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Oral history interview with Alison Knowles, 2010 June 1-2

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Alison Knowles on June 1 and 2, 2010. The interview took place in New York, New York, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Elizabeth Murray Oral History of Women in the Visual Arts Project, funded by the A G Foundation.

Alison Knowles and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Alison Knowles on Spring Street in New York City for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one. This is June 1, 2010.

Alison, I'd like to start with asking you about your family background, your grandparents, back as far as you would like to reach.

ALISON KNOWLES: Well, I think we were over here on some early boat from England. [Laughs.] But my first memories concerned my grandmother's garden in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

MS. RICHARDS: This is your paternal or your maternal grandmother?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, she's my maternal grandmother.

MS. RICHARDS: And what was her name?

MS. KNOWLES: Annabaum Beckwith.

MS. RICHARDS: Annabaum? Spell it?

MS. KNOWLES: B-A-U-M, Annabaum Beckwith, and—

MS. RICHARDS: B-E-C-K—

MS. KNOWLES: —W-I-T-H, and she lived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where her husband, Frank Beckwith, ran the Hamilton Watch Company. So what was really so astonishing about going there for Christmas and Thanksgiving was that there was not ostentatious wealth, but there were rose gardens. There was five bedrooms. There was a dog.

There were books and games going on with people who were coming in to play games with my grandmother, and board games in the afternoon. It was a very expansive and rather intellectual background. My father was an English professor at Queens College and NYU. He's this Great Book scholar. He taught Great Books and was a specialist in *Don Quixote*.

MS. RICHARDS: These are your father's parents, then?

MS. KNOWLES: Mother.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her maiden name?

MS. KNOWLES: Her maiden name was Beckwith.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I'm sorry.

MS. KNOWLES: Lois. Lois Beckwith.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry. [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So Lois Beckwith—

MS. RICHARDS: That was your mother.

MS. KNOWLES: —married Edwin B. Knowles, and they settled in Scarsdale, New York.

MS. RICHARDS: And what about your father's parents?

MS. KNOWLES: My father's parents, his father was a Baptist minister. His name was Edwin Blackwell Knowles.

MS. RICHARDS: Ed—

MS. KNOWLES: Edwin Blackwell Knowles, and they lived in Trenton, New Jersey. His wife was Grace, Grace Knowles. I forget her maiden name. And they were simple, very, very fine, middle-class couple with five sons, one of whom was—three lived, and my father went on to earn a scholarship to Wesleyan [University] and became an English professor.

MS. RICHARDS: Did any of your grandparents go to college?

MS. KNOWLES: My mother went to Goucher [College]. My grandmother—you know, I don't know that. I know in my father's side, no, except that my grandfather Edwin Blackwell went to theology seminary. But I think that's about it.

MS. RICHARDS: So both sides of the family were in the Northeast U.S.?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, true.

MS. RICHARDS: And both sides came over here hundreds of years ago.

MS. KNOWLES: The Knowles group did. I don't know how the Beckwiths came in. [Laughs.] I'm not sure about that.

MS. RICHARDS: So your father grew up in Lancaster, Pennsylvania?

MS. KNOWLES: No.

MS. RICHARDS: Your mother grew up in Lancaster?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, more or less in Lancaster. I think she went to a private school nearby and then ended up at Goucher College and was the valedictorian of her class, and she had one sister who died of diphtheria.

We're so used now to having all children live, but 50 years ago, if you had five children, maybe three would get through the childhood diseases. Anyway, I would say that they were both—both the Beckwiths were definitely upper middle class, and the Knowleses were theological-based middle class, lower-middle-class family.

MS. RICHARDS: And you said where your father grew up?

MS. KNOWLES: My father grew up with his several sons in New Jersey.

MS. RICHARDS: His brothers?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, if not Trenton, nearby.

MS. RICHARDS: How did your mother and father meet?

MS. KNOWLES: They met at a church service that was being conducted by his father, and if not by—no, no. I'm sorry. It was in Lancaster they met in a church service. It wasn't run by Edwin Blackwell Knowles.

MS. RICHARDS: What was he doing in Lancaster, your father?

MS. KNOWLES: My father, what was he doing in Lancaster? I think he probably was using libraries. He was always learning Spanish and going over to study *Don Quixote* and to write his great novel on Shelton, who was the first translator of *Don Quixote*.

His novel was going to be about Thomas Shelton. So when we cleaned his desk when he died, we found all these wonderful notes. But it was a case of someone who never quite got their great novel together.

But it was an inspiration to him to be always working on the novel. So wherever he went, I think he'd go to libraries and be learning Spanish. And he loved to travel, much more a traveler than my mother. And he finally did get over to Ireland and Scotland, which is more or less my background, to try to track him down there, Shelton.

MS. RICHARDS: What did your mother do after she graduated college?

MS. KNOWLES: She pretty quickly became helpful with people who were running schools, and these would be—she was a very modest and retiring woman and not at all outspoken. As I remember it, she worked in the nursery school in Scarsdale, where I grew up, for years in the kindergarten. And then since we didn't ever have any extra money, she took a job and got a degree as a nurse.

So she spent—I think it wasn't a full RN. I think it was some kind of [inaudible]. But I can remember she would go to the hospital in the city in Scarsdale pretty full-time after Larry and I were in school. My brother, Larry, is a year older than I.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it soon after they were married they moved to Scarsdale?

MS. KNOWLES: They moved—I was born in New York City. When they were first married, they lived in New York and my father taught in New York.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that in New York?

MS. KNOWLES: Something like 110th Street.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean near Columbia [University], on the Upper West Side?

MS. KNOWLES: Way, way uptown, yes. I don't know where he was teaching. I don't think it was Columbia. I think he was commuting to NYU [New York University] even then. Then there was Queens College, where he taught also.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did they move?

MS. KNOWLES: And finally Pratt [Institute], which is why I never paid to go to college, because this man could get me into—in those years, if you had a parent who was a professor's level, a child could just attend, no fee. I don't know if that's still the case, but it should be.

MS. RICHARDS: What made them move to Scarsdale?

MS. KNOWLES: I think it was—I know, it was the high school. At that time, according to my father's research, it was the best high school in the country, and he was very ambitious about my education.

MS. RICHARDS: And your brother, too?

MS. KNOWLES: No, my brother had always been wanting to be a farmer or a dairyman, and very insistently and very convincingly, and he's now—he finally became a professional fisherman. He never wanted to be indoors, no classroom at all for him. But he graduated with help from high school. But there was really not much question about his direction, and he was not very close to my father.

MS. RICHARDS: Such different people.

MS. KNOWLES: Within a family.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. So soon after you were born in New York, you moved to Scarsdale. Did you enjoy school? What was that experience for you, elementary?

MS. KNOWLES: I didn't particularly enjoy high school.

MS. RICHARDS: What about the early years, elementary, secondary?

MS. KNOWLES: I think they were okay.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you remember enjoying most?

MS. KNOWLES: I remember enjoying drawing and painting, and then I remember in high school—I can't remember much more to say about those early schools. But I went to several schools. Maybe my mother was involved with them, probably. But then I started to be interested in, I think early on, in other countries, in other cultures. I began to study French. Never did very well at it, but I did get myself to France. And then—but this was very much encouraged by my father.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think of yourself, at any point when you were young, maybe even before high school, as being an artist? Was art and being an artist something that you felt identified with?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, for some reason I not only identified with it, but I was good at it, in terms of my peers. I could draw well, even as a young woman.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there teachers at any point in those early years who encouraged that?

MS. KNOWLES: In those early years, there was Miss Sterling in the high school. Miss Sterling was interested in really encouraging me with all of my academics, and she would actually sometimes drive me home with her at night. I'd stay overnight with her, and she'd fix a meal for me and really talk with me about books. Miss Sterling—some of these people you don't forget.

MS. RICHARDS: How did your parents feel about that?

MS. KNOWLES: I think they accepted it. They accepted my judgment about that, because we were really not at the upper end of the social life of Scarsdale, mind you. We really struggled to maintain a simple—my mother had the bridge club and my father had the bird watching society. And they were interesting occupations. But I can remember only about three couples who would come to the house regularly, say, as opposed to some people that I see now, early married people that see—every night they're seeing people. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find other kids whom you felt were sympathetic to your art interest?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think the art interest also gave me a chance to develop my separateness from other people. I think artists are separate. I know they feed off other ideas and other people, but they're a separate group. I don't want to say "special," but I would do things like go into the woods and be there drawing and writing stories all by myself.

And we were adjoining the Winchell Woods property. He was a commentator on the news. And I found a way to sit at the bottom of the fence. There were deer, and I've never been lonely when I'm alone.

I don't have feelings of, well, I should be with other people, or I should be seeing these people; I'd be better if I was seeing. I was automatically kind of separate in my group. I was a member of the Intelligentsia Society of Scarsdale High School, which were people whose grade average was in the top five percent. But I was regarded as kind of a strange bird.

MS. RICHARDS: I didn't ask you to say the date of your birth.

MS. KNOWLES: Nineteen thirty-three, April. So I did have Barbara Goff as a great friend.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me her last name.

MS. KNOWLES: And she lived on sort of the other side of the Winchell Woods.

MS. RICHARDS: What's her last name?

MS. KNOWLES: Barbara Goff, G-O-F-F, and she had a sister, Betty Goff, and these two young women lived very close to my house in Scarsdale. I could get to their house through the woods. So it was a way to get through the woods to see them. Also I could go through the woods to take my piano lesson.

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like you loved the woods.

MS. KNOWLES: Somewhere where you don't see any other people. I don't know why I ended up in New York City, where the crowds are knocking each other off the sidewalk. So Barbara and I had a club up in a tree, and we would climb up the tree and read, just to be sure that nobody would see us. We wouldn't see anybody.

I don't know if kids are that way now, but I have one granddaughter who has a little bit of that, the desire to be alone, or work alone a little bit.

So I began making books for my father, which were basically Walt Disney figures with maybe a different story for Bambi or Dumbo, because I could draw the figures. But then I'd make another story. And there was a cycle of, I would say, a number of months when I'd have a book for him whenever he came home from teaching. He would look at these books. I don't think they—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you mean every day?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, just about every day I'd make a book. Well, I don't know, maybe it was every two or three days. But I turned them out, stapled the side, it was about so big. I hope nobody finds those books. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: It would be wonderful if they were found.

MS. KNOWLES: [Laughs.] So then my father began to think where I should go to college.

MS. RICHARDS: Before we get to that, was there something that you and your family, or just you, did every summer or many summers?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, we went to Sunset Lake in Vermont, and that was—that house, I think, was a gift from the Beckwith family. It wasn't a big house, but it was on a lake and we had a boat. And we could go fishing and frogging in this, just, lovely Vermont lake, where about three other—

MS. RICHARDS: Did your whole family spend the summer there?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, as soon as school was out for my father, we'd go there for a few months. And I think, too, it was very good for my brother because he was such a nature person. He would trap different—even in Scarsdale he would trap something like some grizzly weasel or something, and then bring it inside in the trap and feed it and take care of the babies which were born, and he just loved that. We didn't go near his room. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you were in high school, did you go to museums in the city?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, occasionally, and I also was very active in the theater group. I was doing a lot of performing with the Greenville Players, of which my father was a director, in the church. The Greenville Community Church had the Greenville Players. So we had theater presentations, and it also was my first job to care for children during the hour when their parents were at church. I was quite young to do that with 10 or 12 little children.

I would read to them or draw with them and things like that. So then when we moved, we moved back to New York, but that was quite awhile from Scarsdale time, which, as I say, had a very tight social structure, of which I was in the high school of which I was not a part.

I was not a member of either a sorority or—and the same thing in college. The special groups of women—just I think it was not my nature or something that they found that they would find me interesting. It was kind of a mutual standoff. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You said you did go to museums from time to time?

MS. KNOWLES: I did. But especially when I was in high school. I had encouragement with my own artwork and I had some—I had classes. I had a wonderful class in music appreciation. I played the recorder, very poorly, for some time and—did I try another instrument, oboe? No, just recorder, but that sort of fell away for the artwork I began to do in college. I was doing really nice watercolors with a teacher named A.K.D. Healy.

MS. RICHARDS: A-K—

MS. KNOWLES: A.K.D. Healy, H-E-A-L-Y.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were thinking about what to do after high school, you said your father got involved?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, he wanted me to go to France and be a French scholar, and he tried to get me into the Sorbonne for a while.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about that?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I listened to him. I thought I could do my work over there as well and it would make him so happy if I was a member of the Sorbonne, and I had a very dear friend who later I married her brother. It was my first marriage.

MS. RICHARDS: What was her name?

MS. KNOWLES: Sylvia Ericson. E-R-I-C-S-O-N. So we were going to go to France together.

MS. RICHARDS: You and Sylvia

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, but she was really bright and she got into the Sorbonne, and I missed it by several points. But what I did know was the French teacher that I had in high school wanted someone else to be going, and not me, and favored the exam in favor of that person. I really know that. But I think it worked for the best because, who knows, I might have been translating [Jean-Paul] Sartre by now. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have any thought about going to study art at a university or an art school rather than

French?

MS. KNOWLES: No. I actually am still looking at my art as something that was my pleasure to do, and that any art that I might do wasn't what I could learn from an art teacher.

I changed my tune, and by the time I got to the Art Students League, or Pratt, I was studying art and drawing the figure and all the things you're supposed to do. But in those years, the idea of going to France with Sylvia and studying at the Sorbonne and living with this nice French family and speaking—and I have to say, I thought it would be fine.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it a huge disappointment when you didn't get to go?

MS. KNOWLES: For my father it was huge, a huge disappointment. I don't think I felt so deeply disappointed about it because I think I was realizing I was not a French intellectual translator type of girl. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: I understand you ended up at Middlebury [College]. Is that right?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that happen?

MS. KNOWLES: I filled out about three applications for colleges and even though my academics were very high, somehow Middlebury attracted me the most. I'm not sure which other schools I really got into because I immediately liked the idea of a school in Vermont, because we had our summers there. I liked the idea of a smaller school, and I imagined that I could study art there seriously.

So I was able to get a full scholarship, which is probably the reason Middlebury was chosen. So I was—I waited table in the French dorm. It was called Chateau North, and I waited table three meals a day, so I was up at 6:00, and it really—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have to do that?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, I had to. I had to have a full scholarship.

MS. RICHARDS: That was part of the scholarship, working?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. Oh, I didn't choose to wait table. No, I had to. And I had to do it in French. So all the meals I would announced in French, and I had to go to each one of these high-end little girls and find out what they'd like for dinner and take it down and take it to the kitchen, deliver it to them, and then take trays up to all the teachers, the French teachers in the chateau, and everybody started fussing about how the eggs were done. And finally I couldn't do it anymore. I wasn't getting enough studying done.

MS. RICHARDS: It's so hard to understand why such a time-consuming sort of job would be required.

MS. KNOWLES: Extremely time-consuming. An hour before the meal, serving it and cleaning up, getting all the dirty dishes into the kitchen.

MS. RICHARDS: They wouldn't allow you to stay and have a scholarship if you didn't do that job?

MS. KNOWLES: That's right. The scholarship was the job.

MS. RICHARDS: And that would have been a four-year job?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah. As far as I know, it would have gone for four years. But after two years I decided to go to art school, and I knew I could do that at Pratt and not charge our family anything. So meanwhile, my brother's situation was also very good. He was at dairy husbandry school, and he was earning his way through college as well. So meanwhile, there were other strains on the family.

My father's mother, Grace, had to be full-time in a kind of a hostel [hospice] place. Those were expensive. And meanwhile, my grandfather, Edwin B. Knowles, had died, and that meant that Grace had to live with us, which was very hard for my mother. So, I forgot. I lost my thread there.

MS. RICHARDS: We were talking about when you transferred between Middlebury and Pratt, and your brother was taking care of—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, that was a very good move for me to do, very good. Not only was I able to completely

drop the work—I still worked every summer full-time at one job or another—and so when I got to Pratt, it was just the doors thrown open. It was wonderful. I lived four blocks [away] on DeKalb Avenue near the school.

MS. RICHARDS: In your own place, or shared with—

MS. KNOWLES: In my own place with two other professors' daughters who also were studying art. So the three of us were rooming together on DeKalb Avenue in Brooklyn, and I really began to enjoy my life. [Laughs.] Not that it wasn't just fine before that, but it was a strain to carry on with the French at that level, when I knew that I wasn't going to be taking that into a life-study while living in France. That was clear to me. Not only from Mademoiselle Binand, who was my professor.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell—

MS. KNOWLES: B-I-N-A-N-D, whom one would never forget. She was a maiden lady from, I think, the Loire Valley with white hair piled on top of her head, and she really—she used a stick to get attention and she had a screechy voice and she was really the most difficult, difficult teacher that I had even encountered. She did not like me at all, probably because I was so tired with the work and, as I say, not gifted in the language.

So on top of everything, I felt picked on and kind of miserable studying with her. We would approach these [New York State] exams. They were called Regents exams and I think it was—it went from high school and then your first year of French. I forget, but I practically expired getting through those exams.

MS. RICHARDS: When you got to Pratt, did you get credit for the time at Middlebury?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, sure.

MS. RICHARDS: So you would only have two more years at Pratt?

MS. KNOWLES: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you'd have the B.F.A.?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, actually I wasn't able to get full credit because—I don't know what the system was with what one school demanded and the other. I can't tell you that exactly. But the curriculum at Pratt meant that I could go just three years, and two years at night. I went to night school as well. So I think it's a good question, how much was transferred from Middlebury.

MS. RICHARDS: But you didn't have any studio classes at Middlebury, right?

MS. KNOWLES: No, and also it was academics in French and English literature and the New European history. Those were the courses I took. So I don't know of what value those were in night school. I think, actually, I had to fulfill the whole curriculum, and I did go to night school for those two years; loved it.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point at Pratt did you decide what your main focus would be?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, for the first several years of art school, everybody has to take the same courses in figure drawing. There's a wonderful, wonderful course in architectural design, and there was a course in European history that I loved. So they had some academics kind of thrown in there. But then in the night school I got to study with—in day school I studied with Richard Lindner, who was a book illustrator and a wonderful painter.

And then in the night school I studied with Adolph Gottlieb, who was kind of an offshoot of the [Abstract] Expressionism group, with Pollock and the others. But through—let's see, we're still in college now—at Pratt, because of Gottlieb, I was able to get to a lot of openings, and I got to meet de Kooning and, actually, Pollock.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you mean "because of Gottlieb"?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, because he was teaching and was comrades with those other Expressionists. I never thought of him as that much of an Expressionist, but they would drink together and they'd go to something called the Artists Club together.

MS. RICHARDS: So he invited the students?

MS. KNOWLES: So he would invite—he'd tell to students that, "Thursday night, we'll all be at the tavern." And so we'd all go hang out and look in the window and even, as I said, sometimes meet these people and sit with them.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of teacher was Gottlieb?

MS. KNOWLES: He was not at all outgoing with his thinking, rather hard. And he depended on you to tell him what kind of thing you wanted to do. But then, he had a lot of suggestions and he would—each class in the evening he would spend a little time with you and your canvas, and he thought I was really good. He encouraged me to have a show. At that time I was doing sort of monochrome strips with maybe some palatte knife.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that your earliest inclinations were toward abstraction?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, right, and the first exhibition that I had in New York—not the first, but the Judson Gallery show, was—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, that's 1962.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh right. So that was basically abstract paintings.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at Pratt, obviously, you took all the required courses, including figure drawing, and you must have had some teachers who were oriented more toward realism or surrealism.

What was the process that you went through to find your own voice? It seemed that you found yourself involved with abstraction and a nonrepresentational approach rather than just abstraction?

MS. KNOWLES: My painting shows were nonrepresentational.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember influences that drew you to that, that opened your eyes to that way of painting?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, maybe I had just been doing the drawing and the drawing of little figures in these books for so long, I'd kind of—I felt I'd kind of done that, or I don't know, that it was not commanding enough for me to develop. I mean, I had to learn how to draw the figure. I was not great at charcoal drawings of the figure. But I kept up with the class perfectly well. I just—I don't know why—it didn't particularly seem to be my métier or what I really felt painting should be.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there museum visits during which you saw abstract painters' work that inspired you?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, as I say, at that time I was going to see the work of all these Expressionists.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm thinking of museums and any abstraction you saw there.

MS. KNOWLES: You mean earlier?

MS. RICHARDS: Like Mondrian or anyone else?

MS. KNOWLES: I think I was taking it in as a young person—something like a Mondrian, I don't think you can forget your first Mondrian. But I don't think I really thought of painting as in an abstractionist direction until I—this happens to me all the time.

Unless I know the person, unless I know—have met—the person doing that work and talking to them—and as I say, I had that opportunity with Gottlieb and Lindner. Although Lindner, even though it was not abstract painting, it was this extremely stylized line and color patterning more than it was figures, I would say.

So having the opportunity to know these men—no women; even though I think there were some wonderful painters from that period, I didn't know any of them.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you encounter any difficult situations at Pratt being a woman, having a teacher discount your—

MS. KNOWLES: Fortunately, I didn't. I didn't, and I think I never have, because I just don't accept it. I never feel that there's some sexist thing going on and I'm shouldered out. I'm often—I've done some interviews with feminists who—like Judy Chicago, for instance. She said to me, "Well, clearly, you just always work with men, don't you?" But at the time I was becoming an artist, that's all there was to work with. And even when we first had the Fluxus tours of Europe, I was the only woman.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to go to that, but let me just step back to Pratt for a second before we do. What was Richard Lindner like as a teacher?

MS. KNOWLES: Richard Lindner was a delightful man. His class was on book illustration and so I thought, "Oh, this might be fun." It was extremely difficult, and he had organized this very interesting methodology for getting

us to think about what we were doing, and that was that you would—we worked in tempera, on an 8.5-by-11 sheet of canvased paper. We were paired with one of those, one afternoon a week. So on the back of your finished tempera painting—these were realistic paintings I was doing.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you working from a model or from a setup?

MS. KNOWLES: No, just from your own head.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: So he would give us themes, like, How about something like riding the subway every day? Or I remember one was my first memory of water. Another one was, What is it about eating at the same time, or really challenging kinds of ideas to illustrate, and then you could—in your own concept, you could form one sentence and you wrote that on the back of this painting you'd done.

And then you stood up in front of the class and held up your painting and everybody guessed what was the sentence on the back. And you know what, nobody ever got the sentence on the back, which told us that really—if you're going to convey some absolute or exact meaning, you'd better think about it, because I remember no one could ever guess what it was I was saying on the back, or anybody. It was a very challenging assignment.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any other memorable teachers from Pratt?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. There was a great teacher in color theory. His name was—I think it was Kessler.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember his first name?

MS. KNOWLES: He had a book we had to read on color theory.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean he authored a book on color theory?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, I can find that.

MS. KNOWLES: And he had a huge class. The whole freshman class had to attend his lectures every year, and they were very good. They were excellent. Something else that I remember about [Josef] Albers was that—

MS. RICHARDS: Did you study with Albers?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, I did, in the summer. In order to get through in three years and two nights I had to take summer courses. I took one in Syracuse with Albers.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you have an urgent need to finish as quickly as possible? Since you had free tuition, you maybe didn't have to take the night courses and the summer courses if you didn't want to.

MS. KNOWLES: I think that those men I wanted to study with were not in the day school.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. KNOWLES: I know Gottlieb was not. Gottlieb's not in the day school, and I'm trying to remember the name of the painter who did the color fields, where it was a circle in the center that radiated out. It begins with G. Anyway.

Around the night school and the painting class, it was very lively. People would come in. Other painters would come in that were our peers or from this Expressionist group that would talk at the Artists Club—[inaudible]—speaking to the Artists Club—to listen to these men talking.

MS. RICHARDS: Describe the work you were doing when you finally graduated.

MS. KNOWLES: When I finally graduated and still had some credits to do in the night school, I was going back at night to Pratt because I think I missed a whole semester going somewhere else in the borough traveling. Anyway, I had to do a whole night school thing after I graduated.

So I graduated with my class, but then I had this added night school thing to do later. It doesn't make sense, does it? But I know that I was going on the subway to Pratt at night. I was at that time within my first marriage, and I was traveling from my first loft at Canal and Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me just step back for one second and rephrase the question I asked. What was your work

like? What was your painting medium, and what was the imagery when you were in your last year at Pratt?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, during the day school, as I say, I was wearing this other hat of drawing the figure in charcoal, making art books with stories and illustrations, realistic illustrations, and that was fine, but I guess I didn't think I was making art. So when I got to the night school, it was a compete jump into abstract painting.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you using oil?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. I clearly remember several paintings, because I put them up at the Judson Gallery, which must have been—

MS. RICHARDS: I think you graduated in '56. Maybe you were taking extra courses. And is that when you got married?

MS. KNOWLES: [Inaudible.]

MS. RICHARDS: And what was his name?

MS. KNOWLES: James Ericson, and he was the son of a Vermont Episcopal minister, high church, and a Swedish diva. They had seven children, and James Ericson was the oldest son and a really wonderful, extremely disturbed character. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: You knew him from Scarsdale?

MS. KNOWLES: I was with him for several years, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What was he doing while you were married?

MS. KNOWLES: He was graduating from Haverford College. His family wanted him to be a minister, but he had a very severe stuttering impediment. I think I found him very attractive because I imagined that I could help him, maybe cure him so he could graduate without this impediment from his college. I don't know. But he wasn't able to hold work. He was a gambler and things went downhill quite rapidly. But we had support financially from his parents.

MS. RICHARDS: So you got married after you graduated from Pratt, and you moved to a loft on Canal Street with him?

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

MS. RICHARDS: And he was finished with Haverford?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. I can't say whether he actually got—graduation, but we thought of him as having graduated and—

MS. RICHARDS: How did you—

MS. KNOWLES: He began to work at a children's hospital in the West Village. It turned out he was really excellent with young children. I think it was St. Joseph's School. I forget. It's on Bleecker Street, and he could live there. So I wasn't faced with him and his problems all the time as a young married person, because I was painting into the night and who would want to live with me anyway? And he could spend, like, three nights there.

But then I discovered that he was significantly betting on the horses and the greyhounds and the poker games. And he drank a lot. So he had everything going for him to fall back. I loved him very much. He was really, I think, the first person who convinced me that they loved me, that I was a loved person, outside of the family and a few dates.

As I say, I'm an oddball. I'm just an oddball and I had some female—very good female friends but no intimacies the way most young women do. So I feel that James Ericson was very important for me personally, a kind of breakthrough [in] my need of affection, and he would watch me paint.

He was around when I was painting. But I realize now he was kind of just waiting to either call in numbers for the horses or—[inaudible]. But we had a loft on Canal and Broadway, and there was no heat in the building, so we carted coal up three flights of stairs.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember the address?

MS. KNOWLES: Four Twenty-Three Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you pick that place?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, Gottlieb said, "Now that you're"—I would say we had become good friends, and he would help advise me on the next steps in my life, even though he was very brusque. He would just say what he thought. He said, "You get out there and get yourself a loft and a gallery because you can paint a show now. Get out of here and go do that."

So I was kind of wondering how to accomplish that, and when I first married James Ericson, he had an apartment on 11th Street, which was a total disaster. There was no place to work and it was an apartment. So then that gave me time to look around for a loft. So I found a place at 423 Broadway above what was then a Nedick's and a sewing factory on the second floor. I had the third floor walkup, this wonderful space, and the windows on Broadway.

And then I went through the back wall and made three little windows in the back of the space. The other day I just walked around to see the back, and those little windows are still there. They could let some light in and I could open them and that's where I could burn coal.

That kind of thing was not uncommon for artists in those days. You'd burn coal, and early in the morning you took your coal ashes out to the dumpster and into the wastebasket. But then the inspections began. Shall I go on with the inspections? Do you want to hear about that?

MS. RICHARDS: Sure, sure. Are you talking about many years later?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I'm talking about the first few years I'm at the loft on 423 Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: And that was a case of my working at the greeting card company during the day, Norcross.

MS. RICHARDS: So his family, James's family, was supporting you. But once you divorced, then you took a job at the greeting card factory?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I took a job right after Pratt, to have my own money. I've always done that. So I worked at Norcross Greeting Cards. I was in a department for roses, with the stencils. I could make a stenciled rose very quickly.

You had different sprays and chalks, and it went from there to the photographer. So the darker petals were done with the stencil, and then the next stencil flips over for the medium, and the pink ones on top.

Meanwhile, I'm thinking about getting to my painting class somehow. And again, it didn't seem to matter that I had the greeting card company. But I always had to have a day job because James was going through the money with his gambling. So there wasn't much for me. And from the greeting card company, I moved to a small layout and paste-up artist—I became—at a Prince Street production house, for pages.

MS. RICHARDS: For pages?

MS. KNOWLES: Making pages, and then from there to the Salzman Company, where I was doing wig and hair designs.

MS. RICHARDS: S-A-L-T-Z?

MS. KNOWLES: S-A-L-Z-M-A-N, and before that it was the Meshikoff Studio—M-E-S-H-I-K-O-F-F. That was really quite interesting because that was just layout and page design, which I'd taken quite a bit of at Pratt during the day school.

And so you might one day be laying out a page for a beer ad, or the next day it might be a real estate ad. You ordered the typeface you wanted and size, and then that would be delivered to you, and you'd paste it out. That was how pages were made in those days. [Laughs.] No computer.

And then from the Salzman Company was at last a chance to do photography. So they made—the Salzman Company—yes, again, layout and paste out. It may have been Meshikoff, but I believe it was Salzman

Yes, Salzman, where I was given a little photo lab—I used to have one here for years before it became a bedroom—and I'd be given the type and typeface from a Xerox machine, and then I would go into the camera and enlarge it, and then I'd leave the camera and make a silk screen of that image.

[END CD1.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Alison Knowles in New York City on June 1, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, disc two.

MS. KNOWLES: So with the Salzman Company and the Meshikoff Company, I was definitely able to make my way as a commercial artist in New York City. But again, it's kind of like the books I'd been making as a child.

It didn't seem to answer my needs, or whatever you want to say. I just kind of did it, did it well, and got out of there by 5:00 and came home to feed some husband or boyfriend or brother and get to my class at Pratt. I was really at that point preparing for my first painting show, consciously.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that the show you had at Nonagon?

MS. KNOWLES: Judson. Nonagon, what was the year for Nonagon?

MS. RICHARDS: Fifty-eight.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: That was four years before Judson.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, '58, I was preparing for the Nonagon show.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you end up connecting to that gallery?

MS. KNOWLES: Through someone named Skid Shallaty and her dear friend whose name escapes me, but I'll think of it.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you—

MS. KNOWLES: I had known them because of my circulating in what I would call the "underground New York," where Jim could get his drugs and where there could be pot parties. I never smoked pot, but I went to a lot of gatherings, which were very exciting and creative places where music was played.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that mostly?

MS. KNOWLES: What?

MS. RICHARDS: Was that mostly in the East Village?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, the East Village, and around Canal Street there was a café. I think I needed that kind of social outlet. I drank a lot of wine. I had a kind of circle of underground friends who I imagined understood what I was doing, and Dorothy Podber was the name of this other friend.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

MS. KNOWLES: P-O-D-B-E-R. Brilliant; I guess Polish. She worked a lot of trades, let's put it that way. And her dear friend was Ray Johnson, and Ray would come with Dorothy to visit us sometimes in the evening and try to get me to go out with them and "play the streets," we'd call it, and we'd just walk and talk. Mostly my memories of walking and talking are in the Lower East Side.

Ray lived on Norfolk. She lived on Suffolk. And with my background, which was sort of middle class, I'd never seen the nightlife that could go on, where people could dance in the street. There could be small galleries, which had very interesting work.

So Ray and Dorothy were very important to my certain kind of education. And they also knew Jim Ericson. But they were the ones that introduced me to Dick Higgins.

By that time, I wasn't seeing a lot of Jim Ericson, and I don't mean it was his fault. It was my fault. I wasn't trying to help him. I'd given up trying to help. I knew that I could find him at the Beacon Street Children's Center [teaching and being with young kids]. I just kind of let that be it.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you still living with him?

MS. KNOWLES: He could be there three nights a week, at the Center, and he also had developed a girlfriend there. He could eat there. So I didn't have to cook for him.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you envision that you were going to be divorcing him?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, but I don't think I looked at it like, Now, we're going to divorce, but eventually there just wasn't much point in being with him anymore. We weren't doing anything together. So we did divorce. I don't remember the year for that.

Anyway, I'd finally, I think, met somebody with Dick who was gay but had these wonderful parties on Christopher Street and so was part of the Dorothy Podber-Ray Johnson underground. So I went to a party.

They said, "You have to meet this guy." "He's a fabulous guy"—kicked out of Yale. [Laughs.] So I went with him to the party and then we sort of never parted after that. I stayed there a few days, and then he came down to 423 Broadway. We felt very close together quite quickly.

MS. RICHARDS: When was it that you met him? Do you know?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, when was the New School class?

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I know you married him in 1960. So you could say how long was it after you met that you married?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think it was—I think we married in—could it be'62, or something like that.

MS. RICHARDS: I believe you married in '60.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, we married in '60, and what's your question?

MS. RICHARDS: I was wondering when you met him, and how long was it until you—

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, maybe about two years.

MS. RICHARDS: So around the time you met him, you had that show at Nonagon. You were saying that Ray and Dorothy, through their contacts, introduced you to that gallery.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, to Dick, to Dick.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, and then Dick brought you to—

MS. KNOWLES: Dick didn't have to do with the gallery. It was Dorothy Podber and Skid Shallaty who introduced me to the gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: Skit?

MS. KNOWLES: Skid Shallaty.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell that?

MS. KNOWLES: S-H-A-L-L-A-T-Y, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned a Chris Shallaty. Did I mishear that?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, no, that would be Skid Shallaty.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: I don't know if that's a real name. I know that she and Dorothy were part of this underground world with Ray Johnson. I don't know her at all, whereas I feel I do know Dorothy and Ray.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the work that you had in that exhibition?

MS. KNOWLES: In the Nonagon I had large abstractions.

MS. RICHARDS: Again, oil on canvas?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, and I was doing projections on the canvas.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind—what was the color like?

MS. KNOWLES: It was sort of compatible within the frame, like blues and whites. It wouldn't be any really huge color. I wasn't a colorist in spite of—I mean, I had color theory there. But I'd say that I can remember there was

one with a block of blue, a block of white, and then always these projections I was doing with a Bell-Opticon projector, where I put part of the newspaper or postcard inside the mirror flat, and then I could see it enlarged as much as I wanted onto the canvas, and I'd fill it in.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you recall what inspired you to do that?

MS. KNOWLES: Probably just because I'd done so much paste-up and mechanicals.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you know Rauschenberg's work at the time?

MS. KNOWLES: I knew of Rauschenberg. I'm trying to think if I knew about him through [John] Cage or what. But I remember going to a show of his on West Broadway and he was giving himself permanents, curls. He later just had straight hair. But I remember seeing this handsome, curly-haired guy with all this curly hair and meeting him. But I think I wasn't struck enough by the work to remember it very well.

MS. RICHARDS: I was thinking of his use of newsprint and newspaper, and you were saying that you projected something like that.

MS. KNOWLES: I projected all kinds of things, objects. You could project out a spoon.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there anything else that prompted you to think of mixing those two very interesting, separate kinds of approaches to making images, the painting and the projection?

MS. KNOWLES: I think that just coming from paste-up and mechanicals, and loving words and letters, and having done a lot of reading, that I could put whole sentences in there. Rarely, you put a meaningful sentence but I'd have a few typefaces and a couple of large numbers.

MS. RICHARDS: So the paintings, if you were to sell one, would need to be accompanied by a projector?

MS. KNOWLES: No, no. The ones I projected and painted, there was no projector in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Ah, I was picturing there was a projector in the gallery.

MS. KNOWLES: No.

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying, to make the painting, you projected an image.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry.

MS. KNOWLES: And fill it n.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you painted the image on, the projected image.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, or since by then with the Satzman and the—I'd made silk screens for two years commercially for this airline company. So I could turn out a silk screen easily and print right on the canvas. I did a lot of that. And I do feel that Rauschenberg was in there too because we weren't Expressionists. We were something else.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Right. Did you have any other important artist friends at the time, people who you thought were serious artists who were painting?

MS. KNOWLES: There was work from Ray Johnson. But Ray Johnson, for me, is more of a literary figure, or more of kind of a correspondence artist.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, other painters, maybe people you knew from Pratt?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, again, I always kind of stepped away, I think, from other artists, in a way. I don't mean that I was so full of confidence that I was superior in any way. Just most of my friends were writers and composers. That's true. La Monte Young.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you happy with the exhibition?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, I think I was. I can't remember my exact feelings about it. I think my father was still alive. I would have liked him to be pleased also.

MS. RICHARDS: And your mother?

MS. KNOWLES: She would always say, “The work doesn’t mean anything to me, but I do like this color.” She’d make a remark like that. She was never negative, but she just, I think, left that side of life to my father completely. I mean, to look at something and have an opinion about it.

MS. RICHARDS: After that show, how did your work proceed?

MS. KNOWLES: After the Nonagon show, then I remember—

MS. RICHARDS: And I guess you had met Dick.

MS. KNOWLES: Not yet, I guess.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: Painting all those paintings, I started them at 423 Broadway. They were large. Some were as large as the window.

MS. RICHARDS: I guess none of them sold from the show?

MS. KNOWLES: I think I had a grandmother who bought one. I forget—in absentia. So we got them back to Broadway and I had these—

MS. RICHARDS: —painting racks?

MS. KNOWLES: Jim Ericson had actually built me wonderful painting racks I could slip the paintings in. And now I notice that if you go to my daughter Hannah’s Chicago house—she’s in Washington now, but she’ll move back to teach in Chicago. She’s done the same thing. It’s wonderful. It’s a rack system you can walk into and see a painting and pull it out. So she has Dick’s paintings stored there, because he took up painting in the last years of his life.

MS. RICHARDS: So you brought all the paintings home from Nonagon Gallery.

MS. KNOWLES: From the Nonagon.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you—

MS. KNOWLES: But I was more involved with this underground world of art and music and poetry than I was with what other painters were doing. I never really struggled to find a decent gallery or anything like that. This Emily Harvey Gallery here on Broadway, where I’ve shown a number of times, it’s more of a community center now. It never sells work. I’ve never been able to equate selling art with making art. I think there are other people like that, always to have another job or something.

MS. RICHARDS: I read that at some point after that show, you burned the paintings.

MS. KNOWLES: I destroyed them.

MS. RICHARDS: Why was that?

MS. KNOWLES: I guess I very impetuously decided that I didn’t think they were a high enough level that I wanted to keep them. So we got a truck and we drove out to my brother’s Easthampton house, which had been my father’s house before, and we dug a hole and we burned them, burned the paintings. It’s always, too, the logistics of living. They took up half the space. I was having children soon. I burned the paintings before.

MS. RICHARDS: So you didn’t burn them until after you were married? You didn’t burn them right away?

MS. KNOWLES: No, not right away. I let them sit around for a little while.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. KNOWLES: I don’t know. It’s very hard to describe that. But I guess once I’ve decided to do something, it always gets done, and quite immediately. So if somebody wants to cut their hair, maybe they make an appointment and they go next week, and then there are others who just go into the bathroom and get the scissors and get it done. I think I’m like that.

MS. RICHARDS: After that show, did you continue painting in the same manner?

MS. KNOWLES: Now we’re approaching the Judson show.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I guess the show was in ’58 at Nonagon, and then you met Dick. And when you met him, how did that impact your work?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I was then back to realizing the value of my father’s influence on me, his teaching, all the reading I’d done. I read all the Great Books, and here was someone who had also done a tremendous amount of reading and was himself a writer and a poet. So we would spend a lot of time up in North Brookfield, Mass., where his father and one of—his second wife, I guess—

MS. RICHARDS: North Brookfield?

MS. KNOWLES: North Brookfield, Mass.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that three words?

MS. KNOWLES: No. “North Brookfield” is only one word [town]. So we could go up there and just hang out with each other and talk and go swimming and have a kind of luxurious time with one another. And his father approved of me, which was important, because he had been gay in school.

MS. RICHARDS: Dick?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, and as a matter of fact had done some rather outrageous performances, let’s call them, within a club that he set up. They finally had to let him go. They threw him out of Yale.

And I think his mother and father imagined that, with me, he was going to settle down, turn the corner, some kind of corner. For me, what interested me was he was a little bit crazy and was having ideas all the time, [which] reflected what I felt was my father’s gift to me, was imagination and encouragement of your own way or your own expression.

So I began to write books and poems myself. It wasn’t that I had left painting, but I definitely was doing other things. I began to think about sound, for instance. Words like “intermedia” were coming into the culture. I used to do a whole evening of sound, and I’d call it "sound and poetry" or "sound poetry," in nearby galleries, which would consist in putting some of my bean collections into sonic paper bases and shaking them.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you doing that before you met Dick?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I don’t think so.

MS. RICHARDS: So you met him and married. Did you think of yourself as an artist?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, then I was using the word "intermedia artist." I notice now my daughter Jessica uses that word. I think that’s nice, because it means that what you’re doing with poetry is no threat to your painting. I was doing radio shows in Germany, because by the time we’d met Cage, we had a liaison with a man named Klaus Schöning, and Klaus Schöning ran West German Radio.

MS. RICHARDS: What is his last name?

MS. KNOWLES: S-C-H-Ö-N-I-N-G. So Klaus was just an amazing—what’s the word—vernisseur [ph]. Through John’s direction, he would invite—I think he invited [Richard] Kostelanetz over, Philip Corner, myself. He was interested in bringing American intermedia art, or particularly sonic art, to West German Radio, and he carried on for at least five years, maybe more, with superlative programs. So I made only one part. I think it was called *Paper Weather*. Another was—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes, yes, where it—that’s a little—

MS. KNOWLES: Maybe that’s further on in life.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. KNOWLES: But I did a lot of work with Klaus Schöning, and therefore could broaden into a gallery in Cologne with Shubinheur [ph] and other people who had galleries in Cologne.

MS. RICHARDS: When you talked about the Judson Gallery show—I wanted to get back to that. That’s in ’62.

MS. KNOWLES: Jon Hendricks was the director then.

MS. RICHARDS: Jon Hendricks—you met Jon? He was part of the circle of—

MS. KNOWLES: I don’t remember exactly how I met Jon Hendricks. But both Jon and Geoff are part of the art

scene that would have begun in those years.

MS. RICHARDS: Geoff?

MS. KNOWLES: G-E-O-F-F Hendricks, Geoffrey, R-E-Y.

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

MS. KNOWLES: And then Jon Hendricks was doing a lot of collection and interviewing for someone named Gilbert Silverman and that collection is now at the MoMA.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure, sure. That must be a number of years later.

MS. KNOWLES: Well, Jon started working very early for Gil.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me go back to when you first were married in the early ’60s and you—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I met Jon. He was running the Judson Gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: What was your work at that show at the Judson?

MS. KNOWLES: It was these large paintings of numbers and letters and photos.

MS. RICHARDS: Similar to what you had at Nonagon?

MS. KNOWLES: No, they were—the words and letters and numbers were definitely in evidence. I think the Nonagon was more just abstract paintings. I should check that out. I probably have some slides.

But my sense is that the abstract paintings, being, if you will, adulterated or, if you will, advanced into—I now call them "pages." I’m having a show in Potsdam [Germany] in a few weeks; they’re just giant pages that you can walk through. So I’m having frames made that you can push the page back and walk through it. It’s kind of reminiscent of *The Big Book* [1967], but also of my engagement with paper now.

MS. RICHARDS: When you had the show at Judson—

MS. KNOWLES: So I’m trying to remember specifically—there was a painting that I—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: —silk-screen paintings, and those were made with projections as well?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, a very, very interesting one was called *Mother, or The Great Train Robbery.*

MS. RICHARDS: Where did that title come from?

MS. KNOWLES: *Mother* was a picture of my grandmother. It was done with a little line brush, but kind of a nice—a Bell-Opticon projection of a face of a mother. And then *The Great Train Robbery* was either a piece of music or a film of the time. I forget. And there was some imagery that recalled that film.

MS. RICHARDS: So to clarify, you were projecting images and doing those silk-screen paintings that you showed at Judson. The paintings that you showed four years earlier at Nonagon, they were also made with projections?

MS. KNOWLES: Mm-mm. [Negative.]

MS. RICHARDS: No? Okay. Those were just straight abstraction, these paintings—

[Cross talk.]

MS. KNOWLES: Basically, I think that I was going home from working all day in paste-up and mechanicals, and starting to paint and realizing that the numbers and words were really beautiful in themselves. And I could project a word up, and then in filling it in, I could use different colors or different densities.

MS. RICHARDS: Do any of those paintings still survive?

MS. KNOWLES: The last one I remember was in the Chelsea house. *The Mother andThe Great Train Robbery* [sic], again, I’m afraid I destroyed them. I don’t know.

MS. RICHARDS: Those were burned with the earlier show?

MS. KNOWLES: No, they weren't.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. [Laughs.] A different episode.

MS. KNOWLES: They were left outside my loft in Chelsea. That's the way I abandoned them. A psychiatrist could do a lot with this. Once it's done, I don't want it around. I can't store it. Someone can buy it. But I don't want to keep it. I have this Bread and Water series up there, loaves of breads with the rivers of the world in them.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. KNOWLES: Now, that's a small enough series in—I guess they're lithographs—that I can store them all right. But I don't want to sit here and look at abstractions from that long ago or have to house them or pay for—I was friends with Claes Oldenburg. He had two warehouses full of work. Maybe it's—maybe I wasn't enough of a feminist. I don't know. But I just had to have it gone.

MS. RICHARDS: In those early years, speaking of feminism, did you talk to other women artists to get a sense of what the situation was like for them, for you?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, as I say, I never felt it was for me. I would look at women who—and I know many of them now whose names I needn't tell you—who feel they've been terribly treated in the art world and in their private lives. It's been nothing but abuse. I don't allow abuse. I'm not abused, ever, in what I do. I'm sorry for someone who is victimized that way. But even when it got to the Womanhouse at CalArts [California Institute of the Arts], it didn't work.

MS. RICHARDS: When you met Dick, soon after that, you and he became part of the Fluxus group. What was your experience of the coming together of that group and working with them in the early years, '61, '62?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, we first knew about George, who was living—

MS. RICHARDS: George Maciunas?

MS. KNOWLES: George—

MS. RICHARDS: Or Brecht?

MS. KNOWLES: George Maciunas.

MS. RICHARDS: Maciunas.

MS. KNOWLES: George Maciunas instigated the group. We called him our leader, or our director, and he was a very eccentric man who lived on Wooster Street just south of Spring. He had a loft in the basement. He had chronic bronchitis. His mother, whom we all knew pretty well, made it possible for us, when we first knew him, to plan to do performances together.

And of course, that suited me fine. And also Dick had his poetry readings he wanted to do. So there's a gallery uptown—I think it was called the A Gallery—and George arranged for us to perform there Fridays for a month, something like that. But it didn't work very well. It was a very uptown—they hadn't understood what we were doing.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there other people involved besides just you two?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did they all come together? What was your experience of them all being together, and what was the dynamics? How was it determined what would be done? Did George decide? Was it totally democratic?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think something like that can't be totally either way, certainly not the Obama administration. [Laughs.] But the idea was that Maciunas had come from—he came from Lithuania, and he really believed that we could put a group together that wasn't theater, that was based on most of the Cage class [at the New School for Social Research] and people in it, like George Brecht and Dick Higgins and Jackson Mac Low.

We could all meet and have our own tour, our own system of presenting work in little theaters. And he was very dedicated to having this happen. And so he did, and always was someone who made all of the arrangements.

And since Jon [Henricks] was never paid for anything anyway in those days, you'd just get a call that he had a theater, you know, for 10 days from now and, "You have to decide what you want to do, and we'll meet the day before and decide what we're going to present," and he'd make up a card.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he decide who would be part of the group?

MS. KNOWLES: It was always the same group.

MS. RICHARDS: But he decided, George?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, mostly it would be appropriate for some people to be in the group, and if it wasn't appropriate, it somehow—they didn't come again or he didn't address them wanting a work. I know that he has a bad reputation with some women. But many times the work that women were doing was more based on feminism or sort of the solo track, meaning they're the only person on the stage, or there'd be reasons why they wouldn't be interested.

And so our group, which was coming basically from the Cage class and basically from music and poetry, not art, made it very nice for, say, George Brecht and Bob Watts to come in from Metuchen, New Jersey, and just bring a piece to do that day.

And because of the Cage class, which became sort of a bedrock of performance art in the city, once it became known what had gone on in that class, he could write pieces, and took us to Europe. You write the piece. You do it the next day.

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me about the Cage class. How did you get involved with that?

MS. KNOWLES: In '59 and '60, that's when I was first talking with Dick on the telephone. I wasn't married to him yet. But we had met, and I have no idea why I didn't join the Cage class.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh you didn't join?

MS. KNOWLES: Probably because I was still getting James Ericson out of the house, or I was too confused about getting painting time. Again, it was decision I had to make quickly, and in that case I made the wrong decision and I didn't join the class. I know that many of the people in the class—Florence Tarlow, a wonderful actress, was in many of Dick's theater pieces.

See, Dick didn't write event scores particularly, and I don't know if you've seen *The Great Bear Pamphlets* series [1965]. You'll see his pamphlets are mostly happenings like Allan Kaprow has. But it was George Brecht that I was very attracted to, and his style of very minimal event stories was what I started to do.

MS. RICHARDS: At what point did you learn about the work of Yoko Ono and her event pieces?

MS. KNOWLES: You mean, when did she learn about ours? Anyway, however you want to phrase it, Yoko was being marketed by Jon early on, Jon Hendricks, and she was immediately in a kind of a theatrical solo performer idiom, as most women wish for. I'd say her basic, basic ethic, her basic ideology was antithetical to Fluxus, in that we did group pieces and we all discussed what we wanted to do and had a kind of agreement.

But my experience is that she, not so much with this [inaudible] but later, that she decides what she wants to do and has the publicity and the money to do it. And another thing, Fluxus was running on pennies. We were trying to get to Europe. So we didn't need a star, and she was sort of born a star, Yoko, and if you like her work or not, the point is, it was always available.

You could always find it, find it in a magazine, or you could call one of her publicists. And one favorite of her pieces is a very simple one. It's about looking at the moon and a tale of water, or even before she got a whole show together, it was, for me, in the theater basically. Anyway, she wasn't appropriate to the group, and as a matter of fact, there weren't any women who were at that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Except you.

MS. KNOWLES: Until the Japanese came along.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: And you had Mieko Shiomi and Takako Saito.

MS. RICHARDS: What was Mieko's last name?

MS. KNOWLES: Mieko Shiomi, who is very, very well known in Japan, and Takako Saito, who is living in Germany now. Takako S-A-I-T-O. And these two women—although we're not talking so much about the '60s; we're talking about when we got to Europe.

Takako was there, and then she came back to New York and was living with Joe Jones for quite a while, and Mieko was in Osaka. So we could go and perform there, and then she also came to live in George's house, because George Maciunas provided apartments for these people.

MS. RICHARDS: George was involved in real estate in SoHo, right?

MS. KNOWLES: He was, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that impact on you and Dick?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think his real estate days were not a great success. But what it did allow was cheap lofts in the neighborhood, or this neighborhood, which was then, you know, a manufacturing and secondhand businesses.

MS. RICHARDS: After you were married, did you live at—

MS. KNOWLES: Four Twenty-Three Broadway.

MS. RICHARDS: Four Twenty-Three Broadway?

MS. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm. Yes. Dick had a studio on Canal Street, 359 Canal, and we did performances there. Joe Jones had a studio there as well, and there could be window displays of Joe's instruments.

MS. RICHARDS: So even though you weren't in the class, you had a relationship with John Cage and with all the other—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, because Dick now was very interested in publishing. So the first book he published was his own *Postface/Jefferson's Birthday*. But then shortly after that came Cage, and I designed a book called *Silence*.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was that? Or we can look it up.

MS. KNOWLES: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: We'll look it up.

MS. KNOWLES: So that was done—

MS. RICHARDS: And you said you designed it with him?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: And how was that collaboration?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, just a fabulous collaboration. You should look at the book, since we're talking about it.

MS. RICHARDS: The book you did was called *A Year from Monday*[*: New Lectures and Writings*. John Cage, 1967]

MS. KNOWLES: This was it. Here it is.

MS. RICHARDS: That's *Silence*[*: Selected Lectures and Writings*. 1961]. So when you collaborated with Cage on that book, which you have in your hands, *Silence*, what was your role and how did the collaboration work?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, what we did was meet at the—by then we had moved to Chelsea, and we had a whole house in Chelsea; we were renting out all of the top floor and the basement.

MS. RICHARDS: What address was that?

MS. KNOWLES: Two Thirty-Eight West 22nd Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know what year you moved?

MS. KNOWLES: No. Well, sorry.

MS. RICHARDS: That's okay.

MS. KNOWLES: I haven't got the—

MS. RICHARDS: But you were saying how you collaborated.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, well, we made this book together.

MS. RICHARDS: So this—

MS. KNOWLES: *Notations*, we called it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, ,.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay so it's not this book, *Silence*.

MS. KNOWLES: No, it isn't *Silence*. It isn't *A Year from Monday*. It's *Notations*.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay, *Notations*. That was 1969.

MS. KNOWLES: So that was the second book that came out of the Something Else Press, which was the name of Dick's press. So we would meet, and I actually had an assistant who helped us do the paste-up and mechanicals, and we threw coins—the *I Ching*: you throw coins to get the answers to questions.

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

MS. KNOWLES: We wrote to all the composers that interested us to be in the book, and when we threw the coins, we looked at the *I Ching* for what number we had thrown. There are 64 possibilities. So, say—[inaudible] would get two words and someone else would get 64 words and someone else would get 14 words.

But it just set everybody against everybody else. I had a file of letters, which I burned, people who wrote back and said, "Well, I heard that Luigi Nono got 15 words and I only got three. What's going on here?" So we had to print out a page about how we derived the number for each person.

And then along the bottom of each page [we] would give the name and the composition name of the music we showed, okay? And then around that was our writings about, or his writings about, music that were sent in by the people whose names along the bottom, but it wasn't necessarily on that page. [Laughs.] So I was able to do all different sizes of type and typefaces and put a fragment of someone's remarks on one page maybe with piece of music that I thought it went well with.

MS. RICHARDS: So he gave you the freedom to make all these decisions?

MS. KNOWLES: All the decisions, but if you wanted to know who did that piece, it was always right along the bottom of the page. So there was something to hold onto, and the rest was poetry, and, yeah, we didn't repeat a fragment. If some, say, got 32 words to write about "What is notation," we didn't repeat any part of that because we liked it.

We just did it. We fragmented it throughout the pages, maybe with other fragments. But there was an absolute logic to the book, and I suppose what anybody says about John, he did not improvise with any of these things he was doing. He was using coins and numbers and had set up a way to get what he wanted.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it before this that you met Duchamp and you worked with him on a book as well?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I worked with him on a print.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that's right, a print, sorry.

MS. KNOWLES: And the print was—

MS. RICHARDS: And that was before this?

MS. KNOWLES: This is '67.

MS. RICHARDS: Right before.

MS. KNOWLES: And the print is called *Coeurs Volants* [1967].

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

MS. KNOWLES: At that time, when Dick was running the press, I was producing silk-screen prints out of my studio, and one of them was—

MS. RICHARDS: To exist as individual works of art?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, yeah, not that—maybe I would—

MS. RICHARDS: In small editions?

MS. KNOWLES: Small editions, right. Since I was working alone, I usually got back half the edition worked out. In the case of Duchamp, I wanted to have a hundred. I ended up with what I called the Alphabet series, which is 26. And so Daniel Spoerri, who's a French artist, suggested that the Something Else Press and my printing editions, that we should go meet Marcel. He could set it up for us.

MS. RICHARDS: He could set up what?

MS. KNOWLES: Our meeting.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, that Daniel could set up the meeting.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. So he—

MS. RICHARDS: And you and Dick wanted to meet Duchamp—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, we didn't particularly think we could or wanted. It would have been nice, but we saw opportunity through our then-editor Emmett Williams and his friend Daniel Spoerri, who we had met doing Fluxus in Europe. Daniel said to Emmett that we should go over there and meet his man because he'd be happy to meet us.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't go with a project in mind? You just went to meet him?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, actually, I think there was a phone conversation with Teeny—that's his wife—and that he would like, he said, to repeat a print that he had done in Sweden, which was these hearts overlaying, which was called *Coeurs Volants*, "flying hearts."

And so I decided to go with some ideas about how to do that, and I made a series of color swatches in red and blue on black. I wanted to try printing on black Color-aid paper. Color-aid paper is a silk-screen paper. And so I ended up with 11 samples, which he's looking at there, and then he selected one.

MS. RICHARDS: We're looking at a photograph.

MS. KNOWLES: We're looking at a photograph of Duchamp looking—

MS. RICHARDS: Where is this apartment?

MS. KNOWLES: This is his 10th Street apartment, Duchamp's 10th Street apartment.

MS. RICHARDS: And he had a studio nearby there, too, I think.

MS. KNOWLES: I think so, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So he chose a swatch and the swatches were about, oh, four by five [inches], and there would be a circle of red and then a circle of blue printed over it. So you could see the vibration between the red and the blue, and the heart should vibrate. So out of these 11, I made different hues and tones of blue and red, so that each one was just a little different. So that's what we're looking at in the picture.

We're looking at these four-by-five Color-aid printed color swatches. And then when he chose one, it was a room like this and he—I took the one that he'd chosen, and I put it, like, on over there by that table, put it on the edge of the table, and just so I wouldn't be confused, I put all the others away in my attaché case; left that one out.

And then Teeny, his wife, was walking to the kitchen over there. And she glanced over at the table, and she really hadn't known exactly what we were doing. She was talking to Emmett in the other room pretty much. So she saw it and she said, "Oh, Marcel, when did you do this?" So without a word, he stood up, picked up a pencil, walked over, and he signed it. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How did you feel about that?

MS. KNOWLES: So how did any of us feel about that, let alone when I got home and Dick, by the next day, had it framed on the wall. And then I did call a friend in France, a printmaker, and asked—who's a friend of Marcel's—and I asked, What did I have? Was it a Marcel Duchamp print, or was it a lot of fun he was having, or what is it? And so the consensus was that it's just what it was, just a color swatch that he had signed.

But of course, even then his signature was valuable, and also that's the one I had the match-up in my studio to do the print. The print was large. And my friend in—actually his name is Richard Hamilton, and Richard Hamilton was the one who said that Marcel was always doing things like that.

He was signing people's arms. He was taking an old letter and signing it and giving it to you. He was always up to tricks like that. You don't have a work of art. You have a memorabilia piece. So that settled that. But by that time, it had been sold, and either I had already decided on my colors in the screen studio—anyway, it very quickly disappeared to a collector in Renscheid.

MS. RICHARDS: In where? Where did you say the collector was?

MS. KNOWLES: R-E-N-S-C-H-E-I-D.

[END CD2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards—

MS. KNOWLES: Should I grab a water for you? Are you all right?

MS. RICHARDS: —interviewing Alison Knowles in New York City on Spring Street, on June 1, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

So you managed to do the print even though you didn't have the swatch anymore.

MS. KNOWLES: I can't swear exactly that I didn't have a swatch that was just like it. But I had made a set for myself. I can't answer that. I don't remember. But I did produce this *Coeurs Volants* print with very, very limited technology, very poorly done, all these layers of ink.

It looks good, but anybody who knows silk screening can—and there are prints I've seen recently where a little crack has developed. The ink was much too heavy. I should have gone to a studio or had some help with it. So we got 26 of them. Is it 26 or 24 letters of the alphabet?

MS. RICHARDS: Twenty-six.

MS. KNOWLES: So we got 26 of them, and we made a date to go back and have him sign them. But he said he would come to Chelsea. So he came to 238 West 22nd Street—and we had a nice pair of glass doors and a funny garden—and so he sat there and he signed them.

And I just received an email from someone in Germany that, actually, with all the confusion of people getting number two or number five, that Marcel himself never got one. But then he never asked for one. So the first ones went—

MS. RICHARDS: Were there APs [artist proofs]?

MS. KNOWLES: AP, there were a couple of APs.

MS. RICHARDS: But he didn't get one of those?

MS. KNOWLES: Again, I don't remember, but Emmett says that I never gave him one. Well, in the confusion of that afternoon, I may not have. But I know Emmett got one, and it was pouring rain, and he fell down in the rain and ruined his print. Just it was so amazing to have this man in there. And I decided I'd have cucumber sandwiches. Now, how much do I know about a cucumber sandwich?

So I later discovered that—since Richard Hamilton came also—that it was definitely the American version of a cucumber sandwich. Apparently if you're doing it English style, it's white bread and butter. And the crusts are cut off and the pinwheels are very thin and it's just the butter, the cucumber, and the white bread.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. KNOWLES: So I had mayonnaise and wheat bread. You name it.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. KNOWLES: It was funny. But he signed them, and that's the last time I saw him. He died a year later. That's right on the brink of his last years.

MS. RICHARDS: Before that, you and Dick and the others had been traveling quite a bit. You had created a number of Fluxus event scores, and I wanted to ask you about a few of them. One of the early ones, 1962, was *Make a Salad*, which you've done subsequently.

I think you also did *Make a Soup* [1964]. How did the idea for that piece come about? Was that the first time that you were making something using food that people would eat?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I've become sort of known for the food art thing with the *Identical Lunch* [1969], which I'm doing up—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right, but that was a little bit afterward. So the *Make a Salad* was earlier.

MS. KNOWLES: The *Make a Salad* is earlier. Actually, I don't call it a Fluxus event score. I think my event scores, some of them—they were done during that time.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But I also think of a lot of the work in the box there, *The Great Bear Pamphlet* box.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. KNOWLES: It's during the Fluxus time, but often evades the, what I would call a strict definition, if you even could do it for Fluxus. So it's okay.

But for me, they are event scores, and they're more based on the work of John Cage than they are on, I think—or George Brecht, let's say—than what became Fluxus performances that many people were doing and adding to.

So what's meant by "a Fluxus performance"? I really don't know until you describe it to me. But with the *Make a Salad* event score, you knew exactly what's going to happen.

MS. RICHARDS: So if you knew exactly what was going to happen, you're making a distinction between that and something where you didn't know what was going to happen.

MS. KNOWLES: Well, between what you know is going to happen, and things that happen from what you have done, is what differentiates, I think, the event score from something like happenings, where there was much more of an "anything goes" attitude. And it was more important that certain people were there or the site where it happened, say the Segal [ph] barn or one of Kaprow's happenings.

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

MS. KNOWLES: When I say you know what's going to happen in the event scores, for something like *Shoes of Your Choice* [1963] or *Make a Salad*, you're going to have someone describing their shoes.

You're not going to have someone telling a story about when they went to India, and with *Make a Salad* you're not going to have someone serving hors d'oeuvres. So that's what I mean by there's a known quantity, and then there's all the things that happen around it. But the salad might be made in Indonesia, and you have to work with very different ingredients than you would in New York City.

MS. RICHARDS: When you made that, did you think that it might turn out to be a piece that would be done again and again and that people would respond to it so?

MS. KNOWLES: No, absolutely not. I remember how the piece happened. I was riding with Dick in a cab in London, and a performance was going to be the next day, and I think I was expected to come up with a lot of the pieces on the program.

It was one of those concerts where somehow just Dick and I were there along with Richard Hamilton in the audience. George was not there. George Brecht, George Maciunas was not there. And it was the Museum of Contemporary Art. So Dick said, "Well, what are you doing to do?"

MS. RICHARDS: The Institute of Contemporary Art?

MS. KNOWLES: Is it called the "Institute"?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: The Institute of Contemporary Art, and they had a very nice little audience room. So it wasn't a big hall. It was a nice-sized room, and I had decided in the cab with him; I said, "What can I do? Why don't I do something with food? Why don't I make a salad?"

He said, "Fine, make a salad," and that would be always Dick's backup for an idea. He would say, "Good, talk about your shoes," or, "Fine, go take the train at 8:00 a.m." He just was very quick to back up a thought. It's almost like he wanted to be thinking about something else or he had something else—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: But it served to validate your ideas.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, absolutely.

MS. RICHARDS: It was a tremendous—

MS. KNOWLES: I never remember him saying, "No, don't do that." He just completely trusted what I would say for this occasion, and there was no time to do anything but buy the vegetables in the morning. That's all the time there was. And meanwhile, of course, people were expecting some huge show or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, when you approached that coming performance that you knew you would be doing, was it actually a very positive approach that you waited until the last minute; was that a usual approach?

MS. KNOWLES: Usually, we had no time. We usually had just taken the train the day before from Nice. We probably lost a passport. Absolutely a hair-raising tour, absolutely, across France, Germany, and you'd get somebody to pay your train fare and that's about it.

MS. RICHARDS: One might have taken all of these already-created performances with you and not had to have created them at all at the spur of the moment. So I'm just trying to imagine that maybe—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, who would perform them? You'd have to train a group, or you'd have to write ahead what you were going—what people were going to do.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm wondering whether it was, in a way, purposeful that they were made at the last minute, because in fact, it's possible you could have come up with *Make a Salad* before you left New York.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, I see. No, I think that the spontaneity of the imminent event was useful.

MS. RICHARDS: It focused you.

MS. KNOWLES: Because probably back in New York I would have decided to do something more elaborate, or involve more people, or—but I love Emmett Williams's phrase: We have no time and we had to present a united front. In other words, within the group, there were people who didn't get along.

As human beings, they didn't get along with this or that idea or this or that person. People always thought they were meeting this completely compatible group getting off a bus. But by the time we got to present at the theater, we certainly had a pretty good idea what we were going to be doing.

We met the night before and put our ideas together, and then often there was George Maciunas, who would act as our director, whatever, and was very good as a—what do you want to call it, the man who presents on a television show.

MS. RICHARDS: Emcee?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, he was a great emcee. He looked strange. He wore a monocle and full dress suit, black, with a monocle, and spoke with a decided accent. He used more of an Eastern European accent. When you consider that most of these are American artists, exhausted, traveling around from place to place, with Emmett, who was a wonderful performer and brilliant and who was putting in a lot of very good pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: Why were [you] doing all this touring in Europe? Was it just a much more welcoming artistic scene that you couldn't find in the U.S.?

MS. KNOWLES: It didn't exist here at all, and even when we came back after the first Wiesbaden Museum presentation and then went through Europe, we came back to New York and we tried to put on an event on Canal Street in Dick Higgins's space, his studio. And I think he didn't properly manage the promotion, because

George had always done that in Europe. All we had to do was get there.

So here I think we all made a few phone calls, but there couldn't have been more than 20 people in the audience and not plausible—it was very haphazard. We did a piece of mine called *String Piece* [1964], where I kind of tie up the audience and make chairs get tied to me, and I get tied to the mike, and it was kind of a nice web piece, which could be done when something else is being read.

So the *Make a Salad* was a totally amazing event. He also did *Shoes of Your Choice* that night with Richard Hamilton's performance. Anyway, with *Make a Salad*, I got there, and the little man in a red jacket who served the drinks, he said I couldn't use any water because he needed the water to wash the glasses.

And I said, "But I have to wash a lot of lettuce." He said, "I'm sorry, I knew nothing of this," and he began to raise his voice. And my friend Robert Filliou was standing by the door. He walked in—and this man had little red lapels on his little dinner jacket—and he lifted this little guy by his lapels right up off the floor. And he shook him and he said, "You give her whatever she wants," put this guy down, completely turned him around and he left. And I turned on the water and washed everything. I didn't see him again.

MS. RICHARDS: During this first half of the '60s, you created a large number of these event scores.

MS. KNOWLES: I just want to stop you for a moment there because that same evening was when I had the delight of the premier performance of *Shoes of Your Choice*. And I notice that Nam June Paik and Charlotte Moorman assumed this same style. You announce the piece, and then I had a chair and I said, "Well, I invite someone to perform this piece. I'm not going to do it tonight," and you just sit in a chair and you wait and you wait.

So I announced the piece and stood away from the mike, and there was, I guess, almost a full minute before Richard Hamilton stood up out of the audience, which wasn't that huge, took off his brown leather shoe, and started to talk about it.

He said, "Well, I remember buying this. I didn't have really enough bank notes to get the ones I wanted, but I came to like these very much because it goes with a jacket that I used to wear, and I had this friend; she really liked my jacket.

"So whenever I wore the jacket, I put on the shoes, and I came to like them very much, and I've had them for years." And then someone else stood up and said, "I used to like patent leather, but I don't like it anymore because it squeezes my toes." And I'll tell you, it was fantastic, the initiation of that piece, just wonderful. [Laughs.]

I think Dick screamed that evening. He screamed his *Danger Music*; he screamed six times. And that's always just a paralyzing piece for everyone. I can't listen to it because he screams and he loses his voice.

MS. RICHARDS: The piece is to scream until he loses his voice?

MS. KNOWLES: No, he screamed six times. When he screams six times, it's so loud and so long that he finally doesn't have much of a voice left. So the Institute of Contemporary Art really gave us a wonderful venue that night for learning.

And it was a real—a very fine, small audience and very, very good pieces. George Maciunas was not there, and I can't remember anyone else who was. But I certainly remember the quality of the evening.

MS. RICHARDS: And then you mentioned *The Great Bear Pamphlet*. That's a compilation of event scores. Am I correct?

MS. KNOWLES: For me, it is.

MS. RICHARDS: For you, yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But you'll see what other people did with it. It was done as one of the first ventures of the Something Else Press. So these were all young artists, like Bengt af Klintberg, Wolf Vostell—all these people were invited by Dick, this young avant-garde and, I would say, extremely adventurous young publisher that they knew that he would have to publish what we gave him.

So there absolutely was no equivocation. He never turned down a manuscript. He published all those pamphlets, which were basically people we'd met in Europe, as this series and, I think very brilliantly made them into individual books with this Great Bear stamp, which was our water cooler in the basement.

I think the fact that they were individual books—if a writer, let's say, like Wolf Vostell or someone like Bengt af

Klintberg, who did a pamphlet, they could like order 10 of their pamphlet or 15 of their pamphlet, and we didn't have to produce the whole box.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you keep it going financially?

MS. KNOWLES: Dick had a stipend from his family, which went for about four or five years of the press. But we also had children then.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to say, you said that in 1964 you had—

MS. KNOWLES: —twins.

MS. RICHARDS: Twins.

MS. KNOWLES: Also Dick's mother was—you see, Dick's mother was the one person—his father was a very eloquent man, I know, but he really wanted his son to go into the steel business in Worcester, Mass., and it was his mother, actually, Kitsy Doman—

MS. RICHARDS: Tell me her name again.

MS. KNOWLES: Katherine, K-A-T-H-E-R-I-N-E, Bigelow, B-I-G-E-L-O-W—and then she married a man named Doman, D-O-M-A-N, and Dick had two stepsons [brothers], Alex and Sammy. But she always would talk about Dick's essays when he'd gone to this private school she sent him to. As a boy, they'd say he was just brilliant. We can't manage him.

So go to another private school, and that was kind of the story of his education. He's a difficult person. He always was subject to great anger and very strongly opinionated, very well read, and if he didn't really take to someone, he didn't make any attempt to be with them or see them again. Anyway, the mother, we called her Kitsy, was a big fan of Dick Higgins.

So when she married this Nicholas Doman and moved into the city from North Brookfield, she married at something like 18 and was with her husband Carter for the birth of these three children in Worcester, Mass.

MS. RICHARDS: So Alex and Sandy were Dick's stepbrothers.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. I said sons, didn't I? Stepbrothers. So she finally—Nicholas Doman finally died, and Nicholas was never close to Dick, really, or appreciated what he was doing. But most people didn't, a difficult man, and—but his mother was a great friend, as I say, who always liked to see—always bought the books, came to the readings and the performances. It's like my father. You need somebody—[laughs]—when you're growing up—

MS. RICHARDS: Who's really supportive and appreciates your talents.

MS. KNOWLES: But it doesn't have to be a family member. It can be just somebody, a teacher, somebody who encourages you and wants to see what you're going to do next.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: Like Ms. Sterling for me.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah. How did life change after you had the twins?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think that I finally could not carry on with paste-up and mechanicals and outside work. There was simply either I hired someone or—and actually, this Kitsy, she did send her helper, Lizzie Federman, for three days a week to take my twins to the park or just to help me.

And I made no attempt to do anything but to get up to my studio on the top floor, which worked, because I always had these two little bassinettes, or two places for babies to sleep, in the same room, with their beds almost together.

So we just got away with murder. They'd entertain themselves in the morning. They made a natural balance with their personalities that worked out.

MS. RICHARDS: And their names?

MS. KNOWLES: Jessica Andre and Hannah B., just the letter B. So Jessica and Hannah got along fine and went to different schools as they grew. They have very different lives, different talents.

And I think it functioned very well when we were living, especially in Chelsea, that I could drive them to that children's school on my bike, and by the time I got home, it was only 10:00 a.m. and I could work until 4:00. So I didn't have any trouble with motherhood. I got away so easy.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, then let's go back to art. [Laughs.] Now, tell me about your involvement with beans, beans and flax. Tell me the whole story of that.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, right.

MS. RICHARDS: And when it started.

MS. KNOWLES: Okay, I'm trying to think about—the beans certainly began when I got this phone call from George Maciunas that—he was always calling that he had a backer; he had someone who was really going to support the group and pay our way.

And so he called me that he had a backer, and I said, "Wow," and he said, "But you have to say what you're going to do by tomorrow because he wants to know how he can make up the program. So tell me what you're going to do." I didn't really have a thought, but I had been cooking pots of beans for the Something Else Press people at the 22nd Street house, kind of just without even thinking about it.

I'd soak out beans, and there would always be beans to eat if there was nothing else. So I called George the next day and I said, "Well, it will probably be something to do with beans, because I discovered I have quite a bit of knowledge about that legume."

So I made a book called *A Bean Concordance* [1983], which is various information about proverbs and songs—and you're welcome to take a book. I have a whole pile of them down there. They've run out of them at Printed Matter, and it's very strange that these books seem to go along.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me see what date it was you made that, *A Bean Concordance*.

MS. KNOWLES: Print Editions, multiples, paper works.

MS. RICHARDS: And it was in about the mid-'60s that you came up with that initial thought about beans?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I had also been, since the mid-'60s, doing a—shaking these beans in—my daughters had a tambourine, which I'd use and it seemed to have something like beans in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: But then I made—there's a certain kind of cake that you make with a rigid circular—when you pour the batter in and then you flop it out.

So I lined that with paper and I could shake the beans in that. I had several drums. They are over on the wall there.

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

MS. KNOWLES: It was just part of my reading, was to be doing something as long as I had four or five types of beans right up there when I was reading, and they make different sounds in the flax paper. But I didn't at that point know much about flax.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah, how did that come—

MS. KNOWLES: But I was working with a friend, Amanda Degener, in Minneapolis.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

MS. KNOWLES: D-E-G-E-N-E-R. She was kind enough to give me some teaching engagements at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, I guess it was. And so either I met Helmut Becker there, or I met him—I'm sure I met him through Coco Gordon. Coco Gordon was the first person who taught me about paper.

She was down here on Duane Street and she also wanted to be a performer. I think she's doing all those things in California now. I hope so. But we made some wonderful sheets of paper, sometimes flax, sometimes out of different types of paper, and I could throw the beans into them, into the paper. And they'd—lentils would stick. So now I just give these away as a matter of course.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. KNOWLES: That just has a couple of lentils. But I make lentil papers for people and lentil paper books.

MS. RICHARDS: What is this paper made of?

MS. KNOWLES: Flax, yeah, and flax is a—inside of the stem of a flax weed or whatever is this fuzzy stuff that you cull out and you beat up in a beater with water, and it makes a paste, and the paste makes a paper when it dries. So something like this is pressed many times. It's poured out and then water is drained out, and then it's put into a press to make it flat.

MS. RICHARDS: And it's a particularly durable paper?

MS. KNOWLES: Very durable. It's really hard to tear it.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you immediately realize—

MS. KNOWLES: That's flax, too.

MS. RICHARDS: —this was going to be an incredibly important material for you?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I just—it was the next thing I was doing with a friend and I knew I could use it. I didn't progress that way with goals, this was going to be the big thing. She was just a friend who had a studio down on Duane Street and just like my friend Eugenie Barron.

MS. RICHARDS: Who is that?

MS. KNOWLES: E-U-G-E-N-I-E B-A-R-R-O-N, and she's in Durham, upstate, Durham, New York. Coco Gordon's on Duane Street in New York, and Amanda Degener was in Minneapolis, and suddenly I'm making paper with these people in various cities. Amanda made this one here about a year ago. That's flax, and it's a page, and that's a page. But it was too much work to ship them to Potsdam. So I left them here.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about the piece you did called [*A*] *House of Dust,* [a] poem, which was done in collaboration. I know something about it, but I wanted you to describe the evolution of that piece. That was in '67.

MS. KNOWLES: That seems to be of great interest right now. There's at least one book that [is] being worked on. It's one of the—if not the initial computer poem that I conceived of in a class with Jim Tenney.

MS. RICHARDS: What kind of class was it?

MS. KNOWLES: Jim Tenney—this is in 22nd Street, was—is, was, I'm sorry—a composer, who was not in the Cage class, but surely should have been, could have been, a wonderful composer. And he worked in electronics at the Bell Labs, got a grant or a commission, and he was doing music at the Bell Labs.

He was a very generous [person] and a person very interested in what people were thinking. He would invite people to come and see him at the computers—at the Bell Labs, which were the size of that couch, huge computers, FORTRAN. So we decided, Dick and I, to have a class on Thursday nights for people who were interested in listening to a little talk by an interesting person.

We had this salon room with a couple of pillars, which was in an old house, and it was just very nice to have people come and sit and listen to an intelligent talk. So Jim proposed that he would give a talk on FORTRAN, and so he gave the talk. Nam June Paik was there and some other people, Philip Corner.

MS. RICHARDS: Philip Corner, you said?

MS. KNOWLES: And so Paik came up with an interesting conception for what to do with a computer. But I came up with a random-cycle printout that had to do with three different elements. One was a house; what was the house made of? Have you seen the poem? How was the house lighted? Where was it, and who was living in it?

So you'd have *A House of Dust* in the country lighted by natural light, inhabited by people who wear red clothing all the time. You could have a house of broken dishes in Michigan, lighted by natural light, inhabited by fish and monkeys. I had these categories that were sort of endless.

And Jim took it to the lab and he printed out the first edition of the *House of Dust*, which I then took over to the Gebr. König Verlag in Cologne.

MS. RICHARDS: To where?

MS. KNOWLES: G-E-B-R. K-O—well, either umlaut or E-N-I-G [König]. *Verlag* means "patience" [publishing house].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: V-E-R-L-A-G. They made a formal edition of hundreds of pages, and they bound it into a plastic sleeve and screen-printed *AHouse of Dust* on it and started selling it out of what then was my gallery in Cologne. Gerb. König Verlag was really right next door.

So it proved to be something people liked very much because it had to do with this amazing electronics revolution, and it also is a wonderful poem, easy to read, and certainly had randomizations that I never dreamed of.

I'm working on another with Cornelia Lauf of Three Star Books, and I'm right now with someone named Rikrit Tiravanija.

MS. RICHARDS: Tiravanija.

MS. KNOWLES: He's working with setting of this in some interesting type, Fibonacci [sequence].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So that's going to be published as a book, I'd say in the next year or so. But again, I like the three categories. But this is not a house, and it's a situation that people get involved with and what the weather is. It's got different categories, but it will be staggered down just like the *House of Dust*. And that's—I'm very pleased that Cornelia Lauf wants to do this. I think she's in Switzerland.

MS. RICHARDS: You also did a sound installation for the *House of Dust*, right?

MS. KNOWLES: So then when I won the Guggenheim for the *House of Dust*, I could build one, and that's when I took a job at CalArts.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had a plan to build it. You applied for the Guggenheim?

MS. KNOWLES: No, I got a Guggenheim for the poem. I think John Cage said he could put that through for me. And so when I got the $10,000 or whatever it was, $12,000, I had already agreed to teach at CalArts. So now we're up to—

MS. RICHARDS: [Nineteen] Seventy.

MS. KNOWLES: Seventy, and so I said, "Well, I'll come on the condition that I can build *A House of Dust*," and Allan Kaprow said, "Fine, sounds good to me." He had no idea. [Laughs.] And Paul Brach should be credited because he gave me access to the land.

MS. RICHARDS: So this was a piece you were building outdoors. Was it always in your mind that it would be built outdoors?

MS. KNOWLES: No. I actually got—before I got the Guggenheim, I had started and I tried to build it out in the—in an apartment, South End Apartments I guess they were called, on Eighth Avenue and 23rd Street.

There's a complex of apartments, and I met a Mr. Margulies. I just walked into the office and said, "I'm an artist," and I wanted to make an installation on his land. I could show him some ideas, and it just happened to be someone who loved that idea.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember his first name?

MS. KNOWLES: What?

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember his first name, Margulies?

MS. KNOWLES: No. He died the next day. So all I had was his promise and some plans that he had sketched out on the desk. He died of a heart attack. So I told the secretary who managed these buildings that this was based on a poem, and I handed out the poem. And they handed the poem out to the people in the co-op, who happened to be of Greek origin and very conservative people.

And I said, "I'm going to arrive with castings I've made in Philadelphia in a furniture factory, and I'm going to build it on the land here. It will be generally an amoeboid form and I'm going to spray it with fiberglass, and

there will be found objects in it."

Meanwhile people, the Greeks in the co-op decided I was mad, and they no longer had Margulies to speak with them, and they didn't wish to speak to me. So they began to picket around the little plot of land that I had that they would have to look down on.

And it never should have been managed this way. I should have had sketches and talked to them, given them a few lectures on what I was interested in and how I loved Chelsea and I was around. But none of that worked out. I just had to forge ahead, because I planned to get it done before I went to California.

So I got the structure up and then they arsoned it [1968]. They burned it down. It was a five-alarm fire. At 4:00 a.m. somebody called me up and said, "You better get the hell over here because your *House of Dust* is burning to the ground," and all I had was the wooden straights on it.

But I had started to put on the—it was actually fiberglass with dust thrown in it. It looked like rock, a very handsome surface. So I just packed up the idea and I went to California.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you go to California with the twins and with Dick?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: All of you went.

MS. KNOWLES: What?

MS. RICHARDS: All of you went?

MS. KNOWLES: We all went, but he was going to be teaching a class in publishing. He was perfectly miserable with that. But he held on for a couple of years. He didn't seem to relate to the whole idea of CalArts and its experimental thrust.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you all live in Valencia near CalArts?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, we lived in Valencia, up in the hills. I was in the hills in a commune, and Dick—

MS. RICHARDS: In a commune?

MS. KNOWLES: In a commune.

MS. RICHARDS: With the girls?

MS. KNOWLES: No, the girls were with Dick somewhere in Valencia. It was about a 20-minute drive, and I would go in a pickup every weekend.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did you do that? Why did you live in the commune?

MS. KNOWLES: I just needed away from the marriage at that point. So I took up with someone named Pieter van Ryberg, who was my assistant in the graphics lab, and Simone Forte and Barbara Mayfield and Richard Teitelbaum.

We just started a co-op up in an orange—we rented an abandoned orange grove up in Valencia, which had little cabins and a main house. I've never had such an extraordinary few years in my life, just amazing. I'd jump into my blue Toyota Land Cruiser and would drive down to CalArts, work on the *House of Dust* with students, who were crazy about it, build it, put down the remnant from Chelsea on the ground, and started to work on it again.

MS. RICHARDS: Why did your time there end? You left CalArts.

MS. KNOWLES: Two years. Dick left. He hated it, and he left and took the girls with him, and I held out for another year. I realized if I was going to get this all together again, meaning my marriage, I'd better get out of here. But it was such a wonderful experience. I got to really know Simone Forte, who I'd known here in New York somewhat, but I was able to do one of these projection pieces with her as a dancer, projecting over her body [using an opaque projector].

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And Jim Tenney would play music, [Charles] Ives. Piano music at that time was rather frowned upon. But he had students and he taught piano and he taught electronic music.

MS. RICHARDS: Was Carolee Schneemann there?

MS. KNOWLES: No.

MS. RICHARDS: No, but you knew her from in New York when you knew James?

MS. KNOWLES: I knew Carolee. I went to some of her early performances, and we were acquaintances. We've gotten to be better friends as time goes on. But she wanted to be involved in the Fluxus group and that didn't work well. So I think it wedged us apart a little bit, but we never saw each other regularly anyway. We were just all doing our work.

So CalArts provided this amazing possibility for all kinds of experimental work, all kinds—[Morton] Subotnick with his computers and Richard Teitelbaum, who was doing very interesting things musically, Jim, who was a leader of the pack, for me, in terms of music.

The art department was a little less interesting once I got there because all I wanted to do was the *House of Dust,* but I did have students and we did work on the *House of Dust*. The other factor there was the Womanshouse with Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And so that was very interesting to the young women students, very important for them, I think. And, oh, there was a design department. There was an animation department; just amazing what went on in that school, and so heavily funded. I bought a graphic arts camera to fill this room, just project huge images, and Disney just picked up the tab for the whole base of the school.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But this was Roy, who was the head of the—and then he I think began to think back on the whole thing. People began to leave, and there was some kind of scandal involving some students and quite a bit of dope. But it had a great flowering, I'd say, after five or six years, and it's still a good school. But it's calmed down a lot.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So I put *AHouse of Dust* up there at CalArts and it lasted for at least—oh, until the late '80s, I believe. There was an earthquake and it split apart, and they had to cart it away. But it was initially in—there were two. There's a large house and a small house.

But the small house endured for years at CalArts. It's a great outdoor source of poetry, and people could sleep out there inside the house. There was a way you could watch the dawn through the skylight. It was just lovely. I'm very pleased that I could actually finally get it built, get one built, because usually that, for me, is important, if there's an idea I think is worthwhile, that it gets done.

MS. RICHARDS: There were two pieces that you did that seem significant before then. There's *The Big Book* and then there's also *Identical Lunch* [1969]. They're both important pieces.

MS. KNOWLES: We're going to go on for 10 more minutes, right?

MS. RICHARDS: Actually, we only have about five right now.

MS. KNOWLES: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: You can't do either of these in five minutes, I'm afraid. [Laughs.]

MS. KNOWLES: [Laughs.] No, I do find that both of those pieces have really picked up in the last little while, and I'd like to begin talking about those tomorrow.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure. Okay, that would be perfect.

MS. KNOWLES: All right? Very good.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, absolutely.

[END CD3.]

MS. RICHARDS: [In progress]—because you didn't feel you had enough for them to show and sell?

MS. KNOWLES: I don't know, I guess I didn't fit into the scene here. I was an underground figure with these Fluxus people. The concept is maybe I was wasting my time with these people.

MS. RICHARDS: You mean the dealer will think you—

MS. KNOWLES: I was prancing all over Europe when I should have been home painting, but I didn't want to paint anymore. I felt that Gottlieb's support and—[inaudible]—those days were over, and certainly with Dick supporting my work and publishing my books, I had an occasion which most people don't; they have to send manuscripts around.

So I was doing these simple books and performing these pieces like *Newspaper Music* and *The Tape*. So they began to pick up that I was getting invitations to go places to do these Event Score pieces, which students or—

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get connected with the Emily Harvey Gallery? You started showing there in the '70s.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, right. Emily Harvey came to town and rented space—not there at first. She was working for a greeting card company, but she was pretty well-to-do. Her father had died and her mother lived in Connecticut, and she decided she wanted to run an art gallery—open an art gallery—and give up the greeting card business. And just how she found that space, I'm not sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was the space?

MS. KNOWLES: Five Thirty-Seven Broadway. And she started by renting the whole space, and she kept—she kept the whole space, which—I don't know; it's big enough. You see, the divisions of the spaces are such that artists would stay in the back by the windows. There's a little john and kitchen and a walk-up spiral—a spiral staircase to a bed. I just don't have that situation here. I wish I did. I would like to.

I feel very sorry about people I have to turn away who want to come to New York because it's a—there's just one facility. So I'm very careful who stays here. If I'm away or just in and out, that's fine. And so, in the summer, I'll just be in and out here.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had several shows at Emily Harvey.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: What was the arrangement? If you sold something, was there a percentage that went to the gallery?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, certainly, but—

MS. RICHARDS: So, it operated as a for-profit gallery?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. Yes. It's now nonprofit, but if she sold something, it would be divided. It was very loosely arranged. I was doing, at that time, silk screen and cyanotype still. I had a show called *Seven Indian Moons* [1990]. There's one piece over there. I took the forms of bread and—well, actually, that's *Bread and Water* [1995], but it's a similar image to the Indian Moon pieces, which were quite literary. I researched the different tribes, from the Navajos to the Kwakiutls. I knew those tribes and their habits, and I silk-screened that onto a panel with some of their artifacts and—

MS. RICHARDS: That's in 1990.

MS. KNOWLES: —and sound—some of their sound-making instruments, which may have led me to the bean-turners, which I don't think I've shown you yet. But I've just had a call from somebody, Malcolm Goldstein, and he came down to the installation. I had some woods and trees on his land in Vermont that he sounded. He's a violinist. So making my first sound installations, in a way based on these different tribes. So you could walk to see a panel hanging, some stones, perhaps some of the cooking equipment, and the sound-makers. And there were some places to sit down, activate this, if you wanted to.

MS. RICHARDS: You were never tempted to create scores for the sound pieces? As far as I know, the sound pieces were objects that made sounds if you move them, but one could create instructions or a score to have people move them in a certain way.

MS. KNOWLES: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever do that?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, I did. I had scores within the installations, what to pick up and have to move something to make sound.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you ever consider yourself a musical composer in that sense?

MS. KNOWLES: I was kind of moving into that place a little bit at that time, and attending Phill Niblock's evenings. Phill Niblock is over on Lafayette Street—rather, Center Street. And he carries on wonderful musical events—about 30, 40 years. It's a situation like this, with chairs. Then he invites people to do—he has a complete electronics studio there, too. But I did several evenings there at his music space.

MS. RICHARDS: Around the time, in the early '80s, you did something—I think that's when it began—the loose paper sculpture.

MS. KNOWLES: *Loose Pages* [1983].

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, yes, *Loose Pages*.

MS. KNOWLES: Well, they were paper—

[Cross talk.]

—but I try to link to books and pages with most of what I do.

MS. RICHARDS: —and some performances with those, where those pages went on the body.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: How did that idea come about, those *Loose Pages* works? What were you thinking was the goal of that?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think that I had named papers for books, art books, and put them into boxes, or had these papers to be read, stamped or—and it just occurred to me that the sound was so extraordinary that I could make a dress, could make something to put onto the body.

So, I first made some of those pieces, some of those papers, with Coco Gordon; I mentioned her before. And then I started making—all these papermakers, I'd drop in on them when I had an idea. So I would go out to Amanda Degener and do pages that could be shaken or sounded in some way and—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Is that because you put two pieces of paper together, open in the middle, and put the beans to make the sound?

MS. KNOWLES: That's a bean-turner, right, but the work I'm putting in Potsdam, some of these—these are single pages that you get the sound just from paper itself. The bean-turners are—oh, I just had this marvelous memory that this man in Berlin is bringing a bean-turner I left in his gallery last year to my show in Potsdam, so I'll get it back. How honest of him to say that I'd forgotten to—What should he do? Should he send it? Well, the bean-turners are hard to make and they're expensive to make. But anyway—

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about the *Loose Pages.*

MS. KNOWLES: The *Loose Pages*. So I think, first, I just made the arm. The paper was laid down with a piece of plastic, and then another piece of paper was poured on and it was pressed, and then the plastic was taken out, so you had a space to put your arm in. And I discovered that, like shaking the beans, that that aspect of performing with something made my talking much more interesting, that I could pause, and the wonderful cracking sound of the flax woke everybody up.

Then I made another one, and this one was like a wing that went way up over my head. And then I believe that the lentil legs, which are orange—this color, actually not a natural color, but they're bright—were bright orange with the lentils all down the legs. I fooled around with a vest, but the arms and the legs and the hat were what I perform now as *Loose Pages*, those elements—the hat—

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever use amplification?

MS. KNOWLES: Sometimes, but usually it's simply not needed. When I go into a hall, if the manager will say, you know, the amplification is terrible in here; I don't know what to tell you, but we can set up a microphone. So then he'll do that. It's a little awkward because once I'm dressing the figure, somehow the microphone is over

here, or I have to pick it up, and I can't do that and dress the figure.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about instances where someone else is wearing the *Loose Pages*.

MS. KNOWLES: When someone else is wearing—which is what happened after a few years of doing it myself. I discovered that it was a better identity for me to be the sculptor of a figure than to be the sculptor and the figure.

So then the shoes are the last thing. I forgot that. The shoes are just flat pieces of paper that you stick your toes into and scrub along the floor, and they're connected with two strings, the way a child's—I don't know where I got that image of the strings to connect the two slippers—so you can only step so far. It's mechanical.

One of the reasons I changed to my dressing the figure is because the figure becomes, without any identity or action of their own, so any movement is what I do. I lift the arm. I turn the head. I put on the hat. I change the hat to another hat. It's a passive robot creature.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think of it as a puppet as well?

MS. KNOWLES: A puppet or robot is moved by the sculptor or the artist. It's like moving your own work, I guess you would say.

The exit for the piece is very nice because it starts in a portfolio, where I take the papers and dress the figure, who, hopefully, is up on a podium like that. We're going to do a recording of the piece here next week just before I go—a sound recording.

Initially part of the piece was a T-shirt with all the ingredients of the paper [written on it] and how it was made—pressed six times—abaca, hand-dried, the different—the lentil legs. And once I had that T-shirt on, I could read it from the figure or hold it up and read it to the audience. For some reason, that part of it, unless I have 15 minutes, I haven't done the reading of the T-shirt, but I like to read the ingredients.

So the figure, once it's dressed, the difficulty is to get those shoes down on either the steps from the stage or—I have to do that myself. I have to move those feet of the robot, you see, one after the other. I've had a lot of people enjoy very much that—I usually use my daughter Jessica, and there's some aspect of caring for her movement, caring for her performance, that people get. They get it. I don't announce her as my daughter, but they get that.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it end by your putting the pieces back into the box?

MS. KNOWLES: No, the exit is either down whatever floor we have in the hall or the theater, down the aisle, with the sound of the scraping.

MS. RICHARDS: This reminds me of the early piece called *Shuffle* [1961].

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, *Shuffle* is quite—it certainly has that aspect of going, usually, up to the stage with—

MS. RICHARDS: —with a kind of walking.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. Yes, to sound the floor or sound the rug. You're absolutely right. So the flax makes a great sound, and then people can all turn around and watch us go out, and then they wave or they clap, and I take the pieces off.

MS. RICHARDS: Have people talked to you about making editions of those pieces and selling them as something people could perform themselves? You know the Brazilian [Hélio] Oiticica who made cloth pieces that audiences would put on? Has anyone talked to you about that?

MS. KNOWLES: No. It's costly to make these pages, and they have a shelf life. Once they're used two or three times, they don't crack[le] anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: They become soft, like tissue paper. It's very fine paper and yet it only has that brilliance—

MS. RICHARDS: Can you recycle them in any way?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah. Yeah, I could do that if I wanted to make editions of them and have the audience do that also.

MS. RICHARDS: So once they've been broken in, once you've used them, they can't be used for that anymore?

MS. KNOWLES: I use them, but it's very different. It's a very soft—it's very soft. I don't know how else to describe it. Then it's nice to have a microphone, because then it's like touching silk.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And then it has—it's very limp; whereas, when it's brand new, it will stand right here on the floor.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But I did make four, an edition of four, and I did sell them in Germany—one to my dear collector friend Hermann Braun in Remshid [ph], who supported my work for years.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that Brown just spelled Brown?

MS. KNOWLES: B-R-A-U-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, Braun.

MS. KNOWLES: And Walter Schnepel is a collector in Cologne.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, what was his last name?

MS. KNOWLES: S-C-H-N-E-P-E-L. He has a piece called *Bean and Barley*, which I really would love to see again. It's a large panel and has bean and barley embedded in it, but it also has silk screen and numbers in it as well.

I'm always working on these soft things, so I can roll up and carry on my back. This is the first time I've sent a show over to Potsdam. I decided not to carry it.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, they must have had the funds to help you pay for that.

MS. KNOWLES: Well, they will, I'm sure.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you some questions about making the work and your methods. Talking about *TheBig Book,* or any of the other pieces that have multiple parts, do you start by making preliminary sketches? Do you keep a sketchbook, a notebook? How do you document your ideas as they're evolving?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, *TheBig Book*, I was working with Masami Kodama, who had only broken English. So I did have models and drawings for him. I made these little circular models of the pages so that he could cut them up, make them in his shop on Canal Street, and walk them up to the 22nd Street house.

But then I decided I wanted to have a pipe page—it was really quite effective, like the plumbing pipes with the elbow, and it would go down and then the feet would be there. It had a part of a chicken-wire screen on it. So it wasn't just lovely materials; it was actually quite raw and, I'd say, materials that were more used in the making of—more machinery-like.

MS. RICHARDS: Before you got to the point of making the sketches for him, what about drawing [for] yourself, just to develop the ideas, as you were thinking about the piece—

[Cross talk.]

MS. KNOWLES: Well, even after I got to that point to put the pages together, I certainly—I think more than most artists, I kind of work through the end product, not with a lot of drawings and preparation, but step by step, to do this page, and then I'll do the next page. When I saw what that page was like—speaking of *TheBig Book*—or something like these pages may eventually go into some book structure, because this one will reflect on that one, and that one will help make the next one. That's really the idea.

MS. RICHARDS: So the work evolves as it goes along. You don't start with a preconceived idea of the whole.

MS. KNOWLES: No, I don't.

MS. RICHARDS: And have you kept sketchbooks or diaries or notebooks?

MS. KNOWLES: I have all—I have a book over there called *Footnotes* [2001].

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I know you published that, yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And that's about, well, about 15 traveling diaries. I just tore the pages off and gave them to Steve Clay.

MS. RICHARDS: I saw that. That's wonderful. It's about 20 years of those.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, a lot of books. I have another one going right now. I think they were more interesting years ago than they are now, where I find the last one from two years ago; it's mostly just names and addresses and emails.

MS. RICHARDS: Less poetry.

Talking about the works that include sound objects, what have you thought about when you're picking these objects up? What qualities come to mind? What connections are you looking for?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I sort of pick them up thoughtlessly and put them in my pocket or in a bag, and then when I get them home and put them on that table, or put them here, then I'll think—something will occur to me that is interesting about—most of the objects were rolled flat by truck wheels on Greene Street; it was a manufacturing street. And so they would stick a little bit in the tire until I could pick them up.

MS. RICHARDS: So they used to be three-dimensional and they have become two-dimensional.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, by trucks.

MS. RICHARDS: Was it partly that transformation that intrigued you?

MS. KNOWLES: Definitely. Definitely; that they had gone from something being useful to being utterly useless. And so they then were in a place where—when something is useless, then you can attach all kinds of things to it, such as, oh, I don't know, different kinds of—it's outside the world. It's not useful anymore, so it has a certain quality of distance, and, I would say, it has another kind of beauty; if it has any beauty, it has the beauty of something useless.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you look for things or end up keeping things—

MS. KNOWLES: No, I—

MS. RICHARDS: —because of their formal quality—the color, the shape?

MS. KNOWLES: I actually picked them up for so many different reasons—very spontaneously on my way to lunch, probably.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you still do that?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, Greene Street doesn't allow for that anymore. It's all paved over. You don't see anything on Greene Street anymore. It's closed off in front of clothing stores.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you find things in other places, not just Greene Street?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yeah, I would pick up some things on Mercer, I think, and on Canal.

MS. RICHARDS: Never in the country?

MS. KNOWLES: Canal Street is also very—

MS. RICHARDS: Never in Europe?

MS. KNOWLES: Sometimes, if I was struck by something, but I didn't really think about that. I never stood there and said, Do I like the shape and—is that an interesting color, or —I kind of just—I call them "pocket-warmers." I wanted something in my pocket to look at later. I did a show in Copenhagen of "pocket-warmers," bought lots of little tiny bags.

All of us were given these kind of cubicles to put our artwork, like shelves. This was in Roskilde in Denmark. It was called *The Fantastics*. And I made pocket-warmers. People could take them away. I had a whole basket of them.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, people would take them. About what portion of the things you picked up and put in your pocket did you end up deciding to discard, that didn't quite evolve into something?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I think actually I used most of them, because I was doing screen-printing by then, going on

with the cyanotype prints, which are sunlight prints, where you put a coat—you coat a surface with [photographic emulsion]—paper or cloth—you put your object on it, and you expose it and then wash it out, and you have a print—a negative print. And if you want a positive print, then I go to silk-screen, you see, and be able to print the positive over the negative and get a layering.

I just sent off to Potsdam a panel that was on the wall here. It has 12 objects in it, and I'm really hoping that I don't sell it because I realize they're my finest; they're my finest pieces.

MS. RICHARDS: Put a high price on it.

MS. KNOWLES: That's what I'm going to do, but I'd like to show it at James Fuentes next year. It's almost 300 meters—300 cm, centimeters, so about three meters long.

MS. RICHARDS: Or can you simply say it's not for sale?

MS. KNOWLES: I can, but I hate to do that, because I have other things that are not for sale. It's kind of like, I know I can put things together satisfactorily for James, but I'm very fond of having a good show for James. He's offered me, more or less, a retrospective—whatever I wanted.

MS. RICHARDS: That's James who?

MS. KNOWLES: F-U-E-N-T-E-S. And he's looking around, I hope, on the Lower East Side to make his gallery. It's been right off Chinatown, a space about like this—charming gallery, really nice—young people. I have no idea how he ran into me, but anyway he's getting a new gallery and it will be much larger, and I would like to have a very full show.

MS. RICHARDS: You did a show with Miguel Abrau.

MS. KNOWLES: Miguel Abrau—wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: Why wouldn't you be still having shows with him instead?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I would like to; I just want to support James in his opening show, but I'm sure I'll show with Miguel again. I'm very fond of him. He's a wonderful dealer, and he actually bought a large work for himself. He liked these—I call it *Event Threads*, where the object—now, that red piece is from Canal Street. So there are some things that are still—it's rather a nice one.

And then this one is from the beach in East Hampton, where I go to visit my brother. All the others have gone to Potsdam. The other four we wrapped up with—

MS. RICHARDS: What's the institution in Potsdam that's presenting the exhibition?

MS. KNOWLES: It's called Fluxus + Museum. It's just the word "Fluxus" and then a tiny "plus Museum." And that's—the Fluxus + Museum in Potsdam is run by Heinrich Liman.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm sorry, what was his last name?

MS. KNOWLES: L-I-M-A-N. He's the one who gutted the factories and made a museum for himself, to have a different—

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yeah, you told me he was retiring.

I wanted to ask you about the relationship in your practice of all the different mediums you use—the sound, the objects, the papermaking, the printmaking, the sculpture—all those. Does one of those activities usually come before another? How do you orchestrate all those activities?

MS. KNOWLES: Well—

MS. RICHARDS: Or is it completely random?

MS. KNOWLES: No, it really has to do, part of it, with what I'm offered in terms of a coworker and a space to work in, because I find that it's much easier, for these large pieces, to have someone working with me—one or two people—to get something done.

Now, I suppose also I would say that if I have a direction of a show in Potsdam, which I do, I would think of larger pieces, because it's a huge space—although I'm not sending these. I can't do that. But it depends on a lot of happenstance materials such as—

MS. RICHARDS: So, external forces?

MS. KNOWLES: Very definitely.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that true in the ’70s and ’80s and ’90s as well?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, maybe the concept of being an artist is different now than it was then. When I was growing up, even in my family, and when I got to art school and began to do my own work, I never had to make a choice. I had a [inaudible], perhaps, but if I picked up things from the street, that would lead me to do the street work with those objects, or—

MS. RICHARDS: So—

MS. KNOWLES: —if Jim Tenney walked in and said he had a sound studio to work in—at Bell Labs—did I have an idea for a computer poem, you see? So it was very much fed from the outside.

MS. RICHARDS: So, each thing would lead to something else. Did you find—

MS. KNOWLES: Only now do I see that it makes any sense at all.

MS. RICHARDS: In all the years when you were doing prints and making works with the objects, and also traveling to present performances, did you feel that those travels were an interruption, or did they, in fact, inspire you to other work?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, it’s the only place that I could possibly sell something. You don’t sell work in New York City in the 1960s. At least I never did.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that true in the succeeding decades as well, that you needed to go to Europe?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, I would go there because, with the Fluxus performances, I would meet people who—like Walter Schnepel or Hermann Braun—who would buy a work.

MS. RICHARDS: An object—two or three—

MS. KNOWLES: A panel—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: They would see something in, say, the gallery of Renate Fassbender. I had a show in Hamburg with Renate Fassbender. Or there was Birgita Sein Soth—S-O-T-H—in Cologne. So I had shows in Europe. And, actually, in terms of being in good faith with the artist, a dealer is supposed to buy a work or want a work.

That’s why I really appreciate the international quality of Miguel Abrau. If he likes a show, he likes an artist, he buys her work. And it was so with Brigita Sein Soth in Cologne. She and Udo, her husband, I think they bought a small work, but they did all the shipping, or something like that. There’s a financial obligation, which I find—that Emily tried to live up to. Emily Harvey bought a piece called the *Finger Book* [1982]. I made three *Finger Book*s, and Emily bought one, and Hermann Braun—

MS. RICHARDS: Hermann Braun, yes, you mentioned him.

MS. KNOWLES: And this is for the blind, where it has the description of—the poems of Basha [ph]– in braille. It has to be read with fingers, but then there’s a little tiny booklet for those of us who are sighted that tells you what each page has in English. And I made one—I made a little booklet in French because I show work in France as well.

The *Finger Book* got around, too. It closed up—if you took the pages, again like *TheBig Book* that came off the spine—and in this case they were 11 inches long and they fit into the carrying case, which became the base for the book.

MS. RICHARDS: What gave you the idea to do a work with braille?

MS. KNOWLES: I had a very interesting exchange with the Lighthouse for the Blind. I gave a talk there about my work; I don’t remember how that happened, but I was giving a talk at the Lighthouse, but I was very impressed, especially with this one young woman—in a torn, dirty T-shirt. She couldn’t control her saliva. Her eyes were open and she was totally blind.

She was so excited by the concept of a book for the blind that I invited her down here. And she went through it

with her fingers. I have an incredible videotape of—I think her name is Maya. And you see her head looking through the pages with these large—

MS. RICHARDS: Very moving.

MS. KNOWLES: Very moving. So she was reading it in this sort of garbled—while she was excitedly reading the page, so you see her hands going over it like this. And I remember that she had this cat that she brought with her. The cat was just this threadbare street creature. Anyway, I profited a lot from knowing this woman.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you learn—

MS. KNOWLES: That it was an—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you get any other feedback from the blind about their appreciation of this book?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, definitely—letter, I got a braille letter. I got—I forget just what.

So there was *TheBig Book,* and there was the book—*Finger Book,* I called it. And there was *The Book of Bean*, and that's quite a nice tape also. It shows my daughter Jessica going through the book. She has these wonderful long fingers, and she's touching the Astroturf, and she's opening up the gauze panel to see the print underneath it.

It's all these layerings I'm interested in. I don't want people to just stand there and look at something. I want them to do something with it.

MS. RICHARDS: And the books, as you said, are evolving intuitively from one part to the next.

MS. KNOWLES: Well, it's hard to say that it's really intuitive. It's thoughtful. For instance, in Potsdam, I had to order these doors, and I just heard that there are six of them waiting for me, but they've attached them all, like the rollout style. But I figure it's easier just to go there and undo the pins and make them separate.

But then I'll have to make them some bridges to stand on, and it's going to be—if I had been able to do drawings, exact drawings, for the carpenter, I wouldn't be where I am now, which is that I have four days to put together a very large installation. And again, I wasn't sure what the hangings would be looking like. I thought I would be taking these, but I decided, no, they're too large for the door shape.

But I've always had a lot of help. It's like I have the concept and I work alone, but I have helpers—I have helpers just coming from nowhere. Meghan DellaCrosse comes tomorrow, and she's a wonderful art historian at NYU. And she just came to a lecture and—

MS. RICHARDS: —volunteered.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Her name is Meghan Dellacrosse?

MS. KNOWLES: M-E-G-H-A-N, and the second name is capital D-E-L-L-A-C-R-O-S-S-E. She's very bright with the machine. My daughter—

MS. RICHARDS: The computer.

MS. KNOWLES: But she also has a lot of ideas about art. I don't know if she'll be an artist, but she's smart and aggressive with me if she has an idea.

MS. RICHARDS: As you're developing the pieces—

MS. KNOWLES: I'm developing as much from what other people are doing or saying back to me, actually, as I am in terms of not being goal-oriented. It's like I just shuffle along.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you ever get to the point where you think something is just not working and you're going to just give up?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, if I don't finish a panel—I threw one away the other day, a cloth cyanotype panel. I showed it once and I tried to—you know that with cyanotype, you can bleach out the blue and dip it into tea, and it becomes brown; the images, the objects pick up a brown tint. I remember struggling with this and finally threw it away. And I usually know pretty much when it's done if I can save it. I have no trouble throwing things away.

MS. RICHARDS: As we learned yesterday with the bonfires. [They laugh.] Do you tend to work on one thing at a time, or do you have multiple things in progress at once?

MS. KNOWLES: I usually have a number of things going. For instance, while I'm going away to Potsdam and Poland—there will be these things going on to try to get the studio together upstate, plus things going on to get that man out of my studio and all his—

MS. RICHARDS: You have a tenant there now?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah. And all that will be working, to have a clean studio with a storage barn. My car will be back in the garage upstate. This space—Kenji Kuratani will have built the doors for my studio. He will have repaired the sink top, which is all stained and broken. I'd say I have pretty much a lot of things going on.

That's what I do between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning, I lie there, paralyzed—[laughs]—with, Where I shall begin?

MS. RICHARDS: Do you think of humor as being part of your work? There's a lovely lightness to some things, but I'm not sure if you would define it as humor or not.

MS. KNOWLES: I like "lightness" better. It's not really funny, like a joke.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But it's not heavy like a steel sculpture either, definitely. And also, if something is destroyed or something happens to a work, I don't find that it disturbs me as much as most people.

I was working with my dear Taketo, my assistant, and we had just printed out—and I won't give you my schedule—and suddenly it was he or I knocked the coffee over on everything we had just printed. And so we scrambled to see if any of it was salvageable, and it wasn't. So we both laughed. What is it? It's paper and it will be recycled.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, what's Taketo's last name?

MS. KNOWLES: Shinada—S-H-I-N-A-D-A.

MS. RICHARDS: And Taketo is T-E—

MS. KNOWLES: Taketo, T-A-K-E-T-O. He's been a faithful helper ever since he arrived at the Emily Harvey Gallery five years ago—at least five years—and he was looking for a job.

MS. RICHARDS: You were talking about destroying a piece that just didn't work, and it brought me back to a question I had for you yesterday. I was looking through the book you gave me, the compilation that Ken Friedman did of—

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, the performance book.

MS. RICHARDS: The performance book. And I was wondering, how did you apply that kind of judgment of whether something works or not to these panels you were talking—could you apply it to those scores and to other people's, and could the Fluxus group as a whole want to make those kind of judgments?

Because if you read the scores in the book, there are differences. But did that issue come up, of editing—self-editing or editing other people's work? And how did you make that kind of judgment?

MS. KNOWLES: What a complicated question. Very interesting. There are some people's work that I can't even look at when they're performing on the stage. They have no respect for the audience, or seemingly for themselves. It's kind of very casually knocked off, their time to be up there, or they're so frightened they come off as stupid or—I don't know.

I'm extremely judgmental about performance art, and I don't really like it in myself, but if it's no good, it's no good. So, usually this group of us doing some pieces, discussing the night before what we're going to do, I might find that my opinion is not solitary, that other people also find it's—it doesn't matter if it's a Fluxus work. It's either a reasonable work or it's not. These works really have subtle points, and as you say, they have a lightness, so we would have a chance to edit things out.

And if someone in the group insists on doing some kind of work that's not—it somehow just doesn't get done. So it's a democracy and things are democratically decided on, except always George Maciunas could have a little higher authority, because he would always want to do the *In Memoriam Adriano Olivetti* [1962], which is

quite a delightful piece with these strips of data paper which have numbers on them.

The performers, five of six of us on stage, choose a number, and then when our number comes in the line—it comes twice—then we lift the hat twice, or opening an umbrella. So, as a line piece, it's really beautiful—the umbrellas are going up and down; people are staring at this paper, which is winding down, and some people have their hats going up and down. Bowler hats were what he usually used.

So George did have a way to have—to make a special selection, I would say. And if someone was planning to come from that town to be in the performance and try to—well, we'd listen but wouldn't be bullied to—the son of the director or something imagines he's going to—well, fine, but what would you do, and let's look at it. Let's see what it would be like—not in rehearsal necessarily, but what is the quality of this piece? And tell us what you expect from this piece. Get the person to describe it so we could possibly do it.

People have illusions about what they do, that something's really good or it's really terrible, and you need other people to take a look at it sometimes to make a decision—they aren't doing it right; they aren't doing it correctly. But most often it would be a piece that we'd like to do. Say a young person from that school would appear to present his work to us and have us do it; well, we probably would do it. Because, in a way, it would be a compliment to us as well, that he wanted to come join us, because his theater club that voted him—you know.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. As the years passed, from the beginning of Fluxus, more artists identified themselves as Fluxus artists. I know that George had wanted to make a huge compilation, but I don't think he ever did, so Ken Friedman did that book, and I think someone else after him. But if it had been up to you to do that book that Ken did, would you have included all those artists and all those works, or would you—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I was happier just to make my Alison Knowles book, because I really don't care to be judging anyone else, even who's a little better than somebody or not. I think it's better if I just put my own things together. And there are pieces by others that I really enjoy very much and love to do, such as Emmett Williams's *You just never quite know* [1957], which is another one that will probably be in Potsdam.

I remember there was a series of four Fluxus concerts we gave in—I think it was in Los Angeles—and the same guy was sitting in the fourth row all four evenings. The first evening he just shouted out. He said, "This is idiocy! What is going on here? Let me out." And he left, and a number of other people left. The next day he's sitting in the fourth row again. Again he stands up and says, "I don't understand this. What is this?" We're doing these simple pieces with shoes or hats. We wondered, Where is his mind that he can't enjoy this? All of us, we really thought at this.

The third night he's still sitting there, and he says nothing. But the fourth night—he was a very expressive guy. He stood up and he started laughing wildly—

MS. RICHARDS: At the end?

MS. KNOWLES: —and he said, "I get it! I get it!" And he said, "It doesn't mean anything at all. It doesn't mean anything at all!" [Laughs.] He was so pleased with that idea, because he'd probably come from a world where everything has these deeper meanings, and these heavy messages in theater. He's probably been to grand opera, where people get killed. I don't know. We never saw him again. [Laughs.] "I get it!"

MS. RICHARDS: When you're working here in your studio, what are the—

[END CD4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Alison Knowles, 122 Spring Street, New York City, on June 2, 2010, for the Archives of American Art, disc five.

I was starting to ask you if there are certain elements that you always like to have in your studio when you're working, a kind of light, a kind of sound, music, silence, the atmospheric quality of the space.

MS. KNOWLES: I think I try to have the tools ready that I'm wanting to work with, with the person who has agreed to work with me. That means that the squeegees are clean and the inks are ready, or if it's been through the winter, I've had to add water to the screen inks to make them pliable and thinner so that that person—since they're usually donating time from Bard [College] or somewhere else, have to stand around and wait for me to get things ready.

But I do have a very nice working situation in the country, because there's a two-car garage that became the studio. It had a double deck in it for sleeping and then the two-car garage. I can leave my car outside. So I can work and I can cyanotype a panel. It becomes a darkroom because I've covered the one little window in the garage with a curtain.

So those things I want to be arranged. Usually it doesn't work that it's all arranged but—[laughs]—I try to. I don't do much with the telephones. That's not usually a problem. And any room that I'm working in, I don't have the computer in that room. I don't have that kind of busywork there. But this is more or less a presentation room here.

I have my books there I can show you, and I have screens and a screen door. I have prints. I have something waiting to be picked up for the MoMA show, or I have a wall to look at things. But the actual doing of work can either go on back there or in the country, which is much dirtier and a much more haphazard space because I'm not—things are in order, but they're not that clean.

MS. RICHARDS: Most of the time you're working with someone else, it sounds like.

MS. KNOWLES: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: So—

[Cross talk.]

MS. KNOWLES: Recently I am, because I've become quite forgetful. I can put down a cup of coffee and look for it for half an hour. I'm not kidding; it's pretty serious.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you want to listen to music or not—

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I often have the radio on, but then I notice that I have no idea what's been on the radio.

MS. RICHARDS: So you're really not listening.

MS. KNOWLES: I'm really not listening to it. But I do love radio. I love the news on radio, and I think it's something I grew up with in my family. We always had the radio on in the morning for the news.

MS. RICHARDS: A connection to the real world?

MS. KNOWLES: Something like that, if that's the real world.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Well, yeah—

[Cross talk.]

MS. KNOWLES: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Instead of your own selection of music, perhaps.

MS. KNOWLES: Okay, so then there is the idea that if someone's working with me—for instance, Meghan Dellacrosse will come to the country, or Taketo will come to the country, he and his wife, to—he wants to get a driving license. So it's usually something else they're up there to do. She has connections at Bard. I think she can go swimming there.

It's kind of like if they're coming up for three days, I only ask four or five hours, or four hours or so, of them, and then I always try to pay them. I had a paid assistant a few years ago. He was very successful, from Bard. But now if Taketo comes in, it will be some arrangement about the car, and in any case I don't pay people very well.

MS. RICHARDS: You're talking about the place in the country. Where is that exactly?

MS. KNOWLES: That's around the corner from Bard College. It's called Barrytown, New York.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you get the place?

MS. KNOWLES: And the name for the Bard College town is Annandale-on-Hudson. But it's about a 20-minute walk to Bard.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. How did you get the place in Barrytown?

MS. KNOWLES: We had a friend, George Quacha, who's a poet and a publisher, and he had a publishing house called Station Hill Press. So he called us in Vermont when this church became vacant, a little Catholic church, and the manse next to it and a two-car garage. Suddenly there was no longer a parsonage. There was no longer anybody.

They just closed the church down, and the Catholic church maybe opened up somewhere else. But it's a small

church that Dick Higgins could use for his library and for his Steinway piano and his piano playing and his solitudes. So, well, we put a kitchen in and a bathroom, or the bathroom was already there.

MS. RICHARDS: What year was it that you got that?

MS. KNOWLES: Okay, so I came from CalArts and he was still in Vermont. So we must be talking about ’85.

MS. RICHARDS: You came from CalArts in ’72.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, I’m saying that he was in Vermont, trying to be here back and forth.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And then we decided we’d try to get something out of the city together, where I could work, and he could have his concepts of the natural man in the country worked out. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So he could use the church. You both lived in the house and you used the garage.

MS. KNOWLES: Right. So this George Quacha called us one day and said, “The church is vacant now. There’s no more Sunday services and it’s up for sale,” and that happened. There was a small listing in the *New York Times*,and we bought it in the next two days. Don’t ask me how. [Laughs.] But it was very cheap and it had a great deal of work to be done. The furnace was gone. But we slowly put it together to be usable for us, and it had space. It had space.

MS. RICHARDS: And it’s so much closer to the city than going to Vermont.

MS. KNOWLES: That’s what turned the trick, the closeness to the city, which I had discovered I really couldn’t give up.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were talking about cyanotypes, I wanted to ask you about a wonderful project you did in 1995 called *Bread and Water*. How did that come up, using bread, almost as an alternative to beans, yes?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, well, Dick was a bread maker. Dick decided that that was part of his image with the garden, and, well, he really sort of turned against academia in a way. He felt there should be another way for an intellectual person to write and be in connection besides being in academia. Because he felt it had done him ill and not any service and he had not been properly recognized.

In fact, he always felt that way about himself. But that’s all right. There are a lot of people who just perceive their own idea of themselves, and I think he did quite well with the way he felt about himself, and was able to produce many books by his friends. The Something Else Press, there was nothing else like it in American books.

So when George called us and said this property was available, we went up and got it. And it was successful for both of us, because I could be here for four days a week, or stay up there all summer and still be connected to—there’s something about New York City. I was with this friend this morning and he has been trying to get out of New York with his wife and his baby, finally taking a place in San Francisco. He just doesn’t know how it’s going to go.

MS. RICHARDS: He’s nervous about leaving?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, and so he’s set up a lot of clients. He cuts hair as an artwork, very interesting man called Nelson, Nelson the haircutter, and he’s arranged already to come back every three weeks and serve clients here in New York City who really have to have Nelson cut their hair, right?

I felt that the solution in Barrytown wasn’t perfect, but what would be perfect? It was a quiet street. Friends could come up and stay in my shop, because we right away rented to Bard students in the manse. We used to call it "the manse," or "the parsonage."

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, you rented it for them to live in during school?

MS. KNOWLES: Whenever. We rented the bottom out, and we formed this relationship with a man named Brian McHugh, and I’ve just dedicated my book that I’ve done in Maine.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell McHugh?

MS. KNOWLES: M-C-H-U-G-H.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: Whom I probably will never see again, but in any case, he's sort of this [inaudible] relationship that we had. He was living in a tiny extension of the manse, which was just a nice little bedroom and kitchen and bathroom and a view of the woods. He would cook for us. He became very interested in publishing himself and started up something with Dick called Left Hand Books, which, of course, was perfect for Dick, because he had shut down his own press.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's what published *Bread and Water*.

MS. KNOWLES: And that's—*Bread and Water*, well, the *Bread and Water* is a series of not cyanotypes, but it's a different type of printing.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, palladium print, I think I read.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, palladium print.

MS. RICHARDS: Did he bake the breads that you used in that?

MS. KNOWLES: Dick and Brian would bake the breads.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. KNOWLES: And then I would find the rivers in them the next morning.

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: How did you come up with that, such a fascinating idea of looking at the bottom of a bread loaf and seeing rivers?

MS. KNOWLES: Because I was looking at the bottom of the bread one day.

MS. RICHARDS: And that's what came to mind?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, since I was looking at rivers, and of course, it's a global shape. So I opened the atlas and I began to compare the bread to the atlas drawings of continents and cities—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: And then you found the texts.

MS. KNOWLES: Then I'd go to the library at Bard or New York Public Library, and I'd look up the Amazon, and of course, I imagine that my father would have adored the project because I could compile facts about these rivers and then put them into these palladiums. But also Brian published a *Bread and Water* book.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So I had the book and I had the palladium prints. I sold the whole set of palladium prints to Walter Schnepel in Cologne, a huge wonderful sale. But I didn't make more than two or three copies of each of the palladiums because it's very difficult, non-silver darkroom process. And I had a wonderful helper, a woman who was very skilled in that, in making the palladiums, and again, I've lost her name.

She came to work with me in Vermont, and she also did palladiums with me here because I used to have—what is now my bedroom was a darkroom before I put the skylight in. Now that kind of work I have done inside other studios. I often don't try to do that kind of work myself.

MS. RICHARDS: As you looked at the bottom of the breads and looked at the maps and decided on which river would go with which loaf of bread, you could have picked from innumerable texts, both encyclopedic entries and poems.

MS. KNOWLES: Usually they were the encyclopedia, the complete set of *Britannica*s that my father had in Vermont and left to me. What magnificent books, the original *Britannica*. So that's where I got my *Bread and Water* texts, unless I was struck by something else I was reading, but usually—

MS. RICHARDS: There were some poems in the book, I think, or texts, yes.

MS. KNOWLES: But Brian was very exciting to work with because he, at last, wasn't working the post office, which is where we found him, at last—he was this very lively guy and one of these Irish boys from a family of 15, something like that—never had a chance.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: He just leapt into it, publishing. He did very well and learned a lot from Dick and about typesetting and paper.

MS. RICHARDS: The next year, I think it was, you had a guest professorship in Kassel [Germany] related to documenta, right? How was that experience?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, that was very interesting. A lot of my support has come from Germany, and I have no real sense of who on the board voted me in. But it's the same thing with getting the Guggenheim. Sometimes you just don't know the dynamics.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you apply?

MS. KNOWLES: No. I got a phone call, just like the Guggenheim, that they wanted me to come to Kassel and they wanted to know what dates I would like.

MS. RICHARDS: What did you teach?

MS. KNOWLES: Kassel was a graduate class, and we had a graphics lab, no camera. But we made artworks, posters, prints. There was a print lab of sorts. But there were many very exciting events that the students would do in terms of theater. I'm trying to remember.

I think we did one of the outdoor performances; yes, we did. But I found that most of the art students were not that willing to do anything except go for their degree. In other words, I wasn't able to take them really too much into performance art. But there were some wonderful things from students that came out of that class.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you enjoy teaching?

MS. KNOWLES: I'm not a teacher. I have information I think I can give people. But I think a teacher—I look at my daughter Hannah; I have such a great respect for the profession that I would never assume that I would be able to do this without the proper degrees. I don't have a B.F.A. from Pratt and that's all right.

I do inform, and I think my ideas are interesting to people who seem to arrive here. But I think if you're undertaking a class in contemporary art, you'd have to have more together than I do, and you'd have to have more real acquaintanceship with what's going on.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at CalArts you taught classes, didn't you?

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, I gave a lecture, my slide lecture. But that was studio.

MS. RICHARDS: I see. So you went to individual artists' studios and talked about their work.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, we all worked in a big studio together with lots of tables, and we had access to an art library. I also like the idea that maybe I can work with some types of people, but maybe—I know that we lost about six students out of 20.

MS. RICHARDS: At CalArts?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. No, no at—

MS. RICHARDS: —documenta in Kassel?

MS. KNOWLES: At Kassel, because they could make a choice within the first four or five days if they wanted to be here or there—and they're making up their minds about their direction.

MS. RICHARDS: About which teacher would be most beneficial for them.

MS. KNOWLES: That's right, and I was speaking English. And so also it's a reflection of how much English they had, because I was not going to be speaking German. So actually, the memory is rather good. We had a canteen and we could walk to town with little groups. I would take them outdoors into a kind of woods area to draw.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you give them specific drawing assignments?

MS. KNOWLES: Usually they had to do with things that—well, maybe they would guide themselves in that sense. I liked that, each class, we would begin with what I would call a "concentration drawing." And that was

timed at five minutes and then three minutes and then one minute.

So that whatever they were doing to do with the toothpicks and the red bear [sic], they'd know before they began that they only had five minutes. These were really—these were wonderful drawings. I did some blind drawings with them, be blindfolded and have to feel the size of the paper and work out something.

Maybe they'd be remembering the red bear and they only had two minutes, that kind of experiment. And then we'd put them all up and we'd look at them. I've done the concentration drawings also in some situation at CalArts. I forget.

But I notice my friend Marcia Hafif, who is a wonderful minimal painter here in New York, she has a drawing in which she sets the time for how long she has to make the tiny squares. You'd be surprised how interesting it is that in one hour she only got halfway down the page, and it says, "One hour, May 15, 2010." What does it mean? What does it mean? I've got it! I've got it!

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You were talking about how much support you've gotten from Germany and perhaps in Europe, shows, sales. Has that been mirrored in terms of criticism, or have you gotten equal interest in that respect from the U.S.?

MS. KNOWLES: I think I've gotten some writings from Germany, but not very much, because actually I was only in Kassel as a visiting professor.

MS. RICHARDS: I'm talking about through your whole career. Maybe a simpler question, has there been a difference between the critical response from the U.S. versus Europe?

MS. KNOWLES: I would say that in Europe it's been—the critical response has been to the Fluxus group in which I had articles which describe certain pieces that I've done, and describe the quality of the evening or the institution that invited us and why had they done such a stupid thing—or, "We hadn't seen anything like this; isn't this interesting," or kind of really pushed the reviewer to think what to do and to say.

And I think here, the single-person reviews that I've gotten to my work have been—there's one in *Art in America,* and there have been some in smaller magazine publications. But nothing huge that wasn't somehow related to Fluxus.

There is a review of the *Seven Indian Moons* show at Emily Harvey and the *Bread and Water* prints. The *Art Journal* right now has my daughter Hannah's article about her family as artists and what happened as she was growing up to this amusing family, and I think it's worth reading. It really is.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you saying that there was more attention paid to you as an individual artist—

MS. KNOWLES: Through Fluxus.

MS. RICHARDS: —here rather than through Fluxus, that there were reviews and critical attention to your work in Europe in the context of your being part of the Fluxus group.

MS. KNOWLES: The Fluxus group, right.

MS. RICHARDS: Whereas here, your work was judged on its individual—

MS. KNOWLES: The few reviews that I've had were in the *Village Voice,* by Tom Johnson; it's been as an individual artist simply because Fluxus didn't really catch on here. As I think I said, when we came back from Europe and we put on some shows, performances, down at Canal Street and our friends came.

And now that we're into the '90s and the 2000s, something has changed, and museums are looking at this work from the '60s and '70s, and they're seeing that it maybe was a basis for a lot of what's going on now. I met these curators that are these fantastic people, Gretchen Wagner, Cathy—I have four curators, is it, working on 11 prints that I did in 1967. That's a pretty long stretch.

MS. RICHARDS: More than 40 years ago.

MS. KNOWLES: And the show, which is called *Contemporary Works from the Collection,* will be up for a year at MoMA.

MS. RICHARDS: Opening this—

MS. KNOWLES: The 29th.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: I was hoping it would be a little earlier so I could get to it. But I've got a year. [Laughs.] But also the MoMA has these symposiums, and I had to turn it down, because I'm gone in late June, and they're having the next one—but this is a personal invitation from Klaus Biesenbach. Marina Abramović's show will be closed. I know that 10 or so artists will be around this table, and I'm very glad to have a chance to hear them and see them.

MS. RICHARDS: When is that taking place?

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, that is in my red book. I believe it's 22nd of June.

MS. RICHARDS: Another question about presentation of your work and critical response. Does it matter to you, talking about audiences and that man, how he reacted, does it matter to you—

MS. KNOWLES: But that's a little bit what you want from performance art.

MS. RICHARDS: Does it matter to you that people understand it? Do different kinds of readings excite you, disappoint you?

MS. KNOWLES: That's fine, yes. No, no I wouldn't be disappointed. I don't like to be hit in the face with a rotten tomato, as I was in Wiesbaden, but I don't mind at all an outright audience response, especially since you don't get it anymore. It's become a very respected tradition, Fluxus, and I guess that's what happens.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that similar to the fact that you made objects to be held and to be used, and if they're [in] a vitrine in a museum and no one can experience them, so they're kind of—

MS. KNOWLES: No, or something like—the museum has struggled to invite six people and that's quite a funding situation. Usually an individual person appears for a few times, but they're going to have three evenings, six people, in another country and bringing them from all around the place.

Museums don't have any money anymore. Most things seem to depend on individual patronage, whether it's television and radio or the stuff on WBAI that I listen to now depending on private patronage. Museums, I broach with my fee for the lunches. I plan on doing eight [sic] lunches, three weeks—three months [weeks] in January at the MoMA and two weeks in February, twice a week.

MS. RICHARDS: You are? Where is that happening?

MS. KNOWLES: In the canteen.

MS. RICHARDS: The cafeteria? I mean, café.

MS. KNOWLES: In the café.

MS. RICHARDS: What are you going to be doing?

MS. KNOWLES: I'm making the *Identical Lunch*. Chefs are making the lunch and serving it to 10 people, two of my choice. I'll certainly see if I can work for you to come.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

MS. KNOWLES: And then we'll go see the show, which is on the wall, and I felt it's very nice to do a show at the MoMA for three weeks. No, it's up for a year, 2011. But again, it's from their collection, which is based on the work of—most of the pieces that will be shown are from '57 to '76, '75, and it's this Gil Silverman who donated his collection.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. KNOWLES: I think it gave them an opportunity to have a show. It's called "selections," "contributions from the collection," or whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: So that work, the 11 [sic] lunches I have rolled up there, will be nicely framed. Of course, that was a huge dialogue with one of these lovely women—Cathy, I think. Will they be framed or will they be pinned up, because sizes are all [inaudible]—

MS. RICHARDS: And how did you make that decision?

MS. KNOWLES: I said, “You make that decision because it would really be fine for me if you just want to pin them up,” because each frame is custom. They decided to frame them.

MS. RICHARDS: They might not last if they were just hung up. They might get destroyed.

MS. KNOWLES: Possibly. That’s true. So I’m going to do those lunches, and it will be announced on the wall when you walk into the MoMA, the *Identical Lunch* with the recipe and then, of course, the fact that, as I say, you can have buttermilk or soup; it gives you a chance you for to have soup or for you to have buttermilk or nothing at all.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you tell them what kind of soup to make?

MS. KNOWLES: That’s up to them. It’s their choice.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you give them a recipe for the tuna salad?

MS. KNOWLES: I have to go in and meet them.

MS. RICHARDS: The chef?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, which one, Cathy or—

MS. RICHARDS: Or one of the curators?

MS. KNOWLES: No, Gretchen is working that date with the chefs.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you envision yourself being open to any ingredients they might have in mind, or do you feel that it should be a very traditional tuna fish salad?

MS. KNOWLES: With lettuce and butter, no mayo, and a cup of soup or a glass of buttermilk. If they’re not going to do it, you might as just well—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: So no mayo, no celery?

MS. KNOWLES: No. Well, the mayo is—but once the bread—the best sandwich is a toasted wheat bread with butter and then the lettuce, and then your tuna fish has the mayo in it.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: And so that’s the—

MS. RICHARDS: But if they want to put some other ingredients in the tuna, that wouldn’t be appropriate, right? You’re saying it should be—

MS. KNOWLES: No, it wouldn’t be appropriate.

MS. RICHARDS: So they’re not going to have a lot of latitude.

MS. KNOWLES: No.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] How do you feel—

MS. KNOWLES: But the latitude is in the buttermilk or the soup. First of all, I love buttermilk, but it’s hard to get these days. I used to have it all the time. So they have to work on that, and they also have some latitude with the soup.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. KNOWLES: Hugely free. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How do you feel the art world has changed over the time of your career in New York?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I’ve seen performance art come in, not only to these museums, but it’s an accepted form. People will say, “Well, you can come and do your talk, but what will your performance be?”

MS. RICHARDS: And that's different?

MS. KNOWLES: And they use the word "performance." They don't use the word "theater." Performance is a new word. So it's also that I'm grateful to Marina Abramović, no matter what I think of the work, that she has been a month sitting out there.

MS. RICHARDS: More than a month.

MS. KNOWLES: More than a month and having this huge room and doing a very strict and exact and painful performance. The museum just loves it. No problem.

MS. RICHARDS: So the doors have really opened for performance.

MS. KNOWLES: The doors have really opened.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think has been the most—

[Cross talk.]

MS. KNOWLES: That's what I perceive now, not only because of these four curators I'm working with for a tuna fish sandwich, but the fact that the precision with which they would hang a picture—I've tried to hang a picture in a museum before, and one curator wants the wall—this is actually *The Big Book*—should it be pale gray, or should it be ivory, or how about just a light pale blue because it's got the sky. These people spend days on these questions.

So now instead of what color is the wall, they're talking about how many seats should be at the table, and how many strangers should be there, and how many guests would Alison invite, and what time of the day should it be. These are very different questions, daily questions.

MS. RICHARDS: Would you say that, of all the work you've done, that the performance-based work has had the most impact?

MS. KNOWLES: No question about it, and it's not just my ideas of performance, but Fluxus has a room at the MoMA. It also has all these works on the fourth floor. I don't consider the *Identical Lunch* to necessarily be a Fluxus work, but I'm not a semanticist. Semantics don't bother me that much. Just I think that the *Identical Lunch* is basically a performance, more than the print works that Silverman kindly bought as sort of the residue.

MS. RICHARDS: Thinking about museums and galleries in New York, when you're here, do you go to exhibitions on a regular basis?

MS. KNOWLES: No, no.

MS. RICHARDS: Are there particular ones that you always seek out, or museum shows, permanent collections you go to see?

MS. KNOWLES: I'm not a responsible artist. By the time I get my work done in the day, I need to look at the news and make my dinner, and occasionally, like today, someone will come and I'll see them in the evening, but rarely, and if it's a museum show, I usually have a friend in it. I'll go to the show of Cyrilla Mozenter on Saturday.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, who was that?

MS. KNOWLES: C-Y-R-I-L-L-A M-O-Z-E-N-T-E-R, very interesting artist. She's showing in a gallery in SoHo—sorry, on 74th Street—and I'll go this Saturday to see her work.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember which gallery?

MS. KNOWLES: Right, I think—it's not a gallery that I know. But I don't know the Chelsea galleries anymore.

MS. RICHARDS: You said it's on 74th Street?

MS. KNOWLES: I think that's it, and he has his own group of three or four people and they play in Brooklyn all the time.

MS. RICHARDS: That's Shimada.

MS. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The show is called *Warm Snow*. There's her name, and it's the Adam

Baumgold Gallery.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Seventy-Fifth Street.

MS. KNOWLES: Seventy-Fifth Street. I was close. But I met her at the Drawing Center, where I had an exhibition and she had an exhibition also.

MS. RICHARDS: You mentioned in passing the book *Footnotes*.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: That was published in 2000; that's using—

MS. KNOWLES: Did you see that?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes, yes, using all the little notebooks that you had made. I think it's over 20 years. Whose idea was it to publish that?

MS. KNOWLES: Steve Clay.

MS. RICHARDS: Who is he?

MS. KNOWLES: His publishing is called Granary Books. He invited me to give him a manuscript, and the only thing I could think of was to do the notebooks.

And he has a very talented wife, Julie—Julie—anyway. Oh, here's the *Loose Pages*. I'm looking at a picture of the *Loose Pages* with dressed figure with the special sound hat. That's what I would do if I were to do another edition. I would just make the hat, because the sound of the hat on the ears—so I would say—

MS. RICHARDS: So he invited you, and then you thought of using those notebooks and tearing the pages out.

MS. KNOWLES: Right. No, I decided which pages I wanted to tear out, because often they were two-sided and sometimes they would do both sides. I haven't looked at that book for a while. It's selling fairly well. It's not great. I had to buy a box from him myself because he said he couldn't store. He doesn't have much storage space. He's over here a block or so away, and she, his wife, does a lot of the work in the press.

MS. RICHARDS: After you did that—

MS. KNOWLES: It's a heavy book. It's very hard to carry around. That's the only problem. Most of my other books, I can take a copy or two in my—because I never travel with more than one suitcase and an over-the-shoulder bag. So since I'm leaving next week, I'm already calculating what I can take other than—

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Traveling light is a very good thing.

MS. KNOWLES: [Laughs.] I know. I know that.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You did in 2006 something called *Time Sample,s* and it was exhibited in various locations and in different forms. I think it was an exhibition. Then it was a book. Could you talk about that work, *Time Samples*, what it was and why that title?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. Well, it started out with—that's the Cage book—it started out with—I guess Steve invited me to do this book before the *Footnotes* book. And so I said, "Well, all I have in my studio is sort of little pieces of silk screens and cyanotypes."

MS. RICHARDS: Fantastic.

MS. KNOWLES: And, "Why don't I just put them all together and I'll make a text here."

MS. RICHARDS: So what we're looking at is six-inch square pages all linked together to form one long—not accordion, but a long form that opens when you pull it out of a book.

MS. KNOWLES: Right.

MS. RICHARDS: And these are all bits of—

MS. KNOWLES: Little bits of silk screens, that—I love maps and breads—

MS. RICHARDS: That you found in the studio.

MS. KNOWLES: That I had cut up in my studio.

MS. RICHARDS: Now, how is this exhibited?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, it was actually hung on a nail here.

MS. RICHARDS: Or I suppose it could be put in a vitrine. I see there's a hole here.

MS. KNOWLES: Then you can look at it this way. But most people just—people don't touch art. That's one of the problems.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] To most people it's good.

MS. KNOWLES: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: But to you it's not, of course.

MS. KNOWLES: To me it's not. But here's—see, it's Granary Books, and I made 45 of these.

MS. RICHARDS: So each one is unique.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Because the pages are different.

MS. KNOWLES: I think this is what I did at the Drawing Center, isn't it?

MS. RICHARDS: And what is the text?

MS. KNOWLES: The texts—

MS. RICHARDS: Is there something about the color red in the book?

MS. KNOWLES: Right. Okay, so I only made 45 of these, and they were made by Kathy Kuehn, K-U-E-H-N.

MS. RICHARDS: Kathy with a C or a K?

MS. KNOWLES: It's K-U-E-H-N.

MS. RICHARDS: And Kathy?

MS. KNOWLES: Produced by Kathy Kuehn.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it Kathy with a K?

MS. KNOWLES: K, designed and produced; she cut them and mounted them and all.

MS. RICHARDS: But you made the selections.

MS. KNOWLES: Printed at SoHo Letter Press by Taketo, and I had a performance piece called *Celebration Red*. And the way that it reads is, "Celebrate every red thing," and that was done by the museum in Paris. Ulrich did it.

MS. RICHARDS: Hans Ulrich Obrist?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. That was after your piece in the show *Do It* that ICI [Independent Curators International] did that time.

MS. KNOWLES: Yeah, *Do It*, he made a—that was a name he had for his—

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes. So what he did was he gridded the floor in 10-inch squares, and then he invited the people in the community that he was a part of in Paris to bring a red thing.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that your instructions?

MS. KNOWLES: "Celebrate every red thing."

MS. RICHARDS: But the instructions you did for *Do It* before this book was to make a grid on the floor and put a red object in each spot.

MS. KNOWLES: I made that instruction when invited to do so.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. KNOWLES: I don't think—it's not in the event score. So all the event score said, "Celebrate every red thing," because I know someone asked, "Well how am I going to do that?" Then this would be the idea.

MS. RICHARDS: I see.

MS. KNOWLES: How about appearing in a total red outfit and describing where the hat's gone—it's up to you what you want to do with these pieces. But he did a lovely—

MS. RICHARDS: That's a beautiful book.

MS. KNOWLES: Isn't that lovely? And so that's Kathy Kuehn who put a box together like that. Can you believe that?

MS. RICHARDS: In the same year, you did a piece that I read about that sounded intriguing, with a rake.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, yes, the *Rake's Progress*.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] How did you decide to do a piece with a rake?

MS. KNOWLES: I found the rake in a field in the Midwest—and it's since been lost in show—but it had the most amazing contortion of the tines, which were as if they had been crushed and squeezed together somehow. I think there were two tines that were working. The rest were just—and I found them beautiful. So first I made a silk screen of it.

That means I suspended it in front of a camera lens and made a shot, and then made that into a silk screen. And then once I had that film, I could make a cyanotype. That's the nice thing about knowing these print media; you can go from one thing to another, make a partial xerox and that becomes—I've just gotten lazy. It's true.

So the *Rake's Progress* was—I took that show around quite a bit. And always especially—Miguel Abreu had the rake in the show. He liked that a lot. I had it leaning against the corner. I don't know whatever happened to that. But things happen and I think after that it went somewhere else. But for me, when something's gone, it's just gone. I don't lose sleep over it. I'll find something else.

MS. RICHARDS: What do you think is your biggest challenge right now as an artist?

MS. KNOWLES: The challenge right now, I feel very strongly—strangely enough, I feel very strongly, as an artist, engaged with what my daughters are doing and trying to offer some—they're 46 or something, but they seem to want a really active dialogue with me, things like why I do what I do, or where am I going now, or can I go with you, or maybe your granddaughter Zoe could go with you.

So just not to abuse that precious relationship that has developed since Dick died, because I think Dick had wonderful aspirations for his daughters, based on a lot of anguish he had with himself and somehow—or maybe it's because I feel they're so successful in their lives, maybe I just want to be part of that and have shows in Chicago and have a show with Jess in Massachusetts, where she's connected with a gallery.

I can see that as very useful for me personally. And challenges, again, I would very much like to have the show with James Fuentes be a real knockout for New York City. I haven't had a show here for years and—

MS. RICHARDS: Besides the Miguel Abreu.

MS. KNOWLES: What?

MS. RICHARDS: Besides the Miguel Abreu show.

MS. KNOWLES: Oh, I can show in Abreu again. It's a smaller gallery and I would like to. I'd like to be in a group show there. But in terms of a one-person show, for reasons which aren't really too clear to me, maybe because James just came here very directly and sat down and asked me if I would please open his new gallery when he decides where it is. Miguel is very established and he's the best underground gallery I know about. I love that

street, Orchard Street.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it important to you that the gallery you show in be that kind of edgy—you were talking about the virtues of the gallery being on Orchard Street or being underground. And I was wondering if it's important to you that the gallery you show in be a kind of edgy gallery in some way, not a mainstream––

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I feel I'm not—I feel I'm not a trendy, mainstream artist.

MS. RICHARDS: So you don't see yourself and your work in a big gallery in Chelsea.

MS. KNOWLES: I don't. I definitely do not. If someone invited me to do something like that, I would wonder how on earth they ever heard about me, or I wouldn't' know where to start with figuring that out. Again, I might or might not, depending on the person and the situation, decide to do that. But usually if it's a big gallery, they're having a Fluxus exhibition. This *Make a Salad* that I did at the Gray Gallery was in a big gallery—

MS. RICHARDS: Alexander Gray, yes.

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, Alex Gray. So it kind of depends on a lot of things. He was opening a new gallery, and so these event scores fit nicely with that because they're festive usually. They can be festive.

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking about *Make a Salad*, what was your experience at the Tate [Modern, 2008], when you did it for an enormous audience? What was that like?

MS. KNOWLES: Well, I found that—

MS. RICHARDS: And did you expect it to be that way? Was it a surprise?

MS. KNOWLES: They had, I guess, only about three curators working on it. [Laughs.] And the one who was in touch with me by email had everything arranged, down to the types of lettuce. Nothing was left to chance. The only thing I didn't really know was that it would be on a bridge over the space, and that I would be throwing salad.

She said something, I think, about it would be elevated, a little bit up. Well, it's a whole flight, two flights of stairs. But according to her part, these garbage bags full of three different types of lettuces were delivering up these stairs, and I looked down on 3,000 people. It was like a football stadium, and they were looking up at me.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you feel this was appropriate for the piece? Did you have any concerns about this changing its meaning to you in some way?

MS. KNOWLES: No, no. I was delighted that I could have a piece at the Tate, and I think that they—again, it was a festive opening, and so I was confident and worked with the situation to make it, actually, I think very amusing, very nice, because I could have all the Goldsmiths college students below me, with this tarpaulin the side of this room. And then I would announce that the carrots were coming over.

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] And so what they were holding was the bowl, became the bowl?

MS. KNOWLES: No, they were holding the tarp.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, the tarp became a kind of a salad bowl.

MS. KNOWLES: The tarp was just—preceded the bowl. I didn't serve out of the tarp. I served out of a huge bowl. But that was part of the process that—I naturally raked the salad in the tarp. That was after I poured the dressing from the bridge, gallons of dressing and vinegar, and every time that I poured something, I announced it and everyone would cheer. Beets. Yay!

So after pouring the dressing—there were, by the way, two chefs who helped me chop on the bridge. There were three tables. So someone was doing onions, someone else scallions and carrots. It was really an all-organic, from the Borough Market—food, fantastic food.

Then there was four—one, two, three, four—eight Goldsmiths college students mixed the salad, rolled the salad back and forth, you see, and then I came down and raked it with a stainless steel rake that had been boiled so that it would be no problem about any germs on the salad. The plates were impeccable and the napkins.

Everything was state of the art, just beautifully done. So after I raked, then someone appeared with this huge bowl, and I just, with a shovel, a snow shovel, also which had been boiled, I shoveled the salad into the bowl. And actually, a question about whether it was appropriate—

I think if I had known beforehand the extent of feeding so many people with a salad, I probably would have ended up laughing and just wondering if such a thing could be done. I wouldn't have been angry. But there was my Hannah B. She was there. Maybe even Joe. Every single person.

MS. RICHARDS: Who is Joe?

MS. KNOWLES: Joe Reinstein is her husband, who works at the Obama administration. So I, by hand, served every single person. They lined up all around the hall.

MS. RICHARDS: Was that important that you do that?

MS. KNOWLES: I don't think so. I just think it worked out that way. So two people holding the bowl, and I could do it pretty fast. But it was not a minimal salad. There were radishes and scallions and carrots—

[Cross talk.]

MS. RICHARDS: You provided the ingredient list, right?

MS. KNOWLES: No, they provided all the ingredients.

[END CD4.]

MS. RICHARDS: But you told them what ingredients you wanted.

MS. KNOWLES: I said I would like a variety of ingredients, and they said, "Well"—actually, they did end up driving me to the Borough Market with a truck. So I could—I remember pointing to the radishes—but they could have purchased all that themselves and I wouldn't have been that taken aback, because they'd already said, "You can have three types of lettuce." The Borough Market would provide everything else, like scallions and radishes. So I knew that we'd have a great salad, and people were donating things. Like people brought their own vinegar.

MS. RICHARDS: What's the most exciting project you're working on right now?

MS. KNOWLES: I think right now I'm concerned with having a success of the *Mad Hatter's Dinner*. That's in Poland and that will happen on the 27th of June.

MS. RICHARDS: Why is it called the *Mad Hatter's Dinner*? As in *Alice in Wonderland*?

MS. KNOWLES: Yes, and the Fluxus people are sitting at the Mad Hatter's table, and then other people who either consider themselves Fluxus or would like to know about it, whatever, they're sitting at smaller tables along this one long table where we're sitting.

I have to do a performance, and so I'm making placemats and there will be different types of lentil papers and there will be some larger ones. And I imagine I'll put them out around the table, and then when people sit down, I'll probably—I have a bag of separate lentils— I'll pour the lentils down the center of the table and then rearrange the salt and pepper in the lentils.

And then I think that when the wine is poured, that we'll get some interesting staining on the placemats, and when will dinner is done, perhaps I'll take the Nivea Creme and smudge some—maybe some thumbprints like on a stamp pad, and we'll put them up on the walls as artworks. And that will be the *Mad Hatters Dinner,* in Lodz, L-O-D-Z, Poland.

MS. RICHARDS: Are you involved in what's going to be served for dinner?

MS. KNOWLES: That's the work of somebody named Ryszard Wasko.

MS. RICHARDS: What's his last name?

MS. KNOWLES: R-Y-S-Z-A-R-D W-A-S-K-O, and he's began working in art in something called *Construction in Process,* which was a very daring concept that people could come from all over the world; they would help pay their ticket to do performance art in places which needed some vitality. So we went to this town in Israel, which was really in the midst of all this fraction; one side of the street was Palestine and the other was Israel, and it was dry and hot.

So Ryszard Wasko arranged that *Construction in Process*. My daughter went, too, Jessica. What I did there was I took all of the local newspapers from both sides of the street, and I brought a spinning wheel, and with white paste I put all the newspapers together. [Laughs.]

And I just stood there all day churning the newspapers together. I had been able to have the spinning wheel sunk into a little cement so that it couldn't be stolen, and I was told that as the wind came up and the weather changed, the newspapers would be flying all over the cliff. It was on a cliff.

But I had the installation, and flying all over the cliff—and who knows where—he did wonderful things like that. There were some eating events. Both Josh Selman, my son-in-law, and Jessica Higgins did the performance pieces of one kind of another. But he kept on doing this *Construction in Process* in other countries which needed help psychically. They needed help with—to lift their spirits.

MS. RICHARDS: So you have lots to look forward to right now.

MS. KNOWLES: It's what performance art should do. I think art should take us out of very good times or very bad. It's a neutral resting place. It's a place to take a breath. Art should relieve us and enliven us.

MS. RICHARDS: That's a wonderful place to stop. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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