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Oral history interview with Nina von Eckardt, 2012 July 31 and August 13

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nina Von Eckardt on 2012 July 31 and August 13. The interview took place at Von Eckardt's home in West New York, New Jersey, and was conducted by Avis Berman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Nina Von Eckardt reviewed the transcript in 2020. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Nina Von Eckardt for the Archives of American Art Oral History Program on July 31st, 2012, in her house in West New York, New Jersey.

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

NINA VON ECKARDT: My name is Nina Von Eckardt, and my date of birth is December 6th, 1940.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, Nina Von Eckardt is the name that you have now, but perhaps we should go into a little bit about your background and maybe the name you started with, which is a bit different.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, there are many names, unfortunately. The name that I was using when I was working at Castelli Gallery was Nina Sutherland. I was born Belinda French, and my father died when I was just 2 years old, and my mother remarried shortly to a gentleman named Hugh Sutherland.

AVIS BERMAN: So your biological parents were?

NINA VON ECKARDT: My biological parents were Mary Knox Collins, who married Robert James French. He was the sports editor of the Philadelphia Inquirer. And he died of spinal meningitis on February 1, 1943. I had just become 2 years old. And my mother had been in love with a guy named Hugh Sutherland, who was also a newspaper man. My father was on the Inquirer. Hugh Sutherland was with the Record. But at that point, in 1943, Daddy [Sutherland] was in the Army. And subsequently I called my father Daddy Bob, and I called Daddy "Daddy" because, well, he became—you know, they were married about six months after my father died.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. So she was having an affair with him?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, never had an affair. She just had been in love with him, and then he said, no entangling alliances, and she said, you know, "fungoo." And in those days women were quite interesting, and she didn't hang around. And then my father had been in love with her and he proposed. She married him. I used to say to her, well, you had to marry Daddy Bob to have me. And of course, the implication of that was she was pregnant when they got married, which, of course, was not that. But oh, no, no, no, no, they didn't do that in those days, which, of course —

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so I see. So by now Mr. Sutherland decided he would have this alliance.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. Somebody telegraphed him or—oh, I know, he was on officers training in Texas, and somebody sent him a telegram and said, Mary French is a widow, or something. And he started writing her, whatever.

And he was a wonderful man. He subsequently—we ended up going to Paris in 1949 with the Marshall Plan, which was one of the greatest things the United States ever did. And then the Marshall Plan, after a couple of years, became USIA [United States Information Agency] in Paris. And then subsequently we were in Lisbon and in Brussels.

AVIS BERMAN: So your father remained with USIA?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Daddy remained with USIA till he retired. And we traveled, lived in—you know, well, we lived in Paris and Lisbon and Brussels. And then Daddy—Brussels was basically when I was in college. I went to Bryn Mawr, kicking and screaming. I was told—my mother took me to Bryn Mawr the summer we were on home leave. I was 16. And I was interviewed by the dean of admissions, and she said, well, obviously since you've been entirely educated in French, you won't be able to pass, you know, American college boards, but if you pass the Baccalaureate, we will accept you at Bryn Mawr.

And I just thought, ha-ha, no problem, I'll never pass the Baccalaureate, because the French don't believe anybody is going to pass the Baccalaureate. And you spend the last three years of your schooling absolutely knowing for sure that you will never pass the Baccalaureate. So I thought, no problem, I'll get to go to art school. [Laughs.] And then I passed the Baccalaureate—[laughs]—and ended up going to Bryn Mawr! And every year, I'd go home—my parents were then in Brussels—I'd go home every summer vowing never to go back to Bryn Mawr. But, you know, you're 17, 18 years old.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so you actually went to college, what, at 17?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I was not quite 18 when I went to college.

AVIS BERMAN: And did they speak English at home? Did you speak English?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, no, we spoke English. I was bilingual. When we moved to Paris, I only spoke English. We had a wonderful friend named Jacques Masson-Forestier, who was unemployed at the time, a young Frenchman whose father had been a general and whose mother was one of the housing people at the embassy. And she became great friends with my mother because Marguerite Masson-Forestier, Jacques's mother, used to take my mother around. We moved five times in five years in Paris, living always in quite interesting furnished homes. We lived once at 44—"quarante-quatre" rue del Bac—44 rue del Bac, which was Ambassador Couve de Murville's apartment. He was at the time the ambassador to Egypt. And always furnished.

AVIS BERMAN: What was the ambassador's name again?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Couve de Murville, C-O-U-V-E D-E M-U-R-V-I-L-L-E.

AVIS BERMAN: Sorry, I have to write these names down.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, no, I'll get—but I'll fill that stuff in for you.

But anyway—and then I also went to five different schools. So it was—it was a little up and down. When we moved to Lisbon, we only lived in one apartment, but my mother kept looking at other apartments. But she and Marguerite became very good friends. Marguerite became a family friend. Her mother's name was Madame Martie, who was in her 90s. And Madame Martie had been—in her own way she had been, in her, I guess, late 80s—she was her own resistance movement to the Nazis. Whenever she would be walking up and down in the streets of Paris, the German officers would stop and ask her directions And whatever they asked her—I mean, it could be, "Where is the Arc de Triomphe?" and it could be right behind her. She'd send them over to the Bastille. [Laughs.] That was her way of resisting.

And so we became their American family. And Jacques was the first person to start teaching us French. But we basically literally arrived in Paris—were staying at the St. James Hotel, and we were put in a school that was right down the street from the St. James Hotel.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you have any siblings?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I had a sister, Melissa, who was four years younger than I was. The first school we were in, she sat on my lap most of the day and cried, and I could count to 10 in French. And we moved to Passy, a little house in Passy, and I went to a school called La Martine, L'Ecole La Martine [after the French poet -NVE], and that's when I really started to learn, but just simply by being put into a classroom.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Now, you said you hoped you didn't have to go to Bryn Mawr, because you wanted to go to art school. So at some point you had a sense—I mean, were you drawing—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, I started painting when I was 5. I was a serious artist starting at 5 [laughs], and much more serious when I was in college. I mean, I painted in college, although Bryn Mawr didn't have any studio classes. And then I would paint in the summers, and I painted as a teenager in Lisbon, and it was my desire to go to art school, which never actually happened. And then, of course, what happened once I became part of the New York art world was that I was just completely—it's like becoming completely catatonic [gasps], you know, because you're just surrounded and overwhelmed, so it took me a very long time to get back to painting after I'd actually been working with what I considered real artists.

So I was in Bryn Mawr. My senior year in Bryn Mawr I took a seminar. Lessing Rosenwald opened up his house to a small group of Bryn Mawr seniors, and his curator was a woman named Elizabeth Mongan. And she was quite a fascinating woman, and that was a very interesting—I mean, you know, they'd open up drawers and, you know, bring out Durers, and they'd say, oh, let's study da Vinci today, you know, and they'd open up another drawer. And then Lessing would—he would come around, an absolutely, utterly charming man. They served us tea, and he would come and—I remember one time—he was a terrible flirt. [Laughs.] And he liked me, so he would say, oh, you must try this. [Laughs.] So it was a highly—a very enjoyable seminar.

But what was interesting was that—that was the last summer that my parents were in Europe. I went home after graduation, and we went to Italy as a graduation present. And we came back to the States. And my mother—we were in Washington, Daddy was working for Luke Battle at the State Department, which was all kinds of cultural stuff, and—

[Audio break.]

AVIS BERMAN: I'm assuming in Europe you were going to all the museums, all the great museums, or not?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, yeah. In Paris, yes, actually yes. Belgium, Brussels, has beautiful little museums. I don't think I went to a museum in Portugal. I don't even think I went to the Carriage Museum in Portugal, but I was in high school then, this French Lycée, and you're basically taking 10 courses a day. And I had a very tight group of Portuguese-American friends, and then at school most of my friends were Belgian or French. So it was a very busy teenage social life, and teenagers are very self-involved. I mean, art? Other than painting myself—you know, I considered myself a great painter, but—

AVIS BERMAN: So you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: But then when we would travel, I mean, we would go to Barcelona. We—you know, we would obviously go to the museums. And Spain had wonderful museums. And of course Paris—whenever I went to Paris I would go to the Jeu de Paume, a little bit the Louvre, but I was always much more interested in the Impressionists, and that was always—I preferred, you know, Dubuffet to Poussaint. [Laughs.] One time I was standing in front of a Renoir at the Jeu de Paume—that was when it was in the Tuileries Gardens before they moved all that to the Musée d'Orsay. And a little—tiny, little lady was standing next to me, and she was smiling and looking at this painting. And she looked at me and she said, "*C'est moi.*" And I looked at her and I looked back at the painting, and I thought, oh, my god, she had been the model. She had been Renoir's model for this painting. It was a portrait of a very beautiful, round-faced young woman. And you know, things like that are just fascinating.

So I ended up majoring in history of art.

AVIS BERMAN: At Bryn Mawr.

NINA VON ECKARDT: At Bryn Mawr. I had been a history major, but I'd taken as many art—history of art courses as history courses. And then at the end of my junior year, I was approached by this wonderful English guy named Charles Mitchell, who had been a visiting professor from London, and he asked me to do an honors paper. So I switched instantly from history to history of art so I could do honors, and I wrote a paper. Now, this is in 1962—well, '61/'62. It was the winter of '61, and I graduated in '62. I did a paper on Aubrey Beardsley. Now, this was before anybody was interested in Aubrey Beardsley. That interest kind of came slightly a little bit after that. It turned out that Princeton, the rare book Princeton library had a—has a collection of Beardsley letters. So I spent a lot of time going back and forth from Bryn Mawr to Princeton to look at—you know, to look at the letters and read the letters and everything.

So I ended up graduating with honors from Bryn Mawr and started living in Washington with my

parents in the fall of—I guess it was '62. Yeah, I guess it was the fall of '62. And I started—

AVIS BERMAN: Were you looking for a job?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I was trying to get a job, and everywhere I applied, they needed typing. And I applied for a job at the National Symphony. They were looking for a secretary. I mean, it's interesting that guys can graduate from Harvard and go to a publishing company and become, you know, associate editors, and young women from Bryn Mawr can go and try and find a job, and they say, "Do you type?" So I kept running into that.

So my mother one day was at some party, a tea party or a woman's gathering or something like that, and she came back and she said, "Oh, I just met Adelyn Breeskin, and she's going to be—they're opening up this new gallery in Washington called the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, and so I told her about you and she said can you come over."

So I did. I went over to the gallery. We were living up on—right off of 34th Place, above the British embassy, right off of Massachusetts Avenue. So everything was right there. I mean, I walked to the gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Where was the gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: The gallery was—oh, where was it? I don't know if it was on Mass Ave. It was near Dupont Circle. It was near, actually, where Wolf [Von Eckardt] and I ended up living, where Wolf's house was, Hillier Place, sort of, but over—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I know where that is, between Dupont and Kalorama..

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, exactly. And—they already had a secretary, so it was basically Mrs. Breeskin, Alice Denney, and Bunny McPeck.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Who was Bunny McPeck?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Bunny McPeck was the ultimate WASP secretary. I think Bunny may have gone to Radcliffe, but I'm not sure. She was dating J. Carter Brown—[laughs]—at the time. And she was very attractive—you know, I mean, beyond WASP. I mean just the blond hair pageboy and the little dresses and everything. But very smart, very sweet.

AVIS BERMAN: What was her real name?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I have no idea—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I'll just—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —other than Bunny.

AVIS BERMAN: Bunny. Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: An archetypal WASP. And, see, I have a lot of Irish in me, so that saves me from being archetypal WASP. And I was the receptionist. I used to go two or three times a week. I was always there on Saturdays, night-times. I remember one time Abe Fortas—it was some big opening. I was in the David Smith opening, and I was the receptionist, and Abe Fortas came in and started flirting outrageously. It was like, oh, my god.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But it was interesting because, of course, people will come and talk to me and ask about—you know, so I would give them lectures on the—

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm-hmm.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And Alice, of course, was the precursor of—you know, she was, like, the pop art person. And so she had this huge group show. I can remember Wesselmann, I mean everybody was in it. So that was another great big—they had an Ashile Gorky show, the David Smith show, and they had this big pop art group show. And I probably worked there until I decided to move up to—back up to New York and since I moved up to New York in October of—around October of '83, so it was—

AVIS BERMAN: No, it was not '83.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was '63. It was, you know, quite a few months that I was working there, it became very different.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what was the relationship between Alice Denney and Adelyn [Breeskin]?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I think it was—I mean, I was 21 years old, and you're not aware of things like that at that time. But I know that there was tension. But because Alice was so much younger and had the energy and it's what people wanted—I mean, I don't know that Mrs. Breeskin—I think Mrs. Breeskin probably ended up being, as most directors are, you know, fundraiser and the social person, the person that has all of the Washington contacts and that kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: So what was Alice's title there? Was it curator or was it something else?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know if it was associate director or whether it was curator. She definitely curated.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Because, I mean, Adelyn left, and I guess Alice stayed or kept it open for—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I don't know whether Walter—I don't know when Walter Hopps was there. I don't know whether he immediately followed Adelyn or whether Alice kind of held down the fort for a long time. I know that Alice was, you know, very connected. She loved the New York art scene. She loved—she adored Alan Solomon [Jewish museum -NVE]. They had a very tight friendship. And Alice was the reason that I started working for Castelli Gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, I just—well, I'm going to get to that in a minute, but in terms—did people come into the Washington—you know, what was the Washington art world or scene like at the time?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh. Well, I didn't—I wasn't part of it at that point at all. I mean, it was Tom Downing, Morris Louis, oh, the other one, who ended up teaching in Vermont.

AVIS BERMAN: Ken Noland?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Ken Noland. So it was—it was [Clement] Greenberg's gang, and of course [André] Emmerich's also, because I think most of them worked with Emmerich.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you ever meet Alma Thomas?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I never did. I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: Were things pretty segregated then?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. I mean, I remember coming down on a train from Philadelphia and sitting next to an African gentleman and having people walking up and down the aisles, like, glaring at me for sitting next a black man. And if there was an art scene—and I'm sure there was. I mean, I subsequently, you know, became very, very close to Tom Downing when he and his wife, Louise, moved up to New York when I was—after I was married. Young, single girls don't have a lot of entrée anywhere. People like to flirt with them, but they're not a—they're not very interesting to people, unless, you know, somebody kind of picks you up, which nobody—I mean, that wasn't happening.

There was a—there was a football game. It was like a touch football game or something in Rockland Park on Sunday afternoons, maybe. And a lot of the young reporters from the congressional newspaper on the Hill and a lot of—well, it was basically Harvard and Radcliffe, maybe Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, whoever was around—graduates were—all kind of met there. I—and I had known a couple of the guys from Harvard previously. So it was a little group of people like that. But—

AVIS BERMAN: Very funny—touch football, of course, because this was the Kennedy White House time.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Exactly. Exactly.

AVIS BERMAN: Did—and did any politicians—I mean, in terms of coming into the gallery, was there anyone who would—did any—you know, did any of the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: There—the openings were always very full. But I didn't know that many people, and I didn't recognize that. And I—you know, you're interested in your own—I was—actually, I was—I was painting. I was creating a book. It was my first book. And it was in French and English, and it rhymed. And you could see six of the paintings on the wall. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: So you had a—shall we say a higher purpose in life. At least—I mean—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I had a higher purpose in life. I also had a very—and it was my first intense relationship. So I was very focused on that. And of course, as usual, it was a complete and total disaster. So I was mostly miserable. But I was, you know, more involved in my life with this young man than I—than I cared about what senator was walking into the gallery.

Ironically, I think very possibly Wolf might have come into the gallery, and I would not have—you know, absolutely had no recollection of that.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Wolf Von Eckardt for the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Wolf Von Eckardt.

AVIS BERMAN: —for the tape, which we—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, who—at that time he was—he might even have been doing—he started out doing art criticism and architecture criticism for the—for the Post. But I think he—and he might have—he might have been already writing at that time.

So the relationship went down the tubes. And I decided, "this is silly, I'm not doing anything here. I've got to get a job." So I just—that's when I decided to move to New York. It was—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Did—now, was this full time? I mean, I—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I was a volunteer. I—what—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, so you didn't—

NINA VON ECKARDT: What you would now call an intern.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: They called them interns subsequently, but at that time, you know, it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Okay. So you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So I was—I just—was just volunteering. But I spent—I mean, you know, I volunteered quite dependably in many hours.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And so had you—and at Bryn Mawr, had you studied contemporary art at all? Where there courses in that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. No. No. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there wouldn't have been, but I—

NINA VON ECKARDT: In fact, I don't think we—I even studied. I don't think I even had a course in impressionism. I don't think I ever got that far. I mean, I studied Renaissance painting and medieval art and architecture and Gothic stuff and all kinds of things, but I don't think there was a—

AVIS BERMAN: So was this—so this gallery in Washington was your first exposure to contemporary art?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And it was like a fish in water. I mean, I just loved it. I instantly responded to it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. And did—Okay, you were an intern and volunteering. Did you feel that either Adelyn Breeskin or Alice Denney mentored you at all or helped you?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Alice did.

AVIS BERMAN: In what ways?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I mean, she just—well, not—no, not—she just was—I was visible to her. I mean, Mrs. Breeskin was, you know, always friendly and polite, and when she'd come in and I'd be sitting at the front desk, she'd say—you know, she knew my name and that sort of thing. But there was no—there was no connection, whereas Alice kind of took me under her wing.

But as I said, I wasn't socially involved in the—in the gallery. I would go to—I would work openings, but, I mean, I didn't—you know, I didn't hang the stuff, or, you know, there was no—there was no, you know—[inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. I was trying to figure out what you were learning there.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I was—I was seeing all different kinds of new art. I mean, you know, I'd never seen David—I had never seen any of the art that—I mean, obviously, yes, I knew Gorky, but I hadn't seen David Smith's work, I hadn't seen any of—any of the pop artists. So pretty much everything that I saw—and if I—if I had a list of the shows, I would imagine that most of it was brand new.

And I remember talking to people—I mean, I would talk to people who would go around and say, "huh, this is art?"—and having conversations and explaining to them, yes, that it was art, and trying to get them to look at it in a different way and to see that it was art and to enjoy it rather than to condemn it. So in a funny way, I sort of acted as a docent because I was educated, and I understood, as an artist and as an educated—you know, someone who'd been educated in art history, I understood the language. So I could speak to them—I could speak to them in their language and try and become a bridge.

And it was—it was more doing that than my relationship with—although as I said, Alice was very—you know, we've—we had a—we had a friendly relationship. It was—it was a relationship of equals. You know, she didn't look down on—you know, she perceived me as an equal, basically, and was—[inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

So anyway, we will now go to the fall of '63. You have decided—you know, you're—

NINA VON ECKARDT: [Laughs.] I decided to move to New York.

AVIS BERMAN: And Alice—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I didn't have a—well, I know some friends of my parents in Lisbon, a guy who had been the—I guess—oh, I can't remember his name; I think it was Harry Smith—he and his wife had moved to New York from Brussels. They had—he had been the *New York Times* correspondent at one point in Brussels. And they moved back to New York, and he was working on the book review, the *Sunday Book Review*. And they were—they very sweetly said, "oh, you can stay with us until you find a job." They had an apartment on West End Avenue and 72nd St, which worked out wonderfully.

When I told Alice I was leaving, she said to me, well, I have some information that nobody else knows. She said, Leo Castelli's secretary, Connie Trimble, is moving to Washington because her husband, Lester Trimble, who's a composer, had just gotten—was the beneficiary of some grant. Now, I don't whether it was a Guggenheim—I don't remember what grant it was, but it was a grant that I guess required him—or that he wanted to come down to Washington, or maybe he was—got a grant to compose a piece for the National Symphony or something, and they were leaving New York. And Connie was leaving Castelli Gallery, and Leo didn't know. And I subsequently understood why Leo didn't know. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Which was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, very hard to break that kind of news to Leo. Leo's relationship with his staff was autocratic but at the same time familial. And Connie had been working with him for quite a number of years.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, she'd gotten there—she was there from '57 to '58, from the beginning.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

So I had made myself a pink linen suit that was absolutely gorgeous.

AVIS BERMAN: So how did Alice know this?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Alice knew it because Connie had asked Alice to help her find a place to live, and—because Alice spent probably as much time in New York. And, of course, Alan Solomon was one Leo's best friends, and she was—you know, she and Alan were, like, inseparable. So—

AVIS BERMAN: How did they get to know each other? Do you have any sense of why they were so friendly?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Alan—Alice and Alan, I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm-hmm [affirmative]. Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Just probably they ran into each other at some point. I don't know how they knew each other.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so it's—so that's—so anyway, you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: But anyway, so that's how she knew—and Connie had called her or contacted her and said wait, and said, "don't tell Leo, but I'm leaving, and I"—you know. So she said, "just go to the gallery."

So I did. I came up to New York. I was staying with friends.

AVIS BERMAN: You had a pink linen suit.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I was wearing a beautiful handmade pink linen suit, and I had very long blond hair that I wore a la Grace Kelly in a French knot. And I walked into the gallery, and Leo and Connie were at—I had the name yesterday—oh, Janis' wife's funeral.

AVIS BERMAN: Harriet Janis.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Harriet Janis' funeral. So this was—whenever that was, either memorial service or funeral.

Ivan [Karp] was probably sitting in the little front office smoking a cigar looking at slides, but I think I walked down—there was a corridor leading to the back—

AVIS BERMAN: By the way, had you ever heard of Leo Castelli Gallery by then?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No.

AVIS BERMAN: So—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No clue. It was a job.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you didn't know it was, like, one gallery or that—or it was—could have been Joe Schmoe gallery.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. No. Yeah, it could have been Joe Schmoe gallery.

And the guy who was the recorder and was in the little middle room and took care of every single piece of art that either came in or went out and recorded everything—and he was basically the life and blood of the gallery, although Ivan thought was he was—a very sweet guy named Jim [He was the registrar at Castelli Gallery, I cannot recall his name -NVE], and I can't think of his last name. I went back into the backroom, which was a—they—it was a room where they brought paintings to show collectors, but it had very comfortable—

AVIS BERMAN: So we should say this is at 4 E. 77th St.

NINA VON ECKARDT: 4 E. 77th St.

Jim came back, and I said Alice Denney suggested that I come by to meet Leo. And he was so friendly and he said, "oh, Leo and Connie are on their way back," and "take a seat." And, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: You didn't tell him that you were looking for a job.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. Made me—made me feel at home.

And Leo and Connie came in shortly thereafter. And Jim introduced me to them and said that I was a friend of Alice Denney's. And it turned out that Connie had told Leo in the taxicab on the way back to the gallery that she was—had to quit, that she was moving.

So I had—I had an interview with Leo and Connie, and—during which it came out that I was bilingual in French, that I spoke and understood Italian and could write some Italian. And Leo was very, very nice, and he said, "well, I'm—you know, I should—"

AVIS BERMAN: Also—I mean, you would have been introduced to him as Nina Sutherland, right?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, Nina Sutherland.

AVIS BERMAN: So—right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. "This is the friend of Alice Denney's." And then I also talked about my experience—you know, my background and everything, and—but also the connection in Washington and Alice. And—

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, I only meant his own daughter was named Nina.

NINA VON ECKARDT: That—well, that was what was so interesting. That was what I found out. But then I think by then she was already Nina Sundell, but I'm not sure.

So that was so bizarre.

And he said—he didn't offer me the job at that point. He said, "I will—I will call you Thursday"—I think there was, like, a week—you know, like, a week to wait. "I'm going to—there are—there are a few other people that I would like to talk to."

AVIS BERMAN: Well, how did he know that—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, because in a taxicab, Leo's mind—[snaps fingers]—turns out there was one other young woman that he was going to talk to that he knew through—I think through—she might have worked at MoMA. And—but as it turned out, she'd been offered a job by Arthur Penn. So she took that job. And I don't even know whether Leo would have offered her that job or whether he decided to give it to me, but in the end I got the job.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I only say that he's hearing that, and then—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, but, you know, Leo would immediately start filling the—[laughs]—

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] The space. [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. I—the same thing happened when I—when I told him I was getting married and leaving, and he had that job filled the next day. No grass, you know, grew.

AVIS BERMAN: Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.] Okay. So you found out that you had—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So I found out I had the job.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, was the job at—was "secretary" the title?

NINA VON ECKARDT: "Secretary" was the title; \$72 a week was the salary.

AVIS BERMAN: But you didn't type.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I did sort of type. There was this Olivetti, you know, and—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I meant, in other words, that—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Typing was not my forte.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. But they must have asked you if you—[inaudible].

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh yeah. They said, "do you type?" And I said—and I—I mean, I said, what, that I'd been typing college papers for years. And Leo—but Leo also understood that—you know, that I was not a typist.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Mmm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But he was more interested in the languages.

And as it turned out—the thing that's wonderful about galleries is that you do absolutely everything. We—you know, we did have a—somebody who came in and cleaned the gallery, but if on a Saturday morning of a—of an opening, the bathrooms were dirty, you cleaned the bathrooms. You know, you just—there wasn't any question of "that's not my job." There was a bookkeeper, a wonderful bookkeeper. She was in a closet behind the office. The office was miniscule. It was, like, two desks right opposite each other. And my typewriter was, you know, on the side. And of course—

AVIS BERMAN: Who did you—who was at the other desk?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Leo.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay, so you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Literally, Leo and I sat across from each other. And basically, I answered all the phones. I was very good at telling people's voices. I knew who everybody was by—just by their voice because I had a good ear. And the only two that gave me a problem were Friedel Dzubas and Robert Elkou because they both had slightly foreign—but I keep them talking, and then I'd realize who was who. And Leo liked that about me, and I—and I—and I memorized every phone number on the planet.

And I protected Leo. I kept people from him. That's basically what he wanted. But I also was able to talk to people. And he—and he liked that part of it, I mean, because I could talk to clients. I could talk to, you know, the Santini brothers. I could talk to the guys who worked—I just had a very good—I had a lot of social skills.

But you also—I mean, I helped with the shows. We'd go in and—"well, do you think this should be higher or lower?" Or, "where do you think—oh, let's put that one over there." And they would—you know, I was part of that. I was part of—you know, part of all of that.

Leo gave me a wonderful talk about the artists in the gallery. Warned me about John Chamberlain, which was an interesting thing because the first time I ever met John Chamberlain, I was typing up something. And he walked into the little back room. Never met him before, and I, you know, turned around and said "hi" or something. And he said, "hi, baby, want to fuck?" And I said, "well, not right now." [They laugh.] And I went back to my typing.

And he warned me about Rauschenberg and Johns and, you know, this sort of thing. And I let—you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I would like to know what these mini characterizations were, if you could remember, about Chamberlain, about—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, Chamberlain was a wild man. Chamberlain was the bad boy. He really was a bad boy. He was very uncouth. He was very—but, you know, sculptors are very physical. And of course, Johns is—I mean, Chamberlain's work was extremely physical.

But the thing—the thing that's fascinating is that most artists come from working-class backgrounds. They don't come from upper-class—you know, wealthy families in most instances—certainly in America. I mean, people like, you know, Allan D'Arcangelo—I remember Allan D'Arcangelo telling me one time that he'd survived school because of benign neglect, the fact that artists should not really be tampered with. They should be allowed to kind of go through school and then learn what—you know, absorb whatever they want to absorb, but, you know, don't mess with them too much kind of thing. But most of these guys were working-class. I mean, that's the only thing I—they're not blue collar so much. It's just—they weren't white-collar people.

And they were basically—I used to laugh and say they're all pirates. There was a little bit of Robin Hood pirate about them. They didn't like rules. They—I mean, I'm sort of the same myself;

I've never met a rule I didn't want to break—on a modest scale; I mean, I don't want to become Bonnie and Clyde. But they were always—and to be an artist, you have to be totally in touch with your child. So in many ways, even the most scatological of them, you know, the guys that are out there really trying to shock you, they're so silly and so childlike.

AVIS BERMAN: I always say about artists, "children with beards." [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. I mean, they should never be married. I mean, I know that's a terrible thing to say, you know, that you sort of say to them, you can—you can't get married and have families, but they make terrible—and that's why it's so hard for women to be artists, even today, because they can never find a nice wife to take care of them.

Barney Newman's wife taught school for 300 years so that Barney Newman could become this amazing artists. Now, Barney Newman was wonderful because he was one of the more formal—I mean, Barney I don't think ever—I think Barney slept in a three-piece suit with a tie. I mean, he just was this elegant—but he was—nevertheless, he wasn't from a wealthy upper-class background. He came from people who work with their hands or with their—you know, some—you know, maybe accountants, maybe, you know, some of the more—didn't all just work with their hands. But they weren't from—they weren't elegant.

But what they were was, they had these incredible, unleashed minds. And they just simply couldn't stop—I mean, they couldn't stop. I mean, every time they would turn around, they'd have another idea. Exhausting. I mean, Roy Lichtenstein—a good example. Also, they don't—they don't ever believe their good luck. Roy was terrified—now, I didn't—you know, I didn't know him after a certain time. So maybe at some point he got used to the fact that he was going to wake up the next day, and it wasn't all going to disappear. But he was terrified that he was going to end up—you know, nobody was ever going to buy anything, and he'd have to go back teaching.

And they—and they all chose a life that—nothing was ever—they never did anything for money. What's fascinating about Leo is that Leo never did anything for money. Leo was one of the purest idealists on the planet. He was—he was a great marketing guy. I remember the year of the Venice Biennale. Everybody was furious at us because Leo took the back page of *Art International*, which was then very big—[inaudible]—when it was big. And he had this map of Europe. And he had, you know, these stars all over the—[laughs]—like Napoleon's campaigns, right? Rauschenberg, Johns—he had—was having all these shows because what Leo understood—Leo would send an entire show to Ileana [Sonnabend] in Paris. There was some gal in Italy he'd send work to. But Irving Blum and the Dwan Gallery in LA—he'd send entire shows to them, and they'd sell all the work, and he'd be lucky to get 5 cents out of it. Ileana was always messing around with—you know, "Oh, I don't have the money right now," you know—I know—and Leo understood the value of getting the work out.

One of his favorite people was Bob Buck. And I was trying to remember—he was subsequently at the Albright-Knox, but in '63 I don't know where he was because I was actually trying to figure out where he was. And I remembered Albright-Knox, but I saw on Google that that—they said he wasn't there till '72. Now, this would have been '63, '64. So I—but it was some sort of university gallery or something. He would come in. Leo would give you the entire back room to put in a group show because he understood getting the work out there. So there's this map of Europe. Alan Solomon had done—you know, was putting together the Venice Biennale. And so he had—he had Rauschenberg and Johns in Venice, but he also had one of them in Paris and then one of the—and then other people around. And people were just—got so upset to see this at, you know, Castelli Gallery and then the map of Europe and all these little stars and the names of all of these artists around.

And Leo was—he was arrogant, and he was difficult. He was very difficult. But he was also incredibly smart. But it wasn't about money. We used to go to Chase Bank every—you know, in the summertime with our like, our hearts in our hands because we didn't have enough money to get through the summer. Now, Leo gave all of his artists a stipend. He was like a Medici. Everybody—you know, and at one point—

AVIS BERMAN: Why were you going to Chase?

NINA VON ECKARDT: To get a loan to get through the summer.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So we'd borrow \$10,000 to get through the summer or 15,000 [dollars] or something. And he gave—you know, obviously, Rauschenberg, Johns, Lichtenstein, they got higher—you know, but he gave—he gave—he gave Salvatore Scarpitta, like, 600 bucks a month, something like that. And I don't think he ever sold one of Scarpitta's pieces. He had—he had this understanding now—and of course, sometimes, you know, artists would get angry because there was a time when Roy was supporting—his sales were supporting the gallery or Bob's sales were supporting the gallery or, you know, Jasper's were. But Leo just would say to them—you know, and then if they wanted more money, if they needed to—you know, a down payment for a house or something, he'd try very hard to get it to them because obviously, he did owe it to them because the monthly stipend, if they sold a lot, wasn't quite what they—you know, what they were owed. But he tried to make them understand why.

And of course, in those days the cut was 30-70. The artist got 70 percent, and the gallery got 30 percent. Now, that changed subsequently. I was very surprised to hear that at one point it was 50-50, and then it might even be—at this point it might be 70-30 in the opposite direction. But I didn't know any other gallery that gave their artists a check every month. And that was—that was, you know, really an amazing thing. Leo had—he had—it was interesting. He didn't—I don't know that he understood the art per se. He had this sense of history and of mission. Ivan and Ileana picked a lot of the early artists. I think Ivan subsequently probably picked more of the later artists.

Leo—loved Rauschenberg, I think, more than anybody. I think he felt comfortable with Bob. I think they would talk all the time. He had a real relationship with Bob and with Alan Solomon. I think he was very—not afraid of Jasper, but, Jasper was so smart and so—and Jasper—Jasper wasn't cuddly, and Bob was definitely cuddly. And he—and he was very fond of Roy. Roy—he felt at ease with Roy. But they—but Roy was so diffident, they also did not become—I mean, they didn't become, like, great friends or anything like that. You could always tell—Leo took people to lunch all the time. And if you were up here—I mean, if you were Victor Ganz, he would take you to The Carlyle. If you were just—if you were Paul Cummings, he would take you to—[they laugh]—to Longchamps. [They laugh.] But if you were Alan Solomon, you had lunch at Leo's apartment.

So he took the really—the people that he really cared about into the family and—Leo was a very complicated man. He could be unbelievably charming. I don't know if he was kind. He could be charming, but I think it was always with a purpose. I know he was very fond of me, and he was—and he was good with me. He was—he didn't—he was never mean to me, but he did use me. I mean—[laughs]—you know, the job was supposed to be, I don't know, 10:00 to 6:00, something, and it generally was 8:00 to midnight. I mean, it was understood that you went to all the openings. You basically didn't have any time off. At one point he tried to con me into coming in on Monday morning and then getting Wednesday afternoon off. And I said, Leo, you know perfectly well that if I come in Wednesday morning, I'll never leave; I can't get away. So no, I'm not giving you my Monday morning; you can't have it. But he tried.

AVIS BERMAN: Did he ever hit on you?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No.

AVIS BERMAN: I only say that because, you know—you know, he loved women.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, no, that—no, absolutely. It was fascinating. Toiny [Castelli] and I became good friends because I of course spoke French, and I was one of a few people that she liked. And I liked her very much. When I first got there, she was pregnant. Leo was on the phone with her 20 times a day—"Ah, *ma chérie, ma chérie*—da da da"—adored her.

Was so happy when Jean-Christophe was born. And of course, ironically, they're looking for all these names that are the same in French as in English, you know, like how about Paul? How about—[they laugh]—and then they end up with Jean-Christophe, right, as a—right, typical. I don't know what happened. Ileana was always invasive. I mean, she and Leo, regardless of the fact that they were divorced, they weren't separated. I mean, they just talked all the time and whatever. I don't know whether it was Toiny just being insecure. She came from an extremely good family. But he had met her as an au pair. I think she had been—Jill Kornblee [Kornblee Gallery -NVE]—you know, working at Jill Kornblee's house as an au pair. But she came from such an elevated background that I couldn't imagine that—you know, and plus she was French. So she was difficult. I mean, the French are just impossible.

And I think she was holding Leo—Leo was such an easy touch. You could manipulate Leo with

both hands tied behind your back and your eyes closed because all you had to do was sweet-talk him. And I remember thinking, why is she doing that? All she has to do is smile sweetly and say, you know, *ah, mon cheri, mon petit papillon* [butterfly -NVE], and he's in your pocket. But for whatever reason, she set up this sort of counter-energy dynamic with him that basically turned into a war.

AVIS BERMAN: So they were fighting even then? Or—I—[inaudible]—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, that they—they started fighting very soon after—I mean, as far as I could tell, very soon after Jean-Christophe was born. She would go back to Europe in the summer. I know she was in France when Leo was at the Venice Biennale. Leo was very charmed by a number of people. There was a young woman he met at—I think, at Andy's studio, and of course, you know, young women are completely unscrupulous. What do they care? They're going to flirt and come in and go out to lunch and do whatever they want to do. And while the cat's away, the mouse is definitely going to play. And whether Toiny found out about it or whether she just suspected things, it just basically kind of got sourer and sourer. And it was very sad because it didn't have to. It really didn't have to because he was—he had loved her. I mean, they—it had been a love relationship. But people have this way of torpedoing their lives.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, who knows if—well—but they—I think she must have gotten pregnant before they were married.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Oh, no, no, he had to—I mean, didn't have to, I guess. I suppose he could have said no.

AVIS BERMAN: Unlikely.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know the chronology of Leo sees Toiny, Leo dates Toiny, Leo gets her pregnant, Leo divorces Ileana. I—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, they were—they were—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was very—

AVIS BERMAN: Ileana—they were divorced about 1960.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So it was around that time. Now, I—when I got there, obviously, he had—I don't know whether he'd been planning on messing around with her for a long time, but they were—I mean, they—she was very pregnant, and they were very married by the time I came on the scene. But I think that he had probably met her before he and Ileana got divorced.

AVIS BERMAN: I'm not sure. I don't know the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know the exact chronology of that. And if it wasn't Toiny, it was somebody else, I mean, because Ileana looked like Gertrude Stein. I mean, she just was, you know, short and dumpy, and there's a point at which, you know, brains aren't going to get you anywhere. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he had—there were—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And she really was brilliant. And she also just knew—she understood about art. I mean, she just had—you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Leo had had many girlfriends before Toiny. I mean, it was just maybe—

MS. VON ECKHARDT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. No, Leo was a—you know, the round heels. I mean, Leo was the archetypal round-heeled person. [They laugh.] And because Ileana was also European, I suppose she—you know, she put up with him for—but I mean, I guess at a certain point—or maybe she found—who did she end up marrying? Was it—

AVIS BERMAN: Michael Sonnabend.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Michael Sonnabend. So she probably—maybe has—that's why she divorced him possibly, because finally she found somebody that, you know, worked for her, and she had enough of the whole Leo thing. Oscar de la Renta either owned the whole building—

AVIS BERMAN: Which building are we talking about?

NINA VON ECKARDT: 4 East 77th Street.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or lived upstairs. And that was kind of cool because he would—you know, it was nice to be stuck in the one-person elevator with Oscar because he's going up to—upstairs, or he would walk upstairs. I don't know, it was just—it was an interesting building. It was an interesting building. And they had been there—I mean, I think they had actually lived there for a while, and there was a story that maybe the dining room table that was in their apartment, Leo and Toiny's apartment, had been the dining room table that had been originally in the back room that, you know, people like de Kooning sat around, and Pollock and, you know, the whole gang, and they would have parties and eat and drink and whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: You said Leo was arrogant. Could you elaborate on that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was always right. And he had a genius for—he really—I mean, he really worked people. He was very, very good. I mean, he—the way he would play the collectors—you know, Jasper would come back with half a painting from a summer in Edisto, you know, and Leo would call Vera List and Victor Ganz and, you know, this one and that one and—he also—part of his—part of being arrogant was that he absolutely knew... There was a time when if you weren't in Castelli Gallery, you weren't—you just weren't making it. You weren't cutting it.

I remember one time Jasper coming in and saying to Leo, "Oh, will you just get Jim Dine off of Bob's back?" And, it was sort of a, "What, what?" But it was basically that Jasper felt that Jim Dine was kind of breathing too close to Bob's work. Most of—Jim Dine would have cut off his right hand to get into Castelli Gallery. He—all of them—even the ones that were with—in Green Gallery wanted to be with Leo, even though the vision at Green was much purer. I mean, that was—that was an intensely pure vision there. And he had some of the—you know, like the—well, he had [James] Rosenquist and [Claes] Oldenburg and—so it was—it was a very different—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well, he knew Richard Bellamy. I'm going—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Richard Bellamy, yeah, who was—well, and also—I mean, I found out much later that basically, it was [Robert] Scull keeping Green open. Richard—he was funding Bellamy. But Bellamy was a purist. He was totally a purist—[inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: What was he like?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I didn't know him at all. You—I—no way I could have gotten to know him. I mean, at this point I'm, you know, 22, 23 years old.

AVIS BERMAN: Was he coming in the gallery? Did you meet him?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, he never came to the gallery. I used to go to openings there. And his openings were—everybody went to his openings. And he just was—ate, slept—the most pure, incorruptible—I mean, this is my perception, now. He could have been taking money under tables. I have no idea. But I don't think so. I think he just—these guys were nuts. They're on some messianic mission. You don't—you really, really don't—or none of these people did, anyway—obviously, it's true, people get very wealthy making—you know, making—I don't even know if they're intelligent choices—lucky choices about art. Back in those days before artists sort of got together—and they didn't get together for quite a while—I think now when a live artist painting comes up at auction, I think they get a percentage, but I'm not sure. They were trying—I mean, how fair is it to sell a Johns map for 2,500 bucks and then have somebody four years later auction it off for, you know, at that point 2[00,000 dollars], \$300,000, and the artist gets nothing, and at the time they might have gotten whatever their—whatever their 70 percent would have been on the 2,3[00 dollars], \$2,500?

AVIS BERMAN: I don't think that's ever been successful. It was very famous—I mean—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I know there was a—there was a movement to do this, and of course it seemed eminently fair. And how easy would that be also even to lop off X percent and give it to an artist's estate if they're dead?

AVIS BERMAN: But what if—what if the art—what if the painting sold for \$5,000 and because of the artist's reputation 20 years later, it sells for \$2,000? Does the artist give it back?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, no, I know. I know they make that argument. But that's probably a very rare occurrence with most—I mean, if your work is in that bad decline, you're probably not even going to make it to auction. People are going to, you know, put it in the attic or something. I mean, I know people made that argument, but that always seems very specious to me. It's like, you know, why is it—why did you always have to go back in that direction when patently, 99 3/4 of the examples go in the opposite direction? And it's so little money, when you think of it, in the end. I mean, they were talking infinitesimal percentages, I mean, not 50 percent. Maybe—I don't even think it was 10 percent that they were—you know, that they were asking for.

AVIS BERMAN: No, there was a famous incident—because Robert Scull sold a Rauschenberg for far more than he paid for it. Rauschenberg was so mad, I guess he, you know, punched him or got mad at him, and they—he got into a fight with him.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, that may have been one of the—I mean, I know Bob was very active in the—you know, the—I mean, Bob was always very active in any—I mean, he was part of the anti-Vietnam thing, I mean, the whole—he just—you know, he was very socially—they—actually, they—Johns was too. I mean, they all were pretty socially conscious and idealistic, I mean, politically very idealistic, not to say completely naïve and—well, again, the whole child—the whole child image comes up. They had really—well, very—not nationalistic but patriotic. I mean, they believed in things and they believed in—you know, in social change and, I mean, you know, all the stuff that's happening now, pretty much because of nightly television.

I mean, people put down television, but I once said years ago, when they were starting to do all-black shows and, you know, somebody would come out and say, I'm gay, and there'd be a gay show. And I said, you know, it's not going to work until you have a real hodge-podge and you've got gay black guys on evening drama shows. And all of a sudden, that was what was happening.

And you invite these people into your life every night—you're watching these television shows—and there's a black doctor whose little kid gets shot in the kindergarten massacre and you're crying for this—and he can't be the enemy. He's not the "other" anymore. Well, artists were already there 50 years before that happened. They just—they're just there already and people are—it scares people.

It was always very funny going to—going to museum openings because you always knew that the museum didn't really want—[laughs]—they didn't really want to invite the artist to the opening, but they kind of had to because they were in the show. But they were always very uncomfortable—most people are very uncomfortable with live artists. They like the dead ones.

And I remember when I was—when I was writing art criticism, and I remember somebody saying to me, right, that I—that I should write a review of the—it was an Andrew Wyeth show at the Met or something. And I said no, I don't need to write a review of Andrew Wyeth. He's already—you know, he's—and he's not my favorite artist and I don't—I would never write a negative piece about an artist. And they said, well, that's a copout, and I said no, it's not a copout.

I said, there may be 5,000 people in the entire world who care about live artists and their work. So if I find somebody that I find inspiring—that I love and I'm—inspiring, I'm going to write the best piece I could write about their work so that somebody reads my piece and wants to go see their show.

And I subsequently found out much later that I had written pieces about artists that—I mean, I remember one time somebody said to me, oh, you know what? There was this collector in Hong Kong who read your piece in *Art International* and he called the gallery and he bought two of her works. From Hong Kong. And I thought, wow.

And I wrote a piece about a Japanese artist once at Salander O'Reilly before—[laughs]—the shit hit the fan, and Fitzsimmons contacted the gallery and he was—he was—it was James Fitzsimmons who was the editor and owner of *Art International*, and he was a very—well, but he had to be—I mean, you know, he had to sell advertising space and everything. So if they took either a full-page ad or a half-page ad, he would give this guy the cover.

Now, this guy had come to America from Japan. I could find who these people are but I'd have to go into the garage and open up a filing cabinet and bring out my writing. But he was able to go home—and visit his family because he could take with him—*Art International* with him on the cover and my piece inside. And so he had—basically, that was an honor for him, and I thought, wow, how about—why isn't that so much better than writing a nasty piece about Louise Nevelson? You know, she doesn't need me to write a nasty piece about her, why would I do that?

But people don't understand that. I mean, I say I'm not—I'm not John Simon, I'm not trying to save the virginity of the art world.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But a lot of people go in with—they start—and that's one of the things I don't like about art criticism. It's like, you know, why do you have to kill people to feel good about yourself or whatever—whatever reason? But it's—there's so little to be gained, really. I mean, the pyramid, there's like three people on the top of the pyramid and maybe a couple of thousand underneath, you know, down—as you go down towards the bottom.

It's such a tiny world, and it's such a rarified world. And if you don't absolutely love it, and if it's not a mission, what's the point? And most of the people that I—one of my favorite people scared me to death when I first started working. I—Cordier and Ekstrom had a gallery in—in the—the same building as—not Christie's but Sotheby's on Madison Avenue—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That—right. Mm hmm [affirmative].

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I went to a couple of the shows, and you know, Mr. Ekstrom was walking around looking like the—he was embalmed.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, he always did.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And completely unapproachable. Years later, I'm an art critic. I was—I guess at that point, I was working—I was writing pieces for Richard Martin, and I used to get—I used to be able to say, Richard, can I do a full—a full-page piece on so-and-so, and he'd say, sure, go ahead, because you made \$35 for one of those. And for the—the sort of—the tiny pieces, you made, like, \$10 apiece for the tiny—I mean, you know, I had to stop writing art criticism because I couldn't afford it. I couldn't eat.

But anyway, there was a wonderful black artist that Ekstrom was showing in—in the—in what—[inaudible]—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, it's Romare Bearden.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Romare Bearden. And I went to the show and I just—oh my god, it was so wonderful, and I—and I went up to his secretary who was this wonderful woman from, like, the Bronx, and that alone should have been a clue. She was just this, you know, mother type, and we became—you know, we liked each other. You know, I'd call up and say, you got any pictures? I'm coming over, get some pictures out for me, whatever. And she was really sweet, and she introduced me to—she grabbed me one time because I tended to sneak in and not let them know that I was writing anything, especially if it was, like, a whole bunch of small pieces or I didn't want a photograph or something. But if it was a main piece, I would—I would let them know that I was writing.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were talking about Romare Bearden.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So she introduced me to Ekstrom, because I'd never actually met him. He was so absolutely kind, and subsequently, he'd call me every once in a while and he'd say, I'm having a show, so-and-so. Would you be interested in doing a piece? And I'd come over and I'd look at the photographs and I'd say, oh, this is really—because he did. He had a wonderful stable.

One of my favorite people—and I should think of his name, but I can't—he was a sculptor and he taught up at—up at Dartmouth. He was a sculptor/teacher up at Dartmouth, and he was one of the—Ekstrom's best artists.

AVIS BERMAN: Was it Varujan Yegan Boghosian?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I went up there, spent the weekend with him. He dragged me around the studio, showed me all the new work, we went to see *Beyond the Fringe*, which the Dartmouth Drama Club was putting—one of the most wonderful human beings on the planet.

AVIS BERMAN: I agree. I know him very—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Just—

AVIS BERMAN: I know him well.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —so wonderful. And I adored him. I couldn't understand why he was married to that person. [They laugh.] That's beside the point. Why do these wonderful artists marry these—

The other one who wrote cookbooks, he was—they were close friends. Giono [*sic*].

AVIS BERMAN: I don't know him.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Ed—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Giobbi.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Giobbi.

AVIS BERMAN: Giobbi.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Now, he hit on me. [They laugh.] He did hit on me.

But I think Arnie [Ekstrom] drove me to the airport—you know, got me to LaGuardia to get up there. I mean, he could not have been kinder, more thoughtful, warmer, funnier, sweeter. Now, his wife [Parmenia Migel -NVE] was a tarantula. She really was a piece of work. And I loved Niki, their son. He was—but—

AVIS BERMAN: I think, by the way, since we have wandered into the art writing, what we should say is what name did you write under—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay, all right.

AVIS BERMAN: —because we should—when people are going to look this up—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, no.

AVIS BERMAN: —you're not writing under Nina Sutherland.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I'm not writing under Nina Sutherland. What happened was I got married. I got married and left Castelli Gallery, and then at one point, I was married to Charles Frazier, who was a Los Angeles sculptor out of Morris, Oklahoma. And he had been with Dwan Gallery. And the very first time I met Charlie, I was at a dinner party at Larry Rivers in the Chelsea Hotel with LeRoi Jones and his wife, and I thought LeRoi Jones was absolutely adorable.

And then when he became—[laughs]—this militant black—practically a Panther, I was, like, stunned because that had not been my experience with him. And Mary McCarthy was at this dinner party, and Mary McCarthy was married to a man named Jim West who was one of my parents' best friends in Paris. And when I was 13 years old, Jim West had taken me and my sister to lunch at Maxim's [Famous Parisian Restaurant -NVE]. And then a number of years later, he met and married Mary McCarthy.

And so—because unbeknownst to Roy, I mean—and I don't think I knew that Mary McCarthy—how would I have known [inaudible] who was going to be at the dinner party, but when I got there and saw that it was—and I had never met her, but I introduced myself to her, and we had a very nice—very nice conversation.

Towards the end of that party, two men walked in, both very tall, both very thin, one blond, one dark. And I looked at them and they were both very good-looking and I thought, oh, what a shame. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: You thought they were gay?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I thought they were gay. Of course, it was John Weber and Charles Frazier.

Charlie was having—Charlie was, I guess—I know Charlie—yeah, he was. He was having a show. He was having a show at Jill Kornblee. And John had accompanied him. And then Charlie was

leaving New York and going to Europe where he was—he ended up going to Ibiza, where he did a series of plasters, and then he went to Rome and he—and he cast these—all these plasters in bronzes and the lost wax, blah, blah, blah. And then he came back and he spent the winter in Arman's studio in the city, and then eventually had another show at Kornblee.

But the first time I met him was that time when he walked into Larry Rivers' dinner party. I was dating Roy at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so that would have been—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That would have been in—

AVIS BERMAN: —'63. Fall of '63.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, probably fall, or early, early—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. I will just say for the tape that you dated Roy

Lichtenstein from probably, like, October to December 1963.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, something like that. Yeah, yeah.

And then I went to Charlie's show at the Kornblee Gallery, and it was all—it was beautiful little bronzes, the very—his early, early work of turtles with houses on top of them and heads with, you know, things coming—popping out of them. And I was—I don't think I even went up to—I don't think I said—went up and said hi, I like your show, I think I just went and saw the show and left.

So when he came back after having been to Ibiza and—it was a—many, many months later, he walked into Castelli Gallery, and I actually was sitting in the front at Ivan's—sitting at Ivan's desk because I think Ivan had gone off to lunch or something, so I was just, you know, sitting at the front desk.

AVIS BERMAN: So this would've been at some point in '64.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Probably '64, yeah. Yes, because we were married in '65. So it was—it would've been, yeah, somewhere, spring or whatever of '64, summer maybe, or going into fall—no, it was probably fall of '64. And he walked in and he said something like hi, I'm Charles Frazier, and I said, oh, yes, I remember you. I lied, you know, I—we met at Larry Rivers' and I like your show and whatever.

And he said, do you eat lunch? And I said yes. [Laughs.] And what he meant was, you know, would I go out to lunch with him then, but of course, we didn't go out to lunch because—[laughs]—I think—I think Jill Kornblee just said, oh, just call her. So he did subsequently call me and we started seeing each other and eventually got married, which is when I left Castelli Gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: So you got married probably, what, in June—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I got married in May of '65 because he was going to have a show in LA of these bronzes. He had had a show at Kornblee of the fancy bronzes that he'd spent the entire winter polishing. And then the whole show was being shipped out to LA, and he was going to have a show out there at the Dwan Gallery because he was with the Dwan Gallery. And so we got married and got onto a plane and flew out. And I think he had his opening two days later. And that was the beginning of—I mean, why I didn't stay married—you know, get married and stay working, but we never even thought about it.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, did you move to California?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, we lived in Sea Cliff, Long Island. We were very good friends with David Jacobs and his wife, and David taught at Hofstra. He also—a marvelous sculptor, and they had a great, big old Victorian house and there was this little tiny farmhouse that we—it wasn't in—on a farm. I mean, it was a farmhouse in the middle of town that I think the rent was like, you know, 300 bucks a month or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Was your husband teaching there at Hofstra?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No.

AVIS BERMAN: In other words, why did you choose Seacrest [*sic*]?

NINA VON ECKARDT: We chose Sea Cliff because of David.

AVIS BERMAN: Sea Cliff, sorry.

NINA VON ECKARDT: David had been Charlie's best man in our wedding. No, it was completely crazy. Charlie was getting a small stipend from Dwan and a tiny stipend from Kornblee.

AVIS BERMAN: Does that mean—because it sounds as if you would have needed to work.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, you'd think. But no, didn't—he got—he got—and I was very good at managing money—not very good at manifesting it but very good at managing it. So somehow, we managed to live and he sold a couple of pieces, not very many. And it was—it was hand-to-mouth. I mean, it was literally hand-to-mouth. But then he—as it turned out, he subsequently had a career as a designer for multimedia shows. He was really good at that and made quite, you know, good money doing that.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, first of all, let's establish how long you were married to Charles Frazier.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I was married a total of—we got married in May of '65—

AVIS BERMAN: '65.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —and I left him from California the summer of '76. I came back to the East Coast.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so you did move to California.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So we did eventually move to California. We lived in Sea Cliff for a couple of years. My daughter Merin was born when we lived in Sea Cliff.

AVIS BERMAN: Merin.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Merin, M-E-R-I-N. Merin. She was born in December of '66. No, we lived quite a few years in Sea Cliff because my son Graham was born in May of '68. And it wasn't until after he was born that we then moved into the city.

In the meantime, Charlie had—oh, I know. He had started—he had been an animator. He had worked for Disney back when he went to school at Chouinard [Art Institute]. After he graduated from Chouinard he was part of that California—totally part of that California art scene and knew everybody—they all knew each other and they all went, you know—and a lot of them—but he ended up—his first job was at Disney Studios, but he also—apparently, I think he worked for Charles Eames for a while.

He's a—he was a—as most sculptors are, he's a very, very good draftsman, I mean, a wonderful—his drawings are beautiful. And so he started putting together—getting in touch with old friends from California who'd come east who were in animation and things like that. He was doing some animation and working on animated commercials and things.

AVIS BERMAN: This is to support you all.

NINA VON ECKARDT: This was to support us all because it was by that time, you know, I had two children.

We moved into the city when we found out from somebody that you could get these big apartments—oh, I know. No, there was an—there was actually something rather fascinating that happened. Allan Kaprow was one of our neighbors up there. Allan Kaprow lived in the little next-door town that I don't know—it wasn't Sea Cliff but it was right next door. He and Vaughan [Rachel] and—they had a daughter and a son and then Vaughan and I were both pregnant—I was pregnant with Merin, she was pregnant with a little girl who was named Nina eventually. And she was killed. They lived on a—in a—

AVIS BERMAN: Nina or the other—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Nina.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: She was killed in a corner—they lived in a corner house and she ran out into the street and got hit by a car. It was just absolutely tragic. But we became very close, and Charlie and Allan started talking about a happening. And we ended up—now, what summer was that? That—oh, that was the summer of—that was the summer of '66.

We ended up doing a happening called *Gas* in the Hamptons. I had some friends named Mickey and Gene Rachlis. Their son, Kit Rachlis, he was a big deal at Rolling Stone, and I—and I babysat Kit Rachlis. I actually toilet-trained Kit Rachlis—[they laugh]—in a—in a little farmhouse near Versailles outside of Paris when I was 13.

We were close friends with—family friends with the Rachlises. Gene Rachlis had been my father's boss at one point. Gene came back to New York and went into editing. They lived down in the Village for a while. But they had a house on the island in between—past Sag Harbor—

AVIS BERMAN: Shelter Island?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Shelter—they had a house in Shelter Island, this wonderful, old, old, old house with a porch. And Gene—they gave it to me for the summer. They said, "Eh, we're not going out there this summer."

So—well, we only needed it for like four days. It was the Kaprows, and Charlie and I, Vaughan and I, you know, out to here. Charlie had gotten—well, Michael Benedict at one point got involved, and he ended up writing about it, but I'm not—and I think he must have—he must have been there, because he wasn't like—you know, he'd come out and experienced it firsthand, and then some camera type—you know, camera people, friends, you know, film—filmmaker-type people friends of Charlie's from LA, who had—you know, who moved to the East Coast.

But what had happened was is that Charlie and Allan got talking, talking, talking—"We want to this thing in the summer, three days in the Hamptons, all these events." And I'm thinking, "Who's paying for this?"

So I remembered a guy named Gordon Hyatt, who was a producer at "Eye on New York," Channel 4. So I called up Gordon Hyatt, and I said, "Gordon"—and I explained the whole situation to him, and I said, "Do you think—would that be a segment—I mean, would that be an interesting segment for your show?" Because he had done—he was very interested—he used to come into the gallery, and he'd done—he'd done a bunch of art pieces. So I knew he was interested in the art world. And I thought, "This is, like, really freaky." You know, we got Allan Kaprow and this—crazy California artists, and this would be very interesting.

So Gordon said, "Absolutely." Hung up the phone, picked up the phone—[laughs]—and I called Virginia Dwan. So I played one against the other, and I got—Virginia Dwan gave us some money. Now at the time—I think it was \$2,500—I mean, bupkes—but it worked.

So we had "Eye on New York." We had the funding from Virginia Dwan, and all that she required was that with—somewhere in "Eye on New York," Dwan Gallery, you know, whatever, "supported by Dwan Gallery" or something like that—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: —which happened.

I don't know what made me do it, but I called up Bob Scull and I said, "I've got 'Eye on New York,' I've got—look, we've got funding." Bob Scull pulled together a party, a pool party of Harold Rosenberg, May Tabak, any artist that was around at the time. Oh, I'm going to look this up so I could tell you—her neighbor. She's a writer. She wrote for *The New Yorker* magazine. Her first name was Jane.

AVIS BERMAN: Jane Kramer?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. Jane Kramer was in situ all summer, writing a profile of the Sculls.

The day we went, Allan and Charlie and I went down to sort of suss out what was going on, you know, where we wanted to shoot, we stopped in at—in the springs, we went and visited Harold

Rosenberg, who I fell immediately in love with—beyond the most charming person. And because I'm out to here, right, everybody—you know, they're like, "Can I touch you?" "Yes. Are you kidding? Yes, you can—you can have my belly." [Laughs.]

And when we stopped by the Sculls' house, Jane was there. You know, it was—it was this magical—and the whole thing fell into place. We did a series of very strange events. Charlie blew up an inflatable black—it was a—it was either a black 300-foot plastic penis or it was the Empire State Building—I mean, it was the precursor of the World Trade Center—on the beach in one of the Hamptons.

We did this—we got—the entire Montauk Fire Department came and they threw fire foam down the cliffs at Montauk, and Allan is walking through this foam being followed by all these crazy, you know, art people, and he was like Moses.

And that day de Kooning arrived in a yellow convertible with two or three young women, and they just parked the convertible at the top of the cliff and they're watching the event happen.

We did something on the Sag Harbor ferry that went back and forth between Shelter Island.

And it got on "Eye of New York." It won a number of prizes. It is probably to this day still available at the Museum of Modern Art. You could see *Gas*.

My part in it, of course, is completely forgotten. Nobody has any idea that I did anything. We went to a luncheon at the Emmys and I think it might have won an Emmy. I think Gordon might have won an Emmy for that—for that particular segment. And I got a little—kind of like a diploma, like a little thank-you thing saying, you know, "Thank you for your participation." And I wanted to say, "What do you mean, 'participation'?" I essentially executive produced this thing." But hey, you know, what are you going to do? [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And it's like I'm—I was—you know, I was pregnant, and I was a woman and—and I'm not the kind of—I don't—you know, I don't—I wanted to—what mattered was doing it. I don't care.

So—but it's ironic, because nobody—I'm sure Michael Benedict never, never said a word about, you know, the phone calls, the—which is what literally made it happen.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But it was a wonderful, wonderful—and then Allan—unfortunately, Allan went back to LA, and they—Vaughan and Allan—I found out—you know, you lose touch with people—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —which is very sad. I mean, it—we did actually see them subsequently when we were in LA. We saw them a couple of times. But it was never—you know, never the same.

And then I found out that she had divorced him, which I—did surprise me, because I would not have—but I think what happened was that she got just—she just got in touch with herself, you know, as most of us did in the—in the '70s. Anybody who was married and had children, by the time they were 36 to 40, whatever they were doing then, they divorced, they got rid of the kids, they switched around, and they changed, and they were doing something completely different when they—when—from that point on, when they were in their 40s.

So after *Gas*, we moved into the city—

AVIS BERMAN: And *Gas* was the summer of '66?

NINA VON ECKARDT: *Gas* was the summer of '66, because Merin was born in December.

There was one other event that took place in Central Park, with Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik. That was in the fall of '66, but it was early fall, because it was beautiful weather.

And there was a guy that put up inflatable buildings. It was part of a—and I'm not sure why he

did these buildings. It was something where they—that you could store things while—you could put all your—everything there while they were debugging a building or while they were tearing something down and they had these—and they were beautiful; they were all these round domed things. They were absolutely gorgeous. They were kind of like Bucky Fuller domes. And Charlie convinced this guy to basically, you know, let us have a building for the day, and he filled it with helium balloons, and it became like a children's—it was—it was absolutely—it was absolutely—[inaudible]—and I think Allan also had something. It was something—well, it was—it was one of—I think it was called, like, "International Art Festival" or something, and it was—and it was—and it was run—it was kind of driven by Charlotte. And she was living at the hotel—the Paris Hotel up on West End Avenue and, you know, playing the violin with—you know, with the—[laughs]—with no tops, anything. I mean, it was—it was the most—I'm sure it's the same now, except that I'm not part of it anymore, but it was—it was—it was magical. I mean, it was like living a fairy tale because everything was interconnected. I mean, I look back on my life and I think, "Holy shit." I mean, I think Elizabeth Mongan and—I mean, Adelyn—yeah, Elizabeth Mongan and Adelyn Breeskin were sisters or something. I mean, it was—it's—everybody was interconnected, and it was very strange.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Well, first of all, I'm not sure that Adelyn Breeskin was sisters with—also, there was an Agnes Mongan, and you're saying Elizabeth Mongan—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, that's a—I thought her name was Agnes.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But I read somewhere else that it was Elizabeth, and under the name Elizabeth, she is—she's called curator—because, you know, the—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: —the Internet doesn't always get it right.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So I mean, there could be two Mongans—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —who were sisters.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: But I don't think that Adelyn—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —that Agnes Mongan and—

NINA VON ECKARDT: For some reason, I always thought they were sisters.

AVIS BERMAN: I think, well—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I—you know, but—you know, I mean—

AVIS BERMAN: I'm going to—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —I could've gotten it completely wrong.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I'm going to dispute you on that.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: But—well, I'll have to look it up.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, and—[inaudible]—and I'm also thinking that I was wrong and I'm trying to remember why I had that idea, or maybe somebody said that, and they were wrong.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or the fact that they sort of looked alike—I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But interestingly, they both went to Bryn Mawr—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] No, actually—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —which I didn't know at the time, and I thought—

AVIS BERMAN: —Adelyn went to Radcliffe.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Really? But she—what she—she had a stint at Bryn Mawr.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: She didn't graduate, but she—I think she probably—there were lot of people, and to this day, there are people who go to Bryn Mawr, but they really want to be in Radcliffe, and then she obviously was one of them, and she decided, you know, "I'm out of here" and then ended up at—because she graduated from Radcliffe, whereas Mongan graduated from Bryn Mawr.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But it's just interesting that all of these interconnections, which just goes to prove, you know, the six degrees of separation or that there are only 500 people in the world or that it is—the art world is such a tiny, tiny place.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It really, really is.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But going back to—you know, going back to Leo's arrogance, it wasn't—he could be—I mean, every once in a while somebody would come into the gallery and Leo, who was always, you know, bowing and scraping and, you know, "Come into my parlor"—I mean, you talk about the spider and the—you know, the fly—oh, my god, was he the spider! I mean, he could get any fly he wanted in his net.

But every once in a while, he would be so rude to somebody, and I'd think, you know, "Who does he think they are, that—why would he choose this person to be rude to?"

But it was his sense of, if this person is my artist in my gallery, I mean, my gallery—he absolutely was the reason—it was his perception of his gallery that made everybody else believe that this was the most important gallery on the planet, ever; these were the most—the only artists, these are the only artists. I mean, for quite a while, you know, abstract expressionism—you know, people were just like walking on the paintings because they were dust—I mean, they—he really—he actually had a rather negative influence at one point where he turned a lot of stuff that wasn't his gallery into dust or that people thought, "Oh, well, that's—you know, I mean, that—you know, that that can't be any good because it's a Tibor de Nagy"—I mean that sort of thing. And that's not good. I mean, that isn't good for the art world because the art world thrives—and I think now it's more of anything goes, just the way it is in fashion. I mean, you know, if I choose to wear long dresses and funny hats, nobody's going to say, "You can't wear that because that's not—that's not what we're wearing." And you know, I don't have to wear like little, tiny short things and high boots, and there's no—there is no fashion anymore. There's—and in a sense, I'm totally disconnected from whatever's going on now in the art world, although it would probably take me five minutes to reconnect if I—if I made the effort, but it's not important.

But Leo created this magical space that worked for his artists and himself, and it didn't have a lot of fallout onto other people, which—I mean, people survived. Obviously the art world, you know, didn't die or anything. But it was—it was—it was his mental power that convinced these people to have—you know, to have all these shows and have them streaming into the gallery and have *Vogue* magazine come and do layouts with, you know, Don Judd and this one and that one, and it's like he turned it into—and ironically, none of it was about money.

And Leo—I mean, I have no idea what Leo ultimately was worth, but if he was worth anything, it was because Toiny made him buy the paintings. Leo didn't have the idea of buying the paintings because that would increase his—and he—and he would give things away. I mean, he gave—he

gave the—that wonderful—the goat to the Museum of Modern Art. It was more important for him to have a Rauschenberg in the Museum of Modern Art than that he had it and made money out of it.

When I started working—the day I started working at Castelli Gallery, I sat there typing over and over and over a press release with the next two shows, Robert Rauschenberg and Roy Lichtenstein and the dates—me, who can't type, right—the two longest names—

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: —you know, it couldn't have been Frank Stella and Jasper Johns.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: John Canaday was still writing vituperous criticism and laughing at Jasper Johns and denigrating Lichtenstein. I think there was a heinous review that came out after Roy's show.

Leo? Impervious. Leo basically had an—and I don't know; I was going to say unstated policy, but it wasn't unstated. Everybody knew about it, so it was obviously—Leo essentially promised his collectors that if they had to—if they put a painting at—into auction, he would support—he would—if it wasn't selling, he would buy it back at a much higher—to keep that value up, he would—he would buy it, he would buy it back. And he did.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But wouldn't it have been just easier for the collector, you know, to buy it from—to take it from the collector and resell it at the gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, they—I don't—there was a whole auction thing that would go on.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And they made huge—they made—they actually—nobody lost any money. But I mean, a Jasper Johns, Tanya Rosenbaum would do—no, Grosman—Tanya Grosman would come in and do, you know, the beautiful series of—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —of prints of Johns and Rauschenberg and whatever.

Even very early on, but then much later, when I was working for Toiny, when I had left Charlie and come back to New York—so this was in the '70s—this was in the late '70s—something would come out at X amount with the first issue—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: —but then very shortly the price would double and triple in—you know, in a—in—and most of the time you didn't have anything to sell because most of them were already spoken for. So there wasn't a whole lot available. But—and people would bring things back to the gallery for Toiny to sell them because of course they'd think that, you know—I remember Leo Steinberg bringing one—a Johns that he had, bringing it into the gallery. And there was a tremendous sense of loyalty to these people, to people who had been supportive in the very beginning and written wonderful pieces about, you know—and helped get them on the map and everything.

So sometimes Toiny would buy the thing herself and give—and give them the money, just to keep the price up, keep the—you know, the façade of—generally it wasn't necessary, but even back then, in the early '70s, I mean, things weren't—we're not talking—you now, they weren't yet million—weren't in the millions, which they of course subsequently—they subsequently became.

And so anyway, I was there from the fall of '63 until spring of '65.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that—I think—why don't we stop for a while?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And then we'll take a break and then we'll start again. But this is fabulous.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Lunch?

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AVIS BERMAN: Continuing the interview on July 31st, back from lunch, Avis Berman, Nina Von Eckardt. I'm going to—you said you had a beautiful story about Eva Hesse.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. I met Eva during that tiny interlude with Roy—with Roy. We went to Eva's—we went down to Tom and Eva's loft for dinner.

AVIS BERMAN: Tom Doyle, the name.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Tom Doyle. She was married to the sculptor Tom Doyle.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And Eva. And I don't know if there were other people there or if it was just the two of them and Roy and myself. And I think they had just come back from Europe. Maybe Eva had had a grant or something, or they had just come back from Europe. I don't know why I seem to remember that. But—

AVIS BERMAN: They were in Germany, I think.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay, that must have been it.

AVIS BERMAN: I think Tom had the grant.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, exactly. And what was fascinating about the evening was, A, that she was the most beautiful—I mean, she was ravishingly beautiful, absolutely beautiful and tiny and so lovely and sweet. But the whole evening was about Tom and Tom's work. I mean, I didn't know that Eva was—I mean, maybe it came up that she was an artist. I have no idea—don't even remember. I guess maybe that, "yes, we were both artists," whatever, but this was—the dynamic was definitely Tom Doyle. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you're making a hand gesture. Tom up—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Tom way up here, and Eva, you know, sort of, like, peripherally somewhere, you know, on the—running around on the outskirts.

And then she used to come into the gallery. You know, we just—we became sort of—we'd chat at openings and if we ran into each other at a party or something, we would always, like, you know, connect and then talk a little bit. But we didn't become friends or anything. But I just always was so struck by her, her just—she was like a China doll. She was so beautiful.

And couple of years later, after I was [inaudible] I was married to Charlie, and we were still going to museum openings because we were always, in one way or the other, still connected to the art world. I learned that Eva was very sick. And I was at an opening. I can't remember where it was. I don't know whether it was at the Jewish Museum or at MoMA. And we were waiting for an elevator, and the elevator opened, and Eva and Richard Artschwager came out of the elevator.

And he was protecting her. He had brought her to this opening, and he was like a knight in—he was—you know, he had—I don't even know if he had an arm around her shoulder. He was her guardian. And she, of course—you know, the hair was—she had hurt—from the medication and everything, her face—it happens where your body starts to expand. Your head expands.

AVIS BERMAN: I think that's from steroids [inaudible].

NINA VON ECKARDT: Exactly. I mean, I've seen other people who had—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, she had a—I think she ended up having a brain tumor.

NINA VON ECKARDT: She had a brain tumor. And so very often with brain tumors—I mean, your whole body transforms itself. So here was this absolutely incredibly beautiful creature who had become—she looked retarded. She looked as if—she looked—she looked as if she were a Down syndrome child.

And I don't remember whether she recognized me, but I remember, you know, that I knew who she was, and I smiled, and then I probably kissed her because we used to, you know—but I was just—I was so touched by Artschwager's humanity that at this point—I don't know whether she and Tom had divorced, I don't know whether they were still together—but he was with her. He was—and I just thought there is always an angel in your life when you need it most.

And then, of course, her career post, you know, mortem just—I mean, she just became this—in huge, huge light. And that was—that was probably one of the saddest stories of, you know, the—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, just to get back to that evening was—do you think that—was Roy interested in—was it about Tom's work because Roy was asking him questions too? Or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I think they were—they were buddies. There was a—there was a kind of—Roy had a lot of friends. People really—you know, he was a really nice guy. People liked him. I don't know why—I mean, I don't even know why he took me there. But we often—I think he just—he just had a lot of friends. I don't know how he knew Tom.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, well, I do. And that what was why I was asking you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: —is that I'm wondering if partially—and this is not to excuse the disparity, but Tom went to Ohio State—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, Okay. So—yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —when—not only when it was Roy teaching there, but rented a room in hour for a year. So Tom—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —So then they were old friends.

AVIS BERMAN: They were old friends.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So they would be talking about the work. But I don't know if Roy was ignoring Eva.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I don't think it was that. I just think—I just think that—you know, we're talking back in the '60s here.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So unless you're Louise Nevelson and, you know, you're really tough, it's not going to be about you. And I think—I mean, from what I could tell, Tom and Eva were, like, you know, very much in love. And they were—this was definitely a happy—a happy marriage. And she was being a wife. I mean, she—I think she cooked the dinner. I mean, it was—it was—it was really—I remember it being a lovely evening. But I—maybe I probably then knew that—you know, Roy probably explained the relationship to me at that point, but, you know—[laughs].

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: This many years later, *buu*.

AVIS BERMAN: No, no. You're doing great. I just thought I'd, like—

NINA VON ECKARDT: You know, that I can even remember it all is like—I mean, it kind of popped up at one point. And I said, like, oh my God. You know, I would—things come up like that. That's sort of, like, out of the primeval swamp. I'll remember, you know, an episode of—I mean, I had the exact opposite, you know, remembrance of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, I mean. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, did you—did you meet—well—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Yes. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Was that when you were at Castelli?

NINA VON ECKARDT: When I was at Castelli. And Jeanne-Claude was probably the most—oh,

man, she was a tarantula. She was the most ambitious—Christo would still be painting naked women in an attic in—you know, in Romania if it weren't for Jeanne-Claude. I mean, she worked—she came to New York, and she—first thing they did was to come to Castelli Gallery, and then she tried to get Leo to take Christo on, which he wasn't going to do.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he did eventually.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. But, I mean, at this point not. And she literally pulled every string. She started inviting people and then other people and then other people and then other people. And one night she invited me to dinner, and she had invited Robert Elkon. And I was dating Charlie, and Charlie and I went.

And in the process of the conversation—something about Charles Frazier, Los Angeles or whatever he was having, or talked about his show or something—and she said, "oh, you are that Charles Frazier," you know? And it was the—and it was funny. She almost said, "if I'd known who you were, I would have invited you with somebody, you know, like, even more interesting than Bob Elkon tonight." [Laughs.]

I mean, she—and then one time—one time I met—we ran into each other at a party at Castelli Gallery, and I don't know whether I was pregnant at the time. I might have been pregnant at the time. Toiny gave me all of her maternity clothes. She had this gorgeous maternity wardrobe from Jean-Christophe, and she gave me Jean-Christophe's English pram. So Merin was, like, you know, the princess royale. And I looked like something out of Vogue magazine when I was pregnant with all of Toiny's beautiful maternity clothes.

And—I can't remember exactly what she said to me, but it was—it was, like, such a total put-down, as if, you know, here I was now married to this, you know, artist, and I was—I was just a housewife now. And I just—I, you know, sent a memo back to the back of my cortex saying, you know, next time you meet this woman, just cut her dead. [Laughs.] She was not my favorite person. He, on the other hand, was one of the—is one of the sweetest people, Christo.

AVIS BERMAN: What do you remember of Christo from your time, then?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, he—you know, he would—he—we always spoke in French because his English was very, you know, shaky. But he just was—he was a very, very sweet guy, I mean.

AVIS BERMAN: How did Leo—which was, I think, '64—how did he decide to have Christo in the gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Probably Jeanne-Claude putting a gun to his head, you know, and bringing in reference to all of the people that she'd met, like, you know, Christophe Thurman and the de Menil and everything, because she milked all those connections. And like I said, you know, she got him very, very good connections, and he is not stupid. Plus the work was wonderful.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah, of course. But he didn't take it at first, though.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. No. And, you know, the stuff that he—that he eventually did was—I mean, was fascinating. And she organized all that. I mean, you have to give her that. I mean, she—[laughs]—she lived a tireless—[laughs]—a tireless life. But she was the daughter of a general. She was the daughter of a French general. So that does take—[laughs]—

But he was just—he was so sweet. He was just sweet. That—I mean, think of Christo, and it's just the sweetest person. I mean, very—I don't know. I mean, maybe she—who knows? I mean, I'm assuming those were all his ideas, not her ideas. I wouldn't put it past her to channel—you know, channel him. But I think, no, he had a genuine talent. I mean, he really did. But he was very gentle and very sweet. He would—he was not—I mean, maybe he was ambitious, because I suppose he wasn't just being pushed around by her. So he obviously, you know—but I think—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, no. Well, I mean, she did the dirty work so he could look like a—be the sweet guy.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So—yeah, so he could be—he could be the good guy, you know. I never saw him put anything—now, the way you'd know how somebody is, if I'd ever seen him produce something—in other words, big—you know, literally put it together and how he worked with the people that had to, you know, put up the parapluie—you know, the umbrellas and whatever, then you would know who they were.

But to be sweet to me or to Leo—now, a lot of people were sweet to me. Irving Blum used to, you know, send—I—of course, in the beginning I thought it was, you know, for my beautiful blue eyes, and then I realized pretty quickly that people wanted to get to Leo through me. And so they would take me out to lunch, or they would, you know, send me flowers, whatever, to thank me for having done my job, basically. It's, like, you know, you don't have to send me flowers to do my job. The only person who wasn't like that was Alan Solomon, and he just—he was a—just a good guy.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, we're going to get back to Leo eventually, but what I want to do is—pick up a little bit is that—so fall of 1966, you moved back into New York—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. We—no, my daughter was born winter of '66. We didn't move back into New York until fall of—well, summer, actually, of—summer of '68 when we found—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Okay. Not, '67; '68.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, '68. We found this—Charlie was working—he was doing either animation, or he had gotten a job designing—they were called modules. What they were, were they—it was—it was the audiovisual business. He worked for a company called Caribiner, which put on these huge business meetings for IBM—

AVIS BERMAN: C-A—or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: C-A, kind of like the Caribbean, or C-A-R-I-B-I-N-E-R. A guy named Les Buckland, who was a Brit, had started this company, which did these huge awards meetings. So basically they started out as, like, a tax—you know, a tax write-off. They'd say—they'd get all their guys who met quota or something or gone above quota. And they would take them to Las Vegas. They would take them all over, you know, the country, to these country clubs or big convention halls and stuff. And they would have inspirational—they were called modules. And they were done with—in the beginning they were initially done with slide projectors. And Charlie used to design these absolutely beautiful—they're—basically, they were animated stories, but they were done with slides. And he would do collages and photographs and—

AVIS BERMAN: So kind of an ancestor of PowerPoint.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Exactly. Exactly that, only extremely complex and very visually—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, and artistic.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, very, very artistic.

And then they—then they—then they went to video, and they used to do video and lasers and—but for quite a while they—I mean, I used to travel with—because I subsequently got into that business; that's how I made a living for quite a number of years. I mean, I would go—I would—I would have setups of, you know, up to 2[00], 300 slide projectors on the stage for IBM, and click, click, click, click, click, click. I mean, very complicated stuff. So Charlie was working at that.

And we discovered there was a real estate law in New York City that artists could live in certain apartments that were, like, commercial apartments.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, the Loft Law.

NINA VON ECKARDT: The Loft Law. Well, we found an apartment in a building on the corner of 98th and Broadway, 10-room apartment for, like, \$350 a month—absolutely huge, beautiful apartment. And we moved in. We decided, Okay, we'll move into the city.

So we lived there for a while. And the kids were—I guess Merin was—I was putting Merin in nursery school at that point, so she was, like, maybe three or four, and by that time Graham was, like, two. And I had a Haitian gal that used to come in a couple of times a week. And I went back to—I went back and worked with Toiny for a little while, just for a little while. It was just a—just a tiny window of—because it was only for a few months, actually.

AVIS BERMAN: In the late '60s.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. This was in the late '60s. But that didn't last very long because it just got—it just got too complicated.

AVIS BERMAN: That wasn't the—you were—and you went back later.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I went back later, when I came—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so—all right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. This was, like, just initially for a few months.

AVIS BERMAN: What were—what were you doing—

NINA VON ECKARDT: To help her out when she was—you know, when she was sort of starting the print gallery and—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. I think she started—did she start—yeah, I guess, she started Castelli Graphics then?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. And that lasted a very short time.

And somewhere in there—

AVIS BERMAN: So you had remained—even though—did you remain friendly with Leo after you stopped working?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, I remained friendly with Leo and Toiny. We saw them socially. I started doing tea parties in this apartment, which is wonderful. I basically cooked my way through the art world. I started—we started having dinner parties.

Charlie got a grant up at MIT. Oh, God, the German guy was giving Nan Rosenthal and her husband—German artist [Otto Piene -NVE]—it may come to me. He was—he was up there. Charlie met him up there, and Nan and I became very good friends for a while. It was some program that was through an art—it was an art grant. And Charlie would go up to Boston maybe once a week or something and do some sort of project up there. He was also teaching at Visual Arts for a little while.

We gave just dinner party after dinner party. I was, like, the Julia Child of West 98th Street, and we had invited everybody. But I also then decided on these Sunday afternoon tea parties. Leo came to a couple of those. He came to a couple of dinner parties.

That's when we met Jim Harithas. Somewhere in there we met Jim Harithas. And Jim really got Charlie. They—and Jim had this strange coterie of artists: Juan Downey, Jean Dupuy, Frank Gillette, Tom Downing—that's when I met Tom Downing. That's when Tom Downing and I became Siamese twins.

It was a—it was a wonderful—there were—there were parties all the time. We would go to Harithas' for parties. We'd go to—we'd go to Downey's loft. Downey had a loft on—in one of the—it wasn't in the flat-iron building, but it was in one of those other amazing buildings on—I think on Broadway, the white one with the—and everybody—it was a family. It was really a family. It was—it was—

But I want to get the name Nan Rosenthal's German husband [Otto Piene -NVE]. He was gorgeous, and—that—Charlie met him up at MIT, and I can't remember the name of the program. But it was—it was, like, openings, parties, it was one sort of big social world. I mean, and I literally cooked my way through it. We got to know Tejas Englesmith, who was at the Jewish Museum.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh. And he was eventually at Castelli, too.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, that's interesting. Was it after there were—that—

AVIS BERMAN: Afterwards.

NINA VON ECKARDT: After. Okay.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, I don't know who that is. It's just he's got this crazy name.

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was a—he was a Brit, the sweetest, adorable young guy. He ended up back in Texas cooking. I mean, he had a—opened up a restaurant or something. But he came to

the—or he might have been Australian. He came to the Jewish Museum. He was like our son. We gave him our brass bed when we—when we moved out to California. But he loved Charlie.

Charlie did the most beautiful piece with parachutes in this show that he did of—I think David Jacobs was in the show at the Jewish Museum. It was like—it was, like, sort of air art or something. Charlie did a huge piece. It was an inflatable parachute up against the wall with a long inflatable tube that led into it. And that was—that was when we—Tejas just somehow got very close to Lee Krasner. So Lee Krasner was, like, his grandmother, and we used to pal around with Tejas—[inaudible]—and Lee. It was just—it was like this floating feast all the time.

AVIS BERMAN: And Lee Krasner was nice to you?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, she was wonderful. She had the most stringent wit. Henry Geldzahler was doing the show "*40 Years of Art in New York*, or something like that, or whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. That was Henry's show, at the Met.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And he wanted to borrow some Pollocks from Lee. And Lee said, "Hey, you want my Pollocks? Put me in the show." And I said, "Good for you, Lee." She was a total feminist, and she was so funny. Yeah, we just loved her—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] Yeah—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —and Norman Bluhm—but I mean, she was a killer.

AVIS BERMAN: That's what I mean. But she was so—yeah, but I—

NINA VON ECKARDT: She, for what—maybe because the—I just loved her; I mean, I liked her. And there's no competition and, I mean, you know, she liked to eat. "Come over!" [Laughs.] It was just this open—it really was like a family. I mean, everybody knew everybody, and everybody was—one night there was—somebody put some LSD in the punch. I don't drink at all, and I used to get contact high, because of course they smoked, like, you know, marijuana—like they'd walk in and—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I didn't smoke it so much; I'd just inhale it through my—you know, through my pores. But then I would—I would find that the next day I couldn't talk; I—the words would all come out jumbled, and it would be very funny. So I knew that I'd been affected by it.

But everybody smoked, everybody drank, everybody was doing shrooms. They were all doing LSD; that was like—oh, my God, they all loved that. And one—and one of the—after one of the parties, Harithas, his wife, Chris; and Marisol [Marilyns] Downey found themselves on some subway platform somewhere. They didn't even know where they were. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Acknowledgment.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I can't even remember how they got home; I think they finally got home at like 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning. But nobody was looking for them.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, nobody knew they weren't there, you know, kind of thing. And what—and interestingly Harithas had kids—Charlie and I had kids; we were about the only ones that—no, no, Marisol Downey had kids. We used to go to Juan Downeys' loft, and they had—they would hang sheets and view the Indonesian—but it would just be the kids doing it—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, the shadow puppets?

NINA VON ECKARDT: —we didn't have the puppets, we just would—you know, we would do body—you know, we would do our own thing with puppets. So there was always something going on and some conversation going on.

At that point, Jim [Harithas] had been fired from somewhere [The Corcoran Gallery, D.C. -NVE], and he was suing them, or he was suing *Newsweek* from writing a bad article about him. And I can't remember which museum it was. I want to say that he was fired from Houston, but I don't know if that was the case [No! -NVE].

AVIS BERMAN: I think it was—I think it was California, I don't know— [No, it was the Corcoran - NVE]

NINA VON ECKARDT: California, because he went—he ended up in Houston. But in any event, this guy that sold these beautiful, beautiful, beautiful—the ceramic birds—opened up a gallery in SoHo and hired Jim to be the—to be the director for a while. And Jim was throwing, you know, crazy shows. And I know that there was a Georgia O'Keeffe show at the Whitney, and Harithas called Charlie up and said, "Get over here." And Charlie went up and basically baby-sat Georgia O'Keeffe while they were hanging the show. She walked around the museum with him, like holding his hand.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that would have been about 1970.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah—and '69, '70.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And Harithas just had all these strange—Savelli—

AVIS BERMAN: Angelo Savelli?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: I think he was with Castelli for a while, before you got there.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, he was. He was—yeah, he was. And he was—oh, God, he was one of the most beautiful human beings on the planet. We used—we a couple of times went out to his place in the country and had these magical luncheons, you know, hanging from trees—[laughs]—and—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: It would make a great movie. It would make an incredible movie.

So Charlie and Jim were like brothers. That was a very close relationship. And at one point, Jim and I were going to start our own gallery, but that didn't happen. We looked at some lofts, and we talked about it, but it never—we were going to call it "Our Daily Bread," and we would have—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: [Laughs.] Luckily, it didn't happen. That probably would have been a huge disaster.

And somewhere in there, Jim got hired by the Everson, in Syracuse.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: So basically—and where Jim goes—Jim's one of those guys; he's like George Clooney and Bruce Willis, that have a coterie. He's like—it's like surround sound; it's like, where Jim goes, the gang goes, too.

So Jim moves up to Syracuse. And the opening show at Syracuse is Yoko Ono. And Charlie had a room for his pastels; he had done some absolutely gorgeous pastel drawings. So there is obviously—time had elapsed because we were leaving—we had decided—Jim left, and then we decided to—Charlie—I don't know, out of the blue, we decided we were going to go move to California. Charlie had a friend with a huge amount of land in Mendocino; we were going to just move to Northern California and I was going to bake bread and—I mean, crazy.

So we basically—I sold everything in the apartment. I had this—I put an ad in the *Village Voice* and I said: "Artists fleeing New York. Must sell all." And I sold every stick of furniture; I sold some of his sculpture. People came and said, "Oh, that's great. Will you sell it?" We sold the pieces of sculpture. We packed up a—my dearest friend in college and Merin's godmother—her mother gave us a '58 Chevy station wagon—pale blue, robin's egg blue.

We packed that up, and I don't know whether we had enough to have a little caravan on the back, but we drove to Syracuse, with the show. And the show got home. Chris [Harithas] was not there; she had gone back to Greece or something for the summer, whatever. The kids weren't

there, either; it was Jim, Charlie and myself and the kids and Yoko Ono and John Lennon. We had—I was like a den mother. Juan [Downey] came up; Frank Gillette was there. I mean, they all just followed Jim to Syracuse and hung out. And I cooked—I cooked. So the night that— [laughs]—John and Yoko came for dinner, I made this beautiful lamb stew. And I think Keith Richards was there.

And John had this wonderful bodyguard. He was a New York cop, a retired New York narc cop; he was their bodyguard. And he and I got along like a house on fire. And he was telling me how he could—he was taught to kill somebody with his hands—like, he could hit them in seven different places and kill them seven times. And he was this great big guy, and he was everywhere. He followed Yoko and John everywhere.

Yoko's show was very interesting. She had some—I mean, she was good. She had some beautiful stuff. She had some very beautiful stuff. It was very—it was very Zen and, you know, sort of—mostly the pieces were very spiritual. I remember, there was one that I really loved with the—with crystal glasses and levels of water that was very delicate. But she was a good—she was a good artist. She really was—she really was good.

And then Charlie had his little room. It was very exciting because the Dames of Columbus, some women's group in Syracuse, was picketing the museum—[laughs]—because they didn't want John and Yoko Ono there. So I think—I can't remember how that was resolved—whether we had cops or whether they paid them off, or whether they—you know, Jim went and schmoozed with them or gave them—you know, let them come for—who knows? But they—people were like lined—they—you know, picketing the museum with signs that they didn't want this to happen.

But it did happen. And it was—it was—there was a huge rock band, and you walked into the—the museum—beautiful museum. I mean, Pei, you know—so you can't go wrong with I. M. Pei. It was absolutely gorgeous. You walked in, and the music was playing. And I can remember my heartbeat, just goes—[raps table]—my heart started to mimic the rhythm of the music. And then we—a couple days later we got into our car and we drove—[laughs]—to California.

AVIS BERMAN: So was—and during this time, is your husband still represented by—is he still in the Dwan Gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: All this time?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. He was still represented by Virginia. In fact, he still has a relationship with Virginia.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: She has—they've been friends for years. I always thought that she had a thing for him and he, of course, completely unaware. She invited him to a New Year's Eve party, and he took me to the party. And I thought—I mean, I sort of thought afterwards, "Oh, you know what? I think she invited him."

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: You know, but—and then she actually let us have her guesthouse in Malibu when we—when we went—it was on our honeymoon, when we went to the opening of his show there.

I don't think—I think she stopped giving him—Kornblee stopped giving him money, and she stopped giving him money very shortly because he wasn't selling anything. He did sell some stuff to—you know, every once in a while he'd sell something.

AVIS BERMAN: But he was—well, he was—but did he still maintain a career as an artist while he was working on all of these [inaudible]—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Always, always. This is one of—the guy's a genius. I mean, unfortunately I'm attracted to geniuses. He—even my son, who, you know, has been through the divorce and the whole thing, and it's not the world's greatest relationship—the last time he went up to see him—he's living in Athens, New York, right up the river here—Graham said, "You know, Mom, he—dad is just—he's nonstop genius." He really is. I mean, these—most of these guys are.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] So he's still working in Athens—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. He's still getting grants. Virginia just gave him another grant. Virginia hands him out grants every once in a while. But he also—he also has a huge sense of history. He can talk you—[inhales]—if you think I talk—[exhales]. And he remembers names—[they laugh]—better than I do.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So you have—you have moved to—so—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So we moved to California.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And where do you—where do you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, we go and visit his friend who's living in a shack with an outhouse. And I say, "You know, Charlie, I don't think I can do this." So we ended up going down and we stay in a motel in Sausalito near some other friends, who had lived across the hall from us in New York and had moved out to California. And I don't even know how you start a new life in a new place; you just do. He found a couple of people who were doing the same kind of work that he'd done, and then at one point he ran into somebody who was doing the World's Fair in Taiwan, and he ended up working on that.

So we spent some time—oh, no, I forgot; there was David Ross. When we were in Syracuse with the Yoko-Charlie show—[laughs]—the mostly Yoko show—there was this crazy gofer. He looked like Harpo Marx, only with brown hair, curly brown hair all over his head—very funny, running around like a crazy person—and his name was David Ross.

And one of the nights I cooked a spaghetti dinner—in, I think, David's apartment—for everybody. We'd all gone to David's apartment, and I have no idea why. And the way I tested whether the spaghetti was done or not was I'd take a piece out of the pot and I'd throw it against the wall. And if it stuck to the wall, it was done. Well, David thought that was, you know, completely hysterical. I don't know; we made a connection.

And I don't remember whether we stayed in touch, because we actually eventually lost touch with Harithas. I mean, Charlie kind of kept in touch with Harithas, but Harithas, once he left the Everson and went to Houston—and then he and Chris got divorced and he married the gal from the King Ranch, he went into the stratosphere. And he—but he—you know, when he—if he came to LA, he would call and say, "Hi, how are you?"

But David was hired by Jan Adelman at the Long Beach Museum. He made—he started making—I think he started in Syracuse creating a niche for himself with video. So he made it a—made a point—very, very smart guy, and he made a point of becoming the video guy and knowing everybody and—and you know, having these shows and showing people. And so I think he started to make a name for himself—not just being Jim's gofer but creating a niche for himself with video, which of course at that point was brand new and happening.

And so Jan Adelman, who was at the Long Beach Museum and was romancing I. M. Pei to build a museum there—and you know, raising funds and everything—he contacted David and hired David to become his video curator. I think he was about—yeah, he was the video curator. At that point, we were living in Marin County, but we had stayed—I guess we must have stayed in touch with David. And at one point, we drove down to Long Beach and stayed at David's house, and I would—I would—David was married to an absolutely beautiful young woman named Cheryl [David Ross' wife, Cheryl Ross -NVE], and I—but I don't think Cheryl could cook. So I would come down and I'd cook these big dinners, and anybody who was in the vicinity would come for dinner. I mean—and Bruce Nauman and—I used to call him "Neutron"—Newton—oh, God, I can't think of his name, but anyway, all of these—New York video artists—of course, Frank Gillette and David had a beautiful Juan Downey show and a Gillette show—and Bill Viola. But also the—you know, the California gang was all there—you know, Bouchet and Belle and Bob Irwin. I mean, Charlie remembered Bob Irwin driving around in a—in a convertible, surfing [they laugh] when he was younger, he was a real surfer boy. I mean, the California guys were very flaky. They were very ditzy and flaky.

So David started making a real place for—a name for himself there, with these video shows. And Jan and I became very good friends. We just—one of those things where it just—where—I did with Tom Downing. I mean, it was never anything romantic or sexual; it was just this combustion of like minds. I mean, it's—you just met somebody, it was like, "Oh, my God, you know, you're like my sort of spiritual, alter—whatever." It's like you meet somebody and you've obviously

known them in 10 other previous lives. I mean, there's no way of explaining it, that you meet somebody at a dinner party at some point and it's like you've known them your whole life and they're related to you. And I had that with Downing and I had that with Adelman. And then at one point he started saying that he was—

AVIS BERMAN: And Adelman or Ross?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He—this is Jan Adelman, who was David's boss.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Oh—so Jan Adelman was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. We kept in touch with David, and we were—and we would go and stay with David.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: But Adelman was the reason we actually moved down from Marin County to Long Beach. We moved back—we moved down there because Adelman started pretending he was going to give me a job at the museum. And I believed it. But it didn't happen.

So—but we did move down. And what we ended up doing—we ended up doing two things. I ended up getting a job at a photography gallery down in—down the coast at Newport Beach, and a guy who had been one of—Leo's collectors—Jack somebody-or-other who had a few—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Jack Glenn.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —Jack Glenn, who had this huge, modern house on the beach. And I remember being incensed one time. We had this enormous dinner party for a very famous—I think it was an Italian collector, was it? It was either a German or an Italian collector.

AVIS BERMAN: Panza [Giuseppe Panza, an Italian collector -NVE]? Or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, it was—I think it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Or Ludwig or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I think it was Panza.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And he would come to LA, and he served tacos.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: I said to Charlie, "Don't serve tacos." But anyway—but—

AVIS BERMAN: Jack Glenn, right—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. I was working for Jack Glenn for a hundred bucks a week in cash, you know, under the table. Charlie was doing a marketing video for—to get—for a fundraiser for—around the I. M. Pei building—you know, to get money to do whatever. So we were interviewing all kinds of artists. I became the interviewer. And so I was doing what you're doing, only on video. So we interviewed, you know, a lot of artists. And I'll put this—put this tape together—I remember at one point we went and we interviewed—I think we interviewed Jan [Adelman -NVE] in a—in the Winston Churchill cabin on the Queen Mary, which was in Long Beach. And the first—Queen Mary was the first ship that I had ever been on, when we went to Paris in 1949. So I walk into the ship and burst into tears because I—was just—I had no idea I would react this way, but I was just so affected by it emotionally.

So we put together a very, very good little video to—for the museum. So that's what Charlie was doing.

Jan hired some other gay friend, you know, to—for the job that I was doing. And David continued to have these wonderful video exhibits. And we continued to stay friends, and every time he'd have somebody—some bigwig in, he'd say, "Will you cook dinner?" And I'd, you know, come over and do a Moroccan dinner, or—and then one time he had a huge, huge, huge party for like 200 people, and I did this whole meal for him. I think that was actually the last thing I ever did before

I came back to New York City.

And my marriage to Charlie was just falling to pieces. By the—by the wayside, in spite of the fact that we had this fascinating life, there was no marriage, basically. And it was very difficult.

So finally—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, do you—did you think—did you have a marriage when you moved to California, do you think?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, we did. We did when we moved to Northern California, but then by the time we moved down to—Charlie—it was just—I realized that Charlie was just never going to take care. And if I was going to have to do everything, then I wanted to be on my own and free. And also, I was 36 and, as I said before, whatever you're doing as a woman before you're 36, you're going to turn around and do something exactly the exact opposite.

AVIS BERMAN: Because it does sound as if he did try to provide for the family.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah. No, no, he did, but it just—when I married him, he didn't smoke dope, and by the time that I left, he was just—you know, he'd come home from whatever he was doing and he'd sit in the corner and, you know, get high.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And it just dissolved. It basically dissolved. And plus I came from, you know, sort of very Anglo, Calvinist background. I just thought if I work a little harder at this, I can make it work. But it wasn't working and I was miserable. And I just thought, you know, if I'm going to be miserable, at least I want to have some hope.

AVIS BERMAN: So let's—before we leave California, I want to ask you about what the Jack Glenn Gallery showed and what you did there.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I basically was the—you know, the secretary/receptionist. I kept track of everything. He had—I can't remember what the exact shows were. He had wonderful photographs. I mean, he had absolutely, you know, everybody.

AVIS BERMAN: It was mostly photography?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, it was all photography. It was a photography gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I didn't realize that.

NINA VON ECKARDT: He put up very good shows.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what about Connie Glenn? Were you involved with Connie or did you know her at all?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I didn't know her at all. I mean, I went to her house, I guess, just that one time, for the big party. And she was at Long Beach.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, exactly. She ended up at Long Beach. And also, when you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I remember thinking afterwards, oh, my god, you know, if I'd known her better, I might have gotten a real job. But I didn't know her. You know, our paths didn't—I mean, one day when I was sitting—and also, Jack would just leave me there, - because there wasn't exactly too much happening, so Jack would just leave me there. People would wander in. One day Diane Keaton wandered in and I showed her everything, you know, pulled everything out. Because I was very good at that.

And the other thing, he would sell stuff and not pay the commission. So people would come after him and then finally—but, you know, a lot of art—art galleries do that. You know, they—Jill Kornblee literally—Janet Fish put an injunction on Jill Kornblee she couldn't—that if Jill got paid for one of her paintings, that money had to be deposited in a special account in Barclay's bank and Jill could not touch the money until, you know, it was cosigned by 10 other people, and Janet Fish got her part first. I mean, they just—and ironically, you know, Jill was the last person on the planet that—because she had money. And Jack, also. I mean, I assume Jack had money. He had this unbelievable house and all. They probably didn't have as much money as it seemed.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, Connie always had worked. You know, she was supporting—well, also, what happened was—it's interesting—did you know them when they were in Kansas City and were huge, you know, Castelli collectors?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, that's when he—that's when I first met him. And that's how I reconnected with him, was, like, oh, my god, you're the guy that, you know—because he used to come in. They would come in and then, you know, buy stuff. He was a—I always thought of him as a wealthy collector.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, eventually they had to stop because they couldn't afford—well, actually—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean they closed down his gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, they sold—in other words, they sold their collection to fund the gallery.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay. Oh, okay.

AVIS BERMAN: And they had great works by—you know.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes, they had a great collection. But he was not selling a lot of work out of the gallery, and plus, you know, as I said, he was—you know, just delaying payment. I mean, it wasn't like he would always—or if they found out about some—but I used to have phone calls where I'd look at the records and I'd see that something had been sold that had been there on commission, had sold months earlier and no money had been sent to the—you know. And of course I felt—I mean, I couldn't say anything. I said, you know, you should call Mr. Glenn when he's in the office, or I'll tell him you called and give him the message and try and make sure that he—whatever. There's always a lot of that, you know, going on in the art world because it's pretty much hand-to-mouth.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, how was Leo with paying off people?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Leo was—it was the reverse with Leo. Leo was constantly getting screwed by people—I told you that when I came to the gallery, Ben Heller had bought the *White Map*. What that means is Ben Heller walked out of the gallery with the *White Map*, you know, figuratively under his arm. It was, you know, a little big for him to carry. And I think by the time I left the gallery, I don't think Ben had paid had more than \$500 on it, maybe. And Nancy [Friedberg] would send out statements every month. We were spending—you know, we spent more money mailing statements to collectors saying, you know, please give us the money.

And then one time—I think I told you this when we were talking about Roy. One time Boswell came in with a—I think it was a Pollock. It was either a Giacometti—now, somebody came in with a Giacometti painting one time, and then somebody came with this gorgeous Pollock. But Leo didn't have anybody to buy that kind of stuff, so I think -- definitely the Giacometti I remember he handed over to Glimcher, Arne Glimcher, who Ivan was instrumental in—[laughs]—filling up his gallery with [inaudible] artists in the very beginning. The first show, I think, was this ghastly Mel Ramos pin-up show, you know, with Playboy bunnies walking around. Please. And Arnold had a mother who was like the Queen Mary in full sail. She was just—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Milly—no, that's his wife—Mama Glimcher. Milly Glimcher is Arne's wife, sorry.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But Milly—

AVIS BERMAN: No, Milly is his wife. I don't know what Mama—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, right, Mama—yeah, Mama Glimcher, she came. She was wild. But I loved him. I thought he was—I liked Arnold. He and Fred were—they were so cute—because they were show biz.

AVIS BERMAN: Fred?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, what was Fred's name? [Fred Mueller -NVE] His first partner. Ivan used to call them "Little Glim and big Fred." Fred went into producing Broadway plays.

AVIS BERMAN: I have no idea who this Fred person is.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. I'm trying to think of—Fred, but very tall, very handsome. Gay, but totally—and he dressed always in double-breasted suits.

AVIS BERMAN: Because Arnold Glimcher was fairly tall. He wasn't little.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah, tall, but Fred was taller than Arnold and a little bit broader, but Arnold was like, you know, a drink of water.

But he had an instinct. I mean, you know, he got out from under Ivan, and he used Ivan to get going, and he got out from—and he was always charming and he—but he had a real instinct for—I remember one time going to some opening and they had bird calls. I mean, it was like going into the Amazon jungle. I have no idea at this point who the artist was. He had some very strange people in the beginning, but then he cleaned up his act. Maybe I'll remember Fred's name by the next—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or I can Google the original, you know, Arnold—do you know the name of the gallery? Was it always called—

AVIS BERMAN: It was Pace Gallery.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Always called Pace. So it didn't have both of their names. There's no way of going by—well, I wonder, if I put in Pace Gallery, 1960s, it would maybe say Fred's name.

Fred was money. I mean, Fred definitely—but so was Arnold. I mean, he had money too. But you always got a sense with them that they really loved show business. I mean, it didn't surprise me remotely when Arnold started producing movies. I mean, you know, that was what he should have always been doing. I think this was—people often use the art world as a steppingstone to something because the art world is always so open, if you have any money, you can always start something. I mean, I always used to laugh at Bob Scull. I think I told you this the last time. Bob Scull had all these collections so he could get Ethel into the—you know, Society. And it's like, I don't think so, you know. I mean, you're not going to get into the Almanach de Gotha, you know, with your collection, because those people don't easily open their doors. You know, sorry dear. But I liked Bob Scull. He was a good guy.

AVIS BERMAN: What was he like to deal with at Castelli?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He actually didn't do a whole lot. I think he had probably at that point turned his eyes onto Bellamy and was pretty much working through Bellamy at that point. He was kind of a little bit of a wheeler-dealer, but he paid for—he paid for the art. I mean, he did. I mean, he wasn't, as I said, above bringing in something that Leo couldn't possibly sell in exchange. You know, he'd pay X amount, but let me give you this and I'll—I'll give you 2,000 [dollars], and here, take this and you resell that, da-da-da. But he had already sort of switched gears by then, and I don't remember him buying too much at that point.

You know, there was—Victor Ganz was there, and he was my favorite because this was a guy that had—see, I came, A, from Europe; B from—I mean, which was a rarified existence. You know, an American living in Europe, post-war Europe, you might as well be on the moon. And then Bryn Mawr, duh. So I was a space cadet. And I had all of these ideals, and so I worked—I started working in this amazing art gallery of this incredible artist, and then I—suddenly the market side of it was just horrible.

Now, there were some real, you know, incredibly cultured people: Mrs. List, Victor Ganz, Mrs. Woodward. I mean, there were some—

AVIS BERMAN: Mrs. Woodward?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Mrs. Woodward had the Arts and Embassies program in Washington, the State Department, and she was—she actually reminds me a little bit of Adelyn Breeskin. She was a *grande dame*. Oh, my gosh, she would come with, you know, ambassadors' wives and their assistants. She was wonderful.

But with a lot of the—I mean, I can't even remember the man's name. He was so tacky. He was this little short guy. He used to wear tight leather outfits. And he'd have rolls of cash in his pocket.

AVIS BERMAN: Would that be Leon Kraushar?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. He'd come in with the curly hair and he'd say, "So, Leo," you know?—

and, you know, "What do ya got?" you know, what's the painting du jour? [Laughs.] Now, mind you, Leo was going to sell him anything, right?

One time Jasper came back from Edisto, and he brought one painting. And Leo was standing in the back room, you know, the way he stood, with his hands in his pockets, slightly tilted—and Jasper is so wicked. And Leo's, like, looking at the painting, and he says, "Ah, I've got to call Mrs. List and Victor Ganz and—da-da-da." And Jasper looks at Leo. He says, "I knew that, Leo. That's why I painted three of them." And Leo's scurrying off to the phone. And he's sort of, like, believing what Jasper was saying, and I'm going, like, "Leo, no, it's a joke. He's joking." [Laughs.]

But Leo—I remember one guy came in one time and he said, "I had this dream," and he's, like, telling Leo the dream. And Leo's going along with it, right? And he's, like, equating the dream to some painting of Bob's or Roy's, and he sells the guy a painting.

But it wasn't about the money. It was never about the money. He may have ended up with a lot of money. I don't know. I mean, I'm assuming when he died he—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he had to sell the paintings to keep the gallery going.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. Exactly. I mean, that's what was always happening. Like, it's the same thing, your hat in your hand, your heart in your mouth, going to Chase to try and borrow \$10,000 to stay open that summer, because he could never—he could never make anybody pay.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Did you run across a guy named Ben Barillo?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: What was the story?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know why? Who was he?

AVIS BERMAN: He was a friend of Ivan's.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Ivan had some—

AVIS BERMAN: But he was like—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I remember the name.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. He was friends of this guy Kraushar. Leon Kraushar.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Because, see, Ivan—interesting, Ivan really was an entity unto himself. He did whatever he wanted. He sat in the front. He had these drawers full of boxes of slides and smoked his cigars, and he never knew anything that was going on. He had no idea. If somebody would come and say, "What's the next show?" Ivan didn't know, he didn't care. I was the one. I mean, I ran the gallery, basically. Ivan was like a frontispiece, and he had his own world going.

And then, of course, he subsequently took that world and created OK Harris, which is wonderful. And I'm sure there he knew—you know, he knew exactly what he was doing. But he was—he was a very interesting balance to Leo and he attracted different kinds of people in. But he also attracted a lot of artists. Very few of whom Leo was interested in, but he would go with Leo to—he's the one—I'm pretty sure he's the one who chose Roy.

AVIS BERMAN: Absolutely.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Who said, you know, this is good, this is good. I don't know who picked Lee Bontecou. Probably Leo liked Lee Bontecou. But she was a lovely person. She was really lovely. But unfortunately, the very first pieces were amazing, and then I don't know whether—I don't think Leo stuck with her, well, through the glass-blown fish and stuff like that. And that happened a lot. I mean, that happened to a lot of people.

And I think—oh, of course, Ivan was the Warhol contact. And he probably was the—yeah, he would have been the Rosenquist contact too. Jim Rosenquist was one of the most wonderful people on the planet. He had the most pixilated sense of humor. He was in the phone book. I said, "Are you in the phone book?" Because I couldn't reach him at one point. I said, "I couldn't reach you. I tried to find you in the phone book." He said, "Oh, I'm in the phone book." Oh, no—I said, "I couldn't reach you. I tried to find you." He said, "Oh, I'm in the phone book." I said, "Well,

you aren't in the phone book." He said, "Yes, I am." He said, "I'm in the phone book under Clark Kent." [They laugh.]

And he was totally brilliant. I mean, his stuff was just—you know, the beautiful FX-whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: *F-111*.

NINA VON ECKARDT: 111.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he wasn't in the gallery when you first came there.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, he was with—

AVIS BERMAN: —Bellamy.

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was at Green. He was with Bellamy. I think Leo inherited probably Bellamy's absolute *crème de la crème* when Bellamy had to close, and that was—I don't remember when that was. I think I might have still been working for Leo.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah. It closed in '64.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, okay, so that was—I mean that was a tragedy. But he also, as I said, he was such a—he was like a ray of light that was so pure he was invisible. And I think he had zipsense of—you know, he probably couldn't add or subtract, but he was like—I think he probably was, I don't know, maybe a bad businessman or something, because he had amazing shows and he had incredible artists. And they were selling. I mean, they all—pretty much all of them went some—basically, they got famous. Because Andy was at—

AVIS BERMAN: —Stable.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Eleanor Ward. She was a piece of work. But we never—Leo never took Jim Dine. [Laughs.] I remember Roy and I went to dinner one night at Jim Dine's. See, he was friends with Jim Dine. Roy was friends—I used to say Roy walked—Roy walks as if he walks on eggs, very tentatively. He needed people to like him. He was very shy. And he just was nice to everybody, except for the fact that he had absolutely—well, they all did. They had this horrendous sense of humor. They all were funny. But I think that's an aspect of creativity. You can't be creative and not have a sense of irony, a sense of humor. But Roy was just really funny. And Jasper was one of the funniest, meanest people I've ever known. He was just—he scared me and made me shy. He made me feel shy. I always thought I am not even remotely intelligent enough to open my mouth and do anything other than say, "Hi, Jasper; how ya doing?" [Laughs.] Because he was so unbelievably—

AVIS BERMAN: You mentioned over the phone, you said Frank Stella was your favorite. Why?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I guess because he reminds me of my cousin Neil. He was—again, he went to Princeton. Beyond smart. He was easily hurt. He was woundable. And Barbara Rose really hurt him. And, I don't know, we became friends. We would go sit on the bench. He would come over and—I don't know even know where they lived. I had no idea where they lived. Barbara hated me.

AVIS BERMAN: Why?

NINA VON ECKARDT: The first time she walked into the gallery—oh, it was just—it was a cat thing. I mean, it was like—[makes a sound like a cat hissing]. I hated her and she hated me. The first time I met her it was like—[makes a gasping sound]. You know, like she'd walked on my firstborn's grave or something. And I thought she was mean. I don't like mean people, and she seemed mean to me and just a little full of herself; like she was so self-centered. She was so happy with herself.

So I don't know where they were living, but Frank would show up and we'd—and it'd be my lunchtime, and we'd go sit on a bench and he'd cry on my shoulder. And Rachel would run up and down, and we'd make sure she didn't get taken off by a dog or something. She—

AVIS BERMAN: This is his daughter, Rachel.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh my god, she was adorable. She was smarter than anybody at the age of 2. She'd—they'd go to the—Uncle Chaz, that's Uncle Bob. You know, she'd go point out all the

paintings and, you know, you'd take her to the Metropolitan Museum, Van Gogh and Picasso. [They laugh.] And she was—well, she look—she looked—I don't even know, I mean, she—obviously, Barbara had her, but there was nothing of Barbara about her.

I mean, I don't even know whether she—somehow you could be the mother of a child and who's not your child. I mean, she was Frank, and—and I loved his titles. I mean, he—I loved the way his—he just had this wonderful mind, and he was kind. He was kind and he was sweet and he was so smart, and his work was so beautiful.

Like I said, I'm always attracted to the white light. It's like—[makes sucking noise]—and I just—I just—you know, I get him. We were just—we were just—we were like buddies. You know, he'd come take me—[inaudible]—sit and munching on my sandwich—[laughs]—and he had his head on my shoulder and I'd pat him on the back or something.

AVIS BERMAN: What was—what was in particular so difficult—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, Barbara!

AVIS BERMAN: —well, in what ways?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I don't know whether—actually, she couldn't—oh, well, I don't know if she couldn't—I don't know whether—who knows about Jasper, right? At one point, she and Jasper were like Siamese twins. It was—they were together all the time, constantly. I think she had Rachel and she—

AVIS BERMAN: But Jasper was gay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, well, that's—I always said that but, you know, all of his close friends are women. He loved Susan Sondheim, he loved—I mean, you know, he loved all these, you know, incredibly brilliant women. But—you know, but Barbara was flirting with him. I mean, this was a—you know, this is a flirtatious relationship. She was—she was in love with him. I mean, she was in love with him, but that's easy. I mean, women fall in love with—I mean, you know, I've been in love with gay guys, but we're not talking about that. But that was a lot of the reasons for some of my moves, but in any event—then she—then she was fussing around with Bob Morris; I'm pretty sure that they had an affair, I'm pretty sure. And I don't know when she and Frank got divorced and I don't know who got Rachel at that point because I don't know how old she would have been. But I just know that at that time, he was so cute.

He would come and he'd take his teeth out; he had fake teeth in the front and he'd take them out. You know—[laughs]—I think he felt comfortable enough with me to take his teeth out. And I think eventually he fell in love with and married a wonderful person and had a really happy marriage. You know, it was a lovely—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, the—she's a pediatrician.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —yeah, exactly. I mean, like a really, really—the perfect person. And, of course, I mean, I didn't—he I've never seen since—never seen or connected with since I left there. But I just—we just had this—you know, he knew I was kind and I knew he was kind and he—and I treated people nicely.

Sometimes Leo wasn't too nice to people, and I always—you know, he—anybody could call me up and I'd know who it was. People like that, you know. So I got to—I got to have a connection with him even though we weren't necessarily friends because, as I said before, you know, I was a single person, and nobody—you know, I mean, nobody was asking me out. I mean, I was—I was actually dating Richard Feigen at one point; that was a disaster.

I had started out with him. That was one of those, you know, people trying to get close to Leo.

AVIS BERMAN: So that would have been after Roy.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh yeah. That was at—

AVIS BERMAN: So that would have been in '64.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, that was—yeah, that was—it was before—it was between Roy and Charlie basically. But my—you know, the—like I never saw Frank outside of—outside of work. I mean, I'd be working, he'd have a lunch break, we'd come and we go. Like David Whitney—well,

actually, David Whitney and I would see each other—David Whitney was working for Henry Geldzahler I think, and he and Tory Barr [Victoria Barr, daughter of Alfred Barr (MoMA) -NVE] were good friends.

And I remember one time being invited to—you know, to the top floor of—some top floor walk-up for a dinner party for David and Tory and some gal that had been at Bryn Mawr a couple of years ahead of me [Renata Adler -NVE], and just having these wonderful—you know, these wonderful conversations. And David and I, same thing. We would wander off, we'd—he'd come over and we'd wander off to lunch together and basically bitch and piss and moan. And he would diss Henry and I'd diss Leo.

Now, of course, he eventually, you know, worked with Leo, and he was, I think, responsible for—when I left, for Henry's secretary—I think her name was Kay—

AVIS BERMAN: Kay Bearman.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —yeah, coming to Leo. So it was a very incestuous little world.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] Right. Okay. Well, I will get back to that later, but what I want to get—let's finish—you leave—you leave your husband. Do you take your children with you when you move back.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. I tried to do that, I tried to get my parents to help me.

AVIS BERMAN: And this was, what, '76?

NINA VON ECKARDT: This would have been summer of '76, yes. I brought the kids back east and stayed with my aunt's boyfriend in—outside of Philadelphia, not Paoli, but I think Frazier, Pennsylvania; somewhere out there, he had a big house. Exton, Pennsylvania. Exton.

I spent the summer there and I knew I was going to—I knew I was going to stay. My sister was working for Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, how great.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I basically spent the summer—they were doing a play. They were doing it in Dennis—the playhouse in Dennis, and they also did it in Tanglewood—what's the town? The Redline Inn in—

AVIS BERMAN: Stockbridge.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Stockbridge. Stockbridge. So I actually went up and stayed with Melissa and worked—Gar had me selling Ruth's latest book, you know, during intermission. Gar puts everybody to work. And I also had a—a fling with Gar. [Laughs.] I was madly in love with Gar. That's not for publication. I adored him. He was wonderful.

And that sort of slowly got me to the East Coast. I was trying to figure out a way to move. I mean, no money. I mean, we had put the house in Marin County for sale, and it actually did end up selling and I ended up giving Charlie more of the money than I took. And I eventually found an apartment in New York, and I eventually—that's when I started working both for Kornblee.

I worked for Toiny for a while and then I also worked for Arras Gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: A—

NINA VON ECKARDT: A-R-R-A-S. She did all kinds of tapestry works and hangings. And there was some Brazilian artist that she loved that—major hangings. But I spent that summer in Pennsylvania, coming back and forth. And I had the children with me. And then by the end of the summer, I had no place to live. I ended up sleeping on my sister's floor for, like, two or three months before I found a job and a place to live, et cetera.

So I—and Charlie was working and living and we had a little tiny house in Venice at that point just behind David Ross and Cheryl's house. That was—had been the last place that we'd been living in Long Beach. And—well, this was in Venice Beach, the house was in Venice Beach.

So I—and they were in school, so I sent them—this was the most stable thing I could do at that point, so I had to send them back to Charlie. And that was—I mean, that was horrible. That was

just—that was awful. And I finally got him a job in the city, back in New York, and he brought the kids back east after about six months, I guess—no, it was a little longer than that. And I—oh, that's when I started—that's also when I started writing art criticism because at the end of the time in LA—or Long Beach—I started writing—I guess it came out of all of the interviews and stuff I'd been doing for this film for the Long Beach Museum.

I don't know how I started, I just started—I don't know whether I just started reviewing shows or whether—and sending the copy to *News*—it was called—I think it was called *Newsweek*, it was a big—or *Art Week*, it was called *Art Week*. It was a newspaper. It was a big newspaper, big format newspaper, and they published—

AVIS BERMAN: And this was an LA newspaper.

NINA VON ECKARDT: This is LA, this is an LA art paper.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I know that I wrote a—I wrote an incredibly long piece on—David gave Juan Downey a show, and I wrote a piece on that and I wrote a piece on—I don't know, I wrote a whole bunch of—I wrote two or three pieces, and that's when Don Goddard must have either seen what I'd done—

AVIS BERMAN: Don Goddard being an editor at *ARTnews*.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —being an editor at *ARTnews*. And he called me up and he said, I'd like to hire you as our LA stringer, and I said, well, that would be absolutely lovely, except I'm moving back to New York. Would it be possible for me to write for you in the city? Could I, you know, do pieces in the city? And he said, oh, absolutely. When you're—when you're—you know, when you're in town, call me and come by and see me.

So I did. I—the—one of the first people I saw when got back—got into New York was Don, and I started—I said to him, I'm very interested in photography. Could I—you know, would it be—and so I basically started a photography column for them.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And then I—and I guess I would call him and I'd say—every once in a while, he'd suggest something, but by and large, I would check the galleries and I'd run around and I'd work—I guess I had gotten the job. Jill [Kornblee] had—I had contacted Jill and said, could you—you know, could you use some help, and she said yes.

So I worked at Jill's from—now, one time I worked at a framing place. I mean, I one time said that my biography is crazier than George C. Scott's, right, except that I never drove a truck. I did actually work in one place that would—where they did frames, and that nearly killed me; I was terrible at that. I think I cried most of the time because I'm not good at math.

[They laugh.] There's nothing like mis-measuring an entire series of Plexiglas frames. [Gasps.]

AVIS BERMAN: So we should say at this moment, you did not—you did not use—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No.

AVIS BERMAN: —what was your byline?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Okay. In LA—[laughs]—in LA, I'm not sure how this happened, but I started calling myself—I started using—I—instead of going back to Sutherland, because my—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you were still married, so it wouldn't have been Nina Frazier?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. My legal name, because I never changed my name to Nina—I'd never legalized Nina—my legal name at that point—I was married—Belinda Sutherland-Frazier. So I was Belinda Sutherland-Frazier. Nobody ever called me Belinda, I was always called Nina. So I was Nina Frazier.

So what I did was I got rid of the Sutherland.

AVIS BERMAN: Is there a reason for that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, phonetic.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I went back to French. I thought, French. But I—I'm the—I mean, I've been reading history forever, so in the process of reading, I saw somebody under Henry VIII who was—had come over with William the Conqueror and ended up in Wales. And their name was French, two small "fs," and I thought, ooh, that's cool. [Laughs.] So I became Nina ffrench-Frazier, F-F--R-E-N-C-H-F-R-A-Z-I-E-R, and I demoted the Frazier, so I had two small "fs" in french and a small "f" in Frazier. And that's when I—when I started writing for *Art Week*, I was Nina ffrench-frazier. That was the first time I was ever, you know, Nina ffrench-frazier.

And I kept using—I used that name until I—until I married Wolf, and then I took Von Eckardt because that was—and at that point I legalized Nina. We went down to City Hall, signed the papers, got rid of Belinda—we did that thing where you put—put an ad in the—in some newspaper that says Belinda, whatever—Belinda Sutherland-Frazier's debts are, whatever—they did that for three weeks—

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —and then if nobody calls in and says you owe me a million dollars, you can change your name. So I changed my name officially to Nina Von Eckardt and I got my Social Security card and my driver's license, whatever. But I was Nina ffrench-frazier, and many people still think of me as—I mean, I still have friends—I still get mail, Nina ffrench-frazier. And I use it because, since I could be Googled—you can Google me under Nina ffrench-frazier and it says some—you know, the articles and things—with my art, I use Nina ffrench-frazier because that's who my art—that's my artist's name, so basically—but I just use Nina, I mean—you know.

But all of my books—and I know it confuses some of my friends at church. When I give them one of my books, the books say Nina—by Nina—edited and illustrated by Nina ffrench-frazier. But officially, that was when I became Nina ffrench-frazier, was that my last few months in—[inaudible] the end of World War II, my last few months in Los Angeles. [Laughs.] But—

AVIS BERMAN: And so you move to New York and you worked for *ARTnews*, and what else? Did you say *Art International*?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I worked for *ARTnews*, I worked for *Arts Magazines* and *Home*. Richard Martin—I don't know how that happened or whether I contacted him or whether he somehow—

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: It's very strange because that again is such—and then all of a sudden, completely out of the blue, I got a—either a phone call or a letter from James Fitzsimmons saying—actually, it was very interesting. It was Paula Cooper who recommended me, and the reason—apparently, I don't know why she recommended me, although—except that I did remember having written a review of one of her artists, somebody named Raphael-something. I think he was either Spanish or South American.

I had—at first, I thought it might have been Enrique Castro-Cid, but I don't know whether he was—I don't know what gallery he was in. I can't remember who he was with. But he and I became very good friends. He was wonderful. I loved him and wrote about him—I—the next—before you come the next time, I will go down and find—I know I have a whole stack of—I saved—you know, I have all this stuff and can tell you who I wrote about.

The interesting thing is you—the reason I could write is that I just basically—my theory was nobody's ever going to read this stuff, so I can write—it freed me to write anything I wanted to because I wasn't expecting anybody to ever read it. And so I was able to then get rid of all of the constraints around having people read you and judge you and not agree with you or, you know, whatever that was. And also when I—as I said before, when I went into most places, I went in invisibly—they didn't know who I was; I mean, I would just sneak in and write and—

AVIS BERMAN: Did you—did you write about or review Castelli artists?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I'm trying to remember. I'd have to look through the thing. I know that I used to—I occasionally went to Leo, but I don't think I—I might have reviewed one or two of them. I certainly never reviewed Roy or any of the ones that I'd known. I don't—I actually don't

think I ever did.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it's also interesting. So while you're writing this, you were also working for Toiny and Jill Kornblee while you're writing at the same time.

NINA VON ECKARDT: At that time, yeah I was, actually.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. Well, I mean, at—I mean, nowadays, that would, of course, be considered a huge conflict of interest, but—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. But I—but I—but I didn't—I didn't do that for very long because I then got a job—[laughs]—I then got a job at a nightclub. The way I would leave one place for another is that I would—I would go to the person I was leaving—mostly because they were impossible to work for, they really were. I mean, I actually didn't write that—write that long and I don't think—I mean, I certainly never wrote about anybody in the gallery where I was working. But as I recall, the working in the gallery part was a very brief stint because I then subsequently went to work for a guy named Bob Sherin who had produced the *Black Mame* with—if I could think of her name; an incredibly famous, much older actress who you would know, a Black singer that you would know—and—

AVIS BERMAN: Pearl Bailey.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. And we were in—and he had this nightclub that had been called Poof. It had been a gay nightclub over on—in the East—probably East 70s, maybe. And when I went to work there, it—he had partnered up with this very wealthy young Jewish couple, and basically what they were doing, they were—they were doing readings of musicals, but, like, no sets, no costumes. And, of course, you can imagine that went over like a lead balloon. I mean, I think I started working there maybe in September and it was closed by Christmas.

I think I got a free Thanksgiving turkey, you know, as we were, like, closing the doors. But it was a lot of fun. I really loved working there. I did all the bookkeeping and I fell madly in love with—he looked like a little, tiny Mr. Esquire, but I just loved him. He was—he was so—

AVIS BERMAN: You fell in love with whom?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Bob Sherin—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —the boss. You know, I had a terrible crush on him. And—but that didn't last very long. And then I—I mean, I just had a series of hit-and-miss jobs. And then Charlie was working for—actually, very interesting. I'll have to think of his name. His brother—his brother writes *Downton Abbey*, Julian—

AVIS BERMAN: Fellowes.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —Fellowes. This is David Fellowes, was producing—David Fellowes had gotten Mr. Jovanovich's daughter pregnant. He, unfortunately, was married with, I think, something like six adopted children to some woman in Canada, having come over from England. But he'd gotten Liz Jovanovich pregnant, and I think he managed to sort of squeak a divorce through and marry her like two minutes before the baby was born.

David was producing these modules; in other words, these were educational, but they were, again, slides. And, of course, Charlie designed these beautiful, beautiful slides. And we had a wonderful photographer, and he and I used to go all over the city, and I would—

AVIS BERMAN: Wait a minute. Is Charlie now in New York?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Charlie's in New York, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Charlie's come back to New York. I got Charlie a job in New York. He came back with the kids very—you know, like, not too long after I came—[inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. You—okay, you're separated, but you're both—but—

NINA VON ECKARDT: We're separated. And it took years to get [divorced -NVE], but we had, like, a no-fault divorce. And the—and a lawyer son of a very dear old friend gave it to me for court costs or something. I mean, he didn't even charge me for his work.

So somewhere around 1981, we had, like, a no—you know, I got this thing saying you're divorced, no-fault divorce. But he had come back—he probably came back—I came back and never went back the summer of '76. He probably came back the summer of '77. I'd gotten him, again, a job with some old A/V person. And he—and he just came back, and I found him a loft down on—down on Duane Street.

Interestingly, I subsequently became the best friend of an artist named Anna Bialobroda who was the—she was, like, the head of their loft committee, only she—I don't think she ever met Charlie at the time. And—but she and I met years later because I'd written a piece—Barbara Rose had done a group show with Anna and her husband, her then-husband Mark Schlesinger. And for some bizarre reason, I love their work, and I wrote about them. And I was invited to their—to a dinner party where they both were. And Anna claims that—I don't know whether this is true or not. Anna claims that I literally took one of the chairs and brought it right up to her knees, and we sat knee to knee and talked for the whole evening. [Laughs]. And I made Mark very upset because I was, like, the art critic, right? And here I was talking to Anna and not to him. But that's a diversion of—we'll get back to Anna at some point.

But anyway, Charlie had come back, and then he moved around. And he at one point found a wonderful apartment on 14th Street. But the kids—I found a wonderful apartment on 96th Street—three-room apartment—living room, two bedrooms. Each kid had a bedroom; I had the living room. So they came back up to me. But unfortunately, I mean, divorce is—it's inevitable, but it's also—you know, I mean, at no point did I ever say to myself, "Oh, you're doing a great thing." It was always a horrible thing. But it was—it was either—I mean, if I hadn't done what I did, it was metaphorical suicide. And if I'd stayed in California, and—I just—I would have just been dead. And I wasn't ready to die. I mean, you know, a whole other life emerged, as they say.

But I was basically working for a while in two galleries. But I didn't work Saturdays. Oh, no, did I? No, I didn't work Saturdays. Or maybe I did work Saturdays. I don't know. And I was delivering key food fliers with an actor friend of mine down in the Village. That actually paid me more money than all the galleries put together because that was 10 bucks an hour, but I only did that for three hours, so—[laughs]—yet somehow I cobbled together a life. And yet I think it was the freest time I've ever—I didn't feel as if I was poor, even though I had no money. It was an incredibly free time. And I was writing. I mean, I would have these—

AVIS BERMAN: How was the—how had the art world changed since your first—you know, from the mid-'60s now to the late '70s? What did you—what did you experience?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I thought—well, it freed—it opened up. The thing that I was saying about Leo casting such a broad shadow—Leo's shadow had broken up by then. And it was okay not to be a pop artist. Old—you know, other older artists were sort of getting recognized and being seen again, like, you know, people like Fairfield Porter who is, like—you know, because he wasn't hard-core type of thing. I mean, more—there was a lot more room for people and all different kinds of shows and very, very—it wasn't that awful sense that if you weren't with Castelli Gallery, you know, you might as well just go jump under a bus. And that was a—that was a really good—that was a really wonderful change. I mean, that was—that was a good thing.

Jill had wonderful artists. I mean, Jill had—she had a very good stable, except that she was, you know, the world's worst businesswoman, and they would never stay with her. I mean, they would stay—usually they wouldn't stay with her past the first show because she'd get paid for their work—[laughs]—and then she wouldn't give them the money, you know. You know, "I'm not doing this for my health" kind of thing.

But then, again, I wasn't in it that long. And then I stopped writing for *Arts Magazine* [sic] —*ARTnews*. I stopped writing for—oh, I know what it was. I remember what it was. [Pause.] I think I actually got fired from *ARTnews*. And I think it was Andre Emmerich's—I think it was Andre Emmerich got me fired from *ARTnews* because I think Don had asked me to write a review of the David Hockney show that was at Emmerich. And I didn't like it. And I said, "You don't need to write a review." "Yeah, yeah, I need you to write this review." And I said, "I didn't like the show." He said, "Ah, that's okay." So I wrote a not terribly good review. And I think—I think—and that was the last time Don said—

So I was writing for Richard Martin. So I started doing a whole bunch of—for him I only did the one—the one piece, the big—the bigger pieces. And then Fitzsimmons contacted me, and then I started literally—I mean, Sundays I would go to group shows in museums. I used to love ICP [International Center of Photography]. They always had wonderful shows. And he was—I mean, Jim was happy with anything that I sent him. He never—he never gave me an agenda, although a couple of times I met—I—actually I met the artist who introduced me to Wolf, Fred Folsom, who was a Washington artist—a wonderful Washington artist.

And Jim said to me, "Look, just check it out." And I thought later, "What a—what a"—you know, I called him up, made an appointment to come see him, got on a train, went down to Washington and spent the day with him. I mean, it's, like, absolutely with no sense of—I mean, just, "Oh, yeah, sure, fine." I did that, you know. And later I thought, "He could have been a serial killer," you know, but I just—you just sort of went with it.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, also by that time, Soho had started, so that was very different.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Exactly. I mean, everything was opening up. And—well, actually, I don't—I don't remember when Leo got down to Soho, but—

AVIS BERMAN: 1971.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, he was down—[inaudible]—he was definitely down there. It was—it was just much healthier. There was just room for—it was—it was like a free-for-all. There was room for everybody.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So what were your duties at—what did you do at Toiny's when you were working for Castelli Graphics?

NINA VON ECKARDT: The same thing. You do everything—I mean, manning the phones, selling things, keeping the books, you know, keeping records—keeping records, helping to hang the shows. I worked there very—for a very short time.

AVIS BERMAN: Even in the late '70s it was short.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, it was very, very short time.

AVIS BERMAN: And you were still getting along with her?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. No, we always—we always got along. I really loved her. I mean, she was a very not easy person. But I like—I never met a neurotic person I didn't love. My kids used to say to me, "Mom, you never met a house you couldn't love." I like very difficult people, and I like neurotic people. And I also see—I see their vulnerabilities. I always see the vulnerability of the tough person, so I don't see them as the tough, mean, you know, nasty person. I see them as the—as the hurt person that's maybe acting that way, but I see who's inside. And so it makes me see people differently.

And I—and I knew the—I mean, I knew how unhappy she—[inaudible]. But she was very—she was actually—as a—as a gallery dealer, she was actually smarter than—she really was smarter than Leo. She had a wonderful eye. She had a really good eye, and she had a—she was French, right? She had a business sense that was *nonpareil*. I mean, she really, I think, was a terrific businesswoman, very smart, very organized, very ordered. I mean, she was a pleasure to work for.

And I don't remember why I stopped working there. I think maybe because logistically, I—it wasn't enough money there. It wasn't—there was—she—you know, she wasn't ever going to be able to pay me more than X amount. And then I think I must have gotten the two jobs across the street from each other.

AVIS BERMAN: Which would have—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or actually, no; I went from Toiny to the framing job. That's what it was. And then I went from the—which was horrible. It was a friend of Toiny's who got me the framing job, and it was way more money. That actually was quite—was quite a good—but, but—usually what I would do is I would say, "Oh, I've been—you know, I've been offered this job that I can't—I can't refuse because"—you know, and I would, like, make the salary much more than, A, they were paying me, and B, that they ever would raise me. That's how I left Arras Gallery, because

they were impossible to work. She was impossible. She was one of those people, you know, "Take my—take my full-length sable coat to the—to the dry cleaner; while you're there, pick up my Missoni from Bonwits]." And it was, like—[groans.] [Laughs.] And I realized that, you know, you're supposed to do everything when you work in a gallery, but I'm—but I'm also not your—you know, I'm not your lady's maidservant. And plus, she was not a very nice person.

AVIS BERMAN: Who—well, who was that woman? Who was Arras Gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: What was her name? Siegel? Something Siegel? [Adele Siegal, owner of Arras Gallery -NVE] I'll check. I'll look that up. I'll have that the next time. She was—I loved her assistant. Her assistant was wonderful. She kept all the books. And she was—she was really quiet and gentle and very sweet. But Lady Arras was—boy, she was a barracuda. Very, very wealthy, and, you know, very privileged.

AVIS BERMAN: So how long did this period of writing and gallery working and then night clubbing—you know, all of that—how long did that go on after the—[inaudible]?

NINA VON ECKARDT: That went on from LA '76 or maybe '75—I might've started writing in—yeah, probably started writing in LA maybe in '75, until I got my first job in A/V, because I was—oh, I know, it went on through the David—

AVIS BERMAN: —Hockney—

NINA VON ECKARDT: The Harcourt Brace Jovanovich job.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It went on through that. Then I—then—oh, I know what happened. Oh, so anyway, David [Fellowes] was the—was producing these beautiful modules. We—the photographer and I would go to the—to the New York Public Library, and we were working with original manuscripts. They let us—you know, because we were doing it for an educational facility. So we went into—we were—we were filming stuff in churches, and we would give them an offering, but they didn't charge us a fee, whereas subsequently—later, when I was doing the same kind of organizing for Caribiner and another company called Aniforms of course you had to pay because it was—it was the marketplace. It wasn't for education.

So we put together this beautiful, beautiful series of little stories, educational things. And we had a screening. And Jovanovich walks out of the screening, and he says, "David, it's wonderful. I knew it would be beautiful. I expected it to be on time." And he fired David and closed—fired his son-in-law, David, and he closed our office. Literally the next time we went up to the office, the door was locked. Now, David stiffed Charlie on money he owed him—[inaudible]. And David took all the money for himself, you know, because he had a very high lifestyle with—[laughs]—his little girl Jovanovich and the—and the granddaughter. And he owed me. I mean, he didn't pay me the last couple weeks of my salary.

So I was out of a job for six months. And that was really scary. Fortunately, my son Graham was modeling, acting, and he literally paid the rent for four months. And then I got—I got another job. But I was still writing until, out of the blue, maybe a month into being out of work and having no money—and I'm thinking, "Well, if I write—if I write two big pieces, that's X amount. And then if I write, you know, the New York byline, like, five or six or seven reviews, that's X amount." You know, so I was, like, cobbling that together. Fitzsimmons [James Fitzsimmons, publisher of *Art International* -NVE] writes me and says, "Well, I'm really sorry, but I'm very sick, and I'm going to be in the hospital for X amount of time. And then I'm closing the—I'm closing the magazine down."

So—oh, no, there was a—there was an interim job. I worked for a while for a publicist named Donald Smith. And he was, like, Dorothy Loudon's publicist and Marian Selde's publicist. And he put together Constance Towers and John Gavin, you know, before they went to Mexico to be the ambassador; and a dinner at some restaurant that was just opening, so we'd get in—some would—I did that for about six months. And then I got a phone call. Got a phone call. And it was a place I'd sent a résumé to, like, a year earlier when I was working for David. And I'd sent them a production résumé, and never heard anything, never heard anything. And I got a phone call saying, "We're interviewing for coordinators, and would you be interested in coming in?" This was in October of '80—no, October of '79—October of '79. This was at this company called Caribiner.

So I went in, and I had this interesting interview. And—now, I was in my—let's see, oh, '79, what was I? I was—I was—I was 49. I was born in—so I was 49—no, 39.

AVIS BERMAN: Thirty-nine.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Thirty-nine. I was almost 39, because I was born in 1940. So I was almost 39. And before I left—you know when the interview was over. Now, everybody who was a coordinator was—they were, I mean, half my age. But when I left the interview, I shook the guy's hand; his name was Jay Rubin. And I said, "This is my job. Give me a call." [They laugh.] And he said to me later—he said to me later, "If you had been much younger with that attitude, I wouldn't have hired you. But because of your age, that's why I hired you." And that was—it was an absolutely wonderful job, but it was 24/7. And that's when I stopped. In other words, in October of '79 I stopped writing.

I—Fitzsimmons, who'd been, like, gone for, like, eight months out of my life—well, maybe not quite that long, but for long enough that, you know—he got back in touch with me. And I wrote him, and I—and I responded, and I said, "I'm so sorry, but I've just—you know, I could—I could write—I could write the occasional big piece. I could do that; I'd be happy to do that. But I can no longer—you know, I just don't—I don't—it's not—I have to travel," you know. He got so angry at me. He wrote me the nastiest letter about, you know, betrayal and—[inarticulate noises.]

AVIS BERMAN: Betrayal? You got a job. I mean, he—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. But I also found out later that he drank and, you know, he had a very—he had a lousy temper. So I wrote him—I wrote him—I'm—I don't often do it, but I can write really nasty letters. So I wrote him back a completely nasty letter. And that was the end of him, which was sad because we'd had—up to that point we've had a wonderful—he has a wonderful sense of humor.

He used to piss me off because he would misunderstand something I'd written and edit it badly. He did that once around—when I was actually reviewing Rosenquist's *F-111*. He completely misunderstood something I said, and he rewrote it to say the opposite of what I meant. And that really made me angry. That was the one time that I got really upset at him. But by and large, he left—you know, he left my stuff alone. He let me, you know, write what I wrote. And sometimes I would reread—like, years later I reread some of the stuff I wrote, and I—and I would think, "Who the hell wrote this? Who—how did—how did I know—I mean, I forgot that I knew that," you know, kind of thing.

It's like—because that was one of the questions that Wolf asked me the first time we had our set-up lunch at Childe Harold in Washington. He said to me, "Have you ever experienced going back and reading something you've written a long time ago? And how did you respond? You know, how did you feel about it?" And I remember thinking, "Okay, I can—I can just be pleasant and give him a blow-off answer, or I can answer this honestly." And I—so I decided to answer it honestly. And I—that's what I told him. I said—I said I couldn't believe who'd written this; it was so brilliant. [They laugh.] And he threw his head back and laughed. And at that point I fell in love with him, because up to that point he'd been this kind of stiff, you know, kind of very Teutonic gentleman. And then I realized he's really a four-year-old, and that was okay, you know. [They laugh.]

But I couldn't—there was just no time to write anymore, although I—you know, as I said, I probably could have done maybe one long piece a month or something. I couldn't pull—except that once you're in that world, when you're in a client-driven world, your life is not your own. And back then, this was—this was—you know, and it was like—I can't even imagine what it's like today, because back then—this is even before faxes—or no, before FedEx, even. And FedEx didn't come along till, like, another couple of years. So you could kind of put the client off—you know, "I'll get that to you tomorrow," or "I'll get that to you next week." But now there's just no—and they want it now; they want it yesterday.

And you literally—when you were at the final month—few weeks of production—and then when you were doing the show, when you were actually on the road doing the show—no sleep. You didn't get any sleep. And they owned you. So it was a—it was a very, very, very, very intense but very interesting—and the good thing about it was—and I—[inaudible]—say this—if you hated the client, you only had to deal with it for, maximally, three months. I mean, most shows took—you could do most of the shows in, like, six weeks—they were—from beginning to end. The big shows could take three to four months.

But then if you—then if you really didn't like the client, the next time they came around, you know, you could say, you know, "Put somebody else on that show," you know. And that didn't happen. I mean, I actually ended up liking pretty much all the clients. And the shows were—because they were always different. They were fascinating. And so it was a—it was a very good—it was a very good life. But it was—that was—that was—at that point, that was the end of that art-world life, although I kept—stayed friends with a number of people.

And then—and I'm still—to this day still—well, not that many—mostly Anna [Bialobroda -NVE] and Janet Stayton. But she's so crazy, and she lives in Italy, and she sends me announcements once in a while. I mean, I think if she came to New York, she might call me and then we would—we would have dinner, and we would be back exactly where we were the last time we had dinner 30 years ago or whatever. I mean, she actually came down—I had a show for her in Washington. She was doing something in Washington, and so I gave a little preview show at the house, because of course Wolf knew everybody and could invite everybody in the—and he did, so she had a great—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think that this is a good point to stop for today. And—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. It's a good time because hopefully you'll—at this hour you'll avoid—you'll get into the city without too much—[inaudible].

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Thank you very much.

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AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman interviewing Nina von Eckardt for the Archives of American Art Oral History Program on July—

NINA VON ECKARDT: August.

AVIS BERMAN: It's August, sorry, August 13, 2012, for the Castelli Gallery project.

And I do have more questions on Castelli, because we—I mean, a lot of basic questions, because we branched off into all sorts of other things. But you had said—and I'm not sure if this is an art-type incident—but to ask you about Salvador Dalí—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, that?

AVIS BERMAN: —which I thought I would just do first, because—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That actually was a—that was a Charles Frazier instance. I had talked to you a little bit about Charlie and Allan Kaprow doing the *Gas* happening in the Hamptons in the summer of '66. And Charlie had—was building hovercraft. He had this idea of a floating sculpture that he was crazy about at one point. And somewhere in the fall, there was a show, a little, tiny show somewhere in the city, of miscellaneous sculptures. Yeah. It was some gallery.

AVIS BERMAN: By your husband?

NINA VON ECKARDT: And he had a piece in it. And the piece that he put in it was some form of mechanical sculpture that was flying or floating or whatever, because that was his obsession at the time. And Salvador Dalí went to that exhibit. And he saw this piece of Charlie's, and he contacted Charlie or had one of his slaves contact Charlie.

So that would have been—probably that was the—would have been the winter of '67 it happened, because I know Merin—I was nursing Merin when all of this took place. It had been quite uncomfortable going in and out of the city trying to accommodate my—[laughs]—few-month-old child. And we spent a number of meetings with Dalí and a guy named Captain Clark. I don't know if his first—I seem to remember that his first name was Peter Clark, but he was a rather interesting fellow.

Dalí wanted Charlie to make a flying piece for him. He had this idea that they would do some sort of event or something together. And we had lunch one day—of course, he stayed at the St. Regis, so we would go and meet him in the King Cole Bar and have these long conversations. Or one day we had lunch in the restaurant with—and Gala came, and she joined us at lunch, which was kind of interesting, historically. And this went on for probably two or three months.

But what was obvious was Dalí wanted Charlie to pay for the piece, and of course we had no money whatsoever. And Charlie kept trying to get Dalí to—you know, so it all came to naught, completely, but it was a very fascinating—just in terms of art history, for me, anyway, it was a very fascinating time. He was a very interesting fellow, very manipulative and extremely charming and very smart. And he was surrounded by businessmen.

This Captain Clark was a British—retired British army officer who obviously liked young, nursing women. [They laugh.] He would walk very close behind me into, you know, whichever room we were going into and whisper innuendos in my ear, and I would keep moving.

But it was just—it was just a very droll little episode, and it was sort of funny to see this person who was so famous and had—if he didn't have a lot of—[inaudible]—we weren't living in the St. Regis. He was the one, you know, coming over to America and spending whatever—I think it was four months that—of the year in New York City and being in touch with all kinds of makeup companies and—I mean, you know, he knew people with money, and all he had to do, you would assume, was lift a finger, and somebody would shower him with funds for something. Trying to get somebody as poor as we were to be part of this project—but essentially he was trying to get us to fund it. And so of course it just—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, would the funding—I mean, was this—what did he—exactly did he want made, one object or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, he wanted one—he wanted to design a flying sculpture. He would have—you know, he and Charlie would work on the design of the flying sculpture, and then Charlie would have executed it technically.

Charlie—at the time we were living in Sea Cliff, Long Island, and Charlie's best friend at the time was another sculptor named David Jacobs, who taught at Hofstra. And Charlie and David both knew the divorced wife of a guy who owned a place called Wah Chang. It was a huge bauxite factory right there on the—on the sound. And this guy gave Charlie and David studios. He just gave them these humongous, empty rooms in the factory.

So Charlie had this absolutely—I mean, you know, we're talking 40-foot ceilings and huge, empty factory rooms. I mean, it was probably the best place Charlie ever lived and worked. But it—none of it ever led to anything. I mean, Charlie eventually had to go back working for multimedia to make a living, because at the time he was with Kornblee and with Dwan, and they were both giving him a small stipend, but it was, you know—and they weren't—they weren't selling the work.

I mean, the work doesn't sell itself. Art needs to be sold. Art needs—and that's what Leo was so absolutely brilliant at. Leo was—he just had this completely effortless sense of marketing. That was a—because you talked about Marc Ratliff and having spoken with him. Marc used to do all of our advertising, and he would place all the advertising, and he'd come by every month, and he and Leo would concoct, you know, whichever ad would be going that month, or ads, usually ads.

And Marc was responsible for that ad that I mentioned the last time around the Venice Biennale, where it was like the entire map of Europe and Leo's artists sprinkled all over like starbursts. And people were totally incensed and offended by that ad, but I just thought, "How completely brilliant." It was absolutely the truth. These artists were having shows in these different places simply because Leo would literally get Santini to pack up an entire show and send it out to Ileana, and then there was a gal in Italy that Leo used to send work to and Irving Blum in Los Angeles.

I mean, anybody wanted any work of art from Leo, Leo was right there, because he understood the value of getting people to see the work and talk about the work, and, you know, know that the—be—come to know the artists' names. How else—so he was a brilliant entrepreneur in that sense. He really understood that the—you know, the artists have to be allowed to do the work and paint and not have to worry, so he paid them a monthly stipend, however small or big, and let them do what—you know, gave them their head, basically.

And then he would—was the one who would be out there running around getting—and, you know, that was—people objected to—I think probably before Leo, artists didn't find themselves in *Vogue*, middle—you know, what do you call that?

AVIS BERMAN: Middle of the—middle—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —Middle page, you know, with art—you know, Don Judd surrounded by the current beautiful model of the day. I mean, Leo understood that that—whoa, you know, why not? Why not make them stars? That's what it was.

It was like—and that's why—it was interesting, the connection Leo—and it was a late connection with Andy. I mean, Andy was one of the late arrivals at the gallery. But Andy also understood that 15 minutes of fame.

The thing is, once you've become a household word, you never—you never can really disappear, because even if people are saying, "Oh, whatever happened to—" 20 years later, they're still remembering the name. And for the time that it lasted, it got them to a different level. And if you've never been—if you've never—you've never been known, then you've got—essentially, you've got nothing to lose. But even if you've been well-known, you can always come back to that. You can always make a return. You can always have a recovery.

And so Leo was out there working for his—he truly—whatever percent he earned—and at the time, it was only 30 percent. I mean, I was shocked, subsequently, years later. I mean, I think now—I don't even know what it is now. At one point it was 50-50 [percent]. But we only took 30 percent.

And Leo paid his artists. He didn't forget that the collector had paid, or—oh, well, actually, he paid his artists even when the collectors didn't pay. I mean, that was part of the deal. And that was his integrity. I mean, that was where he was really—he had a noblesse oblige. I mean, he really was an aristocrat in that sense of understanding, kind of like the—I used to think he was like—you know, he modeled himself on the Medici. You know, he understood that sense of caring for people.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, did you have any sense—I mean, did Leo ever talk about his past or his family?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, that was what was interesting. He never did. And the thing that was so interesting was when we—the first time we went hat in hand to Chase Manhattan on the corner of 79th and Madison and we had to—I guess I was a signatory as well, which of course I didn't understand at the time that I—[laughs]—that probably made me liable for the \$10,000. Oops. But they asked for background, his parents' names, my parents' names, whatever. And Leo said that his father's name was Otto Krausz, and his mother's name was Anna Castelli, and it was just, like, "I had no idea his father's name was—" I mean, that he had taken his mother's name. It was a very smart move to have taken his mother's name.

AVIS BERMAN: Were you aware that he was Jewish?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, but it had—it was completely—I mean, Leo wasn't aware that he was Jewish. I was aware that Leo was Jewish. Leo was not Jewish, just the way Wolf—my husband Wolf Von Eckardt—was Jewish, but he was so not Jewish that—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, very secular.

NINA VON ECKARDT: There was no identity. There was no Jewish identity with Leo.

AVIS BERMAN: With Ileana was there ever?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I didn't know her. I really didn't know her well enough to know whether—obviously there was with Nina, I think. But that often happens, where a child—a spouse has something that they perceive as important that maybe the parents were not quite that connected to. Ileana might have been; I don't know. I don't know whether in any way they celebrated any of the Jewish holidays or anything like that.

I mean, many of Leo's closest friends were Jewish, and that was the case with Wolf, and—but Wolf—we would constantly give these dinner parties, and I'd say something about so and so, whatever, bar mitzvah, some Jewish aspect of their lives. Leo would say, "Wow, are they Jewish?" And I'd say, "Yes, Leo. They're Jewish." [They laugh.] It was like I was more Jewish than Leo—I mean, than Wolf was.

AVIS BERMAN: Wait a minute. You just—this thing about the bar mitzvah, you had said Leo—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I meant Wolf. I meant Wolf—with Wolf's friends. No, Leo was totally

aware of who was and who wasn't, but he—and he had many of his—of his very close friends—Alan Solomon and some of the—what was her name, Barbara?

AVIS BERMAN: Jakobson?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Jakobson, yeah, who he was very close to.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, let's talk about some of the friendships. What was the friendship with Alan Solomon like, and what was their relationship and what brought them together and—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know what brought them together, because by the time I was there—in fact, the fact that I was there because of Alice Denney, who was also very close to Alan and loved Alan and that relationship, as did Leo's relationship, was already in full bloom when I got there. But they just—essentially—my friend Tom Freudenheim wrote me recently, and he was saying how Alan Solomon is probably one of the least—that his reputation after he died, that he should—he should have had a much higher place in the art world than he has right now, that he's not—he's not considered as—he really was much more important than people at this point—

AVIS BERMAN: I think that people—probably people who study things and know things know he was a pioneer. But he died—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah, but I think that it's not—it's not—it's not a household—he's not a household word in that sense of being as honored for all that he did as he should be, because he really was a pioneer. I mean, he turned the Jewish Museum into a completely different direction than they ever anticipated going in.

And his relationship with Leo, they were like best friends, the way, you know, guys who went to high school and then college together and, you know, played on the football team together. They were very close friends. Alan was often a guest at Leo's apartment. And as I said before, you know, he would take the very well thought-of and the wealthy collectors to the Carlisle for lunch or dinner, but if he really liked you, he brought you home.

And Alan, I think, had carte blanche in going to the apartment, as did Bob Rauschenberg. He—Leo was completely comfortable with them. And Leo would spend, you know, a 12-hour day at the gallery and then go home and talk another five hours on the phone to Bob and Alan. Those were the people that I knew of at that time that he was—you know, that he was really intimate with.

AVIS BERMAN: How about Robert Rosenblum?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. I mean, good friend of the gallery and always welcome, as was Leo Steinberg and his wife, who was Dorothy—

AVIS BERMAN: Seiberling.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —Seiberling, were—I would—I would call them great and good friends of the gallery as opposed to close friends to Leo. And I remember Leo Steinberg bringing in a—John's print at one point, and I think that was later when I was working for Toiny in her—in the print gallery. And every effort was made to sell it for Leo and to get a good price for it and then also not to take a commission. In other words, you don't make money off of your friends. And in that sense—but not, I don't think, not what I would call a family friend, which is—Alan was definitely a family friend.

AVIS BERMAN: Who else was that close that I may not know about, besides Rauschenberg and Alan Solomon?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, he loved Roy. He was—he was—but he wasn't—and I think he felt comfortable with Roy. But I think Roy also was living so much his own life at that point and essentially recreating a life for himself.

It—he liked funny people. He loved [Salvatore] Scarpitta. At one point, I think he and [Jack] Tworokov had been—had been good friends. I remember one time when I was there very early on, a young guy wrote, loved Tworokov's work and didn't have a lot of money and wondered if Leo would, you know, give him a Tworokov for, you know, less than whatever the going price was. And Leo wouldn't do it. And I sort of thought, "Oh, why not?" Because, you know, with my idealistic approach to things, really loving something and wanting it was the equivalent of having a lot of

—having enough money to buy it, which of course it wasn't in Leo's book.

And I—but then I later came to understand that, you know, Leo didn't want to cheat Tworokov by selling something under market value, because his main thing was keep Tworokov's prices up so that it would essentially support who Tworokov was as an artist and his place in the history, you know, of the—of art so that he—Leo had a very high—he really loved Tworokov.

He liked Andy [Warhol], but he—the relationship with Andy was more Leo hanging—going in the evening and just sort of possibly occasionally hanging out at the studio and at The Factory, as it was called, at The Factory, and getting to meet other people there.

I really didn't see into what was going on in the private life other than the most obvious things of, you know, the people that he really liked. He didn't have—I mean, there were—that I can remember, he respected and admired Mrs. List and Victor Ganz. He had a kind of—slightly adversarial relationship with Bob Scull and definitely with Ben Heller, who didn't pay.

But because Leo understood the value of never burning bridges and never closing doors behind you, he always maintained a very, very friendly surface relationship with people.

But, you know, I would go home at night—I mean, I had to go to openings, and I had to be there, you know, 20 days a week. But other than being able to see what was going on—obviously going on in the marriage, and obviously seeing the—Ileana's manipulation, and their essentially always being connected—there was no way that Ileana and Leo were going to ever disconnect. I mean, they were—they were divorced, but they were still on the same mission. And so he was always willing to help her whenever she needed to be helped. And then of course she came when she—once she got to New York, she became a huge power in and of herself. She was very responsible for most of the early choices. She was basically the one with the eye and the sense of history, I think. I mean, she really knew what—

AVIS BERMAN: What do you mean by Ileana's manipulation?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, she could always call him and get whatever she wanted from him. I mean, we literally sent entire shows to Europe for which we got not a dime. We paid for the packing and shipping. And the pieces would go over there because Leo understood on a—he kind of lived on a historic—in a—in this historic space that was—that was disconnected from commerce and money. As I said before, A, he was a brilliant—he really was an incredible businessman, and he—and he understood marketing. Sometimes I wondered if he actually got the work on the sort of spiritual level; I don't know that he ever did. But he understood how—he knew that these guys were important, and he knew how to make other people believe that they were important. But he also had this sense of history, of—I think he felt he was on a mission.

So Ileana would call up, and "I don't have anything for May," you know, and Leo would send her whatever he had. And if we ever found out that it sold, chances of our getting any money back from all of that expense were nil. And Nancy, the bookkeeper, would come in, and she'd—you know, "Leo, Leo, da da da." But it was—you know, it was Ileana—Irving Blum had the same—you know, Irving could call him up and get whatever he wanted from him, mostly because Leo understood the value of what they were—and he liked Irving, and he—and he—because he loved Ileana.

Didn't have quite such friendly relations—he didn't like John Weber very much. [Laughs.] So he—John Weber didn't have the charm or the ability to charm that, say, someone like Irving Blum had. And that's the other thing: Irving was Jewish, and John Weber was distinctly not Jewish. And I'm not saying that it was—it was that, but there's a—there's an amount of charming and then smoothing—oh, Friedel Dzugas was a close friend of Leo's. And they went back a long way. They might even have gone back to Paris; I'm not sure. But Friedel could come in anytime, and he was always welcome into the gallery. He was one of the sweetest, most charming people. And interestingly, Bob Elkon, who—Leo and Bob Elkon had a—had a very friendly, close relationship. I would say they were more friends than colleagues.

I'm trying to think who else had that kind of entrée into the gallery. You know, Leo was always attracted to and charmed by and charming to young women. So there were a number of them. He gave Ivan the freedom—he understood the role that Ivan played, which was Ivan had no idea what was going on. I mean, people would come in and ask Ivan a question about Castelli Gallery. [Laughs.] Ivan couldn't tell you, you know, because he didn't pay attention to that even though he was right there out front.

But Leo understood that the artists that Ivan was interested in, that he kept in his drawer, that he then passed out to people like Holly Solomon and Arnold Glimcher and Fred Mueller—Fred Mueller was Glimcher's partner; he—that was the name I couldn't remember. And Fred became—well, they both were involved in film, but I think Fred became involved in Broadway with a lot of—some serious Broadway stuff at one point.

But that—again, this fell into the space of—basically anybody who talks about us, anybody that we can help, anybody that we can connect with Green Gallery—Bellamy was a—was a—in a funny way a friend, because he was—he was such an abstract person that I don't think that they were—they weren't intimate friends. But they—there was—there was a lot of very good feeling. And there was a lot of—I think there was a lot of respect for someone like, say, Betty Parsons, that kind of thing between colleagues. But that was more of a colleague thing than a—than a close relationship thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what was his relationship to Sidney Janis?

NINA VON ECKARDT: There was a—there was respect there. They were—they were—you know, they were colleagues. As I said, the first day that I walked into the gallery, Connie Trimble and Leo were coming back from Mrs. Janis' memorial service. We didn't have any dealings in terms of any sort of overlapping of art or shows or anything like that. I mean, nobody was—there were no exchanges in that sense. But I mean, a very sort of respectful—right.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, Janis at that point—before he did show some of the pop, he did have a—he had the abstract expressionists. I mean, he had Rothko,—[inaudible].

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. I mean, the—you know, the fact is, it is such a tiny universe, they obviously all knew each other. And because they were all of them successful in one of the most difficult arenas on the planet—I mean, making any kind of money out of—out of fine art is, like, impossible. So the—somebody that somehow manages to do that garners a huge amount of respect.

It's interesting that Leo and Alan were so close. I mean, they socialized outside of working hours. Of course, working hours were anywhere from, you know, six in the morning until six in the morning. There were—there were—[laughs]—they were there and not working. It's just that wonderful thing of recognizing someone. I mean, you just do, you know—and the same thing with Bob. I mean, they were just—you know, they were just very, very close.

And Leo wasn't—Leo was—he—I don't think he—I think he—it was not easy for him to be intimate with people. You know, I think—I think he kept his distance from—you know, from most people. He had that wonderful barrier of charm, because he was just so instantly and deeply charming. And it was—it was just genuine. He breathed charm.

And he also—he was generous. And that's a—that is actually—in the long run, that's a very—that's a very rare quality. He was—he was—he was a giver. And so he would help the—you know, he would help very strange people just because, in a funny way, that was his—that was his nature and, I think, just part of his philosophy. Whether all of this came from his mother, I have no idea. We never—you know, we never talked about stuff like that. I mean, I never said to him, you know, "Oh my God, your father's name is Otto Krausz." [They laugh.] I'd just tuck that away in a little pocket and thought *boop*.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, did he find—was he hesitant to say any—I mean, no, no—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, no, no. I just think—you know, I don't think he—I don't think he thought about it. You know, I have no idea why he took—I mean, I—obviously I do have some idea of why he took his mother's name. I don't know when he took her name. I assume it was sometime during the war or around the war, that kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: Just—I want to go back to a couple of things. You mentioned Barbara Jakobson. What was she collecting? How was Leo influencing her at the time? What was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't honestly know. This was very early. I just know that she was there quite often. I mean, she was somebody that was there often enough that I actually—would be—you know, was aware that she was someone special. I gather that at some point they actually were—I don't know whether they were a romantic item or not ever, but Barbara was one of those people. She came into the gallery; Leo got up and spent, you know, the whole time she was there with her. I don't remember anything she might have bought. She might not have bought

anything at that time.

She was extremely attractive and very nice. And he just spent a lot of time with her. I think he also—I think they would have lunch together—not at the house. But he was always—you know, I was busy working. And so whatever I might see out of the side of my eye, I would sort of notice—because as I said, anybody who would come in that often, I would—I would notice that—or come in, say, after—you know, after six o'clock so that they would be part of the little—the—you know, the few people who might assemble in the back room and just sit around and talk after the work day was over. And as I said, that would be Alan, and someone like Barbara Jacobson would be part of that—you know, would be welcome into that group.

At one point there was a young gal named Nancy Fish that I know Leo met at Andy's. And one summer she became very prominent. Probably was—yeah, would have been '64, would have been the summer of '64—because I got married in May of '65, so I was gone by then. [Inaudible]—you have to remember, I was only there—it was a very crucial time, but it was a very short—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. But it was a—[inaudible]—crucial time.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was—[inaudible]—but it was a very, very crucial time. It was the time that finally—in a sense Leo had been climbing the mountain, and he—and he got up to the top and was just kind of flying around—because as I said, when I first—the first two shows when I got there in October were Rauschenberg and Lichtenstein, typing these press releases out. And John Canady [*New York Times* art critic -NVE] was still writing really nasty pieces and excoriating Jasper Johns at MoMA, and then that kind of thing—"Oh, why would anybody hang one of those monstrosities," blah, blah, blah, blah, blah—and going from that in a—in a very short—in—you know, in a little over a year's time to Rauschenberg winning the prize at the Venice Biennale. I mean, that's extraordinary.

AVIS BERMAN: [Inaudible]—you—exactly. I mean, your time there is, like, the—all the important people were there or were joining.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Exactly. And they were all showing. I mean, it was all of them, at that point. It was Bob, Roy, Stella, Jasper—I think [Lee] Bontecou might have—might have had a show in that time, and certainly [John] Chamberlain and [Ed] Higgins. So it was a—it was a very—

AVIS BERMAN: And then, as you say, the Green Gallery closed in '64, so that was also—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. So then Rosenquist joined. Interestingly, he never took Oldenburg, I don't think.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, why not?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know. I think—I think that was—it might have been—where did Oldenburg go? I don't remember where he went. Or did he just sort of go out on his own or go to California or—

AVIS BERMAN: No. I have to look that—I have to look that up.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. I don't remember who he went to. Oh, no, I do. Didn't he go to Emmerich? Oldenburg might have gone to Emmerich.

AVIS BERMAN: No, he joined—okay, I have this—no, he joined Castelli in 1974. So he may have been at Emmerich for, you know, a while. But in '74—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So he did join. He did join, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, but there was that 10-year period that I can't tell you about. I mean I'm sure he's—[inaudible]—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay. Yeah. For whatever it's—for some reason Emmerich comes to mind.

AVIS BERMAN: Although I'm sure you're right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't think—I don't think Dine was ever—I don't think Leo ever took on Dine. I don't—I don't remember, but I don't think so.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, you're right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But I do remember Jasper coming in and telling Leo to get Dine off of Bob's back. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: I don't understand what you mean by—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know—I don't know what he meant, because I mean, you look at Dine's work, and you sort of say, "Well, that's not remotely like Bob's."

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, gee, well, I was wondering, do you think that Jim Dine was trying to get Rauschenberg to use some pull with Leo to get him into the gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I don't think it was that. I think it was more sort of—you know, sort of—in some way stealing some of Bob's ideas—now, maybe putting them into his own format. I think—I think the bathrobes—I think—I think there was something around the bathrobes that I think—maybe Bob had done—maybe Bob had done a piece or something with bathrobes in it. I don't remember. But definitely Jasper felt that Dine was, you know, kind of second string, not—and I don't know where Wesselmann went. I don't know where Wesselmann—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, he—well, he was with Janis for a long time. I know that.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, okay. I almost thought of Wesselmann as kind of thin. He seemed sort of thin to me.

AVIS BERMAN: Also, you—just going back to Tworkov—now, Tworkov—did he leave the gallery on his own volition, or what happened to him?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, Tworkov was up at Yale teaching. And interestingly, I was in the same Lamaze class as Tworkov's daughter; I don't remember which of his daughters. And—

AVIS BERMAN: Isn't there only one, Hermine, or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It's—maybe it was her. And she was married to an artist—

AVIS BERMAN: Bob Moskowitz? That's Hermine.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —Bob Moskowitz, who was one of the sweetest human beings on the planet. And I liked his work, and he had shown—Leo had shown some of his stuff. But then, again, just as Lee Bontecou's next few ventures didn't kind of—Leo wasn't into it—she—all the kind of blown-glass fishes and things, Moskowitz went off onto this heart tangent. And Leo wasn't happy with that as a direction. And I don't know whether he dropped him or whether things just sort of—you know, he wasn't showing him—whatever.

I don't think that created any animosity with Tworkov. But I just think that Tworkov—basically, Leo wasn't selling any Tworkovs at all. And I think that Tworkov probably rightly felt that his work just simply was no longer in sync with what—the direction Leo was moving in, because of course he was so not in sync with anything Leo was doing. I don't remember, during the time that I was there, whether it just sort of kept floating along, nobody taking any concerted move to do anything. And I don't know when the relationship came to an end. But I think probably it—at some point—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, what—in terms of what you witnessed, how did Leo get rid of an artist if—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, what I—what I witnessed was Leo was incapable of getting rid of an artist. Leo would continue to send them money and just keep on—with Scarpitta—of course, he loved Scarpitta as a person. And he gave him some—such—some little amount of money, but he also—he tried to help get him a job, you know, get him—I know he helped him get a teaching job down at Maryland Institute of College Art.

That was one of Leo's—[laughs]—I don't know whether it was one of his greatest virtues or one of his worst attributes, was his inability to basically come to a—you know, a—say, "Okay, we're going to—we're going to do this," and then do it. I mean, he just let things slide along because it was very difficult for him to get rid of anybody, stop paying them—or conversely, you know, get them to pay for something that they had bought, other than sending out, you know, monthly statements to hint that, "You know, you never did pay for this painting." [Laughs.]

And also, you know, things like Scull bringing in—he—actually I think Scull brought the Giacometti in. I don't remember whether Scull brought the Pollock in or not. But I'm pretty sure

Scull brought the Giacometti in to give to Leo. Leo was supposed to sell—it was a painting, not even a sculpture, it was a painting—this Giacometti and that would help pay for something Scull had bought and not paid for. And Leo eventually ended up passing that on to Pace because he had no client to—so that he could get rid of either of the Pollock or the Giacometti.

But he couldn't say no. He couldn't say no to Scull and say, "Look, come on, guy. Give me the money. I don't—I can't do this," you know, "I'm nowhere in that market." He used—he could have initially. When the gallery first opened and it was in that back room and they were living there apparently—I think they were actually living in the, you know, at [Four East] 77 as well as using it as the gallery. It was a settle. It started out as a settle, more.

And so they—pretty much anything that would bring people in. I mean, apparently people—you know, everyone would stop by. De Kooning, all the abstract expressionists would come by and sit and have drinks after regular office hours and that kind of thing. And I think that's how they sort of got off the ground doing it, but then they moved into this completely different direction.

AVIS BERMAN: It seems hard to believe that Leo couldn't have sold a Pollock.

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was so devoted to the path he was on with these guys and his strength was that he had tunnel vision and he only saw what he saw. And that was how he made them so important, because nobody else was as good, as talented, as great, whatever.

AVIS BERMAN: Now, in terms of—you were saying he couldn't get rid of people. Did he ask other people? Did you or anyone else have to do it?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Nope. Nope. Nope. There was no—not that I can—I mean maybe Ivan. He might have, you know, maybe hinted that Ivan should give somebody the heave-ho, but not that I've ever—not that I ever experienced it. I know that—I think what happened with Moskowitz, I think that Ivan and Leo went to the studio, saw all the heart drawings, paintings, whatever they were, and basically said no, they weren't going to give him a show. They didn't want to show that work. I don't think that they necessarily implied the next step, which was, we're no longer going to show you, period. I think possibly Moskowitz might have gotten the idea and left. I mean, people did leave.

But I think—I don't know, but as far as I can remember, Lee was still with him when I—when I left.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean she never—there was never any kind of parting of the ways or—he just didn't show her.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also she wasn't showing or making, she—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, then that's true, then she sort of pulled back and wasn't—

AVIS BERMAN: She self-retreated or became self—a self-exile.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. She was living out—way out in the country. But I do think she eventually had a comeback. I think she did come back.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes. Yes she did.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But at the same time that she was still working on these blown glass things, I think Alan [Solomon] gave her a huge retrospective at the—at The Jewish Museum. I mean, there was a huge show at The Jewish Museum of all the old—those amazing—I called them the shark's teeth sculptures, it's like—

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.]

NINA VON ECKARDT: Very scary. Very scary stuff, I mean sexually. It's just like—[gasps]—[they laugh]—but wonderful. And she of course was the sweetest, gentlest, so not what you would assume. You know, you would think that she'd be this absolutely ferocious ball-buster bull-dyke creature and she was absolutely, totally not. I mean, she was gentle and sweet and very pretty, very feminine and she created these—[laughs]. I mean, you can't even imagine how she put them together, let alone how she conceived of them.

It was very interesting. I mean the psyche is an amazing beast. And that's what's so fascinating. It's like, what makes the difference between someone like a Bontecou who—I mean, we all have nightmares inside. What allows her to somehow access this part of her and then reveal it, you know? I mean, and that's the magic. I mean, that's the magic.

And I don't know how Leo and Ivan found her because the more you know about the art world, the more you know how really impossible it is, how difficult is. It takes a miracle for something to happen. And—I mean, I always had this idea that if you were really good, if you were really—had a real—you know, if you had a real talent, it would be discovered and somehow you would make through to the outside and that's not true. It really isn't true. I mean, as the older I get, that's one of the most—the saddest and most disillusioning realities of life is that there are—there are geniuses out there that nobody's ever going to know about. And I grew up believing that you would always find out if somebody was really good. That they would make their way. And it's interesting, sometimes, to see the people who are utterly mediocre who, you know, who become famous—rich and famous and then all these other people that you'll never hear about. We'll never get, you know, never have that kind of a life.

But basically the people Leo chose were—they were worthy of the fame and—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. I want to go back on sort of something, again, very basic. When you were there, who were the other people, the employees in the gallery? There was you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: There was me and Leo and—in living in the kitchen, which was off our little tiny room, which is sort of like a large—we—Leo and I had the two—

AVIS BERMAN: I'm going to ask you in a minute to go through the exact basic physical dimensions, but let's do the people first. In the kitchen—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay. So there was—there was in the kitchen was the accountant, Nancy, but don't ask me last names—

AVIS BERMAN: Could it possibly be Friedberg?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, Nancy Friedberg, and her birthday was the same birthday as Toiny and my daughter—[laughs]. Toiny was December 2nd, Nancy was December 2nd and my daughter was December 2nd. And then there was, of course Leo out—I mean, Ivan out front, Ivan Karp. And then in the middle was, basically, the person who essentially, if he weren't there, the place would have completely fallen to pieces, and that was Jim and I can't remember Jim's last name.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Who—what—Okay. Who were the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Jim was the registrar. Jim was in the middle room. He had a window. He did have a window. That would have been the room that would sort of look off into the middle, you know, surrounded by four walls of windows. He had a window; he had a desk; he had, basically—well, there was another bathroom there; and he had storage. A lot of art, even though they had—they had a lot of art also down at Santini, they kept art there. But Jim had the sort of stuff that people would—he would pull out and show people.

AVIS BERMAN: Boy, it would be great to find—to know who he was. He would be a great person to find and—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I have—I have no way of knowing what his name was. I had a—I mean I never—there wasn't writing—it was like a WASP name like—but I can't, I literally—

AVIS BERMAN: That's okay. Well, it's—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And he basically was the person who wrote down every single piece of art that walked in and out of the door, what came in, what went out, what was on consignment, what was there that was the artist's work. Absolutely nothing came in or out of that gallery that Jim didn't write about it.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I wonder what his training was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I have no idea.

AVIS BERMAN: —if he had been at a museum or—

NINA VON ECKARDT: He might have been. He might have been, but I don't know. I don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: —or another gallery. Right.

And let's just try to define this more than like, what was Ivan's role? Wasn't he, sort of, the director or assistant director—I mean he—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, he sat up front. He was the first person that anybody saw. He had other people's art in galleries.

AVIS BERMAN: Other—yeah, right—other people's art that—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Other people's who weren't part of the gallery. He showed—he had all kinds of, you know, like Mel Ramos and all different kinds of people that he showed to other people, not to Leo. He did have a—he did have a—I mean, he was very good friends with Roy. He became good friends with Pace.

He knew—I guess when he wasn't working at the gallery, he probably did go around to people's studios, but people would come into the gallery and he would talk to them and they would—and they would show him his art. And he would either say, "Yeah, I'll take this and see what I can do," or he wouldn't. I mean, he—people could give him their slides. He was very—I don't know what his criteria was because I didn't know what his—I didn't who his—his slides, you know, his slides were in the—his slides were in the drawer.

He and Marilyn [Karp] went to a lot of galleries. They went out to parties. They went to—they loved to go to the movies. They used to go out and—[inaudible]—when Roy and I were dating, we would go out with them to dinner a lot.

AVIS BERMAN: I will just—I just want to say for the tape that I'm not asking Nina too much about Roy Lichtenstein because I previously interviewed her in depth about her relationship with Roy Lichtenstein, and it is—the interview is at the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and can be accessed there because it would be repeating everything.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. I think he—he and Leo used to go out together. They would disappear and go to somebody's, probably, studio, I would imagine. I don't know—I would imagine that it would be that because somebody had talked to Ivan first and asked if they would talk to Leo and then Leo would go with him.

Ivan was very tight with Warhol. He liked Warhol. He loved—I'm trying to think, who were the guys that he—that he liked. He actually was good friends with Dine. He loved Rosenquist. So I'm pretty sure that—he was very close with Green. I think that he was very supportive of Green. He would talk a lot about him, that kind of thing. If nobody came—if somebody came to the gallery and was putting together a group show, there were certain people that Ivan would tout, absolutely Green, you know, Bellamy would be the first person to come out of his mouth, obviously he would talk about Warhol. He would have them go, you know, around and look at other people.

He would try and take Leo to take, you know, take him around to go look at stuff. And he would—I'm pretty sure he was very influential to get—to getting Andy and Jim to come, you know, to be part of the gallery when their other, you know, when they left the other galleries.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I don't even think, frankly, that he—they needed an influence because Andy wanted to be there and Leo had rejected him.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But Ivan would try and influence Leo. But Leo was very pigheaded, if he didn't want to—if he wasn't interested, he basically had the—he would have the last—he always had, basically, the last word. So anybody who came subsequent to when I was there, the people who were already there, now, certainly I would think that Ivan would have absolute influence on bringing, you know, Chamberlain—to bring, you know, for Leo—see, you know, see his stuff, that kind of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: You felt—you think that Chamberlain, initially, might have been alien to Leo's sensibility?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was scary. [Laughs.] He was a wild man. And I think, you know, Leo—but, you know, Ivan convinced him and said, "You know this is really interesting stuff," and that

kind of thing. I think, actually, it was—it was Ivan who discovered or who, you know, saw Roy first and—

AVIS BERMAN: Absolutely.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —brought him into it. And as I said before, Ivan definitely—it was—it was, you know— Roy—I mean, not Roy, Bob and Johns were the—they were the first two. I'm not sure whether it was Bob or Jasper first. I think it was—I think it was Bob first, although they were living with each other at that point.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it was very famous—is that they were actually—one, I think, was below the other and—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, they had—right.

AVIS BERMAN: —And Rauschenberg brought Leo down to see Johns.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —To see Johns and—but I think it was—it was Ileana who was sort of really drawn to them and, you know, initially like, oh, this is wonderful, and that got Leo very, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Let us—I want to discuss now the physical—oh, also, do you think that Ivan, because he was in the front, was like a guard dog or any—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah. Although, the—interestingly, there was the stairs that came up and the way it would go would be—the show would be at the very front room and Ivan was right there, right at the— you know, the door would be there and then there was the show, but Ivan was right there.

But there was this other—[laughs]—yeah, there was this hallway that you would turn—you'd turn left to—at the top of the stairs to get into the showplace. But then, if you knew, you would take the right hand—and that usually was open. There was a—there was a bathroom and then there was this long hallway and then the great big—the big back room, which always had stuff hanging. And then there was a—I guess there was a—I don't know if there was a door or not—there was—there was an open door probably that was Jim's—that was Jim's room. And then there was, as I said, there was the nice, kind of like a living room. And then our little tiny office and Nancy's little tiny office there. But people could go in on that hallway and nobody would stop them.

AVIS BERMAN: So was this originally a one-bedroom or a two-bedroom apartment?

NINA VON ECKARDT: It might have been probably two-bedroom.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. So—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It would be living room with—[inaudible]—yeah, probably—well, I don't know how that would work.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay. Well, how about—

NINA VON ECKARDT: But there were—there were—

AVIS BERMAN: I'm trying to figure out how many rooms there are in this—in other words, I want to do the physical setup. You come up the stairs and there are two doors, the left, there is the main gallery and Ivan has a desk in there.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And there—and there's like a—like a—as if it would be like a nice—very nice hallway, but there was an opening that was into the main gallery and then Ivan's space was—would have been like a—either a very, very nice hallway or might have been, possibly, maybe it was a dining—a small dining area kind of thing. And then—

AVIS BERMAN: Would you call it a foyer or not?

NINA VON ECKARDT: It could have been a foyer, but it have might have been a foyer where you would have a small dining room table or something.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm [affirmative]. Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And then—

AVIS BERMAN: Is that where Ivan was?

NINA VON ECKARDT: That's where Ivan was.

AVIS BERMAN: So he was in the foyer?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was in the foyer with the gallery part. And—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, didn't the foyer have pictures hung on there too?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I think—mostly, no, I don't there would have been. I think we only—we would just put—just whatever the show was in the gallery room.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Then you would go past Ivan in the foyer, is that correct?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I'm trying to remember whether, I think, there was a door behind Ivan's desk that led into Jim's room that had all of the art stuff all in, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Racks.

NINA VON ECKARDT: There were—yeah, there were quite a number of racks and some higher, quite tall ones. I think the room—the rooms had quite high ceilings. I think they might have been, like, 13-foot ceilings possibly. Jim's room had—as I said, it had a nice window. It also had a bathroom—full bathroom—that had a full bathroom.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, maybe it was a bedroom originally.

NINA VON ECKARDT: That was definitely a bedroom—that was definitely a bedroom. And then right past Jim's room was the open—again, another—kind of a gallery, but we used—it had a couch and furniture and a coffee table. And that's where we had—the clients would come. That's where people—friends would come and sit.

AVIS BERMAN: Is that—was that—is that what you considering—is that what you're calling the back room?

NINA VON ECKARDT: That was the back room. That was the back room.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. And was there furniture in the gallery space?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, just—no furniture at all.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. There just was really—so there was just—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Just the gallery room.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, just one room as a—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Like a big living room with—yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: What—can you remember what the dimension where, or can you guess?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I'm trying to remember. I think there were two very nice—they would have been windows, but I think we didn't have windows. I think there was a wall. I think there was, you know, a fake wall. So there—

AVIS BERMAN: There would be four walls.

NINA VON ECKARDT: There would have been one, two, three and then partial wall, because that was the nice door—not a door like a—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, there was—you had to have a hole for people to come into it.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah. Exactly. Exactly. Exactly. And as I said, probably 13-feet high and it could have been—I mean, maybe I'm crazy, but it could have been like 20 by 15, that kind of thing? It could have been that big—could have been that big because those were very—I mean, that was, you know, right next to 5th Avenue and then—and those were bigger buildings

than you ordinarily—I mean those were lovely-sized spaces. The back room—what I call the back room, basically—the room with the furniture had windows looking out into one of the typical New York mostly brick walls, you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, the back, yeah.

NINA VON ECKARDT: The back—or actually was the side, really.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And so that—there were windows there. I don't think we had—we never had any—where we had—where we had art hanging was the wall that was essentially part of—part of the wall that—there was a door, our office and Nancy's office—so there was a—say, a six-foot wall there and our door. And then the wall that was across from the windows, that was probably—that was a pretty big wall. That was a good—you know, like—something like that possibly 15, 20 feet. And then the hallway that—I'm trying to remember if we ever had—if we ever had, like, framed stuff on that wall, but I can't remember whether we ever put anything on that wall.

AVIS BERMAN: I was just wondering in this back room where the clients were, what would be—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That would be—that would be work—for instance the time that Jasper came back from Edisto. And he'd been there all summer. And he did, like, maybe—at the very most he did maybe two paintings. And he was telling Wolf he had—

AVIS BERMAN: Not Wolf, Leo.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Leo. One of the—one of the great paintings was—I can't remember which one it was that he had done that summer. And Leo was, like, naming Victor Ganz and Mrs. List—he's going to call this person and that person. Leo's—[laughs]—and so at last—Leo's like, you know, jumping around the phone. And Jasper says, oh, well you know, I knew that they were going to want that so I painted three of them. But we had two paintings that he'd done. We had the two paintings up, that sort of thing.

AVIS BERMAN: So—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or something in the—if somebody—if somebody was coming to look at stuff and had made a—you know, a—

AVIS BERMAN: So this would be a viewing room?

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was a viewing room, yeah. It was—it was for collectors to come and look at stuff.

AVIS BERMAN: So then—okay, so beyond the viewing room, the room that—you and Leo were in a room together?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: So you would be sitting in the same room?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Leo had his back to the window. I had my back to the kitchen, looking out. So I basically was the person who protected him. If I saw somebody coming in that I knew he didn't want to talk to I would get up and, you know, close the door and go out and be very friendly to them. And I'd say, "So-and-so's there, do you want—" and he'd say, "No." You know, same thing with the telephone. I always answered the phone. I always made the phone calls.

AVIS BERMAN: So he would really over—I mean, so he really knew what you were doing because you were in the same room, because he would hear everything.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, totally. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And indeed, you would overhear him on the phone too.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. Yeah, no absolutely.

AVIS BERMAN: So was this—do you think this was another bedroom, this other room, or?

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was—no, it was very tiny. No, it would have been a closet. I mean, it probably was a closet. It was very small.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And the kitchen was—

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, so you were in the—and the bookkeeper was in the kitchen?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: And—okay, so—which would have been very small too.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. It was tiny.

AVIS BERMAN: So were they—there was this little, tiny—you know, it could have been what we used to call the maid's room, that type of thing.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Because it was near the kitchen—or a big closet, who knows.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or depending on who lived in it, they might have used that room as a sort of dining room because—to entertain people and have dinner, and then the living room—although somebody might have—I suppose somebody could have used the—what they used the gallery as a bedroom. Well, except that the bed—the bathroom was literally—and Jim's room was big, it wasn't a small room; it was quite a large room. And there was—I want to say there was a fireplace in that room, but I could be completely wrong.

AVIS BERMAN: In Jim's room?

NINA VON ECKARDT: In Jim's work room, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Okay, so then—so you and Leo were in a tiny room in the back and the book—was the bookkeeper full time?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. Yeah, the whole—when she started working with me, she was there—she was amazing—she was there all the time and very, very good.

AVIS BERMAN: Great. So—okay, so that means that there were five employees? Yeah, Leo, Ivan, you, the bookkeeper and Jim. So—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That's right. Yeah, that's right.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you feel cramped?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No. No, mm-mm. [Negative.] No, there was plenty of room. No, it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Did you and Leo—was—did you have two different desks?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, we had two different desks. [Laughs.] We had two desks—he had a desk, I had a desk.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, okay. It just seems so small—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, no, it was. There were—but there actually were two desks and obviously two chairs and everything.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I had—I had a—

AVIS BERMAN: Credenza?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, no, no, no. I had my typewriter right there. This was before computers.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So did Leo—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So I had an Olivetti.

AVIS BERMAN: Did Leo pick that out?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, because it was Italian and it was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And then I think eventually—the Olivetti was so awful—he finally gave in and got me an IBM. I think he finally got me an IBM. Now, at one point—and I'm trying to remember whether she started to work with Jim before I—and I don't—I shouldn't bring this up because I can't remotely remember her—but she got a job working in Texas in a museum, but at one point she was, like, a historian/registrar. Oh, God, I wish I could think of her name.

AVIS BERMAN: This is someone else who was in the gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: She was late, yeah, yeah. And she was a museum—she became a museum person. I think she was working at the—ended up working at the Houston museum at one point. I don't remember whether it was as a curator or as a—but she was a terrific gal and she knew her stuff. I think she was working—she might have actually been working at one point with—I can't think of his name. It'll come to me. I'll think—when I think of it, I'll let you know. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: That's okay. And did you have art or anything on the walls of the office?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I don't think so. I don't—

AVIS BERMAN: Posters or anything?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't think we did. I don't remember.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. What was—well, what was the décor?

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was mostly pretty modern furniture. I think—I think it was—I can't remember whether it was, you know, Bauhaus stuff. I'm pretty sure it was mostly very modern. I'm trying to—I'm trying to think, of the Bauhaus types, who it was that—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, we're really talking about the late '50s, early '60s. So it would have been—you know, it could have been what we now call mid-century modern or it could have been Mies van der Rohe—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I mean, it—you know, it was—I'm not sure if—I don't know if it was Mies. I think it was the other one—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there could have been Marcel Breuer chairs.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I think it was Breuer. I think it was—I think it was more his stuff. And —

AVIS BERMAN: Or Knoll or—you know.

NINA VON ECKARDT: —you know, glass tables and—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. It could have been—it could have been Saarinen or Knoll, you know.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But I think it was—I think it was Breuer.

AVIS BERMAN: Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Not the house—his house was much more sort of—I'm trying to remember what the house was like. The dining room was definitely, you know, very nice—not modern—wooden, in a lovely—pretty sure that was not Bauhaus stuff. But of course, that could have been influenced by—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, Toiny, early on. It could have been European furniture. It could have been traditional, you know, French country—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, and I think—I mean, nice rugs—I mean, beautiful rugs and that sort of thing. But I—but I don't remember whether—when Leo and Toiny got married, whether—the

apartment was already—you know, on Fifth Avenue—that was already—like, she moved into a place that already been—you know, that she basically had nothing to do in terms of furniture or —

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that could have changed. Most people don't want to completely—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, exactly. I mean, over the time that she then was able to, you know, change things and put in stuff she wanted to. I do know that buying the work of art—she bought the Rauschenberg, she bought the Stella. I mean, she was very—

AVIS BERMAN: Are you talking *Bed*? The Rauschenberg—the one that he—that Leo—I mean, that's the famous one that he owned, *Bed*.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: You're saying that Toiny bought that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: And one of the—I think it—I think it—one of this—I think it was one of the black Stellas. I mean, she understood how important it was for them to own. I mean, you know, Leo would have a show and then he'd sell everything. And then Toiny would say, "No, no, no, no, no. We have to"—you know, "it can't just be that if something doesn't sell during the exhibit that you put it—you know, it's in Jim's office, you know, in the storage bin. We need to have something that we own that becomes ours." And so she—it was basically her buying this stuff, not Leo.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, did she do that because she was sort of canny or did she do that because suddenly now there was a child to consider for heritage or legacy?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I think both. I think she was—she was just a really smart person and she understood about money. And she was—money was important to her, whereas Leo, you know, he just—it wasn't that he didn't like—he liked money, you know, but he just—he had a whole different—I swear to God, he just wasn't interested in money. There were more important things in the world than money, and that was history and people being known and, you know, their—just having a sense of people being honored for their being brilliant. I mean, that was much more important to him than—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, of course, Leo had had the luxury of his first marriage. Ileana's family was rich.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I mean, there was—you know, he—

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, he always had some means.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, wealthy people tend to sort of not really—the money is—money's—they don't worry about it. I mean, they just kind of don't understand that something's not there. They just assume that it is. I mean, they've always had it. Well, you know, why would we not have it now? And yet, in a funny way, whether it's a miracle or not, I mean, that's the truth. There's—you know, there's always enough money to get—but for him, he really wanted to be respected and admired and—

AVIS BERMAN: No, I think he had it, and he spent it on other people as well as himself, so it was something that—but it was the sense of it was coming from somewhere. See, I think if he worried about it no one would ever see—the façade would not shatter.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, and I think—I think that—I mean, you know, obviously, we both understood. I mean, we were worried and scared about being able to pay the rent on the gallery in the summer, you know, because nobody was paying for anything. So, you know, we understood going to get—you know, get a loan from Chase Manhattan. But there was nothing—there wasn't, like, desperation about it. There was no sort of fear about—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I think also credit was something he was probably used to, I mean, which is—I mean, and nowadays galleries have credit lines. There are a lot of things that people do that you didn't then, but, you know, I'm sure there were a lot of galleries that went every summer and then paid it back in the fall.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And it just—and it just—yeah, and it just—it just wasn't—I mean, you know, there was no sense of "Oh God, you know, the—everything is horrible and we're—you know, the

gallery's not going to survive," and blah blah blah. I mean, there really was—

MS. BERMAN: What did you do in the summer there? I mean, you didn't really hang shows or anything. I mean, was the gallery—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, basically, I think we were—I think I—we closed the—we closed the gallery for August. So I was there—I mean, I had the month of August as vacation. I was definitely there June and July. And then Leo was gone. I mean, Leo would be gone maybe six weeks over the course of the year that the—that they did the Venice Biennale, and he would go to Europe. Toiny would go home to her family in France, and then Leo would then join her.

She—I'm trying to remember whether she went with him to Venice, whether she actually was there with him. I don't remember whether she actually was there with him. Of course, Alan Solomon was there, definitely. You know, there were a lot of people who were there. And I was in the gallery, basically running the—answering the phone, sending messages to—I mean, if anything—if there were anything remotely that was an emergency, I would call him directly and talk to him. But it was pretty much—you know, there really wasn't a whole lot of—there weren't any problems.

I did get a phone call from Leo asking me to please try and see if I could get Dorothy Miller from MoMA to be on as one of the judges. And I called and spoke—she came and answered the phone, and she got on the phone and talked to me, and we had a very nice conversation, and she said no, that's not something that she wanted to do.

AVIS BERMAN: This was for the '64 Biennale? For the Rauschenberg—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, yeah, this was for the Rauschenberg Biennale. And I ended up calling Sam Hunter, and he said, absolutely, he'd be delighted to be a judge, and he made, you know—made—got tickets and made the reservation and off he went. And I don't know whether that would be something now that would be, "Oh, golly, you know, you have no right to do that, and that's, you know, that's a really bad thing that you did, but—

AVIS BERMAN: Did Leo ask for you to call Sam Hunter, or was that your idea?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, I think I called Leo right away and said that, "You know, Dorothy does not want to be part of this," or maybe they sent me a—maybe Leo in the first conversation said "Try this one, this one, and this one" type of thing. I mean, it's very possible that Sam Hunter was second on the list, or he might have been third or fourth, and there were other people that I tried, and they weren't there and I couldn't reach them, because, of course, at this point, it was July, so—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. So if you said yes, was Leo going to pay for your tickets and everything too? And then would just Sam Hunter have to pay his own way?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, I think that was—I think it wouldn't be—it would be Leo paying. It would have been through Alan, because Alan then was not—he said a Venice Biennale would have been separate from being part of the Jewish Museum. In other words, it wouldn't be—he would do it disconnected from the Jewish Museum; it wouldn't be sponsored by the Jewish Museum. So I think yes, he probably would have had to pay his own way to get there, because it was, like, last minute, but then he would have been—

AVIS BERMAN: He would have been reimbursed by—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —reimbursed by whatever the Venice Biennale—

AVIS BERMAN: —authority was.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Authority or the commission or—

AVIS BERMAN: And I'm asking you this because, of course, Leo isn't just the ad, Leo is famously accused of manipulating this whole Biennale for Rauschenberg.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't know whether—I mean, I think that Alan set it up. I don't remember whether he did it after they had the Rauschenberg retrospective or the Johns retrospective. I mean, all of those retrospectives took place within those couple of years.

I mean, obviously, Leo and Alan were good friends, but, I mean, that was part of what Alan was

doing, was bringing these amazing artists to peoples'—into their lives to show them what was going on, so, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Because everyone—Leo is accused of, you know, bribing, buying, paying, selling, you know, trying—you know, doing everything, lobbying, everything he could to get—

NINA VON ECKARDT: To my—to my knowledge, there was no financial bribing from Leo to anyone. Now, whether there was Leo Steinberg writing a monograph on somebody, that would have been talked about but not paid for. I mean, I remember that Leo Steinberg did write a—did write monographs about Johns and Rauschenberg. I'm trying to remember whether they received a gift of one of Tanya Grosman's lithographs or prints. I don't know. Maybe they were given—maybe Steinberg was given—didn't buy the Jasper Johns that he had. Maybe it was a gift from Leo or from the artist. That I don't remember. I really don't know.

AVIS BERMAN: I just am wondering—and also in Italy, if he was wining and dining officials, doing this and that and the other, but that was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That probably was happening, yeah. But at the same time, it's not like they were being blackmailed to vote for somebody. I mean, you know, people don't necessarily vote for what you suggest that they're going to vote for, and there was no way of Leo being able to threaten them with anything or say, "If you don't vote for this, blah blah blah." I mean, very hard to know whether or not it was—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, and I'm not saying it was. I'm just looking for anything you picked up.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. No, I know. Exactly. Yeah. Yeah. And in a way, I mean, anything that happens in contemporary art, again, is a miracle, because in reality there are so few people who understand or really care about art that is done by live—you know living artists.

And so anybody that—I mean, my whole thing when I became a critic and was writing under the name of Nina French-Frazier for—first for *ARTnews*, then for *Arts* and then eventually for *Art International*, was writing positive pieces about—I mean, I could go into a gallery and in three seconds know that I liked what I was seeing and that I wanted to write a piece about the artist.

I very seldom would tell the people in the gallery who I was. I would come and just sort of come in quietly and look at the work. Every once in a while, I would talk to just the secretary and say, "Could I have a photograph?" of so-and-so and that I was, you know, thinking of writing something. But I wouldn't necessarily tell them who I was writing for, what kind of piece it was.

Unlike politics, it's—there really is no particular result for something like that. It doesn't guarantee that you're selling the work. Certainly Leo didn't get any personal money given back to him, and as far as I know, he didn't give people. He didn't bribe people with money. I mean, he might have taken people out to dinner, that's very possible.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, that's pretty—that's pretty minor. If you're going to take a fall for a dinner, you're pretty low down anyway.

Well, I think—why don't we take a break? I think this is a good time for lunch.

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AVIS BERMAN: This is Avis Berman continuing the interview with Nina Von Eckardt on August 13, 2012. I just want to ask you—you know, we had just sort of said in the beginning—you were telling me about this Salvador Dalí business. I wondered if you remembered any of the kinds of things that he may have talked about other than this project? Or was there—I mean, it seems that you met so often and—what the—I mean, and just—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It's hard to remember that far back. I mean, we're talking 1967. I just remember, we always met either in the King Cole—

AVIS BERMAN: Did he pick up the tab for that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I think he did. I think—I mean, for one thing, very little—you know, we—I didn't drink, so I mean, I probably either had a coke or a glass of water, and Charlie was not a big drinker. So whatever the tab was, it wasn't very—and I'm pretty sure he picked up the tab, or

—actually, Captain Clark probably was the one who paid the bills.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, it's such a strange arrangement.

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was sort of like his manager or something, and had—as I said, had been a military man and was very—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, well I just wondered why you thought that Dalí was trying to get the two of you to pay for this.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, because it always hinged—I mean, it fell through because we couldn't afford to pay for it.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, I understand this completely. It just seems so odd if it, that it—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, it was just—it was just sort of—it was almost as if he accepted that if Charlie were going to be involved, Charlie was going to be paying for—to do this piece for Dalí.

AVIS BERMAN: For the honor of doing it for Dalí?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I guess. Or for the exposure—of course the exposure would have been, you know, quite terrific. But—and I don't at all remember. I know Charlie did a whole series of drawings and designs and things, and that was another reason we went in the number of times over the—I think it probably lasted about six weeks.

AVIS BERMAN: Was Charlie really interested in doing it?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah, no, he was very excited about it. He was excited that, you know, Dalí had gone to the exhibit for one thing, had signaled him out. I think he became a little less—I think he in the end was sort of philosophical about it. I think he realized that what Dalí was interested in was the technique and not Charlie's creative visions so much, because he was going to—Dalí was definitely going to superimpose his own creative vision on it. I think we talked about Spain and America—and I mean, I don't really know what we talked about. There was—it was always very friendly and easy—very easy conversation.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, I just—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It was fascinating to have lunch with Gala, because of course, she'd been married to André Breton in a previous life. And then—and then when Dalí became part of the sort of, you know, Gaga-Dadas circle in Paris when—and he was very—he was much younger then, and I believe Dalí was considerably younger than Gala when they—when he stole her away from Breton and they got married. So that was probably a little bit of a *cause célèbre* when that happened back then.

For me, it was just the sense of history. I mean, I—Dalí is not my favorite artist. Melting clocks—not my, you know, not my thing. But you—there's no way of discounting his genius. Not just his technique, which is extraordinary, but I mean his ideas were fascinating, and the whole surrealism school is, you know, so interesting. And I think we talked about Picasso, I think—you know, we talked about Miró, we talked about other Spanish artists. But it was—

AVIS BERMAN: I just wondered if you—well, I was going to ask him if you found either of them so narcissistic that they couldn't talk about anything but themselves.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, no, not at all, no, not at all. I mean, it was—what I remember was that it was a very—it was always a very interesting conversation. And of course he's endlessly smart, and—but I honestly don't—I mean, if I'd gone home and written down in my journals, but—you know, I find when you're sort of busy and happy you don't write journals. [They laugh.] And it's like, you know, when your life isn't floating and falling to bits, you start writing every detail. So unfortunately, I was so busy in those days that I didn't really have a whole lot of meditative journal time.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. No, no, I understand—no, I think that's interesting. I—you know, because it's just so implausible, because no matter what their finances were, to think that they could bamboozle you into—that you would even would have had the money—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah. Exactly, yeah, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: —or to misjudge, or not to know what a young artist—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, in that sense, I mean, to not really understand—of course, I had never—I mean, I had had this elitist upbringing. I, you know—completely inadvertently, but as it happened, I—you know, I did have an elitist upbringing. And so I never thought of myself as being poor, and I've always been very good at managing money. Not necessarily manifesting it, but if I have any, I can stretch it a long way. So we didn't—Charlie was very—he always dressed beautifully. He, you know, didn't wear overalls into the city. And I used to—you know, I dressed very, sort of—somewhat conservatively, and at the time I still had my fake Chanel suit. So I would wear something very nice to the meetings. So he would have no idea that we were living on \$500 a month.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmmm. [Affirmative.] Right, right. Well, it's true, it's just interesting that he wouldn't have figured out that—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And plus, we both had such a broad knowledge of—we both were pretty sophisticated. Charlie also is very sophisticated.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. It's interesting, so I'm just—I'm just wondering if he would have asked anyone to pay, or if when he saw you, he maybe thought you were more well-off than you are.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It's possible. I mean, you know, he could have—because a number of people—I have another, an actor friend who visited me—this is somebody who had his own show at one point and was making, you know, gazillions of dollars a week and owned six houses and had 12 cars. And—[laughs]—he told me years later that the first time he came to my apartment—I had a three-room apartment in New York City—but it was—it was beautiful, I mean, it was lovely, he thought I was an heiress. And I just sort of said, "Excuse me?" I was like, you know, making \$15,000 a year before taxes and I was a single working mother with two children.

AVIS BERMAN: A year—a year before taxes.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, no—well no—yeah, a year before—yeah, I mean I—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, not \$15,000 a month.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, sorry, \$15,000 a year before taxes, and, you know, which is—so I always did seem to, you know, to come from the Philadelphia Main Line, which is not true at all. But that's what—you know, I mean, you give—I mean—I, you know, went to Bryn Mawr—you're smart, you're—you have a sense of yourself. And I've always felt totally comfortable in any kind of milieu, either blue collar, working class—I'm very comfortable in that—in that—there, and then in any kind of social situation. I mean, I've never had that feeling that I know some people have that someone is better than they are, or they feel awkward or shy, because, you know—I've never—I've never felt that. So I felt—you know, perfectly comfortable with Dalí, and of course Charlie felt comfortable as an artist.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes. And what was—what was—do you remember what Gala was like?

NINA VON ECKARDT: She was very tiny. Now, this was '66, so I don't know how old she would have been, but she sort of came from—no, we were sitting at the table in the dining room, and she came and joined us, so she sort of came a little late to the lunch. And I believe she and I spoke French. She probably does speak English, but we spoke French to each other, and just that she was extremely, you know, friendly and polite. And I think mostly, I mean, she—we didn't talk that much because, Captain Clark and Dalí and Charlie were busy talking. And I don't know why we had lunch that day. Maybe there was somebody at the table that Dalí was introducing Charlie to. It's possible, but I don't remember, because that was the only time we ever actually shared a meal rather than just going in around, you know, five, six-ish to have drinks. And we were living out in Sea Cliff, Long Island, so we had a car so we would drive in and park and then go over to the hotel, which was a very nice hotel.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes—no, no, it's still, you know—no—

NINA VON ECKARDT: It still is, right? It's—King Cole Bar, and—

AVIS BERMAN: Right, it is. No, it's just—yeah, no, I just think it's so bizarre—it's almost ala Dalí, that there's like, here is this famous world established artist living in the St. Regis, you know, princely habits and all—were trying to persuade you guys to bankroll the project.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, to bankroll the project. It's like—[laughs]—not going to happen. And as it—as it turned out, I mean, it didn't; unfortunately, it fell through. And Charlie was sad, but there was just—you know, it wasn't going anywhere, it just wasn't going to go anywhere, so—but we—you know, we ended on very amicable terms. And Dalí probably went back to wherever. He might have gone back to—I think he spent different times of the year—I know he spent at least three months in New York every year, and of course he spent time in—I think they had a house on the Costa Brava [Spain -NVE]—

AVIS BERMAN: Yes.

NINA VON ECKARDT: They had a house on the Costa Brava. And then they—but they might have spent some time in France, also, every year, I'm not sure.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, well, I just had to explore that because it was so bizarre.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, it is bizarre. I mean, that was—that was what was so fascinating about my life, is that my life is ultimately—I started writing sort of an autobiography at one point, and I called it *Shadow Dancer*. And if I ever finish it, it will be entitled, *Shadow Dancer*, the idea of someone who essentially dances in the shadows of all of these things that happen tangentially to my life, but are not intrinsically a part of my life in that I'm there, but I'm sort of like Tinker Bell, you know, sort of touching on it, but, you know, not close friends with anybody, but there enough to be able to—and also smart enough to be able to sort of see what people—understand what people are like, and what their, you know—

AVIS BERMAN: Just the kind of person who makes a great interviewee. [They laugh.] So—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well someday, when you want to talk about the Los Angeles art world—

AVIS BERMAN: We did do a little of that last time.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah. That was—that was kind of interesting, I mean, the fact that they all started out, you know, with the yellow surfboards and convertibles. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, I now want to go back to something that, again—I'm picking up on things you said the first time and then, because we talked about other things, I didn't go back to—is that you had said that Leo—I mean, you had just mentioned about Chamberlain—I guess that—when you came in, did Leo give you any kind of orientation about the gallery or the artists?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: And could you describe that?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Leo was extremely protective and very paternal of me. I was—I don't know that I'm much younger than Connie [Trimble], but I was younger than Connie. I probably was like, a good 10 years younger than Connie, or maybe even more. And it was very sweet because he basically went through all of the artists—he specifically warned me about Chamberlain. He told me Roy's situation, that Roy—I think at that point, Roy was still married, but they were getting a divorced, or they were separated or something. But he, you know, described Roy, teaching—he was still teaching in Ohio—married with children—

AVIS BERMAN: Rutgers.

NINA VON ECKARDT: - and—I mean, that's what I meant. I didn't mean Ohio. He described—[laughs]—Roy's wife as sort of a dragon, that she was a rather strong and a little bit overpowering woman. And he talked about Bob and Jasper, and it was very cute there because it was as if he was sort of protecting me, or at least trying to gauge what my—my degree of innocence around homosexuality, and you know, don't worry, it's okay, it's cool. [Laughs.] I think I admitted to him that the first person I was ever madly in love with at the age of 13 was distinctly gay, and I realized this, it made me sad, but, you know, didn't change my feelings. So—but the way he did it was very—as I said, very protective and very paternal. And there really wasn't—he explained, you know—he explained the way the gallery was set up in terms of—and I think Nancy might not have started—I think Nancy might have started either just before me or just after me. He hadn't had a bookkeeper until then.

So we both sort of started at the same time, so he explained, you know, about consignments, he explained, sort of the Ben Heller situation, where somebody would come in and actually buy a

painting, take it home and not pay for it. And he gave me a—you know, a talk about what the job would entail in terms of my commitment to the job.

Now, he didn't actually—[laughs]—he sort of soft-pedaled that a little bit, you know. But it wouldn't have mattered to me, because I—for me, everything is all or nothing, so I mean, it was just, "hey, it's 24/7? Nah, no problem with that." But he explained that, you know, there was the expectation that I would be going to—that I would be going to openings other than at Castelli Gallery, and that I would be expected to go to as many of the openings as I could after work, and that I'd be going to, you know, MoMA and that sort of thing. And what my—basically what my duties would be—of course, those became expanded when he realized that I could pretty much speak Italian, definitely bilingual in French and could write letters. I mean, I was constantly writing letters, and then he would look at them and either correct them or approve of them and that sort of thing. So he gave me a very good rundown of what to expect, and—but at that point, I didn't have the job. He told me that he'd let me know the following week, which he did, in fact. He called me less than a week later to tell me that I had the job. But he was always very—it was like a family.

Now, luckily, Toiny and I got along like a house afire, because of the French and everything. So that was a very—I think he felt that was a very good combination and—but it's such a tiny environment that you—I mean, that was before Briggs-Meyers, you know, the test that they used to give people to see if they were introverted or extroverted or—you know.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, right, right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: And so it was as if—just by talking to me. I mean, Leo was very smart about people.

AVIS BERMAN: Did you get along with Ivan?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah, I loved Ivan. I mean, Ivan and I were pals. I mean, he would tease me; I would tease him. He could be very helpful, I mean, if—you know, if—he couldn't—he—as I said, like, for instance, when Leo would go away in the summer and Ivan was still sitting up front, he really didn't get involved in the day-to-day. He had no idea if we were sending a show to some—you know, the Rose Art Museum. He had no clue. And he would not be in any way helpful in terms of making that happen. But he was—he was—he was a very—he was always a very positive force. I mean, Ivan was extremely positive. And he got along with people, and he was funny.

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I like Marilyn [Karp]. Marilyn was a nice—she was his—she was his—

AVIS BERMAN: Second wife.

NINA VON ECKARDT: She was his second wife. She was—no, she was a fantasy come true. I mean, he was very lucky. He used to say that, you know, that here I had this fantasy, and then I met her. And it was really, I mean, very sad for the first wife. They had children. And I don't know that that was a happy parting of the ways at all. I think she was, you know, obviously older. But Marilyn was absolutely, utterly lovely, just nice, so nice, and smart and funny. And what are you going to do, you know? They got lucky that they found each other. And I just remember how funny he was. He'd smoke these cigars—"Hey kid!" [They laugh.] Now, he was informal. [They laugh.] But Leo was always—I mean, Leo came to my wedding. He was very sad, you know, that I was leaving. And we had—I mean, we really did—we had a very special relationship.

AVIS BERMAN: Did he give you, perhaps, a work—did he give you a work of art for your wedding present?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't think he did. No, maybe he did. Jasper did, and Andy did. Andy gave me a little tiny—one of the little tiny flowers, and—no, I'm sure Leo did. I'm sure Leo did, something like a print or something. I don't remember exactly what he gave me because I subsequently sold pieces. That's another thing; Ivan would sell things for me and get a good price for me and not take a commission.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay, that—but that would have been after—

NINA VON ECKARDT: That would have been after. That would have been with Charlie. Actually, I

didn't do that until we moved to California and we were desperate to buy a house, and I did it to buy a house. I mean, that whole thing of, unfortunately, if I had everything that I'd ever had, including all the different houses I had, I'd be a zillionaire, but you have to sell some things to move on to the next stage, and you don't have much option to do—you know. No, actually, it was probably Leo who gave me the Johns print. It was Leo who gave me the Johns print. But Andy gave me a little tiny—

AVIS BERMAN: So, you had a friendship with Andy? So what was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, that was what was so interesting. I mean, friendship to the degree that I used to—you know, I'd talk to him on the phone, go to The Factory with—to take things or to—I can't remember why I went to The Factory. I think a couple of times, I actually took—you know, took money, maybe cash or something. I only was there a couple of times. But we had—you know, I was friendly with everybody. It just completely blew me away.

AVIS BERMAN: Exactly.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, it was the sweetest thing. It was just like, "Oh, my god!" No, I think maybe what happened was Leo gave me a bigger flower, Andy gave me a tiny flower, and Jasper—I'm sure that Jasper gave me one of his prints. I'm pretty sure it was Jasper who gave me, which absolutely stunned me, because I was—Jasper was the only person I was shy of. I once had a dream that Jasper walked into the gallery. He'd been away in Edisto, I had a dream that Jasper walked into the gallery, and I ran up to him, gave him a big hug, and we embraced and said hi and, you know, good to see you and everything. The next day, literally the next day Jasper walks into the gallery—[laughs]—as in my dream, and I go up to him, and we hug and—you know, how are you, da da da da.

I think he liked me. I think he was so brilliant that I never thought that my intelligence—I mean, I'm 23, 24 years old—my intelligence, you know, came anywhere—I mean, it's like, you know, having breakfast with the Schopenhauers, like, oh, my God. But he also had a wicked, wicked—I mean, he could be incredibly mean. I know at one point I was very good friends with Ray Johnson. Ray Johnson and I became close. And he was very upset about something that Jasper had said that—you know, Jasper could be very cutting and—because he was so smart. And I think sometimes, not even meaning it, it was just what came to mind, and you can't resist saying it, even though you—honest to God, you don't mean it, but it's clever, and it's smart, and it's apropos of what's going on, but it's hurtful. And Jasper was a little bit like that. So he kind of scared me, but—and then I met him years later, and he was like—he remembered me and was friendly. And so I realized that, you know, you don't always know that somebody either respects you for whatever reason, that you work hard or you're—you have integrity or, you know, he could trust me or something, I mean, on some level. I was very, very, very pure.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, let's go through some of these other people who were at the gallery at the time, and you—and anything you remember about them would be of interest. And some of them, you may not, like Cy Twombly.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh yeah. I loved him. He was mostly in Italy at that point. And so—

AVIS BERMAN: That's what I meant.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But he did come back, because we had a show. And I loved his work. I thought his work was absolutely beautiful, and I thought he was one of the most—oh, he was a sweet man. He was, first of all, gorgeous. I don't know whether he aged, whether he got heavier, whatever. But at the time, he was drop-dead handsome. I think he might have been married to some Italian royalty or something. He seemed as if he might be gay, but I don't know if he was or not. But he was charming and very, very nice and very helpful and unassuming. But his work—I mean, he was—I thought, was a wonderful painter.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] Robert Morris?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh yeah. Yes, well, Robert Morris I didn't know. I don't even remember if he ever came into the gallery then. But he and Barbara Rose—at one point, I thought Jasper and Barbara Rose were having an affair, in spite of the fact that—you know, but of course, Jasper liked very powerful women, I mean, he and Susan Sontag and that whole bunch. But Barbara Rose was definitely having an affair with Bob Morris at one point, when Frank was crying on my shoulder. And I think he was—and he's a very—he's a very fine artist.

AVIS BERMAN: There was, this was a show, this was in May '64. It was called *Introducing Artschwager, Christo, Hay, and Bob Watts*. I don't know who Hay was, but—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't remember. I remember—I don't remember Bob Watts either. I don't think I remember Bob Watts. But I remembered Richard Artschwager. I told you the thing about Richard Artschwager and Eva Hesse.

AVIS BERMAN: Yes, yes.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Of course, he was married at the time. He basically was a woodworker or something. He—I think he built—he was a carpenter, or something—a cabinetmaker, not a carpenter, a cabinetmaker, highly skilled. Now, he was, I think, one of Ivan's—Ivan was—loved him. And I think Ivan was the one—I think maybe that whole show was an Ivan, you know, slides under the table, look at this Leo show.

But Artschwager was—his pieces were quite fascinating and he was just the nicest person on the planet. He was just—and completely overwhelmed by this connection. I mean, he—something he would never in a million years anticipated or thought could happen, and he was absolutely thrilled that it was happening and completely unassuming. And an all-around good guy and a wonderful person, and his pieces are fascinating.

AVIS BERMAN: Ed Higgins?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I don't remember Ed. I remember the total sadness of his show opening the day that Kennedy was assassinated.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, you're absolutely right. It was the day—I'm looking—I have a chronology there. It opened November 23rd, the day after, you're right. Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: It did. Which means that we might as well have put black sheets on everything, and the show as a consequence—now, I don't know whether it was as a total consequence of that—but it's like, what are you going to do? I mean, talk about horrific luck.

And I don't know that we sold one piece at that show. Ironically, I can't—I mean, I remember helping put the show—because I mean, that was another one of my jobs, is, you know, helping hang shows and place shows and, you know, whatever. I have a feeling we probably didn't sell anything. And he and Lee Bontecou were together. But I don't know whether he left the gallery or—I mean, I don't remember what happened.

AVIS BERMAN: He—they were romantically together?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, I'm pretty sure. At some point in that time frame.

And I remember he was a really nice guy. I mean, kind of country, like a—like a—definitely country; not a city mouse, a country mouse. And I seem to recall that I liked the work. I mean, I'm pretty sure I remember that the work was—but for the life of me, I can't remember what any of it was.

But it was just a complete and utter karmic disaster for him. And I think—I don't know whether that totally put the kibosh on his career and life, but I think it may have taken him years to kind of come back from it. I think he subsequently did; I think he, you know, was—sold work and—I mean, I don't think he stopped being a sculptor.

AVIS BERMAN: I really don't know, because—

NINA VON ECKARDT: But he—but probably what happened is that he got a job teaching sculpture somewhere. In the boonies, I mean, some—you know. But I honestly don't know. I just know that that was just such—[sighs]. I mean, you just ache for somebody when something like that happens, because there's absolutely nothing you can do. And I don't know whether he and Lee got married and lived on a farm in the country, or what happened. I think maybe they did get married. I know that—I know they were together. I'm pretty sure they were together at one point.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, the husband she's been with for quite a while is not Ed.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay, so then maybe they just were a romance. Yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: You know, they may have been married, but—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah, exactly, but for some reason, I seem to think they might have married, but—

AVIS BERMAN: You could be right. I don't know enough about either of them in that regard.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, yeah, exactly, but they were both not in the city. They were both out in the country somewhere. But I do remember him being a really nice guy. And feeling dreadful. [Laughs.]

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.]

Oh, let's see. I mean, I'm picking some of the ones who are less well-known because, one, we haven't discussed them, and—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: Nassos Daphnis.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, he was a sweetheart. I didn't like his work.

Well, that's not true. I did like—I mean, he did this whole series, the Santorini series, that was quite beautiful. And he was a very exuberant, flamboyant, over-the-top Greek. I mean, just—you know, he was bigger than life. He would come in—[laughs]—into the back office, and it's like he wanted to knock the wall down because he filled the space. And he was really—he was very nice. He was extremely nice. And it's not true, I did like his work.

He was more—he was more of a sort of illustrative abstract expressionist. I mean, it wasn't that he was totally abstract, because you could see Greece in his—you know, there was this—there was a—there was a sort of a form that you could—you know, but he wasn't totally, totally—he wasn't—he wasn't realistic at all. And his—and his color was just beautiful. His color sense, I mean, his combinations were. And I've always loved the name Santorini, I always wanted to go to Santorini, so.

AVIS BERMAN: [Laughs.] Yeah. And do you know—is like—were you present or in on it in Andy [Warhol] coming into the Castelli Gallery?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I was there. I mean, I was around. I wasn't—I wasn't part of any of the negotiations, but I was part of hanging the show—[laughs]. No, I was—I was—I really—I loved his work, I thought his work was wonderful and I thought it was—I think some people thought he was frivolous, and I didn't. I thought he was much deeper than, and then, of course, once he got into the electric chair and the Jackie Kennedy stuff, you know, it was very dark, and—but he was an interesting, he was a very interesting character.

I don't think—I don't know—I mean, I wonder if anybody ever got close to him. But he was—he was—well, you know, he had white hair and he had white skin, and it was interesting—you sort of didn't really know what he looked like. You'd look at him and you'd see him, but I always wondered what he really looked like. You couldn't actually see—I mean, the—I'm pretty sure he wore a wig, and that sort of hid a lot of who he might really have been. But he was a very soft person. I mean, smart as the day is long and obviously a total survivor, and figured out how to become rich and famous very quickly.

But at the same time, that's not what you—that was not your first impression of him. He was very—oh, intangible, it's like—you couldn't put your finger on it. Couldn't put your finger on him. It was like—it was like he was like, not a ghost, because he was obviously three-dimensional, but you know—who's Andy? I—

AVIS BERMAN: Either elusive or ephemeral?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, very. Yeah. Yeah. But at the same time, they all were—I know the word gets bandied about, and I know people used to say to me, particularly when I was an art critic, who's your favorite artist? Like, please, the last one I wrote about. You know—Van der Weyden, Memling, whatever. Very hard. I mean, on a scale of one to 10, how do you place Rembrandt, Rubens or, you know, starting back at, you know, Van Eyck, and then Rauschenberg and Johns? I don't know how you do that. But intrinsically, these people were—they were geniuses. They functioned on a different plane. And they really were smarter and more

perceptive and they saw things other people don't—most people don't look. People don't see.

When I worked in the audiovisual world, we would start with the storyboard. Then we'd have a light box. Then we'd have a slide, sort of, where we'd take the slides off of the light box and, you know, put them in a projector and put them up on the screen. You'd go through seven different stages. You'd get to the dress rehearsal. You'd be sitting in the dress rehearsal at, you know, three o'clock in the morning just before the show and somebody would say, oh my god, there's a slide there saying that profits have gone down 69 percent! Well, it's like, you've seen that slide in seven different incarnations. People don't see things. Artists see things. They actually use their eyes, they use their ears, they use their, you know, their sense of smell and taste. They function on a different wavelength than most people.

And Andy was just—he was brilliant. Crazy, but at the same time—I have to say, most of these guys—other than Jasper [Johns], who had a hard edge, who was—you know, he could cut like a knife, Jasper. He didn't do it all the time, but he did do it. But Roy [Lichtenstein] and Bob [Rauschenberg] and Andy, Rosenquist, they were funny, there was a softness about them. I always used to say that Roy walked on eggs, it was like this sort of tenuousness. And Andy had that same sort of—like a sense of hesitation, or—but actually I think what that was was—it was something that they would put between you and them and looking, so that they would step back because they were observers.

They—I don't think Andy missed a trick his entire life. And I was at—I was at The Factory a couple of times, and of course it was—there were always a million people. Although I imagine he kept himself, you know, pretty isolated within the throng, because I think most artists also get peopled out very easily; they like their solitude. But you can create solitude within a crowd. But he just—he understood, he understood. And certainly—not Roy so much. I mean, I don't think Roy felt he was instrumental in his—in his success, other than, of course, he did the work. But I mean—he was always doing five or six paintings at a time, so—I mean, he certainly did the work. But I mean, I think he was, of them all, the least—I always laughed and said Jasper had his first dollar, he had it framed and it was on a wall somewhere. He was pretty canny financially. I don't think—I think Bob was one of those people that had open hands on both ends—money in here, money out there—and he just relied on it being there, but also, like [Edward] Hopper, if it wasn't there, wasn't going to stop him from doing what he had to do and living.

With most of them, I never sensed that—nothing was ever done for the money. I think it was the idea first, and if the idea led to something, I mean, like Andy and the magazine, and—you know, all that stuff. I think he probably was the most notorious of all of them.

AVIS BERMAN: Mm hmm. [Affirmative.] Right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: The only person I really hated—[laughs]—I didn't hate him, I didn't hate him, he was just such a—[whispers]—asshole— was Don Judd.

AVIS BERMAN: What was—what was—what was the dimensions of his, excuse me, assholeness? What were the dimensions?

NINA VON ECKARDT: He was a user. I told you that Leo was a giver. I was at a party after I was married, had long—left Leo. You know, I think I actually might have been there with baby Merin, and Rosenquist was there with baby—who I called Baby Boy Rosenquist. I mean, these two children who were like—Rosenquist's son had almost white curly hair and the biggest head I've ever seen on any child. Maren was pretty close in terms of size. And it was some loft, you know, down on—I'd have no idea. Maybe it was Betty Cunningham, maybe it was her loft. She might have thrown a loft party.

And it was like down on Greene Street or something. And Judd was there. And I don't know if Julie was there. Julie was one of the sweetest people on the planet.

But Judd had been with Leo for a while. I mean, he took on Dan Flavin and Judd, and I can't remember whether I had left already or whether it was toward—very much towards the end. I think actually there was a Flavin show. There might even have been a Judd show before I left. And Flavin was just—you know, Flavin was an Irish Catholic priest turned crazy artist. I mean, he was terminally Irish and very whimsical and very funny and smart. And big, and quixotic. And Judd—it was like he was all uptight and had constipation. He was talking about how—you know, Leo used to give people this stipend, right? So Judd was talking about how he spent a lot of time trying to think up the next completely outrageous thing that he wanted that he would then get Leo to give him money for. So basically what he was doing was using Leo.

He—at the time, I don't remember the name of it, but he was very pleased with himself that he had gotten Leo to pay for a complete 24-piece set of some absolutely outrageously expensive designer sterling silver.

I mean, stuff like that. I mean, we're talking material crap. I don't think he had him buy him a Maserati, but maybe he had Leo pay for a loft that he had just bought. He had Leo paying—he would—he would essentially—it was as if he were blackmailing Leo to—because he—not that he was holding anything over Leo, just the fact that Leo couldn't say no. So he would go to Leo saying, oh, I need, da da da da. But the stuff that he was using, that he was spending the money on, was just—he was making this stuff up to find reasons to get money out of Leo, to hoard all this sort of material goods, and I just thought that was—I thought that was so awful. I thought that was just so tacky.

And he was so pleased with himself. I mean, he was like—you know, he was really—he thought he was like—he'd really—he'd really—was really pulling one over on Leo, and I thought, here's this guy that, you know, took you into his gallery and, you know, got you in

Harper's Bazaar or whatever magazine with, you know, Naomi Campbell, or whoever the famous model was, and put you on the map, and now you're taking advantage of this guy because, you know, you're smart enough to realize what his weakness is. And I just thought that was not nice. Now, of course, I have actually the daughter of a very dear friend—Marella Consolini, the one that I made the chocolate poster for—she has a lovely daughter, and she's running the Judd Foundation in Texas, out in Texas, in the—you know, the end of the universe Texas.

And Julie had been there. Julie had been, I guess, the titular head of the—of the foundation, but then when Marella came—her name is Marella Consolini, and at one point she was actually at the Whitney. Before she took this job, she was at the Whitney. I think she was, like, assistant director or associate director, but you know the Whitney. The Whitney has 147 people on the board and can be a little problematic, because I remember when my friend David Ross was director of the Whitney. And so Marella—I'm not sure whether she went directly from the Whitney to the job in Texas. I think maybe she did. I think she finally did just—this other job came up, and she took it. But I believe Judd has been gone for quite a while. I mean, I don't remember when he died, but it's interesting some of the people who have died very young. And I think Judd was pretty young when he died.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. By the way, Flavin joined the gallery in 1970.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay, so he couldn't have had a show there.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, he could have.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Or maybe he had a piece there, though, when—maybe—I don't know, but I know that they're—that they subsequently—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Did Judd have anything when I—he probably didn't have anything when I was still there. Somehow I thought that there had been a—or maybe a piece, a Judd piece in a group show maybe?

AVIS BERMAN: Well, it could be, but not any—in other words, it—not anything that I see—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, okay.

AVIS BERMAN: I mean, I know, basically, Flavin—that the reason that Ivan and Leo broke up is over Dan Flavin, that Leo wanted him in the gallery and Ivan did not.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, that's interesting. So then—so then that's when Ivan went to OK Harris.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, because he just felt that the vision was getting different. I don't think he was interested in minimalism, essentially.

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, he wouldn't have been. No, he wouldn't have been, no.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Let me go through another—like, of course, he was in Europe, and he died young, but did you ever have, through the gallery, any contact with Yves Klein?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, nor Niki [de Saint Phalle]. When I was there, I mean, obviously, they were—they were talked about, but they never—I mean, she never came through, although I'm pretty sure Leo knew them when he was in France.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah.

NINA VON ECKARDT: I mean, they would have been in association through—what's the name of the French gallery?

AVIS BERMAN: Iris Clert?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, but there was a guy. It starts with a "D," I want to say, an older—an older gallery, sort of coming out of World War II.

AVIS BERMAN: I'm not sure about that, but did—maybe Ileana showed Yves Klein?

NINA VON ECKARDT: She might have. She might have.

AVIS BERMAN: How about Paul Brach?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yes. Yes, he used to come by a lot. And he was definitely in the category, friends of the gallery. And Leo—you know, Leo was good friends with him. He was—who was he with at that point? Was he with—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, he was married to Miriam Shapiro, his wife. I mean—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. Yeah. Yes, I remember him. He was a really nice guy.

AVIS BERMAN: Again, someone who was in the gallery and then not.

NINA VON ECKARDT: People used to, you know, kind of wander in and out and come and sit in the back, and you know, we'd stop and sit and chat with them and—[laughs]—

AVIS BERMAN: How about Norman Bluhm? What was he like?

NINA VON ECKARDT: I knew Norman Bluhm through Harithas, not through Leo, not through Castelli. It was after I was married to Charlie. And we used to spend a lot of time eating down in SoHo. I was there a number of years ago with my friend Kevin Tighe. Oh, God, what was the name of that restaurant? It was on—it was on Prince Street?

AVIS BERMAN: Jerry's?

NINA VON ECKARDT: No, it wasn't Jerry's. It was—

AVIS BERMAN: Fanelli's?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes. We spent a lot of time. And at Fanelli's—and Norman—I don't think I ever met Norman's wife. But Norman, like Tom Downing, was one of those people that—instant rapport. We just liked each other. And we didn't see each other that much. I don't think I ever—don't think I ever invited Norman, because I would have met his wife then, because I would have invited, you know, his wife as well. But I don't think Norman ever came to our place for dinner. But I think I probably saw him a lot at Jim's [Harithas], because Jim used to throw parties all the time, and he was just—I didn't know his work terribly well, but I—he was the most debonair, charming—old-school, very wonderful—loved him.

My friend Anna Bialobroda and he were very good friends. And she mentioned him recently, and I—and it was like, oh, my God, I hadn't thought about Norman in years and years, but he was one of my absolutely favorite people, he and [Angelo] Savelli. I loved Savelli. And I think Leo knew Savelli, but there was—and there should have been a connection. There should have been—actually—and I think at one point there had been a connection, but it didn't quite take. Also, Savelli's work was very—was minimal, and I think it, you know, was not something at the time.

AVIS BERMAN: How about Ludwig Sander?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah, I remember him. But no, I don't remember. I think he was one of the guys that used to call with a foreign accent. It was Friedel Dzubas and Bob Elkon and Rudy Burckhardt. [Laughs.] I loved Rudy Burckhardt. He was—he was the great photographer. He was

an amazing photographer. He did all of our photography. He used to come in all the time. He was also Red Grooms' father-in-law, I seem to remember—incredible guy.

AVIS BERMAN: No, I don't think it was—I think Red Grooms was married to Mimi Gross, so—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, okay, no, so he couldn't have been. No, that wasn't it. Yeah, you're right. What was—but he had a connection with Red Grooms. Why do I think that? There was some weird connection.

AVIS BERMAN: Right. By the way, you said that Leo—that—you know, that Oldenburg could not show with the gallery, but was Oldenburg around? Was Oldenburg an artist you knew?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, Charlie [Frazier] knew Oldenburg, ironically. Charlie and Oldenburg had been friends in LA at one point. But no, Oldenburg—I mean, I was at the occasional party or opening with Oldenburg, and his wife was—I thought his wife was kind of crazy.

AVIS BERMAN: Patty.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah. No, I mean, the sort of thing where you had the feeling that they were in the bathroom screwing and it was always like, "Huh? This is an opening, guys." But she was, like, a little wild. [Laughs.] I could be totally wrong, but I'm pretty sure I remember that happening a couple of times. [Laughs.] Oh, what a world. That was, like, the most amazing world. It was just—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah. And then—

NINA VON ECKARDT: I'm assuming it's still like that, but I just don't know anybody anymore.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, I hope so. [They laugh.] Actually, people are so, you know, concentrating on their careers, who knows if they can do that. These are—these are Castelli—let's see, we've done this. These are the exhibitions. I made a list of everything from September '63 to May '65, so if you just want to look at this, and if there's any other—many other memories come to mind from this list, fire away.

NINA VON ECKARDT: So Judd did have an exhibition. I was right.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, when do you—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, no, that's just over here on the side. okay—[inaudible]—okay, that's just on this side, okay, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, those are just the names of the artists that I just asked you about.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Okay, no, no, no.

AVIS BERMAN: No, he didn't join the gallery until '66, I believe. Yeah, 1966 he joined Castelli. [Pause.] And Oldenburg, as I said, joined in '74, so that he did—right.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes, so it was much later. Yeah, yeah. So basically, the November-December exhibit in '64 would have been Andy's very first one of the Flower paintings. I totally remember that. Yeah. Oh, god, yes, the racing cars. Scarpitta had done this wonderful—he was doing a whole series of, they were like, [inaudible] with these strips of white canvas that he would sort of wrap around, and they were quite incredibly beautiful. He really was actually a very good artist. I have no recollection whatsoever, interestingly, of the John Chamberlain paintings. [Laughs.] Everything else slightly rings a bell, although I don't know who Hay or Watts are, really—

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, and that's how he said it—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —which is interesting, yeah.

AVIS BERMAN: "I don't know who Hay is."

NINA VON ECKARDT: No idea who Hay is. Watts—like, that's a little familiar.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, Bob Watts. Well, he was also at Douglass [College], as was Roy [Lichtenstein].

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, that's what they're saying. Yeah, I do remember Bob Watts. But I guess—I have no idea what kind of work he did. It just doesn't ring a bell at all, whereas Artschwager I remember, I remember very distinctly. But he also used to come and he used to hang around the gallery a lot. He'd come up and, you know, people would come and they'd sit with Ivan in the front. You know, they'd sit on the desk.

[Pause.]

I just don't remember anything other than that basically, at one point Lichtenstein was keeping the gallery afloat in terms of his sales, and then certainly Warhol was. I mean, everything we put up of Warhol's, we'd sell. Everything Jasper brought in would sell, basically. So it was a line of—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, right, but he [Johns] wasn't as prolific as the—

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, one painting a year. Well, he was—he did—he did prints with Tanya Grosman. He was very—both he and Rauschenberg, you know, did wonderful series of prints. And then at one point—I don't know if it was Roy, but at one point we were working with some silkscreen people out in LA, and I don't remember—

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, Gemini.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yes.

AVIS BERMAN: But Roy didn't—well, Roy didn't go to Gemini until '69, but others were doing it before that. Gemini started about '59 or the early '60s. I mean, first they had Albers, and Washington—excuse me, Albers and Rauschenberg. And then Roy didn't do it till later, but they—that was the LA—Gemini G.E.L. was the print atelier.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But Roy, in either '63 or—that would have been '64—did a book of prints. He had a sock, and he had a—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, there was *One-Cent Life*. That was with Wallasse Ting.

NINA VON ECKARDT: But there actually was a rather—like, a large portfolio of prints that he did.

AVIS BERMAN: Oh, yeah, he was doing a lot. No, he did—there was the New York—there were—there was, like, the *New York Ten*. Sam Wagstaff did a portfolio of the pop artists.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, okay, maybe that's what it was. That may be what it was, that it was a part of that. That could have been what it was—

AVIS BERMAN: No, Roy did—was—

NINA VON ECKARDT: —because I remember Sam coming in a lot. I mean, Sam was—he was quite fascinating, actually.

AVIS BERMAN: Yeah, it was—I think when it was at the Wadsworth—

NINA VON ECKARDT: The Gary Cooper of the art world. So gorgeous, but *helas*. That was interesting though, that he was, you know, Wadsworth Atheneum. And coming from—you know, I mean, he always seemed very formal, and he seemed different than he actually was. I guess that's what it was, because of course he was so gorgeous and dressed so beautifully and was always proper. But he had extraordinary taste. And that was quite interesting. The people who actually got this were fascinating, because not everybody did, and there was a long time before people—I mean, people were dragging their feet, and it was not easy to get either. I mean, it was very easy to just basically sort of poopoo it and discount it as, oh, well, it's just, you know, somebody's trying to make commercial art seem like it's real art. And it took—it took a lot to understand what it really was, and that was what was so extraordinary about it.

It was always fun. I always expected, you know, kids to come in and get it. And they sometimes were more conservative, you know, like a class of high school kids would come in and look at the work, and sometimes they would—they would say, "Well, you call this art?" kind of thing.

[Laughs.] It was like—

AVIS BERMAN: Now, here, you know, this was someone who was—certainly dismissed pop art, but you ever remember Clement Greenberg coming in the gallery? [Pause.] Would you have known what he looked like?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Oh, yeah, I knew Clement. I mean, I knew what he—absolutely, yeah. He looked like a soft-boiled egg, a poached egg. I don't know that he ever did. I don't know that he ever did. I mean, he and Leo knew each other. I mean, Ivan and he—they all knew each other. But I think he hung out mostly with Emmerich and—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, true, but—

NINA VON ECKARDT: He might have come to—he might have come to an opening or two. I mean, that's not beyond—

AVIS BERMAN: Well, also, if you're writing about it, even to dismiss it, you have to see it.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah, no, I'm sure he must have come in. He was very pompous and, you know, knew exactly what he thought and of course knew that what he thought was right. It was very interesting. He was responsible for Anne Truitt's career. I became friends with her at one point. I—after Wolf died, I somehow came upon her day books, and she'd written three books. And I wrote her a letter after one of them because it was very odd, she had been at Bryn Mawr exactly 20 years before I had, and then she'd married a *Washington Post* reporter but had ended up in Japan and had not initially gotten pregnant so had gone to the Corcoran and had decided to become an artist. She eventually had three children.

But she was doing—she was studying art at the Corcoran, and Ken Noland was going up to Bennington to teach. And somehow he asked her if she would like to take his studio; would she like to, you know, use his studio, because he was going to be away, but he—would it be okay if he stored some paintings there? So Anne said, "Oh, absolutely." And she took over his studio. I guess she paid him rent. And she was doing the white picket fences. And Greenberg came down for Morris Louis' funeral. And he wanted to—he'd spoken to Noland, and he wanted to go by the studio. I think he was putting together a group show and he wanted to look at some paintings, and Morris had said—I mean, Noland had said, you know, "Anne Truitt is in my studio; you'll have to, you know, contact her."

So he contacted Anne, and Anne said, "Absolutely." She made an appointment for him to come to the studio. And he went to the studio, and he absolutely loved her fences. Oh, no, it was slightly different. The first time he came down was to look at Noland paintings. And he went by the studio, and as I said, he liked the fences. So he went back up to New York, then Morris Louis died. And he came down with Emmerich, and he said to Emmerich, "I want to show you something. We need to go to Ken Nolan's studio; there's some work there that I want you to see." So he called up Anne Truitt, and he said, "I want to bring Andre Emmerich by." I mean, karma, right? So he takes Andre Emmerich by. Andre Emmerich loves the picket fences, gives Anne a show, and she was with him for twenty—you know, till she died a few years ago. She used to go to Yaddo a lot. She got a number of grants at Yaddo, and then at one point I think Nina Castelli Sundell—I think Michael Sundell was the director there, and occasionally he would, like, take a vacation, and Anne would actually, you know, come over and be the director for that—for that summer or something.

So I had written her a letter saying, you know, just explaining who I was and telling her how much her books had meant to me and how ironic it was that, you know, we've been in Washington at the same time, and Wolf with the *Washington Post*—and her husband was dead by the time I got there—but you know, that we had—our paths had, in a funny way, crossed, but never—we'd never met. And she wrote me back, and she said, "I always answer any letter that I get, but I never want to see the person, but I would love to meet you." So I drove from Jaffrey over to Saratoga Springs, and we spent the day together in her studio. And she said something that I quote in my—I did a portrait of her, and I—and I used the quote that she's actually said to me, which was. "Don't be afraid of the paper."

And I thought that was the most amazing—amazingly philosophically deep—because you are afraid of the paper. You start with this paralysis and cramp, and it's like, what, you're going to screw a 10-cent page of paper? Just get it out. Get it out on the paper. If you don't like it, guess what? You can wrinkle up the paper and throw it out and start with another piece of paper. But it was as if she had opened up some—the Grand Canyon to me. Like, oh my God. But it made me understand that it is—yes, you have to be ready. Nobody who's not ready can be there. So basically what comes first is you're working, you're working, you're working, you have ideas, you're working. For some people, a door opens, and you just walk through it. I mean, she could not have avoided what happened to her if she tried.

Now, there are other people I know, I mean, fine artists, lovely artists, who work harder than God, and they do everything right. And you would think they would be Georgia O'Keeffe or Grace Hartigan by the amount of effort and time and thought and planning they put into their careers, and yet they're nowhere. They're still teaching, they're still doing university exhibits, they have shows in galleries, but nobody knows who they are. They're—they don't—and you can't make it happen if it's not supposed to happen, and you absolutely cannot stop it from happening if it's supposed to happen other than you do have to be ready.

And Anne Truitt's story, just for me, is like—it clarifies so incredibly how that happens. And so all of these people who, you know, get to the—because, you know, in the art world, it's like—it's like a teeny, teeny pyramid. There's hardly anybody up there on the top of that pyramid, I mean, when you compare that to theater or movies or writing, you know, literature, publishing. There's nobody in the art world. There are, like, hardly any people at all.

And yet, the people that you know of—I don't know—I never knew anybody that I didn't think deserved their career. I mean, that—I do have to say that, is that all of them absolutely earned it, and they—and they were worthy of what happened. I mean, I can't think of anybody that—even if I didn't like their work, because it just wasn't, you know, something that I appreciated, and also my tastes change, I mean, that's another thing. I mean, one—you know, in one period, you know, like 20 years ago, I might not like something, and then your taste evolves and 20 years later you see the same thing and you think, "Oh my God, why didn't I see that earlier?"

And as much as I disliked him, I mean, even somebody like Judd had a vision. You couldn't deny his vision. He just was—you know, he was kind of a dog. [They laugh.] No, I don't want to denigrate dogs. [They laugh.] He was—I don't like—I don't like takers and I don't like—I don't do mean. I don't do mean, and I think when somebody is a giver, if somebody systematically takes from that person, I think that's really unkind and cruel and unnecessary, certainly. But it didn't hinder. I mean, that's the other thing, you know, good karma, bad karma, you know. Good things happen to really nasty people, and bad things happen to good people, but really good things happen to shitty people. So, I mean, you know, you can't—there's not much you can do about that.

But, I mean, when I think back over all of the people that, you know, I was the shadow dancer to, for, around and then subsequently, when I came back to New York after I left California, even though I was an art critic for a while, I mostly was—became friends with actors and—mostly with actors—it was still the same sort of being a moth to their flame. Quite happy—I mean, that's a—that's a very nice place to be in, because you meet incredibly interesting people, and life is never boring. [Laughs.] And here I am, in West New York. [They laugh]

AVIS BERMAN: Right, well, anything else that we should say or that I haven't covered about Castelli that we need to?

NINA VON ECKARDT: Well, mostly just to stress the purity of his vision. I mean, I know a lot of people thought he was, you know, like a merchant. But I—you know, in all the time that I knew him, money was the last thing he really—I mean, he would—yes, he would—you know, it'd be nice to pay the rent, but he just—he was—he really was on this mission, and I think he basically—he accomplished his mission. He really did. But I think there really was a purity of vision, and, I mean, he was an absolutely critical, major part of the 20th—you know, 20th-century art world. I mean, without him, so many of the really great painters and sculptors that we—that we now—these are the people that are going to get remembered.

In our lifetime, I mean, every single day, people are concerned with power; they're concerned with money. They're trying to hoard money and get richer, and they're trying to get more power over other people or whatever their—you know, whatever they want the power for. But the interesting thing is, is that when all of these people die, nobody remembers the money. Very few people remember the power.

What they remember are the paintings. They remember the books. They remember the music. So it's that creative force that, you know, basically streams through the universe, like the Amazon River, and when people are alive and trying to become successful, that's only like a fringe element of their lives: "Oh, let's go to a museum on Sunday." But, in fact, when everybody—when all is said and done, that's what matters.

A hundred years from now, nobody's going to remember that So-and-So was, you know, the Koch brothers, you know, funded all these PACs and were more rich than God, and that they had

all this money. Rich people think that they have some sort of a special position and that they're privileged in many ways. And I used to—I actually knew some rich people at one point, and I used to say to them, "You know, the interesting thing is, if our value system was different, if we actually thought that a creative idea in our lifetime was more important than money and that you needed to wake up tomorrow morning, and not to be put in front of a firing squad, that you needed to come up with some major creative idea, or paint a painting, or write a poem, you'd be dead. You wouldn't be able to do it. But you don't understand the value of the people who can, because you're too busy thinking that money is the most important thing, or that money makes you special, whereas, in fact, money doesn't make you anything."

And Leo wasn't concerned. I mean, yes, he needed money; that was fuel. Money was fuel. It's like people who eat food just to stay alive as opposed to people for whom food is, you know, is what they—what they live for. And Leo didn't live for money. No, he used money just to fuel his mission. And not that he was remotely messianic. I mean, you would never think of him as being messianic to talk to him, but he had an understanding and a vision that was just extraordinary.

AVIS BERMAN: Okay. Thank you very much.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Thank you. I wish I remembered more, more clearly. [Laughs] Jim Henderson, I keep going back to the name Henderson. I wouldn't be surprised if maybe his name wasn't Henderson. Write that down, maybe somebody will—I mean you might even be able to Google, you know, "Silly staff."

AVIS BERMAN: Right, Jim Henderson, registrar. That would be very—it would be interesting to find him. And—

NINA VON ECKARDT: And I wish I could—and if I ever think of the—and I might be able to ask—Charlie [Frazier] might remember. She actually was at that party that Judd was at. And that's the funny thing, I can see her, and I know she went to Houston as some kind of a curator. And she would have been there, maybe before Jim Harithas, so she would have been there in the early '70s.

AVIS BERMAN: Well, we still—

NINA VON ECKARDT: So if you can get a list of people who were employed by the Houston Museum in the early '70s, and, you know, if I wake up at three in the morning—I woke up the other day—I was looking for a name, and I literally woke up in the middle of the night, and I had the name on the—on the tip of my tongue. I mean, I remember—[inaudible]—

AVIS BERMAN: Right. Well, you will, so thank you.

NINA VON ECKARDT: Yeah.

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