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Oral history interview with Jo Baer, 2010 October 5-7

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Jo Baer on 2010 October 5-7. The interview took place in Baer's home and studio in Amsterdam, Netherlands, and was conducted by Avis Berman 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.

Jo Baer and Avis Berman have reviewed the transcript and have made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman recording Jo Baer for the Archives of American Art Oral History Project on October 5, 2010, in her studio in Amsterdam.

Now, I start the same way with everyone. Would you please state your full name and date of birth.

JO BAER: Josephine Gail Kleinberg. Wait a minute, I have three more names to add, don't I?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I have been Baer, Jo Baer.

MS. BERMAN: Well, before Baer there was someone else.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. Hanauer. Josephine—Jo Hanauer, Jo Baer, Jo Wesley. Those are the legal ones.

Do you want the two sort of common-law ones that followed?

MS. BERMAN: Well, did the common-law ones—I think we can—

MS. BAER: There were no documents.

MS. BERMAN: So was that—

MS. BAER: That would be Robert Lobe, and that would be Bruce Robbins—English Bruce Robbins. There's an American one who is a bad artist. This is a good artist.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Well, we'll figure this out.

But out of curiosity, though—after you married John Wesley, you kept Jo Baer as your name. I mean, you never were Jo Wesley. Were you Jo Wesley?

MS. BAER: Yes. My passport is Josephine Wesley, but my artist name is Jo Baer. I have a son, Josh Baer. And I sign J. Baer on my paintings. If I sign J. Wesley—there are two J. Wesleys.

MS. BERMAN: Of course.

MS. BAER: John Wesley.

So that's a working name. And—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. But your passport still has to say Jo Wesley. They won't take your professional name.

MS. BAER: No, I didn't want to spend the money to take my earlier name back. However, when I moved to Holland, because I was divorced, they made me take my father's name again. So in all the state—governmental things, I'm Kleinberg, but I'm often Kleinberg-Wesley, or Wesley-Baer, or Wesley-Kleinberg. And I have to ask people, when they ask me to sign something, "Who am I?" [They laugh.] They don't know. And I have trouble providing IDs; I have the wrong one with me, or something like that. So it's a nuisance. Stupid.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it is a stupid governmental—why go back to a name you haven't used in decades?

MS. BAER: Well, because this is still a tribal country. I mean, so all these family names. You know, they're the tribe of bakers, the tribe of fishermen, et cetera.

MS. BERMAN: The other thing I have noticed about Holland, which has nothing to do with you, but I will just throw it out, is that there have been many great Dutch painters, but there seems to be no great Dutch sculptor. And I have no idea why that is, but just as an observation.

MS. BAER: Well, recently there are no great Dutch painters.

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: And I can tell you the reason for that, because what they do have and what they are great at is graphic art. They're amongst the best graphic artists in the world. I guess the Japanese may be their equal.

So everything—and it has to do with how the country is. I've lived here for 25 years, something like that, and every time I start a new painting, I become more and more of a graphic artist. I line it up, and it's beautiful, and it's no good. It's not a painting. And I'm like Jacob wrestling the angel. For weeks this goes on, trying to turn a beautiful graphic into a painting. And it gets more and more difficult, I'll tell you.

So whatever makes them great graphic artists is built in, because it's happening to me, too.

Their book design is beautiful. And you can see this in the cover of that book, this book here. It's taken from a painting of mine. And the painting is in here, and—wherever it is.

MS. BERMAN: It's toward the beginning, after the color pic [picture], of the—

MS. BAER: Yes. I wanted you to see the difference there.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, there it is.

MS. BAER: There it is. And this is utterly different.

MS. BERMAN: And I will just say for the tape that this is *Untitled* [*White Star*] [1961].

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. Can you see the difference between this and what he did?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Well, he took the—

MS. BAER: He took all the color off and everything else. This would have made a lousy cover.

And that has gotten scratched, I must say. Did that just happen now? I'm sorry.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, no, no, no. It didn't—I think it may have happened on its travels over—it's been used for the past couple weeks.

MS. BAER: Yes, here's the other section that goes with it. But do you want to—I think we'll talk about this a little later, when we're not—

MS. BERMAN: Later, yes.

MS. BAER: This is shrink-wrapped into them now. Okay? It's an interesting thing.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. And so to get back to early life, what were your parents' names?

MS. BAER: My mother was Hortense Zerenza Calisher. There was a Hortense Calisher—

MS. BERMAN: A writer.

MS. BAER: Yes—with exactly the same name. Who could possibly imagine such a thing, and the same generation.

MS. BERMAN: And Zerenza

MS. BAER: I have no idea. She sometimes signed her paintings and things Zerenza, or Horte, for the signature. So she wasn't a writer, she was an artist.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And do you remember her birth date and death date?

MS. BAER: No. I could look them up for you. Should I make a note to look them up [1905-1966]?

MS. BERMAN: Okay, yes, and then we can just put it on the tape tomorrow. Here's a pen.

MS. BAER: I have notebooks and papers all over the place. Okay, Hortense—[writing]—"b" date, "d" date. Okay. I think she was born—she grew up in Peshtigo, Wisconsin, she was born [there]. And then I think they were in—they were Chicago people. Yes. I think she was staying with a friend in Seattle. I may have the two of them confused now. Oh, no, she grew up in Portland. The family—most of the family was Chicago-based.

MS. BERMAN: And how about your father?

MS. BAER: My father was born in Ellensburg, Washington. One of them is in 1905 and the other in 1906, something like that. And he lived to be 80. So he died in the '70s. My mother died much earlier, when I was in New York, in the '60s, I think. She lived to be 60-something, my father 80-something. And my father's mother was born in Roseburg, Oregon, I believe, before there were states there. It was Oregon territory.

MS. BERMAN: Very unusual for Jewish people.

MS. BAER: Absolutely.

MS. BERMAN: They would be like Yankees, if they had been in New England.

MS. BAER: And they were ranchers. I mean, they owned—they bought land, and they were in the hay and grain business. Brokers, commodities. So that when I was a child, we would go—I grew up in Seattle. And I remember at the age of 10 or 12 being taken over the mountains from Seattle, over to Ellensburg or that area—Yakima, Ellensburg, Wenatchee—to a rodeo. And on the way, we kept passing barns that had my grandfather's name on them, Henry Kleinberg.

Because they—my grandfather, my father, and a cousin came in from Germany, had a business where they went around—my father went around and bought hay, grain, things like that, from farmers. And it was warehoused. And they brought—they had these barns. They had tenant farmers, 26 of them, in the Oregon-Washington-Idaho area.

MS. BERMAN: I guess they were commodities brokers?

MS. BAER: Yes, on the Chicago commodities exchange. And they went out of business, that business, after the war, because the Teamsters came in with their trucks. They used to sell things through train loads. So they would—their customers were the co-ops and big loads. And the truckers came in and talked to the farmers individually, and put them out of business. And actually the banks turned them into a finance company because they had a great credit rating. So my father and brothers became—

MS. BERMAN: Bankers.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: You did not say your date of birth before because we got off on names.

MS. BAER: August 7, 1929.

MS. BERMAN: And you're not an only child?

MS. BAER: I am the eldest of three. I have two brothers: Henry and Larry, or Lester, Jr. And they're both alive. Henry, the doctor, lives in [the] San Francisco area. I forget the name, one of those fancy cities. He's had two or three wives and lots of children. And Larry was a judge briefly, the traffic court or something, an extreme right-wing Republican—[laughs]—has one child.

MS. BERMAN: And where does he live?

MS. BAER: Seattle.

MS. BERMAN: Are you in contact with your brothers?

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, when I was there for a lifetime achievement award, was a college—yes, WCA [Women's Caucus for Art], 2002 or '3 or '4, someplace in there [2004]. The conference was in Seattle. So for the first time, my brother was very proud of me and, I believe, so was the legislature. They said something about this "former native daughter." I've never been able to get a show in their damn museum, "native girl, native daughter." But I've asked a couple of times. I thought it would be nice to do.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I think the kind of stuff I do is just not quite what they would like to think about. There is work there—

the Seattle Museum [Seattle Art Museum]—but that's it.

MS. BERMAN: Well, the Wrights were collectors of yours, the Bagley Wrights [Bagley and Virginia Wright]?

MS. BAER: Yes. They have one or two paintings of mine still. And I like Virginia very much.

Any rate, they gave a big party for me when I was there. I'll never forget just—it was out in the forest, and they have a tree growing inside the house. You come into the house and a tree is there. This was very exotic, rich people, in a funny way. And I was standing there—I never get past the door; people coming up, and I didn't even get in to get a drink. And suddenly there is what appears to be Bill Gates. I thought, what?! [Laughs.] What is he doing?

So I was speaking to him, and I was telling him about—his grandfather's house was two blocks, a block away from where I grew up. I mean, they were in the neighborhood. And he's saying strange things back to me. He's an enormous man; he's seven feet tall. And then I realized that it was his father, also Bill Gates. It wasn't Bill Gates; it was Bill Gates, Sr.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay.

MS. BAER: And it's his second wife, Myrtle, who is the director of the Seattle Art Museum, which is why he was there. He was very polite. And when I was talking about grandfather—[they laugh]—it was his house.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it was very funny, because once the Archives of American Art had some party where they were honoring someone, and that wife, Mimi Gates, was there.

MS. BAER: Yes, Mimi.

MS. BERMAN: And then he got up to say something. And he said, "Oh, it's so great for me. Usually—I'm only known as someone's son. Now at least this time I'm known as someone's husband." Someone's father—excuse me—"I'm usually known as someone's father. Now I'm known, at least, as someone's husband. It's a change."

So he had some sort of humor.

MS. BAER: Yes. I really—he looks exactly like him, except for the size. And I was so puzzled. I was really in shock. Anyway, that was—yes, I know the Wrights. But that's the last I had to do with them.

MS. BERMAN: Were your brothers interested in anything artistic? Even—

MS. BAER: Well, as I say, my mother was a professional—a commercial artist. So I think the youngest brother won a national poster contest when he was in high school, maybe. And Henry, the doctor, the consumer, the Maserati owner, this sort of thing, originally wanted to be a plastic surgeon so he could make people prettier, eeek. [Laughs]. And he became instead a—what's the one with X-rays?

MS. BERMAN: Radiologist?

MS. BAER: Radiologist, yes. And I guess he's retired now. He had his own clinic, went to—he did graduate work at Stanford.

MS. BERMAN: So you grew up fairly well off, it sounds like? I mean, even—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Did the Depression have an effect on your family?

MS. BAER: Yes. I had to—in high school I had to make my own clothes. My mother insisted. Which I hate. I have given away sewing machines whenever they've appeared next to me. I will not sew. I safety-pin everything, or I wear it torn. I don't care. I would see something I'd want to buy, and she'd say, "You have to make it." So I would—I know how to even cut patterns and stuff like that.

MS. BERMAN: So she was a fashion illustrator, too?

MS. BAER: She was. She did—she kept doing businesses, art businesses. Like she did a series of watercolors with alphabets, but in French: "*Jardiniere*, J," and a little boy gardener, and the watercolor. I think they were printed lithos [lithographs] that she watercolored and sold. And my father would always make her stop, because she was earning too much money and ruining his tax returns. So—and she did a—she got into business with making furniture stuff. She went to auctions and bought old oak tables, and took the legs and sanded them and turned them into very big, fancy lamps, and things like that. And they're all over the place. In fact, she went into

business with Edward Kienholz, my friend Edward. Edward always was very good at buying things. And Edward took the tops, and my mother "Hortensed" [laughs] the legs.

MS. BERMAN: Well, this—of course, we're jumping ahead, but—

MS. BAER: That's Los Angeles.

MS. BERMAN: That's okay, but was your—had your mother moved to Los Angeles?

MS. BAER: No, she was visiting.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MS. BAER: And she met Edward and he—and then—[inaudible]—she was in Vancouver buying oak tables—I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Well, she sounds as if she had a lot of ingenuity, a lot of cleverness, and probably—a lot of frustration.

MS. BAER: Yes. She went to the Art Students League from—in Brooklyn, from—no, she went to Pratt Institute from Portland, Oregon, at the age of 16. I've seen letters to her mother saying, "Did you like the suit I made for you?" and things, and "Why don't you ever write me?" And she had a sister who was much nicer. My mother was very beautiful, but she's crazy. She's—I don't think that I ought to say that.

MS. BERMAN: Was your mother as harsh on your brothers as she was on you?

MS. BAER: No, she was very competitive—yes—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, that's—

MS. BAER: She was very, very competitive. And because of that, when I was in—I was sent to art school when I was 10 or 12. Saturday mornings, Cornish School of Art, in Seattle [Cornish College of the Arts]. And my mother had decided, because she'd been in fashion in New York, after she—after Pratt Institute. She also did post-graduate work at the Art Students League, something to do with Woodstock. I'm not sure she [inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Oh, they—Woodstock had a summer—there was a summer school there.

MS. BAER: She did that—

MS. BERMAN: And Robert Henri taught there, and George Bellows, and people like that.

MS. BAER: Yes. My mother went to that. And then every year, she would come home to Portland, through either the Panama Canal or through Lake Louise that's over in Canada. And she was on her way to Paris when she met my father. She was going to cover—I think she worked for *Vogue*, did some illustrating, and I think she did maybe Delman shoes. I'm not quite sure.

Any rate, she was successful and—why am I telling you all this? Ah!

MS. BERMAN: Oh—

MS. BAER: She hated the fashion world, and so for me, she wanted to make sure I never went in it. One can understand this. I know what that world was like, and so did she. So she insisted I train to become a medical illustrator. That is because photography wasn't that good at that time. They—when they did operations and things, they found that an illustrator could show and make more visible the things.

MS. BERMAN: Sure, well, *Gray's Anatomy* was illustrated for years—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —with drawings and other medical images.

MS. BAER: She wanted me to do that. So when I went to art school, the Cornish School of Art and Music—music and art, I believe. Everybody else, all the children are in doing stuff with colors, and I had to sit in a separate room. And she would send a chicken, or a crab, or something else, which I had to render. I had to sit by myself and render and—

MS. BERMAN: Well, why did your mother have so much power over the teacher?

MS. BAER: My mother did that. When I was at university, I took an art course, which I enjoyed even—you know, I was first year. And they liked my work, the professor liked my work. I came home to say, "Oh he liked the first paintings," and stuff like that. She got furious. And she went out and she told the professor, "You should not encourage her. She has no talent," and so on and so forth; which I heard about. So I switched to science, not being strong enough to compete with it. She was [even] bigger than me—which is very un-American—great, big woman. And she—

MS. BERMAN: Well—

MS. BAER: Listen, this woman went to the state legislature, and kept chlorine—

MS. BERMAN: Fluoride?

MS. BAER: —fluoride out of the water. She kept religious education out of the schools. She ran for the legislature as a Republican—and lost, I'm happy to say. But she was saving the world. As our housekeeper would say, "Ah, your mother's down in Olympia, saving the world." This is somebody—big.

MS. BERMAN: Right. So she was well known outside—very—in the state, as—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. Yes. And I have to say in here, I'm sure—do we edit at all?

MS. BERMAN: Oh, you can take things out at the end. And we also have a consent form in which you can restrict things or not.

MS. BAER: Well, I'm not sure if it's nice to talk badly of the dead, but that woman—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think you should be truthful, and we'll worry about restricting it later.

MS. BAER: Oh, okay. She used to get sued for—well, she did get sued once, I found out as a teenager; though I found—My father would do something like this and say a magic name: "Theresa." My mother—there was a woman she really disliked, and they were very rich, and—a doctor's wife, et cetera. And what is it she said? Oh—"They got their money because Theresa was raped by a black porter on a train." This is what she decided. And the woman sued her, and won. So whenever my mother would start in, she was—she was vicious, and paranoid.

If we hadn't been upper middle class, they would have put her away. She would just go—what she wanted was the truth, her thinking. So whenever my mother would start this, my father would say "Theresa." And then I found out later on, this was the woman that—you know. So she was libelous, and—

MS. BERMAN: And was your father a counterweight to this at all?

MS. BAER: My father was very smart, and a great sportsman. And he stayed—he was this golfing—was a golf champ—the state golf champion. He went hunting every September to November to—so he didn't have to go to Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah, any of that. He would load a trailer full of hams and turkeys, and he would disappear up into the mountains in Canada, and come home with a trailer-load of bear, elk, deer—I mean, he didn't like deer; he liked hunting—moose. We had to—my mother had to butcher it and freeze it. They froze it in wax and—and she butchered it as if it were beef, whatever it was. And so we'd come home and find bear steaks—it stinks. It really stinks. I hate game.

And I would go out and refuse to eat. I would go to the neighbors and say, "I don't want to eat. Can I have dinner here?"—which my mother hated. I mean, she said, "You were always—you were always—" not—unfaithful, untrustworthy—disloyal. My mother said, "You were always disloyal." This is at an eight-year-old who is refusing to eat steak, bear steak. And my father would take the moose testicles, put a zipper on it, and it was his tobacco pouch. We had mountain goat ashtrays.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, like the hooves.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, the hooves, yes.

MS. BERMAN: So straight out of Teddy Roosevelt.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes—no, this is my father. My father—they had memorable fights, which I do recall with great pleasure and joy. My father would come home from one of these [hunting trips], and he would come up into my mother's new lime-green bedroom, chenille rug, provincial—French provincial furniture—which—this was her joy. And down would go the guns, big rifles, and shotguns and things, and a sleeping bag. He was bearded and everything. And my mother says, "Put them away. Keep them out of here." He doesn't pay any attention. My mother goes, she picks up all of these things, she opens the windows and she throws them all out on the front lawn. My father looks at this, he goes to my mother's closet, opens it up, takes everything out—[inaudible]

[laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: In comes the housekeeper, who was with them for 22 years, whatever, and she says, "Mr. K! Mr. K! You stop that! You stop that!" And he goes to the maid's room, opens the closet, throws everything out to the back yard. Well, this is hilarious—

MS. BERMAN: This is like an Irene Dunne movie.

MS. BAER: Yes. No, it's just the god's truth. These are the people I grew up with. I got out when I was 18 or 19. [Laughs.] I really—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, exactly. And they thought you were crazy.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. But I was given a great deal of freedom. And I have to say my father was university-educated, great tennis player, great—any sports, superb athlete. He really didn't want to work; he really wanted to—he was a playboy, and a man's man, very, very macho. My mother threw scissors at him once. He lost money gambling at the racetrack, or at the—et cetera. It's all right, you know? I mean, I'm rather privileged to come from a background like this.

And the other thing I should mention right now is that my mother was very independent. She insisted I learn a trade—this was the medical illustration thing—which is why I was starting to take science courses. And because my mother was so horrible about the art stuff, I began to do the science stuff. So I have a university science background because my mother [wa]s stupid, and talented, and my father was very smart, and useless. And I managed to get a little bit of both of it, and I'm very grateful.

MS. BERMAN: Did you like, at the time, rendering for being a medical illustrator?

MS. BAER: No. I hated it. This is not me.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Did any of that kind of training ever come in handy? Or does it ever show up in your work again?

MS. BAER: I'll tell you—yes. I hadn't ever thought about this until this moment. But I always say I don't draw, because I draw like a 12-year-old still. [They laugh.] I do. I render. It would take me three or four years to develop a drawing style. I was never allowed to be free in that. So I trace things, and then I can play with the line a bit, but I don't spend any more energy in there. I'm not a Matisse. That part of me would never be that. And I never connected it until just this minute, of course. So I got praised for rendering.

I have a lovely set of two drawings that John—Jack Wesley—John Wesley and I made of each other when we were first dating. And he has this marvelous drawing of me that could have been a Matisse; it looks like me and it's so loose and everything. And I have this very strict rendering that looks exactly like him. And it's real crap; it's a 12-year-old drawing. I never grew up, though, because of this.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Now, you mentioned before about these hunting trips your father would take in the fall, and you mentioned to miss the religious holidays. Were you all observant at all, or—

MS. BAER: They—we were reform. And in fact, half of each of my parents' families were not Jewish. So then sometimes, depending who I'm talking to, if I don't feel like being Jewish at all, I am not. I am sometimes half. I am—it depends on my mood. But half of my mother's family were Unitarians, that sort of thing. And her first cousin was Nelson Algren.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: The Chicago writer.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, *A Walk on the Wild Side* [New York: Farrar, Straus, and Cudahy, 1956]. His mother and my grandfather were brother and sister. And there's an uncle who was a ship captain, I think, that shared—and other—that's her family. These are Chicago.

And my father's family—well, my grandmother's sister was—is Catholic. And my grandmother actually went to school in Eugene, or Roseburg, wherever the hell it was. The only schools they had were the Catholic schools. So I have great aunts and all of these people who are not Jewish.

MS. BERMAN: Right. It's more a vaguely ethnic group than a—

MS. BAER: I had to go to Sunday school. And this was because in the Depression, there were—in Seattle there were clubs that were non-Jewish and there were the big—gated housing, can we call it? Where "No Jews allowed." And during the Depression, my grandfather was asked to join both, and he refused. So to that extent—and would be in my case, also—to that extent, well, we were Jewish. And I was sent to Sunday school, which I loathed, which I really hated that I would—[inaudible] there. And I stopped when I was about 15.

And after that I was in a sorority at university for a very brief time. I was in a Jewish sorority, and I quit in front of all them. They told me that I had to do something, and I said "No." And—[they laugh]—and they said, "You must," and I said, "No." Then they sent people to talk to my family, to tell me I couldn't do this, I could not quit this sorority, and I said "No." [They laugh.]

And apparently I've always gone my own way. I thank my mother, and my father, and my grandparents, obviously, for the—my brothers are not like the—I am Bolshie—the English word, British word—I just—my mother was screaming at me, "You're just like your father! You only do what you want to do!" [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes! [Inaudible.]

MS. BAER: Yes, that sort of thing. So for women's lib [liberation], I have to say, my grandmother on my mother's side in—when she—in the early 1900s, supported her family selling insurance as a businesswoman—now that's a businesswoman in 1910. That's first-generation women's lib. She supported the family because her husband, my grandfather, was a very small prizefighter. [They laugh.]

I really come from very strange people. I thank god for it. I have to tell you that during my teens, though, I tried so hard to be normal and like everybody else. I couldn't figure out why—why weren't they like me? You know, this sort of thing. I worked very hard.

MS. BERMAN: Do you know what the definition of "normal" is? Someone you don't know very well. [They laugh.]

MS. BAER: Never heard of that. [Laughs.]

I tried very much—very hard to be like everyone else.

MS. BERMAN: To fit in.

MS. BAER: And—yes. It never worked. And I never understood why.

They did do an interesting thing with me. Everything I belonged to—classes and things like that—they always made me vice president, which is something that keeps you in the group, gives you something to do. They recognized that I could be destructive. So they kept me in and they gave me a job that didn't matter. I didn't have to do anything. I couldn't fuck it up.

MS. BERMAN: Right. But you wouldn't destroy the group because you were—

MS. BAER: Out of the sixth grade and the fifth grade, yes, I was popular in that sense. They had enough sense to keep me in, even when I left.

MS. BERMAN: What kind of a student were you?

MS. BAER: About a B—I mean, I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Besides art, did you have any other—reading, or, any kinds of other interests?

MS. BAER: Oh, I—you mean as a child, or you—

MS. BERMAN: Well, yes, as a high school—before college.

MS. BAER: Oh. Before college, no. No, I think I was around 16 or 17—I was boy-crazy. I liked boys. I really always did. I hung out with them and—tomboyish. And it changed when—[laughs]—when I really sort of grew up. It became more awkward.

But somewhere in there, I discovered thought, conceptualization, and I began to think about things. I noticed how they did—how the boys did it. And at that point I think I must have changed completely and become the adult that I am. Up to then, I did it by imitation, and it would be—it really interested me, and especially later on, when I was working as an artist with other artists, living with other artists, like Jack [Wesley]. I found that concepts and their way of going about it fascinating. I worked on it, developed it for myself, which was a little

different. They found the female sensitivity to color and to all those things, which I can do any time, any place, no respect for it. It's normal, and uninteresting.

So I took from the males around me how to think. Great, great invention. [They laugh.] No, I mean logic—and this sort of thing is fascinating to a girl.

MS. BERMAN: Who's usually shut out of it—science and math, especially then. It's interesting that your mother pushed you toward that, because usually with—females were not pushed towards science at all.

MS. BAER: She just pushed me out of the fashion world. She did not push me into science. I went into that on my own. Again, all the boys were coming home from the Army, and that part of the University of Washington was full of—[laughs]—you know, god—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. On the G.I. bill.

MS. BAER: Yes. And I was the only female in a chemistry class, and I can remember the—and disliked for being there—and having something blow up on me, and the teacher—and I'd look in—and he says, "Ah, you can get on your broom and sweep it away." [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: He's, you know, "Ride your broom, witch." You know, "Get out of my class," that sort of thing. I did not do well in physics and mathematics. I did for a couple years. I did very well in biology, but that's later. So—

MS. BERMAN: And did Seattle have any cultural institutions you were interested in? Are there—

MS. BAER: Well, the opera and ballet came through, and again, my mother took me to the Ballet Russes. I saw a lot of that. And I saw Lauritz somebody singing *[Die] Meistersinger*.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Lauritz Melchior, probably.

MS. BAER: —Melchior, yes, and things of that sort. I believe I saw Sophie Tucker once. [They laugh.] I'm not sure how these things happen.

So when these things come to a place like Seattle, apparently—well, yes—

MS. BERMAN: People go. Now was there any interest—did you have any sense—and this may not have been formed yet—of Northwest coastal Native American art? Was that on the radar as interesting forms to look at, or just even ethnography?

MS. BAER: I find that my early work is taken from that—the colors, at any rate. But I had no logic about it. I had no notice of them; they were just all around. I liked working with sand, [the] color[s] red and black. These are totem color—totem pole colors. I tried—my first place that I—apartment I wanted to decorate, those were the colors I liked.

And I still use them in paintings. I have certain palettes. And that one is certainly Native American—my Kwakiutl, sort of—yes, that thing.

But I would go over to see the rodeo, and there's a whole Indian camp there still, and teepees, and things like that. They were around. During the war, some of them came down from Alaska. So I had them as classmates, coming down from Juneau and things, real Indians. And when my grandmother took me to Alaska as a ten-year-old—Indians, again—I remember throwing pennies to them on the docks. [They laugh.] We were in a boat—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —and taking a rail—a train all the way up into the Yukon, over to [Lake Bennett in Canada].

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, you may have seen some real totems—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: The original ones.

MS. BAER: Real—they're in Seattle at certain places. Yes. I'm conscious that they're there.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And how about when—since you had relatives in Chicago, did you go to Chicago as a child or anything, and—

MS. BAER: No. I had a great aunt there who sent me Christmas or birthday presents until I didn't write thank-you notes well enough, and my mother said, "You're not getting any more," and that, "You didn't [inaudible]." They were always taking things away from me. When my birthday comes, the present goes away because I did this or that. So—I never learned. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Right.

So you were taking these science—you were at the University of Seattle—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —as a rebellious sorority sister, and—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —let me see. I mean, I'm also really—it's so interesting that, you know—

MS. BAER: I'm screwing up your chronology. I'm so sorry—

MS. BERMAN: Not in the least. No, no, not at all. I mean, where—it doesn't have to be in chronological order. It's as we speak about it.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: This is just because of a picture I saw in the book—is that there was a picture of you as a little girl on a horse. So did you have a horse as a child, or animals?

MS. BAER: I was promised a horse, because my father was in the hay and grain business. And I went to riding school when I was about ten, so—I remember I was made to wear a boy's jacket instead of a girl's jacket, so that my brothers could get them later—a tweed jacket. And I learned English riding. And I was very small. I was a very runty child who had great big feet and nose—and very tiny and very fast. I could run very fast and things like that.

And they would have to have a groom throw me up on the horse if—I was in a horse show once. I remember having to get off and on, and that sort of thing.

So I learned English riding. Then there was another stable that had horses that I liked, that I rode on Saturdays, et cetera, and I wanted to buy one and my father said yes, but it never happened.

I had chickens once. I had rabbits once. The dog ate them all. [They laugh.] We had dogs. My father's hunting dogs sometimes came and lived with us. And I remember being pulled around the streets of Seattle with a Labrador, a big black Labrador, and getting lost—being miles away. And I—you can't let the dog go. And somebody turned me around and I got pulled back home.

But we had Dalmatians, pointers, because he liked duck hunting. No, that was pheasant. Labrador was for the water—

MS. BERMAN: Pointers, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, they had a hunting club that in October, November—that they planted with things that ducks like, so that when they were flying south—they'd go up and drink and stay there all night, my father, my mother. And Eddie Bauer and his wife, Stine, were very close friends of my father's. So we had—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, isn't that funny—of course I had no idea there was a real Eddie Bauer.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. And I have pictures of Christine and my mother with a dead bear, and they're standing there with rifles. And so I grew up in feather jackets and that sort of thing. My father never took them off, so I had […].

MS. BERMAN: I just realized, because animals were important.

Was there anywhere [away] from the pressures or always feeling you were made to do things with this—where did you find relief? Where was the retreat for you? I mean, was there one? How did you get away?

MS. BAER: Ah. I ran away, among—[laughs]—I'm not sure this should go—well, I got married when I was 18 to Jerry Hanauer, Gerard Hanauer. He was a German-Jewish refugee. His family was from Stuttgart. They came out via Lisbon and—well, no, they came out of it via Liechtenstein, and then Lisbon, and then to Seattle.

And in Stuttgart they—Sigmund had the feather factories for—

MS. BERMAN: Sigmund was his—Jerry's father?

MS. BAER: Father, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: So it was Nelly and—Nelly and Sigmund. And so they bought a feather factory in Seattle, and they—he got the feathers for Eddie Bauer. [They laugh.]

And I met Jerry when I was 15, somehow, I think at some kind of mixer, dance of some sort, probably from Sunday school. It's possible. And we were—I'm not sure mother—my mother built houses, on top of everything else, designed the house [inaudible]—and it was about a block away from where his parents lived. And so he was my boyfriend from 15 on. So I learned my Mozart, my Köchel Listings and—yes, and Marx and Freud. He'd been to Gymnasium. He was a year or two older.

So he's coming from Gymnasium, in Liechtenstein or Switzerland.

MS. BERMAN: Very sophisticated, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, very sophisticated. So I start very early to have a sophisticated intellectual background. And he was a skier, and so was I, or I learned to ski.

MS. BERMAN; Anyway, you were very sophisticated. This was your first husband.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And were you still going to college when—

MS. BAER: He went into the Army. He got drafted. And so my last year of high school—actually I skipped it. So I came—so I went to summer school and took two courses that were missing or something, and then went directly to university at the age of 16. And then he came back the following year. He was in the Army for two years.

He was in the Medical Corps. He didn't go abroad. And he worked for a very famous psychiatrist. So he came—he became very, very expert on manic depression and schizophrenia and all of these things. So he was the orderly for this—for the guy who wrote the book—the—oh, it's *Rebel Without a Cause* [Robert M. Lindner. New York: Grune and Statton, 1944], whoever that—I can almost say his name. But it's too—

MS. BERMAN: I don't know who—

MS. BAER: It's too early for you. But—

MS. BERMAN: Well, of course I know the movie, but I never even thought about—that there was a book.

MS. BAER: Yes, it was [by] a psychiatrist. And Jerry was his orderly. So he comes home with all this kind of stuff. And that's when we sort of got married. And it's material I don't think I will go into. I think I'll leave my sex life out of this. Should I?

MS. BERMAN: This is not the *National Inquirer*, there's no need for someone to read about that.

MS. BAER: No, I have an interesting history, because—[laughs]—which I'm willing to discuss with people. But I don't think it should be an archival—my girlfriends or—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: —anybody who knows me knows about—

So it's very difficult to—any rate, we were married and lived together for a year. We lived with his parents. We were both at university. I was by then second or third year at the University of Washington, and I guess he was something like that, too.

And funny, I can't remember him at university at all. I—he went to New York after we lived together for a year at his family's. We—I wanted to find an apartment. I wanted to do this and that. He went to work for his father, that's it, in the feather factory.

MS. BERMAN: So everything was really—it was classic. It was just sort of exchanging one kind of, shall we say, bondage for another, but you're just in a different house.

MS. BAER: Well, I liked them.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. But, it's just—you're not independent. You didn't run away.

MS. BAER: That's right. I wanted an apartment and—and all of this. And—

MS. BERMAN: You wanted your own household so you could be—do it—enjoy it yourself.

MS. BAER: Of course. Yes, yes, yes.

And he wouldn't do it, and so I got a divorce.

MS. BERMAN: Well, at this point, though, didn't you move to New York? Isn't that how you got to New York the first time?

MS. BAER: Well, he moved to New York and was working for a brokerage house, a Sutro [Sutro and Company] one. These were friends of the—the family was friends with the Thannhausers, who are the whole of the Guggenheim Museum's collection.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: Those—you know, they were friend of the [Guggenheim] director's. These were cultured—

MS. BERMAN: Germans.

MS. BAER: Germans, yes. High-cultured Germans. And Nelly [Hanauer] wouldn't listen to anything conducted by what's his name—who stayed because—[inaudible]?

MS. BERMAN: Herbert von Karajan?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: Or Wilhelm Furtwängler?

MS. BAER: Something like that. No, there's a third one, but—et cetera.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay.

MS. BAER: So I have a lot of that kind of background in there. I did take some German in school, and I became addicted to quoting [Johann Wolfgang von] Goethe, to everybody's annoyance later on. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Of all the color theory, or other things?

MS. BAER: I have written about that, but that's much later. But I had enough German to—or German history or background to annoy Kaspar König very mightily. When he first came to New York when he was 19, he was hanging out with Richard Bellamy and the pop artists. I remember him talking to me. I looked at him and I said, "*Götz von Berlichingen. Götz von Berlichingen*." Which means in German—that means "kiss my ass."

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Because it's the way polite people said it. It's a play; it's a name of a play by Goethe, where in the play, the priest drops his pants and moons out the window. "*Leck mick arn arsch*" is the way you say it in German. But polite people—high, polite people will just name the play. "Götz von Berlichingen," they would say .

So I said this to Kaspar, and he actually was appalled. He said, "You're not supposed to know things like that. You're supposed to know about baseball and—" He was so offended that I would know a thing like that. So ever since then I have bothered to collect various phrases. [Laughs.] I enjoy doing that, yes. So I got that.

But mainly they were interested—when I lived there, I did not learn German. What they did is, they insisted that any German word that came out of my mouth had to be pronounced perfectly. And I could remember: Wolfgang, Wolfgang, Wolfgang, Wolfgang!

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: This is all—I never got to speak or anything. I did learn to yodel.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

Oh, you know what? I wanted to ask you one other thing just going back to the Seattle time—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —is that there was even then, of course, a large Asian community, Asian-Americans.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And do you remember—did you have any experiences? How—

MS. BAER: I had Chinese girlfriends.

MS. BERMAN: And what—well, and also—

MS. BAER: In high school.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, I was wondering if—about the Japanese community there, and the war, and if you had a sense of—

MS. BAER: Well, I'm afraid half of my memories are stories. My father, the bad boy—

MS. BERMAN: Are you cold? We can stop for a minute.

MS. BAER: No, no, no.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Yes. Pearl Harbor Day. My father took us all to Chinatown to see what was going on. We had to have dinner in a Chinese restaurant, which, of course, was deserted. With—it was also Japanese and Filipino town, in Seattle. It's one—and I can remember being the only people in this whole restaurant with the waiters there and being frightened, actually, at such a thing. It was just my father, because he decided he wants to see what's going on, and "what are they going to do with the Japs." And that was kind of—yes, I was not aware of the Japanese—oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: The interment, or the attitudes?

MS. BAER: Yes. Our Japanese cleaner came to our door to say goodbye, and to give my mother a beautiful silk scarf to say goodbye. And I have to tell you that prior to the war, in the '30s, 1936, my mother went to jail for picketing the waterfront [for] sending scrap iron to the Japanese. She fought—it didn't matter where—this was sort of her socialist, communist phase. [They laugh.]

Yes, so I knew about that, and we knew about China. And some very close family friends had lived in Japan and had come home. And I knew all the family and I developed—they eat dinner on Imari—what do you call it?—china. So since then I have Imari—

MS. BERMAN: Imari porcelain.

MS. BAER: Yes. I have, actually, a better bowl over there, which I wanted when I got married. They asked me to sign up for [my] Wedgwood, or whatever.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: And I said Imari—[they laugh]—and Danish handmade silver, because I didn't get any—

Yes. So in a sense, I have that also as a background thing. And I had pearls, real—really good pearls, several strings of very real pearls—I still have them. And earrings and stuff. This is—this is Seattle. This is West Coast gear.

MS. BERMAN: The other thing I wanted to ask you was, where does working on a kibbutz fit in here?

MS. BAER: Oh, well, after I was divorced, I wanted to get out of the—my parents were very upset with me. I can't remember why. I guess for getting divorced? No, more than that, okay. So I moved out. I got a job at the—I was going to school—in a restaurant, a Greek restaurant, where I served dinners. I learned to do plates.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Up the arm.

MS. BAER: —with the arms and all. And they fed me. So I had one meal. And I had tips and things like that. And I refused to come home. And I think it's because also they put my grandfather, who was dying, into my bedroom.

Oh, yes, I walked out. I can remember. I walked out; I just walked out. I think I said something bad—[inaudible]. I

forget. I was very—oh, I shouldn't tell this story, either. I was eyeing my father's gun cabinet. I was very upset with these people. I can't quite remember why. And I was wondering who I would take out first. And when I realized what I was doing and thinking, I took whatever money I had, and my coat, and I left. I walked out of the house and I never came back. If you get to the place where you're thinking of shooting your—and you're wondering if you'd do the maid, and what about the brothers—you're serious about it.

Oh, enough of that. I walked out with toothbrush, coat, enough money to get to the university. And that's when I took—I got this job. And I can remember sharing a bed with somebody because she didn't have any heat, so we had my coat on top of hers, and things like that. So I was that way. And my parents were saying, "You stay—we don't want you around your brothers. One bad apple spoils the lot," and so on and so forth.

So, yes. I did about a year of this, where—it was interesting. It was not very pleasant.

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

MS. BAER: And I made friends with all of the communists and all those kind of people on campus, and the literary people, which was very interesting.

Jerry had been in New York. And then I decided I was—I had met some Quakers who were working in Palestine—in Israel. And I—[inaudible]—that sounds interesting. This is 1950. The girls I went to high school with were all going to the pope's jubilee, fifty years [inaudible].

And I decided to go to Israel and work on a kibbutz the same year. And my mother had been national president of Hadassah, and my mother was very anti-Israeli, it turned out. She felt that it was a religion and it shouldn't be a country, et cetera, et cetera. So she was very upset that I was going to Israel, for god's sake. So—and she told everybody I was out seeing the pope. [They laugh.] Hortense. Yes.

At any rate, I had some money—a bank account that had been my wedding present. Oh, my father put it in the account, said that, "If you divorce this guy, I'll give you a Cadillac with some money," or something like that. At any rate—

MS. BERMAN: So he—your father didn't like this first marriage then.

MS. BAER: That's right. He didn't like the family or anything else. They were down the street, and they were refugees; they were Germans.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Okay. Yes.

MS. BAER: This is a Republican—yes. Any rate, when I was in Israel working on this kibbutz, I hitchhiked around. The first letter I got from them back was saying they were taking all the money out of my account. I had my ticket back; that was all. Because I cost them so much money for dentists and luggage. Yes, they sent me a bill. I mean, this was war.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Especially because, one, they were—also, you were probably about 21 by now. So it was your money.

MS. BAER: Yes. I celebrated my 21st birthday in Israel. And I think I came home—see, I went there in April and came home in September, absolutely penniless. And I landed in New York. So I went and stayed with my first husband, who was working there, Jerry. I went and stayed for another year and we had an apartment together. But it still—it was no good.

MS. BERMAN: All right. I just want to ask you about Israel. Is that—does that experience—I mean, also, Israel was just becoming a state. I mean, was the—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, I think it would have been an exciting time to be there.

MS. BAER: It was. Yes. I—they had something called the Palmach, which was an army of some sort. And I ended up in a Canadian kibbutz. Or no—it was a real kibbutz. It was people who had been in the Dead Sea, and they had come up after the war to a place called Nahariya, [Kibbutz Cabri Beit Harava] which was an orchard outside of Haifa, I think.

MS. BERMAN: The names are in the book.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: So don't worry about it. I can fill those in.

MS. BAER: Okay. And there was a Canadian group learning to do all the skills in order to do their own kibbutz. So I joined them because they were English-speaking. And I worked as a carpenter, which was very good.

MS. BERMAN: That probably stood you in good stead.

MS. BAER: Yes. And I worked in the orchard, climbing trees and sawing branches off, and things like that. I was a carpentress. And nails out of timber to be used again for things like—but I discovered that most of these people had private bank accounts and things like this, and then—[laughs]—they could—

MS. BERMAN: They could stay there.

MS. BAER: I was interested in socialism. Let me put it that way. As a political thing. And I discovered that it really didn't work very well, as much as one would have wanted it. That fixed a lot of things for me later on. I never got trapped into things. I found it interesting, and I would go against the FBI if I wanted the Spanish Civil War songs, which I knew they were photographing whoever went in that bookstore. I went in anyway, so on and so forth. So I have bad marks. I've signed against the Nixon bills, and things like petitions, and—

MS. BERMAN: Well, everybody's got files, of course.

MS. BAER: Yes. But later on when I married Richard Baer, whose family owned NBC and RCA, they discovered I was blacklisted. [They laugh.] But they used me. They would sit me at dinner parties next to Wall Street because I was literate and read the *Manchester Guardian*, my dear, and things of that sort. And then I had [David] Sarnoff sitting on the other side to make sure that this communist did not fuck up—do bad things. [They laugh.] So this was very clever.

But no, I never joined anything. I would consider myself a Marxist, so to speak. But not the sort that believes in revolution and so on and so forth. I certainly like the overview of history, or at least the admonition to pay attention to it, which Americans seem unable to do—shortest memories in the world, god. They do—yes. I mean, as far as events of importance.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Police shooting everybody and things like that, our police shooting our people, our college students—[inaudible]—five years later, ten years later. Astonishing. Anyway.

Yes. Israel taught me just enough. And to be honest, I was a bit snobbish. They had people like pianists come, entertainment came, very high-level stuff. Except it was never Bach, it was always—[laughs]—Beethoven, or worse. And I got tired of it. And they kept saying, "Isn't this marvelous?" And I kept saying—"uh-uhh" [negative.] I was not impressed, frankly. But I did spend a number of months doing it. And I will say I'm still not that impressed with what the Israelis are doing.

I met some of the Stern Gang also, the real left-wing hardcore people. Not for me. *Niet voor mij*.

MS. BERMAN: No. It just was an interesting detour, if it was a detour.

MS. BAER: Yes. It was an adventure, I would say.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Exactly.

MS. BAER: So I came back with no money and nothing, and I started in New York and I got a job. And I went to school. I went to the New School [for Social Research] at that point. I still hadn't graduated from the University of Washington when I left.

MS. BERMAN: Now, you went to the New School, but just out of—I don't know if you went to the Parsons—the School of Design part at all. But you were now away from mom. Was there any sense about trying to go to the Art Students League or Pratt?

MS. BAER: No. I just took an art—I took an art course or two. I took life drawing classes, which amused me. But oh, no, I was in a remarkable intellectual world. I was—my economics professor had been the director of finance, the minister of finance in the Weimar Republic [Adolph Lowe]. And I learned Keynesian—he assigned me [John Maynard] Keynes to study. And I looked over this thing, and I thought, oh, god, that's a beautiful theory and it'll never work, as people [do now ?]—[laughs]—and I wrote that. I wrote that as my thing in a real economics—graduate school economics—class, and I got an A-plus, because he sa[id], "No one ever says that."

MS. BERMAN: Well, also, if you proved [it], a lot of times they don't care. It's not a right or wrong answer. It's the

process that you use to get there.

MS. BAER: Yes. No, no, I said, "People don't act that way." [Laughs.]

At any rate, such—and we had very famous—I mean, [Claude] Lévi-Strauss used to teach there. I didn't have a class from him, unfortunately. But—

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's absolutely—

MS. BAER: —but Karen—I don't know. I was—

MS. BERMAN: Karen Horney?

MS. BAER: —I think she was teaching there. I don't think I—but I was with all the Gestalt people. The ones that—Wallach, Hans Wallach—actually, I was dating him. I mean, I went out with him a couple of times. And Koffka—[Kurt] Koffka. You know who I mean? Koffka—no, there were two Ks in the founders of Gestalt—[Max] Wertheimer—[inaudible]—motion pictures; he was old and was gone. But there—one of them was still left teaching at Rutgers, or someplace like that. Mary somebody [Mary Henle]. Any rate, I could look that up—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Certainly, from the '30s through the '50s, and into the '60s, those were the great days of the New School in terms of pre-and post-war refugees.

MS. BAER: Well, I'll get you the names of the Gestalt professors. But also in other fields, in the literary fields, and things like that, where I was exposed to all the Europeans—[Martin] Heidegger and [Edmund] Husserl, and—[inaudible]. What American in the world had that kind of a background? I mean, I was adoring it. [Laughs.]

It really suited me very much. And I never had anybody I could talk to once I left that place. And I think it was 10 or 15 years before my other artist friends suddenly had discovered suchlike names and places.

MS. BERMAN: So you lived with your husband for about a year. And then where were you on your own, and how were you surviving?

MS. BAER: I went on—[inaudible]. I worked at a job, caused them to go bankrupt. [Laughs.] It [was] an interior design studio that built showrooms for toys and things like that. And I was the secretary and I had to draw the stuff and everything. And I had to pay the carpenters, and did things like that. And it was a one person—the guy could sell these things, et cetera, and I did this sort of work. And I wasn't very good at it, but I said, "Listen, you're always—you never have enough money. You should go and borrow some money so that I don't have to take phone calls all the time, telling lies, and 'the check's in the mail,' et cetera, et cetera."

So he went and did it. And something happened to him in the sense that now he was in debt. This is a man with five children in Brooklyn, a young, almost Orthodox guy. And something happened to his mind. He suddenly was deadly, and he couldn't sell anything anymore and he went bankrupt. [They laugh.] Wonderful.

MS. BERMAN: Not quite.

MS. BAER: You know what I mean.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: He shouldn't have done what I said. So I think I went on unemployment insurance because I think I worked for him for a couple of years, and I was still going to school. I was working and going to school at night. I believe it was at that time where—I've spoken about this before—I was getting ready to try and do a PhD. I was working for a master's. I owed a thesis, which I never did, and—

MS. BERMAN: Why do you think that was, that you just never did it? I know you moved, but—

MS. BAER: No, I stopped. Actually, what happened is the teacher—first of all, he told me there was no room for women in his field. This was the time when the mind was a black box, the brain was a black box. And they were just beginning to have theories that the mind worked as yes/no, zero/one—computers had just begun to arrive. So they were thinking that the brain was a computer. And he sent me up to Yale, to one of his students who was teaching at Yale.

MS. BERMAN: Is this in physiology or psychology at this point?

MS. BAER: It was physiological psychology, neuropsychology. And I went up there, and I came in and there's an enormous [Alexander] Calder mobile hanging. And she's in the kitchen cooking dinner with the Bach B minor mass on.

MS. BERMAN: This isn't—this is the physiological—you're not [with] Albers, or anything like that.

MS. BAER: No, no, no. This is a young professor and his wife that was going to advise me about steps of how to get into a graduate school to take a PhD. I was getting ready to—the next year I was going to take a PhD. And I was so aesthetically offended by the combination of the Calder, which I know is junk, and the idea that anybody would—cooking to a Bach B minor mass, this just struck me as not right. I don't want to be around people like this. This is not my world. I didn't know what my world was, but this was not going to be it, especially in a conversation where he kept talking about zero, one, all this kind of stuff. And it suddenly occurred to me that they were going into mathematics, which I'm very poor at.

I had already discussed with my teacher—as far as doing a thesis, I was interested in writing about [Gottfried] Leibniz, and they wanted me to do illustrations, if you turn it 20 degrees, how does—do people recognize it. Something called [Statistical Hoeffding Function]—something, which did not interest me at all.

So, I just got off the train—I don't think this is in Judy's article [Judith E. Stein, "The Adventures of Jo Baer," *Art in America* (May 2003)]—at eight o'clock or nine o'clock at night, after having dinner at Yale. And I walked down the street and there in a window was a little Matisse drawing. And I looked at it and I burst into tears, and I never went back to school. And everything—I got letters from my professors—Professor—[inaudible], "Where are you, what has happened?" I didn't answer. I just quit. Matisses do that to you.

Yes, and then I don't remember what I did. I left New York.

MS. BERMAN: But was there a sense of, I am going to be an artist? Or was that sense of just crying, of just—

MS. BAER: Just crying. I'm not going to do that. No. I considered going back to school for architecture, was my first thing. And then the second thing I thought was maybe I—television was new, maybe I could be a TV director. I knew one, yes. And he was one of the very first ones, so he and his wife were friends, and everything like that. And that's what I decided to do because I thought I was so good with people. [Laughs.] Do you believe that?

MS. BERMAN: Well, you probably are, but not—[they laugh]—not brown-nosing, is what—which is what was really being—

MS. BAER: I have no idea. When I—I went out, I hitchhiked—no. I found friends, Seattle friends—not even friends, but I had people I knew who were driving from New York to Los Angeles, so I hitched a ride with them. It was horrible, three days with people you—I had my head out the window the whole time so I wouldn't have to talk to them. And I had family in L.A., cousins, which is another—another little thing that I—at any rate. What did you just ask me?

MS. BERMAN: I wasn't so much asking. But was there an art direction? You said no, you had just—

MS. BAER: Right, go—just so then I started—

MS. BERMAN: You went to L.A.—

MS. BAER: Yes, I decided to get a job as a—to work somehow or—what did I—earlier, I had done something similar in New York. Earlier, before I left, I actually got a job at CBS for the same reason. Ah. I used to hang out in certain bars—Minetta [Tavern], or there was San Remo [Café], when people like Dylan were just coming through in—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —the neighborhood. Yes. And—

MS. BERMAN: In the Village.

MS. BAER: Yes. I lived on the Lower East Side. I lived on Ludlow Street. However, I'd walk over to the Village. Oh, there's a whole—there were several years in there I'm leaving out. Maybe we should get back to that—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: —because it's an interesting time. If I can—I've forgotten all about this. But—yes. No—oh, I did this in Hollywood, sorry. I did get a job working as an assistant director, a script girl, with these friends from New York.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Oh no, CBS, CBS. I met at the San Remo a very ugly man—[they laugh]—who happened to be the TV

critic for the [*New York] Daily News*. And he had been eying me up, everything like this [inaudible]—nothing. And I suddenly decided people get jobs by going up to somebody like that—his name was Sid Shalit, Shalit, Shit? Oh —

MS. BERMAN: Oh, was that Gene Shalit?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Sid [Shalit]. No. And so I agreed to go out with him. And he took me to the Stork Club, the Stork Club, and showed me off, like a trophy.

MS. BERMAN: Right, you were eye candy.

MS. BAER: Yes, well, tits, and—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —intelligent. [Inaudible]—[I] was also very intelligent. Or literate, et cetera. And so he promised he would get me a job at CBS, which he did, where I worked in the—where—in the place where they send out invitations—the mail rooms, essentially, but—I can't type, incidentally. [They laugh.]

So—I'm very slow. And I never learned how to type. I mean, every time I learn it, I forget it very quickly.

MS. BERMAN: You know, you purposely wouldn't learn how, you wouldn't be stuck as a typist.

MS. BAER: Yes—yes, well, they—I passed the test well enough to just get the job. And I lasted, I think, one week or two weeks. What happened is, there I am on Madison Avenue at CBS. I'm in these elevators with these people. And the whole thing was so unpleasant to me. I actually burst out into hives, and every part of my body —my eyes, my mouth, my parts—everything swelled up totally, just totally sealed me in. And I went to a psychiatrist who gave me some sleeping pills. They put me to sleep for two days or three days. [Laughs.] And I never went back.

And then I got all these horrible phone calls from this man. He says, "You're such a piece of shit. You can't do anything, and you've made my name useless." And I got berated for wasting a great opportunity. I thought maybe from there, I could get—become an assistant director, go out on the floor—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, but apparently I just—

MS. BERMAN: Well, your body obviously told you with the hives that it was—

MS. BAER: Well, it was not—this was not happening.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I really cannot do what I don't want to do. I mean, I know how to do things, to—I mean, I'm smart enough to understand how it works. And I try it out, but there's no way that I'm able to be that person. It's interesting in that sense. So it keeps me honest.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I haven't seen it in your publications, but I wanted to find out if this was truth or some sort of distortion. At some time, you worked as a photographic model and then—and that you were—

MS. BAER: The Hamilton [Richard Hamilton, *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Appealing*, 1956]?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes, well, that's—I think that's really important, so I think we should mention that because it's —

MS. BAER: All right.

MS. BERMAN: —almost like you became an accidental icon.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: I'm not sure if this is where it is or not. Or maybe it's a little later. But that piece was 1956, so it would—you know.

MS. BAER: Yes. When I was going—when I came back from Israel, it would be 1950. I used to—I was scared to death of nighttime. I stayed up all night in a cafeteria. And I had adventures. I can remember some crazy person throwing chairs at me. I'm just sitting there reading, and stuff like that.

I think it was before I was going to school—no, I must have been going to school. And there were two guys there. They both worked in television. And one worked at NBC, and one worked at CBS, for the children's programs, things like that. And they—one of them took photographs. You know, he had a studio and everything else. And he asked me to pose for him. And I was posed with an Israeli scarf—never naked, but I may have had the scarf off.

And I don't know what happened to the photographs. I remember doing it. And they loaned me money, so in that sense—but they were two friends that hung out at night. I knew them all the way through Los Angeles: Sid Wasserman and Nat Wilkes. I actually know their names.

MS. BERMAN: Wilkes or Wills?

MS. BAER: Wilkes, W-I-L-K-E-S. He had a children's program. So they loaned me the money to buy—the key money for my apartment at Ludlow Street, which I paid off as a loan. I mean, it was—it was paper and all. There was—they were not boyfriends. These were—

MS. BERMAN: This was not exploitative, is what you're saying.

MS. BAER: Yes, there's nothing sexual here except in—I guess it was in their sense, but nothing that I had to do. And photographs were taken then. And I have some beautiful—many of these very young photographs from here, where I look like an Italian movie actress. I could even name—I could show you pictures of her and me [Silvana Mangano]. And I used to get free grappa and drinks in Italian restaurants, because I looked like one of—I had a nice fat face. And it's apparently one of these photographs that could have been me. I don't know.

Years later, Jack Wesley comes home from work, and he's got a copy of *Art in America*, and in it is the Richard Hamilton photograph and herself in the—and he says, "That's you." And I looked, and I said, "Oh my god." And except for the tassels, which are obviously stuck on, the mouth is open—[they laugh]—she's talking—and it looks like my earrings, and it's my haircut. And it was sort of a joke. Except a guy from the Tate comes to see Jack's work for [a show on] Pop Art. And so we ask him about this Richard Hamilton, and did he know him, and any idea who this woman was.

But he says, "Oh, it's from some photographic magazine from New York," he thought. Well, a photographic magazine from New York could well have been me. So this was just sort of a thing.

So when they were writing the book [*Richard Hamilton: Collected Words 1953-1982.* London: Tate, 1982]—oh, I met Hamilton's wife in Ireland when I lived there.

MS. BERMAN: Which one? The first or the second?

MS. BAER: Rita.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, right. His first wife was killed in a car accident. So she's still his wife—

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: —Rita Donagh.

MS. BAER: Donagh, yes. And I asked her if it was possible—if she could find out who that woman was, to see if it was me or not. So apparently—and they never got back to me, and I forgot about it—but apparently when they were writing the book, she had said something about this.

So the editor wrote me and said, "Is it possible it's you?" I said, "Well, I don't know," et cetera. They were looking for it. I—finally they said, "Well, we can't find who it is." I've sent him pictures of myself from the same period, and he said, "It looks just like you."

So I said, "Well, if you can't find who it was, you can say it's me." I mean, it's a good story. Why not? It's such a nice ironic—of all people—first of all, Hamilton and I are very much alike in our careers in the sense of being very independent and out here, in that sense. So it would be absolutely fitting.

MS. BERMAN: Right, now—and also, have you ever met Richard Hamilton himself?

MS. BAER: No. It was Rita I met. No.

MS. BERMAN: Because I was going to ask you, when you lived in London, if you were—when you got there, if you had met him.

MS. BAER: Never.

MS. BERMAN: No. And he was—also in the '60s, he was in New York a lot.

MS. BAER: No. There's really no connection. Any rate, after this all went on, it suddenly occurred to me to ask to see a blow-up. I've only ever seen the magazine. I still have it. And it's not me. There's no way it's me. I never had a waist that tiny. I've never had a nose that short. On the other hand, my legs were better, and I was broader in the shoulders.

So I wrote him, and I said, "No, it really isn't me. It's—you know, it's—nice try." But he kept it in. And I had given him permission, because I said, "If you never find anybody, you can have me." You know.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Of course, I'm not sure how much he did and didn't what we would call Photoshop it, maybe change or select a little bit on the painting in the collage.

MS. BAER: I don't think they could in those days.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I think you just took the picture and—well, and he pasted on these nipple things, and stuff like that.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. It's—well, it's his most famous picture.

MS. BAER: I know. So you can leave this in or take this out. I—

MS. BERMAN: Well, I just think it's a good discussion because it's come up, so why not—

MS. BAER: —yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: It's a definite maybe.

MS. BAER: I think—yes, okay. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, in other words, I saw it [online], but someone glancingly said it in one line.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: —And the story's a little bit more complex than that.

MS. BAER: And I was never a model. This was a favor I was doing. In fact I—well, I'm telling a lie. I modeled once for somebody for money, when I first came to New York, for a fine arts class for some painter around, because I certainly needed money. I had no money. And these were sort of about five old people—well, 40-year-olds—[they laugh]—50-year-olds, perfectly nice.

And I'm sitting there—and it's on Bleecker Street or someplace—yes, it's Bleecker Street, some little studio. And I sat there for the two hours absolutely bright red. [They laugh.] Totally—the whole body was the color of my rug in there. [They laugh.] I never did it again. I got $15 for it. So that was the only time I ever did any nude modeling in that sense of sitting a life drawing. Not my sort—

MS. BERMAN: Right. But see, I'm glad you're talking about this, because it said in this reference "photographic model"—

MS. BAER: Yes—

MS. BERMAN: —which, as you say, you did this once for friends and another—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —which makes one think, "Oh, [she] worked as a model for a time."

MS. BAER: No, and in fact I tried it again about five years ago. Not nude modeling, but fashion, because I heard that a photographer who has done Vivienne Westwood, and Blondie, et cetera—and she used to [be] a girlfriend of the [Red Hot] Chili Peppers—one of the Chili Peppers, et cetera. Her name was Barbara [van Ittersum]. She asked, would I pose for her book. And apparently she wanted an old person. I don't know. So she dressed me up into a rubber dress of ruffles that they couldn't even get closed in the back. They had to—[inaudible]—clamp—

[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: They stuck me in stiletto heels. And there's a—[inaudible]—and everything. And it was absolutely—it was—you could tell I was an old woman. She made me look like an old whore.

MS. BERMAN: Because it would be mutton dressed as lamb.

MS. BAER: Yes, it's truly wrong, not me in any way. I hate—but I did this. I showed up at two o'clock in the afternoon and I got home at eight o'clock at night. And the next day, I—my whole body went into cramp, every part of me. I am not an object. There is—I was—I did everything I was told, but my whole body just went into—I cannot model. I cannot be an object. I cannot. It's just—it just won't work. I've been told that I could make a lot of money on TV. They needed healthy old people, and that I would do very, very well. But I can't do it. I really can't, certainly not now.

So what was true 50 or 60 years ago remains true to this day. It's nothing to do with ethics or anything else. It's just—body says no. And I am a body person, a very physical person.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I think we'll get to this later. And I think some of the size of your paintings relates to your body and what you're entering into it.

MS. BAER: Yes, but I don't normally critique that way. I read those things. I've got to take them for granted. It should be everybody. You have to move to do something. [Laughs.] Should be without saying, is I guess what I mean. It never occurs to me to speak of that or think about that, unless it's bending over or climbing up these days—[they laugh]—which is indeed a problem.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Where we vaguely left off was you were on your way to L.A. with people you didn't like. So you got to L.A.

MS. BAER: Yes, and I stayed. I went to my uncle—aunt and uncle's home. They had a daughter my age who'd been married recently and then the two older brothers were long married and gone. But I'd known them all my life, since they used to—they'd lived in Seattle before. And at the age of even five years old, I used to spend summertimes with—this was a very rich uncle who had Tennessee walking horses, et cetera, that I also—[inaudible]—growing up. So I knew this uncle. And this uncle had a ranch that had been Roy Rogers's ranch. And on it, he had, I think, black Angus cattle.

MS. BERMAN: I think you—are you sure Roy Rogers? He would—Roy would have still—Roy Rogers was still very much alive there, not that he couldn't have sold it. But—it's all right if it isn't. But I'm just—

MS. BAER: Well, if it wasn't Roy Rogers, then it was another one.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, it doesn't matter. But I think Roy Rogers was still pretty active as a—not just as an actor—

MS. BAER: [Inaudible] the '50s?

MS. BERMAN: Well, yes. But, anyway—it's okay. I just—

MS. BAER: I could have been told a lie as far as that goes.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it could have been Roy—it could have been Roy Rogers.

MS. BAER: It was out in the San Fernando Valley. And my uncle had black Angus cattle.

MS. BERMAN: Maybe Gene Autry. But never mind.

MS. BAER: Maybe it's Gene Autry. Yes, who knows?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Anyway.

MS. BAER: Yes, thank you, I told you I'm having trouble with names.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's okay.

MS. BAER: Yes, Gene Autry's place, probably. Not that I paid any attention to the difference between either of them in my lifetime. Good girl—

MS. BERMAN: Well, only because Roy Rogers came along slightly later than—

MS. BAER: I had no idea, no. All I know is Uncle Dan and Aunt Nettie [Kleinberg]. And when I—they had no children there, anymore. This is a house with tennis court, swimming pool, horses, cattle. And he was going to get me a job in a brokerage, downtown Los Angeles, but I must never tell anyone I'd been divorced. Indeed—had all these rules—

MS. BERMAN: Well, that was in the '50s in California. It was still the land of the divorced. But go on, yes.

MS. BAER: San Fernando Valley, Seattle people moved down there. And, incidentally, he was—he almost had to go to prison for smuggling silver from Mexico. [Laughs.] You've never been divorced. Yes, Uncle Dan and Aunt Nettie. And I last[ed] about two weeks. Then I went home to Seattle. And I lasted there about two weeks, where I had to go out [with] boys that I had gone to college with—all the ones who hadn't married yet. [Laughs.] Yes, I'd been living in New York. I—[inaudible]—no way.

So my parents gave me my youngest brother's little Chevrolet coupe car. And I drove down to L.A. They gave me a credit card for gasoline. Petrol, gasoline. And I stayed in a motel. And that's when I began job hunting for—for movies, places—[inaudible]—going to be a director, or something like that.

Yes, and interesting, I hadn't been there more than two days looking around when the mafia got in touch with me. I was getting phone calls. People I had known in New York apparently were mafia. And whether I ran into one of them or what, I don't know—phone calls saying. "What was my size" and "What would I like to. . . "—kind of thing. They wanted sympathy, wanted to give me a gift. And I suddenly realized what was going on. I was getting these phone calls. There I am, in a motel looking for a job. And—

MS. BERMAN: I don't quite understand what's going on. I mean, did you know people in the mafia in New York?

MS. BAER: Yes. One always did.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay—

MS. BAER: I mean, they were around in the bars. And I guess they knew I was going to California. And how on earth they got my phone number or what, I don't know. But I can remember Robinson's department store calling me. And I put it together. It's possible I was looking for a job. And this guy was—had something to do with—with the director I knew from New York. I think I must have run into him. And a day or two later, I'm getting these phone calls. And I realized what was going on.

So I called the vice squad. And I said, "I'm getting these phone calls, da, da, da, da." Now the vice squad always knows the mafia. So it all stopped. So—it's just the way that works. And I was left alone. But I'm not quite sure how that happened. Do we need to research to make it non—

MS. BERMAN: No, no, that's okay. We don't need to research it. I just was—I guess because I was just a little bit thick about what that thread was. So—but I guess somehow you met them in New York. And, as they say, they were going to take care of you, if you—if you wished.

MS. BAER: Yes, something like that. Yes, well, no, earlier I had a run-in with them—when I was living on unemployment insurance and my phone had been turned off and things like that. This is in the Village.

And suddenly the guy—somebody called Ruby—got in touch with me from a jewelry store where I used to buy earrings and stuff. Somebody called Ruby took me out to dinner. He had the used—he had the Chrysler thing—franchise for the Village. And he took me out to dinner and he said, "A woman like you, a young woman like you, a girl like you shouldn't have to have her telephone turned off." They knew about me. "And there are things we can help you with." This scared the hell out of me.

Yes, you know, then I thanked him and—so they would have liked to have groomed me as a call girl. And they were starting to put pressure on me that, "You shouldn't give it away." "You should get paid for this." [Laughs.] And I was promiscuous to some extent.

MS. BERMAN: That was the time.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, yes. And I was very much alone. The thing is, I didn't know any adults in New York. And I knew enough you don't go to the police, because then they have you. And they are corrupt enough so then you're a policeman's girlfriend.

So there's nothing—that's why I left. So I left with all of this going on. I found my way out of there as fast as I could. It scared me. And apparently there were enough networkings going on, the same people knew the same people that I landed with it—they knew I was there. And then they were at it again. And the way to stop it is of course you go to the police. To vice, you don't just go to the police. You could go to the vice squad. And I was smart enough to do that. And then I was left alone.

But, yes, I was scared to death, you know. I was very lucky. I was around—but it's always very interesting, because I was around always the wrong kinds of people. I was around—in New York, I knew all the communist members of the maritime union—you know, the National Maritime Union, NMU.

They were very, very strong guys and very, very, very tough. And I remember junkies suddenly pulling guns in the San Remo, and people—[inaudible]—I just remember a lot of really frightening people.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, the Village was not gentrified then in the least.

MS. BAER: Oh no. So I became very experienced one step off having it happen to me, just was close enough to watch it. And every time it got really close, I'd skitter out of there very, very fast. But I felt that one should know the world. And I—okay, I was an intellectual at the time, and not even an artist. You should know the world. And this world [is] of course very interesting.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And it wasn't the ivory tower.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: This was the real life.

MS. BAER: Yes, absolutely. I remember spending an evening with a beautiful black—a big black guy who was a songwriter. And he wrote one of the lyrics, the—what do you call it? When they—it's not Jabberwocky, but it's—and it's not scat. It's a certain kind of nonsense stuff.

MS. BERMAN: No, is scat—

MS. BAER: No, it's not scat. Oh, I've infected you. I knew I would eventually.

MS. BERMAN: No, no, no. It's just I'm just not as good as—I'm thinking of someone like Ella Fitzgerald—she used to call it scatting. So—

MS. BAER: No, that's—no. It's—with the get-get-get-on-the-bats, Danny Lou—[inaudible]—Danny Kaye—but the hot spot—the hot spot on and the—[inaudible]—very, very hip black guy who I wasn't really pretty enough for. But I can remember having drinks with him. And I can remember Brazilian artists, writers, yes, who taught me that coffee should always have chocolate in it, and—[inaudible]—I mean—

MS. BERMAN: It was an education.

MS. BAER: Absolutely. And I am still totally illiterate by feel for who is gay and who isn't gay. Only in America—England, I don't know. Holland, I know now. But where I—from across the room, I knew, you know—[inaudible]—and I had lesbians tearing my sweaters off with their husbands watching—[they laugh]—running for my life. I spent about three very informative years where I came out of it knowing a hell of a lot more than most of my contemporaries. But I was very lucky, because I never got any diseases. I never even had crabs. I never—I did—[what ?] happened in California. So a stunt man hit—smashed me around. And I—[laughs]—[inaudible] a lot of blood. That was strange, but unwarranted.

By and large, I was very, very lucky. But I am not a naive woman. And I thank god for it. You know, I'm not a bourgeois anymore. If [I] ever [was]. I don't know what I am. I mean, I'm an artist.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right, very much. Maybe because you were running to some sort of safety, after these very rough episodes, you ran into, or somehow met, Richard Baer. And you had a very upholstered life. It was briefly —

MS. BAER: Oh, god, he gave me steak and shrimp salad, and he was good-looking, and he was smarter than I, and he came from a rich family. What more could you want? [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: But—I mean, but you must have been in love with him at first or something.

MS. BAER: I mean—[inaudible]—in love—I don't think I was ever in love with anybody, except the ones I shouldn't have been—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —[laughs]—who didn't want me. No, I think I had begun to realize that I'd be lucky if I got anyone. And I left it at that. I think this was true up until—no, I think, in a sense, it's always been true, even with the younger men later on. That I was lucky anybody wanted me. I left it at that. If I could stand them—[they laugh]—if I liked them, if I enjoyed them, and all the rest of it.

MS. BERMAN: The way you're saying that it was lucky that anyone wanted you—don't you think that's also some of your mother's imprint? Because your mother seemed—said you have no talent, you know.

MS. BAER: No, no, nothing like that. No, I overcame my mother, as far as I know. No, no, I felt that I began to realize that I was rather monstrous. It's not that I was not good enough. [They laugh]. The other way around. That I would—that I was very difficult to be around, especially for men. The older and more successful I got, the more I realized that this is—you know, who takes the garbage out? Well, it ain't me. You know I mean, who wants somebody like that? And it's not something I can change.

So I figured I was lucky, that anybody strong enough and dumb enough that I could stand was for me. And it's an immediate kind of thing, and I wouldn't call it love. I don't know what I would call it, because I don't think I'm in the love business, is what I'm really trying to say.

The last and only thing I remember loving was my horse. [Laughs.] I really adored my—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I loved his—smelled so good, and I—I really grieved when he was killed. But—and before that, one of my cats.

MS. BERMAN: Is—so you married Richard Baer in '53, I guess? And that was—because your son was—

MS. BAER: Yes, because Josh was born in '55, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. And was this something—did you have to meet his family? Or you were both—

MS. BAER: [Inaudible.] [Laughs.] You mean the Sarnoffs.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. You know who the Sarnoffs—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, sure. NBC.

MS. BAER: Uncle General [David Sarnoff]. Yes. Well, talk about in-laws. General's only sister was my mother-in-law, and—princess—[inaudible]—won't do—how to describe her?

MS. BERMAN: Was that Esme?

MS. BAER: No, it was Edie.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Edie, okay.

MS. BAER: Edie. Which was Ida; became Edie. And she still is in touch with Tante—[inaudible]—and Tante [Saritel and Tante Chaienta] and such.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Like, I've never been around anything like that. Yes, they were very tough people.

MS. BERMAN: But they didn't prevent him from marrying you.

MS. BAER: No, not at all. Uncle General was—met my mother, was bowled over by her. And my mother considered him, you know, Russian Jews—

MS. BERMAN: [As lower]—yes. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] My mother was having none of it. He was always trying: "Tell your mother that I did this," and—I mean, the General was something else. He was a piece of work.

MS. BERMAN: Well, also, your mother was a force of—if she could—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: If she could make him try to get her approval—

MS. BAER: Yes. [Laughs.] Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and never feel he succeeded.

MS. BAER: Yes—

MS. BERMAN: You must have enjoyed the comedy of that.

MS. BAER: I did, I did, I did. [Laughs.] Yes. No, I found certain parts of that marriage very interesting. I mean, as I say, they used me at dinner parties. Did I say—oh, I was hanging out with the Wall Street bankers for NBC, you know, they had—or Gene Autry, or—dinner—I think Roy Rogers was at—it was a dinner I was at, because I was sitting next—on the other side of his wife.

MS. BERMAN: Dale Evans.

MS. BAER: Dale. Dale Evans was there. I met Frank Sinatra. I got to go backstage and say hello to him.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. So was your husband a writer, or a director?

MS. BAER: Writer. Later on he did some Broadway plays and movies, I think.

MS. BERMAN: Is he still alive?

MS. BAER: He just died last year. First the first husband died, then the second husband died. And I'm waiting for the—Jack.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I saw Bill Barrett this summer, and I guess Bill is writing a book on him?

MS. BAER: [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Did you get—did you ever get one of these?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes, I got this in—I went to the show this summer, so yes.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. Well, they tell me he's ill, so. But they were all my age. And after that, the next ones were lots and lots younger.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. But I guess—did Josh keep up with his father?

MS. BAER: He didn't until a few years before he was—Josh refused to have anything to do with either of us for a number of years. I mean, I think these yuppie '80s children decided they had invented themselves. And I can remember there was an art fair here with young galleries being invited. The KunstRAI, sort of—I think it's called here.

And so Josh, when he had a gallery, and certain others whose names I—at any rate, they are having dinner down in the Leidseplein, and I'm there—you know, the mom—and I'm the only artist there, and the only—the only mother there, god knows. And they've forgotten I'm there. I'm very quiet. I've [been] quiet for a very long time until recently, because my work was accepted, but not accepted, in a sense. So I was sort of taking shit in the—nicest possible way.

So I was being very quiet. And they're all bragging about how long it's been since they had anything to do with their mothers. One is saying 20 years; another's saying 15 years. And I'm sitting there listening to them. These people—these were the yuppies, the real ones. And Josh was part of that.

So he certainly did not wish to—he used to—when I was in New York, he took me around the East Village when that was hot. And he introduced me to people who had shows of people from my generation, minimalist artists there, who would certainly know my name. And he would say, "and this is my mother, Jo Baer." And they would hear "mother," and that made them know who I was. This—he was doing this to me. And I suddenly caught on. So one of the art fairs, I'm talking to Leo Castelli, and I said, "And this is my son." [They laugh.] And he just stands there. It's like—I just stand there.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And I suddenly realize they don't know who I am. He's doing this. He was very upset with me because I didn't care for the art he showed particularly. I didn't think it was bad; I just didn't think it was good. And I did come to the openings and stuff. But I didn't praise him, and all the rest.

So he really cut off all communication, refused to answer phones or e-mails or anything for several years—till we

ran into one another in Basel, which—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I knew he was there. I had work there in a show. And I went to get my badge, and they—there was Josh Baer there. So I knew he would be there.

So I walked around and we bumped into each other. And he said, "Oh, hello." He said, "Would you like a glass of champagne?" [Laughs.] This is two years—[inaudible].

So we go and have a glass of champagne, and I ask how his father is, or has he ever been in touch. And he says, "Well, [I] might." And I say, "You should." And that was it. And another year or so goes by.

MS. BERMAN: Right, because he mostly lived with you—or seemed to live with you.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes, he always lived with me and just visited the West Coast.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. Well, anyway, you are now in an upper-middle-class-to-wealthy situation in Beverly Hills, I guess. Are you, now that—I mean, I don't know if you want to work but can't, or shouldn't, or what you're doing. Are you becoming a small-time art collector? Or are you having any—

MS. BAER: Oh—[inaudible]. On our honeymoon we went and bought two paintings for the house. And one of them was from Richard Bellamy's first gallery—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Hansa.

MS. BAER: Hansa—

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: —up on Fifty-Seventh Street. And—

MS. BERMAN: So you went to New York for your honeymoon.

MS. BAER: Yes. And we were staying at the Essex House, on the park [Central Park]. Somebody loaned us the—I don't know. Edie Baer—they knew people, of course. And they lived next door in the—whatever the hotel is next door. So—kept us close.

Bought a painting by somebody called Jan Müller that was this—well, eight foot across and six foot high, and was made on sailboat canvas, so it had gold—the things—[inaudible]—up in California. And then a strange portrait of—sort of [a] picture of a head. I kept the big one when we were divorced, and Dick kept—

MS. BERMAN: Kept the other one.

MS. BAER: —the other one, yes. And then there was a little Jan Müller that he kept. And I think he sold them. I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Did you—now, of course, Hansa, besides Dick Bellamy, had Ivan Karp—I don't know if you met him—and also Allan Kaprow working there.

MS. BAER: No, I didn't. No, I met only Bellamy.

Yes, the thing is, when I had lived in New York before, I had been hanging out, and I'd been to the Cedar Bar [Cedar Tavern], and things like that. I didn't like the art. I really didn't. And I remember being a member of the Museum of Modern Art, or at least eating at the restaurant. And I really didn't have any great feeling for the abstract art—I'm not quite sure why—at the time. As I say, I was very much into philosophy and science and things like that. And—

MS. BERMAN: No, I was just wondering—or if you were beginning to go or—at least for the house, you got those two paintings. And if there was something else you were beginning to explore in terms of galleries in—

MS. BAER: No. It was only—actually, what happened was, this house that we were in belonged to a very famous movie director, a Yugoslavian, [Slavko Vorkapic], the one who invented, along with [Sergei] Eisenstein, the montage. And he was teaching at USC [University of Southern California], and he was Dick's professor.

So I should—should we look up the name? Glen Canyon, where the hell—Benedict Canyon—Benedict Canyon—

MS. BERMAN: Benedict Canyon, that's where you were living.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Fancy. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I've almost got the name. Anyway, we rented this house and it had a studio up the hill. And I decided I was going to paint. And it was there that I was doing it. And so I have—I don't show them to anyone. I still have the photographs of them, and some of them were given away, which I hope I didn't sign. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: What did they look like?

MS. BAER: I was trying out all kinds of things. There were some figurative ones, one was a self-portrait; abstractions, soft ones, hard ones. I think about ten of them, little things. I remember Stanley Kubrick was a friend of mine, and he told me, "Oh, this work"—and I showed him these, and he said, "Oh, they look like my friend Wolf somebody in New York."

MS. BERMAN: Well, the only—of course, there could—there being more than one Wolf, the only Wolf I can think of is Wolf Kahn—

MS. BAER: Me too.

MS. BERMAN: —who was a [Hans] Hofmann student.

MS. BAER: Yes. That would be who.

MS. BERMAN: But I was wondering if some of these West Coast painters at the time—I wondered if Clyfford Still was important, if you had seen anything like that.

MS. BAER: Later he became one of my favorites. But I don't quite remember when. It must have been in—yes, I was in California.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: It would be before New York.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I don't know. I went to a traveling show, a Whitney traveling show, L.A. County, or someplace like that, one of the museums in L.A. And I was very taken with an [Arshile] Gorky, oddly enough, so much so that I copied it. I mean, I—in chalk. I sat there and did that.

And it may be there that I saw my first Stills, Clyfford Stills. I liked them very much—feel very—I liked [Robert] Motherwell, black and white Motherwells. I liked Stills. I liked—

MS. BERMAN: [Mark] Rothko, possibly?

MS. BAER: Not then—yes. Well, I count Rothko as one of my pre—[inaudible]—"before" ones.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I'll ask about him later, because there are certain things I want to ask you of your work, and certain other artists I want to ask your relations to as you mature. So on the way—

MS. BAER: I think it wasn't that I liked Rothko; I think it's that I learned from him, which is a different thing.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I was—right, because certainly how to deal with the edge is a very important thing that he did.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, something like that. That's—that is there. Jasper Johns, also very important to me. That the painting is the painting, and it isn't—you know, if it's a beer can, it's a beer can. You know. But it's—those are learning experiences.

MS. BERMAN: And maybe Franz Kline would have been important to you, too. But I'm not sure, because it's probably—

MS. BAER: I met him once. And I went—[inaudible]—until the—I went to—it was before he died, or something. And I remember going to the bathroom and coming back out, and I think Jack [Wesley] must have said, "He thinks you've got a very strange mouth." And it was because I was trying to keep it shut and not talk. [They laugh.] And that's my only contact with Franz Kline.

MS. BERMAN: Right. You started to paint, but you were no longer—now, actually, you had a real connection to TV

and movies. You were no longer interested in working in the movie or TV business yourself?

MS. BAER: Right, because I had married Richard Baer. And when—actually, I did work in it briefly. He brought an editor home to teach me editing, which is to say, what the hell is happening on set, and things like that. And then this friend from New York, this television director, took me on as an assistant director, at which I was real rubbish. I mean, I was really horrible.

She/he is the one with the—with the stopwatch and the director, he [clips ?]—turns to me: "How much more time you got?" I was like, "I don't know. I don't know." [Laughs.] Just totally panicked and wrong. And then he tried me as a script girl, which is the person on set who keeps track of when they're changing scene—[inaudible]—on the left, how are they turned, and everything else. And I—totally useless. I don't remember. I don't know. I didn't—[laughs]—really—[inaudible].

I worked once as an assistant director, and once—this is one time—and one time as a script girl. Oh, it was on that set that I met the accountant for the Mafia, who was on an adjoining set, or doing something there at the same place. I think that was it. So it must have been right after I got there. And I was working as a script girl and as an assistant director. [Laughs.] Totally, totally wrong.

MS. BERMAN: Well, at least you didn't work fruitlessly for months and years trying to get into the business and then it wouldn't have worked.

MS. BAER: Yes. I did two weeks of getting into it, and managed to do it, but I couldn't stay.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. So, you're painting, and meanwhile you're a mom by now too, and—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: So that was rough. I mean, to establish wanting to do something serious in the '50s while being a mother.

MS. BAER: But I'm from that—I am from three generations of liberated women. There was never any question that I was going to be a housewife. Matter of fact, while Josh was taking his naps in the morning, I had a tutor from university come, and I did about a year's worth of ancient Greek. Just because—why?—because I always wanted to know Greek, et cetera. So I can translate Aristotle. Or I could.

MS. BERMAN: So you're looking, doing these various things. Now, then there's this line in the chronology, "peripherally associated with the Ferus Gallery." So I think we should—that's all it said. We should elaborate.

[END CD 1.]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman continuing the interview with Jo Baer for the Archives of American Art on October 5, 2010, in her studio in Amsterdam. And I think what we left off about is just some art collecting you did. And we mentioned the Jan Müller, and then I was asking if there was anything else you collected. We had just gotten to the point of explicating the sentence "peripherally associated with the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles."

MS. BAER: Yes, Edward Kienholz's friend, who I was in business with before my mother was. I was his banker because I had alimony as well as child support very briefly. I had child support for many years but I had alimony briefly until—

MS. BERMAN: You remarried?

MS. BAER: I think so. Yes. Yes. And so I was a rich woman. And we had this deal where if he needed to borrow money, because he would buy and sell stuff, he would borrow the money and then he would return it to me with extra money on it.

MS. BERMAN: How did you meet him?

MS. BAER: I don't remember. Well, the Ferus Gallery didn't—I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: I guess, when did you become aware of the Ferus Gallery?

MS. BAER: After I was divorced. After Richard [Baer]—Dick—moved out. I suppose I got interested in galleries.

MS. BERMAN: And you were still painting?

MS. BAER: I was just beginning to paint.

MS. BERMAN: And were you looking for a gallery for your own work yet?

MS. BAER: Not really. I didn't have that much work. I was just learning how to paint. In fact, the very first painting I did, a big painting, four square, my landlords took—they liked it. And I refused to sign it. And they keep bothering me now.

MS. BERMAN: The landlords?

MS. BAER: From then. And they bother Josh, that, "Please would I sign this." And of course it's a rotten painting, and there's no way in the world I would. I mean, the idea that I would—do [such a] thing. They tried to get—I was on the ground floor of a duplex and they moved in. They bought the building and they moved in the top floor. I was renting the bottom floor, a woman alone with a child. It's where I moved after Dick—Richard—moved into a Frank Lloyd Wright house—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —and I moved into this duplex on the wrong side of Olympic Boulevard or—Pico, the wrong side of Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, and outside Beverly Hills. And it was really quite a nice place. It had a big living room that I had. I rented a piano. And I had most of the furniture. And he came to see or pick up Josh. Josh was, say, two or three years old. And he would hold him in his arms and cry, and then the child would scream the rest of the night. This was very nice. This went on. This was forever. Anyway, I had a good time with—and I finally forbade him to come at all. I said, "This child is very—[inaudible]."

I did go out once and left him with a child-minder, a baby-sitter from UCLA, who told him that if he didn't stop crying, his mother would never come home, I discovered. That's what he told me when I came in. And from then on it was—I walked this child all night. I don't know if we should—Josh will read this. I'm not sure he knows about this. Let's—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Yes, I think better not use it because—my life, I don't mind. But that's something that—

MS. BERMAN: Well, you know what? What will happen eventually is you will get a copy of the transcript—

MS. BAER: We'll cross this out.

MS. BERMAN: —and you can cross out whatever you wish.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. Sorry. I'm talking as I'm remembering things.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And I'm not having time to edit.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: At any rate, at someplace in there, I suppose I started going to art galleries. And Edward built me a studio. And—oh no, I was working in my bedroom. I had a big house. I mean, I had several bedrooms. And I had an old woman babysitter, so I could go out. She was more trouble than the child. Her own children wouldn't have her and I knew why. She insisted on cleaning everything with kerosene—faces, furniture, everything, hair, hands. And—she—[inaudible]—stunk.

Anyway, the second big painting is at the Stedelijk [Museum, Amsterdam]. I gave it to Rudi Fuchs. It's—I mean, it's in here. [Inaudible]—I called it *[Four Foot Square* [1958]]. And it's probably the first real painting I made.

And actually I do it both ways. I could be this way, or it could be the other way around. But I think it's a tougher painting this way. But once in a while, you might see it turned—[laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, and it does have a mass. I mean, it seems a little bit more molten than still. But—

MS. BAER: No, no, this—no, this is very much who I am at the very beginning. And my work hasn't changed that much in a certain way. So it's why I bothered to keep it, and I believe Edward had—Ed Kienholz had it as trade for something. And then when he was divorced from Mary, his first wife, she gave it to a psychiatrist to pay her bills. And we finally found it. Oh, it came up for sale. The guy wanted to sell it. So I bought it for $2,000. I bought my own—$1,900.

And we kept it with [John] Berggruen, who's in San Francisco, a friend of Josh's, for a couple of years. What to do with it? And he said, "Well, why don't you give it to the Stedelijk?" [Laughs.] So I did, and they accepted it. So—story of that painting.

I made that in a very large bedroom that I'd turned into a studio. Then I somehow met Ed Kienholz, and he turned my garage—I had a duplex garage. This was a duplex house. And he put a skylight in for me and built me a wall easel. And from then on I was working on big stuff.

I painted with a house broom and from paint-store paints. And Richard Baer has those paintings. I sold them to him when I left L.A. So I did sell some paintings, but only to my ex-husband. And they actually made their Barcelona chair, their Mies van der Rohe chair, avocado green to match the painting. [They laugh.] But also some of the paintings in the "Jo and Jack" show ["Jo and Jack: Jo Baer and Jack Wesley in the Sixties," Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 2010], they—maybe they bought some of Jack's paintings also. And they're in the show. These are the children now of Richard Baer and whoever came next, who had inherited some very nice Wesleys. I don't think all of them are in the show. Anyway, and I think some are sold. I don't know about what.

MS. BERMAN: All right. But what about in terms of the Ferus? What about Irving Blum? Did you meet him then?

MS. BAER: There—I think there was a Ferus before that Ferus.

MS. BERMAN: Well, there were several stages. And it did—

MS. BAER: Yes, it's an earlier one that I knew Kienholz from. I think it was his.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And then there was the fancy one that Irving had.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, because Irving, they needed some help and he moved out to New York. But I think they, Kienholz and Walter Hopps, started it together.

MS. BAER: Yes, Hopps. Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And they were also at first showing Bay area painters, too.

MS. BAER: Yes, Jay DeFeo, and people like that. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. And then—but I think before Irving got in, I think Billy Al Bengston was in there. You know—

MS. BAER: Yes, Billy Al, and Bob Irwin, and then Craig.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Craig Kaufmann.

MS. BAER: Craig Kaufmann. And Ben somebody [Craig], whom I liked,—it was sort of a boys-only—and, yes, it was a buddy fuck. [They laugh.] There were no women.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, well, I was going to say, was there a chance of having women?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: Was that something—I mean—

MS. BAER: Absolutely not.

MS. BERMAN: I would definitely say there was a testosterone overload there. Although Shirley Blum—excuse me, Shirley—

MS. BAER: Shirley Hopps?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, Shirley Hopps, who became Shirley Blum, was an art historian and was involved in it at first.

MS. BAER: She was involved in—only at the management level. And of course they had to be nice to her because she said who could come in or could—Shirley was all right. I rather liked her.

Chico [Walter Hopps] and I probably never got along. Irving, I didn't know at all. But Ed and I were okay. And what I used to do was give him this money and he would buy—first of all, he built me a truck that I bought. That was my first dealing with him. It was a pickup truck that he turned—and what did he do? He turned something into something else. At any rate, it broke within a week. It was a complete thing. Never, never had it again. On

the street I just left it, but—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: But besides being partners, what was he like, in other words?

MS. BAER: Edward asked everybody to sleep with him. [They laugh.] And he figured one of them was going to say yes, and sometimes did. Certainly not me. And they lived up 100, 200 stairs up a hill in Beverly Glen or—no, Laurel Canyon.

And—oh god, who did I get in a fight with? I got in a fight with Craig at a party. They used to give parties on the Fourth of July that went on for two or three days. And I remember there was a fence, and then this hill that goes all the way down. A couple of hundred steps down to the road, steep sort of thing. And I got in a—I got into something with Craig Kaufmann. And I refused to do something. [They laugh.] What's new?

And we wrestled, and I figured out he was going to try—he was going to try to throw me over. I could tell. Craig was crazy, often. And I suddenly realized, being bent over backwards with this hill, with—god, you know, Craig fighting with me. And I took him and I threw him and I threw him through a door, which broke. [Laughs.] That's how I—and it's not the first door I've broken, when I think of it. I've broken three doors in my life that I remember, come to think of it, over various times.

At any rate, Edward came out furious. "You've broken my door." [Laughs.] I think he was going to kill me. "You've broken my door. You have to pay for it." "I'm not paying for it, he almost killed me." This is the sort of thing that went on. Anyway, so I knew Edward and I knew Mary [Kienholz] at that time, who sometimes gets in touch with me. And Lynn [Kienholz] does get in touch with me. And the third one [Nancy Reddin Keinholz] is a horrible woman—I only met her once. And I would hope to hell never to be in touch with her. You can take that out if you want. Well, her name isn't there. All right. No, she shows his work now, she does his work now. Who cares?

I have another Edward story if you want it.

MS. BERMAN: Sure.

MS. BAER: Robert Lobe and I in 1970—'68, '79—'69, '70, sometime then, drove across the country and then came up the coast. We were in Los Angeles. And then we came up the coast to Seattle, and then we went to Idaho, where Edward had a house in a place called Hope—Hope, Idaho, where he—they spent six months a year. Where he shot deer and froze it and made the family eat it all year round, and that sort of thing. And there's that—he'd come back from the Berlin Wall, where he used to live on the Berlin Wall, and watch people escaping and laugh—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —you know Edward. At any rate, there he is. He's paterfamilias—wife I guess was there, Lynn, probably children. Nice kid.

And what is it? Oh, we're driving around in his Range Rover—Land Rover thing. This was Robert, my young boyfriend. And I—[inaudible]—Robert, a sculptor. And Edward is waxing on about art and things. And he says to us all that this Oregon artist [(Portland), Kenneth Snelson] was the best sculptor in the world—the one who did all these crossbeam things, the engineer. It was an engineer, not very well known, not a very—such a very bad artist. An engineer who decided he was a sculptor, an artist. I may have to search for that name. As usual, from the backseat comes this snickering. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Like that?

MS. BAER: Oh yes. And Edward is surrounded by his family, and he is very authoritarian and he's very angry.

So we get out of the car someplace, back home, wherever he is. And oh, we'd been fishing. He'd made us fish in the river with waders on and—all of this shit going on. And there's a pig pen. Don't fall over, the pig will eat you. There's all this happening. At any rate, Edward marches up to me. And he picks me up and he throws me over his shoulder and he says, "Now what are you going to do, Jo Baer?" And of course there I am. There he is. And you know what I'm going to do. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: And I said, "I don't know, Edward. What are you going to do?" Squeezed [his balls]. Threw me through the air. And then we never spoke again. But that is what you should do. You don't get picked up and say, "Now what are you going to do, Jo Baer?" You can count on this as an automatic reaction. This is without thought.

MR. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Squeeze, yes.

MS. BAER: So, yes. Well, not hard. I didn't hurt him. Just enough to let him know that you do something, something else happens. Yes.

So that sort of is a good way of picturing my relationship to the other artists.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, like I'm not allowed to disagree. They said so. And we've been here two or three times already. And what's interesting is that I always, more or less, acted the same way. And they don't seem to learn or to ever take this into account that I'm going to do this. And in fact, I don't mind. I mean, I don't need them. I'm still in the shows I'm supposed to be in, and all the rest of it. I suppose it contributes to the—I was perhaps known as difficult. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: But men are never known as difficult, right?

MS. BAER: No. No. And I've also, on that subject, I'm often reviewed as eccentric. No, the work is eccentric, not me—as opposed to original. A man is original; a woman is eccentric. That sort of thing. Yes.

No, no, I know these things exist. I don't care, is the point. I say, oh, that's stupid. And I do remember and I do put it in the archives.

MS. BERMAN: Exactly. Now, about this time, how does John Wesley come into your life?

MS. BAER: Met him at some show, perhaps at Ferus. I don't know. Got to talking. He lived in Venice, had his son with him, about the same age as Josh. And I don't know, I guess we liked each other or something. And he moved in. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: With his son, too?

MS. BAER: No, the son went back to the mother. And so then when we left for New York—we left for New York because after Jack moved in, we went skiing with my brother and his new wife, Lynn, or soon-to-be—engaged—fiancée. We went skiing in Sun Valley, Idaho. We drove from Los Angeles, 24 hours in my DeSoto convertible—[laughs]—because my brother's Corvette was too small for four of us.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] But you know what a DeSoto convertible is? Well, never mind. It's actually a strange car. We got there and I was on the top of my—Jack had never skied; Lynn had never skied. My brother is a champion skier and I've been skiing since I was 18 and I've been a ski instructor, so—when I lived in New York, I got free skiing that way.

So there I am at the top of the mountain, Sun Valley, Idaho. And I'm skiing with something called long thongs, which is a binding—do not let your foot go. You have great control. And it's just—the front part can escape, but you can't get rid of the ski. Seven-and-a-half feet of leather strap that goes through and around and around. So very nice for skiing. Unfortunately, at the top of the hill I came and—ski tips in a snow bank, a very steep thing, and I fell over myself. And of course the ski—

MS. BERMAN: Ski didn't give.

MS. BAER: No. One leg did and one stayed, and I completely severed the ligament here. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, on your right leg at the knee.

MS. BAER: Yes. So I fell over. I fell over myself. But it doesn't hurt when you do that. It's not a broken bone. It's just that I knew I was very seriously injured. And I sort of lay there and the ski patrol came. They put me on a board, down three—[inaudible]. I put a black scarf over my face—[inaudible]. And I was taken to the hospital, Sun Valley Hospital. My brother the doctor came in, and the surgeon, or the guy—they're standing there discussing it. And they're saying, well, we're going to have to operate, otherwise she's going to have an unstable leg. And he got my foot and put it there.

MS. BERMAN: You saw that?

MS. BAER: Yes, I saw that. From then I was sick as a—[inaudible]. At any rate, they operated and I was in a cast from here to here.

MS. BERMAN: Which is ankle to hip.

MS. BAER: Six weeks. Ankle to hip. Yes. And we drove back to Los Angeles, I in the back with my leg up, and having great trouble peeing and whatnot. And having great trouble being in a cast and not allowed to move freely. It really was horrible. So we get back and my child had been with his father. And I said this had happened, and he was supposed to be there for two weeks. This is only one week. And he insisted on sending him back. And I said, "I can't take care of him. I can't even move. I can't even go to the bathroom." He sent him back.

And I said, when Josh came in, I said to Jack, "We're leaving." That's that. "I'm not having this." I could take the child out of state if my new husband has a job someplace else. This is when—this was February, and we were in New York by June. Again, this is how I am.

MS. BERMAN: So that would have been June, let me see, 1960.

MS. BAER: 1960.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: So this is an injury I'm still dealing with. [They laugh.] But never mind that.

MS. BERMAN: But Jack was willing to leave, too?

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. I had money, and he had child support. So my child support went back to his child support. So when we got to New York, we had a sublet, which I hated. I let all her plants die. She had all the copper cooking pans that had never had been used. I mean, I think actually she's still alive, she and her husband—probably not her husband anymore—on Sixteenth Street, up from Union Square, just off Park Avenue South.

MS. BERMAN: So Union Square East, or something there at Park Avenue South.

MS. BAER: Yes, Fifteenth or Sixteenth Street. It's now—it became a parking garage. But we were there for three months, and meanwhile we found, we found a loft that was Al [Alfred] Leslie's place where *Pull My Daisy* [1959] was made. So we bought that and moved in there.

MS. BERMAN: So that would have been Fourth Avenue, right?

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I think that building is gone too, now. It was two doors from Grace Church, where Josh ended up going to school.

MS. BERMAN: And so you—I don't know how much you were looking at the time, but—the Castelli Rauschenberg and Johns shows had taken place already when you weren't there, and in '59—

MS. BAER: But I saw Johns—not at—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: At Ferus.

MS. BAER: Yes. And I was immediately—I think there were targets, I think maybe a flag. I was enormously impressed at the time. So I had Johns on my mind as something very interesting. I had Rothko on my mind as something one could do. One could work with a format. And Johns on my mind as how a work should be itself, the identity of what art should be.

MS. BERMAN: It should be the thing itself.

MS. BAER: The thing in—yes. And I had [Samuel] Beckett in mind from some reading I'd done about layers, walls, osmosis, boundaries. He was talking about the self, the universe, et cetera.

MS. BERMAN: That was permeable.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes, osmosis. [Inaudible]—biological—[inaudible]. Yes. So these ideas of creating locations that interacted always interested me, so I started from the outside. And so the minimal work of—ultimately comes from that, from Beckett.

MS. BERMAN: And also, this was, obviously, a different New York than you knew before. I mean, did you find it stimulating, frightening? How did you feel when you came back?

MS. BAER: Well, I had Jack—great big white-trash six-foot-three blond. In New York, they used to call him—say, "Is the giant there?" [They laugh.] All the little Puerto Ricans around, and—we went to see, Josh, Jack, and myself

went to see my place on Ludlow Street. This time we walked down a street and people were throwing firecrackers at us, and things like that. We were white people on a totally Puerto Rican street at that time. Got out of there fast, I mean, we weren't going to hang around. It was hostile. But I felt pretty safe; I had a very big, strong man in tow and a child, I mean—

MS. BERMAN: Well, I also meant in terms of the cultural stimulation. I mean, you were in a different milieu than before, I would imagine.

MS. BAER: Yes. And going to New York shows and things like that. But working {i]n new work—well, shaped canvases were around, which I didn't feel were interesting—I thought they were sculpture, I guess, which doesn't interest me and never did.

MS. BERMAN: Actually, I just wanted to interrupt you to ask you if you ever did attempt sculpture.

MS. BAER: Once. No, I did some drawings for it once, and never did them. They're at Matthew Marks right now, because they were too academic, and I'm going to pick them up when I'm there. And I'm going to give them as a gift to somebody who is helping me for this—reading the script for me and correcting. But they weren't interested in me—interested in sculpture. So it was just one piece I was interested, and I checked it out with—Klaus Kertess was helping me. But I don't know, it was too expensive, or it couldn't be done, or I lost interest, or all three of these things.

MS. BERMAN: So it really never appealed to you that much?

MS. BAER: No. And the paintings I made that went around the corners, which are sometimes spoken of as sculptural—Stella used ten inches; I used four. That's hardly sculpture. I just wanted to know what happens around a corner. That interested me as an optical thing, as a painterly thing. Murals and things sometimes do that. You have a painting and it goes on a little bit more, but it's not a sculpture.

MS. BERMAN: Right. No, murals always have to—because to blend in, because murals, by definition, are supposed to be somehow part of their environment.

MS. BAER: Yes. But there are freestanding walls, which are one edge, could be. In other words—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: It also interested me when you got into these ideas. The thinking about it is that people weren't—forward-looking people weren't necessarily framing their paintings anymore. But they still had things like staples and this, and then you had to deal with this, you were making this perfect edge. I was trying to figure out how you got around to dealing with the idea of not framing, but making, the sense of making it look right all over. And that was much harder for you.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. It wasn't about framing; it was about painting. What happens—it's about light and shadow, because the light is different, so you change the paint, you can do anything. So it's about illusion, and if you're not sure where something is, all those kinds of things. Those are true painting subjects.

MS. BERMAN: Right. This summer, when you had the show, I was looking at that and I was thinking, most—you know, because often, you know—[inaudible]—the staples, and then, of course, you couldn't have anything like that and that you had to—

MS. BAER: Well, you just staple the back, there's no problem there. Just like—around one more corner.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's true, but yours just look like it was more thoughtful than that. Let's put it that way.

MS. BAER: Oh, mine was extremely thoughtful. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: So there were just all kinds of things going on.

Now, let's see. So I wonder—but had you seen Frank Stella in California, or just reproductions in magazines?

MS. BAER: I don't think—I think Stella first came to my attention in New York. He was in a—something like maze paintings.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, the black paintings?

MS. BAER: Yes, the black paintings. I'm not sure whether I knew them in California or New York. I certainly knew those from that Modern [MoMA] show. Whether I saw it just as a catalogue, I don't know. But I remembered. They didn't interest me that much.

MS. BERMAN: And when—in the late '50s in California, and early 1960, what did Jack Wesley's work look like?

MS. BAER: Very painterly. I don't know, he did little paintings. He worked mostly in grays and reds and blacks and depressive colors, but the red is in there very nicely. He was a natural painter. He had brushes for fingers, you know? He's one of those big men with these—these phalanges that did stuff. We shared a studio together, so it was a question of stealing colors from one another, tablets and things like that.

He was a painter of touch, probably, and did some rather formal paintings. But they were very painterly; they weren't flat. They were not conceptual, particularly. I don't know what they were. They're quite good. Josh—as I say, they're in Josh's family. And I like them very much, a couple of them. It was before the pots.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. That's why I was asking what—do you feel that you influenced him to change?

MS. BAER: I don't know. We influenced each other, there's no question of that. But I don't think I influenced—yes, we influenced each other about equally, I would say.

MS. BERMAN: And what do you feel were the most significant ways?

MS. BAER: Well, actually people keep telling me—he used a framing device for all his things, and I was told by Robert [Lobe], when he saw the [John Wesley] PS1 show [in 2000], he wrote to me and he said, "Boy, I could sure see where your work came from." From a man. Yes. Thoughtless thing. This is a man who lived with me for eight years. He just decided, when he saw these paintings, that naturally I took my idea from Jack.

But in fact I have paintings that precede that. He was framing as framing. I was making paintings that happened to be—that went on to be this way. They were three-quarters this way with stars here, and things like that. Nothing to do—or everything to do—with. I was leaving the centers empty. He was putting figures in them. I mean, two different ways of proceeding.

I did drawings, though, of shoes and all kinds of things that are a big hit right now. I played—this is my Pop Art. I used to joke about it. I did paintings of drawings and said, "This is my Pop Art." Of graph paper things, of drawings on graph paper. I made them for paintings. I did that at night when the kid was asleep. He would never have done anything like that. On the other hand, he did things I would never have done. [Inaudible.] That's all I can tell you.

MS. BERMAN: Well, in discussing those more rather ironic drawing-paintings, or you used to say your "Pop Art," were you interested at all in Rauschenberg?

MS. BAER: No, never. I never liked his work. I always thought—I didn't know him that well, he was very nice. He was a very nice guy sometimes also, I suspect. I always thought he took from other people and made it more popular. And there's nothing wrong with that. I just don't like it. He popularized other people's concepts. He was very good at it, obviously.

MS. BERMAN: And how about [Marcel] Duchamp?

MS. BAER: Duchamp I respect as somebody who made the rules. The rule is, if someone says it's art, it's art. [Laughs.] That's really what I have from Duchamp. Except I think he was a neighbor at one time. He was on Tenth Street, and one of my closest friends lived next door. Yes, I think. She's dead now.

No, I have respect for Duchamp, no fondness. But of course—but I'm not a surrealist.

MS. BERMAN: No, no, but sometimes you just never—I mean, artists are never one to one.

MS. BAER: I don't mind the questions.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. [It was] that atmosphere and what you were learning. And meanwhile, of course, this is 1961 and '62. What about Pop Art and, all of a sudden—I mean, I don't know if these were your friends, because [Jack] Wesley was and wasn't considered a Pop Artist.

MS. BAER: He was at first. I went to the first Pop Art show ["The Popular Image Show," Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Washington, DC, 1963]. And when they came to see his work, there's a woman from the Washington gallery—public gallery that was doing the show, and—

MS. BERMAN: Alice Denney?

MS. BAER: I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Or Adelyn Breeskin, one or the other.

MS. BAER: I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: But anyway—

MS. BAER: It was just—I was the wife. I was just there. And Ivan Karp, and Richard Bellamy, I think, w[ere] there. Any rate—oh, and Andy Warhol was there. Andy went in and played with Josh's toys, spent his whole time in Josh's bedroom playing with toys.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: And I was just around. And they were putting together the show. And this was about three weeks or a month before Kennedy was assassinated, I believe.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. This was in Washington, D.C. It was the first Pop Art show. So there's Jasper Johns, and Rauschenberg, and [Claes] Oldenburg, and Jack [those little things ?] there. So he was getting a lot of attention. And I was doing what I do, which is totally different.

But what happened after that—and then he got a gallery with Robert Elkon, and he takes off. But I know all these people, not very well, and I'm Mrs. Wesley. And suddenly there are invitations to openings to Jack Wesley. No me. Things like that. People who had dinner at my house, knew my work, knew I was an artist, but I was dumped, to use this phrase.

And he actually refused—I wanted to make some more paintings. I had a set of these what are called Koreans.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: And I had made 12 and I wanted to do 4 more. And he refused to give me the money, my own money. He says, "Listen, you struck out. You know, finished, you're done. You didn't get anywhere . You don't have a gallery—[inaudible]." And he used to say things like—one of his favorite sayings was, "Do hens crow?" This is who I was married to for ten years. I have to say that in the Prada catalogue—have you seen this great, big John Wesley thing [Germano Celant. *John Wesley*. Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2009]?

MS. BERMAN: No, I haven't.

MS. BAER: Well, I have it here. There's a whole bunch in the front where they talk about his early life, and then his interlude with Jo Baer. And in the middle of it, he says the most incredible thing. He says, "Well, of course, the marriage was a disaster." Now, we were married for 11 years. There is no such thing as an 11-year marriage that is a disaster.

MS. BERMAN: Right, because you're out of it earlier.

MS. BAER: And I was out of it because he [drank so much], and he was getting dangerous around Joshua, in fact. He was getting nastier and nastier. He was bullying. And that's when you get out. And I wasn't nice about it. When they tried to make me go back, I said, "I don't like living with a drunk." Whatever they asked me, I said, "Oh, you drunk." I hate it. I don't like drunks. I hate that. So I wasn't nice about it. Never said it to his face, because I was afraid he'd hit me, but he never hit me. He did knock me down once in the Whitney Museum, in the lobby. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, you should have just thrown him through that big glass door. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I wasn't near him. He did it from far away. I insisted on having my coat, to leave. I'd been talking to other artists and et cetera, and he got jealous or something, or he got drunk, I don't know which. And I was—we were leaving, and I said, "Fine, I want my coat."

Now, my coat consisted of what is called an army parka—it was a ski parka, too. It had a rug on inside. It was a very heavy thing. It was marvelous. And you could snap out the fleece thing and all, or the top. And I just kept saying, "No, you have to go to the cloakroom." So I'm waiting for it. And he gets the thing and he picks it up—he's a big guy—and he throws it at me. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: So you were hit by a coat, a projectile. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Right. So there was no way I could have shoved him through a door. So that was sort of near the end of things, I guess.

MS. BERMAN: I guess you didn't have any more children with him or anything like that. That would have been

horrible.

MS. BAER: Well, it was one of the things he didn't forgive me for. Because I took pains not to on one occasion, and from then on, the marriage was no good. I think some men's sense of sexual identity only comes out of the thought of making children, which I think we—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: Well, you may—you can take that off later.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. And things were never the same after I rejected his child. Well, two in one place that I'm already paying for, and one is at home; we don't need another. And I'm not stopping work.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: But the thing, actually, between Jack and I was we're from two different social classes. And I was university—higher than university educated, and he'd never even been to college. Which does not mean he was stupid, by any means.

MS. BERMAN: But sometimes people like that are also more insecure, or even very—

MS. BAER: Yes, that's the problem. Yes. And the money was mine. I earned it on my back. Seriously. You can leave that in.

No, it's—I outranked him. And men cannot take that. And when he left to become [Donald] Judd's friend, that part remained. They were a clique, a clan. And they would have been this way with anybody, incidentally, any woman who was like me. And I discovered the reason for this, and why I had to mate later on with much younger men, or—mate? No. I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Cohabit with, have relationships with, or whatever.

MS. BAER: Yes—was because the generation thing had changed. At my generation still, if a woman was as good as any man, then a man is only as good as a woman, and that in no way could be done. This is not their fault. It was absolutely built-in. It was unthoughtful. It was unconscious. And it was invariable; this had to happen. And 10 years later, say 15 years later, they didn't care, especially since when they were my age, they were going to be as good. So, I mean, I really fitted very well with 15, 17 years, 20 years younger men.

MS. BERMAN: Well, she is slightly younger than you, but I wondered if you were friendly with or intersected with Dorothea Rockburne.

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Oh. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Well, [Mel] Bochner was a friend before Dorothea. And I have nothing against Dorothea particularly, but I was successful. Dorothea was a housekeeper for Rauschenberg—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And all I can tell you about—I think the only time I've ever spoken to Dorothea is [when] she came up to me at a Whitney opening and she said, "I would be"—oh, no, Bill [Barrett] brought her to our house, so she knew me, she knew Jack, she knew Josh. She was there for evening drinks or dinner, or something like that. So the next time I see Dorothea is at a Whitney opening. And she comes up to me and she says, out of the blue, "I would be as successful as you, except I have a child to raise." I said, "What am I raising, pumpkins?" [They laugh.]

And that's the last time, the only time I've spoken to Dorothea, was when I went, huh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Because I just thought you had this external situation that was very similar at one point.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And that's why I thought there would be actually more warmth, as opposed to—

MS. BAER: Well, not possible. Not possible.

MS. BERMAN: There was always only just so much—again, either the one woman—there wasn't enough room for more than one woman most of the time.

MS. BAER: I never thought of it at that time. I thought I would take care of myself, and I could do that, and for

the rest, they just have to do the best they could do. It's not my fault [that] she can't remember that I have a child or that I am successful.

I mean—but I had great problems with most of the people. I had a dance class that I liked very much, with somebody called June Ekman, which—well, see, I—Claire Wesselmann went to, and Jeannie Blake went to, and Joan Jonas at one time went to. And I enjoyed it. It was the only time I was around other women.

And first of all, I'm pretty good, so I can do a lot of this, before I started doing gymnastics and acrobatics. And I can roll pretty good, and I'm physically able, unlike a lot of these people who are very beautiful and all, but I can move. So June is upset with me because she says, "You're not supposed to be better than the teacher." What do I know?

And any rate, the following year it turns out they went and scheduled the whole thing and never told me. They got rid of me. I had to go to Elaine Summers [laughs], who was much better. But, I mean, they actually bothered to get rid of me. And all I wanted to know was, what butchers do you go to, where do you get your hair cut? It was the only time I had anything—and these women just were like this, because I was competitive with their husbands, with their economy. This was money talking here. That was that. So I was really stuck.

And with the younger male artists, they embraced me, and it was, how many push-ups could I do? You know, I could find myself on the ground doing push-ups, competing with Dan Christensen, Peter Young, people like that. Which just did not really seem like—I mean, I was very homesick for other women. The dancers were okay, Yvonne—

MS. BERMAN: Rainer.

MS. BAER: —Rainer, Lucinda, Meredith—

MS. BERMAN: Meredith Monk.

MS. BAER: Yes. I socialized.

MS. BERMAN: Lucinda Childs.

MS. BAER: Lucinda Child[s], yes. I socialized a bit with them. But again—

MS. BERMAN: Maybe Trisha Brown.

MS. BAER: Trisha I met and saw once, but I never—I liked her—I like her on stage, let's say, I like her presence and all. But I never socialized with her. I never went anywhere with her or anything like that. I never had drinks with her, coffee or anything. Twyla Tharp [was] around—also, I knew her husband who—[inaudible]—Huot—Doug Huot—Huebler.

MS. BERMAN: Oh yes. Yes, Douglas Huebler.

MS. BAER: Ohlson. Either Doug Ohlson or Huebler, one of the two [Bob Huot]. Not a very good artist, but my generation, an abstract artist. So he was married to this exotic, beautiful dancer I'd heard of, Twyla Tharp, but [I] never met her. So that was the closest I could come to socializing. Some of the—some of the women curators and critics and stuff were friends.

MS. BERMAN: It seemed to me that Lucy Lippard was the most sympathetic to you, if I'm right.

MS. BAER: She liked my—she liked my work, yes. And she wrote on me quite a bit. Didn't like her husband. Jack did. Jack and he traded works.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Robert Ryman.

MS. BAER: Yes, Bobby Ryman.

I was at a party at the director of the Guggenheim, 2002 or '03 of—

MS. BERMAN: Tom Krens?

MS. BAER: Yes, the great—the giant—the real giant—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, Tom Krens.

MS. BAER: Yes, Krens. Yes. And I was in New York at the time when they had the minimal show up. And there were the tables of artists and so—and so I was going around to those I hadn't seen in 20 or 30 years. We get to

Bobby Ryman and he's sitting there. And he looks up at me; he says, "You still painting bunny rabbits?"—[laughs]—to which I said nothing. I'm not going to pick him up and throw him out in front of all these people.

And what—well, what a kind of thing to say, you know? I to this day have no answer to that that doesn't involve physical battering, or something. I must have cut into what he thought of as his world very badly for that kind of thing to happen.

MS. BERMAN: Did he confuse you with Wesley's work?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: No, no. He knew—well, who knows what the state of his mind—never occurred to me. Bunny rabbits. Well, no; he wouldn't have said bunny rabbits.

MS. BERMAN: No—

MS. BAER: No, no, no. There were those who said I had gone to Ireland to become a horse painter, and I think it was off of that.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay. I didn't catch that segue.

MS. BAER: Yes. Oh, I thought this was well known. Anyway, sorry.

MS. BERMAN: Well—or that he would have known that, per se.

MS. BAER: Well, I was written down, so I assume it comes—that he was keeping track.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Let me put it that way. They knew what I had done.

I mean, you have to understand: when I started doing this image work, I went—I was living here—a lot later—living here in Amsterdam, invited to a show at the Van Abbe [Van Abbemuseum, Amsterdam]—a retrospective of Carl's work, Carl André's work [1987]. So I get myself down about three o'clock to Van Abbe in Eindhoven, two-hour train ride at that time. And I walk in, and Carl looks at me and he says, "What are you doing here?" I mean, I had been invited. You know, I betrayed them. I had gone and done this other stuff. "What are you doing here? Go away." [Inaudible.] This is how I was socializing for very, very many—very many years. So I am now socially inept.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it is a funny thing, and I will ask you—this is for later on—but we're—as long as we're sort of on this subject—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —as I say, we don't have to be in strict chronology.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: But I found this very interesting, because—this is a book you're controlling.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: But this is—this was this 1974 portrait, and it's obviously about Rubin Gorewitz, who's there.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. And they needed women.

MS. BERMAN: Well, the thing is, you are the only woman—you did not list any of the other women in this picture. And I certainly see Nancy Graves—

MS. BAER: Yes, I—

MS. BERMAN: I see Jackie Winsor. I see Marisol.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: But you didn't—you only listed the male artists in the picture.

MS. BAER: I didn't actually—that comes from the *Esquire* article.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, well, I know. But in other words, this is not the same caption. In other words, they—

MS. BAER: The editor did it and I didn't catch it.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Because they're not—

MS. BAER: But I don't like Nancy Graves, and I don't like Chryssa. I knew Chryssa well. I also don't like [Joseph] Kosuth, and I also don't like—et cetera.

MS. BERMAN: No, but Kosuth's name is—let me see if he's in there.

MS. BAER: Of course—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: He's—yes, well, I just thought—

MS. BAER: These are all the—

MS. BERMAN: The famous male artists are all listed. And some of these women are obviously well known, too.

MS. BAER: They are well known, but at this time I was better known. And Maria—Marie-Helene, whatever her—what's her name? Marie-Helene, Mari-Jo—the Venezuelan artist.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Marisol.

MS. BAER: Marisol. Marie-Helene is the Dutch Marisol for me. She was more famous, but she disappeared by 1974. Nobody had heard—Nancy was not really on, either. She never really was. She was in a big gallery. She had been married to—

MS. BERMAN: [Richard] Serra.

MS. BAER: Serra. So was Joan—well, Joan isn't there, okay.

This woman I've never known. I don't even know her name.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's Jackie Winsor.

MS. BAER: Yes. But she's married. She was married to—

MS. BERMAN: Keith Sonnier, for a while.

MS. BAER: Yes. [Inaudible]—Serra. Yes, I didn't—I didn't even know her. I didn't know her name. I still don't know her name. So that may be true. But as far as—

MS. BERMAN: I'm not accusing you. I just notice that whoever did this is that—that none of the other women were mentioned.

MS. BAER: You're right. Yes. It's not because of women, it's because of who was well known, essentially. I was not one of his clients. Thank god for that.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Thank goodness.

MS. BAER: They brought me in. Yes, no.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's what I was going to ask you—actually I was going to ask you if you lost a whole bunch of money through Rubin Gorewitz. Because he was a—

MS. BAER: I only—never met him except on this occasion. They needed a well-known woman. So I've always accepted that I was there to—[inaudible]—it up.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: And these other women didn't count to me because otherwise—they wouldn't have asked me.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Because, no, there—it's a very strange thing, because this original article was about Rubin Gorewitz, accountant to the art stars.

MS. BAER: Yes. I know.

MS. BERMAN: And then—and they brought in people who weren't—

MS. BAER: They only brought in stars, and his people.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Those are mostly his people. Maybe they brought in Warhol and me and a few to—

MS. BERMAN: Well, [James] Rosenquist, and Serra, and—oh, I see Malcolm Morley, and Claes, and all of them.

No, it was just a very strange kind of photo. But anyway—okay.

MS. BAER: You're right.

MS. BERMAN: So I just thought I would—but that's the strangest thing of all, is that you didn't even have Gorewitz, thank goodness.

MS. BAER: Yeah, no. I was brought in as a filler for this. And I thought, "What the hell?"

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Because it's sort of a—it looks like, hey, it could be an Irascible 18 kind of picture—

MS. BAER: Yes. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: On a certain level it was, although—anyway.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And there's Rauschenberg, of course.

MS. BAER: Yes. There's Rauschenberg. Yes. There's everybody.

MS. BERMAN: That's everybody, but he never had—

MS. BAER: Well, Jack Wesley isn't in there.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I mean, I outranked—this question of rank, in my case—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: —because I was—I was very successful at that time. I'd just had a retrospective at the Whitney [1975], or was having one, and so forth. I was in all the big shows. None of these other women were. They either had been and disappeared, or would never be. So it really was—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

Yup, the only one missing is Roy Lichtenstein, really, of this caliber of fame.

MS. BAER: Yes. I haven't—I didn't even—actually, none of that occurs to me.

MS. BERMAN: I'm just commenting on the—looking at this, this is—

MS. BAER: Oh, there are others probably.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, sure, sure. But I mean, none of the Abstract Expressionists are in there, who are still alive, anyway, at that point.

MS. BAER: Malcolm Morley is strange in being there. There are some that are strange being there. There were probably really his clients. So you would find the lesser-known ones were his clients. And they probably drafted in these others because it was *Esquire*.

MS. BERMAN: I just want to get back to the Koreans, which were painted '62 to '63. And I know that they were named after something that Dick Bellamy said.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Now, Bellamy, is he—I mean, he's not selling you or he's not helping you yet, or he's not your dealer yet?

MS. BAER: He was my dealer after I left Fischbach [Fischbach Gallery].

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: From then on until I left New York, at which time I also asked Klaus Kertess to represent me. So Bellamy got to stomp about that. But he—I had a whole show at the Whitney and he didn't sell—the Whitney still owned no work of mine until many years later, when one of their rotten directors accosted me on the stairs at the Stedelijk and said, "Oh, guess what? We just acquired a painting of your at auction and it only cost $2,000. Isn't that nice?" Fuck off. Yes, I mean, tell me you don't buy from the artist; you buy at auction for $2,000—a damaged painting and you brag to me about this? "Look how little we got your thing?" Classy museum, classy director.

Yes. So if Bellamy couldn't even sell a painting from a whole fourth-floor retrospective, what good was he?

MS. BERMAN: And so then you wanted to go to Bykert [Gallery]. Or—

MS. BAER: When I—well, I was leaving and I wanted somebody else to handle my work as well.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: You know, there's nothing wrong with two. But of course, then he gets sulky, and Klaus was quitting the gallery business and giving it over to somebody who wouldn't pay you when he did sell anything. I had to put on the black t-shirt and go after my money and—[they laugh]. I came in from Ireland and immediately turned into a Puerto Rican dyke. "I want my money. [Inaudible]—I want my money, man. I want my money." Scary. But I got the money.

MS. BERMAN: That's really funny. Well, I guess also we should begin to talk about some—the people in the early '60s, your core peers and people you were interested in until the breakup. Which would have been Sol LeWitt and [Donald] Judd and Dan Flavin. And most of them were sculptors. It was interesting—

MS. BAER: They all were sculptors, but they all were painters first.

MS. BERMAN: Right. But you knew them as sculptors, right? Or did you—

MS. BAER: I knew them as beginning sculptors and I saw their paintings, which I was not—which I did not think very highly of. I thought they'd done the right thing. And, of course, things got nasty then after a while.

MS. BERMAN: Because Sol LeWitt, of course, was a—

MS. BAER: Sol was always okay with me. We were fine.

MS. BERMAN: Because I guess—and this is a dumb way to put the question, because obviously these were the most interesting people. They had the most interesting minds to you. But were you able to find any painters who had minds of interest to you later on, or during this time?

MS. BAER: No. No, not that I recall. I mean, there are paintings and painters that I like, but—no.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Did Chuck Close ever become a friend? But that was later on, I know that.

MS. BAER: Yes, we—well, we were sort of friends. We'd come from the same city, so to speak, he comes from a little suburb town outside of Seattle. And we did write those letters to the editors [inaudible] ["Letters," *Artforum* (September 1967 and April 1969)]. No, we were—I don't know. I've never been to his house, or anything like that. He's the mayor of SoHo, or used to be. Now he's—

MS. BERMAN: He's the mayor of the art world. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: The art world, yes. I see him once in a while and go up to him and say, "Hello," and he doesn't recognize me particularly.

MS. BERMAN: He doesn't recognize too many—he can't recognize too many people's faces anymore, period, because of the illness.

MS. BAER: Yes, I don't even know what illness—what is it—

MS. BERMAN: He's had several different—he's had strokes and he's had several [neurological conditions. Besides

being in the wheelchair, now he has to have the brushes strapped on his hand. And he has very—it's—you can be introduced to him ten times and he won't remember. It's not—

MS. BAER: Even ten years ago he smiled back, he was gracious. But he didn't—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, also, his vision is very bad now, too. It's very—he gets very close up to the big canvas and works very— I mean, it's the will to paint.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. No, I respected him. I don't think I liked that. I still don't. I think it's very clever. I think he's very clever. No underestimating him. And I admired the fact that he could actually live on producing one painting a year, which is—I can't even get one done anymore a year. And I've always remembered that it can be done; Chuck did it. So I'm grateful to him in that sense.

But no, I really do—I've never had a social life. I don't have a girlfriend or girlfriends that I talk to over the phone. I'm afraid if I start talking to people over the phone I'll never get off.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: No, I'm serious. You can hear. With you I'm making up for one week of never having spoken to anybody.

When I was married, which was always from the age of 16, 18 on until I moved here, this was taken care of. The husband, the child, I mean—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, the built-in companionship.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes, and I didn't even talk very much. But it was important it was said. The hardest part about living alone, if you're not used to it particularly, like me, was all the things that are interesting that you wanted to say and then you lose them. And all the list-taking in the world won't find them. So it's—I have no conversation with anyone. And that's hard.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: The only way I can get in touch with myself is quite often through writing, which is a big struggle, because I mean four things at once and then I—which has priority? And does it go over here? And I get tangled a lot.

So, serious conversation. I'm making Ann do it with me a little bit. She's the only person here that's qualified to talk to me.

MS. BERMAN: And this is your assistant, Ann?

MS. BAER: No, I'm talking—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Ann Goldstein!

MS. BAER: I'm talking about a director.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. No, Ann Goldstein.

MS. BAER: It's all right. And she would not—I think that should not be—well, it's all right to put in that. Ann likes to be understood as a friend of artists. And we are certainly by now friends, because I'm just realizing that Ann is [someone] I can have a serious conversation with, that—and she's here. And I have dinner with her once in a while when her husband's away. And she likes the Japanese place on the corner. And she limps down. And we—we trust one another. So this is fine. And I'm beginning to realize that aside from her being the director of—[laughs]—one of the great museums of the world in my city [Stedelijk Museum], that she is rather invaluable, or becoming invaluable to me, to run things past. And I think it's a very good thing for me to have. But that's not socializing. That's—well, it is. It's intellectual socializing.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's—right.

MS. BAER: Yes, I haven't had that.

MS. BERMAN: It's—well, it's—having a kindred spirit, I suppose, is the way to say—

MS. BAER: With that background in—when I was in New York, I found myself with the women who are restoring my work. You know Dana? Dana—

MS. BERMAN: Cranmer. Yes.

MS. BAER: —and her—and her whole thing. They're doing a lot of work on mine. And she came to my show. And she invited me to the studio and to dinner. And I met the other women and the people there—men, the guy who wasn't there, not—it was just women. But it was like being around people I'd missed so much, I can't tell you, because they have a certain kind of mindset, which is half mine.

MS. BERMAN: Well, everything is understood, that certain—

MS. BAER: Yes, well, they're not artists. They're rather scientific. And they're logical women. They're women—they're women who think. Aside from writers—writers are a different thing. This is—this was like coming home to women who work with their hands and their minds and everything. It was—I'm having lunch with—she's actually exchanged work on one of my paintings that I would have to pay for, for a set of drawings from Matthew Marks [Gallery]. So she's now my collector. And we're talking big money. Really big money.

MS. BERMAN: She's done wonderful things. I mean, she has restored Rothkos.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —you know, [a] 32nd of an inch by [a] 32nd of an inch.

MS. BAER: Unfortunately, she's—did things like that with some of my work, too. Yes. No, but the process itself, they showed me what they're doing and everything. So I really—at any rate, they felt like company I would adore to be around, to have here to talk to.

As it is, I'm hanging out with 30-year-olds who are now unfortunately on their second children, so they're now unavailable. But women who were—I've got a cadre of them—who are writers and scientists and that sort of thing. So they help me buy clothes when they come to my openings.

So they—I get to go to their dinner parties. But now they're into second babies. And it's—and one of them [Gabrielle Kennedy] writes for *TIME Magazine Japan*, and her husband's a well-known economist. So I'm tied to the 30, 35-year-olds right now. It's the closest I get to conversation outside of the art world.

MS. BERMAN: One can always use conversation outside of the art world.

MS. BAER: I've always tried for it. Well, the gym was the only other place I was getting—I know a lot of people from my gym.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I wanted to ask you now, because it's very well chronicled in the book, about your friendship and breakup with people like [Donald] Judd, and the criticism—

MS. BAER: That's that. It's just the wind blowing through—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay. But what I found interesting, speaking of writing, is that when you were working on these polemical writings, that you found the letter format best for you. Why was that?

MS. BAER: I didn't want to be paid for attacking. I didn't want the formality of a real attack. I wanted it to be a personal thing, understood as a personal thing. This is—I am not a judge of art. I don't want to trash other artists. If I say this as a personal thing, then it's different. I'm not speaking as an expert. I'm speaking as myself. And I actually try to be very, very careful about that. Because there's a lot of stuff I like, and a lot of stuff I don't like. And I have a right to that. And if it's a question of defending myself, which—these letters in a sense really are defense—I have a right to these prejudices in that situation. But not if I were paid to write an article on them.

MS. BERMAN: Because—

MS. BAER: I distinguish between them. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Because I think also, whether you thought about it or not, rhetorically it was the most effective format because you could say "you," and—I mean—

MS. BAER: Yes, I wanted the freedom to speak for myself and not in a formal format. And that's what I mean by being paid for it. I didn't want an editor saying, "You can't do this or can't do that." Well, publish it or don't publish it. I don't care. But this is what I have to say. I was more interested in what I had to say than—

MS. BERMAN: Right. So part of it was formulating your own position, too.

MS. BAER: Absolutely. Of course. But that's what you can do in that thing, and because there was—no one has to formulate it for me. Don't forget, all the writing was about the sculpture. And nobody else was going to say the things that I said. Which is very good.

Actually, at the signing at 192 [Books] when I was last in New York, there was a young man who had read the whole book [*Jo Baer: Broadsides & Belles Lettres. Selections Writings and Interviews, 1965—2010*. Roma Publications, 2010] the night before, and he was from Princeton. And he came in—I've got his name, he's never gotten back in touch with me. But he said that all the writing I did on illusion and Judd and—et cetera, he says that—see, I've got it—the woman editor of *October*—

MS. BERMAN: Rosalind—

MS. BAER: Rosalind.

MS. BERMAN: —Krauss and Annette Michelson.

MS. BAER: Well, it was—it was either Rosalind or Annette wrote exactly the same things in the same year. And there's no chance that I read theirs and there's—

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: —no chance they read mine, that we actually wrote identical things. So there were people who were going to write the same things, some of them.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: It's just I had more I wanted to say than they did.

MS. BERMAN: Now I guess I just find it absolutely—and I guess it's because the art world was much smaller—that you could write something like this in the spirit of a debate, of controversy, of discussion of having a different opinion and become, it sounds like, ostracized.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, first of all, it was published and then Dan Graham went—I think I've written about this—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: [Inaudible]—to have something—Phil Leider has something on his site that says, "that never happened." [They laugh.] Jo Baer writes—I mean, it's—finally he'd gotten all the way through and then he said, "That never happened."

MS. BERMAN: Dan Graham knows the truth as well as you.

MS. BAER: Well, Dan Graham quite often and half the time does not tell the truth. Dan Graham is an expert in disinformation. But—which makes it even more awkward that it is absolutely the truth. I wouldn't make—I wouldn't know how to make something like that up. It's shocking to me how the world works.

MS. BERMAN: Did your husband support you on this? Or what did he think? I mean, he was a painter after all.

MS. BAER: You know, I was—he didn't say boo one way or another that I recall. Possibly. He wouldn't have come up and said, "Oh, that's all right, honey." [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Or, "Good idea?"

MS. BAER: Oh no. No, I never heard that. I've never heard anything good from Jack when I think about it—or I could—no, that I can remember. No, I don't—I don't think our relationship had anything to do with anything like that. I don't think we were supportive of one another particularly. We just didn't intrude or make obstacles in any way.

I don't recall him ever being supportive to me. And I don't recall myself ever being supportive of him. We each took each other for granted is what I'm trying to say. And I fought my own battles and he had his.

The one time I asked him to do something for me was when—I don't know if it's in here—when he was working at the post office and [Robert] Elkon was coming to look at work for a show. He did this twice, where I had to show the work. And one time he brought Paula Cooper, who was somebody else then. Paula was his girlfriend at that time—

MS. BERMAN: Elkon's girlfriend?

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: I don't know if Paula was a girlfriend or just a friend.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Okay, I was getting—I was losing a pronoun reference. That's all. So that's why I said—okay.

MS. BAER: Okay. Or he always had a woman on his arm. Let me put it that way.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: And Paula at one time, whether it was this time or another time. And Elkon always called me Joanne. He would never call me Jo or Josephine. "Hello, Joanne." "Joanne this, Joanne that."

And I said to Jack, "Make him stop, please." And he said, "I can't. This is my dealer. This is my gallery. I can't do that. I need him to do a show."

So here in walks Robert, and he says, "Hello, Joanne." And I say, "Hello, Richard." And this goes on. "Hello, Harry." "Yes, John." And an hour later, he's finally heard this. And he says, "My name's Robert." I said, "My name's Jo, Harry." And he said, "Stop that. I don't like it." I said, "John, neither do I." And from then on he called me Josephine.

But, I mean, imagine—I was introduced to Clement Greenberg as Joanne, and things like that—this just won't do. I asked the husband to talk to him and to make him stop and he refused. So this was our relationship. I could take care of myself, but if I asked for any help, no way. Not even my own money to buy my own stretcher bars to make my own canvas. Disastrous marriage. [They laugh.] Well, on hindsight.

MS. BERMAN: Before the big break, we should talk about the Kaymar Gallery show, which was your first exhibition in New York. And that was "Eleven Artists" [1964]. And I was—I know that Dan Flavin got you into that. But who—what—this was a short-lived gallery. So who ran it? Or who was in charge of it?

MS. BAER: It was a real gallery that Dan took over for this new—[inaudible]. He apparently talked the owner into giving him the gallery for a month.

MS. BERMAN: I see.

MS. BAER: And then he just chose the artists that he knew or wanted. And that was that.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, because sometimes Kaymar sounds as if it was the combination of two people's names.

MS. BAER: Could well be, but we had nothing to do with that.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And there were 11 artists. And were—the other ones in there, were those people of sympathy to you?

MS. BAER: Well, Sol [Lewitt] was in there, and [Donald] Judd was in there. And Darby Bannard was in there. And Larry Poons, I believe, and Frank Stella. And Flavin.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Bobby Ryman with a beige painting. [They laugh.] And he said I stole white from him. He's quoted as saying she—"Jo Baer stole white from me." What crap. Bunny rabbits and stole white.

MS. BERMAN: But he had a lot more impasto on. I mean, it was very—

MS. BAER: Yes, he was—it was just abstract. It was an abstract painting in beiges.

MS. BERMAN: The other thing was, his couldn't reflect—his didn't reflect light. I mean, it was a very different—

MS. BAER: Right. Nothing—it was nothing to do with me. There's a version of the lady walking 50 yards with the painting.

MS. BERMAN: Well, didn't you both—if we're going to get that literal, you both stole it from the Russians, if we're going to say that.

MS. BAER: [Kasimir] Malevich, absolutely. Yes. Or Rauschenberg in the '50s did a white painting. No, no, I can—I've lost the book, but there was a book by an Egyptian from 1930-something that spoke about an artist who did

nothing but white paintings. That was literary. And that's before Rauschenberg in Paris. Now, this was a Parisian Moroccan, or Algerian, or something like that.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, you can always find—

MS. BAER: Of course.

MS. BERMAN: —someone, some precedent—

MS. BAER: There was Dada and [the] surrealists and then all the rest, of course.

MS. BERMAN: And then you can also look at [Piet] Mondrian and isolate that, too.

MS. BAER: Yes. But I mean, it's just stupid to say that, "Jo Baer stole white painting from me." Well, Bobby didn't —never that bright.

MS. BERMAN: Oh. Anyway, and he started—he came along later than you, anyway.

MS. BAER: He would say not. But these artists quite often pre-date their work, which is another thing that happens. I do not. I'm really very, very careful. I think Jack [Wesley] did with one painting, to make it look like he was ahead of me.

MS. BERMAN: Because I think that Ryman had his first show ever at Bianchini Gallery, and that would have been about '67.

MS. BAER: Who?

MS. BERMAN: Bianchini Gallery, and that was 1967.

MS. BAER: And who had a show there?

MS. BERMAN: Ryman.

MS. BAER: Oh, Ryman.

MS. BERMAN: So that's later. I think that was his first show.

MS. BAER: Possibly. I don't know. I never followed his—he asked to trade work with me, and I didn't. And he traded with Jack instead. I was supposed to do it, but I really—I always sort of—

MS. BERMAN: You weren't interested.

MS. BAER: I thought he was a horrid kind of artist. [They laugh.] He had a big dental chair in his studio. I think I only saw it once. And I could just imagine him sitting there and—[laughs]—fantasizing, I believe we say for the record, for his greatness and his—you know—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. And when you were doing these paintings, they really were radical, and they were different from anyone else. But when you were doing this, were you scared at what you were doing?

MS. BAER: No. No.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, it's just so out there.

MS. BAER: It seems so—no, it seems so reasonable to me. This is what I mean. I am strange, obviously. I am bizarre, without noticing it. And it doesn't bother me, unless somebody is really pointing it out to me in a very vicious way, that I've just done something bizarre. And then I'm liable to kick them or something. I really—well, I'm not that violent. Well, I am. I have a violent streak, but I normally contain it quite well.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I just meant when I—they look so classic and classical to me right now, but—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —but of course for the—that's because, of course, I'm looking at them in hindsight.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: But I was trying to imagine stepping back into when they were made.

MS. BAER: Yes, but—[I was] young. I was making sketches that said "No." Matisse has one. There's a portrait [inaudible] that says "*Non*." Antonietta [Peeters], who worked for me, did a duvet in white satin that says "No." This is a kind of work—working with negativity is what I'm trying to say. I think I got turned onto this by a California artist by the name of Ed Moses—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, sure.

MS. BAER: Well, hang on a second; you may not want this in this. Where he made this whole thing, and signed his name in the middle of it. [Laughs.] And I thought, this is truly what I do not ever in my life want to do. Because the name was there, "Oh, this is fine." Actually, it goes—it's that simple. You look at something that's—that one would never do, that I would never do, and you get rid of it. And you say, "Ah, look at that."

MS. BERMAN: But it stimulated you.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. And then I took it on from there by using the blue line I was using in between the black and the white—that is to say, these osmotic—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —barriers, these—

MS. BERMAN: This is a—I mean, you're the artist, but is "line" the exact word? I mean, this—when I got—

MS. BAER: Band.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Maybe because I was looking there, your works this summer, and it wasn't mechanical, and they were just little, little—

MS. BAER: No, they were hand-done.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, exactly. I mean, they were—

MS. BAER: Yes. But it's much more interesting, because the light goes in and out.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: So it stays alive. But I bothered to make these bands—you are correct—because I'm thinking of photographs now. I haven't seen these paintings in years. [Laughs.] Photographs. These bands, I bothered to make them sky blue because that's a—it's another negative factor. So I was working—I was playing with the idea of three negatives, which I thought—you know, you have the white, which is blank—[inaudible]—you have the black, which is blank—dark blank, light blank. And then you have a slit of sky, which is always negative, eternal. And I was playing with that.

No more Ed Moses. Subject matter is stupid. Subject matter is still stupid, even with images, working with images. I mean, really, we've outgrown subject matter. Cameras do it. It's not for high art any more. Installation is the last gasp of it. It's just letting out all the subject matter, putting it here, a little bit here, a little bit here. It's the shallowest thing in the world. It's gestural. Subject matter's stupid for the high art, okay? This is what I'm trying to say in this other thing, too, that—[inaudible]—art, good art, goes much further. We're not interested in your name, mister. Or your face, for that matter, or where you ate dinner.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes. Someone I would think would have been interested in your work was Alan Solomon at the Jewish Museum. When he came along, it was quite—he was looking at all sorts of things—

MS. BAER: [Inaudible]—was too late. He died. He died just about the time I would have gotten to him.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay.

MS. BAER: I—it's a faint memory that's coming back. I didn't know him, and I was trying to find somebody who would put me in touch—him in touch with me. And he died.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. But that, as I said, he was someone who —

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: — seemed to be imaginative and not close-minded.

MS. BAER: Yes, but I was too late.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes.

MS. BAER: I was in California.

MS. BERMAN: And then, of course, you were in the Guggenheim show, so—.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: So that was—was that Lawrence Alloway?

MS. BAER: Yes. And [Mel] Bochner wrote a beautiful review of my work. This is before Dorothea [Rockburne].

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And we were close at that time. He helped me with my writing. I helped him with his. So that after I wrote the letter in *Artforum*, and happened to go to a party—I think I may have talked about this in the book—I went to a party at [Robert] Smithson's a week later, so—and Bochner says, "I have to give you back all your books," he says, "because I'm not a—I can't speak with you any more." And that was that.

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

MS. BAER: A careerist. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: No, it's all about his—it's shocking and especially if you did think you were close and important—that you were friends.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Well, he edited the damn letter. And so it's a big shock that it's published, and now he can't have anything to do with me?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. That's cowardly.

MS. BAER: Yes, well, these guys, they're—they're innocent. Their career is on their mind, right. Nothing to do with me, really.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Let's—you know, up to 70—this—by the way, this was the old résumé on the—in the Whitney file.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: You can tell by the typing. Of these one-person exhibitions, why don't you pick out a couple that you think that we should talk about because of their importance, or anything here that was—you know, led to something meaningful or—

MS. BAER: I don't even have to. I mean, you can—I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: I don't know, they all had their ins and outs. I can't distinguish between various—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Toselli [Toselli Gallery, Milan, 1974], I never got paid for anything, ever. But they—the whole show was sold, and nothing was ever given to me. Weinberg [Daniel Weinberg Gallery, Los Angeles, 1974] is—I don't know—nothing much to say there. I never saw the show. The Giudice [Jack Lo Giudice Gallery, New York, 1972]—that's—there are two—there have been two shows, my own, Matt Winston. That's where—[inaudible]—no, School of the Visual Arts [New York, 1971], 14 of the Korean ones were shown in one room, which was nice. I got a great review from a friend, Kasha-somebody [Kasha Linville, "New York: Jo Baer. School of Visual Art," *Artforum* (May 1971)]. This disappeared. No, I'm sorry.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. That's okay. I mean, I'm just throwing out these things for—you know, how about the Dwan Gallery? Now, was it Virginia Dwan or John Weber who liked—

MS. BAER: Virginia Dwan—well, I don't know. They had these meetings at her apartment where—Ad Reinhardt, I believe, and Virginia decided to do this show, and wanted to tie into the—to this younger generation. And I don't

know, I was asked. And Jack was in the kitchen with Sonja Flavin—[laughs]—the wives were in the kitchen, playing. [Laughs.] And these people—[Ad] Reinhardt wanted photographs of everybody. We all said, "No." [They laugh.] Reinhardt had wanted this and that. It was really strange. And I was just one of the people there. I didn't have anything to say at all. I was just included.

I think I also mentioned in one of—someplace—that I only had one other conversation with Reinhardt, and it was at a Guggenheim opening. And it was at this time, or a little after it, where he asked me about—did any of—were any of this derived from him, or did he have any influence on any of this. And I said—well, I didn't really know. I said, "But if it's any comfort to you, neither did Barney Newman." [Laughs.] And that was our only conversation.

But what was—that part was interesting, but what was really interesting was we were standing there in the main lobby and there was like a moat around us, a halo space, where the whole crowd was around—and they were allowing these two giants—[laughs]—of abstract art to have this private conversation. It was really—for me, it was very strange to be in that situation, to be treated with that kind of—respect, perhaps, I don't know what. But whatever it was, it—made me a bit uncomfortable, so I immediately took care of it and got out. I really had nothing to say to Reinhardt. I don't derive from him. I think he's a Cubist who just went in the dark—[they laugh]—which is a good place for a late Cubist to be. And I'm not going to say that to him.

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: No. So just said, yes—[inaudible]—so that show was interesting in those ways. But I really had nothing, really, to do with them. And John was—just worked for Virginia at that time.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I didn't know that.

MS. BAER: Yes, I think. And then the show also went to Los Angeles.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Which I never saw. I don't know any—I don't even know—I don't even know how it was installed. No photographs, never was invited. Maybe I wasn't in it. I don't know. Possible.

MS. BERMAN: It says here that you were still in it, but—so then you must have known at that point—

MS. BAER: In Los Angeles?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: No, Dwan—

MS. BERMAN: It says, yes—

MS. BAER: Well—well—

MS. BERMAN: —ten[in] 1966, and Los Angeles, 1967, so—

MS. BAER: Oh, well, see, I didn't know.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's okay.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, I think this is probably a good time to stop for today.

[END CD2.]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Jo Baer for the Archives of American Art Oral History Project on October 6, 2010, in her studio in Amsterdam.

And before we start questions, we're doing a little bit of housekeeping on dates. And I am looking at Jo's birth certificate. Again, August 7, 1929. Father, Lester Kleinberg. Address, 1029 Summit North, in Seattle. And it said that his age was 27, and your mother, Hortense Kalisher, is 24 years old. And your father came from Ellensburg, Washington, and he's listed as a "hay and grain salesman." And your mother just says, "Wisconsin," which we said was Peshtigo. And it says, "Occupation: housewife." So I don't think we need the names of the attending physicians. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Who was the attending—oh, Dr. Goriza [ph]. [They laugh.] Interesting. Okay. Gestalt people that I—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: The head of the department was Hans Wallach, who was a chemist originally. He—as I said, I even went out with him a couple times, had dinner or coffee or something. But the founder was Max Wertheimer. I remembered that. And it was Kurt Koffka, was one of the Gestalt people. He died in '41, though. He wasn't around. But Wolfgang Köhler, who's the very famous one, was still alive, and was teaching at Swarthmore [College] at this time. He died in '67. And I was there in '50-something, so he was very much an influence here.

MS. BERMAN: All right, fine.

MS. BAER: And my teachers were the students of these people. This is the original German, actually Estonian—I think one of them is Estonian. And Wallach was certainly from Germany. They were refugees and so on. So.

MS. BERMAN: Right. They were invited by the New School [for Social Research] faculty to come over, to sponsor them.

MS. BAER: That's right. That's what I'm saying. Levi-Strauss and—god, I wish I could remember the philosophers and the literary people, very famous critics. So I have this remarkable background, you know? And I said to—what's the name of my economics professor? I almost—

MS. BERMAN: Well, that was the one you said was the finance—

MS. BAER: Yes, minister of finance in the Weimar Republic. That's your teacher for Economics 1! Anyway, I'll have that for you by tomorrow. Keynesian—K.

The other name I looked up—when I lived in California, I said I lived in a house with a very famous film person. His name was Slavko Vorkapic. And he worked at MGM. He was the best-known montage specialist in the 1930s. And his pictures were, like, *The Good Earth* [1937], and *Romeo and Juliet* in 1936. So it was Vorkapic's house. So he was a big—I knew a lot of the 1930s MGM people. My mother-in-law's close friend, Lillie Messinger was [Louis B.] Mayer's private secretary. And she was also the agent for [Alan Jay] Lerner. She was an agent for people like Lerner. So I knew people like the guy who wrote "Somewhere Over the Rainbow [1939]."

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Harold—Yip Harburg.

MS. BAER: I knew Yip Harburg. And I knew Marlon Brando's sister's [Jocelyn Brando's]—Eliot [Asinof]—husband. So I had Marlon—a shirt of Marlon Brando's. [They laugh.] I saw it on Eliot and I said, "Give me that shirt," because I knew that he wasn't—it was the wrong shirt for him; it was perfect for me. So for years I had Marlon's cowboy shirt.

MS. BERMAN: That would go in the Smithsonian.

MS. BAER: You wouldn't have gotten it. Neither would I, anymore. But it was a very slim-fitting thing with snaps. I mean, I see Eliot in it, and his wife—former wife—is the sister of, and they were close, you know. So I was sort of around all kinds of interesting people. One of the big directors was the—well, at any rate, Lillie Messinger, old Mayer's—what's his name?

MS. BERMAN: Louis B. Mayer.

MS. BAER: Louie B. Yes, Louie B's. She also was married to the prince of Thurn und Taxis. Now, you know that Thurn und Taxis—any rate, they lived on a yacht. So it turns out that Lillie Messinger was also the princess of Thurn und Taxis, which I found out—she gave a baby shower for me when I was pregnant with Josh. And as I say, her best friend was my mother-in-law, E. E. Sarnoff Baer.

And I read about—I only know this because I read about this in the society pages, where a big headline says, "Prince and Princess of Thurn und Taxis give baby shower to Josephine Baer," or something or other, "to Richard and Josephine Baer." So we were big news. So I was hanging with royalty, so to speak.

And yes, which is why when he [Richard Baer] left—I think it was one of their houses they owned—that he went to Joan Crawford's old house with the waterfall. It's where, poor thing, I threw him out. [Laughs.] A Frank Lloyd Wright house temporarily. It was for rent, I guess. I don't know.

Anyway, so that was Hollywood; that's a little bit of stuff. I couldn't stand the place. I couldn't wait to get out of there. I'm not sure California—California does not recognize me as having lived there. They didn't like me very well, either, except lately Lynn Kienholz has listed me as somebody who lived there. But when they do shows of artists who were part of the history of California, they leave me out.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think the L.A. MOCA did a Minimalism show, and you were in that ["A Minimalist Future?: Art as Object, 1958—1968," 2004].

MS. BAER: Oh, yes, but that's because I was a Minimalist artist. But when they do shows of California artists or L.A. artists, I'm never included. They have—Lynn Kienholz runs a very active foundation, which puts on shows and publications, and they finally have included a picture of mine or something, a mention. But not—never part of the star group, the star—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Where we left off yesterday was the late '60s. And I was about to ask you about Clement Greenberg and how you formed a relationship with him, which seemed to have been in response to what you wrote to *Artforum*.

MS. BAER: I don't know—I really don't remember precisely how I came—oh, I—now it's coming back.

Somebody I knew had walked around with Clem at a Whitney Annual that I had a painting or paintings in, maybe a triptych or diptych. I don't remember what painting. And he commented to whoever it was that it was very interesting, or he liked it a lot, but he said something critical about it. Which means he misunderstood it. He was looking at it as an abstract—like an abstract. What do they—words. What I called Ad Reinhardt the other day. What did I say? [They laugh.] Was it an abstract artist?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, Clem was looking at this the wrong way. So I heard about this. This person ran to tell me. I can't remember who it was. Could have been Will Insley, or somebody like that, somebody I don't like—whoops. [They laugh.] Somebody I seldom see unless they're bringing bad news, or in this case, neutral news.

MS. BERMAN: Right, a tale carrier.

MS. BAER: Yes. And so I wrote him a letter. That's probably the letter. You have the letter.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Well, that's probably the one I brought, the one I brought you.

MS. BAER: Yes, and I don't remember, but I would have addressed in it—I will look at it tonight and see what it is that bothered me about what he said.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Because I had—and this is, again—what I gathered from your book was that after you wrote the letter to *Artforum* about it, that Greenberg called you up and said that it was good and he agreed with it.

MS. BAER: I don't think—I don't—no, [Kenneth] Noland did. Greenberg—

MS. BERMAN: Noland. Oh, Noland. Noland did. Okay.

MS. BAER: Well, he didn't call me up. This is really what happened. Because of this letter, Clem invited me for drinks or something, and we were fine, I think, in that conversation. And as I was leaving, in comes Ken and maybe Jules [Olitski], probably Jules, or maybe Ken and wife, I don't know. "How do you do?" et cetera. And he says, "Oh, he so enjoyed," et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So it was Ken in personal conversation. Probably the only time I ever spoke to him or met him. But they knew I was there. So in that group, this was a big deal.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. It looked like you had received the benediction.

MS. BAER: Yes, I had indeed. Yes. And from there on, I was there a second time, and it may have—I'm sure it must have been by invitation. And I'm not sure if I took Robert with me or not. No, that's more with Jules. I'm not sure, but I remember I came—the second time we went to Clem's house for martinis, which is always a mistake for me. [They laugh.] Brings out both the best and the worst, you might say.

I was wearing one of my very favorite outfits for very inclement weather, which was an Alaskan fox fur, pelts, that had the head and the ears and the paws and everything on. [They laugh.] And I wore it over with the nose over my forehead and bobby pins through the eyes. And then the front paws kind of tied under my chin, and then the rest down my back, over, I believe, my army parka, my ski parka, which is—I only wore that maybe three times. I wore it once at Max's Kansas City, and when I came in, everyone stood up and applauded me. Because it was gray and my hair was gray, and we were of a piece. It really was—[inaudible].

Well, I walked in. I can remember coming off the elevator, or possibly leaving and putting it on again, putting the bobby pins in. And Clem said, "You are vicious. You are a vicious person"—[they laugh]—which pleased me immensely. But we had been arguing because we were talking about, for some reason, the war in Vietnam, this came up. And I disagreed with him thoroughly because he's telling me that we had to have that war, otherwise there would be a civil war in America, a race war. So this was to prevent a race war in America.

And I said, "You're telling me, the mother of an 18-year-old, 17-year-old who could very well be conscripted, where I have to—we have to more to Canada next month, you're telling me all this kind of crap?" I said, "What bullshit." You know, I really went at him. And I think that's when he told me I was vicious, because—

MR. BERMAN: [Inaudible.]

MS. BAER: —yes, well, first of all, I disagreed with him. And I never really spoke to him again. I was told by his messenger—he had a young messenger, a young artist—

MS. BERMAN: Andrew Hudson?

MS. BAER: Hmm?

MS. BERMAN: Maybe Andrew Hudson?

MS. BAER: No. No. Michael Steiner.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, yes, Michael Steiner.

MS. BAER: Michael Steiner told me I had to apologize to Clem for what I said in the French magazine, the *Art Press*. Which was, after all, published in French, but where I said—Clem said to me, "Why don't you paint it pink?" And what I understood by that was he could sell it then. He made his living from the gifts that artists gave him for his help, and he was a dealer. He was selling these works. That's how he lived on Park Avenue. So you had to cooperate and give him the product.

And the product, in my case, was no longer gray or white; for god's sake, paint it pink. And I said, "Listen, you've got Ken and Jules to do that." [Laughs.] I wasn't having any of it.

But there's no way in the world that I would allow myself to join a group like this, especially when they tell me how to do my work. And I just absolutely refused.

And so I repeated this, and I just left it to "paint it pink," because that's what it deserved, in fact. And there are still arguments on the Internet, I have just have seen somewhere, somebody is objecting to my being held up as the high—et cetera, that she wouldn't even—[inaudible]—Greenberg, she had this thing.

And how dare she, and—I mean, this whole thing from what I've said. But to clarify it, it's because I knew he wished product from me, and that I—he was a brilliant—as I always said, he was a brilliant critic. And I took a lot of what he had to say on board and agreed with him, but he was a vicious man. And—

MS. BERMAN: And he—besides telling you "paint it pink," did he attempt to ask you for any of the things you already had?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: It didn't get that far.

MS. BAER: We never got that far. No, no, no, I made it quite clear that I didn't want to join. I was happy to speak with him if he had a good word to say. Subsequently, in Ireland and places like that, he was always part of the Irish thing, and building international shows and things. And he was there speaking once. And I said something from the audience, and he deigned not to recognize me or anything else. Which is fine with me, who cares? But yes, I'm pleased to correct any misunderstanding there.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

It seems to me between about '69 and '74, you seemed to be working on more than one series at once—or are you? I want to talk about what your working process was during this moment.

MS. BAER: Well, I had people—I had somebody working for me. And I mixed the colors and they put the paint on and I looked at them. I expanded several of the earlier sets. I had notes—I felt it was legitimate because I had notes that said, "could do in salmon color," "might do—" I sorted out additional works from—especially the diptychs and things. So you'll find paintings that are noted "'66," meaning that group of paintings, and then "'72," when I had David working for me.

MS. BERMAN: Who was David?

MS. BAER: David Shulman was working for me at that time. He also showed at Sonnabend [Gallery], was a filmmaker, and he came to visit me in Ireland once. And he still makes films there. He's around, Shulman, S—the

way you spell it. And before that, Bill Barrette worked for me.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MS. BAER: But for some reason, Bill Barrette shifted over to John Wesley.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Really wouldn't answer invitations or anything from me. There seems to be some thing where they all think I did something bad to Jack; all I did was support him for ten fucking years. Fuck them. You know what I mean. But—

MS. BERMAN: Bill works at the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] as a photographer now.

MS. BAER: Yes, but I mean, he was—he began working with—for Eva [Hesse] just before she died, and then became the caretaker and et cetera. So I think these guys are very competitive where even I wouldn't have been. He actually found me an enemy. I find people who have been around Nancy Spero also treating me like an enemy. They are very partial to that. I haven't very nice things to say. I don't have bad things to say either, but I'm fairly neutral on these artists. And they just get very upset with me and they're nasty. They won't have anything to do—[inaudible]—I mean, they're rude.

MS. BERMAN: I think Bill pretty much is John Wesley's caretaker at the moment.

MS. BAER: Yes, of course. But why be nasty to me? I mean, okay. So I don't like drunks. That's a normal thing to say to any woman who's having furniture thrown at her, and her coats. He threw things. Bring the child and put it in front of me—and he broke the front of a closet, the whole wall of a built-in closet. And he threw chairs at us—missed—broke down all the doors around us, and I stand there. And I've got the kid here and you just—stared him down.

Okay. That's somebody who drinks too much. That's not a bad person. But I'm not supposed to say that out loud? [Laughs.] That I don't want to live with someone who throws chairs at me and my child? You know. But there's a male fraternity that seems to think that I'm much too uppity.

What I have heard all through my years in New York, from [Richard] Bellamy—but people who really like me and like my work. When I would do something like write that letter, the first thing they say is, "Who the hell do you think you are?" And then they go on—"You can't talk about Bob Morris that way." I mean, or "You can't—who do you think you are?" The husband—you know. [Inaudible.] They all denied my right because I was a woman. Well, I think because I was a woman. I think it must have been.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Whereas Donald Judd could say anything he wished, and he was certainly a very tough critic to people.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Very hard.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: As was [Ad] Reinhardt. Reinhardt wasn't in your circle, but why was free speech just—right of opinion denied?

MS. BAER: I didn't have the stature to do this because I was female, but I did have the stature to do this as far as the work goes, as far as criticism, as far as—I have all the necessaries, and of course I can say what I really think. So this is what I always heard, "Who the hell do you think you are?" And it's gone on all my life. It never bothers me—[laughs]—I have to say. It amuses me because I pay no attention to it, obviously. Who do I think I am? I think I can do this. Fuck you. You know?

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Yes, this is from friends, even. Every friend has a line that I seem to have crossed over at some point. And whether I've ever been forgiven for it in the case of people like Bill Barrett, apparently not. Big deal. I mean, who is Bill Barrett? Caretaker. Who am I?

MS. BERMAN: We were talking about assistance because you had this branching out of work. Since you did project[s] having series, and over and over, you do say in your work, "I am a very intuitive artist," but you seem to be able to plan big projects.

MS. BAER: Yes. I'm a smart, intuitive artist.

MS. BERMAN: I want to know what intuitive—how you define intuitive for your—

MS. BAER: I don't use the word at all, so I find it difficult. I try something and it doesn't work, so then I try something else. I have a picture in my mind—not a picture, but an idea. It's something between an idea and a picture, a sense of something. And I try it and it's not right. How do I fix it? Now, this is a talent I have, a genuine talent. I can fix things. I can make them work. And I'm not even sure what I'm doing when I do this, it's just that, oh, suddenly, something comes alive. And the reason my work is still around is because it's alive.

And I can tell you in hindsight why that is, but I cannot tell you how I knew to do it because I didn't. I tried it and I saw it—oh, yes, this is what I want. And there are beautiful things that I've had to throw away because they really didn't work in the general thing. And that's how I work. And I don't know what to call that. I call that being a scientist.

MS. BERMAN: Trial and error, I suppose?

MS. BAER: Yes. But no, it's the feel for the thing.

MS. BERMAN: But you start with a canvas. Or color notes or any kind of—

MS. BAER: I quite often start with scribbles and scraps and lay them out on a table, pieces of paper, and play with them and say, "oh, this goes with this, and what goes with—" But this is image work. On the minimalist work, once I had the format, which as I say comes from, ultimately from permission from Rothko—[laughs]—yes, exactly, precisely. Permission to use format. And then work in that. But then it's a question of mixing the color correctly or getting the size.

The gray paintings—yes. The gray paintings were originally white paintings. I'd gone from the Koreans, and then I'd taken the black from the edge and moved it in and then colored—and in other words, there's the outside margin and then the black, and then a color thing, then the white. And I'd taken—I made the top symmetrical with the bottom. I—[inaudible]—done that. And those were white paintings. And they were no good. [Laughs.] I did six of them. They were no good. They were just no good. And I looked at them, and I don't understand the reason for this, but I just darkened the white into a sort of—just off-gray, you know.

That was enough and then the whole thing came alive. So the first set of—all six of those had gray paint on top of white paint and it was all flaking off on the sides. I showed them at the Corcoran [Gallery of Art] as a circle, as a sextet, I called it. I called it *Stations of the Spectrum* [1967]. You've read where Barney Newman saw the—[inaudible, laughs]—going to Europe. So I had these paintings with the gray beginning to come off the sides when they're handled, going to Documenta—the ninth Documenta, I believe. The only Documenta I've been in, which is shameful. And Newman was walking around the warehouse for some reason and he saw my crate, and on meeting me he said, "Yes, I saw your crate." I said, "Yes." That's all I said. What are you going to say?

I found his *Stations of the Cross* title pretentious. I found his titles always pretentious. I thought a lot of the paintings were very good, but I really hated this "Oh, I am so"—you know what I mean, really hated this pretentiousness.

So I was being sly, but *Stations of the Spectrum* is a very good title. Anyway. So off they went to Europe, and three of them went to Germany or Italy and never came back, and so they remained with [flaking paint]all over them. And three, I turned them into two triptychs from the sextet.

MS. BERMAN: Have those ever come up, those three that were lost in Italy and Germany?

MS. BAER: Yes. They came in from Sicily or one of the—Corsica, someplace like that. And they came up for sale and Alex Gray went and bought them and I said, "Don't, they have to be repainted." I repainted the other three and they belong to the Tate. They were repainted without the white under it, but the same colors. I keep my colors and I keep color charts, or I did, actual color charts. And the Tate owns those.

And these three are now in some Boston collector—because Alex couldn't sell them; he had them restored badly. And I told him, "You don't know this field, you do not know auction." And Josh was saying, "This is crazy," because he's putting them at $300,000 and they're badly restored. And they were brought in again; they weren't sold. So he was stuck. He had investors, he doesn't know anything, and these guys were just waiting for him to dump them. And then somebody walked in and took them and they're in Boston. But I have never been paid for them, as usual.

MS. BERMAN: No, they were stolen.

MS. BAER: Yes. Stolen. But I made that very clear, that they were stolen goods and all the rest. And I said, "You don't want to touch these paintings—you know, don't." He lost—that's when he stopped speaking to me, and he wouldn't even answer phone calls. My fault, didn't sell, he was going to become big and famous off my name for something like that. I told him, "No way, it's stupid, stop it." So this is what happened with me and Alex Gray.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, well, that's outrageous that you couldn't get your paintings back when they were stolen.

MS. BAER: Well, actually, other ones—my whole show from Franco Toselli in Milano [1974] was stolen, were sold and I was never able to get them back. I could borrow them back for a show at the Whitney, and I tried to get an injunction to keep them until I was paid. They wouldn't—they refused to do it. They said their credibility as a lender would be jeopardized. So I couldn't even use the law with my own museums.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, that's also what happened with MoMA, with the Egon Schiele that someone in the late '90s, is that a Holocaust survivor that—that there was a Schiele painting that had been taken from his parents or grandparents.

MS. BAER: Right.

MS. BERMAN: And it was his and that was true, but it was at the MoMA show that he saw it, and—but MoMA wouldn't help him for the same reason.

MS. BAER: Yes. Story of my life. I will not give anything to Italy unless I'm paid for it first.

MS. BERMAN: The story of most artists, unfortunately. The artists always get the short end of the stick.

MS. BAER: Yes. But I am—when I get the time, I have a collection of these—and photographs and proofs all the way from Heiner Friedrich [Gallery] right on up, who stole six drawings of mine in 1967. Well, you better not put this in because I think it was his assistant. We're tracing it now for a show I have in Cologne of these early drawings, and I have proof I sent them and I was never paid, and they never came back. I am building—I'm going to put it on a special site of my own. I am building a wall of shame. [Laughs.]

I'm going to list the history of all these things and these paintings that—I have some of them listed. I think John [Weber] never returned a painting. We couldn't find it at the warehouse, and—I shouldn't say that—but it's listed in England, a lost art thing that if it ever comes up for auction, it is—

MS. BERMAN: Right, because there's the Lost Art Register [Art Loss Register], and all that.

MS. BAER: Yes, I've got—I paid the money, and so that painting is there. It's a nice painting. And—but I'm going to do a wall of shame. [Laughs.] There's a woman who has two prints of mine that she sent someplace some ten years ago; she doesn't know where, and she won't go through her attic. And they're worth a couple thousand each. They're hand-painted prints signed from an edition.

And she said, "Well, why do you bother me all the time? I don't know." You sent it to—she said, "You sent it to someone. You asked me to send it to someone." And I write—[inaudible]—I never did. I know that I didn't tell her to send them to somebody. She said, "Then somebody in Los Angeles." Well, maybe she did, but I don't know the woman. I mean, it's a gallery I don't know. Go find out and get them back for me.

And I finally said, "Listen, if you won't do this"—this is the ex-wife of Paul Andriesse—my gallery, and this rich girl who has a print gallery—I said, "You won't like what I'm going to do." Which is she goes up on the wall of shame. You know, give me—get me the work back, please. Because somebody who is too lazy to go through their letters and find out what happened and is crying to me, "How can you—I'm so busy. And how can you ask me? It was so long ago," and everything [inaudible]—fuck that.

MS. BERMAN: She has no respect for the work if she does that.

MS. BAER: She has no respect for anything but her own greed.

MS. BERMAN: Because it's—she places no real value on the work.

MS. BAER: Absolutely not. She's a rich girl playing in art. Family's very rich, and she has the money. And so I think that goes up on the wall. [They laugh.] But I hope I live long enough to get this done. I mean, I have other things that are much more important, but—

MS. BERMAN: Let us get back to some of the series in which—also what begins to happen is there are a lot more curvilinear—in other words, you must—you decided what you were working on was restricted—

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and you needed more in the work and more color.

MS. BAER: Yes. Why not?

MS. BERMAN: And—exactly. And also what begins to happen about—and I guess was—we should bring it up because it seems to be very important, is since you do not do things by halves, I have noticed—[they laugh]—

MS. BAER: Really? I never noticed that.

MS. BERMAN: Well, let's say going into orchids.

MS. BAER: Oh, right.

MS. BERMAN: Was this something—what you did after you moved away—

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: —out of John Wesley, or did you start that with him?

MS. BAER: Oh, no, after—yes, because Robert Lobe, who I was living with from then on, until I—for eight years, actually, from, say, 1969, I think, we were together, until—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Till you moved to Ireland?

MS. BAER: Yes, '70s, '75. Yes. And he came over and actually helped me build things—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Were you still in—on Fourth Avenue when—with him—

MS. BAER: Oh, no.

MS. BERMAN: —or you moved out with—

MS. BAER: I was up by Grace Church.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, so that was—

MS. BAER: Yes, Fourth Avenue, sorry.

MS. BERMAN: 53 East Tenth—

MS. BAER: Yes, East Tenth Street, which was just—sorry.

MS. BERMAN: No, no, that's okay.

MS. BAER: Slow down, Josephine. Orchids—Robert helped me build the room. And I had been reading Nero Wolfe. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I actually—I have to say that I am an avid junk reader. I read for entertainment. The older I get, the harder it is for me to do serious reading unless I really need it, in which case, I will immerse myself in it. But it's a lot of work.

And frankly, I work in an area that's hard work. And as far as the other arts go, I can understand all of them, as artists often can, from the music right on through to the poetry, or whatever. But I don't want to get into the avant-garde aspects of them, because it's a great deal of work. And I don't feel like investing the energy or the time. I am not a dilettante. I am a professional, hard-working artist, period, and I'll take what I need. That's it.

For the rest, I don't like the serious stuff. I tried—my favorite book of all time at one time was *Madame Bovary* [Gustave Flaubert, 1856]. And I tried to reread it about five years ago. I couldn't get past the first three pages. Of course, that's age as well as everything else. I couldn't do it. It just—it bored the hell out of me, it was too much work, and I—all of the generation that has happened, our attention span isn't very good, and certainly mentally for older people—I can't get through a—I could never read Henry James again. I would never be able to get to the end of the sentence. It's—I can't read my own early writing very easily because it's too complex. My mind begins to forget at really this age.

But essentially, I read junk. And sort of good junk isn't even that good. I just finished an Iain Banks [Iain McEwan] book. I've—I had only read one other before. And it wasn't very good. I could see every—all the plot—his plotting

and stuff was worse than the junk stuff, which is much more careful.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: It's just—he had people I recognized and knew personally. I know them personally. I didn't need to read about them. His ideas about them are no better than mine, and in most cases, they're worse. So I know them better than he does.

You know, these are media people and—I mean, I had been reading what a great writer he was. What crap. This is—*Amsterdam* [London: Jonathan Cape, 1998] was the book. You know, absolute stupid book. I much prefer Nero Wolfe. At any rate, Nero Wolfe had orchids—

MS. BERMAN: Of course.

MS. BAER: —and the more I read about them, the more I got interested. So I looked at some of them, and then I bought a few. Then we built the room, and I deducted it as a work installation, an artwork, for my income tax. But I ended up with over 200 orchids—warm, cool, neutral—an enormous gardenia tree flowered all the time. I gave it to the Brooklyn gardens [Brooklyn Botanic Garden], whatever they're called.

MS. BERMAN: Botanical gardens.

MS. BAER: Botanical gardens in Brooklyn, yes. I used to go to the [American] Orchid Society meetings with—they were—we had a car. We had an Aston Martin DB something—[they laugh]—that Robert had restored, Robert over with the car restorers and doing parts. It had a Ford motor, and there was no floor. [They laugh.] The floor was gone. You had to put your feet up on something. In fact, I tried to drive it, and I'm a good driver. Actually, I had—was supposed to change the parking place. I couldn't even get it in to gear. So Robert had to drive it.

So we would take my whole box of orchids, and I was flowering vandas and all kinds of exotic things, taking gardenias to my class at visual arts [School of Visual Arts, New York], a box of 27 gardenias for everyone, and things—so I enjoyed it.

But every Sunday, I spent over five hours bucket watering, doing fungicides, insecticides, that sort of thing.

MS. BERMAN: I read the articles that were in the book that you wrote about them, and it sounds so—it was very labor-intensive.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: I was surprised—you could almost—and the whole family was engaged—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —in this constant upkeep.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes. So I was pleased to get rid of it. So when I moved, I gave all the orchids—loaned them over to somebody with real greenhouses. Then they shipped them to me in Ireland, bare root out of the pots. And they had to go through fumigation and all that kind of stuff. So most of them died. In fact, they all died within the winter. We kept the best ones also—it was larcenous, that man, Rich, so at least they lived.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Did you find that tending to them or thinking about them at all—did that have an effect on your work, on your art?

MS. BAER: The only—no. The only thing that I did take from that was a book of botanical Latin, which I began to use to name paintings with.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I mean, I think language is fascinating. If—you may find that strange since I can't even speak any one but my own, but I spoke that one pretty well—I used to. And I enjoy watching what happens to language and how people use it and where it goes.

For instance, I've been watching a particular word that has been changing. The word "to wander" has become "to wonder." So "they wondered through the space"—[inaudible]—[they laugh]—absolutely full of glee, watching them being amazed, when they don't mean that at all. Or they have—or wondering what's going to happen next, which is probably what they really mean when it changes that way. So they're wandering and they're afraid. You know—[demonstrates].

Any rate, so I found the strictures of naming fun, and the fact that I could make up my own. And so I used that. But people went and misunderstood it as these were named after orchids. People are very literate and literal-minded, unfortunately.

MS. BERMAN: It's a real problem for artists with titles, because you have to give it something, and then you try to find something that doesn't immediately attach a narrative to it that—and every—most people—

MS. BAER: Yes. And they do it anyway. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, or they—exactly, but it's not something that anybody likes to—

MS. BAER: Yes, but—

MS. BERMAN: You have to find something to call it, but you hate the associations that go [with it].

MS. BAER: Well, I have a fairly recent painting of urinals and toilets and whatnot, called *The Shrine of the Piggies* [2000].

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: That part I did, and I sent it—I sent the photo of it to Robert Lobe, who's a sculptor after all, and not a—not a painter. And he couldn't figure out—"What the hell? What is this? What is this?" And then he wrote back, "The rest of the title, the rest of the title." Oh, he says, "*Oh, The Pigs Hog it All and Defecate*"—misspelled—"and *Piss on Where From They Got It* and *With Whom They Will Not Share*." That's it.

And I think another Avis I know from England, Avis Newman, was here, and I showed her the letter because it was so funny. She said, "That's the title." And that's—you're right. So—

MS. BERMAN: So that's been added as the entire title.

MS. BAER: Yes, but that prevents anybody from doing anything that I don't want them to. It's not what I meant at all. Actually, what I meant was something about cheap food. And then another writer, which I had forgotten, a woman who's the director of research at the Slade, had—was very interested in my work and had me as a guest—as an "encounter" guest at the conference of literature and philosophy in Helsinki, Finland [2010]. I was the guest artist with all the structural—poststructuralists and de[con]struct[ion]ists. And, what's his name's—the one who just died, the French one who just died—

MS. BERMAN: [Jacques] Derrida.

MS. BAER: I have to sing some of these words to get the title. Derrida just died. So there I was with the heads of faculty departments and all—with people who were talking about my work. There was a professor of Kantian transcendentalist philosophy from Manchester [Joanna Hodge] who wrote an essay on me and my work. I met her—they come, and actually they looked at work and they hung it up. It was such fun. We got along pretty well. I didn't understand a word of what she wrote. She kept talking about space, and I know space in about five ways, but I don't know transcendental Kantian space as opposed—you know—it happens to my work.

I have the essay here. I like her fine. I spent one day in Helsinki with the woman who was organizing this. And she's explaining to me what I have to answer or talk about, because I couldn't understand it. But she did write an essay, an excellent catalogue essay, in which she spoke of *The Shrine of the Piggies* as a dystopian work—aha!—which celebrates treasure—a treasured icon—[inaudible]—I had never even thought of the Duchamp.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right, the urinal, right.

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] [Inaudible]—but it takes a head of research at the Slade—I'm using this quote in my—in my movie coming up, talking about the work. This work has been described, written, et cetera.

So okay, titles—anything can happen in there. And when I find clues about what I've done from other people, I'm quite happy to use them. The point of the work I've done since I left the minimalist work is that it's open work. And there's enough structure for you to do a narrative. Narrative will always be with us. As humans, we need a story. It's just how our brain works. So abstract art ultimately is also narrative art in another—in a meta-sense.

And I provided something like that. And it's very difficult to explain, because subject matter is the—it's the work. It is not the subject matter, you know.

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's interesting that you brought up Henry James because I would say that the work of the early, mid-'70s has that Jamesian flow and complexity and layers.

MS. BAER: Digresses all over the place—it digresses.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Exactly. And you know, you can't read it all at once. You've got to go back and forth. So, yes, there are images. But I wouldn't say you lose them, but they face—you see other—

MS. BAER: Yes. They come and go. Fine.

MS. BERMAN: They fade—they come and go. There are more dark and white contrasts—the images are—

MS. BAER: I did it on purpose.

MS. BERMAN: Well, we'll talk about that later. But that's—and there was also, again, that idea about Beckett, and the membranes and the veils and layers.

MS. BAER: I still work with them.

MS. BERMAN: Right. It's almost like layers of cells, or something like that. [As] on a slide when you can see through—you look at a slide and you see layers of different sorts of things.

MS. BAER: Well, I'm working with that—with palimpsests later on, where I truly am building layers. I use layers still. It's a way of—

MS. BERMAN: Well, it's transparent layering, where whatever you're using has a watercolor affect sometimes, whether you're using—

MS. BAER: I got over that. I mean, I finished that in the '90s because I was being described as weak and fragile. And these were very bold, ballsy paintings. It's just that I was sliding from one thing to another to another and to another. And in that complexity, meant it to feature one thing, and then it's—that's it. And I didn't want that. So in order to speak a complexity—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —you have to weaken it. And the fragile thing I've given up because—so that's one of the reasons *Piggies* and those are—bang! And I brought some of the complexity down into the titles. I set the dark into the title.

MS. BERMAN: Maybe I'm describing them improperly, but—because the problem is I haven't—I've only seen those works in reproduction.

MS. BAER: I know. That's correct.

MS. BERMAN: And that's what's—when I knew I was doing this, I tried to see work and I was happy I got to see the Minimalist work, but I couldn't find a way of seeing—

MS. BAER: Americans can't, and yet Berlin is celebrating this work like crazy. Suddenly—and as I say, even van Abbe[museum], Eindhoven—it's suddenly readable. But the Americans are resisting like crazy. First of all, they don't want—content. They want nice abstraction that doesn't mean anything. [Laughs.]

I have actually been told this by fans, Minimalist fans of mine. "Why have you done this? We just used to—I used to love to stand in front of your work and think of nothing at all." This is from a woman professor of philosophy, Belgian, from Brussels. And she meant it. She really wanted to trance off of me; it's like intellectual masturbation. Nice, thank you so much. Go home. [They laugh.] Leave me alone.

[Cross talk.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, I think it's also a lot of things from the '60s have come back and so maybe this is part of a misreading of that.

MS. BAER: Well, this was 10, 15 years ago when this woman said this.

She—I mean, she bothered to come up from Belgium to see me in Brussels. And it was amongst the first things I hear from her—[inaudible] talk like—to someone like that. But, yes, I don't know, the Minimalist thing, it's not particularly about me. It's really about what is happening in America, and the young people are having none of it. When I do lectures at Skowhegan or in Copenhagen at the Royal Academy, I was bothering to use a lecture on Minimalism that Mark Godfrey from the Tate—used to be from the Slade [Slade School of Fine Art, University College, London]—did at Dia. And it's such a good lecture on my Minimalist work and the whole context of it that I asked him permission, could I use it when I had to do lectures. And he gave me permission. So like 100—75

slides are his, and then I go on to "And then," and I add the work I've done since then, which is getting bigger and better since time goes on.

In all of these cases, students are bored to death with the whole—and he's entertaining. He really is, and he covers everything. And he's got all kinds of people in there, David Bowie in makeup and all the things that you would think, you know. And they're paying no attention at all. Faculty is adoring, because they're old. And then all the questions are from the students about the new work and what am I doing now, and all the rest, they really—they want nothing to do with it. Skowhegan three years ago— these are students from all over the world. And this is—so I will not use the lecture again. It's—

[Cross talk.]

MS. BAER: —that work is finished. It's only for rich people and old people, and mostly Americans.

MS. BERMAN: Do the recent work. That really is a better thing for, I think, an artist to do, if possible.

Now you were teaching in the late '60s at SVA [School of Visual Arts, New York]. Was that your first—had you taught before?

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: And what were you teaching?

MS. BAER: Second year foundation to 19-year-olds.

MS. BERMAN: Did you enjoy it?

MS. BAER: No. [They laugh.] I tried to quit. I did it one year and I discovered that for one day's teaching, it was three days of my life. The night before—or the day before—arranging it, the day, and the day after. And that I was more like a parent to 30— go smoke your pot outside in the stairways and—[inaudible]—your girlfriends or your parents or the job, or the whole thing you give these—But the thing that really bothered me was the fact that—well, two things bothered me.

First, I never developed a teaching shell. This was me, gold, solid gold. The second thing is the cliches that they had to do, and I wouldn't get them and there's no—they're very vulnerable. You cannot tell them, "This is shit," nor "This is," et cetera. You must allow them to do these things and find out where they can go with them and everything else. But what happened is that I started wondering about things I had given up many years ago—oh, maybe this was—it was a waste of time. It made me go back over things that I know were not useful. That were clichés. And I hated it.

So I decided I wanted to quit. So I said this to somebody else—another faculty there. I said, how do I get out of this contract, because I was replacing Larry Sox, Sax —

MS. BERMAN: Zox.

MS. BAER: —Zox. And they needed—they needed female teachers to get their thing from the Veterans Administration. So I was one of their first female teachers. And I was certainly qualified. So I was told, go in and say to Simon [Rhodes], you want more money. Simon was the owner—whoever Simon was—and he'll fire you. And I said, okay. So I waited and I said, "Simon, I want more money." And he says, "How much?" [They laugh.] And I said, "I want $100 a day for teaching." And it—I was getting 50, 75 [dollars] or something. And he says, "Okay, but no telling any other teachers." So I was stuck for another year. That's—and believe me, a true story. [They laugh.]

So that's where I knew Bill Barrett from. And I—so I was getting studio assistance from there. One of them, I actually—I stopped teaching—I was going to go on and do something in visual perception because I am qualified for that. And I'd even gone and spoken to some of my old teachers up at Columbia and things like that.

I was arranging a course in visual perception. And a guy who was working for me—Andrew somebody—at that time found certain things very interesting that I had taught him about light and how things worked. And he had built for his show a piece in the—it was in the lobby or someplace—that actually injured peoples' eyes for two or three days out of what I had told him.

This light was—I mean, it was doing something terrible. And I said—when he said pieces—"[inaudible] they're taking this information and they're going to—[inaudible]." I stopped right there. I said, "Just take that piece out and stop that." And I mean, I was—I felt very bad, guilty, and I certainly did not want—because students are useless anyway. And when they do things like this with what you give them, you really just—that's it.

So I only teach in each place I've lived if I'm asked to do guest teaching, and I hate it. Because you're in somebody else's place. And actually, at the Rijksacademie here, I was guest teaching for three months. And the head of the department came in when I was talking to a student, and I was saying to him, "Listen—"—I was trying to tell him, "Go look in a mirror to see the mirror image and how you weighted the painting." That paintings have—in other words—everybody puts important things on the right and at the bottom. And if you want to make a painting that's interesting, put it on the left or on the top, at least change the diagonals, et cetera. And I'm saying how to make a flat painting.

And she comes in and she's listening, she said, "That's not true at all." This is the head of department telling me, this is the woman who is known mainly for her drawings and her films. [Laughs.] And she's a friend, but I will never go back to a place where—when I'm speaking to a student to be contradicted in public is—it's absolutely insulting. This is Dutch, incidentally. They don't realize that it's insulting. They have no sense of protocol.

MS. BERMAN: They just thought it was direct, or a debate, or—

MS. BAER: Yes, I mean, they congratulate themselves on being honest, and they're just very true of Dutch society. But I won't teach in a Dutch school again. I mean, what's the point? I did it once—once again later—much later. Just one day from my Avis, my other Avis, my first Avis, who was head of department then and she asked me to come and do this.

And one of the students, one of the male students, was painting very nice cars, really slick, sleek cars. Sometimes one car, sometimes two little cars. And I said something about, "Have you ever thought of making two-thirds of a car?" These are very beautiful paintings and well executed. And I suggested a few things of this sort, which he turned down, defiantly. And later on when they had the diploma show, I actually bothered to come to his place because there were three students I knew, et cetera. And I looked and he took one look at me and he walked up to the window and he turned his back on me and he stood there. So we stood there for 15 minutes. He refused even to speak to me. On his board, bulletin board, was a show—he had a show in Delft. This is, he knew what he was doing—and he [inaudible]. I mean, who needs it?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Have you had any students that you had warm, good relationship with or who became—

MS. BAER: Not as students.

MS. BERMAN: —who became what you would call good artists?

MS. BAER: There—Antonietta [inaudible]—who worked for me, but she was from a different school. Actually, she was from what is called Studio—[inaudible]—I don't know—the Ateliers—[inaudible]—something like that. It is one of the two—I mean, it's like the Rijksmuseum, Rijksacademie, I'm sorry. It's a better school. They never had a woman teacher. I did, when I needed money, ask to teach there. The only woman they've ever had teach there since then is Marlene Dumas, and that's because she's more famous than I am. Or has been.

MS. BERMAN: Well, in the past few years, she suddenly, her star—she has exploded.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, in terms of publicity.

MS. BERMAN: Yes—[and sales and exhibitions.] Now, is she an artist that you know?

MS. BAER: Oh, yes, quite well. You know—same gallery. We have the same birthday. [They laugh.] It's interesting. We're not in touch. She won't—we kiss when we meet and all that sort of thing. She bothers—right in the middle of the mouth. She's like that, which is okay. But when we—I wanted to try and do some writing or something with her because I really enjoy her writing a great deal. I think she's very good. I like her head, so to speak. I don't care for her paintings that much. I think they're, you know, high art school.

MS. BERMAN: Trivial.

MS. BAER: Hmm.

MS. BERMAN: They're trivial.

MS. BAER: They are trivial. Yes. But I like her concept making. And I really wanted to work with her. But first of all, her rotten husband, who is a cousin of the gallerist, another Andriesse, went and praised some writing of mine to the skies. And that just—she won't have anything to do with me. I would have loved to have done some things with her. She works with all kinds of—she works with other women artists, all of them, except me. But—so she's competitive. And it doesn't work.

MS. BERMAN: Oh—

MS. BAER: It's too bad. I would have had fun doing something with her.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. I guess, on a certain level, it's like you would have had to have caught her before she became—before that—

MS. BAER: But this was before that.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. BAER: She might have done something now, but she's much more confident.

MS. BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

MS. BAER: But there's nothing I want from her now. I don't like what she's been doing. I think what she's been doing is what I would—I need—I amuse myself—I talk to myself—[laughs]—normally it doesn't come out. I'm calling it "art journalism." You know, when you take whoever's hot and you pick, you know—[inaudible]—these people that you're going to—they make the quality about who they're talking about, the celebrity stuff. It's journalism, you know. "Arty journalism" you might call it, the school of arty journalism, yes.

So I think that's what she was doing. I think she's stopped doing that. She's trying to go back to her roots and stuff. So she—she's pretty good there.

But she got—she does not like what happened to her. She understands that—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, because she's serious.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, she is serious. And if it—Marlene could never say no. She's one of these people who would say yes to everything. So you'd be—you'd have lunch with her or something, and she had to go back because somebody's student wanted to see her, and she had this—she wrote that for someone, and she did everything for everyone except me—[laughs]—on record. I forgive her, but I am putting it in the record.

It would have been nice to have worked with her, because I respect her mind and her—I respect her writing. She is—the little sentences and all she—little pieces. But those little pieces are quite on the—very good, right on. She has a talent there that I don't have, which would have been nice to combine, go back and forth.

Anyway, yes.

MS. BERMAN: So also what happens about '73, '74—and I guess—is this that you have with Brooke Alexander—you make prints—

MS. BAER: Right.

MS. BERMAN: —for the first time.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And were those the first opportunities that you had had for serious printmaking?

MS. BAER: Yes. And I decided I wanted to make some money, so that's why I decided to make some prints. Who could be more wrong, again? [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: It's like being a director in film or something like that.

What happened is, I made some very beautiful prints. But of course I'm not a printmaker, so scale and the fact that they're under glass and everything—they're much too subtle. So they're still for sale. They never made any money.

I have made no money—I don't get any money until he's sold enough to make—[laughs]—up the expenses. We're talking from 1972 or '4. And we've never made the expenses. I've never made a single penny from *Cardinations* [1974]. They're in museum collections and things like that. But they're too subtle. They're not prints, they're little—they may have been—the mechanism—but I made the mechanism into—it's the same way with graphic art and painting. I made little paintings in a print process, and they got lost in living rooms and in glass, in frames and stuff like that. So I am not a printmaker—

MS. BERMAN: I guess glass and frames are also very contrary to how you want to express yourself, too.

MS. BAER: Of course, all the feel, all the sensuality is gone, you know. I'm not—

MS. BERMAN: It's too removed—

MS. BAER: [Some of it's too gruff ?]. Excuse me. [Laughs.] It's too coarse.

I mean, I am what I am. I'm a high artist. And I don't expect to be a household name. I leave that to Rauschenberg or whoever. I mean—[inaudible]—there are artists who are good at that. I am good at a certain thing. And I should know better than to try to turn it into money. [Laughs.] I'm not good at money. I will never earn money, and I will always have a great deal of prestige.

So, okay. It's all right with me as long as I can pay the rent, and don't become homeless. I—there's every chance in the world I can be homeless in five years. I have enough money for two years. This is at the age of 81, with no jobs or anything else. [Laughs.]

I mean, things are going very well, fortunately. I finally have a market in 35 years' worth of work—although the longer it went on, the slower I worked. Because I'm not selling very much, so it becomes harder and harder to motivate a lot of work.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that is an interesting thing, because I had never seen this before in something a dealer said, and maybe it was just who it was. It was that—I looked at this press release for that Alexander Gray [Alexander Gray Associates] show—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and he said that you had—that your oeuvre consisted of 106 paintings.

MS. BAER: I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, how would he have found—I mean, that was—

MS. BAER: I don't know. Is it true?

MS. BERMAN: That's what I'm asking you.

MS. BAER: I don't know. I haven't counted.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, because that did—that seemed—

MS. BAER: Is it too little or too much? Or—too little, huh?

MS. BERMAN: It sounded like not a lot.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, it isn't a lot. Especially in the last 10 or 20 years, it's become less and less.

When I first came here, I was actually able to sell some of the new work, because of my name. They didn't understand it particularly, but they didn't dislike it. So—and it's—Eindhoven—Van Abbe [Van Abbemuseum] didn't even know they had one of those paintings when I was there. They knew about the minimal painting—the diptych, triptych that they had. They were showing that all the time. But when they listed the works they owned, I said, "Yes, but where's this painting?" It's rolled up someplace in there. It's rolled. There was a painting—a beautiful painting in [Arnheim] that the big Reichsdienst, the government, buys within the first year I was here—"Ooh, Jo Baer is here; we'll come and buy." Bought some drawings, and they bought one painting, and then they give it to a museum that wants it. Which was Arnhem [Museum voor Modern Kunst, Arnhem], which showed a lot of women. Liesbeth Brandt Corstius—just took it. She has a lot of Nancy Spero and—et cetera, et cetera.

So this work is—has been sold. Rudi bought a big diptych for the Stedelijk.

MS. BERMAN: Rudi Fuchs.

MS. BAER: Yes, Fuchs.

When we were talking, I asked to do a retrospective, because I'd done two shows with him, et cetera, and with Rudi, you ask. And he said, "Yes, okay." And it takes seven years. And it takes—"No, you can't have that space. You go down to the basement. No, I won't show it off"—you know, "Put me upstairs." That—that's the way it goes.

And so in his visit, he saw the first of these big, great, giant very big diptychs, and he bought it, because he liked

the tugboat. He thought that was a cute boat. It's never been shown outside of my show. It's in the stacks someplace in the Stedelijk. So when I was able to sell some works, [Marianne Brouwer from the] Kröller-Müller—well, did a show—it was the first time they did a show—the show in '93 that included the Minimal work as well, and it was about half and half. And what they bought were a big set of drawings, which is new work, image work. You know, there were—six-foot, big, big drawings, which they owned. (Four drawings.)

And later on, a few years later, the director came back. He bought all my early Minimalist work. Bought the two paintings from 1960 or '61 and one from '72. And they're loaned all the time to museum shows and everything else.

And then came back [again after a] a couple years—it was '06—and he actually bought one of the new big paintings—right, from the [*Shrine of the*]*Piggies*, that size paintings. He saw the *Piggies*. He saw *Testament* [*Testament of the Powers that Be (Where Trees Turn Sand, Residual Colours Stain the Lands),* 2001]. I can remember him looking at them. I had them up on the wall as a way of sort of hanging them up. And then it happened that the newest one [*Altar after the Ego (Through a Glass Darkly)* [2004]] was in a show at the gallery, a group show, and he decided on that one-- bought it off the wall.

So that's the story. It's enough. I got grants. The government here is very good about bursaries, which I think I had four of them. But you get slower and slower, and you start two years working on a book, which I consider actually quite important. So I'm so glad that you really had a chance to see what I was doing. Because you're saying, you're thinking—[inaudible]—et cetera, but you see what I was doing. So if I can't do it this way, I'm going to do it that way. I'm going to— so if somebody says, "Well, what did you do"—[inaudible]—I'll say, "I wrote a book"—or half a book.

MS. BERMAN: Right. No, you've definite [by]—that book is a real—is—

MS. BAER: It's equal to a baby.

MS. BERMAN: At least.

MS. BAER: At least. Oh, good. Thank you. Thank you—and from the world that counts. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Oh, no. I just began to dig into this. And I thought, oh—

MS. BAER: Blessing on you. Thank god. Because, here I am, I don't know—I don't know anybody to talk to who would value anything of this sort. I am on my own. And it's probably the best way to be, because I don't get talked out of anything. I have to sort out for myself. That's the paintings, that's everything else. It's why it takes so long. I can't go fast because I have no one to bounce from; I am truly alone here.

So these works are very, very, very valuable. They should go up and up and up. I can't put them all over the world. They can't be copied; they can't be. There's no way to do them fast. So they're going to be like a Chuck Close, one a year, or you go on a waiting list or something else. This is—this is—this is doable.

MS. BERMAN: Right. You really have to think a lot. You have to think so much of it out.

Well, let me ask you if this is sort of off the wall or not. Does a painter like—does Edward Hopper interest you at all? For the—

MS. BAER: The sense of him, the sense of the paintings, because they're full of sensibility, their mood.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, and there's light.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And there's so much thought. And this [was] also someone who would sit all day—all—most of the year planning and thinking about the picture.

MS. BAER: I have no idea about the light. I do not go to museums unless I have to. I find that they—everything intrudes on me and I get—[word inaudible]—you know? Jack [Wesley] used to say he always got diarrhea—[they laugh]—whenever he walked in the museum door. That never happened to me, but I am not an art lover in the sense of other artists. I have enough trouble doing what I do. When I think of something, an artist that I meet that is interesting to me for some reason, I will go out and look and see how did they do this. I take what I need. So I have them filed away for what I need. Hopper I need. I don't need his life at all. I couldn't care less.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: You need it. Yes. Me, I wouldn't know. I don't mind.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: What I know is the light, which I'm calling "mood," because light is mood.

MS. BERMAN: [Yes].

MS. BAER: [Inaudible.]

Yes. And who it is at its time, what it comes out of—I don't lose the sociological, anthropological point of anything. I seek to be absolutely clamped on to the question of who were they then, what were they doing, what did it mean, where is it in terms of history? I'm a born Marxist somehow in who's profiting and what is it? You know, truly, I don't like to look at things without context. But the artist's life is not the context, it's what was the world in 1936 or '28 or—et cetera. Was it before the Depression or afterwards? What was happening there? How did that painting happen? Do I need this? Do I want it? I don't want that time. [Inaudible.] These are work issues for me. Other artists are work for me.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Other makers and—

MS. BAER: Yes. I mean, so I will go shopping—I go shopping all the time—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —[laughs]—for what I need intellectually. All the rest—

MS. BERMAN: Right. So anyway—so the SVA—so we talked about the teaching and it was not a productive experience for you.

MS. BAER: I will do it as a guest, specially. Now I do sort of these shows, lecture panel—panels and things like that, because I think I'm on a roll, and I think I should continue it. I think it's a way to get my work out in the world to a great many people. And I feel I have to do it.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: It's a responsibility.

MS. BERMAN: Now let's talk about your Whitney retrospective.

MS. BAER: Okay.

MS. BERMAN: Because, one, it was very important. It wasn't something that a lot of people had. And you can certainly talk about the externals, but I want to start with when you saw all your work all gathered together like that.

Did it cause a reevaluation on your part or any kind of sensation?

MS. BAER: No. [Laughs.] Well, it was such an enormous space for—and it was so underhung. And it was mostly relief that my paintings were strong enough to handle it, frankly. It was legitimizing. It was—better word than—

MS. BERMAN: A validation?

MS. BAER: A reaffirmation—reaffirmation of what I had already learned. I had learned in Noah Goldowsky's little gallery—vis-a-vis Noah and [Richard] Bellamy—that they could take a paint—a single painting of mine and hang it with a Rothko, a de Kooning, a Newman, and perhaps a Kline, and I was perfectly okay, me and those. That—to find out that you're okay in that kind of company—I have also hung next to a Matisse. And I was okay; the painting was okay. I already had that.

So by the time I get to the Whitney, it was just a question of the space, the size of the place. And I had already done a show at the Lo Giudice [Gallery], which was a very large space, just with the radiator—you know, just with the wraparounds, six paintings, maybe, in that enormous space. And it worked. I could do that.

So by the time we get to the Whitney, there's just these 18-foot ceilings we're talking about. And it worked. That's relief for me. Other than that, I have no sense of—

MS. BERMAN: Well of course they had—there was supposed to be a show in '72 and they were making it smaller and smaller, so you refused it.

MS. BAER: You've got that right.

MS. BERMAN: So you held out. Even though it was a big—it was—you held out for the space that you felt you deserved.

MS. BAER: "No" was the—one of the most important words in the world. And so the second one is when you're asking to bring down price, you go up. That works. It really does. Dealers go crazy. But it worked with [Peter] Ludwig, and it worked with with [Charles] Saatchi. They insisted they wanted 3,000. "Make it seven [thousand]." And, "I can't do that. I can't do that." I said, "Do it. You can't have it for less." And they do it. They don't care. This is something that rich people really evaluate what you think of your work, what it's worth. And when they start taking a reasonable price and going under it, you immediately go up—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, yes.

MS. BAER: —because you can know you'll sell the work some other time. Fuck you. You know, if you want it, you want it. You've got the money. Fuck it.

MS. BERMAN: Besides, women in particular should not put themselves on sale.

MS. BAER: I've never even thought—work is work. I mean—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: I meant that women do that more than men, they will go for the low, they'll let themselves be pushed into that.

MS. BAER: Do you see? This is a problem I have with feminists. That never occurred to me. In fact, when I've talked to feminists and I've tried to work with them—and I was thinking of suing the Guggenheim for—because I'd applied seven times and I had all the things.

And I thought it would be a very good idea, because I have so much going for me. I really thought I had a lawsuit there. So I started talking to the feminists and the lawyers, and they're trying to find lawyers and what-not to set this up.

And what I get is I get in a conversation with one of the well-known women around that I had spoken to, she starts telling me about all the terrible things that have been done to her, or friends of hers. And I say, "What did you do?" If somebody treats you like shit, you send it back immediately! "What did you do? What did you do?" They don't do anything. They don't understand how—I mean, so I couldn't work with them. By virtue of very great luck and a grandmother who was—three generations of liberated women, I don't understand the things you're saying, which is not to invalidate them at all.

My friends who were in high places like you and the others, working women who are where you are supposed to be, all say without feminism, you wouldn't be there. And you're quite right. But you have to understand I'm missing that. I just do it on my own. And I don't know why or how. I just know I ain't—[inaudible].

So I was—I have something else. I didn't use feminism. And I was called a "female man" at the time of most of the feminist stuff—by people I didn't—or who didn't know me. Because I was successful in the male world. But now I am called a role model. [They laugh.]

They've come back to me, but only like, like Judy Brodsky, who's very big in these things, suddenly I'm discovered again. And I asked her about this and she said, "Yes, when we were—we're more reasonable now." [They laugh.] Not, but it took—

MS. BERMAN: True.

MS. BAER: —until like 2003 before I was let back into feminist conversation. And I have to do a thing at the Stedlijk, the end of November for a tabletop, I think I told you. Or table—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. ArtTable.

MS. BAER: ArtTable, tabletop. ArtTable. I don't really know how I'm going to handle myself there. Because what you've just said, I really—it never occurs to me that I am a woman in this world. I—it's really—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, it's not that you should be, but I have seen other—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —people do these things.

MS. BAER: Oh, you're quite—you're quite—

MS. BERMAN: It's not that I approve of it, but I've seen it happen.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: So it was good that—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —or they—they're so desperate to get it into a collection or a museum and they'll mark it down. And that's—

MS. BAER: Yes, no, I understand all that.

MS. BERMAN: And I'm sure some male artists do, too, but I just don't know.

MS. BAER: Yes, but of course they do. But, I mean, yes, but—

MS. BERMAN: And that's what people count on, "Oh, you'll want it in our collection."

MS. BAER: Yes, but I know that, so I won't do it. But how come they don't know? They know it and they do it, anyway—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: Yes! Exactly.

MS. BAER: But, well, see, I'm strange. And I'm not congratulating myself here. I am saying it really doesn't occur to me to do the other. That's because I am very lucky and no other reason. It's not because I'm morally better. It's just I don't want to do it, I can't explain it.

MS. BERMAN: As you said yesterday, you just learned early on that you don't—if you don't want to do it, you don't.

MS. BAER: Don't do it! "No" is a great word. [Laughs.] That's the other thing, my—[inaudible] Antonietta, and me, we say "No."

MS. BERMAN: Right. Or you love Bartleby, I'm sure, *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. "I would prefer not to," the Melville story [1853].

MS. BAER: Oh, no. I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, [it's] great. It's a short story by Herman Melville and it's on—because it's off copyright, it's on the web. You can download—

MS. BAER: Oh.

MS. BERMAN: —the whole thing and read it. And he's this humble clerk. And the guy wants him to do something and he just says, "I would prefer not to." The whole thing goes on from there, and then he liberates himself and he starts saying that about everything.

MS. BAER: [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: And it changes. But it's a great story.

MS. BAER: And I always say—

MS. BERMAN: And as a matter of fact, there's a site for years that's called Bartleby.com. And then anything that's not in copyright—this is well before Google—you could find any story. But, anyway, it's called *Bartleby, the Scrivener*. And so every once in a while, I would say [it] to someone, if somebody gets it. I mean, this is something, again, people say you know—

MS. BAER: Thank you. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: —I would just say, to somebody who knows, "I would prefer not to." And anyone who's ever read the story—

MS. BAER: I have heard it in certain high-class British dramas or something once—you know, where they—where they portray intellectuals and things like that. But you don't have in American drama generally. But—

MS. BERMAN: The English.

MS. BAER: —I have BBC 1 and 2 and 3 and 4.

MS. BERMAN: Of course some of Melville is very complex to read. But this is —this is easy. I [shouldn't] say easy. But—

MS. BAER: Oh no.

MS. BERMAN: —this is compassable—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and it's not 5,000 pages about whaling. So—

MS. BAER: Well, I've heard the "I do not prefer"—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, "I would prefer not to."

MS. BAER: "I would prefer not to," yes.

MS. BERMAN: Anyway, it's quite—it's a wonderful story.

MS. BAER: Thank you.

MS. BERMAN: Anyway—the Whitney Museum, you've had your retrospective, or you're having it. Because I have wondered if you had come to a point where you didn't want to go any further with that work. And I wondered if on some hand the retrospective was tied into it. Although I know there is that transitional—

MS. BAER: No.

MS. BERMAN: —painting called *The Old Year* [1974—75]—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —from '74.

MS. BAER: Yes. There was one from before it that was in the show. And it was called something else. [They laugh.] It's been sold. It's been away for so long. I can get it, but—it's on my website. It's also a wraparound, but it's hard instead of soft.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, because this would certainly be old.

MS. BAER: No, it's not in there. It—wait a minute. Where is my Stedelijk—oh, here, it's in this catalog, because it was in this show. I'll check. I'm not sure if there's a picture of it, but it will be in the titles. Oh, it's the one that—Dia. It's in the print room.

Oh, wait, here. Here's what it looks like. See, it's hard-edged—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —but it goes around.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And I'll give you the name of it in a moment.

MS. BERMAN: Right. It's on page 78 of the Stedlijk catalog.

MS. BAER: Yes, and it's—titles. *M. Refractarius*, 1974—75, private collection, Paris.

MS. BERMAN: Right. So that's also—yes, that's based on an orchid—

MS. BAER: Refractarius, I forget what that means.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, it's—again, it's taking off—

MS. BAER: Well, I made it up. [Laughs.] [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Because of course what I'm leading up to is the big transition in your life of moving to Ireland. So we should—we should get you there.

MS. BAER: Yes. One other thing to say about the Whitney show, it was supposed to be a di Suvero show and he wasn't ready. And then suddenly they asked me. And I was in the process of moving. I hadn't asked for—I mean, whatever happened before was history. And it was Barbara Haskell—I don't know—thought it was a good idea, I suppose, to put—slip me in during that space of time. So it was all an accident as far as I knew.

So I had no thoughts on the show. And, you know, okay, the Whitney was there. That was then. That was then. Oh, now, okay. And I'm moving—actually I moved while it was still up. I had already made plans to leave. So the Whitney show was serendipitous. It had nothing to do with me really. And she did everything and she didn't ask very much. And, I mean, she didn't need my advice or didn't want it. And that was that. I helped hang it, but it was already mapped out. It doesn't mean anything to me.

The reviews, I didn't even read them. I heard there was one bad one by Roberta Smith, who used to be [Donald] Judd's secretary. So she really reviewed it as—what do you call it—Art Nouveau, and things like that. And then I heard—because I was living in Ireland and I didn't even have a—I wasn't even getting the magazines or anything—that she regretted—she got so many letters from people that she regretted ever doing this, that she'll never do that again. Ever since then, she's written quite well on my work. She speaks of "This works well," and "This is good," and stuff like that.

I met her at the Getty thing, the Minimalist forum at the Getty, when I was in L.A. ["Minimal Art in the United States," May 2004]. I was speaking at MoCA [Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles] with Mark Godfrey again, and did a dialogue. And she was one of the speakers. And she had reviewed my show at DIA badly in the sense that she said she'd seen my work looking much better in other places. And I quite agreed with her. I did not like the way Lynne [Cooke] installed the show. I would never do a whole big room in white. I think it's—I got reviewed in the *New Yorker* as "arctic queen." You know—[laughs]—I agree.

And she hung the, quote, Radiator, the wraparound paintings, absolutely against the way I intended them. She alternated them, which turned them into objects. And she writes about the objectness of it. I kept them so that they grabbed the whole wall. I did not wish them as objects. I wished them as paintings. Well, if you go horizontal, vertical, horizontal, vertical, you disrupt the whole space of the room.

So I said—I mean, I was horrified. I said, "You've just ruined ten years of my work." I didn't say that. I like Lynne, and we've remained friends. So she said—they rehung it and tried it over the weekend and it didn't work. [Laughs.] So I was stuck with it. But what happened was the young people all adored it, and they would say, "Yes, you're hot in the street—you're hot in the street."

They understood that. So she was right. Her show was a big hit. I did not like the way it was hung. Roberta did not like it. I went up to her at the Getty and said, "I agreed with your review of my Dia show." And she said, "You did?" [They laugh.] And that was it, nothing.

So Roberta, the history all the way from Judd's secretary to the Getty—you did, right.

MS. BERMAN: She also worked—before she became a critic, she worked for Paula Cooper, too, I think.

MS. BAER: Oh, swell. Lots of my background in there. Anyway—no, what I—I find her a good enough critic, a lot better than her boss, if he's still there. Blah, blah, blah. Okay.

MS. BERMAN: So, anyway, in 1974, you were thinking about moving.

MS. BAER: I started before '74. It took two or three years to move. I went on a—I don't know, it must have been '72, the year [Richard] Nixon was elected in a landslide?

MS. BERMAN: That was the year the Watergate tricksters had undermined [George] McGovern.

MS. BAER: Yes. And I'm waiting in line, and I was saying, "the American people are doing a really wretched thing, a horrible thing" to some woman, some stranger, waiting in line on Eleventh Street. A Presbyterian church, I think, is where we—was open.

I said, "I'd get out of here if I knew where to go." And she said, "You're an artist—" the way I dressed. I said, "Yes." She said, "Why don't you go to Ireland? It's tax-free for artists." "Oh, what a good idea"—[laughs]—[inaudible]—and I said, "I think I'll go to Ireland. I'm going to get out of here." The idea of Nixon scared me. I have a big mouth and—it's like I could never live in the South.

I have a big mouth. [Laughs.] I'm a danger to myself. And what he was doing with the White House, throwing out all the abstract art and putting in all the little landscapes. I thought, "Hey, I just want out of here. And New

York's too expensive. I'm not using it." The rent was—they sold the building that I was in, and I was—I could have bought my floor, if Josh's father would let me have the trust fund to do it, and he wouldn't for—

MS. BERMAN: It was—that trust fund was for Josh?

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BAER: And when he was 21 or something. But we could—he would have then been an owner of property. He should have done it, it was stupid. But so I sold everything and just got the hell out. And I was in the—so it was a question of finding a place. It was before the oil thing that happened in Europe, where there were tanks and everything else in the Heathrow Airport, as I recall, and things like that.

When I first decided to move, I got in touch with—I think Clem[ent Greenberg] or somebody gave me names of people. And I [picked up ?] one of these tickets that give you a little car—a little lawn mower—that you drive around. [Laughs.] And I went through up to [William Butler] Yeats territory, I drove all over the country, and got to Dublin and met the artists and things like that. And I loved it.

And so I decided to—and I was told I could get a great mortgage. I was looking for a Georgian house. And Bank of Ireland would give me, for free, practically, a mortgage that's—and then, within the next year or so, that crashed and there was no longer any possibility of mortgages or anything. And I didn't know what to do. I was in Europe doing a show of some sort. I was talking to a cab driver in London, as one does, and I said I would—you know, move to Ireland, but the whole thing— "The tanks at Heathrow, and there's no money, and all this—[inaudible]—"Why don't you rent?" "Oh, what a good idea." [They laugh.]

And I go home. And Josh says, "Come on, let's—you've been to Europe. It's Thanksgiving vacation. Come on, mom."

So I booked us for a week in Ireland together. And we went to rental agencies, and they sent us to two places. One was a mill house—hundreds of little rooms and central heating. Absolutely improper; no studio rooms, or anything like that. And the other was this 12th-century—11th-century Norman castle—[laughs]—that hadn't been lived in, and was—et cetera. And we walked around in, I think, was it 22—32 rooms, and no heat, et cetera.

And Josh was saying, "Take it, mom! Take it, mom!" [Laughs.] And we're opening the shutters, there's the dining room with Chippendale—[laughs]—and two kitchens—three maybe, I don't know. And there's a pink bedroom, and there's a green one, and there's a—et cetera, et cetera—beautiful, really. So, I say, "Okay." [They laugh.]

And they wanted somebody in there, because it was being vandalized and they had been losing brass fireplaces and chandeliers and stuff to thieves, because they're selling for a lot of money in Dublin. So they were renting it. Did I want the—did I want the [Royal] Crown Derby china and the silver? And I said, "No, I have my own Limoges—" [they laugh] "—and Danish—[inaudible]—" I don't know, I didn't—[inaudible]—no, I didn't want the responsibility, so that stayed in the vault. But for the rest, it was furnished and everything, and that was how that happened.

And so in June—the Whitney show was in February, going on to the end of June. But on June 16—

MS. BERMAN: Bloomsday.

MS. BAER: Bloomsday, I believe—[laughs]—off I went to celebrate Leopold and his—or herself—Anna Livia Plurabelle—what was—what was her name?

MS. BERMAN: Molly Bloom.

MS. BAER: Molly Bloom.

MS. BERMAN: Anna Livia Plurabelle is in *Finnegans Wake* [James Joyce, 1939], I think.

MS. BAER: Oh, I do conflate them. Probably the only person in the world that can say that. [Laughs.] I used to quote *Finnegans Wake* at people, when I was trying to be a movie director. I would suddenly slip into *Finnegans Wa*ke. Do you believe that?

MS. BERMAN: Well, I—

MS. BAER: So inappropriate, I mean—[they laugh]. No, there's a—there's a song in it. The song of the ant and the grasshopper—*The Ondt and the Gracehoper*, yes. And I quote from that: "I pick up your reprieve—your reprieve—your—" when you attack somebody—"I pick up your reproof, the horsegift of a friend, for the prize of your save is the price of my spend"—[laughs]—and things like that. And people look at me like I'm crazy. I still enjoy that.

I also picked up the expression, "Suck it yourself, sugarstick!," which is quite often misunderstood these days. Somebody—I wrote that someplace, and somebody translated it to—[inaudible]—[laughs]. Yes, but—

MS. BERMAN: Anyway, you were there—by the way, before this time, had you ever been to Europe.

MS. BAER: No. Wait a minute, '72 I was in Italy—no, this was the time when I was doing shows finally in Italy. I had a child at home.

MS. BERMAN: Right. That's right.

MS. BAER: And I didn't want to leave. Yes. And then he was old enough—and actually, by the time I moved, he was in college.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And where did—where did Josh go to college?

MS. BAER: He went to a place in Ohio that was called Kenyon [College].

MS. BERMAN: Oh, yes. That's well known.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes, yes—

MS. BERMAN: It's quite liberal.

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. He went to—he could have gone to other schools, especially—I mean, Hannah [Green], Jack's new wife, her uncle or cousin or something like that was head of admissions at Princeton. So Josh had gone to Princeton and, I mean, he could have gone right in. He had all the credentials and everything. So we knew people in various places. He never—he did what he wanted. And the kids from Grace Church went to Kenyon. This was—[inaudible]—like normal.

And he didn't really—didn't—I thought Reed was interesting, I thought Swarthmore was interesting. These are the places I thought he should go. And Jack and the family thought it should be Princeton. His father is a Yale alumnus. So he could have gone to Yale or Princeton, Reed or Swarthmore. He chose Kenyon. That's—he did what he wanted.

And he did his—he did a master's at the University of Illinois which—in computer theory. I said, "You're crazy. You're absolutely crazy." And of course he was, because the minute he graduated, my god, the degree was out of date, and he could only work for banks and department stores. I mean, that's stupid—put yourself in with a bunch of engineers, you know, I mean—but he did what he wanted.

He could have gone—done a master's at Oxford or Cambridge. I had—I knew people by then in Europe in all of these places, and he would have been welcomed, you know. And he could come home weekends to me in my castle—[laughs]—to the chatelaine.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: No, he used to visit a lot, and they—the girls were thinking of him as husband material; he was quite desirable. Yes. But—yes—

MS. BERMAN: Right, so—

MS. BAER: No, but—

MS. BERMAN: You see that as familiar. He wanted to do what he wanted to do.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, no, no, I'm a good mommy. I tell him what I think, and then he does what he wants, you know.

MS. BERMAN: Right. So you were—was it true that it was tax-free for artists?

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, you didn't pay Irish taxes. Didn't mean you didn't pay American taxes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: That's—[laughs]—I think—no, I didn't pay—I had to fill out forms, like I do now, which I am four years behind and which I am told I must—this is—these are—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: [Inaudible]—have to be done before the end of November.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Busy time.

MS. BAER: Last year's. We're talking last year's and five years ago. I get to do this after—yes.

MS. BERMAN: So, but Robert [Lobe] did not come with you to Ireland?

MS. BAER: He came over once I was there—or, yes, he came with me when I arrived. And he helped unpack stuff, and he stayed about six weeks to see me in and stuff like that. And as I told you, he started making sculpture with the—with the farmers in the neighborhood, with their chain saws. And he got to pull out oak trees that were laying in the ditches—you know, old things. And they all became very interested in making these pieces of sculpture with Robert. Robert was wonderful.

But so then he left, which was proper. I mean, one of the reason I left was because he was young and really should have children and a wife and proper stuff. He was 22 when I met him, and I was 39, 40. That's a big difference.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: And I had to pretend to be 28 for his sister, visiting sister. Do you have any idea how—I mean, I look young for my age, but I was trying to stay out of lights—streetlights. You're talking on the corner, and I'm inching out of the light. And she follows me into the ladies room, which is full of lights, and I am hiding—I mean, it was just horrible. This 16-year-old sister—it's shocking, too shocking, to have an old woman as brother's girlfriend.

Actually, when his family—his mother and father found out how old I was—we were in a show that Sam Wagner did in Detroit—

MS. BERMAN: Sam Wagstaff.

MS. BAER: Wagstaff, yes, sorry.

MS. BERMAN: That's okay.

MS. BAER: Wagner is Dutch—all the Dutch names are intruding on my names now. It's—it's really—you know, I get Marialine instead of Marisol and—okay, Sam Wagstaff.

MS. BERMAN: Wagstaff.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, he's been dead a long time. At any rate, it was a show. And they had my birthdate and a photograph in the paper, the Detroit something-or-other—or this was Cleveland, or Detroit—I think it was in Cleveland, and the parents are in Detroit, or the other way—I'm not sure one way or the other. And they found out my birthdate. And the—they disinherited him. Took years before they took him back. They said, "You're no child of ours." And they wouldn't speak to him or anything else because of me. Nice, huh? So—[laughs].

MS. BERMAN: I guess you have to settle in. And are you thinking about making art when you're going there?

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. I actually moved, most importantly, to make new art. Secondarily, to break off with Robert, because it seemed proper to me. And the idea of not staying in New York—it's very difficult to evade your reputation and your trademarks. And the young people were starting to do dumb art—literally called "dumb art." Neil Jenney was good at it. But Neil Jenney is not dumb, incidentally, by any means.

MS. BERMAN: No, no.

MS. BAER: But I really did not want to dumb down. This is very much against my grain, you might say—the grain of me—does one say that, the grain of one's—no—the—

MS. BERMAN: Against my grain, or against one's grain.

MS. BAER: Against my grain. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Right, yes. Against one's grain.

MS. BAER: No, I don't think it's ever used on oneself. One doesn't have a grain. But that—

MS. BERMAN: Against my nature, maybe.

MS. BAER: Nature, yes. That's not very specific. Yes—no, there's just no way—to this day, I don't watch *The Simpsons*. I, fuck it, I am not watching comic strips. If they can't use real people to do things, that's the only way they can say things, they can say them to the people who need to hear it. I don't need to hear that kind of stuff. Imagine not watching *The Simpsons*. I mean—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: I don't watch it.

MS. BAER: All right. Then you don't watch television, but I watch television all the time.

MS. BERMAN: Well, I do, but I don't watch series—those kinds of things. I watch movies.

MS. BAER: Yes, I don't watch movies, so I'm really—I mean, in a really strange place. My junk reading and television watching could probably—properly be a subject that should not be discussed. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Okay, well, then we won't.

MS. BAER: Very low class. No, I have to say I pride myself on a certain vulgarity, which—vulgarity, I mean certain areas that seem to have certain prohibitions, or whatever that word is.

MS. BERMAN: I think it's called guilty pleasures.

MS. BAER: No, I'm not even guilty about them. It's just that I'm careful about how I say them in public. That's not guilt; that's careful.

I got—didn't you—I was bodybuilding, weightlifting, for 25 years. I started doing it when I discovered I was a very fast runner, in London, and they—I joined a running club. And if you're doing a sport, even though you're 57 years old—or 50, whatever—you begin to also train with weights. This is sort of normal. You don't use heavy weights, you do lots of repetitions. But you're building up strength and endurance and all that sort of thing. It's normal to do. The women didn't do it; that was the only thing. And so I learned weight training in London, with one of the coaches from Arsenal—never mind, long story. When I came here, I enjoyed doing it. And I was still running, and I joined the gym that I'm still at. And they actually had a woman's section and a man's section. [inaudible]—and I was used to certain big machines—leg lifts, and things like that. So I was told I could go into the main weight rooms if I had a partner with me, a man. I wasn't allowed to go [inaudible]. And I said, "Well, then I'm going to quit this gym."

I said, I'm used to using, like a—so I was allowed to go in and use the men's machines, and the other women—one of the women said to me, "Well, it's okay for you, you're old." And I—[laughs]—I mean, there would be no sexual business going on. At 57, I looked as good as she did at 30. It was very—it really was—it was an actual insult.

But—so, okay. And eventually, I did whatever I wanted to do, as usual. And someplace in there, I met one—I met a professional weightlifter, a woman who was exhibiting, whatever they call it, in shows and stuff like that—

MS. BERMAN: A bodybuilder.

MS. BAER: [A] bodybuilder, yes. She was showing me some of these stuff and she said, "You've got the natural body that we really try to get." Oh. Well, so I started working with heavy weights to see how big I'd get.

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

MS. BAER: Found this all very interesting. And I also discovered it slowed down my running a great deal, because the more muscle you have, the more you've got to push around. And I wasn't that strong a runner. But ever since then, I've been curious to see how big I'll get, because—

MS. BERMAN: Your arms are really well defined.

MS. BAER: Yes, but—well, then I'm very strong. I always have been, and I have the proper body for it. Then my legs aren't great. But point is, if you're going to have hanging—you know, you've got a choice. You can get fat, you can have hanging skin, or you can get muscles. Nothing to really choose from for me; vain and physical, et cetera.

But the point of all of this, I was asking one of the young artists around, here, "What do you think if somebody said I was doing bodybuilding? Would this affect how people think about my work?" "Oh, don't tell anybody, don't tell anybody." I was just told to shut up. So somebody was doing a movie of me, they couldn't believe I was doing pull-ups—that I can do chins and things like that—from the film academy for a local television thing, would I do it. And I said, "yes," but I said—that's why I was asking Maureen [Schouten]—"but I don't want to use my real name."

So I did it all on my—oh, I have a pseudonym—*nom de art*—that I share with Edward Kienholz. We are brother and sister, and whenever we want to do anything bad, whenever we did want to do anything bad, he became Carl Stender and I became his sister Clara, Clara Stender. This is before we understood—or before I understood that Stender is actually the name of a Dutch beer. It's a very common name here, but to Americans—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.].

MS. BAER: —you laughed. Yes, it's a great name. So I did it as Clara Stender. I still have the video of it. And I can remember they were photographing in—shooting in the Vondelpark, me riding a bicycle. The idea that a 60-year-old woman could ride a bicycle. And they had shots of me, cruising around on a bicycle. They had shots of me doing real chins. And when I had the thing made to send to America, I had the beta, the video changed—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —so I could send it to Josh or to Rosetta [Brooks, Josh's girlfriend] at the time—the guy who was processing it, he was showing it to me and he said—he said, "You were standing on a chair, weren't you, when you did this?" [They laugh.] I was kneeling on a chair—there was no way I could—I usually do with chins, pull-ups, you know.

So this is how this was considered in those days. So I have these other names. And the video is very funny because I sound like Mrs. [Margaret] Thatcher in them, you know. I went—they came here to photograph me in the studio, but I wouldn't let them understand it as a studio. And I told lies and they said, "Why did you come here?" And I said, "Well, I thought it would be such a good place to live." [They laugh.] It's very funny.

But, yes, I do believe—I forget why you asked me about this at the very beginning, but—

MS. BERMAN: We will get back to Ireland and making new art.

MS. BAER: Right. It's—we're already into Holland and—

MS. BERMAN: It's all right. We can go back and forth. But—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and—but it was—you could set that up as a studio and get—I mean, was there an—

MS. BAER: I used the big drawing room as a studio. I covered the gilt—walls and things like that with wallboard and I had to build fires. The fireplace had painted posies all around it—[laughs]—and I refused to let any—the help or any of the Irish in.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Because you were saying you were also evading your reputation. And—but it looked as if from the photos that you got into the country life.

MS. BAER: Oh, I adored it. Actually, I never fit in so well before. It's funny. I come from old family—Washington state old family. I mean, that's ridiculous. It's a hundred years at the most. I'm sitting with people from 500 years. But I understand them and they understand me. So there is something to do with how many generations you've been rich.

MS. BERMAN: [Yes.]

MS. BAER: It is a bit of a—[inaudible]. And my family were pioneers, they were landowners and so they were upper-middle class. There is no aristocracy in America. But upper-middle-class Americans are the same as aristocrats—at least Irish or English aristocrats, in the sense that—I have one other story to tell you.

Armstrong was the Whitney director, Tom Armstrong?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —you remember that from—Tom Armstrong. There was a radio serial when I was child; Tom Armstrong, "Eat your Wheaties," Tom Armstrong. That name [it was Jack Armstrong]. When the Whitney show was on, they had a gala—a friends dinner thing. And I was the only artist invited because I had the show on at the museum. And I can remember being there and being introduced to Armstrong's mother whom we'd call an—[inaudible]—dowager; [laughs]—I didn't think she had those—but one of these WASP old, establishment women. And he introduces her to me, and then she says, "Where's my drink?" And I say to her, "Your name isn't 'Where is my drink.'" [They laugh.] Blinks, blinks, blinks. And then she takes me by the hand and we go around.

What I'm trying to say is I understood immediately, without a thought, how I address this woman. That is built in,

and this is why I thrived in Ireland. I—it's not conscious. Again, another lucky thing. So I could be with the farmers, and I could be with the aristocrats, and I would be invited to dinner through [the] Lord and Lady [Mount Charles] of [the] [Slane] Castle, and they're thinking of me as a rich divorcee for their 17-year-old son who is courting me at table, which is hilarious.

You know, I find this all great fun, and I was happy and pleased to go along with it. I enjoyed it. There were lots of bad things that happened, difficult things, and all kinds of things like that. I learned a great deal that I wouldn't have learned in any other place or way. I think—I don't know who I'd been talking to—did I tell you that I learned to lie? [They laugh.]

Oh, all right. That's another subject. I was talking to somebody else. Well—because you're living where they know everything that you do, and if you want a sex life, it's—"Oh, I've decided not to talk about this." Okay, that's why I was talking about this with somebody else, and goody for you. [Laughs.]

If you wish to keep your private life private, you have to learn to lie, and you also—I—actually, better than that—I never lied, particularly, because I'm lazy. Essentially, I am very lazy. I discovered that this laziness has to be overcome and you have to do dis-information. You have to point them [in] other directions and you have to work hard.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it's much easier to tell the truth. Then you don't have to remember all the stuff you made up.

MS. BAER: Yes, exactly. I am essentially lazy. But you cannot live in a countryside where the houses—they let the old houses go to ruin because they're up a driveway, and they build a new bungalow up the road so that she can watch the road to know who goes by. And she knows every license number and she says, "Oh, you were in Navan. My brother saw you yesterday afternoon," or—they know exactly where you are. This is what they have to do when they're not killing chickens and milking goats and doing—they do—they work very hard. This is their social life. Who goes by. So if you want any kind of life you have to hide it, which is very interesting. I've never done that before in my life. I sometimes practice it on people nowadays just to have some fun. I quite often tell people lately—the last few years, I have told people I was Canadian. And years ago, I used to tell people I was from Alaska because they didn't know where Seattle was, since Washington State is always confused with Washington, D.C. So I've been to Alaska, I can be from Alaska.

I mean, I played with this since then. That was a good thing to learn; it's useful if you need it. And this is—because they—the business with the park and the whole thing. To me, it seems proper to do that, and sometimes enjoyable, even. Yes?

MS. BERMAN: Right. Did any of these people that you knew locally have interest in what you were doing as an artist, or have a clue?

MS. BAER: I tried not to. [Laughs.] No, my secret finally came out when I had a show at the—it was the inaugural show from the university—not the university, from Trinity—

MS. BERMAN: Oxford? No—

MS. BAER: Trinity—Trinity in Dublin. And it traveled. It went—was it Trinity? No, it's the museum of something or other that was—

MS. BERMAN: Museum of Modern Art, Oxford [Modern Art Oxford], which travels to Edinburgh, Dublin, and Eindhoven.

MS. BAER: Yes, but in Dublin.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, right.

MS. BAER: Dublin was—I was living still in Ireland at that time.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Where was it in Dublin, or does it say?

MS. BERMAN: It doesn't say.

MS. BAER: Yes, well it was the Douglas Hyde Gallery, which was—that's it.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: The Douglas Hyde Gallery, which is part of Trinity—was part of Trinity—Trinity University. College

[Trinity College, Dublin].

At any rate, from that point on, they said, "Oh, she does blank canvases," and, all this kind of stuff. And I have had quite a lot of—I will talk about that show later because the newspaper stuff—I was scandalous all over and I was denounced in the House of Commons and—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Because it was the minimal work? It was—

MS. BAER: Yes—

MS. BERMAN: Kind of like, in England, the decade before, how the Tate Gallery, how they—Carl Andre had been denounced for his bricks.

MS. BAER: My—yes. My grocer in the village—[inaudible]—decided that I was the brick man. Was I the brick man? [They laugh.] I said, "I'm not a man, Mr. Murphy. I'm not a sculptor, Mr. Murphy."

MS. BERMAN: Well—

MS. BAER: I've got the newspapers and things. And BBC and everybody else—I was denounced all over the place. And I was actually crying—I'd talked to my landlady, who was English, and she laughed at me. And I was in tears. She said, "Anybody who's anybody has been denounced in the House of Commons, my dear." [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, it's an honor.

MS. BAER: So from then on, when they saw what I did, they just— it was cruel what they did. "Would you come and paint my kitchen,"—[inaudible]—"the window frames need some—" They can be so nasty, which is why—I knew all that. I mean, I didn't care and I was leaving fairly soon anyway, since I'd run out of money. But—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, that's—no, as a matter of fact, Richard Morphet, who was [at] the Tate Gallery [and] involved in buying The *Bricks* [Carl Andre, *Equivalent VIII*, 1966] in 1966. I think I met him three or four years ago. He says, "They're still talking—'oh, you bought The *Bricks*.'"

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: It's 40 years later, they're still angry with—and they still mention *The Bricks* in London as a terrible—

MS. BAER: I knew—I know. I lived there for three years, thank you very much. I am quite aware of the British art world. I can do 20 minutes on that for you, if you like. I should possibly—I have the newspapers of the stuff like that there. It goes all the way from Oxford, where the woman kissed one of the canvases—[they laugh]—because it looked so cold and lonely. [They laugh.] And it was picked up by Reuters and went all over the world, from Kenya to Washington, D.C.

And people were sending me strange postcards saying, "It looked so cold and lonely." What? [Laughs.] And actually what they did is she was caught on camera and she was having a drink around the block and was recognized, so they put her in jail. You know, this was a—she was on trial for this. So, this is—a blank canvas got kissed. Anyway, it's very funny.

[END CD3.]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman continuing the interview with Jo Baer for the Archives of American Art Oral History Project on October 6, 2010.

And we left off in—about moving to Ireland and getting acquainted with it. And when we were walking back from our lunch break, you mentioned in Ireland the "soft day," or the "soft weather," and you wondered—and were you going to say that perhaps something of the atmosphere moved itself into your art at that time?

MS. BAER: I was joking a little bit in the writing I was doing when I said—first of all, I said that where I live seems to affect what the work looks like, which I cannot specify, in fact, or prove. But perhaps the Irish saying, "Ah, it's a soft day" to speak of pouring rain may have crept into my consciousness, and I became aware that it's okay to be soft, even in language. Mm-hmm [affirmative], yes.

MS. BERMAN: Because whether this was, directly or not, from the countryside or not, you certainly are painting animal and plant life, as well as incorporating the figure, of course. Although the figure and the ground, everything is kind of blending and melding, and as I said, moving in and out of each other.

MS. BAER: Yes—

MS. BERMAN: Weaving, maybe.

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] Thank you very much. Find me another feminine art. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: I didn't mean to be insulting.

MS. BAER: Crochet. No, crocheting perhaps. No, I try to stay away from words like that because that immediately puts me over into women-only. Indeed, it's weaving of sorts, but one weaves stories without being a female—

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: But when you get into my world—our world of female artists, if the things are very light, et cetera, they're female, and so on and so forth. But so to add weaving to it, or—[laughs]—that sort of thing—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, okay.

MS. BAER: —I am just leery—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —leery of such a term. You may use them privately, but—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, because I also—I probably used "veils," but that was used with Morris Louis, too. But the membrane— after a while everything can get terribly loaded.

MS. BAER: I know. That's—I really am on the alert to scotch. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: No, it's fine. I'm glad that you called it to my attention, because it didn't click to me, because I wasn't thinking—

MS. BAER: But why would it? But why would it?

MS. BERMAN: —thinking of it as female.

MS. BAER: No, of course. Why would it? But it will be thought of as that.

I have been looking for words that do not tie to literature in the first place because I am not narrating. So I have to stay away from narrative terms, because I, for instance, have a feeling that I'm doing little essays on things. Well, I can't say that, even if I'm saying it into the microphone now, because immediately people have me making a narrative.

And I don't do narratives. But I mean the form is short, and it's not epic. That's why I finally arrived at the term "poetry" to explain. If we must do literary or verbal connections or relationships with my work, the closest is to poetry, because of its denseness, and for many reasons. But actually—

MS. BERMAN: Denseness is a good word.

MS. BAER: Well, it—yes. I mean—well, I will quote myself here, from 1983, sort of: "The—something to make good work." I forget how it starts—

MS. BERMAN: Is this from "I am No Longer an Abstract Artist," [*Art in America* (October 1983)]?

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay, we have this essay here that we can look and—

MS. BAER: And the object is to make poetic works that are dense, yet legible, or something like that. I'm screwing it up.

MS. BERMAN: Okay, well, I'll find it.

MS. BAER: We do not trust my memory on anything precise, please. It won't be in—oh, yes it will be.

MS. BERMAN: It's in here somewhere. I should—

MS. BAER: Yes, page 83? No, that's 1983. No, it was page—I can find it for you, if you want.

MS. BERMAN: All right, let me—I could look at—

MS. BAER: It's near the end, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, I could look at this table of contents.

MS. BAER: Do that. You're almost at it right now.

MS. BERMAN: Okay, page 111.

MS. BAER: 111, okay. I would have said 128. [Laughs.] And it's—

MS. BERMAN: Okay, "I am No Longer an Abstract Artist," 1983.

MS. BAER: Sorry. And it is near the end. The object of—it may be here, someplace in here. Can you fast read?

MS. BERMAN: I'm looking.

MS. BAER: This preface should—I'm sorry.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's okay.

[Pause.]

MS. BAER: Do you want to turn it off while we're searching?

MS. BERMAN: Well, the other thing I could do is we can—I can put this in later.

MS. BAER: Okay. It just starts—the sentence goes, I mean, da-da-da-da-da, to make a poetic—make it—construct, perhaps, poetic object that is—so, and it's just—and it's quoted by everybody else too.

[Pause.]

MS. BAER: It's invisible.

MS. BERMAN: You know what? I think it's not in this one after all. It's in something else maybe that you wrote too. So maybe we'll have to find it later.

MS. BAER: All right.

MS. BERMAN: But you could certainly make the point that poetry is what you want to have your—that's where comparisons should come.

MS. BAER: Yes. It's in here too, if I could find it. Okay. Let me just—yes. [Inaudible.] Oh, I hate it. Sometimes I go looking for things that I've lost, and they were lost for years, and I keep looking for them.

When I was a child, I was brought two—I was brought a frog or two, little tree frogs. My father had a duck-hunting island, and they would come back, and for some reason they brought me a jar with a frog in it. And I had my sand screen over the top of it, and it was in my closet with the door open, and the next morning I got up to find it and it was gone. Now, where could it have gone? I searched everywhere.

I finally thought there were secret doors or passages in my house. Of course, my mother must have gone in and thrown it down the toilet during the night. For years, every time I'd go in the closet I would look. Is there maybe a passageway—where is it, where is it, where is it? I have been like this for years.

I cannot believe that people will steal your pliers—that you're missing pliers. Who can have a household or a painting studio without pliers? Fucking student walked off with them, never told me. Who walks off with your pliers and doesn't tell you?

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I mean, you need a pair of pliers for things when you need—when you really need one.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: This is a terrible thing to do [to] somebody—and looking and looking and looking. And I can tell you about four more things that I still—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —[laughs]—they're not available. All right.

MS. BERMAN: Well, we should—Now, I want to ask you about Bruce Robbins—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —and how you got together, and—

MS. BAER: Good idea. Yes, I'll put this down here.

The show that I started in Oxford, traveled to Dublin and to Scotland, and ended up Eindhoven, in Holland. It was sponsored by both Oxford—and I know this is [Rudi] Fuchs's first job, practically. I remember when he was without a belly, a skinny little guy. [They laugh.]

Anyway, and I was there doing the show and Bruce was there. Rudi was showing Conceptual artists, and he was going to show—Bruce had shown at Whitechapel [Whitechapel Gallery, London] when [Nicholas] Serota was there.

MS. BERMAN: Right, yes.

MS. BAER: And I think it was booked for Oxford or something, and also booked for Eindhoven. So he was there to discuss his show with Rudi while I was hanging the show. And of course we were talking and talking and talking, and hit it off very much.

So he was supposed to—when I left, I was being driven to Paris. I was being driven to Paris to see somebody in the Museum of Modern Art in Paris, so perhaps the show could go on to there. We had an appointment with a curator, who, because we showed up at five o'clock, walked right past us and refused to even stop. She took one look—I think she thought I was a man with the name "Jo," and she saw it was a woman, and she just kept going. So this was a drive all the way to Paris.

Meanwhile, Bruce was supposed to go to see Konni [Konrad] Fischer in Dusseldorf, I guess, and he was supposed to go there to see about a show. But it turns out he actually left his luggage someplace on the railroad thing, and he had to turn around and come back and get it. And he was very taken with having gone his way, I went mine. So we were in touch immediately when he got back to London. So I said, well—

MS. BERMAN: And that's where he was based at the time, was London?

MS. BAER: He was in London. He was part of Jack Wendler's gallery, which name escapes me [Jack Wendler Gallery], I should have that, Wendler—with John Murphy, and with Stephen McKenna, which was sort of part of Maria—the Belgian concept artist. Okay. Anyway, Seth Siegelaub was part of Jack's gallery, and I forget—

He was no longer a gallerist at this point, or he was—had to do with something called *Art Monthly*, a publication. At any rate, this was a whole little enclave. And that's not the right word. It's the same—[coterie ?] is not the right word. There is this word that begins with "c" that describes these people. Not a buddy fuck. These are legitimate people.

MS. BERMAN: A clique.

MS. BAER: It isn't even a clique. Clique, I could get. No, it's a great, very exotic word.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: It's probably French. A cadre, but—yes, a cadre comes in many forms. Cadre is close—a cadre of people. Still not exactly the word. Okay.

And yes, I came to London. Yes, I came to London two weeks later. And I stayed at Jack Wendler's house, in just one of the kids' beds, a little tiny room and bed. And my first husband was there—that's why. He wrote me a letter—Gerry Hanauer—to say that it had been 50 years since we were together; "I want to know what happened, what happened between us?"—it was such a strange thing—and, "I will come and see you in Ireland," or "I am in Germany now," or, "I'm going to be in London, but I will—"

In other words, I just decided it best to go to London—to not have him in my castle—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, right.

MS. BAER: —from 50 years ago, thank you, and marching into my bedroom perhaps. So I said okay. So I met him. He was staying at the Plaza, I think—yes. And I can remember, I was going from Wendler's house and the guy was playing some Bob Marley. I remember he—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes, yes—reggae.

MS. BAER: Reggae, oh yes. But it was—I was trying to remember which one. "No Cry Tonight," I believe. [Laughs.] And I was completely quite happy and quite comfortable in this London cab.

And then I get out with the doorman at the Waldorf—at the Plaza, and here comes this person running at me, with the little pot belly and all, running at me: "Joey, Joey—[laughs]—I'm rich, I'm rich; I won in—" wherever they gamble, Strasbourg, or wherever the fuck he'd come from just now. And, "So what," says I to him. I said, "So what, so what?" At any rate, so off we go to—he's asked for, "Where do we go to dinner?" So we walked someplace to have roast beef that comes on a cart, and all of this kind of—that's what a hotel will tell you.

And he's going on and on, and I'm listening, and I'm talking, whatever. At any rate, but dinner over, we take a cab—a taxi to the Wendlers' house where I was staying. And he's—oh, he's going on, how much he loved me and never loved anyone else, and I'm getting nastier and nastier. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Leave me alone!

MS. BAER: And he's crying—[laughs]—and I—which for me, on a man, crying—I only wade in and make it worse, because I don't like to see a man cry, especially when he's made all this up. He's a writer, and he's—in his head.

This is all fantasy and should have the hell kicked out of it, because he doesn't know me. He never knew me. And he's always had only a fantasy picture of me, and I've had enough of it. So I just got nastier and nastier and climbed out of the car. And I gave him a print. Bye.

Incidentally, before he died, a year before, he sent me a four-page love letter. I'm the only woman of his life. He's screwed women all over the world. He was bragging about dental hygienists that he was having it off with in Paris, he had—and really he was just going bragging on about his conquests, see. And he said, of course, I kicked the shit out of them, you know. One would—one does. At any rate—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes.

MS. BAER: —yes, so I get home, and I've made a late date with Bruce—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —to my shame. So we've met up, and the Wendlers are away on vacation or something, so we end up getting to know one another quite well in the—

MS. BERMAN: In the children's room, right.

MS. BAER: —children's room—with Bruce, yes—and that was that.

So he moved to Ireland the next week. And he's supposed to sort of help out and do the—he was a gardener at that time. He was working in the public gardens—

MS. BERMAN: To support his painting?

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, right, right.

MS. BAER: He was good at gardens. He was good at lots of things. But that was that. So we lived actually quite well together for a year or two. And—[laughs]—by the end of the time he was living there—because he, like most English men, drink. Again, I'm stuck with another one of them. And he's got the car, and he's crashing the car, and I can't control him. And I don't realize that he's been lying about his age.

MS. BERMAN: Was he even younger?

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] Yes. He was almost the age of my son. [They laugh.] Well, he'd been lying. Not to me, he'd been lying to everybody, because they were all much older. So he had added—I only found this out when he was divorced from his last wife of 20 years, and he's gone off to marry the woman, a 28-year-old who lived next door. When he was working home, he was busy over there with her. And so poor old what's-her-name, she's on the phone, she's—"Bastard, bastard!" [Laughs]. And I'd say, well, that'll teach him, a 60-year-old with a 28-year-old.

[Laughs.] "He's not 60; he's only 51."

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: What?! They bought a house together. She knows. I mean, you have to do your proper—

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: And I'm saying, oh my god, no wonder I was tired all the time! You know, he really wanted to go out all the time, and he wouldn't come home until midnight. I'd say, "I want to go to bed." I was 50—I was 60 years old almost—[laughs]—with this 31-year-old, which, it turns out, I—you know. So after the bloom went off, I was trying to figure out a way of getting rid of him.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Which is not easy.

MS. BERMAN: Well, especially when someone has moved in.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: In that big place, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, but I knew he had been a member of the Communist Party. He'd showed me his card. And I knew if I could find that card, I could go to the Irish police and they'd have him out of there in a minute. If I just went and said anything domestic, they wouldn't touch it. So I looked through that man's every piece of clothing. I looked everywhere in that house.

But he was that clever. He knew me. He's a—Bruce is lovely, and we're still in touch, and I hope none of this does any harm for him, but there's a certain kind of sociopath who always knows what's best for themselves, before you know, even. Knows how to take it, how to get rid of it, how to do it. He had that as an exquisite talent.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, just like in the Tom Ripley novels.

MS. BAER: I don't know them—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, those are the Patricia Highsmith novels of this very amoral sociopath. Anyway—

MS. BAER: Yes, no. To give you an example, we were—one of our trips to London, we were taking the ferry over, the boat over—we had the car, of course, but—so we're sitting on this ferryboat at night. It goes from Dublin to Wales or Liverpool, whichever way we went, I'm not sure. And he says, "We're going to play cards," he says, "and there are going to be people—there are going to be men come up and join us. And then you will stop and I will play with them."

And sure enough, there we are playing gin, or something like that. In come several truck drivers—lorry drivers. They drive in big oil rigs to Birmingham, or to some such place, and they've got money. So they sit down and they start playing poker. But meanwhile they're talking to me. They're showing off, you know—I didn't have, you know, crappy, skinny old arms. I was still—what, 60, 55, something—55, probably.

And Bruce is taking—every time he wins, he's taking the paper money off the table and hiding it, so they have no idea how much they've lost. And finally we end up playing—that's poker—then we end up playing blackjack. And I'm playing now, because I know how to do that, et cetera. We wiped them out totally, and they said they had no more money. So Bruce gave them a tenner for breakfast.

And then he said, "Come on," and he grabbed me by the hand and took me, and we ran off and we had to hide in our car underneath the—so that they wouldn't—he says they'll come and get us. I said, "But why did you do this? These are working men, for god's sake," you know? He didn't cheat. He simply did this other thing.

I was very, very angry because they're working men. We don't need that much money. You know, what the fuck? "No," he says, "they lost. They knew what they were doing." That was that. I find that totally—that's a sociopath, to me.

MS. BERMAN: I mean, just to do it.

How were you surviving financially there?

MS. BAER: Selling everything we had, and everything else. He was teaching the first two years. He would go over

to—he was teaching at St. Martin's, I think, and then he'd spend it all to buy a suit or something. So it was my money still coming in from sales of paintings and things that were still going on. So I supported him eventually, and that's why I wanted to get rid of him. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Yes]. Also, it is listed that you did collaborations together. So what does that mean?

MS. BAER: It didn't. It just means—well, first of all, he writes much better than I do. He still does. And even when I lived here, I asked him to come over and write with me. I'd done the illustrations and all, and I knew what I wanted to say.

But he, like most English people, has the gift of metaphor, which Americans are never taught. So I'd have to really work very hard to find one, and Bruce gives me the choice of 10: "Which one do you want?" So I'd say, "I like this one."

But on the other hand, my sense of content, and what is important to say and all, is way superior to his. He really can't construct something like I can.

MS. BERMAN: So he handled—

MS. BAER: So we were a very good—a very good team for writing.

MS. BERMAN: So it wasn't on anything visual that you—

MS. BAER: Yes, we did drawings together. But they were all small drawings, and we did them—even did a set when he was here—[inaudible]—very large—it's one in there—we did them. They're variations on various drawings we'd both been using in our own works. So we had the images.

And we were sort of constructing them and stuff, and we never took note—told anybody whose hand it was, or whose idea it was or exactly what. We truly worked together on that. And they were—they were described as—I don't know, sex things [inaudible]—*Times* writer. It's—I don't know, I wish I could quote these things, I wish I could right now for you, because they were really very funny.

MS. BERMAN: But did you enjoy collaborating like that on a drawing?

MS. BAER: Well, it's all right with me.

There was a real problem with—what went on was that I was asked to do shows of the work we were doing, but not with him, and I had to refuse shows that only incorporated me. So I have a long trail of refusal, some that he doesn't even know about, where they've been in touch with me and they wanted to show my work.

And I have to say that this was correct, in that he was trying to do my work. His work that he started off with was beautiful, but he saw that my—he saw something else in my work that he wanted. And he decided he did it better than I did anyway, because I didn't know how to draw. For instance, I didn't use my whole arm, and this sort of thing.

So what he has, after the first three paintings he made, which were really quite different and quite good, which he destroyed and threw in the Thames River—he just—I don't know how to explain someone like this, but he refused to keep the good work. And back in the corner of my studio are all the bad work. And I just found a contract saying that I get two-thirds of the sale price, but who the hell would want to buy them?

They are bad imitations of what I do. And, all right, they're bigger—and he used his whole arm—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —his drawing, et cetera—they're no good. They're just, as Bruce keeps saying—and I've said that to his face quite often—he says, "Yes, but they're better than anything else that was around," which is also true.

So what am I to do with them? He won't take them back, either. They came with my things, and they're supposed to be safe here.

So we didn't collaborate in the true sense, and it lost me a lot of groundwork. I could have had this work in several decent galleries long, long before. And I had people like Anish Kapoor, who loves the work, trying to put me in galleries, but hated Bruce.

Bruce could be very hateful to people also. He did class stuff, you know. And somebody who stutters, he'd make them stutter worse. And he could be very bad. He could be very cruel. And enjoyed it. But he wasn't cruel and wretched by nature. If he just saw a chance, he'd—he saw one.

But he felt—he told me—I said, "Why did you do that to him?" He said, "Because he was so snobbish." He was putting him in his place for being snobbish. And Bruce is from working class, sort of, so you get the working class—

MS. BERMAN: Resentment.

MS. BAER: —up, and he's squashed. I mean, they really can be very brutal—their nicknames and their—the English, I learned a lot about them. I don't like them. I like the Irish, don't like the English. And hated living in London.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, and why did you—let me see, London was—let me just—

MS. BAER: Eighty-two to '84.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And were you still with Bruce?

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes, I couldn't get rid of him.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: No, I'm serious.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: This was when he throws his work into the Thames.

MS. BERMAN: Right, yes, you moved to—in the summer of '82, but was that because he wanted to move to London, or you?

MS. BAER: We ran out of money. I left owing 300—I left owing £100 to the coal man, which it still breaks my heart so to run out on the coal man. I mean, that's terrible.

We had enough to get to London. We'd sent a truck ahead—and we had Jack Wendler's house. They were in Rhode Island—Block Island—for the summer, so we had a few weeks there. But we didn't even have the money for cigarettes. We were bumming cigarettes off of people, and putting, like my LeWitt sale at Sotheby's or Christie's or whatever, and so on and so forth, and waiting for—my father died, and left me about £10,000, or dollars. Every bit went into being in London. They ripped us off.

And we found a loft that cost us £3,000 to get title to it, without—for the keys, without doing anything. I never had a bank account in my own name. He had my money in his bank account. They wouldn't even give me a bank thing. It was a nightmare.

I've never been to—it's not Fortnum and Mason, I was there, but the other—I've never been to Harrods. First of all, these were Thatcher years. I couldn't afford the Tube fare. We ended up living in a place called Wapping, which is in East London.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes, it's—

MS. BAER: I liked that, actually. I would have hated to be in Sloane Square, or—and I have to say that the first six months we were there, while we were waiting for a place, we lived in everybody else's house who was away, or anything else. And I've never hated anything so much in my life, because I hated their books, I hated—and I didn't like their libraries, their taste was horrible.

I mean, I just—we lived under somebody's dining room table for a long time. We had to wait until they went—finished dinner and everything—to put the mattress down, so that we could go to sleep. And that's when I'm teaching at Brighton. I got teaching jobs, and he eventually got some at Goldsmiths [University of London] also, so we had a little money coming in.

But really, when I moved to here, we had £100 between us. We had a—I had a ticket—we had tickets to Italy. Rudi was opening something called Castello di Rivoli [Museo d'Arte Contemporanea]—

MS. BERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. BAER: —in Torino. So we were invited there, and that was—[laughs]—that was something else. And I got—on the way back, I got off with what I could carry. And Bruce had enough subway fare, when he got to London, to get to where—to the loft we had. That was the money we had in the world.

MS. BERMAN: And you say you got off here?

MS. BAER: I got off in Amsterdam with enough to get here, and et cetera, and I had a room rented ahead of time from somebody from a gallery here, with furniture.

MS. BERMAN: So were you—so were you officially splitting at this point, or—

MS. BAER: Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Well, how were you able to get rid of him?

MS. BAER: Well, that's just—that's it. He's afraid of coming to a strange place, like Holland, to live. [They laugh.] He was supposed to have gone to Germany and he couldn't. He's really specifically for England, and knows his way around, and ultimately a coward like most sociopaths.

MS. BERMAN: I can see why you hated living in London, because you're describing these terrible experiences of living—having no place to live. But were you interested in the history? Was there any enjoyment of England at all? Were you able to?

MS. BAER: No. They wanted to co-opt me into their—they found me very useful. I was invited to very nice dinner parties and things. But I don't like the class system. And what I discovered was everybody hates everybody else because of the class system. And it's none of my business—I mean, I'm a foreigner.

And I did not wish to become English. The point is, they were grooming me, they accepted me, but all I had to do was be like them. And, of course, you know me well by now—[they laugh]—you know how well that works.

MS. BERMAN: Right, and also with your very pro-Irish overlay on that too.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes. I found that their ways of making fun of the Irish were totally English. Instead, I made fun of the Welsh, which is unfortunately what they did.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. BAER: I picked up some of their thing. I really don't like the Welsh [laughs], and I'm not even from there.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, I remember that.

MS. BAER: But I don't like the way they sound, or the way they look, or the way they act. Do I know what the Welsh are really like? No. This is ridiculous. But I understand how those things work, and I don't hold it against them. I don't like living in it. Live your life, be yourself, be English, I don't care, but, please, I don't want to live here.

And what I discovered—it would have been the same thing in France or in Germany—I would have been exceedingly acceptable. I am—at that time highly acceptable still, and a trophy sort of kind of thing, especially in the English art world. I outranked everybody there, practically, in world terms.

I don't wish to become English, but to live there you have to become English. I do not wish to be French; to live there, you have to be French. Germans, same thing. These big countries really require you to become a true member of the population. These little countries—Ireland is very pleased to have me, and you're never going to be Irish, nor would I want to be. I can't even—I can't even imitate their accents.

I told you, I think I told you that—or somebody recently—that out in the country I discovered that for six months I was talking country-music English. In the sense that you make yourself sort of part of the place, and unconsciously I was—I'm Tammy Wynette —[they laugh]—which, I like country music, and this strange English was coming out of me. But I wasn't—could never do the Irish accent. I could do the Anglo-Irish accent. That was my mother in high Roosevelt dudgeon—"Over here; there," which is very close to the Anglo-Irish accent.

So I had it fine until I moved to London. Unfortunately, I became incredibly American the minute I got into London. I don't like the English. And the Anglo-Irish is too English. And I heard this horrible American accent blossoming, blaring forth again. [Laughs.] It was horrible.

And that's when people started saying, "You're really, really a Yank." And I'd say, "No, I'm Canadian." This is the first time where I don't get caught with Reaganisms, and the atom bomb, and all the things they want to say about Americans. So Canadian is handy.

MS. BERMAN: And were you able to work in England?

MS. BAER: Yes, but I have several paintings I made there that I don't even list. Some people like them a lot, but I've been leaving them out.

MS. BERMAN: And why are you unhappy with them, or why aren't you listing them?

MS. BAER: Because I don't like them very much. I don't even know if they're any good or any bad. There are people who prefer them to some of the other work I do. I just never really—I guess I wasn't myself enough, or could reach myself enough to make them proper.

I did start one body of work there that I finished in Holland, which are—that I made very good. So the first painting is part of it—it's *The Inception*—but I don't think I did it very well. But as I say, it's rough, and so people like it better. I could still see where this is no good and that's no good, but in rough work it's allowed. So it's not that they're bad.

And I tried a very specific painting that looks too specific without my understanding why the hell I did this. I can't remember. And I would—I would include it if I could speak about it, but I don't really understand why I made it. So there's a period in there that is not exactly me. It may be quite all right, it may be the best I've ever done. But I don't understand it, so I just—why beat myself up, you know?

MS. BERMAN: And did you—

MS. BAER: —why I would do something I can't figure out.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Did you have a studio at any time in those—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. We had—

MS. BERMAN: —when you—

MS. BAER: We took over an enormous space, 4,000 square feet, 40 by 100, on a wharf in the Thames, with no heat.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, so that's the Wapping place?

MS. BAER: Yes, Wapping, yes. It was a big Atlantis Art Gallery place. It was a gallery and an art store. And it had no hot water. It had—a tea kettle was hot water. It had a toilet and a sink but cold water.

We bathed at other people's houses or at the sports center down the way—showers, washed hair, and stuff. So you'd go to somebody's house for dinner; if they had a bathtub or shower, you'd bring your shampoo and things like that.

This is for—this cost us £3,000 to live in for two years, three years. Yes, no, it's just the rip-off capital of the world. I don't like being ripped off.

At any rate, then the Home Office got in. We were—we came to a Documenta in Berlin with some other people, and then spent a week in Brussels at Marianne's house—Marianne Brouwer. And the reason she loaned us—they gave us the house, it was August—it turns out it was a real bourgeois Brussels house, you know, four or five floors, with a winding staircase, and much of Maria [Gillessen]'s [the widow of Broodthaers] and—[inaudible]—stuff. And McKenna's now the husband there.

But the only reason we were given this house for these two weeks is because in the back yard there was an enormous pear tree, about 150 feet high, that dropped all its pears—[laughs]—during this time. They went smashing onto the roofs, and the flies, and really the smell, and went like bang, bang, bang—[laughs]. I hate Brussels. I really hate Brussels.

At any rate, coming back [to England], British immigration stopped us and they said, "You can't come in. You don't have permission. You have no visa, you're an American citizen." And I said, "But I live here." They said, "Well, okay," and they finally let me in.

But then from then on I had to prove that I—they wanted to—they said I had to go back to New York and ask for permission to come and live there. Well, this is me with my money there, and all my possessions there and everything else. Because we'd moved from Ireland, which is an open border, this is what happened.

So finally we had to get a lawyer. And the lawyer got—I mean, I had letters from Saatchi, from the Tate, from Joanna Drew of the Arts Council [of Great Britain]—the head of the Arts Council, certainly Nicholas Logsdail from Lisson [Gallery], David Elliott from Oxford [Modern Art Oxford], the guy from the ICA [Institute of Contemporary Arts], Declan [McGonagle]—whoever was there. At any rate, all of these people saying, "Yes, this is a very

important artist," et cetera, et cetera.

They said, "Oh, well then, you may have a trial. Then we will see you at six months, to get out or to have a trial." And then I discovered that that trial was going to cost me £1,000 to have a barrister to speak for me. And I said, "Enough of this. I don't like it."

So that's when I decided to come across the water. So we knew—I knew Lawrence and Alice Weiner, who had a houseboat here. I have never been on that houseboat. Even my son has been there. The minute I got here, they dropped me—[laughs]—the only people I knew. And I arrived with what I could carry. And during the summer, I found this space. I mean, I had letters—I had Rudi Fuchs, and [Edie] de Wilde [ph], the people from the Stedelijk, and all the—told the city art place that they must find me a place.

And I kept saying, no, no—[inaudible]—and then this place. And two or three other—one, two, three other artists and myself took this. I found it. And we split this floor with a Dutch woman artist. And the top floor, which I almost took, starts here and goes back, but it only has the low ceilings—you know, normal ceiling height.

And this is what I need, of course, because I do big work. So I would—if I had the money, I would have taken two floors. But then I knew, once I was up there—no elevator—that I would never come down.

MS. BERMAN: So were you—is this something they let you buy, or they—

MS. BAER: This is rent. This is a commercial building. And it's a long story, but it had been empty, except for the first floor that had 40 Turks on sewing machines—black market, who sat on the stairs smoking, and they're—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: So you've been here since the summer of '84?

MS. BAER: Yes, '85. I came '84 Christmas, or New Year's, just a day or two before the thing. I remember going to a New Year's party, a strange somebody escorting me around. Anyway, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Now, it seems to me, up to this point, that you have been really—I mean, more than most people, you've been ready to pull up stakes, or move—and move around. Why do you think that is? Or you can disagree with me, of course, too.

MS. BAER: No, obviously I am like that, and I now call it gypsy. I think it's because—since I am such a negative person in so many ways. I mean, if you ask me, "Do I want to do anything?" I will always say, "No." Don't ask, because I won't. But on the other hand, I will do it if it's just normal. Don't ask, "Do I want?"

What do I want? I don't know. I want to sleep. I want to sit here. I don't want to do anything ever, in that sense. But, of course, if it's Sunday, I get up and go running, because it's Sunday, that's what I do. Now, I make these laws for myself that—some of the laws are very good ones, there, that I—[inaudible]—discuss it. I made sex laws, and all kinds of—[they laugh]. And they work. They work for me. And I need the discipline, in other words. I am really quite chaotic.

When you leave me to my own ways and means, I will sit quite happily for two or three days, in my own mind, and once and a while scratching a place that itches, or standing up and stretching, then going to sleep for a while, and then maybe reading a little bit. I mean, I'm quite—absolutely happy to be like that.

But then I'm not eating, because I haven't been out for groceries, and I haven't cooked anything. And really I am totally slothful by nature. I'm not sure what it is. It's—I don't know how to describe the reasons for such a negativity, but it's there.

And—what did you ask me? [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: There was this ability to move around. I realize your reputation is international; that could have made it easier. But every time you move, on a certain level, in terms of the work, you have to just start up again—

MS. BAER: Yes, I know.

MS. BERMAN: —and these shifts do impact work.

MS. BAER: Well, one of my laws—one of Jo's laws is, you don't do anything until you have to do it, and therefore then you don't worry about, did I do the wrong thing? You can't do the wrong thing.

So apparently they handed me all this stuff about the Home Office, and the leaving of it. And of course there's no way that—I simply was not spending 1,000 [pounds] more with this place that I didn't like anyway. So I had to

move.

The business of going to Ireland, Nixon was there, and I found it unpleasant. And I was not using anything in New York. I was staying home, and I didn't like what the art world would do to me. And Josh had just gone to university. I had to move. It was a question of where. So I went to Ireland. Good choice for me, incidentally.

In London we had to move because we had no more money, and there was no way of getting money. You're in the Irish—you can make a little business, but you need even money to invest in that. Like growing quail, which is one thing Bruce wanted to do, which I said no. "No, I'm an artist, and I'm not going into business and I'm not buying anything."

Did I say to you the only things I really owned in my life—I do not buy property—I have owned a car, a computer, and a horse. That is it. [They laugh.] And of course the books and stuff like that. But things of—that you buy, things that cost a lot, those—that's it. I've never had a house or anything else.

So I move when I have to move, and not a minute before. So there's no choice involved here—so I have to fix it. And, as I say, my main talent underneath it all is I can fix anything, it turns out, given enough time and patience, which I often don't have. It is a talent. It's to do with laziness. Okay, when it goes too far, then you have to fix it, change it, do this or do that. But these are always things where I learn a great deal, and apparently I'm good enough to do it and get the most out of it. I may, indeed, need such a thing.

I don't know—the other thing I do not do is explore myself and my reasons, at least in the art world. I find it very—not useful and inutile. Inutile—what is it, inutile—non-utile? No one says that. [Laughs.] What am I doing?

MS. BERMAN: Not effective? [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: If there is an in-or non-utile—

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: —but I don't know the—you see what's happened? All these exotic terms are coming out of me and I can't find the normal ones. This is instead of, forgive me.

My Dutch friends are going crazy with me because I keep using words they don't know what they are, and they're embarrassed to ask. And I can't help it anymore, and I just laugh, and I think it means this and that. I used to speak a language they could understand, but I discovered I was losing all my real English.

So whether this is—I want it back because I need it for writing and things like that. It is flowing back, and it's catching people—[they laugh]—things they thought they knew English. And suddenly the right word is there and they don't know English at all. They know pidgin. Too bad. They know me well enough, whether they accept it or not.

MS. BERMAN: Right. But there was a possibility of, when you were going to leave London—I'm not sure if it did or did not—did it occur to you to move back to the U.S.?

MS. BAER: No. I didn't see anything better in the [President Ronald] Reagan years. The Thatcher years in London were bad enough.

No, I've become less and less American, you may have noticed. I would have trouble fitting into any place but New York.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's what I probably would have meant. Although it's certainly expensive. It wouldn't get any cheaper to move back, but I just thought—

MS. BAER: It would have been more. I couldn't afford New York, in fact. When I thought I was losing this place, and found I couldn't get a mortgage to get another place because I don't have a job—it's against the law here to get a mortgage without a job, without at least a year or two commitment of payments back.

And they said, "You would have to come up with all the cash." And we're talking €300,000 for a place almost the size of this, with windows this end and this end, and down the street—not so bad. And so I was exploring all of this.

At the same time, I had read about certain charities that subsidize artists for some senior living, and they sound very good. And there are—there's one down by the battery that seems to have a restaurant, and all kinds of things affiliated with it. It's for rich people. But they have one or two places, that I thought perhaps I had the nous, whatever the word is, to carry—the celebrity-ness to maybe affect somebody who would maybe, et cetera, et cetera.

So I said—and then maybe rent a storefront nearby. There's still parts of downtown that are possible as a studio. So that seemed like something I could do if I really couldn't find anything else. And my son laughed in my face. He said, "You can't get one of those things. Nobody would give you anything like that. There are thousands of people ahead of you that are more worthwhile, la-la-la-la." He didn't want me living there.

You're looking very—[laughs]—strange.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: Yes, well, this is my relationship with Josh at this time. He didn't want me there. Whether what he said was true or not, he made me feel very foolish for thinking that I could possibly do such a thing. I think I probably could have, incidentally, even then.

MS. BERMAN: There were lots and lots and lots of people, but there was also Westbeth [Artists' Housing] to sign up for, in which—there were possibilities.

MS. BAER: There were possibilities. I could have done that. It's just the only time it occurred to me, and that was when I thought I would lose this place. But this place is much better for me.

MS. BERMAN: This is much bigger than anything you'd get in Westbeth.

MS. BAER: Absolutely. I mean, I am very comfortable here. I am in the right location here.

I've been told by the people who find artist's studios—I joined that when I thought I was going to have to—for god's sake, do anything you have to do to keep this, because there is nothing else like this in the city available now that you can afford—I mean, that anybody can afford. And they would have to put me way out in the suburbs, and I would die out there.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, that would be awful. And I think by—I don't know how it is, but at least in New York, eventually when you're a senior citizen, they do treat you better and they're less likely to throw you out. And I assume that goes double here.

MS. BAER: Well, this is why the judge said, "You're not putting a 75-year-old woman on the streets," to my landlords. I was in court for five years. And I gave them extra money for things, for them to save face. Then I got a lease for the next 15 years—ten years plus five years, if I wanted it, which has me 92 when I leave.

One way or another. And I can, if I want, put a sleeping platform up there. If I need somebody to take care of me, there is now an elevator. I can have groceries delivered if I want. I'm not doing any of that now. The longer I can do everything by myself, the better. And I don't like strangers at my door. I've got a spy hole already. [They laugh.]

I am really an old woman, in fact, and I am taking care of myself quite well at this point. But the fact is, I am very old. By now, they're—I'm almost a freak in this city. There are no people this old, or they're hiding. [They laugh.]

So I was telling you at the restaurant that there was a woman of 70 years old, when I was about 70, who—we became friends. She was, as I told you, an Anne Frank person, and—

MS. BERMAN: Just to elaborate for the tape, this is a woman who did spend World War II here in hiding.

MS. BAER: Yes. Everyone knows Anne Frank.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: You see all the people lined up year round—year round.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, but that's—I mean, in other words, but this is someone—just—elliptically.

MS. BAER: You're right.

MS. BERMAN: That's okay.

MS. BAER: Thank you, you're quite right.

At any rate, what I've discovered, having been friends with her, she would invite me for lunch or something and at five o'clock in the afternoon I still couldn't get home. And then she wanted to play bridge, or she wanted to discuss the latest book of philosophy that was on Oprah [Winfrey], or one of those things. That it just was—there was no way that I could hang out, even though we could laugh about certain age things, and stuff like that.

It's nice to be around somebody your own age. They do have some history. Even if hers was here, or hiding, there's—after that there's 20 years, or 50 years or so that we've sort of shared music, you know. And she wasn't stupid and her English was very good. And she was—she kept trying to drag me to Dutch comedy standup things. I mean, she's just a lively woman who wore very bright red lipstick and dyed her hair. I mean, she's fine. I still get letters from her, and she's widowed now.

But I don't want to play bridge. I don't want to talk philosophy with someone like that. I mean, she doesn't know shit from Shinola, I believe.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: It's all coming back—[laughs]—yes.

I don't want her ideas on art, and she thinks she's capable of making them. Yes, I mean, it's just—it just doesn't work. But I mean, I was very pleased to be picked up by somebody like this, and introduced to family.

And people have been very, very kind, but it's very, very difficult. There's no one else here for me, outside of other foreigners. And then, even then—well, no, I can get along with Germans and I can get along with people fine. I don't mind any of the—any of the—

MS. BERMAN: Okay. How often, typically, do you visit the United States?

MS. BAER: Only when they pay me. Well, no, I'm going on my own—I'm paying for my own this time. I'm paying my own and my own hotel. But recently more. I've done shows there, and I've had things to do, and I have a granddaughter that they want me to see, of course. She's four, so for the last four years I've been going maybe once a year. I have maybe skipped one year, and sometimes two times a year.

And if they're paying for it, fine. I would prefer that. But this time I'm paying for it. But I got a discount at the hotel—it's from the book fair. [They laugh.]

I mean, it's a hotel I don't want to stay at, and I couldn't find any other hotel. By the time they—I found the discount, all the other hotels that I—I usually stay at Washington Square Hotel because it's an easy ride up to Chelsea, or—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —and then over to Lafayette Street and Josh, et cetera, and down to Canal, and—it's a neighborhood I know. I've always lived downtown.

But now I'm up at the Ace Hotel, which is Twenty-Ninth and Broadway. It's a—it's an art trend hotel, and I saw it listed. I wanted to go to The Standard, and this is what they said they were going to get me. By the time they finally got the discount, it was the Ace.

The Ace is full of the worst expressionist art you ever saw. It's one of those kind of places. It's an art place, but I'm going to be sick to my stomach every time I walk in. And it's a terrible location for me, except I'm going to be at PS1 all the time. I'm not sure how you even get there from there, but I'll find out.

What I'm saying is, it's only three nights, four nights. Well, let's see, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday—four nights.

MS. BERMAN: Things could be worse. It's close to Chelsea.

MS. BAER: Yes, I know that, but I don't have anything to do in Chelsea. I have the DIA Gala, but that's at a Spanish church someplace—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —or wherever, I don't know. I read it once, and now I've forgotten. I have no idea. I don't know how to go—I've never been to PS1. They once offered me a show the first year, and I turned it down for some reason. That was Bell Tower [Clocktower Gallery]. It wasn't even PS1.

MS. BERMAN: Oh yes, the Bell—the Clocktower.

MS. BAER: The Clocktower.

MS. BERMAN: [Inaudible.]

MS. BAER: Yes, thank you. And I don't remember why I turned it down. I was in Ireland at the time. Alana Heiss wrote me about it. And I don't know, I was busy doing something else, or I didn't feel like it. I just—

MS. BERMAN: [Yes].

I want to get back to Ireland, about the work. And I'm really not asking how it sounds, because I don't—I really didn't believe that you moved to Ireland to be a horse painter. But can you talk about the horse as a symbol in your work?

MS. BAER: Not as a symbol in my work, but as a reality in my life. When you're within—when you live out in the real country, you don't have any respect from your neighbors unless you own a—I've written about it. It's in my writing.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Yes, and it was true. We had to take part somehow in large animals. And of course I rode as a child, I rode as a teenager, so I can ride. And I got—you know, I went and bought a horse—[laughs]—and so on and so forth, and I enjoyed it enormously.

And I hunted the fox. Forgive me, but this is normal. Foxes eat your chickens, and eat your lambs and all, and the best way to deal with them is actually hunt them, as opposed to trapping them and leaving them to die dangerous, you know—not dangerous—painful deaths and all, so where they got skins for them, and they delivered skin for money. They got money for killing them.

So killing foxes by hound and horse, is—you know that, you learn the countryside. And, as you may notice, I really am interested in the constructions of stuff around me, the actual—I like maps; I like "How does this happen?;" and I like that hill that goes this way, and it—"Was it a moraine or did glaciers form it?," and "How does this work?," and this sort of thing. I like the texture of the world. It interests me—urban, wherever.

So the countryside was extremely exotic and in those terms for me. And animals are in them. And you go down, and on Wednesday—he kills in the morning, so if you want liver, it's straight out of the animal. You get over a certain squeamishness. You know that, that sheep up there, you're going to be eating it. And it teaches you a great deal, or it taught me a great deal, about our whole history. Because sacrifice—practically all our religious things and half our myths have to do with what we do with these animals, and how—who they are, what they mean to us.

And you don't know them from a supermarket package. I know them—or I did—I still know them. I remember this one and that one. And you understand the work that goes into them, and the fact—the life of them, and how it comes over to you. It's so many of the deep things that are built into our nature by thousands—millions of years of evolution of living in the countryside with the animal.

As an artist, I am talking about us. And how can you not have that part of your understanding? You can't understand history, in a funny way, unless you're extraordinary, and extremely well read, and extremely open to things that you haven't experienced. So there was something I was experiencing that—but it wasn't being a horse painter.

But the idea, like, for instance, yourself and a horse, and an animal. When you have your own animal—it's not a riding stable or something like that—you know the animal, the animal knows you, and you actually get into a dialogue. It's almost sexual. It is: let's do this, let's do that. To have an animal responding to you, and then tell you what he wants—it's the most incredible experience. And you know what he's doing—or not—quite often.

And what a gift to have the chance to experience something like this, and to know that people before you lived these things. So that you begin to understand what these drawings are, and what that is, and something else, and why use them, how we use them. So for me, these are all part of what I do. And I won't forget.

I mean, and all these places, you asked me. It's accidental I go here or there. As I say, I don't move until I have to. I don't jump until I have to, because I make mistakes if I think about things. I wait until—and then it settles in, and it's the right thing. And if it isn't the right thing, I'll fucking make it the right thing. I don't know. This is the way I work, and it's a very good way for me.

And I can't explain it. I mean, if were on a—if we were doing this on television on a talk show, I would sound the most terrible fool because I can't really answer any of these things. You'd see my hands waving around, all this. So I'm full of—I'm full of what I'm talking about, and I'm trying to communicate it to you the best I can. But it's silly I can't communicate—look at my work.

MS. BERMAN: I was starting with looking at the work, and the questions are coming out of—

MS. BAER: What I'm saying is the answers—the answers are really there, but they're very difficult for people to—if you really want origins. If I don't know them, how the hell are you—but you can—you've been asking very good questions, that tell me possibly what I was doing.

But I have a habit of forgetting that as fast as I can unless I need it, because it—and I say, well, "Maybe I should do that again. What was it again? What was it again?" And it derails me a little bit. If I need it, it will come back. [Laughs.] And until then, leave it alone. If it ain't broke, don't fix it, don't mess with it.

MS. BERMAN: The process you were describing is—oh, I have heard jockeys talk about it, too, about their—oh, he tells—the horse tells him—

MS. BAER: Yes, they do.

MS. BERMAN: —they know.

MS. BAER: They do. They communicate it. If you have a chance to know an animal, if you have owned an animal for year or two, you take care of them—you muck out his shit, and you—[laughs]—you pick up his feet and clean them, and you brush them and smell them [sniffs] and you kiss them and you hug them, and you sock them—[laughs]—"Pipe down, you bastard," and so on, and so forth. He knows what you want, or not, and he may or may not. They're the—

MS. BERMAN: Does this also go back to—of course, your father hunted and had animals, and probably had this kind of communion with them too.

MS. BAER: Yes, probably. I doubt this is genetic—

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: —or inherited, but—

MS. BERMAN: No, but you—it was something you saw.

MS. BAER: That's why I'm saying I was more comfortable in Ireland, as a person, than I have been in anyplace else in my grown life. I am really not a city person. I am quite happy in the countryside as long as I don't have to work too hard—[laughs]—I mean, if I have farmers digging for me, please, and so on. I mean, I would be a very nice—I was a very good chatelaine: "You do it."

I mean, I'm too lazy. I didn't even garden. I don't like gardening outdoors. Indoors, it's fine. But outdoors there are flies, and it's too hot, and I sweat. And it hurts my hands, and there are things that bite me, and big chunks of dirt—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —it's all dirt, and it scratches you. And I am not that outdoor person, exactly. I will use the outdoors best I can. I will go down to the stream, and pick watercress wild watercress—[laughs]—which I seem to have, things of that stripe.

MS. BERMAN: Now, when you first got here, and you had this room, and you got this studio, I guess you were without a lot of your work at that moment because it was in London, or at—

MS. BAER: No. It was shipped to me. It came—as soon as I had this space, I ordered the truck to please bring it.

So I was living in a plastic tent here, where I had no toilet. I had running water, I had a sink someplace. Where did I get water? I don't remember, because I could do a tea kettle. And we had a plug to the elevator, so I had one plug in the wall that went out. And I had a hot plate, and I can remember learning to cook, one on top of the other. You know that kind of cooking, or maybe you don't?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes, of course.

MS. BAER: Well, I learned it for the first time. And I must have had water, because I had water to cook with. I can't remember where I got it.

There may have been—there weren't any toilets. I had to—I peed in a bucket and threw it out at six in the morning before anybody was awake, because you're out throwing out yellow stuff. And for more serious stuff and brushing teeth, I knew of toilets—public toilets in different buildings, because I'd been in the building down the street. And I knew where there was a sink so I could brush my teeth, and I knew where there was a toilet that flushed, so I could do my daily stuff.

And I made a plastic tent that I lived in, because it was cold. I had no heat, I had no gas, I had only electricity for cooking, and I camped out.

MS. BERMAN: Because I was—

MS. BAER: I didn't pay any rent, because there wasn't anything here yet.

And I went through the coldest winter that they'd had in 20 years, where the country froze from top to bottom, so that the gas line couldn't be put in from—this was January, February, through to March. My eyebrows fell out. I slept with soda bottles full of water from the sink in the bed, and they would break. And my electric blanket, Bruce never sent me. He kept it for himself. I had no blanket. I've never been so cold in my life. It was horrible.

But I had my work here, but there's no way I could work.

MS. BERMAN: No, no, because what I was going to ask you, if you were -- I didn't know about the situation of the rawness, the lack of anything, and the cold. Because I was wondering if you were—how much you look at your other work for reference when you're working, if you go back.

I mean, obviously you want your work with you, but if it's—are you someone who is going back and looking at older things, or back and forth all the time?

MS. BAER: I'm always surprised when I see them—"Oh, there you are." And then I just see this mistake that I never could get rid of—[laughs]—and try not to get the paint out. I have been known to actually see something I really can't stand and I've fixed it. And so it's different than the photograph and it will be of a different age. I can't help it. You know, it's—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, you're a different—you're a different person when you fix it.

MS. BAER: I know, but you can see how to do it. I'd learned, you know.

Well, they are big things. I don't think I did that more than once or twice. Mostly I kept the stuff wrapped up, and all the minimal works certainly, and it was all stored against this wall in cartons and crates before. This wall came out to the edge of that door—the double door. I had all of the works stored there. And then I put some of the paintings that were unstretched—the non-minimalist work—I had on these walls.

I was going to use these walls for painting, and then I discovered of course that the light—the glare was too bad and I couldn't even show work on them. But that's why I put the photographic paper on, so that I didn't have to live with things, and I could open them up and close them up as far as—.

This is the only wall I can work on, it turns out. So I built a painting wall there, that comes over if I have to do a second painting, if I was doing the diptychs, or showing the works that were this size. There are hooks and holes in the tops of the others, and the—[inaudible]—little things, screws, and whatnot that I could do that with.

But there's no work here now. I mean, there's one large diptych and a couple of very large drawings that are on—so there's a horizontal painting, there's a vertical—the other half of the vertical painting, and behind it are two very large tracing-paper drawings. And the rest is in Germany. She's [Barbara Thumm] taken enough for the last show we did, plus a show next year, or whatever. And there are paintings in the corner rolled up—some of the ones—two from London, and small bits of—different kinds of stuff, and Bruce's stuff.

So there is work there—three or four. There's some of the early works. She took one instead of three, and so the other two are here. And I know where everything is now. And drawings are in shoeboxes, and stuff like that, tucked away someplace in there.

But I can't find anything anymore. All this stuff is coming back from publishing the book, and from the shows, and from what is—I mean, if I put it away, it'll be lost again. As you can see, I'm full up.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Okay, well, I think this would be a good place to stop for today. And I think we'll do one more tomorrow morning, and then we'll be fine, okay?

MS. BAER: [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: Okay, well, thank you very much.

MS. BAER: You're very welcome.

[END CD4.]

MS. BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Jo Baer for the Archives of American Art Oral History Project on October 7, 2010, in her studio in Amsterdam.

And we are going to start off with—Jo has looked up answers to some questions and facts that came up yesterday.

MS. BAER: Okay. So from the essay "I am No Longer an Abstract Artist,"—it is from that—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: And in the Stedelijk catalogue, it's on page 16. I had it from my book, page 111, on the fifth paragraph. So you have both. And the full sentence is, "Programmatics aside, the real challenge in painting was to make poetic objects that would be discrete yet coherent, legible yet dense." Then it goes on. The next sentence is also nice. "Double dealing, double-edged, the elegant course was through color."

MS. BERMAN: Great. Thank you.

MS. BAER: The finance minister is very famous. He's got great listings in the—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: —in Wiki—Wikipedia, rather. And his name was Adolph Lowe. And in Germany, it was umlaut O. But he came to America with the Graduate Faculty with the University in Exile. That was formed in '33.

So he has papers from—published by social—I guess students—[inaudible]—Social Research School, starting in '50 something. Any rate, I was there in '51 or '52. And—yes. He was 1893 to 1995. And—yes, the graduate faculty of political and social science. That's where I was studying. I wasn't studying at the New School.

Actually, I had somebody write something that said that I was teaching, because it said from—I was from the graduate faculty, et cetera. You know, like, she was very young to be teaching at the graduate [laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: I had to clear up that, but that's going to happen. That's too bad. It's none of my business, so I can't control it.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: Any rate, he has about 50 economic essays on various things, very, very famous. And they've had memorial services. He died in '95.

MS. BERMAN: He lived to be 98.

MS. BAER: He was born in 1893 and he lived—he died [in] '95.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, so 102.

MS. BAER: 102. Yes, and he was still publishing into the '90s, I think. I don't know. It's an enormous page. I was blessed, much blessed there to have such a professor. I had no idea—[inaudible]—finance minister in the Weimar Republic is pretty good. They don't mention that even. Well, I could have, should have gone into the German [inaudible]. I didn't go into any of that.

MS. BERMAN: That's okay. It was just getting the name.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes. And Jack Wendler, the gallery—it was called the Jack Wendler Gallery—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: —and it was from '71 to '74. I met Bruce in '77. He was one of the artists along with Robert Barry, Lawrence Weiner, [John] Baldessari, Daniel Buren, et cetera. So he was a registered, qualified [Conceptual] artist.

MS. BERMAN: Is that W-E-N-D-L-E-R?

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: And he went on—he closed the gallery and went on to publish something called *Art Monthly*, which, along with the former editor of—Peter [Peter Townsend]—what the hell—I just read it this morning. I forgot all about him, former editor of *Art International*.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Jim Fitzsimmons?

MS. BAER: No. I remember—I work—I wrote something for Jim Fitzsimmons. No. In London, *Studio International*, sorry—Peter—the very famous editor, Peter—gone again.

MS. BERMAN: Was that the one who was killed in an auto accident?

MS. BAER: Who?

MS. BERMAN: There was some editor in England who was a well-known art—was killed in an auto accident. His name may have been Peter. Was it Peter Fuller?

MS. BAER: No. Well, it could be. Peter Fuller might have been, but no, this was—this is a famous editor who was an expert on China, a famous—came from a Marxist family—

MS. BERMAN: Well—

MS. BAER: —and this sort of thing, and was one of the first writers on China in 19 something—Peter—never mind.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right.

MS. BAER: It was Jack Wendler's partner, yes. I got along with him very well. Wendler and I always fought in a funny way even though I stayed at his house. He never bought my work. He bought everything from everyone except from me. And he even had the trick of what he put in the toilet in the guest bathrooms and things like that, what he thought of people and stuff like that.

MS. BERMAN: But did he mostly buy Conceptual art?

MS. BAER: Bought all kinds of stuff, just never bought anything by me, from me.

MS. BERMAN: Were you involved or meeting some of those artists in the gallery like Daniel Buren.

MS. BAER: I liked Daniel. As I said, I've seen him a few times. And he was the only one—we were talking about Rudi's show at the Castello di Rivoli in Torino. And I think I didn't talk about it, but the artists in that show were either from Michael—the gallery—Werner [Michael Werner Gallery], or from Konni Fischer [Konrad Fischer Galerie]. And they were sort of lined up against each other. When we got there—Bruce [Robbins] and I having no galleries, or Lisson at best. And there sitting on one side of the room are the Germans, in their cowboy boots and their black leather jackets, and gold, and bald, and very big, and there. And you see them walk—they don't even know how to walk in cowboy—pathetic.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: And on the other side, the Fischer—there's Lawrence [Weiner], and there's Sol LeWitt, and Buren and so on. And they're not speaking. And there's great hostility and tension in the air.

So at meals, Bruce and I—one set was sitting here, another set was sitting here. And Bruce and I were at a tiny table all by ourselves, and no one spoke with us.

Now, Lawrence has stayed with me. I've stayed with him. He and Alice [Weiner] didn't know me. Sol nodded, wouldn't be seen with me. These artists did not know who they should talk to. These are my old friends in the midst of this—which is a horrible situation to be in. There we are, Bruce and I, all by ourselves, literally at a table alone. And then these big tables of these big artists.

And who should get up in the middle of this and walk over and say, "Hello, Jo," was Daniel Buren. And I've always loved him for that ever since. I mean, I could—I sat with him on a plane from, I don't know, Edinburgh to London once. The only time I really spoke—we were in a show together.

But he picked up on it and he understood it. He came over. And my old friends wouldn't even acknowledge that they knew me. That's horrible. I've never forgiven them, incidentally. Sol, okay. But—at least he nodded and said—Lawrence wouldn't even acknowledge he knew me. Lawrence and Alice. And that—I mean, how dare Alice, okay. [They laugh.] Jumped-up waitress, god damn it, who is she? [They laugh.] You know what I mean.

I have spoken to them lately, but I have, for instance, never been on their boat. Ever since I've lived here, they

were the only people I knew in Amsterdam. My son was there. He was invited. I was never—I've never even been to their house here. It's just very [confusing ?].

Any rate, it's changing now. He's very friendly now. He was last month when I saw them. Oh, and Alice was all over me, da, da, da, da, and so on. But—and Kirsten [Weiner] sent a photograph that she found of me. But she didn't send it to me. She sent it to Josh—the daughter—sent it to Josh and sent it on. It was a very nice photograph. In fact, I haven't put it away yet. I'll show you for one reason only. It's taken at their house on Bleecker Street while I lived in—when I lived in Ireland. And I slept in the—in Kirsten's room on the bottom bunk.

MS. BERMAN: This is a good—yes, that is a nice photo.

MS. BAER: But do you know what? When I saw it, I saw all the things I've been complaining about that has happened to my face haven't happened at all. I look exactly the same, except for the lines and stuff. I had thought my skull had gotten smaller and that my eyes had moved closer together. But they hadn't. [They laugh.]

So that photograph is an eye-opener in a sense of "stop complaining, woman." [They laugh.] You don't look any different.

So I was 57—

MS. BERMAN: And their daughter's name was—is Kirsten.

MS. BAER: Kirsten Weiner, yes—yes, Lawrence and Alice Weiner's daughter.

MS. BERMAN: And did they—I guess one of the Weiners t[ook] this picture? It's very nice. It really is.

MS. BAER: Yes, it would have been Lawrence or Alice. It would have been Lawrence. He was running around with the camera.

MS. BERMAN: It's a good—

MS. BAER: He had to put on his director's hat before he would take a picture. [They laugh.]

Very funny. Yes, it is a very nice picture. But this was delivered to the Matthew Marks Gallery, to Josh. And whether she thought I might be dead by now or something, I don't know.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Well, maybe if she's—if she was in New York, then that would be—

MS. BAER: She lives single—[inaudible]. She doesn't mind getting in touch with young men who will send it on to me. But yes, there is that. Jack Wendler, graduate faculty, "I am No Longer"—I have a note to myself when we get going. Or maybe I should put it in here. You were talking about how I work?

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

MS. BAER: And because we were in the early '60s, or '70s, or '80s—I don't know. I didn't get into—I don't work that way at all anymore. I mean to say I work with [the] computer.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Yes, let's talk about what you're—how you're working now in that—

MS. BAER: Yes, instead of scraps of paper on a table, I put them together on a computer. Images I'm interested in, and sort of mess with them there. And on the painting, *Testament*, the one with the dams, that one, I was printing them out in black and white and then taking colored pencils to figure out what kind of things I want. And Antonietta was here, and she's, "Oh, what a beautiful drawing." Drawing? I didn't see any there either—[inaudible]. Oh, I would—"Can I have one with the—"—

So I suddenly realized I had a thing to sell. [They laugh.] Drawings from the computer. And by god, I did about 50. And they were real working drawings, I mean, printed out. And then I could scan it when it had been—when I had maybe put it onto the canvas already. So instead of photographing, I had the drawing of the color more or less and then put that on a scanner and printed it out and worked with that.

So it was a real work process. And I sold practically all of them. They're—if you look on my website, you'll see these various stages of the drawings. These are like processed.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Would you call these preparatory studies?

MS. BAER: I call them digital image—digital drawings. I called them—I split them into work that happened and

work that—I mean, I didn't know what to do, because there were—there were various stages. But if they had any ink or pencil or any mark on them, they were—they were drawings.

MS. BERMAN: Right. But they were—what I guess I'm trying to find out is, they may have started as work to be used toward a painting, but then did they come and take an independent life of their own? Or were they always related to a final painting?

MS. BAER: They were always related to the same painting. So I did the same thing with the painting you like called *Altars*.

MS. BERMAN: *Altars of the Ego [(Through a Glass Darkly)* [2004]], yes.

MS. BAER: Yes, it's a self—I did—I didn't even explain any of these to you. I don't know that I should.

MS. BERMAN: Well, that's what I wanted to do today.

MS. BAER: Okay, well, then let—you start on what you want from me. And if I think you've left anything out, I'll know about it tonight and tomorrow.

MS. BERMAN: All right. Well, also, if you wanted to go—talk a little bit more about the computer, I mean, we can talk about that—

MS. BAER: Well, for instance, with *Altar*, I was changing it around, but I was changing the colors a lot. And I made a lot of things. By then, I knew I could sell these. So I threw everything in. So there are hundreds of them on the drawing side and some that are framed and none have ever been sold. [They laugh.] Antonietta took one, the first one, after that. So they're not necessarily saleable.

And I haven't really done that—I didn't do that with the last painting, called *Memorial* [*for an Art World Body (Nevermore)*, 2009]. I could, I can't—I haven't had the time. I have saved that for—and the final digital image I did is—appears in catalogs and things. People liked it so much that even before the painting was made, that will appear, and it will say "digital image."

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: But of course, the painting is so much better—a painting is so much better than a digital image that to compare them is—I don't know. So—

MS. BERMAN: And on these images, some of them, I recognized as being from other photos or things that you owned. But do you ever take images that you, say, something you see in a newspaper, do you—I mean, where are sources of images from?

MS. BAER: Every place—newspapers, everything.

MS. BERMAN: Magazines, or—

MS. BAER: Sure. Books. Outside, I take a camera for things if I want.

MS. BERMAN: That's what I meant. And these photographs that you take, are these digital photographs? And do you keep, I mean, how do you treat your photography or things you take pictures of as notes?

MS. BAER: I hate the camera. The minute I download it, I call it a JPEG or a TIF, or something. I'm not a very good photographer and I had some of the first digital cameras, and I just kept buying the cheap ones. I'm up to a Canon something, which is very heavy and big. And I would just realize that I've got a better picture of one of these things. The first three paintings, the early Irish paintings at the time, with the same painting from before featured? I have a photograph I made from the other direction so you can see the other two paintings. That photographer didn't do it. And I saw it on my website that I had a perfectly good one—where is it?—In fact I was just looking for it and I just found it.

So it was from my Canon. I also have a small, good, precise camera with a very good lens that has a small video. And that's where some of these little videos have come from. With the technician doing the Van Abbe[museum] thing—[inaudible]—better than—

So, depends on how steady people can be. I don't use it, put it that way, but at least I can travel with it without it hanging around my neck.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: That's the cleaner. Don't worry about him. He's here today.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yesterday, we touched a little bit on some critics who were more sympathetic to you, like Lucy Lippard, and also you mentioned Rudi Fuchs as someone who wrote well and was—

MS. BAER: You know, when Rudi is—if he's given me shows, I'm part of his history.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: He doesn't particularly like me or my work, but since I'm all the way back as one of his, he's compelled to do something about it. And whenever I ask, he's that kind of person. I belong to him, I'm part of his life, so I can ask for anything. [They laugh.] I'm serious. We had big, big arguments about this big show that I had, over seven years of what happened to it from the great big room and all the things that were supposed to be.

I finally went down and he put me down in the basement. We even went outside, which is where all the women go. Rudi never showed any women except his ex-mistress and a little room for Joan Jonas, who is a close friend of his wife, Nellica. Those were the only women who in his reign were upstairs, aside from me, into the real museum.

So we were getting ready for it and I've been given a date for the show and Marja Bloem is my curator—she's very good to work with, incidentally, and she did a beautiful job with the catalog, too. And she let me do anything I wanted, which is what I mean by beautiful to work with. At any rate she says, "Listen," she said, "We've just come out of a meeting and Rudi is saying that you will be shown downstairs in this new wing," which has nothing in it, ever, maybe some sculpture—see, it has sliding glass windows and—really horrible space. And I say, "Well, I'm not going to do it." What would I do, I mean, there's no way I'm doing this. She said, "Invite him to your studio again." He hadn't been in five years. He loves coming to the studio. I tried that; he refused to come.

So then I said to the secretary, "I'd like to make an appointment to see him in his office, please." So they gave me one for a week or two later. And I went in prepared to say, ask, "Can the date be changed, Rudi," first of all. To make sure that I'm not—not being too aggressive here. And if he says no, than I say, "No, I'm not doing the show, very sorry." And I really mean that, because I cannot do the show this way.

And so I come in and he gives me coffee and I have a couple of things to show him, that—works that he hasn't seen since, this sort of thing. And I guess the—[inaudible]—two diptychs that followed, these were just—

And we're having coffee and he says, suddenly, he says, he turns to me and he says, like [a] pointing finger at me, "Did you say, did you tell Marja Bloem that you would not do the show if it was downstairs?" I said, "Well, Rudi, I was going to—"—"Did you say that?" "Yes, Rudi, I said that." "Oh," he says. He takes his book out of his pocket, "We'll have to find another date." He was trying it on, you know? He says, "Nobody wants to show down there." Well, I certainly don't. And that's that. And then he only gave me five rooms; one of the young artists got seven rooms. See, he's disappeared. I mean, they kept trying to push Dutch artists, Rudi particularly, to get an international reputation for at least one Dutch artist.

So he didn't give me the great honor for the show itself. He walked through in awe, looked at his favorites. But he hung on either side of me, there were galleries on either side of my show and on one side he hung [Robert] Ryman and [Ellsworth] Kelly and all those—all the artists that pertained to my minimal work on one and the other side is Karel Appel and all these artists—the so-called major figurative artists, all at the highest level. So in that sense he was still showing me respect. But at the dinner, he said, again, "Well, she wouldn't do what I wanted, and of course she was right, but she wouldn't do what I wanted." And then he never forgave me, that I said no, again. And I really meant it. There was no way, with my reputation, to put it downstairs that way without even talking about the women he doesn't show. I mean there are sexist pigs everywhere, so—

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: No point fighting him one-on-one. And Rudi is very sexist, he and his friends. But he also loves good art. So he writes these things for me. They're very short. He feminizes them—I mean, he talks of me as a female. He can't get over that. He sort of says, "For a woman, she's really [inaudible]"—[laughs.] So, okay—take what you get.

MS. BERMAN: Because I was going to ask you also about—and, of course, this is back to America because—about Barbara Rose.

MS. BAER: Barbara Rose mentioned—Barbara Rose was interested, way back when—she was very interested in [Donald] Judd, and very interested—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I don't know how far that "very interested" went. He wasn't married then, and she was married to [Frank] Stella. And she was doing this article, "ABC Art," for *Art in America* [October 1965], which at that point was an extremely prestigious magazine. It was the high art magazine. I don't know how Betsy [Elizabeth Baker] managed to take it down—[laughs]—it's still a good one, but—her reviewers are horrible, if you don't mind my—if you don't mind. They're really mostly horrible. Can't stand anything they write about me in that magazine. Can't stand the questions they ask me, either. [Inaudible]—horrible. Anyway.

But I like Betsy very much and she lets me do whatever I want. She's the one who let me do the "I am No longer —." The people who are doing this say, "You can't do this. You just can't—more space, and—we're interviewing you," and "No, you're not." I know what they are going to ask me—"Do you wear high heels when you paint?," and, "Who was in Max's [Kansas City]?" Which is what turned out—Brice Marden was the only other artist that mentioned the Vietnam War. You've got a whole thesis, a theme, in a magazine on the '60s, what the painters were doing. And none of them mentioned the Vietnam War except Brice and myself? That's what these people got. So, yes, I was quite right to do it and Betsy, of course, saw a marvelous—a muckraking broadside.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. Because again, it would be controversial. Yes, of course, of course.

MS. BAER: So she immediately said okay. She's always been very good with me. And I—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I had asked you about Barbara Rose and you had mentioned "ABC Art"—

MS. BAER: Barbara Rose. Well, this magazine came out and I was told I was included. It turned out she didn't say a word. But by accident, they still had a photograph, and Donald Droll phoned me up. He worked at Fischbach Gallery at that time. He saw the photograph [inaudible]. Barbara Rose hasn't mentioned a word about me. She took me out.

Stella did something of the same. Stella voted against me for a grant. He came to my house, to my studio, looked at all my work, found it very interesting. And then when I was up for the National Endowment [for the Arts], [Richard] Bellamy phoned me. He was hysterical. He says, "I have to use my free vote. They all voted against you—Stella, [Henry] Geldzahler—they refused to give you a grant. So I have to give you the one I was going to give to so-and-so because I have to."

And that's the only reason I got it. So I know who my enemies are, put it that way. And for somebody like Frank Stella to do that after looking at my work and finding it very interesting and all—but I assume these people just don't like any competition. And of course, he's right. I win, finally. But yes, he's a very good designer. He did start out with some really strong stuff and he just—downhill, et cetera. But I guess she felt the same way. They were—these people were very excluding towards me. I was scheduled to do one of the radio dialogues and then I wasn't. There's like [inaudible]—I'm not paranoid about this, but truly all these things that were supposed to happen with me, suddenly they didn't. They happened with everyone else.

I doubt that it was because I was a woman. I don't think they were exactly into that kind of thing. I think it was because my work questioned everybody else's at the same time. I think it was correct in the sense of what they did. I think they understood that I was doing something that was not Minimalist, aside from not being sculpture. I was also questioning all of their tenets, which I did, and which is why my work is still good. And there's this interesting history, essentially. You know, my work included the sensual—[laughs]—you don't take the sensual out of art.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: You make it a great publishing portfolio out of it—"Oh, how very avant-garde"—[inaudible]—for god's sake. Art is much older and better than that.

So my history is—if you ask me, am I bitter? No. It's only now that I really see there really was a pattern in there, which actually surprises me. I didn't feel it at that time, oh, this is the way it happened, oh, this is the way it happened. I can see now that this is, indeed, the way it happened, and I think it was more or less unconscious. I was never included in any of David Whitney's things. He said things like, "She's got my balls."

I was never included in Castelli's things. "Her work destroys—it's too strong, it destroys everything around it." These are quotes that are coming back to me.

I think these are true, and I think that it's just better—never mind. And it doesn't bother me.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Did you ever have an interest in showing or being part of [Leo] Castelli's gallery?

MS. BAER: I asked. In fact, I was supposed to be—when I was living in Ireland, Nicholas Logsdail, my dealer, I

said, "I need a New York dealer." I had—Bellamy was doing nothing and Klaus [Kertess] had given over the stuff to this guy. So Nicholas said—oh, it was Nicholas came to me and he said, "Leo was asking about you." Well, I said, "Okay, go ahead. It would be a good idea."

Earlier on, I had thought to ask and I went to the gallery—this was still in New York—and I looked in his office and I saw, suddenly, all the artists whom I respected expanded in grandiose scales of things. And I thought, Jesus, I can't do that. I'm not going to do that. I don't belong here. I'm not going to operate commercially; it's too commercial for me. And so I didn't bother. But then when I was living in Ireland, Nicholas said, "Leo was asking about you." And I said, "Okay, go ahead—fine." And a week later, I get a phone— he's talking to me, a week later, I get a phone call from him, and he's saying, "Listen, Leo [Castelli]'s going to die of a heart attack soon, so you've got a new gallery. You've got a new gallery in New York, John Weber."

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: And I really disliked John. I really think he's an oaf, really—this is not a good fit for me. And I can't even do anything about it, because the next thing is I get a phone call or a letter from Sol saying, "Oh, we're so pleased to have you in the gallery." And I can't do anything about it, because what am I going to say to Sol? I could not. So I was stuck with John Weber, which I hated.

And, yes, I never did a show there. I tried not to do a show there. I really didn't—my work would be shipped there. It's how one of these paintings got lost, and—not that I ever heard of him as particularly fraudulent or theft-like.

But even so, lost in the—I was lucky to get all of the rest of the work out, back again, I'm sure. At any rate, Josh went to find it and they couldn't find it. So one painting went—well early, very early, one of the first paintings.

So at any rate, Castelli—I also was asked to show an Emmerich [André Emmerich Gallery], who was big at that time. And then he said the first show would be downtown in a small gallery. And I said no.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, at 420 West Broadway.

MS. BAER: Wherever it was.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it was in the same—he and Leo and Ileana [Castelli] owned that building—

MS. BAER: Right.

MS. BERMAN: —at 420 West Broadway. So it was going to be downtown as opposed to Fifty-Seventh [Street], or wherever he was at the time.

MS. BAER: For some reason, I just—I don't know why—we had good conversation. These great big galleries do not appeal to me. I don't feel right in them. I'm not a man. I'm not—[they laugh]—I'm not going to produce. It's not about—and although I probably wouldn't have said it in that way at that time, I just said, "Well, thank you. No, I don't think so." Or didn't phone him back, probably didn't even say—[inaudible].

So, yes. So it's been—when I'm asked, with "How could you let Castelli —with such a great reputation? How could you let him sort of go?," et cetera. "Don't you feel"—et cetera—"that they did this to you; they did that?" I did it. Nobody really did anything bad to me. I have to say it's all my own fault. I don't even think it's my own fault. I don't think it's a fault. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, I don't think it's a—you are the person you had to be.

MS. BAER: Exactly. And I had to go on. For instance, they would never have allowed that. None of them would. Once you have a brand, they don't let you stop. That's one of the reasons I left New York is I knew had a brand. And I wanted to stop because I really wanted to go on and do other things. I was finished with the minimal stuff because I was starting to get Baroque. I was starting to decorate, for god's sake. There was nothing more to do for me. You know, I had already started investigating corners of things, really. I mean—

MS. BERMAN: Right. You were—yes, exactly. You were embellishing the original impulse.

MS. BAER: That is what decorating means—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Right. Right.

MS. BAER: —to me. Sorry, I'm talking to an art historian.

MS. BERMAN: No, that's okay, because it's got to be on the—I mean, I'm also elaborating a little bit because I

just—someone might read this in 20 years who—

MS. BAER: Has that vocabulary instead of mine.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, thank you. You're supposed to.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Exactly. So I'm not correcting you or anything.

MS. BAER: No, no.

MS. BERMAN: But I just want to make it—and afterwards when this is over and I get a transcript, I'll be annotating the things that are a little elliptical.

MS. BAER: Good. I have a very quick tongue. I'm so sorry.

MS. BERMAN: No, no.

MS. BAER: That comes out—that would be—in normal conversation, that would be exactly what I'd say with a smile on my face. Not criticizing, being amused to find myself translated back again. That—to me—I'm sorry.

MS. BERMAN: No, no, it's funny. I always call oral histories, "the conversation that isn't," because—

MS. BAER: You have to take it out.

MS. BERMAN: Or it's just—superficially it is, but there are just—

MS. BAER: Yes. You will do things. I hope so.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. Right. And sometimes I either keep it on track or sometimes I—the point is, it's about you talking, not about me talking. Whereas if we're having a real conversation—

MS. BAER: It's back and forth. Or should be. Or should be.

MS. BERMAN: —or I'm contributing. I don't want to say no one cares about me. But someone who goes to this want[s] to find out about Jo Baer, not Avis Berman.

MS. BAER: You're a facilitator.

MS. BERMAN: Correct. Correct. Let me see. So I asked about Castelli. Also you—just before the beginning of our conversation, you had mentioned that at best you were in Lisson Gallery. Was that—I thought that Lisson Gallery was quite a good gallery.

MS. BAER: It is a very good gallery. Yes, and I left under a cloud, so to speak. [They laugh.] Yes. I have—actually, Nicholas was really a sculpture gallery—and I sort of came in that way—and then became a conceptual art gallery through Art & Language, and stuff like that. And he had very little for painting, very little fondness for it or eye for it. He treated my work very well. He hung things beautifully. He always paid on time. If he had the money, he paid it.

After that, he lied about everything. The man's a pathological liar. Ask anyone. I am not making this up. If he can, he'll tell a lie. You know, the kind of people who would rather tell a lie than say anything right?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, they—it's like [Richard] Nixon. They can't help it.

MS. BAER: Truly, truly. And the other thing, when I was really—really had no money, just before I came to Holland, I had a few paintings left. [Charles] Saatchi was interested in buying a bunch of them. And they already were priced low. And then Nicholas was saying something like a £9,000 painting, which isn't—wasn't very much at that time, he wanted it for 3,000 [pounds], and he wanted this one for 2,000 [pounds], or this one for five [thousand pounds]. Right down the line, there were about five paintings involved.

And I said, "No way. This is…" And I tore into him, and I said, "You're not supposed to be representing the buyer. You're supposed to be doing something for me. You know I have no money. You know I wouldn't be selling these at this time except—[inaudible]—and what you're doing here, I really"—I said, "You're a piss-poor dealer." And I really attacked him, truly—and I said, "You lie about everybody," and, I mean, I just went at him like crazy. And that was that.

Now. This is a little story that goes—about a week later, invited to dinner—or maybe a few days later—at Mark

Francis's house. Mark Francis was my curator at Oxford. And he traveled —

MS. BERMAN: I know him well.

MS. BAER: —all the way to [Eindhoven ?]—it was his first job, I think, first big job. So we hung the—my show in Dublin and in Edinburgh, and so and so forth. So Mark and I knew one another well. We used to say we're close in the way of colleagues. And he just married—

MS. BERMAN: Sheena [Wagstaff].

MS. BAER: Sheila.

MS. BERMAN: Sheena.

MS. BAER: Oh, Sheena, Sheena—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BEAR: —Sheena, who had just come back from a little term at the Whitney. So Sheena knew everything, and she was working with Nicholas for—a secretary, or something at Nicholas—at Lisson Gallery.

So there we were for dinner, newlyweds' dinner, in Brixton, I believe. And I don't know—we're talking through dinner—I'm with Bruce [Robbins], and there's Mark, and there's Sheena, and I think Sheena's brother, or some relative, or maybe a boyfriend on the side. You never would know with her. I wouldn't think—or with Mark. I'll put it that way. Anyway, I'm waiting for coffee and desert and she's starting in, and she says, "You know," she said, "you made Nicholas cry," during that day or the day before. She said, "You're a horrible woman. Get out!" And I said, "But I haven't had my coffee." [They laugh.] And she said, "Get out! Get out of my house!" And then I'm—[inaudible]—"but I want my coffee." [They laugh.]

But now I'm really pissed off. I really want my coffee. So I go out, and I'm dragging Bruce with me who—they're like, oh, you know, "What's happening—going to happen to me," is what Bruce was probably be doing. I don't know what. But I go out and I slam the door so hard that the glass breaks. And I don't care. And then we had to sit out in Brixton on a wall waiting for a cab, trying to get a way home, et cetera. And after about five or ten minutes, I see—I see Mark, and he's coming. He's taken the door off the hinges and he's put another door in. [They laugh.] Apparently this is happening all the time.

MS. BERMAN: Who has a spare door around?

MS. BAER: That's what I mean—[inaudible]—[laughs]—he's starting to look at me and he's starting to—I said, "I'll break the next fucking door," you know, et cetera. And after that, I've never spoken to him at anything because I didn't do—I mean, that's so against the rules of everything. You do not do that.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, well, why she'd have you to dinner in the first place?

MS. BAER: I don't—well, it happened that day. I mean—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I don't know. Who knows? Maybe she had her period. I really don't know. I really don't care. But for years Mark has tried to come over to speak to me—[inaudible]—[they laugh]—I won't have it. He's—I think he asked people, "Do you think she'll speak to me yet?" Probably not. Such bad manners. Well, he can't help it. It's his new wife. There isn't much he can do, but—

MS. BERMAN: Right. What was Nicholas's last name? Longsdale [sp]?

MS. BAER: Logsdail. L-O-G-S-D-A-I-L.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: And his aunt was married—was Patricia whatever—married to Roald Dahl.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Patricia Neal.

MS. BAER: Neal. Yes, with a stroke—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —who learned to talk again.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: That [was] his family or sort of [aunt]. He [loved] coming over to Ireland. He said—he said it is like England from 50 years before, the country house. But we couldn't get him down to look at the horses. He wouldn't leave the living room. He had some very good Irish whiskey in his hand. And for two days, he sat—just sat in the house, in the castle, drinking. [Laughs.]

No, I don't—I'll tell you another Nicholas story just to prove what I'm saying. I have a friend who used to live upstairs, who became the girlfriend of a conductor, a musical symphony opera conductor by the name—who worked for Berio in Italy, who was a very avant-garde musician. And they moved to Italy, so I had friends to visit in—where they were in Florence.

And someplace—let's see. Where am I—where am I going with this? Oh, wherever he was conducting, he was conducting at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. He was conducting this enormous opera by Luciano Berio. Berio wasn't there, so he was—he was, you know, stepping in for him. And it involved monkeys and gymnasts and all this. It's what called *The King Listens*, in Italian. And I was in the conductor's box and I was told I could invite a friend to come—you know, to sit in the—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —in the box and everything. So I thought it would be very nice to ask Nicholas and his that-time wife, who I didn't mind, the child sitter who married—he married. So I went in to see him and I asked, would he care to go? And he said he was busy. They were busy. This was automatically he was busy that evening.

So I asked David Elliot and his wife from the Oxford museum [Modern Art Oxford], who were absolutely thrilled to come. Of course we were ladies in long dresses, that sort of thing. And it was a nice thing to be able to do, to take somebody to.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And a day or two later, I was back in the gallery. And his wife—I was saying I'd been to this. And his wife said, "Oh, I'd give anything to go to that." And Nicholas is just looking at me—[inaudible]. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: He actually turned it down without a thought. He was busy, just like that. This is a lie. I could have trapped him in it right there and say, "Well, you were invited. Didn't Nicholas tell you? You were busy that night." I didn't do it. I don't throw people out of my dinner table. I mean—[laughs]—these people are beyond—but I've never—he doesn't list me as an artis,t even. He owns work and he won't give it back. I tried to buy some—I tried to buy a drawing back. He won't sell it. He wouldn't—he lied about who owned the work. I said, "Who has the work?" And he says, "Oh, it's in New Zealand." Well, no, it's in Oxford, always has been.

I mean, he just is incapable of telling you anything straight. This—notorious for this. I haven't made this up. And it's tricky, and I would stay with it if he wasn't trying to cheat me in the sense of finding me weak, and therefore—that's—that is unforgivable. And not only not advancing you any money if you're in trouble, but—or buying something and you've been there for five or ten years—but actually trying to rip you off on top of it. So, no.

So now we've got that in the archives.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. Right. Okay. Now—

MS. BAER: Now, let me say again—

MS. BERMAN: Sure.

MS. BAER: —he did beautiful shows, and he loved what he did. And he paid on time. Those are all great things with dealers. What Nicholas did is not the worst that dealers do. Believe me. At various times, I've wished I could get back there and do a show. But there's no way. I'm totally unforgiven, I'm sure, by him, although he always says nice things about me now. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Not that I'm advocating that you try to go back there, but a lot of these people—business is business. And when they say that, then whether they like you or forgive you or not, if they want the show, they do it.

MS. BAER: Yes, but listen, he deals with sculptors who are putting major works all over the world. Richard Deacon, and all of these people, they're decorating buildings, architecture things in Singapore and whatnot.

I don't think he has a feeling for painting particularly. And I don't think it's a good place for me. I don't know anything—I don't know of any place in London that would be a good place for me at the moment, unless it's a young gallery, like coming up, which is fine with me.

I mean, like this business of showing in Berlin [Barbara Thumm Galerie, 2010]. That's not a famous gallery. She's an up-and-coming gallery, and she just moved from a smaller space. And the only reason I got that was because I kept hearing about, "You'd love Berlin." So when I was doing my book, the—my editor—Roel—

MS. BERMAN: Roel.

MS. BAER: Roel Arkesteijn—[laughs]—Roel—you're supposed to—[inaudible]—I can't really do it. What is it—I was just telling you—yes, I don't know, he was saying he hated living in Antwerp and he—you know, he wanted to leave Holland. He's also a curator of a small museum and does a lot of editing work, et cetera. He's hot, as a young guy.

And I said, "Why not Berlin? Everybody's—all the Dutch artists are in Berlin now." You know, "It's cheap rent, good food, beautiful place, very heavy art town." And he said something about—I don't know, his girlfriend is Belgian, or something like that. I said, "I'd give anything to do a show there. I just don't know anyone." He says, "I know somebody, maybe." And I said, "Well, I'll give you a drawing if you get me a show," one of these drawings, because he loves these drawings.

So within weeks, he was in touch with her. And I sent her some of these videos, and she really started researching. She's very good. She's very professional. And she shows Fiona Banner, and she used to show Alex Katz—doesn't seem to any more. I don't ask what happened or anything. I'm not that fond of Alex, but Alex was in my—in Fischbach [Gallery] at the time that—from all the way back to there.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And she's had a varied enough thing that—nothing wrong with her. And she just moved into a lovely space. But we did a marvelous show together. And she works hard and she—she had been to the Royal Academy to school for eight years as a painter, so she—her English is good and she knows England, she knows London. And—okay, one quick story.

So I was hit by a car last October, on my bicycle. I was in the bicycle lane. It came from behind. It was a builder—lumber, timber was sticking out; caught the back spokes of my bicycle. I was standing still; it's driving by. And it picks me and the bicycle up, and throws us through the air. And by the way, through the air I'm yelling, "Bloody hell—" which is not what I say. [They laugh.] I say [an] American thing—"Bloody hell" means "What is this? What's going on?" And I smash to the ground on my—unfortunately, on my left knee; and all kinds of torn muscles and a true knee injury that has taken up till this last month to heal. That one year in healing, because I'm old.

This was September 28. And I had this appointment two days later in Eindhoven—my show was closing that week—with this woman from Berlin, from this Berlin gallery, who was coming in at four o'clock in the afternoon and had to leave at five [o'clock] because she had no baby-sitter for her five-year-old. [They laugh.] And I was to meet her in Eindhoven. So there I am, strapped all around with bandages and everything else. But I can carry a portfolio, you know, with where things are, and price list, and stuff like that. And I managed to get that there.

And sitting on a tram—well, you can sit in a tram, you can sit in a train. You know, the tram is outside my house; the train is at the end of the tram line, and four steps. I mean, what's the—I had walked the bicycle home, by the way—because I didn't want it to swell up too much, so I limped it home, you know, I hung on it, got it home that way, and went on to the police. So I didn't know how bad it was at the time. I was in shock anyway.

So this is two days later. I'm with a—I'm with Barbara. Her name is Barbara—I've just forgotten her name—Thumm—T-H-U-M-M—Barbara Thumm Galerie in Berlin. And we walked around the show, and she asked me the right questions, and we were fine. And then we get in a cab and we get in the train, and she's going to Schipol to go home—[inaudible]—her five-year-old and the baby-sitter. And I find out that she was in—that we know a lot of people, like Nicholas, all these people in London together.

So we sat for the hour train ride, trashing everybody. [Laughs.] I haven't laughed so hard in years. It was so good to be— when you're in this whole horrible situation—she and I were roaring with laughter, trashing people. So, I mean, from then on, this is— we were sealed.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. So we work very, very well together. And she came here later and she asked me— I hung the show, and she took it apart and made it correct. Well, she knows her space. I haven't shown in a large gallery in

a long time; little galleries, or museums. This is just one big room, which was—it scared the hell out of me. How do you do one big room? I don't know. By scale, by measurement? What will fit? You know, so what I had, I had it overcrowded, and she just took this out and redid—and this and this. [They laugh.] So we're very good.

And she sold some of the very [inaudible]. The earliest works were the most interesting. You've said something about it—that you saw— this was all image work, incidentally; no Minimalist work. There is none, anyway. She sold practically all the drawings she had. She went through my drawing box, and she kept putting them into her purse. [Laughs.] She took about 20 of them. And then, when Matthew Marks was doing the show ["Jo and Jack: Jo Baer and John Wesley in the Sixties," 2010], he—there were—he demanded drawings from her. She actually was good enough to let him have these, and she gets the 10%. And they're all sold. So there's a rush on these drawings.

But she grabbed a whole bunch of them, had them restored. People had gone by, "Eh," [inaudible] like that. She had them beautifully restored, beautifully—[inaudible]—so she's fine, she's good. And now I think she's looking for a backer and is getting more and more serious. She's in Basel—Miami [Art Basel, Miami Beach]—waiting to get into Switzerland, I guess. And she's doing Mexican art fairs, and she's doing the Berlin ones, of course. So I'm going—she's taking one of my big paintings to Miami, and we're fine. And she took enough work for a second show, so she's got practically all my work. So she's my chief gallery. But that's how it happened.

I like—oh, I like Berlin, though. Food's good; everything fine; lovely. The big museum there was—the Pergamon [Museum]—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: It was open, among other things. [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] There's that, too. Yes. Well, I'm not a museum-goer, but—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —but I'm still working in my mind on this book. And then—huh-uh—yes.

MS. BERMAN: I want to talk about maybe what you would consider—and I just marked, because I figured you probably thought that they were, because you reproduced them, of these—I'm looking on, say, pages 165 through—

MS. BAER: They've—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Of—to 171 of your—of your book.

MS. BAER: Right.

MS. BERMAN: Do you consider these to be your most pivotal or important paintings of the last few years?

MS. BAER: Well, since I made so few of them, of course.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Let's talk about some of them. First of all, in a little bit of general terms, a lot of imagery becomes more explicit, and even just in terms of the clarity in which you can see images.

MS. BAER: I just—in the movie script for the video of these works, or whatever, my little movie, I said that I shifted into a more declarative mode, which is what you're saying.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes. But you—that's a better way to say it.

MS. BAER: Yes, but I'm writing the script—[inaudible]—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. Yes, yes.

MS. BAER: So, yes. Incidentally, before you go, in this book there's a huge mistake, because there is no titling or anything else on this painting.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, that's on page 168 of the—

MS. BAER: Yes, it's—I mention it now—and because there's—there is shrink-wrap, they can't even put an errata on it. So I asked to put a sticker on the outside with—now. And he said he noticed it when he was doing the blue booklet, and he has placed it at the end of the printing—the printing credits; not this book, the blue one.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Oh, okay.

MS. BAER: By then, you know, it was coming later. That is an errata. And then he got the name wrong.

MS. BERMAN: That was one of the basic questions I was going to ask you, so we would have it on the record somewhere. On page 168, what is the exact title of this painting?

MS. BAER: It's—it is *Memorial*—I just got trapped in my own thing—*Memorial to—Memorial for—*

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: *—for an Art World Body (Nevermore)* [2009]*.*

MS. BERMAN: Okay. So *Memorial* F-O-R *an Art World—*

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: *—Body*, parenthesis, *(Nevermore).*

MS. BAER: *Nevermore*, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: He puts his errata as a "*Memorial from*"—[laughs]. That's Dutch.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: And if you say "*Memorial to,*" you've got—you've got a person who's dead—or is it the other way around? I have to check on that. How do you say that, a memorial for somebody who's dead? "*Memorial for*"?

MS. BERMAN: For.

MS. BAER: Well, then it's *Memorial to*.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Change it. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: I know I often—I'm so perverse. I'm always backwards on things. Once it's in question, it's no longer automatic. And the Dutch, you see, they immediately go to "from." They take that word very literal. I have trouble—what they say is "up" and "down," and "back" and "forth," are not. And it's the same word, and it doesn't mean the same thing here. It's really horrible.

Well, any rate, it is 183 by 153 [centimeters], as the others. It's also oil on canvas, as the others. I don't think there's anything that has to be—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: And the year is not on it.

MS. BAER: Oh, it would be '09, 2009, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: Because I finished it two weeks before the Van Abbe[museum] show. The paint was barely dry. I was working night and day. I had a real nightmare. The black in this painting is very matte. It's very difficult to get a matte oil. And I had to—I was working with all different kinds of paints. And I finally spoke to the Rijksacademie, to their painting laboratory. And the guy said—had me put pigment into an oil paint. I had to throw in a lot of it. And it was a very—it's a beautiful, beautiful surface.

Unfortunately, wherever I had tried out different things, like ivory black and this kind of black, it came through as patches. So then I started trying to fix it and then it—I got into this horrible thing of—I was actually outside finding sand because I was trying to get the shininess out and I couldn't get it and sandpapering—[inaudible]—it got worse and worse. I cannot tell you what—I mean, you could put the paint on, but it still did the same thing. And then it—this went on, and I only barely got it to the museum.

I should speak about it that I didn't speak about with you, since this is the last painting I have made to this date, although I'm ready to go on one the size of that, unfortunately—what, three meters by two and a half, or four? It's like the great big ones. It will only work that size. I know, because you hold up the drawing, and I was looking at it for the painting, and I said, "No, that's too small a canvas. It won't work." So I need another canvas that will—another painting that will work on this size. And then I have the other one that I'm going to have to have some help for. So I have two paintings truly in the works. So this is the—this is just the—not the last one.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right, to the last—

MS. BAER: Isn't there another word?

MS. BERMAN: It's not the ultimate paintings—

MS. BAER: Well, yes—there isn't another word, is there?

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: Not a single word.

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: But this is another self-portrait. You've looked at it close enough to see what I've done.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes.

MS. BAER: I have taken back the images of myself by others.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I have reappropriated my own self. So that's a [Jack] Wesley painting—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —that I, of course—put her in a coffin, and et cetera. That's another Wesley painting, where I've put her in a cradle. I've turned her over. And there's a drawing in the casket there from Bruce [Robbins], who has this wing. This was Bruce's first painting, the wing, which was—the title was—*To Conceal the Murder*—[they laugh]—*of Mary*—whatever her name—*in the Rue de—Rue de—*

MS. BERMAN: Oh, *The Murder[s] in the Rue Morgue*.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: This is a wing to discreetly—[inaudible] conceal the corpse of Mary, then this is Bruce—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, no, maybe *The Murder [sic] of Marie Roget*.

MS. BAER: Marie Roget, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Right. Right.

MS. BAER: Sorry. And so I have said in the writing on this—there's a—there's a very nice—I put together a collage of all my texts and wrote about them. And I say, "Who's to know that it was her under that wing instead of me?" [Laughs.] I mean, these are all me, I think.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: There—I told you about the raven?

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Well, the raven is here. I can see that.

MS. BAER: Yes, but there are ravens down here, too.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, yes. And definitely there are birds all—.

MS. BAER: These are all—these are all ravens.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I wouldn't do any other kind of bird on that.

And that's a photograph that Robert [Lobe] took of me, so—when I was 40. So—

MS. BERMAN: Right. This is just for the tape. This is you in a bikini and you've got yourself on the half-shell a la *The Birth of Venus*.

MS. BAER: [Laughs.] Absolutely. And for the record, I suppose the stars happen to be the birth chart of my birthday. This—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, the constellations.

MS. BAER: The constellations, yes. Well, no; it's the whole sky.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: [Inaudible]—I've done the constellations because that's done in the charts.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: So, the coffin's a real one from a friend, and her father is in it—I took him out. [Laughs.] And stuck me in upside down, I believe, just to make sure that I've—nothing is ever too beautiful or elegant.

And about the raven and the tree, I had a larch tree—like, this is a larch. And the larch is a very interesting tree in that it's the only conifer that loses its leaves, that loses its needles. So in the winter it's all very scraggly looking. And it was a favorite haunt for a raven, it turned [out]. I had a big, giant raven that sat up there, which in itself is nice enough. But this creature drove me crazy because he'd go around the house, and he was eating the insects out of the window face, so he was "tap, tap, tap"—and I kept opening the door. I didn't realize it was the raven.

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. BAER: You know, who is that rapping at my door?

MS. BERMAN: Yes, "tapping, tapping." Yes, "Quoth, 'Nevermore'." Right.

MS. BAER: "Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore'"—yes, yes. So I actually experienced—but it took me a long time to stop answering the door. And listen, this is a door of a castle with a key this big on chains. I was a real chatelaine, really. And opening and shutting this door was like a weight [a] bodybuilder task. So this raven was driving me nuts. And that's what they do.

And actually, somebody was here—was it you here? Who was here the other day? I had a bird—I think it was a magpie—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that wasn't me.

MS. BAER: Yes, doing the same thing here. But a magpie is a crow, is a raven. I mean, they're all the same family. [Makes bird noise.] And we all—[inaudible]—and it was a bird. It was a bird. So, "nevermore."

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Edgar Allen and I—well, it isn't—

MS. BERMAN: I thought, as you say, you were taking back your images that other people made of you. But I also thought that this was a comment on—I mean, we all are—but what a physical person you are, how important your body was to you. You've always done sports, running, body building.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: So the body—you know, in others words, I think you were—

MS. BAER: I was making—I was being sly.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, but your—

MS. BAER: Which I sometimes am.

MS. BERMAN: -- consciousness. Anyway, that seemed to be just another motif in there. Again, whether you were thinking about it or not.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. Oh, yes, I'd—no, no, I understand the word "body"—[they laugh]—out of body building and myself within there.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: I chose my—I choose my words. Actually, I have piles of notes of—for titles as I go along, and I sort of play with them and correct them and find something better. So I'm a long time considering what I want to say.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

And then also down, down here, the other painting on the side, again, it's so, if not Egyptian or—in other words, you really evoke something historical here. Plus using the constellations, whether they're your birth—it's—

MS. BAER: I don't know in this painting. I was painting my own death, and I was sitting here on the couch and looking at a beautiful painting and suddenly I was absolutely touched that I could contemplate my own death as beautiful. And I just sat there and I said, "Oh, my god." Imagine doing a thing like that. I impressed myself enormously for being able to do something like that. And mean it. And I hope I can hold this in my mind when it gets very rough, days to come. At least I've thought about it, and worked about it, and lived for something—but a beautiful one.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I think it's very monumental.

MS. BAER: Yes, it is my last words, in that way. I'm going back into another kind of work; I'm changing work again. I can't—there's nothing more I can do in a series like this. I mean, that's obviously the last one, one should try.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: So I'm doing something totally different next. But, yes, I hope I have the time, because the next ones are beautiful, absolutely. I really believe it. You would like them, yes. They're quite different, very simple. Old work is always simple; we just don't have time anymore.

MS. BERMAN: You economize.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. This took me over a year. This was—first of all, when I've—I was trying to tell you about graphic art, the fight through—from the first set of images, which was a beautiful graphic and was not a painting. What went on to change this into a painting was like a life-and-death struggle, because I really wanted to do this painting and it really wasn't—it was beautiful, and it wasn't a painting.

And, I mean, I really—I struggled with this thing the whole time. This one cost me—it is not for sale yet. I'm—they were trying to buy it off the wall and I wouldn't even show it in Berlin. I wouldn't let her have it. I have it here, home, wrapped up some place. It should go to America because I don't have any of this work owned in an American museum. So this should, hopefully, go to the Modern [Museum of Modern Art]. Someone will sell it to them. Otherwise, it's not sold. That's that. Unless the Modern is no longer an interesting museum at the time it becomes saleable. I don't know—but something like that, I think not the Whitney. [They laugh.]

MS. BAER: Yes, so, if you have other questions—

MS. BERMAN: But maybe what we should do just because we did this one, maybe we should also talk about this other self-portrait, the *Altar of the Egos.*

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. He wouldn't—he didn't have room for another color thing. So this is concluded—this interview was by this very young artist, artist/writer.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, Brian Evans White. Is this your friend who—

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. I had to [bind/buy ?] the book for—and everything else.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes.

MS. BAER: And he included his idea of illustrations. This was to be for a magazine—a Brooklyn magazine.

MS. BERMAN: *Brooklyn Rail*.

MS. BAER: No, that's—you know, I don't know. That's a newspaper. No, this was one of the little magazines [Kingsboro Press], something sort of connected to Pratt, this guy from Pratt. He's a poet. This is a guy who won poetry contests at university.

So he actually came—this was incredible anyway. He's never seen any of this work. He'd never even seen any of my other work. He got in touch with me and said, could he do an interview for the Brooklyn whatever. And—no,

it was Kings—Kings Country—Kings—

MS. BERMAN: Kings County.

MS. BAER: No, it's a well-known little magazine. Kings something. I have it—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: Sure.

MS. BAER: Kings—[writing]. What's the county name? King—

MS. BERMAN: Well, in—for Brooklyn?

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Kings County.

MS. BAER: Yes. But then, it's not that, it's something else. Okay. "From Brian" [writing]—okay.

So this astonishing—and this essay, for somebody who has never known the work, seen the work—he's only known it from computers. Now, he's 23 years old. Yes, he's a 23-year-old who's been a poet and a writer. And they're doing everything, and he's in a band, and he has no money, and et cetera. But in there he's saying things like, "It looks like there are lots of loose ends." [They laugh.] [Inaudible]—great. And he said, "They stare back at you"—[laughs]—and so on.

[At] any rate, this drawing was in color, and it's got yellow and stuff in it. And he used—this is one of the computer drawings from it, which, if you—so the color you'd see would be quite different from the painting. And of course, this all is very different than the painting.

MS. BERMAN: Right, right. Because this—yes, this is like—this lower image of the older—

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: —the other ones looks more like you, than [inaudible].

MS. BAER: Yes, but this is a drawing.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: And the other one's a painting; I had time to play with it. So I—these are just jottings to figure out, you know, what's what and what's what and what's where and what color they should be.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: So, yes. What I was doing there—you liked that painting very much. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, I like—well, I also really like—I like this one from 2009. This—

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: I find [it] extremely moving. But, I see this as a precursor, of course, to this kind of facing one's self.

MS. BAER: Yes. I actually certainly never thought of it that way. I just thought, "Well, every artist does a self-portrait. That's what I'll do next." And you know me, by now. I think you know me by now. Yes.

And this horse is the most beautiful thing. I saw at a—[inaudible]. It's a newspaper photograph, and it has a man standing there whose face didn't look too bad, much different than mine. And the profile of the horse was so gorgeous that I took it and stuck myself in it. And I actually took the frame from the mirror in there—[laughs]—put it in a frame, and had it silkscreened onto an empty canvas, or a primed canvas, then brought the canvas home. And, of course, it was very faint. I wouldn't let them use a lot of colors. So I actually used it as template to paint. So it's—

MS. BERMAN: Like an underdrawing.

MS. BAER: Yes, yes. So I messed around a lot with that and got it quite well, I thought. But that's myself, of course, at 17 or 20, 21, which is when I came back from Israel. This is one of the photographs that the photographer took from the [Richard] Hamilton thing.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I recognize that.

MS. BAER: Yes. And that's one of the ones—one of the reasons I used to get grappa and things like that in Italian restaurants. I do look like, in these photographs, I do look like those Italian movie actresses.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Not Magnani but the—

MS. BERMAN: Gina—

MS. BAER: Mangano.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, okay. Silvana Mangano, right?

MS. BAER: Silvana—yes. I've got some pictures of her that I found on the Internet which look like—very much like this picture. In other pictures we don't look alike, but some of them we look very much alike—anyway, enough so that I'd get free grappa—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. [They laugh.]

MS. BAER: —and apparently almost into a Richard Hamilton. [Laughs.] So, okay, vanity. I'm interested in eyes. I'm interested in framing. I'm interested in—oh, I'm calling it fresh and desiccated. And a second mirror down here, and a peacock, of course, and a third mirror here. That's [inaudible]. You can't see it very well in black and white.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: So we were all eyes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. I don't want to make too much of this. It's a *vanitas* piece.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Certainly in all sorts of countries they've made *vanitas* pieces, but certainly in Holland there were a great deal of them.

MS. BAER: Yes. I don't even know what they are. What is—what is a *vanitas* piece? Sorry. I'm not an art historian.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, that's okay. Essentially, it is a meditation on—

MS. BAER: Life and death.

MS. BERMAN: Right, and things—you know, things growing, but also things fading and—

MS. BAER: Oh, I didn't know there was a genre.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it's called a *vanitas*.

MS. BAER: Oh, well, then, yes, thank you.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And sometimes people are in them and sometimes it will be fruit or vegetables standing in.

MS. BAER: And they're decaying and they're—

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Right. Right. But—

MS. BAER: I didn't—I—may I have—I'll have your word for my movie script.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. You can look it up.

MS. BAER: I wish I had known that earlier.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. But you can look it up and find it. But also they often have mirrors in them—

MS. BAER: Yes. No—

MS. BERMAN: —and people looking at themselves in mirrors, and they're thoughtful.

MS. BAER: That's why the director of the Kröller-Müller bought this painting. It's a form he understands. I didn't know that. I mean, it's obvious—out of all these other pictures, paintings. Piggies and urinals, and—I have given him a Dutch painting. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes—well, something in the history—

MS. BAER: It's European. It's European, but the Dutch particularly enjoyed it. Oh, god, I am becoming Dutch. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, you can certainly say it's a self-portrait because you've got old and young, I mean, absolutely.

MS. BAER: Oh, I did. It was—

MS. BERMAN: But it's got other dimensions to it.

MS. BAER: Oh, thank you.

MS. BERMAN: That's what I mean. Whether there are symbols or not, they have a symbolic resonance.

MS. BAER: Actually, peacock would only be—that and the eye of—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —the—those are the only two symbols I used and the rest are all mirrors and cranes.

MS. BERMAN: Well, the mirror is important.

MS. BAER: Yes, but it's an object; it's not a symbol. I mean—yes.

MS. BERMAN: All right.

MS. BAER: This really, in the painting, does not look like a mirror. This looks like a window, and I made—because it's structured such that they're sort of looking out a window.

MS. BERMAN: Right. I was looking at this round mirror at the base.

MS. BAER: That's true. That's my grandmother's mirror.

MS. BERMAN: Oh. Because often they have people looking in these oval mirrors like that.

MS. BAER: This one's sort of ruined. It's in my bathroom, across from the sink. It's laying there. It has pictures of somebody or other. My mother used it for years. So it was my grandmother's. And this is, like, a horrible picture that I found of myself that I got in there. I tried a lot of things. I had a lot of trouble with that. Harsh. One would. [They laugh.] One looks back.

In the other—in the earlier painting, the [Diego] Velazquez—where is the Velazquez?

MS. BERMAN: Oh, are you talking about [Velázquez's] *Rokeby Venus* [1647—51], or *Las Meninas* [1656], or—

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. I have her in one of my paintings someplace earlier.

MS. BERMAN: One of the most famous *vanitas* paintings

MS. BAER: Yes. But instead of having her face or my face—this is from a—where is she? Oh, she's in one of the diptychs, yes? No, she's not there. I think it's one that isn't—

MS. BERMAN: Maybe it's not reproduced. Or let's see here. [Paging through book.] No.

MS. BAER: Where in hell is my—[laughs]—my own work, I don't know. [Pause.] [Paging through book.] I'll see if I can find her in this. [Pause.] This is ridiculous. No, she's—I know where she is, but she isn't—

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: No, the mirror has in it a crocodile looking back, as a very ancient, evil thing. And I'm damned if I remember. [Paging through book.] Really strange. The Venus. And she's not in—she's not in either of these paintings. Have we missed her? She's not laying there someplace? She's on the right-hand side somewhere. [Pause.]

MS. BERMAN: No, she's not in there.

MS. BAER: No, and it's a painting with color in it. So—there have only been these four—not there. I don't see a Venus anywhere.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Well, we'll figure that out later, I guess.

But I really would like to talk about, as we said, this more declarative phase that began.

[Pause.]

MS. BAER: [Writing.] I'll have to find it for you. [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: Okay. I guess we should begin with these, because they're a little bit earlier, is that—you—let's see, there were three—

MS. BAER: The diptychs.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And there were three poets, or three writers, that you—[Eugenio] Montale, Dylan Thomas, and—

MS. BAER: Wilfred Owen.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And also, in parenthesis, a Scottish one for the subtitle. So the title of the painting is *Wilfred Owen*—from a poem by Wilfred Owen, and then the panels are—that I can get from here.

William Drennan, 17th century, *Slaughter*. William Drennan. So *Holy Oil and Holy Water, Mix and Fill the World with Slaughter* is William Drennan. But *The Old Lie: Dulce et Decorum Est...Pro Patria Mori* is Wilfred Owen, is the full title. The old lie: It is beautiful and glorious to die for your country.

But I had a very hard time finding any poetry that didn't celebrate war. You have paintings nowadays, or art, that speaks of the horrors of war, but all—practically all the poetry celebrates the heroism.

MS. BERMAN: Well, until World War I, and then—

MS. BAER: Wilfred Owen is the first that—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: The only one, and even then he talks about homesickness and things like that. He doesn't talk about war. He talks about it in the intimate sense; in the very—what is happening to the men around him. But he is not addressing war.

MS. BERMAN: Right, not until the 1950s and '60s and post-War War II do you get—

MS. BAER: Anybody even—yes. Someplace in my script, I would have liked to have worked in the phrase, "war, man's earliest sport." But I couldn't find a place where it would fit. [Laughs.] But I liked it very well, and would you please keep it in my auditory history—my oral history.

MS. BERMAN: Sure. I was going to ask you if the impulse of this was the wars in the Mideast or you were—there was a disgust with religion that you wanted to express, or if there was something—a specific force behind some of these paintings.

MS. BAER: Well, again, I've just written this—I've written about it several times. It was—the painting was made in '98, '99, and at that time, I found war rather interesting and could see what was happening in the world. But by now, I find it disgusting, jihad wars and African wars. It's still oil, and it's still religion or ethnicity.

And, you know, I say, "*plus ça change*," I mean, what—but I took that out because it's such a cliché. And I would have liked to have said, yes, "man's earliest sport." But I think that's too conversa[tional]—one shouldn't write that. Somehow that's not a proper thing to write. I would have liked to have gone on and said "Thank god for football," but that's only in the West—

MS. BERMAN: Or soccer—

MS. BAER: —that's been replaced.

MS. BERMAN: The audience is sometimes more violent in soccer games than the players.

MS. BAER: Absolutely. I mean, it goes all the way back to the Roman Empire, or the Byzantine Empire. Constantinople, the Reds and the Blues, same people, lived down the street from each other. They killed each other all the time. People like to do this, apparently.

MS. BERMAN: I thought that this—that *Vision and Prayer* [*Vision and Prayer (Dylan Thomas)*, 1996—97], certainly this first on the left had very—well, they both have, but the one on the left, by the use of the hoods on the figures, they look—they could be medieval.

MS. BAER: They are a contemporary troupe of mummers. Most people see it and think they're Africans or something. And the Africans do wear hats like that still, some of the tribes use them. I don't know, to be like their huts, who knows.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: But that was a newspaper photograph. And of course there's the butcher, and the soldier, and the prostitute—the whore is there, and so on. So, yes, but midwives of—[inaudible].

MS. BERMAN: And, you know, I'm not trying to make you a sum of influences, but I see this as [having] a Goya-esque quality, the "disasters of war" sort of—

MS. BAER: Thank you. I hadn't thought of that.

MS. BERMAN: And the palette has a Goya-esque—

MS. BAER: Oh, yes. I have actually—when not a Kwakiutl palette, I suspect I have a Spanish palette. I think you're quite right. I actually hadn't ever thought of that or put it into words. Thank you. But you're absolutely right. I don't even like the Spaniards. [Laughs.] Is that possible, to use their colors and not like them?

MS. BERMAN: Well, they have—they do have in Spanish painting—and this is a generalization—but there's that sense of sadness and cruelty that runs through their painting.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: And that kind of palette is necessary, or—

MS. BAER: Oh, my god.

MS. BERMAN: You know, if not sadism—

MS. BAER: I know.

MS. BERMAN: -- what they record[in] those paintings—injustice and madness—

MS. BAER: I know. I know.

MS. BERMAN: —and this is the color.

MS. BAER: First modern artist, Goya.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And there's—

MS. BAER: What I meant when I said I don't like the Spaniards, I don't like the people. I don't like the Spaniards. The paintings are fine with me. I don't like them.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And what we've just said and shown is that I'm like them. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, I agree. I was making a commentary on what the painters have recorded there and the flagellating monks, and things like that.

MS. BAER: I dislike the cruelty of the Spanish, especially as it went around Latin America.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I don't like [Puerto Ricans ?] or any of these—I don't like the culture. I like the people sometimes—I

really don't like the macho qualities and the whole thing. I mean, there's no reason for me to say this or anything else. I don't go to Spain. I don't know Spanish people, or the ones I know are fine with me. But I don't like who they've been historically. So for me to be using their damn palette. And you're perfectly right. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, their palette is—the artists are criticizing the society, they're not upholding it, most of the time.

MS. BAER: Well, do we live in a Spanish—in a society such as that I am disliking? I suppose we do.

MS. BERMAN: If you are discussing war, you may well—I mean, it's a subject—

MS. BAER: I'm discussing a lot of things that are within that palette.

MS. BERMAN: Well, as you say, war and cruelty and just—

MS. BAER: Yes, okay.

Spanish painters and I are okay. [They laugh.]

MS. BERMAN: Then here, as we go on to the other one, you certainly have a more—clearer analogies here between sex and death, which is the—

MS. BAER: I'm calling it desire and matter. Well, was the text legible to you?

MS. BERMAN: *Vision and Prayer (Dylan Thomas)—*

MS. BAER: No, no, I mean the text.

MS. BERMAN: Oh.

MS. BAER: The text in the paintings. I'll try and see if I can read it.

MS. BERMAN: Let me see: "In the name of the lost"—it looked like—

MS. BAER: —"who glory in"—

MS. BERMAN: —"the"—this I couldn't read.

MS. BAER: —"the swinish plains of carrion."

"Awake no heart but let it break." "Under the—

MS. BERMAN: —something "burial."

MS. BAER: "Under the burial of the beasts, of the birds of burden." Beautiful play on things. "Never to awake. Under the night forever falling."

I actually put some lines from later on in the same poem together. I like—I love "Under the night forever falling," which always makes me cry. [They laugh.] But, I mean, this is—"The born sea, praise the sun, the finding one, upright—[inaudible]—casting tomorrow like a thorn, and the midwives of miracles sing." So these—[inaudible]. So we have the seas and the heavens.

This arches over this, and I'm wondering, is this Isis, or is this Ishtar? This is Isis, isn't it, queen of heaven?

MS. BERMAN: And this is Thebes.

MS. BAER: Pharaoh is—

MS. BERMAN: Right. The pharaoh—that one's on the right, and this is Isis on the left.

MS. BAER: No, I mean the original thing is she's on here and he's here. I've separated them. But they belong—they are together. There are arching women and arching women, and arching women who—

MS. BERMAN: I guess I'm finding this a little hard to read, but I can see it when you're pointing it out to me, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. The photograph isn't that good, and the painting's very clear. [Inaudible]—in the sky, her milk making the Milky Way, and so forth. I've used her in a lot of these things. And yes, this is her way of bending over, lady bending over.

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right. I see that now in both. I couldn't see that before.

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, and this is the cover of *Scientific American*, where they're discovering arthritis in the toes, et cetera, of all ancient women from grinding corn. This is work. And in fact, this background, which looks like a bunch of spots, I actually found the—I actually took the photograph of the Brazilian miners in those gold mines, and [flood/blood ?], at enormous—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, the one that Sebastiao Salgado took, some of his photos?

MS. BAER: Yes, Salgado, yes. One of the work photos. Every one of those dots is a miner. [Laughs.] And over here you can actually see them falling down in their carts and stuff in the painting. You can just see that there are things. But there are the railroad tracks and the whole thing. If there was ever a vision of hell, that was it to me. But of course, it's work, so—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: It's labor and it's work, so—we're talking about *Vision and Prayer*, so you pray for those who are—et cetera, et cetera.

MS. BERMAN: Thank you, because I was not able to read it.

MS. BAER: You couldn't read it.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: That's why I'm filling this in for you, and others.

MS. BERMAN: Others, yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. And the—these are silkscreens sewn onto the canvas. They're actually—somebody was saying, "You're doing operas now, everything, you're sewing, you're doing—[inaudible]—this woman's [dangerous ?]—" [laughs]—more like operettas.

These are negatives, they're photographs I took from the television screen of a BBC Radio trip of a—one of the Russian ballerinas who'd moved—who'd defected to London. And she was—Perestroika must have happened, and she was taking her son—no, she was just going by her—no, she had her 16-year-old son with her—taking back to Moscow. And this was just when Moscow was opening up.

And it was a cafe or nightclub that had staged one of the [Jean] Genet plays. And this was a dancer who comes out in the most incredible drag. And this is his—[his ass ?] to the audience, which goes on for a long time. [Laughs.] It was some of the dirtiest dancing I've ever seen in my life. So I happened to have it on tape, video. So I stopped—I stopped tape and clicked—I stopped tape and clicked—[laughs]—so this is from a video screen.

And there—I had somebody—the silkscreen—[inaudible]—and so there's—Berlin of the '20s is really what I had in mind, and it reappeared in Moscow for a brief time. May still—no, no, it was literally a Berlin of the '20s, which was incredibly decadent. So I was interested in decadence, and work, and hell. And so—using the rivers again. Okay, so we've got the sea comes over into the mountains and whatever, okay?

MS. BERMAN: Well, thank you. Thank you for clarifying that.

MS. BAER: And there seem to be two little birds there. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Well, "the birds of burden," says the poem. And I have these two little birds. And you don't see them until you see this painting in the corner, and suddenly these little birds out of all these are sitting there in such a sinister way. They are little birds, and one is dark, and one is light. And they look like—[inaudible]—the whole thing. And I cannot explain that, but they—god, it shook me up when I saw—oh, no, god, I forgot I did those. But the corner installation brought them forward.

MS. BERMAN: [It] really takes a long time for certain things to come in and out on these paintings.

MS. BAER: Even for me. I don't remember—or why. I mean, that's just—[inaudible]—10, 20 years ago. So the fact that—okay.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And then we've talked about the evolution of the title of *The Shrine of the Piggies*.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: But no, this is hilarious to me.

MS. BAER: A very tough painting, isn't it?

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: I wonder if anybody will ever buy it. [Laughs.]

It's probably the best of them all because it's so tough.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: It's not pretty and it's not Christmas colors and it's not *vanitas*, with a genre of its own.

MS. BERMAN: No, there's not a face of a beautiful woman on there. No, it has—it's got a urinal. It's got a toilet. It's like a water closet—

MS. BAER: It's got a bladder.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: That's what that is, even though there's a penis and testicles attached to it. And it's got a big intestine, somewhat full.

MS. BERMAN: Right. So it's a—

MS. BAER: Yes, and down into—[laughs]—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, so it's a—cloacal painting.

MS. BAER: And actually, that's—actually, that's the head and throat. And then I left out part of it, and then went right to the lower—

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it's a digestive and cloacal painting.

MS. BAER: Absolutely. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: It's about—it's really about the basic function.

MS. BAER: Let us not forget them.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Let us not forget—well, you saw Robert trying to figure it out. [They laugh.] That's it. Ah-ha, that's it. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes—no, it's about cheap food, and how we're conducting ourselves, and how with all this cheap food and this enormous obesity business going on, think of what the plumbing must be like. It's really—I mean, it is dystopian. So far, the plumbing hasn't broken down, but as it just keeps going on all over the world, we're going to be absolutely awash in piss and shit. This is—you know, we're already changing the oceans with—

MS. BERMAN: Right, with our garbage. All kinds of things.

MS. BAER: Yes, but this business of cheap food, of making it available to everyone so that no one's starving any more—but worse.

MS. BERMAN: Super-size me.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. Yes. I mean, it has the other side to it, aside from all the problems of it. And no one—I seem to feel that I must step up and—[laughs]—remind—a lot of these paintings are about reminders of things. And I don't know any way to put that into something that doesn't—isn't literary. A reminder is a literary—is a verbal—is a word. I wish I knew a visual equivalent of—I say aidé-memoire. Aidé-memoire would do, but nobody would

understand that.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And these are not sketches. So it's—in a sense it's—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: It's like [a] serious reminder. And I don't know a word for it. Please, if you think of it, let me know. Because otherwise, I'm stuck with all these litter—literate—

MS. BERMAN: Right. Right.

MS. BAER: —literature terms—not literary, literature terms. And I don't want to be. And I know what I mean, but I have never been able to find the proper word to—

MS. BERMAN: Well, certainly it's—this is a critique of—or a criticism—

MS. BAER: Yes, but it's—I mean reminder.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, okay.

MS. BAER: There are critiques, and they just sit there and float there, like the rest of the stuff. But there is a way to pay attention—reminder. Come on, this is serious—in fact, serious stuff. Same with this. And again, it's too pedestrian to talk about.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes—yes.

MS. BERMAN: Because, clearly, this is so aesthetic, artistic, but you've got a social message, but you don't want to—

MS. BAER: Yes, but you can never do propaganda. I mean, any message—without beauty of some sort—

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: —is useless. I mean, it's not a work of art; it's just propaganda or journalism. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: And this one, I—

MS. BERMAN: *Testament of the Powers That Be (Where Trees Turn to Sand, Residual Colours Stain the Lands)* [2001].

MS. BAER: Yes. Well, it's about—yes—that's China, that's three—the "Three-something [Gorges] Dam," that sort of thing. That's part of it. That's where it opens. It's—they were just finishing it when I—and these are Chinese mountains, but this is, of course, Hoover Dam, or one of those. This is Grand Canyon. [Laughs.] That's Morocco, from the air. Those are the camels.

MS. BERMAN: Oh, the camels. Right. Right.

MS. BAER: Yes. So from many places it's—so a collage. But I was reviewed—this painting and this painting were at Alexander Gray, along with those two big, very sketchy ones.

And a woman who reviewed my—in *Art in America*, reviewed my Dia show, and she loved it, and she got it all wrong. And then Judy's interview was there, Judy Stein's interview—so she's already reviewed me as a Minimalist. And she comes on these paintings. And I'll never forget, she talked about how blocky this was, that there were blocky shapes and—not well painted, is what she's saying, and she—and she forgives me because it's obvious I have a lot of passion. [Laughs.] And I don't even use this review. I ran across it again by accident. I immediately said, "This woman doesn't know anything." And she didn't know anything on the Minimal art, which she loves. So, fuck her.

But really, on thinking about this, what she doesn't understand is in a painting like this you want it to be —"blocky" is the wrong word—sulky—but, okay, blocky—what—you know, these are sort of chunks of stuff. But what she was—

MS. BERMAN: They're large—they're large masses.

MS. BAER: Yes. You want it to say, this is a painting. This is not—no landscape. This is not a portrait. She [inaudible] subject, and she said I could do a better job on a landscape, that I was clumsy. She says I was clumsy, and—yes. And I had flowers all over the place.

And I mean, she totally was lazy and did not read it, et cetera—which does not matter. But—because I started writing. Without her name, I was going to put it in the—but it suddenly occurred to me that I did this certainly to make sure that you know this is a painting. But as a painting, it should send a shiver down your spine. It—that is what it's constructed for. It's not—[inaudible]—global warming, la-la-la. This is, when you mess with all of these things, our fluid—our fluids are now very much awry. And this should send a shiver down everyone's spine. This is what I mean.

This is what poetry means, when a painting is poetry. I have been translating these into the poetry of it, which is very, very hard, because I didn't—I don't know. I'm finding them out now, as I'm trying to do it. But that's what this is.

MS. BERMAN: I would also say, which is another—again, it's, when you have time to think about it, another layer. It's the—that Northwest coastal palette, which also—

MS. BAER: Yes, that's the Kwakiutl.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, right. It's hard for me to say that. But that certainly adds to the environmental consciousness, without broadcasting it.

MS. BAER: I wasn't aware of it. [Laughs]. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: But you know what I'm talking about.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. No, I know how to make it.

MS. BERMAN: Right. [In] good art, you don't wear [emotion] on your sleeve, but it's one of those things that you look—and it adds—

MS. BAER: Yes. Thank you. It never occurs to me. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Well, you can't—

MS. BAER: No, I don't want to ask, actually, unless I'm writing on it.

MS. BERMAN: Right. No, no, you've got to—if you stop and become self-conscious, you can't—

MS. BAER: Then you lose it.

MS. BERMAN: You lose it.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: It's just like talking about it too much before you're doing it.

MS. BAER: I never had anyone to talk to anyway. It's a good thing, probably. But—yes. So these paintings are—this painting, somebody—there's a—

MS. BERMAN: This is the—

MS. BAER: There's the German who is—wants to buy it; doesn't want to buy it; wants to buy it. So it's—[laughs]—still sitting there. He has bought a drawing that everybody wants. He was the lover of [Martin] Kippenberger, so this is not an unsophisticated man.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: But Kippenberger's works I don't know very well. I've seen some. But he's good—but he's dead.

MS. BERMAN: Yes. Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: The show at the Modern [Museum of Modern Art] was very good ["Martin Kippenberger: The

Problem Perspective," 2009].

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: It just gave you an idea of this—I mean, this guy did a ton of work, and some things worked and some didn't, but he was try[ing everything.]

MS. BAER: I think the Germans did, yes.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes.

MS. BERMAN: He wasn't afraid.

MS. BAER: Yes. Right. Well, his boyfriend is the one who's trying to buy this, and isn't sure, and is trying to buy it. And it's been on reserve, and he wants it. And he's met me. He's a lovely man. His name is Tom-something. I don't know. I suppose it's a good collection. I wonder if this kind of painting could ever be in a museum collection. It may be too off-putting.

MS. BERMAN: Well, you know what? If you signed "Francis Bacon" to it, it would be there in a second.

MS. BAER: Yes, but Francis Bacon is not as explicit as I [am]. He smears things—to make them decent, in a sense. Well, smeary is not decent, by any means. But a lot of people do not understand the smears; they like smeared—there's a very funny place. Jack [Wesley] taught me something in here. He had a painting once of two squirrels mating. They're pink squirrels, or blue, you know, with—in the Wesley fashion. And there's one on top of the other, and they've got their claws out, their fingers out. And he put a wedding band on one of them. [They laugh.]

And people were outraged. I mean, they really—no one would have that. None of it. So buy pornography. But when you remind them that animals mate and you put the—yes, he let it—then he put the—[inaudible]—he crossed their worlds. That's what this is also. It is—there are certain things. They'll take pornography, but they won't take that. That's biology. They won't take this. This is biology.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: They don't want it in their living room. They don't want to be reminded that even—[inaudible]—so I think that museums boards also will always choose around something like this. That has to go to a private collector, I would think. So—

MS. BERMAN: Probably at first.

MS. BAER: At first. Yes, well, who knows where your work goes afterwards.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: It could be horrifying where it goes. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: I'm just thinking of other things, and not just the [Marcel] Duchamp urinal. Certain paintings by Gustave Courbet went to private collectors first.

MS. BAER: Yes.

MS. BERMAN: Ditto Lucian Freud, all sorts of people who did—ditto Walter Sickert, or [Edgar] Degas.

MS. BAER: Yes, but they—

MS. BERMAN: It takes—it takes a long time for acceptance [by] museums.

MS. BAER: Yes. I don't mind. This was the first one where I decided—these were small enough instead—you know, I'd been working on these gigantic things, and suddenly I really—actually, there were supposed to be seven. And I thought I would do something simple and get it done in a year or so. And I thought I would sort of go back a little bit to abstract roots by doing, you know, things that echoed the—the canvas.

MS. BERMAN: This orange plane, for example.

MS. BAER: The urinal itself is the same as the—is the same shape as the canvas, sort of thing. So—

MS. BERMAN: Oh, formally, it hangs together perfectly. If this weren't explicit and this was sort of a white shape, or just a little bit abstract, it would be—

MS. BAER: I know. I know. I know. [Laughs.]

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: But I don't—what's—a long time ago when I had these very big paintings of the hanging man and the ballet dancers hanging, I had them on my wall. Or at least that one was on my wall. And somebody I knew, an American living here who was a friend of Robert Miller, the Robert Miller Gallery. And this is sort of the gay mafia—half-gay mafia. And he had something to do with Elsevier—

MS. BERMAN: Publishers.

MS. BAER: —Publishers, and stuff like that. He was one of the first sort of computer people. Actually, his brother was a very big computer person from Microsoft or something like that. Any rate, he liked me and he thought he should try and get me a gallery and wanted me to go to Robert Miller.

But he didn't know my work looked like. So I had him here and then I showed him—I pointed to this wall. I showed him this painting. He looks—he says—he looks at this hanging black man and he said, "You can't put that in an Exxon boardroom." [They laugh.] And that was that. It's absolutely true. You cannot put this in an Exxon boardroom. I actually was horrified when I first came to England to learn that the CIA had been taking my paintings from the Museum of Modern Art. They had a program where they placed them into embassies—

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: —in Eastern Europe. And they had a painting of mine in Hungary that was professed to show that Americans had the freedom to do anything, even blank canvases. Do I continue to go to things like that, to be treated like that, you know, to prove the freedom of America? So I—in my own mind, I felt from—that if I cannot include something rude enough to move these people away from me—I don't care if it's [Charles] Saatchi, or Exxon, or whoever—then I'm not doing my job.

So from that day, from then on, particularly in this image work, you will see me being deliberately rude and that's why. I don't like to be co-opted, I think, was the word for other peoples' purposes, especially not advertising agencies. Embassies and government, okay. They may not even get me stipends. But I do think it's important to make sure they don't use me. Other artists can do what they want, but I do not wish to be used by these people.

So if you wonder why these are usually rude somewhere—[inaudible]—that's why. This one I noticed isn't rude. [They laugh.] Oh, yes, it is. Oh, yes, it is.

MS. BERMAN: We're talking about *Testament of the Powers That Be*.

MS. BAER: Yes. Yes. You see how the river system actually is a penis. This is the Brahmaputra and the Ganges River coming from the Himalayan glaciers. It's a river system, and river systems with little veins look a great deal like a penis. There. [They laugh.] It's in another one of these paintings also.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: It's in the first one that has rivers, the one that the Stedelijk [Museum] owns.

MS. BERMAN: Yes, it's the one—

MS. BAER: [Inaudible.]

MS. BERMAN: [-- that] he bought because he liked the tugboat, he said.

MS. BAER: Yes. But where is it? Where is it? This is the Hudson. And this is the Seine. And where is the—oh, well, then it's in this one. Here.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: It's in that other painting. I can't find it.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And it's in *Vision and Prayer* as well.

MS. BAER: Well, no, this is the Himalayan one. And it isn't in *Vision and Prayer*. *Vision and Prayer* has to be the

Thames, the Hudson, and the Seine.

MS. BERMAN: Okay.

MS. BAER: And then I—since I was in rivers, anyway, I went on to the Ganges. And this is—you see how it looks like a penis there? It really is very, very much like that. Instead of being red, it's yellow here. And yellow is just a much more subtle way of putting a penis in.

MS. BERMAN: Well, believe it or not, I am finished with my questions.

MS. BAER: All right.

MS. BERMAN: So if there's anything you would like to add at the moment?

MS. BAER: Well, I will—get the name of that Brooklyn thing for you.

MS. BERMAN: Right. And you can e-mail that to me if you would like.

MS. BAER: Yes. And I will—yes, and I will find the Rokeby Venus. I can see her. I mean, and she's—instead of looking at herself in the mirror, I extended the mirror and it's a—it's a crocodile looking back as the ages of women. And why isn't it in the self-portrait? Are we looking at it and not seeing—there's no—there's not been a Rokeby Venus in any of the—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: No.

MS. BAER: That's very strange because there is in some painting I've done. [At] any rate, the idea of the nubile women—woman, as opposed to the young woman or the old woman, nubile, she's evil. In the ancient sense of the word, we are.

MS. BERMAN: Yes.

MS. BAER: No question.

MS. BERMAN: Beyond ancient, you know, "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" [1820]. [John] Keats.

MS. BAER: Yes. Crocodile.

MS. BERMAN: Right.

MS. BAER: Crocodile. There is nothing more ancient and evil than a crocodile looking at you. And he has green eyes. Where the hell—

MS. BERMAN: Well, there's the gorgon, too, of course. She's female, and that's—

MS. BAER: Would it be in my Greek book? No, because it's in color. No, it's got to be a painting. This has me absolutely—[inaudible]—

MS. BERMAN: Okay. Right. [You'll ?] find it later.

MS. BAER: —to e-mail you.

MS. BERMAN: Okay. That's great. Thank you so much.

MS. BAER: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]