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Oral history interview with Suellen Rocca, 2015 November 5-6

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Suellen Rocca on 2015 November 5-6. The interview took place in Elmhurst, Illinois, and was conducted by Lanny Silverman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Chicago's Art-Related Archival Materials: A Terra Foundation Resource.

Suellen Rocca 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

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is Lanny Silverman for the Smithsonian Institute of American Arts, Archives of American Art. And I'm interviewing Suellen Rocca at Elmhurst College on November 5th. This is part one of an interview.

[END SD1, TR1.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Looks pretty good. So, Suellen, I guess the first obvious question is: Where and when were you born? And let's start from that.

SUELLEN ROCCA: I was born in Chicago, Illinois, at Mount Sinai Hospital in 1943. October 2nd, 1943.

MR. SILVERMAN: Another October birth. I'm not too far away. And you have lived in Chicago all your life?

MS. ROCCA: I've lived in Chicago all my life, except for about nine years that I lived in Northern California in the Bay Area.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, we'll get to that soon. When was that? What point in time was that?

MS. ROCCA: In the '70s.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so that's further on—because, let's try and go chronologically. I've read that your mom was very supportive of your making art, but I'd like to know about your family—what was it like?

MS. ROCCA: I'm an only child.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. ROCCA: And, um, yes, my mother was very supportive. Both my parents were supportive, but she took a more active role in being supportive. Her family—she was from a German-Jewish background, and music was very important in her family. She was one of four siblings, and they all played musical instruments. And she was actually a very fine pianist, and so she had a real appreciation for the arts. And I think she was really delighted when she thought that she had a child who was artistic and did everything to support and help to promote my education.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now this is—you grew up in a similar time as me, and I know that she probably was—in quotes—"a housewife." She didn't have a career as a musician, but she did this as an avocation? She managed to fit that in?

MS. ROCCA: She did it sort of semiprofessionally.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh?

MS. ROCCA: There were some—there was, I recall, a singer who she accompanied. She was an accompanist for her and, of course, I learned, you know, as soon as she told me—as soon as—she later—she said, "You know, as soon as you, you know, you really can start to learn to read, that's a time you should start taking piano lessons."

MR. SILVERMAN: So did you take piano lessons?

MS. ROCCA: Yes, I did, and she didn't want to teach me. She—I went around the corner to a teacher, I remember vividly. You know—she, I—lessons were in her apartment, you know, and I remember waiting for my lessons.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now did you—

MS. ROCCA: She had these busts of all these famous—like, Chopin, and you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: But, yeah, I mean—I grew up listening to my mother, you know, play classical music on the piano so that, you know, that was all very familiar to me. My father was—my father was actually born in Irkutsk, Siberia.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. ROCCA: He was one of 12 children.

MR. SILVERMAN: Whoa.

MS. ROCCA: One of the youngest of 12 and was about 7 years old when they came here, and they came to—when they came to the States—and they came to Duluth, Minnesota, where his mother had relatives. And I think he—his childhood was not such an easy one. And, actually, he had to quit school at a pretty early age and go out and work so that he could help support the family.

MR. SILVERMAN: This is post-Depression, which, a lot of people—this is the generation where being an artist or musician—any of those things—was not only a luxury but it was somewhat a madness, given the economy, which is, you know, probably what your father was coming out of.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I think, you know, being in an immigrant family—I mean, I think everybody just helped out to, you know, to try to survive. I think it was about 1911 or so when he came here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: You know, and the whole family came. So, they were—they all lived up in Minnesota and Duluth, St. Paul, and we would go up to visit every summer, and I was always, you know, very fascinated by all the relatives up there.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm assuming your father was also Jewish, or no?

MS. ROCCA: Yes. Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Jewish community in Duluth? That seems pretty WASP-ish to me. I mean, I was in Madison for a while and I thought, "Boy, my God. There's all blond-haired, blue-eyed German and whatever." But it—was it a pretty small enclave of Jewish community there or—?

MS. ROCCA: I don't—I don't know, actually. My—neither of my parents were religious.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that wasn't a part of their—that wasn't a part of your upbringing?

MS. ROCCA: But I think his family, you know, like, when he was growing up, his family may have been religious. But he himself—neither of my parents—they identified with being Jewish.

MR. SILVERMAN: Culturally but not—?

MS. ROCCA: Culturally, really.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: And we observed the holidays, you know, but we really weren't members of a synagogue. And, actually, I was one of these kinds of kids that always sort of desired, sort of, some sort of spiritual—

MR. SILVERMAN: It's rebellion [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Right [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Whatever it is, you go the opposite way.

MS. ROCCA: So, I kind of, you know, asked to be sent to Sunday school, and, so—but I—but I did not really grow up in a religious home, although certainly we identified as being Jewish.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, what did your father do to survive in terms of the economy? How did he make a living?

MS. ROCCA: My father was a salesman. He was a self-made man. He was a self-educated person. He was a salesman and he sold lighting.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know, like, lighting for factories. Hardworking. Very hardworking. Very honest. Hardworking person. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, your early childhood—how would you characterize it in terms of—were you interested in art from an early—? You obviously listened to music, but what was your introduction to art? How did you—?

MS. ROCCA: I was always, you know, as long as I can remember, interested in art, and when I was in third grade, one—I had a teacher—her name was Miss Carlson—and she identified my talent, called my mother to school, and said, "Take this child to the Art Institute!"

MR. SILVERMAN: I read that somewhere.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. That's great.

MS. ROCCA: And, actually, I would—after I would finish my work—I was always a good student. I had, I think, they—an arithmetic pad, which was just blank paper at that time—and I would draw, you know. And I don't know where I ever got charcoal, but I think they were done with charcoal. And she gave me my first one-person show.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: She collected—you know, instead of saying, "Why aren't you studying math?" I mean, she collected my work and put it up in the hall outside.

MR. SILVERMAN: She validated your interest?

MS. ROCCA: She validated it, and then she called my—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's great.

MS. ROCCA: —called—she—those things are really important.

MR. SILVERMAN: They are, and so much education snuffs out interest and tries to get you to do what you're supposed to do, as opposed to what would get you—your natural curiosity—would get you to the next step.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I think that's one reason, and there—I think I was very fortunate in that way. She was one of the people, I think, in my life that have always, you know, the—one of the reasons I've always wanted to teach, because I think doing that for somebody else is so important.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: So, she called my mother to school. She, you know—and I had this exhibition, and she said that I—she should take me to the Art Institute and sign me up for classes, and so we went down there. And, this is kind of—it's sort of a fun story. And, at that time the classes for children were called the Junior School, and—I don't know what it was, whether it was after the deadline or the classes were filled or whatever it was, but I couldn't register for a class. And so, we're leaving the Art Institute and I'm crying [laughs], and a guard at the Art Institute says, "What's wrong?" And my mother explains to the guard, you know, that I was hoping to go to school, and so the guard tells her about these classes called the Raymond Fund Classes that were given by the Museum, not by the School at the Art Institute.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. ROCCA: And the—if you're a member you could go to these classes, so my mother becomes a member and I start going to these classes. And there are many people that I have met, many artists through the years, who actually attended these classes. They were for members, for the children of members, but they also provided a similar kind of class for seventh and eighth graders that were selected from the public schools in Chicago—like, two students were selected and given the privilege of going to these classes. Well, the thing was, there was a wonderful teacher there, and his name was Addis Osborne, so he was—he really became my first mentor.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, that's early on.

MS. ROCCA: Very early on. And he took an interest in me, took an interest in my work. Totally inspired me, you know, by the things that he said. He was a—he loved traveling, he always carried a sketchbook with him, and he would show us his sketchbooks. These were not intimate classes. These were held in Fullerton Hall. And there

were—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. That's huge [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Yes. Huge.

MR. SILVERMAN: As a matter of fact, I taught museum classes in Cleveland and they were smaller classes. Fullerton Hall is huge. That's a big—

MS. ROCCA: It's huge. And so, it wasn't, you know—it was—there were lots of children, young people, in the classes. But, from the time I was 8 till through high school, Addis Osborne was my mentor and, you know, very supportive, you know, helped inspire me and—

MR. SILVERMAN: What was your work like when you—let's do a before and after? The stuff when you had your one-person show [laughs]—

MS. ROCCA: I drew figures for some reason, which is kind of unusual for—I don't have any of those drawings. I have all the drawing—all the paintings that I did for the Raymond Fund classes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: I have a portfolio because we used to make—we used to make our own portfolios. It was really a wonderful class.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, they gave you training in how to become an artist, too. Just the idea of composing a portfolio—

MS. ROCCA: We made a portfolio—

MR. SILVERMAN: —and editing.

MS. ROCCA: —and our work would be graded, would be turned—we have to kind of—I—it's—you have—I have to sort of explain this so that it makes sense. There were two types of classes that would alternate. There was a six-week figure drawing class; you would come to Fullerton Hall, you would pay, I think, 10 or 15 cents.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: You would get a drawing board with, you know, newsprint paper and charcoal, and then you would sit in Fullerton Hall and there was a model on the stage posing and you would draw the model. And then there was a great big drawing—the great big easel on the stage where Addis Osborne or one of the other teachers was drawing, and then you would turn in what you thought was your best drawing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right. So was he making his version and then that was your example of maybe—?

MS. ROCCA: No, not so much an example, but seeing—but seeing him draw on this big easel, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: But just doing this with you, so, you had a role model. Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: So, I mean, I think that's pretty unusual at 8 or 9 or 10 years old to be drawing from a live model.

MR. SILVERMAN: That is pretty precocious in terms of—

MS. ROCCA: It is.

MR. SILVERMAN: —classical training, too. That's interesting. A lot of people don't realize that. A lot of people see either abstraction or wacky stuff and they assume the person has no idea how to do the other stuff, but you started out classically.

MS. ROCCA: I started—I started out drawing from a model at 8—at 8 years old. And then there would be—that class would alternate with another class, which I believe was 12 weeks long, and you were given assignments—like, an assignment might be "a winter day." And, so, you would do your work at home and then come and turn it in. But, when the assignment was given, on the big screen in Fullerton Hall, you would see work by [Pieter] Bruegel—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You would see, you know, on the theme of a winter day, you know, by many, many artists, and so—

MR. SILVERMAN: Is that intimidating after you've done your little winter scene, and then you—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, not at all. It was totally inspiring.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's great.

MS. ROCCA: And, it's—just like it's unusual to be drawing from a figure at 8 years old, most kids don't have the opportunity to learn art history in that way.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's also another—yes.

MS. ROCCA: So, I never, you know—I mean, art history was just something that—

MR. SILVERMAN: Is organic.

MS. ROCCA: —came naturally.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's the way you worked on your pieces.

MS. ROCCA: But not only that, you turned work in and they graded the work. They graded it as you could get a star, an HM, or—

MR. SILVERMAN: What's HM?

MS. ROCCA: HM would be honorable mention.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, honorable mention. Okay. Right.

MS. ROCCA: And you could accumulate points, which—but they would photograph the work. If you got a star, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: —first of all, the work would be shown the next week up on the stage—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you had an early—

MS. ROCCA: Well, my heart, you know? Going into Fullerton Hall and, like, the H—the works that got HMs were up at the back—but the work that got stars were—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you already learned the competitive nature of the art world?

MS. ROCCA: Yes, well. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Very early on.

MS. ROCCA: And, it was like, you know—and I would run down—

MR. SILVERMAN: Were you crushed if you didn't—?

MS. ROCCA: Well, not—I mean, I usually did get a [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's good. But, you know, the winners are always happy. But the—but I mean that nature of the art world, how it's especially, as a kid—I mean, kids are sensitive about that—about how that—how were you treated by your peers in terms of being so interested in art early on, because that's not your standard–?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I just wanted to finish this if that's okay.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: So—but the important thing was really—if you got a star, you know, they photographed the work. So when they gave the assignment of a winter day, you might see a [Pieter] Bruegel and then you might see—

MR. SILVERMAN: Your piece.

MS. ROCCA: Your piece.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: And the impact of seeing work by these great masters, you know, on whatever the theme was and then seeing your work—you know, it was like, what was the message there? It was like, "Oh, I can be a great artist."

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, you can enter art history. This is huge. This is like you're learning not just what a role of the artist is but what the rewards are and what that means—that one day somebody might be looking at their picture next to theirs.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Or it might be hanging in the Museum.

MR. SILVERMAN: Or, better yet, it might be—

MS. ROCCA: It was very inspirational.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's very important.

MS. ROCCA: Plus, the fact they were wonderful, wonderful teachers. And, you know, I mean, I got, you know, the opportunity to actually talk with them about the work that I did. I also helped them, you know, with, you know—just sort of was like a little assistant as I got older. And so—but—

MR. SILVERMAN: You were really lucky.

MS. ROCCA: I was really lucky.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's an unusual story.

MS. ROCCA: And, like I say, I think—I think Gladys Nilsson went to these classes. I think maybe even Karl [Wirsum].

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: There are just quite a few artists—you know, people who became artists who went to those classes, and we've just, like, found out about it through conversations, you know, that we attended the classes. And then, as I got older I went to the classes—not the members classes but the—

MR. SILVERMAN: The art—the School of the Art Institute. Well, we'll get to that—

MS. ROCCA: Well, no, no, no, no, no. I—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh no, the—

MS. ROCCA: I went to the classes that were for the seventh and eighth grade and then went through high school and so forth. But I actually have, like I said, my portfolio with all of the paintings that I did in those classes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Have you looked at that in the last five or 10 years? Have you ever looked at that recently to think about what—?

MS. ROCCA: You know, I have them. I have them in the room where I store my work. They're there. I haven't pulled them out—

MR. SILVERMAN: Do you feel continuity with them is what I was going to ask?

MS. ROCCA: I do feel continuity.

MR. SILVERMAN: You feel that—I mean, you can see where it all began and how—

MS. ROCCA: Well, I can see that, early on, you know, it was, you know, it—early on, art was so important to me, and I was really serious about making art and that it just—it meant everything to me. I must say though [laughs], when I was 7 or maybe it was when I was 8 there were three things I wanted. You know how they ask kids—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, what do you want to be when you grow up?

MS. ROCCA: What do you want to be when you grow up? Well, I said I wanted to be a ballet dancer, an opera singer, and an artist. But by the time I was 8—

MR. SILVERMAN: Clearly—

MS. ROCCA: —settled on art, and that was it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, the music part may have come from your parents. This other—so—

MS. ROCCA: I was a very idealistic child.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Well, I'm curious, though, because I—in a sense, though—I mean, the music would make a certain amount of sense, and there's two or three other people I've interviewed—I think Franz [Schulze] as well—that have had—I think Ted Halkin, too—that had music lessons—and maybe Dennis [Adrian], too. I can't—anyway, they were very interested in music, but way of their parents—but the art, is that something that you think just came out of—

MS. ROCCA: It just came out of me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Came—just came out of you, which is very—

MS. ROCCA: No. No, I—there was nothing really prior to my—this teacher in third grade identifying it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Somehow.

MS. ROCCA: It was just—

MR. SILVERMAN: Somebody. And so, that's an amazing story, in terms of getting—you had so much, I don't know, reinforcement and encouragement early on.

MS. ROCCA: Wonderful. And just very fortunate in my development as an artist. My education growing up and even at the School of the Art Institute—to always have a really wonderful mentor.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's important.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Very fortunate.

MR. SILVERMAN: And how—I was starting to ask—I was curious. I'm assuming, since art is not the usual, like, way to make friends and influence people as—especially as a teenager—were you somewhat removed from—did—how did kids view your pursuit of art? You were—

MS. ROCCA: I always had friends that were interested in art, too.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you managed to find like-minded people?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's great, because that period in time—I mean, you know, art is—there's this romantic notion that an artist—you know, the crazy artist and the—and it's not usually that easy to mix with people if that's your—either being an intellectual and aesthete. Any of those things are not your standard social signs of—

MS. ROCCA: Well, you know, I went to a big high school and I—there were, you know, different groups, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Cliques?

MS. ROCCA: There were athletes—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I always had friends who were artists and also I was a good student, you know, so I had other—I had other interests, too. I was a good student, but I also was interested in music, and I sang in choirs, something that I found very pleasurable. And so—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you had other points of entry in terms of socializing and other—it wasn't just all art, all the time, with just this little narrow clique. You had ways you could overlap with other people. I guess I'm kind of interested—so [laughs] that's funny because I was going to probably ask you: Were there any other alternate careers you considered? So, at that early age—?

MS. ROCCA: That's it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was—?

MS. ROCCA: That was it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was it, then, from that point on?

MS. ROCCA: After 8 years old, that was it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You had it. It was headlong. And, you had a touch of—you had your one-person show at age 7 or something [laughs]. I could not want to follow that up. I mean, that's a great beginning. So, I guess the next thing we probably come to is—I think you had early admission into the School of the Art Institute? Were you 16 or something? Did I read that?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I was quite young. I had skipped several grades in—throughout, you know, the elementary and high school. Well, it was in elementary school. So I was younger. So, I think I was actually 16 when I started.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you have that in common with Dennis [Adrian]. He was an enfant terrible—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: He came to the U of Chicago—University of Chicago at probably not too far off in age.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, I don't know—that's not an easy path either, in terms of just, like—in terms of socializing. So you were—you were there young?

MS. ROCCA: I was young. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Although, I think art school is very different. So, you had mentors there, I'm sure, and teachers —?

MS. ROCCA: Oh, absolutely. But, you know, at the time, the way—the School of the Art Institute had a competition. They gave a scholarship to a suburban student and a scholarship to a city student, or maybe there were several. And so, the competition was a daylong event where you actually were given assignments throughout the day and you did the work there.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's an art-off, like a cook-off? It's an art-off.

MS. ROCCA: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: You had to sort of—well, that's funny. I mean, it's like a reality show or something.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. It was pretty pressured, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'll bet.

MS. ROCCA: And there was, as I remember, about three or four assignments, you know. So, I won the suburban scholarship.

MR. SILVERMAN: Ah. And so—and you got in early at 16 or so?

MS. ROCCA: Right. I—that's when I graduated from high school. I was 16, shortly to become 17 in the fall.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, I know that the names that always keep coming up—and I'm sure one that we—you just—off the tape, we were talking about Ray Yoshida. He had to clearly be an important influence?

MS. ROCCA: Ray was very—

MR. SILVERMAN: Very big for a lot of the people that we're going to be talking about.

MS. ROCCA: He was my most important influence at the School of the Art Institute. He—they had just instituted a first-year program, you know—I think the School has gone back and forth about, you know, the curriculum, probably like all schools that, you know, change the curriculum throughout the years, but at that time they had a first-year program that all first-year students took. And he was—it was one of his first few years teaching at the School—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. And he was my drawing instructor, okay? And, you know, from the—from that class on,

whether I was actually formally in his class or not, he was a mentor. You know—I mean, he was—he was the person that I—he was interested in my work, he was a person I would bring my paintings to, to show him and discuss it. So I think that, actually, that first-year drawing class may have been the only class that I actually took with him, and he wasn't teaching painting back then.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. ROCCA: No, uh-huh [negative].

MR. SILVERMAN: What was he teaching? Oh, maybe—I talked to Art Green and he was—he took a class in silk-screening and he was a little bit miffed because he was expecting to learn some chops about how to do the actual printmaking or the, you know, the technique, and I guess Ray—the story was funny because what Ray was interested in is them finding their voice: "What is it you want to say? Forget about any of the other stuff."

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: They were at odds in terms of the—but—so maybe he was teaching—

MS. ROCCA: I've heard Ray—Art talk about that.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, maybe he was teaching printmaking?

MS. ROCCA: He may have been teaching silk—yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Silk-screening

MS. ROCCA: He was obviously teaching silk-screening, but I think drawing—that first-year drawing class—maybe I had him for another drawing class. I also had Tom Kapsalis.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. ROCCA: For a drawing class?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And he was a wonderful teacher. I also studied with Vera Berdich, and she was a wonderful teacher as well. And, actually, Art Green and I were in the same class.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. ROCCA: And also the same year at school. So I got different things—

MR. SILVERMAN: From different people.

MS. ROCCA: You know, from different people. You know—but Ray had a wonderful way. I mean, his teaching I'm sure evolved as he taught for more and more years, and he influenced so many generations of artists at the School, but what he would do that I thought was so wonderful is, I mean, he would be able to see things in your work that you didn't see because of your limited experience. And he wouldn't tell you what to do, but he might come by with a book, you know, by Ensor, or a book—or a book of African masks or, you know, whatever it was, and just put it down next to you and allow you to look at it and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Find the connections.

MS. ROCCA: —start to make connections.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's great.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. And then, you know—yeah. And one thing that I got from Vera Berdich was her—just her love of the materials and her love of the process of etching. So—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, actually—and there's some other people that are—that have probably come up. How about Whitney Halstead. Was that somebody—?

MS. ROCCA: Yes, I took his classes, and that was important as well. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: There are some other names that come up a lot, but I guess, going back to Ray, one of the

things that I think Ray is known for is initiating—looking at a, other cultures, looking at junk stores and flea market finds, Maxwell Street shopping, stuff like that?

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Did he take people out on jaunts like that?

MS. ROCCA: I actually never went on a jaunt with him.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because I'm not sure if he did that with his class or that was informal?

MS. ROCCA: No, not back then.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay. Maybe that's later.

MS. ROCCA: I think it was later. I mean, it was—it was—it was interesting the way the relationship evolved from his being a teacher to being like a peer, you know, and so—I think the kind of thing you're talking about was with, you know, many of the artists who, you know, like Christina, Phil, and, you know, and—where they would go into Maxwell Street and I—you know, I actually don't think I ever did that. But, I mean, we became—following school we continued to, you know, be friends, and he continued to look at work—my work and be close to my family and to my children. He loved children.

MR. SILVERMAN: Huh?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, actually, one of the things that you may also—I mean, I don't know if this came about from him or whatever, because so far you've talked about more classical influences in teaching, but Ray was very interested in pop culture and comic books. And this has a lot to do with *Hairy Who* and Imagists, which we'll be talking about soon enough, but did you get that from him at all or is that something—?

MS. ROCCA: No, I think he may have gotten some of that from us [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Oh, that's what I'm wondering about. Oh, so that's interesting. I don't know, because I—this is not—

MS. ROCCA: Maybe it was parallel?

MR. SILVERMAN: Maybe it—yeah, that's very interesting. The teacher gets taught or vice versa.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, yeah. No, I mean, there was—it—the relationship just very naturally evolved into—and yet, you know, there was always, for me at least, this sort of awe I had with Ray, even though he was a friend and a peer and a contemporary and an amazing artist.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. Definitely.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I guess that brings us sort of to this community of friends that I guess there's a lot of now are coming to. I've already thrown the term *Hairy Who* or Imagists. How did you get—you got friends with your peers—with—we're talking about Karl [Wirsum] and Christina [Ramberg] and Jim Nutt and Gladys. All those people. Did they—did you naturally align each other? How did that happen? Was it an informal thing at first and you just get closer as your—as you started to show together or—how did that come about from your standpoint?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I think—I think—because we've gone over this recently—quite recently in the movie *Hairy Who and the Chicago Imagists*. I think it was Jim who—Jim and Jim Falconer—Jim Nutt, Jim Falconer—who initiated—proposed a show with Don Baum—a—to Don Baum at the Hyde Park Art Center, and Don was Director of the Arts under them, and I think he proposed the artists that he was interested in having in the show. And I don't think I really knew Jim Nutt and Gladys that well before we started getting together. I knew them from school.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I wondered. So, you just sort of casually—?

MS. ROCCA: We were not close friends but we got to know each other. We had all exhibited in some shows that Don had given at the Hyde Park Art Center called *Animal*, *Vegetable*, and *Mineral*, and the way that Jim describes it is that he was looking for an opportunity to show more work, not just a single piece, and so I think he put together the group, which was Gladys—which, of course, is—Gladys and Jim are husband and wife—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —and Jim Falconer, myself, Art Green—and, of course, Art and I knew each other pretty well from school. And it was—it was Don Baum who suggested Karl [Wirsum]—that—he thought he would be good to include.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, it's interesting, too, because there's—there is allegiances and differences—there's *Hairy Who* and there is Imagists and there's False Imagists. [*False Image* is the name of an exhibition group. –SR] There's different—

MS. ROCCA: Which is all really muddled.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not only muddled, but, I guess, when it gets down to it—I've had this conversation with a number of curators and artists—but, a lot of it is sort of an artificial construct. These people knew each other—you people [laughs] for lack of a better way of putting it. You knew each other, and some of these were shows that brought you together, but style-wise there are—there are broad difference between some of you. Some of it looks similar—

MS. ROCCA: All of us.

MR. SILVERMAN: All of you. It's very hard to sort of lump it together as a movement. So, at the time you didn't see it so much as a movement as people who were just showing together. You didn't see it as, like, some—?

MS. ROCCA: No, we didn't see it as a movement. No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Even though maybe in retrospect that's—?

MS. ROCCA: But we saw, I think, a complementary nature to the work that even, you know—no, not that it was a single style or that—but that we had similar interests in, you know, in our work. We expressed it in different ways—

MR. SILVERMAN: Definitely.

MS. ROCCA: —and the work, I think, complemented each other—showed well together. But, you know, it was—it was through, really, you know, the meetings we had planning the shows and the installation of the shows, and, you know, the work that we did prior to the shows for the show that we really—the interest that we had in each other's work, you know, that, you know, was important. You know—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, in a way Don was like the ringmaster. He's sort of the impresario. He brought these people together and then something synergistic happened afterwards is what you're—

MS. ROCCA: Impresario is the word that I always use for Don.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, definitely.

MS. ROCCA: But he did not bring us together. It was Jim Nutt and Jim Falconer who brought it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Brought it to Don—

MS. ROCCA: —brought it to Don, and Don suggested including Karl [Wirsum]. Then we—I don't—I don't remember exactly the sequence of events, but I recall, you know, that we got together for meetings and we talked about the show and what we wanted to do, and that's how the name *Hairy Who* came up. What did we want to name the show? That's how the idea of doing comic books for the shows—

MR. SILVERMAN: Or catalogs or whatever?

MS. ROCCA: And sort of really what we were doing was developing what these shows would be like and how they would be unique—

MR. SILVERMAN: Not only that but—

MS. ROCCA: —you know, how they would be, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Like wallpaper—the wallpaper that was used for the Hyde Park show?

MS. ROCCA: Well, it was linoleum—

MR. SILVERMAN: Linoleum? It wasn't wallpaper?

MS. ROCCA: It was flowered. It was flowered—

MR. SILVERMAN: It was linoleum. That's what I—yeah, yeah. That's right. And that—

MS. ROCCA: 1940s flowered linoleum.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's just amazing.

MS. ROCCA: So it really was an early installation.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, and it's a whole different way of presenting art—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's like maximal—my exhibit designer when I did the Karl [Wirsum] show said, "This is way too much stuff happening." I said, "Look at the original installation. This is minimal, man [laughs]."

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, just getting your—

MS. ROCCA: And it's things like—and it was true when we would get together as a group that we would come up with these ideas, you know, such as—and we had cases with our thrift-store finds, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah. I've seen those.

MS. ROCCA: So, we did—we did create an environment, and I remember one show we decided to hang yellow tags—price tags—off the corner—bottom right-hand corner of the paintings with prices like $99.99. So, there was a lot—you know, obviously a lot of playfulness creating the comic book and, you know, all of that so it—and it was over, you know, several years, too, because there were three shows at Hyde Park—'66—1966—'67, and '68—and then we were invited to show at the San Francisco Art Institute and at the Corcoran Museum in D.C.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it got out of Chicago, which is difficult because there's a—I'm going to talk a little bit about that wide divide between New York and Chicago, and then there also is—like, when Don did the *Chicago Needs—Who Says Chicago Needs Art?* The thing that was at the MCA—?

MS. ROCCA: *Chicago Needs Famous Artists*.

MR. SILVERMAN: The—*Needs Famous Artists*. Thank you. Yeah. And, actually, someone accused him of putting this all together—of being his own—have you read that? That someone thought maybe it was all him. It was—they—it was a hoax—that it was all Don Baum's work that he had put together.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, no [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That—so I'm thinking, "How could you think that?" This stuff is all over the map in many ways.

MS. ROCCA: And the thing is about the Hyde Park Art Center, too—that they had a very strong, you know—first of all, the presence of Don really created, you know, the atmosphere of—not atmosphere but created, you know, what the Hyde Park Art Center was and—but they had a very strong support group of collectors and people who were involved, you know, with the art center, and I—you know, I think that was really due to Don and his relationship—

MR. SILVERMAN: Ruth Horwich I'm thinking of, for one.

MS. ROCCA: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: She has a major—had a major collection.

MS. ROCCA: And so, we had from—you know, we would be invited to their homes after our openings. First of all, the openings were wonderful. They were crazy. They were wild.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'll bet [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: They were really, you know—people dressed really outrageously and wonderfully, and, you know—and, so, it was a real visual treat. And then we would be invited, like, say to Ruth Horwich's—Ruth and Leonard Horwich's home afterwards and see their wonderful collections. I would be sitting there, you know, with [Alexander] Calders hanging above us and a [Roberto] Matta painting and a [René] Magritte, and, you know—so

that was a—that was wonderful, you know. That was really wonderful. And the [Edwin & "Lindy"] Bergmans and, you know, so, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: You've had a pretty charmed—pretty charmed sort of life in terms of the art world.

MS. ROCCA: It was wonderful.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: It was. It really—and Don, Don, you know, was—

MR. SILVERMAN: Amazing man.

MS. ROCCA: —was just amazing, amazing. There's nobody like Don.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: He was the impresario, and he, through his whole life, was supportive of young artists. And it just—

MR. SILVERMAN: And even to the point when he was on our exhibition committee he was still looking for new things, which is—some people just—I won't name names—some people just give up and it's, like, all done after a certain point. But he was continuing to grow and to be curious—

MS. ROCCA: Absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and that's always the most exciting thing.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I want to get back to the Chicago. You say that—yeah, I agree that there—I probably led you to this, too—is that Chicago or the Imagists and *Hairy Who* are a very diverse group. Maybe what they have in common, though, and what was noted by New York in its sort of scoffing at the Chicago tradition, is that Chicago rejected abstract—by and large very much rejected abstract expressionism, the ruling canon of the time—the [Harold] Rosenbergian—whatever—[Clement] Greenbergian stuff—and also was—if it—if there's pop in Chicago art, it's without a sense of irony or it's not making fun of the stuff; it's out of love of the sources. This is probably what you guys had in common, although that's just one thread—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. No, I think well put.

MR. SILVERMAN: And so, you think that's probably—I mean, you think that—

MS. ROCCA: I like the way you say "love of the sources," and I think that's a big difference.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, because irony has reigned in the last 10 or 20 years, and there's so much ways to sort of comment on or to sort of make some sort of a critique.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I think that pop art was—to a large extent, I—although interesting, a comment on popular culture—

MR. SILVERMAN: And it—

MS. ROCCA: —in a very different way, and when you know our collection, that I'm Curator of—I didn't mean to stop you—

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. Go ahead. This is your interview. I want you to talk [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: The art collection that I'm Curator of at Elmhurst College, which is focused on the Chicago Imagist—when I try to explain the difference between Pop art and New York versus Chicago, I say—well, not just this, but I end up by saying, "New York was cool."

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Definitely.

MS. ROCCA: And it basically—it took popular culture, put in a different context, and put it in, you know—put it on a canvas, put it in a gallery and it was—it was cool, it was objective. New York—Chicago was hot.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Well, that—that can—

MS. ROCCA: And when you say "the love of those sources"—

MR. SILVERMAN: And even people like Ray Yoshida or Jim Nutt, who have formal chops galore, who can be very formal and beautiful and elegant—still, there's—it's a different attitude towards the—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, definitely elegant.

MR. SILVERMAN: —towards—

MS. ROCCA: Definitely. I mean, is there a better draftsman or painter than Jim Nutt?

MR. SILVERMAN: I can't think of one.

MS. ROCCA: Or Karl [Wirsum]?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I mean, you know, I mean—yeah, no—I—when I say hot, I'm—I mean, I mean—

MR. SILVERMAN: Impassioned?

MS. ROCCA: Passion. When you say love of the sources—

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I think that's a very important—

MS. ROCCA: And not just popular sources. I mean, there were lots of other sources of inspiration that were not popular culture.

MR. SILVERMAN: Outsider art?

MS. ROCCA: Well, outsider—

MR. SILVERMAN: Art of other cultures?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: All these things and this somewhat—I know Ray was—

MS. ROCCA: German Expressionism.

MR. SILVERMAN: German Expressionism. Yeah. There's a lot of things going into the mix—

MS. ROCCA: For me, Egyptian art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Surrealism, too, which is big in—

MS. ROCCA: Surrealism.

MR. SILVERMAN: Big Surrealism collections—

MS. ROCCA: Dada.

MR. SILVERMAN: Surrealism and Dada are very big in Chicago by way of the collections at the Art Institute—

MS. ROCCA: And private collections.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, as well. Did seeing that stuff early on—you obviously had to see the collections at the Art Institute—at the Museum. Did that influence you in terms of your own work?

MS. ROCCA: Oh, I think—I'm sure seeing the things in the Art Institute's' collection—I mean, I think everybody says the fact—one of the most important things about going to School of the Art Institute was walking through the Museum constantly.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, definitely.

MS. ROCCA: And I remember when they came up with a rule that we couldn't walk through the Museum—we couldn't carry our portfolio through the Museum. We went on a big protest, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: No—but—because, actually, some of the classes were even—there were some classrooms above some of the galleries early on when Gladys and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I know this from having worked in the Cleveland museum. The directors—Sherman Lee—get very nervous when you're in front of a million dollar [Jackson] Pollock and you've got a bunch of little kids scribbling. That's very nice, but, you know, like [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Well, we would—we were—we would—there was nothing that we were—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I know.

MS. ROCCA: —we were just carrying our portfolio.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, but even—

MS. ROCCA: —but the point being that, having that daily access to the Museum and going up and looking at that—you know, the collection, and there's—it's a wonderful collection, certainly. It was very, very important.

MR. SILVERMAN: What sources do you remember as a kid? I—we're going back—I guess I'm circling back around the ranch here. There—are there particular paintings or Thorne Rooms or things that really, you know—or particular cultures that—

MS. ROCCA: What were my favorite—?

MR. SILVERMAN: Things that, when you were young—what was—

MS. ROCCA: Gosh.

MR. SILVERMAN: —what was it that really got you excited about art in the collection there? Because there's a lot there.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, that's a good question, but I don't remember. There were so many things, I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: Probably loved the Egyptian room. Something tells me the glyphs and the—

MS. ROCCA: That came later for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's later?

MS. ROCCA: That came later for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that's more—after you had a voice?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. But as a child, gosh. I liked El Greco a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, but I'm—what—I'm trying to remember if I really liked the Impressionists a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's certainly a lot of it there.

MS. ROCCA: Yes, there's certainly a lot of it, that's for sure.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Whatever you want to say about that [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: I just think there were so many things I can't—I can't think. I'll try to think about it, but not one single painting or painter comes to mind. I think I admired a lot of things.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, let's go back to Chicago art before you. How about the Monster Roster—the people of the previous generation like Leon Golub and [Seymour] Rosofsky and some of the other people? Did—is that something that was evident at the School of the Art Institute? Would—did you—were you aware of them?

MS. ROCCA: Not so much, really.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you didn't become aware of that until later.

MS. ROCCA: Later, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting, too, because I sense a continuity. Some of those people are Art Institute—Art Institute people, so—

MS. ROCCA: Well, now, I know that that post–World War II—you know—I mean, I've known for a long time that that post–World War II period was a very exciting time at the School, and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: And Chicago was finding a separate voice from New York, which I think is important for—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah. But I didn't know it then. I didn't know it when I was in school

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting

MS. ROCCA: There wasn't a sense of—

MR. SILVERMAN: Your predecessors.

MS. ROCCA: Of that so much.

MR. SILVERMAN: So when you were at the School, even though—I—we—I suggested that maybe Chicago was something of a rejection of the New York way of working, which paid its—paid a price, I think, for a lot of the artists. It was very hard to get the recognition. Just now it seems like this work is seeing its due course, as you know.

MS. ROCCA: Pretty amazing, you know, that it took 50 years.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's pretty amazing that people are revisiting it, but it took a while. But New York is very stubborn in—it's like that Saul Steinberg cartoon. It's: Everything is New York and the rest is the demons at the end of the universe.

MS. ROCCA: Right. Well, there's the LA and New York and nothing in between.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, everything else in between you can forget about. Well, I guess what I was going to ask—were you aware of—did you go to New York? Did you visit New York as a student? Were you aware of—were you reading the magazines probably? Or not?

MS. ROCCA: No, I don't think as a student I went to New York, really. When I was in high school I won an award. My painting was in an exhibit at UNICEF.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: The Children's Milk Fund. And my painting won an award, and I'll never forget that because that was the first time I was in New York. So my parents—we got in the car and we—

MR. SILVERMAN: You drove to New York?

MS. ROCCA: We drove to New York—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's a long ride, too.

MS. ROCCA: —to see my painting, and that trip was like, "Wow."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know, it was really eye-opening, you know, to be in New York and very exciting—and to have my painting on exhibition, but I don't think—I don't know—I don't think I went to New York too much while I was in school. I married when I was in school. I think I was in my third year of school and just—had just turned 19 when I got married. And—well, I remember we took—we took a trip with two other students who were friends of ours to Mexico. We drove down to Mexico City and that was pretty exciting to drive to Mexico City—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's an even longer drive.

MS. ROCCA: —and we went—talk about going to the flea markets. And that—that's what we did mostly, is we went to the wonderful street markets and came back with a car full of stuff. That was fun. And then I always thought—again, these dreams of an 8-year-old—that I would—from the time that I found out that there was a—and that was when I was in those classes—found out that there was a traveling fellowship—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. ROCCA: —that you could win—at the—that you could compete for at the end of your studies at the School of the Art Institute. Always thought I was going to win that [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So, you were trying?

MS. ROCCA: And guess what? I didn't [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh. So did you—

MS. ROCCA: So, we went to Europe anyway.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh. You did it on your own?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. We went to Europe anyway and that, you know, that was a wonderful traveling.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, did you look at—obviously you looked at the classical sources in the Museums that have a lot of things that we don't have here.

MS. ROCCA: Sure.

MR. SILVERMAN: Chicago—like, how many [Johannes] Vermeers can you find in this country. Or [Hieronymus] Bosch.

MS. ROCCA: I mean, every trip that I've taken to Europe has been wonderful. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Have you hit any other cultures other than Europe? Have you done any of the—other than Mexico?

MS. ROCCA: Mexico and Europe. No, I've never been to the Far East.

MR. SILVERMAN: Far East, for example. Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, have you gone back to your—you know, you, like either Irkutsk or Germany? Have you gone back to where your parents lived at all?

MS. ROCCA: No, uh-huh [negative]. I've always been curious about where my father grew up in Siberia, but I don't think I'm going to ever go.

MR. SILVERMAN: I have some more feelings about [Laughs.] Ukrainian—just like Kiev or something like that. There's just—there's a lot of reasons to maybe not want to be in that part of the world right now, but [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, but I—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, let's get back to—I guess you were privileged to have—well, you had your first one-person show as a 7-year-old, but—

MS. ROCCA: Eight.

MR. SILVERMAN: Eight. Okay, 8. We won't—we won't—we won't make it too precocious [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Don't make it too—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But—so, I was going to ask you a little bit about how—I know you mentioned Jim Falconer and—who else was it who brought this stuff to Don? —Oh and—

MS. ROCCA: Jim Nutt.

MR. SILVERMAN: And Jim Nutt brought it to Don, but were there any other connections to shows or to dealers at that point? Did you have a dealer at that point?

MS. ROCCA: No, uh-huh [negative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh. You managed to survive as an artist with just those shows. Did you—when you graduated did you—

MS. ROCCA: Well, the shows were after graduation.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, they were after graduation. So, what were you doing to survive?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I graduated in '64.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so that's actually great–

MS. ROCCA: And the shows started in '66.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it's right after that. And did you—how do you manage other than being married, which is—one way that artists survive is having a spouse that, you know, has the day gig. Did you teach or did you—how did you survive?

MS. ROCCA: Not at that time. The first teaching I ever did was in about '68. Don Baum was the head of the department at Roosevelt, and he asked me to teach printmaking. It was printmaking. But I hadn't taught up till then, and I was just making art, you know, and having babies.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Well, my son was born in '65, my daughter was born in '68.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I graduated in '64.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that keeps you pretty busy.

MS. ROCCA: Paul was born in '65 and Leah was born in '68. And I was making lots of art, and I was—we were showing, you know—every year we were showing in—

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, that's what—

MS. ROCCA: It was just, you know, it was a very creative, very exciting time. And also, you know, being a new mother and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Were you making art with your kids right—I mean, while you were having the kids, would the kids wait at bay, you know, just like—

MS. ROCCA: No, they took long naps.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: I didn't care—

MR. SILVERMAN: You're lucky.

MS. ROCCA: They could—they could be up until 10:00, I didn't care.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I see.

MS. ROCCA: But they took long naps [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: You wore them out, then let them sleep [laughs]?

MS. ROCCA: They took long naps in the afternoon and I worked. I mean, I was able to—I made lots of—lots of work and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that was a key period for you?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you made lots of art and you had lots of shows, but there weren't really, at that point, I guess, there weren't that many people showing? There was Alan Frumkin and there was Phyllis Kind.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But that was not the—?

MS. ROCCA: No, Phyllis Kind wasn't until later.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was much later that she started?

MS. ROCCA: Not much later. She was, I think, in the beginning of the '70s.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, she started showing some of the work?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because that's actually the main gallery, and Alan was provably before that but I don't know?

MS. ROCCA: Well, Jim was very connected with the Frumkin. He worked at Frumkin, and he got to see [H.C.] Westermann's work there because he would unpack it and—you know—and I know that was an influence.

MR. SILVERMAN: Dennis [Adrian] worked there, too, actually.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, that's right.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, actually, I think someone told me the story about Cliff Westermaan punching somebody out [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Oh, I don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: At the gallery.

MS. ROCCA: I never met Cliff Westermann.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, what an amazing artist [inaudible].

MS. ROCCA: I admire his work, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, likewise.

MS. ROCCA: But I never—I never met him.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's another person that's not only undervalued but sort of misunderstood, I think. I mean, I think people see him as something other than, I guess—they make it seem like it was either naïve or it was very—

MS. ROCCA: No, he certainly wasn't.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not at all [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Not at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: Or, it's not outsider art at all?

MS. ROCCA: Not at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: It can easily be mischaracterized because it looks like a lot of things that it's not.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: So, in terms of you finding your voice—at the point where we're at, we're at your sort of—your peak period now, and you've gotten married, you're having—you're churning out art and kids [laughs] and making a lot—a lot of things and there are shows. How did you see—I mean, how did you see your work as being distinct from your friends', the cohorts that you showed with? I mean—

MS. ROCCA: You know, I don't think—that wasn't—that wasn't really an issue. I mean, I—

MR. SILVERMAN: You didn't look at it that way?

MS. ROCCA: We didn't really look at it. I mean, we didn't worry about it. I mean–

MR. SILVERMAN: You just made what you did and they made what they did?

MS. ROCCA: Right. And I think we really—at least for me—and I'm pretty sure it was the same for the others—I mean, there was a synergy that developed—pretty big word—I mean—at having the opportunity to look at each other's work, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Something happens when you interact.

MS. ROCCA: —because it's exciting. It's exciting to see, you know, such interesting work, you know. And, you know, we would visit each other's studios, and, I mean, some people have the idea that maybe we all worked together, which of course, wasn't true. We each—you know, our studios were in our homes, you know, and we would visit each other, we would—we would socialize. [Gladys's son, Claude –SR], was a couple years older, and she would come over, we would—as young mothers we would spend the afternoon together, you know. [Claude –SR]—he was a couple years older than Paul, and, you know, we would visit, you know. So we became friends. And—but then, also, just the opportunity to see each other's work. And my ex-husband was a wonderful cook, so often we would have a big meal, and I think everybody else really appreciated that [Laughs.], you know, because, as you say, I mean, I don't think—I was pretty comfortable because my ex-husband had an—a very good income, so I didn't have a—I think—but maybe some of the other artists may be—

MR. SILVERMAN: Not so much?

MS. ROCCA: —living on a shoestring, and so we would have these big dinners, you know, of Italian food, and, you know, so there was socializing, there was a wonderful opportunity to see each other's work, and then, you know, everybody was doing such interesting work, I—

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess one—

MS. ROCCA: I do want to say something about the term *Imagist*—

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. ROCCA: —but not necessarily right now. But I—at some point.

MR. SILVERMAN: Let's talk about it now, because I talked with Franz Schulze about it, too, and I'm kind of curious about it, because he obviously—

MS. ROCCA: I'd be interested in knowing what Franz Schulze said—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, first of all, Dennis [Adrian]—

MS. ROCCA: —because he invented the term.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know. And Dennis [Adrian] has been very gracious in acknowledging that. I thought there might be some turf wars there.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, no. I don't think.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, he's very comfortable about that. I mean—

MS. ROCCA: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: Dennis and he have their other issues, but probably—but as far as that goes, I talked to him a little bit about the term. But I'm curious to see what you say first. Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Well, it's not a term that anybody has ever—that anybody that I'm close with has ever liked.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: But that's not unusual, because I think if you—if you read art history, you know, that the names that styles ended up with were often not the chosen—were not chosen by the artists themselves but were given to the movement—to the style by an art historian or critic.

MR. SILVERMAN: People like order. Art historians love order. They love, like, movements and like ways to look at progress or whatever it is that they're looking for.

MS. ROCCA: It's hard. As one art historian said—

MR. SILVERMAN: You play both sides of the coin, too.

MS. ROCCA: Right. As they said, you need art—art historians need names for things so they can talk about them [laughs]. It's hard to talk about things.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, technically, that term came up from the previous generation. I think he was referring more to—as I reread the book recently—I hadn't reread it in a long time—I think he was more referring to

[Seymour] Rosofsky.

MS. ROCCA: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: Compoli and Leon—

MS. ROCCA: I thought that—I thought that he—his definition was of a first generation imagist and a second generation imagist and the first generation are post-World War II—artists that emerged post-World War II.

MR. SILVERMAN: All right, Ivan Albright too, yeah. Yeah, even before, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah and then the second generation are the artists of the '60s, you know, the*Hairy Who*. And the other thing that people get really confused about is that the—who were the *Hairy Who* members? Who were the *Nonplussed Some* members? You know, who were the *False Image* members? And it's amazing because to me, it's such recent history and people will say, "Oh, yeah, Ed Paschke was a *Hairy Who* member." Well, no, he wasn't ever a *Hairy Who*.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're going by some of the shows, but the shows didn't always attach the name. Why I could speak with—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, yes, they did.

MR. SILVERMAN: They did attach the name, okay.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, how about *Artful Codgers*? I came across that one. You were a member of the *Artful Codgers*, did I misread that?

MS. ROCCA: Oh, no, that was *Marriage Chicago Style*.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was what *Chicago Style*?

MS. ROCCA: You're referring—there were two shows. Oh, I know what you're saying.

MR. SILVERMAN: Some—can I—

MS. ROCCA: Because it was a blending of artists from the various groups.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm not sure. I read this somewhere. Either in an interview with you or something that connected to you. I got—

MS. ROCCA: No, there were two—

MR. SILVERMAN: —I have that in my notes, but I don't—

MS. ROCCA: —two—there were two shows, *Marriage Chicago Style* and then the following year, *Chicago Antigua*.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. ROCCA: And the artists in the shows were artists from the various—who were in the various groups, *Hairy Who*, *False Image*, et cetera.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I was in the show. Barbara Rossi was in the show. Ed Paschke was in the show, Ed Flood, Sara Canright, so forth. So, it wasn't a *Hairy Who* show or a *False Image* show. But there is a pretty simple history if you followed who were in the various groups and the various shows and when the shows occurred. But those were interesting shows and the posters for those shows are really interesting because the poster for the *Marriage Chicago Style*—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —Show, I don't know if you've ever seen it. It's a wonderful poster.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I would probably remember.

MS. ROCCA: But Barbara Rossi was a nun.

MR. SILVERMAN: I knew that, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Right, yeah and we went to her church. It was an old church as I recall on—an old Catholic church on the south side and we were dressed up in bridal gowns, the women were dressed in bridal gowns or white frilly dresses from resale shops. And the men bought tuxes from resale shops.

MR. SILVERMAN: I've seen that image. It's somewhere.

MS. ROCCA: And we wore ice skates and we stood on the altar of the church and were photographed.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's in some book or other I came across.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, it's a wonderful poster and—

MR. SILVERMAN: I have seen that image and maybe it's in the Robert Cozzolino essay or something about Chicago.

MS. ROCCA: Well, it could be. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Somewhere I saw it recently because I think it's like this—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —so-called marriage. Yeah, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, *Marriage Chicago Style* and I believe Ed Paschke was my husband—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —in that show and then the following year, it was *Chicago Antigua* and that might be the *Artful Codgers*. It's where we—we put on makeup and as if we were 70 or 80 years old.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know, as if we had aged.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's kind of fun.

MS. ROCCA: And—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, these names—all these collective names and whatever are not so important to any of the members themselves. Probably it's—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, yeah, they are.

MR. SILVERMAN: —well, they are in terms of this marketing these days.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, it's not marketing. I mean, the names were, you know, were—

MR. SILVERMAN: Part of the playful nature—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, it wasn't marketing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay, well, what I'm getting at though is nowadays, people are not just art historians, but people like hooks to get a hold of and that helps people to sort of, you know—

MS. ROCCA: Well, that may be true, but we weren't thinking of it in that—

MR. SILVERMAN: No, you were not.

MS. ROCCA: —those terms and you know the story of how the name came—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, sure, with—

MS. ROCCA: —about.

MR. SILVERMAN: —Harry Bouras.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and the thing—everyone talked about the playful nature, but for decades, we wouldn't reveal

where the name came from.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really, so that's much later in terms of—

MS. ROCCA: It—oh, it's only probably in the last maybe 15 years or something like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, because I—

MS. ROCCA: So that was part of, you know, creating sort of this aura—

MR. SILVERMAN: Puns.

MS. ROCCA: Puns and you know, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it has a lot to do with your work, which we'll talk about more later in terms of some of the particulars of your work and of the puns and—one of the things I think—

MS. ROCCA: But what we didn't want was a show of what was popular at the time, you know, five new artists. You know, or and we didn't want white walls, and we didn't want—, so it wasn't—

MR. SILVERMAN: It was a different way of—

MS. ROCCA: —it was a rejection of that, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And not only rejection of it, but wanting to do something else, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it was also frankly, it was also the '60s, wild and crazy times too in terms of psychedelic and all that stuff that went on and I lived through that too, so it's—that's why you could get away with maybe that—it almost looks like an acid dream. That linoleum background with also very intensely patterned work and all that overload. That's part of the timing.

MS. ROCCA: You know, Karl [Wirsum]—Karl [Wirsum] and Lori [Gunn] and Gladys and Jim [moved to –SR] Davis—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —in California—at Sacramento State and they were always being asked whether [laughs] the work was created under the—

MR. SILVERMAN: Under the influence.

MS. ROCCA: —influence and really, it absolutely wasn't.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's the irony of it. I think I knew that.

MS. ROCCA: And they were like a little dumbfounded at first because they thought, "How could I," you know, because if you see the work and now precisely it's done and how, you know, there's no way you could be on a—

MR. SILVERMAN: Even if you were—no matter how obsessive or how technically talented you are, it doesn't really look like the work done under the influence, but the color schemes—it still reads out as—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —'60s and '70s. It's of its era of a certain kind of—

MS. ROCCA: And *Hairy Who* ends up being—sounding like a rock group really. I mean—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, and there's a certain kind of—I don't know, a—

MS. ROCCA: '60s were pretty great.

MR. SILVERMAN: They were. As a matter of fact—

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —I'm hoping that some people say history is cyclical. The repressive '50s and the whatever '80s and '90s, it's time for us to go back to something—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —more open and fun—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —than this really—nowadays, everyone's concerned with fame and—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —it's a whole different—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —mentality. We'll get to that later in terms of changing art world. I guess another question for me. It [seems like –SR] you were making art and you were having shows. Were you getting reviews or sort of—?

MS. ROCCA: We were, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —Alan Artner. Who was reviewing it, Dennis Adrian?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I've always felt that the best writing that was done about our work was Dennis.

MR. SILVERMAN: He's probably—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the biggest supporter too?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Alan had issues with some of the work, I guess?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: He wasn't a—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and actually, I tried to ask Dennis about the story. Maybe you can help me out. He didn't really help. Apparently, the feud between Dennis—not sorry, Dennis. Alan Artner and Rodger Brown—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —apparently, that occurs in some of the paintings. I just read recently, there's the one painting, I think, that has the acolytes that has, I think, has Alan Artner sort of in a not favorable light. There's another painting I just read about recently where the critic has his head up his butt. [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: I didn't know that painting. I have to look for that, but you don't know that story?

MS. ROCCA: I don't think I can shed any light on that.

MR. SILVERMAN: But apparently, Artner—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —wasn't a huge—

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —proponent of this younger generation of images?

MS. ROCCA: I don't remember. There were some really positive articles that were—and really great pictures, photographs during the *Hairy Who* days that appeared in newspaper and so, but I can't really—I'm not really sure who was responsible for that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there were a couple of other writers that I think Dennis brought up and I think he was

writing not just—I think he wrote for Art in America and a couple of other places too. I think he did some national writing, but then the national reviews were pretty scathing of *Imagist* work I've read.

MS. ROCCA: Really?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. New York—

MS. ROCCA: Were they later?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know—

MS. ROCCA: Because I don't remember.

MR. SILVERMAN: —no at the time there were a couple of shows. There's the one that, is it Whitney did? Someone—a couple of people did some shows in New York. There's the New *Images of Man* is one of the early shows. That's probably slightly early generation. Peter Selz or something.

MS. ROCCA: That's—

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a—

MS. ROCCA: —yeah, but there weren't any—he—

MR. SILVERMAN: Not that. That wasn't *Imagist*. That was earlier work.

MS. ROCCA: Wasn't that the one that Richard Hunt was in?

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm not sure, but that may have been like, John Canaday. There were some reviews of—but of the younger artists, of your generation that this generation that we're talking about. There were some scathing reviews. I guess it was seen as rude and crude and not particularly refined, which as we both agree is totally ironic given that—look at Karl and [laughs]—

MS. ROCCA: Well, it's both.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's both at the same time, which—

MS. ROCCA: It's rude and crude and beautifully refined.

MR. SILVERMAN: Beautifully refined too, which is what makes it so wonderful because the sources may be, you know, pimple heads or like whatever, but—or common advertising, but at the same time, it's treated with great love and care. So, I guess—so, you weren't so aware of the New York response to this?

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Which is fine because you did fine without it because apparently, it never got its—and now finally, you know, I looked at Peter Schjeldahl's review and now, it's starting to get some—you know, the show that you were in recently at Matthew Marks and now, everyone is raving about it and it's really funny because where were they then [laughs], when it was happening?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Art history and the vagaries of fashion in the art world are peculiar.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: We'll get to that too, I guess. That's a whole other topic. So, we're at a certain point where you're—you've developed your voice. Well, let me take a break here. I'm going to take a look at my notes for just a second. It's kind of—I mean it's a very—

MS. ROCCA: It's important.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I wanted to talk about women in art because I think there's so much talk lately about parody in Hollywood, the lack of parody in Hollywood and women's roles. And feminism was—we're talking about the '60s—one of the things we were so excited about in the '60s is we thought we were changing the world in terms of women's rights, blacks' rights, all these other things. Gay rights were just beginning, but that's later probably, but the role of women and art has always been somewhat problematic. A lot of artists have finally given credit to their collaborators, like, Christo and Jeanne Claude or [Ed] Keinholz or there's other people too I'm thinking of. But there are a lot of people that worked together [that –SR] are finally acknowledging that their

partner was a big part of their art.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: And one of the things I think is interesting about women in art, in terms of *Imagist*, is that the material that we're talking about rude and crude, the material of like, Jim Nutt and Paschke is a certain kind of vulgarity which is elegant vulgarity. Or it's just kind of a wonderful contradiction, but it is kind of—the sexuality has been, I think one of the things New York critics considered as poor. Or they considered it somewhat adolescent or off-putting in it's being sort of very macho in a weird way. On the other hand, there are people like you, Christina Ramberg, Gladys Nilsson, whose aesthetics maintain an interest in sexuality, in vulgar and popular culture, both. But there's a—do you think there's a distinction between the women's version of it than the men's? Would you characterize it as different than—?

MS. ROCCA: Well, yeah. Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think for each of us it was a reflection of ourselves, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And so, you know, I don't think, certainly, you know, we weren't trying to be male, or they weren't trying to be—

MR. SILVERMAN: You weren't conscience of being a variant in any way, but it comes off as—seems like I'm looking at—well, one of the things I found really fascinating to read about is Christina Ramberg, she had some really interesting takes on, just like you, on fashion and on notions of beauty.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Female—the very restricted—we're talking about the '50s. Very restrictive notions, physically and culturally, both. Physically in the sense of like corsets. She—remembered her mom being dressed in the morning—

MS. ROCCA: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —into these iron maidens, I guess they were called?

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Did that content, that subject matter is a little different for you, Christina—it's all different for all of you, of course—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —but you're aware—very aware of female content in the sense of—?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I think that's true.

MR. SILVERMAN: You think that distinguishes you some from the boys or is that—?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I think that the commonality was that the source material came from popular culture. I think, you know, in Christina's case, my case, it reflected—came from our own experience, so obviously was reflecting a more feminine experience. But it wasn't like, I don't every consciously—ever consciously—I never consciously felt like "I'm going to make a feminine painting or I'm going to make"—I mean, I want to be really clear about that because that wasn't what was in my mind. But while, say, Jim might have been looking at the back of wrestling magazines, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —you know, I was looking at Sears catalogue bride ads.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Or, you know, my ex-husband was a third generation jeweler—

MR. SILVERMAN: I know you looked at jewelry ads like—

MS. ROCCA: When I would go after school, go up to the office which was right downtown in the jewelers' building and I would see these books of rows and rows and rows of diamond rings, well, that was a reflection of the culture and love and marriage and, you know, or when I became fascinated with, you know, something I found in a resale shop which was a book about crocheting purses, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: Something that you—a woman would do would be to, you know—but each purse had a name, like "First Love" or, you know, I'm trying to think. And I actually titled paintings or drawings—

MR. SILVERMAN: Based on the original.

MS. ROCCA: —based on those names. Well, I wish I could remember some of the other names. Maybe tomorrow.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, so I guess some of these things are natural content for you to—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —shift towards? Were you—since your work seems fairly—

MS. ROCCA: But it wasn't a protest.

MR. SILVERMAN: It wasn't a feminist work of art in the—it wasn't a political statement [inaudible]—

MS. ROCCA: It wasn't a political statement.

MR. SILVERMAN: Regardless of whether the fact that embedded in it is a bunch of issues of the restrictiveness of female beauty and—

MS. ROCCA: I can see how it might be read that way.

MR. SILVERMAN: After the fact, we'll acknowledge that it definitely—again, it's not necessarily a critique or a statement, but it does—it's got a witty sensibility about love and marriage and about feminine sexuality and all these things. These are all—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —this is your content. You clearly acknowledge that, but it wasn't—you weren't—you weren't making a conscious statement of any kind about those things. You just drifted towards those subjects by way of who you were and what your position was. But—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I think you put it well when you said it was kind of a—how did you put it? A witty—

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't remember what I said.

[Laughter.]

MR. SILVERMAN: It's on the tape for us. But in any case, yeah—

MS. ROCCA: But yeah, it was a reflection of some of the ironies and the idiosyncrasies of and the expectations of being a woman, a young woman and what, you know, as far as being expected to fall in love and to, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: The scenario.

MS. ROCCA: Like I said, groom yourself and, you know, your hair and things about hair and, you know, handbags, you know, was an image that I used a lot and—

MR. SILVERMAN: That can be taken as very Freudian and very—

MS. ROCCA: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —I mean, I'm sure you're aware of that [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: I was aware of it and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Even if you weren't thinking about it ahead of time.

MS. ROCCA: I was thinking about sexuality and, you know, the idea of reaching in and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Because I see that in the physical, sort of, it's in the imagery whether again, if you aware—

MS. ROCCA: I was aware of it. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: You were aware of that when you did that?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, that didn't just happen, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know and yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, I guess one of the things—?

MS. ROCCA: Lots of reaching.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah and then there's also some phallic imagery too in some of the things too?

MS. ROCCA: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, sexuality was kind of important. You and Christina—?

MS. ROCCA: Hair and curls and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah, all that stuff.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah. No. I was aware of it. I was—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you—

MS. ROCCA: —aware of it. I was sort of the double image of the, you know, double meaning—

MR. SILVERMAN: Like a visual pun, yeah, in that sense. So, you were certainly playing around with that stuff. The '60s were a time of pretty heavy time for feminism. Did you—

MS. ROCCA: More '70s.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's actually probably '70s, yeah, I think—?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —yeah, it's probably '70s?

MS. ROCCA: Well, really, the feminist movement, I think was more—

MR. SILVERMAN: I think, yeah, it's probably a little later. I'm a little off on my timeline there. Yeah, but—

MS. ROCCA: I could be wrong.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but did you—I guess this is separate from the content issue, which is just something I'm wondering. Did you see the difficulties of being a woman as an artist because this is way before the *Guerilla Girls* or any of that, but there were all these disparities? Even within the art world here—?

MS. ROCCA: No, it wasn't something that I was really focused on.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you were—

MS. ROCCA: I do know and I do see that I was kind of naïve. I mean, in the sense that if you walk through a museum and [laughs] you go from room to room and you never see—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —the work of a woman artist and certainly women were—are still extremely under-represented. You know, so, yeah, I do think that, that wasn't something that—I do think I was sort of naïve about that, but it wasn't whether or not—maybe even if I had been more aware, I don't know that, that would have been the focus of my work. That really in the '70s, there were things—there were important movements in Chicago—galleries that were, you know, like Artemisia—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's right, you said you weren't a member of Artemisia?

MS. ROCCA: No, I wasn't. I wasn't here. I was in California.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's when you were in California.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, so when I would come back, you know, I became aware of the things that were happening,

but that's when those—but the other thing is, and I've been interviewed a lot. Or a number of times about the issue of feminism and the fact that there was opportunity for women in Chicago, I've been asked, "Well, did I ever feel like I was considered"—maybe this wasn't the exact question, but, "Did I ever feel like I was less important or that my work was considered, you know, secondary or"—?

MR. SILVERMAN: That's kind of where I'm heading with my line of questioning.

MS. ROCCA: —no, no, I never personally—

MR. SILVERMAN: Because you also had a very—you had your show at eight [laughs], you had many—

MS. ROCCA: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —other shows—

MS. ROCCA: And I get—

MR. SILVERMAN: —you got treated well in the art world—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —relatively speaking.

MS. ROCCA: And certainly, there was equanimity, you know, thinking about the *Hairy Who*, you know. Think about the other groups similar, you know, the other groups that showed.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: Think about all the women, you know, fine women artists that emerged. So, I never and not in school, not after school, I never personally experienced and I guess was maybe so wrapped up in myself, you know, and my life and making art that I wasn't really thinking outside of my own experience about the fact that, yes, there's a great disparity—

MR. SILVERMAN: This vacuum.

MS. ROCCA: —you know, for women in the art world. So, you know, like consciousness raising later, you know. I never actively have been involved, but I certainly can appreciate—

MR. SILVERMAN: Now that you're serving a different point in your career and your life, you see very differently. And I guess I just wanted to ask you a little bit about—as long as we're on sort of the subject—now, that you're also and this is also to do with your professional life, you're also a curator and an administrator, do you become aware of that sort of trying to—I just saw an article in the New York Times about diversity. About how it's so overused and it becomes a way to just sort of act as if you're doing something when you're not. Is this something you've very conscious of as a curator? Tell me a little about your role as a curator and how this maybe affects—

MS. ROCCA: Not in our collection because our collection is a Chicago-based collection and the focus is the Imagists. And so, what I just said about there being—

MR. SILVERMAN: There were a number of women, yes. They're certainly well represented.

MS. ROCCA: And I probably should go down the list of all the work—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —and count out how many women, but actually, interestingly, I just did a tour for the—let's see if I get the name right; American—American Association of University Women.

MR. SILVERMAN: Interesting.

MS. ROCCA: American Association of University Women, oh, maybe a couple of weeks ago, and I was asked for the first time, could you focus on the women in your collection?

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. ROCCA: And I did and it was so much fun. And I said, "This is a great opportunity," because we have so many wonderful works by women artists. Phyllis Bramson, Barbara Rossi, Christina Ramberg and on and on and on, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Gladys Nilsson and oh, there was no, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: No shortage of topic?

MS. ROCCA: No shortage of topic.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I guess in the environment that you were in, I could see how you maybe weren't so aware of it as a larger problems until you get to museums or galleries. And you didn't deal that much—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —with galleries, which is interesting.

MS. ROCCA: No, I didn't, really never. -

MR. SILVERMAN: You didn't, so maybe that wasn't an issue for you.

MS. ROCCA: And, you know, then Phyllis Kind opened her gallery and just took me on as, you know, one of—one of the artists. So, I never actively had to go out and look—

MR. SILVERMAN: Or see the response in terms of the commercial world?

MS. ROCCA: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because that's what we're really talking about, which is—

MS. ROCCA: And I just recently was at a two-day symposium in Peoria on women—Midwest women artists, 1940 to 1960, and Bob Cozzolino, from PAFA [Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts], gave the keynote and talked about this collection of women's art that was given to the Pennsylvania Academy. And I don't want to misquote the name, but it was of the women that gave the collection. Is it Linda Lee Alter?

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know. We can look it up maybe. It's a Google.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, we can look it up. And it was very, very interesting. And he also gave some figures of where things are today, whether things have improved. How many major museum shows are by women? How many women are in major galleries in New York? And it appears there's still a problem.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, there was an article about the *Guerilla Girls* many years later and what's happened. Apparently, isn't as good as you'd expect.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it's true everywhere. Bob Cozzolino is a good example of somebody—he's one of the emissaries that was in Chicago. I mentioned some other people that moved to New York. It's not just Peter Selz, but there's a couple of other people that gave shows to Chicago. They're—Chicago moved to New York. It made some appearances, not always well received. And you're not so aware of those reviews, but he's one of the people that's a real strong supporter.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there aren't that many and actually, it's kind of sad. Let's go back to what I guess we were talking about in terms of your career. How do you view your—speaking—you taught a little bit. You didn't talk so much about teaching. You felt like it might be able to start with teaching and then go to—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, but you did—I'm sorry because you did ask me about my role as a curator and I was—and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Curator, yeah, now, I want to go back to teaching. Let's start with curator, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Okay, so ask me that again.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: But I—but I didn't fully answer that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's what I wanted to get.

MS. ROCCA: About diversity, yes, about diversity—

MR. SILVERMAN: And how, as a curator, how do you feel about?

MS. ROCCA: You know, as a curator, our collection has a direction. It has—and it's unusual for a college or university collection to be so focused. Usually, it's more diverse and I think that's sometimes due to the fact that, you know, a major donor or major alum will give their collection of X to the, you know, university or whatever—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: But ours is very, very focused and—and so I don't really see—I don't see at all trying to change the nature of it by making it diverse.

MR. SILVERMAN: How about giving—you mentioned some shows you did because—

MS. ROCCA: But shows is something—

MR. SILVERMAN: —you mentioned curating some shows like, I mean—

MS. ROCCA: The College has. I curate 12 shows a year and five to six of those shows are artists that I invite on campus. The rest are in-house shows, our senior shows, our student shows and so forth, high school show. And the college encourages diversity, which I admire that. I think that's important.

MR. SILVERMAN: As long as you maintain the quality, if you can apply that.

MS. ROCCA: Well, of course, yeah. But also, I was at Elmhurst College as an adjunct in the '80s, '90s when there wasn't as much diversity. And I think it's a much stronger, you know, the college. And the college—the philosophy of the college—it isn't just like, "let's be diverse," but it really encourages diversity in all aspects and I think that's a good thing. So, the college—I have—I follow a pattern that the college established where they celebrate Hispanic heritage, Black history and women's history. And so during those months, I show works by a Latino artist, a Black artist, a woman. Well, I could show women anytime really, that doesn't—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —really not an issue because there's plenty of women that—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there also comes out the issue, do you want to separate it out, or do you want to put it in the context of excellence. That's kind of a big issue in the world of large—

MS. ROCCA: Yes, well, that's what—well, it all—it has—it goes without saying that it has to be—

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course.

MS. ROCCA: —as excellent as any, you know, so the quality is—there's no question about that. I have enjoyed showing and getting to know more Latino artists and Chicago artists. And I must say that it's always local artists because we don't have the budget to ask artists from California and ship their work here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: It's somebody who is a Chicago-based artist and I've really, really enjoyed the artists that I've shown and gotten to know—that's part of the pleasure of being an exhibition's director is getting to know the artists, or at least for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you wear both hats and that's why I wanted to ask you a little bit, not even just about the diversity issue—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —being a curator—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —and we'll talk about that with teaching. It's a way of giving back in a certain sense. Being able to give voice to other people—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and that's something you really appreciate?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I really enjoy that and so, that's been, you know, and believe me, I mean, over 10 plus years, that's 10 shows in September, you know, October and for each of those. I've never had a Latino artist—artist of Latino descent—that I've asked to show who hasn't been enthused, who's objected to the fact that it was Hispanic Heritage Month.

MR. SILVERMAN: In that context. Well, it's a little like putting Chicago in that special section. This, you know, I see this local art whenever museums put it in segregated—but always get concerned because it's not being treated fairly in the context of the, you know, overall pattern of excellence. It's kind of—

MS. ROCCA: Well, if you think about it, if there are six artists that I invite and three of them are, you know, that's quite a bit.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: But I have had Black artists who objected. Why are you asking me? Because it's February?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's kind of the beginning—

MS. ROCCA: And I—it's embarrassing to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And I say, "Well," I try to explain that this has been the way that the college so—wants to celebrate. That means, their lectures and whether they're going to continue doing that way, I think they're questioning it too actually.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's issues structurally about doing it that way.

MS. ROCCA: But this is how it has been and all I can say to them is, "I can respect and understand how you feel about it," and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there's that argument that has been made. As I say, every city I go to there's a—Cleveland Museum had, like, a May show that was Chicago artists. Or, you know, the Art Institute until recently or the MCA. They didn't really—when they don't do much for local artists, they tend to put them in a separate little gallery—

MS. ROCCA: They do. Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and it's ghettoizing and—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and I think it's much better to put—

MS. ROCCA: But this isn't really, except for the month.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I mean, it's the same exhibit. It's just as large. It's—we do all the same things. It's just that it happens during those months.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a marketing idea. It's sort of—

MS. ROCCA: And the idea was that there would be all the music events, there would be lectures, there would be all kinds of events.

MR. SILVERMAN: Programmatically makes sense in terms of marketing.

MS. ROCCA: But like I say, the college is questioning that too and whether it continues to be that way. I don't know. I've sort of been discussing it, but it certainly has enabled me to broaden my knowledge of more of the Chicago-based artists in these other—from these other communities, so to speak or artistic, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: As a curator, are there any discoveries you've made, speaking on one of those lines, things—artists that you've discovered that you're proudest of in terms of—?

MS. ROCCA: Oh, gosh, a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you feel really good about doing that. That's a—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. I do. I just think that they, you know, because the artists that I showed, probably started out showing were artists that I knew, but I've gotten to know so many more artists through other artists and through, you know, asking other artists about, you know, who would you—?

MR. SILVERMAN: They lead you?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah and that's one of the most exciting things to me about being exhibitions director. I just had a show last—and it was for Hispanic Heritage month—an artist by the name of—he goes by the artist name of Piloto and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Does that mean anything in Spanish?

MS. ROCCA: I think it actually means pilot. [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: But he has a very long name, but he says, his artist name is Piloto. And he does these wonderful sculptures out of clay. Very surreal, very kind of ancient archaic and also dealing with—dealing with the environment because he uses trash along with—I mean, just very, very strange and wonderful and it was through the artists that I showed last year—I said who recommended Diana Solis, being one of the artists. I love her work. And I—and actually, that was through somebody else, so I mean, the opportunity to have learned about these artists and show their work is very, very exciting to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: As a fellow curator, I have to say that's the most joyous; finding something new and seeing something and nurturing it to the point where maybe it gets somewhere really, goes somewhere positive.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: How about teaching? Did you enjoy teaching? You didn't talk too much about teaching.

MS. ROCCA: You know, I have taught—I've taught at every level, every age level that you can think of—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —which is really been kind of interesting because I love working with children. I love children's art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And I did a program in the '80s at the Art Institute for their museum education—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you came back and worked the other end of the coin?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I—well, I taught so many different places, it was one of those things I said well, if someone had a soapbox, I'd stand up and teach art," you know, in the middle of the street, but I did a program called Mini-Masters, which was for four and five-year olds. But it wasn't only art making. We went up to the galleries and looked at works of art and then came back down to the—

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know about you, but I was able to do—that's why I say, Sherman Lee probably puked, but I was doing it in front of $1 million paintings. I was doing performance art and poetry and art making in the Cleveland Museum, but right in front of the paintings.

MS. ROCCA: Really?

MR. SILVERMAN: And it's a little scary [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, none other than the actual hands-on.

MR. SILVERMAN: They didn't let you do that at the Art Institute.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, we came down, but if you've ever really looked at a painting with a group of four and five-year olds, it's wonderful.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Because if you talk about movement, they're not just like, "Oh, well, yes, we—it's really moving." You know [laughs]—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Or if you ask them to look for something, they really find little [details –SR]—because everything is new and fresh—

MR. SILVERMAN: And they don't have any of the preconceptions and all the jargon—

MS. ROCCA: Exactly. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and all the crap that gets in the way of it.

MS. ROCCA: So, I've done that and, you know, I teach at college and I love working with students and a lot of my students are not art majors and I love the opportunity like, "Okay, this is my—this is the only chance they're going—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Your shot at influencing young minds.

MS. ROCCA: Exactly, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Did you feel like that art—when you get to people like, let's say like, when you get to people that—at a higher level that are specifically art majors or something like that, do you feel that art can be taught or do you think that you just have to sort of—just the technique? How do you encourage people to have their voice?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I think what I work with our capstone students and that's, you know, like I would if a student chooses me to be their advisor. If we decide to work together, it's more like the way Ray Yoshida worked with me. It's more like—

MR. SILVERMAN: Giving you hints where to go next?

MS. ROCCA: Seeing what's in their work. Have you thought of that? Why don't you look at this, you know? You know, so it's a very personal one-to-one and that's very satisfying and I would probably like to do more of that than I get an opportunity to do, but I am very busy doing, you know, the collection, curating the collection—

MR. SILVERMAN: Administrative stuff, the part of the curating and the directing and administrative job–

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Well, the exhibitions, but also with the collection, you know, we've gotten some wonderful, wonderful gifts of work. One of my goals with the collection was, you know, people say, "Oh, this is an amazing collection they have hidden in the western suburbs." Well, why is it hidden?

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: So, one of my first goals when I became curator was and I used to talk to Sandra Jorgensen about this and Sandra was the curator for decades and built a collection, but I'd say, "Why is it hidden?" You know, so I think because of having so many relationships in the art world, I was able to introduce a collection to people and I did it through having, you know, I would have like a program—an evening program—

MR. SILVERMAN: Talks or—

MS. ROCCA: Talks, we had panels. One was on Don Baum and, you know, so I invited them, and people and they were like, everybody was always amazed when they see the collections. Like, "Oh, this is amazing." So lots, lots more people know about it now and we also have it online, on our website.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's actually probably the way to get younger generation, but sorry, a lot of people don't even look at art anymore. They look at—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, that's too bad.

MR. SILVERMAN: —their phones. [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Right, but I have a—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's another way to look at art.

MS. ROCCA: But I had a student last year who contacted me and said, "Well, I'm doing my doctoral"—I think it was doctoral, not master thesis on the Chicago Imagists or maybe it was the *Hairy Who,* at the Sorbonne. "Could I come and visit your collection?" I said, "Oh, yeah." So she came and visited the collection. She also—the next day, had an interview with Jim Nutt. She told me the next day, but so, I mean, people know about it now. If she

knew about it from France, I guess it's becoming—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —plus now, the movie, *Hairy Who and the Chicago Imagists*.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, the Buchbinder, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, Leslie Buchbinder's wonderful movie. You know—

MR. SILVERMAN: And the next day, we'll talk about that tomorrow more, but just how it's getting received much more—it's getting much more publicity what, you know, the main person who collected it, I think, was [Charles] Saatchi in terms of the heavies in the art world. And at certain point, I think he was divesting himself of some of the Imagist work. I know he was divesting himself. It affected the art value. Now, it's back up again. It went down. I think [Charles] Saatchi was keen on it for a while in the '70s or '80s. I mean, he was the major big time buyer that was really behind maybe some of the marketing value of it. But now, it's back up again. It's making inroads in New York and I don't know—

MS. ROCCA: I've never really followed—

MR. SILVERMAN: The art market?

MS. ROCCA: —the art market.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's the brutal business that you don't want to think about, especially, again, as a woman or as a person of a certain age. I mean, sometimes people get re-discovered, but by and large, you know, you look at a Whitney by any old catalogue from the '60s or '70s, you won't—other than the blue chip artists, you won't know any of those people. They have their moments and then its ups and downs. It's—who can understand how it, how it works. I'm not sure I do.

MS. ROCCA: I had a visit from a professor at Northwestern. He came in to see the collection and I talked with him and what he teaches is the sociology of art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Of the sociology of the art world. He gave me one of the books that he had published and I think that's true. I think it's something that we don't really—I think—I think it's the way it is. [Laughs.] You know, I think—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, its capitalism and it has a lot to do with marketing. And these days, fame and all these other things that are extraneous.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I'll tell you, it takes a village, you know, I mean, the artist does the work and then there are all these other parts to the art world. He wasn't saying it in a negative way. He wasn't approaching it in a negative way, but like any other world, it has its—

MR. SILVERMAN: Rules and structures?

MS. ROCCA: —structure and rules and, you know, and a very wise friend of mine, artist friend of mine said, "As an artist, all you can do is make the best work you can make."

MR. SILVERMAN: That's basically what I advise people to do. You have to do it out of love and passion because if you're trying to think about marketability, forget it. You can't anticipate the markets.

MS. ROCCA: I guess a lot of young artists do.

MR. SILVERMAN: Nowadays, they look at the models, you know, the Damien Hirst and the, you know, [Jeff] Koons and they look at the people that are post Warhol, they're so keen in marketing and fame and having the meme or hot trick of the moment and that's all they see. They're blinded by that. They don't see that if you do it for that reason—

MS. ROCCA: That's what I was told by people that teach at the School.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: But when I was in school, it was like, "Well, maybe you'll drive a taxicab. Maybe you'll become a carpenter. I don't know what you [will –SR] do and, you know, you'll make your art because of your passion."

Well, I don't know. It's not maybe that's not the best approach either, but we certainly weren't encouraged to focus on marketing our work.

MR. SILVERMAN: On the other hand, look at how much the Art Institute costs these days and you think, "Well, it'd almost be better to give your kids a, you know, start-up company. Give them the money for a start-up company on the internet," rather than—

MS. ROCCA: You mean the admission?

MR. SILVERMAN: Admission, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Oh, I think that's awful.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not only is it awful, but I mean, that puts a certain amount of pressure, like, how do you even deal with your student loans?

MS. ROCCA: I mean, all the Museums. I mean, for me growing up in Chicago, I mean, we—I would—oh, I mean, I was in—the Art Institute was like a second home, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And the other museums too. And now, for a family of four to go to a museum, it's not even feasible.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I'm talking about the School, the Art Institute admission, but the admission for the—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, oh, oh.

MR. SILVERMAN: —you're talking about the admission, but same thing with the Museums, but the School, the Art Institute, I don't know what it is a year, but it's a phenomenal amount of money to go to school.

MS. ROCCA: It was not very expensive—

MR. SILVERMAN: And all the people from the previous generation, like, Ted Halkin, they had GI bills and those people probably managed to—

MS. ROCCA: I wish I could remember it actually, what tuition was. I never paid tuition because I was on scholarship, but I think it was maybe $400 a semester or something.

MR. SILVERMAN: Multiply that by about 10,000 and then we're talking - it's like $40,000 or something.

MS. ROCCA: Well, all schools.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's true. All schools, but particularly, art school.

MS. ROCCA: And I don't know, you know, maybe museums have to charge that admission. I don't know, I mean, but it is a shame because it really limits—

MR. SILVERMAN: Puts a divide between people and culture and art.

MS. ROCCA: You know, the Minneapolis Art Institute, I was there this summer, they don't have an admission fee.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well—

MS. ROCCA: I mean, they do in most museums. You know, we go to New York, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's the business of art. They got to make the money to survive.

MS. ROCCA: But no, I think they have really big donors, so at the Minneapolis Museum, I think they have some very strong support, so that's why they're able to do it. But—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, they do have free admission days. They try to make an effort to do that.

MS. ROCCA: Not that many [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Not that many. No, I guess, I—what I was talking about is no going to school—going to art school though, it's just so pricy that—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —as a career, it's kind of tricky in this economy.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I can understand that. So, have you done any other professions? Have you had any other—you've been a curator, an administrator and a teacher.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I've taught all kinds of, like I say, children. I've taught in all kinds of different—oh, I did a really interesting thing in teaching too for quite few years. I—there was a program at the Department of Children and Family Services called Pathways to Development. It was started by Sidney Goldberg, who was a counselor, a social worker there. And felt really strongly that if a ward of the state, a child needed healthcare, dental, mental healthcare, that was available, but if a—somebody he was working with said, "Yeah, I really want to learn to play the violin," there was no way to do it.

And he—his philosophy was that; we become fully human by having the opportunity to follow our interests. How do we become who we are? And so, against great odds, he started this program called Pathways to Development and he didn't want—he didn't want it to be like an after school type program. He hired professional groups. He wanted people who were teaching-artists. And I started working with him when I was Education Director in Art Resources in Teaching, which is a whole other story I guess I should talk about.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And then I—after I was no—I no longer was there, I started my own arts organization called Arts Excel and I worked with him for many years and then he went off to New York and there were people here at DCFS that continued it for quite a long time. So, I had teaching-artists working for me—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —in Arts Excel, working with children. And the programs were—I did some of the programs initially too. And the programs were all over the city. Could be in a church, could be in a boys and girls club, it could be in a park district. That was just where they were held, but I had really wonderful teachers who were patient and inspirational to the kids.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a sort kind of karmic payback?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and the—yes, exactly.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because you actually—

MS. ROCCA: Thank you. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —you were very lucky because—

MS. ROCCA: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —I think about how often people have this story that you're telling me. It's very rare and you've got not only encouragement, but support—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and people really directed you to the next step, so you're able to send—to do that a little—send some other people off.

MS. ROCCA: And what was also unique about his philosophy was that he didn't want—it's like, take dance now and take, you know, this something. If a child was really interested in something, he wanted the teacher to stay with that child and help them to grow and develop.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's how you learn. Even if you have issues—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —whatever they may be, environmental or developmental, the fact that if you're curious about something, there's a sort of natural—it gets knocked out so often in our educational system because there's a curriculum. How often does it include art or music or things that are more perverse than that even? But it's so often that it gets snuffed out, but following the natural curiosity is how you learn.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah and—

MR. SILVERMAN: You know that as well, I'm sure.

MS. ROCCA: And as part of this program, I did—I taught at the University of Illinois Medical Center Hospital and I worked with adolescents that were in the psych ward. And I did a Sunday morning class [laughs]. I usually [called it –SR] to myself, my Sunday morning church—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —and it was very inspirational. You know, I worked with maybe about 10, 11 young people each week. I did it for years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. ROCCA: I can—that class, I continued to do myself. And the people who were the nurses and the doctors on the ward, they felt that it was very—that it really—it wouldn't have been continued unless they felt that it was [helpful to –SR] the kids—it was really important to the kids and I didn't do anything that was much different than I did when I taught anyone, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: That's great and probably what's really great about it is it came—there are a lot of people that think they're interested in art for all the wrong reasons. If these people were interested, they were probably interested for the real reason. There was something near and dear to them.

MS. ROCCA: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: It was more personal.

MS. ROCCA: —I don't know because it happened. You know, they were in a contained environment and it happened every Sunday morning for roughly an hour and a half. So, everybody participated. I think if anyone wanted to opt out, they probably could. So, these were not a group that self—had self-identified that [they really liked art –SR].

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: They were there and then I was there [laughs]—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] And whatever happens, happens.

MS. ROCCA: —and whatever happened and I would come in with, you know, some theme that I wanted to do and interesting materials to work with and it was very, very gratifying to me and, you know, to see a positive response and, you know, people would say, "Is this art therapy?" "Well, it's art." And, you know, art is therapeutic—

MR. SILVERMAN: By its nature.

MS. ROCCA: —by its nature. It is for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's true of a lot of people because if it weren't, God knows [laughs]—

MS. ROCCA: Why would you do it?

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yeah, it's not an easy path for a lot of people.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: You mentioned art—artists' resources.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative]. A.R.T.

MR. SILVERMAN: A.R.T., I think I know a little bit about them. Tell me a little bit—

MS. ROCCA: This is a hundred—over 125-year old organization. It was started by Ellen Gates Starr from Hull House, [with –SR] Jane Addams—

MR. SILVERMAN: Jane Addams, yeah, sure.

MS. ROCCA: —and Ellen Gates Starr—Ellen Gates Starr—now, we're talking about back in the 19th century.

MR. SILVERMAN: This is way back, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Ellen Gates Starr went off to Europe and collected—I'm giving you the whole story. I don't know, do you want the whole story?

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you can give me the brief version. Oh, sure.

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I don't know how big a story is it, because—

MS. ROCCA: She collected prints of paintings—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —and she brought it. She came back to Chicago and hung them in the public schools. The idea was to foster art appreciation and so, that's how it started. It was called the Chicago Public School Art Society. And then it evolved over the years to Art Resources in Teaching and what Art Resources in Teaching did was send teaching artists, again, artists who taught. Working artists into the schools who showed—who had a program that they developed—and I started out as a teaching-artist showing slides and doing some hands-on, but it wasn't basically a hands-on program. And talking about—

MR. SILVERMAN: What you did and how you did it?

MS. ROCCA: Talking about art and mostly asking questions. You know and when I would do in-services, you know, because you'd see five teachers a day. The teachers were, "Oh, my kids won't be interested in that. They're not going to be interested in looking at art." And the kids used to fall out of their chairs, you know, waving their hands in the air to answer questions. It was exciting. It was really exciting. Again, I guess that sort of really fed that part of me where I felt that I was giving back and reaching out.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure, because you have the charmed—

MS. ROCCA: Art has been so important to me and it meant so much to me. And being able to, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: And to still listen to somebody else to send that spark.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: If you see that one big spark in that kid's eye—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —they get excited about it. That could have been you, like, a long time ago.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's great.

MS. ROCCA: And they have a—so I did that as a teaching-artist and then eventually, became, you know, Program Director, Education Director. And sadly, a number of years ago, the organization ended after all those years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Why was that because I think I'd heard of them? But I can't—

MS. ROCCA: It's only maybe four years ago or something like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: —because I'd heard of them, when—

MS. ROCCA: But I had already gone—I had already left. I left in the late '90s. I also was [laughs], I've done a lot of things. I also was assistant director at the Ragdale Foundation.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know Ragdale, of course.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, which is an artist retreat, a retreat for artists and writers and musicians. A wonderful, beautiful place.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it does some wonderful support of people. I know a lot of people that have—

MS. ROCCA: I called it "Nirvana for artists." Nobody ever wanted to leave.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: It's so wonderful. We took such good care of them. Where in our culture is an artist nurtured and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess I knew somewhere that you would have some association with Ragdale. Yeah, Toby's [Zallman] been to Ragdale. I've known many people that have benefitted greatly from it.

MS. ROCCA: So, one thing I can say and I—you to say "charmed life," I have never had to do any kind of work that wasn't in some way about art.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's amazing.

MS. ROCCA: And I've done lots of things that I never expected to do. I never expected I would be a curator.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know, never expected, you know, that I'd do a lot of things that I did. You know, when I finished school, I just thought I was going to paint, you know, I was just going to be an artist, but I—

MR. SILVERMAN: Again, you say, there's certain naiveté. You just thought this is what my friend—this is what I do. This is what we do. We'll work it out. We'll figure it out. But it worked out.

MS. ROCCA: But I really enjoyed all the different situations that I've worked, you know, worked in, but I've never done any work that wasn't about—

MR. SILVERMAN: You're a lucky person.

MS. ROCCA: I am a—I am a lucky person.

MR. SILVERMAN: I feel the same way. On the other hand, I've done some peculiar things, but that's another story for another time. I think we're pretty close to—I think we're good for a first day's interview because I wanted to save some time and talk about your art.

MS. ROCCA: Okay.

[END OF rocca15_1of2_sd_track02_r]

MR. SILVERMAN: —there. This is Lanny Silverman on behalf of the Smithsonian Institute of Arts, Archives of American Art. I'm here at Elmhurst College on November 6, 2015. Part two of an interview with Suellen Rocca.

[END OF rocca15_2of2_sd_track01_r]

MR. SILVERMAN: [Unintelligible.] This is peculiar. It might be a different file. So I wanted to continue—before we got into your work Suellen, I wanted to talk a little bit about some things that we talked about yesterday. I wanted to talk about the changing art world and I also wanted to talk about whether you could see yourself as a Chicago artist?

MS. ROCCA: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That would be probably the—

MS. ROCCA: I do, I do. And I don't—I know some people feel that that term is limiting. I know Gladys Nilsson has, when that question was asked of her, she said I consider myself an American artist. Well, I consider myself an American artist but Chicago has been important to me and I don't think of it in, you know, as being limiting or, you know, in any way and so yeah, I would say Chicago artist. I lived and worked in Chicago and been influenced by.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you're proud of it?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I'm proud of it, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, why not? I just wondered because I thought that would be the answer. Not everyone would say that. What do you think constitutes a Chicago artist? We talked about this some but I'd like to see what you think in terms of how would you characterize a Chicago artist if there is such a thing?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I mean, I think the fact that this is the place where I've lived, this is the place where I've worked, other artists who have lived and worked here have been very important to me. Their work's been important. Their—just as people they've been important. I think it's a shame that the term is used in a limiting way to sort of discriminate, you know, and a lot of people think of it as, you know, certainly less important than

other art centers in the United States. So, in that sense I think it's kind of a shame the way, you know, the way that it's used. But, yeah, I'm proud of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, I guess the other thing I was going to ask you—we didn't talk about the changes in Chicago art. You've seen a lot of things come and go and you're now seeing a younger generation of students and gallerists and so forth. How would you characterize the changes that happened since you were first coming up?

MS. ROCCA: Oh boy, that's a—

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean that's a lot of period of time.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, that's a hard question. Well, it's partly things that I hear from my friends who teach at the School of the Art Institute and it relates to some things we talked about yesterday about artists being much more interested—young artists being much more interested in success. Not that we wouldn't all like success, but in putting their energies toward becoming well known and successful and promoting their work and that even while they're in school or just when they're out of school they're less focused on their work and more focused on, you know, getting recognition.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. ROCCA: I mean, again, we'd all like recognition. Recognition is important.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there's an obsession with fame it seems like, that's—I mean, Andy Warhol may have started it but I think it's gotten way out of that kind of league. It's something else now.

MS. ROCCA: And the other thing, again, I sort of hear second hand from friends of mine who teach at the School, many friends of mine, that students don't look at art as much as they used to. They'll look online and think they've seen it but they don't go into the galleries. They don't—or into the Museum and actually see the work. So I think I, you know, I think technology certainly has had a huge impact on the art world, the world in general.

MR. SILVERMAN: We'll talk about that with your work. I don't know if you have been influenced or have done anything with that, but, so you see a lot of social media and digital work. Do students bring you digital work these days or do they bring you the latest?

MS. ROCCA: The—I don't actually—I mean we have classes where student do digital work—we, you know, and they do some interesting things. But I don't work with those students, so I, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't see that directly as much?

MS. ROCCA: So I don't see it directly except if they're say submitting it to one of our student exhibitions. You know, and it can—it can be very interesting. I mean, graphic design and digital are very popular here at the college. Students are very interested in—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well there's practical applications of graphic design of course and that's one way to deal with a career if you're not going to become rich and famous through art. How about trends in the art world in terms of just things that you see in the art world? When you were in the '60s and the '70s and '80s when you were at your peak of, you know, getting lots of shows and things like that. Chicago, first of all there was a very concentrated gallery scene in the Superior Huron area at that point. That's probably '70s and '80s. Now it's much more dispersed. What other things do you see in the Chicago viewing and art, sort of, scene?

MS. ROCCA: Well, you know, I—you know, I don't—I don't spend a lot of time going to a lot of galleries. I will go to a gallery when somebody I know is having a show, somebody's work who I'm interested in and, as I said yesterday, there are a lot of artists that I didn't know that I met through doing exhibitions and I will go to see their work. And I think going—it's to see the work. I'm interested in the work, but also to support the artist. But I don't really like, go to, you know, to a huge number of shows to sort of survey what's happening in the art world.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's harder to do now. It's much more spread out. It used to be pretty concentrated.

MS. ROCCA: It is very spread out, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It used to be mostly in that one building. I worked in that building so I know that's—one Superior, that one that burnt down—but now it's like West Loop and its spread out to Pilson. So, you don't get as much, to see as much Chicago art scene as probably you'd like. You're just too busy to get out or is it more, I don't know—are you still involved with?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I'll go to see something I'm interested in seeing but I'm not like, interested in going just, you know, to survey everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: To peruse it, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: What's the newest thing that's happening, who is the new art star? Who—that's not something that I'm really interested in. Certainly there are lots of new artists that I do go to see and there are people I've learned about or shown their work or—

MR. SILVERMAN: But your time gets, as you get older your time gets more valuable and we get a little more jaded so we have more interest in seeing things that we're excited about rather than just seeing them for the sake of art.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I don't think I ever though really was out there going to tons of galleries.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really? That's kind of, yeah, what you were saying. You were involved in your own work and your own circle of friends and so forth. I wanted to pick up on something else before we move on which was you had mentioned to me when we were talking I think by phone, something about how supportive Dennis Adrian had been to you. You didn't tell me a little bit—so do you think he had a particular allegiance—affection for your work? Or do you think it was just, I mean—

MS. ROCCA: No, he always seemed to really like my work and has always been extremely supportive of my work. Yeah, yeah. It wasn't just being part of a group that he was supportive of. He always seemed to really—

MR. SILVERMAN: So he got you and sort of understood what your work was about?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because there are certain people, I mean, he has a certain circle of people that he really supported and when he supported them he really, he went all out. It's not just—Don Baum had the same kind of thing. We talked about him some. But Dennis seemed to really—I mean, he helped get people into galleries. He helped people with sales. He did a lot of things by way of Frumkin and so forth. Did he—he also wrote about your work too, right? He was one of the people I think you said wrote very well?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah he did. Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: About your work. I think I read something.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, he's always been very, very supportive and he's somebody I really admire, you know, and so that means a lot to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Do you see any people, I guess, taking up the previous part of the conversation we were just on—do you see anything, any scenes or do you sense any, like, anything comparable to the days that you guys were around in terms of impresarios like Don Baum or people that are really major players? Do you see any of that happening in the art world today or is it hard to be aware of? I'm not sure I could even answer that one.

MS. ROCCA: Well, yeah, I think there are important players, you know? I think Corbett and Dempsey have really developed something that is unique and has its own vision and is important. So I think they're important players. There doesn't seem to be much in the way of art criticism written in Chicago.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I've had that conversation with a number of the writers and—

MS. ROCCA: It's amazing.

MR. SILVERMAN: And curators.

MS. ROCCA: The—none of the papers have regular art criticisms.

MR. SILVERMAN: As much as people had problems with Alan Artner, if they did, he was important and Fred Camper, too, I really liked and they've disappeared and I think the support from the papers. One of the differences between New York and Chicago is we don't have the writing support the periodicals or the—

MS. ROCCA: And I think that makes a big difference.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think so too.

MS. ROCCA: And what amazes me is like, the only—maybe there are others, but the only ones that I, you know, and leafing through the newspapers that I find are articles in the *Tribune* and they're constantly about things that are going on other places. Does that make sense? I mean if you're reading the news don't you want to—because there's so much happening in Chicago.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well I can read the *New York Times* or whatever other papers to find out what's going on elsewhere. There's a lot in Chicago, more than ever.

MS. ROCCA: There's a lot going—and a lot of really interesting scene—when you were asking me do I get around? There are probably a lot of things that I would be very interested in that I'm not seeing, you know, because there is a lot going on. I think that's very exciting. I—it just seems that the art world is getting bigger and bigger in Chicago.

MR. SILVERMAN: The problem is that it isn't as visible by way of—well, I have the feeling that we're probably dating ourselves. Because probably kids are looking at this stuff online rather than we're used to newsprint. We're used to actually physical objects.

MS. ROCCA: Right, well, I do know that there are—there are news—there are reviews online that *Hyperallergic* is a good one and I was interviewed for that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right, so that's what kids are probably looking at.

MS. ROCCA: And there's—was a wonderful of Karl Wirsum recently, just a really, really wonderful interview. So, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I guess that's probably where things have turned to. Speaking of like, that sort of interview and Karl, I was asking about how, you know, how Chicago has changed. Maybe the other thing is what do you make of the recent developments—you were in the show with Karl—there was one at RISD and Matthew Marks. And it seems like the rest of the world is paying—for some reason—paying attention to Chicago and historical Chicago as 70s and 80s I mean. What do you think that is? What do you think that's about?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I do think that there are a couple contributing factors. I think one is the movie that Leslie Buchbinder and her crew made, *Hairy Who and the Chicago Imagists*. I think it was a wonderfully—it is a wonderfully made movie and I think, you know, they worked very hard at having a very wide distribution. So a lot of people got to see that movie and I think, you know, it told a story, it was interesting, they made it—they made a movie that was interesting to watch for two hours or so, or almost two hours.

And, so I think that had an impact but I think also there's a lot of interest in the art world right now in comic-type imagery and so, you know, here's things that we were doing, you know, a long time ago that fits with what people are interested in, young artists are interested in. After the—the day after the opening of the Matthew Marks exhibition [last –SR] summer in New York we had a panel discussion, the *Hairy Who* members, with Dan Nadel who was the curator of the RISD show and was involved in the Matthew Marks show. And, a book signing because Matthew Marks published a book of all the comic books.

MR. SILVERMAN: Which is wonderful, I recommend.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, it's a wonderful book. And all the posters and the ephemera with installation shots of the exhibitions. So, we had this panel discussion and we also had a book singing at the same time. This whole huge gallery, which was—it was an empty gallery, you know, one of his galleries, it was where the discussion was, the panel and the book signing. And every seat was filled and in the back there were people standing. There were just lots and lots— so when they—all this comes to the point which I wanted to make which was; as people came up and we were signing—they wanted us to sign their books—you know, I asked people, you know, are you an artist? Are you, you know—and there were so many young artists there. And it seemed—they seemed to be predominately male. There were certainly women too.

MR. SILVERMAN: There is a sort of stereotype I'm afraid, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. But, and that was really exciting to me and I had people coming up to me at the opening, you know, young artists and artists in their 20s, maybe early 30s. You know, saying how much they liked the work. So I think that they see something important, they see a connection, they see something that they're interested in and I think there's sort of a swing or a direction in the art world right now toward, for want of a better term, comic type imagery.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, people—and it's also reexamining things. Like look at Robert Crumb. He's now shown in an art gallery and there's a bunch of—Art Spiegelman—there's a bunch of people doing graphic novels that have won, you know, win Pulitzer prizes. It's taken much more seriously. It's not just the adolescent male, you know, fantasy world. It's become something else and there's now women doing it. There's some really wonderful female comic artists too, or graphic artists too. Did you—I don't know, *Persepolis*, the woman that—the—I think she's Syrian. The woman that did the graphic novel about her life. There's people doing things with political content and feminist content and it's changed quite a bit and I think that probably has something to do with the environment but it's curious that it was so long in coming because there is so much here.

MS. ROCCA: A lot of stuff in between though, really, when you think about it. And I think that's probably no different than the art world's ever been where there's a group of artists that do something very innovative and maybe it gets initial attention but then it sort of fades and then suddenly a generation or so or two later it just reemerges. You know, there's an interest in it and you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: It's so weird, talking about it, it's like fads and fashions. It comes and goes like it seems like the conceptual sort of peak seems to have sort of faded. It may have not, but it seems like it has at least for the moment so maybe there'll be another round of that, who knows? And that's—I'm talking about *post-conceptualism* as opposed to the stuff in the early '60s. There was a whole wave of that and a whole wave—what do you make—I asked Rhona [Hoffman] this and she was a little bit flummoxed by my use of the term "irony" in terms of a lot of artists in the '80s and '90s were, I view as, were employing irony. In other words, it was kind of like throwing things out at you with an attitude as if they didn't care.

And I know you were talking about passion and art—that sort of approach or sort of throwing things—not making—not having a great deal of attention to craft or caring. It was a certain kind of punk attitude, it's a DIY kind of attitude, and irony kind of, I think generational difference. Do you acknowledge that you think that was happening? Because I think she was saying she didn't even get that and I suggested—I suggest Mike Lash, Raymond Pettibon—there's people that throw off things, that throw off their lack of abilities to make it sort of—they smirk at you kind of. What did you make of that kind of work?

MS. ROCCA: I don't know. I don't know. No comment.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] No comment. Maybe that's discretion, I don't know. Well, I'd like to get to your work and I think one of the things I wanted to talk about before we even got into specifics was, like, you work at home? You have a studio at home?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I've almost always had my studio at home

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's kind of nice.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that way when you had family, that's why I was asking about it—you could attend to other things. They've grown, but I mean, that makes it a lot easier to attend to real world matters and at the same time. And, let's see, do you—I'm thinking, do you have any particular way of working? Do you come in with a whole bunch of ideas? Where do—do your ideas come from dreams or do they come from newspapers?

MS. ROCCA: Some—some ideas come from dreams. Some ideas come from newspapers. Some ideas, you know, —you know, it was interesting, just recently I was looking at an old scrapbook just a couple days ago. And I had forgotten I had actually, this was like, it would be like in the early '80s. I had cut out, like titles from newspaper articles and used them for a series of drawings that I'd made and—

MR. SILVERMAN: You started with the title then and that inspired?

MS. ROCCA: Well, no, I think I found the title.

MR. SILVERMAN: After? [Laughs] Because I was talking—

MS. ROCCA: I think the title fit the idea of what I—but I hadn't realized I had forgotten that those titles were actually, you know, I had found them in newspapers. But no, I mean, more recently the work has been inspired by dreams. But then it's an evolution, then. Because the initial—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, we're going to talk about that because I think your work has changed too.

MS. ROCCA: The initial idea may have come from a dream but then the—in the process of making the art and—because my work is always kind of "in series." Not a—it's like a series, at least to me it's a series, one work leads to another work which leads to another work. And, so the initial idea may have been something that I dreamt or thought about, or, you know, and when I'm working I get ideas for things I want to do and I, you know, will jot down on scraps of paper, you know, ideas and just a few words.

MR. SILVERMAN: Do you work—do you improvise or do you have a formal structure in mind when you start? In other words, does the idea lead you to the structure or do the materials lead you to the structure?

MS. ROCCA: No, I mean, I'm pretty traditional in terms of materials. I don't do anything really unusual with materials but the development of the idea or the thought or the image is really what's exciting to me when I'm working and it happens as I'm working. There's an initial something that I'm starting with, you know, an image of something that I'm interested in. But I never, I don't do studies. I don't do sketches. No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting. So it's kind of—

MS. ROCCA: But I like to work on drawings at the same time I'm working on a painting and they sort of complement each other.

MR. SILVERMAN: So some of the energy of the idea sort of spills into a drawing, which is a different kind of medium, so?

MS. ROCCA: And they're drawings—I like my—my work takes time. I don't like to rush the work and—

MR. SILVERMAN: I saw that you sometimes take as much as a couple years on a piece, which is—

MS. ROCCA: Well, I may go back to something. It doesn't usually take a couple of years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, different people have different thoughts on this. Do you rework pieces or do you?

MS. ROCCA: Not usually, no.

MR. SILVERMAN: You usually consider it done and you want to move on.

MS. ROCCA: But I have. I have. There are some big drawings that I have gone back to and go, "Oh, this was really interesting. I think want to go back and finish this."

MR. SILVERMAN: Have you gone way back—we brought this example up, the famous case of [Giorgio] de Chirico who like 50 years, 40 years later he went—I guess they had already been—maybe they were already in somebody's home too. He went back and reworked pieces and it irritated people to no end. Do you go back—do you ever have the impulse to—?

MS. ROCCA: I don't really do that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You move on to the next thing?

MS. ROCCA: But there have been a few drawings—this isn't anything that happened often—where I'll go, I went back. Actually it happened for the show that I had for the State of Illinois gallery.

MR. SILVERMAN: We'll talk about that.

MS. ROCCA: Where there were—because that covered about a, what, 25 year period—where there were some drawings that I had pulled out and I hadn't finished. And I, you know, I'm talking about one or two drawings, and I'm like, "Oh, I like this. I'm going to go back." But no, not usually because the work evolves and so I'm kind of in a different place. I mean, I don't see any, personally, any big breaks in the work where I go like, "Oh, I'm tired of this direction, I want to go this direction." No. I mean, I see it as a continuum and I like the process of working because I get—and I think this is probably true of most artists—in a kind of state where ideas relate to each other differently or thoughts than is different [from –SR] sort of normal, everyday experience.

MR. SILVERMAN: Art is a different way—

MS. ROCCA: It's like dreaming.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Art is a different way of working through something, then. Do you ever find—well, we're going to talk about, I guess let's start with the early work. Because I think I see it really continually, it was kind of interesting to see the progress seeing your work as a whole that sort of let me see the big picture. When I look at the early work it looks more linear. You've gotten more sculptural and more formal and more textural in more recent work,

MS. ROCCA: I think it's still very linear.

MR. SILVERMAN: You still think there's a lot of line? Well, there seems like the sort of drawing aspect seems to be bigger in the beginning. But that's a question maybe for later in terms of evolution. But when I look at the early work it's particularly full of the kind of ideas or tools that I think we talked about—purses, female ideas of beauty, hairdos—there's a whole sort of repertoire of—did you come upon those, they get reworked a lot of different times. There's variations on those. Did you see those as your sort of area? Or did that just happen as it– I think that's the way you talked about it yesterday is that it just sort of happened? You weren't consciously looking at those as things to examine necessarily?

MS. ROCCA: No, I think it just kind of happened.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, and the jewelers catalogs from your ex-husband, that actually, there's certain things that were lying around and you mentioned, you know—

MS. ROCCA: I mean, it didn't just happen in the sense that—I mean, I selected those things. I chose those things. But I wasn't like, "Okay." It wasn't like I had a category of things and then I was looking for things to fill that category. It's just those were things that appealed to me, you know, and I selected them. And, you know, I think leave it up to other people to look at them as a whole and say, "well, what do these 10 things mean in relationship to each other?" You know? But they were—I mean, I've always felt that my work is autobiographical. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was the next question I was going to ask you. Your work is not the easiest to decipher, which is true of Art Green's, which is so fascinating when he had this—he had something on a drive that was—that showed his influences and what he was thinking about. It's not always apparent. It was very helpful for me to see because just like his work, your work isn't—I mean, if you know that his dad was an engineer and the bridges, there's certain things that if you just do a little research you find out. But your work isn't that easy to decipher, either. Is that intentional to be sort of ambiguous or is that just the way you work?

MS. ROCCA: No, it's just the way I work, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, the other thing I notice is that particularly the early work—more so than what I see as a change, which we'll talk about. I mean, I may disagree with you a little with you about the change but I think the earlier work seems to be—I quote, like, topographies. It's like listing not just verbally but visually listing a whole bunch of sometimes just wacky kinds of disjunctions. You know, it might look like a whole bunch of purses but then there's other things thrown in but it looks like a catalog so to speak.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, it depends which work you're talking about. There—

MR. SILVERMAN: But—yeah.

MS. ROCCA: There were some Matthew Marks showed a really early work about—either '65 or '66. I don't know, it's not here. I don't think—I don't know if you had a chance to see it, but it is what you're describing. It is like a big catalog. It's a big—and I also thought of it as picture writing, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Picture writing—glyphs. I also see them as sort of, like, glyphs. There's a lot of symbols and pictures and that relates to Ted Halkin and a bunch of other people who had played with similar kinds of things. Even Karl to a certain extent. The kind of glyphs are sort of like sign language-y kinds of things come from any particular influence or is that a conscious thing?

MS. ROCCA: Well, they work in temporary things. They were, you know, like the diamond rings and like the little, you know, the little figures, little dancing figures. And these things were kind of culled, many of them from popular culture. But they were also like, from pre-readers—kindergarten pre-readers and I don't think they have them anymore. But where you would see pictures of a man with a hat, a man without a hat and a woman, you know, some—what?—A pot of flowers or whatever and then you were like, which one doesn't belong or something. So, you know, I was, you know, I thought those were really interesting and games like mazes and you know, and so they came from my own history, my own experience. So I think, you know, I think it's pretty fair to say that they are autobiographical. Also, my children were young at that time so, you know, like I was looking at a lot of sort of picture books. But really, really—glyphs like you say, picture writing, the influence of Egyptian, you know, Egyptian—ancient Egyptian art. Things like the pre-readers, seeing kind of a similarity between those things and, like a huge catalog writing thing, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it also seems to influence the structure. They're kind of grid-y but they're a loose kind of grid so they're sort of funky grids. That's what I'm talking about in terms of the way they're spewed out. That's formally how I see a difference between the organization between the early work and maybe what I saw most recently which seems to be more solid and sculptural and organized. Very differently. Not as sporadic—or it's not like a field. It's more—I don't know how to describe this so well, but I see a difference there in terms of your work evolving.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I've been working with torsos, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's part of what I'm saying. Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: You know, the torso without the head, you know, just the middle part of the body and actually, there are some early paintings that I also used the torso in.

MR. SILVERMAN: I've seen that.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But they're sort of more—well, they're disembodied but in a different way. They're not so much cropped as they are sort of disembodied. The ones I'm thinking of. Maybe you've got different ones in mind. I mean, yeah, it's tough because no one can see what we're talking about.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, no one can see what we're talking about.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, but I'm thinking I know what you mean—there's some—

MS. ROCCA: Like this one here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, yeah—but the thing is it seems like a different—there's something, there's more solid weight and your palette has changed quite a bit too. It's not—I don't know how to describe that either. Well, let's go back to the torsos and something you said yesterday. You were saying that you weren't brought up with standard religious practices. But I see a certain kind of—veering towards a certain kind of spirituality in the more recent work. I guess we're talking about more recent work.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I think they are.

MR. SILVERMAN: And I see some - we mentioned east, you hadn't gone to Asia, whatever, but I see some sort of like, almost Buddha or Eastern kinds of imagery.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I like Eastern [imagery –SR] very much. I don't have—you know, I'm not, you know, knowledgeable in the meanings of all the myths or anything but it's something that I find visually very, very interesting. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it seems like that's in a more—I guess we've jumped up. I was going to go in order.

MS. ROCCA: You jumped.

MR. SILVERMAN: I jumped, but I was kind of curious to make the distinction because I think what I see in the more recent work is not just the torsos but I see, and there's also some imagery that isn't quite so oblique or hard to read. There's some things like some fairly obvious symbols of perhaps spirituality like boats—possibly journeys or things like that that could be easily a common metaphor.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, it's really hard to talk about work when you can't—

MR. SILVERMAN: See it.

MS. ROCCA: You know, I mean, I imagine somebody listening to this interview, it would be confusing without being able to see an image of what we're talking about but—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's always tricky.

MS. ROCCA: But, the image of boats was—that came from a dream.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and I've been working with it in a lot of different ways for—since really I think about the '80s.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's not that recent. But there—but there is a wave of that again I think in the—

MS. ROCCA: Well, it's been there.

MR. SILVERMAN: All along, yeah, I think I saw that.

MS. ROCCA: Since about the mid-'80s but in different ways. That's what I'm saying about that it just sort of—it evolves. When I first started working with it I had this dream of being above the water and looking down and seeing three pelicans and three boats and so, there are some paintings, you know, and there are drawings that relate to—it's never literal, the drawings are never—I read once that Salvador Dali would actually have a dream, wake up and paint it, literally.

MR. SILVERMAN: Paint the dream. Wow.

MS. ROCCA: But, the way I think of it at least when I talk to students about it I say it's like continuing the dream as you're working with it, you know? So the image of the boat started initially from that dream and it's had lots of different—it's evolved in lots and lots of different ways.

MR. SILVERMAN: Did you—I'm curious if this interaction between your dream life and your art life. Do you actually still dream of boats ever? Does it come back?

MS. ROCCA: You know, I only have to dream of it once.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it's material for life?

MS. ROCCA: And then—that's what I'm saying—

MR. SILVERMAN: You work it through.

MS. ROCCA: When you're making art it's like you're in a kind of sort of state, at least this is how I try to explain it—and I think this is probably true for a lot of artists—where you make connections in ways that you don't normally make them, that's more like a dream.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not so much straight rational?

MS. ROCCA: No, it's not rational.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's coming from either your own conscious or whatever.

MS. ROCCA: Coming from—so, but also when I first started working with it I also was interested in its similarity to—I had this child's drawing that had this great big smile that was like the shape of a boat.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, I've seen some portraits that you did that were with a sort of boat like mouth that you had done that. Yeah there's a number of those.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, so it's kind of a double image of the—so, you know—so from that, and this is a long time ago, this is like in the mid-'80s or maybe early '90s. Late '80s I think—to now, you know, now we're talking about what? How many years later? And I think this is kind of funny. I have a boat in my garage.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really? [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: My grandson has his grandfather's small fishing boat that lives in my garage so I get to see this boat and it's a very simple boat. It's not a fancy fisherman's—it's just a real, real basic fishing boat. And so I get to see this boat every time I pull into the—

MR. SILVERMAN: So it's playing on your—whatever, your unconscious or in the back of your mind somewhere.

MS. ROCCA: Right, so I—so boats still are in my drawings, in my paintings. But it's very different from the way they were in, you know, when I first started using the image. Fish—there are a lot of fish.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was going to ask you about the fish because that's a very Christian symbol which I didn't know if that's how you were using it but I didn't think that's how you were using it because they can be a literally a—

MS. ROCCA: Not at all—well, it's a really universal, very universal symbol.

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, I'm thinking about how to decode some of these.

MS. ROCCA: It came from a dream.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just from a dream again?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because I'm seeing a lot of—there were a lot of fish things that you did.

MS. ROCCA: I was—I was studying for my advanced work in art history going for a Masters in Art History and Criticism in the School of the Art Institute and I was taking a class on Balthus, [Max] Beckmann—and who was the third artist? But I was doing a paper on Beckmann, on the symbolism of the fish in Beckmann's work. And I really like Beckmann's work. To this day I really like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You've mentioned—I think you said something before and I think that's come up, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And I had this dream. I had this dream about, well, you know, it's like you're thinking—I love the way he uses fish in his—you know, I had this dream about this fish that was nursing. Well, that's pretty powerful. And then that led to a whole lot of incarnations of imagery using the fish and I still, you know, I still am using fish, boats.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well something about using the water and the boat and there was something that fits in with some of your other concerns in terms of there was this sort of female sexuality and male sexuality, there's sperm, fish, there's a whole bunch of areas you can go with that. I don't know if that's—

MS. ROCCA: Fish, fish and boats and ladders, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yeah, ladders are there too. I guess I—I wasn't going to ask you about—

MS. ROCCA: Birds.

MR. SILVERMAN: Birds as well. And I guess, let's go back to your prototypical dream, the one with the pelicans. Any idea what you think you were up to—what was going on with you in terms—

MS. ROCCA: Doesn't matter.

MR. SILVERMAN: It doesn't really matter? You were just working it through?

MS. ROCCA: Because—well, because, you know, it was just, it's so much more interesting. So much more meaningful to just, you know, because it just was powerful and, yeah. So birds, you know. Then there was a period, let's see, what year was that—my mother passed away and the boat became—I did a painting, which Elmhurst College owns. I think it was—it was '89 or '90—is that right? I should know the date; it's called *Passed*. I was working on a painting that had a boat in it and as it evolved it had this bird, a big bird in the boat laying on its back.

MR. SILVERMAN: I do remember that, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Which as I continued to work on it that I realized was about my mother. And she had just passed away and I was with her actually at the moment that she passed and I realized more and more as I worked on this painting following that time that that's what it was about.

MR. SILVERMAN: That happened with Art Green. He was telling me that sometimes the meanings came to him afterwards. In other words, you're working it through, just what you're describing and because his meanings—his meanings like yours are not always apparent, readily, and then I guess sometimes as an artist it's a way of working through the material. This is what you're saying. It's better than trying to rationally say "what does it all mean?"

MS. ROCCA: I never, never start with—I mean, I think that—you know, I would never want to start with a drawing or painting saying "I want to do a panting about X." I'll start with imagery that's interesting to me but I never will, like, codify what the—it's about.

MR. SILVERMAN: What it means or what it's supposed to be. Or it's—and that's what you were saying with like making a feminist kind of—you're not trying to make a point or to illustrate an idea or something.

MS. ROCCA: That's an illustration.

MR. SILVERMAN: Basically, and there are people, you know, that scoff at that. But there are people that are very good at that and there's a whole other way of making art. Do you ever work differently than that? Do you ever—you've never done a commission or have you?

MS. ROCCA: No. I don't think so.

MR. SILVERMAN: Have you ever worked differently? Like I think I asked Bill [William] Conger this perhaps or somebody maybe because they seemed so tightly wound in terms of organizational structure. Do you ever improvise and come in with no ideas and just see where it leads you without any—?

MS. ROCCA: No, because I—there are things I'm interested in. You know, and one thing leads to another thing and that's kind of the beauty of it, you know? I mean, no. I've never come in with like, "oh, what am I going to do next?" Or, you know, because there are things—there's a body of—I guess you know, I keep using the word imagery. Imagery is very important to me. I like images, you know? And I like putting them together but I never start with an idea of this painting is going to be about this. I have a sense of what it's about, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: And you probably have the sort of vocabulary that you're interested in but if you adjust that as you go.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And do you ever get completely surprised and find something going in a completely different

direction?

MS. ROCCA: Well, not usually. But as I'm working on it, it changes. But maybe not going in a completely different direction, no.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I guess I'm going to go back to what I was saying before. I don't know why but it seems like I felt—I mean, I know why but I'm not quite sure if I'm articulating it right. But it seems like there's the work in the—I think I wasn't always looking at the dates, but the work in the '80s and '90s and the work that was in the state of Illinois show it seems, it's about torsos but it seems it's got a more sculptural presence. It's not as, I said linear but it's got—it's organizational. It's formally organized differently. You don't see that at all, or you just?

MS. ROCCA: Well, yes, you know. It's not—

MR. SILVERMAN: It seems scattered in terms of there's nothing wrong with scattered. It seems much more loose, it seems much tighter organized and color pallet seems to have changed and become, strident isn't the right term at all. I don't know how to put it but it seems like it's a more orchestrated and muted kind of color as well and I also noticed that a la Susan Frankel or Michele Feder-Nadoff—a lot of people that were—a lot of pattern and decoration people there seems to be a lot of very tightly obsessive patterning on surfaces of things as opposed to having it, just objects that are. It seems like it's a different—

MS. ROCCA: I think—I think you're relating to those two large paintings—larger paintings that were in the State of Illinois show.

MR. SILVERMAN: And the torsos as well.

MS. ROCCA: These—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, well unfortunately I had—well, even the torsos, it seems like—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, these are small.

MR. SILVERMAN: Those are smaller, I—

MS. ROCCA: Those are small. But yeah, yeah, you know—but these two are either each 30 by 30.

MR. SILVERMAN: It seems like you've honed down in simplified forms. They're not small forms that, like, gridded out loosely. So I guess what I'm saying, the organizational structure seems to have changed.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I can see that

MR. SILVERMAN: You can see that so you'll agree to that.

MS. ROCCA: I'll agree to that.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you're not—there isn't a conscious—you're not aiming to change it in any way.

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know that you would say that.

MS. ROCCA: I think the work, as you do the work, as I do the work it evolves. I would be very bored doing the same thing, you know? I don't consciously, like, "I need to change so I'm not going to be bored." It's just a natural progression to change and, you know, to try to stay the same—I'm not the same, you know? So why would I be doing the same thing? But yet, I've never thought of my work as "I'm really tired of that direction, I'm going to go in a new direction." No, it has—a natural evolution.

MR. SILVERMAN: It just evolves.

MS. ROCCA: It has a natural evolution.

MR. SILVERMAN: What do you think, Jasper Johns, if there are enough targets or enough number of things, do you think he just went nuts? I mean, is that the commercial world saying we need more of these to sell, Jasper, or what? I mean, that would drive you nuts if you had to just churn out—

MS. ROCCA: I wouldn't—I wouldn't do that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's not your—

MS. ROCCA: I would never do that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's kind of a whole different way of working.

MS. ROCCA: I mean, you know, I mean, as I was sharing with you yesterday—earlier in the interview. The people who were my inspiration like Ray Yoshida, I mean, they're just—very ethical, you know? They would never encourage to—

MR. SILVERMAN: Just make stuff to sell?

MS. ROCCA: Make stuff to sell—never.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's never been your—and I think that's what I still admire about Karl as well. The people that I know well in this group of people are admirable. I don't know Jim very well, but what I think is most admirable is that they stuck to their—what they were doing and the rest of the world either, that's what I was talking about with Matthew Marks, either catches up with you or not as the case may be.

MS. ROCCA: No, I think that's really true and I just have lots of respect for Karl, for Jim, Gladys, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Just keeping what they do and doing it without looking at the making money or fame or whatever or love or attention or whatever. Because let's face it, that's not the easiest thing to get in the art world and it can come or go easily. You know, you can be a star one day and then you're gone.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and that's not the reason for making art, I don't think.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not the real reason and not the reason that will sustain you, because the other stuff—if you're that caught up into fame, if you lose it then it's kind of really sad because you can't really, you know, it's hard to control and who does control it?

MS. ROCCA: Well, I said this yesterday but I didn't say the other half of it which was that a friend of mine said something that I think is just—who is an artist—something that's very, very true. "All we can make as artists is the best work we can make. The rest we don't have control over."

MR. SILVERMAN: Definitely.

MS. ROCCA: Not everybody will agree with that. I mean, because like we've been talking about, changes in the art world. But that's sort of the philosophy that I come from and it's been rather wonderful and heady and exciting and scary.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you've managed—and you've managed to have a—

MS. ROCCA: Having this happen, you know, 50 years or so after, you know, the early works. And like I say, it's exciting, it's scary, it's like, you know, how do you—and also I think realizing that it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Could go away? The attention could—

MS. ROCCA: It could go away or it's not something that I have any control over. And so, that's why I think, you know, that that really makes sense. All as an artist that I can do is make the best work I can make and the rest I don't have control over.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I guess that's the healthiest attitude to have because if you really get that caught up in the externals you drive yourself crazy and particularly as a woman of a certain age, I mean, people get rediscovered like Mekly Bonahue [ph] but she had quit because she just gave up on the art world. I know many people that just decided that the marketing in the art world is just, you know, not for them. Although there's people like we have Tony Fitzpatrick in town who is a consummate marketer and is—actually helps other artists too and he's very—and he's very connected to Hollywood and to other areas of pop culture and manages to tread that line very carefully but he has great disdain for the art market too. But at the same time he's really good at it.

MS. ROCCA: Well, I'm not saying I have disdain for the art market but it's not—it's not—as an artist it's not something I have control over.

MR. SILVERMAN: But that's not—yeah.

MS. ROCCA: You know? And I think it's wonderful and exciting that there are people who are really excited about my work and interested in my work. I think it's wonderful.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, what work are you proudest of in terms of what do you consider to be your best?

MS. ROCCA: All of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That's funny because—

MS. ROCCA: You know, I can't—you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: it's hard for you. If you were editing—I mean, if you were saying what's the show that you were proudest of in terms of exhibitions?

MS. ROCCA: I mean, it's hard, you know, this early painting that I was talking about that was rolled up in my basement. It's a very large painting. It's a diptych and each panel is seven feet by five feet so it's a very large painting and actually there were three paintings I did at that time of a similar size. And it's—Dan Nadel who saw them and it was in the Matthew Marks show [last –SR] summer and it looked great, you know? But I have a distance from it, you know what I mean?

MR. SILVERMAN: You can see it differently now.

MS. ROCCA: I have a—it's not that I didn't like it then but I mean, it's like this younger me. Younger incarnation of me made this painting and I can stand back from it and say, "That's a damn good painting." You know?

MR. SILVERMAN: It's also interesting that you're a curator so some artists don't have that editorial eye. I know people that think that everything they did is wonderful, but it's largely because whatever they're working on now is what they're most excited about and they don't have the ability to see good or bad. But you're also a curator so you're probably an editor therefore.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and I've been like, going through a lot of slides over the summer after the show and having them put on CD, you know? So I've been looking at a lot of my work. I've been reviewing my work from the early to the recent work. So it's interesting because yeah, I see certain works, you know? I have a chance to look at them again that I maybe haven't looked at in a while and I'll, yeah, I'll react to them. Like, "That's a really good drawing. I really like it." And maybe another one I'll say, "I don't like that quite as much.

MR. SILVERMAN: So did you edit for that CD-ROM that you—the CD-ROMs that you showed me, did you add it from—for those or was that pretty much—

MS. ROCCA: It's—

MR. SILVERMAN: —because you've obviously done a lot more work than is on those disks.

MS. ROCCA: Well there's a lot on there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Believe me, I looked.

MS. ROCCA: I don't think I would put anything on there that I really didn't like, but there may be things. There are things that I like better than other things, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course, I mean that's kind of that's what I said. As a, as a curator or critic, whatever, as someone who's—plays the other side of the game you obviously have the ability to look at it dispassionately.

MS. ROCCA: Well I think it—most artists probably do, you know, most, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: I see some.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Some people it—critical eye isn't always—or the ability to articulate it is another matter too.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: You have—since this is your professional life, you also have to be—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —able to articulate what's—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I think I do. I think I do have a really good eye for—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —you know, for other people's work and I—it does—I never really kind of thought of it that way, but I think it probably does relate to looking at my own work—

MR. SILVERMAN: It informs—

MS. ROCCA: —you know, where I'll say wow, you know, that's just—but I think, you know, I'm sure Karl does that. I'm sure Jim does that. I'm sure, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well I think to grow you have to have a sense of—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —self criticism.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, you do.

MR. SILVERMAN: But I think that's important, otherwise you make the same painting over and over again—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —or you do the same mistakes and you don't see what's going on.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Do you solicit—do you—your—you had mentioned still being friendly with a number of these people. Do you have studio visits from colleagues like Susan Frankel?

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Or any of the—or people that you mentioned or some—you mentioned a couple—this may have been off the record, but you mentioned some other people that you're still very friendly with.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, but not so much studio visits.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not so much studio visits?

MS. ROCCA: You know, we support each other going to—

MR. SILVERMAN: To shows.

MS. ROCCA: —a show.

MR. SILVERMAN: To shows more so than—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the actual process.

MS. ROCCA: Than a studio visit, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you wait until it gets out into the world.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Are you very shy about showing work until you—until it's done? Are you open to—?

MS. ROCCA: I'd rather show it when it's done, yeah, because it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well that's interesting. Some people do that.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Some don't.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, because it, you know, it is—it changes until it's finished. I—like I say, I don't start with knowing how it's going to look at the end. I start with an idea, you know, and it evolves, and that's what's interesting to me, is that process of it evolving as I'm working on it making changes, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: In the studio with you do you, do you listen to music? Because music was important to you early on.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I listen to music. I might have—

MR. SILVERMAN: Does that ever influence—

MS. ROCCA: I might have television on.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you actually—there—I know someone who used to just do things like the—just have the TV on as a sort of—

MS. ROCCA: Noise.

MR. SILVERMAN: —a mind number. Yeah, noise.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, white noise.

MR. SILVERMAN: Background noise. So you do that?

MS. ROCCA: That's kind of how it is, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's an interesting one.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, it's a little tiny old television.

[They laugh.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's great.

MS. ROCCA: And it's more like background noise really.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it's background noise.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And the music that you listen to doesn't necessarily influence mood-wise or whatever?

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's just there for—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because like most artists I know have music on—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the background.

MS. ROCCA: No, I mean it's—I'm interested. Like I—not as a, you know, in the imagery, in allowing it to—it's interesting to let it evolve whether it's a drawing or a painting and, you know, make changes. I make lots and lots of changes.

MR. SILVERMAN: As you go.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, as I go. Take it, put things in, take things out, put things in, you know. And I know some artists don't do that and as—make it kind of a challenge not to do that. I think Evelyn Statsinger doesn't.

MR. SILVERMAN: She's more like that, yeah and even—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, and even Barbara Rossi I think too.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well I haven't talked to her, but I—yeah. There are people that work differently. That's why—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —I kind of was asking you—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and also in terms of—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —improvising versus having a real structure or—then sticking to it.

MS. ROCCA: And Barbara does or at least she used to do lots and lots and lots of studies, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: To work up to things.

MS. ROCCA: Different—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's unusual that you don't study so much because most people I know have some sort of—well you say you do drawings that spill—the energy spills out into them—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but it's not so much just sort of—

MS. ROCCA: But they're finished works of art when they're done, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, they're parallel. They're not—

MS. ROCCA: They're parallel.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're not a leading—they're not a way of working through the idea.

MS. ROCCA: No and I never would want to take a drawing and make a painting of it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. ROCCA: —but they're related. They're parallel, like you said.

MR. SILVERMAN: Interesting. And you mentioned when we were talking a little bit about the sort of—well I'll get into visual puns and one of the things that in—that the group that you were part of is very well known for is visual—is verbal puns and visual puns—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —and things like that. You're talking about the mouth. The series that you did that was—where we were talking about the boat is the mouth, the sort of wacky thing. Those are self-portraits I assume or not?

MS. ROCCA: Not so much self-portraits.

MR. SILVERMAN: They were portraits.

MS. ROCCA: Portraits. They were faces.

MR. SILVERMAN: They weren't of any—they weren't necessarily any particular—well there are arguments that all art is autobiographical or self-portraiture.

MS. ROCCA: Well yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there—they weren't meant to represent anyone in particular?

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: They were just faces.

MS. ROCCA: Faces.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just goofy faces.

MS. ROCCA: Faces. In fact, I did a whole series of drawings that I called "face pictures." Do you remember seeing them on the CD?

MR. SILVERMAN: I think that—yeah.

MS. ROCCA: They weren't really big. They were maybe—

MR. SILVERMAN: I think that's the series I'm talking about, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —11 by 14, something like that. And that was inspired by when I was in California. I taught preschool.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. ROCCA: And I also—at a private school and I taught art in the afternoon, and with the preschoolers, we used to show them these moods and emotions pictures.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You know, to help little children identify their feelings like—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Because sometimes kids have a hard time, you know, they're [angry –SR], but they don't really say it.

MR. SILVERMAN: They don't know what's going on.

MS. ROCCA: "I'm angry" and, you know, we were [laughs], like trying to teach the kids to be able to communicate with words like just say it instead of punching the other kid.

[Laughter..]

MR. SILVERMAN: Hopefully, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: You know, just say "I'm really angry at you." So they—we'd show these photographs. They were large photographs and, you know, "what do you thinks going on in this picture?" Much later, years later, I thought about those pictures and the face pictures and there were four of them, *face picture 1, 2, 3, 4*, were inspired so to speak—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —so to speak by the moods and what—but they were—

MR. SILVERMAN: So there—

MS. ROCCA: —very abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're learning aids [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: —and they had—they were nothing like the photographs. I mean they were—there was lots and lots of pattern in them.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And, you know, they were kind of freaky faces. They were, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was thinking, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah and that—the whole, the whole rectangle of the, of the drawing was the face, but it looked nothing—I mean you could, you could see some features, maybe, like eyes, but it was very densely patterned.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's enough abstraction—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and pattern and—

MS. ROCCA: Oh, it looked nothing like a realistic—nothing at all like it, but it was inspired by [laughs]—

MR. SILVERMAN: A learning aid until I figure out emotions.

MS. ROCCA: So that's kind of a good example of how something in my life inspired—

MR. SILVERMAN: Comes back many years later.

MS. ROCCA: Comes back, but in a totally different form. I mean again not having—it'd be nice if when we were talking about this if there could be on this, you know, a visual.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well scholars can probably look that series up.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm afraid that's probably all you can do because it's not an easy thing and that's always a problem.

MS. ROCCA: But because I'm saying a face and I'm talking about a photograph and it was not at all like that. They were very abstract really.

MR. SILVERMAN: They could be read as faces.

MS. ROCCA: They were like landscapes in a way, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah. Now you've never—you've done some things—that just brings up a topic. I'm sort of improvising here, but one of the things—I think Art Green was talking about this, about the difference—there were a lot of the images had this sort of horror of vacuums and filled up the space, but he did floating images in space. Now there are other people like Evelyn or Bill Conger that did sort of landscapes or did sort of dreamscapes. Did you ever deal with landscape consciously or do you think—I can't remember too much of your work being—there are some things that float a little like Art Green's in terms of they're not—I guess Art said he felt that everything had to be supported because he was like an engineer at heart.

[Laughter..]

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Or his—came from his genes or his upbringing. Do you ever—some of your things sort of float in that space—

MS. ROCCA: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: —but do they ever involve like a—

MS. ROCCA: Well I think—

MR. SILVERMAN: Seems like they're more figure or image based or image object and—

MS. ROCCA: I mean the—some of the works that had the pelicans—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —you know, or the birds and the boats, or the one that I was talking about called*Passed* that I did after my mother passed away. They have water. There, you know, there's water.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, the one, yeah, I know the one you're talking about.

MS. ROCCA: So they're kind of like a—they're sort of—

MR. SILVERMAN: A seascape a sort of—

MS. ROCCA: Sort of like a seascape, yeah. It's this one here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, that's the one I was thinking of.

MS. ROCCA: And also in other things I've been interested in between things at that time. Here's the birds and the boats.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, I remember that one that I—

MS. ROCCA: Is dichotomy.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's an important subject too.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. One half of the painting or the drawing having one—sort of the yin and the yang, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Hard or soft or various other kinds of dichotomies or—

MS. ROCCA: Out of control, in control.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Day and night, interested in opposites.

MR. SILVERMAN: The dream—not the dream, the sort of love fantasy of the '50s of romance and stuff like that versus the gritty realities of it?

MS. ROCCA: No, this is later.

MR. SILVERMAN: This is—you're talking about—

MS. ROCCA: Later, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —more recently.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, more recent work, not the early work. I don't think there was really too many dichotomies in the early work.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's something that changed.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Have things changed in terms of your physical abilities? You're still, you're still working and you're still—not just at art, but you're still working and you're still involved. Has—are any physical limitations or changes as you aged or maybe just wisdom. Maybe that's what you gained. How do you think your work has changed from aging? Is that—you're working smaller or—?

MS. ROCCA: Well, you know, this early painting that I was talking about that was rolled up in my basement and then sent off to Matthew Marks, and he had beautifully stretched and some conservation done on it. I was amazed at how big it was [laughs] because I worked really large at that time, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's kind of what I was getting at, maybe working smaller because it's easier to—?

MS. ROCCA: And then there were—there was another—there's another painting the same size—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: —you know, and a third actually that he has, and they're really big and I'm not working that big anymore.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't work that big anymore.

MS. ROCCA: But it was like wow and, you know, the works were really big. Dennis Adrian and Richard Born have a painting, a really large paint—I mean I—generally the early work was—

MR. SILVERMAN: Bigger.

MS. ROCCA: Either small—

MR. SILVERMAN: Or very big.

MS. ROCCA: —or very—or very big.

MR. SILVERMAN: Interesting.

MS. ROCCA: So, you know, it's again a sort of me standing back at the stage in life that I'm at and looking at that younger me and saying "wow, I really worked large."

MR. SILVERMAN: There was a, there was a sense of ambition and scale and—?

MS. ROCCA: Admiring it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: Admiring it because I think they have, you know, a certain impact, you know, being that size, but yet I would have hard time doing that now.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah and that's—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —not even just physical ability. Some of it is time and other things too.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: You've got a lot of things going on—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that you maybe didn't have then, although you managed to make art when you had a family and dealt with—

MS. ROCCA: Oh yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —all those other things too.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So there's always been a lot going on.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Going back to the sort of issue of women's issues, I was kind of curious. I came across Maya Deren, the experimental filmmaker. A quote from her that was kind of fascinating to me. She said that her work was very influenced by the difference between women and men. She said that she felt that men were very much about immediacy and women were much more about time, by way of being child bearers and they were about becoming. Does that reflect anything—does that sort of resonate in you in any kind of way?

MS. ROCCA: No, not really.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's not really something—

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that you would—?

MS. ROCCA: No, no, I don't think I analyze the differences or, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't look at it that way?

MS. ROCCA: It was—it just—no.

MR. SILVERMAN: You just do that, but—

MS. ROCCA: I'm not saying it's wrong. I'm just saying that that wasn't something—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's not the way you think about it?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually that's—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I got that yesterday too when we were talking some about the sort of issues of like the fact that your earlier work in particular seems to be caught up in female beauty notions from the '50s—those are heavy things to get over because I grew up in that era too and it was—I mean it's come back again now. Young girls are probably even more obsessed with this Kardashian stuff, but there's female beauty, makeup, and hairdos, and the accouterments as I was saying of beauty and of self-presentation. That was a much bigger part of your work early on.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Do you think you worked that through enough that that sort of just—you were done with that and moved on? Is that kind of—?

MS. ROCCA: I think so and I think, you know, different stages in your life, there are different feelings, different issues, you know, I don't think you go through life being the same.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, hopefully you grow [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. Well hopefully.

[Laughter.]

MS. ROCCA: But you change, for sure you change.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: I think it would be—I can't imagine any—you change. I mean you change physically, you change emotionally, intellectually you change. So—

MR. SILVERMAN: That goes with it. So, um, I was commenting before too that it seemed like the more recent work—work of the I think it's '80s and '90s or '90s and onwards, seems to be more about spiritual connections. Is it in the early work if you look at it now or am I missing that in the early work?

MS. ROCCA: No, I don't think it—

MR. SILVERMAN: I think it came about later.

MS. ROCCA: I think it came about later.

MR. SILVERMAN: And—

MS. ROCCA: I think starting maybe—well, yeah. I mean I think the work of the early '80s and late '80s too is different. It's different than the work now, but it also is different than the early work.

MR. SILVERMAN: How would you characterize that difference? Because I'm not sure where—again it might be hard for someone to not see—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but I mean what—how would you make a—if you were characterizing the differences from between the early and the more recent work?

MS. ROCCA: Well what I think a lot of that work in the '80s was about emotions.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, about feelings.

MR. SILVERMAN: When you say "about" to some people that might read as like the pictures you were talking about, the photographs [laughs], you know, like it's not so obvious. How would you—

MS. ROCCA: Well it is to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That's why I'm going to have you explain.

MS. ROCCA: Well maybe, you know, like I didn't bring it with me, but the titles of the work might be interesting, you know. I should have brought the titles with me. Like, you know, *These Are Not Very Nice People*.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm trying to remember because I saw some.

MS. ROCCA: I had, I had a whole list.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's some that have some words that are sort of very emotive like *Don't* or—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I can't remember—well offhand, they're coming back to me. I think I know what you're talking about.

MS. ROCCA: I really wish I had that with me because I think it'd be interesting to just read some of the titles, and I have a whole list of them. *Silly Doggies*, this one is *Silly Doggies*.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Oh gosh. Well maybe we can add it—or something. Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well so when you describe them of being more about emotions, tell me what you mean because, again, it's not quite so obvious as like the picture of the person who's angry [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not, it's not like—

MS. ROCCA: No, it's not a picture of a—

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not—or it's not, it's not like Max Beckmann or one of the expressionists where there's turmoil and tumult [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: Well here's—I'm looking at some of the drawings from the early '80s and there's one that was called *Scary Road*. I really wish I had the titles in front of me because I'm not thinking of them.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well let's get back to what they are because your way of working, you don't come in identifying a mood like I'm feeling really—?

MS. ROCCA: No, it's not a mood.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's just stuff?

MS. ROCCA: Its emotions.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Just coming out.

MS. ROCCA: It's not like "I'm feeling happy today so I'm going to make a happy picture."

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: It's about the strength, about the power of emotions, and sometimes emotions can be troubling, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Of course. Do you find this—art as being very therapeutic? You had mentioned therapy.

MS. ROCCA: Like there's this one drawing that—of two hands reaching into a bag and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —you know, one of the hands is sort of like a claw and the other one is I guess more like a normal hand. I wish I could think of the title of it. And the, you know, I think of the bag as kind of—well, you know, in a way it's like the purse isn't it now that I think of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And here we're back to that, okay.

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: I didn't mean to get too analytic with you, but I guess that's kind of where we're going.

MS. ROCCA: But it—but the idea of reaching in—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —and the bag being, you know, when you reach into something like a bag, you don't know what's in the bag, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: But then there's that—

MS. ROCCA: And also the bag can be protective, you know, but the, you know, this—that particular drawing that I was looking at also, you know, is very much about dichotomy and—but the bag—

MR. SILVERMAN: But the hand is also very feral. It's very sort of like—yeah, it's like an animal hand.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, but the bag, you know, I've done a lot of drawings with bags. Bags can hold things that you don't want to get out. Sort of like Pandora's Box.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. ROCCA: You know, so a box or a bag can contain things that are maybe not [what you want released –SR], that you don't want [laughs] that you want—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well particularly in that so pretty social society there's a whole bunch of stuff that a lot of people have like [James] Ensor you've mentioned before. I'm sure you loved Ensor too.

MS. ROCCA: I do like Ensor.

MR. SILVERMAN: The masks and the sense of like—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —what's behind with that feral thing—?

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —there I'm thinking of that too. There's a sensibility that's—that humans are containing a lot of stuff, dark sides, and things that are—

MS. ROCCA: Dark sides.

MR. SILVERMAN: —dark sides.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now your work doesn't seem so much about dark side, but maybe in there there's—maybe there's a little stuff—undercurrent there, maybe the surfaces are—this—the surface is—the attractive surfaces are fooling us. So you think there's a darker side that you're expressing through that?

MS. ROCCA: Oh yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's something that's maybe been in your work, perhaps all along.

MS. ROCCA: No, I don't think it was so much in the early work.

MR. SILVERMAN: Not so much the early work? Yeah, I think that is another distinction I would make as well as I think about it.

MS. ROCCA: But it is interesting, you know, the use of, you know, as I'm talking, you know, the use of the purse in the early work and the reaching in which is—as more of a sexual metaphor, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think those metaphors were more obvious then in that way—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and less emotive.

MS. ROCCA: And the use of the bag, and there are several works with the use of a bag, and a hand, big hand, reaching in the bag, the container becomes something else. It contains things that—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Like I said, that you don't necessarily want released. And this one large drawing of the bag has all kinds of little dangerous things. It has little knives. It has a lot of little images like the earlier work.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was talking about with it.

MS. ROCCA: This is a drawing that I like very much. It has—but it also has little bunny rabbits and it has—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's you. You have—that's the thing that you threw in even at the beginning that would be—you'd throw in the midst of the love and happiness things. All of the sudden there would be this—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —weird little strange thing that kept going—

MS. ROCCA: Right, well that's true.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: That's true, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you've always had those sort of dichotomies—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in a way.

MS. ROCCA: But this, but this—you looked at this—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, no, I like that one too.

MS. ROCCA: —on the, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: I remember it.

MS. ROCCA: And it has like I say knives. It had—I—it—I think this also has birds on knives. So things that are dangerous, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: This is kind of a dangerous world too, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's stuff lurking.

MS. ROCCA: I mean it's just got stuff lurking and I mean—

MR. SILVERMAN: So it's not just an internal sort of projection, it's also the outside world?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's all kinds of stuff behind surfaces too.

MS. ROCCA: Both, yeah

MR. SILVERMAN: Both, so both at the same time?

MS. ROCCA: But the idea of containment and, you know, reaching in. There's a number of drawings of hands.

MR. SILVERMAN: Hands are very interesting too in that regard. Both portraits or faces, you start off—it's interesting, you were starting off with your first show at age eight. You were telling me about when you were—

MS. ROCCA: People.

MR. SILVERMAN: —pretty much involved with people and figures?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Portraiture has so much emotional meaning and it's so much psychological meaning. Hands as well. You can do so much with hands.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: So those are very classical kinds of interests that have come to the fore in your work even though they're not handled in a classical way, maybe. I mean not in, you know, 18th, 19th century kind of classical any sense anyways.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And here's one of those paintings with the double image.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah. No, I remember those.

MS. ROCCA: With—or the face with the—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: And the figure, and the figure so that they had—becomes the nose.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: So I mean that's also—I mean [I've –SR] been interested in double images. This is a face too.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well that visual pun thing is—what—it's interesting that a number of your colleagues in *Hairy Who* and Imagists were very interested in verbal puns and language, and I love you've mentioned titles. Art Green was telling me that he had this book of titles that he just sort of [laughs] pulled out of the air to use for—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —found some of them really appropriate. Playing with verbiage and playing with double entendres, I know Karl does that a lot.

MS. ROCCA: A lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: A lot and I—

MS. ROCCA: Karl's titles are the—

MR. SILVERMAN: They're hilarious.

MS. ROCCA: He—I think he, I think he probably—he and Jim, but Karl's titles I mean he's very interested in words and wordplay.

MR. SILVERMAN: Language.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's why when we title—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —this show we—I came up with a pun for his title of the show. We -

MS. ROCCA: Oh, what was it?

MR. SILVERMAN: *Win some work some*.

MS. ROCCA: Oh yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because I figured it had to sort of come up—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —to what he was doing and actually so you do that too, a fair amount, and there's visual puns a lot and that's what we're talking about now is more visual puns, but in the early work there's—maybe more recently, but there's language as well, but there's—that's something that just intrigued you from the beginning, that sort of notion of—

MS. ROCCA: I think my puns are different than Karl's because he really plays with the sound of words a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And words that sound the same that mean different things. I don't think I do that as much, but I like, you know, I like—and I'll often put words in my, in my work too. I'll often—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I—that's what I was talking about with a couple of the things with the emotional things with the —

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, there are a lot of, a lot—yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: That don't. There were a couple other that were in that series. I can't remember where they were.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there were some things that sort of—is that a signpost perhaps to figure out what the content is for people or is that just—yeah?

MS. ROCCA: I think words are, you know, they're visual images, you know, I think, you know, whatever it means to somebody else, you know, I mean but it's just putting in images and then putting in a phrase or something that I feel should go with it. I mean the words are visual.

MR. SILVERMAN: There are people that don't like that mix. There's this—

MS. ROCCA: No, I'm fine with it.

MR. SILVERMAN: No and there—I think your cohorts are as well.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now I as well, but I guess what I'm saying there are people that really want it.

MS. ROCCA: It's not, it's not supposed to be telling people what to think, although, you know, it has an importance, you know, I wouldn't put it in unless it was important. And—but visually it's important, too.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not meant to be literal either or like in—when we were talking about the notion of it—not just narrative, but illustration. It's not meant to be an illustration in any sense.

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually there are people that on the other side, there are people that do the opposite that do text and art to be illustrative and, you know, to play the two together. That's not what it's about either.

MS. ROCCA: But lots of artists use words.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a whole—

MS. ROCCA: And then are artists that just use words as a visual image which is—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh of course.

MS. ROCCA: —kind of interesting I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Gets—at least the ones I've seen get a little boring after a while, but I think it's an interesting idea.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. ROCCA: Or the neon, using neon.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course. Now you never did—we didn't talk about this at all, but you never—we were talking about—have you ever done—we were just talking about this off the tape, but installations or have you ever tried to do things where it got beyond just the traditional bounds of painting? I mean you're pretty much classical in the sense—

MS. ROCCA: Oh only when we did the *Hairy Who* shows.

MR. SILVERMAN: So there's were—

MS. ROCCA: And I worked on objects. I worked on actual purses, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I saw a couple of those.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's that wonderful pink one that I think I saw an image at Corbett vs. Dempsey, and there were some shoes I saw in there too—

MS. ROCCA: Oh okay, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that was kind of an interesting—

MS. ROCCA: And there was some little sort of imitation leatherette—a navy blue—they must have been child's purses. They were little that I painted on. I also painted on lamps.

MR. SILVERMAN: I saw the lamp too.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually that's—there are a number of things that people—

MS. ROCCA: Lampshades I should say, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: Lampshades and there were chairs that I know that—

MS. ROCCA: And then there are paintings of lamps.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: And paintings on lampshades.

MR. SILVERMAN: And lamps that are painted [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: I don't have any of those lampshades. There was one *Hairy Who* show that I had quite a few lampshades.

MR. SILVERMAN: A whole—

MS. ROCCA: Actual lamps that I painted on. I don't have any of those.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just images. I think I just saw the one. There's one in the—

MS. ROCCA: But there are paintings of lampshades.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there was one, there was one lampshade somewhere or other.

MS. ROCCA: Wait, this one here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: These two.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, these two.

MR. SILVERMAN: But so you've done objects, but you haven't tried to move into the realm. Have you ever tried performance or any of the other things?

MS. ROCCA: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: How about—I guess that—

MS. ROCCA: I'd like to do more objects. I think the—

MR. SILVERMAN: More objects.

MS. ROCCA: —the idea of painting like on a lampshade.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh that's hilarious. Yeah, I love those things.

MS. ROCCA: I would like to do that again, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: And Roger Brown did some wonderful ones too in those irons.

MS. ROCCA: Embroidery has always interested me too.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh that's interesting.

MS. ROCCA: But I've never really—I just actually recently found an embroidery that I had started, but—

MR. SILVERMAN: I see. I was talking about that; there's in the work in the nineties or 2000s, whenever, there was some work that seems like it's very more textural detail—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —textural things that makes me think you would love—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, well there is a large [drawing –SR] here which I like very much that Elmhurst College owns called *Piety* and it's a double figure. It's also a dichotomy.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And all of the lines in the drawing—it's a big drawing. All of the lines are embroidery lines. They're not embroidered. They're drawings of—

MR. SILVERMAN: Of.

MS. ROCCA: —the embroidered lines, different kinds of stitches.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're representations.

MS. ROCCA: And the whole drawing is made of stitches. I really like it a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—

MS. ROCCA: So it's these two figures.

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: And on one side—well you can look it up online.

[They laugh.]

MR. SILVERMAN: But—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, but it, you know, just in terms of things that was inspired by was also inspired by a renaissance painting, you know, so the influences are really—

MR. SILVERMAN: They're not always direct. They're not always things that are immediate and they might come to you much later?

MS. ROCCA: No, I knew it. There was, you know, if there's a painting or, you know, like if I go to a museum I'll get postcards of paintings I like and, you know, they're pinned up on my bulletin board.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was about to ask. Do you do like a lot of artists, do you have things that, you know—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —give you sort of ideas?

MS. ROCCA: And there was this, you know, like a lot of Renaissance paintings have a window, have a figure with a window.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And then out the window is this lovely little landscape. Well the—my drawing has a window in it like that with—and I believe there was a vase on the window which is also in my drawing.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you're peering—I asked about landscapes. So there are some. I guess I missed that. There are some landscapes that are little background-y kind of windows that refer to, you know, to Renaissance paintings?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. So but that drawing has a lot of things we've been talking about, you know, and it's a good example of a whole lot of different things, inspirations, different kinds of inspiration that went into the drawing

and it's got that yin and yang and the sort of—the background of the one figure is very chaotic lines and the [other is –SR] sort of regular patterns. So in control, out of control. The inspiration of the little Renaissance painting, you know, the embroidery so they're not necessarily—it's not one thing, you know, it's a whole lot of different things that are inspirational.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it sounds like it's—well here's the question I was going to ask as this was a good lead in to it. What do you think will happen? Eventually you're going to probably retire from this gig. I—there's no microphones here I hope.

[Laughter.]

But eventually you'll retire. What do you think it'll be like to be making art full time? I ask my wife this sometimes because—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —there are some good parts about it, but there's a certain isolation from social world and from the world at large.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you seem like a very internal kind of person in terms of you work through your own material through art.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: What do you think will happen when you just spend full time making art? How do you think that might change things for you?

MS. ROCCA: The isolation that you talk about—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: There are many things I really love about the kinds of things I do here at the College and, you know, I've referred to them before about meeting new artists, putting a show together, and curating. Something I didn't mention is [that –SR] I love, you know, putting, arranging work, installing work, and deciding, you know, what painting is going to be next to what painting and how they're going to create a dialogue with each other.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh sure, that's the pleasures of curating.

MS. ROCCA: And I've been told by people I really respect that I'm very good at it. So I'm tooting my own horn, which maybe I shouldn't do.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: So—but also working with other people—

MR. SILVERMAN: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MS. ROCCA: —is something that I really enjoy. It's a part of this—of the work I do here at the college that I really enjoy, and because I live by myself it can be very isolating and I am a person who needs—has, you know, I—took me a long time to realize that each of us has a different need for sociability, you know, and, you know, the kind of sociability, you know, you have family sociability, you have other artists, you know, who you socialize with and exchange ideas and—but in general, sociability. And there were people who I greatly admired who I thought functioned—I thought and I could have been wrong too, functioned really well with very minimal sociability.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Very minimal contact with other people and I thought, "well gosh I should be like that. What's wrong with me, you know?"

[They laugh.]

"Why do I need this?"

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Need it in the sense that if I don't have it, I'm unhappy, you know, and I thought—and then it really

took me a long time to realize that we are each different and part of getting to know yourself or being able to take care of yourself is knowing what you need, you know, and that includes—

MR. SILVERMAN: And there's a superficial sort of expectation of sociability that's not the real thing. In other words there's, you know, when your mom or dad sends you out to play because you should be with the outside—with the kids. Well some of that is sort of BS because you really sometimes need to be alone and to sense who you are. So some of it you start realize the real need for other people which is not the expectation or the societal sort of expectation of being social. So some of what you're saying is you grow to understand that balance.

MS. ROCCA: Well it wasn't so much the outside expectation. It wasn't so much anybody else saying to me, "oh you should be more sociable." It was, it was that I felt that I should be fine with very little sociability because there were people who I really admired who I thought—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah?

MS. ROCCA: —were just fine with very little so—but it took me quite a while to get to acknowledge, to understand that we each have different needs in that area.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. ROCCA: And so what I'm saying is that that's part of what I enjoy working outside.

MR. SILVERMAN: So how do you—

MS. ROCCA: Because I would basically be by myself all the time unless—

MR. SILVERMAN: Unless there was an event or something to go to?

MS. ROCCA: Event or I—and, you know, or I set something up to, you know, and so that is a need that it fills.

MR. SILVERMAN: So how do you see your retirement? Do you see yourself making more art?

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Or does that make you nervous to be that isolated? Or do you—

MS. ROCCA: No, I just, I just realized that yeah, I certainly would like more time to work.

MR. SILVERMAN: And what do you think will happen as a result?

MS. ROCCA: But I—as far as sociability, I realize that it's just something that I have to—

MR. SILVERMAN: Make an effort to—yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Make plans, make plans for, yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: I—one of the things about retirement, as much as I said I really enjoy retirement, I was surprised at how much I just—you had to separate all the BS part of the social schmoozing in the art world and realize that there was a certain aspect of working in systems and with people that you do need and that's just what I'm getting at.

MS. ROCCA: That's right and it's more like one to one like we're talking now—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —or with a few good friends. It doesn't so much happen at an opening or—

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's a whole other thing.

MS. ROCCA: I mean although that's nice too. It's nice to celebrate and, you know, and something that I realized later in life is that the art world, at least the part of the art world that I'm engaged in, are very affectionate, you know, there's lots of hugging that goes on—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's a lot of good stuff.

MS. ROCCA: —at openings and, you know, and there is this really nice community. I know lots and lots of artists and who I admire and who—and get to know more all the time. So that's real positive.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, there's good stuff in there, too.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not all mixed with the politics and the competition and there's—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah. I mean it isn't for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, me neither. There's both. I guess what I'm asking though is what do you see yourself maybe making—trying some embroidery or trying some—?

MS. ROCCA: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: What kind of—that's where I'm coming around to.

MS. ROCCA: I don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: You had mentioned that. That's why I said this is a logical way to ask you about what happens when you have more time.

MS. ROCCA: No, I'll try, I'll try that when I, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: That might be something you try?

MS. ROCCA: I just when I pulled out this scrapbook—it was in the scrapbook this piece of—

MR. SILVERMAN: So that made you think of a possible—

MS. ROCCA: So maybe I'll start embroidering on it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Anything else you have in mind for upcoming or where do you think your work is headed apart from whether you retire or not? I mean what—

MS. ROCCA: It's—I'm working on a third painting that goes with these two that were in the state of Illinois show, and it's *Night*. One of these paintings is called *Departure*, and the other one is called *Sunset*, and this third one is called *Night.*

[Laughter.]

MR. SILVERMAN: That's a logical progression sure. So anything else that—

MS. ROCCA: No, but I just—I'll paint more and I'll have more time to paint. I'll have more time to draw and that would be good.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, no, I think that's kind of what I was—

MS. ROCCA: You know, and more energy because I won't be sharing my energy.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you will have to sort of make the effort to go out. I can tell—yeah, I can attest to that.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: You have to make the effort to get out there because it's easy to just become curmudgeonly and just sit in your own little lair [laughs].

MS. ROCCA: That doesn't make me happy, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: That doesn't—no, that doesn't appeal to any of us I think. Well there are people that can do that.

MS. ROCCA: There are people that are, you know, or like I say I think it's a very individual thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: How much of that you need or don't need.

MR. SILVERMAN: How much—

MS. ROCCA: Some, you know, that's what I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess one of the questions I had for you is one of the larger looming questions is like, someone's listening to this 50 years in the future or whenever, how do you see your contributions to American art or to art or what do you, what do you—how would you like to be seen? What do you—how would you characterize your—your achievements? [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: Wow, gosh.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's not an easy one to answer probably.

MS. ROCCA: That's a—yeah. Well I would hope, you know, that my work continues to be exhibited or shown, you know, that when I'm not here anymore or—I mean I think everybody kind of hopes that, that their work doesn't just fade away.

MR. SILVERMAN: Or get put in dumpsters.

[Laughter.]

Oh, god.

MS. ROCCA: I actually recently heard about somebody who was, you know, trying to make plans for what was going to happen to his work and he had decided that he was going to burn a lot of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Who?

MS. ROCCA: Because he—no, I don't know. It wasn't somebody I really knew, but somebody told me this story, because he felt that it would just get thrown away anyway and he would just burn most of it and—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's an aggressive kind of way to deal with it.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah and I thought boy, that sounds awful. I'd never want to do that [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah that's kind of strange.

MS. ROCCA: But then I know a lot of artists, you know, who are maybe a little bit older than I am who are, you know, like thinking well, you know, really working on placing as many pieces as they can in collections. And we've certainly been here at Elmhurst College, our collection has been the benefactor, received the benefit of that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. ROCCA: Gotten some wonderful, wonderful gifts of art from artists.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you are concerned about your legacy, but you're not sure?

MS. ROCCA: Yeah, I hope—I guess, you know, I'm not at the point. I haven't really gotten to specifically—

[They laugh.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Thinking—

MS. ROCCA: —planning out what I'm going to do. I mean I did work on compiling all these CDs. That was my big —

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's important getting your records in order too.

MS. ROCCA: Getting my records in order and that is, you know, it's a big job and also it makes one reflect. It, you know, on a body of work, and sometimes an earlier work can inspire a more—a current work. So I think there's a real value to doing that, although sometimes it's like very tedious, and like I don't want to do this anymore, but I —how would I like to be remembered? I would hope that, you know, my work has a life after I'm not here anymore and that artists and, you know, people who care about art find it interesting and, you know, I guess that's what I hope.

[They laugh.]

MR. SILVERMAN: That's very reasonable. On the other hand, who knows? It's like it's hard to say what happens, hard to say what happens in terms of the future because—

MS. ROCCA: Nobody knows.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, maybe people, maybe art changes too in terms of the culture, maybe the value of art changes. I mean there's some changes in the world that are going on. I was just reading an article about museums and about—in the *New York Times*—about I guess just there's an attempt to sort of look at global art and to change the nature of museums and I don't know. I'm—do you look at the—are you getting—

MS. ROCCA: You know, in a way it's amazing how much museums have stayed the same—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —and haven't changed.

MR. SILVERMAN: Actually this is by Colin Hunt. This is an old school critic who was saying basically despite all the frou-frou and the fancy buildings that the insides and what they're doing is pretty much the same, and even the attempts to be more global or look at other kinds of art are really just window dressing that it really hasn't changed much.

MS. ROCCA: Well I think the art has changed. I mean the art that's shown there certainly, you know, the contemporary art shown, but the sort of institution of what a museum is and the way that the spectator, the visitor is expected to experience the work hasn't changed, you know?

MR. SILVERMAN: Although there's a lot of people now—I mean I wonder—I was also reading about the same issue. I was reading about how much the world - the auction world has changed to accept the internet and people are now buying—more and more art is bought on the internet.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: And more and more people as we were saying or the kids in particular are looking at art and I wonder how much they're going to—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Go to museums.

MR. SILVERMAN: You talked about this, actually go to museums because you could just look at it in your iPhone or take your selfie.

MS. ROCCA: And museums are busy.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, they're doing very well which is good. On the other hand, I wonder because I just see so many kids that don't see the difference between—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —being in front of a piece of art and it's very different even if you've got great resolution and the best resolution—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the world, it's very different then—

MS. ROCCA: Well that's scary [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: It is. Do you feel like there—

MS. ROCCA: I mean because I don't think one experiences, you know, it's great. I look at things all the time on the internet. I mean somebody says—

MR. SILVERMAN: Me too.

MS. ROCCA: —you know, tells me about an artist and it's wonderful that can just quickly Google them and look and see what they do and get a sense of whether I want to go visit the studio and see the work. That's nice, but there's—it's nothing like looking at the work or nothing like looking at a, you know, painting. I think though, you know, museums are repositories and I don't think museums are going to go away, but I sometimes—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I don't think so, no.

MS. ROCCA: —think about the way people—the expectation of how people—the way that people are expected to look at works of art in a museum, you know. Even, you know, the way, the way work is hung, you know, so that you look at one thing and then you move onto another thing and another, you know, and you—and there's one hard bench in the middle of the room and, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well now there's audio guides too. There's a directed experience as opposed—

MS. ROCCA: Well I've never used that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Me neither, even though I'm—I was—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —an art education person, I have to say for some reason that just doesn't appeal to me. I don't want something predigested. I actually find that weird.

MS. ROCCA: I mean it could be helpful for somebody -

MR. SILVERMAN: It probably is very helpful for people.

MS. ROCCA: And now they don't have art guides. You can just use your phone.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh right. It's not—I'm sorry, I'm old school.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: This is a generation back.

MS. ROCCA: And actually I want to do that with our collection because I think our students would love it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: You know, I do lots of tours and I'm happy to do that, and I love the interaction, but I think our students would love to have an app on their phone so that they could, you know, just hold it up to a painting and get a short description. And actually it's really a project that I'd like to do.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's important too because I think there's a certain kind of—I don't know—funny too because I use to—I worked in the Cleveland museum. I once threatened to do a project with inner city kids and—because I worked with kids when I started. Just in the bathrooms there's this awe and this sort of disconnect or—from their lives, just this certain sort of—you could just do it just the marble in the bathrooms would be enough to just sort of wow people. And the art world is very intimidating to people.

MS. ROCCA: Yes, it is.

MR. SILVERMAN: They don't—and I'm thinking of inner city kids.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: You know, African American kids in particular, but just the notion that this is part of your life.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: That art can be part of your life is not—

MS. ROCCA: You know, have ever seen the bathrooms in the Kohler Foundation?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

MS. ROCCA: Michael Kohler museum.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, Toby [Zallman] made me go in there actually.

MS. ROCCA: They're wonderful.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're all installations.

MS. ROCCA: They're just what you're talking about.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, well that's intentional as opposed to the other [laughs], but I guess what I'm saying is there's a certain—it comes from that European tradition of—and people are complaining about the MCA of having those steps. The intimidation and the sort of palatial and sort of class difference between—in other cultures, art is part of your life, particularly in Africa or Southeast Asia.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: Whereas the European tradition, it's a class thing and it's part of your life if you're wealthy—

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —but it's somewhat disconnected from you. So I think—and people even going to galleries, particularly in New York, can be very intimidating.

MS. ROCCA: Oh absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: And I think making it comfortable—

MS. ROCCA: I was at a symposium and we were talking about painting and different cultures, you know and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: —the comment was made. I don't know if it'll make sense out of context, but that in Italy—they were talking about a particular town in Italy—everything is painted, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: You've got an object on the street, it gets painted.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

MS. ROCCA: And your front door is painted. It's, you know, painting is just everywhere, not just, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's true, yeah. It's part of your life.

MS. ROCCA: —in a museum.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, it's not—

MS. ROCCA: And painting is so much a part of the culture, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it's not even just painting, it's also theatre and music and dance.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's something you do as it's your neighbors.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's you, it's your family.

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: As opposed to a museum—

MS. ROCCA: Yeah.

MR. SILVERMAN: —which separates it, but there are some good things about that model and I guess it still survives. Do you feel somewhat—

MS. ROCCA: Well I think graffiti on trains is really interesting. I think painting on fences and, you know, bringing painting—

MR. SILVERMAN: Into the world.

MS. ROCCA: —into the world is interesting.

MR. SILVERMAN: I tell political artists that that's what they should, you know, I, you know, I—there are people like Adam Brooks like with *Industry of the Ordinary*. There are people that do street art to make political points, but I say much better to be out on the street than to be in a museum or a gallery, because that's preaching to the converted and it really doesn't change the people you need to change. Go down to Texas or the south of Alabama and [laughs] do some stuff on billboards or in the community, but I don't know. But that's—so do you feel like in terms of the art world and the technology and stuff like that, do you feel certain wistful or sad kind of aspect of that some of the old school stuff is changing so fast? Or are you just—

MS. ROCCA: No, I think change is—

MR. SILVERMAN: Change is good?

MS. ROCCA: Change isn't good or bad. Change is. And if there's one thing, you know, one thing you can always count on, it'll be change.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you're comfortable with that and just see what happens and you'll accommodate to it? You don't—but you don't use—

MS. ROCCA: Well I may not change, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah, you don't use technology in your art?

MS. ROCCA: No, I don't.

MR. SILVERMAN: I asked you I think.

MS. ROCCA: And I—but I think it is—somebody could certainly use it in—and people certainly use it in interesting ways, but that doesn't mean I should use it or want to use it. I like, I like that gooey paint.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: And I like—and this was part of the symposium. It was a symposium actually just a week ago at the University of Chicago on "Is Painting Comedic?" and so there were a lot of things discussed, but, you know, you know, I—somebody brought up—well this person actually he painted, he painted with animals. He had animals painting like elephants.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yeah.

MS. ROCCA: You know, and—

MS. ROCCA: They make music too.

MS. ROCCA: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a guy—

MS. ROCCA: He was actually a very interesting guy.

MR. SILVERMAN: I've heard.

MS. ROCCA: Vitali [ph], I don't know. He's a Russian artist, but I said, you know, I really like painting with that stick with the animal hairs at the end—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —and that gooey paint. It's—I like it, you know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

MS. ROCCA: So I don't feel the need to change, but no, I mean, you know, there've always been innovations and [inaudible].

MR. SILVERMAN: You're perfectly open to them, but you were trained classically and you're—you've quite a whiles to go with working through that stuff.

MS. ROCCA: Well I mean, yeah, but I think there are always changes just—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. ROCCA: —art and the world and they—it just doesn't stay the same. It always changes.

[END OF SD1, TR2.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]