orange, hard-edged geometrical on unprimed canvas. I felt at the time that those

were important. He was then to go on and do his glass works, Karl Benjamin who was a Classicist. I don't know about those works. I know about very Reinhardt-like works, John Coplans, Lorser Feitelson, June Harwood, Frederick Hammersley, Helen Lundeberg, John McLaughlin, Dorothy Waldman.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't know what happened to Dorothy Waldman. I haven't heard of her lately but that may be just my ignorance.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What do you know about Florence Arnold?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Florence Arnold lives down in Fullerton still. I am really not aware of what she did before she became a hard-edge painter.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: What about John Barbour?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: John Barbour was an older man who worked on a smaller scale than some of the other Abstract Classicists. He's no longer living.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: He was born in 1891, so probably not.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think he died some years ago. My impression is that he was not a well man then, and he had a heart problem or something.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There are all 24" x 24" in this show. One of them is 24" x 36".

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They were rather small but very, very nice.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Larry Bell was a youngster at that point. Can you tell me about Dorothy Waldman?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I didn't know her. Jules probably saw her work at some exhibition and decided she belonged in this show.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: June Harwood was very young then. She was born in 1934.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: She's still working in the hard-edge vein. Her work has changed and developed as time went on, but she's been doing some very beautiful things. She's not as well-known as she should be.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Is she exhibiting here? I've only seen her work in reproduction.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: She had two or three small shows, small in the number of paintings. At David Stuart's Gallery, within the last few years.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In looking at this catalog from Newport Harbor in 1964, California Hard-Edged Painting, there certainly seems to be absolutely no reason one would not include you in this show. However, you were the only one whose work was referential.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I think so.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Now these are pretty subtly referential. It's very similar to the one, close in date, to the one that was in the California exhibition at Vice President Mondale's house in 1980. Number 47 of 1963, Desert Coast. It has a very subtle referential.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I should remember my own paintings, shouldn't I. My memory is that this and that area are the untouched primed canvas.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That much. The top and the very wide portion at the bottom, nearly half the canvas.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: This large area of color does separate itself more than it does here, from the ground.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You really have the canvas at an angle.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: But of course you see mountains, the red.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you ever have any connection with either Joe Goode or Ed Ruscha, who were younger artists in the sixties?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No. I know of them, and I've seen some of their work. But I'm not acquainted with them.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: They continue to do works with a very subtle Surrealism. A Surrealism combined with realism.

Combined with certain Pop edges. Joe Goode's window paintings and sky paintings certainly had those overtones. I was looking at *Desert Coast* and because of the angulation of the composition and so on, I suddenly began thinking about early paintings by Ed Ruscha, such as *Standard Station*, which was certainly very hard-edged and very particular as a composition. I'm always interested in where these crossovers came. Some times with younger artists, it's simply that they've seen your work some place. It would be interesting to talk to them.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They probably wouldn't even remember.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It often happens.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Sometimes we're fortuitously influenced or inspired by something we forget about afterward or don't take seriously. Or it comes out so different than the work of the one who is influenced that it's not identified.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I think writers do that too. It can be a very unconscious process of simply absorbing something that has a feeling or sensibility. Certainly visual artists do that. Some times you can say your work of such and such a period looks like artist X or artist Y. And they'll say, yes, I realize that now but I certainly didn't know it when I was doing it. Now that it has been pointed out to me, I've been able to trace it back and say, I must have seen artist X and Y. I know they had an exhibition and I remember liking that show. But I sure didn't realize that when I was in the studio. Very often it's in no way conscious.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Sometimes people see influences where there are none, too. I can remember when we were meeting someone in a gallery, a museum person. We were perhaps looking at a catalog, at my painting Oracle, which has rather strange and unusual shapes. He muttered something about Arthur Dove. I couldn't say anything but I was outraged because I don't like Arthur Dove's paintings. I could have told him what inspired that painting. It was a varicolored blot, a puddling of acrylic paint which had occurred fortuitously on a plate I had been using for a palette. I liked it so much that I started making drawings from that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I can't tell you how many times stories like that come up in interviews. They're not monumental historical clicks, but some wonderful accident.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of course the thing grows from there.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In what way do you not care for Arthur Dove?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I've seen mostly reproductions of his work. They are often a little heavy, awkward, clumsy. They don't appeal to me.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Are you talking about content as well as technique?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm talking about the look of them.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Do you think they're heavy-handed attitudinally as well?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I really haven't thought about that. I know that they are not paintings I stop to look at when I come across them.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: He walks with lead shoes in areas where you go much more quietly. There's quite a bit of difference. There are very few examples of professional colleagueship among husbands and wives in a studio situation. You two also shared a studio. I think something extraordinary took place that allowed you to maintain your freedom and your flexibility as individual artists, at the same time, working out of the same base.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: One thing that helped is I'm a daytime worker. Lorser liked to work at night.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Would he paint all night?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Most of the night, or well into the night. I have to work in daylight. By dinnertime I'm through. Unless I have a show coming up, and a strip of paint already planned to put on a particular canvas, I can't work at night. I don't feel I see that well. I don't feel I function that well.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: You literally shared the same studio.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: We did have separate studios at one time. So we worked side by side or we worked separately. Sometimes I worked on some little thing in 1942 or 1943 while he was working on something big in that same large studio.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: In the same physical room. But you were saying separate studios, side by side?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They were separate, side by side, yes. I didn't always work in my own studio. Sometimes I worked in his. I never liked to start anything with anyone around. I always started a painting, or conceived it, when I could be alone. But since for many years Lorser spent a great deal of day time teaching, I had a fair amount of time.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: To do what you wanted to do. Do you criticize each other's work at all?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: We talked about each other's work.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Was it difficult for you to have a painting up, let's say half or a third of the way through, especially a painting where you'd reached a problematical state. Did you want to be private about that problematical state, or was it easy for you to say, look, I've gotten this far and it's not working?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, not necessarily. Once I'd conceived it and had got it going, I didn't mind talking about it. I didn't always take the good advice I got. Sometimes I argued.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's the terrible thing about two strong people who know what they're doing. There's a terrible question about who is right. I know so few husband and wife teams, and certainly not teams who—I'm saying collaborative when I obviously don't mean collaborative. I mean collaborative in a life relationship way rather, not in a studio sense. I think those things are difficult at best, with obviously strong egos.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I never thought that was a difficulty. Lorser talked about what he was doing, and would say when he was drawing a shape on the canvas. He would be constructing one of these so subtle lines and he'd say, "Come and look at this." Then he'd change it and say, "Now look." Sometimes I'd say I liked it better before. In the end he did what he wanted to do. But he paid attention because it's interesting to get someone who knows what you're more or less trying to do, to get their reaction. That worked the other way for me, too.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: If there is an atmosphere of total trust, it's possible to do that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: If they are competitive with each other, then it would be impossible. But that never existed.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Were you both strong enough all along, even from the beginning in terms of the work? You are very secure.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Lorser was a very strong artist, and secure about himself and his own work.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I would sense that.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: At first I began as his student. But Lorser's great virtue as a teacher was that, as soon as he saw the student's own tendencies and abilities and direction, he pushed the student in that direction. He never wanted disciples or imitators. So the fact that I was his student didn't hinder me. There are some who are outraged if their students depart from their precepts.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The hallmark of a good teacher is exactly that he or she has that capacity to open doors and have students walk through them.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Too many teachers do not have a broad enough background and knowledge and enthusiasm themselves. They are limited in what they can teach, or what they can appreciate, or what they can see in their students.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Since you were a student of Lorser's from the very beginning, it's interesting that there weren't problems for you in relation to the teacher and pupil relationship. Somebody can go on being your mentor for the rest of your life, and never let go of that. And always do it in a slightly patronizing way: "That's very good, dear," that kind of implication, which obviously you never had.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I know what you mean.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's totally destructive in an art situation. It's marvelous because it's a real rarity. Did you ever have art fights in relation to points of view?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In relation to our own work, I can't say so. In talking about other things, I remember Lorser would appreciate something that I didn't care for at all. But I don't consider that a fight, a difference in sensibility.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Did you ever feel that your egos were in competition?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: No, I didn't. I was happily occupied with some other things, and painting mostly small

paintings in the forties and fifties. I was not exhibiting too often, and not giving a damn. I thought this was a very unprofessional attitude. My husband said, “What!” I’m really not a very competitive person. I want to do my own thing. I don’t want any accompaniment, but—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There really can’t be. Competition and jealousy are really wasted emotions. I don’t think you can be competitive with somebody.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It’s stupid, really. Each person has certain possibilities, certain abilities. But you have to be your own—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Some of that comes with maturity. I was probably pretty competitive when I was young, because there were things I didn’t understand.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I suppose that time and experience make a difference, too.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Some place along the line, even though you both had exhibited in New York, and you traveled a reasonable amount, you made a calculated decision to stay here in California. A decision that in some ways was hard for your work. I should rephrase that, you made a decision to be Californians, and to remain in California, and to function here instead of going to New York. In retrospect it would have focused New York attention on your work at an early period of time when both of you were doing stronger work than most of the New York painters.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It probably was true that at a certain point, in terms of being noticed, in terms of the works being sold, it would have been better to be on the New York scene. A lot of things happen just because of an inertia. But neither of us liked what we saw in the New York scene, to live and work. Neither of us had a taste for art politics and the whole game that you play in that arena.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Do you have any regrets about not having gone for a period of time to New York?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Not really.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It’s nice to be able to say that. There has not been a consistent heavy-handed pattern of criticism. Before Artforum began and after Artforum moved, we had no journal out here. If that made the going tougher, it also allowed complete freedom and room for mistakes. For privacy, for growth and development in your own studio without having a spotlight turned on you. In many cases there’s a richness and a depth in the work. In any number of cases I think the art of California artists is often richer because of that development line. One has the freedom to work over a ten, twenty, or thirty year period of time.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I’m glad to hear you say that because Lorser came out here in 1927 not intending to stay, but for a visit. He stayed on. Since he was in his own work, he wasn’t a sociable person in the studio, he was always working on his own ideas, he found it a marvelous place. You do just what you please and nobody bothers you. So he just stayed on and on.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: For nearly fifty years.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I dislike the idea of other artists always walking in and out of the studio and saying this and that. I like to work very much on my own. I really have no regrets. I know there have been certain disadvantages, but there have been great advantages too. The artists here in Los Angeles are so scattered around the map.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: They really are.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Few know each other except by name or by work. I don’t really believe in groups and movements. The only time I was ever involved in that type of thing was during the short period of the Post-Surrealists, and as far as numbers in the group go, the group concerned was very small.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Most tendencies of movements are at least partially over laid by art history and art criticism, and not by the artists. I don’t care whether you’re talking about Minimalism or Pop Art or Abstract Expressionism or Social Realism, however far back you want to go.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Those things are usually named by other people.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That’s right. The artists involved in those things didn’t consider themselves Pop artists until some way reasonably down the line. Somebody puts them in a show, and says, “Oh, you’re a thus and so.”

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Somebody found a category and lumped them together.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: One of the things that's going to be interesting in relation to the things happening around the development of the new museum of contemporary art to be built on Bunker Hill in Los Angeles is that there's a very vocal and very active artists community. Vocal in a positive way, not in the old political sense. A great group of people who care and who are deeply desirous that this time around, if a new museum is built, it should serve the artists. In the process of that, a number of artists are getting to know each other who never knew each other before. There could be some interesting ramifications. They are artists who have no visual or aesthetic link, but have some interesting human links. It's been my observation over the last few years, as I've begun extensively to interview artists, that we tend to develop friendships along aesthetic lines. One tends not to have friends whose work is radically different from one's own. I wouldn't say that's 100% true across the board, but there's a very curious pattern which may have stronger psychological roots.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: That makes sense.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: "I like your work because you like my work," it's not that kind of thing. It has to do with the root base. By the same token, I have never been excited or deeply affected by a painting or a group of paintings, or to a body of work and not found the same common thing in the artist. It doesn't ever surprise me to meet an artist whose work I have spent a lot of time with. The people never surprise me. The work is so much a part of what that human being is about.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm not sure.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: The one exception to that is Dan Flavin who works with fluorescent. Dan is a very large, very heavy-set man. Everybody expects him to look like a tube, because it's clean ascetic, linear, and he's not. There are some exceptions.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I can remember an artist who worked as a mural assistant for the art project. He looked rather like a bear walking. You wouldn't expect anything very delicate from him, and yet he did fine lettering, delicate, little detailed miniature sorts of things.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I think if you plumbed that person, there would be great sensitivity and gentleness beneath all that. It's not always physiognomy. It's something much more in the personality. What about your specific desire to hold onto the referential, to have present, implications of three-dimensional space?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Besides the formal considerations of a visual structure, I want also certain subjective qualities which I seem to be able to suggest by certain relationships to what we call reality. Whether it's landscape, seascape, certain kinds of interiors, or certain arrangements of lights and shadows. It's a subjective quality I can get with these referential abstractions rather than a complete—I don't mean to say that the painting of Lorser's which refers to nothing you ever saw before or since, has no subjective quality, because it does. It must have to do with the associational values. It's difficult to say it by making comparisons, because I seem to be negative about completely non-objective hard-edge abstraction, which I don't mean to be. I don't feel that way. Does that make sense?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Is the subjectivity for you or for the viewer?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: It has to be for me, but I hope that it says something to others who look at it. I, f or one, don't know how to work on the subjectivity of viewers. Do you know what I mean?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Doing so is probably specious, anyway.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I have to work on myself first. When I feel there's some thing there, then I can feel that since I'm not that different from everyone else, someone else will feel it too. The artist has to work for his own satisfaction first. I don't know of any other way. Of course there's having to consider in a literal way what this looks like to someone else.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: But that's not the same thing. Was there a time when you might have become a hard-edge painter, and let go of things referential, where you made a conscious decision not to do that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't remember ever thinking about the possibility of being referential in some way. I might do what are called pure abstractions or non-objective works. For instance, you speak about 1958, as sort of a turning point back as far as 1951, when I painted Mirror No. 2 and a painting, a partner to it, The Shell. The only forms there which are painted at all realistically are the little objects, the shell, the fruit. I forget what they all are. But the background, the areas which make a setting for these objects, are almost totally abstract, really hard-edge, flat areas which suggest walls, cast shadows, even landscape and sky. But they are not modulated at all. That goes right on through to paintings like The Portrait, which is in the Santa Barbara Museum collection, in which a little girl of another era is depicted with a carnation in her hand in a canvas on an easel. That's not a very good example, come to think of it. There are more what you might call realistically painted objects in that

picture. But those hard-edge areas come right down from the earliest fifties. In fact, perhaps they appear in some of the Post-Surrealist things.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: But you don't let the objects disappear ever, or the reference.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: But at a certain time, that little painting *A Quiet Place*, done in 1950, was the forebear of a painting The Road, in which there are no modulated surfaces. The treatment is flat, to create an interior and a view out of a door with a road going back into a landscape. It's all purely geometric shapes. My hard-edge debut came about for two reasons. First of all this tendency which I already had, treatment of areas and spaces, meant to suggest walls, floors, cast shadows and so on. The other thing is that I would look at Lorser's *Magical Space Forms*, in which these flat areas are ambiguously positive and negative, and be fascinated by the three-dimensional possibilities I saw. But I wanted to use those possibilities for my own purposes. That's as near as I can come to it. Then, as you go on with this sort of painting, the size expanded. I found ways of suggesting landscape. I began to introduce curves instead of just angular geometric forms.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: So you were really interested in the quality of three- dimension which is important to opening up the space, and the implied referential attitudes which open it up, depending on where the viewer wants to take it. Those things are terribly important in relation to the Formalists' attitudes about the respect of the flatness of the canvas.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I don't give a damn about flatness of the canvas. I like to knock a hole in the canvas. I'm also interested in what it looks like as an arrangement on a flat canvas, an arrangement of forms.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: They work both ways. It's not that they don't work as flat forms. They certainly do.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I'm interested in both aspects. I want to have everything.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It's interesting because there are not very many examples of that. Do you know anybody else working in an implied referential way like that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Of f hand, I can't say I do. As far as I'm concerned, I would feel it was a natural discipline.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Especially at a time when that was not done, when it was accepted that one did not do that. That becomes even more interesting. During the sixties, the criticism that could have conceivably been leveled against your work would be the criticism that was often leveled against de Kooning, that he could simply not get rid of the figure. "Isn't it too bad that de Kooning couldn't get rid of the figure?" As we look back on it we're awfully glad he didn't. Diebenkorn got hit with that too, "Isn't it too bad he wasn't disciplined enough?"

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Perhaps I was lucky I was less conspicuous than Diebenkorn or de Kooning. I remember that when I had my first one or two shows of the hard-edge paintings the critic Henry Seldis was not very happy about this development. He had always spoken nicely of my work before that, but there were some nice little complaints in his reviews at that time. He was not the only one. I remember one man who came up to me and bawled me out, "A renegade."

JAN BUTTERFIELD: How did he mean that?

HELEN LUNDEBERG: He implied that I had just let myself be taken over by Lorser, and was imitating him.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: That's ridiculous.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Because I had dropped out these nice little fruits and flowers and shells and things. But you can't pay attention to that. Anyway, I was never working in what do they still call it, the "mainstream"?

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Yes.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: And neither was Lorser. Lorser came out with all those *Magical Space Forms* just when Abstract Expressionism was beginning.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: However, his earliest hard-edge dates precede Kelly's.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Oh. That's one of the things that annoys me, when people bring up Kelly.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: I think Lorser is much more important than Kelly, but he's never been given that credibility. I hope that will happen—

HELEN LUNDEBERG: I hope it will too. It burns me up every time I—

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It’s not right. I’m glad to hear you say that because Kelly has always looked thin to me in comparison to Lorser. That is one of those problems of art history being written from the East Coast.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: They just don’t know what goes on. I hope things are better. It’s not quite so bad now.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: There is that new journal called Images and Issues. If that succeeds in doing the job it intends to do, that could make a great deal of difference. Simply and purely in terms of giving visibility to strong figures.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: In the beginning *Artforum* started out to do something like that.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: It did, and it did a wonderful job in the beginning.

HELEN LUNDEBERG: Then they took off to New York.

JAN BUTTERFIELD: Then it got mainstream. It took itself terribly seriously. Now it’s beginning to change again. It’s under new leader ship. It could be quite interesting. The phenomenon of a journal opening up out here could be quite important. The fact that there is a new museum being built on Bunker Hill, and that the L.A. County Museum is also talking about building a structure for their modern art, and the Bunker Hill museum will be contemporary art. You will see eventually this revivification to set up the thing that happened in the sixties when the L.A. County Museum was built, and there was all that great excitement and great focus. Those things will help to refocus attitudes and attention. The time is right. I talked to a very important critic a couple of days ago who has been on a number of panels and has been involved with a number of seminars recently, all having to do with Post-Modernism, the death of formalism, and the very real phenomenon of pluralism. As pluralism gets talked about as a real attitude of mind, it opens up everything for out here. Because we have never fit the formalist structure. Because it was conceived to deal with a different kind of art. Or it was developed out of that art and then more art was developed to fit the structure. But as criticism becomes pluralist, suddenly an awful lot of very interesting people out here are being looked at again. A number of older figures are being picked up by galleries and so on. I keep hearing about people who now are in their fifties and so on, who are now going to have shows in New York in major galleries. The shift is with us. But I don’t think it’s going to happen overnight.

END OF INTERVIEW

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