Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Theresa Schwartz, 1965 March 25

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Theresa Schwartz on March 25, 1965 The interview was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The sound quality for this interview is poor throughout, leading to an abnormally high number of inaudible sections. The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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

DOROTHY SECKLER: Dorothy Seckler interviewing Theresa Schwartz on March 25, 1965 in Mrs.—Miss Schwartz's studio. I was interested in what you were saying about the, uh, way an artist would like to the rest of the art world, whether it's a good thing to be consciously very much involved with it, or stand off from it, and whatever your position is right now [laughs] with it.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I've been thinking about that a great deal because I used to think that an artist should paint positively, only positively. He should be concerned only with himself, and his work, and as far as possible, consciously leave out everybody else's work when he works, because then that brings in the business of artists who paint like other artists. Now, I'm not talking about that. But I realize when I started on these paintings, thinking about them six months ago, that I was painting positively, but I also had a negative feeling that I wanted to include in my work the things that I was against, and by—and doing that, not by talking about it, but by putting so much positive quality in my work that it would act as a negation of the things that I was against.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And a thing that I was mostly against was the impersonal quality of most of the work that seemed to be showed last season. And it was impersonal either when it was not objective and even some of the last Op art paintings, I feel were completely impersonal because they used cut-outs from advertisements that I thought were merely taking an impersonal medium and perpetuating it in a way. [00:02:00] So I had been using the—a figure, a particular figure, with a particular face, and I thought I wanted to use this in such a way that the canvas would contain the figure. Plus, the things that went up went in to make the life around the figure. The elements that were actually happening, the things in life that were really there, the things that weren't pictured in advertisements, for instance, but that existed all around us. Or if you used objects that were used in advertisements, you used them in a way that were meaningful to you personally. And I wanted to create a canvas that was so full that the eye would just feast on it, and that the response would be not just an experience of the eye, but it would bring in memory, and the past, your past, the viewer's past, the artist's past, the very, very definite present, odd bits that were occurring all around us—whether it was in the art world or not in the art world, if it was a significant thing in the art world that seemed to belong, along with the figure to use it—but only, only in its relative importance. For instance, when I use a little square that might look like Op art, I'm in a way saying this is as important as I want to make it. It's part of what's going on around us, and I don't have to make it less important or more important of the figure. I just want it there—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —with the other elements and, uh, not singled out for any particular tension . In fact, as it comes out in the canvas, the figure always is more important than the declaration, and that's the way it should be. [00:04:00]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I thought that it might be interesting to put on the record something about the actual, uh, look of the painting. Do you have a title for it yet? We might get a photograph [laughs] and add it to your file.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I can get you a photograph. I haven't thought of it because it's obviously a sequence of something, and I didn't want to give it a misleading—I'll tell you a very tentative title I had, because it was just being a little bit funny, but I don't know if I'll use it. I was thinking, well, it could be *Fifth Avenue*, *Saks, Bomatella* , *Museum of Modern Art. 1965*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Now, of course, the nude figure, well it's there anyhow.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. She at least wears a hat.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: She wears a hat, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So she [laughs] sort of has status for—in some way, a figure that's related to civilization and not just being nude in—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: She is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —Arcadia. [Laughs.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Exactly, Dorothy. That's exactly what. She's very much an urbane, or an urban young woman. She's not in the landscape, and she's not in front of a window, and she doesn't have a pot of flowers near her, but she exists in line and on the same surface—on the same line of vision with—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —the other elements that make up the whole life. And I don't mean just the important things. For instance, you can't put current events in the canvas, but the—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some people have tried to recently. Like the Kennedy confirmation has appeared in visual art.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I always have a feeling that that's exactly what dates the canvas, the need to bring in something terribly important. For instance, I would love to bring in the whole business of the revolution that's going on around us today. There's a Negro revolution going on, and it's very related to a student revolution that's going on, and I've thought about it. [00:06:06] The easiest thing in the world to do is to put marching heads on the canvas, but I thought, No. If the revolution is to make—to achieve the ultimate in equality, a lack of hypocrisy, a complete openness of conditions between people, an honesty, well then the most you can do is paint honestly. I mean, you can't encompass more than what goes on a canvas. You can't paint a revolution as a battle, but you can paint it by saying, I will do away with all the dishonest elements that I feel exist in painting. I think it's dishonest to say that painting should be, uh, pure, or painting should leave out all the living vital qualities, or that painting should be related to just how it affects the retina. I think there's a kind of dishonesty there because the painter is so much more than that, that I think painting with a quarter of your intelligence—because I think even if the whole intelligence is involved, then the more results than just moving the retina. I think if a painter honestly transfers himself to the canvas, then he in a way is making a very small revolution on the canvas. For instance, I never knew this until I began doing these paintings. I seem to be a combination of many things, and I suppose many women are. I have a great interest in the sensual in painting. I can be terribly overcome with color, and I love to create the human form. I get great pleasure. On the other hand, I'm obviously what you might call an intellectual woman. I can't help that. [00:08:01] Well, I'm not going to negate one or the other. That's why my paintings are structured. They're geometrical. The form is very carefully laid out because to do it sloppily would be a negation of myself. On the other hand, I insist on the sensual being right there with it. So you might say in that way, you're creating—if you're doing it, you're bringing everything—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —of yourself on the surface, and you're making it kind of a small revolution on the canvas, which is, I think, the most that any painter can do.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's very well put.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, I sometimes don't even know how—how I mean it until I say it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And sometimes I stood here and I'll say something to myself, because I have to hear the words [laughs] before I know exactly what I mean. And when I was doing headless figures, I think this in a way was because there was a part of myself that was not ready to come to the surface in the canvas. And because they were headless, they could be more related to a more ambiguous style of painting, which was Abstract Expressionism, which had the ambiguity—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —in the style.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, once you're willing to leave that, and to say that you can almost begin to put—transfer the whole self to the canvas, which is what I think every artist eventually does when he reaches a

mature state, then I think you have to throw away the ambiguity and your painting has to be as clear as—well, as a billboard, as a billboard really.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. These are course from Wendy your photograph. We don't have to talk about these today, but we do have silhouettes that are very clear, very flat, and yet very sensuous in all of the figures we're looking at. [00:10:01]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And there's no shading. There's no—

DOROTHY SECKLER: —no modulation.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No modulation at all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's absolutely clear—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And no color on the figure, if you notice. They're white.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hmm. Except for the eyes.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Except for the eyes, which are very important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And we, uh, we haven't mentioned the filmstrip—you know, suggestion and the band in which the series of figures are enclosed. The block and it has punctuations that somehow suggest the little punctuated spots in the edge of [laughs] film.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: In the edge of film, yes. Well, another element that I wanted to include in that, because I think that if you want your paintings to be looked at in your own time, you are bound—you are limited to the kind of painting you can do. What I mean is if you want to be sure that your paintings will be looked at by your contemporaries, then your painting has to be—they have to be completely contemporary. One of the things that I feel is important is that a painting has to move in a formal way in order the attention continues throughout the paintings, that the painting is really looked at from place to place, and that if you're going to have a painting that has so many elements in it, you have to direct the movement pretty much the way an abstract expressionist really directed the movement in his painting and the way he put his forms in color. Well here, where there's a little more—where there's some reality in the painting, or a good deal, you have to—you really should follow a sequence. So instead of doing it by a hidden way, I do it by making it—putting it in like strips, which would be like film strips. Then I use little circles of color, which vary dark and light, so that your eye will move up and down. [00:12:05]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And they're very directional somehow, in their pulls.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And they pull because of the color. It's only by accident that they became film strips, but I was sort of tempted to do it because I figured if it's—if the painting moves in sequence, and if films move in sequence, I might—might just as well use the technique. You know, I think you can use any technique [laughs] as long as it's—as you make it yours. But I'm—I wouldn't be bound, uh, to follow that by making it—by making the filmstrip tell a story.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I mean, that's where I would—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —where I would leave it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well the—at the present time, as far as I can see, and I haven't seen all of the paintings yet, they are—they continue to be paintings of the female figure, and in—banded more or less in the series as well.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: In another painting, I use arrows to direct it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Arrows which I thought were even more direct than the—than the balls of color, except they began to intrude themselves a little too much in a painting which had much more color. So I left the arrows and I used the little bouncing balls. Well, you know how balls used to bounce over a song—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —when you sang songs in the movies?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. [Laughs.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Pretty much like that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Incidentally, I thought about—this morning, when I knew you were coming—about why do I paint the female figure? Well, I used to feel much more strongly that it had to be a female figure than I do now, but I think now, I'm not so concerned with female or male figures. I think I'm using the female figure because it's more familiar to me—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —because I can use it in a more central way more freely. I don't think I would know how to use a male figure that way. And because I still want a certain unity in the canvas, which I couldn't get if I introduced a man in the same canvas—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Yes.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —with a woman. [00:14:02] I wouldn't—I don't really know yet what I wanted to do. So for the time being, I'll leave it but I think I will use it eventually.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course there—women that had a kind of, uh, opaque character in a sense. You've got really—they aren't women that you can type as belonging to any particular occupation or even, very much to age, although they—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —do suggest a younger woman in general, rather than an older woman. But they are sort of women rather than a woman.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And, uh—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, you know, a few men would see the painting. They've got—three of them have had the same reaction. They say they're very contained. And they look as though they were pretty complete in themselves. Well, that I hadn't intended. I'm very glad they are, but I wanted an age, which was, oh let's say, desirable with no question. I wanted no possibility they're not being a completely desirable human female.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And I took, uh, a standard almost classical head because I thought there, there could be no dispute as to what type they were. I didn't want them to look as they even belonged to any style because they aren't going to wear clothes, you see, so they don't—really shouldn't have a style.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And they still have a slight feeling of that archaic brief idea that you had come back with after being this—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes, yes because that seemed to be the most perfect or the most complete, contained of young-ish female. But mostly because I wanted to avoid—I wanted to keep them out of the class [laughs] that was being currently attacked in every Broadway play. [They laugh.] I just didn't want it to be called *Moms* or *Harpies* . [00:16:04] I just didn't want that because that would—that was too easy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hmm.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I don't think you could attack them for that because I suppose they're not there. They may get there but they're not there yet.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.] I mentioned it in the color, Theresa; I know that you were working almost entirely with near-primary colors and that .

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I was. All primary colors, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You know, and now, of course there are violets and oranges—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and in fact the whole color wheel in one part of this canvas. And I wondered, I think you've mentioned before some of the—well being intuitive, as far as that's concerned, but I wondered if there was anything more that you'd like to say about—I mean, primary colors today are represent a kind of vision as far as you're concerned?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Um, yes I think they did. And the—I think the reason I used them last season in the paintings I did was because I was going back in my mind to a time when I was doing very formal geometric constructions. And before that, I had worked only in black and white. And I think when I go into a new experience for me, as these figures were last year, I try to be very certain that I won't be intruding on myself with other elements. And one way I knew to keep the idea of these paintings very clear in my mind was to use only the formal colors because you know in advance what a certain color with me. When you use blue, red, and yellow out of the tube, you know exactly what they're going to be. And I was much more concerned with freeing, allowing this free figure to emerge with the head. It was the first time I'd used the head.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: To me, that was terribly important. [00:18:01] I'm sure it wouldn't have been to anybody else. I also wanted an absolute freedom in the way the figure was presented so the drawing was very informal, almost primitive. And if you're going to use the primitive drawing and a lot of white, and very free color, you might get something quite sentimental, whereas if you want to keep it classic—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —use all that white and the primitive line, then the color has to be, uh, very—not unimportant, but only for emphasis, which is the way I used it. Well, in these paintings, which are divided up into squares and rectangles, and are so formal there's practically a framework under them, then I can again let the color seduce me somewhat and feel my way with color through that. Like I had no idea that I wanted a purple until I put the figure down and I said, Oh I—what I really want is a kind of an Easter hat quality.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. It certainly has.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: So I put the Easter hat on and the color followed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: In a way, you always free yourself when you kind of, uh, tie yourself down to something—really tie yourself into it. Then you're very free. Then you can move around with it when the form has been set. You don't have to look for it anymore. And it's a tremendous pleasure for me because I don't even know what color would come next. I didn't know that I would want to play with five different shades of pink, which is what I'm doing in the next canvas, or a cerulean blue, a color that I have—I really stayed away from for years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: You know, it can be very sentimental.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Theresa, I'm going to head back for a moment. [Audio break.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I was born in the DR . Should I talk louder?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, let's see how it does with these mikes on you.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: All right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think I can see the—I should have been watching whether the green light was blinking. [00:20:04]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: We hadn't—I hadn't heard yours .

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Well I won't—I'm just as well off [laughs]. Anyway, I was just going to ask you about your beginnings. You had mentioned your father was a wood carver. Where was this, Theresa?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: My father was a wood carver in Europe. Matter of fact, his first job of wood carving was to travel from railroads—around the railroad stations in Russia carving the first-class wedding rooms. And this was in—he was a boy of 14, and then he was a carver in Paris when he was 16. And my earliest memories of him, we were—were his sitting at home on a Sunday and doing extra carving, you know, for extra piecework on the

handles of these fancy pocketbooks that women used to carry that had carved frames.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And I never want to be a carver, but I had a—I knew that you did things with—with, uh, woodcarving materials. My father used to draw pictures for us to amuse us.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you in this country by this time?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I was born here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were born here, yes. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: My father came here and was married right after he arrived. And he used to draw pictures for us for amusement, so I always knew that such a thing that you made—that you could make sketches with a pencil—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and that somebody did [inaudible]. And, uh, but my being a painter started, I think, when I was in high school. I, you know, painted and by the time I was 16 or 18 I thought of myself as an artist. But I don't think I was anything of an artist until I was at least 30. So I was—I think I developed real life—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you go to some special high school like music and art, or anything?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No, no. I went to a high school in Brooklyn, then I started going to college and I quit very shortly after that to get married. [00:22:01] And then I went to art school in Washington. I went to the Corvan [ph] Arts School and then I came back to New York and went to the Brooklyn Museum Arts School. And then started a little bit here or there with people like Boris Marvo [ph] and then I used to go to the Hoffman classes whenever I could in the summertime when I was in Provincetown. That was about all I ever—but I think I was probably more influenced by Hoffman than by anybody else.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Even though I only went there once in a while, and I used to go to the criticisms as often as I could. And I remember I would listen to the criticism, and I would sometimes take back enough ideas with me to work for six months by myself in Washington. Like there was a time when he talked about natural space and, uh, and the canvas space, and that alone occupied me for six months because I'd never heard anybody say that before and any arts [inaudible].

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were you working for a model when you were working by yourself in Washington?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I worked with a model in the different art schools I went to, but then I used to work by myself. I went to the American University [inaudible] too. We worked with models. I had a—I couldn't [inaudible] drawing from the figure, which is probably why I won't draw from the figure now. [Audio break.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Good. Well, we're kind of—well, what kind of things were you doing in Washington, abstract work, or to some extent home figure?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No. When I started painting, uh, really painting as an artist, I painted geometric constructions in black and white, black and white for at least three or four years. [00:24:01] And I remember Franz Klein saw my black-and-whites when I had just started doing them, and he was interested in them. He said they were very good and he felt that there was a—a sort of a kinship between us. And when I used to come to New York, I'd always go to see him, and talk to him, and I learned a great deal from him just by talking to him, just—just sort of batting an idea around between us. And then I began working this way with the primary colors, and I did this at the time I went to Europe with my—my whole life as a painter changed because we lived in Europe for a year. And in a way, I had never seen whole areas of painting. I had seen very little of the Renaissance, for instance.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: There were some in Washington, but it really wasn't a great deal. I'd never really looked very carefully. I was very much, uh, concerned with being an abstract painter because that was the way the people I admired painted. I never paid very much attention to the business of—of painting anything except abstract painting. And I must say, I've never had—had been—I had never been educated with any other kind of art except the completely contemporary art that was going on. And I thought that Franz Klein was the greatest

artist in the world, and I still think he was a great artist. I just know that he wasn't—I know that he wasn't the only one. So when I went to Europe, I did nothing but look at paintings and I went to Italy on a trip for about five weeks and I just went to churches and looked at the church paintings, something I'd never done before. I didn't produce a single painting that year, but I just looked. And the end of the year, I knew that I was not going to be an abstract painter anymore because there was just so much more I wanted to do. I had been both confused, and exhilarated, and fed with many elements in painting that I had never thought about seriously before. [00:26:08] And I was very curiously moved by certain things, in a way that I had never been moved. It sounds a little corny now, but I stood in front of things and I cried, and that had never happened to me. I remember—

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year was this?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: This was, uh, 1955. It's as late as that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I remember in, uh, [inaudible] there were some chinah buoys [ph] which were not even on exhibition, but the caretaker who had seen me come back two or three times said did I want to see something really good. And I was a little frightened, but I said yes. And he took me down to a basement room, and they had the chinah buoys which had not been restored, but which were going to be put up on walls, but they were just standing against walls freely. And they were, uh, paintings of individual saints done as very beautiful, simple, completely modern contemporary right and they were very moving because, uh, while—what I felt was if—while they were very impressive as paintings, as former paintings, there was a subject matter. There was a content in them, which I found very stirring. I found myself related to them. I wanted to put my hand out and say, you know, I know just what you mean, chinah buoy! And I had a feeling he would have understood exactly what I was doing. And this was, for me, very new. Nothing like that had ever happened to me. And I felt that I didn't want to leave out all the other elements that existed around me. I wanted—I came back wanting to paint flowers, and animals, and people, and saints, and just everything. I wanted to get something of what I had responded to so greatly over there. [00:28:06] And this caused me one year of complete confusion in which I could paint nothing, and at the end of my year in Europe—we were living in Paris then—the shadowy, shadowy forms, female forms, began to emerge from the canvas, and they were just shadows. They could hardly be made out, and the color was very hazy, but very, um, very much away from the primaries. I remember I did three canvasses in pinks, with just the shadowy female form. And I've kept them, not because they're good paintings, because I figure they're very important to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And then my—we came to New York the next year. I spent another year fighting myself because part of me wanting to bring the figure right out on top, and the other part of me was a little embarrassed because all my friends were painting Abstract Expressionism and I felt a little bit like a traitor.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And I remember one or two people responded that way, and one of them said, What are you doing? You're using the figure but that's terrible. You know, the figure is only a solace. And I've never forgotten his words. I won't even mention his name because he's painting the figure now too. [They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, that's special .

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But it took me another year when I would make—I made very muddy looking pictures because the figure was there, but then I would obscure them. And it—and it really was making me terribly unhappy because I knew that they would—these paintings were just no good because they weren't honest. They weren't clear. And then one day, I came to the studio and I said, well, you know, this is the end of all this fooling around. And I started painting those paintings that you saw at the Palmer and they just came. [00:30:04] I never had any trouble [laughs] after that. I just did like seven or eight paintings quickly because they were all stored up but they were—the figure was right there but without heads. I get—that was part of my trouble, that I didn't know what kind of a head to use—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and I didn't know that I could do without a head, but then I decided to take a chance. I was going to use masks at first. Then I thought, No, that was enough—nothing [inaudible]. So I just painted them without the heads, but the figures were clear, and they were female, and they were sensuous, and they existed within the abstract painting because all around them were all the elements that go into an abstract painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What colors areas and strike effects and—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of feeling of—as if the figures might have been in some sporting area if—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes they—that did happen, yes. They did look a little bit like performers or something.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Young .

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But they were right out in front almost like characters in a play. My first feeling about them were that they might have been on a stage or in some—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that's right.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —in some theater.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And after that, I don't think I had any—any trouble, any confusion, but I must say it took me two whole years; one year with no paintings, and one year of bad paintings. And at the end of that year, I think I got what I wanted and it sustained me—

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible] the year of the Palmer show.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: The Palmer —

DOROTHY SECKLER: At the Palmer gallery.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: The Palmer gallery? That was 1959. And all these paintings were done in '58, and they were shown early in '59. So '57 was the year of terrible paintings, and '56 was the year when I didn't produce any paintings. I painted a great deal, but I destroyed them before I left Europe. And I brought back empty stretchers .

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. [00:32:00] I didn't know there were some paintings of yours from before that period when you went to Europe. [Inaudible] watercolors and there were little spots of black through the—but some colors like

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DOROTHY SECKLER: Now let's see—end of the sentence right there. And, uh, we'd just gotten you—we'd been talking about what preceded the, uh, the paintings at the Palmer gallery. And some of the—I wondered during the year or so when these were developing, let's say, the Palmer gallery figures, were you still going to Hoffman's classes, still in that milieu at all—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —or what new interests and so on did you have, or did that reflect?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No. I pretty well turned away, um, from the people who had been my hero teachers. See, I didn't have them as teachers, but I knew them and they were—they were the important artists in my life when I still felt myself a student. They were the big, important artists. And I didn't reject them because I didn't think the same or as well of them, because I still do. But I had to leave—I had to tell myself that the thing that they believed in, the things that they found important, were not necessarily what I found important. Now, maybe it was an accident that they were men and I was a woman. I don't know. It could have been part of it. Maybe it wasn't at all important. But for instance, Adolph Gotley was very important to me—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —in my life. I never painted the way he painted, but I listened to him talk, and I loved his completely straightforward, honest way about talking about everything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But there were areas in which he very much wouldn't have wanted to concern himself, and these areas were important to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: [00:02:00] The whole business of, um, well, of the figure, for one thing. And he was very

much against painting that, and still is, so I had to in a way leave him and I had to leave the things that Franz Klein stood for, and many, many others who had been—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Both of these men, though, at earlier stages in their career, had painted figuratively—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Of course.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and beautifully at first.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Of course.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Um, maybe not powerfully but beautifully.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But they were not there anymore—

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it was a long time.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and they had no interest in it. Yes. And many other people in New York who had been terribly important to me when I was—when I felt myself somebody in the country coming into the city every once in a while because I didn't—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When did you move from Washington?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Not until 1957.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But until then, I used to come New York sometimes, and then I spent summers in Provincetown. I used to listen to these people talk because they were concerned with what was really happening in art, and in Washington that wasn't going on. You know, the revival in Washington came many, many years later.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: In fact, after I left. So I had to reject all of that, and to think pretty seriously about what I wanted to do, and this was very hard to do. And it meant, uh, it meant being part of nothing for a while because, uh, while the abstract expressionists did have a group, the people who were splintering off and then didn't have a group—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You were never part of the club group at—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No. I never was part of that group either, and I had a—I had a little bit of unfriendliness, a little hostility to the face when I started showing the figure. But of course, that's been forgotten for a long time now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I don't think there was a group until the, for instance, the Op artists sort of seemed to be grouped together. [00:04:00]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well how about the early days of, let's say, Alex Katz and—well you wouldn't have been like Marsha Mars [ph] but maybe Katz would have been. Was he at all like kind of companionable figure there?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I don't think so. I don't think so because I felt that the—well, there was a kind of a formula idea in his paintings. I didn't think he was interested in the figure particularly, but in kind of a formula of presenting the figure. I didn't feel he had anything to do with me, especially in the way I started painting the figure which was—which had a mixture of so many things in it. You know, it had the strong figure and the abstract background and that kind of thing. And the other figure paintings were pretty much, I thought, going back—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Like Beechum [ph] for instance?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah. I thought they were going back. I thought they were painting like Matisse—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Definitely .

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and I thought they were painting like, uh, Renoir and some of them were painting like Rubens, and some of them were painting like, uh, Lucas Cranach, you know, and I don't—no point in identifying

everyone, but I didn't feel that I had anything to get or anything—there's no reason for me to feel identified with them—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —because I didn't think that's what I wanted to do with the figure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mostly, I think, if you—if you're not concerned with just painting a painting, but in presenting a very strong idea on canvas, then you can't—if you—and if it's going to be the figure, then you can't use it in a way that has associations with another period.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I think that's the only reason for not using it. There's no evil connected with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But if you're going to paint the strong nude, and put her in a landscape, or put her in a—in a Venetian palace with a fur rug under her—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —then all you can expect is a reaction, Oh yeah, I've seen that. [00:06:02]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And then the painting might just as well not have been made.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well when [inaudible] including people like Marisol [ph], for instance, do you feel any kinship with Marisol and—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, I love her work. I don't know her, so I couldn't—I couldn't—I have no way of knowing whether she feels the way I do about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But I respond very warmly to her work. I think it's, uh, it has a great feel of an interest in—in living things—in living and in people. I think she puts that into it and she's willing to engage herself and expose herself. But people have asked me whether I feel that my using a certain face is the same as Marisol using her face. Uh, well I never knew that—I mean, I didn't know I was using a face that might be called my face, and I hadn't seen Marisol's show when I started doing it. Uh, but I think in one sense, she's using—she uses her face and she makes it comic. She does funny things with it, and I don't do anything comic with this face because I take this face I use very seriously, and I won't do anything to it. I won't—well, I won't distort it in any way. I'll emphasize things about it, but I feel very strongly about distortion.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Uh, I don't think it proves anything except how you feel about the figure when you distort it. So if you don't feel interested in a distorted figure, or you don't feel you have to show the distortion of human nature, for instance—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —uh, if you want to show a kind of a healthy quality about humans, because I think there is a great deal of that too, then you don't distort. [00:08:00]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course, from the point of view of a—someone who was a pupil of Akins [ph], your figures would look like, uh, drastic simplifications, that that would be distortion from a realist's point of view.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I suppose so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Because they are almost—they have a very real presence, and yet they are reduced to the very element—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —very simple, masklike—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And I don't quite understand why that happens either.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Laughs.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: It surprised me the first time it happened because I could see the—that figure was alive, and yet it was a perfectly flat, painted white figure with no modulations, no shadows.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No—only an implied nose.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No nose.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No nose because I think the nose would make it too personal a face. The eyes are very important.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And they're without pupils. They're painted green and—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Because, yes, I don't want them to focus anywhere in particular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: In a way, they sort of look out but they don't see anybody in particular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They could be looking out and looking in at the same time almost.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: The same time, yes. Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a curious effect. The curious thing is, to me, that the figures, the two that are white on black as if they were negatives, somehow look like they're more out-focused than the other ones [they laugh].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Isn't it strange? Isn't it? Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: As if they might, you know, speak where the other figures are all very silent [laughs].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes. And I don't even know why that happens. Or sometimes you'll do four of them, and each one looks different. Each one has a different expression on her face, and I don't quite know why that happens either.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I don't try for that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We were speaking before about, uh, your feelings about some of the things that are going on in the art world right now, and I was very much interested in your opinions. [00:09:59] We touched before on, I think, something about Op art. But, uh, I know that you—I assume that you feel that the impersonality of it, that bothers you. Are there other things about it?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes, there's something else that bothers me. I think that, um, there's a certain permitted brutality in all the arts today. And I think it's—when I say it's permitted, I mean because a small element of our whole cultural climate permits it, no more than that. For instance, if you get two or three plays in which the theme is kind of an antisocial brutality—I don't mean a play about brutality. I mean a play which sort of slaps out at everybody in a particularly sadistic way, and there are such plays. Or they set up a figure, a type, whether it's a woman or a man, and then they proceed to slap them around.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Um, I think that that exists elsewhere too. There's a little of that in movies, and I think it's beginning to be apparent in art. And while it's probably a little bit, uh, rough on a whole group of people to say that's what they mean—I don't know whether they all mean it—I think there's a certain sadism involved in painting in a way which disturbs your—only your eye and can make you a little bit sick because it does make you a little sick.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And it does disturb your retina, and in some of them, it's only supposed to go as far as

that. I mean, there isn't supposed to be any other effect. Now, this is also done with a great deal of intelligence. I don't think there could be a stupid Op painter. I think they're—they must be people of real intelligence and real thought, which means they know what they're doing. [00:12:05]

DOROTHY SECKLER: You mean a technical intelligence, or a real understanding of painting [inaudible]?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Uh, I don't mean a real understanding of painting. I mean the kind of intelligence, for instance, that can solve mathematical problems, or maybe the kind that would make a rather superficial kind of a scientist. I don't mean the best kind of scientist.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But it's that the intelligence has to be there. You can't be stupid. And also, if—because he has to be a good craftsman.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But I think to set out to create this kind of a painting, and to spend your life, or a good part of your life, doing it implies a certain antisocial attitude in what you want to present when you present your paintings. Because obviously if you make them, you want to present them. You want people to see them. If you want to cause that kind of a disturbance, a disturbance only of the eye, um, it's both antisocial and it's somewhat sadistic, and it certainly isn't being involved with any of the real things that are happening. For instance, how can you be so concerned, do nothing but disturb, uh, a retina and say that—and tell yourself this is a valid facet of our time? Valid, I mean. That it is a facet is obvious. When all around you, this is a time of great turbulence, a time when tremendous importance is being paid to the dignity of humans, uh, the right to vote, the right to speak out in the college campus. You can't say that this is the way it is now because it's not the way it is. [00:14:00] What concerns people today? That's why I feel to just give them a little pain in the eye is—is a very—is a kind of sadism. I don't see how an artist can spend his time doing it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You don't feel it's a means to a spatial end, then, or you don't think it's justified as that.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I don't know what you mean by spatial end.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, if by creating a, uh, a sense—let's say one of the problems of abstract geometric painting has the been placement of a figure on a background. Figure and ground relationship has always been a main problem. Well, if you create a figure, which instead of being a solid shape is a series of molecular shapes, which give a pulsating effect so that the edge is almost indeterminate, well you've solved that problem to a certain extent or in a certain way. You have—you've made your background-foreground relationship—well you've taken them into a new—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY SECKLER: —set of references, whereas the old problem doesn't exist. Maybe a new problem's come up [laughs] but the old one doesn't. So that—well, I mean, you—in that sense, the irritation of the eye, in creating the dazzle would be a means. Now, sometimes the means is so powerful that it seems almost becoming an end as I feel it does in some of the Bridget Riley's where—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY SECKLER: —it's pain and lacerating to the eye. Other times, the after [inaudible] colors are—give you just a kind of a pulsation, which isn't too painful at all and which does give you a kind of sense of the space being animated. Well, I don't want to go into an [laughs] analysis—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY SECKLER: —of that but I mean, I'm also wrestling with this question of the whether or not there is an unconscious element of—at least not sadism but perhaps—but being willing to irritate, or aggressive, let's say. [00:16:08] I would say aggressive is about the word, uh, involved .

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I would be—I am for an aggressive painting if it's going to be—if the idea is to evoke in the viewer. For instance, a painting should—a painting should be so good that it makes everybody a little angry. It should evoke things in him that maybe he'd rather forget.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Because that's the function of art. Uh, what's an experience? What is any kind of an aesthetic experience? You go to a movie. And if you're not provoked, if you're not involved, if you don't become,

um—something in you isn't responding, you don't feel a kind of a—whether it's thrill, or disgust, or anger, or hate or something, about the thing, whether it's a painting, or a play, or a movie, then you might just not well have gone. You might just well not have looked. I mean, there's a function of art. I think humans have to have art. They apparently can't live without it. They only live without art under a time when art has been repressed forcefully. Um, every people, I mean, every people that have ever lived on earth have had art of some kind. So apparently it's a necessity. Now, why? Why is it a necessity? Well, apparently it has to feed some quality in a human that an animal may not need.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: A human needs it. Well now, what is he being fed with? Certainly, he's being fed more than just having his eye moved around. His eye is the thing that receives it, but then there's a whole human in back of it that has to receive the rest of it. [00:17:57] Now, if you stop and if you've done something, uh, marvelous by moving the space around, you might say, What's the—what's the good of the whole thing if it hasn't also had an effect on the human? Now, I can see where if you might—you might have something very powerful to paint, you may want to be sure that your viewer will have to look. You may have to use—you may want to use some of these elements in your painting just to strengthen what you were going to say. Maybe you have to know these things. Maybe they'll become more important. But not for that, not for just that. Then I think —

DOROTHY SECKLER: I guess there's—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —it's unimportant.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —a danger, uh, as you reply in the fact that the reaction is a kind of a—well we're being manipulated by the artist in a very elementary way. I mean, and it could very well be an out for people who have always been made uncomfortable—well just uncomfortable and not really responding by not knowing how they should respond to a pain. Well, if their eyes are dazzled, that's it. [Laughs.] You don't have to look any further than, you know—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, I have heard that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I'm sure you have too.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hmm.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: That there's no—for instance, I have heard that the reason that the Op art can be accepted so widely, so completely, is there's no question about how you can respond. You can only respond in one way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hmm.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well in a way, if it's—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Your eyes water . [Laughs.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well this is perfect mass production art.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Uh, it could—I suppose there's—the rationalization, uh, to that is that it's democratic art because for the first time in history, there's a kind of art that everybody, you know, from the—the, uh, let's say the most illiterate [laughs] tribe or whatever on up just can enjoy and feel like—that he's not being talked down to. He, uh, he can—his eyes will vibrate just as well [laughs] as the next fellow's, and there's nothing secret about it and so on.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes. [00:20:00] But unfortunately, I think we all know this, that that's not how art is made and that's not how it finally, uh—you might say trickles down. It never starts that way. It always starts—

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's a very good point.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —in another way—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Very good point.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and then eventually—

DOROTHY SECKLER: It comes [inaudible].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —maybe everybody gets the effect.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yeah.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But it, uh, if it st—

DOROTHY SECKLER: If it starts on that level [laughs] where is it going to go?

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Where is it going to go? It can't go up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't know.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Also it—you see, art has to have a kind of a mystique element with it. I think it was some French writer who said without mystery, there is no art. Well, one of the things that makes it art is that you have to be willing to go into it, have yourself—the wonder aroused, the curiosity. The senses have to be aware that something different is happening. Without it, you can't experience. Now of course, not everybody experiences this way, but eventually the benefits of abstraction, it almost got around to everybody. It affected architecture. It affected fabrics. It affected furniture. Everybody's getting the better results of better-looking houses, better-looking rooms, better-looking fabrics because there was this freeing, uh, which was done by the abstract artists in their time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now with the Op artists, the dresses are designing up before they show it off as [laughs] we were saying before.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: That's right, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In other words, they—they've taken a very superficial aspect of it, you know, just the perspective effects and the polka dots going back and coming forward and so on. But we're getting awfully tired of that, I'm afraid—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —very quickly.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, what I—I felt that the one valid element of the painting that was being done, the so-called Op painting, was the fact that the clarity, the surface clarity of the painting—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —I think this is important. I think this is what's going to be—I think this is going to be an important element in painting for a long time. [00:22:03] I think, uh, having gotten used to seeing things immediately and clearly, I think that's going to be the kind of painting that will be done. I don't know what the subject matter will be or how it will be developed, but that painting will have to be clear. It'll have to have a little of a quality of an outdoor sign. I think that's pretty obvious and that's why so many—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well there's curious—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —people are doing it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —ambiguity, of course, in a great deal of Op art where you have the clarity and you also have the fact that you can't quite focus on it. The shapes are, you know, plain and clear, and things like round red dots and blue dots [laughs] and yet you—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: I know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —see them in such a way that they're, uh, like hovering—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

DOROTHY SECKLER: —and not, uh, absolutely—you know they're caused by something happening as you move, so that they're never absolutely that clear [laughs]. It's amazing.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I think that—I don't think that element is going to be an important one. I think that's where the—that has to do a little bit with the trick.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And that, after all, can be learned. I'm sure it can be explained completely—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —in a book.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, very easily.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And very curious about it.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah. So I don't think that's—I don't think that's anything for artists to use. For instance, uh, can you see a new—a new generation of artists? Suppose they were being taken from the kids who were carrying on all this student, uh, protest movements all over the country. I can't see them being seduced by painting and art which they can learn from a book, not—not right after they've been—they've been carrying on so violently for personal freedom—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-mm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —individuality and going around the country risking their lives in different courses. I can't see them taking anything from an art, which came from a book because what was all the—the fighting about? [00:24:00] About being individuals, that they were then going to start painting that way? So I think this is going to be rejected completely by the very young, the ones that, say, are art students right now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well of course I—at least one of the Op artists who's very prominent told me the art in a way felt completely separate, absolutely separate. I wouldn't know, uh, [inaudible].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well how can that be? What is art—well what does art come from? Art is created by a human being, and we've all agreed that it's not—art is not created by the intelligence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well this is a—they are taking the point of view that it is, to a large extent, that it is an intellectual feat. I mean, working with art is now, from now on, going to be a matter of the intellect.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well, what happened to the rest of us? [They laugh.]

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see. [Laughs.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Oh, in a way, you'd have to say that the human had changed biologically, and you know that hasn't happened. That hasn't happened in at least, uh, since—we know that it hasn't happened since the days of the Cro-Magnon Man. And now, what's that? Twenty thousand years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well you say you're calling on a different level of—that's for instance the, uh—many of the abstract expressionists, uh, use their intelligence to arrive at a point where they recognize that the thing they wanted was not intellectual control but spontaneity and the automatic reaction. So having arrived at a point by intelligence, that they then proceeded to allow their work to spring from automatic, uh, and the most spontaneous gestures and to, as far as possible, withdraw or ignore a signal [laughs] of kind from—except perhaps in—afterwards there would always have to be some amount of control. [00:26:05]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But the good ones never did that. That may have been the, what I call the third-generation abstract expressionists. But the giants in the field never worked that way, and I don't think they ever said they did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I think a good many of them tried to get very close to the automatic thing. But, uh, that doesn't mean that they maybe did [inaudible].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But even Jackson Pollock thought, sat, and—I've read—sat and observed his paintings for hours and hours of hours, and that must have been the intelligence—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —at work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Afterwards. And then with—then we work again in the—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes. Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —heat of the, uh, reflection.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: And Klein had one of the keenest minds I've ever met—

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible.]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —and used it every time he made a painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I noticed he even sketched in forms and events, which was absolutely astonishing [laughs] in terms of the theories of action painting.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You know [inaudible].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I think—I think the—when it became a labeled action painting is when its downfall—

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —began because I don't think that's what it ever wanted to be anyhow. Now, I think that the—it's a little bit naïve to say that you—that art is separated from life and it's a product of the intelligence because as the human grows and matures, more and more of himself goes into his art. And he would have to sit there very carefully with a filter and keep anything that he had experienced, anything he had become, anything he had grown into, from entering his art. And then for—his art would never change from the time he was 20 until the time he was 80, and that's not poss—I don't even think the ones who say it are going to be able to do that. I think they would have to retire.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I don't think they—I don't think that they really mean to exclude the personality. Obviously, that would be impossible. I think they simply mean you don't, for instance, go out and march with the, uh, let's say the groups that are marching in Selma and so on, and then come back and make a painting about the march that is related to that event. [00:28:09]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Oh, certainly. I—

DOROTHY SECKLER: I [inaudible] necessary—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: —agree with them completely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's one of the things they mean. Now, they may mean a good many other things too, but that's the most evidently clear thing that [inaudible].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: But I think that's been a concept that's been around for a long time. I think one of the—I remember reading later that one of the great reasons for the complete separation of the so-called realist painters in New York, many years ago, and the abstract painters was that the realist painters were the ones who were painting what they called working-class paintings. And I think they were never taken very seriously after they were done. They were the whole group of people who were doing the things having to do with depression and so on. Well, they never became the important American paintings. I think they've been pretty well pushed aside. You don't hear about them. You don't see them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, well they have their following and their, uh, and their grading because people like, I suppose, Ben Shan and Jack Levine and similar all through the years, although the sophisticated element in the art world was not concerned with what they were doing.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: No, and it wasn't those paintings that influenced the rest of the world either.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

THERESA SCHWARTZ: That's not what they picked up everywhere in the world, uh, to imitate so it couldn't have been that important. In a way, is that so different from the—from the proscribed Russian paintings that the painters had to turn out for so long, you know? These posters with the—the girl and boy and the banner over their head, you know, and the five-year plan, oh that's the same thing!

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it's a long—it would be too difficult for us to go into a take . I can sort of see how then like, then John has a way of getting into a personal, um, imagery from the social, where they're the kind of junction but it's affected, uh, by a rather intellectual process actually, with a good bit of direction from what would be more exterior than you would be willing [laughs] to entertain. [00:30:14]

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Hmm.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Um, but it's a very—you know, it's a question that we could talk about [laughs] for hours—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —to get any clarity on it.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it's true that of course there are—this generation of being involved with social issues, and yet not bringing it directly into painting. It's going to—it's going to be interesting to see how it will be reflected.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: It'll have to be reflected.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It'll be reflected in some way and, uh, maybe more deeply because not—not put in the obvious but by the obvious story of some descriptive—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Yeah.

DOROTHY SECKLER: —thing.

THERESA SCHWARTZ: Well I think about it. I have a feeling that I'm doing what I feel can be done, uh, and still keep it painting and not mix it up with any kind of social message, which I don't believe belongs in the painting either any more than I think you can write a novel today with slogans and you can't write a play with slogans. But I think you have to find a way of bringing enough, um, importance to your painting, enough vitality, encompassing enough of your scene, your scene really, in your painting to make it do, to make it say what's being said in slogans elsewhere. For instance, how could you possibly relate a disturbing Op art painting with, um, say a student—a student movement that goes down to march in Selma? That's too far-fetched, you see. It doesn't belong.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well the—

THERESA SCHWARTZ: It's separating it too clearly. [00:32:00]

DOROTHY SECKLER: One, uh, connection [laughs] that was made was that in a painting, let's say, of [inaudible] every touch or—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]