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Oral history interview with Mary Corse, 2013 August 10-December 14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Mary Corse on August 10, 2013. The interview took place at Corse's studio in Topanga, CA, and was conducted by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Mary Corse has reviewed the transcript. 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

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Mary Corse at her studio in Topanga, California on August 10th, 2013 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, here we are sitting in Mary Corse's beautiful studio surrounded by her white iridescent paintings and her white and black paintings. Some of them are covered with plastic. She's been in this location since 1970, although not exactly in this studio. And she's in the process of remodeling and expanding her studio. And I'm going to start by asking her right from the beginning, tell me about—a little bit, first of all, about where you grew up. I just read in your chronology that you grew up in—were born in Berkeley.

MARY CORSE: Berkeley, California. I was born there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Can you tell me what date you were born?

MARY CORSE: December 5th, 1945.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—oh, a significant date in history.

MARY CORSE: It is?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what did your parents do?

MARY CORSE: My father had a shop for a while. And then he was in real estate. My mother—I was raised mostly by my mother because they were divorced.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How old were you when they divorced?

MARY CORSE: They were divorced when I was five. [… –MC] And she did some real estate. […–MC] And we lived in Berkeley—actually Kensington, the Berkeley hills. I had a view which I loved. It was right on the edge. I could see all across the bay to the Golden Gate Bridge. I could see the Bay Bridge. I could see the San Rafael Bridge, but we used to take the ferry there before they built that bridge. The ferry boat, Santa Rosa, up north, lot of farm country, lot of nature, farms.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It must have been gorgeous then, completely undeveloped.

MARY CORSE: It was gorgeous. And it was fun riding the ferry, you know, as a little kid and—so that was Berkeley.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you have siblings?

MARY CORSE: I had a brother and a sister.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are they older or younger?

MARY CORSE: My sister was older and my brother was younger.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So did your mother manage to support you—

MARY CORSE: Yes, she did.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —throughout your—and—

MARY CORSE: She did very well.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. And was she interested in art?

MARY CORSE: I used to hide from my mother to paint. [Laughs.] She did—you know, and I'd paint abstract. "Why don't you put some daisies?" "Where's the daisies?" Yeah, she was a sweetheart, but no, the art was not—but she loved theatre, what am I saying? She took us to operas. All the operas, and the—in San Francisco I'd be taken out of school to see the all the plays and—the plays in San Francisco.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How would you characterize your childhood?

MARY CORSE: I started ballet class when I was five, and piano also. So from the time I was five, it was—my—how would I characterize my childhood? [Laughs.] Way too [inaudible].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Happy?

MARY CORSE: Oh, I—oh, happy? I thought I was happy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah?

MARY CORSE: Happy, yeah, happy. I thought I was happy. But I had a lot of piano lessons, a lot of dancing lessons. It was a lot of work. In later life I realized that I hated the ballet. I love it now. Now it's my passion again. But, by the time I was 15, I was with the Oakland Ballet for two performances. And you can imagine how rough that is. And doing piano, so it was—it was a lot of work. My childhood was that, a lot of—but now dancing is my passion.

[… –MC]

I was in two performances, and then I quit.

MARY CORSE: Now that I've said it—now, Pausé. Raoul Pausé. I don't know how to spell it or pronounce it correctly. Anyway, that's not so important, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It is important. It's all important. So you did two—

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was it the result of doing those two performances that made you want to quit?

MARY CORSE: No, who knows what it was? I don't know. I don't remember why exactly I quit. I was 15.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, to back up a little bit—

MARY CORSE: I was painting a lot.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where did you go to elementary school?

MARY CORSE: Elementary, I went to Kensington Elementary. Then I went to—oh yeah, right, then my mother sent me to a private school. Private girls' school.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How old were you when you went there?

MARY CORSE: For the seventh grade, starting in the seventh grade in Berkeley. Right down there by—I forget the name of the streets, Dwight and Channing? Right by the campus. It was beatnik area, you know? [Laughs.] It was a time when it was, like—Telegraph, right there on Telegraph Avenue, Telegraph and Channing Way.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was it called?

MARY CORSE: Anna Head [School for Girls].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Anna—

MARY CORSE: Anna Head.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: H-E-A-D?

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh [affirmative], School.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how long were you there?

MARY CORSE: Seventh, eighth, ninth, tenth—four years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, so seventh to tenth grade. Yeah, so basically your high—well I guess not quite your high school, like your junior high school years.

MARY CORSE: [… –MC] The great thing about the school is—I was already interested in art. I'd already had art lessons. By the time I was nine I could draw the human figure in proportion and all that. And at school [… –MC], I was always the one that brought the milk cartons to mix the paint. You know those easels we used to have? I was always in charge of all the easels and, you know, so it was there early. But the lucky thing was in the seventh grade, I—at this private school, I had like three hours a day of this teacher who had gone to Chouinard [Art Institute, Los Angeles]. And there were only three of us in the class.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, my gosh.

MARY CORSE: For hours a day. By the time I was twelve, I was writing 10-page papers on [Willem] de Kooning. Tracing them—you know, I'd had the Josef Albers thick book. We were studying that by the time I was, you know, 12, 13. I have paintings from that era. So—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Just to pause for second, I noticed in the chronology you call her Mrs. Keffler. Do you know her first name?

MARY CORSE: Mrs. Keffler, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's okay. I can look it up.

MARY CORSE: She was great. She was so liberal. She would listen to the three of us as we painted and talked about our renegade experiences. [Laughs.] So it was great. It was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And Mrs. Keffler had attended Chouinard?

MARY CORSE: She had gone to Chouinard in L.A., yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And had she—was she a practicing artist?

MARY CORSE: At her—yeah, she probably was. I never saw her paintings, you know. She was the teacher. But yes, she was. And I've always meant to find her.

[They laugh.]

But I never did. Never have.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We'll see—we'll see if we can find—at least find out what her first name was. So was she an older or a younger woman?

MARY CORSE: She was probably in her 30s then, teaching, 30s or 40s. Awkward looking. Real artist, she was into it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: She was a real artist?

MARY CORSE: I mean she was—she sure gave me a jumpstart.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And tell me about how she did that.

MARY CORSE: Well, by making me study the right—the certain lineage. What was happening at the time, you know. Lot of Hans Hofmann and painting, you know, painting off it. And understanding how to create space in a painting, or not—and same—you know, so the early ideas. Well I was attracted—she showed it to me, but I also gravitated towards it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And this is abstract painting?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, it was abstract. We had to have our drawing book. And we had to draw hands and people. I have a few of those left. And we had to draw, also. But the painting was abstract very early. I was—I liked it. I like abstract. It's not that I liked the way that Hans Hofmann's looked, but it did something. I was early on interested that in a painting, did something. It wasn't just a picture of something else that—you know, the shapes move around. You could make shapes move around on a flat surface. And that's one reason why I stick to painting rather than going out into the environment.

[Telephone rings.]

It's that two-dimensional flatness and creating a space in that which is a totally abstract space. There is no three—other, like with the inner bands that I paint now. There is no inside a two-dimensional. So if you look from the side you don't see anything. It's flat. So—and it has less dimension. But anyway, I think that was all early gravitating, you know, starting to interest me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and it would have been, if you started there in the seventh grade, you would have been like 12 or 13 years old. So the year would have been nineteen-fifty—oh, here it is. It's 1958 to 1960 you studied with her. So that really was fairly—

MARY CORSE: Long.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and also fairly, I mean, like not really early, but certainly in the early evolution of modern abstraction in America.

MARY CORSE: Right. Jackson Pollock was just coming out as a renegade against—you know. I remember that she was trying to hold us to de Kooning and Hofmann. And Jackson Pollock was—but anyway.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you weren't that interested in Expressionist abstraction. You were interested—

MARY CORSE: Oh, yeah. I went through that first. I have stuff from that too. First, we studied all—I'd paint like—you know, analyze Cézanne. How it's flat but it's three-dimensional. But the, you know, the apples don't fall off, but yet they're in space and, you know. Oh yeah, oh yeah, the whole lineage of where it came from, where abstraction and where my—created the same space. It comes from those guys. Cézanne—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You were really studying that as early as the seventh, eighth—the seventh, eighth, ninth—

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —grade?

MARY CORSE: Right, three hours a day.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Very early.

MARY CORSE: Very early.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So—and you were writing papers for her and reading books. Do you remember any particular books you were reading?

MARY CORSE: Mostly—it wasn't reading books so much. We learned from looking at paintings [in books –MC] more, I think. I do remember the Josef Albers books. And I was so interested, and it was early phenomenology that color not only can create, you know, the illusion of space, or space, and move around, but the colors would mix. And you could create actual phenomena like—I'm not good—so good with words, but, you know, like—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, I get it. I get what you're saying. And so—

MARY CORSE: The unseen was making the unseen come around.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you were really fascinated with this. And you're doing painting. And you're going to the ballet, doing the ballet classes. And so you had a really hard—

MARY CORSE: And the piano.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You had a very arts-intensive upbringing.

MARY CORSE: Not much social. My mother was a little bit on a trip, you might say.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How so?

MARY CORSE: Well, that was a lot of work for a kid. I see that now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you resist—did you ever—?

MARY CORSE: But, had I not had the dancing, and all of that discipline and—you know, I probably wouldn't have

been able to make all these paintings and stick to it as an artist. I mean, it was helpful in that way because I'm used to working.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because of the discipline of dance, which is so intense?

MARY CORSE: It is. But I don't come from painting through discipline. It's passion. I don't discipline myself to make a painting. I run towards it. It's a freeing thing. And now the ballet is too. But a year ago I was able to take a few classes. I got to get back, and I found a school. And not next week, but the week after I'm going to find time, you know, to get this stuff done. And I'm going to go back to ballet. So finally, I love it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, great.

[… –MC]

So we're finished with the—with—I see you've got this intensive arts upbringing and maybe not such a social life, which means—you next go to study art history at the Oakland Museum of Arts and Crafts [sic] in 1961.

MARY CORSE: I didn't study art history there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's your chronology.

MARY CORSE: I took some paint classes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Your chronology's erroneous. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: I didn't study art history. I took some—I painted.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, tell me about painting at the—tell me about the Oakland Museum of Arts and Crafts [sic] in 1961.

MARY CORSE: It was not a big influence. It was not much at all. And, yeah, that was after I quit the dancing, right? Yeah, I think it was—quit the dancing. And I went to that school—I had this one period of a few years, where it sort of wasn't happening in that way. And I remember painting. I can picture this painting I was working on right now, you know. I had a break in there. There was a break, I think from when I was around 15, 16 to—because I remember driving home from the Oakland class and I'm—I think they're doing oil paints even, when I'd done acrylic already. I mean, something was off. I guess the teacher's assignments were so—something. Anyway, I was out of there. And I remember having my paint box, and I didn't care that it was—I didn't clean my brushes or anything. I'd had it, so.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you weren't really—

MARY CORSE: Gee, it's hard to think of all this stuff. It's sort of an emotional [laughs]—it's almost like—you know what I mean?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But it's an interesting time to remember, I mean you had such a good response to your teacher at Anna Head.

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This Mrs. Keffler, and then at the Oakland Museum of Arts and Crafts [sic] you didn't have a good experience.

MARY CORSE: It wasn't—it wasn't very long either. It was—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Just a few courses?

MARY CORSE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now during that time—now so is this—

MARY CORSE: That was not a big deal.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, okay.

MARY CORSE: Was it even during the summer or something? I can't remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It just says 1961.

MARY CORSE: It wasn't—I went down to Chouinard. Whenever I went—and then—so I went down to Chouinard and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, you didn't go to Chouinard yet. We—you can't leap ahead of your own chronology. I have it written down in front of me. Next you went to Europe.

MARY CORSE: Oh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In 1962, you went to Europe, and you had your—

[Cross talk]

MARY CORSE: That's right. I went to Europe. I forgot all about that. Oh, I looked at art over there somewhat. I remember seeing the Degas.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So let's pause for a second. In 1962, you go to Europe. So—45, 55, 60, you're—I guess you're 17 years old, and you go to Europe. How do you end up going to Europe?

MARY CORSE: I'm 18, 19. With a student tour group that my mother sent me on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: From your school?

MARY CORSE: No, I guess it was a travel agent or something, you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: It was a tour of that college-age—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Tell me about that.

MARY CORSE: We toured around Europe, went to seventeen countries. She wanted me to, you know, do that. And I like—and I remember looking at the Degas. And the—oh, and the [El] Grecos and the—you know, looking at a lot of wonderful paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because you hadn't seen those kinds of paintings before?

MARY CORSE: Not in real—Berkeley—it was before the Berkeley [Art] Museum.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So how did that affect you?

MARY CORSE: I loved the paintings. I was very emotional about them. Yeah, they made me very emotional, those paintings. Painting does that—oh, dear.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so here you are, aspiring to be a painter, and now you've seen—

MARY CORSE: Oh, well, I didn't have the idea of me being a painter. There was no idea of career ever. Nobody in my family—my mother never went to work. I never saw a dad come home with a job. There was—no one worked. There was no jobs. There was no career.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh.

MARY CORSE: No, I painted. It had nothing to do with the career, and actually I think I thought—I think I thought a lot of those artists were dead, also. I think—maybe I didn't even know at that time, when I was 12 or 13, that Hofmann was alive. Because I remember much later it striking me, "Oh, all those guys are alive?"

[They laugh.]

"They're in New York?"

[They laugh.]

Yeah, so that's right, I went to Europe. Oh, my god.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you went to Europe and when you came back in 1963 you start, according to this, studying at the University of California at Santa Barbara in psychology.

MARY CORSE: My mother wanted me to go to Santa Barbara. You can tell she was not big on the art thing, really. Not that she knew anything about it. But, so, I couldn't go to Chouinard unless I went at least one year.

She wanted me to go there. So I went one year.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do you think she wanted you to get a proper education, quote, unquote? Like a B.A. or some sort of degree where you'd have—

MARY CORSE: I think she—I don't know where she—it's very complex. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So she didn't want—do you think she wanted you to have a job? If she never mentioned you—if nobody ever had a job, what do you think her aspirations for you were? I mean, she obviously has you very—in a lot of classes. [Laughs.] She's obviously very involved in your education.

MARY CORSE: Right, but it wasn't about getting a job.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, no, I mean—

MARY CORSE: Or—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —what were her aspirations for you?

MARY CORSE: She probably wanted me to live in that area, or something. Just have a nice—a good life. I don't think she thought of how one does that, or—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you got to UC Santa Barbara and took your courses in psychology and—

MARY CORSE: I took a couple art classes. They were way behind. They were so far behind where I'd already been that I was totally, you know—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: That's what happened in Oakland, too. I mean it was like, "Oh!"

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So really this woman Mrs. Keffler had already taken you so far in your education that by the time you went to school, you felt like you were already beyond what they were teaching. Is that correct?

MARY CORSE: Definitely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that a correct way of thinking about it?

MARY CORSE: Well, I mean it's true. I don't want to sound—it was because of Mrs. Keffler, yeah. And they already—yeah, I was already ahead of—what he was talking about. Sort of boring.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So then you went, after that you decided—you were awarded a scholarship to Chouinard. And I'd like to know how that happened. How did you get a scholarship to Chouinard?

MARY CORSE: Well, I'd kept a lot of the [paintings I had painted –MC]. And I still have a few of the work that I had done with Mrs. Keffler. And they saw it and gave me a scholarship.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So tell me about what you—what did you do then, move to Los Angeles?

MARY CORSE: Then I did. I came down to L.A.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Had you been to L.A. before?

MARY CORSE: Maybe not to "L.A." L.A., but I'd been south. I have relatives in the Valley, a cousin.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, how did you make the transition to Chouinard? Where did you live? And—

MARY CORSE: I went to the Y or something first. Chouinard then was downtown by Alvarado Park. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Down by MacArthur Park you mean?

MARY CORSE: MacArthur Park.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: We would walk barefoot [laughs] from where I stayed to school. I remember that. So I stayed

there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's student housing?

MARY CORSE: No, it wasn't student housing. It was more like YMCA or something. All kinds of different—it was more like a hotel. I don't know what it was. Stayed there for a while, and then I finally got an apartment upstairs or something. Right, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What? In one of those little rooming houses?

MARY CORSE: In one of those little houses. Not a rooming house, no, like a duplex or something like that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And do you remember—who did you live with? Or did you live by yourself? I always assume that people in college have roommates. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Well, I had my own room at the place.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: At Chouinard?

MARY CORSE: At the first building. It's just a rooms and cafeterias downstairs. Oh, and then when I found a place, [… –MC] every once in a while I'd have a roommate. Can't remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you get to Chouinard and according to this chronology you are taken under the wing of the great Emerson Woelffer.

MARY CORSE: Emerson was great. What a wonderful person.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wonderful person and a wonderful teacher.

MARY CORSE: Yes, and he let me work in my own studio. After I was in school for a couple years—I had to take some of the basic classes, but couldn't wait to get to—moving on. But then I got a studio, a big space on Beverly and Hoover. It's in town. A big space, not that far from the school. And Woelffer saw that I was on—you know, very directed, so he let me work there. And I started building these big light boxes. And I was able to do large works and work on them for months at a time without having to go to class, which was great. And he would come every six months.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now Chouinard at that time was such an incredible sort of melting pot for artists. I mean, you're younger than the sort of, quote, Ferus generation, but it still had a lot of people teaching there. Do you remember any of your other teachers?

MARY CORSE: Right, [John] Canavier did sculpture. Fred Hammersley was there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was he already working—oh, Fred Hammersley was there?

MARY CORSE: I think so.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He could have been. Well, that would be—that's the kind of work that's very close to what you've—

MARY CORSE: I know, but Fred Hammersley—actually what I found out—I did have—now I remember—did have a classroom. Even though I thought I was liking it because, well, I mean I like his work. It's not that. But for me, I realized he came from a different place. The way he got to a painting, and the things he was asking us to do were very different than the way I approached it. So I remember that being interesting, even though sometimes they could look almost similar, or very minimal bands or arches. He comes from a very different place. That's all I can say about it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did you have—but you didn't—but I think Robert Irwin was still teaching at night there at that point.

MARY CORSE: There's a guy up there without any clothes on, I think.

[They laugh.]

MARY CORSE: Oops!

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh dear. Shall we put it on pause?

MARY CORSE: Oh, shoot!

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'm recording again. So, do you remember taking classes with any of the sort of, quote, Light artists? I mean, certainly, I know Irwin was teaching there about that time, but maybe you didn't get a class with him. I don't know.

MARY CORSE: No, I didn't.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—but you were friends with Doug Wheeler, I understand?

MARY CORSE: Doug Wheeler and I weren't really friends. No, we weren't friends.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, I thought he said something about your being friends, whether it was through his wife, or—

MARY CORSE: I knew his wife.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: I knew his wife. I knew her very well, but I didn't really see Doug. And I never went to their place. Doug and I weren't friends until much, much, much later.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, okay. So, tell me about the—so did you know what he was up to? Because your work—you both are coming up with this light work at almost the same time.

MARY CORSE: Our work is actually very different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, no, I'm not saying it's the same, at all. I'm just saying, I mean, just interest in light is obviously in the air in Los Angeles, or was—

MARY CORSE: I don't know, to me it came right out of the history of painting. It was the obvious next step. If you think of Josef Albers, you know, it's the next step. It's about light. It's about after-tones, overtones. It's not about—it's about the—for me, the subtle, the unseen. That stuff. [… –MC] I didn't get it through logic. But if you look at my work after the abstract, and da, da, da, da, around 1964 I got very minimal with red. And then there was one more painting. The paintings got shaped. There was one painting where I was starting to put light in it. In '64, I put little speckles that you can buy at the art supply store, very, very, fine. It was pre—before the glass beads.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Before the glass beads, mm-hmm [affirmative].

MARY CORSE: Before the glass beads, I'd put this little mica, the silvery stuff in the blue. And it was a shaped canvas, and then the next one—so that was the blue, that was the last color painting, light blue. And the next one, the same shape was all white. And it was really getting the light there. See, the light came out of putting that in—the idea was coming. Putting the sparkly stuff in the blue and then it went to white. I was trying to get light.

And the other thing that started early then, too, is around the outside of the shape was an—indented, under-painted. When I look back—because now I have these paintings—I call them the *Inner Band* paintings. The inner band was way back then. It's just like the L.A. County [Museum of Art] has that one that's a shape. It's a hexagram, white with one unpainted band down the middle. It's a pre-inner band [1964 –MC]. It's like I've been doing the same—it's interesting how each painting grows out of the other painting.

And if you look back—when I looked back, because we brought up the early work, that's when I realized—that I thought, "Oh, my god. I've been painting the same painting for over 40 years. It just keeps moving around." So the paintings were shaped, and the white, getting to the light. And then the shaped canvas then came off the wall into those columns that I did, two triangular columns facing each other. And there again was the inner band. It was actual space. Three inches between the two white. So I was questioning coming off the wall, three-dimensional. It was like the same—I had done a diamond painting, or you know, shape on the wall like this—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

MARY CORSE: —and the columns were—then that painting then came off the wall, then it went back on the wall with the all-white, and I added the Plexiglas, the space. So I made these forms, the square—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's when you did the Plexiglas floating boxes.

MARY CORSE: […–MC] I started doing the squares. They were about three inches thick, white and then with Plexiglas in front. They went on the wall.

There's something I should tell you, but I don't think I should do it on tape.

But anyway, they went on the wall. So they were like, okay, so the white then again, and then I just thought, "Oh, there's got to be light." I was making it white, whiter, and so the first light piece was just like those. It went on the wall. It wasn't free-standing. I made its own—it had its own wall, where the lights were all encased. You couldn't see them. And it was built into that, so it was like a painting. I called them *Light Paintings*. It didn't matter that they weren't made out of paint. It was about more—"What is a painting?" Interested me. "What is a painting? Why do human beings make paintings?" More than that it's made out of paint. It's what it does. So, I called them *Light Paintings*. So it was a form—that was the first one. That was the first.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How many of those did you make? Very complex, it seemed to me.

MARY CORSE: Which ones?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, especially those Plexiglas boxes of white with the two—

MARY CORSE: The hanging ones?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I guess, yes. It comes off the wall then—and then they're hanging in front of the wall.

MARY CORSE: Oh, then I'm—so I made that light piece look like it was hanging on the wall.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right, but you made your own free-standing wall.

MARY CORSE: And then I wanted to make them free-standing. Then I took them off that wall even, made them two-sided. So free on the floor, like, say, six feet, 10 inches deep, hanging with wires. All the wires went up to the ceiling. Did you—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I've never seen one of those.

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's a—I've seen—

MARY CORSE: We have photos. There's some on the website, the big light box. But now it had white and had Plexiglas on both sides. Started on the one side, started on the wall, no light, just white. And then to get brighter, I thought, "Oh, we'll make it out of light." And [inaudible] light. And then we go to "Oh, it doesn't have to be on the wall. It can be free-standing." And it should be. So then it comes off the wall, free-standing, hanging from the ceiling. You don't see the wires—this stuff, transparent wire. But then after that six-foot, it was like, "Oh, you know, we don't need those wires up there." So then I—I'm going, "Okay, I'm going to get rid of the wires."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Can we just pause for a second? When you made this six-foot one that was free-standing, that didn't have the wall behind it. It's Plexiglas on both sides with a white light box in the center. And it's hanging from the electrical wires. Suspended by how many—like—it's hanging off the floor.

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's hanging, and so it's really just like light in space, floating in space. Now that's a big thing to make. How many of those did you make and how did you make them?

MARY CORSE: Well, that one—I have one. It's still down there in Beverly Hills. I should show you the photographs, because then like I say, the wires that it was hanging—I was trying to make a—I wanted to make a free object. I was still looking for an objective truth, I think. I didn't want art to be subjective. I wanted there to be an objective reality. I wanted to make an object with soul, you know. So, the wires were in the way. I wanted it to be freer. So I had to figure out how to get rid of them. So that's when I realized that—a Tesla coil. I set up an electrical field, and I put it in the wall. So I don't—so I could get rid of a lot of the wires, and it was freer. So, see how that came right out of the other? Each piece comes out of the piece before that—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But my question really is how did you figure that out? I mean you're a painter, not an electronics major. So how did you figure out how to physically make these large Plexiglas light boxes floating, and then within the front of a wall, with Tesla coils? How did you figure all that out?

MARY CORSE: You just know what you want to make it—make, and start with—figure out what works. You know, one could be about Plexiglas, so I find out, and then you look at it, how thick or thin and what works. Will it hold its strength?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, did you find something—

MARY CORSE: And I want the lights suspended. Actually I worked for months on that six-footer that's down there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

MARY CORSE: Inside of it. So I have this—I could show you pictures, but I guess pictures aren't in here.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I just want to know—did you get someone to help you, is what I'm asking?

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you find—like ask—

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Of course, you didn't know Jack Brogan at that point.

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So did you have—

MARY CORSE: No, I was 20-something.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: Well—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you have an—you didn't have an electronics assistant or something?

MARY CORSE: No, but finally in order to get the parts to build the bigger—the bigger Tesla coil, I made a lot of smaller ones. But in order to get the parts from Edmund Scientific to build the bigger one, I had to go and study some physics, because they make you pass a test before they'll [laughs] send you the parts. Did you ever see that film of the *White Light*?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: I have the film where I'm working on it to get those parts. I still have that thing. I keep it for fun. See, it's over there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, my gosh.

MARY CORSE: Yeah, I made that. It is a trip.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It is. It is. It looks like your mad scientist corner.

MARY CORSE: Yeah, I was the mad scientist, the artist. Well, it's always interested me, you know, this right/left brain thing that they say, the intuitive and the logical, the artist and the scientist. And I don't think they have to be so separate, the sides of our brain.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No.

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Not at all.

MARY CORSE: So they can both sort of work together, because finally physics is metaphysics. And it's not much different, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—so you're really on your own little path of discovery here, where you're trying to make these electronic light paintings. And I know you've said you weren't influenced by anybody, but there must have been an atmosphere of permissiveness for you to move from these paintings you were making to working in Plexiglas, and—

MARY CORSE: Well, I wasn't—it was what the painting needed.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: It needed that space. I'd already gone to the shape. It was what the painting needs. That's what's interesting. It tells you. It becomes a conversation with what I call—and I said before—an abstract entity. So it becomes a conversation in a way. The painting tells you. It informs you. You inform it. It informs you, you know? And it—so that's—I'm just having a conversation with that, in a way. So it says, "Oh, I need to be shiny. Oh, I need to be made with light. Oh, I need to be—" Then, like I was saying—so I made these light pieces still looking for the objective truth. Then when I was studying the physics to get these parts in the—I was studying the quantum physics. I think something—I was so amazed. I was so shocked that there was no linear reality. And I started to understand in a different way. And I started to open up to the subjective because finally, they say, it's a subjective universe. You can't track the wave and the particle at the same time or whatever, you know—ambiguity is—we live in ambiguity. Whether we can—and that's for me important to express in the paintings. So somehow the paintings tell me that. They—I think I got a little side-tracked. But—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, that's good. And during this time, again—did you befriend any of the other artists who were working also, similarly involved with light? Did you find any kind of support there?

MARY CORSE: All I know, is I'll remember one thing. I was making these big light boxes. And now I do remember something. And those guys were having—John Coplans was here, and [James] Turrell, and Wheeler. And they were all—and then they had this show in Pasadena that—you know. I had these big light boxes and stuff. And I thought—he didn't, you know, not even a phone call. No interest in—you know, I was just a—what, I don't know. There was no—I remember thinking, "Those aren't—" You know—you know, I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did they know what you were doing?

MARY CORSE: That's what I mean, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, they didn't know?

MARY CORSE: No, except that's the thing I was going to say off—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Just say it.

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean this is—come on.

MARY CORSE: Nope.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Come on, get it out. You've been sitting on it all these years. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Anyway—anyway, that was it. I was just the kid, I guess, to them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I have to say one thing, which is I know it's—it may or may not be correct. But you know, here you are, a woman, of course, and a very attractive young woman, very attractive, very young, blond.

MARY CORSE: I was, yeah, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And there's a video of you that I saw. And I thought, well, that would have been an interesting additional piece of your story from—in terms of working in the 1960s, when it was so hard for women to have any credibility at all.

MARY CORSE: Well, it was, and also for me it was even worse because I didn't want to, like—some "Women's Lib" thing. People would want to put me in shows and everything. But I didn't want to make—I didn't want to show the work in a political—I didn't want to make it political. So I didn't do all-woman shows. You know, and they didn't like me for that. And the guys didn't like me. [Laughs.] Even though I've definitely—for Women's Lib, look, I raised two kids on my own, and I'm independent. Women's Lib should love me for doing it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, this is earlier. This is in the late '60s, before you had your—

MARY CORSE: Well, I had the kids in '70. Yeah, no, this was still in the late '60s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so you felt like you were not really accepted by the women—support—

MARY CORSE: Well, no, I felt bad that I couldn't—you know, that I didn't want to do the political thing. My politics was about living my life that way and—you know. But I didn't want to make the art about politics. Like do a Women's Lib show. So, that's it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and there were lots of those as of 1970. I wanted to ask you one more thing that I didn't, which is that in 1964 apparently you started studying Tibetan Buddhism. And how did that affect your path?

MARY CORSE: Well, of course it affected my path, because that and—but all my studies of, you know, [P. D.] Ouspensky, physics guys, and I—the Tibetan Buddhist. It was Tibetan Buddhism. And they seemed to be the most intelligent about the ego, and the development of the ego, and state of mind—you know. They're very brilliant. So, of course I learned a lot and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where did you study this?

MARY CORSE: Just on my own. That's what I mean when you say, "I study." I studied on my own.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So you studied the Tibetan Buddhism. And you went back—but you went back to USC [University of Southern California], I think, to study physics, didn't you?

MARY CORSE: Oh, then I took—I did. That was—yeah, I did take a physics thing there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In 1967?

MARY CORSE: It's hard to remember all of this.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did you—and when you took these courses in physics—

MARY CORSE: Well, I was—that's what I—what were you saying?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did it help you understand more about making work with electricity, and light, and all of that?

MARY CORSE: Well, that's what I was now—earlier was going to say, when I was even on my own studying—yet trying to understand quantum physics, and it was so amazing. I think it was absorbing, and that's when I then went away from the technology. I thought, "Man is not technology. Let's go back to the—" You know, I went back to the brush stroke. I didn't make a logical decision, but I found myself all of a sudden doing these large grid—that's when I discovered the glass beads, and I wanted to go back to two-dimension. I wanted to be less in the—I no longer was looking for an objective truth. So then I wanted to understand more, you know, what was. And paintings—I learn from the paintings. So you get a—you know, I did the grid painting, and then it tells you, like I say, it informs me. I inform it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, when I did this recent book on Craig Kauffman, at a certain point he found that he just couldn't go any further with his Plexiglas work. He really just wanted to go back into the studio and paint. And it was very almost painful for him to make that transition. Because of course he'd had such success with the other work. Did you find it difficult to go back to painting after you'd been doing so much Plexiglas work?

MARY CORSE: No, it wasn't even a question, or it wouldn't come up. It was just the next painting. Or this is what I need. I need to go back to a flatter way of getting light. That's what I wanted. I wanted to go away from the three-dimension. I wanted to go back to the two-dimensional. Back—because it had one less dimension. And I now realized that the objective reality wasn't the whole picture, and so—in the painting. So I went back to painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now in 1967—by 1967, you've done these Plexiglas boxes and you're in the process of re-transitioning to your painting. And that's when you meet Dick Bellamy.

MARY CORSE: Oh, yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And it says here that Nick Wilder introduced you to Dick Bellamy. Did you ever show with Nick Wilder?

MARY CORSE: No, Nick saw my work. I forget why. But he saw my work, and he said he didn't know what to do with me. He saw the light boxes. And so he brought Dick Bellamy. And the funny thing is, though, the night—they just came and knocked on my door, and actually we had just—I had just painted the studio floor silver, and the—and I was into something else. And I actually made them come back the next day. [Laughs.] I think that really impressed Dick. He wasn't used to artists—I didn't know who Dick Bellamy was, you know, or anything. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where did you live at the time?

MARY CORSE: That was on—downtown L.A. I had a big studio.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And whereabouts?

MARY CORSE: Beverly and Hoover.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's still at that studio?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, that studio was a great studio. Huge.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you painted the floor silver? Why? [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: I'm hanging the light boxes, silver floor, and the paintings. And, you know, it was cement. It was a studio floor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So then you did meet with Dick Bellamy. What was his reaction?

MARY CORSE: Oh, I did meet with Bellamy. He was—it was great. And then it went on for years, and years, and years. And the first time he came, he was amazed. He almost bumped into—you know, he's like so affected, he was [laughs]—he was great.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He liked the work so much?

MARY CORSE: He loved it. He liked the work and—you know, wanted to be my dealer. The only thing is, Dick wasn't a real kind of regular dealer at all. So—and I was very naïve.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did he ever sell any of your work?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, he did. He put in all this equipment and—oh, yeah, he did. And they were always very good collections.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so here you are in New York. Not you, but your art.

MARY CORSE: Well, in 1970 the Guggenheim did hang that piece, too. Two pieces, [inaudible].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So suddenly your work is in New York City and—

MARY CORSE: Right. L.A., nothing. Dick though, he immediately said, "Okay." So he was my dealer, or whatever that meant, later. You know, he supported—he sold stuff and supported a lot of stuff. And then he wanted me to—you know, he says, "You have to work and struggle until you're 40." [Laughs.] When I was 40, he put me on his list. I mean, this went on forever, Dick. [… –MC] But before that it was a very interesting relationship because Dick looked at art in a way that people don't. I mean he would come and lay on the floor and stare at a painting for hours. And, you know, he was—he liked the art. I don't know, but anyway. That's enough of that. Dick Bellamy was great. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he got your work in the New York art world. So, when you showed in New York, what was the response critically and through collectors to your work?

MARY CORSE: Well, when I first met Dick he was at Noah Goldowsky's, a tiny little place. And then he went down to Park Street. Yeah, he showed some stuff there. But he didn't really—I didn't really have a show in New York. Did I?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I don't know. Where was his gallery then? I don't remember.

MARY CORSE: He kept moving around. No, that's what I mean. He wasn't going to show me until later.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, so he would sell your work but he didn't give you an actual show?

[They laugh.]

And so you're having this sort of this tremendous interest in your work, but not really being supported critically in New York either.

MARY CORSE: He had a big fear of artists being successful and taking over too soon and losing it. That's why he loved it that I was struggling and—you know. He liked that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because he was afraid that he might lose you as a—he might lose you to another gallery?

MARY CORSE: I always thought he was afraid I might lose my artistic thread.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, right.

MARY CORSE: And be carried away by—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, I see.

MARY CORSE: —a lot of sales.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: And in a way, it was sort of helpful. I did have to stick to the art for longer, you know? I mean, I survived, but it wasn't like now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well, interesting, okay. So you survived. Were you able to support yourself making your art, or did your mom help you, or—

MARY CORSE: No, my mom. It was over with her.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: Yeah, and I was divorced, raising two kids, so.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let's back up a bit. So here you are, a beautiful young woman making art in Los Angeles, and who did you date when you were in Chouinard and what led to your marriage?

MARY CORSE: Oh, well I met my husband, first husband, Andy Eason. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Andy Eason, mm-hmm, [affirmative].

MARY CORSE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And we had two children.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And spell his last name? E—

MARY CORSE: E-A-S-O-N.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what did he do at the time?

MARY CORSE: He was a student in advertising.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how old were both of you when you got married?

MARY CORSE: I don't know, 22?

[They laugh.]

In my early 20s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you got married, and you had two—

MARY CORSE: I had my first son, I think I was 26.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what was your first son's name?

MARY CORSE: Ivan Eason, and then two years later I had Leif.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how, L-I-E-F?

MARY CORSE: Wait, is that how you spell? [Laughs.] L-E-I-F—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well it's—

MARY CORSE: L-E-I-F.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: It's either L-I-E-F or it's L-E-A-F. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Oh, no. […–MC] Yeah, Leif.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how many years later did you have him?

MARY CORSE: Two.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you were 26, and you were 28, and you had these two sons. And is that when you—that's when you moved to Topanga?

MARY CORSE: Yep.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: With Andy, you both moved here?

MARY CORSE: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Is this where you moved?

MARY CORSE: We built this.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You built this together?

MARY CORSE: It was just—yeah. We built this.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In 1970. And how long were you married?

MARY CORSE: My first time, I think he was five when we divorced. When would he be five? 26, 27, 28, 29, 30. When I was around 30 I divorced.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, how many years then were you married?

MARY CORSE: I forget when we were married.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, no I'm just—so you don't remember what year you married? Do you remember what year you divorced?

MARY CORSE: I think I was 30. I don't remember the year.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, and then you divorced, and do you remember why?

MARY CORSE: Hmm. [Laughs.] Things weren't working out.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so here you—so okay, so you divorce and you're in Topanga raising these two sons. And how are you supporting yourself and the two sons? If you don't mind my asking. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Well, I made a few sales with Dick. And different things would come along. I had a National Endowment [for the Arts grant] there once. But that was—I don't know, I don't remember when that was. But—you know, and I'd make a sale. And I didn't have a lot of money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did Andy help you?

MARY CORSE: Not that much, no. Not much.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it was a—would it be correct to say it was a struggle?

MARY CORSE: It is correct to say it was a struggle.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now how did you—did you ever teach?

MARY CORSE: Well, I loved it. I was a happy person.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you ever teach?

MARY CORSE: No, because I felt that if I had a job and raised two kids, when would I paint?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: So, I didn't.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you—looking back on it today, you say—what would you say about it looking back on it today?

MARY CORSE: Looking back on it today? I think that this property here really saved me. And I'm glad my payments were so inexpensive at the time. Because here, this land in Topanga made it so I could work and raise kids, you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You said earlier you have three acres here.

MARY CORSE: Yeah, and it was very cheap. I think my, you know—very cheap. So, that was helpful.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, looking back on it—it's like, here you are with all this talent, and all this passion, and some initial recognition, and how did you find the ability to just keep going?

MARY CORSE: It's like when there's something you want to do. It's to see the next painting. You know, if I couldn't work it would be much worse. No, no. I have to be painting because it had the most meaning, the most satisfaction, you know. I have to be painting even now. I mean, you'd think I'd be sick of it now. Now it's even more intense!

[They laugh.]

It's true.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I noticed that—now during this time of the '60s to the '70s, of course, it's a time of tremendous, really a lot of change in the climate in Los Angeles. I mean, L.A. really sort of comes into its own in the '60s as an art center. And in the '70s is a whole new movement towards conceptual art and performance art. How aware were you—

MARY CORSE: Right, and they opened MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That was 1983.

MARY CORSE: Oh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But they opened LICA. They opened LICA in '73. And the L.A. Institute of Contemporary Art was sort of like the proto-Museum of Contemporary Art in a way. But there was—how involved were you with the L.A. art scene at the time?

MARY CORSE: Not much. I was up here with the two kids. Plus, after working on the *White Light Paintings* for 10 years, and this very ethereal—I found myself needing to make these *Black Earth Paintings*. So I found my need to ground, or something. I guess I was—I found myself going in the mountains, and looking for flat places, and taking a mold off the earth, and making these *Black Earth* pieces—paintings. And it would also—in order to do that, since I had been doing an eight-foot-square—I think eight-foot-square was my smallest painting [… –MC]. Mostly I worked eight and nine feet. So when I went from the *White Light Painting* to do the *Black Earth Painting*, to me it had to be eight feet. So I thought, "Oh, I'll just build a kiln." So, I would go all around to the [… –MC] kiln builders and find out how to do it. And they said, "Oh it will never work. You're going to need 70 burners in the floor," and everything.

But little by little I found this sort of Chinese method where you circulate the air, and so I built this—I started building this huge kiln. Big enough for an eight-foot-square tile. I have photographs of it. The stack is still there outside, on top of all this stuff—that big stack? And that's what this steel beam through the studio—would lift the tiles up and roll it out into the kiln. Huge kiln floor would roll out, and I'd lower these *Black Earth* pieces. It was quite a production. But that kiln worked so well. I could balance it everywhere. I mean, people said it would never work. I made it—see four-foot, like over here?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: I made four-foot no problem. And I remember Bellamy had gotten me backing, I think it was Robert Scull, somebody, to make the first eight-foot. And I figured it out. And I figured out what was needed. This eight-foot kiln—

[Audio break.]

MARY CORSE:—shelf was the secret. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Wow.

MARY CORSE: But then I didn't have quite the next 10,000 [dollars], the next—you know, to buy the next cement shelf. So I never completed it, but I think I have figured out how to make an eight-foot-square *Black Earth*. But then I also always had worked on the paintings, I had worked on the grid. So I made grids, large

pieces with grids of the four-foot tiles.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

MARY CORSE: *Black Earth*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, did you ever get in contact with John Mason, who had done—

MARY CORSE: I loved John Mason's work, but no. I never did.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and he'd done so much monumental sculpture that way with clay.

MARY CORSE: He had different issues though. I had to do flat.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: Oh, I felt perfectly confident I could figure it out.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's an interesting point. You didn't feel like you had to go get advice from other people who had done this.

MARY CORSE: No one had done it. Who was I going to ask?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, like John Mason, who'd done all this huge—

MARY CORSE: He didn't do flat.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, he'd done—

MARY CORSE: Which is very different. Trying to get something flat—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: —not to crack—have to—and to mold it off the earth, which leaves it a little bumpy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: All right.

MARY CORSE: So, what I did is—first of all, I had to design these kiln shelves that are high-fire, which—I'd go to the ceramics place and they'd say, "No, it's not going to work. These are our biggest ones." So I thought, "Okay, forget them." I had to make my own kiln shelves. And I figured out—I figured out how to make the eight-foot one. You put zinc needles in there and it would hold it together. But the four-footers—I made the four-footers. It wasn't easy. I had this equipment. But I made the high-fire kiln shelf. And then I would go in the mountains and make this mold. On top of the car with a friend, and we'd tie it down, and it was heavy, and we'd trail it down the mountain.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Unbelievable.

MARY CORSE: Bring it home. Turn it over. Pack it with this clay. And then, because it's bumpy, then we would—I figured out I'd put sand, solid sand. And then I'd—because it was going to go in the kiln, you couldn't put wood. So I'd stretch canvas over it. And then we devised this way—because this thing was really heavy by now—with a hook on the ceiling, to where I'd flip it up and slip it over really quick. So then the tile would be still on top of the sand and it would keep the bumps. So it wouldn't crack. And then we'd take the mold off like that. I would have this whole floor that was full of those. And I would let it dry really slow on sand, because I figured if it doesn't know that it's moving, it won't crack if I move it so slow. And it worked.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Unbelievable.

[They laugh.]

It's unbelievable.

MARY CORSE: That's before I hoisted it out to the kiln, and da, da, da. And then you roll the kiln floor in and it—you have to stack all those bricks, hundreds of bricks, and fire it for like three days. So here I'm up this dirt road, two kids there, firing this thing for three days.

I remember one time it was raining. And on the top there's a hole where the stack is. I was up on top trying to save the tiles, because it was starting to drip. Standing on top of this fire dragon, this eight-foot, ten-foot kiln up there trying to—I had one of those moments of consciousness, "Mary, what are you doing? It's raining quite

hard." You know?

[They laugh.]

And then I realized it was adventure. I like adventure. So, I fired the kiln and—[laughs].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Fantastic. How much does the four-foot tile weigh?

MARY CORSE: Probably a couple of hundred pounds.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So an eight-foot one would weigh like a thousand pounds?

MARY CORSE: It would be heavy.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you have any consciousness of the Land Art movement that was going on at the time?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, Michael Heizer, and yeah, I knew about his *Double Negative*, brilliant.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you responded to that when you were making the clay impressions of the earth.

MARY CORSE: I don't know when I knew about Michael Heizer. When did he do that piece?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Early '70s.

MARY CORSE: Early '70s, that's when I was molding the earth, early '70s, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I was thinking maybe you'd heard about working with the land that way. It might have had some little spark of connection for you.

MARY CORSE: Well, sometimes like even with the Light and Space artists, which obviously there's a kinship, even though—you know, our work is really—everybody's is really very different. But, I mean there was some stuff when you did see it you liked it, you know. Great, somebody got it. But I loved Irwin's work, and I loved Heizer, Michael Heizer, you know. But then you love all the artists, you know. I mean so many. Donald Judd—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, speaking of that—

MARY CORSE: I think Robert Morris I was looking at.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, that would make sense, too. And he was out here. A lot of those people, of course, were out here a lot in those days, too, teaching.

MARY CORSE: It's hard to remember because you look at a lot of the art. But yet it's all—and it's just like all the things you study. All the life you live. And it all sort of soaks in on the way I feel. It soaks in to your being and then you create something with that, with all of it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now around this time you get involved—you and Chris Burden are involved.

MARY CORSE: Around that time? Was it—was that when it was? In the '70s?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mid-'70s. Mid-'70s.

MARY CORSE: Oh, it was in the '70s, that was a long time ago. It was in the '70s, yeah. We were close friends for a few years, a couple of years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He lived with you?

MARY CORSE: Not really. He had his place in Venice on the boardwalk.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you were spending a lot of—

MARY CORSE: We'd go back and forth.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Spent a lot of time together.

MARY CORSE: We spent a long time together.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: For a couple of years, a few years?

MARY CORSE: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So this is a very formative time in his work, because it's the—he's doing the performances on—

MARY CORSE: He'd done the performances.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he's—he'd done performances, because he went—at UC Irvine. And he'd also had graduated—was doing—but anyway, he was very involved in his performance and sculptural work. [… –MC] Do you feel like there was any conversation in terms of influences, or support, or—

[… –MC]

MARY CORSE: Chris and I were attracted but very different. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, very different.

[… –MC]

But you had a longer career at that point. At that point, your career would have been more established. Well, your work.

MARY CORSE: No, no, no, no, no. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, yeah, in the '70s really, here you are with Chris Burden. But you hadn't really shown that much even though you had this relationship with Bellamy?

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Kind of a curious situation.

MARY CORSE: L.A. was not open to looking at my work. The few critics that did see it and wrote about it didn't really get it. But some in New York did. And the—who was that? This is one thing we'll have to add, who wrote for that—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Fidel Danieli wrote about your work.

MARY CORSE: Oh, yeah. Very good—very well.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And he was always a good critic.

MARY CORSE: And no, this was the one who wrote for the Guggenheim, for that show in 1970. He really got it too. But we'll have to add his name, okay, for sure?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. And I might be able to pull it up here in a minute. But we—I want to ask about Chris. Okay, so Chris did get a lot of notoriety certainly very early.

MARY CORSE: Oh yeah, he was totally famous.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did that have any knock-on effect in terms of people looking at your work? "We get to come look at Chris's work. We'll come look at Mary's work."

MARY CORSE: No, not at all. Not at all.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, now the women's movement is in full flower. Did it help at all?

MARY CORSE: The women's movement, like I say, I felt bad. I—you know [laughs]—who knows, they probably hated me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you weren't getting any help—

MARY CORSE: But I didn't want to make it political.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No help from the women's movement. No help from Chris's fame. So people still aren't paying attention to your work?

MARY CORSE: Suddenly—Dick had people, you know, there were major collectors that were becoming aware of it. Not in California but, I mean, Dick was helpful. Mostly I worked. Yeah, no, I didn't have a lot of shows.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you were—but he was selling—placing some work?

MARY CORSE: Some. Little bit.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So what do you think you and Chris had in common?

MARY CORSE: What did we have in common? Oh, he was very warm, magnetic. We had a lot of magnetism, I guess I would say.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And now he lives in Topanga as well. [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Well, I introduced him to Topanga.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's right. You introduced him to Topanga, and here he is still, okay. Well, that went on for a number of years. And after that ended was that—did you—was that a difficult thing when that ended?

MARY CORSE: That was—I was ready for it to end.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it ends, and then you're—and you're busy with your *Black Earth Paintings*. And it says here—so that would be the mid '70s. You do the *Black Earth Paintings* in clay in [the mid '70s –MC]. And in 1982 you would go back to *White Light Paintings* after all those years of working with the kiln and developing the black ceramic surfaces, you know. What led you to go back to the *White Light Paintings*?

MARY CORSE: I think I understood them. I had a—I understood them more after the earth. And I wanted that—one thing when I was doing the *Black Earth* that I really liked is there was no artist's ego, no lines. It was made out of the earth, fired, clay. It was clay—you know, it was earth. It was molded off the earth. There was no artist ego in a sense. And then I guess, going back to the painting again, something about that act of painting itself. The brush

and, not necessarily ego, but still I think then I could go back with less ego and more immediacy. And just going like this [laughs]—this is me painting with brushes to help me think.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's interesting you would talk about "go back with less ego." You know, was that a concern for you in trying to create these paintings of white—?

MARY CORSE: Well, I was trying to—in the minimal art, I'm not—I don't know if I'm a minimal artist, but in reductive, more reductive. I wanted to get rid of everything. That was—that wasn't necessary. That didn't have meaning, but not meaning of something in particular, just meaning itself. Didn't have consciousness or didn't have—I didn't want any artist trip.

Like if you're going to allow subjectivity, I mean, that doesn't mean that we can just be on our personal side trip that doesn't relate to the bigger collective or the meaning of what it is to be a human being. You know, it could be like our psychosis. As I think there's a fine line between psychosis and art. Sometimes people think psychotic behavior, "Oh, that's so creative." But for me to be really art, it's the opposite. It has to express the possible sanity of the human being.

And so I would try to work at getting rid of all personality things that are going to influence—get in the way. Just like when you're painting, that's why I don't want too much brush stroke, you know, you don't want to—and when you're painting, you can actually tell the difference. And as far as your painting, you want to be there doing what has to be done. And if you start decorating or think, "Oh maybe a little stroke will look good over there or there," you know, you start getting your personal in there, for me it doesn't work. You want to just have what the painting wants. What it needs. What it, like—what it tells you it wants. Not what you try to—because of your own personal taste—put in it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What is the relationship in that regard to an artist's—to the proportions of the lines that you use in your paintings? There are these bands—

MARY CORSE: Proportion, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —these bands, and of course people have talked about John McLaughlin being a consummate L.A. geometric abstract painter. Is that something you ever looked at or thought about in terms of the proportion of your bands?

MARY CORSE: Proportion is almost the whole thing. The proportion is so critical. And that's what really speaks to you. I mean, I think that certain proportions actually realign my psyche when you look at them. They put your psyche in order. And those are what I search for. The proportions—I've done paintings that were, say, 12 feet by 28 feet, and before that I would do a drawing on the wall. They're rolled up over here. I still have them. Like that whole wall would be a drawing of—it was the *Arch* paintings—just because I couldn't quite get that last couple inches of how big that arch should be in relation to that—I actually had to feel it. So I would do drawings just to get that last couple inches. You know, where it goes. So proportion is it. It's [inaudible].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you have to actually see it before you can paint it. Like when you do the drawings, you're actually seeing where the proportions are going to go.

MARY CORSE: On those—on those, yeah. You have to—yeah. And lots of time I'll do tape drawings on the wall, or pen—see all these lines?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Just to feel the proportion, yeah. I never order a frame without feeling the proportion first, or unless I already know, you know, those lines. The proportion is the—yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, just to—did you ever find a relationship for yourself with John McLaughlin's paintings?

MARY CORSE: I love his paintings, you know. For me, I had to be confrontational human-size more than smaller. When a painting is smaller, for me it's harder to get beyond the object quality and more the—I want the experience. So the bigger paintings are almost like an environment, even though they're still flat and two-dimensional. They're not three-dimensional yet. They can—you can move around in them. Like, for example, that painting on the wall over there is 42 feet long.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Oh, my god. And where's that going to go?

MARY CORSE: It has a couple of places that it might go, but first we're going to—next month put all the color work down at Ace [Gallery]. I've never really shown the color work. We're not really showing it. We're hanging it yet, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's an interesting question as well. Because of course one of the prominent art personalities who moves to Los Angeles in the 1970s is Douglas Chrismas, who opens his gallery out in Venice back when it was out on the pier. And when did you meet him?

MARY CORSE: It might have been at that courageous show of Michael Heizer's that he did down there in Venice [*Displaced/Replaced Mass*, 1977]. Where he took the whole wall of the building off and moved the—those boulders in and cut those huge—did you see that show?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I wasn't here then.

MARY CORSE: Oh, well he did this great show where two of those huge boulders—and he cut big pits in the floor and took the whole front of the building off to get them in. I thought, "Ah. He's courageous."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, no, he was an extraordinary force in Los Angeles when he arrived and started supporting that kind of work.

MARY CORSE: And he showed those early Turrells over there, too. That was the first—well, was that the first one of those I'd seen of Turrell's? Or, maybe.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could be. But they had—but he certainly was an early supporter of that kind of thing. But your relationship with him doesn't date to that point, does it? When do you start—

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —working with Doug? Is Doug your first—I don't have a—

MARY CORSE: Well, Richard Bellamy—I was working with him.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But in L.A., is—was Douglas Chrismas your first L.A. dealer? No, it can't be. Yes?

[… –MC]

MARY CORSE: There was a show at MOCA, you know, I think '85. And Doug saw that, and that was the beginning.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, well then we have to backtrack a little.

MARY CORSE: But I had met him at Heizer's, uh-huh [affirmative].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you thought—and you knew he was an interesting dealer?

MARY CORSE: Not at Heizer's, I met him somewhere—oh yeah. He was interested in my work, put it that way.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's a nice long relationship. Now after you go back to the white paintings, you say—it says in 1983 you execute your first *Black Light Painting*. Tell me about that.

MARY CORSE: Oh, when did I do that?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: '83.

MARY CORSE: That was the first black one with the glass beads.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you haven't really said in this interview—

MARY CORSE: After—oh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —I've read it before, but clarify on the interview about the moment when you—how do you discover the glass beads and how do you integrate them into your painting?

MARY CORSE: Well, it was when I was going—I wanted to be less technical. I didn't want to use the Plexiglas and the lights. I wanted to actually have something that I could paint with. Put in the painting. And I wanted to put light in the painting. And how am I going to get light in the painting without any lights? So I tried Murano paint, I would look around, da, da, da, da. Try this, try that, reflective. And then it struck me. I was driving down the road at that time, and the sun was behind me, and this road was lighting up, and I thought, "Oh, glass beads. That's the stuff that's in the roads." So I immediately went and got some. And what I liked about them is they're micro-glass spheres, which prism the light. They don't reflect. It's not a two dimensional reflect back, but it's a prism that creates a triangle between the light, the surface, and the viewer. So that's what I liked, because it also allowed the other thing that I was working on in bringing the viewer into the painting. So now the viewer, as you move, the painting would change. So—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that when the scale really expanded? When you started doing those?

MARY CORSE: Right, then the scale got bigger, at 35 [feet]. So you'd walk by and it would change and what one person would see at one end would be different. So it was obvious that the art was not on the wall. It was in our perception.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And I would say—did you start those in about—it says here you started them in '73? Adding the glass beads?

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: '71—I'm sorry.

MARY CORSE: No, no, that Guggenheim show was in '70.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: '68 begins *White Light*, '68. So in '68.

MARY CORSE: I think '68 was the first glass bead. When I—when I was realizing—starting to go away from the—from the technical. I started looking for something, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So really, since '68 you started doing the glass beads and expanding the scale. And you knew—and by expanding the scale you felt like you were really moving almost into an environmental kind of work. Would it be correct to say that? Or were you aware of the idea of an environmental approach toward work as opposed to discrete paintings—

MARY CORSE: Oh, yeah, right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that the right word, would you use that word?

MARY CORSE: And when, I think that was—when was that? '80s, it's so hard to remember dates.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'm not really meaning dates. Seems to me that after you start with the glass bead work that you expand the scale.

MARY CORSE: But the scale—I'm trying to think of when it got really big, like they were all 35 feet, 20—when was that? Because I was using—it was expanding all along, right. I was learning from the paintings too. [Laughs.] I think I'll have a sip of coffee.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Have some more coffee. We'll take a break in a moment but let's just—before we do that let's close—at least let's get as far as the first show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, which opens here in 1983. Your show is 1984, very soon after it opened. Who organized that show?

MARY CORSE: Julia Brown? Was that that show? Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And that is your first solo museum show?

MARY CORSE: I wouldn't say it was a solo. It was solo—we all had our huge space, but there were—it wasn't the whole museum or anything.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what did you show in that—put in that show?

MARY CORSE: I showed *Earth*—I showed *Earth* pieces and two *Grids*—two early *Grids*. So I mixed the beads and the—I had the *White Paintings* that each had their separate rooms. And then I had the *Earth*—the tiles also.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And do you remember how it was received?

MARY CORSE: People liked the show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: They liked it. They liked it. They liked it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So finally, finally getting your due. [Laughs.] And now we're in the mid '80s. And let's take a break, if you don't mind—

MARY CORSE: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —because we have a gap in the chronology. So it's a good time to take a break, and we'll reorganize ourselves.

[END OF CARD ONE.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp interviewing Mary Corse at the artist's studio in Topanga, California on August 10th, 2013 for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number two. Well, Mary, when we last spoke, minutes ago, we were talking about your show at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and did that have effect on your—the reception of your work? Is it after that that you developed a relationship with Doug Chrismas?

MARY CORSE: It is. That's where Doug saw my work and called me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And how did your relationship with Doug evolve after that?

MARY CORSE: Let's see. That was in '85? We did some work. We did some shows, and he did a 30-year survey here in L.A. and in New York. He had a space in New York. I forget what year that was.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That was—and by this time, we might point out that Dick Bellamy is no longer in business.

MARY CORSE: Well, Dick Bellamy and Doug were together for a while, but then Doug wanted the whole thing. And I needed the money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, and this would be—

MARY CORSE: And anyway, Doug, you know—what?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No. Go ahead. Tell me.

MARY CORSE: Doug was doing a lot, you know. That's why. Anyway, Doug was doing a lot. Plus, he had the money.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And do you remember how much your paintings were selling for at that point? Early, like the mid-'80s. A range, obviously, because they're obviously very big or, you know, a variety of sizes.

MARY CORSE: Right. I don't. I would be making a guess to tell you the truth, but—you know, Dick was happy with whatever happened. There was never a problem with it—with Dick. Like, when I started working with Doug, he was fine with it, you know. Dick had no problems with anything. Wonderful person, you know, and he still continued and, you know—so, that was never a problem.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, they worked well together.

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: Dick wasn't doing that much, you know. I mean, he was mostly Mark di Suvero then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: You know, Mark was, sort of, keeping him real busy. I mean, he always had a painting of mine up out there—big painting out there at Long Island, at their place. So, he was always supportive. You know, Dick was great—miss him. He was great.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He is a much beloved dealer. I have to say that—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —among artists anyway.

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You know, you just never hear anything except wonderful things about him from artists, and Doug, by that point, really had established his—a big reputation here in Los Angeles. Now, he did a 30-year survey of your work in Los Angeles. Would that have been at the Wilshire Boulevard location?

MARY CORSE: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. So, Doug Chrismas, at that point, had a huge space that he still has in the old Desmond Building—

MARY CORSE: Right. Right, it was there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —which is a building with really extraordinary light—the way the light comes in the windows of that space is really exceptional, I think, for a gallery.

MARY CORSE: Beautiful space. You know, we did a 30-year survey of the whole space—huge, huge space.

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Before you had your 30-year survey with Doug at Ace Gallery in Los Angeles and New York, you had started what you call the configurations—*Black Arch* and the configurations—paintings that are the *Arch* paintings?

MARY CORSE: Oh, the *Arch* paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: I did that. Yes, I painted the *Arch* paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, those are in 1989—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and how did those develop, sort of, a transition away from just the—from the bars?

MARY CORSE: Oh. Well, the configurations would change. I mean, I started—I did the *Grid* series, the grids, and then the grid opened up, and for a while, I only had unpainted squares in the corners. And I think that was in 1970. That's what the Guggenheim has. That's when I did the first beveled one, where I beveled them back, and so, those were—had squares in the corners. And then, the squares in the corners—then I did—became bands, right? And I also did the arches. Right. The—and the *Arch* paintings is actually where I discovered the inner band—you know, *White Arch Painting*. That was the first inner band—was in an *Arch* painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Meaning the central element between the two pillars on either side.

MARY CORSE: Like that band that appears and disappears. As you move by it, it appears and disappears.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But in the *Arch* period, there's a lintel over the top.

MARY CORSE: There's an arch—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: —and in the middle of that was a band.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Also, the *White Light Arch*—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —with an inner band that appeared and disappeared.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: So, that's where the first *Arches* were white, and then, I did *Black Arch*—a single black arch. And then, it just grew to being longer. It was a multiple arch.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: It was 28 feet long—multiple—like it had four arches. It grew.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] And shortly, in 1993, you were awarded a Resident Art—a Resident Artist Fellowship at the Fondation Cartier in Paris.

MARY CORSE: That was wonderful.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'll bet.

MARY CORSE: In Jouy-en-Josas. It's about 20 minutes outside Paris.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Country—little country place. I had a—you know, they had a hundred acres of a sculpture garden. It was like a park—Cartier, and they had a studio. And there was a restaurant there. It was fantastic.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How long were you there?

MARY CORSE: Three months.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how much work did you produce?

MARY CORSE: I produced. I had a studio and an apartment, and I took my assistant with me for sanding. And so, I kept painting. And I know, I was even doing like 15, 20-foot paintings there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, did you ship them back to the United States?

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] I took a couple paintings—a couple big paintings, shipped them back.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did the experience change your work at all, or make—because the light is different, the landscape is different?

MARY CORSE: Well, see, that's the thing. I'm not a landscape painter.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: I'm not influenced by the outside world, and what I come up with, it comes out of the other paintings. And it comes—it's more of an inner—I'm not—I'm into pure abstraction, not abstracting from something you see in the outside world. Abstraction started that way. You know, maybe even started with Cézanne and then even de Kooning took it further, but abstracting from still—with the women. But then, finally, pure abstraction, to me, is something—the evolution of abstractionism is now we can realize that the abstract experience is within us, and it's not as related. I don't need a landscape or the side of a building to bounce off of. It's an inner vision to bounce off of, and the other work—what comes—the painting before. It's the language thing. So, that's different.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: An artist whose name hasn't come up—seems to me we might want to talk about, is [Kazimir] Malevich.

MARY CORSE: Oh, Malevich. Yeah, Malevich. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, at what point in your understanding of art history did that become known to you? That idea of pure white painting—the idea of—

MARY CORSE: Well, Malevich—you know, early on, I was—but it never—that's not what struck me about Malevich—that white painting on white. That didn't affect my whiteness at all.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, really?

MARY CORSE: No. My whiteness came out of a need to make light. To put light in the painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: But I love Malevich. But also, the Suprematist paintings, the color, and his ideas—fourth dimension ideas. I related a lot to that kind of stuff.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's what I was, kind of, getting at. I was—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —seeing if you had a—

MARY CORSE: But not the white.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you feel like your work is rooted in art history to that extent? That it comes out of a tradition of, say, Albers and—well, Malevich, then Albers? I mean, do you feel like it's coming out of something? Or do you feel like it has—what is—what do you—where do you feel like you are in the continuum of art history?

MARY CORSE: Well, I think paintings in history went to a certain point, and then, you know, I was influenced by them to a certain point. But then, I found my own—I don't think I'm just—well, now, let's see. [Laughs.] How would I say? It comes out of art history, and each painting comes out of the painting, really.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: I mean, I wouldn't be painting like this if I hadn't come out of those other painters.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Hadn't really understood what they were doing. And then, you don't want to repeat. So, you keep pushing it to see what hasn't been done or, you know—or what's important now where we are in this century, right now. And especially with the new physics, we can no longer have just a static painting. Because it doesn't have the same reality. It doesn't have the same truth as in the moment of right now, with the discoveries of the physics and all that's going on. We know there's nothing static, you know? So, that's what I mean. It moves along. You're trying to be with the—I mean, you're with the times. The idea is to be present now and what's going on now and what's absolutely necessary now, and what can you throw out? What has no more meaning? Throw it out.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's interesting, and did that contribute to—I mean, so you continued to study and read in and around the area of physics and physics—the writing about physics, have you?

MARY CORSE: I try to. Yeah. It's always so fascinating, and I like to read about artists, too. Fascinating. But—what were you going to say?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No. Go ahead.

MARY CORSE: But the painting—I mean, that's all about your being and understanding reality.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you feel like as many people do painting as—in a challenged position today?

MARY CORSE: What do you mean?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That, you know—

MARY CORSE: Oh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —people are always—I mean, the argument that painting is dead keeps coming up.

MARY CORSE: Oh. I painted through "painting is dead."

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: I was having a good time with it! [Laughs.] No. Painting was dead when Chris—when performance art was in.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what can—

MARY CORSE: Painting's a two-dimensional—it's just I have my curiosities about painting and why it is such a satisfying thing, and why painting is so—you know, it's—lots of it are mystery to me, because once you get that paintbrush in your hand and you're painting, it's a whole change in your consciousness, your being, what you're thinking about. [… –MC] Painting, to me, is fascinating. I mean, besides what you end up with, the actual doing of it. I like painting those big paintings, your two or three hours, your—it's sort of a meditation that way. You'll be painting. By the time you get from one end of the 42-footer to the other, because it has to be all in one layer—some of them. All the circles of your mind you've—you know, gone—but yet, there's this constant painting. This brush keeps going up and down.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's terribly physical.

MARY CORSE: It's very physical.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you ever go back to your, sort of, the physicality of your ballet training just to keep up with that?

MARY CORSE: That's another reason [laughs] I've got to get back to ballet while I can still—you know, you have to stay in shape. I know. It's a big struggle.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you always use a brush or do you use a roller?

MARY CORSE: No. A brush.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Always a brush, even though they're so big?

MARY CORSE: I know. I tried a roller. It didn't work—didn't get the right texture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you paint them all yourself or do you have an—

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —assistant who paints them, as well?

MARY CORSE: I like the painting part.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The part. You don't ever have—

MARY CORSE: Sanding.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You're not delegating.

MARY CORSE: I have someone that does the sanding now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And when you say sanding, what does that entail?

MARY CORSE: Well, there's many layers that I do, like about five layers, and then, we sand the whole thing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Then, I do like five more layers, and we sand it because I like to get rid of all those bumps in the canvas. And so, there's a lot of sanding. They're actually a lot of work.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How long does it take you to finish—typically finish, say, an eight-foot painting? Or eight by—I think I'm looking at an eight-foot painting. Maybe I'm looking at a seven-foot painting, but approximately how long would it take you to finish something like that?

MARY CORSE: Once I order it and that?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: If I were doing nothing else, just one painting?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. Well, do they take a week or a day or—

MARY CORSE: A month.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: A month? Really? So you have to let the surface dry.

MARY CORSE: There's a lot of layers—dry in between. You can only do so many layers a day, and then, the sanding takes a few days each layer. And then, you paint some more. And you sand it, and then you have to paint some more, sand it, and then—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But they're painted with acrylic?

MARY CORSE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, they—at least they dry in between.

MARY CORSE: Right. Yeah. Thanks—acrylic changed painting. You can do big surfaces and—yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you could do them in oil, but they would just take forever [laughs] to dry. Right? Or could you?

MARY CORSE: I don't think you actually—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Could? It would be too thick?

MARY CORSE: And you couldn't do the final layers with the beads, no.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So again, the technology, and in terms—well, let's get back up to chronology here. You've come—you've had your big 30-year—you've had your time at the Fondation Cartier. And you've created—after that, you created an eight-by-34-foot painting called *White Light Painting With Squares* and another *Black Light Painting* with four arches. And that's the one you were just describing with all the arches carrying on 28 feet long. Nine—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] One of them has four—there was a series of *Black Arches*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, nine feet by 28 feet long. At this point, you're entering the realm of architecture. Do you ever think about that?

MARY CORSE: I think about architecture. I love it, and I love showing in modern architecture buildings, but it's not a big issue. I don't change my paintings around architecture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But the scale is now almost like a—

MARY CORSE: But it has to do with more about how your—perception has more to do with the human being size—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay.

MARY CORSE: —than the architecture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: They relate to the human size—confrontational or—it's, you know—it's proportion to the human.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Because they're nine feet tall?

MARY CORSE: Well, if it's nine, maybe I wanted them to have a feeling of something bigger than them or—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —something—a band—a person-size band or not.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: You know, it's still scaled to the person, even though—you know, when I do a show, I'll put paintings that fit in the building, you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: So, you do relate to it, also.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where did those paintings—where are those paintings today?

MARY CORSE: Which paintings?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The ones that are nine-by-28 feet—nine feet tall by 28 feet long.

MARY CORSE: They're here and there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In private collections or museums?

MARY CORSE: Doug has quite a—has some. I have some. Let's see, the museums—the big, big ones? I'd have to look at my records to see. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: I don't know where—you know, I have some. Doug has some. They're out there—some are out there.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But they're hard to place. I mean, I guess the point I'm getting to is now you're making paintings that are actually very difficult to place.

MARY CORSE: Well, this 42-foot one here, this multicolored, I think we have two people interested. So, you never know. Anyway, I don't paint for—I paint for my sanity—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: —not for the market.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yes. Well, clearly.

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, clearly.

MARY CORSE: Well, so—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, as you're—because now, you're up to like the mid-'90s and you're making these—you start making paintings that are even—

MARY CORSE: Well, in the '90s, I made some that aren't—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —so big, also.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] To see what they look like. So then, you have your 30-year survey in L.A. at Ace, and then, you have one at Ace's location in New York, because Doug Chrismas had a gallery there then. And that was in 1995. 30-year retrospective—what came up for you when you looked at your own 30-year retrospective?

MARY CORSE: Well, it was interesting, and that's also when I realized how each painting came out of the one before it. And it was interesting how I saw that things that I'm working on now were—I was working on then. For example, what I call the inner band—in some of my white paintings, there's a band that appears and disappears. Well, as you look back, I think I said this to you before—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's okay.

MARY CORSE: —but this is different. I see that it was there in the beginning. I didn't call it an inner band, but it was a band inside the painting. So, it was already—you know, so, that was very interesting to see when I—to see the one step after the other.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: To see there had been a progression of ideas but also a—circling back to your original idea.

MARY CORSE: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And the consistency is, of course, about light. But was there also a consistency of interest in the metaphysical aspect of the painting?

MARY CORSE: The metaphysical aspect of art? Well, I'm trying to create the experience of art, and it is metaphysical. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, talk—and what would you ideally like a viewer to experience in that regard—in the metaphysical regard when they're looking at your painting?

MARY CORSE: The moment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You'd like them to be present in that moment in front of your painting—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —as opposed to walking by in a rush?

[They laugh.]

MARY CORSE: If they're walking by in a rush, to be present in that moment walking by in a rush.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: The way people do today—boom, boom, boom.

MARY CORSE: But to be present in themselves. I want it to bring presence, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you maintain presence within yourself as you're painting the paintings?

MARY CORSE: Painting brings it back to you when you go about your life. You're there, and you're—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, that's how it fulfills you.

MARY CORSE: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, it really is, kind of, a meditation for—it—would you say—

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —it is a meditation for you, then? The act of it—keeping present while you're—

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —painting the paintings.

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, Turrell talked about that the other day. James Turrell talked about that the other day when I was interviewing him about—this is a constant throughout our history. You know, artists painting light for its metaphysical properties, you know, and he talks about how he is essentially surrounding the viewer with that. Do you feel, also, that you're surrounding the viewer with the feeling of light, in a way?

MARY CORSE: Yes, in a way. I like them to recognize light as part of them—having to do with them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: An inner light?

MARY CORSE: Well, then, when they're looking at the paintings, it's an outer light, but when you relate to it, it becomes an inner light to feel—to feel light—to feel the light in you.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: And the—well, I don't know how to say it. But anyway, that's—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is it hard to talk about that?

MARY CORSE: Well, the words, you know, are—can be so misleading. Like one person can say the word spiritual, and it associates the religion, all that. Another person could say spiritual, and it just means nonphysical. So, you know, when we use words, it's a—it's difficult.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you think it's been—do you think contemporary art has come to the point where it often, sort of, demonizes people who are interested in working in a metaphysical way?

MARY CORSE: Oh, yes, which [laughs] has always been puzzling to me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, it creates a kind of self-censorship for—it seems like it creates a kind of self-censorship for artists in a way—that they don't want to talk about it anymore because they're afraid they'll be castigated or criticized for their spiritual or their metaphysical beliefs, which seems odd.

MARY CORSE: Well, see, that's where it gets tricky, because see all those words you've already used—for one thing, beliefs—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —has nothing to do with beliefs—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —because beliefs, then, you're already projecting, and you already have a thing. So, and then—you know what I mean? That's why when we use those words, we're talking about something that's unseen, that's felt, possibly, that's sensed. And to put the words—it can be so misleading, because just when you said belief—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —see, because belief is one of the things we want to throw out of a painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And what you would like is the experience.

MARY CORSE: The experience, right there. Naked experience with whatever is there. Ambiguity, change, movement, whatever is—the light and, who knows, you know? You never know exactly what people experience looking at your paintings. But I—you know, so—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's good. That's—we want to talk about this. There's a whole mention in your chronology of your experience of talking to the German critic Rainer Crone. How did that affect you or did that affect you? It says in your chronology here that in 1995, you entered a dialogue with the German critic—

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —Rainer Crone.

MARY CORSE: That reminds me. We were going to do a book. What happened?

[They laugh.]

Yeah, he was interesting. We had—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How—what was that about?

MARY CORSE: It was—I liked him, we had good ideas, we talked a lot. I think we were going to do a book. I don't know what happened.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Maybe it's in process. And then, between—in the '90s, things start to really—you start to show quite a bit more, it seems to me. This is in 1999. You were shown and exhibited in a show called *Powder* organized by Francesco Bonami in Aspen [CO]. And you also showed your color work at Ace in 2000.

MARY CORSE: I didn't show the color work at Ace in—2000?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: *Primary Color Bands* at Ace Gallery, 2000.

MARY CORSE: Oh.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that the first—?

MARY CORSE: Well, I did show in Beverly Hills when he opened. Was that 2000? Was I with him in 2000?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, let's talk about the color—the *Primary Color Bands,* because after—when does color—when do the primary colors start to appear in your work, and why?

MARY CORSE: Way back. It started with red, like I'd do white paintings with red corners. The red would creep in every few years. And then, it would come, and it was always with black and white. Like the *Arch* series was red arch with black and white, yellow arch. But always one color, either red, yellow, or blue with black and white. And then, recently, a few years ago in that 42-foot one, it's the first time that three colors were in the same painting with black and white.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, red, yellow, and blue.

MARY CORSE: Yeah. That painting back there on the wall is red, yellow, blue with black and white—black and white—black and white, and that's why it had to be so big, so that the colors would be far apart from each other. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: And still, it's mostly one color with black and white. But now—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Why primary colors only? Like, why not turquoise or hot pink or whatever?

MARY CORSE: Why?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Well, you're the painter. Like why—

MARY CORSE: I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is that because there's—

MARY CORSE: Because there's no need. There's no need for it. If I want to do color—more important to me is that I'm not making—see, I put the lighted color—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: I wouldn't be doing color paintings if I couldn't put the light in it with those beads—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —because I don't want to make a picture of color—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right.

MARY CORSE: —and color is light. So, I put the light in the color in the painting. So, that's what's important to me, and red, yellow, and blue is all that's really necessary. They're so different from each other and, you know, to make it turquoise or start mixing colors—again, why? See, that's that artist preference. "Oh, it's pretty," or, "Oh, this." It's not necessary for the—it's not—that's why I don't. It's not necessary. I didn't feel a need for it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I think Ellsworth Kelly feels that way about color in his paintings. Doesn't he?

MARY CORSE: What does he say?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Similarly. You know, that he will pick colors that are not too—he's not mixing in a way that is, you know, so much—

MARY CORSE: They're pure. The first—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Pure colors is what I'm trying to say. Pure colors.

MARY CORSE: Pure light comes out as red, yellow, and blue.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And for you, it seems like there has been more color coming in, in the last—well, I guess now it's a long time since 2000, but like the last decade. Do you feel like you've been more—

MARY CORSE: The last 10 years, maybe. I think I'm doing more paintings, generally.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Well, you're doing—so, you're going to show the color—well, you're basically known for the white paintings, obviously.

MARY CORSE: Mostly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And—

MARY CORSE: But there—the colors have been shown somewhat. But they will be.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then, last—so, I would say that, you know, after years of, sort of, benign—I wouldn't call it benign neglect really, but, you know, your work's really gained a tremendous amount of attention in the last, what? Ten years.

MARY CORSE: Last five years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Last five years.

MARY CORSE: It's been really picking up.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Certainly since the Getty—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —developed its interesting in southern—southern California art of the '60s. Do you think that's when it happened through the—with the Getty's interest, or a—

MARY CORSE: Well, quite a few things, you know, and the show in London and shows in New York.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Here's the show in London. Hang on. Let's go back and talk about that. What show in London?

MARY CORSE: At White Cube.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ah. Here we are.

MARY CORSE: And then, the show in New York last year got a lot of press.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And where did you show in New York last year?

MARY CORSE: At Lehmann Maupin.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh. That's right, excuse me. So, you showed at White Cube in London. You showed at Lehmann Maupin in New York, and that combined with the, sort of, overwhelming amount of interest that the Getty—

MARY CORSE: The Getty was great. Right. They also did Germany. They sent that show to Germany.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's right. They sent the show to Berlin.

MARY CORSE: They did a good job.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, here you've been up on your mountaintop area for years doing your thing, and suddenly, you're a famous artist.

MARY CORSE: Oh yeah? [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How does it feel?

MARY CORSE: I keep making paintings, you know, and it's nice. I can knock my building down and build another building. You know, the finances are nice, and it's good to know that your paintings—you know, it's nice when people like them, or when they get it. When they get it, it's after so many years of not getting it. It makes me wonder what's happening out there. Is their mind changing? Is consciousness changing, that people are more interested in light and inner? I think they're more interested in inner experience. It's fine with me.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's the thing about making contemporary art. It's always a double-edged thing, right? Like you want people to appreciate the work and be understood and you don't.

MARY CORSE: Right. Exactly.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, most artists feel the same way. Right?

MARY CORSE: That's not why you do it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: That's not why you make a painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: You make a painting and if someone likes it, that's nice. But, you know, when they don't like it, it doesn't phase you so much either. So, it's not really—it's not that big an issue.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But looking back from over your, really, like a long career now, is there anything you wish you had done differently?

MARY CORSE: Anything I wish I'd done differently?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah. You know, I mean, do you wish you'd moved to New York in the '70s? Do you wish—

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —you'd like, you know—

MARY CORSE: Uh-uh. [Negative.] No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: No. I'm happy to have this place.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No. No. I'm just saying, is there anything that you look back and you think, like, "Well, gosh. If I had done this, or I'd done that, it would've been different."

MARY CORSE: [Laughs.] No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's good.

MARY CORSE: Huh?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's good. Right?

MARY CORSE: Is it?

[They laugh.]

I say—again, I pretty much did what I wanted. That's the thing. You know, I'm a big family person.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I was going to ask you that. I was going to double back to these kids you raised for all these years. So—

MARY CORSE: Oh, my two sons—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —tell me what—tell me what happened with your two sons.

MARY CORSE: Ivan and Leif, and they're now married. Ivan and Julie and—Julie Renick—and Leif and Kelly

Eason, and I have three grandchildren.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Let's go—do this—Ivan married Julie.

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

Leif married—Renick.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And Leif—and Leif married who?

MARY CORSE: Kelly Philbrick.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And they each—

MARY CORSE: And Leif has three sons.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: Gavin, Hayden, and Beckett.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, my goodness. What names.

MARY CORSE: I know. They're so cute, too. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And how about Ivan and Julie, no kids?

MARY CORSE: No kids. No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are any of them artists?

MARY CORSE: No. They're creative. One of them plays music, and the other is very creative with cars. He's a motor—you know, he's a brilliant mechanic-type.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, and which one is that? Leif?

MARY CORSE: Ivan.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ivan is the car person, and is Leif a musician?

MARY CORSE: He works, but he also plays music. I mean, he has been—you know, it's not his main thing, but he has fun with it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's probably a good thing.

MARY CORSE: No. He's a family man.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: A family man. So, do they live up here in Topanga?

MARY CORSE: The kids live in Santa Barbara.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, you're involved in your family, and you're involved in your art. And—

MARY CORSE: Try to get to it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —along the way, after Chris, did you have other boyfriends?

MARY CORSE: I did. I had other boyfriends, and I got married again.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Ah, tell me about that, because I didn't know that part.

MARY CORSE: I married Torrey Bridgman.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: T-O-R-Y?

MARY CORSE: T-O-R-R-E-Y.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: B-R-I-D-G-E—

MARY CORSE: D-G-M-A-N.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No E?

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And is he an artist?

MARY CORSE: No.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Are you still married?

MARY CORSE: No, no, no. We've been divorced.

[… –MC]

We were together for about 10 years. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you remember what year did you—

MARY CORSE: I don't remember. [… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When did you get married?

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] In the '80s? In the '90s?

Must have been the '80s. It's hard to remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I can remember my marriages.

MARY CORSE: Oh yeah.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But I must say, it's like—you know, it's—I do understand the problem. Time marches on, but it's—so, you were married to Torrey in the '80s, more or less.

MARY CORSE: For a while, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And up here in Topanga, still.

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No kids. You didn't—

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you have kids with him? No.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you just have your two sons.

MARY CORSE: Oh, yeah.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Any significant influences in your life?

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were there any other people in your life, your personal life, who were influential or had an effect on you?

MARY CORSE: No. Just my—you know, my friends. We have friends and—just like friendships, but not really.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Who are your closest friends here in L.A.?

MARY CORSE: Who are my closest friends?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Who do you consider like long-term close friends?

MARY CORSE: Helen Berlant.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Deborah Salt. I don't know. I don't want to start putting a bunch of names in there. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's interesting to know who your crowd was or who your fellow travelers might be. What I've always liked about L.A. is the integration of the community here and the way people know each other for long periods of time—

MARY CORSE: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —and have relationships with each other for a long time.

MARY CORSE: I do have long relationships with a couple of friends, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I mean, it's—you know, it's pertinent to the history of the area—

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —the way artists stay here, and you chose to stay here. You chose not to go to New York.

MARY CORSE: Yes.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you ever—

MARY CORSE: I used to go back and forth to New York, quite often. When Dick was there—hang out with him and John Chamberlain. I would stay there from time to time, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where?

MARY CORSE: Well, I'd stay at my friend—Deborah Salt had a place there. It's hard to remember, but I don't like New York now.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you go—when were you in New York the most?

MARY CORSE: The most—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I should be sitting closer to you, because I can't even hear my questions.

MARY CORSE: You know, I'm so bad with dates.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Like in the '70s?

MARY CORSE: I would go when Dick was there. I went in the '70s.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: I went in the '80s. I went in the '90s, and I went there in 2000. I just like it less now, but I was there more earlier.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Were you ever part of the Max's Kansas City crowd in New York?

MARY CORSE: Not really. I mean, I've been there, but no. I wasn't part of the crowd. I'd go hang out with Dick, John Chamberlain—I did a show there at Joe Lo Giudice's. He was—all those guys. I knew them, somewhat. Mostly John Chamberlain.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, John lived—was out here for a while. Wasn't he?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, but we didn't hook up when he was out here, finally.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Were you friends with him?

MARY CORSE: Yeah. When I'd go to New York, and he'd been here in Topanga. [… –MC]

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I was going to ask if you were friends with Larry Bell, because I don't think of your work—

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, people always talk about it—I've done it myself—is they talk about the influence of California light on the art, but the more I've been thinking about it, the less I've been convinced that actually is a factor.

MARY CORSE: With me, it's not. As I say, I'm not a landscape painter.

[… –MC]

I'm into pure abstraction and the abstract experience not coming from there—coming through painting, through —

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And when you show your paintings, do you consider—how do you determine how they will be lit? By natural and/or artificial light? How does that work for you?

MARY CORSE: Well, when you show a painting and people come in—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I've noticed in here, you don't—you have some natural light coming in through the doors, but you don't have skylights.

MARY CORSE: No. Skylights sort of wash it. I don't like skylights as much, but the thing is, the paintings work in all different—that's the thing, is they are what the moment is.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: But when you do a show and people come in and out real quick, you want them to get that idea. So, you want the paintings to light up at some point. So, I like to light the shows so they light up and then don't light up, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So, they light up and they don't. What do you mean by that?

MARY CORSE: Well, they'll appear and disappear as you walk by.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: Sometimes, there's nothing there. There's no light. No painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Right. Very flat.

MARY CORSE: Yeah. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] You want to look from the side, and I'll show you, sort of, the ideas like—well—

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I know what happens.

MARY CORSE: —give you a different question or—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No. I know what happens, where you go by, they lose their reflectivity. So, they look almost matte and you can't really even see the differentiation between the pale—

MARY CORSE: Right. So, it keeps changing.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —stripes and the moiré pattern.

MARY CORSE: Appears and disappears, sort of, like we do.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah.

MARY CORSE: Nonlinear.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You mean, our presence.

MARY CORSE: Our presence is also nonlinear. Well, that puzzled me so much, but obviously, we die. So, we're not continuous, but who knows? We pop here. We pop there, just like things pop into reality instead of go linear. So, maybe our energy is going to pop somewhere else.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Maybe we'll come back.

MARY CORSE: Or we'll pop back.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] Come back for another round if we haven't behaved ourselves—

MARY CORSE: [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in a certain way. You know, looking at them from here—looking at these two recent paintings of yours, there is, kind of, almost like a—also a slightly watery quality that I don't really think I've picked up before, and you know, like watered silk—like moiré. Do you ever think about that? Did they have a kind of liquescence to the surface, as well as—or is that something I'm—

MARY CORSE: I don't really think about that because I don't—I don't even really refer to—I wouldn't refer to water, or things don't look like something so much to me.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's—well, of course, you said that, because they're abstract. They're coming out of pure abstraction. I don't mean that they're representations of water.

MARY CORSE: But I mean, when I look at it, I see the light changing and the—I see—I think of more, pattern—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: —repetition or light changing direction, movement.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, they're very bold. They're very big, and they're very bold. And it's a pleasure to see this—to sit with them. Is there anything I need to ask you that I haven't asked you?

MARY CORSE: Nothing I can think of. I can't think of [laughs] anything.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Well, if you do, you can always—we can add it. You know, we can add—we add stuff. I wanted to ask one thing before I forgot, which is what year did your mother pass away? Do you remember?

MARY CORSE: So, yeah. You can tell I'm so bad on years.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: I mean, it was approximately 10 years ago.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And your father has also passed away?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, before that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did your mother ever reconcile herself to the fact that you were an artist?

MARY CORSE: She stopped telling me to paint daisies.

[They laugh.]

She said she always knew I was an artist.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: She had a fine sensibility, but contemporary art was not—I used to lock myself [laughs] in the room not to have her opinions.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's not—

MARY CORSE: Painting abstract.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's not for everybody, you know.

MARY CORSE: No. Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] My—if it's any consolation, my mother was the same way.

[END OF CARD TWO.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: This is the second session interviewing Mary Corse, for the Archives of American Art. This is Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, interviewing Mary Corse at the artist's studio in Topanga, CA, on December 14th, 2013, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number three.

So Mary, here we are again, revisiting some of the things we talked about a few months ago. You're still in the process of sort of reorganizing your studio, actually tearing down your studio and building a new studio. I'm sure this has been very disruptive to your work life, but—so I'm even happier that we're able to get together to revisit some of the things that we talked about a few months ago. I'd like to go back and ask you a little bit more about your relationship with your mother. I know you didn't really want to talk about this that much in the first interview, and maybe you still don't, but as women, we're all so influenced by our mothers, one way or the other.

MARY CORSE: Women and men. We're definitely influenced by our mothers, but my question would be, talking about art, is my particular relationship with my mother—is it important? I mean—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: We talked about her being sort of a perfectionist.

MARY CORSE:—it's a very complicated relationship.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

[… –MC]

Because of the discipline?

MARY CORSE: The discipline and the kind of—the discipline and also the amazingness of it, the experience of it. I mean, serious dancing. I was with the Oakland Ballet when I was 15, so you can imagine, that's a lot of work. [Laughs.]

But painting and drawing is what's—I didn't like it then. I didn't like the ballet. But it's when I found painting. It was my safe place doing what I wanted, so—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did she—

MARY CORSE: That was the influence. And my mother influenced my art because she turned me in that direction.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I just wanted to, you know, I think sometimes people develop in opposition to—I mean, their mother wants them to be one way, they sort of pursue something more dramatically in another way.

MARY CORSE: Well, in that way, yeah. The art and painting was something that I wanted to do. Ballet and piano I had to do, so—but I guess our life was all about dancing, piano, beauty, the way things looked. So that was an influence also.

[… –MC]

Well, it's sort of obvious. Art is not a material, and I've lived my life around that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Not a materialistic life, you mean?

MARY CORSE: Well, the main concern with something that is non-physical.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But it's hard to make a life as an artist, and support yourself that way.

MARY CORSE: It's very difficult.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You've pretty much done that for a long time, I suppose. How many years do you think you've been supporting yourself with your art?

MARY CORSE: Well, I never really had a job, so I have supported myself off my art for many, many years, but many years ago I was very broke—

[They laugh.]

—supporting myself off my art, you know? Luckily, there was Richard Bellamy in New York. You know, I was still only, I don't know, 20 or something when—let's see, in 1968, I don't know how old I was, 25, 20-something, when I started getting little supports, you know. Not so much in L.A., but a little bit more in New York, and—but I was broke. Single mom raising two kids. Luckily, it was the hippie era, so I could pass for a hippie. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did you identify—

MARY CORSE: But, I wasn't.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You weren't a hippie.

MARY CORSE: Of course I agree with everything, but I'm not a joiner, usually. I mean, I didn't go to participate physically, mentally maybe. But you could live a very casual lifestyle without—anyway, I was broke, I'm not broke now.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Hallelujah.

[… –MC]

Like when you started, do you remember how much your dealers would ask for your work?

MARY CORSE: I think Bellamy sold, like, say, a nine-foot-square *Grid* for fifteen hundred [dollars].

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And that would be in—

MARY CORSE: Maybe. I'd have to—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —1970, 1969, in that timeframe. No, earlier probably.

MARY CORSE: Sold it to—in Texas. I wonder how much we did sell those for.

[They laugh.]

But yeah. Not much then.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, so how many works a year do you think he would sell?

MARY CORSE: Oh, not very many. And I had that little bit of a grant, the National Endowment. Little things. You know, things would come just-in-the-nick-of-time-type thing. But I managed to work through all this, so I must have had—you know, we had enough sales. I kept working and experimenting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'm just trying to look at this and make sure that it's actually recording you.

How much do you think it cost, how much money did you need per year to live in the—when you started out as artist?

MARY CORSE: Oh, I have never figured that out, or had—I have so little idea about that kind of thing, that that's probably why, you know, it wasn't solid and material that, you know, for me. It sort of—I just counted—something came up at the right time. There were times, though, when it didn't. I don't know how much it took me to live. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you've sold consistently. You'd never felt like teaching or—

MARY CORSE: Well, you know, I had two children, and I felt like I would have liked to teach, but I felt like that was my side job. You know, as an artist, how would I keep working? It would be like being a teacher and having a kid and trying to paint. Forget it, you know? So I always felt since I have kids, if I want to keep painting, but I

didn't—you know, I couldn't, that was my excuse [laughs] anyways. I didn't get a job, I was broke and kept painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So would it be correct to say that your priority was in—your art?

MARY CORSE: My art and my kids. Kids first.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Kids first. Okay.

MARY CORSE: Kids first.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, sometimes—

MARY CORSE: Definitely.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —sometimes with artists that's not the case. So, in your case you felt like the kids came first and then your painting.

MARY CORSE: Definitely. And we were up here in Topanga, so I sort of was able to make a simple life where they could go outside and, you know, you play outside and it's just fields and hills. So it wasn't as expensive in that kind of way, and my house payments, my studio, was really inexpensive.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You just concentrated on your painting. So essentially we talked about—since I saw you last, I went to Amsterdam and I saw the exhibition of Malevich at the Stedelijk Museum. And I thought about those white-ish on white-ish kinds of paintings that he was doing back then, and I thought of the brief discussion we had about Malevich and your work and the materialistic aspect of—not materialist like money, but the actual way of working with the material. So let's revisit that a little bit in terms of our brief discussion with Malevich before. And whether or not that was ever—about the influence that might have had—

MARY CORSE: It wasn't an influence. I wasn't really influenced by Malevich, but later on, after I was doing things already—my interests—his ideas, especially, you know, ideas of the fourth dimension. I was very into Ouspensky and the fourth dimension. He must have—he was there, maybe he knew the guy, you know. So philosophically, or whatever you call it. It's not really philosophy, but—I—you know, I love his work. I wasn't influenced by it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So when you started out making the white on—when you first made the transition to just the white—

MARY CORSE: I was trying—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —paintings.

MARY CORSE: Right. I had done color paintings that came more out of Albers, or you know, studying—or Hoffman.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you pared them down to the white?

MARY CORSE: Right. I was trying to get closer and closer to the essential experience of absolute necessity or—and color, you see, white light contains color. It's all there. Even when I do color paintings, I actually, the red, yellow, and blue separate—you know, those separate, you know—because implicitly, or tacitly, finally in yellow and blue, you have white light. So, I didn't feel a need to have color, and this is why I got rid of it. I mean, just use the white, all the color's there. You just didn't have—you know, it's there. It doesn't really have to be visual, finally, visual art.

It's a funny thing to say, but a painting for me has to be more than visual, and it has to itself have a sort of a living element that's true. So I keep searching for that and going deeper into the white, and it took me to light. After the white paintings—I started with white paintings, after the color. Getting rid of the color, over—even though what I was trying to say is, essentially, the color is still there. It's in the white. And then the white paintings led me to the early *White Light* pieces, then I used actual light. A painting didn't have to be about the paint. You see, I realized that it's not only—the painting is not as visual for me. It has to go beyond the visual. And painting is not about the paint. It has a deeper context. The context being more on the human state. So there I was reducing white paint, then finally to white light, light and space. Then I'd make the space a space, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then you kind of came back into painting?

MARY CORSE: Well, yes. After leaving painting to go further, I made the *White Light* pieces, which had space

and light. There was a space in the Plexiglas and then there was a white light object. They was still—an object. I was trying to find truth in the outside world. I was trying to make an object with its own—its own soul, I don't—you know—or its own—I was questioning the objective and the subjective. So I made a big series of the *White Light*, and then I got rid of the wires and used it with the high frequency generator, trying to simplify it to just a pure form, light and space—form of light and space with its own being. And then to build the larger pieces, I had to go and take this class, sit in on this class, physics, to get the parts to build the bigger one, which I did and I got the parts and I started building the bigger generators, to do them bigger. But when I was studying the physics, I was, you know—I was introduced to quantum physics, and I was struck by our nonlinear existence and by so many things, and it started putting the objective/subjective—started coming together in a different way. So I went back to the painting because, not that it's subjective, but it has a more element of subjectivity than the three-dimensional pieces I was making, than the light pieces.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When you say subjectivity, do you mean the personal?

MARY CORSE: No, not necessarily the personal, just the inner—just the human being. The perceptual, that it's coming from perception.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You felt that that was a stronger part of you painting than it was with the more sculptural pieces?

MARY CORSE: Not stronger. It was—well, the painting brought back—even though I left everything, no gesture, no, you know—the color, no gesture, no—after leaving everything, putting it back in—of course these things are totally intuitive. It takes me sometimes years to understand it myself, and then it clicks and I get it, because you can't think a painting. Intuitively, I went back and had to get the paint in there and some gestures getting—still getting—I think it's the hand and brain connection, and it's making the mark. Hand, brain, and immediate mark somehow, you know, lets us know that we exist. Something about painting, I tell you [laughs], it's fascinating.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But, you know—don't you also use rollers and things to kind of make it less—

MARY CORSE: I tested rollers and things, no, because—I tested rollers, but, no, I use a brush.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, that's right, you told me that, I'm sorry, I—

MARY CORSE: That's okay, because I did test every—I have painted with a lot of different things, you know, but finally you do what works, and it was the brush works, and it happens to have that element that we don't like anymore in painting, the gesture. Yet—see, you can't get rid of subjectivity. We tried with the objective work, I was trying to get rid of subjectivity, no personal, no artist ego, no personality, no personal problem, you know, no story. I wanted to get to the essence of, like, the collective human being. But you can't get rid of subjectivity, finally, because it's in our reality and parallels with physics. It's in our perception. It's a perceptual reality, [… –MC] realizing how important the observer was in reality, in our picture of reality.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, it's also your perception as the artist, ultimately. Whether you're making brush marks or not, you're still making decisions about how art is going to come out, so what—at least, I'm always confused about this anyway, because ultimately you're determining the appearance of what you're creating.

MARY CORSE: […–MC]

But that's the question, you know. How—like you say for the artist, how much of the artist is in the painting, and how much is it collective, or essential? You see, the artist for me, I want to get rid of—like I am not Mary Corse in the paintings, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How so, when you've build such a very identifiable body of work?

MARY CORSE: I know. That's what I mean. That's why it's such a question. But, coming from the artists' point of view, as you say—I'm not trying to be more Mary Corse personally when I do a painting. That's why I have to live up here by myself, up in the mountain. […–MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: If you look back over your paintings, do you see an evolution of that process for yourself? I mean, do you see when you look at paintings for over a decade or two, do you see paintings where there is less of your Mary Corse-ness, or Mary—more where you feel like you've sort of transcended the personality to be in your painting, to be just—

MARY CORSE: It's a funny thing. No, because all the paintings, once they're a painting, it's—that part of me is gone, you see. Otherwise I wouldn't, you know—no. Once that brush is in my hand, or once I'm in the painting, and it's becoming more and more this way.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And then when you have finished the painting and you send it off to a gallery, and you see it again in the gallery, when you look at it in the gallery, you're—does it seem to have that same life force for you?

MARY CORSE: I connect with it. Yeah, I'm trying to picture right now going into a gallery and seeing one of my paintings. Yeah, it becomes a—it's a connection. You know, the whole thing is more of a process, of a conversation, in a way, so it's like seeing friends.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Like seeing friends, that's good. Let me put this up a little bit because you're so soft-spoken today. And when you send them out into the world, do you anticipate that the viewer will also respond to the energy that you've put into the painting?

MARY CORSE: I don't think they respond to it, I mean, the energy that I put into the painting. I don't know, when you put it like that, it's a little confusing. Will they respond—will they get the same kind of energy from the painting that I put in it? Will it communicate that energy? You know, sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't.

[They laugh.]

Depends again, here, back to the perceiver, also. If they get it, if they've had experiences of that kind of inner place, then they might say, "Oh yeah, aha." And someone else might—you know, the old saying is, "When are you going to paint the painting?" Didn't they say that about some paintings that were white or something?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, when they walk up to the white painting and they say, "When are you going to paint the painting?"

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Like they can't see it?

MARY CORSE: Like to Rauschenberg or somebody. So who knows whether people get it or not. I mean, a lot of people are getting it. More now are getting it than used to, I think. I think there's actually a consciousness, a little bit more growth out here, in L.A., more—a little bit more intellectual. I can't quite say intellectual yet, but some, in L.A. More—don't you think a little bit more than there was?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I ran into a woman last night, oddly enough, who told me she had just bought a painting of yours, and she said to me, she said, "Do you know that Mary Corse only paints in the hours before 10 in the morning?" And I said, "No, I don't think we talked about that." Is that true?

MARY CORSE: No, well, it's not. [Laughs.] Are you kidding?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Was there misunderstanding?

MARY CORSE: No—what I only can do, when I put the final layer of the glass beads on, the microspheres—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Microspheres.

MARY CORSE:—that is always early in the morning, and even—because it's such a difficult process, the way it goes on to get it the way I want it to look. It's flat on the floor, and I'm on a board with rollers, and my assistant has ropes attached, and I have to paint fast, and—it needs cool temperature and moist air. So, by 11 o'clock in L.A. most of the time it's too hot to do the final layer, but there's 21 layers of paint on there, so there's many layers and sanding that come before that. I work all the time. [Laughs.] That's the final layer—is the most intense part, and it has to go on, usually early, because it's for temperature, for—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So it's not about the morning light. It's not about the way the light affects your ability to see?

MARY CORSE: And the light. Well, I would be able to alter the other light, you know, so—not so much the light. I use lights anyway, you know, so, no. It's the temperature. They're really hard to do. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I'll bet.

MARY CORSE: They—it dries fast. It's the only paint that will do it. Et cetera.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So it dries fast—it's the only paint that will—

MARY CORSE: Put the beads on.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Where you're brushing that final coat of those microspheres onto the white surface, how long does it take? When you say you have to work quickly, how quickly do you have to put that coating on?

MARY CORSE: Well, it depends on how big the painting is. For example, an 8-by-20-foot painting, or just say, a more average size, 8-by-15 feet—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.]

MARY CORSE: —the painting is flat on the floor, and—so I paint in sections, and then I get—I'm on a board that has wheels, and then I'm pulled back quickly, and I paint another section, so—I paint, and then I throw the beads on to the section that I reach, and then we roll back. So, it's as fast as I can go.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Let's just do that one more time. So the painting is lying—

MARY CORSE: On the floor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —on rollers.

MARY CORSE: No. The paint—the painting's on the floor.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Painting's on the floor.

MARY CORSE: See this board over here?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yep.

MARY CORSE: That flat board—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yep.

MARY CORSE: —that has wheels. It has rope hooks, hooks for ropes. That is over the painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, I see. You're actually—

MARY CORSE: I'm on it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —suspended over the painting. You're kneeling over the painting.

MARY CORSE: I'm suspended. I'm on this.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And you're kneeling.

MARY CORSE: I'm kneeling, or standing. Quite often—well, when I throw the beads, I'm standing, but yeah, I'm kneeling, and painting and painting and painting and then I throw the beads and then I yell and he rolls me back about here, and I paint and I paint and I paint and I paint, and I fuss and I paint and I hurry up and, "Oh no, there's this over there—oh shit, there's one over there!"

[They laugh.]

Then I throw it on. Torture.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I liked that demonstration! So essentially, this board is on rollers, and someone's pulling you back as you work on top of your canvas.

MARY CORSE: He pulls me back—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you're standing over the canvas.

MARY CORSE: —then he runs around to the side and gets ready to hand me the beads in this kind of thing. He hands me the beads and I throw them on, and—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He hands you the beads, you throw them onto the canvas and brush them in.

MARY CORSE: I throw them on where the paint's wet and not too over—you know, it's tricky and you can't go in

the part that hasn't been and you can't overthrow them—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So you're scattering these microspheres onto the paint?

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You're not mixing them in?

MARY CORSE: Right.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You're not mixing the microspheres into the paint and painting it on.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But when you look at—we talked a little bit about this before, but I wouldn't mind going deeper into it. We talked about the nature of perception and sort of being associated with the Light and Space movement as it's called in L.A. in the '60s, and you talked about how you do and do not fit in there. And, do you want to talk about—

MARY CORSE: Well, I was in the '60s working and still do work with light and space, you know. Art has always been about light and space. The human being is about light and space. Maybe I said that because I am a painter. I still—but the difference really is, for me, is—I'm two-dimensional rather than three-dimensional. Most of the light is—but still, my work is still about light and space, and it comes out of—at that time, I was making the big light boxes, and—but, for me, the two-dimensional surface is more abstract than three dimensions, and I'm really concerned with pure abstraction, and the human state we live in, which is quite often an abstract state.

And so—I think I don't know that most of the other artists, the Light and Space [artists] are as interested in that coming from abstraction and understanding that. Two-dimensional, having one less dimension [… –MC]. Well, for me the two-dimensional, then with the band, and the band is sort of inside that two dimensions, which is an abstract space because there is no inside two dimensions, really, in that. So in that kind of way, working with abstraction, where for me—it works for them, but for me, the added three dimensions, like having a room or physical space, gets in the way, even though the paintings are big. Sometimes 45 feet long, so it's almost three-dimensional, but the context really is still with painting, as being a painting with two-dimensional surface. Two-dimensional.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What does it mean—

MARY CORSE: Flat plane. Huh?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What does it mean—a two-dimensional flat plane. What does it mean for you to extend your paintings to that length, like a 45-foot long painting?

MARY CORSE: Well, it's—my paintings involve the viewer, and your perception. So when they're long, you walk by, and they change and it's—you experience that easier than a—I mean a—a painting's blah, blah, blah. Did that answer that? Because then you walk by there and see the changes. It's different, it becomes beyond an object. It's not an object on the wall, it becomes more of an experience in the space, and then again, it's the light and the space, the space you're moving in, the light drawing you in, and dimension of appearing and disappearing. The band appears and disappears as you move. So when they're long, you walk farther and there are more changes. Do you get that? Does that make sense?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: It puts it more obviously in your perception, because what someone's looking at 20 feet down and standing over there, 20 feet from you, what they see is different than what you see. So, the painting's not really on the wall, it's in your perception.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Have you been down to Doug's to see your new paintings—your big painting that's installed there?

MARY CORSE: Have you?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Have you been down to Ace Gallery to see your colored painting that's done?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, I helped him install. We're not finished though, because the Bernar Venet sculptures are

still in there, and those are coming out, and then I'll go fine tune it. Have you seen it?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I haven't been down to see it yet.

MARY CORSE: Well, don't go yet, because it's going to be up for a while, and it's not ready.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: It's—we had to hang it early for a couple of reasons, so that's that story.

[They laugh.]

Well, this will be the first time that I've really shown a lot of these colored pieces.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Now, in that case, you really are asking people to be immersed in this experience of perception, but now we're immersed in color, not white. How does that change the message?

MARY CORSE: Well, it's a different message. I mean, not a totally different—they don't deny each other, but I guess it's all like a conversation, in a way. I like to think of it as a conversation with abstraction. I've always done—I can't say always, but for the first, about ten years, I only did white paintings. And then I only did *Black Earth* things for a while. And then I did black and white, but then it started—every once in a while red would appear. A small amount of red in a painting. I actually did white with red corners, or—and then, I don't know, 20 years ago or so, I would do a couple color paintings.

And so it's always been growing, and when I really realized—it's all the same. You know, white light, as I said earlier, white light contains red, yellow, and blue. I use red, yellow, and blue out of the colors, black and white. For some reason, each painting has black and white and a color. And I thought it was important to do these paintings because I wanted to—color, when I finally put color back in the painting, I didn't want it to be a picture of color, if color was light. So, I wanted to put the light itself in the painting. So with the glass beads, and the way I do it, the light itself is in the [color –MC]. And they change, and light up as you move.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: When you pick your primaries, these red, yellows, and blues, are they mixed by you, or do you use set colors that come from a manufacturer?

MARY CORSE: Well, they're fixed by me in my mind and my vision, my inner vision, and then I'll search. Sometimes I have—mostly I have to mix them a little. Very rarely do I find a color all ready to go, but if I did, I'd use it, you know? It's the vision. It has to match the vision.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So the—they're not what some monochrome painting has been, in terms of being—working against the idea of an artist's choice. You are choosing a very specific red, yellow, and blue that you are fine-tuning to your own specifications, is that correct?

MARY CORSE: Again, there's that little bit of subjectivity because the artist does have to make the painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you're making the color.

MARY CORSE: I'm making the color. Again, that shows up in color, brush, and gesture. It shows up, it shows up in color, what color you pick. But what you mostly—what I mostly try to do—well, yeah, the color—but you want the painting to sort of tell you. I guess that's still you. You have to feel it. It becomes—it's a conversation with your inner self. It's not inner—only inner, though, that's what's confusing.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But there is like—there certainly is a language of abstraction that has—a language to discuss abstract paintings that's evolved over the 20th century, bringing us back to Malevich, and these elaborate theories that he created for himself to justify and to explain what he felt he was coming to by creating such reductive painting, made of just the three primary colors. Although, in his case, not just three primary colors, but—you know, and white and black, but primarily. And certainly Mondrian, the same way, these kinds of—I mean, this is a long conversation. Do you think of your work as an extension of those early-on ideas, or do you feel their work is an extension of a different body of ideas? Do you feel like your work comes out of the long tradition of modern, abstract, geometric painting?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, I think I come out of—I think I come out of painting because I studied all those paintings, and worked on all—you know, worked—first, I was influenced, and painted like Abstract Expressionists and I worked through all of the people, you know, studying Cézanne, tracing Cézannes, you know, starting—so—and I

think that—in my paintings, have in some ways, gone where it had to go. It had to bring perception, you know, and the color with the light, so, you know—you can't go backwards. You can't keep repeating, you know? So I guess as artists, yeah, we are always trying to move forward, and add something. Try to add to the lineage, and I think there's probably—there's a few lineages through art, you know? Duchamp was probably the originator of the conceptual lineage, you know, which goes in a different direction, and there's Malevich, and—or Cézanne are lineages that I—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, let's just pause for a second because I have to—let's pause for a moment here.

[Audio break.]

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And also, I wanted to revisit something that I feel we didn't go deep enough on, which is something I have come up against a few times in doing oral histories over the years, and that's the women's movement and women artists. Women artists and their relationship to the women's movement in Los Angeles, in particular. And I think last time, if I remember correctly, you sort of bristled at what you sensed was a bit of a—that you didn't want to be associated with that particular group when it happened. Am I correct remembering that?

MARY CORSE: Well, I didn't—me myself?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You yourself.

MARY CORSE: Me, myself was a—you know, very much a Women's Lib-ist, but I didn't want the art, the work, to be associated, and I think that got mixed up. I didn't want to do women art—women's shows, just like I didn't want to do blond shows, or, you know, American, necessarily, shows, or something, you know? I didn't want the art to have political attachments. And that's—I'm glad you brought that up because I think I was unclear about that. So, I mean, I was very much of a Women's Lib-ist. I was a single mom raising kids and supporting myself, and—you know. So I think the confusion was that I didn't want to do women's shows, and I would get invited to shows that were all women, or based on women, it's the "Women's Lib Movement" shows. I just didn't want art to be about politics or social stuff.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did you want—did you ever participate in any of those kinds of meetings or conversations or consciousness-raising groups that were held here in the early '70s? Not just with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro but other artists around town who would gather to give each other support as women working in a field dominated by men?

MARY CORSE: Well, you know, I was so busy trying to raise two kids, trying to keep a car running, trying to make paintings, and, you know [laughs]—that I didn't really have much time. You know, I would have enjoyed it. I don't know that—didn't know that much about social—you know, not that I could be helpful in that I was living my life as a liberated woman. I thought that was the biggest thing I could do, was to support my kids and do my paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so did you respond? You obviously knew what was going on. You obviously knew that there was a feminist movement going on, and from what you're saying, I think—I think I understand you felt like you identified, even if you weren't really participating.

MARY CORSE: Well, yeah. I mean, I thought it was more obviously women in the workforce and—yeah, obviously. It was a disaster, and times change, and that's when it was starting to change, and it did. And it's so much better. No, they weren't—and then for me as an artist, too, I mean, it was harder I think, because—especially in those days, way, way back then—

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But in a way, you had a lot of—you actually—you exhibited a lot very early in your career.

MARY CORSE: I wouldn't say a lot, but yeah, I did.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You showed in New York with—

MARY CORSE: Richard Bellamy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —Richard Bellamy, and you showed—

MARY CORSE: Not huge shows with Richard Bellamy, though. Richard Bellamy was also holding me back. He's wonderful, yeah, but he liked his artists [laughs] to suffer and struggle for a long time. [Laughs.] When I was finally at 40 or something, you know, "You're on the list." He was a character.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But didn't he buy—well, didn't he give you a show—I think we talked about how he was so supportive?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, he was so supportive. He—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What's the other side of that? How—

MARY CORSE: —gave me a show.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —in what way do you think he held back—held you back?

MARY CORSE: Well, Dick—you know, I couldn't even say. Dick was such an unusual dealer, you know? And especially later, most of his involvement had to be with Mark, you know, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: With Mark?

MARY CORSE: di Suvero.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mark di Suvero. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] But I think Dick lost his influence, or—I don't know. Ask anybody about Richard Bellamy. He was such an unusual, wonderful art dealer and person, that's, you know—he was a rare—a rare force.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: If you were doing it over again, would you have tried to be with a different—a different dealer?

MARY CORSE: I didn't really know that much about art business. Nick Wilder actually brought Bellamy over in 1968 because he didn't know what to do with me, I guess. I didn't know that much about art business. The truth is, I'd never been to an art gallery before I was 20. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But you—

MARY CORSE: Odd, isn't that? That part's odd.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you'd been to museums.

MARY CORSE: Art was never a career. We didn't have—to me, I think that's new, in the '80s or something. Art wasn't a career. I never thought of it as a career. Even though I went to art college, art school, it still wasn't a career, and I never knew about art business. And Nick Wilder brought Richard Bellamy over when I was doing the light pieces because he said he didn't know what to do with me [laughs], so he brought Richard Bellamy, and Dick immediately was just enthralled, loved the work, and that started a—you know, a long relationship.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That must have been something rather special to have someone from New York respond so positively to this work that you're making out here in Los Angeles at a time when Los Angeles didn't really have an art scene.

MARY CORSE: It was. Well, Los Angeles did have some things going on, but they were not—like I say, I was young and a girl. Like, John Coplans was here. I was doing those big light pieces that people like now, but they were totally unknown to anybody in L.A. because nobody wanted to look at them. That's why Nick Wilder said, "I don't know," when he brought Dick.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: So for me it was good, because we got a—you know, the Guggenheim bought a piece, and other museums that Bellamy—and I got some serious—you know, it was good, even though it wasn't, you know—I don't know. Yeah, it was great to have Bellamy. He put all this equipment in. This steel beam finally, when I was doing the earth pieces, and I knew him from my—in my early studio. Then when I moved up here, he was so helpful.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: What do you mean he put the beam in?

MARY CORSE: He sent someone from Mark—Dallas, from Mark's crew, down. That's when I was doing these

large earth pieces.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: He sent somebody from Mark di Suvero's crew?

MARY CORSE: I mean, he would help me—he would—yeah, put this steel beam, helped me with my—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, explain that—

MARY CORSE: —tile factory.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —whole thing to me.

MARY CORSE: Well, that's a whole—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you've talked before about making the earth tiles—

MARY CORSE: The *Earth Paintings*, I call them.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —the *Earth Paintings*, but that they were fired.

MARY CORSE: They were made out of earth, molded off the earth, and then I build this giant kiln to fire them in. The whole studio floor was these earth pieces. I went from the *White Light* and the *Black Earth*.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: In what way did Dick Bellamy have—help build—help you in your studio?

MARY CORSE: Oh, he would help, like, not—financially, he would make a few sales, but then he would also help by sending someone down from Mark di Suvero's crew who knew how—they put all this—this huge steel beam in through the studio, and—so that I could carry these heavy slabs out there on—these heavy cement slabs, and then I built this big kiln. And the floor rolled out. I was working on an eight-foot-square tile.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So really, it was—you were—he was—

[Audio break.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —lending you the expertise of Mark di Suvero's crew to build these very—

MARY CORSE: Dallas. One person of the crew, not the whole crew, yes. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: One person. And what was that person's name?

MARY CORSE: Dallas.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Oh, his name was Dallas.

MARY CORSE: Yeah, Dallas.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Dallas what?

MARY CORSE: I don't remember.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Dallas from the crew, okay. But he was—he understood that there was, like—there was a technical—that he was helping you technically?

MARY CORSE: Well, this was equipment, helping with equipment.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Equipment. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

MARY CORSE: Yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And let's talk again about the—did you have much relationship with the Land Art movement that was coming up in the '70s?

MARY CORSE: I thought it was great. One of my favorite works of art on the planet is Michael Heizer's *Double Negative*. Brilliant, you know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, so much of it was happening out here in the west.

MARY CORSE: Love it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Love it.

MARY CORSE: Connected, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And what—how did you learn about it, and did you have contact with any of those artists?

MARY CORSE: Yeah, I met Michael. And with Dick, John Chamberlain—we would hang out a lot, and he sent Diane Waldman, and he sent Marcia Tucker, you know, brilliant people, in the—way back in, I guess, the late '60s, '70s, because they'd come to my downtown studio and I moved in the '70s, so it was back then. With Dick, there was more energy. And then I moved up here, and he still helped a lot, and slowed down a little, he started working differently. With Mark, they moved out to Long Island, and Mark—you know, so.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But how did you—the Land Art movement was so, you know, how did you keep abreast of what was going on? Were other artists talking about it?

MARY CORSE: There were no artists out here talking about anything that I hung out with.

[They laugh.]

I—that's—you know, there was the guys. They got together, they did—you know, that group, the L.A.—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You mean the Ferus Gallery group.

MARY CORSE: All that group, yeah. But I was still younger than that and, anyway, didn't know anything about that.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And so your knowledge of Michael Heizer came from, what, going back to New York?

MARY CORSE: From Bellamy.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Yeah, but from trips—did you go to New York to talk to them?

MARY CORSE: Oh, yeah. And also, Ace showed those Heizer pieces. Remember when he tore the front of his building down over there, and—?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Have you known Doug Chrismas since those days, since the early '70s?

MARY CORSE: No.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: How long have you—

MARY CORSE: '80s, '85. When I did that show at MOCA.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But did you see the shows that Ace did with Michael Heizer, and—

MARY CORSE: I thought so, but see, I get mixed-up on the dates. When did Heizer have that—those rocks installed, remember? He took out the front of this building and installed those rocks down there in Venice?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I think it's the '70s.

MARY CORSE: Was that the '70s? Well, I met Doug then, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But anyway, back to—just briefly, I want to talk about the earth castings that you did, as fired ceramics. The tiles, these huge, eight-foot tiles.

MARY CORSE: I was working on those. The four-footers I got down.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: But was that in response to a larger awareness of what was going on with Land Art?

MARY CORSE: Well, here's the thing. I don't really think so, because what it really came out of—and one thing about my work is, usually, each painting or movement or something comes out of the one before. For example, I had only painted *White Light Paintings* now for ten years. It was all, you know, white light, the clear, the ethereal, the unseen. You know, all this. I was so involved. And then, I think my intuition, my nature was making me ground myself and realize, "Hey, you have a body," you know, psychologically. See, it was an inner experience that I was—the *Black Earth* was in response to the *White Light*. That's where it really came from.

See, it comes from an inner—something's going on where each painting talks to—each painting comes out of—what before.

And when I looked back at the work—Doug Chrismas made me bring a lot of the early work out of storage, which I had saved quite a bit—some. Well, I saved some, yeah. And one of the things that was so fascinating is I saw things I forgot about, that early on, I was—some of the same things were still there. For example, these two columns that I did that faced each other? I don't know if you saw them, I think the San Diego museum [Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego] might have one, or who knows? The two columns facing each other, that inner band? And now when I paint with the light feel I call it the inner band that appears and disappears, but it was always there. And the painting that the L.A. County [Museum of Art] has, the white—it's a white hexagonal shape, where I've indented the—there's a stripe down the middle that's not as painted as the other, so it's an indented inner band. So that inner band was there in the '60s.

And so this—this—see, that's where I learn, because this that's happening is trying to tell me something. Beyond telling everybody, you know—it's also, because what is that about that it keeps unconsciously appearing in the work, that inner band? And now, it's one of the main things that it's about, is that inner band that appears and disappears, and it's about our inner vision. That's why a lot of my work, the vision really comes from inner vision, rather than outside influence. I love some of the things outside, you know, because they're simpatico, but where my work comes from, it comes from itself, in a way. Like—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Did we talk before about meditating? Do you do that? Do you meditate?

MARY CORSE: Painting is a meditation.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Painting's your meditation. So that awareness, that sort of inner awareness, that comes to you while you're painting?

MARY CORSE: It's a—yeah. That's why I like doing the big paintings especially, because—say it takes two hours or three hours to put a layer. So for that three hours, you were—you can't stop as you're going. This is the under-layers, because the way it's drying. So you're painting up and down for that many hours straight. And it is a meditation. All these thoughts, the circles of your mind, you see them at one end of the painting, the circles like this, you know? So it's—by the time you're at the end of that painting, you're in a much different state.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Do you have to pay attention the entire time you're doing it? Or—

MARY CORSE: You have to pay attention.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You can't be thinking about, oh, I've got to go pick up the groceries, or—

MARY CORSE: Well, no, you can think, but I'm lately starting to think—you know, I keep wondering, "Why is this painting so satisfying?" And then I thought, well, maybe what it is is you're using both sides of your brain, because you have the brush in your hand and you have to concentrate. One side of your brain is concentrating, the logical side—you're painting it just right, not too thick, not too thin, not too this. Hurry up, da da. But while you're doing that, the other side of your mind thinks about your kids, da da, yeah. So—and then I thought, "Oh, it's satisfying, because my total being is engaged." Both sides of my brain. It's not left, or—you know. Both there in painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I wonder if all painters feel that way.

MARY CORSE: Well, they don't paint—I don't think so. Because for one thing, they don't always paint that big a surface and have to pay attention. And, you know, I got it from painting, because when you're painting, that's what happens. You're [laughs]—it's just lately I'm starting to notice it. But some, probably monochrome—monochrome painters, like to paint, yeah.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I did an interview the other day with a couple of other monochrome geometric painters who work differently from you, but we talked about how—they are a little bit younger than you, but how they also had gone through the whole idea of the "death of painting," and continue doing their monochrome painting anyway. Did you ever feel you were—did you ever think about the idea of the death of painting, which was very prominent everywhere in the art world, and has—

MARY CORSE: Hell, I've heard about it a lot because I was a close friend of Chris Burden, which is the epitome of death of painting, you know. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: That's right.

MARY CORSE: Oh, definitely, painting is dead.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: And did—how—

MARY CORSE: I was dead. I was a painter, I was bad. I was a women, I was bad. [Laughs.] I was young, I was bad. I was a mother, I was bad.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: So how do you keep going?

MARY CORSE: Well, that's where my passion is. That's where it is. How do you keep—you don't—you learn you don't need the support. You get inner support. Better to have some support. You want something, but—

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, it's a real question. I mean, how—how to go on when, you know, basically—

MARY CORSE: Well, it just goes to show you, I—the paintings were what were satisfying to me, more than opinions. I didn't get reviewed, or I didn't get great, you know—but I knew what I was doing. Also, I thought, "Ah," because obviously I do things where painting has to go. A lot of the young people are getting it.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You think?

MARY CORSE: I think.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: You think? Do you see younger painters—work—younger artists painting—

MARY CORSE: Well, I don't want to get into any names, or, you know. Not a lot of them, actually, when you put it that way.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: [Laughs.] When you consider.

MARY CORSE: People are still making pictures.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Paintings or pictures?

MARY CORSE: Pictures.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Pictures—

MARY CORSE: Pictures, not paintings.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —not paintings.

MARY CORSE: They're making pictures and not paintings, which I thought we already got over.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, that's something that was—that's an interesting thing to talk about, I mean, that you feel like you conscientiously moved out of pictures.

MARY CORSE: Pictures were moved out of before I was even doing them, yeah. I mean, pictures have been long gone.

[They laugh.]

Long—since, you know, since when? 1900 or something. [Laughs.]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, I mean, people go back.

MARY CORSE: No going back.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: There's a long—

MARY CORSE: I know, I know, I know.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —a long history of monochrome painting now, and it's, sort of—

MARY CORSE: Yeah, and abstract painting.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Well, you got it out—I wonder about that. Like this yearning to do monochrome painting, which has just not—that has not left us.

MARY CORSE: I think I added the light, though. I added the light in the painting, but it's in the painting.

[… –MC]

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: I think we've come a long way.

MARY CORSE: Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Is there anything else you want to add? Well, I think this has been a very positive addition to—

MARY CORSE: Oh, you do? Good. Okay.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: —what happened last time, and—I do. I think we covered some ground we didn't cover the first time.

MARY CORSE: And one thing I'll tell you, when we do take things out, I know two things I'm going to take out.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay. Well, why don't you just go ahead and tell me?

MARY CORSE: Am I off the speaking?

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: No, you're on the speaking.

MARY CORSE: I don't want to be on speaker with this.

HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP: Okay, hang on. Then I have to put this on—

MARY CORSE: Oh, or I can tell you when you're done.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]