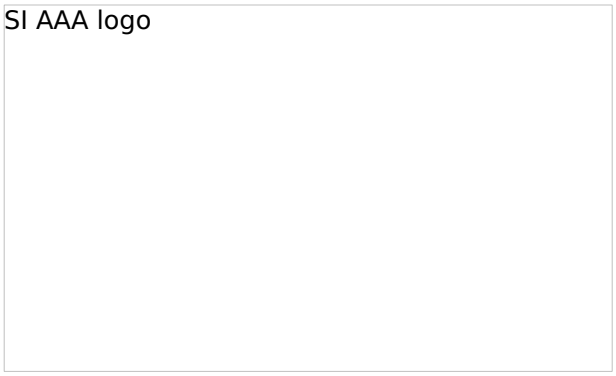

Oral history interview with Julia Santos Solomon, 2021 March 9 - 2021 April 15

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Transcript

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Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Julia Santos Solomon on March 9 – April 15, 2021. The interview took place over Zoom at Santos Solomon's home and studio in Woodstock, New York, and was conducted by Fernanda Espinosa for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Julia Santos Solomon and Fernanda Espinosa have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: All right, so we're recording the oral history of Júlia Santos Solomon. This is a virtual interview for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Today is March 9, 2021. And Júlia, you are in your studio and home in Woodstock, New York. This is Fernanda Espinosa—I don't think I said that—I am the interviewer, the oral historian for this project. And now, if you can please introduce yourself, Júlia, and tell us when and where you were born.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I'm Júlia Santos Solomon, and I was born in the Dominican Republic, and I have been a visual artist for 40 years, maybe more. So that is my calling in life, and I'm very excited to create this oral history.

I was born into grief, and I think that that's marked my experience in life. My mother was 21 years old when she had me, and the biggest love of her life was her father, and he was killed three months before my birth in a trucking accident. And that event impacted my place in our family. So Mom was sad and depressed when she was carrying me. But my grandmother saw my birth as a joyful event because I was able to replace the terrible loss that she had. So what she did was that she pretty much claimed me during that time. She took me to her room as a baby.

Fortunately, Mom breastfed me, so I had some contact with my mother. Mom had to become the breadwinner for the family. She was the oldest, and she was female, but she had to take on the role of financially supporting my grandmother and my aunt, who was 14 at the time. And Mom, who had been an athlete, became a Phys. Ed. teacher in the public school system, and that's how she supported the family. Unfortunately, less than two years into my life, she divorced my father, and that created another break with the family.

I know that my father—you know, at those times when you were born, people didn't come to meet you in the hospital, so he never came. No one came, you know. And I was born right at the tail end of Trujillo's dictatorship. So my birth certificate says that I was born in Ciudad Trujillo, which is now Santo Domingo. So being divorced in the Dominican Republic in 1958, [19]59, [laughs] somewhere around there, that was a big taboo. And Mom was very beautiful, she was a beautiful woman, and she had such a hard time. She was ahead of her time there. She had a hard time creating a harmonious life. My mother's life was very chaotic during those years. My grandmother, in an effort to clear the rift between my father and Mom, actually moved into a house with my father hoping that Mom would join us, but she never did.

[00:05:18]

So I'm born into Trujillo's dictatorship, [laughs] Mom gets divorced, my grandfather dies, my grandmother is thrilled, and we're just trying to make sense of it all.

Mom was invited to do some athletic workshops in Maryland University because she was a good athlete, and she opted not to do that. The way that we ended up immigrating to the United States was with my aunt Tomasa, who was a teenager. So Aunt Tomasa came to the States when she was about 18 years old. And she came because we had relatives who could claim her and give her papers. So she came, and she was living with the mother of an in-law, sleeping in the pullout couch with two twin girls. And she got a job in a factory. My aunt is a really gifted seamstress. Later in life, she became a sample maker for designers on Seventh Avenue, but the

work she was doing then as a teenager was rather simple. I think she says she was making like seven dollars a week back then. And, you know, after a year or two, she got lonely and decided that she didn't want to stay here, because she was the only one from our family that was in the States, and she decided she was going to go back. Then my mother said to her, "Don't come back, I want to come to you." She wanted to leave the Dominican Republic and all the chaos she was experiencing there. So my aunt did stay, and she brought Mom to the States with her.

So now, we are a three-person nuclear family. There's Grandma Gabina, my mother Lucía, and my aunt Tomasa, and myself. That year when Mom left, I was four years old, and I do a lot of art around this story—around this part of my story—a lot. So that age was really something that was very important in my life, my fourth year. And also, that's the year that Trujillo was assassinated. So that dictatorship ended when I was four. And even though I was a little girl, I understood the commotion that was going on in the country. You know, something big had happened, and I was trying to find my bearings around it.

So we started applying for visas, and we couldn't get them. We couldn't get visas. So Mom and Aunt Tomasa and I and *Güela,* we were separated. We were separated a good two, three years. And you know, back then people didn't just get on a plane and fly. You know, travel was very limited. So I remember that Pan American was the airline that would fly in and out of the Dominican Republic, and we were all dressed up to get on a plane, and we were able to procure a visitor's visa. And at age six, I came to the United States for the first time.

[00:10:09]

And we were staying with my great-aunt Octavia. And I'm actually now finishing a sculpture of my great-aunt Octavia. She was on Manhattan Avenue in New York City. We stayed there for a while and then realized that we needed [laughs] more room because we were staying—it was too crowded. So Mom and Aunt Tomasa and a cousin of ours rented an apartment in Long Island City. And my grandmother and I joined them, and there was enough room for all of us, and that was a very nice space.

It was really [laughs]—for me, it was a cultural experience that was very profound. I was put in first grade, so I went to the local school and was a very shy little girl, and I didn't speak English. And I stood out from the other kids because, you know, in my culture, kids went to school with uniforms. And even though we didn't have uniforms, I still had school clothes, like little Mary Jane shoes, [laughs] and little pull-up socks with pom-poms and little sweater sets. I stood out because I looked so different. And I remember looking at the American kids going, "Why are they dressed that way, you know, in T-shirts and Keds and jeans?" I just didn't understand it all.

There were some very comical things that occurred. My grandmother would make me lunch, and it was lunch for Fred Flintstone. So I'm this little girl, and she would make a steak hero with peppers and onions, and I would arrive with this thing, this meal for an adult. [Laughs.] And then the American kids were eating like these thin, thin, thin, little sandwiches with peanut butter on them, and I was, like, so confused. I was like, What is that, you know? So I was beginning to understand that there was a cultural difference.

The other thing that occurred in school was that—you know, my family, in our culture, tend to call their children by their middle name, so I was Yvelisse at home. Actually, to this day, my elder relatives, that's what they call me: Yvelisse. So when I arrived in school, no one could pronounce that, and they started calling me Julia. And that was very disorienting for a while for me to become someone else. So those are the things—again, to this day—that feed a lot of the art, all of those transitions. So I'm Julia in school and Yvelisse at home. So now begins that divide between the two cultures.

There were things that I absolutely loved about being there. And that was that there was an ice cream truck that would come every day at the same time, and the little song, the little Carvel song would go on, and we just ran downstairs. By then, I had come out of my [laughs] school clothes, and I was wearing my play clothes. You know, my little sneakers and little matching top and bottom so that I could play. But regardless of the clothes, I was out there waiting for that ice cream and that made me so happy. And there's a little candy store in the corner where they sold those rolls of candy with the little dots on them, and Mary Janes, and I would take my allowance and go there and get that. I mean, life was really getting good.

[00:15:02]

And once in a while, especially on the weekends, they have these trucks with rides on them, like

the kind of rides you would get in an amusement park, like little Ferris wheels and little horses. And these trucks would drive to the street, and they would come apart like a Transformer, and you could ride on the Ferris wheel or in the little merry-go-round, and that was such a miracle to me. I thought, Wow, this is unbelievable! [Laughs.]

So those are things that I remember from those years. And what happened rather quickly was that I learned English, I learned how to speak English. And for some reason, I didn't speak English with an accent. My ear was absorbing it in a particular way. And I liked to read, and I liked to do little handcrafts in English, and all of a sudden I'm speaking English. What that created was what I would call a hybrid. I became a hybrid person, a hybrid child. I would have to translate all the mail that came to the house for all the adults. I would have to make the phone calls to make appointments for people because nobody felt comfortable with the language. So in a way, it became a burden. You know, I was carrying the adults in this way.

I do have to say that during that year, The Beatles came for the first time to the United States, and they sang on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, and we had a black-and-white television with the antennas on top, and we watched The Beatles on TV. So to me, [laughs] that was like being part of American history, [laughs] hearing The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. So that was really exciting. I remember that so clearly. So I started walking on both sides of the aisle.

I turned seven in that apartment. And then shortly after that, we had to leave because our visa had expired.

This is what happened when we arrived. While we were in the United States, there was an election in Dominican Republic, the first election after Trujillo's death. A socialist president was elected. His name was Juan Bosch. Now, there was the battle with Cuba being Communist, and we were right next to Cuba. So geographically, we were part of the domino-effect fear. So when we arrived in the Dominican Republic, we arrived in the middle of civil war.

And honestly, for many years, I did block that memory. It's only been maybe four or five years that I've allowed it to come through. I had never been in a war. The smell of war, you know, bazookas destroying the radio and television station, sandbags on the street, dead bodies on the street, and my grandmother and I alone. We went to our little house—we had this little house where she and I lived—and what we would do when we would hear shooting, we would go next door to our neighbors who had a bigger home, and we would hide under the bed. We would hide under the bed. They had three kids, and I was the fourth kid in that house, and we just—we would just stay under the bed until it stopped.

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At a certain point, my grandmother realized that it was just too dangerous to stay there. So we were able to leave Santo Domingo and head to Santiago where the majority of my grandmother's family was from. And to this day, most of my relatives are there. I have a very small handful of relatives in Santo Domingo and a small handful of relatives in San Pedro de Macorís, but the big family branch was in Santiago.

What happened when we arrived—I remember this so distinctly, walking—we had these long boulevards with wonderful promenades of trees. And in the central boulevard were the municipal buildings and all the buildings that had to with governance. We were walking down this boulevard, and we could see people carrying out furniture and carrying [laughs]—you know, emptying out the municipal buildings. And I remember being so confused. I'm like, What are they doing? Well, what are they doing?

That period of our lives was extremely difficult because we were homeless. We didn't have our own place, so we had to stay with relatives. And my grandmother had a lot of siblings there. So the first relative we stayed with was really—I would call her her poorest sister, you know. We slept on little cots, you know, in the middle of the house, and we had, you know, a simple pipe that we used for showering. And in the kitchen we had what they called a *tinaja*, which was a big ceramic jug that we filled with water, and we used that for cooking and for doing the dishes, and that was the layout of that particular house. I remember distinctly in that house—because I didn't have toys, and I'm about seven going on eight—I used to collect little bottles with nice shapes, and I would fill them up with water, so it gave them a nice weight, and then I would make little clothes for the bottles and pretend that they were dolls.

So we started rolling from one sibling to the other. The next sibling that we stayed with was really well-off. It was like the complete opposite. She had staff, you know, people cooking and

shopping and cleaning and this and that. And I think the difficult part for me is that she had a girl, you know, my age that I was bonding with, but she was like a slave child, you know what I mean? Where poor families would often leave their children with well-to-do families, hoping that the children would do better, but in reality, what happened was that they were not—they were treated like little slaves. They had to work morning, noon, and night. And I was so aware of this distinction between us, and I worried about it.

[00:25:00]

My [great -JSS] aunt's husband, first real macho man I ever met in my life. And *oof*, he was something else. He was a very successful entrepreneur. He used to make very high-end pool tables out of mahogany, and he had a fleet of what we called *coches*, which is a horse and buggies. And in that time, horse and buggies [laughs] was a legitimate way to—it was a legitimate form of transportation. So rather than taking a motorcycle or a car, you got on a horse and buggy and got where you needed to go. So at lunchtime, we would have this fleet of horse and buggies parked in front of the house because all the of the drivers were fed at the house.

So it was always a very busy house, and everything centered around her husband, Fano. They had the main house and then there was this other house that they no longer used in the back. It was a long lot, so they have this old house in the back, and I remember Grandma and I had a little bureau to put our clothes in, and we had these little cots. And I would, every day, take all my clothes out and take them to the back house where they had abandoned furniture and stuff they didn't need or use, and I would put my clothes in there. And my grandmother would get very annoyed with me: "What are you doing? That's not where it goes!" So she and I had this game, I would take it out, and I was trying to remove myself from that place.

Fano had a lot of children because he was a big macho man and he had income and he had children everywhere of all ages, but one of them lived with them, and he was older than me. He was probably 10 or 11 when I was eight. My aunt's one child with Fano was a very kind boy, and I liked him tremendously, and I still like him; we're still in touch. His name was Felito, and the older boy was Leandro. And Leandro was a troublemaker. Leandro was a troublemaker. Once, you know, there was this family across the street with really pretty sisters, and he wrote one of the sisters this love note, and I didn't understand what it was. He said, "Would you bring it across the street?" I did, and of course the mother read it. I got in terrible trouble. My grandmother had to go in the middle of the street and have a screaming fight with this woman and clear that up.

This is what he did that I'll never forget. Leandro used to pit the other child, Tatica, and I. He wanted us to fight each other, like a cockfight. This is a girl I loved, you know, so I did it once, and it felt so bad. I was like, I don't care what happens, I'm not doing that again. So the second time he asked me to do it, I attacked him instead, and I bit the life out of him. I was little, but I knew that I had to defend myself. So, of course, he's screaming bloody murder, everyone is like, "Oh, you're so dead, Julia, wait till Fano gets home, you're going to get such a beating." And I [laughs] was like, I better not let Fano catch me.

So Fano gets home, they tell him what happens, he takes off his belt, and he comes running after me. And I jumped on—it was called a *fogón*. A *fogón* was—this is pre-stoves. A *fogón* was a ceramic place where you cook. There were holes in it, and it went to the bottom, and you would put charcoal at the bottom, and that's how you would cook. So there was this flat *fogón*, huge, with all this multiple cooking surfaces. I jumped up on the *fogón*, and there was a little window in the kitchen, and I just slipped my body through the window and jumped to the other side. And I stayed away from the house until my grandmother came home. And after that, we had to leave the fancy house, you know, we just had to—we were no longer welcome there.

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But I have to say, something joyful happened. One of my grandmother's brothers, who was a single man, had bought property outside of the city. It was set on a hill like this. And he brought together three families, three siblings, and that included that first aunt who was poor—her entire family there. I slept with her daughter—we shared a bed in a room—and her little brother, Juan, became my best friend, and he was downstairs. And then the oldest son, Victor, is someone who's very important to me to this day. Victor is 80 years old. And Victor lived in that house. So that family was there.

Then in addition to that family, there was a younger sibling, the youngest of all my

grandmother's siblings, who was just married. And he lived in *el campo*, you know? So he came with his wife, who was pregnant, and she had her first child in that house, and I fell in love with that baby.

Several things happened there. I really felt at home for the first time. I felt at home. Each one of us had chores in the house, and I loved that. My task was to water the gardens. We had gardens on the top and then gardens going down the stairs. And then my uncle loved roses, so he had a rose garden in the bottom level. He had yellow roses and white roses, and they smell so magnificent. So I used to love that job! And to know that I was contributing to the household. So that was the first thing.

The other thing was, I became a complete and utter tomboy. I started hanging out with Juan, and Juan and I were, like, jumping fences, climbing over things, going into abandoned soap factories, climbing up trees. I was so liberated hanging out with a boy. Of course, we were both pressured not to do that. You know, he was a boy, I'm a girl; I'm supposed to be cooking, and he's supposed to be, I don't know, studying for a PhD, I don't know. But he and I did not give up our friendship. We hung out, we're still friends. Juan is very important to me also.

He was the youngest of Angelica's children. He was very intellectual, Juan, and he used to [laughs]—you know, he would take a calendar with the Virgin Mary and put a mustache on her, and he would get in terrible trouble. [Laughs.] Or, he was just confrontational in an intellectual way at a young age, and he grew up like that. He never really truly changed that. That became who he was. So Juan and I, for many many years, would write each other letters and keeping each other informed once we were separated. But those years together, he really saved me, and developing that rebellious tomboy phase of my childhood was really wonderful.

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Uncle Eliseo was an entrepreneur and he had a—what they called bars in the Dominican Republic, but there was no alcohol. What they served was, like, homemade cottage cheese and baked goods and milkshakes and soda pop. And that's what he did. And after school, Juan and I, in our little unforms, we would go to his place and have a snack. And that was a real joy. So here's another thing, another joyous event. So we remained rebellious, we remained best friends, we did so many things. I think the safest thing we ever did was play jacks. We had daylong tournaments, daylong tournament of jacks-playing, where we were making up different ways to pick these things up and then it was just like, go, go, go, and it was very competitive. [Laughs.] That was fantastic. So when we were playing jacks tournaments, everyone was happy because we were not climbing over a fence somewhere.

So I'm finally happy, you know? And my longing for my mother was softened because of this communal experience that I was having in that house. And we get a visa.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And where was your mom at this point?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mom was in New York. Mom was—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So she stayed when you returned to the Dominican Republic?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: She stayed behind with my aunt. And the two of them were working very hard to get us residencies. They ended up hiring a lawyer. My aunt found a lawyer, an immigration lawyer, who helped them with our case, and that's the reason we were granted a visa.

But I think, in terms of my life, I am finally feeling like I belong somewhere, and I was taken from it. And there's a preciousness for me around those years that I was in that house. There's this gratitude that I felt for those years there and for those family friendships. Reyna, who I shared a room with—she and I are also very very close. She's the one in San Pedro de Macorís. And Reyna has got to be 77 maybe, now?

So when I got to the United States the second time, it was highly traumatic for me. And I'll tell you—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And how old were you at that point?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I had just turned 10. I had turned 10. My mother during those years had decided that she wanted to bring me to the States into a family situation. She wanted me to

have a family setting, so she married a man. And he was just the wrong person. He was an alcoholic, and he didn't want me there. This was not his idea. [Laughs.] My mother was 26, long legged, five foot seven, just gorgeous. She was a beautiful woman, and he was a very handsome man. He didn't want a 10-year-old in that setting.

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So I'll explain what that was like. They got married, and they rented what was called a furnished room. And I know that furnished rooms, like the '40s and the '50s, you know, were understood, it was—these were like studio—they weren't apartments. It was like a big room with living room, dining room, and bedroom, everything in one space. Then you have a little tiny kitchenette, and the bathroom was in the hallway, so it was a shared bathroom. So I went in this physical space, and they don't have room for me. So what ended up happening was that they got a cot and they put a little curtain in the frame that separated the kitchenette from the main room. Now, my cot fit just exactly in the corner against the stove. So all night, I would be smelling the gas. I don't know how it is I didn't die. [Laughs.] All night long I'm smelling this gas. And I think the most humiliating moment in that kitchenette for me was when I woke up and I realized that there were cockroaches crawling on me. So that's my bedroom.

The second difficulty was, these furnished rooms were intended for adults, not for children, so I was there illegally. I was not supposed to be there. So leaving in the morning for school was difficult, so as to not be seen by the neighbors. And coming back after school was difficult. So I had to find a way to run in there and not be seen. Now, taking a shower in the hallway bathroom was a terror for me. I'm not supposed to be there taking a shower. People from other floors could come and knock on the door. I couldn't speak to them because I had a child's voice. It was terrifying for me. So that's what I come into.

My grandmother and I were separated for the first time since my birth. My aunt had married, she lived on Dyckman, and they decided—"they" meaning my mother and my aunt—that my grandmother would go live with my aunt, so my aunt could have a baby and my grandmother would raise it. They never asked us, they never warned us. So I'm feeling desperate, I really was. You know, it was like, There's no room in the world for you, there's no place where you belong. You know, the rug was pulled out from under you, and you're with someone who doesn't want you. My stepfather would literally say to me that if it wasn't for me, they would not have any kind of problems ever anymore, that I was the cause of all problems in their lives. Including his factory job, you know, whatever was happening anywhere, it was my problem and my fault.

Fortunately, Mom got pregnant, and you couldn't have children in these places, so they were forced to move out. And we moved down the block, 183rd Street between Audubon and Amsterdam. On Amsterdam if you made a left was Yeshiva University, and that was my two-bedroom apartment.

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My stepfather told me that my role in life was to take care of my newborn brother, to clean the house, to cook, and that I was not to leave that house until I myself was married someday. I started feeling really trapped, and I was suffocating. Mom didn't really know how to handle it. She didn't understand what to do. At one point she thought, "This is not working. I'll get divorced!" And then a friend from the Dominican Republic who knew her after her first divorce scared her out of it. He said, "You can't go through that again, you can't go through that again."

Well, I'll tell you something, and this is where my faith comes from: I got this strong feeling that I could have something else. I understood that if I stayed there, that I would either run the streets, find some drugs or alcohol, get pregnant, marry the wrong person just to get out, and then my life would be damaged. And I had this idea that wanted to go to college. I didn't want that life. So I started thinking, How do I get out of here?

I was smart. I was very smart. I mean, when I first arrived there, I was in third grade, and I was so troubled at home that I had reading issues, but I had found all these nice, wonderful ladies who took me under their wings. One of them was the librarian, Mrs. Goldsmith, and she made me a monitor. And she was a defender, no one could touch me. And she would make me work wherever there was a break, and she gave me books. And all of a sudden, I started reading books! And in the books, I find other worlds! And I just couldn't stop reading because I could escape my life. And then she told me I could get a library card. And I would take out 10 books a week, and I would read about China, and I would read about Africa, and I would read about

anything I could get my hands on, because I had to escape.

So guess what happens? I'm doing all this reading, and all of a sudden, I skip a grade. Instead of being held back, I'm skipping a grade. So now, I'm transitioning from grade school to middle school, and I'm put—in those years, they used to categorize kid's classes by intelligence. So if you were in 7-1, it meant you were smart. If you were in 7-23, it meant you were not. So that's [laughs] how the system was organized. So they had 7-1 through 7-23 because it's a huge school, then they had on top of that what they called EP classes, which is special progress or something, and they had three classes above 7-1. But then above that, they had the SP classes, which were the classes that skipped grades, and guess who was in SP-1?

[00:50:12]

I was the only brown girl in that group. So there's a pride to it, and then you realize, Oh, my gosh, here I am in this class. It was during that time that I was in SP-1 that I started to be bullied at school. We had this massive class, you know, lunchroom, and people hung with their—you know, in cliques, and I was with the nerds. And I was—you know, I don't know where to go or what to do. My friends who were there with me who were artists, they were pretty wild. You know, they were gay and flamboyant and had high-heeled shoes on them, they were doing that. And I didn't fit in there either. And by the way, that friend and I are as siblings, we are so close. He's in Seattle, his name is Hugo.

So anyway, I started to get pushed every day from behind when I came out of the classroom. And I was a shy girl, and I didn't know what was going on, and I started to get annoyed. So I would turn around and say, "Who did that?!" You know, "Stop it, stop it!" You know, *da-da-da*. I would do that, but of course, it never stopped. And I have to share something very personal. My mother asked my aunt to give me some of her bras. My aunt is very petite. She's a little woman, petite to this day. But I didn't have a proper training bra. And one day, I was wearing one of my aunt's hand-me-down bras, and I have a dress on, and I had red vinyl wood clogs because they had just come in to the States, and they were the rage. Red clogs. So I'm walking out of the lunchroom, and this time, not only did I get pushed, but they pulled me back, and they ripped the zipper on my dress, and you could see the strap, that's all. And the humiliation that I felt was so intense that I went into a black rage. I literally cannot tell you. I don't remember. I threw my books on the floor, and I just threw them, took off my clog and hit whoever touched me last until my speech teacher who was on that floor came over, separated us, brought me to her room and says, "Julia, calm down, but I have to report this." And I said, "I can't go anywhere with this ripped back." And she said, "Don't worry, I'll sew it for you." And she did.

So she sews it, and now I have to go to the principal. Now, this is a girl in SP-1 being brought to the principal's office. When I go up the stairs and I sit outside, on the other side was the girl I beat up. She was someone I had been in sixth grade with, and she was upset that I was in SP-1. And I looked at her, and she was bruised, and she had bandages on her. I couldn't believe I had done that, I felt so ashamed, but she wasn't going to do it again. She wasn't going to do that to me again. She knew it and her friends knew it. It was over. They were not going to bully me one more day.

[00:55:07]

So I had enough bullying from everybody, everywhere else, and that's the day that I said, "No. No more. I'm fighting back." So the principal says, "Someone has to come and pick you up because we have to—you can't come to school for a couple of days, you're going to be suspended." It's the middle of the day, who's home but my stepfather? So he comes across the street—yes, we lived across the street—comes across the street, goes to the principal's office, and the principal says, "This is not respectable behavior, she can't do this ever again, no, she can't go back to—and you have to sign this piece of paper," and blah, blah, blah. So my stepfather said, "Oh, I can't believe it, of course I'm going to sign the piece of paper, and I will take her home."

Now, I'm getting all hot telling you this story. When we leave the school, and now we're on the street, we're crossing the street, he turns over to me, he goes, "Did you do that to that girl?" And I said, "Yes, I did that. Yes, that was me." This is the only time in my life that he said this. He turns around to me, he goes, "I'm so proud of you!" [Laughs.] I was bewildered. I was like, [laughs] he was proud of me for kicking somebody's ass. It's like, Oh, my gosh, okay, okay.

So I found my fighting, I found myself—that part of me that could fight. And that part of me, over

my life, has been very useful. It's a place that I can go to and I don't have to do a thing, but people know it's there. I don't have to say anything, I just have to feel it, and it comes across as a message, a primal message: Do not mess with me. Those years that I lived in that apartment, this guy who lived downstairs whose mother was doing drugs came upstairs and tried to break into the apartment to rape me. And we had what was called a police lock, you know, it's this metal rod that went from the door to a hole on the ground, and there was a metal bracket that you could slide this lock in. And for some reason, I found the strength to place the police lock on the door. And then I had to go find the keys to open the gate to our windows, because everyone had gated windows so no one would come in from the fire escape. So I found the keys and I—again, I jumped out the window, and got away.

One day, I was—my brother and I shared a room, and we are 10 years apart. And he, by the way, was the best thing that ever happened to me in that environment, having a sibling. I washed his diapers, he was my doll, I was no longer alone. My brother was very important to me. But he was five and I'm 15, you know? [Laughs.] So I slept in the upper bunk because he was a little boy and we wanted him safe. So I'm on the upper bunk, and I used took keep art supplies under the bed. I always used to fight with him. I would say, "Don't you touch my art supplies." [Laughs.]

I should tell you why I had art supplies. When I was in seventh grade—this is maybe a couple of years before the fight—the whole class was called to the auditorium. And they handed out to the entire seventh-grade class, everyone, they handed out a piece of paper and a pen and—no, it was a pencil. Pencil and a piece of paper. And they said, "Okay, class, draw a book on a table, the book should be open, put a candle on the table, and put your names and homeroom and send this back."

[01:00:22]

So they collect these little sketches, and I get a letter the following week: "Congratulations, you're in art class." I'm like, What? I wanted to play the drums. [Laughs.] That was my idea, that I would play the drums in an apartment in Manhattan. [Laughs.] So they said, "No, you're in art class." And along comes this incredible woman named Hope Irvine, and she embraced us. And she had us drawing while we were in school, she had us doing after-school art, she had us doing murals, she had us thinking! And she did an exercise that I will never forget in my life because it was so important. She took all of us and put us in a room and said, "Go to the furthest corner, you know, everybody just huddle in the corner," and she gave us all string. And she says, "Come out of the room, but you have to tie your way out of there." In other words, use the string to tie from one object to the other, and when you come out, it should look like all string. I thought, What is she asking? What? Okay, so we did it, and then we talked about it, and what she had done was help us understand space. When you're drawing, when you're painting, you are using a two-dimensional media to create an illusion of depth. So you can talk about that all day long, but when you experience it physically, when you see how much string it took to get out of there, you understand.

So she was my very first art teacher, my very first art angel. She made sure I got into Saturday programs at Cooper Union where I made my first sculpture from a plaster mold from a clay bucket. It was a bucket we put plaster in, and I carved it. Then she had me in figure drawing class. I mean, I'm 15 years old, I never—you know, we were very modest in my house, we didn't see each other naked. She had me in front of [laughs] a nude model at age 15, and she was just blowing my mind.

So she pointed out that I was a talented person in the visual arts. She made sure that I had all this extra help and was exposed to all this stuff. And she said, "You need to apply to the High School of Art and Design." I didn't know what that was, I didn't know it existed, but she gave me hope. She saw talent and value in me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And you said her name was Hope?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Irvine, I-R-V-I-N-E.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: She was also Hugo's teacher, and Hugo and I were in the same program, and he went on Art and Design too. So from that day on, I had a single focus and that was going to college for art. And it was during that time that my higher power helped me see an alternative lifestyle. So instead of losing my life, I wanted to find my life.

[01:05:00]

And I was in my bedroom with my brother that day, one day, and I was reading one of my 10 books [laughs] of the week. And I'm reading, and my stepfather walks in, and he starts screaming in my face. And I decided I can't look at this man with this anger in his drunkenness, I can't deal with him. So I just thought, "It's safer if I just stay in my book." So he's about, I don't know, 10 inches from my face, so he got very angry and very frustrated that I would not stop reading, so he knocks the book out of my hand. And it was that day that I took my guitar, a brown paper bag, some underwear, and some change, and I walked out of that house and never went back.

I found a phone booth, and I put all the coins in. In those days, you had—and I called my teacher, the one who sewed my dress, the one who saved me after the fight. And I said, "I don't know where I'm going, I just walked out of my life and my family, but I'm telling you one thing, I am not going back there." She says, "What about your family?" I said, "If I go to any of my relatives, I will be back here tomorrow, and that's not what I'm doing." So she said, "Take the subway to 242nd Street, take this bus for another half hour. Come to Yonkers, come to my house, we'll talk about it." So she and her brand-new husband took me in to their place. He didn't know me from a hole in the wall. So she said, "Okay, Julia, why don't you call your mother, tell her you're safe, and that you'll be here with me for the weekend." I said, "Great, thank you for that." So I called my mother, "Mom, I'm safe, I'm with my teacher, you know who she is."

Here's the thing: The weekend became a week, and the week became the summer. So I am a junior in high school, and I'm living in Yonkers with them.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And you were also younger—

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I was younger, yeah, yeah.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —than your classmates.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Correct, so I was 15 going on 16. I have to dedicate some time in this history to my high school painting teacher who was my second absolute mind-boggling, life-changing teacher, and he's very important. Irwin Greenberg was his name, and Irwin Greenberg was a rebel. He was a painting teacher at the High School of Art and Design, and he and his buddy, Max Ginsburg, were teaching students how to paint from the masters. And this was the time of the Ashcan School, so everyone was doing abstract everything, and the school wanted that modern curriculum to be followed in the painting class, but they refused.

So what they did instead was they taught us how to be classically trained. We talked about Velázquez, Goya, Rembrandt, and Vermeer. When we walked into his classroom in the morning, he would say, "Bow to the masters." [Laughs.] That's what he'd say! "Bow to the masters." And while we were painting, he would be talking about literature, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Hokusai, Trotsky. He was the most well-read adult that I knew. So we're painting, and he's discussing literature about the nature of mankind and getting to humanity and all of this stuff! I need to talk a lot more about him, but I do want to mention him in that way.

[01:10:34]

The reason I'm bringing him up now is because he had us arriving at school at 6:30 a.m., because having two periods of painting was just not enough in his mind. So school began at eight, we got there at 6:30, and we posed for each other, so we would get another hour and a half of painting, because in his mind, that's the only way to become an artist. You do it, you do it, you do it, and you do it.

So I'm in Yonkers now, and I'm a junior, [laughs] and I'm supposed to get to him by 6:30. So that was not working out for me, and after a short period of time, a mutual friend of Golda's found a solution where I would spend the week with her friend who was a widow, helping her with her two kids and getting to my class at 6:30 in the morning.

All I could focus on was college. That's all I cared about. As a junior in school, I started investigating, where would one go to school? Greenberg helped me with suggesting schools. So he suggested Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia College of Art. He suggested the Rhode Island School of Design. School of Visual Arts. He came up with this roster of schools that he felt were of value. So then I started, you know, getting catalogues back then and looking into them, and I realized that the Rhode Island School of Design had a program abroad, junior year. They had an

honors program, so if you got into that honors program, you could study for a year in Rome. And I'm looking at the other schools, and the other schools had similar maybe—but not that! Not Rome! [Laughs.]

So I decided that Rhode Island School of Design was my number one choice. However, I applied to everything. Golda's husband, Eric, helped me get to all the interviews. He would get me to the bus terminal so I could get to Philadelphia, and they would help me find a place to sleep over, so I could have my interviews. And you know, they really were instrumental in that phase, the find-the-college phase. And Eric was a talented photographer, so he photographed all of my art. And he was in marketing and sales, so he would say, "You have to be very careful which slide goes first." He gave me all this advice, and it was the first time that I experienced a parental relationship with a man. He was the person behaving like a father towards me. And that was vitally important. Greenberg was very paternal, but Eric Solomon was paternal at home.

[01:15:11]

So I started thinking, "Okay, you can do this, you can do this, you can do this." So I get into every school that I applied for. The reality was, my father in the Dominican Republic was a foreign car mechanic. That was his reality. My mother's reality was that she worked at a doctor's office as an office manager. Neither one of them could afford to send me to college. So everybody offered me money. And I got—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: What was—oh, go ahead, sorry.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's okay. I got into the Rhode Island School of Design with a full scholarship. And that's God in my life. When I look back, this is where I credit God in my life. Making that phone call to Golda, her saying yes, having Greenberg for a teacher, having Eric help me, getting into that school. Completely. So there I was, you know?

I'm sorry, you had a question for me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I just wanted to go back a little bit and ask you about the relationship you had with both of your parents at this point. You did speak about your stepfather. What was the communication like with your mom and your father throughout these years when you were going from high school into higher education?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay, that's a wonderful question. My father used to send me telegrams for my birthday. He sent the last one when I turned 13 years old. The years that we lived in the United States, my grandmother and I would go back to the Dominican Republic every summer. You know, every summer, we went back, and it was during those trips back that I would see my father in the Dominican Republic. He would come to the airport, we would go to the beach, we would have a meal together, we saw each other, and it was very nice. I have pictures of us when I was 15, you know, which was the last time that my grandmother and I were able to travel, because you know what else was going on. [Laughs.] And his last telegram was when I was 13 years old. So that's my dad. I know he loved me, but he didn't know how to show it.

The thing about my father's family is that they all abandoned me. My grandmother, his siblings. It's as if I didn't exist. So not only didn't I have a relationship with him, but he becomes a very important figure later in my troubled years, but the rest of them never ever called, sent a card, nothing. As if I was never born. My mother, during those years, we had a rough relationship. She was a very good woman. Mom was a good woman, she wanted the best for me. But I confronted her in the kitchen one day before I left, and I said, "Mom, I love you, but I don't want your life. I don't want your life, I need something else." And something about that conversation really marked the difficulty in our interaction.

[01:20:07]

So when I was living with Golda and Eric, and I called Mom to say I was okay, the rest of my family was pressuring her to send the police, to pick me up. "How could that be? You can't just have her in some stranger's house, you don't know what's going on!" They were pressuring my mother to behave in that way, to respond in that way. And I give my mother credit for saying, "No, that's not what's best for her." So we had a painful relationship because I had to break away from her, but we also—I also acknowledge that she could've behaved very differently, and she thought about what was best for me.

You know, those years that I was at RISD, we did not have much communication, Mom and I. When I went on the European Honors Program, I would write her and she would write back, so we were corresponding, but I never went back to live in her house. I never slept in her house again from that day. I did sleep in her house when she was dying. My brother and I were in vigil when my mother was passing. So that night, I was there. But other than that, from age 15 on, I never went back to sleep there. You know, because she remained married to my stepfather.

I'll tell you something. The difficulty around that relationship is that, because he used to tell me that I was the cause of all the problems in the family, I had this fantasy that when I left, my little brother would have a wonderful experience. I was the problem, I was removed, and now he was free to have a loving relationship with his father and his mother. I really wanted that, and I thought that that was true because I believed some of the things that my stepfather told me. I believed them.

But this is what happened instead: With me out of the way, my stepfather took his drunkenness onto my brother, and it was [makes hitting sound] this, and this [makes hitting sound] and this [makes hitting sound]. He caused a lot of emotional damage to my brother, who was a sweet little boy that I loved so much. But as adults, we talk about it. As adults, we're dealing with it. What that was. That trauma. The trauma of my stepfather. I mean, I only lived with the man, I guess, six—five years of my life, and I'm still recuperating, and my brother was with him from birth till he went to the army.

All of these things molded me. All these things feed my creativity. So it's important that I talk about it. You know, when I go to a canvas, when I go to do my work or I go to sculpt, that's the stuff that's still churning inside of me that gives me the emotional energy to put my truth on a surface. That's what feeds it. It doesn't matter if the work is flat or three-dimensional or abstract or figurative, that is what feeds it.

[01:25:33]

Now, my work is not unhappy work. People like it, people buy it, people collect it. You know, it's—they're not looking at it and seeing my story, but they're looking at it and having an experience, and the experience is what I'm bringing up and putting out there. Some people admire my work, they say the loveliest things, and I'm so grateful because it's not—you know, I don't need to make trauma art. A lot of people do, and it's wonderful, they do it very well. But that's not how my art looks like. My art just has to be truthful, meaning it has to come from that well.

You know, right now, I'm working on a series on Trujillo and the Mirabal sisters and parts of our Dominican history that are difficult, that have to do with that era. But they're elegant, and they're gold leaf, and they're pleasant to look at. You know, the collectors don't need the story, sometimes they'll ask and I'll share it with them, but that's not my place. And I have to say that what Woodstock has provided for me is a serene environment that allows me to hear myself, to hear my own voice, to create it.

When I was making art in New York City—the years that I lived in the city, later in my 20s—it was headline news. My art looked like the headlines. Whatever was happening that was awful is what I was making art about. You know, the Atlanta children's murders, John Lennon's shooting. You know, I lived in that environment so I was reflecting the environment. And when I left and came into quiet, I didn't hear the headline news, I heard my story. And Woodstock has facilitated that for a lot of years for me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I would like to pause for a little bit just to check in. I know you've really taken us through so much right now, and I'm okay if you are okay with stopping and then thinking about everything you've shared for today and meeting again next week. And you can tell me a little bit more about going to university and the things that you started reflecting on just a few minutes ago, if you're okay with that. But if you're also having the energy to continue this, that's fine.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I think it's very thoughtful of you. I think it's a good place to stop. I had to share some difficult stuff, but it's important to me that this story be truthful, in an effort to help someone else. There's is a teenager out there who has lived through some of my experiences, the difficulties, and that's why I need to share this, to understand that you can succeed in spite of all that.

[01:30:16]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: And as a Latina, I want our young kids to understand that you can be successful. So I am hot in the face, [laughs] so yes, I'll stop today. I'll feed my cat [laughs] who is trying to get me—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Your beautiful cat.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: He's my little—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I saw him before.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: He's my companion. He's like, Where are you going? Okay, I'll come. [They laugh.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I have a dog who's like that. He's knocking on the door right now. But I just wanted to say quickly that I really appreciate that you are taking into account so carefully who's going to be listening to this, because I would say that that makes a whole lot of difference when we're recording oral history. And I'm really grateful that you're thinking about future generations and very specific future generations of people. So I'm looking forward to hearing more about your life and your story, Júlia, and I hope you get some rest today, and I'll be in touch with you also to see if we can figure out the microphone stuff.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Have a wonderful night, and I'll see you next week.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you, Júlia. Take care, bye-bye.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Bye-bye.

[END OF TRACK santos21_1of7_digaud_m.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay, so we're recording the second session of the oral history with Júlia Santos Solomon. I am Fernanda Espinosa, and I am the interviewer and oral historian for this project. Today is March 19, 2021, and this interview is for the Archives of American Art, at the Smithsonian Institution.

All right, Júlia, thank you so much for joining me again. It's been such a pleasure. Last time, last week, we spoke about your early years as well as some of your relationships with your family in your earlier part of your life. And we also started going into some of your high school experiences and the importance of many people that supported you into art school and high school, then getting ready for college. You had also mentioned that you want to discuss a few more details about that time of your life, and so I wanted to give you that space to go back to whatever you wanted to either review or provide more details, and then we can go from there.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Thank you very much and good morning. It's very nice to be back. I did want to go back to a very important person from my high school days. He was Irwin Greenberg, and Irwin Greenberg was my painting teacher. And the reason he was so very important is because during those years when I was feeling so lost, he gave me confidence. Irwin Greenberg taught me how to become an artist. He talked to all of us about what that life was like, how our first priority had to always be making the art. And he talked about how the only way to truly master your craft was to create every single day. So that established an incredible discipline in me. He would say, "If you can't afford a canvas, you can paint on cardboard. If you can't afford cardboard, you can paint on construction paper." He just would say, "Before you buy yourself a pair of shoes, you go out and get your art supplies." So that was an extraordinary thing to have.

And there was a moment between Irwin Greenberg and I that I will never forget. I was doing a self-portrait in the classroom in front of a mirror. We had a closet for coats, and it had a mirror there, and I opened that door, and I was painting. And he came behind me and he said to me, "Julia, you are powerhouse." Now, no adult had ever told me that. No person had ever given me that reflection of myself. This comment that went beyond the struggling, learning—he just helped me to understand there was something very vital in my art-making. So that comment has carried me my entire artistic life.

He also knew there were a cluster of us who had problems at home, that we were safer being in a painting studio. So in addition to creating the early morning sessions that began at 6:30 in the morning, he had a small group of us painting in his studio on Saturdays. That meant that six days a week, he was overseeing us painting and taking out books and talking about things that were important. And he would make us lunch, tuna fish sandwiches. He just took care of us. And that kind of caring, which became also parental, helped me get to the next steps.

[00:05:20]

The last thing I want to say about him is that [laughs] when I was about 16, he stood up and said, "You know, artists don't mature till they're 50 years old." And I took that in. And I can tell you that I didn't care when I turned 21. My only goal was to turn 50 because he had said that. And when I turned 50, I had a huge party. And then I realized what he meant. By the time you're 50, you've honed your skills. Your hands, your heart, and your mind are now able to access what you need to access. When you're young, you're just talented, but at that age, I had the skills. But I had also lived long enough to have something to say. And that decade for me was the most powerful decade I have lived through. And I can't forget someone like that in my life, and I just will always honor him.

Now, when he wrote a report card, [laughs] he gave me like a 98 percent in my report card, and he said, "Julia, here are the best schools. You need to apply to all of them, I don't want to hear anything else." He also forced me to apply to the *Scholastic* magazine national student competition, which was a big deal. I didn't think of it. He filled out the application, he sent in my piece, it got a gold medal. [Laughs.] I still have it over there! Now, how much validation did this one person bring into my life? The reason I am mentioning him is because some of these younger people, no matter what's going on with them, they may find that one person that believes in them, that sets them apart, that says you have something of value. And that person, that one person, will change the course of what you do. And I will always be grateful to Irwin Greenberg.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You had also mentioned a couple of other people that were really important for you during those years when you went to live with your teacher and her husband, who was a photographer and who helped you photograph your art, apply for college. Tell me more about those two people that you lived with and who supported you throughout those years. And also if we can start talking about why you chose your school, and—I'll ask you more questions about that, but I'm really interested in knowing more details about your actual portfolio and how that came together.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, the two people that took me in when I left home, when I ran away—it was my speech teacher, Golda Solomon. And she was the person who rescued me after that terrible fight outside of the classroom and sewed my dress back together because she knew how I felt about it, how humiliated I was. And she answered her phone the day that I left home, and she invited me to take a bus and a subway to her place in Yonkers.

[00:10:06]

She was recently married, and her husband was someone I had never met and had no relationship with, but he gave me the very first support—parental, paternal support—at a time when I really, really needed it. I had a lot of work that I had created in high school with Irwin Greenberg and Max Ginsburg. And he took it upon himself to create a well-photographed portfolio. He organized the sequence of the presentation. He told me what should come first. He knew that I was going to be interviewed by all these schools, and he says, "When you hang them up, hang it in this sequence." He got me bus tickets to Philadelphia and talked to friends so I could stay over. He stepped in and helped me to do all of that. And because of his intervention in that sort of visual way, I got into all the schools I applied to. And Greenberg had told me that Rhode Island School of Design was the best school and that that's what I should shoot for.

There's a little piece about Rhode Island that I have to include. I have a very dear friend who's a fantastic artist named Hugo Moro, and Hugo and I grew up together in Washington Heights. One day, when we were seniors, we cut class—which was not my way—but I cut class to go see a movie with him called *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*, and it was literally just down the block from where our school was. We went to the matinee. And it was a story of Francis of Assisi and Clare, Saint Clare. The film was shot in Umbria to represent Assisi, and it was the most stunning visual film. And I kept looking at that landscape, and I felt a calling. I wanted to go there.

So when the potential to attend Rhode Island came along, I was very drawn to the idea of applying for the European Honors Program, which allowed you to study in Rome for a year. And even though Italy is the household of Renaissance art, [laughs] the most brilliant masterpieces, which I got to live with and study and observe, my goal was to get to Assisi.

So we arrived in Rome—and by the way, I'll never forget this visual: I had applied for my naturalization papers when I was in school, and they had not been completed. So when we left for Rome, I was the only student with a red passport, which was the Dominican passport, and inside, everything was written handwritten. There's a lot of handwriting and a lot of stamps, and it was very embellished and very red. So anywhere we went, there it was, you know, I was—[laughs] I stood out with this red Dominican passport. [Laughs.] Oh, anyway.

So there was a spiritual connection for me with Assisi. Three days after we arrived in Rome and settled in and got our rooms and have our roommates and all of that, I got on a train and went straight to Assisi. And that connection between that spot and myself has lasted an entire lifetime.

[00:15:19]

I want to acknowledge that when I got to Rhode Island, I was given a full scholarship because of a program called the Third World Program. And I still have wonderful friends from that era. What they did was they chose diversity. They chose Caribbean and Black and Hispanic people and gave them an opportunity to attend the school. And there was a dean who was wonderful, and there was this fantastic secretary, and we had a program within the school. Now, the school needed that diversity. I cannot say that I have witnessed [laughs]—I mean, let me put it this way. Their idea of a diversity was a couple of princesses from Iran, okay? They had chauffeurs, they had beautiful clothes, and they were, you know, diversity. And then the other one was a young girl who was inheriting oil from Venezuela, so there it was.

So [laughs] we were quite different, and thank goodness, we had each other. And we would dance together, and we would do things together, and we stayed close. I'm still in touch with so many of those folks. So that was a very particular moment. I made a lot of friends who were outside of that group, and those folks were people from Ohio that I would never have come across or, you know, from Georgia, Tennessee. You know, so I got a much broader exposure to that element, which I didn't have in New York.

It was very fortunate. It was as if the sky had opened up and here was my opportunity.

There is someone I need to talk about from that time, and she is an outstanding painter. She's a master painter. Her name is Lorraine Shemesh, and Lorraine was a young woman who was teaching me. She was maybe 25, 26 years old. A tiny little woman full of conviction and instruction. And what was fascinating about her was that even though she was so small and so—she was tough as nails. And she was teaching my favorite class which was figure drawing. And she would sit with every student and show them what she was looking for and correct them, and she would write long notes on every single one of your homeworks, and she followed through, and she wouldn't take no for an answer.

So what happens with me is that I'm confronted with someone who is powerful and young and talented. And her devotion was always to the students. She would just do what she needed to do to make sure that we got that instruction. The human form is the most difficult natural form to draw, and I developed an extraordinary love for her because she was such a mentor.

[00:19:59]

Now, many years later, when I ended up in Altos de Chavón School of Design as the only Dominican founding member, and I was assigned to teach figure drawing to all the freshman, Lorraine Shemesh was in the room with me. I was short, I had a little voice, and all of my students were older than me—that first generation—because they already had degrees and they were just coming to the school out of curiosity. Now, the second and third classes, the promotions after them, these were younger people. But that first generation, they would have had me for lunch, and I knew that, but I had Lorraine in my line to follow. So Lorraine transported herself from RISD for me all the way into the Dominican Republic, and she stayed with me and I was successful because I created discipline and I had demands and I pushed. But in pushing, I did what she did, was that I poured myself into these students. I had a mission with them. I had a mission with those kids. And they will tell me now all these years later that they understand that they received it, that they followed what I said, that it filled them up, that it

made a difference. And that was my mission. These were my people.

So, to continue speaking about Lorraine: Lorraine is collected in museums, Lorraine has beautiful books about her art, Lorraine paints the way that Greenberg said people should paint, every day, and we are still close. I told Lorraine about this process, about the oral history, and I said, "Lorraine, you know, at first I didn't want to tell people." And she just wrote to me and said, "You have to celebrate 40 years of showing up in your studio." Now, my mother's passed away, I don't have someone to do that, but Lorraine takes that on. She is still in my life, and she is still writing to me: "This is correct, that is what you deserve. Because I know you that well, and I know how you work, Julia."

Now imagine that, my blessing of someone like Lorraine Shemesh in my life. She had a beautiful opening, and I was there with the next generation: one of my Chavón students who had also taught. So it was Lorraine, myself, and him: three generations of art instruction, of passion, of draftsmanship, and I still have that photograph, and it fills me up. So I have to acknowledge the people who are holding me to what I am, who are reminding me. So Lorraine came from RISD, and I have kept Lorraine. [Laughs.]

Oh, RISD in general was a busy place for me. We had a lot of homework. We stayed up nights. We were in a very particular environment, and it was all focused on the next project. And everyone in there was talented. There was no slouching. So bouncing off of each other was the other part of our education. You know, once you left the classroom and you had to complete your assignments and you were staying up all night, and you were talking to this one and sharing with that one and this one told you this and that one told the other thing. That was the other part of our education.

[00:25:07]

So I had the discipline, you know, that came from Greenberg. But RISD introduced me to conceptual thinking, to process, to science, to filmmaking, to critical thinking. So RISD took care of the other side, and that was really, very, very important.

Now, after freshman year where we had fascinating liberal arts, you know, I was taking film classes and art history classes, it was fantastic. But then by sophomore year, I got a little—I needed more academic stimulation. So RISD and Brown University are neighbors, they're on the same hill. And at the time, you could take classes at either institution if you were a student. So there were Brown students at RISD and there were RISD students at Brown. So I decided, Hey, I'm going to go take my academics at Brown! And it was hard. [Laughs.] It was hard. I had to work so much in my English class, it was unbelievable. But there were some classes where I was just really acing it. I was acing in French because I have an ear for languages, and I was going to the language lab and listening to the French conversations and I loved that. Then I joined their gymnastics team, and—my favorite class, I took a medical anatomy class with medical students. So they had this gallery set up, and of course I'm thinking da Vinci, I'm thinking Michelangelo, you know, that's what I'm thinking.

So, we're all sitting in a gallery, and they start dissecting people, you know, and showing and opening the flaps like they do in da Vinci's drawings, and showing you the muscles and the ligaments and all of this stuff. Now, they were looking at it from a medical point of view, but I was looking at it, "Well, how does that bone move, you know, what's the shape of that muscle, where is that ligament exactly?" So that was really exciting class for me and I was able to do it at Brown.

So Brown fed my intellect and my academic curiosity. So I look back and I think, "Jeez, I was blessed." You know, now RISD and Brown actually have a degree that they will grant you from both places. Back then, that was not in place, but now they actually do it.

You know, I loved swimming at Brown and I loved the gymnastics, like I said, and it just—I mean, art students and art schools are not athletics; we don't have teams. [Laughs.] You know, they don't do that. [Laughs.] But I was a physical person, I liked to move, and I like to exercise, so there I was able to do that as well. [Sighs.] So RISD was important in all those ways, and it really taught me a lot.

I don't know, but I would be very curious to know, if any other Dominican students have been through RISD after me. I will look into that at some point. But it was something that did mark me in a good way.

And then, you know, there was Rome. Rome is an extraordinary city. I mean, now it's become rather busy, you know, and complicated to be in. However, back in those days, you could just walk across the river to Trastevere. And you could walk to all these extraordinary churches with Caravaggios and you could just—the city itself was big character.

[00:30:27]

And Rome even though it has, you know, all the historic Roman influence, it also has extraordinary pre-Roman history. You know, the Parthenon—I mean, you go in there, and you see that structure, and you just have to be in awe. You know, all of these fountains and things that were constructed before, that are still operating! So, you know, living in Rome and walking through Rome, you are literally living in history. There was this palpable sensation of all the things that happened before you showed up on that bridge. So that fed me.

And I chose to do some unusual practices while I was there, because we had to do our own—we had had to design our own curriculum. So the first thing I did was I wanted to keep my hands versatile, and I decided to go to a public school and draw the kids with ink. Who were not posing for me. They were just running and jumping and doing and *da-da-da-da*, and then—and I had a little backpack, a little school backpack where I kept my supplies, and the first thing they did was make fun of me. They used to call me *bambina piccola*, [laughs] which is "little girl," because here I am, and I'm 19 years old, and I've got this little backpack, but they have the backpack, and they're like, "Why is she—you know, what is she doing?" But that need to keep my hands moving allowed me to—I would fill my studio from wall to floor with these kids drawings: *dat, dat, dat, dat, dat*.

And then finally, I decided that my thesis was going to be painting an outdoor marketplace, a small outdoor marketplace. There's a very famous marketplace in Rome called Via dei Giubbonari, called Campo de' Fiori. Every tourist, every person who's ever been there, has been to Campo de' Fiori. You just can't miss it. [Laughs.] It's very, very big. But if you went beyond Campo de' Fiori into the back, there was this little marketplace called Mercato Santa Lucia, and maybe it had, I don't know, six vendors, seven vendors. And I could set myself up there, and I did studies in pencil, in watercolor, in ink. I did every kind of prep that I could, then I did small oil paintings, and I just kept trying things until I became familiar with it. And that painting—it's called *Mercato Santa Lucia*—has become really very important in my development as an artist. The reason being that Rome has a golden light. It's unlike any other light I have ever seen. It's a warm, beautiful light, and that light was shining on me every day.

Now, I arrive with a baroque palette, which is what Greenberg and Ginsburg had taught me because that was the palette of the masters. And then one day, my Caribbean color came through. It was like a bolt of lightning from the sky, everything cracked open, and all those mid tones and warm tones became turquoise, pink, bright yellow, and it was—it was outrageous, and all of that came together in that painting.

[00:35:17]

I sold that painting in 1981, and it left my life. And I kept thinking about it, and then in 2018, my collector said, "We sold the house, we moved to a condo, we have a lot of glass, we can't fit the painting. Do you want it back?" [Laughs.] I was like, Oh, my gosh, I want it back! So they shipped it to me in this huge box, which I still have, and that painting is in my house. And I look at it and I go, "How did I control that color? How did I manage this?" It's teaching me again, it's making—because now that I have all these years and I look at it and I know that it was something new for me, I'm really struck by it. And after that painting, my palette was absolutely—I want to show you something, even though this is an oral history. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yes, I would love to see it. I can picture some of the beautiful descriptions but if I can see some of it, that might be wonderful.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: This is a self-portrait I did immediately after *Santa Lucia*. I went out for a jog, I came back, I'm wearing my stinky little T-shirt, and it had—if you can see here, there was a neutral painting underneath it. And I just took the thing, turned it over, and did this, and I thought, like, "What is that?" So this is full-color Caribbean at its strongest for me. So from here on, there was just no turning back.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Can you take a couple of minutes just to describe what we can see in the painting for people who will be listening to this?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay, so this is a self-portrait, and Greenberg had taught me that when you need to paint something and you don't have a model, you paint yourself. And I have short hair and a little marigold around my ear, and I'm wearing a bright orange T-shirt which I had been wearing when I went out for a jog. And the pose is really very simple. I'm sitting there and I decided to lift up my right arm, so I had hands to paint.

Now, the background, it's different: bold blue hues, and these blues and greens, they hug the head. And in the head, I have colors like—it's almost like a dark Pepto-Bismol. I have bright yellow on the nose, I have a big patch of green underneath the eye, I have some red in the eye. But here's the thing: Even though the color is so strong, it still holds together as a face. The T-shirt has magenta, it has orange, it has burnt umber, it has alizarin crimson, but it still looks like a T-shirt. So I was able to use this very intense color but still describe form with it.

The arms, they have big, bold, green forms that helps the arm turn around, and the hand is washes of turquoise with pink and burnt umber, and it looks like a hand. So that's what this painting is doing, and I look at it every day still. I look at it every single day to remind me of where it came from.

[00:40:08]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Now, this painting happened before the other painting that you mentioned that you were able to get back? Or after—

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: After.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —the *Mercato* painting?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Because the *Mercato* gave me—the forms were more abstract. There were buildings and windows, and, yes, there was some figures, but they were small. So the *Mercato* gave me big, bold forms that have to make sense in space. That was the part that I was observing now, is that everything had to fit properly in space. What was back needed to stay back in the background, and what was in the foreground needed to stay in the foreground, but they were colors that were kneading each other and were very bold, but they still had to describe space.

This painting, which came after—this was about the human form, you know, which is what Lorraine had been teaching me about, which is what Greenberg had talked to me about: How do you get feeling through a self-portrait? How do you describe—how do you make somebody feel what you're thinking, or what that person is feeling? So this was, in some ways, just a completely different challenge.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: But yet it all came together. I mean, all this forming of the face, that's stuff I learned from Lorraine and from Greenberg, you know. So this just proved to me, Okay, you went to both forms of expression that are important to you, and the color is doing something different, but it's doing its job, and you have a feeling when you look at them.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you so much for—I think I need to definitely go back to this video and take a picture so that people will have a visual of what I'm seeing and the privilege of hearing you describe. You know, this actually takes me back to something you said earlier in our interview, in our last session, when you described the division between Júlia and Ivelisse, and being Ivelisse at home with your Dominican family—with the Dominican Republic, your grandmother, your aunt—and then being Julia in English, in school.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And it kind of takes me back—I think of those colors coming together and the baroque and then the colors that you're discovering and coming into one. And maybe this is just me thinking of all of the things that you've told me, but I'm interested in hearing more about that, hearing more about what was happening in your personal life and your—you know, this passport that you were still carrying where you were a resident of the United States and a citizen of the Dominican Republic. I also know a lot of people don't understand how all of these identities/paperwork journeys work. So can you talk a little bit more about what was happening in your personal life and your identities, and your family, your grandmother? What was happening at that point with your internal world?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: That's an excellent question. You know, by that point, I had really gotten used to being other, being different. The thing that was wonderful about Italy was that because I spoke Italian and I spoke it very, very comfortably—it's very close to Spanish. Because I spoke Italian, I was able to create friendships with Italian people. And I made a choice to separate myself a bit from my classmates because they were struggling with the language. And I understood that if I was able to infiltrate the culture through language, that that was going to feed me.

[00:45:21]

So here I am, I don't feel so much like 'other' in Rome. You know, I'm Latina in Rome. [Laughs.] And, you know, I looked a little different, but it wasn't the first thing about me. And instead of being Julia, I was Giulia with a G-I-U-L-I-A. So now I'm Giulia! And I'm like, You know what, I can do Giulia. And somehow that identity suited me. I felt much more comfortable in my own skin.

I made lifelong Italian friends that I am still close to when I was in Rome. I met most of them in a student travel agency. We needed to have international student cards as IDs as we traversed Italy. You know, people all needed that ID card. So we were told that there was this student agency near Largo Argentina, and we could walk to it, and I went straight from my studio. So what does that mean? That means that I've been painting, and I have paint all over me, and I walked in, and they were horrified. [Laughs.] They were like, "Quick! Take care of this one, get her out of the office, she must be crazy! I mean, who walks around like that?" [Laughs.] And I was like, oblivious. I was like, "I need this, I just came from"—there was no thought. So I made an impression on them, and then they got curious, you know. "What do you do? Oh, you're from the Dominican Republic! Oh, look at that!" And all of a sudden, being different was exotic to them. It was exotic.

So I told them about the school, I invited them to come and visit. They came to the school, they fell in love, and all of a sudden, I was in. Every weekend, they would go away somewhere. You know, in these little Fiat 500s that are like this big. And we would all squeeze in, and we would go on adventures. Or before they changed their lunch rituals, we would go and have like three-hour lunches, and it was the whole day! [Laughs.] And it was like, "Let's go to Ostia and get fish." "Okay." "Let's go over here and get some of that. And here's where all the laborers eat, let's go eat with the laborers." So they exposed me to the real culture, to their culture, to the Roman culture. So I met their parents, I met their siblings, I got a boyfriend. You know, it was like I had a full life there. We went to Assisi every time we could.

One of those friends has passed away, and I'm still in touch with her family, but the other ones—I mean, there's a couple, Paola and Cristiano, we met when we were 19. They have been to every place I have ever lived. They would just show up anywhere in the United States, and when I lived in the Dominican Republic, they would just show up, because that's the relationship. She got pregnant with her first baby when we were on a camping trip. I went to that first son's wedding; he now has three kids. Every time there's a baby born, we go over; every time something happens with my daughter, they come over. And that's the relationship.

[00:50:05]

That's family. You know, that's family. I'm talking about 40 years of friendship with these people who know so much about me. When I met my husband, they were like, "Uh-oh, what do we have here, a gringo? I mean, what is this?" You know, so they had to, like, approve. [Laughs.] I mean, it wasn't easy when I had to take somebody in. Thank God, you know, Marty is adventurous, and he tried to speak in Italian and, you know, he's sort of—you know. He's very tall; my husband is tall. My Roman guy friends are short; they're little, you know. [Laughs.] And I'll tell you they now have embraced him because Marty has been willing to respect a different culture. He didn't come in trying to impose who he was on them, you know. And Cristiano will have male conversations with Marty about cars and stuff that doesn't interest me at all, and Paola and I will talk about the kids, who they're dating, what we're eating, where we're going, what's the next—you know, we have completely different relationships, but I credit my husband for understanding that.

You know, when we were young, if they didn't like somebody else's boyfriend, they would, like, play pranks on them, you know. They would, like, shower them with a bucket of water that they tripped on. [Laughs.] Not easy. I was like, "Oh, no, I don't want that." But he made it, he got in. Marty got in. So these are people that are family, and I got that in Rome. They gave that to me, I gave it to them. You know, we have pictures of our children every age everywhere. If their kids

came to the States to learn how to speak English, I would just go meet them: Massachusetts, Vermont, California. We were just like that with each other.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: How long were you in Rome?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Great question. [Laughs.] I was in Rome with the school for a year. I did my junior year there, and I went back to RISD as a senior, and I felt like I was in a shoebox because I had had so many experiences and coming back to school, you know, to classes and—you know, I had really grown.

So after RISD, I got a job working at CBS, and that was an extraordinary experience. I worked first for their—for Columbia Records, you know, advertising their records once they were released, and then I worked for their broadcasting.

I have one very funny story about Columbia Records. We were sharing a floor with—the department then made the LPs, the art for the album covers, and the artwork was extraordinary. It was just award-winner after award-winner. You know, the Chicago logo, that was created as a form, you know, the Bob Dylan Rainbow, it was—you know, this is the time of—they had just introduced Bruce Springsteen, it was tough. So that side [laughs] of the floor was extraordinary. And I loved—

[Zoom audio cuts out for about seven seconds.]

—what happens once the album was released, how do you promote it, and how do you advertise it.

[00:55:03]

So here I am, again. I'm the only person of color [laughs] in the department, and they were lovely to me, they were so sweet and so kind. And my job was unusual. All of our jobs were unusual in that each one of us was given a stereo system, so we could hear the music that we were going to promote. And I got Herbie Hancock, The O'Jays, The Emotions. I got all of the R&B Black cats, [laughs] and all of the jazz. I got all the artists of color, the musicians of color. And I thought—once, once, I did a Willie Nelson job, but it was—[laughs] it was, you know, Deniece Williams, Minnie Riperton, it was unbelievable! But the whole setup was unbelievable: Here's your assignment, here's the copy, here's the music, listen to this, and create something. So it was an extraordinary first job. You know, so I thought, Wow!

Then I was moved to the part of CBS where we were advertising and promoting TV shows: *Rhoda*, the US Open—I loved the US Open, that was always fun. You know, specials by Katharine Hepburn, you know, it was stuff like that. And it was very, very different from Columbia. And I was there, and I started getting the itch to go back to Rome. And I decided that I would stay long enough to buy a plane ticket back to Rome, and I did.

Now, I want to say, I also now still have friends from those years at CBS: art directors that I worked with, copywriters, photographers. It was just so fascinating. And the same level of talent that was prevalent in Columbia Records was prevalent here. There were some unbelievable people doing unbelievable things. And I look back and I go, How blessed was I to have been there?

So I won't forget the day I said, "You know guys, I ought to go back to Rome. I can't stay." Now, I have to tell you, as an adult, there are times when I question my decision. [Laughs.] "What did I do?!" So you know what they did? They threw me this enormous party. I still can't believe it. They threw an enormous party. We had red wine because you could do that in those days, we had fancy food. And they got me a pair of leather bags with my monograms. I'm like, "Okay, this is you."

And I went to Rome without a plan. I just thought, I'm just going to show up. And I did [laughs] and I had to find my way, which I did. And I had some really interesting adventures, and I stayed on—I stayed on three years in Rome. So total, I lived four years in Rome.

But towards the end of my stay, when I lost the apartment that I was subletting in Rome and I had lost the telephone, which allowed me to do promotional work—when all that ended, I took myself to Assisi, where else? [Laughs.] I took myself to Assisi, and I rented this tiny little room with a bathroom, and I had a very monastic life.

[01:00:06]

I was in bed by seven, I would get up with the bells, I would go up to the hills to paint and draw, and I was going through my savings rather quickly. And I was looking for inexpensive restaurants where I could buy one meal a day, you know, I was kind of doing that. And one of the people on the block said, "You know, you should really talk to the nuns who are your neighbors." Now the neighbors, these nuns had—have, because it's still there—this convent that went the whole length of the street. When you're at the very end, you faced the double Duomo in Assisi, so the location was outrageous. And they had an olive grove in that back part that faced the Duomo, and then they had 13 nuns living in this enormous edifice. And they all had—what do you call that, the nun clothing? [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Robes. [Laughs.]

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: They all had robes, and each nun had an assignment. There was, like, the nun that opened the door [laughs], there was the nun that cooked, there was the nun that did the laundry. It was really very interesting to me that everything was so organized.

So they send me to talk to Mother Superior. So I knock on the door. Sora Aloisa, who was the one with the beautiful voice, opens the door, and she pretty much asks me, you know, "How can I help you?" And I said, "Well, I live in that little room over there, and I was told to come here because I'm looking for, you know, a place to get a meal." And she goes, "Well, you'll have to talk to Mother Superior about that." [Laughs.]

So Mother Superior says, "What are you doing there by yourself?" I said, "Well, you know, I'm drawing and I'm painting." "How old are you?" "Well, I'm 22 years old." "Where is your family? Why are you alone?" She just grilled me and said to me, "I will come and look at your living quarters before I make a decision."

I want to tell you what I had up on my walls. I had these huge, mural-size drawings that I was doing of my family in New York. Little—you know, this birthday series that I did—and I also had a marker rendering of a bag. I had never seen a bag with a male torso, and this man was beautiful, and it was extraordinary. I'm thinking, Wow, no one would do this in America. They wouldn't put like a beautiful man's body in a shopping bag. So I felt compelled to draw that beautiful body, and I had that on the wall. And then I had a puppet that my friend David Mah had made of Pope Giovanni XXIII, because David had a wicked sense of humor. And he used to have—in Rome he used to have what he called The Papa Show, [laughs] and he could put his hands inside of this puppet's eyes and mouth and make it talk. And it was so funny to me that I—you know, he gave it to me, and I just had to have it, and it was on my wall.

So the day these women are coming, I'm cleaning like crazy. I managed to take the torso off the wall, but I forgot *el Papa* who was in the bathroom. So [laughs] this entourage of nuns—maybe about six of them, they barely fit in my space—come in, and they're looking at everything, and basically this is what I learned.

[01:05:00]

Women didn't live alone in little rooms because those little rooms were rented by men who wanted to have affairs. So I didn't know that. I wanted to go to Assisi to draw, and I found this room and I could afford it, but that was the history of those little rooms. So they were like, you know, "We're not talking to you until we find out that you don't have someone living there with you and you're not doing anything improper." So you know, that's the mindset, they're looking at everything, and everything is sort of—you know.

And then Mother Superior goes into the bathroom and sees *el Papa*, you know, the *Papa* puppet. She goes, "What's this?" And she's like looking away and pointing with her finger, "What's this?!" And I thought, "It's over, everything you're thinking might happen, it's just not going to happen. This is not good. You're done, [laughs] you're going to have to pack your bags and go back home." This is what I'm thinking in my head.

So I take a breath in, and I go, "That is Giovanni XXIII." [Laughs.] And she's waiting to hear the next sentence. I said, "That's Giovanni XXIII. He was my grandmother's favorite Pope." And it's true, my grandmother liked Giovanni XXIII. So I said, "And I'm not lying, so I'm just saying that's who he is, that's how I know him, I'm done with the conversation." And she looks at me like, "Are you bullshitting me?" Like, she gave me the look, like, "What am I going to do with this girl? Is she lying or is she telling the truth?" And I was doing both. [Laughs.] I was telling her the truth,

but I was also positioning it in a favorable way. [Laughs.]

So she comes out of the bathroom, goes to the front door, and she says, "When the bells ring at noon, you be at our door with a canteen. We will give you one meal a day." And they left, and I collapsed in my bed and thought, What just happened? [Laughs.] What just happened? They said yes. She said yes. And she and I had a lot of—[makes sound of frustration]. So she says, "Okay we're going to feed you, but Julia, you have to go to church." And there was a little church at the end of the alley. I said, "Okay, I'll go to church," you know. And I go to church, and it's all women and the priest. And the priest is doing the sermon about showing up at church, how it's so important that you be there. And there's not a single man in there, and they're like, "And you have to be in church!" *Da-da-da-da.*

So part of my task was to go discuss the sermon with Mother Superior. So I go to discuss the sermon, and she goes, "Well, what did you think?" And I said—I almost said "That's a load of"—I said, "That was insane." I said, "The people who were there were women, and this man is telling them that it is important to be in church, but they were in church." I said, "Where were the men? They were the one who needed that sermon, and this makes no sense to me." And then I thought, "Okay, it's all over, she's never going to feed me again!" [Laughs.] But no, I was wrong, she liked the challenge. She said, "Hmm, here's the thing."

After a while we became like a well-greased machine. I showed up, I helped with harvesting the olives. I had a place in their community, and I was no longer outside. I was part of what they were doing, and guess what I thought? I thought, "You know, this is a good life. [Laughs.] I could do this." [Laughs.] I have a studio in this phenomenal structure and lived the life of a nun.

[01:10:05]

So I think Mother Superior was kind of working in that direction, and I was sort of thinking, I mean, "Who wants to go back to New York, you know, and do that? I could stay here and have a quiet life." So I have these ideas, I'm feeling comfortable with them. And Golda and Eric, people who rescued me, get in touch with me, and they go, "How are things going?" You know. I used to get the mail, they used to put the mail down the window of the bathroom, so that's how they delivered mail. [Laughs.] I get this mail from them, "How's it going?" And I said, "Oh, it's going great! I'm being fed, I like these nuns." I tell them my idea. And then in a week and a half, they were at my door. They flew to Italy, they went straight to Assisi, they said, "Oh, you must be cold, you need new boots, and here's the plane ticket back to United States." [Laughs.]

I'm going to take a little break.

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FERNANDA ESPINOSA: [In progress]—we start recording again. All right, so you had to take a break. We're still on session two. So you were telling me about your experience in Italy. And just to place things a little bit: At this point you're about 22, you had already graduated, had your first professional experience. Do you have a studio at this point, or is the room that you were using—was also your studio?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It was also my studio. I had a little cot and a kerosene heater, if you can imagine, and then I was doing these mural-size drawings on the wall. And the drawings were kind of odd. They were birthday parties that I was remembering from my childhood and from my time in New York. They were awkward. There was an awkwardness [laughs] to all of them, because it's how I felt. You know, I was the oldest one—you know, maybe 12, and, you know, my cousins were turning one or two. And they were such big rituals, the birthday parties. But they were interesting visually. I think it was very interesting that I—here I am in Italy and rather doing Giotto—like, literally I could walk to the double cathedral, which had Giotto all on the top and Masaccio downstairs. And sometimes if I had guests, I would take them to the church like it was the living room, you know. [Laughs.] We would sit there and visit there, you know, and then there was that beautiful lawn in the front. So that was like an extension of my living space, but I wasn't doing that work. I was doing this highly personal memory work that had to do with identity.

I had a very interesting occurrence there during those years. I used to go to the next town, to Perugia, which is a bigger town, and Perugia had the art supply store, and all I used was this big roll of peach-colored paper and charcoal pencils. Those were my only supplies. So I went to Perugia and got some paper, and I was—the bus would leave you at a very high point in Assisi because Assisi is built on a hill. So I was very high up, I got off the bus, and when I got off the

bus, I had this vision. It was very striking. I saw landscapes with turquoise and pink and magenta, and I was like, What was that? I don't know. Because I'm working in black and white, it made no sense. But then seven years later, I'm in Chavón, and I'm exploring my roots, and all of my tropical paintings are coming to life, and they had pink, turquoise, and magenta. So it was like I saw it before it happened. It was very unusual, but it occurred, and I remember.

So I was saying that Golda and Eric showed up [laughs] in Assisi and said, "Here's your ticket, you're going back to the States." And I had to really weigh this. You know, because I knew it represented a huge change in my life if I left. I really don't recall what the big persuasion was, how it was that I—they just were saying, you know, "This is not what you're supposed to be doing; you're not supposed to be a nun." And I got on that plane and came back to the States. I was very sad and very lost for a long time. That was January.

By June or July, I had gotten my first apartment in New York City with a college friend. I was on East 94th Street. And it was an interesting neighborhood because it was—you know, there were like, Puerto Rican streets and then there were Irish streets and, you know, I was in between that. And then if you continue further west, you're going into Central Park and all of that.

[00:05:12]

So I ended up there, and [laughs] I got a corporate job, you know, to pay for the apartment. I was working—this is pre-computers—I was working with the Diebold group, and my job was to make charts by hand, and I thought I would just die from the restriction of that kind of life, you know. But I knew that had to pay my rent, so I was there, and I was able to think, "Oh, my gosh, this is really not—I'm not a corporate person, and this is really not for me, but who am I to choose?"

So there I am, and in the middle of it, my Italian friends call me up and said, "Julia, we're coming to America, you have to come with us!" I'm like, "I can't go with you anywhere, I've got a job! You know, I wear red pumps and a little beige suit, and no, I'm not going." "Well, you'll have to come, we're going to travel cross-country! And we're going to do this and that." And I said, "Look, I'll help you make arrangements, you know, I'll help you rent RVs and places to stay." And I'm telling them this. And they were flying in from different locations into different airports: Boston, New York. They were just kind of coming in from all different areas.

And that occurred. You know, they started to arrive, and I had all their accommodations set up, and they were in the United States for a week, and I thought, I must be insane if I stay in this job and I do not take this trip with my friends. [Laughs.] So for the second time in my life, I quit my corporate job, [laughs] got on a plane, met my friends in California, went to Yosemite, which is where Paola found out that she was pregnant, and had this adventure with my Italian friends who were spontaneous and crazy.

So I—you know, I did it, I left. And then, reality starts to set in. Everyone started to go back from their prospective airports. They were all flying out, and we had Paola, Cristiano, and myself left, because they flew out of JFK. And we got back, and I said, "Oh, my gosh, I have no food," so we ate rice with salt and pepper for a couple of days. And when it was time for them to get to the airport, I took them to the plane on the train, which was very slow. So I'm telling you, they missed their flight to Rome, but they worked it out and eventually got there. And I come back from the subway station into my apartment without a job, and I thought, What am I going to do now? This is not good.

So my roommate had a prehistoric answering machine—there were very large—and it was hers, and it was blinking, and I thought it must be for her. But I hit the play button, and it was for me. And it was a high school friend of mine inviting me to a loft party in South Street in New York City that day, and I thought, "I could be home depressed or I can get on a bus and go to this party." And I didn't have a lot of money, so I only bought two tokens, [laughs] one to get me there and one to get me back. But I've got to go from 94th Street all the way to South Street, and I thought, "Hmm, you're a girl, it's nighttime, I think you should take the bus," [laughs] which was—it took me a very long time. But to protect myself, I wore camouflage and I didn't wear any makeup and I had army boots on, and I thought, "I look like a guy, no one is going to bother me." And I was right, nobody bothered me.

When I got to this loft party, it was full of lesbians, and it was a problem. [Laughs.] I'm like, "Oh, no!" One of the reasons I had gone is because my best friend from high school—one of my best friends—she was dating one of the owner's—it was seven photographers who had rented this

loft, and one of those guys was her boyfriend, so I figured, "Oh, she's going to come, and I'm going to have a good time, and I won't be alone, and I'm going to forget that I don't have a job."

[00:10:23]

But she never came; she had had a fight with him. So I thought, Oh, now you're in for it. So what I would do was I would dance by myself when Stevie Wonder came on, and then I run and hide behind the bookshelf. Literally. So I'm there doing this, right? And as I'm doing that, I noticed at the other end of the floor is this jumping person, somebody jumping up in the sky, just jumping really high and he was—this guy was dancing with someone. I just noticed him because he was jumping. So I'm doing my thing going back and forth from the bookshelf to the dance floor, very close to the bookshelf, and all of a sudden, I come out, and there's the guy who's jumping. And he asked me if I want to dance, and I'm like, "No, I don't want to dance with you." [Laughs.]

But let me tell you what he looked like. He was tall, he had a red ponytail, he had a jacket from the Salvation Army, a little embroidered T-shirt, and I'm like—and he was white! And I'm like, "What am I supposed to do with this?" I was like, "No, go away." So—I'm serious. So he says to me—now, I'm thinking, "That's his girlfriend, what's he doing here?" No, no. So he says to me, "I was on the other side dancing with my friend, I haven't seen her in a year and a half, and she asked me how I was, and I said, 'You know, I don't have a person who's special in my life,' and she said to me, 'The woman you're looking for is here tonight.'"

And I'm like, saying to myself, "What bullshit." I'm like, "What?! Go away, leave me alone." But then, he asked me what I did, and I said, "I'm a painter." He goes, "Oh, I love artists!" *Da-da-da-da.* And I'm like, "Yeah, yeah." I asked him what he did, and he says, "Well, I'm a physician's assistant, and I work with teenagers in the health field." And I paused for a second and I thought, "He must have some patience to be able to work with teenagers. There's got to be some qualities in this person that allows him to do that job, and some of those qualities are qualities I'm interested in." So I opened the door a crack like, [makes sound of creaking open a door], "Oh, you do that, okay."

So I'm looking at my watch, and I realize I got to get back on the bus and go all the way back. He goes, "I have a car, I'll drive you home!" And this is what I'm thinking: I will end up dead in the East River. [Laughs.] I don't know this person. I could just die. [Laughs.] What am I going to do? Or, he's not going to kill me, and he'll drive me home. Right?

I had taken a self-defense class in the city, and one of the things they teach you was, you know, put your keys on a chain and you beat people with it or you do that. And so I put my key [laughs]—I put my key between my fingers, and I said, "Okay let's go." So he drives me home, and he says, "You know, I'm going away for a week, I'm going to be sailing with a friend, may I call you?" And I said, "Why? Why do you want to call me?" [Laughs.] He goes, "I would be interested in seeing you again." And I'm like, "Look"—this is 1980, and it was, you know, the beginning of AIDS and the pandemic, and people really—I said, "Look, if you're into dating a lot of girls, don't call me." And I closed the door in his face.

[00:15:04]

But he called me every day from Florida: How was I, what was going on, what he was doing. And he's doing that, and I was conflicted, I didn't know what to do. Honestly, I didn't have that much experience with dating. I was always just, like, focused on art and, you know, Italian boyfriends. It was very easy to have an Italian boyfriend, you don't have to work too hard to do that. But I didn't know.

But my roommate was this voluptuous, absolute gorgeous woman with a lot of boyfriends. So I said, "Nancy, I don't know what to do." I said, "This guy is calling me, I don't know how I feel about it, he'll be coming back to New York and he said he wants to date me." [Laughs.] She said, "I'll tell you what Julia, the next time he calls"—we had, you know, a railroad apartment, so there were two phones, one in the middle and one near the kitchen. She says, "The next time he calls, you tell me, and I'll listen in." So [laughs] we had this plan, so he calls, I pick up and I go "mm!" and I make a signal. She picks up the phone, she listens to the conversation, he hangs up, I hang up, she hangs up, then she and I meet in the middle. I'm like, "Nancy, what do you think?" She goes, "You know, he sounds like a nice guy, I think you should give him a shot." [Laughs.] And I thought, "Well, that does it, I'm going to date this guy!" [Laughs.]

So I started dating my husband at that time, and he was tall and Aryan, and I'm like, "What am I doing?" the whole time. And I said to him, "Look, you're going to have to go through my family in

order to make this work. This is not going to be just my decision, they're going to have to accept you." And that Christmas, my family, my entire family, which is like all women and my brother, they were coming to my apartment for Christmas Eve, and I said, "They're coming, you have to be ready."

So we had—you know, my bathroom was in the kitchen, you know, and they rang the bell, they came in, all my cousins with the albums with merengue, the albums underneath their arm. And they went straight to the living room, and they put on the music, and everyone's dancing and laughing and having fun. And my grandmother is there, and she goes, "Where's the boyfriend?" [Laughs.] And I said, "He's taking a shower, he wants to make sure he looks nice for you."

So they're, like, waiting and dancing, but really waiting. So he comes out and he takes that long walk to the beginning of the apartment, the living room and where they all were, and the minute he stepped in, everyone sat down and stared at him. [Laughs.] And I whispered to him, I said, "Marty, they're going to put on a merengue and you're going to have to dance. They're going to be watching you very closely. Just know that this is what's going to happen." So *Güela* says, "Merengue!" [Laughs.] And they play the merengue. And I said, "Here we go, Marty. Do the best you can."

So Marty, again, is willing to adapt to somebody else's culture. So he's like, wiggling his hips. I said, "Your hips are very important, make sure you remember that. Don't do, like, you know, the white man thing with that hip. Move your hips." So he's moving, he's moving, and everyone's staring at him. Try to imagine this, they're staring at him like this and looking at him like that. And then my grandmother makes a proclamation. She goes, "*Ay, pero, él puede?!*" [Laughs.]

[00:20:04]

She makes a proclamation! "*Mira, él puede. Porque si no, no vale la pena*." [Laughs.] So I said, "Marty, you're in, you're in! Make sure you understand what's going to happen to you now." And they're like, *yada, yada, yada*, speaking about him in Spanish, [makes sound of rapid chatter], ignoring him like he's not in the room, [makes sound of rapid chatter]. And I said, "Marty, the next thing on your agenda is learning how to speak Spanish because they're all talking about you, [laughs] and you want to know what they're saying." So that was his initiation into my family, and that was a New York City thing.

We had a lot of problems with our German superintendent who didn't think that an Aryan boy should be, you know, dating a brown girl, and it was very, very interesting. Besides, I lived with a Jew. She was not happy with Apartment 4C. [Laughs.] But Marty charmed her, she thought he was so beautiful and stuff, and he says, "Oh, Mrs. Dieter, I'm looking for an apartment." She goes, "You need an apartment?" She goes, "I'll get one for you." [Laughs.] You have to remember, at that time, you had to pay a month's rent in advance, you had to pay the rent for the month, and then you had to pay a broker. She's talking about getting him a free apartment, and she did. She got him a free apartment in the building next door.

So Marty moves in next door, and I'm still in my own apartment because I'm like, I'm not moving in with that guy. I mean, you know what, this is my place, and what if this doesn't work and—what? No! [Laughs.] I was doing that, and he's like, "This will be our place, and it'll be so cute," and *da-da-da-da,* and I'm like, [makes sound of trepidation]. It took me a year and a half to move in with him. [Laughs.] But eventually, I cracked, and I moved in with him.

And it was during those years that my Chavón experience began, and I would like to transition into that part of the story at our next meeting.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: That sounds great, Júlia. Thank you so much for sharing all of these very—I can just imagine everything, and I've had a real blast today hearing all of your experiences. So let's talk again on Tuesday. If anything changes, just let me know, but otherwise, I'll see you then.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Okay.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: See you then, have a good week.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You too, bye-bye.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Bye, sweetie.

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FERNANDA ESPINOSA: All right, so we're recording again with Júlia Santos Solomon. This is the third session of her oral history, and I am the interviewer for this project. My name is Fernanda Espinosa, and today is March 23, 2021. And this interview is being recorded for the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution.

Hello again, Júlia, it's been so nice to see you in March and to have you be part of my weeks. So welcome back. I would like to start by just reviewing the last part that we touched on before we stopped recording in our last session. So you had started telling me more about you moving in with your now-husband, Marty.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mm-hmm [affirmative], mm-hmm [affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And before we move forward for you to tell me more about what happened after that, I wanted to give you a chance to review anything that we didn't have a chance to discuss regarding your college years or anything else before that time.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's nice to see you again and to be back here. It's a pleasure, thank you very much. You know, there's one more person I would like to mention who had a deep effect on me when I was at the Rhode Island School of Design. His name was Victor Lara, and Victor was the only professor I had there that was of Hispanic descent. When we first met, his name was Johnson, which was his stepfather's name, and during the time that I was there, he changed his name to Victor Lara, which was his own name.

Victor had a very different approach to drawing. I had mentioned Lorraine, who was about form and structure, and how important Lorraine was to me. But Victor demanded that we draw the space in between the figure, and that was very esoteric and very emotional and very difficult. Drawing the space between a figure really requires that you tune in to the emotional presence of that person in the room, and we were spending time creating marks on the paper that would represent that. I think the closest I can get to in our list who does that naturally is Giacometti. When he drew his figures, it was always these lines that made a reference to that emotional space. And Victor liked to interrupt us in the middle of a drawing and ask us what we were feeling, and it made me crazy. But, I learned so much about being in tune to spiritual space. I owe him a debt of gratitude.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for that, Júlia. I just want to highlight that you mentioned that you were one of the few students or perhaps the only Dominican student at that point in that school. So it's great to hear that you also had a teacher that obviously made a mark on you, being the other person that taught you such important parts of being an artist and also another Latino fellow in the arts.

So, I also wanted to go back to a couple of things before moving forward. I had asked you previously about Yvelisse as a way of knowing a little bit more—you told me about what happened in your school and how you were developing as an artist and a student, and I was in interested in knowing more about what was happening in your person and your culture with your grandmother. You had also mentioned that the last time you went back to the Dominican Republic with your grandmother was when you were 15. So many years had gone by since then. Can you just tell me a little bit more about what was happening with your family and your relationship to your country at that point?

[00:05:08]

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Well, you know, the last time I went, as a 15-year-old, it really marked the end of my childhood trips with my grandmother and reconnecting in an annual way to the culture and to my relatives. It was interesting because I was a 15-year—almost—how many years?

I went back to the Dominican Republic—at age 24, I went back, and I'll tell you how that came about. There had been all those years without visiting, and my mother told me she was going to visit the island, and that she had a friend who was an artist there, a well-known artist, and he was. His name was Guillo Pérez, and he's a big part of the Dominican art history. They grew up together. So she says, "I'm going to visit. Can I have a portfolio?" [Laughs.] I'm like, "What?" She goes, "Get me a portfolio of your paintings." I was working as a graphic designer at the time at a

place called Unifilm, which was a film distribution company for Brazilian and Cuban films. It was a very interesting time. And I decided that it was a worthwhile project, so I send my mother off with the portfolio. And it put me back in touch with my artwork.

So she comes back from her vacation, and she said, "Guillo looked at your work, and he's very excited, and he's found the right place for you, and you're having a one-person show in 1982 in the Dominican American Institute." Now that was really significant, the location was. He chose that place because he thought it described who I really was, a Dominican American. And they had a beautiful gallery, and I brought so much artwork with me. We took them off the canvases, Marty came with me, when we got there we stretched and we hung them up. And I thought, "Well, this will be nice, I'll just kind of sit here [laughs] in the gallery."

But this is what was important. What was important is that the place was a teaching facility, which had a beautiful gallery. So I would sit in the gallery, and every day I came in touch with Dominican students, young people, who were curious, who wanted to know, who came and talked to me, who asked me everything, who—I just fell in love with these young people with their desire to know things, with their openness. And I thought, "Oh, aren't they interesting?" They weren't jaded, they weren't bored, they weren't half asleep going from class to class. They were engaged! And I thought, "Wow, look at this." So I went every day [laughs] to talk to the kids. I sat at the gallery, we had conversations. So that was a very important thing that happened.

The next thing that happened is that I got so much press. I had never in my mind considered that I would get that much attention: magazines, all kinds of reviews, people came and interviewed me. Of course, it is a small island. But I was someone who was coming back to it. I didn't have an adult relationship with it, and it was really very significant that we got so much coverage in the press. So all that coverage started bringing people to the gallery other than the students, and I was having conversations with adults now.

But here's the key. [Laughs.] The day before the gallery show closed, an entourage of people arrived together, maybe nine people. And they were touring the show, walking here, walking there, always as a group [laughs] and then they—I was just watching them, I was intrigued.

[00:10:14]

And then they came over and found me sitting in a chair, and they said that they were representatives of Altos de Chavón Foundation and Parsons School of Design. They were in the process of developing a design school in the Dominican Republic, and their New York liaison gave me his card and said, "Let's be in touch in New York." And I was like, "Okay."

So I go back to New York, and I didn't know what to really think about that. But here's the thing. He calls me and invites me to his office, which was at Columbus Circle, right on 59th Street in New York City, which is where the current Time Warner building is, it used to be. So it's the one with the big globe in front of it. That building, at the time, housed the office for The Altos de Chavón School of Design, which was owned by Charles Bluhdorn. Okay, so Charles Bluhdorn was a brilliant, powerful CEO of Gulf & Western Industries. He owned Paramount Pictures, and they own Madison Square Garden, they—it was a huge, huge corporation, and that was shocking to me.

So anyway, I started coming to the cocktail parties and the slideshows and all the events that they invited me to. And I got to meet Charles Bluhdorn's daughter, who had also been at the gallery. And she was a little younger than me, but she was very engaged with this process.

So, I got invited by them to be an artist-in-residence. They had an artist-in-residence program, and I thought, "This is great! I can go paint," and all this and all that. But what ended up happening is that, after I met Stephen and I met Dominique and then I met Vevita, and I met all these people—you know, Tim Gunn who was involved with the admissions at the time—people on both the Parsons part of it and then the Chavón—and finally, Stephen said, "We're starting to build a school, and we want to hire people to work there. Are you interested in becoming one of those founding teachers at the school?" It took my breath away because at the time when he asked me, I was 24, and I was living with Marty, and I knew that this was a pivotal moment in my life. And I went ahead and I said, "Yes, I would be interested."

And thus began the most grueling process of interviews. I was interviewed by six different people. The next-to-last person to interview me was the most charming and beautiful man, who ran the fashion design department at Parsons. His name was Frank Rizzo. And Frank approved

me. And then after Frank, I was to be interviewed by the dean of Parsons School of Design, David Levy. And I'll never forget that interview, you know, it's a little intimidating. And I'm in his office and he's looking at my resume and he looks at up and he goes, "You know, Julia, you have a very full life in New York. I mean, you're a graphic designer, you're over here, you're over there," *da-da-da.* He looks at me, and he goes, "Why would you want to do this?" And he meant it. Like, why would I want to give up my life in New York?

[00:15:21]

And I thank God that I stopped and thought about it for a second. And I said, "Because they're my people, and this is my passion, and I would be bringing my passion to my people." And he sat back, looked at me, and said, "Okay, you're hired." And somehow, that moment where I declared my intention and I was very clear with this powerful man that that's why I needed to go, it just laid out the groundwork for what occurred in Chavón with me and the students.

Now, moving to the Dominican Republic was a life-changing event, and my husband was scheduled to go to medical school in New York. And I thought, I can't—you know, I'm not going to step into somebody else's life and say, "Oh, you can't do what you want to do because I'm going to do what I want to do." So I said, "Look, you know, I'm going to the Dominican Republic, I'm going to do this thing, and I understand your position, and I'll see you in a year." And he said, "Well, you know, how is this supposed to work? You know, you're going to be"—and I said, "I don't know, [laughs] I'm packing." And I just packed my stuff. They flew me down there. They were still building the classrooms. We started with the artist-in-residency. I flew there in June, school was opening in July.

So this is what happens with my husband. Just a separate story, and it's very interesting. He was not content to remain in the United States and go to medical school. He decided that he needed to be where I was going to be, and I was perplexed. [Laughs.] I was like, "Why does he want to do that?" Anyway, so I had an uncle, Ramón Guzmán, and Ramón had the very first practice in New York for Dominicans with a Dominican doctor. My mother was his office manager. So Marty went behind my back and talked to my uncle and said, "This is what's happening. Are there any medical schools that are worthwhile in the Dominican Republic?" And he says, "This is the best school, this is the second school, but this is the school that's going to be the closest to where you're going to be living physically, and it's a good school." So he recommends La Universidad Central del Este. And Marty applies, gets in, and I'm like, "How you are supposed to study medicine in Spanish?" He goes, "Oh, don't worry, medicine has its own language and I know that language." I said, "Okay."

So, these were the rules: I was not helping him learn how to speak Spanish. I just couldn't do it. The reason that was the case was because I needed to construct very conceptual classes, and my language, my vocabulary at that level was in English because that's how I was trained. So I used to get up 3:00 a.m. and write out my lesson plans. And I had to do lectures and demonstrations, so it was a combination of things. And then once I wrote them in English, I had to translate them to Spanish and get myself into the classroom. I didn't have time to teach Marty how to say, you know, "Where's the car?" You know, I said, "You have to do that on your own." So we determined that. And you know what, to his credit, he had a completely different life and experience in the Dominican Republic. And it's his and he loves it.

[00:20:09]

You know, now that we are both back, his life and time in the Dominican Republic was really adventurous, and he met some interesting people all on his own. Those were his experiences. So Marty is off doing that. I was shocked, but he was there, and I was off to the school.

Now, here's the thing. Because the school was just inaugurated, we were bombarded with interviews and promoting the school. You know, we were on TV talking about the school, there were reporters coming to the classroom, there was a lot of PR involved initially. So we were teaching during day, then, you know, interviewing or going to cocktails to meet important people. But important people in those days meant Oscar de la Renta. Chavón attracted the highest possible level of design talent. People that I would never ever have access to in New York came to Chavón because it looked like paradise and it was intriguing to them.

I need to spend a moment to explain what it looked like. Chavón looks like a 15th-century Italian village. And it's not like Disney. It was designed and constructed by Roberto Coppa, who was a set designer for Dino De Laurentiis, who knew Bluhdorn because of Paramount Pictures. So

Coppa comes, he sees this amazing location on a cliff. Chavón is built on a cliff, and when you look down, there's the Chavón River winding its way down the cliff and emptying into the Caribbean, and you can see that. So the visuals were unbelievable. So he designed this glorious place, and he used local stone that was already there, and he hired, you know, ironworks people who made doorknobs and candelabras. It was just unbelievable.

The school was built to the side of that. It was not in the front. So we had our own section. But it was an extraordinary place. And initially, I was living with the students, we had dorms and I had —you know, the faculty had apartments there. And I decided after a very short while that I needed to not live there because [laughs] it was a little too close to home, and I was with the kids morning, noon, and night. You know, so if I went for a swim in the pool, they would follow me, and I was like, "Oh, no, [laughs] I can't do this." [Laughs.]

Chavón had all the amenities of a very well-maintained place. It had its own electricity, which was huge because the lights went out in the Dominican Republic for hours, and you never knew when it would go out and when it would come back. But we chose, Marty and I, to move into town. And it gave me the opportunity to be with common people. Common people, you know. And in the Dominican Republic, the rich and the poor, they live on top of each other. So I was in a middle-class apartment. It was the only one at the time. It had 6–10 apartments in it, that's all. Then to the right was this huge, rich compound with gates all around it. And then in front of both of us were the shacks. So that's really how things were organized there. And I got to meet, you know, people from the shacks, and it was just—it was much more real for us. Of course, the lights would go out and it was a problem, and Marty had to study under—you know, with a little light lamp—and it was difficult, but we got this other richness.

[00:25:24]

I had been—I was an artist that fell through the cracks in New York, historically. People didn't know who I was. Unlike now, where there's a real Latinx artist community, I was starving for someone else to mentor me, to talk to me, to be someone that I could be in touch with, and I didn't have that. The other Dominican artist who was with me at the time, but I didn't know him, was Freddy Rodriguez. Freddy is a little older, and he was in the Village and he was doing, you know, Andy Warhol and kind of that scene.

The only Dominican I met during these years in New York was a performance artist named Josefina Baez, and she's a phenomenal phenomenal theater writer, performance person. And Josefina was with a performance troupe around the corner from where I was. You know, I was on East 94th Street, she was a little bit further up north. They had a community theater there where they performed at night. I even remember doing a couple of flyers for their group. That was it, you know. So now that there's a real community, I have to understand and articulate that.

So when I was in Chavón, I was very clear about many things, and I'm grateful for them. First thing was my mission. You know, the mission of, "I've got to leave everything with these kids, everything. I have to pour myself out into them." And I did, but I was very demanding. I knew what I was dealing with. You know, that first class, the students were already graduates. They came to Chavón out of curiosity. They were going to eat me alive. I'm short, and I have a quirky little voice, and I thought, "If you don't establish order immediately, you're not going to make it." So I would close the door because I was teaching figure drawing, and the models were nude. I had to close every door, every window in our classroom, because, you know, all of a sudden the gardeners were cutting grass very close to the classroom. [Laughs.] Everybody wanted to get a look at that naked person, and I couldn't have that.

So it was interesting to have the doors and the windows closed because it really created—it allowed me to command the room. And I wasn't just bossy, I was disciplined. I commanded the room, but I was teaching things that were real and things that were important and things that were not experienced in the Dominican Republic. Because I came from New York. And I understood that if any of them were to receive a scholarship and have the opportunity to come to New York, that they had to be ready.

So Altos de Chavón is a two-year school; you get an associate's degree. Now, Bluhdorn's vision, which was extraordinary, was that with this degree in design—not in fine arts, in design—that those students would remain in their own country and have an impact in their own culture, which I thought was an extraordinary vision. He did not want a fine arts school.

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So Chavón was the first design school in all of the Caribbean and all of South America. But it had dorms, and [laughs] no one ever lived at a college in dorms, so it was controversial in that way. Now as an instructor, the fact that they had dorms meant that these people were with each other twenty-four-seven. They ate together, they did their art homework together, they went to school together, they created what they call now, like, Chavóneros. It's like a nation. It's like a citizenship. When you went through those years of living, eating, breathing, talking, sleeping, doing your homework till one o'clock in the morning, whatever it took—all of a sudden, you had a community that you grew up with in an artistic way.

What happened was that I was very clear that I needed to be part of that community. I helped form it. I helped create that community, and the camaraderie between them. And I had to be part of it because I was a lost sheep, in the contextual sense. So now, I'm infusing these students with information and passion and concept and bringing them in front of things they've never seen before, but I'm part of the community.

It's interesting to teach every student in the school. As foundation teachers, we had foundation classes. And then with sophomores, we had departmental classes. For instance, I taught figure drawing to all the freshmen. Everybody came through my classroom. But when we went to sophomore year, I only worked the fashion design students. We modeled the fashion department after the Parsons School of Design model, which had a design teacher and an illustration teacher side by side. One taught what the clothes should looked like, were they wearable, did they fit together, did they have the right fabric? That was the design. And then the illustration teacher taught how do you develop this on paper, how do you make organza look like organza, how do you use your paints? So that was my job. So the two of us, James Miller and myself, we were running the fashion department.

I have to tell you something important about that first year. When I was coming to Chavón, I was asked by Stephen, "Julia, what do you need to teach?" There was nothing there, meaning there was no library yet. So I said, "Well, I need these books," and I made a list of books that I needed for teaching. And I wanted some trade magazines in our trade to be brought in. And as a joke, really, I was like [laughs], "And I want Antonio Lopez."

Antonio Lopez is the world's most renowned fashion illustrator. I mean, it doesn't get bigger than him. Why did I put his name down? Because I adored his work, I used to cut his illustrations out of magazines, and I thought to myself, "What would happen if these Latin kids are introduced to a giant who is Latino, a big one? What would happen?! What would that look like?!" Well, I've got to give Stephen Kaplan [laughs] and The Altos de Chavón administration credit, because two years later, Antonio Lopez came to Chavón.

[00:35:10]

And I almost have to cry. It was one of those experiences of my life that I thought I could dream about, but it became a reality, and it was so huge. It was so huge to have him there, and his creative partner Juan Ramos. Now, Antonio had had a very long trajectory and a lot of fame, and he knew a lot of people, and I didn't meet him till the very end of his life. So when he came to teach in 1986, I was—I think the first class—we did '85, then we did '86. We did two. Two fashion illustration workshops. I was part of the workshop, I was teaching with him. So it was Juan, Antonio, and I, and we had like 10-hour days. Those kids only had enough time to eat something really fast because we were drawing in the morning, drawing in the afternoon, critiquing in the evening, until it ended. And it was unbelievable.

There's so many funny stories about my time with Antonio. The first story is when they arrived, they had trunks full of clothes. I mean, trunks full of clothes. And music, because Juan had a playlist that he would do. There was morning music and afternoon music, and there was evening music. And then they brought their own models. Now, these models were very famous. This is the '80s, these were the people that he was painting and working with, and they were all runway models that he happened to draw. So their main job was to be on a runway. They arrived in Chavón, and now they have to do physical modeling, meaning standing in place in a pose for a long time! And they couldn't handle it. They couldn't handle it. So Juan packed them up and said, "See you in New York. See you, get out of here." [Laughs.] He got rid of the models, and we had a meeting, and we talked about what to do.

And at the time, I was part of the regional track and field team, and I said, "I know what to do." So I went to my team, and I got high jumpers and hurdlers and hammer throwers [laughs] and brought them to the classroom, and they became the models. And we had a couple of students

who were willing to pose with them very briefly. So we had them and then we had a couple of ladies who said, "Who wants to draw? I just want to be part of this." So that's what we did. It was really so interesting.

Then Antonio said, "You know, I would really love to have some kids. I would love to draw some children, you know, to show them the difference." And I said, "You know, there's a fishing village very close by to La Romana"—where I used to go like every weekend with my family to eat. We're still friendly with that family. They're still there in the village called Bayahibe. And I said, "The kids there are Dutch Dominican." We're talking really exotic, very beautiful children. But no one was going to let those kids come with us. So I said, "The three of us have to go to Bayahibe, and we have to sit in this restaurant, which is like townhall, and send the word out that we would like to draw some children, that they would be released to my care, that we would take them there and feed them and take care of them, and we would bring them back." So that's what happened, you know?

[00:40:00]

Families came to check out Antonio and Juan, made decisions about them. They knew me, and I had to say, "I guarantee I'm going to bring the kids back." They said, "Okay, Julia, if it's you, you can take them." [Laughs.] So we took the kids, and the kids were in the pool, and the kids were riding on the donkey, they were crazy happy! But they got to pose, and we got to bring them home. So with Antonio, all this shifting started to happen, and we were adapting from high fashion to local availability.

At that time, you know, he was rather shy. Antonio was not flamboyant. He had had a history of being very flamboyant, but in those years he was quiet. And he was observing a lot. Juan, on the other hand, Juan was unique. Juan was opinionated and he had standards, and, "This is not the way it is," and, "Who said that?!" And he told me and the kids about Isabel Toledo, who became a well-known designer. She designed Michelle Obama's lime suit for the inauguration. And Juan was like, "That doesn't work, this isn't good, this is the way it should be," *da-da-da*. He was, like, setting the standard.

Oh, my gosh, it was extraordinary. It was extraordinary. I feel so blessed to have been part of that. And to this day, there are hundreds of people who went through those workshops. People started coming from Canada, they started coming from all over, because there was the opportunity to work with Antonio Lopez. And it became really an extraordinary thing.

And Antonio, Juan, and I became good friends. Now, here's the fascinating thing about the friendship with them, particularly with Antonio first. When those workshops were over, he returned to New York. Marty and I are sitting, like, in the dark in La Romana. [Laughs.] He's trying to study, I'm doing I don't know what, [laughs] and the phone would ring, and it was Antonio. And I'm like, "Marty, it's Antonio." So the two of us would get on the phone, and we would talk about his life—what he was doing, where he was going—and I'm thinking, "He knows every fabulous person in the world, why is he calling us?" [Laughs.] You know, but he was, and we developed a friendship in those years, and it was very unique.

When he died, we were devastated. We were devastated. And couldn't get back to the States. Marty was graduating from medical school, our daughter was—anyway, I was pregnant with my daughter. Marty started dreaming about him, having these very personal communication-type dreams, [laughs] and I used to get upset. I'm like, "You're Polish-Irish, why do you have the dreams? I'm the Latina, I should be having the dreams!" [Laughs.] I used to get so upset! [Laughs.] But I couldn't change it, he was having dreams about talking to Antonio after he passed away, and one of them was so deep that I don't know—I'm not even sure I can share it, you know, it's a huge dream.

So our daughter is born in the shadow of this occurrence. And we reached out to Juan and asked if he would be her godfather. And he said, "Of course." So he gets on a plane with his best friend, Gladys Toulis, and they come to La Romana to the little church in the middle of the town. Not into to the fashion—you know, the fancy church in Chavón. We did it in the little town church, and he baptized Paloma. That occurrence, his baptizing her, just deepened our personal relationship. And it wasn't a relationship about fashion and stuff, it was a personal relationship.

[00:45:11]

When we returned to the States, Juan got ill, and we would visit him, Paloma and I. She was maybe five years old. He was in bed. One of Antonio's old cats would lay on his body wherever it

was that he was hurting, and Paloma would talk to him, I would rub his feet. And I decided, I don't care that she's a child, this is someone I love, and he's hurting, and I'm showing up, and she can do whatever she wants. We can talk about it, but she's coming with me.

I forgot this, but it came back into our lives: Juan had a partner from the '70s until his death. His name is Paul Caranicas. And Paul never came to Chavón, never got to Chavón, because he needed to run New York. And we met him here, and we're still very close with him. Anyway, about a month ago, Paul sent me a drawing that Paloma had done at Juan's bedside when she was about five. And it's Juan with his glasses on, and of course her favorite thing in life: a cat. [Laughs.] The cat, and he's in the bed, and—and she dedicated it to Paul. And he sends me this picture, and it brought me right back to that moment—I had forgotten about it—and she said, "For Paul and Juan," and I thought, Oh, my gosh. I said, "You kept this?" He said, "Of course, I have to keep that. Yes! I kept that." So there was that connection.

And then when Juan passed away, Paloma was about six, we went of course to his memorial, which was an incredible event with music and people and celebration. There was a famous *New York Times* fashion photographer named Bill Cunningham, and Bill was wonderful friends with Antonio and Juan. They all had apartments in Carnegie Hall. Antonio, Juan, Bill, before them Leonard Bernstein. Carnegie Hall had this level, this third level with apartments where artists and musicians lived, so they were friends there. And Bill photographed Paloma and I at Juan's memorial.

The reason I'm so touched by it is because [laughs] Paloma is sitting on my lap and she has a little Antonio T-shirt. When Antonio was in the Dominican Republic, he created some designs for T-shirts that were sold [ph] for 30 years till recently, and she had a baby version for it. And she's on my lap with her Antonio T-shirt, and in front of her were her favorite toys, which were these hard plastic animals from the Bronx Zoo. So she had arranged her animals, [laughs] and they were on that table. And I'm trying to manage my sadness—I could tell, in the picture—and Paloma was just being a child, and it's such a wonderful memory to have. And Bill sent me—he never sent me the actual photograph, but he sent me reproductions and wrote some notes on them. And it's just a very rich memory.

I will be organizing an exhibition. Once the world opens up and we can into galleries, I plan to organize an exhibition in honor of Antonio that focuses on his incredible impact on education. Because I'm still in touch with so many of those illustrators that loved him and worked with him.

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Some went to the workshops, some worked with him in New York. It's just the educational impact is something no one has really discussed, and that's how I knew him best. So I want to honor him in that way, and I'm holding off with the proposal until I know that the exhibition can be viewed.

To this day, you know, we own a beautiful, beautiful piece that he made for us and signed to us. We live with it every day. Everywhere we live, that piece is up. You know, there are pieces of art that we can live with and some we can't live without. We just don't live without that piece ever. Everywhere we've ever called home, that piece is in our house, and we're looking at it every day. It's just very beautiful and it's just full of memories. [Sighs.]

I think I need to take a break. [Cries.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Of course. Let me—

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's very emotional. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I'll pause—

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I'll be right back.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —this for a second. Sure.

[END OF TRACK santos21_4of7_digaud_m.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: This is the fourth session for the oral history of Julia Santos Solomon. I am interviewing her virtually in her studio in Woodstock, New York. My name is Fernanda Espinosa, and today is April 1, 2021, and this interview is for the Archives of American Art,

Smithsonian Institution.

I also wanted to mention that I've been calling Julia Júlia because it's the way it's said in Spanish, but we just discussed when she is named in English, usually it's Julia, so that's how I will start addressing her in English.

So hello, Julia, thank you so much for joining me again. This is our fourth session, and I wanted just to review a little bit of what we touched on in the third session. We spent quite a lot of time talking about your experience of Altos de Chavón as well as your very important relationship with Antonio Lopez. So I wanted to take us back there and let you discuss any other relationships and activities and parts of your life that were important during those times.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's very nice to be back here with you. Thank you for the introduction.

The experience in Altos de Chavón in general was really truly magical and rather unique. It was unique because of the setting. I had mentioned that it had been designed as a 15th-century Italian village by a set designer who worked with Dino De Laurentiis, and it really was and is an extraordinary place. And the setting, you know, it's set up way up high on a cliff. I was told that that location was spotted by Jerzy Kosiński, the writer, and by Charles Bluhdorn. They were horseback riding, and Kosiński spotted the area, and they decided to build this artist village there. And the school was intended to be a design school with the thought that many of the graduates would actually stay in the country and create a design discipline, that they would stay and change that part of—you know, enrich the design industry. And actually, they have.

A lot of the graduates, students that I worked with, which were the first three generations in Chavón, are incredibly powerful in their fields. They're wonderful graphic designers. Some of them are incredible painters. I had students working at Nike designing shoes. We had students in California working in animation. We have graduates who are interior designers and accessory designers, and they're just incredible. So it's a very high level of talent and productivity.

One of the things that I find very comical is that because I was in the fashion department and our students were to be integrated into the junior year of the fashion department in New York, which was—at the time, the most competitive department in all of Parsons School of Design was the Chavón affiliate. I had to create an impression of winter to my students, something that [laughs] was completely unnatural to them. I talked about it with my design partner and I talked about it with the fashion department head, Frank Rizzo.

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I came up with this idea of showing the students the film *Doctor Zhivago*, to give them a sense of what winter was. You know, where the men's mustaches were filled with ice and Lara was wearing those big fur coverings. And the idea was so unnatural for them, but it helped me to create the illusion of what winter was. I also know that coming into the United States, particularly in Parsons School of Design, some of their English was really not at the level it needed to be in order to do a verbal presentation of their concepts. So to compensate for that, I taught them how to make very powerful visual presentations that would explain visually what they were trying to do. Everyone was supposed to do that, but our students did it extra well, to compensate for the language limitations.

Those students who were awarded scholarships did extremely well, and I think I mentioned one of them who is a couturier, Rogelio Velasco, who designed for very very famous people and very famous celebrities. And he came out of the Chavón; he was in my first generation. When I had artwork archived at the Smithsonian, I gave them illustrations by some of my Chavón students, so they are now archived, and Rogelio's work is among them. There were students who graduated and came and worked with Oscar de la Renta. I mean, it was really—they were just high-level talent that we were able to work with and transition.

So a lot of my job was to create false pressure for them because there isn't a real pressure in fashion there, in the sense that it's one climate, you know, the fabrics are pretty predictable even though you use them in a creative way, there is no layering, [laughs] so there was a lot that had to be put in there. And I'm grateful to have had the New York experience and the Chavón experience and to understand how those two things connected and to understand what I was preparing them for. And because of the competition they were going to be facing, I was very rough on them. I was very demanding. I didn't let them get away with anything because I knew they wouldn't survive outside of those classrooms if they were in New York. So that was a very particular experience.

And again, you know, I was the youngest teacher there, and I was the only Dominican teacher there, and I had a real investment in my students. And now we are very close. We're like family because we shared that experience.

And I mentioned to you that I was the anatomy teacher to all the freshmen, and that meant using nude models, which was unheard of and undone. And I wanted to just mention one model in particular. Her name is Annie. She's still a living person. Annie was poor, and she was uneducated, and she was a beautiful model, and she was a beautiful soul. Very black, very slim, gorgeous body, wonderful to draw. And I started hiring Annie. She lived in Santo Domingo, so when she worked, she had to take multiple buses, at least three buses to get to us. And initially, you know, she had nowhere to stay, so I was able to procure a place for her to stay in the dorms when she was working with me.

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And this is what was interesting about Annie. The models had breaks, and during their breaks, I would do these long critiques with the students, where we discussed the work. And I noticed that Annie always stayed in the room while I was doing the critiques. And she kept staying in the room and staying in the room. And sometimes she and I would have lunch together. You know, she would cook. And I noticed when I went to her room that she was using her nail polish to draw on aluminum foil. So here is this person, you know, wanting something new, wanting to learn, and the reason she never left was because she was listening to my critiques. And I asked her, I said, "Annie, do you want to draw?" And she says, "Yes, I want to." And I said, "Great." So I brought her some supplies, and she started doing her own thing.

Let me get to the punch line: Annie eventually left the island, she went to Canada, she and I are still in touch, and became an artist [laughs] in Canada with the information that she picked up in the classroom. She has two sons, they're both adults, I think she's a grandmother now. But her youngest son is named Julian, after me. And it's not a reflection of me. She's just someone who needed an opportunity to do something that had been denied to her. You know, and this is someone who was not viewed with a lot of respect or concern by other people. But I respected her, and I saw her, and I understood that she wanted something that I could provide at the time. And now, every so many years, we still call each other, she tells me about her grandkids. So that was an important relationship that started in Chavón and has remained in my life. So I wanted to mention Annie.

Now, the other part of my life during that time when I chose to leave Chavón and to live in La Romana proper and give up the privileges of electricity and running water and all these things—I mean, [laughs] we just never knew when it would be on or off, so—but that allowed me to interact with what I consider to be the people of the Dominican Republic, and that was priceless for me.

During that time, I started training to become a track runner. When I arrived in La Romana, I had been a runner on the roads in New York, and I had been on teams and, you know, had training, but it was all for road racing. And then I arrived in La Romana, and I heard that there was a track, and I went to the track, and I met [laughs] a very powerful person. His name was Elpidio Encarnación, and Elpidio was the coach to the Yuma track team. Yuma, it was the name of the region that La Romana had represented, and he was gleaning this team. He started collecting kids who were 12 years old and then just building them up, building them up, building them up.

So you got to imagine, I'm a new member on the track team, I'm 25, and I'm the oldest one there. Because these are 12-year-olds, 14-year-olds, 16-year-olds. The 16- and 17-year-olds were like the real stars, you know. He has some amazing young athletes there, and I got trained with them and learned the most extraordinary lessons.

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Elpidio had a lot of poor kids on that team, and we ran on a dirt track. It was not a synthetic track, it was a dirt track. On the side of the track, he had a garden where he grew vegetables and fruits, and he had hens and he had ducks. And the reason he had all these things in his tiny farm was so he can send some of his athletes home with proper food, so he was growing things for them. And sometimes, we would be running really hard—like a hard, hard sprint—and you're going around the corner, and you're just going as fast as you can with your spikes, and the ducks would decide to cross the track. And I thought, "I'm going to kill myself [laughs] or I'm going to spike this duck." [Laughs.] You know, so you have to, like, jump over the ducks because

they were very important. And Elpidio didn't care. He's like, you know, "Get it done." And we would take showers in a little space that had just a pipe and you just shower there. And we would do weights workouts with one weight that we passed from teammate to teammate. It was just—it was very special. And he taught us a lot about culture, about the culture.

My husband and I were gifted a little cocker spaniel by one of my students in Chavón. She bred them, and she showed up in our door with this tiny animal. It must have been the runt of the litter because it fit in my hand. But it was honey-colored. And on my team, there were two relatives; there was a nephew and an uncle. The uncle was a hammer thrower and a javelin thrower, and the nephew was a 400-meters runner. So their last name was Polemil, which—I mean, it's their name. So my husband decided that in his mind, Polemil sounded like *un peu de miel* in French, which to him sounded like "a little honey." So he's like, "What a perfect name for the dog." So he names this little tiny dog Polemil, and he brings it to the track, and everyone of course was in love with the dog, and they said, "What's it called?" And he says, "Polemil." And that was an insult in general. You don't name a dog after a person. So the uncle, who's huge, is coming straight at my husband. He's angry. The nephew, who was tall and lanky, was angry. They're both coming at my husband. And my husband doesn't understand, because he's American, that what he just did was insulting. So Elpidio intervenes, he gets in between them, he picks up one of the ducks and says, "From now on, we're calling this duck Martín," [laughs] which is my husband's name. And he [laughs] resolved that by creating a bigger humiliation, in their eyes, to Marty. They named the duck Martín, and that cut it. So that day was a huge cultural lesson for my husband and I, and Elpidio understood that.

I have to tell you something more. I've mentioned before that in the Dominican Republic, sometimes the very rich and the middle-class and the poor live in the same neighborhood. So we were in the middle-class building, next door was this compound for very rich people, and then down the hill were the very poor, but to the side was where Elpidio lived. So we spent a lot of time with Elpidio's kids. We would go visit, sometimes I get shoes donated for the team, you know, through the US, and we were in interaction all the time.

[00:20:01]

Elpidio had four children, three sons and a daughter. Two of his kids [laughs] were named after track athletes that he loved: Evelyn Ashford, who was a sprinter in the '70s and '80s, and Edwin Moses, who was the most dominant 400-meter hurdler in US history at the time. So, of course, I was really taken by that. My husband would go play with the kids. He would throw Frisbees, and he would buy them little *conconete*s, and they loved him because he paid attention to them. Anyway, so we saw these kids, and we were very much engaged.

And then many years later—many many years later—I get a call from their mother to invite me to go to Ohio and visit with her because she had moved to the United States to be with their youngest son, Edwin, named after the American sprinter, who was just signed to Major League Baseball. We're like, "What?" So I said, "You know what, I love you, I love Edwin, but I can't go to Ohio." So that was the beginning of his career, and his name is Edwin Encarnación, who is a designated hitter in baseball. And Edwin became a very very powerful baseball player, and he's very well-known and very well loved.

And about three years ago, our daughter took my husband to a baseball game in Yankee Stadium, and it so happened that that day, Edwin was playing. They didn't know that that was happening, she just bought the tickets. And Edwin hits a home run. So all of a sudden, they're very aware of the name and what happened. So I contacted his mom, and I said, "Oh, this happened." And she goes, "Oh, Julia, we miss you so much, why don't you come visit us?" So I went to visit them, and Edwin was not there. I went to visit his mom and sister in Florida.

And then I get an invitation to a game that Edwin was going to be playing in again in Yankee Stadium where he was playing for the Indians, I think the Cleveland Indians. So we were in the visiting part of the stadium. [Laughs.] This is what I want to say: When I saw Edwin for the first time since he was a little boy—so you've got to understand, he was a little boy, and then I see him as the designated hitter for his baseball team—I just started crying. How could that man be that little boy? And it was just overwhelming for me. And then we went to meet with him after the game, and I just—I'm still overwhelmed, you know. I hugged him and his arm was the size of my thigh. Just a big, big guy! You know, I'm like, How did this happen? [Laughs.] But it was such a joyful reunion for us. And of course, he loves Marty because he remembers playing Frisbee with Marty and having little *conconetes* with Marty. And it was really in a way rather overwhelming. And we're still very much in touch with them, but the connection there was his

dad.

So the last time I spoke to his dad, you know, I was watching him on FaceTime, and he was coaching me: "Julia, are you running?" And I said, "Elpidio, I just—I have a bum knee." He goes, "This is what you're going to do. You're going to get up, you're going to walk gently, and then you're going to jump, and then you"—and I'm like, "Elpidio, are you coaching me?" He goes, "Yeah." [They laugh.] So that was my last conversation with Elpidio, he was [laughs] coaching me on the phone. Actually, when I was pregnant with my daughter, he had me on the track, and he would say, "I don't want any other pregnant woman to pass you, do you understand me?" [Laughs.] And I wouldn't allow it, because he was watching me.

[00:25:16]

And once, he put me—once, one of our sprinters was injured. And I used to run 3000 meters and the 1500 meters, which were, you know, middle distances and take a long time. He comes up to me, he says, "Julia, you have to run a 400-meter leg." I'm like, "I can't do that, I don't know how to do that, I don't even know how to get on a starter's block." He goes, "I don't care." [Laughs.] I'm like, "Elpidio, what do you—what?" He goes, "This is what you're going to do: Put your leg here, do this, that." And I said, "But what? What?" And he goes, "When you hear the gun go off, Julia, I want you to run like an animal." [Laughs.] I'm just giving you an idea of who this man is. I'm terrified, my heart is coming out of my—that gun goes off, and I take off like an animal. It was the fastest 400 meters I've run in my entire life. And our relay team won.

So he had a vision of what I was capable of doing that I didn't see in myself. So that makes a very important person. He became a very important person in my life always. And over the years, our daughter, Paloma, was an extraordinary runner. She had all both her father's talents and all of mine, and between the three of us she was just the better runner. And he got to meet her, [laughs] and he wanted her to run for the Dominican Republic. And she's like, "Mom, Dad, I can't do that!" [Laughs.] And Polemil, the uncle, at the time, he was the director of the Olympic Committee in the Dominican Republic. So these are all relationships that would not have occurred if I had not been in La Romana proper.

While I was there, we created a mural in the town. I brought my students into town and created a mural. And the last time I was in La Romana, the mural had been covered by a big development in front of it, but you could see it sideways, it's still there.

And my husband learned a lot of Spanish by talking to kids every day. He would have his shoes shined by the same boy, he would buy his newspaper from the same boy, every single day, and they would come and have little conversations, and Marty was able to practice his Spanish. So, again, that was his experience and his relationship. His goal, [laughs] my husband's goal at the time, was to come into town, go to a store, and be charged—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: The actual amount.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: —regular prices. Because he's six-two, he's white, and you can see him coming a mile away, and when he walked into the market, all the prices went up. So he used to write little dialogues: "I would like to buy some bread," you know? And we have *pan de huevo* that we loved, right? So he would go and he would try to guess what the other person would say so that he could handle himself. And that was a very funny experience because he did go into the bakery, but instead of asking for *pan de huevo,* he asked for *pan de hueso*, [laughs] which, instead of saying, "Can I have some egg bread?" he asked for bone bread, and he confused the baker, so it got more complicated than he thought. [Laughs.]

But eventually, eventually, they got used to him because he—they go, "Look at that!" You know, "It's a foreigner!" And they go, "Oh, no, that's the blond guy." And then he would walk down with our little blond dog, and they go, "Oh, no, look, it's a foreigner!" And they go, "No, that's just the blond guy with the blond dog." And then our daughter was born. "Oh my gosh, it's a foreigner!" They go, "No, that's just the blond guy with the blond dog and the blond baby." [Laughs.] So this is all his experience, and he has so many stories. La Romana provided that.

[00:30:21]

And referring to the poor section, there was this young man that came from the poor section to our building, and he asked me if there's any work he could do. And you know, I always feel like, "Yes, I have to find something for this person to do." So I said, "Yes, why don't you wash our car, you know, every week?" So he would come up and diligently wash our car, but he started talking

to Marty. And in conversation with Marty, he would say, "Can I practice some English?" And Marty said, "Well, okay, I'm studying Spanish, you want to—okay." So they started this little conversation every Saturday. But here's the thing. When we moved back the United States, that young man was able to get a job at the resort, which was Casa de Campo, working in their restaurant with his newfound language. So it meant that now he had a secure job that occurred because he was in conversation with Marty. And before we left, he brought us this carved wooden sculpture that is still in our home, to thank Marty for helping him secure a job. So that's another experience we would have never had.

And the last story I want to say about Marty is that, you know, he's always been very very physically active, and he rides his bike. And this group of Dominican cyclists found him, and they would take these long rides into Higüey, you know. But here's the thing. Marty's six-two, and all these men were little tiny brown men, and they would come up to the house with their bikes [laughs] and it was like—I almost felt like, "Can Marty come and out and play?" You know? [Laughs.] It was so funny. But they formed this relationship, and it was wonderful for Marty. They ride through sugarcanes and backroads and did all kinds of adventurous stuff that wouldn't have happened if we were sequestered in Chavón. So we had both worlds. We were very blessed in that way.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So as you mentioned, Julia, going to the Dominican Republic as an adult opened the doors to these different communities, you know, contrasting communities. I especially can hear all of the differences culturally, you know, with all of these relationships of reciprocity that have come back to your life throughout the years. They weren't a one-off relationship. These are circular relationships that continue to happen.

I was wondering if you can tell me more about what was happening outside that environment, that very specific environment, and your relationship to the Dominican Republic at large to your family. You had come back after many, many years, so how were you being treated by the country at large, and what was going through you at that point?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: [Laughs.] Well, that's a really fascinating question, and I want to answer it for you. I'm going to start at a local level. Because I was living in town and if I decided I needed to do something very simple like go to the bank, I was expected to dress socially properly in order to go to the bank. I couldn't just show up in my shorts and a T-shirt. So I had to learn that decorum. You know, I was considered of a certain—you know, I was a *professora*, and I needed to respect that.

[00:35:07]

From the teaching point of view, I think I mentioned that when we first opened the doors, we had to promote the school, so I had a lot of interviews on television, in radio. We had journalists in the classroom. So there was this huge kind of PR piece that put me in the media because of the school. Now, as far as my own painting career, I was able to explore the island: Where did I come from? And I started doing all these plein air paintings that were to inform, really, my roots. I would go into certain people's gardens and just carry huge canvases, tie them to the roof of my car and go there, and it was a very fruitful environment. And I think I mentioned that in those years that I was in Italy that I had a foresight of what that work would look like, and it did indeed look like that.

In terms of exhibiting, I had a huge, huge show in The Altos de Chavón Gallery in the early '80s that really launched my career there. That show was of the tropical paintings, and it really literally sold out with the exception of the one painting that I kept for myself. But here's the thing. When I had that show, in addition to inviting the elite—which were the people in the resorts, the villa owners, the people in the gallery list—I invited [laughs] the gardeners, and I invited the weeders, and I invited taxi drivers. And they came dressed up and proud. And in my mind, making something like that accessible to them created an even opportunity for everyone. So it was very—that show was really special. And it got reviewed and written about and talked about. And then [laughs] multiple years later, somebody—you know, the main critic in the Dominican Republic, who was Marianne de Tolentino, she wrote again remembering the show and that show really kind of did something big.

Now, I continued to paint and to make prints. I started working with two of my students who were wonderful printmakers, and I had made graphic translations of some of my paintings, and we made these beautiful silk screens, which are very popular. They're still in existence, I still have some of them, and they're still—they're probably like the most sold item I've ever made,

you know, but the quality was so high. You know, we used Fabriano paper, and we used paints from Holland, and these two women have such a feeling for it all. And they understood when I asked for color what it meant, and everything was pulled by hand, and each color was cut out, it was just an incredible endeavor. So that happened during those years. And then—

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And these were master printers studying at Altos de Chavón?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: They were just students.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Oh, but they're all high qualities.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: But they had this talent, and I gave them the opportunity. And then I realized, Oh, my gosh, this is absolutely stunning. And I was able to then introduce them to printmakers, to other artists who needed prints, in Santo Domingo. And eventually, they became —you know, they created a lovely business, but they were very talented and very good. So that was a part of my artistic development, going into silk-screening.

[00:40:18]

During those years, I also started working with Pete Dye. Pete Dye is one of the most renowned golf architects in the world. He's still living. Pete designed four golf courses in Casa de Campo, and they're very beautiful and very difficult to play. So when I had that show in Chavón, their golf pro came and saw some of my paintings, and he says, "You know, five miles from here, in the golf course, we have landscapes that look just like that." And I was like, "Really?" He says, "Yes, you should come down and look at it." So he invited me there, and I was stunned by the beauty of these places, and then he said, "You know what, I'm going to introduce you to Pete Dye, who designed these courses." And I said, "Wow!" So he introduced me to Pete, and Pete is really quite a genius. He's nonverbal, though. He's not a person who's talking about his process. So I would follow him and watch him mold land [laughs] with big machinery and create curves and interesting sculptural things.

So I was watching him, but his wife Alice was highly articulate. So Alice took me under her wing, and she says, "You know, you can’t make these pretty landscapes. You have to make them golf prints, meaning that when a golfer looks at it, they understand what you're doing." So she taught me how to look at the course holes from a bird's-eye view, and she fed me information and fed me information and fed me information, and I was able to create what she was asking me to. And when that occurred, the golf pro said, "You know what, instead of giving out these tins cans to all the people who win prizes, we're going to give them your print." So that was an incredible little endeavor, you know. And looking back, what an extraordinary privilege for me, to work with Peter and Alice Dye. You know, I'm like, [laughs] That's not something I planned, that's not something I was looking for, it just happened. And we got along and we talked and we understood each other.

And until her death, you know, I was in touch with Alice, who was always encouraging: "What are you painting now? Send me a picture of what you're doing." You know, and she over the years bought a lot of my prints for her friends, but she knew that her hand was in that, you know, the impact that she made. You know, I don't think Pete is active now. The last golf course Pete designed in Altos de Chavón is called To Dye Fore, and it was built along the cliff that I've been describing. [Laughs.] It is extraordinary. So you're looking at the Chavón River, and that it begins in one spot and ends in the Caribbean Sea. It's just extraordinary. So I will always have such respect and affection for them, from the relationship.

Actually, about three weeks ago, we just sent some prints from that era to a golfer who contacted me and said, "I know this golf course. Do you have any left?" And I was like, "That's incredible." [Laughs.] But that's a big part of my life outside of Chavón that was tied to my career. So, what richness. I mean, I just couldn't have dreamt all of these relationships.

[00:45:00]

So the relationship with golf and Pete and Alice, that was a whole other—now, I don't play golf, right, so I don't have—I did not have the understanding of what it feels like. But Alice would take me on the holes and says, "This is what you would be worried about [laughs] if you were playing this hole." So I felt like she taught me how to play golf without my picking up a golf club. So that was a fascinating personal experience.

And again, the archives, the Smithsonian Archives, has my work from that period, and I was

once told it was the only golf art [laughs] of any kind that was in the archives. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And I think they also have some of the letters that you exchanged with Alice. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Oh, yes. Yes. So that was part of my life there.

And then we came back to the United States to get married. Wow, that's another story. I don't know if you want to hear that story. It's Chavón, New York. [Laughs.] It was a very interesting moment when Marty and I decided to get married.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: And at this point, just to kind of situate people who will be listening to this oral history, are we talking about the late '80s?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: We're talking about—the marriage or the golf prints?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Your stay in Altos de Chavón. Or was it divided—

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Oh, okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: —in different parts?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: So my stay in Chavón—I ended up being in the Dominican Republic from 1983 to 1988—'85, '86, '87, '88. So I taught the first three generations of Altos de Chavón. My husband was in medical school, and he was in a five-year program. So in 1986 or '7—I think it was '6—I decided to stop teaching in Chavón because I got pregnant with my daughter.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You said '86?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Yes. I got pregnant, and I was traveling back and forth on a scooter, [laughs] but a really miraculous thing happened. You know, I stopped teaching at the school, but a group of students who were in the school that year decided they wanted me to teach them how to illustrate. So they came as a group to my house, and I continued to instruct these students from my home. I taught them how to illustrate. And one of those former students is Roberto Calasanz, who's like blood to me, and he's a phenomenal accessory designer. So now, this is outside of Chavón.

Marty and I decided to get married in '84. So I arrived in '83. 1984, Marty and I decide, Okay, let's get married. And Dominique Bluhdorn, Charles Bluhdorn's daughter, had offered to have the reception at her exquisite [laughs] villa that had a running porch to this long walkway to the ocean. This exquisite place. She says, "I will host this, you know, the reception." And Marty and I were so excited. So we called our family. All of my families were like, "We're in," but Marty's family was, "No way, we're not going." So that created a conflict for us, and we had to make a decision: cut out his family completely [laughs] or come to the States to get married. And I'm going to tell you the choice that we made was to come to the States to get married.

[00:50:00]

However, I was teaching at the time summer school and regular school, so I was teaching a lot. And Marty was in medical school with three semesters. And finding a spot where the two of us were off simultaneously was really tough. It was like threading a needle. We found two weeks in September—like late August, early September—where we could get to the United States and somehow [laughs] pull a wedding together with no planning. So I bought 10 yards of Swiss Dotting in the Dominican Republic, and I ripped a very simple picture of a dress from a magazine, and I arrived in the United States with that. Marty contacted his family. We did not have a place to get married. The day that we thought we would get married, which was September eighth, happened to have been Labor Day, and we had forgotten American calendars. You know, we were just living in the Caribbean. So I did all these handwritten invitations and I send them out and I called my aunt Tomasa and I said, "Aunt Tomasa, I need you to make a dress for me." She's like, "*Yvelisse, mira! Te voy a matar! Porque tú sabes que tu prima Kathia se acaba de casar la semana pasada y tuve que coser para ella? Y ahora tú quieres que yo te haga este vestido?!*" *[laughs]* She was yelling at me, [laughs] and I was like, "Well, I don't have anything to wear; what do you think?" So she, like, let me have it, but then she made the dress, and I was really excited.

Marty's father was a very famous pigeon breeder. He bred pigeons for years, and he was a

pigeon racer, and he was a prominent pigeon racer. At one point, he was national champion [laughs] of all pigeon racing [laughs] and definitely was state champion, and anyways, he had a race that day. He's like, "Kid, I love you, but you know, I got a race, I'm sorry, I can't go." [Laughs.] So my husband had to get on the phone and say, "Dad, I'm only getting married once, you better show up." [Laughs.] So it was a problem, and he resolved it by asking Marty's sister not to come to the wedding so that he could come to the wedding.

And I have a very important story about race to tell you. When Marty's mom met me, she was like, "Julia is a very nice girl, Marty, but what happened to all those Italian girls you used to date? Didn't you have a nice Irish girl too?" [Laughs.] And Marty's like, "Yeah, Mom, but I don't like them, I like Julia." She goes, "You're not serious!" And Marty said, "I am very serious, Mom, don't make me choose." [Laughs.] Now, I stayed out of that drama because I can't change this. I let them do that. You know, we were having dinner, and I excused myself [laughs] and went somewhere else to allow them to do this, right?

So this is what my husband did, and it's a true story. The day of our wedding, he went up to his mom and says, "Mom, I know you have some problems with Julia because she's of a different race," and he goes, "But don't worry about it. I told her family, because they had a bit of a problem with me, not to worry because you're a Cuban white, [they laugh] and instead of your name being Claire Porter, I told them your name was Clara Portes." [Laughs.] And his mother was so angry, and his father knew what his son was doing. He goes, "Kid, you better cut that out because she won't come to the wedding." [Laughs.] So Marty was doing that with his family.

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My family was busy making *tostones* and, you know, *arroz con pollo* and all this Latin food, which was really great. And when Marty's family came, they brought, you know, deli sandwiches, things that were of their culture. So it was very interesting at our wedding to see for the first time what this was going to look like, you know, the two cultures, the two families together. And because we were so pressed for time, we had rings that we ordered in Altos de Chavón that Bill Everett designed. I believe Bill Everett is still there. But we were hoping that one of the artists in residence who was leaving Chavón would actually get the rings to us the day of our wedding. [Laughs.] A wonderful, wonderful Argentinian artist showed up with our rings that day. We just got lucky.

We didn't have a place to get married. Our friends who were runners lent us their apartment on 72nd Street right across the river from the Hudson—I mean right across the Hudson River view, and we just went down the stairs and walked into Riverside Park without a license. [Laughs.] We just chose a spot to stand. And because we couldn't find anybody to marry us, at the last minute we found a Unitarian minister who said she would come and marry us. She was wonderful, by the way, a great woman. And she officiated and my friends and my family had balloons on sticks and Marty was waiting and I was walking through these sticks and everyone was humming, "Here comes the bride," and that's how we got married.

And, oh, my gosh, so many memories. So we got married; it was like [claps once] hurry up and go. And, you know, we were able to go to my cousin's wedding, which was the week before, September second. And she got married with La Gran Manzana, a Dominican [laughs]—a wonderful Dominican group. Actually, one of their musician's daughters is now a well-known artist. And [laughs] we got to dance, and my cousin had, you know, a Princess Di dress, you know, where she's at the altar and the tail's at the entrance at the church. It was really miraculous and wonderful but so different from ours, you know, because we were like, Maybe it will happen, maybe it won't.

So it was quite the two weeks that we spent in New York. The last hysterical story I'm going to tell you is about Marty's clothes. He didn't have a suit, and we were on a bus crossing—the crosstown on 42nd Street. While we were on the bus, we saw a men's store, and in the window they had this white suit that looked like John Travolta's suit from [laughs] *Saturday Night Fever*. We jumped out of the bus, we go over there, and he tries on the suit, and it was really cheap polyester. It was horrible, [laughs] it was just so bad, and we decided, "Oh, well, that's it, you'll have to get married in your—whatever you brought with you in the suitcase." And while we were there, this young guy was trying on a beautiful suit, beautiful. It was burgundy with this confetti detail, and it was, you know, pinstripes, just gorgeous. And Marty was looking at it, and the guy puts it on layaway and leaves. Marty says, "Oh, you know, I was looking for something to get married in, and I really like that suit that guy tried on. Do you have another one?" And the guys goes, "Oh, sorry, you know, this is the last one." He says, "But, you know, he put it on layaway,

you could try it on." [They laugh.] So Marty puts the suit on, and it fits him great! And the salesman says, "You can buy that suit and I'll order him another one." [Laughs.] Which is how Marty got his suit for our wedding. [Laughs.]

[01:00:02]

So, oh, it was a miracle. [Laughs.] Our wedding was a miracle. And again, you know, I brought the Chavón connection, because of the design and because of the fabric and because of the rings being delivered. It was just really a very wonderful thing.

And I have a father figure who gifted us tickets to Rome, because we were very broke and we didn't have any time or money to go on a honeymoon. So it was through these tickets that Marty and I went to Rome. Marty went there for the first time, and that's when I took him to meet the nuns, which I mentioned to you before. That kind of brings together our experience—you know, our broader experience, in and out of Chavón.

I think one of the things I would like to mention to you moving forward—and I may need some help from my former students—is the mentioning all of the very famous artists that were attracted to Chavón, who came to the school to work with us simply because it was such a miraculous place to be. Such a beautiful, beautiful place. So I realized there was no way any of those people would have been accessible to our students in the United States. So I do want to get to that. I have some names, but I'm sure there's more, and I did want to take some time for that. I'm going to take a little break and get some water.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Sure. Let me just pause this.

[Tape stops, restarts.]

Okay. So we took a little pause and you were telling me about your wedding in New York and going back after several years to Italy with Marty.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: [Laughs.] Yeah.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: What else happened then?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Well, I got to take Marty to meet the nuns in Assisi, the nuns I thought I would join [laughs] not that many years before. I showed up with him, and they gave Marty a very special tour, and I got a little jealous because he got to see things I had never seen, like drawings on the wall done by some of the artists who worked in the first cathedral in the 13th century. And they went crazy now. They had this guy there, and they made him coffee in the special china, and I had to sit with Mother Superior in her office while Marty is being, like, wined and dined, [laughs] I had a conversation with her. I was like, "I'm sorry, I really thought I would become a nun, but look what happened. [Laughs.] I met this guy and I married him." And I was so confused. And she looked at me—and you know what, I give her a lot of credit—and she said to me, "You know, God gives us love in very different forms, and what you're doing in being married and creating a family is a form of love," and she let me off the hook. [Laughs.] I got to stay there for a long time with her and then Marty told me everything that had gone on.

So that was a real important circle for me, closing that. And Marty got introduced to all my Italian friends, and we went to Poppi, where Dante was born, and we went to Florence, and we did all of these adventures. And Marty got a real taste of Italy, and it was a very wonderful thing to share with him.

[01:04:55]

And then, you know, we went back to Chavón. This was '85. We went in December of '85. And he graduated in '87, and our daughter was born in 1987 in the Dominican Republic. And I bring her to Chavón as a baby, and the students got to meet her, and some of them, you know, are of course still in my life, so they know her all of her life.

In 1988, in September, Marty and I decided we would move back the United States because he wanted to practice in the United States. Now, I have to say it was hard for me to leave. At that time, I had created a real presence for myself in the art world and definitely in the teaching world, and it was a hard thing for me to give up. But I gave it up because, you know, my husband wanted something else for himself.

And we had an apartment on East 94th Street that we decided—I decided I couldn't bring a baby into Manhattan, I just couldn't. I just thought she would be hit in the head by a briefcase, you know, [laughs] when I put her in her little stroller. The strollers were different then, they were little umbrella strollers, so the kids were really exposed, and I thought, "Oh, no, they'll hit her in the head with a briefcase," so I decided, "No, we can't go back there." So what I did because I was familiar with the Hudson River villages from the '70s when we used to live in Hastings, I called a realtor while in the Dominican Republic, and I rented a house in Irvington on the Hudson, which is a very beautiful little river town, and I procured a telephone number. Both of these things I did over the phone. So when we arrived, there was a place for us to live. A family member brought us a bed and a picnic table, [laughs] and thus began our life back in the United States.

I do need to say something about that time. Marty was working 29-hour shifts. He was working at Mount Sinai, which meant that for the first time in five years, I was alone all day long with a baby, and our dog Polemil. And that was quite a shift for me. It was very traumatic. So I decided to find a friend because I needed to talk to somebody [laughs] other than the baby. My mother lived in New York City, she was working as an officer manager for my uncle, she worked six days a week, she didn't have much time for helping out. My father figure was head of national sales for Viacom, and he was on a plane every day. No family support. So it meant that I was alone.

And I would walk—I remember this so distinctly, on Main Street. We lived right off of Main Street in Irvington—there was this little shop, a gift shop called Arco Iris, and I thought, "Oh, my gosh, somebody here speaks Spanish." So I went in with my white baby, and I was very dark at the time, and I met a beautiful woman named Juana Martinez, and I said, "Hi, I'm Julia, this is my baby Paloma, your store is called Arco Iris, that means you speak Spanish, and you and I are going to be friends. I'll be back tomorrow." [Laughs.] And I forced myself on this very mild and very lovely woman who had a parrot named Macanudo, after the cigar, and she had Macanudo in the store with her, and Macanudo would talk to us. So of course, Paloma was intrigued. So she was my first friend in Irvington.

[01:09:53]

But this is the thing I discovered: At 5 p.m., there was an exodus in Irvington of people of color. They all went down the hill to the train and they left. And the day I saw that, I thought, Oh, my gosh, I might be the only person of color living on Main Street. What are you going to do about this, Julia? Plus, you have a white baby, people are going to think you're the live-in nanny. Okay, you're going to have to take this one step at a time. I knew people were looking at me, so I thought, Well, might as well make it an easy target. So I would put on purple turbans and dresses with big floral patterns, and I would wait till all of the people of color left, and I would walk down one side of Main Street and up the other side of Main Street. Every day, after the train left, down one side and up the other. It's like if you're getting a look, take a good look, let me make it easy. I live here. Right? So I never felt so—such a target, [laughs] you know? It was just unbelievable. So that's how I dealt with it.

At home, being with the dog and the baby alone for over 29 hours, I was really in need of communication. And when my husband came home, I had my daughter on the other side of the door dangling like the Lion King. He would open the door, and I would pass her on to him and say, "Tag, you're it," and I would leave the building. [Laughs.] And I would just go out for some fresh air and go for a walk on the Aqueduct, which is this wonderful, long national park, which was right in front of our door, and get some fresh air. And I would come home to find my husband on the floor in the bedroom with the gate up so the baby wouldn't escape. He would be sound asleep on the rug with the baby on his chest, and she was awake because she never slept, and she was like swimming on his chest, [demonstrates] like this. [They laugh.] And I'm like, Oh, good, they're just fine.

So I confronted that separation, that obvious—"You're a person of color in this town"—the best way that I knew how. And then eventually, I do have to say, I became a very loved and respected person in that community because I created an art school for kids. I managed it and taught the kids the way I did in college, which was, "We work hard, let me show you how this is done, let me go around"—and I had kids from kindergarten through high school, and I had three semesters a year: drawing—black-and-white drawing—painting, and sculpture. So I was working there running that business and then I was teaching at Parsons, and I want to get to the Parsons part.

We arrived in '88, September, so we're there a couple of months before '89 began—I get a call

from Frank Rizzo, who was the department head for the fashion department, and he invites me to go teach in his department as a fashion illustration teacher. And he got me into the BFA program, and I was so excited. I was so excited to go into New York City, to find someone to care for my baby, to be with students, to do what I love to do, which is to educate. And there, we were following the pattern that I had learned from them, which was I was teaching with—side by side with the design teacher. So there was the design teacher and the illustration teacher together. And I was teaching first in the sophomore year, where I was introducing all of these things to the students for the first time, and I was also teaching in the junior year, which is really the most difficult year in design there.

[01:15:11]

So we were on 40th Street and Seventh Avenue, and I was commuting, and it was a very joyful thing for me. So I started working there in '89, and I worked in Parsons in that department through 2004, a lot of years, and we were involved with a lot of fashion shows. The senior fashion show was the major fundraiser for the entire Parsons School of Design. We raised millions of dollars in one night, and that money would go to fund scholarships and other things throughout the entire school. So it was a lot of stress on that department, but the faculty at the time, we were like a big family—very different all of us, but like a big family—and I'm still close with some of those friends of mine from those years.

It did change, you know. When Frank retired, we had Marie Essex, who was his assistant to the department, and she was an extraordinary woman, and she became head of the department. It wasn't till—oh, I don't know, I forget what year—but the—after Frank left and after Marie came and Marie passed away, the politics of the department changed, and it started to affect the courses, what we were teaching. For instance, drawing was taken out of the curriculum. You can't illustrate if can't draw; you're drawing the human figure, you need to draw that over and over and over again. So that was taken out.

And primarily, the faculty was—we were separated. We used to always have lunch together, and we would talk about our classes and our families, and there was so much interaction going on, and we always sat with Frank. So the whole department, all the faculty and the department head, we were always together. But when they started separating us, of course, it started to break at that fabric. And I just got to a point where I thought, You know what, I love teaching too much, this is just not what I love anymore. So after all those years, in 2004, I stopped teaching at Parsons. That was a hard thing for me to do because I loved it so much, but it also was a good thing for me to do because all that teaching energy, which comes from the same well as your creative energy. All that teaching energy came back to me, and I was able to start harnessing that energy back and focusing it into work.

So I commuted initially from Irvington, but when we moved upstate, I was commuting for seven years [laughs] from Woodstock into Parsons School of Design, and that was quite a commute. You know, I was up at 4 a.m., taking a bus at 6, arriving in Manhattan about 8, 8:30 a.m., going straight to work, and having 16-hour days of teaching, prepping, meeting with students one-on-one, going to meetings. It was very long days, but I did it for seven years while I was still here, living here.

So, I have to tell you what was going on in the '90s. After we came back from Chavón, I had a very fresh connection to the tropical landscapes, and I continued to paint from memory. I had some paintings that I brought with me that were in-process, and we had an extra bedroom in the house, and I made it my painting room. One of those paintings was rather large, and my grandmother was very ill, and she was passing away, and I made a painting for her to transition through, and it's called *Passage for Gabina*.

[01:20:30]

What was happening in the art scene during those years was that Caribbean paintings were—there was a Caribbean movement, so there was a lot of shows around Caribbean art. And there was a wonderful curator who was working at the Housatonic: Ben [Ortiz -JSS]—I forgot Ben's last name, it'll come to me—you know, I'm of a certain age, it'll come back to me. [Laughs.] But Ben was really important. He was organizing all these wonderful shows around art of the Caribbean.

Scherezade and I were always exhibiting together, and we were in some important shows. The first show that was really, really important was called *Crossroads*, and it was organized but Krasdale Foods. That show got a lot of attention, and I was interviewed by NPR around that

exhibition. Then we had a show in the Henry Street Settlement and at the Housatonic, and I was really engaged. Ben had organized a show around a Columbus quincentennial. I had to make a piece for that; I still own the piece. Now, I wasn't sure what I would do, but it was the first time I ever came in touch with my rage at Columbus, and it was a combination of drawing and writing. And basically, I was saying like, you know, Who am I, and what do I look like, where do I fit in? And it was the first time I really got to focus on Columbus. That was an important show for me. I'm not sure for everybody else, but for me it was because it got me in touch with that.

Then, a curious thing happened. After two years of painting tropical landscapes from memory, it was gone. I could no longer recall the colors, the feeling, the heat, the humidity. I was being infused with the northeast of the United States, and what I saw was a lot of gray for a lot of months. I had done a weekend workshop at The Studio School in Manhattan, and we were drawing the same figure over and over, the same setting, and then we ended up doing this very interesting exercise where we mixed 10 versions of gray, and we were painting not the form, but where the eye fell. So you take a tub of a particular gray, and you look at the figure, and you just sort of put—record where your eye fell. So it was not about the form at all, and it was very scary. But I remember the teacher saying to me, "You know, you got this exercise." And the reason was because mine was so abstract and hard to really pin, and other people were trying to make the form with the grays, and I was just kind of following instruction, and it made this very different image for me. So I went back to my studio and I decided, Well, this is very scary because I am a form-driven person. So because it's so scary, I need to explore it. And, all I see is gray. So guess what, I'm not going to touch color. I'm going to start painting in gray.

[01:25:11]

So I continue with that process for seven years. [Laughs.] I was doing this process, and it was terrifying to me. So what I would do was, I would have these big paintings up of gray and white, and then on the other wall, I would do a highly academic rendering, like mural size with a charcoal pencil just to calm myself down, to remind myself that I could still do it. But what was important was these abstract, unusual things. And over seven years, they started to congeal and to make sense, and I learned a very different way of applying color.

There was a tiny little gallery in Dobbs Ferry, which was the next river town south from Irvington. And I decided that no one was going to go to that show because it's this little tiny gallery. And for the first time, I took the risk of exhibiting two of the gray-and-whites. And I felt safe in doing that, but my biggest fear was that someone who knew my tropical work would show up, and I'm like, "Nobody's going to come." So anyway, I put the work up, it was beautifully framed, and I was like, "Ah, we'll see what happens, you know, how people respond."

Who walks through the door? Ben Ortiz, the curator that's been exhibiting my work since I arrived, and I'm like, [laughs] "No, this is my worst nightmare! How do I explain this?!" He goes straight to my work, he goes, "What's that?" And I was like, [laughs] "That is the new work I've been doing." It's nighttime, it's like nine o'clock at night. He goes, "We're going to your studio right now." I was like, [laughs] "Oh, no! Oh, no!"

So Ben Ortiz and I drive to my studio in the middle of the night, so he can see all the walls full of these gray-and-whites. And I thought, "Okay, it's over, [laughs] he'll never show my work again because it's not tropical." And he said—there was one I had done of the *David*. I had done Donatello's childlike *David*, but I put the dome of the Michelangelo *David* on top of the image. He says, "Do you have sketches for these?" I said, "Of course." You know, so I dig out my sketches for that particular piece. He goes, "Great, I'm putting them in the biennial." [Laughs.] I'm like, "What?!" He goes, "I'm doing a drawing biennial at the Housatonic, and I'm going to take the *David* and the sketches and put them in the show." And I was flabbergasted. I was so excited but also flabbergasted because it was like, I never imagined that that would be his response. I thought he was going to say, "Oh, you're a traitor, you know, you're not doing your best work"—I don't know what I was imagining, all kinds of junk in my head. But he rewarded me for taking a risk, and I'll never forget that.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: So the work is in the biennial, and that changed my trajectory. So this is mid-'90s, and I'm working on these gray-and-whites, and then there was a curator who had space in the same building where my studio was. And he was a collector. We met, and he says, "You know, I'm curious about your art," and I say, "Well, you know, just come over to the studio." So he walked over and he said, "Let's create a show."

[01:30:03]

I'm like, "What?" He goes, "Yeah, let's do a show in my space, and I will invite my friends and you'll invite yours." And he was—he was so interesting. His name is Henry Hacker, and Henry was a lawyer and an art collector. When I went to have the show hung, Henry taught me something really important. He had a very large space. He says, "We're only showing six pieces." And I was like, "What? Six pieces, do you know how many pieces I've done over seven years?" And he goes, "I do. We're only going to show the best." [Laughs.] He was so strict with what was shown. I said, "But, Henry, what about these little pieces that I made?" And he goes, "We're going to get a beautiful archival box, we're going to put those drawings in there, and whoever wants to look at them can open the box." And he taught me something so important about how to exhibit work. So I'm, like, all nervous, "Oh, my gosh, six pieces on the wall," and I had this big show.

What was interesting about that show is that a gallery owner from Woodstock came to see it. He's someone we had met when we were visiting Woodstock one weekend. So he came to see the show, and it was interesting because it was like the transition between Irvington and Woodstock. And I have to tell you that three of the six pieces sold that night, including the largest piece, which was a six-by-six painting. Henry Hacker taught me that. And he bought one of the pieces that he wanted.

And then a couple of years later, he sent me a letter saying, "Julia, I'm donating the piece I bought to the Hudson River Museum." I was like—so he began that relationship between the Hudson River Museum and myself. And he bought a lot of little pieces of mine, you know, pieces I had done in Italy for his children. He was an extraordinary person. And then he disappeared from my life, you know, he moved somewhere else, he did something else, and I don't know how to reach Henry Hacker. But the museum says that he ended up moving and doing something related to art that he loved after retirement, and I would love to be in touch with him again at some point just to thank him.

So that was in the winter of '96. And then July of '96, Marty and I moved from Irvington to Woodstock full time. Marty had finished his residencies, and he had offers in Manhattan, in the Bronx, in Nyack; he had offers everywhere. And I had a community in Irvington, which by now is just lovely and wonderful. Our daughter had a great life. Her whole life was [laughs] in a 10-block radius, and I had created something very valuable for her and I because he was gone all the time working, and it was very hard for me to give that up. However, he and I had been taking turns. He came to the Caribbean, I came back to America, and now it's time for me to follow his lead. And so I left Irvington, and I was very sad about it. I came to Woodstock, I didn't know how I fit in, and the room that is now my studio was the annex for the gallery. The gallerist who came to the Irvington show, his name is Tom Fletcher, and Tom had a gallery in the center of Woodstock, and that's how we met him.

[01:35:14]

We went in one weekend to see a show, and I was doing the proper Manhattan etiquette, which is: Look at the work, don't speak to anyone. And my husband went straight up to Tom and started telling him our life story. So [they laugh] it was this thing, this contrast. And Tom, that day asked us—he goes, "What are you doing for the next 15 minutes?" And Marty and I said, "Oh, we're just walking up and down Main Street in Woodstock and looking at things." He goes, "Get in your car, I want to show you something." Tom locks up his gallery, we follow him, and he drives us to this place, which is where we now live.

And he said, "This cottage was built by a sculptor, his name was Paul Fiene." His wife, who was a printmaker, Rosella Hartman, she inherited it, and the only people who had owned this place was Paul and Rosella and then Tom’s wife. There have only been two owners. This space had been Paul's studio, and next door was a sister property where his brother, George Fiene, had a similar cottage and a similar studio. So there was this history, this thing going on here.

And it was tiny. You know, it was a one-bedroom, one tiny loft, one-bathroom cottage. And we came from a three-bedroom, two-bathroom house plus a commercial studio, because I had a commercial studio where I had the school. So we took all that stuff, put it in a 53-foot moving van and came to Woodstock. And this room was the annex for Tom's gallery, so he had sculptures and paintings and stuff here. And I came in, there was no heat. I came in, and it took me a lot of years to make it my own, to turn it into what it is today. A lot of years, a lot of shifting and moving and doing and, you know, just—and now, it really is my universe. But Tom

introduced us to where we live.

One thing I did not understand about this property is that the studio was the very first Woodstock School of Art. I did not understand that history. Robert Angeloch, who created the Woodstock School of Art, started it here. And now, it's several miles down the road and quite a location, where people come from all over to take classes, but it began here. And I got to meet his daughter, Alexandra Angeloch. And she and I made a quick friendship because we were both married to doctors, we both had daughters who were the same age, and I needed a friend, and we became friends. And she introduced me to her dad. And that's how I found out about the history of this building. And I came to that, honestly, by accident. I had no idea.

Those first three years that I was in Woodstock, I was hiding in this space. I didn't know how I fit in, where to go, what to do with myself. And the thing that's unique to Woodstock is that everyone is an artist, and that means my dentist was an artist and my doctor was an artist and my cleaning woman was an artist and the people who retired and came to the Woodstock School of Art were artists. And I'm like, Where do I fit in? [Laughs.] If everyone's an artist, where's my group of people? It took me a very long time to settle.

[01:40:01]

My husband got out of the car the day we moved, he put his foot on the ground and said, "Bury me in Twin Mountains."

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: [Laughs.]

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Meaning, this was it for him; he had no intention of ever moving out. And [laughs] I was like, "Oh, what's a Dominican woman doing in the woods?!" So I had my little adjustment for three years.

I met an extraordinary woman named Kit Taylor. Her grandfather was a very famous artist called Charles Rosen, and there's this incredible history. Charles was a friend with Eugene Speicher and George Bellows. And we're talking all these people lived in houses next to each other, and there is a street called Bellows Lane in Woodstock. So she comes from that tradition, and she was married to an international banker, and she traveled all over the world. She lived in a lot of different countries and was exposed to global culture and economies. So she was very sophisticated in that way, but she was also old-fashioned and wonderful in that when she knew that Marty and I were here, she found out that we came from Irvington, and she had lived with her husband briefly in Irvington. So she invited me to lunch. And I was dying with fear. She invited me to lunch and then she introduced me to this wonderful group of women who she had gathered, this group of curators, painters, wives of artists. She formed this group around art, and she invited me to meet them. And she was responsible for getting me out of the woods.

She was responsible for introducing Marty to this exquisite generation of Woodstock women who at the time were probably in their 80s. And these were women who studied art in Paris in the '20s, who were articulate. I mean, Andrée Ruellan and Petra Cabot and these women who were still living, who were extraordinary. So Marty got to be their doctor. So again, Marty has his own experience doing what he's doing, and I'm having a very different experience. So he was in heaven. He used to take care of Kit's mother, Kay. And Kay was Charles Rosen's daughter. Kay had been a muse to Bellows and all of their friends, and there was a big show [laughs] in Rochester about that group, and there are paintings of Kay everywhere.

So Marty is in Kay's house, and he's surrounded by Charles Rosen images. He falls in love with Charles Rosen's work. We started going to auctions, and Marty's spending five hours in an auction trying to get a Charles Rosen piece. But then when Kay passed away, Kit gifted Marty some of Charles Rosen's pieces. And Marty, because of his relationship with all these women artists, became a collector of Woodstock art. So we have a lot of Woodstock art that Marty absolutely positively has to have, loves, goes everywhere we go. We have stuff in filing flat files. We simply have to rotate, that's what we do. Because we went to a lot of auctions and we bought a lot of work by local artists. That's one of our prides in our lives here, is that beautiful collection of art that we have acquired.

[01:45:24]

So 1996 changed my life. By '99, I was feeling comfortable. Our daughter went from having playdates all day to having to be driven 45 minutes to a playdate, because here the distance is really huge. And if they were playing for an hour, one of us—Marty or I—would stay in the car

because you had to pick her up in an hour, and you didn't have enough time [laughs] to go home, do anything, and come back and get her. So her life changed drastically, and it took her a while to adjust as well. But she became a nature environmental conservation person because of her life here, you know, and that became her career. And she worked for the Wildlife Conservation Society for eight years of her life, because that's what she found here. She went to Africa to work with cheetahs, and, you know, her whole life took a trajectory that was really fascinating because she was here.

She moved back upstate three and a half years ago. She had been living in Manhattan and in Brooklyn and decided, "I've exhausted all of the open parks and it's just not enough. [Laughs.] I need to go back to where I can hike and where I can be by the river." And that decision brought her back upstate. She lives an hour south of us, but all those requirements are now there in her life. She can hike, she can go to the river and be in the park. She can just ride her bike, she just has access to the outdoors like she was hoping to have. So her life has brought her back.

So, 1996 and the shift to black and white in the art, it started—I started to go from black and white to black and white and a little brown, then black and white and a little brown and a little green, to black—and all of a sudden, the color started infusing the work again, until I got to *Birth of Anacaona*, which is the first full-color image that I made post- the black-and-whites. And what happened is that I developed a new way of applying paint, which is light and airy instead of filling in form, everything was happening in a very loose and open way, and you can see that in the sky and in the water of that painting. So all those years with the gray-and-whites introduced another way of applying paint to me.

So in 1999, I was doing these paintings where the color was coming back in, and I was already in Woodstock. Then in 2000, I had a show in Altos de Chavón again, and I brought a lot of these paintings to the gallery there.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I think we can stop here for today if you're okay. I'm guessing you haven't had lunch.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I haven't had lunch.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: [Laughs.] And it's actually later for you, yes. I wrote down many questions that I want to follow up on in our next meeting.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Did you want this recorded?

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[01:50:02]

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: This is fine. I was just going to say, I'm going to follow up on some of the things that you mentioned. I think we've covered a lot of territory today, so I'm really happy about that. And, yeah, let me just stop the recording for now.

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FERNANDA ESPINOSA: *Hola, estimada Júlia*. We're here in our fifth recording oral history session. My name is Fernanda Espinosa. I'm the oral historian for this oral history with Júlia Santos Solomon, and Júlia is joining me virtually from her studio in Woodstock, New York. Today is April 14, 2021, and this interview is for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Hello again, Julia. I keep saying Júlia and Julia. I hope [laughs] that's not too confusing. It's so nice to see you and hear you again. When we left off last time, we had started discussing your transition from your period of black-and-white and some of the experimentation you were doing with texture. And then you painting the *Birth of Anacaona* and introducing color back into your work.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Can you just take us from there and what was the transition like, and then going forward in your painting?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's very nice to see again and to be back. I'm enjoying this project,

thank you.

You know, *Birth of Anacaona* was the first full-color piece that I did after the gray-and-white series, which lasted about seven years. By that time, I was already living in Woodstock, and the way the color started to emerge was one color at a time. Like I remember doing gray-and-whites with a little plum or gray-and-whites with a little ochre, or gray-and-whites with a little plum and ochre. It just started in that way—very, very subtly.

But by the time I got to *Anacaona*, I was back to the form, to painting form, not just recording where my eye went, and she has full color. I used a model for the main figure, and that was a true return to my roots, [laughs] meaning my training. And when I first made her, I did it for rather personal reasons, you know, admiring Anacaona and her place in our history. And growing up looking at her sculpture, which was at the base of a big sculpture of Columbus, who I disliked tremendously. I disliked Columbus, but I loved her form. I mentioned that I was honoring a song by Toña la Negra from *México*, and she was imploring painters to paint black angels and black cherubs. Her song was from the '40s. And I felt a responsibility to honor that call. So Anacaona, who's all brown, she was a very voluptuous woman, very round with curves and hips and long hair. She's very very beautiful in that way. And there is a black mermaid behind her, and an even deeper toned cherub in the water, and the cherub is on a little dolphin.

When I made that picture, I felt happy that I had honored the song. But what's happened over the years is that it has become an image of interest to a lot of people because of its roots. And it is very, very large; it's five by seven feet. I think it's important to say that all this color transition occurred in Woodstock. So I was already living here and painting in acrylic and making that transition.

[00:05:09]

So that was the first full body of work that I did here, you know. And a lot of the first images before *Anacaona*, they were nostalgic images. I recall discussing my life in Assisi with the nuns. The very first, I would say, eight images were of life with the nuns. You know, picking olives and —just remembering my life during those years. I always found it curious that sometimes—it doesn't matter where I'm living, I will make art that references my previous life. For instance, when I was in Assisi, I was busy making birthday parties of my Dominican childhood, and when I was in Woodstock, which is a beautiful place with a magnificent landscape, I was busy making images of my life in Assisi. [Laughs.] I'm not quite sure why that happens, but it does.

So that's how *Anacaona* came to be, but she was the fullest color. She was all color. There was no black-and-white in it. And I experimented; I put some glitter on it and wanted, you know, to—I'm always throwing—it's like cooking, you know, I'm always [laughs] throwing something else in the pot I want to experiment with. So that one has glitter. And you know, many years later, I ended up with gold leaf, so maybe that was [laughs] the beginning of my interest in luminosity, but it's very funny to me anyway. But I did, you know. I experiment all the time.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Before you mentioned this work, you had also mentioned a certain anxiety around when—in your previous transition from—so from painting the tropical landscapes and then almost secretly starting to experiment with, you know, leaving color aside and experimenting with other forms. Can you talk a little bit more about that and just describe a little bit of this fear that you had either in regards to, you know, your career or what you had been building up until that point?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Yes. When I returned to the United States, there was a movement that had begun of exhibitions for Caribbean artists, and at the forefront of that was a curator named Ben Ortiz. And Ben Ortiz included me in a lot of Caribbean-based shows. I had been recalling the tropical landscape, so I continued—for two years, I continued to paint tropical landscapes. You know, this time, I was painting them in the United States—from memories, some from photographs—but the important thing is that the sense of color and light and air that I had captured on the island, I was still able to do. And there was something satisfying about that for me.

There was a huge, huge painting, a six-by-six that I had begun in the Dominican Republic, and then I brought it to the States. And when my grandmother was dying, my grandmother who raised me, I could only deal with my emotions by painting, with her transitioning between life and death. That large painting was up on my wall, and I decided to make a painting for her called *Passageway for Gabina*. And what I did was I created a path through this palm tree grove,

which I simplified. I simplified the grove, made less trees. And I painted mountains in the background, which is where she was born. She was born in the mountains in the Dominican Republic. And so I created a path from the grove to the mountains, and there's a lot of low-growing vegetation.

[00:10:14]

That was a painting that was started in the island but finished in the US. It didn't get a lot of exhibition right away because of its size, but later, it did end up in New York City.

So one day, the color disappeared. I just couldn't access it anymore. And I panicked, I didn't know what to do. What I ended up accepting was the fact that I was living in New York, not in the Caribbean. Light in New York is different. I was by the Hudson River, it was November—I remember that distinctly—and I thought, you know, everything is gray. So out of little bit of an attitude that I decided, "Well, if that's what I'm seeing, well, that's what I'm going to paint. [Laughs.] I'm not painting in color because I can't read this color."

You know, the subtlety which a lot of artists had made masterpieces out of, that was not a palette I understood. That was not something that drove me to a canvas. So I just said, "Forget it, I'm just going to paint in gray and white." So I would mix 10 tubs of gray. I would go from white to black with grays in the middle, and I began a new process of just putting a mark down where my eye fell and therefore releasing form, which is so important to me, three-dimensional form. That alone made me very nervous.

So I had my gray-and-whites on one wall in the studio, and then in the opposite wall, I created a 96-inch mural drawing, an academic drawing that I would do out of nervousness. And I painted it with single pencils, with charcoal pencils, because I was so unsure about this new direction that stripped me of everything that I knew, my color and form, that I would just go running to the other side of the wall and draw this huge, huge image that I borrowed from Veronese. So that was my state. There was a lot of anxiety while I was doing that.

But I've always believed that if I'm deeply uncomfortable, it's worthwhile. So I made myself stay the course. And you know, seven years later, I got into a show in Dobbs Ferry, which was a couple of villages from where I was living in Irvington in this little gallery, and I took a risk and exhibited two pieces. I figured no one would go, but Ben Ortiz showed up. [Laughs.] My biggest fear, can you imagine? This is a guy who's promoting my tropical work. [Laughs.] He asked me immediately what “that” was, and I said, "Well, it's just something I've been playing with in the studio." And he made me leave the opening. He said, "Let's go now." [Laughs.] And he just wasn't going to let it go. And I was like, [sighs].

You know that feeling—I remember talking to you about having Mother Superior in my little room in Assisi. It was the same feeling of, "Oh, well, this is over now, you really messed this up, [laughs] you're not going to get what you want. You're not going to be put in anymore Caribbean shows." [Laughs.] So there they all were, we went into the studio, they were all on the wall, and there was in particular that he liked. I had done a piece on Donatello's *David*, which I've always loved because he sculpted David as a child; not as a gorgeous, luscious, sexy man like Michelangelo did.

[00:15:13]

That, Michelangelo's piece, will make you forget to breathe; it is so stunning. But Donatello’s delicate touch with the *David* was something that I've always loved. I had a lot of sketches that I had done of that sculpture in my sketchbooks. So when he came, he went over to it and he saw the sketches. He asked me, "Do you have sketches for it?" And I said, "Yeah, I made these in Italy when I was there," and I showed them to him. And what I had done in the final image was that I put the little Donatello underneath the dome where Michelangelo's *David* is actually located. Because when you're looking up at Michelangelo's *David*, you're not just looking up at this sculpture that's soaring, you also have this huge dome above it, so everything goes up. So I put that dome above the little *David*, and he rewarded me by putting that piece and the preliminary sketches into a drawing biennial in the Housatonic Museum. So all that fear about, "Oh, I can't let anybody know" was actually rewarded.

And then, I think I mentioned, in '96, I had an exhibition in Irvington of only those gray and white pieces, and the curator was very strict. He only allowed me to put up—I think it was six images, that was it. And he taught me a great lesson because half of them sold. And he bought my favorite. [Laughs.] He bought my favorite image, and years later, he donated it to the Hudson

River Museum. So they now own that piece, and they have restored it. It's been up in their permanent collection. Now they're under construction, so the piece has been taken down while they create a new gallery. But it was a remarkable thing. I would have never guessed what would happen with these images. I still have a lot of them in the studio in Woodstock.

Because I didn't have models, I ended up borrowing from the masters. So I borrowed from sculptures, I borrowed—I did one based on *Las Hilanderas* of the Velázquez. But in the *Las Hilanderas*, the whole image is the patrons in front with their beautiful gowns looking at rugs. But in the back, there's this tiny detail of the weavers, so I only chose the weavers [laughs] because I had a point of view. So I only did the weavers, and I borrowed from some of my favorite masters. And you know, that relationship with the masters was established in me as a teenager in the High School of Art and Design by Irwin Greenburg. So I always feel comfortable leaning on the masters if I need them. You know, just borrowing, looking at, remembering, visiting. I have that relationship in my mind. They're my legacy. That's my inheritance as an artist, is being able to do that.

And you know, years later, in the late '70s, I was introduced to Frida Kahlo, and now she's a huge part of my legacy. You know, because there were no Latin artists in the classrooms when I was being formed, but now I know who they are, and now I go to them. The gray and white were supposed to go to a biennial in Florence, but they got caught in customs [laughs] so they were never exhibited there, but they're in the catalogue for that show. [Laughs.]

[00:20:01]

But they taught me a tremendous amount, and I'm very grateful to have stuck with it and not given in to my fears.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Yeah, and this is why I wanted to mention that, you know. There's a great deal of change throughout the decades, but it seems like that was specifically a very important point, really not fearing jumping to what was something completely different. And then, you know, from my point of view seeing that experimentation and different paths that you took in that decade of the '90s show up in what you started doing in '99. Um, so going again forward to the *Birth of Anacaona*, what happened starting in '99? And then I know in 2000, you had another important show in Altos de Chavón.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So take us through what happened, starting in that new decade.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: So *Anacaona* was '99, and I got to exhibit it along with the more colorful paintings that came along in Altos de Chavón in the year 2000. I was there, and we had an exhibition, and I shipped everything down there. And by the time—you know, post-*Anacaona*, I was doing full color, borrowing from Caravaggio, Botticelli. So these were—you know, the actual look of the show was different than the look of the gray-and-white shows. So this is the first time I got to see them all up. That was really interesting for me to see.

That work came back to the States, and in the year 2001, around there, I started sculpting busts of the women in my family. And that series is called *Family Narrative*. Now, I have a couple of theories about going into full-form, three-dimensional sculpture. One is that by depriving myself of form for seven years, I had this huge appetite for three-dimensional form. [Laughs.] And from a personal point of view, the reason I started sculpting these heads was because I wanted to honor the women in my family who had had part of our immigration story and who had a huge hand in raising me. And I felt instinctively that the thing to do there was to create a material thing, an object. Now, I was not trained as a sculptor, so the first head that I did—now, that doesn't mean I didn't sculpt over the years; I did sculpt over the years. I sculpted in—all over. I was always sculpting, but I had no formal training.

So the first head I did, which is called *Caribbean Thoughts*, I really basically was busy measuring my head, and it was a bit of an academic process. Well, how wide is my forehead and you know, how deep is my jaw? You know, and I was using calipers, and that was the first head. When the head was fired and it was a three-dimensional clay piece, I looked at it and I knew it was incomplete. I said, "Mm-mm [negative], this doesn't look right to me, [laughs] this does not satisfy me." So I decided to go in and paint the sculpture.

[00:25:05]

I did not want to do regular skin tone. It was not about, "Well, what color of brown am I?" I had to go a little deeper, so I decided to paint the head in the colors of the geography where I came from. It's called *Caribbean Thoughts* because I bathed the head in turquoise color. I started with full out turquoise, and then I started modeling the color of the skin on top of the turquoise. The turquoise remains in the eyes, and the eyes are carved rather deep, they're not just superficial. That head I had furrowed into the clay and created these deep, recessed eyes. My reasoning for that when I was done was that I wanted to represent the fact that being Caribbean born, that I perceived the world through Caribbean eyes, but in this case, it was the literal color of the Caribbean Sea.

So all of a sudden, the coloration of the heads became very important and had to tie in with where they were born, what was important to them. For instance, when I did my grandmother's head, I started her with the color of bark because she was born in the mountains, and unlike me with the Caribbean, she was a mountain person. So I wanted to start with that as her essence color, let's say, and then I paint on top of that. And the one I'm working on now of my great-aunt Octavia—she loved amethyst, so I started with her in a full amethyst color, and now I'm building and modeling around and on top of. So, each one of these heads, I want them to have a deep sense of identity: Who are you, where do you come from, what does it look like?

So that began in 2001, around there. And the first three heads were exhibited in Woodstock in 2004, including what I call my ambassador head, which is [laughs] a piece I did of myself at age four, with little *moños* and big bows. She's avocado colored because as a kid, I loved avocado spread on *casabe*. *Casabe* is an indigenous bread that we still make in the Dominican Republic. So that little girl, she's been the most exhibited of all the heads. She is my ambassador; she's been to the Queens Museum, she's been to—she travels more than me, okay? [Laughs.] She's got her own crate, people come and pick her up, and she gets VIP treatment, and she gets shipped here and there. I'm telling you! It's her own life, I stay out of it. [Laughs.]

But when you see her face-to-face, she tells you something. She's telling me, telling other people, that she sees a lot of chaos in the adult world, and you can't escape that. Her face is very intense. And I watch people looking at it, and they respond to that. They respond to her stance. And, you know, the reason I chose that age is because that's the age I was when our family was separated, when my mother and aunt emigrated and my grandmother and I were left in the Dominican Republic. So we were—our family was separated. So there's a lot of emotion behind that little head, and I'm grateful that she transmits that, you know.

[00:30:18]

So now, let's see, I've sculpted my mother Lucía, my grandmother Gabina, myself as an adult, myself as a four-year-old, my daughter Paloma, and now I'm doing my great-aunt Octavia. And in all, they represent four generations. My daughter is the fourth generation. And the truth is that I'm doing all this work for that generation, for my nieces and nephews, for the generation that was born in the States and doesn't have roots in the Dominican Republic, doesn't have that connection that I feel because I was there those first years of my life. You know, they go to resorts, [laughs] and their experience of the culture is so limited. You know, for them, the Dominican experience is in their neighborhood. You know, where they live, the Dominican food, other people of their age who are children of immigrants. But I want them to know what it took to get them here, you know? I want them to know that they're standing on the shoulders of three other generations of people who sacrificed for them in order for them to be who they are right now and for them to have all the choices that they have and all the options that they have. And I'm proud of that. But because we're immigrants, this story cannot be forgotten. I'm making sure that it's not forgotten.

Sometimes the heads are exhibited with my writing. I've done writing over on each head as a way of describing the character of the person, and to link their identity to the immigration story. And all of this, all of this intended for that. Now, it may be that it speaks to other Latinx or other children of immigrants who are fourth generation, who don't speak the language—and I'm not saying there's anything wrong not understanding what it's like to be a hybrid, someone with one foot in one culture and then another foot in another culture and to live in the middle forever. That's my position. I'm the hybrid in the family. But that's my position, you know, and I have the ability to tell the story. It's a long story.

And when I look at all the art—you know, the birthday parties, the self-portrait when I was a year old—I mean, they're—the Dominican identity and story for me is very long, and sometimes I feel like, depending on which part of the narrative I'm in, it will require a different medium. For

instance, I'm going to show you something for a second. Emily, can you bring the digital print over?

[Side conversation with studio assistant.] [00:34:29] - [00:35:01]

That is *Caribbean Thoughts*, the first sculpture I made. And the background is the very first landscape I did in Dominican Republic that made sense to me. So what's happening now is that I am merging, digitally, sculpture with my painting. And these are printed on metal. The piece that you just saw, the large one, that's a 40-by-40 metal print.

Let me show you another one. This is the four-year-old with the gold leaf painting. So now, the story is going digital, and it's quite contemporary. I have one, two, three—three digital mergers that I've done with this. And they're really interesting to look at because when I used the tropical imagery, it's paintings from the '80s, from when I was painting those in the Dominican Republic and then the sculptures, and they're talking to each other.

That first one—this one, *Caribbean Thoughts Mashup*—this is an image I have been wanting to do my entire life, but I didn't know how. I would draw, I would sketch, I would paint, I would do watercolors, and I kept experimenting. And then I came across some experiments where I would take a drawing of myself and print it on film and then place that on top of a watercolor, and I started manually creating these until I found the digital media. And when I saw the metal at my printer's in New York City, I said, "That's what I want." And he says, "Are you sure?" I said, "I'm sure." I said, "That's what I want." He says, "Are you sure?" I said, "I'm sure." And we played this game because they were offering these metal prints, but I was the first person in New York City —

[Zoom audio cuts out for about three seconds.]

—order one. So it was new for them, but I knew that's what I wanted when I saw it.

When I was at the Rhode Island School of Design, I found some of my notebooks. We used to take color theory classes. Now, these classes were full of science and medical information about the eye and how you see and all this stuff. And of course, there was a lot of work done with painted chips and creating prisms. You know, a very very thorough class, and I needed notebooks to take notes. That was my sophomore year. I forget if it was freshman or sophomore, one of those two years. And I wrote in that notebook that I wanted to create an image where the landscape and the figure were the same.

So that was 1976, and I started making these maybe in 2015, 2016. So when I saw this image, I said, "Oh, there you are! It took all these years to get to you." So there's a lot that's brewing always in the back of my head, and it's technology—as far as my facility and my ability, it's way ahead of me. It's ahead of me. This was ahead of me.

[00:40:09]

So that image now is getting a lot of play. You know, I sent it to Austin a couple of years ago for an international women's show, and it became the promotion for that show. I had no idea. I didn't ask them to do that; they made that decision. Then I was in a show in the Hudson River Museum celebrating the passing of the 19th Amendment called *Women to the Fore*, and I have never been in a show like that. I might have mentioned this before, but you know, it was Mary Cassatt and Louise Nevelson and Georgia O'Keefe. These were the people in that show. And then my name was in there too, and I'm like, "What?" But guess what? They chose that image to represent the entire show. I didn't ask them; they made that decision. When you went in and you were looking at the show information, there it was. When you went on their website, there it was. And when I walked into that museum for the first time and I saw the image, which had been blown up to cover the front doors, I had to stop walking and started sobbing. That's something I didn't know, that's something I did not expect; I started crying.

Because at that point, sometimes the work is not about me anymore. Do you know what I mean? I made it, but it's talking to people. It's like the little girl; they have their own lives. So I have no words to tell you really how profound that was for me. They never told me, they didn't ask me—you know, they asked me to send a digital image of work, and I thought it was, you know, for their inventory. That was that. So, because I went to sculpture, I had to cover the trajectory. [Laughs.]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So our video doesn't seem—or my video doesn't seem to work that well,

but I can definitely hear you. It's only that I can't really read your expressions so quickly.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's okay.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: [Laughs.] So, you know, you mentioned before—I don't think we were recording yet, but basically, you've been working on the *Family Narrative* sculptures for 20 years now. And they've taken their own life and this form. But going back to the early 2000s and also the decade from 2000s to 2010, what else were you working on? You did quickly mention to me the *New Zealand* series, and maybe that's something that you want to bring in in terms of, you know, the different landscapes, both of your life but also taking different shapes in your art.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I have a friend. She's a very famous sports figure. She's a running pioneer. We're close friends, and she lives half the year in New York and then half the year in New Zealand. And we were always communicating. And she sent me a postcard from New Zealand, and I saw in the postcard the greens. I recognized—I recognized that island. I had to keep looking at that postcard. I looked at it till I saw my friend again. And there was a recognition in that image of New Zealand—it just spoke to my heart.

[00:45:03]

So the next time I saw her, I said, "You know, I love the colors there." And as our relationship developed—I have a daughter, Paloma, and Paloma was a really stellar runner. She was a fantastic runner. And because that's what my friend—her name is Kathrine Switzer—because that's Kathrine's world, she introduced me to her husband, Roger Robinson, who was a scholar at the time. He was at the Victoria University of Wellington, running their humanities department. But more importantly, Roger was a huge runner. And what happened was he and Kathrine decided to invite our daughter to go to New Zealand to run. And when that invitation came about, my husband Marty and I decided, "Hey, we should go to New Zealand as well." So we made a trip in 2010. We went in December, and we arrived before our daughter did because she was doing an internship.

And I have never seen a more stunning place. New Zealand is brand-new land. It's probably like—it's the baby [laughs]—it's the baby of all the nations, it's brand new. All the plates were still settling, and it looks—in some places, it looks like a dinosaur is going to come out. Well, *Lord of the Rings* was shot in New Zealand. And that was not fake, that was not digitized, that's what New Zealand looks like. That's what it looks like. So we're in Zealand, and I'm going, "Oh, my gosh; oh, my gosh; oh, my gosh."

Now, all of the different types of ecosystems that exist in the United States—rocky mountains, pastural lands, volcanic lakes, glaciers—everything was in New Zealand, except it's this tiny little place. So when we were traveling, particularly in the South Island, they had these places called passes. So New Zealand—the South Island is kind of long and narrow, and interspersed are these passes, and when you looked through the passes, you would see a volcanic lake, a farm, rocky mountains, and a glacier. You saw everything! And my brain was like, "Oh, my gosh!" I just couldn't contain it. So I did a lot of drawing. It's also a great place if you love adventure. You know, my husband is an adventure lover, so he was going on helicopters and flying here and dropping there and doing this and doing that, and I would say, "When you come back, you're going to find me on this picnic table, drawing." [Laughs.] Because I had to say no sometimes, just so I could take all this stuff in. So I was drawing.

And when we came back from New Zealand, I was full of it. I had all this information, and I thought, I should just make one painting and get it out of my system. [Laughs.] So I remember sitting on the floor, putting on a canvas, and I did this painting. And then I said, "Well, I should just do another one, so it's a pair." And I kept talking to myself that way until I produced like 30 paintings of New Zealand. And each place that we went to had a different feeling on the island. So the feeling of being in a hot, hot lakes with minerals and what it smelled like and what it looked like, and then being way up high and looking down at the sound or—anyway.

[00:49:56]

So 2010, we did that trip. By 2011, I had 30 paintings, and for a while—now, that work has been exhibited but not widely. A lot of it is here, a lot of it is in my husband's office, but that work really was a conversation between that island and the island that I carry around inside. [Laughs.] You know, "Oh, you do this in this island?" And you know, the Maori, who are the natives, they kept looking at me because they were trying to figure out if I was Maori myself. So we would go to big events in the North Island where there were concerts and wonderful gatherings of Maori,

and they just kept looking at me, and I thought, Okay. We were the same color, and our features are a little different, you know, because they're the Pacific features, but I'm telling you, I had a real island experience and a real connection there. So I made that work the New Zealand landscapes. And that was 2010, 2011, around there.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You're making me want to go too. I mean, I know New Zealand is amazing, but I kind of want to go right away, [laughs] and it sounds beautiful.

So I guess this is a good time to start talking about your—and you tell me if there's anything else that you want to mention from that time, but I thought it was interesting that you mentioned that the landscape of the island, and then in—I think it was in 2014, you started working with gold leaf, but also these landscapes from a different point of view. Can you talk a little bit more about those series of topographies and maybe how there's a relationship, or maybe there isn't, between these different landscapes that you had been working on?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Well, I have to tell you how my interest in gold leaf began. I have a friend from college, and we've had a long, long friendship, and we've known each other's work for that long, and our conversations about art are always informed with our history. Because we went to Rhode Island School of Design together, and I shared my first apartment with her. Now, I've known her work, and she for a long time worked for Golden Paints. And she has a highly organized mind and incredible scientific understanding of what these products do.

And in that time—you know, towards the end of her time with Golden—she started doing gold leaf paintings. And I was seeing them online, and she would share with me, and I thought they were the most beautiful work she had ever done. I just loved it. And she does a lot of books for North Light Books. Those are the books that teach people how to do a technique. So she had included me to be in a couple of her books, and she was about to do one on gold leaf, and she wanted to include me again, and I said, "Well, I don't do any gold leaf." She goes, "That's okay, you bring me good luck." [Laughs.] So she put one of my sculptures in her gold leaf book.

And then I went to visit her. She lives in New Mexico, in Santa Fe. I went to visit her, and I got to see the gold leaf work upfront, and it was stunning. I just loved it. I was in love with her work, and she gifted me the book, *How to do Gold Leaf*, and she dedicated it to me and thanked me for being in it. And I went home and opened the book, and I thought, "Oh, you know, this is so nicely organized. I should do one of these."

[00:55:12]

So I did the first lesson. And then by the third lesson, I put the book down and I started making art. [Laughs.] I just started using gold leaf, and it came very quickly. Now, gold leaf is highly technical. Sculpture is technical, but gold leaf is technical and layered. So you may have an idea here of what you want to do, but you have to wait. With oil painting and drawing, it's direct; you just go to the surface and you put it down. This was: First you have to do this and let it dry. Then you've got to do that and wait two days. You know, the process was so rigorous, I thought, I'm never going to make it. [Laughs.] But again, that understanding that it was such a challenge for me to discipline myself in order to create images where I have to wait. I said, "Well, you know what that means, Julia. It means you have to continue to do gold leaf because it's so difficult for you."

So I'm making images, I'm making images, and all of a sudden, there's this one image. Let me say this, let me go back. These images were extremely abstract. It's the first time I'm really working in an open, abstract way, except that for me, they had form, structure, direction. All the things that I work with formally on a regular landscape, they were present in these abstract pieces. And immediately when I started really working, I had to have texture, I had to have three-dimensional form to it, so I started squeezing things on to the surface and doing all kinds of texture. And experimenting with it, because I don't do flat [laughs] except for digital printing. I don't do flat.

So I'm in this process, and one night, I have a dream and I wake up. It was like three o'clock in the morning, 3:30, and it was in the summer. We have bears in the summer, so I come out of the house. It's about half a block—between my house and my studio about a half a block from each other. And I came out in my bathrobe, and I had a whistle in my mouth because if you spot a bear and you make a noise, it tends to frighten them and they go away. So from the house to the studio [laughs] I'm in my bathrobe, flashlight and a whistle in my mouth. And I come in the door, [laughs] and I put this—now, let me say, the panel I was working on already had texture. I

had built a texture with fiber and paper. And I started gold leafing, and I didn't stop till I felt like it was something, and I went back to bed. I put it up the next day, and I was like, Whatever. I wasn't impressed with it at all, I didn't like it too much.

But anyway, about a week later, I have a second dream, and I see an image in my head. And it's about early, 3:30 in the morning, I come out with the robe and the flashlight and the whistle, and I do another panel that was also prepped. And I do a second one. And I look at it, I'm like, *ehh*. [Laughs.] So I started hanging them—I have a hanging system on tracks that I can put work on. And I'm hanging them one on top of the other, blah blah. I was experimenting, trying to make myself like it. And then finally, I just put them next to each other, and I had a revelation.

[01:00:03]

What I had dreamt was two halves of the same island. So I had dreamt the Dominican Republic the first time and then I dreamt Haiti, and the reason it wasn't working was because these two pieces belonged together. And I was stunned. I realized, Oh, my gosh, I'm seeing the landscape from the sky. I'm seeing the landscape from the sky. I had been removed from the traditional viewpoint and given an aerial view. And when I understood that that's what was happening, I went in and I painted caps, you know, waves, caps on the water, and I painted fish below and I was—all of a sudden, I understood.

And as I looked back at the first work—that was just like, Oh, I'm experimenting. What is this?—I realized that it was there too. One of those pieces was very profound because it was the universe, and it opened up like this. It created like a little window, and I got to look straight through, and I thought, Wow, that's something I've never experienced before. So that began in about 2014, 2015, and I am still making gold leaf paintings.

Now, over the years, what's occurred is that it's allowed me to express some—not just the landscape but some political and social difficulties [laughs] I've experienced in our history. You know, I did a series that I just finished on Trujillo and the Mirabal sisters who were martyred by him. And when the viewer looks at the work, they don't necessarily see what I'm putting in there, which is a gift for me and for them. [Laughs.] I sold some of that work, and the buyers were very curious. They wanted the whole story, and I'm like, "Do you really want the story? [Laughs.] Do you really want to know where this comes from? What do you see in it?" You know, that's sort of how I get around it.

And many times, I think the gift of working in an abstract form is that people bring their own reflection to it. I'm not imposing on them. I'm not saying, "This is a tree and there's the horizon and there's the sky." I'm not imposing that on them. They're coming and going, "Wow, that looks like a fox!" And I'm like, "Great! I love it! Thank you for the fox!" Or they just bring something to them and so it makes the work more interactive. So that's something I didn't understand was possible. So I'm thinking genocide and, you know, the slaughtering of the Taínos, and they're seeing, like, jewels, [laughs] you know what I'm saying? What a gift!

So a lot of these—the material, the material, has allowed me to explore some very deep, difficult stuff, but because of the nature of the material, it's just an open space for other people. You know, so that's a miracle to me.

[01:04:50]

And I have to tell you, I have my dear friend, Olga Herrera, who is a scholar. Years ago, she came, maybe 2016. She was doing a panel at the Latin Art Now! conference, and she wanted to talk to me about the work because she was including me in one of these panels. And I remember we were sitting here, and we're talking about this, talking about that, and she goes, "Julia, why do you use gold leaf?" So I told her the story I told you: my friend, the book, the this, the that. And she goes, "Well, Julia, why do you use gold leaf?" And I'm like, "Well, I think I just told you this," and she wouldn't leave it alone. She kept at me: "Why do you use gold leaf? Why?" And she kept asking the same question. And I was like, I'm going to lose my mind here.

But this is what she did: She forced me to get into my subconscious by insisting that I answer that question. And until she did that, I didn't understand. And what I told her was that I was using gold leaf because it had been stripped from our island by the Spaniards, and in using gold leaf, I was reappropriating it, I was correcting history. I felt I had that power. Every piece of gold leaf is me putting it back, putting back what they took from the Aztecs and the Incas and the Caribbean, hundreds of tons of gold. It happened, it's history, but I'm an artist and I have a responsibility, and I thank her for allowing me to get to it. And that's what I told her, and that's

what I understand, and that's my opportunity. You know, because there are things that we can do as artists and there are things that we don't. Each one of us in this world, if you're using your gifts, there are things that you can do. Now, I'm not going to be the person to develop a mathematical formula for something, that's not going to be me. But I can reappropriate gold to the Dominican Republic and create a healing. I can do that. That's what I'm doing.

And because of the way my brain works, my brain goes multiple directions. I am simultaneously doing gold leaf, I'm making the digital prints, and, as you can see, I am sculpting and painting. [Laughs.] Now, I can't really truly explain that except that that's how my mind works. I'm thinking about this and then I'm doing that, and while this boils and I'm digesting it, I'm doing that. And when I decide I'm going to do gold leaf, I have to do a lot of panels at once, because it's a process. This one gets this treatment and that treatment, so you're—I'm immediately in a series mode. Some artists can do one piece for a year and a half, and they do beautiful work. That has never been me. I have to have process going on.

And if you were to look at my full body of work and you see all these different mediums, they're all tied to the same story. The question is, which medium is going to tell that piece of the story best? So when I figure out that I have to experiment with a new medium, I just have to be brave and know that I'm going to be uncomfortable, I'm not going to know what I'm doing, I'm going to jump off the cliff, figure stuff out on my way down, and live through that.

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But I cannot repeat the same thing over and over again. Meaning, you know, sometimes an artist will just kind of have one idea, and it's their one idea for the rest of their lives. And that has value, it's important, but that's not me. I have to take risks all the time.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: You know, in hearing you talk about all the layers of meaning, both through the content, the materials, the form, I hear you really bringing together all of these different layers of complexity that you've discovered throughout the decades. And also bringing together political aspects as well as maybe—you didn't say specifically it's spirituality, but I think that's how I think about it when I hear you talk about dreams and healing and how it all kind of comes full circle through this work. So I think that would be a good point for us to talk about the now, and how that has all come together. And I want to hear you say a little bit more about the piece around spirituality and why you do your work, and how this is implemented or is seen through what you're doing right now.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: You know, I have a very deep spiritual life. It's not a traditional religious life. It's an everyday wake up: Who woke you up today? And what are you meant to do? I want to cooperate because at this age, I realize I've been given an extraordinary gift. It's just huge. It's bigger than me. My gift is huge. And when I was young, I didn't understand that. Now I'm mature and I understand that, so how do I best use this gift to serve someone else? So that is tied to my belief in a spiritual life. I'm not concerned so much with who's going to buy this, who's not going to buy that. You know, now, I'm not going to say, "Jeez, it's not important." It is important to sell your work, it is important to be seen. All that stuff is important, but that's not why I wake up in the morning. I wake up in the morning asking: How do I fulfill this purpose? How do I send the elevator down for the next person?

That's what I want to do because I understand that if I'm given this gift, well, with it comes great responsibility. It's not enough to just be talented. I used to say that to my students, "Your talent is not enough. You have to work it." First day of class, they would come in, I close the door, and I say, "All of the gardeners with their machetes cutting grass outside are more talented than you. The difference between them and you is that you have the opportunity to put your ideas down on paper and to work it. You have to work what you have. It's not enough to just be talented." So at this moment, I'm always saying, "Well, how can you serve somebody else? How can your art have a voice? What kind of voice does it have? What is it saying to people?"

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Now, for that, I need guidance. I mean, for me to have been shown the universe from an aerial view to understand my position in this world—you know, that was huge. And it comes from trust. I also have to get up in the morning and say, "Thank you, I'm awake." And sometimes, I go, "I don't know how I'm going to get this done. I have so much on my plate, I don't know. Can you help me? [Laughs.] Can you help me with that?"

And it's—you know, it's all—I have a very close relationship with my higher power, and I develop

it every day. I spend time on it. It's an active relationship. A conversation. Because, as you say, for me to have dreamt one side of the island and then—that wasn't me! The dream was not me. I didn't create that dream. You know, so in my best moments, I'm a vessel. In my best moments, I'm a vessel. And then if I find purpose in life, it's, What can I do for other people? What can I do for other people? And then that fulfills a purpose because I have worked my talent. Whether people knew my name or they didn't know my name, whether it was the right time or the wrong time, whether I had a kid or I didn't—you know, it didn't matter what was happening in my life, I was scribbling, I was doing something. I have never stopped working. I've worked my entire life from the day I realized that I could do this and then it made me feel like I had a purpose in life. I never stopped creating. Good, bad, you know, it doesn't matter. Because with art, you have to practice it.

There's a lot of young artists that are—they're distracted in many different directions. They're doing this and then they do that—I'm not saying that they're experimenting. I'm saying that they want to be a doctor and they want to be an artist and they [laughs] want to be—you know, they want really, really different parts of life, and it's hard to develop a voice unless you keep talking and unless you have focus. Now, I didn't always know what I was doing and saying as a young person. I was just doing. When I turned 50, I started understanding what I was doing and saying and that I have something to say. It wasn't just about facility. It was, I now have lived long enough to have something to say. Well then, what am I going to say? What am I going to say? What has meaning?

And you know what? It can't be, just, "Well, it has meaning for me, I like it, it's all about me." I'm not that kind of artist. I'm not looking at my bellybutton. It's not that interesting. We all have one. What are you going to do with your art for other people? What are you going to say to younger people that would lift them up, that would give them hope, that will say to them, "Go ahead and develop that talent"? Now, I taught a lot of years. That's how I paid the bills, I did a lot of stuff. Unfortunately, in our field, you always have to have a second job. But I didn't decide to become an accountant, you know, because that's not my calling.

[01:20:03]

And I think there's nothing more miserable than a person who has a calling who doesn't pay attention to it. They live an unhappy life. And everyone in their life, anyone they're in contact with, anyone who loves them, will be miserable because of them. There's a danger to have been given a gift and not developing it. It starts to consume you. So you have a responsibility. With talent comes a responsibility to develop it. And when you've developed it, I feel, you have a responsibility to share it. And that's what I believe in. My beliefs really comes from my relationship with my higher power. Because when I was in Assisi and I'm getting off the bus and I have a vision of tropical paintings while I'm doing black and white drawings of kids, now where did that come from? And it didn't happen till seven years later. Where did that come from?

Or, I'm a sophomore in college and I understand that I want to create certain type of image that doesn't come to fruition till 40 years later. Well, where did that come from? Now, if I don't chase it, if I don't chase that image, I'm not going to get it. It's not going to be handed to me, I have to chase it. [Laughs.] That's the work. The work is chasing it. You know, if I don't take risks, if I don't do the gray-and-whites, if I don't jump into all kinds of different stuff, well, I don't grow. I have to fall flat on my face first so that I can grow and change. If I keep doing the same thing, I'm just dying. I would be dying. I don't know about somebody else. I have to be willing to fall on my face and to work. Then, you know—then you can leave something behind that has value. Something of value.

And I'm very interested in history, which is why I find this project exciting. Who's telling the history? Who's telling the story? From what perspective? You know, I was in a conference, an art conference with a lot of educators, and they were talking about the middle school classes and their high school classes and trying to get them excited about art. You know, how do you present art in an exciting way? And I asked them, I said, "Well, who's in your classroom? What do these kids look like?" Well guess what? They're minority kids. And I said, "Well, what are you showing them? Whose art are you showing them?" And they would answer, and I said, "Well, what about this Latin artist? What about that Latin artist? What about this African-American artist? What about this one?" I said, "Change it up! Show them the work of the people that look like them. Then they'll get excited."

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I'm glad you're bringing this up. This is something that I wanted to discuss as well, the role of education on your practice. And also, something you had mentioned

before, I think it was our previous mention that the place where you get that drive to do your art is the same place where you get the drive to pass on the information or to share this gift that you have.

[01:25:13]

Can you say more about education and sharing this gift?

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FERNANDA ESPINOSA: *Listo.* Hello, Julia, thank you for joining me again. We decided to stop the recording yesterday and continue today. So just to orient us a little bit, today is April 15, 2021, and this is our sixth session. We were planning on doing this yesterday, but we'll just take some time to continue discussing what we started yesterday. I had asked you about the role of education in your life, so if you can just continue telling us a little bit more about that aspect.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Good morning, it's nice to be back. Education is extraordinarily important to me. I shared with you in this oral history how there were some pivotal teachers in my life who completely changed the trajectory of what I ended up doing. Very, very important people. They not only taught me but they changed my life. And one of them, Lorraine Shemesh, was a very young teacher when I was with her at the Rhode Island School of Design. I would say she was somewhere between 24 and 26 when she was teaching me and was a very powerful presence. Even though she was quite petite, she had a teaching style that I adopted when I went to Chavón to teach for the first time. It was a demanding position and also very supportive, so she was supportive but she was demanding. And we all respected her, and we all learned, and when I had the opportunity to teach in Chavón, I used her as my mentor mentally.

Education to me is absolutely vital because it has the power to not just feed you information and show you how to do things, but it has the power to give you impetus to grow. When I went to Chavón for the first time to teach in a new school at a college level with a complex series of requirements that we had for these students, I brought with me a very strong sense of mission, mission to give them all I had. I knew before I walked in that I was going to pour myself out because art is my passion and they were my people and that was my intention. And it was also my intention to develop them, to encourage them, to insist on their growth. And sometimes that growth was of course tied to visual themes, or quite often, it was personal growth and maturity that I was requiring of them.

Now, when I do any kind of teaching, I bring the same intensity, whether I'm teaching someone for an hour or I'm doing a whole lecture series or workshops, anything that I do. I am currently the teaching artist-in-residence at the Hudson River Museum in Yonkers, New York, and when I go to teach, that's what I bring. Because I feel that if I bring those elements with me, that something is going to make an impact with the other person. I have been told by many former students that the impact is still with them. You know, that growth that I demanded is still with them. And because of that, we hold a very special space with each other. You know, they are like my artistic children and grandchildren.

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[Audio break.] [00:05:21] - [00:06:19]

It doesn't matter to me whether it's children, adults, artists, whoever it is that I'm approaching, I approach them the same way, with intensity and with purpose. The intention is to create an interaction, something that they'll understand that's different or new, not just about the technique but hopefully about themselves. Particularly when I work with young people that is very important. I've had the most beautiful feedback from former students, feedback that lets me know that I made a difference for them. And that is a feeling that is so wonderful and gratifying because it means that whatever it is that they learned, it’s theirs. And that's my purpose, to give something to someone that has value and allows them to see themselves in a different way and to insist that they do the work. Because we talked about that: Talent is not enough. You have to structure it, you have to work the talent.

So I have come to understand that teaching is for me another gift. It's something that is extra, and I've understood after all these years that it’s the way it is and that I have over the years developed a way of articulating process, which is not easy, of breaking down what is happening step by step, not just in how-to but inside of you. How to use your body when you're drawing, how to use your feelings when you're drawing, how to capture all of that. So I've been able to

learn how to be highly articulate about the art-creating process, and that also is a big element in the teaching. I feel strongly that in teaching, I get to share myself, my values, things that I have learned, struggles that I have had, places where I have failed. I can share a lot about myself when I'm front of a group of people.

I was very blessed to have a dear friend who is a scholar, and she helped me organize a one-hour teaching class in a Latin studies conference. She told me [laughs] that that one hour for her is unforgettable. And it's not because I'm trying to self-aggrandize. I'm just reflecting what people say to me.

[00:10:04]

And the Chavón students, they are—really are almost family for me. You know, and when I meet a Chavón student that's contemporary, I just tell them they're my artistic grandchildren because of the foundational place that I had in that institution. And all those years I taught at Parsons School of Design, all of those students, students who were international, there's so much that we shared. But I knew that in order to be successful, you had to have a process and you had to have discipline and you had to be consistent. But that the inspiration, which comes from outside of you, for me comes from outside of me, then touches my heart, and then it goes to my brain, and from my brain, it travels to my hands. And I can articulate that and break it down: Where are you? Where is that drawing stuck? Where is it coming from? So it's a vital way of life for me.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for articulating that, Julia. And since we're in the topic of education, my understanding is that you have obviously kept learning throughout your life, but more explicitly, you started getting more involved in academia, and the panel that you mentioned as well. And you were a part of or the subject of a panel and started attending different conferences. Can you talk about the role of this information and this aspect of your life in relationship with your art?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Absolutely. In 2014, Iliana García, who's the sister of Scherezade García, informed me that she—there was a paper being presented on her art in a Latin studies conference, and I felt compelled to be physically there to witness it because I thought it was such a tremendous honor. And I had scheduled a conference for business in Anaheim, California, for the same weekend. And again, it's one of those impulses that I have discussed with you throughout my entire life, that I felt that I needed to cancel California and schedule Chicago and go to the conference. So that's what I did.

And when I was there, I was so stimulated by all of the different papers and different points of view, and my intellect was on fire, and I understood that I have found something important, something new that I wanted to pursue. When I am in the studio, it's quite personal and the information is quite intimate when I'm working. But I had this huge intellectual side that I was not using for a long time. I think I recall telling you that I chose to attend Brown University when I was at RISD because I wanted the stimulation. So after a while, that part of me was dormant, and when I got there, it just blew up, and I realized, This is important to me. And I met some wonderful people, including my friend Olga Herrera, who is still a very dear friend of mine, and so many other wonderful scholars. And I decided to continue to be engaged.

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So, the University of Chicago every two years had a Latin arts conference. I went to those and met a lot of artists and met a lot of thinkers. And it was fun for me to interact with scholars because we're very different. Our process is extremely different. You know, scholars are very mind-head oriented, and my process was very physical and very emotional, and we worked from different locations. So I was enjoying that contrast. You know, I would sit down with a professor and listen to what they had to say and I would put a different bend on it, and that became a lot of fun for me.

So in 2015, Scherezade García, Iliana García, and myself presented a panel on The Altos the Chavón School of Design. That was the first time anyone spoke of the school in conference. Scherezade discussed the history of the school, who were the key players, why it came to be. Iliana discussed the student's life, how once you're in Chavón you become a citizen of Chavón, a *chavonero* if you were a student. And she discussed that. And I talked about being a founding teacher and what that meant, and who the students were, and what our assignments were, and who came to teach, and what we did, and who graduated and became a very important in their fields. So we did that in 2015.

And in 2016, Olga Herrera organized a panel on Dominican York artists, and it featured the three of us. It was again Scherezade, Iliana, and myself, and I thought, "Well, who's going to come to this?" You know, [laughs] I remember thinking to myself, "Well"—you know, it was like early in the morning, it was so—I thought, "Okay," but I was ready. And I was shocked to find that the place was packed with curators and professors and artists. It was very very exciting. And it was Olga who was the person that insisted that I identify my relationship to gold and my work.

So that was in 2016, and ever since then I've been attending [laughs] all the conferences. You know, you get to know other people and you get to have conversations and some of them have become personal friends or collectors, and I enjoy it.

There was one scholar that I really like. His name is Richard Flores and he works at the University of Texas in Austin. And he and I sat down, and we were talking about the creative process. And he was drawing parallels between the creative process as a scholar and the creative process as a visual artist, so we had a really fascinating conversation. And I hope that someday he and I can develop a panel about that. Because it was out of that conversation with Richard that I asked to have that one hour to do drawing with scholars. So it's still an area that really excites me. But I think the most important part is that history became extremely important to me. It became obvious to me that who records the history, how the history is recorded, what is said, where does the information come from, was absolutely vital. The more I attended these, the more I understood.

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And in my own life, particularly through a project like this one, it is my intention to record history in the proper way. You know, it's coming from the right place about what's occurred and what happened. So that's been a very rich part of my life, and it's something that continues to feed what I do and I continue those interactions, and all of the archiving has come out of those conferences. The first archive, the first place I was archived, was in the Dominican Studies Institute at City College in New York City, and I met the executive director, Dr. Ramona Hernandez, at one of these conferences.

And then, the same year, the Smithsonian had their very first Latin collectionist, who is Josh Franco, and Josh came to Woodstock, and he took documents of mine to the Smithsonian archives. And then the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum in Woodstock also has my work, but both the Dominican Studies and the Smithsonian occurred in 2015. And I have enjoyed those relationships so much. You know, attending conferences when they're presenting, being supportive, being surprised when my collection was presented, it's just been a very rewarding area of my life. And I am loving some of the books that we're reading. You know, I've got a lot of books on Caribbean history and on politics and all kinds of interesting things. So it's an important and current part of my life now.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: I have had the opportunity to look through some of the papers that you donated to the Dominican Studies archive at City College, and it was just really wonderful to see how you have managed to keep and care for these records, including, you know, postcards, news clips, even smaller items, your different types of IDs. I'm just interested—and I'm not sure, I think this is more of my own interest—but I'm wondering if you've had a process to storing all of this information? Or how is it that—the importance that you talk about the history, it was there, but then it came to be realized through these opportunities. You know, but I was very impressed and I loved seeing—I loved having the pleasure of being able to see your changes, not just through your IDs and your pictures, but also through all of the information that you have been able to compile throughout these years.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Oh, it's a really interesting comment. You know, I had no idea what archiving was, but I felt compelled to organize all this information. And as you can imagine, it's a lot because it's been a long career. I'm going to tell you a really quick story. There was someone who was involved with me in Chavón, and he insisted that I was not there when it was inaugurated. He said, "You weren't there," I said, "I was absolutely."

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So what happens? I need to pull out my school ID with the date and say I was there. "Do you see that? Do you understand?" So there was the moment of historical correction because I had that ID. I actually have another ID here that I have to find a home for. And it's exactly what we were talking about before: Who's telling the story? Now, I had all these things in binders, and even the

technology, you know, changed. When I was typing it on typewriters, [laughs] then it went into word processing and all of that, but I felt that I needed to organize it.

When Josh Franco came to the studio for the first time, he was only here very, very briefly, and I had organized my documents on the table. He looked, he understood that I understood what it meant to archive, only because of what I presented. He put it in a box, went to UPS, and shipped it the same day. Because it existed and it was organized.

Now, I have to tell you it's a great relief to have found homes for all that stuff. [Laughs.] I think the Dominican Studies program has 17 boxes of my documents, and Josh has many boxes but a lot of work—which is physical artwork—is in flat files in the archives. And then the local archive is only the work that ties to Woodstock and, you know, my activity around that. The Dominican Studies is only for artists or people who had an impact both on the island and in the United States. So each archive has different criteria, and that helps me understand where things should go.

And thank you for that comment because it's something I hadn't thought about but it has lovely reflection. Thank you.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: So moving a little bit forward, I also had the pleasure of interviewing you for a different project related to the pandemic. And, you know, we're still living in a pandemic, even though I spoke to you last year in August. I wanted you to talk a little bit more about the changes that have happened lately and specifically the project that you created last year, *In Memoriam*, around this theme.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: When the pandemic arose, when it first started happening, my family lost four people. Two died in March, and the other two died in April. And I did not know what to do with my grief because we couldn't gather as a family to process the loss. We couldn't embrace each other. All the things that were traditional and known to us had been removed. And I think the most disturbing part of that for me was that, at that time, they didn't really understand how to manage the pandemic. But as people were dying, they were dying at the rate of about 800 people a day, they were being put in refrigerated trucks with labels on their toes. And somehow that image disturbed me so deeply. All of my creativity was blocked. I couldn't create a thing. Nothing personal could come out of me because I was drowning in grief.

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So I approached the Christ Lutheran Church, which is a church that I attend. I had done a public mural on the property in 2019, so they understood my involvement with public art. And I said, "This loss is choking me. I think there are other people out there who have the same experience." So Sonja Tillberg, who's the pastor, she and I sat down and we talked about it, about what to do, and I said, "I am visualizing an installation on your property, something that commemorates these people who have died, a place where loved ones can come and read their names. I am visualizing an art piece." And she said, "Okay, let's do that," and we talked about what she could do. And she hosted an online service for these people who had died. And I said to her, "Look, it's very important that these names be called out because we need to acknowledge them."

So last June, she organized a Facebook Live service for *In Memoriam,* and there were people there from all over the world. There were people there who didn't speak a stitch of English. There were people there from universities that—I mean, we were just trying to take care of our own—you know. But the fact that it was on Facebook extended it beyond our borders in a way that was wonderful and unexpected. People left messages in different languages. In addition, the process that we employ is rather collaborative. Some members of the congregations—we have a woodworker, I designed a cross, and he built it, and then we had a couple of volunteers who primed and painted these crosses, and they brought them to me. Anyone who wanted to honor someone could just email their name to us. We had a special address. And as the names came in, those names were passed down to me, I would make and install the crosses.

Now, one of the first things I experienced, first day that I was installing, a stranger stopped walking and got all teary, and he said, "You know, thank you for doing this. Thank you for doing this." And I just stayed outside and talked to him. Now as the pandemic rages on, we were thinking, "Oh, okay we'll just need"—you know, we made X number of crosses. I said, "The rage is on." We are now considering moving the installation beyond the front lawn, probably on to the buildings, because there's a couple of buildings, and we're looking for a more permanent

location for them because this is not stopping. I decided to also include crosses for victims of police brutality on Black lives. So we have some crosses painted black with white paint for the names.

The thing that's incredible about *In Memoriam* is, it just has its own life. I'm not there, you know. People will come and leave little mementos on the crosses, little bracelets and little notes, little stuff, because they needed to do that for their loved one. I don't see them, Sonja doesn't see them, but it's happening.

[00:35:16]

That's all I could create during the pandemic and during all that pain. It's now a year. Right now, we're marking a year since the loss of those four people in our family. One of them is being brought back in ashes, having been cremated, being brought back to the Dominican Republic. My brother and sister-in-law are taking their family, to bring her ashes back. So in addition to the interaction with the public and the conversations and all of that, one of the people who was present at the Facebook event was a graduate student who was part of a special project. A grant had been given to George Washington University, to one of their professors, to explore how people were handling grief during the pandemic. So that prompted multiple conversations with the professor. Her name is Sarah Wagner. And they have created a website that relates to this particular grant and this particular research, and *In Memoriam* is also on that website.

So I'm grateful that I was able to do something other than just walk around with my own grief. And I'm grateful that I got the support and the location from the church. The lawn is right in the heart of Woodstock. Everybody walks by there; they either walk or they drive. So it's highly visible. And it's still up, you know, it's still up. So that's *In Memoriam*.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you, Julia, and again, I'm really sorry about your loss in these times and for all of the people that have lost many of their family members and loved ones. So thank you for recognizing that through your work. Last year, in addition to the pandemic, you were also working on your retrospective and the project around that, which had to be stopped because everything was shut down basically starting in March. Can you talk about that process and where that is at right now?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: I was organizing a retrospective at Taller Boricua in New York City, which is a wonderful institution. It's been there—I think it's their 50th year. We were in the process of setting it up. You know, talking about programs that I wanted to have with some of the schools. Taller Boricua is surrounded by a lot of different schools, and of course, that attracts me a whole lot, so I wanted to bring those kids in and have conversations. And we were just in the planning process when the pandemic put an end to that, and I'm not sure if or when this retrospective would happen, but it was something that I was working, and I wanted to mention it.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you for bringing that up. I hope that still happens sometime soon when things start getting back to normal hopefully.

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So we're coming to an end of these very interesting and enjoyable sessions and conversations. Before we end, I wanted to give an opportunity to discuss anything that I haven't asked you about that you want to make sure that we record in this oral history.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Thank you for that. You know, you and I were talking about identities—Júlia versus Julia, and Ivelisse and all of that—and there's something important that I wanted to mention. My given Dominican name is very very long. And it is Júlia Yvelisse Santos Marmolejos Santana de Oleo. That is the full name, and when I was a child, when I had Dominican passports, I had my full name. It took up like a whole page, [laughs] and they were handwritten in beautiful cursive and a lot of stamps; very very visually stimulating. And I did mention that when I left home at age 16 that I was rescued by my middle school speech teacher and her husband that they took me in. That was a very important turning point in my life in that they really became substitute parents for me.

When I was at Rhode Island School of Design, I had applied for my naturalization papers. And when I went into the court to fill out my application, I saw that you had the option to change your name. And I did not want to change my name, but I wanted to add a name. And I added the name Solomon to my name because that was Eric and Golda's last name. And because of their

role in my life, because of what they had provided me with, I wanted to honor them by adding their last name to mine. And that's how I became Santos Solomon.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Did you also change your name in the Dominican Republic, or is that an identity that exists only in the United States?

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Everywhere. Once I made the decision, I was about 18 years old, and I said, "Well, this is it." I remember discussing with you the painting I did outdoors in Rome where my Dominican colors came out. Well, that was the very first painting that I signed Santos Solomon. And when that painting returned to my home after being with a collector for 30 years, I went up to it, and the signature was still there. [Laughs.] I was like, "Look at that! Santos Solomon." So then I made a decision, "That's it." So I'm Julia Santos Solomon everywhere now. Except with my Dominican family, who called me Ivelisse. But documents, anything that—you know, the deed on our house, everything—that's who I am. And now I've settled. I've settled into that.

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Well, thank you so much, Júlia Yvelisse. It's been such an honor to be and accompany you in this journey, and you'll be hearing from Ben soon about any next steps.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: It's been a pleasure working with you. You're so delightful. I'm glad we got to work together again.

[00:45:07]

FERNANDA ESPINOSA: Thank you, Júlia. Let me stop the recording now.

JULIA SANTOS SOLOMON: Okay.

[END OF TRACK santos21_7of7_digaud_m.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]