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Oral history interview with Lillian Orlowsky,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lillian Orlowsky on August 5 and August 26, 1996. The interview took place in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and was conducted by Robert F. Brown for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay. We're beginning an interview on August 5, 1996. Lillian Orlowsky, in her home in Provincetown, Massachusetts. Robert Brown, the interviewer.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I wanted to start out, maybe, with some of your childhood, family background, some of your early memories.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I was born in New York in 1914, October 14. And uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In Manhattan?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In Manhattan. My parents came from Poland, Russia. I'm part of a twin. I had a twin brother. And we lived in Manhattan most of—most of our lives. And poor, because it was during the war.

ROBERT F. BROWN: During the First World War.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The First World War. And it was very difficult for my father to make ends meet, naturally.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did he have a business or a trade, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no, no. He—he came—for as strange as it may seem—he came by China, because he was in Siberia. And—and he landed in San Francisco, and then came to New York. My parents were childhood sweethearts, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had they—were they married? No, this was before—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, they were married here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They were married here. But he came via China and Siberia.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think he was arrested for sedition. He carried some socialist papers [laughs] in Poland. [They laugh.] So they—I think it was four years in Siberia.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I see. He was—he was imprisoned.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was—he was imprisoned there. [00:02:00] And—and I think it's his brother who, um, when he came to this country had difficulty remaining here because of the imprisonment in Russia. But anyway, he finally came to New York. My parents got married. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So he was—he arrived here, what, in 1910 or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no, no. He arrived in 1914.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, the very year—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. We—we came very fast. [Laughs.] They were—I think they were married in—maybe 1913, you know, and we were born in 1914. And his brother helped him. His brother was, uh, a contractor, and so he worked for his brother awhile, or got employment through his brother. And he was interested in art. His—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Your father?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. He never retained it, that interest, but in Siberia, he used to make all the signs there. You know, for the storekeepers, so, "This is a fish market," or, "This is—" whatever his—they allowed him freedom there. They were not incarcerated. They were able to move about. And—but when he came here, he took up electrical work, or general education. And, uh, and then—when I was, uh—I was a sickly person, for some reason. And—but managed to survive.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And your twin, was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: My brother?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was 10 minutes older than I, so they tell me. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you were—were you pretty conscious that you were, uh, one of a pair? Or was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —this pointed out? Would adults always make reference to the fact that you were twins? [00:04:01]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, they didn't. But I think identical twins are more apt to be identified and no—we seemed to be independent. And, uh, his interests are radically different than mine. And, uh, so we moved from—we did a lot of moving.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they all within, uh, New York?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Were all within New York City. And then to the Bronx.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Why did your—your father, if he were involved in some political movement, was he a—a major—was he interested in intellectual things, and was he a—a writer or a reader?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, he wasn't a writer, and he wasn't interested in intellectual things at all.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. He was just interested in the basic—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —the basic needs. Of course—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —needs of people.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —of people—he was interested in his needs, too. And since it was very difficult to live in Poland, Russia at the time, and being Jewish he had a problem, you know, with the anti-Semitism that did exist then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, I know.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And so that, you know, I don't know exactly what he was trying to, uh—what political aspect he had, but I guess anything you did was antipolitical—or antigovernment.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, you—the radical then is not what we call radical today, you know. So—and a lot of the youngsters were, naturally, interested. And, uh, they were interested, I think, in the Jewish question, going to Israel, which a—a number of people did go to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was very much in the air at that—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: At that—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —beginning at that time.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Beginning at that time, there were very—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Zionism, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The Zionism. The Bundists was at—I don't really know too much about it. [00:06:00] But there was that very strong feeling about the—the Jewish—and since Israel did not exist then, there was also that feeling of building it up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yep. Creating it.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, creating an Israel—uh, Israeli—a—a home, so-called home for the Jews.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Well, was there—did this interest persist with your father, say, when he got to New York? Or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, not the—not the Israel. No. I think that that changed. I—I don't think he had any, uh, great interest then that I remember. I may be wrong, you know, because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, but, uh, growing up, do you recall the family—was what—was it much discussed at home, or was it mostly—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They were politically interested in—in the social situation, because we were all involved. You know, it's—it's not like poor today. In those days, when you were poor, everybody was poor. We all didn't have cars. We all didn't have telephones.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know? We all didn't live in heated apartments. And, uh, so that it—it isn't like today where everybody, even though you're poor, you do have a phone. You do have a car.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know? But you can't afford it, but you do have it. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Because you can pay for it, uh—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah—pay on time. We didn't have welfare as we have—we know it today. And then it was, uh, kind of, like, embarrassing to even apply to any club for money or, you know, support. So the attitude was different then. So the, um, the political aim was to better themselves, you know, to find employment, which was, at that time, rampant, you know. [00:08:03] And so that was the issue, employment—employment. Insurance for employment, and other things. This—the—what we have today, the social advancement, was started at that time. So you had that kind of thing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you remembered some of this being—yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I remember some of it, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, as a young girl, what were your interests, as, sort of, a—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, my interests, uh, was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: In school.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Going to school, and then interested in—in the arts, because I did go, as a young, uh, child, to the museums. I did go there. I was fascinated with the natural history museum, and, uh, the stuffed animals in their environments, you know, and the—the American Indians with the boats, you know. I still recall looking at—in awe at these fantastic figures, you know, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you go with—on your own, or with friends, or with school classes?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I went on my own.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, on your own. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: On my own. One or two girls, you know, I went with. And, um, also I went to the Metropolitan, you know. And as—as I grew older, I became more interested in the modern movement, like the modern dance, and I joined a dance group, not to be a dancer but to exercise, [laughs] you know, and to find out their movements and so forth. I—I was very curious. And—and the group, I think it was a dance—American Dance League. I'm not sure now—that had, uh, Graham—not Martha Graham. I forgot her name now. It'll come to me. But anyway, some of the dancers today—or, at that time, later on, were known—were part of the dance exercise group. [00:10:05] And, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So what—what would you think it was, apart from exercise, that fascinated you about—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The movement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: ---modern---the movement?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Movement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, movement fascinated me.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you---were you encouraged in this by your mother or your father, or---

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: All right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no. They were not---they weren't interested, you know, in that. I was interested in the arts, and they used to do doodling, a lot of doodling. And, uh, I think in the '30s, I was at a social club, and, uh, I think my mother spoke to Freed. He was at that particular club, and she was telling him---

ROBERT F. BROWN: William Freed?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, William Freed. Telling him that I was doing a lot of doodling and so forth, and, uh, he suggested that I go to the Educational Alliance where he was studying---where he was working. He didn't have a ---he was already---he was there for about 10 years, because he came to this country in 1922. And he went to the Education Alliance to study English. Of course, they had a class for foreigners.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, the Educational Alliance was in the---

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: East---Lower East Side. East Broadway in New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And it was set up to provide basic, uh, training and education?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. Yes, it was like a settlement house, a very progressive settlement house, where Eddie Cantor was there and a lot of other Jewish actors performed. And so they had art classes, uh, conducted by an academician---a Russian academician. Very precise, you know [laughs].

ROBERT F. BROWN: You mean very old-fashioned. Very disciplined.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And---very old-fashioned. Very disciplined, you know, with the, you start in a cast class, and then from there you develop into the, uh, life class. [00:12:04] And, uh, so they had theater there, and they had dance. They had all kinds of activities. And so I started there in 1933. And, uh---

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you had any training in the high school years, or just---

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, we did. We did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Before that?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: We had---we had, like, a display---I mean, no, no. Commercial art, like.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh yes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Make a poster or a cover, and insert---we had to do printing, layouts, and stuff like that. That was the early part.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you like that?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. But this was---

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Didn't---

ROBERT F. BROWN: When---when you were in high school, was this in the Bronx or in Manhattan?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was in the Bronx, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So it was after high school---

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was after high school that I---

ROBERT F. BROWN: What were you—did you think you were going to do? Was it expected you would just go to work after high school?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I really don't know, because I think I had to think of work, because I didn't, uh—we didn't have any money. [Laughs.] It was simple as that. So I did odds and ends, you know. My mother did have a little shop, and my father did house painting as a contractor. And—and I did help my mother out in the shop. And then I went to school at the Educational Alliance, and from there—at the Educational Alliance, I met Louise Nevelson.

ROBERT F. BROWN: She was studying there—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: She wasn't studying, no. She just came back from Europe. And, uh, she was studying sculpture with Chaim Gross.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh. Who was teaching there then.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Who was teaching there. And, uh, and she came into the life class to do drawings, and they were fantastic drawings, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they? [00:14:01]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, we academicians, and she modern, after having studied with [Hans] Hofmann and Lachaise.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, she had by then?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: She had then.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And she was a bit older.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: She was a bit older.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did she talk a good deal, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: She may have, you know. She may have.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But did you get to know her at all?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I got to know her, yes. We used to exhibit a lot together in various group exhibitions, you know. So I did get to know her. And I did visit her in her—at her home, when she had the home on 33rd Street. From—every floor was totally occupied with sculpture works, different periods. It was fascinating.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, would—could—was she, or—and others somewhat older, were they—did they, in some ways, inspire you, or did they serve as models in there—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They did. She—she served me as a model, because I was trying to find a school that would, uh, kind of, introduce me to her way of—working, drawing. Because that was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which was freer, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was freer. It was expanded. It was monumental in relation to what I was doing. Mine looked puny.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And at the Alliance, with this Russian academician as a teacher, it was rather—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was not in—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —rigid.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He used to—oh, yeah. He—he snickered, properly. [They laugh.] He was very—well, you know, you—you can't expect someone who boldly occupies the—the figure occupies the entire space, and the head is not exactly proportioned to the seven and a half figures you're supposed to have, you know. That—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Proportions, yes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That you're going to say that that's good drawing, you know, [laughs] or good composition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But did you somewhat enjoy that kind of rigorous—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In the beginning, and—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, in the beginning, yes. I—I think, uh, I enjoyed a—a given amount of discipline. [00:16:03] You know, a certain amount. But then again, I went to the National Academy of Design, which was equally disciplined, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You went then—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In 1930—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The next year, '32 and '33—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Thirty—yes. The Educational Alliance.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But by then, you'd—Nevelson and other things were, sort of, pulling you away from that. Is that right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, they were gone—they were out of my life at that moment, you see. And I think in 1930—oh, then I went to, uh—I moved from there. I went to Raphael Soyer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he had his own—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, he was in the American School of Art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that was—where was that?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That was on Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street, Ninth Street, somewhere around there, in Manhattan. And he, um—but they had a number of teachers there. They had Anton Refregier and others.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yep.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And, uh, so I studied with Soyer then, which was freer.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Freer.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, and I painted there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did—what was his approach to teaching, would you say?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, you know, we used a lot of light, electric light, so we had sharp shadows, contrasts. And, uh, he was, like, a—I would call it the brown school, the ochre school. You know, browns and grays. And—it's more homey-type, you know, much more peasantry, like a peasant would paint, in relation to the academy. It was looser. It was freer. There wasn't the rigidity that, uh, that we found in the academy. I—I—I did and didn't like it, but at the same time, I went out do—watercolors, and I did outdoor painting. [00:18:08] You know?

ROBERT F. BROWN: On your own?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: On my own. And—and occasionally, I would go with Freed, uh, to do seascapes. Went to Coney Island and Rockport—uh—I forgot the name already.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Rockaway, maybe?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Rockaway. Rockport is—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Not leaving New York.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, I'm not leaving—no, I haven't left New York yet.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Not yet.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: [They laugh.] Not quite. And go and get up early in the morning and do this, uh—watercolors. A lot of watercolors, you know. So that—that, sort of, freed—and then I worked at home, did a lot on my own. I moved out of the house. I was on my own as of 18, 19. And then—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you lived—lived on your own. Was that—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I lived on my own.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that not too common for a young woman at that time, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think it wasn't common, no. They usually lived until they got married or employed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And I think in '36 or '37—I'm not sure of dates now—I—I—I went—I went on WPA. I worked at a WPA. And that, of course, changed my life completely.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That was because, what, you—to survive as an artist, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: To survive as an artist.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did you learn about—you must have been—it was pretty well along—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I was already involved with the arts. I was involved with the arts, and I was exhibiting. And—and I had heard about the WPA. I didn't hear about the Congress of American Artists, but that was prior to the WPA. [00:20:01] And—but, uh—but, of course, when you were on WPA, prior to that, you had to be in need. So you had to be—you had to apply for it, in need, and if they—you qualified, which, unfortunately and fortunately, I was, I went on WPA and—and was assigned to the mural division as assistant to Emily Bartos.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Emily Bartos.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: B-A-R-T-O-S, yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, B-A-R. And Moses Soyer. He was on the mural—he was—they were the, uh, the design—they were the designers. They were the artists designing the murals for various places. And I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, you'd worked with his brother. What was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I worked with his brother.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Raphael, he'd been your teacher.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were they more or less the same or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They were the same.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —different temperament? Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The same. They were twins.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yep.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. But they were the same.

ROBERT F. BROWN: How did he—what were they like as—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —as persons? Very friendly. Very nice. I think, uh, Moses was more friendly than Raphael. He—I think he had an unreserved attitude. I think Mo—Raphael was more reserved and conservative, and—whereas Moses—and of course, there may have been a conflict, because Raphael became more famous than Moses. You know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That'll do it.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: [They laugh.] Sure did. I think so. But I think they were friends, but, uh, there must have been—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —certain—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I wasn't aware of it, but there must have been—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —tension.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So did they —would they assign you to, uh, go to a certain place, and—what did—what did this mural assistant's work—[00:22:02]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, we were working on their designs. We were working on cartoons, to enlarge their figures and prepare it for the ultimate execution on canvas, and then paint it, you know. And we were given studios.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Where were these? Do you recall where they were, roughly?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think it was, uh—I think so. I think on King Street—I'm not sure—in Manhattan. I think when I was working with Raphael—Moses, it was in a high school, but I don't remember where.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So your studio was in that high school and such?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. A large room where we—uh, I was not the only assistant he had. I don't remember the others.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was this his design for the high school, or was it—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: His design for a given area. I don't remember which area.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. And working—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And he sub—he submitted a design. They accepted the design, and then we had to execute it, which was quite an experience, you know, to transfer on—we had to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: From a small design, I guess.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. We had to measure out the cartoon, the space, and the squares, and then insert the design. And—which was a wonderful experience. But then from there, I don't really know how I got on the easel division, which was the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Of the WPA, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: WP—still on WPA. Which was to have your own studio—or they gave you a studio—and, uh, which was to—do your own work and give it back to the—the government. [00:24:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that was pretty nice.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, that was wonderful. They gave you the material, the supplies, as much as you needed, and, uh, time by which to submit the work. And if they felt, or if you felt you needed more time, you had—you were given more time. And eventually, you gave them the canvas, the finished product, and, um—and then they gave you another canvas to work on, or whatever materials you requested.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would they come around to your studio to check your work, or not really?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And when you submitted it, did—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You—you had to submit to the committee. They had a supervising committee, and, uh—they—it was accepted, you know. Because otherwise, why would they put you on the easel division, you know? Because you were supposed to be an artist. [Laughs.] You were no longer a student or, uh, apprentice, you know. That was for the artist. But the—it could be that, maybe some artists submitted something that they considered unfinished, too sketchy, or whatever, you know, because you had—on the committee, you had representational and nonrepresentational supervisors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, you did? You had a combination, then.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, yes. That's what made it good.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yep. Oh—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. My tenant.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So, uh, you were on that, the easel division, then, for some months?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, for—actually, I think for two years.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, really?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that was pretty good.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, I just—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You—you felt like you were—had arrived, in a sense, hadn't you, and—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, I felt very good, because I felt that, hell, it was nice to be able to work, and two, it was, uh, that they kept your work. Unfortunately, I don't know whatever happened to it, you know. [00:26:00].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And, three, the association with other artists was very important.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how would that come about? Would you—would they come—you would go to each other's studios, or you would meet?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, we—we would meet to collect our checks. And we would go to 110 Kens—tens—110 King Street—

ROBERT F. BROWN: King Street.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —in Manhattan, and we'd congregate there, because you had to be, uh—the checks were handed out in person. I had \$23.86 every week. And, uh, so you'd stand around, and, what do artists do? They talk about art. And—and especially as diverse the group as we were at that time, and the period where modern art was not accepted, where representational and Ashcan School was the predominant force, and very few galleries, displayed contemporary work like we know it today, abstract work or semi-abstract. So we would hang out together, and—and, anybody can draw a straight line, and we—there's no discipline. There's no color. There's no form, you know, and, you can't recognize the subject, and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is what, your critique or the typical critique?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The—the—this—yeah, the course of current exchange. And—and then Hofmann's name came up as a charlatan. And, he—you don't have to study abstract work. You don't have to study art. You know, the academy is the place, and so forth. Then politics played a part, because you had socialist ideas, uh, the—but it was interesting. [00:28:02] The—those who were the most socialist-minded did the most abstract paintings. They did not conform to the idea of political art.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. Which by then was, uh, realism.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Was, uh, a realism. They—they—they—they were more interested in aesthetics as we know it. And—and if you want politics in art, then go to the cartoons, and go to commercial art, but not—not that we—they turned fine art, you know. So there was also a very strong political, uh, dissent, as a result of WPA—because of WPA, we had—artist's union. Artists got together. And they got together for two reasons. One, to be together. Two, to talk. And three, to exhibit. And four, to hang onto their jobs, you know, trying to fight to continue, because there was already talk about discontinuing the boondogglers.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The boondogglers? [Laughs.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. [Laughs.] Yes. Because, you know, who needs it, you know? Or, What are they doing? They're not qualified. The fact that, I think, 80 percent of our famous artists were at one time on WPA is something somebody doesn't want to acknowledge, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But at that time, there was opposition, too.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, by that time—oh, there was strong opposition, you know. But the, uh, WPA had art teachers. *Index of American Design*, which is one of the great books that came out of that period. And murals—and, of course, easel paintings, but we don't know what happened to them. And other—[laughs] you know? [00:30:01] I heard some artists found them in the—on Canal Street junk shops, and they bought them for five dollars apiece. And Avery, and de Kooning, and all these peo—you know. Of course, they were early works, but nevertheless—[Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So—well, who were some of the artists you began to get to know, say, in 1936, '37?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, uh—well, right along I got to know people like McNeil.

ROBERT F. BROWN: George McNeil.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: George McNeil, Ad Reinhardt—

ROBERT F. BROWN: About that same time, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They were all on the WPA, you know. Then I moved away to different circles, because once I got into the—the Hofmann school, there was Lee Krasner, and there—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Before that, you were meeting a broader group, huh?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: A broader—yes, broader scope. Some of them I, uh, the names I don't remember.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Some you continued to be friends with, and others not, I guess.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It's inevitable. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, were there—you know, you say you congregated and chatted while you were waiting to pick up your WPA checks. Were there also parties, or places you—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: There were parties.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —would go for a cup of coffee—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yeah. Yes, we had the Bickford Café—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —on—on Sixth Avenue. There were other places whose names I don't remember. Of course, there was the Cedar—Cedar Ball, which we did not attend very often. That was later. Uh, then, of course, the—the club. That was later.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But, uh, the early days—it was the automat. I forgot about the automat.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. That's right. The Horn and Hardart.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The Horn—the Horn and Hardart automat on 14th Street.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Or the Bickford Cafeteria, or whatever.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Bickford's, yeah, cafeteria on Sixth Avenue. And, um, Horn and Hardart's was the main place, because it's only a nickel, you know. A sandwich may be 10 cents, you know. And I remember meeting Burgess Meredith there and others, the early actors, you know. And then, of course, the period had the theater. [00:32:00] Very important. And, so we saw plays for 25 cents. The Mercury Theater, the other theaters that were sponsored by the WPA. Eva La Gallienne, Orson Welles, the rest of them. The dance groups. So—so it was a very lively time and a very—I think a very creative period.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was most of it centered in and around, uh, sort of, Washington Square or the Village, broadly speaking?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The Village, yes. Most of it, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, were you in exhibitions?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: There were occasional WPA group exhibitions.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. I was in many of the exhibitions, you know. The ACA gallery, Milch Gallery, or whatever

place that was available, I join—I participated.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—how would you characterize your work of that time, that very early work?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Um, representational but not academic.

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So I wanted to talk a minute about your, uh, work—of this era, of, around 1936-'37.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think this painting here, the landscape, was done at that period. I think it's 1930—I can't read the, uh, the date here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, I can't see it either.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But it's—it's in the year '35, '34.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, it looks a bit of you in the city, certainly.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's—it—it roughly looks like Ashcan type, but is it really of that ilk, because you—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, yeah, it was, uh, the Ashcan. Its subject matter.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The subject, then, was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Subject matter. It was—put together subject matter, because it was not done on the scene. It was assembled, you know, where the figures are, the—the man reading the paper, look—it's looking down. [00:34:00] In fact, it's looking down and looking up at the same time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It is. It's rather a split perspective.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It's—yes. You know, I only [laughs] realize it now that I did it. I don't think I was aware of it at the time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was done, then, in, uh, in those very years.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Those years, yes, where I tried to, uh, depict the landscape and people in, you know, in the landscape. And it was also—the color was very similar to—but it was more—it was more impressionist color than it was of the brown school of, you know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —of—of Soyer?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —the—of the Hudson school, of the Soyers, you know. It was—it—I do have a—a portrait of—that I did in the Soyer's class, but I don't know if it's here. It's not in this album.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Then—and would you say that, uh, signals your preference, really, for a higher keyed palette than the brown?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. I think it changed my, uh, color concept. It also changed my composition, my thinking of—of realism.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Representation. I wasn't imitating the landscape. I was assembling it. In other words, I was composing—the composition was—I was relating the subject, the house and the—and the—the people, and the walk, and the side—and the skyscraper.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And were you, at this time when you did this, uh, scene—were you working with somebody steadily, or not really? You were pretty much—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, I was on my own.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —just working on your own.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was on my own. I was—I think I was also looking for someone, to go to, because I was aware that I couldn't continue with this. [00:36:00] I wanted—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —different things, because as I started to see works—I saw a Cézanne exhibition at that time, the first exhibition that he had that I was able to see. And it was a revelation. It was really quite unusual for me. They also had the World's Fair of—in New York.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, in '39.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In '39. And I remember going there and seeing the Russian exhibition, and talking about Cézanne to the Russian representatives there. And—because I was more interested already in contemporary paintings. I was already studying with Hofmann in '39. And, uh, and I remember the girl telling me that, "Yes, we have Cézanne. We have the modern paintings. But we keep them in the basement."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And that left a lasting impression.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Meaning what? That—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Meaning that they thought that—that that was decadent art, at that time.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Had you assumed that the Russian or the Soviet culture would be more modernist?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I thought they would be, but, uh, obviously not in the arts.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: There was—they—you know, that was that big to do with, Picasso and—and the Soviet—and the Communist movement, where they wanted, representational, and he wanted, "Yes, I'll be political, but not in my work," you know. "I'm going to show it my way rather than your way, like an illustration." Which he did. *War and Peace* or whatever, you know, *Guernica*, was his way. [00:38:01] But it was not the Russian way, you see. Depicting the same thing, a war scene, you know. So, uh—and they did not—they were very adamant against it, the ones that I met here as a child—well, I would call myself a child then, you know, relatively, yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] This—this woman you met at the Russian Pavilion was pretty firm about that.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Very firm.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And they weren't old. They were young. Very firm. And that, kind of, uh, left a—you know, strange feeling.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Because at that very time, many artists and others were pro-Soviet, weren't they?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very—very inspired by their example.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, but they were very inspired by their example. They were very inspired by this—you know, because they were showing the attempt—at least we thought they were—showing the attempt to better their social and economic situation, their educational. And, uh, and then—and we felt that they were, kind of, backwards when it came to the arts. Leave the arts alone, you know. Do what you want, but the arts belongs—the creativity should be left to the creator.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know? Not to, political politics or anything like that. And I think in a way, Lenin did feel that the—the creativity should be left to the creator. I—and my feeling is, had he been alive, the arts would have taken a different stand, because they did have people like Chagall and Kandinsky and the rest of them, and they did leave creativity to the creator. It's only when Stalin came in that the—the whole situation changed. I think—I may be wrong—but I think so. [00:40:01] And that's when they all left, because the artists genuinely had a feeling, Well, we—we have an opportunity to create, and the stupid people there—[laughs] not stupid, but the leaders couldn't see it, you know. And that was unfortunate, because they really lost some great people in—in the—in the process, you know. But—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But you—you were, uh, then gradually in these years tending toward modernism.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I think you said before you went to Hofmann, you were, um—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was doing the academic—I was doing the, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you did this—you haven't—briefly—these courses at—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, I went to—yes. I took a course at the 92nd Street Y[MCA]. That was conducted under the WPA program. And this man—I think his name was Whiteman [ph], who since—who became chairman of the art department at Pratt, I—I believe. And, we were drawing—I was working from the model, and, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, these are rather quite abstracted from the model.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They—they are indeed. I'm in a state of shock, because I don't really [laughs] know how I got to it that way, you know. I just am—I'm not fully aware of it, you know. But I must have been influenced by the exhibitions that I saw, the people that I was surrounded with, you know, and, uh, and also the class, the students in the class. They may have had—because there were some ex-Hofmanns—there were some Hofmann students in the class that took an extra course. They went to Hofmann and the went to Whiteman, you know. And I may have been influenced, you know. I'm sure of that. [00:42:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you—as you look back, do you think you probably, at that time, were in—you were open to influences?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was open, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was very receptive, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, these abrupt changes in scale and size, and—yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They're, you know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's wonderful.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It's—it really—you know, I remember saying, "I don't know what to do with the corner here, or with that corner." He said, "Use your imagination. Fill it up any way you like." And that somehow got to me. I didn't think [laughs] you'd do it that way, back when I was working from nature.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this was Whiteman.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That was Whiteman.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a liberating force.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was a liberating force, because he made me feel, look, I'm not restricted. I was thinking, I had to think in terms of composition, you know, because it wasn't a figure that I was going to draw, and with the tiny little speck on the—on the paper, you know. And when I came to Hofmann, that became a—a reality. But then I learnt how to see and transform the object onto the two-dimensional plane plastically, and think in terms of cubists, and—and volume, space, positive and negative space.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you've mentioned now Hofmann and his teaching several times. And this is what we're talking—is this about 1937 or so?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And is it—do you finally go to see whether he'll admit you as a student?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, I did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And what did he—he—you showed him this work. What did he have to say about it?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, he—he—he said that it wouldn't take me long. I can—I'll understand what, uh—I'll understand—oh, I'm trying to figure out, remember how he said it, you know. But I had a plastic feeling, and that—it would come to me easy. It took me 10 years. I'm still—I'm still struggling with the problems, plastic problems.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it that led you to Hofmann? I mean, was he the one that most people said you should go—[00:44:02]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was the one they spoke against.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They—they seemed to, uh, feel at that time—there was a slow movement towards impressionism, and—and impressionism led to abstract work, because impressionism changed the color, changed the compositions. And—abstract work as seen by Picasso, which was gradually coming into vision—view in the United States, was—it was very radically different. You know, because impressionism, to some degree, was still academic in its representational vision. It was just that the color changed and the technique. But, uh, with Cézanne, it's not only the color that changed, but the concept changed. The vision changed, so that the object no longer was as you thought you saw it, which made a difference.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You've said already that your color was impressionistic.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were tending—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was tending to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were making that progression toward your own style through impressionism.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I was changing. I was change—in other words, I was—I was changing from imitation to expression. You know? I wasn't—I wasn't imitating any longer. I wasn't trying to imitate, uh, my view, my landscape, or my still life.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I'd try to see the composition two-dimensionally, try to experience the—the spaces and the color. [00:46:01] It no longer was that, uh—that the—the—it had to be a green tree, and if the—the light was yellow-green, and the dark was dark green, you know, I no longer looked for shadows, light and dark. Which—or perspective—but looked at the color relationship, the green against another green. Black against white. Black as a color, and white as a color. And I—I wasn't looking for gradations. I was looking for color relationship, and so that, uh—there was that movement of color that appealed to me. And so I was composing. Color, form, shapes. It was not exactly the shape of an orange. It could have been an orange, but different shape.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But these are—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: These are—these are—these are recognizable objects. These are figures that one can see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right. These are the Whiteman, when you were in those classes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But at the same time, you're—you're moving—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I'm moving away.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Like this indicates—where—this—that the Hofmann school, where I'm trying to arrive at the figure—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: So Hofmann, in the first interview, said you—wouldn't take you too long to master what he had to teach you.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Not—to understand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I wouldn't say master. Understand.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was he like as a person? When you first met him, what were your—what was his—the impression?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was very warm, affable, um, giving. He was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he a big man, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, in relation to me, he was big. I'm a short person. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And he was big. Uh, I wasn't aware of his age, although he was obviously older than I. I think I was around 25 when I went to the class, maybe younger, but around 25. And—it was a large class, and I was—I joined the class in—when he was on Ninth Street, 52 West Ninth Street. And it was somebody's studio building at the—prior to his renting the place. And—and in the class—and then he moved to Eighth Street, over the Village Barn. And, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And the Village Barn was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —was a well-known café nightclub. And, um, in the class, there was Lee Krasner, that I had a great deal of admiration. If only I could do and understand that—what she did, because she was there before me, a long time before. And there was McNeil, but he was not in the class. He would come in. And others that I—at the moment, I don't remember. But she did leave a strong impression, Lee.

ROBERT F. BROWN: In what way, would you say?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Her work. And also her personality. [00:02:01] Lee, uh, was always interested in the social aspect at that time. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: By that, you mean—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —mean, the welfare of the artists, the welfare—of people, the economic situation, the political situation. And she proved that, in the end, by having this foundation that she set up for the artists, which I take my hat off, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And, uh—so she was motivated. And she worked, and—during intermission, she would talk about art, and she would talk about politics. You know? And we had some wealthy students there.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Some what?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Wealthy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Wealthy. And we had some poor artists, like—but Hofmann had a lot of WPA artists studying with him. As he once said, the government indirectly supported him, because first he had the—the people—the artists on WPA, and then he had the—the veterans, the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yes, after World War II.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: After World War II. So in each case, [they laugh] he was indirectly supported.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, would he, um, set—set you up, set up problems or set up, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, what—no. What he did—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was a typical class—this is—I'm talking now about before World War II, let's say.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. We're talking about the, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —19—when I was there in '38. I was here in Provincetown in 1938, and then he said—he had, uh, two things, a model in the morning, and in the afternoon still life. And he would set up the still lifes. He

had three or four still lifes that he set up, and that would be there for three or four months. [00:04:01] And, uh, and that was in the daytime. And at night, he had only the model. And I was fortunate to be able to go all day, you know. And so the problem was—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, were you still in the WPA?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was on WPA.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. And since I was on the easel project, I was able to, you know, devote my time there. And he—you start up your way, whatever you—were your approach. In other words—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, say you worked from the figure.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I worked from the figure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you—were you painting, or was this drawing?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, drawing. He recommended drawing. And then he would say, "Maybe you're ready for painting," because it presented other problems. And on the other hand, his charcoal drawings he considered as also painting, but were more or less in black and white and gray. So you had something on your paper or canvas. And from that, from your concept, he tried to develop it, or correct it, or notify or inform you how to do it. Or—and as this—I don't think it's in this drawing—but in one of the drawings, he would have small figures—small—uh, a little illustration.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That he would make on—on your—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That he would make on my canvas or on the drawing. Excuse me. He'd have a little drawing and make—erase a certain part. Have a little sketch, and indicate how one should conceive it, from your point of view. [00:06:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: From your point of view.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, from your point of view. In other words, if I started abstractly, how to develop abstractly. If I wanted to integrate the abstract and the representational, then he would show how it would be done cubistically, and—and have all the four corners work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The four corners work? Was this—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, in other words—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —an important—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was. It was—because you had to take into consideration the entire canvas. You were not working in—in a given area. Plastically, everything had to work, which made it two-dimensional. You—you—you worked for three-dimensionality, but in the end, it should remain two-dimensional.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hm.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: So nothing runs counter each other, but there is movement within the area, within the canvas, so that—they say that what makes a thing plastic is the same thing goes back and comes forward. It's in relationship from one to the other. And that dealt with form, color, that was your composition, whichever way you were working. And this happened to be black and white charcoal. And we used charcoal because it was easy to erase. One thing you have to be sure, you had enough—a kneaded eraser, chamois, and a full box of charcoal, because by the end of the session, all three were gone. [Laughs.] Because he used it up, you know, because he would demonstrate, you know, and he'd—he'd be very emotional and—and, uh, uh, dynamic personality, you know. He would dig into the canvas, and the—and also to have a clean sheet of paper underneath your work, because sometimes he would tear the paper up, and shift your forms around to show you how you could expand it. [00:08:06].

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh. Oh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And having the white sheet of paper underneath, he was able to tack on these things, and then connect in lines and movement, and that was a dramatic experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I would think so.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Very dramatic.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The first time that happens—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The first time that happened, I said, "You don't"—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Take your breath away. [Laughs.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: "I don't believe this!" [They laugh.] You know, there it goes, and, "Oh, it's so light." [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he did all this in a gentle—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, very gentle. He was very affable, and he was, Yeah, yeah, you know, and smile. "Oh, yeah. Don't worry. It'll all come together," you know. "It'll be—it'll be all right," you know. And you looked—but then you learnt to have, uh, all your materials, because if the materials wasn't right, you got a lecture on materials—so that you try to be prepared for full criticism. He also liked that you—to follow him, because he felt that you learned from each other, that if he was criticizing your work, and I was watching him, and he—I could see what this person did in—in relationship to—to the subject, and then what he did to what this person did. So it was an education that way. And that was very exciting. I have here a, uh—these are my early works. Come on, Lillian. I just saw it, you know? Maybe it's in the back. The class—I have a photograph of the—

[Audio Break.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —get going.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you say that Hofmann started you out with drawing, insisted on that.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And then you—and he considered the charcoals to be a form of paintings.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, it—[00:10:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: In a sense?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I would consider it that way, you know, because we—because we were dealing with coal, we were trying to deal with the black and white color, you know. And so that—we were not imitating nature with the darks and lights, so if you were saying that, we have a black plane and a white plane, I call that color.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And I think he thought of it in the same way. Because we were not dealing with shadows.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were dealing with—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —with gradation of color, the light—from light to gray, gray, gray to dark, and dark, you know. So, uh, that would be my interpretation, and I think it would be his, too.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, then, before long, this—we're looking now at a photograph of a—your first painting. That is—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: My first painting.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —I mean your first oil painting—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: My first oil.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —under Hofmann. And that's not—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —until the—the following year, then.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That's right.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So 1938, I think.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I—I thought, I can't stand it. Everybody's painting, and I'm not painting. And he felt I should continue drawing. I said, "Well, I'm going to break the rule, and I'm going to bring my canvas in." And this was on a gesso surface, which meant that it absorbed the oil fast. And for me, it was a relatively large size. I don't remember what the size was. And I painted, and he came in, and he said, "Leave it. Leave the painting." Which I did, you know. And I said, "Gee," I said, "I didn't finish it." He says, "Well," he said, "ten years from now, maybe you'll see what you got by accidental—you're not aware of what you've gotten. So save it." It was my first canvas. [00:12:00] So then I started another canvas, and he said, "Oh," he said. He had a phenomenal memory. He remembered works. And, uh, he said, "Oh," he said, "Leave it." I said, "Mr. Hofmann"—I always called him Mr. Hofmann—"I can't leave all my starts. I want to develop it. I want to go further." "No," he said. "Leave it." And I said, "Well"—after he left—"I'm going to show—I'm going to develop it." And he came back the next time—this is all from the still life, you know. I never painted from the model in class. And he said, "Is this the same canvas you did last week?" And I was very proud. And I said, "Yes." He turned me around, patted my little behind, and he said, "Tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk. You don't know what you did." [Laughs.] So I remember that as a good lesson. I still don't know what I did, because I don't have it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you—were you upset or a little—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No. No, I wasn't upset.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, he—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was annoyed at myself.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He was a charming—in the way he said that.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was charming. It, you know—of course, I was—of course, I thought what I did was great. It was a tremendous improvement, you see. And I was totally unaware of the fact that I was wrong.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, what would you say, as we look at this photograph, you were trying to do? This is certainly an abstraction from the still life.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: From the still life, yes. Well, I was trying to develop this further in a loose way, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, it looks fairly loose as it is.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, but more—more, uh, complete, because there are certain areas that I would not have today, like the—this line going—this color plane going in this direction, which gives a feeling of perspective. [00:14:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I probably wouldn't—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The diagonal color plane.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The diagonal plane—you know. Whereas what I did later on, it was more defined forms, very clear defined forms, which—which is different. And I think that's what happened. I thought that this was too loose, too free, and that the—the—I didn't have my color complexes right—not right, but related properly. And what I thought later on, that if I make more defined forms, which is what this is, that it was better, but both are good, defined forms as well as freeform—free complexes—color complexes. Whereas—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you encouraged in this, in—in this direction by—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, he didn't encourage it in any direction. He just tried to indicate what was right and what was wrong, or what was plastically disturbing or not disturbing, you know. I don't—and my feeling was that he just guided you in—in—in what you were doing. Now, I did this.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is squares and rectangles, more or less.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. These are influenced by Mondrian—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Very—yes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —a great deal, because—

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's very—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —Mondrian just came into the—into—this is 1940. I think he had a show then in New York, and I was influenced in that. So we—this was also from the still life. All the—all—all my work is from objects. I've never been able to break away from it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Whereas this middle one, the second one we talked about, is more—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —it's both up and down, but it's also—there are some—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Diagonals.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —on the diagonal.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. This is where—just horizontals and verticals.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You're trying to eliminate a sense of—of, uh, recession or perspective.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Or I—yes. I wanted to keep everything flat.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Now, Mondrian was a big influence. [00:16:01] Was he a, would you say, a big influence in general at that time among—among young artists? Were they—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think he was beginning to be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. I don't think he was accepted totally at that time, uh, because it—it was very limited. It was restricted. We were going more towards expressionism, and we were trying to express the—in other words, we were going more—like this was freeform, free expression, no—nothing very defined.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would you say a good many of your contemporaries were—were trying to become completely abstract and no reference?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Beginning, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And they were doing—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They were trying—yeah, they were trying to be totally abstract, I think.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Hofmann was an influence, but not by any means the only one, was he?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, he was not the only one, you know. Because at that time, let's remember that we began to see, uh, more exhibitions of Miró, Picasso, Matisse, and more galleries were showing their work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Kandinsky was—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Kandinsky. Oh, he was a great influence, too. So that we were being exposed, and then—then the museum—oh, we have to remember Madame, uh, Hilda [Hilla]—Countess Hilda [Baroness Hilla] Rebay.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, at the Guggenheim, that opened up the—that's before the museum opened—at the Plaza Hotel every Fri—once a month on Friday. She'd invite the artists, and Graham, John Graham, was—I think, uh, head of the department that she set up. And we would go into the Guggenheim apartment—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in the Plaza Hotel.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Plaza Hotel. And she'd have little goodies around, you know, tea things. [00:18:01] And—and we—I would see the painting. From floor to ceiling they were hung, you know. And of course, he had the Cézannes and the Picassos and whatnot. And, and at that time, she was seeking artists to—and gave them grants. And she came up to me. She says, "Are you an artist? Are you an artist?" And I shied away. And I went away, "No, no, no." [Laughs.] Which was very stupid on my part, but—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, because—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But I'm still doing the same thing. I still go around and say, "No, no, no." [Laughs.] And, um, but that was a wonderful exposure to have that opportunity. And then John Graham had written a book, *What is Art?*, that was quotes from various artists. And so that, uh—then the Guggenheim moved to 79th Street. I'm not, you know—where Bauer—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, around that time.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, around that time. Then, uh, Bauer had—she showed Bauer's work, non-objective work, and that was a fascinating experience, because she had these enormous frames, these enormous canvases on the floor, almost on the floor, and Chopin music playing, you know. And it was very nice, you know, and you walked around. You saw these non-objective paintings—only non-objective. And I think it was called the Museum of Non-Objective Art. And then finally they moved to the Guggenheim.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, the present one.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, where they're now. But, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was she a rather, uh—did you get to know her at all, or at least met her?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I met her. Oh, yes, we'd meet. She would be around.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Would she be—was she a—what was she like?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Aggressive, domineering, um, someone who—who was in position of power, you know. [00:20:06] And—but I give her credit, in that she did give artists grants.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: A lot of artists I know had gotten grants, and so I think that was very nice on her part, you know. They didn't like her, but they didn't mind getting—[laughs] getting the money. But I understand what she did was have monthly sessions with the artists, and they had to bring their work and critique. But I wasn't there, so I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But—now, you said, No, no, you weren't an artist. You were a little shy about it, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Shy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —did you simply want to be—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Shy. I was shy.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I always had the impression that you had to be—it took a hundred years before you became an artist. [Laughs.] That's the old school of thought. Not today. Today, you're an artist before you start. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: By the way, in these years, were you developing various close and lasting friendships among contemporaries?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh, various artists?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. You know, we, um, a lot of them are deceased. So we were close to Reinhardt. Freed knew de Kooning better than I did. He worked together with him on the—the May Day parades with Alfred [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, the Mexican artist. And they had floats, so the artists were working on the floats.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is in—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was in—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —in parades in New York?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In New York, yeah. I think it was '36. So I think de Kooning was there. Several other people, you know, working on these floats. And watching Siqueiros work, you know, with duco paint.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, really? Just sort of a—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —industrial enamel.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. Duco was used by a lot of artists. [00:21:58] Duco was used by, Kline, de Kooning. All

the painters used it, because it was a new thing, and it was a new experiment, and also because they didn't have money, and if you're working on large canvases, you needed a lot of paint.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: [They laugh.] You know? That's why some of the paint yellowed so easily. [Laughs.] And—but, uh, and Siqueiros, what Freed told me, was he would pour the paint on—onto the surface. I think it was Masonite, but I'm not sure. And then with a stick, he would draw in the object. And one of the objects that he drew in that Freed pointed out to me was the baby crying that's, I think, at the Museum of Modern Art, that Siqueiros did. So, um—but Freed always considered Siqueiros the first drip painter, [they laugh] because he dripped. But it never remained dripped, you see, but he poured the paint from the can onto the surface and—and let the movement suggest, and then he would outline or finish what he wanted to—it—be the final presentation of the work, you know. I understand he was a very emotional person, but I never met him.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, you keep mentioning Freed. You must have known him, then, throughout these years.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, uh, yes. I married him eventually in 1942. I think it's '42.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were running across each other all the time.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. We were together. We were together then. And went to school together. I got him into the Hofmann school. I went there first, and he said he was through with teaching—or learning. He wasn't going to go to any more schools. [00:24:00] He's had it. And, uh, I suggested that he come to one of the criticism, and there was a Friday night criticism. And—and he was—he didn't want to come by himself, so he brought a friend of his. And when he came to the class on Ninth Street, he said—and he saw Hofmann draw a hand. And he said, "That's the way I always wanted to draw a hand," you know. He experienced, like, a Michelangelo. And—oh, he was an avid student of Michelangelo, because he would go to the library, 42nd Street Library, in room 313, where they had their original works, and you would pull out the drawings that they had. And—and so he joined the class for a month. P.S., he never left it. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, I say. So that was shortly after you did.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, he—shortly after I joined the class, and he joined it. And—and it was a—a turning point for him, because he was doing representational work, and, uh, and he felt—he was—he—in the beginning, he was greatly influenced by Cézanne. And then gradually changed, you know. And—but the Hofmann experience, I think, left me as well as others—a dominating, uh, change in our perspective, and helped us see things. We may not be able to do it, you know, but we did learn how to see and look at works, and probably that's one of the reasons why a lot of works today does not appeal to me. [00:26:00] Um, not because they're representational or because they're abstract, but because they lack the plastic qualities that makes what I consider a work of art. You know, so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Pass—passive art, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, it's—it's really two-dimensional, what they're doing. And whether they realize it or not, it's a—it's a different kind of an academy, you know. You set forward—set a standard of abstract work, and you're following a certain concept, but you're—to me, it's not really abstract. I mean, I consider people abstract like Picasso, Matisse, and Miró, and Chagall, even though you see the figure. It's still—concept. So it—well, I think art is misunderstood. Anyway, this is a, uh, drawing that I did of a head. A pencil drawing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's even much earlier.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It's 1934.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But it's not really academic, in a sense.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No. It's simplified.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Simplified.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Most of these are like that.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah. See, this, uh—see, it's more—it's more—compositional. I mean, at—maybe the—this was about '34—maybe the academy would consider this primitive art, you know, that doesn't have the—this is later.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, you—you were aiming, though, toward, uh, simplifying things.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was aiming, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was very, you know—I wasn't going for the—the, uh—the anatomy, the detail of the anatomy. See, now—now we're going further, where these are—these are—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, let's—we'd better—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, I'm sorry.

ROBERT F. BROWN: I was just thinking—[00:27:59]

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Continuing our interviews with Lillian Orlofsky in Provincetown, Massachusetts. This is Robert Brown, the interviewer, and this is August 26, 1996. We began talking about your study with Hans Hofmann, and you felt that perhaps his most profound influence was in teaching how to see things. You, uh, began working with him as early as 1937 in New York, I believe—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —as you've described. Now, in 1938, the next year, was your first time to come to Provincetown. Is that right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he had a school, or was starting a school here. Is that right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, the former Hawthorne school.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Maybe you could describe that. Was that any different from going to school with him in New York? Was it—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, yes. The, um—first of all, the landscape was different. We were able to work out—out of doors, but I didn't. And—he—it was a very large studio that Hawthorne used in his day for his students. And it was a—it—the—I think the students were slightly different. There were more—there were—there were more exchange of students, because they didn't stay as long. It was more summer—um, have a student that stayed a week or two or three weeks, you know. It wasn't like in New York, where you—they were there for a month or more.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, what did Provincetown in general seem like to you? Was it a serious place, or was it just a wonderful place to spend the summer?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was a serious, wonderful place. There were mostly fishermen, poverty stricken. When I came in '38, they had goats and chickens. [00:30:00] They had little farms. The waterfront had little shacks where the fishermen would, uh, dry their nets, mend their nets, and so forth. We had A&P, two A&P stores and two First National stores, local stores.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Uh-huh [affirmative], but plenty of markets, then. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, but they were—there wasn't one major market. They were small stores. And they—they were throughout the town. Now it's centralized. And they had—we could get as much fish as we wanted, which was free. The fishermen always gave us fish, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Really?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I have never purchased fish in this town.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] Through friends of—among the fishermen.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: We—we'd go down to the docks, and the fishermen would just throw one, two, or whatever, kind of fish.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And it was always very fresh, you know. And—in fact, I went on a fishing boat one time with one of the fishermen that we became friendly with. And he took myself and Earl Pierce to go tuna fishing. And at 4 a.m., we had to get on the boat, and the captain was not very happy to have a female, and [inaudible] I won't be in their way. And—but it was very interesting. They would open up half the net and—and look down, and close the net, and then go to another net, and finally, they'd stop. And without anybody saying a word, they—they—they all had their job. One steered, the other hauled. The other steered, the other hauled.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, these were big fish they're bringing in, tuna.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They're big tuna. There were 90 tunas. [00:31:59] And I was crawling all over the place, [laughs] because there was no room for me. But when we finally got to dock, the—the fishermen were concerned that they might be cheated in weight, so somebody had to watch the scale.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, they were concerned that here on shore, the—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, on the shoreline.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the merchants were cheating a bit, huh?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. I think they were getting a doll—a penny a pound.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Wow.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know. And of course, the captain invited me to come again, because I was good luck.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] But I mean, so you did, in fact, fairly early, get right into the depths of—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —local life.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Local life. And they—they were very, uh—the fact is, on Pearl Street, they had a—a house right opposite the Days Studio, which is now the Fine Arts Work Center—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative], the Days Lumberyard studio.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Days Lumberyard. They had, uh, in—in the back, a—a large building—not very large, but it was only refrigerated. Refrigerated. They would make dinner or cook for the Hawthorne students.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hm, the fishermen were?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The fishermen, yes. They would cook. And—and the fishermen liked to go back with you to, uh, the beach and have cookouts, you know, and so forth. So it was really very nice. It—it was friendly. They were appreciative of the artists, because we rented their rooms.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, true.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They needed the extra money, and—so we indirectly helped them out by—by renting. And—the—their facilities were primitive. They used kerosene stove. There were a lot of fires in those days because of the stoves. And, uh, and refrigeration was iceboxes, so the ice man would come around delivering. And—and they lived that way, you know. [00:34:00] And it was not expensive. It was hard to get here. The train was very nice. I came with a white dress and left with a black one, because [they laugh] the open shutters—open windows and the choo-choo smoke and whatnot, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Kind of, uh—what do you call it? Darkened your clothing. It was the soot. But—it was too bad. They took the trains away, which was very important.

ROBERT F. BROWN: About when was that done? After World War II, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think so—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —after World War—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, but you came—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think it was '60s. I'm not sure, though.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you used to come down by train in the early days.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I came down—originally I came down by train. It changed at [inaudible], and then continued on to Provincetown. And I also came here by boat. I took a boat to Providence and came here on the night boat. And I also came by Boston, and took the early boat. So I really traveled here many ways, including the bus and my own car, eventually. [Laughs.] You know. And it was interesting. It took a long time, because by car, we had to go on 6A, which meant that we had to go through all the small towns.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, on the way down Cape Cod.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: On the way down, yes. In—through Providence, through, Hartford through Connecticut, you know. We really had to. But it was interesting. It took a long time, but, uh—

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was it that impelled you to come? I mean, there was—Hans Hofmann decided he would teach here. Was that one—was that the major reason you came?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, he—he—yeah, I came here because of Hofmann.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. Oh, there—I went originally—one time, I went to Gloucester and Rockport, just to look around, and, uh, and then when I was at Hofmann's I wanted to see what it's like to study here. [00:36:00] I had heard a lot about it. And it does have a different feeling. You have the boats. You have the seashore, you know, bathing, and the atmosphere was very nice. Students were exciting, different, you know, so that—and of course Hofmann himself. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he different, would you say, when—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, no, you know. He was enigmatic, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I just—he—he went out sketching a lot early in the morning. Then he'd come back, you know. And we would sketch. And of course, some of us tried to work out of doors, but, I think, at one point he discontinued it because they weren't close by. He would have to run up the hill, down the hill, you know, instead of settling in a given area where all the students would be together. And since he liked to have students around him while he criticized, it was a little difficult. And also it's—it's difficult on your health to keep running around this way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And so I think it was discontinued, outdoors, because Hofmann really liked to criticize from the object. That was the main difference between the time I studied with him and the GIs.

ROBERT F. BROWN: After World War II?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: After the war.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, throughout this time, you were coming down here. You—you already were acquainted with William Freed, a fellow painter.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, uh, did he come down—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, he came down—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —to Provincetown?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He came down in 19—when we got married. After we got married, we came down here. I think it was '44. I'm not very good at dates.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. You were married in about 1942?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: '42, yes. I think so. I hope I'm right. [They laugh.] But we both came down, and we rented a place on the other side of town, the east end—west end. [00:38:01] Is that the west end?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, that's the west end. We rented a place right on the bay. That was our first experience of having a cottage on the bay. And—and this was with a man who came here to—to—not to live too long, but he lived to 92, and he had this very primitive house. And we were there for one season. Then the following year—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he was interested in artists, this man?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was interested just in, you know, living as—as economically as possible. He was a New England person. Then the following year, I rented a place—no, not the following year, but when—oh, no. When I came by myself, I rented with a Portuguese by the name of Bent on Race Road—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Bent.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —and I shared a cottage with a friend of mine. And we had to use her facilities for bathing and cooking. This was just a sleeping area. And—and I had to walk from one end of town to the other to the Hofmann school, which was very good. Got up there, and I was out at—nine o'clock I was in that class to make sure that my easel was where it was supposed to be. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he quite insistent that it be a certain place, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: If you were working from the object, yes, because how else is he going to criticize it, you know? So it was very important that that was the spot that you were working from. And it was a very nice large room. And—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And his school was on Miller Hill Road.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Miller Hill Road, yes. And he had—a little thing over the, uh, the class, and then they also had the house there. And Mrs. Hofmann, I think, rented out some rooms. Yeah. [00:40:00] And it was—it was very, very nice. It was a nice, healthy atmosphere.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was he a fairly kindly fellow? I mean, pleasant enough to—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was pleasant. He was—friendly. He was—he had a kind of a jovial attitude. You never felt, uh, pressured. You never felt that he was—he was moody or difficult, in the sense of tension, things like that. When he came to class, it was—he was set to teach, you know, and joked around a little bit, you know. And—and—he was very energetic. It was very inspiring to just to see—just watch him. [Laughs.] You know—

ROBERT F. BROWN: So he—well, he attracted enormous numbers of students, didn't he?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, he attracted a lot of students from throughout the country.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was always amazed at the number of students that came from California, and Texas, and south of—you know, some of the students came from New Zealand and Europe. He really did, and—and that was interesting, because he did not show in this country at the time. One of the first times I saw his paintings, major works, was in 1944 when he had his first one-man show at the Art of This Century. And Frederick Kiesler designed the—the, gallery. And that was quite a revelation, because here I—I was studying with a—an instructor by name only, without knowing what kind of work he was doing.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I may have seen here and there something. You know, there may have been an exhibit in different places. But a body of work I didn't see. [00:42:00] And, uh, it was quite exciting. But the work was basically representational. It was abstract, but it was integrated with the—with the object, you know, whereas some of his still lifes that you saw the interiors that later on were shown. And we were working that way, you know, with the—object and the abstract, or tried to work together with the form and the space. It was difficult to—for me, anyway, to introduce both. [Phone rings.] Oh dear. [Laughs.]

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, in Hofmann's class, um, his Friday criticisms, you've said, attracted a lot of people. Even the realists were—were—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Attracted guests.

ROBERT F. BROWN: By the late '30s, were the realists—were they very common, or were they very vocal at that time, people who were following—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yes, very vocal.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. They—they considered the abstract artists, anti-social. They were not, uh, what do you call it—well, they wanted the—they wanted the—they wanted to social comment. They wanted a certain direction, a certain thinking. And—and also the colors were different, the forms were different. It was being, more or less, non-objective. You're not making a social statement. You're making any statement, or whatever—whatever appealed to you at the moment. And, uh—so this is contrary to what, at that time, a very strong social—sentiment, because they had the Spanish Civil War on, and Hitler just came into power, and there was a lot of dissention and a lot—of friction. [00:44:00] So—and then with the bombing of Guernica, with the thing that—what's his name—Picasso [inaudible]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yes, the *Guernica* painting, sure.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The *Guernica* painting. And then the little booklets that Picasso, Miró, Léger, and a number of other artists designed and tried to raise money.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So these things were all in the air, right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: These things were all in the air, so that, uh, by being abstract and—and—and non-social statement, you added the tension.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, did—how about Hofmann himself? Did he, um, take sides, or was he—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, no. Because you pointed—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He was apolitical.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You said he, um, he insisted that students work from nature.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Did you do still lifes, and you worked from models as well, so—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. But that—that was not a social comment.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: This was working from nature—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —as Cézanne worked from nature.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, just, uh, you know, what I can see, the plastic and aesthetic qualities of what I'm looking at, pictorially. They were trying to create a picture rather than make a social—it may be a social comment. You know? Like Picasso with his tomatoes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But, uh, it was not intended.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, now, Hofmann, insisted that you put your easel right in front of the subject, you told me.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, now, the easel—no. I had to be parallel to the subject, not in front of it, but parallel.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay, but parallel to the subject. Okay.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In other words, I'm not going to turn around, as I've seen some people draw, where, uh, you are to the right of me, but my easel's on the left, and I have to—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, no.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —turn my head clear across the room to see you.

ROBERT F. BROWN: If—if—if I were to your right, the easel should also be, say, to your right, parallel with it.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Parallel to it. Yes. [00:46:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. And, um, the—the teaching was based on cubism, fundamentally.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was based on cubism fundamentally, and it—and it was—it was a—it was a planal concept, working with planes, the recession of planes, moving of planes, tension, moving, uh, the plane vertically up or down, or side to side, or diagonally. It was also based on axes, where the axis was in relation to the plane—the planal axis.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And these—these planes and axes in relation to the picture plane. So they take a different form, if it's parallel to the—to the out—outer space, outer line of the canvas. Let's say the axis is parallel, vertical and horizontal. The plane is parallel. But if it's tilted, then it's not. It's in opposition to the picture plane. So we worked on that.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he felt that it should not be in opposition, that it should be consonant.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It should be.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, it should be in opposition.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It is in opposition.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah? Okay. The problem, you've also said, with—he always set a problem, but it was not to be—

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ROBERT F. BROWN: And we were talking about Hofmann and cubism. He stressed always in his teaching the importance of the empty space.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, because [inaudible]—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was that difficult to get across to a student, do you think—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —that concept?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, because we're not aware of the fact that—that even though my hand is positive, it can be in empty space, and we have to take the space around it. It has equal importance. And the relationship of the empty space and relationship to the positive space creates a different dimension and appearance, so that the appearance of the object, like a figure, can be radically different than what you think you see in front of you. Because now it's conforming to the picture plane.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And how you started with your first plane.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, so that the head may become very small. It may become very large. It may be oval. It may be square. Um, it—it—it's all a relative thing, and so that the—the picture plane—the tensions in the axis creates a new image. So we're not looking—we no longer see the same image—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —once it's transformed and translated onto the picture plane. And then your feeling is different than mine. Your emphasis will be slightly different than mine, radically different, you know, so that—for this reason, no two works look alike or should look alike, because they're dealing with two separate feelings and concepts. [00:02:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: And Hofmann was very, uh, tolerant of this, or even expected that this was the case.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He preferred that you feel—that you follow your feeling.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But your feeling should be related to the space around you. And, uh—and also plastic. How you will—what the plastic relationship is between—and the colors that you use, or whether you're using flat area colors, [inaudible] complex or little planes of color. There are various concepts and approaches. So that—that becomes an important factor.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You were to draw all over, or you were to think in terms of the whole canvas. Is that right? I mean, he—he urged you think in terms of the—the whole.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yes. You're—it doesn't mean you have to draw all of it, though.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No, but you were to think it.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I can have an empty space all over, too, and have just one dot.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It depends—[they laugh] it depends where I put that dot—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —and how. So it—the idea is that you think in terms of the entire surface.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Okay. That dot may be only one—well, it may only be one dot, but you've thought of the entire surface. Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That's right. Where that dot is placed in the relationship to everything else, the size, the angle, the axis, and so forth.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: A lot of considerations.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, you've said that Hofmann really never, uh, goaded you. He tried to get you to develop your own style and forms.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, he—well, the—my—my feeling is that once you know, or once you experience nature, you—you will develop on your own, because your feelings—and your emphasis will be different than somebody else's. [00:03:57] So that if you were able to understand what nature is offering, then you will automatically develop on your—I don't think you have to worry about a style. I really don't. Because it's like a handwriting. Do you stop to think whether your penmanship is like somebody else's?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know, it eventually becomes your own, or even the structure of a sentence, although we all learned how to construct it. So, eventually, if you follow your feeling, and if you understand, uh, the formal problems, I think that there is no problem about whether you're an in—individual creative artist or not.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, he, um—you've said he, on the one hand, he—the way you drew figures, he—he changed your approach, and yet he did this in a very gentle way, I guess.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. He changed—because I—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this is perhaps true of many of the other students, right? They changed their approaches.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: For everybody. Everybody had to change their approach.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: What happens is that when you experience it, the negative and positive space—let's say I want to just work with negative space.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: My—my—the concept itself dictates another approach, and the appearance will be different.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: If I'm working with, let's say, with negative and positive space, and I want to introduce the subject—the object, the nose, the face, whatever—the appearance will change, because of the elements that I'm introducing. And, uh, and the way I introduce it is different than yours, than the way you would see the same thing. [00:05:59] And when you go into a class, and you see the various students working on their drawings, and you wonder how is it they saw the object that way and not your way of seeing it. And appearance on their canvas is so radically different. So a lot of it is based on previous experiences. A lot of it is based on, um, your ability to conceive and—and how far you can go with the subject. So it's—it's—it's based on many factors.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you a more experienced student than a lot of his students? Because, I mean, you had —

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No. There were a lot of students that were very experienced. There were a number of students that weren't. The WPA were experienced students—experienced artists, part, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, as you were, too.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But they became students.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] Again.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Again. But, uh, but they were—they were developed in a different direction.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now he—I don't know if he encouraged it, but you've said that Hofmann—that students tended to follow him as he went around critiquing other students.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah, he did encourage it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he—did he—was it always done rather gently, I mean, by and large?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, he'd suggest over. He'd say, "Come on over here," you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: "Follow me," you know, and—and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And how—how did the then student—how did the student he was critiquing feel? He did it very gently?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, they didn't mind it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Because this was part—it was not a personal thing. You'd feel, uh, frustrated or put upon if it was only you that everybody stood around.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. But no.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But they stood around—

ROBERT F. BROWN: —everybody.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Every student. So it was not a personal, you know, vendetta, [laughs] you know, somebody might call it, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: So he, uh, was, you know. [00:08:00] And at the—it was wonderful, because I think in a way, Hofmann was a showman.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He loved to have a crowd. He loved to have people around him. So he expanded, you know. He just pontificated as much as he could.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] Well, you've said that, rather radically, though, he sometimes would take your—your drawing, and, sort of, tear it apart and lay it out on clean paper.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: The first time that happened, that must have been rather frightening, and—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I was scared—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Like, how dare he? [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, I mean—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know. Well, you see, it's interesting the different methods that different teachers take, but I think he felt that getting this radical—giving this radical approach, he, um, he made you aware of the diff—what could happen. You were really tearing the figure apart when you were drawing. You know, when I place the head, let's say, in the upper head—the head to the upper right, and the legs to the lower left, and—and it looks like terribly distorted, you know, and eventually as I'm able to spatially correlate the two, you see, well, it becomes a transformed figure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But not visible immediately.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Phone rings.] And he was able to—

[Audio Break.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: So this, uh, technique of Hofmann of literally tearing apart your drawings and then reconstructing them in front of you on the other—must—once you got over being daunted by that, it was a very, very effective—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was very effective.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —way of making a point, huh?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yes. I thought it was very effective. A lot of people thought the same thing. And a lot of them, uh, almost—were emotionally—[Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: What? [00:10:00]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Emotionally taken—or destroyed, almost, you know. Not really, but what—it—it—it created an emotional impact, you know, somebody to tear your work apart. And, uh, and he would say, "Yeah, yeah. It'll come together. Don't worry," and his yeah, yeah business. "It'll be okay," you know. "You'll see," you know. And—and he would tack it together. "We need some tacks, we flip this here," and he'd be shifting. That's what he did, was shift the object, shift the head to the right, to the left, up, or down; shift the legs. And this shifting that he did when he tore the paper—because he tore the area where the legs were, the area where the thighs were, the stomach, or the breasts, or the head, and he shifted this around. He showed you how you can—how plastically, plane-wise, you were able to shift and move these objects around and then create a new vision. And that was the whole idea, pictor—and it moved in and out of space.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And this he did with you, I assume, among other people.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He did it with everyone.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. So it was a—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Not with everybody, but he did with a number of students. Yes, he did it with me. I—I'm so—I'm very angry that I—I may have saved it, but I don't know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What, some of these examples of—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I—some of this. Because usually I save a lot of things, but then I would have to go through a mess.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But he apparently suggested throughout his teaching that you might get very radically different results, that there wasn't any certain conclusion you'd come to. In fact, I think, didn't he say that you may not quite know what you're moving toward?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Sometimes, no. No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Because there—there is what we call the accidents, and the unexpected life of the canvas, of the work, that well, inadvertently it was introduced, and, uh, that—that by working, you're doing—[00:12:12] You see, when you add—when you add a color, and you add another color, you're introducing a new element. It has two things. Then it creates a third thing, the form, the—the relationship of another thing. And then you change that. Then it radically changes everything else. And if I put a yellow here and a blue there, what is the relationship between the yellow and blue, that is in the lower left and the blue in the upper right? You know, that—so it—movements start to occur. Then you see shapes or forms, and uh, and you follow your feeling, or follow the dictates of the canvas. So, unless you are—you have a set idea in mind, that, this is what I want done, and this is how I'm going to do it, and you set the example, then that's what you do. You know, then it—then it—then it's a formula. Then it's a thing that—you're working with a—a problem—with a, excuse me, I'm going to stop this.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, there's—yeah.

[Audio Break.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Ai, yi, yi.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Now, um, you know, you've pointed out also that he—he—he gave these critiques once a week, but he also gave critiques on Tuesdays, I think, or other days, where he seemed to almost contradict what he'd said.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he said, "Well, that's part of the process."

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But he also—he felt differently, you know. He started with a different idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: With a—so naturally, uh, you know, you'd say, "Well, Mr. Hofmann, I saw the leg on the left side." [00:14:00] "Well, today, well, in relation to the other movement, the leg has moved." Not physically. Pictorially. So that—that's another experience. Because once you've changed something, everything changes with it. It's not a thing—it's not static. The canvas is a living thing. It moves as you move with it. Because you can't say, I fixed this eye over here, and it remains fixed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Unless, of course, you worked with that concept. Then that's another idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: That's another direction.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, did—did this lead, perhaps, to trying to finish something in one shot, so that you didn't have to deal with the matter of, uh, it being different because you're—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: No.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I don't, uh—no. I don't think in one shot had anything to do with it. You may finish a painting in one shot, but that's not a—a deliberate act.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Were you frustrated by the fact that you might never quite find the solution? I mean, because he did say you might not, right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I think we're all frustrated. Any creative artist is frustrated. [They laugh.] They have to—they—if they aren't frustrated, they aren't a creator.

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's right. That's right, yeah. They're—they're—they're bottled by the energy. [Laughs.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They're bottled in. They might just as well Xerox their previous works.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You, uh, found he was then remarkably gifted at this. I mean, he was gentle, he was congenial. He was insistent, though, as well, wasn't he? He was a very effective teacher.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, in his subtle—in his subtle way, in a sense, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. What happened—you've said after World War II, with the coming of all of those GI students, um, he had to change his approach to teaching.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well—

ROBERT F. BROWN: For one thing, they didn't want to sit in the studio, evidently.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yeah.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They wanted to get out more.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They brought their work in. Therefore, he was working, uh, not from the object, but directly from the work. [00:16:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: I see.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: So criticism, of necessity, changed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: They'd bring in their work, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. So that was already a different approach. And almost, uh, with the idea of collages, bringing in a collage idea, because he would tear up—pieces of paper, paint

on it a certain color, and tack it on the canvas to show you. He did the same thing, except—tearing up the canvas or whatever it was. He would take strips of paper, slips of object, put it on, and show you how the relationship is, and, what would happen if I introduced this blue or this shape, this square over here, and I introduced something else? What happens to the two-dimensionality of the canvas, and what happens to the entire approach, you know? So—so he was—so that was another approach, another concept. And that, too, was a teaching experience.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Well, were you just about as involved with—with his classes after World War II as you had been before, because you did study with him into the 1950s?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I did go there. I constantly went there, you see, and I didn't always, uh, work in class, you know. But I did go. I did listen to his criticism. I did follow him. Occasionally I would draw from the model, but—but not as regularly as I did in the early days, where I really was working my butt off here all day. [They laugh.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, he was—you would say that, on balance, he was a—a very effective and, uh, important influence on you and many, many other people.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think he was important. I think Hofmann, uh, is not recognized as an outstanding teacher that he was. [00:18:02] Nobody today teaches as he does, or did. And—and as an artist. He was a creative artist. He inspired people. He also may have frustrated a lot of people. He also may have indirectly destroyed a lot of

people, in the sense that the—the creative problem was so magnified, was so enormous, that the individual felt that he could never achieve something. See, it isn't like you're sitting down, and I'm going to copy you. I'm going to make a portrait of you, and I'm going to say, "Well, you have brown eyes, you wear glasses, and you have—your hair is parted this and this way." There's not that much of a problem in the sense of saying, "Well, I'm going to see how I can creatively recreate you."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Not imitate you.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And that's where the problem—and it's a very frustrating experience. And you have to have it in you. And when you read the Matisse article that I gave you, it's a very important article, um, on how he felt, as I do, the importance of drawing and the importance of learning the fundamentals, so that as a creative artist, you don't have to worry about repeating yourself. You worry when you have nothing say, Oh, you don't know enough.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And you don't have the experience. Not the application of the—of the medium that you're using. It's not the application of the—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —uh, paint. It's what you do with it.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You know? And we all use paint. We all use different, uh, mediums, you know, but that's it. [00:20:00] And—but it's what we do with it in the end. That's exactly what Picasso does, what Matisse does, or Hofmann does, what all the creative artists do.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: They have the tools with which to work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And you know, I go to a sketch class at the Art Association, and, uh, I like to work in ink. And I use a matchstick, the wood, the back part of the wood, because it—it's easy flow, and it absorbs a certain amount of ink, and I—it's free. And somebody turned around and said, "Now I see. I'd like to—where'd you get your gimmick," and—and—and that was the tools of the trade? [They laugh.] So I gave them my gimmick. She thought the matchstick did the trick, you see, there was tricks, you know, I was using a trick, you know. So that's applicable to everything else, you know, where they think that—they accomplish some—I don't know. It—to study with Hofmann really meant working hard.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Huh.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You really had to work.

ROBERT F. BROWN: He did—he did, uh, pay close attention to what you were doing, and you were expected to—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: He paid close attention, and, you know—because he gave you problems. You had a problem. Each time you—you know, you had a special problem. Uh, how are you going to render the space, and—many problems that you're faced with. Are we going to work with form only, or shapes only, or with complexes only? Am I going to work with black and white only? Uh, do I work with a limited—at first, he encouraged a limited palette, yellow, brown, and black, and gray. It was easier to control. You couldn't imitate, because you had your own brown and black. [00:22:01] You know, you're not going to see the shadow. You're not going to see the violet or pink. And, uh, so—so that you were able—it was easier to—to control. And—and also, you had less problems, because you had to worry whether the movement was there. It wasn't interrupted, because maybe it was light there. It was the tiny movement of yellow, so it was—you moved the color with yellow against black, or whatever color you chose.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But you've also pointed out to me that, uh, black and white could be thought of as color.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Hofmann indicated that, or you knew this.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes. Yes. I—I used black and white as color.

ROBERT F. BROWN: You'd—you'd moved a good far away by this time, from the Soyers', kind of, brownish sort of thing.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Brown. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Even the way they drew.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Which you had not been happy with, uh—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —at that time, even.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, it's very limited, you know, because, as I say, you—another face, another portrait, another figure.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. There was beginning to be just, sort of, a routine or predictable quality to it?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Um, so in '38 is when you first worked with Hofmann here, but you continued, then, into the '40s to work either with him here or in—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, not here.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —or New York.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I—I was in New York, mostly. When he was here, I used to attend the lectures and watch him criticize, because I liked that. I always was fascinated to see what—how he transformed somebody else's work. It was really exciting, and it was exciting to see the way the paintings were transformed, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. And he did this very effectively, but gently, is that right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I don't know what you mean by gently, because you keep repeated the word "gentle."

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, I don't mean to—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: [Laughs]. But, uh, I—yes, it was gently, you know. [00:23:59] But when he worked, he worked with a certain emotional impact, a certain force, and you know, and you were carried away with it, too, you know. You no longer existed. Oh, he'd turn around, "Ay, yi. You see, you've got to do this." "Oh, yes." And so he would point out the various structural elements that were necessary. He also, um, made little drawings, little sketches, to show how it could be conceived. You know? How we did this and that, and now we'll take—and he drew the outline of the picture plane, and he would say, "Now, here's the model stand. In relation to the model stand, this is where the figure is." Now, we always made a model stand that was bigger than the figure, but—but relatively speaking, it was smaller. So we had to, you know, sort of, change the whole concept. And this—for this reason, it was exciting to see him do these illustrations, you know. And, uh, and it also gave you a new vision to be able to look at.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Do you—you were—you were back in Provincetown by 1944, you've said—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —with—with, uh, William Freed.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: William Freed, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And that's when you, uh, began renting at Days Lumberyard.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I rented it in '45 or '46. You know, I rented from this woman. I just—I just found her letter, in 1945, Anna Neagoe. She had gone to Paris, and so we rented her place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What was her name?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Anna Neagoe. N-E-A-G-O-E. And he was a poet that—Peter Neagoe. And, uh, so they lived in New York. She stayed with him in Provincetown. [00:26:01] And I—and, well, that year she wasn't coming back, and we sublet the place from her. We paid \$50, then, for the year.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Gee.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Now, uh, we had nothing but cold water, and a john for 10 of us.

ROBERT F. BROWN: This is when you were in the Lumberyard studios?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The Lumberyard. And we were like that for the entire period of time that we were in the Lumberyard until '58. We shared that—but the only thing is, Joe Oliver, who bought the place afterwards, rented—moved the, uh, the—that toilet from studio three to studio seven. That was the only improvement.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [They laugh.] That was a little more central, or something? [Laughs.]

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I don't know what it was, because he didn't include a light, and he didn't include window. Freed had to cut out [laughs] a window because it was so close. I was part of his studio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So you were there, then, under these conditions. This was in the summer only. Is that right?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, only in summertime.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Until 1958, I think you said.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Something like that, yeah. That's when we bought this land here. [Laughs.]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Um, what was the advantage of that? Was it cheaper than any of the other accommodation?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, one, the light was wonderful. It was north light. It was built for Hawthorne students. He had so many students a day, who was very social minded, built the studios above his lumberyard for the, uh, Hawthorne students. And then he—but he gave them nothing except this space and light. And that's what he did. And we rented it. He sold it to Joe Oliver, and then Joe Oliver decided to renovate the place and modernize it. And so we brought the property here on Brewster Street and, uh, rented the [inaudible] studios, two studios. [00:28:02] And living quarters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that, in the end, was a—preferable to living communally?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, no. No, he changed the whole system there. He made it into apartments. It was no longer a studio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Was there an advantage, though, of being the—the—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —the very intimate neighbor of all these other artists.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was very nice, because we were—

ROBERT F. BROWN: Was it?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Nobody interfered with anybody in the studio, but when we—but we did go onto the ramp, and we would have our little, creative fights, our discourses. And, we, uh—Hofmann had one of the studios there. First he had studio six, and then he—he had studio eight. Eight or nine. I forgot now. But when he was next door, we heard him come in at five o'clock in the morning, shuffling things around, and moving things, cleaning up his place, and getting ready to work, you know. And he was an early riser, and he was there early in the morning. You know. And—and it was inspiring, because everybody's working. They—their studios they used to work in, you know.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah. Did you always try to work long hours, or did you happen to?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, I'm—I'm an early riser. I always worked alone. Freed never liked anybody in his

studio.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, you said he liked to work—insisted on working alone.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, alone. So—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And he worked regular hours.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Regular hours. More or less, you know. So we worked separately. We did very well that way. [They laugh.] We got along. That's how you stay married.

ROBERT F. BROWN: [Laughs.] Um, I'm going to ask you another question or so. In 1949, there was a well-known discussion and all at the Art Association—Forum 49.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Forty-nine, yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you were here that summer of 1949.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But that was not the Art Association. [00:30:00]

ROBERT F. BROWN: No? Okay.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: The Forum 49 was held—

ROBERT F. BROWN: That's right.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: —it's, uh—where the exhibition was.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yep.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: On Commercial Street, in the old, printing place. You know, and, uh, and they had lectures there by various artists, architects, and poets, and—

ROBERT F. BROWN: And, um, was this, sort of, ad hoc, or was this part of a pro—of a series of things, this Forum 19—Forum 49?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Well, at that year—it didn't last long. I think it only lasted one year. I don't know why it folded. I think [inaudible] disappeared.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yes.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: So, uh, that was his wonderful idea.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And you've said that it had a considerable impact at the time, and—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, it did.

ROBERT F. BROWN: And perhaps we could look at it as an indicator of the mid-20th century here.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I think it might be. Because at that time, Jackson Pollock had a spread in *Life* magazine, in which they asked the question, "Is Jackson Pollock America's greatest painter?" And they brought up one of his paintings here, at Forum 49, and hung it as a—what would you call it now?

ROBERT F. BROWN: Almost a mural, or—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Almost like a mural.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And something we can talk about, and they had his headline enlarged. And it was a talkative thing. It was a very provocative, um, painting, you know, the drip painting. And everything centered around that, the—I don't really remember too much about it, but, I remember Nat Halper had a discussion on James Joyce, and he brought a—a, uh, a tape recording of *Finnegan's Wake* that Joyce had—[00:32:02]

ROBERT F. BROWN: —had given, or a reading?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Reading.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was a reading. And, uh, they had the different—I forgot now who was on the panel, but the various artists were on the panels, and it was a very inviting, because we had crossed opinions, you know, between this one and that one.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Oh, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: It was not individual. In other words, we disagreed to agree, you know. So it was really very nice that way.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But that was—in those days, there was still a good deal of opposition, at least here—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —from the part of the, uh, more old-fashioned artists, wasn't there?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No. We had different schools here. We had a lot of—as a result of Hofmann coming here, we had the [inaudible] Kendall [ph] school, Morris Davidson school. Uh, we also had Henschel, who was here before. And we had chief, [ph] Cape Cod School. We had other schools I don't remember now. But these are the ones that I do remember off-hand. So there was—a contradiction in—in teaching methods, and a contradiction—so the artists that came here were all interested, more or less, in modern painting, and, sort of, phased out the conservative. But the Art Association still had a number of conservative painters. I shouldn't use the word conservative. Representational painters.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And they were—they were influential as far as the Art Association was concerned, because they controlled the exhibitions and the, uh, the hanging. Finally, they once had an idea that, we'll have the modern group for tourists and a conservative group. [00:34:05] And so, when they hung their paintings, they'd have the—the conservatives on one wall, and the modern another, and some of the conservatives said, "Gee, the modern look different than mine." So the next time they went—they—they—they submitted their work to the modern jury. [They laugh.] So—because it was a more impressive thing, they decided that they were going to mix the show, and not show only conservative on one side and modern on the other.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And so—but—but there was this infighting a lot, but it was good. The artists were there to vent his opinion on how the exhibition should go. The, uh, the auditorium was packed. The galleries were packed with—with exciting programs. They had Hofmann on a—on a panel. They had Davidson, [inaudible], all the rest of the, teachers and artists in town. So the—you know, they—it was a more exciting period, and that's something that we're lacking now. I think we're more exhibiting and more sales rather than any activity.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I may be wrong, but that's my feeling. We didn't have that many galleries, but we did have cooperative galleries, you know. HCE was not a cooperative gallery. Two-fifty-six was. The Sun gallery.

ROBERT F. BROWN: All cooperatives.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: All cooperatives.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And, uh, there was another gallery. I don't—there were a lot of little galleries, but they were more in a serious nature, you see.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: But now, I don't know about the galleries. Of course, we didn't have as many people here. I used to walk down Commercial Street, Freed and I. Every ninth person we were able to say hello. Now every hundredth person, I—I couldn't. [00:36:01]

ROBERT F. BROWN: Sure.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: You don't know any of that. You can't walk down the streets to begin with.

ROBERT F. BROWN: It's so crowded with, uh, visitors and tourists, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Packed. Packed.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, it was never quite that way.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Oh, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: But would you and Freed stay here, what, three or four months a year, and—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: In the beginning, we only stayed two months, because we had a—we had a—we were working people, too. And, uh, and gradually we extended our stay until three months, and then four months was the most.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, did you gradually work out that, uh, you could do that? You could split your time between here and New York—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —and carry out your work without—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —a break, so to speak?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Yes, because we were able to adjust our lives later on. You know, uh, economically.

ROBERT F. BROWN: What about in New York? Did you teach, or did you keep going that way?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: I did teach for a short period of time. I—I taught around 15 years at the Bronx House in New York City.

ROBERT F. BROWN: The Bronx?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: Bronx, B-R-O-N-X, house. It was a settlement place.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah?

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And, uh, I had two classes twice a week, you know. But I gave it up because it was too far to travel. And then we had—they had to take me home. And we had a problem with traveling. It took me too long to get home, so I just gave it up.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Yeah, yeah.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: And I didn't teach [inaudible].

ROBERT F. BROWN: So that never became really a prominent part of your—

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No, no.

ROBERT F. BROWN: —what you were trying to do.

LILLIAN ORLOWSKY: No.

ROBERT F. BROWN: Well, um, we could talk a little more, but I want to get in greater detail about the '50s.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]