

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH:** LUCY LIPPARD (LL)  
**INTERVIEWERS:** SHARON ZANE (SZ)  
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**BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

SZ: Tell me where and when you were born and just a little bit about your family background.

LL: I was born on April 14, 1937 in New York City, at New York Hospital. My parents were from New England. My culture is New England with a vengeance. My father was, at that point, a doctor. My mother was a secretary.

SZ: Old New England?

LL: Well, my father wasn't. His mother was Canadian, his father was Cockney, who came over from London as a cabin boy. My mother is old New England stuff. Poor, but good family. I was raised in New York and New Orleans and Charlottesville, Virginia. My father was a medical educator. He was the dean of various schools. Then they moved to New Haven to Yale. I was, thank God, almost out of the house by then, because I disliked New Haven.

SZ: How did you like moving around like that?

LL: I think it's good training for life.

SZ: Interesting.

LL: The first couple weeks at school and so forth. . .

SZ: Horrible, yes.

LL: I remember going to school in New Orleans -- I had never been to a large co-ed school like that. The South was eons ahead in terms of social sophistication -- [I was] nine -- than New York was. I said to my mother, "I'm never going back to that place." She said, really very wisely, "Well, you don't have to if you don't like it after a week." And, of course, after a week I was into it. But my parents both came from backgrounds without much money and both made it to the upper middle class.

SZ: So, you had a public school education?

LL: A mixture of public and private.

SZ: You mentioned off tape that you were an only child.

LL: Yes, I am an only child and proud of it.

SZ: With all its benefits.

LL: Yes. And they were good liberals. My maternal grandfather was president of Tugaloo, a black college in Mississippi. My grandparents had both been raised in the West, and my great grand-parents had homesteaded in the West. Now that I'm back in the West, I remember all their stories.

SZ: So, there was a political life in your house, is that what you are saying?

LL: Yes. Well, they were both liberals. My mother worked at the League of Women Voters on housing and other issues wherever she was. My father was black-balled from doing government commissions when he spoke out against the Vietnam War.

SZ: So, you had a political consciousness pretty early on?

LL: Yes. It wasn't really what I would call now a political consciousness but it was certainly social consciousness, I guess you'd say. A lot of anti-racism stuff, because my grandfather was a Congregational minister. One side of the family is like an endless line of Congregational ministers. So, my fanaticism comes directly down that line.

SZ: What about. . . I'm thinking of while you were still at home. . . . What about the arts? Was your family interested?

LL: They were Sunday watercolor painters. They were very interested in modern art. Their taste kind of stopped with [John] Marin, but I was raised going to museums. I went to the Met [Metropolitan Museum of Art] often when I a kid, I remember, and I could tell Flemish from French and so forth.

SZ: You could?

LL: Yes, so I'm told.

SZ: And the Modern [The Museum of Modern Art]? Did you go there?

LL: Yes. But I don't have memories of the Modern. We lived over by Carl Schurz Park, on the Upper East Side, so we went to the Met all the time because we went to Central Park all the time. My parents went to the Modern. I have a vague memory of taking classes there. They took drawing classes at Cooper [Union] at one point in the

'30s. But then we moved when I was nine to New Orleans, when my father got back from the war.

SZ: And that was that.

LL: Well, we still went to museums and things. But New Orleans didn't have that much art at that point.

SZ: In terms of the practical side of it, did you draw?

LL: Oh, yes. I did. I went out Sunday painting with them.

SZ: So, you were decent?

LL: We pinned watercolor paper on bread boards, took a whiskey bottle full of water and the watercolors, and we went out and sat out in front of landscapes and things. We went to Maine every summer of my life, which is the other major point, which I still do. In college I made large woodcuts I quite liked but I was never an artist. I liked words.

SZ: Yes. And after high-school? Well, high-school was what?

LL: High-school was part public high-school in Virginia, and then we moved to New Haven in the middle of my junior year, so I went my junior and senior year to Abbot Academy, which is now swallowed up by Andover.

SZ: Yes. That was all-girls at the time, right?

LL: Yes. And then my mother went to Smith [College], which was for her the big liberation in her life -- to get out of a Congregational minister's family and go to Smith. So, I went to Smith, too.

SZ: I went to Smith, too.

LL: Oh, you did? When I graduated from Smith, I was already coming to New York fairly often.

SZ: Let me see, in terms of dates -- you were in the Smith class of. . . ?

LL: 1958.

SZ: 1958. And you studied what at Smith?

LL: Well, my mother had taken her junior year in Paris and this had been talked up all my life as the great moment in her life. I wasn't going to follow my mother anywhere. I applied to other colleges and kept making her nervous by saying that I was going to do other things, but when it came down to it, I went to Smith and I took my junior year in Paris. To do that, I had to major in either art or French. I love languages but I'm terrible at grammar. I don't have any structural sense. So, I ended up by majoring in art.

SZ: Which was a terrific major there.

LL: I wanted to be a writer. I thought I was going to be a novelist.

SZ: Who was in that department at that time?

LL: In the studio art department there were Mervin Jules and George Cohen. And Leonard Baskin. Those three.

When I went to Paris my junior year, I had a boyfriend [whom I met through my best friend]. My best friend, who was a real artist at that age -- I mean I didn't really know

what a real artist was, but she was clearly headed to be an artist -- was going to Stanley Hayter's Atelier 17. [Note: Founded in 1917 by Stanley Hayter, Atelier 17 became one of the significant studios for printmakers.] She had a boyfriend there and I met another guy, and so, I hung out at Hayter's, which was a wonderful art education. He was very kind to me. I wasn't one of his people. He would use me to test perceptual ideas. He would say, "What do you see here?" I learned to look at things there really much more than by running around to the galleries. And it was the beginning of sort of hanging out with artists, which has been a major thing in my life. Baskin didn't like Hayter's ideas so that was interesting when I got back to Smith. I wrote for the Smith newspaper and magazine my senior year.

SZ: I'm just thinking about Paris that year.

LL: It was 1956-1957.

SZ: Paris hadn't really recovered from the war that much yet.

LL: No. [Interruption]. The Hungarian revolution happened that year and we went down and watched them burn the Communist headquarters.

SZ: In Paris?

LL: Yes. I mean, I didn't know enough about politics to know what was going on but my parents were definitely not anti-commies; some of their best friends in New York in the '30s had been Communists.

SZ: The art major at Smith at that time was one of the best departments, too.

LL: I guess it was. I mean, I sort of fell into art almost by default because I really wanted to go to Paris. You took a mixed studio-art history major.

SZ: And so you graduated in 1958?

LL: Yes. I had spent some time in Spain at the end of my junior year. I loved Spain. This guy and I went down and just took a bus down the Costa del Sol and got out when a place looked good and stayed there for three weeks or something.

SZ: On the beach?

LL: Yes. [Laughter]. In two fishing villages, both of which are horrible tourist spots now, but they were wonderful then. I was interested in Spanish. I liked languages as I said. I liked the sound of them, but I'm not great at them.

SZ: But Spain was a weird place then, too, because Franco was. . .

LL: Yes, well, I didn't even know about Franco at that point. I mean, I really didn't have that much global politics. My mother was [into] local politics. My uncle was for Henry Wallace. My parents really weren't. They were more like Roosevelt Democrats. They had a lot of friends in the left in the '30s, which anybody would who was hanging out in New York. But I got interested in Spanish and travel in foreign countries. It was all very exotic. So, when I got back and graduated from college, a friend of mine's brother had gone with the American Friends Service Committee to Mexico and he told me about it, told me how to apply. So, I applied for a few months in Mexico, which was just wonderful. I mean, that was really a turning point in my life. It was the first time I had ever been in the third-world, per se. I worked in a little tiny village in Puebla.

SZ: In Puebla?

LL: Yes. I mean not in the city but in the province of Puebla -- San Salvador El Verde. San Salvador El Seco, the dry part of it, was across the barranca. I taught geography to kids who didn't speak Spanish any better than I did because they spoke some

indigenous dialect. It was a very interesting time. But I was a pain-in-the-ass, I must say. The Quakers [who ran the Committee] were big on consensus and I was not that kind of person at that point. It was always me who disagreed with everything. I kept saying, "I'll do what you want me to do, but you can't make me think that way." [Laughter.] I made some friends there. It was really a wonderful period. And then I came back. I was going to stay in Mexico; I had gotten sort of a vague promise of a job at a well-known gallery by a woman in Mexico City. I can't remember her name.

SZ: To?

LL: To be receptionist, or whatever. She said that my Spanish was good, but it was "very rural." I was obviously going to have to polish it up. But then my best friend got married and I had to go back and be in the wedding and I never made it back to Mexico. Ever. In fact, we have plans to go to Puebla, this spring. I want to go back to the village. But it'll be a totally different. Then, we helped them get electricity and worked in the fields, and taught the kids art, and the adults English.

SZ: Incredibly different, yes.

LL: Yes. So I came back with dirt under my nails that couldn't be gotten out to be in time for the wedding, so all the bridesmaids had to wear fingernail polish. I had a tan mark on my shoulders because you weren't allowed to wear sleeveless clothes in Mexico then. Women didn't do that. They had to make me up for the wedding. It was a real culture shock to come out of the fields and into Darien [Connecticut]. And then I wandered off to New York.

SZ: With any particular thing in mind?

LL: With the idea that I was going to write fiction, basically. I didn't major in English because I didn't like people telling me about what I cared most about. My authority problems have always stood me in very good stead.

SZ: Or telling you how to think about them, is that what you mean?

LL: Yes, telling me what to think about. I was ridiculously independent, obnoxiously independent. One of my father's friends was the dean of the graduate school at NYU [New York University], and I think he had run into somebody at the Modern or something. Oh, no, I know what it was. It was probably Dorothy Miller. [Note: Miller worked as Assistant Curator, Associate Curator, Curator, Department of Painting and Sculpture and Senior Curator, Museum Collections, 1935-69.] One of my mother's close friends was Elizabeth Gilmore Holt, for whom my mother did translations. Elizabeth Gilmore Holt was an art historian who did a lot of documentary histories from original sources. She knew Dorothy Miller from way back.

It wasn't like I got strings pulled, but I got an interview at the Modern to get whatever job and I ended up in the Library. And I think I would have rather have been in an art gallery because it seemed so much more glamorous, but luckily I wasn't pretty enough and I couldn't type. You know, in those days the women at the front desks were all like. . . decorative. So, I went to the Library. That again, was wonderful. Bernard Karpel was. . . I didn't get along with him at first. I worked there for a year and a half. [Note: Karpel was Acting Librarian, 1942-1946; then Librarian, 1946-1973.]

SZ: I was going to ask you to tell me a little about your memories about him.

LL: Let's get into that. It seems to me, somehow, it wasn't Dorothy Miller. I can't remember what the connection was but somehow I got this interview. Anyway, I loved books, needless to say. I was a page in the Library. Bernard was a wonderful man with a huge breadth of interests and knowledge. And I didn't get along with him that well because I really hated to be told what to do. It's probably a psychiatric problem that I just never dealt with. And then I quit after a year and a half to be a free-lance researcher, translator, and bibliographer. I still lived at the Library for

another few years. And then Bernard and I got along just famously, as soon as he wasn't telling me what to do. He wanted me to be a librarian, which is an obviously myopic idea. I would have been a terrible librarian. But he had these really interesting ideas -- which now I suppose have been done, I don't know, but it was way ahead of its time -- about cataloguing things visually. And I was fascinated by that.

SZ: Because at the time things were catalogued in. . .

LL: Just name and subject heading. I remember people coming to the Library and saying, "What do you have on painting on glass?" There wouldn't be enough of a subject heading to find anything like that. But Bernard, who was just an encyclopedia, would rush around and drag out every painting on glass thing that's ever been done, out of five hundred books. And he wanted to do categories like "transparency." As I remember, they were fairly simple but [they were] the kind of words that art critics would use about art and [were] categorized by that rather than just by. . . I mean not get rid of the other stuff, obviously, but it still had a visual, really three-dimensional, level to what the subject headings could be. I know Stanley Lewis up at Queens worked with him very closely. I think they finally did something like that.

It was right after the fire when I came and we had to put the whole Library back on the shelves, I guess, because it had all been taken apart. [A fire broke out in the Museum on April 15, 1958 necessitating a complete closure of the Museum.] This was September 1958. It was a very intimate time for the Museum, I think, the last intimate time for the Museum, in a way, because it was a very small place then given what it is now. Everybody knew each other. There wasn't a lot of hierarchical bullshit, on the surface, anyway. Everybody came into the Library, of course. I was the page and I indexed magazines and I filed vertical files on individual artists. And I looked at every single thing that went under my nose and I got an incredible education.

SZ: Just by doing that.

LL: I mean I knew every artist that ever showed in New York at one point, when my memory was better.

SZ: Pearl Moeller was there too?

LL: Yes. I'm trying to remember more about Pearl Moeller. I just remember knowing her. Everybody was very nice to young people there. If you were bright, you were made to feel like you had a future in the Museum.

SZ: I guess at the time the Library did have what they call now Rights and Reproductions, I mean all that stuff was run out of there. I think she [Pearl Moeller] actually started that whole effort.

LL: I eventually worked freelance in Publications. All these names have floated away.

SZ: Now I have something. It was actually slightly before you went to work there but I think [most of the names are the same].

LL: Well, Charles Oscar, of course, I remember well, because he was murdered. [Note: Oscar was employed by the Museum in the 1950s in the Department of Exhibitions and Publications. He was brutally murdered in 1961.]

SZ: Oh.

LL: One of these Franceses, it must have been Frances Pernas, was Publications manager while I was there. I vaguely remember Jean Volkmer. Kathleen Haven I vaguely remember. And Charles, and Monroe [Wheeler], of course. Yes, this was before I came.

SZ: Slightly.

LL: In the Library it was very interesting. Sylvia Williams, who was a young Afro-American woman was my boss. There was Bernard and there was her and there was me, and that was pretty much it at that point. Later there was Inga Forslund who later became Librarian. I was the flunky and Sylvia was the Assistant Librarian. She was just about my age. She became head of the Afro-American collection or department, whatever, at the Brooklyn Museum, and now she's director of the African Museum on the mall in Washington, D.C. She was an impressive person and good to work for. Pete Tangen worked there too -- Willard Tangen, a painter now, in San Francisco. He was, I think, a page too. I was immensely fond of him, my first close gay friend, when I didn't know from gay. I was really naïve. And Bob Mangold -- Robert Mangold, the painter -- took my place as page when I left. We lived in the same loft building downtown on the Bowery. There's a lot of stuff here. Where do you want me to go?

SZ: You mentioned that the Modern was considered a hospitable place for artists who needed a little income.

LL: Well, [those] who needed to live, period. That was before the whole guard thing was unionized, which I'm all for, needless to say. But then there were a lot of artists who were guards, Ethan's father, Robert Ryman [my former husband], being one of them. That's how I met him. Dan Flavin was a guard. John Button was at the front desk. Al Held had just gotten out of Production. Sol LeWitt was at the night desk. John Button lived on Prince Street. Al lived next door, in the other part of this building eventually. Then 10th street was going strong. Bob [Ryman] began to show at 10<sup>th</sup> Street. But when he came to the Museum, and this is a nice story -- I don't know if you are going to talk to him but you might try at some point because I think he might have something to say because he'd been there quite a while. He came to town as a jazz musician and he was studying with Lennie Tristano and Lee Konitz and he had to have a job.

He lived in a room way up town some place and couldn't practice his tenor sax. So, they let him, at the Museum, practice in the auditorium. And in the film auditorium -- I'm sure you've heard this from other people -- the subways used to go through and roar through in the movies and Arthur [Kleiner] would play for the silent films. He was a wonderful pianist, an older man. He was probably not that much older, but I thought he was ancient. He played wonderful movie piano.

SZ: It sounds like a lot of life, then, really revolved around the Museum?

LL: Well, it did. I had been coming to New York and going to galleries in college, but I didn't really know anything. This friend of my parents, you know, who was the dean of the graduate school at NYU, lived on Washington Square and I would stay with them and wander around. But I didn't really know anything about the gallery system. Paris was the first time I had ever gone to galleries. And I felt very sophisticated, because I had been in Paris and what have you. But I was not very sophisticated!

SZ: Well, except that it was sort of a very exciting time.

LL: It was very exciting. 10<sup>th</sup> Street was very exciting. I started hanging out there. Before I met Bob, I was sort of a fringe beatnik. My picture is in one of the Fred McDarrough books with my ponytail and black stockings and what have you. And Bob lived only a couple of blocks from where I did. I lived first with some college friends, very briefly on Washington Place. And then I. . . Well, this part. . . I don't know how much I want to get into it. I [got involved] with a bunch of Bowery bums.

SZ: Surely.

LL: Real Bowery bums who had interesting backgrounds but who were definitely wins. One in particular, I moved in with him on 9<sup>th</sup> Street and Avenue A, in 1959, I guess.

SZ: What was the name of that famous Bowery place?

LL: Sammy's [Bowery Follies]. Yes, that was there. I don't think I ever went to that. But we lived on 9<sup>th</sup> and A. Then Bob and I lived on 10<sup>th</sup> and A, but then we had to move because I had gotten friendly with an ex-con. This is a Museum story. I suppose this is a Museum story. I don't know how to tell this one. I was hanging out with people from the Catholic Worker, whom I had gotten involved with through the Bowery bums. I got this place on Avenue A. It was \$18 a month. The bathroom was in the hall and I shared it with a drunken Puerto Rican seaman who was always in the bathroom drinking, which was frustrating. It was one of those cold-water flats with a bathtub in the one room and what have you. Anyway, the guy I was living with was arrested for being AWOL from the Navy because he had enlisted for the Navy as a peace protest; he was going to make a big case and be a hero of the peace movement and so on. And instead he just got popped in the Veterans' Hospital for being crazy. And he and I had sort of adopted this young ex-con who got a crush on me. One thing led to another, and he tried to kill me at one point. He had me, sort of, imprisoned in the house. I escaped and I called the cops. I got the cops there and they basically said, "Well, we don't give a damn what happens." And I said, "What does he have to do, kill me?" And they said, "Well, yeah." They saw me, and justifiably I think, as this middle-class woman who was slumming and had led this poor ex-con astray. It was true in a way. He was a sweet guy. He just had a horrible life. Anyway, he was really stalking me and that was not fun. I wasn't seeing Bob yet at this point, or I was just beginning to. Anyway, the ex-con came to the Modern once when I was working and came up to the Library after me. And that was a bad idea, because the Modern just went into gear. I mean you don't do that kind of thing there. A beatnik on the Lower East Side gets one kind of treatment from the cops and someone from The Museum of Modern Art gets another kind of treatment from the cops. So, they had him tied up on the floor in the elevator and off he went. I had to go to court. He was given three months in jail. He sort of vanished at that point. But the Modern came through for me! Lord knows what they thought. I wasn't particularly

ashamed of this, it was just like everybody was wilder then than they are now. As far as I know, they were very tolerant about it. I didn't even tell my parents.

So, Bernard Karpel was, kind of, my professional daddy. I dedicated my Dada book [*Dadas on Art*. Englewood, N.J.; Prentice Hall, 1971] to him as my "professional Dada". And Bill Lieberman was wonderful at that point. He was another person who was a mentor at the Modern.

SZ: How did that come about?

LL: I was very interested in prints because of Hayter and Baskin and I was buying, you know, twenty dollar prints on the Paris quais and in New York. I was interested in prints because they were a populist medium. I didn't really have much politics at that point, but I liked the fact that you could mass-produce them and people like me could afford them and so forth. And Elaine Johnson, who was this wonderful woman who was a very close friend, was Bill's Assistant Curator then. Anyway, Bill took an interest in me and he handed over the Philip Evergood book to me [*The Graphic Work of Philip Evergood: Selected Drawings and Complete Prints*. N.Y.: Crown, 1966], so my first book came from Bill. He wasn't interested in doing a Philip Evergood book, but he was trying to cuddle up to the people who were going to give Evergoods to the Museum and so on. So, he handed the book on to me, which I can't believe they were very happy about. I mean I had barely published anything. I'd done some ghost-writing for curators at the Modern. People knew I could write but. . .

SZ: Who had you ghost-written for?

LL: Well, the first book I was in was co-authored by Alfred Barr and James Thrall Soby and it was called *School of Paris* [*School of Paris: Paintings from the Florene May Schoenborn and Samuel A. Marx Collection*. N.Y.: MoMA, 1965.] and I actually got my name on it as co-author. And I wrote the captions, the catalogue part. It was, you

know, a small coffee-table book; works from the collection. I did the research. I was a good researcher.

SZ: This was while you were still at the Library?

LL: No, I think this was when I was freelancing. After I quit, but still literally living in the Library. I freelanced a lot of jobs that were connected to the Modern. They recommended me and hired me for things that I had been doing for them toward the end of my time in the Library. I quit the Museum in 1960. I was only there for a year and a half. The Museum also paid for my graduate school, one course a semester of graduate school at the Institute of Fine Arts, which was down at NYU.

I didn't have any particular ambitions in art history, but it was a great chance to learn something. Robert Goldwater was my advisor; I had met him in the MoMA Library. I met a lot of people, just hauling books to them, as a page. Max Kozloff, I remember, was a little bit ahead of me at the Institute. He was also very important in my writing career. So, then I took a course with [H.W.] Janson in Florence the summer of 1960. I was ready to travel again. Bernard was trying to make me into a librarian -- and I didn't want to do that.

Oh, the writing thing. At one point very early on, I mean, it must have been the very first couple of months I was in New York, I decided I was going to write for the art magazines. So, I sent something in to Hilton Kramer, who was the editor at that point at *Arts Magazine*. I think I still have these things. They are the sappiest little reviews. "So and so uses color quite well." I mean, I just didn't have any idea what art reviewing was about. And Hilton was quite nice about it. He wrote me a note and said, "You need to be in the art world for a few months or a year until you understand more about it, but you're a good writer." I mean, you got like three dollars a review at that point, so they were desperate for people who could write. He said to come back in the spring. But I had gotten the fiction prize when I graduated from Smith and so forth and I felt very rejected and never went back.

SZ: You did?

LL: The Mary Augusta Jordan [Prize], or something.

SZ: You neglected to tell me that!

LL: So, I thought I was hot stuff and couldn't believe I was being turned down. So, I didn't go back to try to write for art magazines for about four or five years. And that served me again very well. I mean, I was devastated that I couldn't even write these three dollar reviews, but at the same time Hilton was absolutely right. And I determined that when I went back the next time, people would want me, and they did.

SZ: And what did it take for you to make that leap, that change? What did you have to do?

LL: Well, as Hilton had predicted, within a few months I knew exactly how stupid those reviews were and how I could have done better ones, but I was annoyed. And, by then, my ambitions were larger than to just do \$3 reviews, I guess. I was writing fiction. I was getting up at 4:00 a.m. in the morning and writing fiction. I was sending things to *Redbook* and the *New Yorker* and others. I mean I couldn't have been worse at that kind of thing -- these sarcastic love stories, which *Redbook* certainly wasn't up for. One of them was about this woman who always had lettuce in her pocket because she had a pet rabbit and she meets this guy at the pond in Central Park. I mean they were definitely not *Redbook* material. So, I was writing away in fiction, and I saw the art thing as just until I got the great American novel published. I was never really that good at fiction.

SZ: What does it take to be a good critic, would you say?

LL: Well, I mean, I can only speak for my own criteria.

SZ: That's all I'm interested in.

LL: I've never been quite [sure] what other people's were. I've always felt that you have to be intimately involved with the art and the artist. I mean, not "intimately" involved with every artist, but you have to know the context in which people are working. It doesn't do any good to just wander into a gallery, see stuff and say what you see. Nor does it do any good to just know the art history involved, I think you have to know a great deal more about it. Which is why I'm doing very little writing about art. It just doesn't interest me anymore, because I'm not in that context.

SZ: But [going back to] then. If you can think about maybe one piece, maybe the first piece of criticism that you felt really good about.

LL: Well, Jim Rosenquist was a friend. I wrote about friends, because they were the ones whose work I knew well. It wasn't like I began to write about friends but when critics are interested in someone's work, they like you and became friends. Especially in that milieu, which was much smaller and less commercially driven than it is now. And Jim was a friend of this friend of mine -- a bunch of us hung out on the Bowery. There was another guy named Ray Donarski who never made it big as an artist at all but whom everybody loved. He was a friend of Alice Adams, whose sister was married to Jim Rosenquist. So, we all got to know each other. And Alice ended up, of course, by being a major public artist herself but she was a weaver at that point and not taken seriously by anybody.

So, anyway when Pop art struck, Jim was the Pop artist I knew whose work I loved and understood. Later, through the Museum again, somehow, I edited and partly wrote a book on Pop art [*Pop Art*. N.Y.: Praeger, 1966] that came out the same time the Evergood book did -- 1966. But the Evergood book, that was a great favor, because Philip was an old Communist, unrepentant. I mean, I had to learn something about, you know, real politics from looking at his work. And I got to know

him. He was quite a character. And then somebody had come saying they wanted to do a very simple-minded coffee table book, the man who owned *Arts* at the time. Hilton was long gone from *Arts*. This was the mid-1960s. Anyway, he asked who could do a book on Pop art -- and Pop art was apparently dead by then; it didn't look like the moment to do a book on Pop art. It was too late -- but somebody, I think from the Museum recommended me and I was only too happy to do any kind of writing for money instead of research and translations and bibliographies and indexes and all the stuff that I was doing. I used to call myself an art historical whore, because I would do anything for money and I got something like two dollars an hour. That was how they got me into graduate school, because they said, "You could get three dollars an hour if you go to graduate school." It sounded good.

SZ: But you ended up, you said, taking one course?

LL: No, I took a bunch of them. I got my Master's.

SZ: Oh, you did.

LL: Yes, yes. But I did it mostly on my own, after I left the Modern. It was thirty-five bucks per course, or something. It wasn't like a huge amount; it was amazingly inexpensive. And the Institute was such a bizarre place then. They thought they were Harvard. They were convinced they were Harvard. I mean, you had to take Ph.D. language exams to get a Master's. And I'd say, "Why do you have to do this? No one else has to do this." Oh, because we are so much better than everybody else. It was a weird place.

I got to know Louise Bourgeois through Arthur Drexler at the Museum, when I was doing that *Eccentric Abstraction* show in 1966 at the Fischbach Gallery. Arthur Drexler was never particularly a friend, but somehow he had a collection of her pieces. Somebody told me that Louise's work would fit into what I was looking for. And I had never really heard of her. He had some of these latex pieces which were

just extraordinary for that time, little weird turd-like things. And he told me about her and lent the pieces to the show, I guess. And then, after that, Robert and she had me to dinner and I got to know them better. I spoke at his funeral. So, it wasn't through the Institute at all. I mean, I just blew through the Institute. I wasn't interested in a lot of the stuff they were interested in, or being a professor or a PhD. I did my Master's thesis on Max Ernst, because I was working on a show at the Modern on Ernst [*Max Ernst*, Exh. #680, March 1-May 8, 1961.] Someone at the Institute said, "Who can take Max Ernst seriously?"

SZ: Maybe we could back up just to finish the writing business at the Modern, I guess, which was early on when you were working with other curators. Any memories from that time?

LL: Well, you know, it's funny, because I always say I was doing some ghost-writing, but I can't recall what it was. I mean, I did that one thing that I got credit for with Barr and [James Thrall] Soby. I guess I was doing research, I was checking their texts and doing research and moving my own words in now and then. Peter Selz and Bill [William] Seitz were the two people I mainly worked with.

SZ: So, that was what I was going to ask you about that. Barr was an important presence at that time?

LL: He was certainly, yes. Very. He was just worshipped by a lot of the staff, some of whom were so devoted they were called "Museum brides." But he had already been kicked downstairs. René d'Harnoncourt was also very nice. I can't imagine a better job. Although I've never had another job since. I've freelanced ever since then.

SZ: It was that nice. O.K.

LL: I had no other experiences with bosses. It was a warren of internal politics and so on. Most of that kind of went over my head, I think. But you were sort of aware of it.

SZ: What were you aware of about the relationship between Barr and d'Harnoncourt?

LL: I wasn't at all at that point. I knew Barr had started the Museum. Bernard had been there forever. So, everybody thought of Barr as the genius of the Museum. He was the intellectual. The "Museum brides" were Alicia Legg and who was the other one? I can see her.

SZ: Betsy Jones?

LL: Betsy Jones. And [there was] another one, too. Sara Mazo was around a lot. I liked her very much. She was a sweetheart.

SZ: She is married to an artist.

LL: Yes, she was. Yasuo [Kuniyoshi]. Actually, my parents had liked his art, they were impressed at my meeting him. I was impressed by meeting everybody at that point.

SZ: Oh, I know who it is [the other Museum bride]. Helen Franc. They always said that about Alicia Legg and Helen Franc.

LL: It's funny, I can't put a face to Helen Franc at all. But, yes, that was probably it. And Marie Alexander was the secretary. And Dorothy Miller was sort of in and out. I remember Abe Chanin. He was a lovely guy. Andrew Ritchie, I vaguely remember him. I don't know if he was there when I was there or if I just remember him. The Modern was, needless to say, immensely impressive for someone. . . Mildred Constantine, I remember well. Greta Daniel. And Dorothy Dudley, of course, who was a major force.

SZ: And for you, a young person at that time, you were easily integrated into this institution?

LL: The staff, as you see, wasn't that big. But, of course, I didn't see them socially, just at work. I was hardly in the inner circle.

SZ: Yes.

LL: I remember Charles McCurdie. He was there when I was first in the Library. Pearl was in a different department by then; Photography had taken off. The Library cataloguer was Sylvia Williams. Peter Tangen must have been what Charles McCurdie had been, the slide guy. But yes, it was a relatively small group of people involved in this. And you saw the movie stars wandering through the halls, because the Film Department was on the same floor as the Library. You could also get your friends in, which was very nice, because I was hanging out with this absolutely penniless bunch on the Lower East Side. They could ask the desk downstairs for me and go upstairs, say hello to me, and then go down and get into the Museum for free in the other elevator. So, this was a big deal. I had these strange people dragging through to see me. I just put them on the elevator and sent them back down. Judy Chicago's husband, Jerry Gerowitz, was one of them. That's how I met her. It's a fascinating labyrinth of friendships and connections. And the Modern was, for a lot of us, I think, very much the hub of that, the beginning of our art world lives.

SZ: And I'm sure it [was] facilitated by the fact that it was as small as it was at that time.

LL: Yes. I remember a party there right after I got there, which is where I met Bob [Ryman]. It was a big party for the staff to celebrate the fire being over and things getting back on track. There was a lot of wine and stuff in the Penthouse.

SZ: A typical Museum party.

LL: Yes, but it wasn't at all like an opening or like it is now. It was very different. People like Alicia and Betsy were just always nice to you, encouraging. They recognized if

you were serious. I didn't know how serious I was at that point, but other people seemed to have thought I was.

SZ: And when you refer to the political machinations. . .

LL: I would just overhear things. And I can't remember what they were. But Bernard was very aware of that. He was a librarian. He was something of a busybody, a very intelligent one. He was a motherly man, who scurried about taking care of everybody. He was very serious about getting what the curators wanted. He had great respect for the curators. We all were trained to drop everything if somebody came "down" and wanted something. If you were right in the middle of something, tough, you rushed out. The reference librarian stuff was interesting, because I remember manning the phone at one point and being so impressed with how hard it was, with the way they could do this. Because somebody would call with these inane and insane questions, and Bernard and Sylvia could just deal with everything very politely. And I got to do that sometimes. People would call and they'd say things like, "How do you rank Oskar Kokoschka?" Like #68? I went mad with some of these questions. I was not on the phone too often. People were always calling because they had found what looked like a modern painting in their grandmother's attic and things like that.

SZ: And wanted to know how much it was worth?

LL: Exactly. And where you rated the artist. Bernard was inevitably polite; people would come in — clearly not serious people — and he would treat them as though they were serious researchers and help them get books.

SZ: Let me just turn this over.

**END TAPE 1, SIDE 1**

## BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE 2

SZ: So, the movement towards curating occurred how for you?

LL: At one point, after I had been at the Museum for. . . I left in May or June of 1960, so I'd really been there only a little bit over a year -- I thought, looking around at the jobs -- you know, you get embroiled in where you are -- I thought, well, I'm not an artist, so maybe I should be a curator. That lasted a few months, because I saw how the curators had to kiss the ass of all the trustees. And there was a lot of that at the Museum. And Bernard was -- he wasn't obsequious, but he was solicitous. He did do his best to do everything he was supposed to do for everybody. And when the trustees came in there was always a little flutter. And I realized that I would be extremely bad at all of that. So, I didn't want to do that.

SZ: But you ended up [doing] that. I mean not in the context of the Museum. But later you did, you said.

LL: Well, yes, actually I did a couple of traveling exhibitions for the Museum in the 1960s, but as an independent, no ass-kissing. I can't remember how that all came about. Howardena Pindell was working there, and she was my assistant. That's how we met. She's a wonderful artist. We have the same birthday. So, we have this tie. Not the same year. Anyway, I don't know. The curating came about really from my own work and living on the Bowery. I was deeply involved in Minimalism for a few years because of Sol LeWitt and Bob. Bob wasn't really a Minimalist, but everybody sort of thought of him as a Minimalist. Then I got to know Donald Droll -- I can't remember now -- who worked at Fischbach and he was a very close friend for a long time. He was the gallery director at Fischbach. We all knew Eva Hesse and Tom Doyle. They lived on the Bowery too. I called all of us the "Bowery boys". And when I was very involved in Minimalism, there was something I was missing. And I look back at my feminist stuff now and realize what it was -- something sensuous. So, I started looking at people's work who made more sensuous Minimalism. The guy who lived

above me, also in the building -- Frank Lincoln Viner -- was a very eccentric character; he never made it big in the art world but he was a very interesting artist. And I began to see connections. And so, anyway that was how that came about. Then Donald said, "Well, I bet you could do this show at Fischbach," and one thing led to another. At that point, critics weren't curating shows much. Eugene Goosen had done a show at the Modern [*Ellsworth Kelly*, Exh.# 1042, September 12-November 4, 1973]. [Lawrence] Alloway had done a show at the Guggenheim [Museum]. But they were, kind of, big time critics and I wasn't. So, it was fun to do a show. I got criticized: "What is a critic doing curating shows?"

SZ: Because the two disciplines were considered to be what?

LL: Very separate, in a funny way. And the odd thing is that the critics were all Jewish and the curators were all WASPS at that point. Now, it's not that way, it's all mixed up. Everybody assumed I was Jewish -- which I'm not -- because I was a critic. I mean, there was Dore Ashton, there was Barbara Rose, there was Robert Pincus-Witten, there was Max Kozloff, Michael Fried, [Clement] Greenberg, Rosenberg. Everybody was Jewish but me. And I remember Pincus-Witten, at a drunken party, at one point saying something about "We, Jews". And I said, "Well, I always wanted to be Jewish." But I wasn't. He was horrified. "What are you doing here? How did you get to be one of us?" Curating was like a WASP stronghold, like museum directors, at that point.

SZ: But in terms of the actual practice, doing criticism and curating, why were they considered to be so separate?

LL: I'm not really sure. I think I came in at a point where they were becoming not so separate. But I don't think Greenberg. . . Well, Greenberg must have curated shows at some point, but I don't remember a Greenberg-created show that was particularly interesting. But then I was very anti-Greenberg the whole time. The writers were intellectuals. They came from, I think, the left Jewish intellectual world which I wasn't

part of because I came in after that was breaking up. With the New York School -- the people who picked up the New York School and ran with it -- probably a lot of those artists were Jewish, I don't know exactly. But, I think, it was an intellectual milieu that was different from the Ivy League. Not that Alfred Barr wasn't intellectual but it was a different kind of intellectualism, much more abstract, much more WASP. And I didn't like the WASP world much anyway. I was happy to be associated with the "other half." I hope this doesn't sound anti-Semitic, but it was the way it felt at that time. Anti-WASP is more like it.

SZ: But it sounds to me as if from these relationships, for instance with Arthur Drexler, that there was something that you, in various ways, in your own career, took with you.

LL: Yes, well, Arthur Drexler was very minor. Introducing me to Bourgeois' work was the only thing that Drexler ever did together.

SZ: I thought maybe they had you ghostwriting his stuff.

LL: No, no, definitely not. No, it was more the curatorial staff. I can't remember. I used to write press releases. I wrote letters for people, signed their names. I was just a handy flunky to have around. And then Kynaston McShine and I -- this was after I was freelancing -- worked on the *Assemblage* catalogue [*The Art of Assemblage*, Exh. #695, October 4-November 12, 1961.] But I got all these freelancing jobs through the Modern. Bernard would recommend me and the curators would recommend me and a lot of it was for the Modern and for the Publications department. I did the index for Beaumont Newhall's *History of Photography* [*History of Photography: from 1839 to the present*. N.Y.; MoMA, 1964.]

SZ: Oh, wow.

LL: I've been writing a lot about photography for a few years now. People think I'm some kind of expert in photography, which I am not at all. I just like it. But every now and then somebody will say, "Well, how can you say that? You've been involved with photography for so long, you even did the index for Beaumont Newhall." And I would say, "Yes. I was hired to do it. I was an art historical whore."

SZ: But that's another way to learn.

LL: Oh, definitely. All of this stuff I got was just a great education. My NYU education was nothing compared to what I learned at the Modern.

SZ: As a critic and as an observer through the years, looking at the Modern and watching it, I presume, change and also stay the same. . .

LL: I picketed MoMA with the PASTAMoMA staff and then I picketed over every other damn thing. [Note: PASTAMoMA is the abbreviation for the 'Professional and Administrative Staff Association of The Museum of Modern Art,' affiliated in May 1971 as Local I, Museum Division.]

SZ: You picketed. . .

LL: As a protester, against the modern's policies. As an outsider, because by then I was out of there. I can't remember the year that PASTAMoMA. . .

SZ: The first strike was in 1971. [Note: The strike ran from August 20 – September 3, 1971.]

LL: Yes. So, I was involved then in the Art Workers' Coalition. We protested the Rockefellers and Attica, and one First Generation show [*The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation*, Exh. #893, June 18-October 5, 1969], and later because of the Modern's lousy record of showing woman [artists]. I was out on the

street yelling about everything in the world. So, the Modern was kind of interesting. In fact, once when Ethan [my son] was [around] five, we were picketing outside, and they had closed the glass doors so that nobody inside could hear us. I sent Ethan to keep opening the door. And the guards kept coming over and sending him back to us. Finally, we had to go home and we went down into the subway and apparently the minute we disappeared, the guards came out -- they were going to arrest me and Ethan, a five year old. Anyway, it was interesting because the PASTAMoMA people I knew would keep going in and out. Alicia was still there. All those people were still there in the Modern. They were sort of sympathetic with us, but I don't think they were exactly the movers and shakers behind PASTAMoMA. I can't remember who was. They were there, though.

SZ: The issue of wages in the Museum. . . because it had been the domain of people who didn't really work for money.

LL: Yes, definitely.

SZ: And that started to change.

LL: I got forty-five dollars a week for a full-time job the whole time I was working there. Luckily, I had an eighteen dollar a month apartment, so I could do it. The Modern got me all kinds of jobs. The picketing. . . We had already picketed the Modern from 1969 on, starting with the Art Workers Coalition, Takis and the machine show [*The Machine as seen at the end of the Mechanical Age*, Exh. #877, November 27, 1968-February 9, 1969], the Rockefeller shows, and that First Generation show [*The New American Painting and Sculpture: The First Generation*, Exh. #893, June 18-October 5, 1969] -- I can't remember what it was called -- the show where they blackmailed all the Abstract Expressionists into giving them work, because they were having a show that would be "the last show," but they were only including things they owned, and consequently artists had to give them stuff in order to be shown. [Note: Takis, the Greek sculptor, had his *Telesculpture* removed from *The Machine as seen at the*

*end of the Mechanical Age* because he said the work was exhibited without his consent.] And, of course, there was “And Babies,” which was the anti-Vietnam poster. [Note: The Museum originally co-sponsored this poster about the My Lai massacre in Vietnam but subsequently disassociated itself from it.] John Hendricks, Frazier Dougherty and Irving Petlin were the ones who really did that. They were the poster committee of the AWC [Art Workers Coalition]. But they talked to people at the Museum and the staff had voted to distribute this poster. I think that’s what indirectly led to PASTAMoMA, all this ruckus in the art world that the Art Workers Coalition started, because people realized you could speak up against these powerful people. Anyway, the staff had voted to have this poster distributed by the Museum and it was moving through the Museum system, and they were going to do that, and then what’s-his-name, the CBS guy. . .

SZ: [William] Paley.

LL: Paley got wind of it. He was president of the board of trustees and he said, “You must be kidding.” Then we distributed it by handing it to every artist or art worker who came to New York, wherever they came from, wherever they were going to, Iowa, Germany or what-have-you. We just handed them these posters and said, “Get them out there.” It was the best distribution system I have ever seen. It was wonderful. They did us a favor. And then there were all these things where the Museum would talk to us endlessly. They were always having meetings and we wanted to get artists on the board of trustees of every museum in New York. One artist at least. And the Museum, of course, wasn’t even considering doing this, but if they did, they were going to pick their artists. So, they had meetings with their artists and our artists. And their artists. . . I remember Rob Rauschenberg siding with us, which was a shock to them. They had these endless meetings which we couldn’t attend. I was working full-time, supporting everyone — well, by that time I was divorced — but I was supporting Ethan, and Bob wasn’t making money yet. And then we were doing all this political work, and we were supposed to go to meetings where the Modern would drone on and on for hours at a time. We just couldn’t keep that up. They sort of talked us out

existence eventually. The Modern was the enemy for years; luckily, I didn't have to go up against anybody I was fond of. Bill Lieberman was still there and he was not a happy camper when he saw us out there. Bill was pretty conservative. Alfred Barr was gone.

SZ: Although you know the one thing that was said, one of the negatives of the establishment of the union was that it established two categories of workers and pitted what became management against staff. . .

LL: Oh, yes.

SZ: [. . . that it] pitted them against each other, that that has not been so great.

LL: Yes. I'm sure it hasn't. The Museum just feels like an extremely different place to me now. I mean, I don't know anybody there anymore.

SZ: But throughout the 1960s and I guess the 1970s, you did.

LL: Yes. In 1969, I started divorcing myself from the institutional part of the art world. Museums were the enemies, because they wouldn't speak out against the war. The trustees were in the military-industrial complex. We went for the Met really more than the Modern. But we went for the Modern a lot, because they were our museum. We perceived them as our museum. They didn't perceive themselves as our museum at all.

SZ: Well, that's a very interesting observation.

LL: Yes. We said, at one point, in one of our endless leaflets -- I wrote a lot of them, these intellectually argued lead-like articles -- I don't know if anyone read these things -- we said, "Where would you be without us. We are the contemporary artists whose work is worth millions ten years later," or something like that. And I always

identified with artists; that's the "we". Those years were a fantastic education in how the world worked. I mean, Hans Haacke, who was so, you know, precise and thorough and Teutonic about these things, really did economic analyses of the museum trustees both at the Guggenheim, the Met and the Modern, and showed us exactly who was connected to what war industry. That was an eye-opener.

SZ: Who came out the worst in that?

LL: In what?

SZ: I mean, was it to compare or was it just. . .

LL: No, it wasn't to compare. It was to inform. I mean, the museum establishment was so tied into the enemy establishment and a lot of us had never really even thought about that. And, of course, [there was] this endless kissing ass of the museum, hoping that they'd buy something. And we tried to do an artists' strike at one point. There was one brief moratorium strike but we wanted to do a real artists' strike where artists just wouldn't sell things to museums, wouldn't show in galleries and so on. Needless to say, there were scabs lined up around the corner, hoping everyone would get out of some gallery so they could get in. That was also the beginning of my lack of starry-eyedness about artists, the late 1960s.

SZ: In the sense of what?

LL: Well, in the sense that a lot of them were really out for careers and not much else.

SZ: Wanted to sell things to the Modern?

LL: Yes. Of course everybody wanted to sell things to the Modern, whatever their politics were, but there were people who wouldn't touch the Art Workers Coalition with a stick because they didn't want to be associated with us because they might not get a

show. "My art is my politics," they kept saying, which I can agree with on one level, but they were thinking that art was their activism. Their art was their politics alright. I mean, the whole idea of putting artists on the boards of trustees of every museum in the city was a really wonderful idea. And I still think so. Just to have an artist's voice in there. And what we were going to do was we were going to send postcards to every single artist who ever had shown anything. There was some source where we could get this information. And we'd just ask them all to send a postcard to us with three names on it -- or five, whatever -- the names of artists they would like to see represent them in the city's museums. And we were just going to computerize it and whoever came out on top -- and we knew it would be somebody fairly well known because no-one else would be mentioned that often -- we were going to tell the museums that they could either have their choice out of these people or we would give them one or the other, and that's who they would have. The artists themselves might not have wanted to do it. But I thought it was a very interesting idea. Needless to say, the museums didn't.

We protested the Met and the Modern for charging admission. You know, it used to be free or almost nothing and then admission got worse and worse and higher and higher. We used to stand around at the MET and tell people they didn't have to pay, that it was "discretionary". But there was a big sign that said -- it sounds like nothing now -- but it said, "\$1.50 suggested." And if you came with a whole family, \$1.50 was not peanuts in those days. So, we used to stand around telling people, "You can just give a penny. It's discretionary. You don't have to give anything if you don't want to. This isn't legal." And these were museums that had city tax breaks, or city maintenance funding. As far as we were concerned, it should be free. It all sounds so archaic now. You have to pay as much to get into a museum as you do a movie, or more. In those days there was that whole generation of artists who would never have gone to a museum if there had been admission fees. It was like the public library.

SZ: So, what happens today? What does this generation do?

LL: Look at the rents they have to pay. I don't know how they do it. They work at higher paying jobs and a lot of them are trust-funders. That was an unheard-of phenomenon when I was growing up.

SZ: Among artists?

LL: Among artists, yes. If I knew any. I didn't know it, because nobody was bragging about it.

SZ: I was just thinking about what you said about the Modern being considered "our" Museum.

LL: Soho was "our" neighborhood, too. That's long gone.

SZ: But how much of that was fiction, or how much of that really did change because of the political circumstances of the late 1960s?

LL: Well, the perception changed. I don't think the Museum has ever changed. It's always been tied to the establishment in big ways. But we didn't realize it. Actually, Ad Reinhardt had been one of the leaders of a group that picketed the Modern in the '40s, or maybe it was the early 1950s, because they didn't show enough Abstract art, which is ironic. So, they had been picketed before for not being responsive to the artists' community. And the art world, at that point, was artists or that's what we thought it was, although it clearly wasn't. And the Modern was the museum of contemporary art. We looked back and found some old document, I guess from the 1950s or even the 1940s, where the New York museums had sat down and parceled out what they would cover, and The Museum of Modern Art was going to divest, or give to the Met, all of its stuff once it got too old-fashioned, or got too old for The Museum of Modern Art. [Note: In 1947 The Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art formed an agreement designed to coordinate their collecting activities.] That was where we were coming

from. This is the Museum of Modern Art and we're supposed to be showing here. And they were, at that point, not really showing that much recent work. Later, they started *Projects* shows [May 1971] and got younger curators who were more tied into the world that we were in. But at that time, the curators were all another generation. I was in my early thirties.

SZ: So, you're telling me that you think they have successfully addressed that?

LL: Well, from where I am now, I would have done the whole thing completely differently, from scratch. They did, eventually. The Women's Movement had a lot to do with it too. The institutions became more responsive. Somebody like Robert Storr is more responsive to the art world. As a painter, he's been where a lot of us were. I wouldn't agree with everything he does, and he's certainly in the establishment now. But hiring somebody like him was a good move. They made gestures and efforts. But the art world changed, and they had to, too. I mean, I'm not sure how much we had to do with it. The art world speeded up so much that if you didn't have some way of coping with the hot stuff this year, you were going to miss out completely.

SZ: When you think about the Museum as an institution, I guess during the time you were there -- I'm thinking of it through the 1960s because it remained essentially the same -- it grew, there was the expansion and then the turmoil. . . It moved into a different phase. Dick Oldenburg was director for twenty years. And now it's. . .

LL: I don't even know where it's at now. We also had John Hightower [Note: Director, 1970-72] and Bates Lowry [Note: Director, 1968-69.]. Every now and then people mistake these photographs that say "John Hightower meeting with artists at the Museum", thinking it was the Modern. It was the Museum on Broadway, a loft exhibition space that was our stronghold. We had him up against the wall, really. They were really worried about us. I mean, we realized early on, they were so worried about bad publicity and this had to do with money raising and everything,

obviously. That gave us a sense of having the upper-hand for a while, before we realized that they were just going to talk us into comas.

SZ: So, in terms of overall, long term effect.

LL: I think it would all be worse if we hadn't done anything. I think it stuck in their minds that artists can speak up. That part of the art world -- I don't know if it exists anymore -- but at that point there was a lot of solidarity between artists. Not across the board, God knows. For instance, one of our brilliant ideas was tithing. In the artists' community -- which was not exactly a community -- 10% of what everyone made off art would all go into a giant bank account which would fund cultural centers that would be open to the people free [of charge] and show young artists and do all the things that weren't being done at the time. I remember Al Held telling me, "What? And tell people how much I made?" God forbid! I have great faith in the power of ideas to, at least, move people ahead a little bit. Postmodernists hate utopia, and I always say you have to have a utopia, to have something to long for, to move towards. I don't have any more illusions than anybody else that utopia is going to happen, but I think it's a very valuable idea, or very valuable thing to have out there to reach for. Sooner or later somebody may use some of these ideas. And they always, I think, stick in the minds of the establishment or the institutions, to some extent, if only as something to avoid like poison.

I may sound naïve but I think it did all make a difference. I mean, young women artists now see the kind of glass ceiling that still exists for women artists, but they have no idea what it was like when there were just no women taken seriously in the art world, or three, or whatever.

SZ: And the change you attribute to The Women's [Movement]?

LL: Yes, absolutely, it would never have happened. . .

SZ: Well, it makes you think what was the barrier? Were they not represented?

LL: They were not represented. Dealers didn't look at women seriously. Museums certainly didn't. I mean, we picketed the Whitney [Museum of American Art] Annual for a month every Saturday — that was the 1970 annual. In those years, it was annual. Every other year it was sculpture, and every other year it was painting, and this was the sculpture year, and women weren't supposed to be sculptors. It sounds silly now, but there were really very few known women sculptors. And especially since huge sculpture was the modus vivendi. "Did a little girl like you do that great big sculpture?" Stuff like that was really going strong. We got this slide registry together, and we forced the Whitney to come down and we said, "You don't have to put women in the show, but you have to go to their studios; you never go to women's studios." They went, "What? There aren't any women artists." This kind of thing. And so we thrust these shoeboxes of slides at them and made them look. And women's representation went up 400%. They weren't looking. Women were just not taken seriously. I mean, we did these tests where someone [a woman] went around to galleries with their slides and nobody was interested. Then a guy went around with the same slides and someone was interested. It was a real blockade and we did begin to break that down because they looked so foolish. It's not perfect and it still has to be worked at. It drives me nuts when young women come up and say, "Oh, thank you for all you did. Now it's all fine." And we say, "It's not going to be fine for very long unless you keep it up."

SZ: Minority artists?

LL: Same kind of thing. Yes, that was part of the whole business. In 1969, we wanted a Martin Luther King wing at the Modern. They did do a Romare Beardon show [*Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual*, Exh. #958, March 25-June 9, 1971], and that would not have happened if we hadn't been nagging them. We always got a lot less than we wanted, but we did, I think, really have an effect on some levels. And every one of those little things opens it up. They have a women's show and they find

that the sky doesn't fall. Then they may have another women's show. The Modern has not been good with women's shows at all, with giving women solo shows -- they have a show by a black person and the sky doesn't fall, and then they might let another black person in. That was the way it was in the 1970s. Even after The Movement as such -- the antiwar political movement -- had closed down, the Woman's Movement was still going strong. But at one point, in the 1980s, Elizabeth Hess and I tried to get a show going, to get some museum to do a show of 1970s women's art -- because the post-modernist artists were doing work that came right out of the 1970s, but nobody seemed to know it, including the artists, and we wanted to show what had been done in the early 1970s. And not one museum in town would even consider it. Not even the New Museum. We were up against Marcia Tucker in 1970 when she was at the Whitney. She was so annoyed that we were picketing because she was a feminist but she wasn't doing enough inside.

SZ: As you pointed out, there are always these conflicting pressures -- who is looking over your shoulder, where's the money coming from.

LL: Oh, sure. Oh, I understand more about it now. I don't know if I condone it, but I understand it a lot better.

SZ: I didn't ask you about exhibitions at the Modern. Anything you remember from those old days?

LL: Well, *Sixteen Americans* [*16 Americans*, Exh. #656, December 16, 1959-February 17, 1960] was right after I got there and that was a big deal, and years later I ended up writing a book on Ad Reinhardt [*Ad Reinhardt*. N.Y.: Abrams, 1981], who is still one of the people I most admire in the art business. The Rothko show [*Mark Rothko*, Exh. #679, January 18-March 12, 1961] was a big deal for us, because Rothko. . . Bob [Ryman] was mad for Rothko's work and Rothko kept diddling Bob around that he'd have him work for him, he'd be an assistant, but he could never offer enough money for him to live on, or never would, he could have by then. Rothko is the

source of one of my first sexist experiences. I knew him slightly because I was good friends with Herbert and Ilsa Ferber, Herbert's first wife, who was a German art historian who had taken me under her wing. And Herbert was a sweet guy and they used to have us to their parties. And [Philip] Guston and Rothko and everybody would be there. It was like. "Whoa!" I remember Rothko. I met him in the Museum at one point, and he said -- I had started publishing, I guess, and we were going up in the elevator -- and he said he thought he had seen something I had written. And I said yes, and I was all puffed up about it, and he said, "I can't imagine why a pretty girl like you would want to write." What! He was Bob's idol, not my idol; it was pre-feminism and I didn't know what was happening, but I knew it made me madder than hell. I remember distinctly going to the Rothko opening; it was the first opening I think I ever went to at the Modern -- black tie and all -- and through the guards we could get in or we somehow got a ticket. Bob was a guard. I was a page in the Library. So, there we were at the real opening. It was very exciting. I think we did, in fact, have an invitation. And all through his show Rothko would sit around at the Museum. You'd see him down at the garden restaurant constantly while his show was up. He couldn't work and he couldn't get away from his paintings. He was there every day.

Everything was so interesting to me at that point. I don't even think I saw much art I didn't like. I went to every single gallery. I wrote very briefly for *ArtForum*, just for a few months, in the days when you couldn't even get a photograph out of a gallery for *ArtForum* -- they'd say, "For what?" And then Max Kozloff, who had been at the Institute ahead of me, who'd gotten me involved with *ArtForum*, had left *ArtForum* and was at *Art International* and he and Barbara Rose were doing the *New York Letter* there. Then she quit, and I got to do the *New York Letter*. Then Max quit. And *Art International* was really big then. It was really the big magazine. So, I got to do the *New York Letter* alone for the major magazine. And I was eight months pregnant when I got this job. But nobody knew it.

SZ: Nobody knew it?

LL: Well, luckily, the editor was in Switzerland. Everybody here knew it, but nobody bothered to tell Jim Fitzsimmons. And I missed one show. It was, ironically, Anthony Caro, whom I've never been interested in. I wrote to Jim and I said, "I'm sorry I didn't get this one show done, but I was in the hospital having a baby." He was kind of overwhelmed, horrified, I think. I managed to keep my job because I had gotten through it. That was a big deal for me. That was when I started being a writer, but I was still doing stuff for the Modern.

SZ: You mean after. . .

LL: Well, I couldn't live on *Art International*, either. I was still doing freelance research. I can't remember when -- somebody asked me that recently -- and I can't remember when I stopped doing research and was able to do just solid writing and lecturing. It was pretty soon thereafter. But I did writing for anything, for everybody, encyclopedias, museum stuff, editing. I did a lot of copy editing.

SZ: At the same time you had these other interests which I understand were developing, political interests.

LL: Oh, yes, political stuff, yes. That started in 1968 for me. I was really not political in the early days.

SZ: Well, that was the time to have that happen.

LL: Actually it was late. I mean most of the art people who had some politics started earlier than that. Ad Reinhardt was out against the Vietnam War in 1965, 1966. And Rudolph Baranik, who was a close friend and Donald Judd later, and Max Kozloff and Irving Petlin and Dore Ashton, too. They organized *Angry Arts Week* in 1967 which I went to and certainly supported, but didn't have anything to do with organizing.

SZ: I don't know what that is.

LL: It was a wonderful thing. They had a leaderless concert, a conductorless concert at Carnegie Hall, among other things. *Angry Arts* was a model for things that I've done since, like *Artists' Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America*. They got a lot of galleries involved. There was one big show -- I guess it was at the Loeb Student Center at NYU -- and they had a lot of imaginative events and protests. It was the first thing that I know of that was multi-disciplinary, multi-gallery -- a real campaign in the arts. In 1968, I did the first show at Paula Cooper's new gallery, which she moved to Prince Street. She was right up the road here. It was an anti-war show of Minimal Art. That was interesting that Paula let me do the first show.

SZ: Why do you say that?

LL: Well, Paula has never been wildly political. But this was a time when almost everybody was into things, and she's always been sympathetic and supportive.

SZ: You had to be to some degree, yes.

LL: Yes, though not everybody was. The art world was all up in arms. Nobody really did that much, but for the art world, we were going strong. I was recruited to do that show by Bob Huot and a guy from the Socialist Workers' party, Ron Wolin, who worked with a lot of cartoonists.

SZ: So, did you like doing the show?

LL: Yes. I had already done a couple of shows by then, actually. I never thought of myself as a curator. It was just kind of a sideline to writing. I went away in 1970 to Franco Spain and wrote a novel, and it was published later by a little feminist press. But I began to realize that the writing I liked to do was totally influenced by

Conceptual Art, which was another part of all this, that conceptual artists were the ones who had some politics.

SZ: And that's what drew you to it?

LL: No, I was in that already. But they were the ones who came along, not with me particularly, but we all came along together to get involved with the Art Workers' Coalition. Actually, it was started by mostly kinetic artists from Howard Wise, because they were much more international. They were Greek and Chinese and French and German. They knew politics. The New York art world was just pathetic in terms of knowing anything about politics. It was all completely new to me. Carl Andre gave me [Karl] Marx's Grundrisse to read instead of Das Kapital, which was a terrible choice. Grundrisse is very difficult to read. And I never really became a real Marxist because I couldn't plow through the stuff. But we had our resident Marxist, who knew a little more than the rest of us.

But I had already, by 1970 or so, begun to realize that I'd been published, and was becoming a well known critic -- I had a book of essays out already -- [and] that this was not enough. This was what I'd thought I wanted in 1964, but by 1970 it wasn't where I was headed. I wanted to have a lot more to do with the world.

SZ: But you did both things for a while.

LL: Yes, I still do. I was sort of headed out of the art world in 1969 when the Art Workers Coalition came along. I had thought I wanted to be a journalist or something. Then the Women's Movement came along and I was thrown back into the art world by trying to get women into the art world because I figured they deserved to be there just as much as anybody else. And that went on for most of the 1970s. Then I got sort of re-radicalized in the late 1970s and wanted to get out of the art world again. And then I got involved in multi-cultural stuff and I thought I should write a lot so they

can get into the art world. This was obviously my own problem. And it took moving West to really begin to get out of it.

SZ: Which you did when?

LL: I went to Boulder, Colorado in 1986 and I started spending a half a year out there from then on. And I moved to New Mexico, I bought land in 1992. I kept going to Boulder through 1994.

SZ: So, that really moved you out.

LL: Yes, yes. I mean, I got much more involved. The Central America movement was a big thing for me. It seemed there was less and less that artists could do alone, although we did do this huge national campaign called *Artists' Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America*. I was a co-founder and directed the national campaign. And that was fascinating, because, of course, the more you are involved in politics the more you realize how ineffective art is, but how important culture is on another level. So, I spent my whole time torn between the cultural people who thought politics had nothing to do with them, and the political people who felt that culture had nothing to do with them. I spent a good fifteen years of my life in that thankless spot, but learning a tremendous amount. It was very interesting. Now my activism consists of editing the community newsletter in Galisteo [New Mexico] and I work on open space projects.

SZ: And your interest in art?

LL: A lot of my friends are still artists, but the art world doesn't interest me much at all. I go to galleries when I'm here. I have a little list of people I like to see. I often miss the museum shows. I go to friends of Ethan's shows.

SZ: Ethan's an artist now?

LL: No, Ethan's a hip-hop musician, basically -- a composer, not a rapper.

SZ: An artist of one type.

LL: I remember Jerry Kearns and I did a lot of political work together for years in the early 1980s. I remember coming in one night and Ethan and his friends were sitting at this table -- the place was arranged differently, but it was this table -- and Jerry said, "Look -- the next generation of artists." I had never thought of that. But Max Becher is one of Ethan's best friends, and has been since he was fourteen. Ethan's brother Cordy is a painter and there was a girlfriend named Caroline Chen who is a filmmaker. Rosa Silvers is an artist around town. They were indeed the next generation of artists.

SZ: And politically interested, too?

LL: Some of them. Max and his wife, Andrea Robbins, are more politically active than Ethan is. He has good politics, but he's not much of an activist.

SZ: It's a different time.

LL: Yes. But he's done some things, hooked people up for benefit concerts and stuff like that. Is your son an activist?

SZ: I think he's becoming more interested. He's always had good politics and a good heart. But I don't know what's going on.

LL: Yes. That's kind of where Ethan is. He doesn't get out much. I remember going to an anti-apartheid thing that some friends of mine were organizing in Central Park and I came back and I said to Ethan, "You should have gone. There was this great

speech." And Ethan said, "Yes, and I liked so-and-so too." I said, "What! You were there?"

SZ: So, maybe that's the way we succeed the best.

LL: Well, I find it fascinating to look at the cross-cultural stuff, because my great great-grandmother taught escaped slaves in Ohio or some place. Then my great-grandmother went down to Macon, Georgia to teach freed people right after the Civil War. Then my grandfather was president of a black college. My mother worked in race relations in New Orleans -- that's what it was called then, not civil rights but race relations. And I've done what I've done and Ethan works mostly with black musicians. So, it isn't the political thing per se, but it's this vein of do-goodism, probably.

## **END TAPE 1, SIDE 2**

## **BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

SZ: You mentioned Hilton Kramer before, who then went on to become a power of some magnitude in the whole world of art criticism during the period you were really engaged in it.

LL: I've never been that interested in criticism. I was always telling people I didn't want to be on panels on criticism because I'm interested in the art and the artists, and context has been my major interest as much as anything. When I first came to New York, the only well-known woman critic was Dore Ashton. Although we have very different tastes and takes and so on, she has decent politics and she was the female doyenne. I don't know how much older she is than me, not that much older, I don't think. Then there was Barbara Rose who was basically my age, who went to Smith and so forth. But she'd been in the art world a lot longer than I, so I always thought of her as an elder critic. People were always trying to put us in some kind of competitive

thing but it really wasn't. We existed in completely different parts of the art world. We didn't even ever really run into each other socially that much as I recall. But I liked her writing very much. There was the Greenberg/Rosenberg thing, which was overwhelming when I first arrived.

SZ: Overwhelming in the power that they held?

LL: In the power. But Greenberg, because he was a power-vulture much more than Rosenberg was, was the kind of monkey I had to kick off my back. Everybody just idolized Clem. He was a vicious son-of-a-bitch. He was a real mean person. It took me a while. This was at the Modern too, come to think of it -- I can't remember the date but it was the mid-60s, I guess -- Donald Droll and I went to a Greenberg lecture, and Greenberg was doing his thing about "Quality," and he always refused to say what it was. It was like, "I know what it is and if you don't know what it is, you're stupid." And I got up during the question period and asked if he could please define quality. Needless to say, he answered it pretty much like, "If I have to define quality for you, you're worthless. It's like the difference between green and red." And I said, "You mean, Greenberg and Rosenberg?" For some reason, the audience just loved that. It just popped out of my mouth, and everybody howled with laughter. It gave me a little bit of courage. I kept pushing at him. I kept saying, "Well, I really would like to know the difference." I wouldn't sit down. He wouldn't answer it. And so, afterwards I went up and introduced myself and I said, "You know, maybe you didn't want to talk about it in public, but I would like to know how you define this ephemeral thing, this infallible thing you keep talking about." He said, "Oh, you're Lucy Lippard. I thought you were a school teacher from Queens." That's the kind of thing he would do. And I was really determined to get this thing over [with]. He said, "I'm going to a party. You can come if you want." And so he gave me the address. It was at Bill [William] Rubin's brother Larry Rubin's. Full of people who hated my guts. I was standing on the corner waiting for a bus to get up there and he came sweeping by with a bunch of people to take a cab. And he said, "What are you doing here?" And I said, "I'm going to that party and I'm waiting for a bus." And Donald wouldn't come with me. All

my friends were just horrified that I was doing this. They said, "You're walking into a lion's den. Just stay out." So Greenberg said, "I guess you can come with us in the cab." I rode up in the cab with him. I never really got to talk to him at the party. I wandered around, looked at the art, and left. Kenneth Noland, who also hated my guts, and who had told me so was there too.

SZ: Hated your guts because of what?

LL: Things I was writing. I was, you know, against those guys. I was a young critic forging my own place in all this. Careerism on some level. The Minimalists were my friends and we were anti Vietnam war and they were pro-war, and there were a whole lot of things that came together. That was a little later. And when I left, somebody said, "Well, we have to say one thing for you, you have guts." And in those guys' estimations that was a big deal. I thought, well, I never did get my question answered and I never really had the conversation I wanted to have, but I have kicked this problem. I don't give a shit about Greenberg and his people anymore. That really freed me up to go ahead and do whatever the hell I wanted to do.

But they were a tremendous force in the early 1960s. It was Clem, this, Clem that, absolutely. Rumor had it [that] he charged to go to people's studios. He could make or break careers. It was just everything I was opposed to. I really hated it. And he was extremely nasty, he and his people. The only people who have ever been nasty to me in the art world were three times when people had me virtually in tears -- all Greenberg cartel. They could just look at you and say the meanest things. And I was pretty tough. Greenberg wrote like a dream. It's what he said that I didn't like. I knew Rosenberg slightly. He was a friend of the Ferbers and I'd see him at these parties, but when I look back at Rosenberg I realize he was much more important to what I eventually was doing, but I didn't focus on him that much and didn't give him enough credit for doing what he did. Greenberg was more threatening.

And, anyway, Hilton wasn't really that much of a power at that point. He was more interested in figurative art. Then he became a right-winger. He reviewed my Eva Hesse book [*Eva Hesse*. N.Y.: University press, 1976] in the [*New York Times*] very favorably. And then, later, he got really into the right with that magazine the *New Criterion*. [In] the first issue, I think it was, he wrote a diatribe editorial about people like me. "Lucy Lippard would have been a good art historian or writer or something but she fell prey to the radical whirlwind," and now is a mess. I wanted my publishers to put that as a blurb on my next book because I thought it was great. I mean, I just loved it: "Fell prey to the radical whirlwind." He thought I had lost it, and I felt I had found it.

And another time, we were at Louise Bourgeois's Museum of Modern Art opening dinner [*Louise Bourgeois*, Exh. #679, Nov. 3, 1982–Feb. 8, 1983] at some little restaurant around the corner. People were giving toasts, and nobody even mentioned the women's movement, which frankly propelled Louise into the limelight again. (And I had, with my *Eccentric Abstraction* show, in a way.) She was a wonderful artist and she had shown a lot before that, but she was in the doldrums in the mid 1960s. So, people are giving toasts. I rose and I said, "Here's to Louise Bourgeois from the women's movement." And there was a loud hissing from one side of the room. I couldn't believe that someone's hissing this. And, of course, it's Hilton. I ran into him at the coat check and I said, "Hilton, was that you doing that?" I couldn't take it seriously, but it was such an amazing thing to do.

SZ: Who else was there? Canaday. John Canaday.

LL: John Canaday I knew very slightly. Howard Devree was the art editor at the [*New York Times*] when I first came to New York. I got to know him slightly. He was a very nice man. When I went to Mexico -- I had somehow met him when I was in college; I think he was the one I met through this friend who was at NYU. Anyway, he invited me to his place to dinner a couple of times. At that point I'd just realized I was going to be writing about art. I was just about to come to New York. When I went to Mexico,

he told me if I could write something on a print biennale going on there he might be able to use it in the *Times*, which he didn't. But I worked and worked and worked on that article. It would have been totally wrong for the *Times*, but he was kind. Then Canaday came in, and he was an old friend of my. . . It sounds like I'm so well connected. He had been teaching, I guess, at the University of Virginia when my father was there, and so they knew each other. I disagreed with Canaday 100%. I don't think I ever saw him when he was here but I do remember him as a kid. He was the one who did that famous thing to Dore Ashton. He fired her because she "knew artists" too well, implying that she was sleeping around. But she was married to an artist, and I was. I was horrified by his attitude, which was you can't know artists and write good art criticism. The *Times* packed a wallop then. I don't remember it being all that important to me, because it was newspaper journalism and we were sort of snobs about newspaper journalism. *ArtForum* came into its own, and I wrote off and on for them, always having trouble with the editors, no matter who it was.

SZ: Their not liking the content, or the take on things?

LL: Phil Leider apparently didn't like what I wrote for him very briefly at the beginning of his stint in 1964. Max Kozloff had recommended me. But that was fine with me because I was at *Art International* by the time I heard this. And then, who was the editor after that, John Coplans. With Max, at one point, I wrote some things for them, but then Max didn't want short articles -- "featurettes" -- on women. My agenda at that point was to write a lot, to have a short article on a woman in every single issue of *ArtForum*, so that new artists could surface, and he didn't want that, although he was married to a major feminist. I've had endless editorial problems with Betsy Baker, who's a friend whom I admire a great deal but who I can't write for. A lot of it was just politics. Ingrid Sischy, was a good friend until I wrote for her at *ArtForum*. She second thought this piece that Jerry Kearns and I did called "Cashing in a Wolf-Ticket," and put, as a disclaimer, that we had "deeply-held beliefs", meaning "they are too far left for us."

SZ: Well, I think that's pretty good. I'm satisfied.

LL: Good. When you get people going, you can't shut them up.

**END TAPE 2, SIDE 1**

**END INTERVIEW**