THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEW WITH: **DOROTHY LICHTENSTEIN (DL)**

NTERVIEWER: **AGNES GUND (AG)**

LOCATION: **NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

DATE: **MAY 6, 1998**

BEGIN MINICASSETTE MASTER TAPE 1, SIDE A

AG: I'd like to thank you, first of all, for doing this. It's very nice of you. The first question that I'd like to ask you is, how did you and Roy meet, the first time?

DL: The first time we met, I was working at a gallery, the Bianchini Gallery. That was around the corner from the Castelli Gallery at 4 East 77th Street. We were on 78th Street, and, in fact, that's the gallery that Rosa Esmond has now, Ubu Gallery [16 East 78th Street].

AG: Oh, is that her gallery?

DL: Yes. We were doing a show called *The Great American Supermarket*, based on the fact that so much of the work in the early '60s imitated commercial products and ads, so we thought to set the exhibition up.

AG: That's great. And this was a contemporary gallery?

DL: Yes. When I started working there, Paul Bianchini owned it, and he did mostly drawing shows of modern masters, but, say, French and Europeans and mostly pre-war, but he would have had Dubuffet and Giacometti.

AG: And he was a friend of Leo's [Castelli].

DL: Well, he ran this gallery. He knew Leo, and of course it was very exciting. We thought Leo's gallery was the most exciting place. It seemed to be the main center of the contemporary art scene in New York at that point. So, we had this idea that, instead of doing a poster, if we could get Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol to put an image on a shopping bag, that would be perfect. The show took place in 1964. I met Roy in, I guess, the early spring of 1964, when we lured him over there to ask him if he would put an image on the shopping bag. Andy used a Campbell's soup can, and Roy did an image of a turkey. It was from one of his paintings, his *Turkey With Red and Yellow Dots.*

AG: That's a turkey that looks like it's being roasted.

DL: That's right. I think the red and yellow simulated golden brown.

AG: Turkey and soup cans. I wonder -- the turkey wasn't ever in the Guggenheim show?

DL: No.

AG: That's interesting.

DL: And that's when we met.

AG: And did you start going out right away?

DL: Well, he took me out to lunch. I had a broken leg. I had broken my leg skiing. So, he took me out to lunch and, I don't know how. I know he had another girlfriend at the time. He told someone that worked at the gallery that they were breaking up, but that he had promised that he would take her to Paris for his show. Roy forgot to tell me that they were breaking up, yet he knew that they were breaking up, and that when he came back he was going to call me. He [Roy] told this to a friend of mine.

AG: And so that's what happened?

DL: No. The person he told this to said, "I wouldn't think about him. He's gone off to Paris with this other woman. Why be interested in him?" This man worked with us at the gallery, his name is Ben Birillo, he did have a lot of input into the gallery and the Supermarket show.

AG: How did you meet him?

DL: He was a good friend of a man named Leon Kraushaar. Ben was an artist. Ben lived in Brooklyn. Leon Kraushaar was a collector from Great Neck and I think his whole collection became the Astoria collection in Germany. Ben brought him to Dick Bellamy, to Leo, and advised him on what to collect.

AG: And you did know Dick?

DL: Well, I knew him from the days at Bianchini.

AG: I liked him too. It always struck me that he really loved the art too much and he wasn't ever a good dealer.

DL: No, he wasn't a businessman.

AG: I heard the most amazing story from Susan Rothenberg, who said that when the Willard Gallery closed, she went to Dick and asked if he would represent her and he said, "Don't be silly. You should go someplace where they'd really take care of you. I can't do that." And I thought that was such a telling story.

DL: Yes.

AG: That he was like that. Anyway, go back to the Bianchini Gallery. So what happened when he [Roy] came back?

DL: Well, he came back and asked me out, and he discovered that I hadn't been told, that his message had miscarried. But he had broken up with the then girlfriend, as he said, and we started to date.

AG: But you didn't marry until '68.

DL: That's right.

AG: It seemed so long because I remember I met you, I think, just before you got married, [at Emily Tremaine's] and I remember just being bowled over by how cute you were. You had on a short, brown, skirt, I remember that.

DL: I remember that skirt. When I gave it away I gave it away to a six year old and it fit her. It was the right length for her. I can't imagine when I see people in skirts like that now.

AG: And then you had very curly hair.

DL: It was shorter and curlier. It would still do that if…

AG: Now, I read somewhere in one of these articles that people thought that you looked like the women in the paintings of the comic strips. What do you think your attraction was for Roy, besides the obvious, that you were very attractive.

DL: Well, this is so mysterious, why people are attracted, but I don't think… I mean, most of his stereotypes were blonde, blue-eyed people straight from the comic books. I think we just hit it off. He always said that when he walked into the gallery, he heard me speaking French on the telephone, and I had my broken leg in a cast, that somehow that combination really worked.

AG: That's wonderful. This whole pop sensibility. What I was wondering, about the boys [Mitchell and David Lichtenstein], how young were the boys when you first met?

DL: They were eight and nine-and-a-half. Roy and Isabel had been separated probably for five years by that time. He would visit them every week, and then every other weekend they would come to stay with him. He was very concerned about that. He used to drive to Princeton where they lived, and I can remember one Sunday there was a gigantic snow storm and he couldn't drive, and he walked up from our loft on the Bowery up to the Port Authority and took a bus out to Princeton in order to be able to visit them, because he didn't want to disappoint them and not show up on a Sunday when they expected him. Mostly they would play around the studio and draw. I really felt very lucky that he had two boys, because I think that with girls there's more competition when a woman comes in. He was sort of like a mother hen with them. He was very concerned. And then, Isabel really wasn't well. They spent summers with us.

AG: When did they come?

DL: Well, they never really lived with us permanently, except for all summers and probably all summers from about 1966 on, because they were living at Princeton and Isabel wasn't well, but there was a very nice man who stayed at the house and watched over everything. He used to build computers. In fact, that's where I think David got his interest in computers. They built a big, clunky computer in the basement of the house in Princeton. They started really because she wasn't so able to take care of them. They went away to school at that time. Mitchell went to a school called the Chapin School and then the George School, and David went to a school called the Hun School, then he went up to school in Pennsylvania. So essentially all during the school year, except for vacations, Christmas vacations.

AG: Then she died.

DL: By that time they were probably… it's almost 20 years. She was very young, she was 50 when she died, and they were teenagers. I think David was away at school at the time, away at college, and Mitchell was still at the George School.

AG: That was where my former husband once was asked to be headmaster. It's beautiful looking, up on that beautiful Newport site.

DL: This was the one in Pennsylvania.

AG: The one that still runs there, Tom Cahill's son, I think, went there, the George in Pennsylvania.

DL: They're still active. Was the other one a Quaker school?

AG: No, I don't think so.

DL: This is a Quaker school. It was just the best place for Mitchell. I'm sorry David didn't go there. I mean, he hadn't thought about it.

AG: So then after she died, they were with you all of the time.

DL: On vacations, that's right. Our house was… Mitchell's house. But also at that time we were living full time in Southampton. They always spent their summers, until David had gotten old enough to want to go off on his own, they always spent summers there. That was their house then, that's where they had their rooms and their things.

AG: I've always heard that you were like a mother to them and that they were very close to you, and that that went very well.

DL: That did work out. That's why I said I think it was very lucky that he had boys instead of girls.

AG: But now, when did you come to MoMA, either separately or together? Of course, if you worked at the gallery, you were at MoMA probably a lot.

DL: Yes, I was, and I had studied art history, so I had…

AG: Where?

DL: Beaver College. It's a small girls' school in Pennsylvania. Jenkintown and Glenside now. It's still there.

AG: Do you ever go back there?

DL: I keep a little bit of contact but I don't really go back.

AG: So that was why you took the job with the gallery.

DL: Yes.

AG: So you had been to MoMA.

DL: Yes. I had been to MoMA. Well all of the museums in New York at that time, in the '60s, they were like temples. They were very empty. They didn't have the wonderful crowds that they have now, and they seemed like sacred places. And of course it was always very quiet. MoMA was the place for modern art.

AG: Did you know any of the people, like Sol [Lewitt], who worked there as guards? Robert Ryman?

DL: No, I didn't. I met them all later; Ryman, because we showed him at Bianchini.

AG: Oh, you did?

DL: In the '60s.

AG: Well, that would be a pretty avant-garde outfit to show him. Wasn't he pretty hard for people to…

DL: Well, but that's what we tried to do. I mean, Paul had showed modern art and all sorts of things, but we did a series of master drawing shows with a theme and we tried to bring them from old masters to contemporary art.

AG: That sounds interesting.

DL: And, in fact, that Rose Lindquist, of the fork in the ice cube, came from one of the exhibitions we did.

AG: Who were the groups of friends that you initially had that were in the art world?

DL: I hadn't been working at Bianchini that long when I met Roy.

AG: The friends you and Roy had, who were they?

DL: I think we saw the Oldenburgs. I guess it was around that time that collectors started to invite artists to their houses, like [Scull[?], Jim Rosenquist, George Segal.

AG: What about Bob [Rauschenberg]? Were you friendly with Bob?

DL: Well, we knew Bob and I think we became more and more friendly with Bob over the years.

AG: Did you ever know Alfred [H.] Barr [Jr.], or did Roy know him?

DL: I don't think he knew him. I didn't. I think Alfred Barr would have seemed too unapproachable to Roy.

AG: And what about Dorothy Miller? Because I know he was in a Dorothy Miller show. [*The 1960's: Painting & Sculpture from the Museum Collection*, MoMA Exh.# 834, June 28-September 24, 1967].

DL: Yes, he knew her. Roy, as you know, he was always shy and modest, so he probably held back when he met people, he wouldn't have been aggressive. But I remember how pleased he was to be in her show.

AG: And what about Bernice [Rose]? How did they develop a relationship?

DL: She saw a little drawing show that James Goodman did at the gallery, and that gave her the idea to turn out this drawing show of, really, the working sketches, the sketches which were never seen, and where you could really see his hand.

AG: Now, that was one thing I wanted to talk to you more about, about all of the medias that Roy worked in, if he had any favorites, if he had anything that he liked best, because I remember the drawing show was such a revelation to me [*The Drawings of Roy Lichtenstein,* MoMA Exh.# 1443, March 15-June 2, 1987; C/E 87-88; ICE-F-223-87, 1987-88]. That was 1987, the one that was curated by Bernice, then circulated by the International Council. But it was this show, I think, and especially the fact that people said that he owned about ninety percent of them [the drawings.] Why did he not sell his drawings the same way he sold his paintings?

DL: It never occurred to him. He never really thought about it. Of course, there were people who loved them, like Jim. Jim Goodman was probably the first person that really collected them. We met Jim first. I think I may have even met Jim before Roy did, because Jim had a gallery in Buffalo at the time, and he did some work with Paul Bianchini exchanging drawings. Then when we did our drawing shows, we asked these young artists like Warhol and Rosenquist and Roy to contribute a drawing to the show for sale. I think when Jim saw those drawings and then the little sketches, he really went after them. I mean, I'm amazed to see -- he may have more than we do now. But he specifically went after them. Other people may have become interested in them because of Jim, even though he was at that time a private dealer in New York. People didn't really know about them until the show at the Modern.

AG: I was always sort of amazed and sorry that there weren't more shows of Roy's directly at the Modern. Do you have any idea why that was that he didn't have any more monographic or one-person shows? They just didn't do as many, perhaps?

DL: I think they didn't do as many. I think that it may have had to do with William Rubin, who, I think, did come around to see Roy's work but at first was more interested in abstraction.

AG: And people like [Frank] Stella, who he seemed to champion so much.

DL: Then there were people like Philip Johnson who bought the work and gave it to MoMA.

AG: Most of the major gifts of the early work, like the *Girl with Ball* [1961, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas], and the *Drowning Girl* [1963, oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas], and the *Pistol Banner* [1964, red, black and white felt], and the *Seascape with Dunes* [1965, plastic, paper, mounted on cardboard] were from Philip. He seemed to have been, from early on, a big champion. Did you know Philip?

DL: Well, David Whitney went out with Dick Bellamy, and he also followed Roy's work after Dick closed that gallery and I think, worked with Leo for a while also. We would see Philip at openings. I remember Roy was so thrilled because somebody might think that MoMA was the measure… another kind of a measure. To be in a museum with Picasso…

AG: But that brings me to Kirk [Varnedoe]. I think Kirk has felt very strongly that he wanted, along with these developments that they've had with other artists in the past like Pollock and, obviously, Picasso and Matisse, that they wanted to build a collection of the contemporaries, master contemporary artists. And of some of them that he especially liked, I think Roy was way on the top of that list. So what was your connection with Kirk? Did you know him as a friend?

DL: I think Roy really got to know him when he went to MoMA, although we had heard the occasional lecture. I think really, when he started working on the *High and Low* show [*High and Low*: *Modern Art and Popular Culture*, MoMA Exh.# 1559,October 7, 1990-January 1991], they met. And that's where a friendship developed.

AG: Kirk's eloquence about Roy has always interested me because he says it much better than I could do. I always felt that what happened, and has been said in all of these articles, is that Roy's work was sustained. That he really went through all of these different periods of work, but that it was very good and very inventive and very new all of the time, that he didn't just keep working on a one-note Charlie basis. And I think that Kirk recognized that about Roy before a lot of other people did.

DL: Yes. I think a lot of other people, in some way, I think, the general public, when they think about Roy, they still think about the early pop paintings, and they probably really tend to pigeonhole almost every artist from some defining moment. I've heard that when DeKooning did the women, people felt he had betrayed the movement, and when Philip Guston left abstraction, what people now think of as his major period, he betrayed his work. I think that it's very important for artists to be nourished and the fact that Roy started having some success really enabled him to stop teaching, to really work. Even in his pre-pop work, there were similarities. He did spoofs on earlier American paintings and historical subjects. In a sense you could say he was having dialogues with various movements and various artists over the years.

AG: And this was what I really thought was so interesting, about MoMA and the whole stairway piece, the fact that he did that again. [There was] the big piece that he did in Israel for the Tel Aviv Museum and then he also had it in the Creative Artists mural, and he kept quoting from that. I always liked that picture. It aims right back to MoMA and the fact [is] that even with this new expansion that we're doing, Taniguchi [MoMA's expansion architect] is going to keep that staircase, and we're going to have the [Oskar] Schlemmer up there. We'll probably have the Lichtenstein he so generously gave near it.

DL: I knew he always liked that Schlemmer. I think he liked the fact that it was hanging in the stairwell. As soon as we bought this house which we got, when he looked at it, before we did anything, I think Roy came into the entrance and saw that stairwell and he instantly -- that painting, to do something related to the Schlemmer -- that was one of the first things he said to me. He said, "This is the perfect playing out…" Alas, we have something else up now, something fresh to look at. But he thought of that. He was very interested. In the '60s, when Irving Blum still lived in California, Irving had a Schlemmer, a piece of sculpture, and Roy was struck by that, and I think that also fed into his feeling about Schlemmer.

AG: And his timing. Talk to me a little bit [about] the Schlemmer, I mean the forms… the shapes…

DL: The one that is now at MoMA is the first one that he did. The CAA [Creative Artists Association] mural is very different from that, but really based on that idea. [TAPE INTERRUPTION].

AG: I was going to skip to, but will later get back to, Leo. Now though, I would like to ask… because I mentioned the one in Israel and the generosity that you and Roy both have to the art world. Where do you think that generosity came from? It is sort of unique, and I always think of Roy as the most generous. I think there are some other artists, like Ellsworth [Kelly] that are also generous, but Roy seems to be way up there on a pedestal.

DL: There are others. I think he felt extremely lucky, and I think it was really just his personality. I can see he even had an influence on people who have worked with him in terms of his generosity, and I even think that by knowing him I became a much more generous person. It was just that I think he was very grateful for his success. He was very grateful that he was able to do something that he really loved and was passionate about, and do well at it, and I think he just felt an obligation to give that back in some way. I know when he did a series based on American Indian themes, he felt very strongly -- he actually researched

places that he could donate to, because he felt that he had profited by using themes that came out of Indian culture.

AG: I don't know that series. I'd love to see it.

DL: It was some paintings, but then he did some aquatints and some wood block prints.

AG: The prints are another thing that I'm really interested in, because just the other day when I was taking my niece's class through…

END TAPE 1, SIDE A (SIDE B BLANK)

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

AG: When I was going into the Chuck Close show [*Chuck Close*, MoMA Exh.1799, February 26 – May 26, 1998] I noticed that Debbie [Wye] has put up before many Chuck Close prints, a whole series of the sunrise and sunset prints out there, and I looked at them and I thought that it went back to what I had read about, that Roy said that he liked to work with prints because he could get more texture on them?

DL: Yes, well in his paintings, more and more he was able to hide the hand. He didn't really want it to look like a reproduction, but he said that. I think that he did like the texture, but the texture wasn't something that he felt belonged in the paintings. Although in later work, he did, when he started working with the idea of brush strokes. He did do it in some paintings, he used silver or he used sand. He liked that texture. Certainly, in the variety of prints he has done, some have collage material, some have the texture just from wood blocks. Some are embossed. He liked that, and in a way that's also a revelation for people looking at the prints, because the surface of everything is much more textured.

AG: I think the prints are just beautiful, and I was struck by these children's reactions to them, because they kept saying, "Those don't look like prints." I mean, they

look like they were hand done, not machine-done. And I felt that, “Well, at least they understand a little about a print”, that they could think that it wasn't that way. But I wonder if we could go back to Leo and his relationship. As you probably know, at a luncheon Leo was made an Honorary Trustee of MoMA, which he is very happy about. Roy used to tell me that Leo didn't take to him until later, and that he [Leo] kept saying that Jasper [Johns] was his main person, and I'm saying Roy was.

DL: Leo did have his categories, and even after he took to Roy I think he always had this grouping of Bob and Jasper and then Stella and then Roy and Andy. But when Roy first went to the gallery, he was teaching at Rutgers, and here was George Segal and Allan Kaprow and I think Lucas Samaras was out there at the time, Bob Whitman too, and when they saw his work they encouraged him. And I think Allan Kaprow told him to go to the Leo Castelli Gallery, so Roy drove in from New Jersey with one or two paintings, and as he came up the stairs, Ivan Karp was standing on the stairs talking to a group of people. He had never met Roy and he saw Roy with these paintings and he looked at the paintings, and he said, "Here comes the new art. Here is the next great art of the future." Roy felt great, but he went up there and Ivan had him leave the paintings for Leo to look at. And I think Leo wasn't that convinced. I think he was really puzzled. I think Ivan knew about Andy Warhol, because Andy had already showed at the Stable Gallery, but I think that Leo asked Rauschenberg, may have told a number of artists, who were really puzzled. I think Bob was doing some shows at the gallery where he put different things up I think every week for a month, then after a while I think he put one of Roy's paintings that Roy had brought up.

AG: And then what happened to that painting? Do you remember?

DL: I think it sold.

AG: You don't know who to.

DL: No, although I bet the Castelli Gallery has that on record. So I think that Leo may not have, in a sense, gotten any of the pure pop at that time.

AG: Now, do you think that Philip Johnson heard about Roy from David Whitney, or do you think it was through seeing it?

DL: Probably by seeing it. I think David was working at the Greene Gallery by then with Dick Bellamy.

AG: Then did Philip buy pictures from Roy, not only for MoMA but for himself?

DL: Yes, he did, but I think eventually he had given everything to MoMA, and he doesn't have any still out that are in his paintings gallery. He may have. I'm trying to remember when we were up there, I think he had a later one.

AG: Did you become friendly with him and spend time with David and him?

DL: Not so much. I think more with artists. When I met Roy he was friends with a lot of English artists. I think Allan Jones was in New York at the time, Gerald Lang. He was friendly with the Waldmans [Diane and Paul]. Bob Baker was part of this group.

AG: How was he friendly with the Waldmans?

DL: They met because somehow they formed a skating club: to go for exercise and health, they decided that they would skate at Wollman Memorial Rink in Central Park once a week and go ice skating. In about three weeks it deteriorated into an eclair-eating party, [laughter] to see who could eat the most. And I think Paul Waldman won… He came from Pennsylvania. He left home just before his senior year in high school. He had been interested in art and his father didn't want him to be an artist. He was always calling him a sissy So he sent away for a body-building course to prove he wasn't a sissy and he went to New York. When he got to New York the only place he knew to go was to one of these gyms that he had read about. So he must have been sixteen years old, and he finished his last year in Erasmus High School in Brooklyn and he went to the

Brooklyn Museum School of Art because he was interested in being a painter. I mean, instantly. So he came up both ways.

AG; And you've always been close friends with them as a couple, and you'd spend a lot of time with them?

DL: Yes.

AG: Is this why Roy wanted to do the show at the Guggenheim; was it one of the reasons?

DL: Well, the friendship probably did get cemented. I think Diane must have done the first traveling retrospective at the Guggenheim and the Tate, and then it went to Amsterdam. Just working that closely… and also from bonding during the eclair-eating contest.[Laughter].

AG: That's terrific. Now, on the list of books that I was given, there's a sort of strange book that I hadn't seen before. It's by Erle Loran [*Cézanne's Compositions; an Analysis of his Form with Diagrams and Photographs of his Motifs*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1943.], and I was supposed to ask you about that, if that was something that Roy was interested in. Did it influence him? This book is on Cézanne.

DL: Yes. Roy did that diagram of Cézanne. I think Roy thought it was very amusing that you could try to explain art that way. I have to say that the pivotal artist for Roy was probably Cézanne.

AG: Of all artists? Because that was what has always interested me.

DL: Of all artists. I think that somehow the organization of the Cézannes just, everything sprung from that. I think somehow, when he saw Cézanne it formed an essential part of his understanding.

AG: Well then he must have loved the late Cézanne show that Bill Rubin did [*Cézanne: The Late Work*, MoMA Exh.# 1188, October 7, 1977-Jan 2, 1978].

DL: He did. He loved that. In fact, he hadn't really started any drawings from it because he was busy working on his last series, but that was his plan, was to do a series after Cézanne's *Bathers.*

AG: Which would have been wonderful.

DL: I think he was working them out in his mind, because usually it was if he was doing a lot of thinking and he couldn't wait to get to them. He had been for close to two years. I know he had been really thinking about them.

AG: That's very interesting because I was struck by the pictures in Jasper's show, those bathers that he had toward the end. And I knew that Jasper owned a bather picture. This involvement of these particular artists, always with the Bathers of Cézanne. I was lucky enough to see the show that was in the Basel Museum nine years ago. I always felt that they were so awkward, and I didn't know whether the awkwardness was what appealed. What was it that appealed about the Bathers? The fact is that the theme is not that unusual, but that it's not usually bathers, it's usually an odalisque or a nude model or something.

DL: Yes, but even in the Cézanne landscapes, in all of the works, it's very difficult to speak for Roy because I don't want to color things, but I think for him it wasn't that it was the first modern art. I mean, you could say that modernism began in the 1860s and maybe van Gogh is kind of the image of the alienated artist. But, I mean even impressionism and all of that art, I think sometimes Roy felt that cubism could not have happened without Cézanne. That he was the pivotal force. That once Cézanne had done his work, then it was just wide open for Picasso and Braque and getting to cubism.

AG: Now, why did he go through all of the German expressionists, all of the futurists, the people that he started working with like Theo van Doesburg… What was the interest that he had?

DL: Well, of course the first ones he did, I think, [was] Picasso's *Woman with Flowered Hat*. I think that was about the way he thought people looked at art, in a very surface way, and the fact that so much of art is seen in reproduction. I guess previously it was hardly seen at all. But that somehow people took his two-dimensional symbols, symbolism on canvas, for reality, and I somehow think the idea when he did the Picasso, which I think he did before I met him or just as I met him. Of course, Picasso was, again, one of his favorite artists, probably after Cézanne, and I think the scope of Picasso's work was awesome to Roy, and the sculpture, just the inventiveness.

AG: Was there anything about the fact that Picasso appropriated and was appropriated?

DL: Yes, because there is a history of appropriation of some form, which may have gotten out of hand in our day. But I think that certainly allowed him, let him feel entitled to… I mean the fact that Picasso had appropriated other people's work, Roy felt entitled to do an appropriation of Picasso as well. And then another very crucial show of the African primitives [*"Primivitism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern*, MoMA Exh.# 1382, September 19, 1984-January 15, 1985], then you really saw that so many of these artists had used primitive art as the form, not just Western art. That was so clear in the show, and I think that was, again, a revelation to people. That was a really beautiful show.

AG: I would love to know, besides that, who some of the artists are that were Roy's contemporaries, and about whose art he felt keen, not necessarily artists that he was friends with…

DL: I think it's going to be the usual list of suspects. The abstract expressionists. I think for him those were the first meaningful American artists, and he had a brief period in abstract expressionism. Even there it was hard for him. I mean, he didn't have a lot of angst, so.

AG: You mean he didn't sort of throw himself, like de Kooning did, into making things very “angst-y”.

DL: Even de Kooning's work actually is kind of celebratory, where [Mark] Rothko would be moodier. But he [Roy] was definitely impressed by them. He would come in from Ohio State where he was teaching and then go to the Cedar Bar and try to [inaudible]. He wasn't much of a drinker. He liked things that tasted like ice cream sodas. But he was very shy, so he would sit more in the background, but he was happy to be in their presence and to listen to them.

AG: Did he meet Arshile Gorky?

DL: He didn't meet [Arshile] Gorky, as far as I know. I know he met Rothko because when I first met Roy we went out to a cocktail party at Castelli's apartment and Rothko was there.

AG: But did he know [Franz] Kline or Barnett Newman?

DL: He knew them. Barnett Newman we saw in the '60s because Barney was very… he made a point of getting to know the younger artists. He was really outgoing. He was very open and very responsive.

AG: Did any of the kind of mirror paintings or the entablatures ever happen in connection with Newman or is that far-fetched?

DL: I think that's far-fetched. I know that the entablatures were a response to minimalism, because essentially they are very minimal paintings. He always liked that back-and-forth play. He liked the play that the entablatures were taken from photographs that he took. He went around New York looking for interesting architectural pediments and details. He may have started looking at them when he did the '20s style, because there again, there were a lot of buildings in New York -- the Chrysler building and many others -- that had the art deco motifs. Either the doors were cast that way, or the elevators were even designed from the marble. They really are. Then, I think, in looking at that, he started noticing

these details of the pediments and these architectural features, and in his mind he saw that it related to minimalism, or that it could.

AG: Now that's interesting. Did he sketch these things, or did he get books, or did he take photographs?

DL: He got books and he took photographs, and he then made sketches. And of course he combined his own combinations. Sometimes if he [thought?] it might look better than what had actually been there.

AG: Now, why aren't the things that I noticed in the Tel Aviv picture, when he has the abstract section… did that kind of abstract piece that he's done in a lot of other ways, did that have anything to do with the way Cézanne figured on the pictures where they took the arrows and they showed these things? This man has sort of abstracted them from the real picture. If you blanked out the form of the outline of the person with the arrows, you would get an abstraction. If you extended the lines of the arrows…

DL: Yes, but in a way I don't know that that came so much from this. I think that his version of [inaudible] was really the only thing he did directly from [inaudible].

AG: Because when I noticed some of the houses in St. Victoire and the mountains, I thought that it looked sort of like that…

DL: Right. I think in the murals, especially, he put in a lot of homage to other artists. The one at Equitable has the Léger; the brush stroke is of course an homage to abstract expressionism and painting in general. There is a diagonal abstraction with color that extends beyond the perimeter of the painting, and he called that an imperfect painting, and he did a series of them. That relates to Stella, their art, shapes, and related to Ellsworth Kelly. He even did a kind of flagstone area in some of the paintings that were for Jasper. He was always looking at the art and playing with that. He always liked a sense of irony, to get back to what you had asked about van Doesburg. He liked the sense of irony. When we would go to museums or be in Europe and see various things, it would just trigger, it would

nourish his own idea to do something, and there would be a little ironic twist that say, in the example of the cows going. In the cow going abstract that's one thing, but say a bowl of fruit or a portrait. And I think he was also trying to make the point that essentially, even thought the first image looked like something real that you could recognize, it's still an abstraction. It's still really only marks on canvas. That was an idea he played with a lot, I think. And his whole manner of working. He would always have a mirror that he could roll around the studio so that he could look at the work and see it in another way. And he had built these rotating easels so that he could work on the painting without thinking about the subject matter, essentially, but would try to paint it so that it would work in an abstract sense. But I think he felt maybe having the subject matter was his -- the combination of style, trying to put it together with form to create a tension or an exciting painting.

AG: I was also wondering about the mirror in the Reflections series. It goes in to so many of his paintings, not just that wonderful series of mirrors, which, I think, is one of his greatest series but one that isn't so well known by the majority of people…

DL: That gets back to what I said before. I think people really love the subject matter. I think, in general, this is true. It's always easier for figurative artists to sell than abstract artists. That may change, but in general, I think that has just been true that people somehow feel securer if they think they can recognize something in a painting. They may not trust their own judgment in something that they can't decipher. Even that girl with a beach ball, which Roy took out of an ad for Mount Airy Lodge in the Poconos, and that ad still runs.

AG: Oh, it does?

DL: Occasionally you'll see it in the *Travel* section of the [*New York*] *Times*. I think Kirk had found that in *High and Low*. We even have it cut out somewhere. But he would always look through the paper because he thought that commercial representation of objects is so funny, because someone could draw an

engagement ring, with all its facets, and people would actually, in a sense, take it for an engagement ring. I mean, they go to the store [laughter].

AG: What did he ever think of Mark Tansey's work? Because Mark does that in some other ways. He cut out ads of people [inaudible] and then puts them into… relates them to the different periods of art.

DL: I know he liked Mark Tansey's work when he saw it, but I think he didn't see that much of it.

AG: And so he didn't really focus on it.

DL: Right.

AG: Now with the *Chuck Close* show [*Chuck Close*, MoMA Exh.1799, February 26 – May 26, 1998], everyone, I think, feels very strongly about Roy, because of the photograph at the end, for example. But I also think the work that [Chuck Close] did of Roy, which Rob [Storr] said when I was going around with a group, was the chin that was squared off was sort of based on the Dick Tracey and was meant to have a sort of relationship to what Roy had done in his work. Do you like that idea?

DL: That's actually an interesting play, because Roy has a very strong, unmistakable jaw line. Even I could do a portrait sketch of him and if I put that in it would look like him. So that's a kind of good play because, of course, Roy didn't do Dick Tracy, Andy [Warhol] did, but the fact that Roy had the firm jaw. I didn't know about that, and I will ask Chuck about that, but I can see that it would be a good play because most of the portraits are frontal.

AG: Well, I gathered from what Rob said, that it was sort of taking the cartoon aspect and putting a little of it in. He was talking about how Kiki's [Smith] had that sort of hippiness about her [*Kiki Smith*, 1993, oil on canvas], and so they did the green eyes and the hair in the way that it was and the coloring was more of a hippie thing than April [*April*, 1990-1991, oil on canvas], who had more halo-ish

red hair and the brighter lips, a sort of, “tarty” look that she had. And so that's what I heard, I may have heard it wrong, but it would be interesting to find out.

DL: It would be. I get that feeling from looking at that Chuck painting. The paintings are somehow imbued with something that's distinctive about the person.

AG: Did Roy ever talk about what he thought about artists like Chuck or artists like [Cy] Twombly?

DL: Yes, he did. He liked the work. We would go to see shows and then, especially when he liked the work, he would talk about it.

AG: He would never, say, think of making a play on, Ryman, for instance, because you couldn't the way he would have, on somebody like that.

DL: That's right. Not every work lends itself to that, and essentially, Rauschenberg had done a series of white…

END TAPE 2, SIDE A (SIDE B BLANK)

BEGIN TAPE 3, SIDE A

AG: So you were talking about influences and being able to make something out of it.

DL: Not everybody's work lent itself to that, even if Roy liked the work.

AG: Did he ever do, besides the quotations of Jasper in that one painting, anything from Jasper's work?

DL: Yes. He did a flag that is only dots and stripes, an American flag. I think he had a dialogue. Because Roy was generally shy, his dialogues, instead of taking place with the artists, took place with the work itself.

AG: To me that is real key. One of the keys about Roy is that his work always stayed so lively and vibrant because he didn't ever seem to lack an interest in something. Was this something that you thought? What do you think drove it, to stay alive more than many of the artists do?

DL: He had a lot of energy, for one thing. Not everybody has all of that energy. And he really had an inner sense of discipline. He was very clear about what he wanted to do. He had very regular routine he would get up at the same time, more or less, and get on his exercycle every other day. On the other days, he would do a different kind of exercise. Then he would have the same thing for breakfast every single morning when he'd read the newspaper. If we were out, anytime, he was always trying to do the healthy thing as he got older, so he would have skim milk and bananas and bran cereal and fresh orange juice for breakfast. But of course he used traveling as an excuse to order pancakes, because he enjoyed those things too. But basically, he had the discipline. I never saw him eat between meals. If we were traveling he might have a cappucino or a piece of pie or something, but otherwise, he didn't. That enabled him to do a lot. He also took care of unpleasant chores… a lot of people procrastinate when they have something that's unpleasant. Even if it was unpleasant, but, in most cases, that would be the first thing that he would try to deal with.

AG: Where do you think he got this?

DL: I procrastinate too.

AG: It's such an amazing character to have.

DL: For me, if there's something I'm nervous about, I put it off and put it off, and I've realized it blocks me from being able to function. I think that early in Roy's life he was raised to be polite and his mother -- he speaks well about his family. I mean, he's one of the few people who doesn't think he had a dysfunctional family. I don't really know anyone else -- well, Roy's sister, who is a few years younger, doesn't feel that way about the family, but somehow, Roy did. He was

very much like his mother. He looked like his mother, and apparently his father was a very humorous, kind man. But I think they disciplined him and they brought him up to be very polite, and I think he learned early on that in order for him to be able to do what he wanted, the easiest route was to comply with these external things that were demanded of him and get them out of the way so that he could do what he wanted, whether a science project when he was young or... Because he was very interested in science. I think he somehow realized that it was a big waste of energy to fight the kind of external [things demended of him], because you put your energy into that.

AG: And could it have also been because he really wanted to be able to paint and he knew that if he didn't do those things he couldn't get to the painting.

DL: Oh yes. I know that's true, because he always loved music and he always loved jazz, especially because, I think, there was a pivotal musical moment when he came of age, when he was about 13, 14 and 15. He had a friend who was very daring and brave and they would go to Birdland, [Broadway] and 52nd Street, because Roy would probably never have gone on his own. He had this friend, Don Wilkes, who would think nothing of getting up there at 14 and ask if he could sit in and play the piano. But I think when Roy heard Charlie Parker for the first time it just, I mean, something in him responded to that. He owned a flute and he dabbled a little. He had had clarinet lessons as a child, but he really never did anything with it. I knew that saxophone was his favorite instrument and I bought him a saxophone for Christmas about four years before he died, and he just loved it. He started taking lessons. He took a lesson a week and he had that same discipline.

AG: And could he really play?

DL: Well, he had a very good ear for music. But Roy was very impressed that Clinton played the saxophone. He had a good ear. In other words, he could listen to something and reproduce it, so the real thing was to build up what I guess they call your chops, because your lips and the fingering and the breath is what really is the hard work. And you have to be in good shape to do it.

AG: Now, why didn't he ever do any pictures of jazz musicians?

DL: He did do this poster for the Aspen Jazz Festival.

AG: I know. I love that.

DL: When he started playing, that's actually when he did a few paintings and prints which were of musical notes; the composition was of musical notes. I think he was trying to capture that idea of the sound or the change of sound in a composition.

AG: The Bather pictures are kind of musical in some way to me. That may be strange, but they seem to be that way. You said he had scientific interests. What do you think came out of it? Was the brush stroke, say, an idea in itself? That was from abstract expressionism.

DL: That was just a separate interest. He grew up living near the Museum of Natural History. I always say he cut his eye piece on modern artists at the Modern. That was the place to meet art. I think everyone felt that way. You could go and you could see. You didn't have to go to Europe. You could actually see the work, I mean, work that was going on at the time, because Alfred Barr was actually buying. It was a very vital place. But prior to that, he spent his days at the Museum of Natural History. He liked science. As a philosophy of life, I would say, he's a scientific rationalist. The thing he liked about science is that it tests its assumptions. He felt the faith of something that was natural to human beings, the sense of all of our worldly things they couldn't understand but that faith is a personal thing and one's idea of the higher power or deity, there are so many different ideas. It's always personalized.

AG: Did he have an idea himself?

DL: I think he was a scientific rationalist in that. There was a little piece I read about Brendan Gill, who said the same thing. He pooh-poohed the idea of an afterlife

or a soul, and somehow just felt in the stream of life, that it's part of life and history, and that it's all connected, in a sense. That DNA, which seems to be the basis of life, is inherent in all living things in the planet, and it has been a connecting thread. He used to joke that he was going to leave his soul to science. I think it was a natural thing in him. I've often thought about it, that the things that I had to go and do meditation, and sit for eight hours a day [it was] to kind of realize some kind of simplicity that [for] Roy was just a natural thing in him. He had a lot of respect for the world.

AG: I thank you for this.

[A slight break in the tape here, then the interview begins again.]

DL: …There was the interview that he did with David Silvestre in 1966 and one he did just recently, before he died. I wasn't aware I was reading the early one at first, and I thought, "My God; how could he have ever thought he was inarticulate or dull?" He spoke about these things then with such clarity. But I think it was his shyness.

AG: I thought that just in his work he was a very complex person. And he seemed to think he was just a very flat person.

DL: He used to say there was only one thing he could do. He was self-effacing and he was shy. I think that in a social situation, if he didn't really know people well, he was always very shy. He was reticent. He had had the experience of starting to talk and getting all scrambled up because he was so shy.

AG: But the thing that was interesting was that I didn't even know that there had been that many people that had met him, at our house for dinner, for example, that hadn't been in the art world or weren't among the people we saw all of the time, who really remembered him and who really had an impression and who really had come away with knowing that there was a person there, and not in the way that he always seemed to feel that he was.

DL: I can't tell you how many letters we got, of people I know that maybe they spoke to him at an opening where they met him once or he helped them out with something. I was touched at how moved these people seemed to be, and then I thought, he was just a natural. Maybe another reason he was uncomfortable, he didn't have an act. So maybe when he got into conversations with people and felt comfortable, he was open. Maybe they sensed that. He used to say that he was going to have to take curmudgeon lessons, [laughter] because he wanted to be difficult, too. Like, he didn't want to be a nice guy all of the time.

AG: [Laughing] Well, I'm certainly glad he never took the curmudgeon lessons, because it was so great to know Roy because of that. It was hard to believe that somebody should be that consistently nice and also such a good artist because I think this excuse of how you have to be abused to be good is obviously not true. And maybe that is the largest thing that Roy left.

DL: People are probably good in spite of the abuse, or it may color or direct it.

AG: But you have to be struggling or appear to be struggling and always have a problem. Like Bill Styron wouldn't have been the writer he was, having not had this depression. I don't think that's necessarily [inaudible].

DL: No, but I think that for some people, and I actually do feel that a lot of it is chemical. It can happen from abuse. Stress produces certain hormones and substances that become pathways for people, and they maybe can be broken but it's very difficult. So I think that probably Styron had that tendency. The other thing I think is that alcohol in the long run is a depressant. Everyone says that. So I think that people who wind up having a problem with it tend to be worn down. What seems like a lift, originally, wears them down. I mean, there's always a case that disproves that, but.

AG: I think that was very true of the abstract expressionists. On the whole, they seem to have been a group of people that really drank a lot, and that, I think, certainly has to have had some affect on the shortness of [Jackson] Pollock's life.

DL: And Kline. And I would say, Rothko, of course, was very depressed.

AG: Although Gorky's wasn't alcoholic, I don't think so much. But Guston, even though he didn't die so young, his whole way of painting had to do with…

DL: With that angst.

AG: And that alcoholism.

DL: But de Kooning was an exception because he drank a huge amount and lived, despite everything, a long time. I knew him in the '70s. When we were out there we saw him a couple of times, and he was adorable. He didn't seem as if he suffered. He was cute; he was unpretentious. When he was invited to the White House, the great comment, someone was telling the story, that Elaine wanted to go but he didn't want to go, and they said, "But it's the White House; it's the President of the United States of America. What do you mean you don't want to go?" And he said, "Well, they're really not my kind of people." [Laughter]

AG: Which President was this? Carter?

DL: It must have been Carter. It could have been the Republican administration, because I think it was probably in the late '70s.

AG: That's wonderful.

DL: I mean it's adorable. In that sense he was a natural, too.

AG: I hate to keep you any longer.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A.

END INTERVIEW