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Oral history interview with Lee Krasner, 1964 Nov. 2-1968 Apr. 11

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Lee Krasner on November 2, 1964, December 14, 1967 and April 11, 1968. The interview was conducted by Dorothy Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

[SESSION ONE
NOVEMBER 2, 1964]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Lee, I gather that you were born in Brooklyn, New York. I wonder if you recall any experiences in your childhood or adolescence that particularly gave you a sense that your work was to be that of an artist? Was there some family background in art? Can you trace any reason why you became an artist?

LEE KRASNER: It's an interesting question. I've given it a good deal of thought through a period of years. No, I can't find it, can't find the background that led to it. All I can remember is that on graduation from elementary school, you had to designate what you choose to do, in order to select the right high school. The only school that majored in art which is what I wrote, was Washington Irving High School. On applying for entrance I was told that they were filled and as I lived in Brooklyn I couldn't enter. It led to a good deal of complication as I had to go to a public high school.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So then what did you do?

LEE KRASNER: My second choice went to law, curiously enough, so I decided to be a lawyer and entered a high school in Brooklyn called Girls' High, I believe it was, flunked everything in the first six months I was there, and reapplied once more to Washington Irving. This time I was admitted and so I started my art career, I suppose, in that sense.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you been drawing as a child?

LEE KRASNER: Not at all, not that I could remember nor can I even remotely put my finger on any kind of background, on knowing an artist. I don't know where this really came from, but it was very definite. Today I know it was very definite. Curiously enough, on graduating from Washington Irving High School, I then made a decision to go to a woman's art school, Cooper Union, but before graduation, my art teacher (by the time one gets to the graduation class you're majoring in art a great deal, you're drawing from a live model and so forth) called me over and said very quietly and very definitely, "The only reason I am passing you in art (65 was passing mark at that time) is because you've done so excellently in all your other subjects, I don't want to hold you back and so I am giving you a 65 and allowing you to graduate." In other words, I didn't make the grade in art at all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This didn't discourage you?

LEE KRASNER: Apparently not, because I went right on to the Cooper Union Woman's Fine Art. There, of course, again a free school, you had to apply with work, so I picked the best, or what I thought was the best I'd done in Washington Irving and used that to get entrance into Cooper Union. I was admitted and worked there, I believe, for two or three years before I went to the National Academy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Who did you work with there?

LEE KRASNER: In Copper Union? Well, there was a man called Mr. Hitten.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were there any others that had an important influence on you?

LEE KRASNER: There was a Mr. Victor Perard, who was a life instructor, and Mr. Hitten was a cast drawing instructor, and around that, again, another interesting – Oh, what I consider quite amusing – Mr. Hitten's class, when I came into Cooper Union, was divided into alcoves. The first alcove, you did hands and feet of cast, the second the torso, and third, the full figure, and then you were promoted to life. Well, I got stuck in the middle alcove somewhere in the torso and Mr. Hitten at one point, in utter despair and desperation, said more or less, what the high school teacher had said, "I'm going to promote you to life, not because you deserve it, but because I can't do anything with you." And so I got into life and Mr. Perard was quite nice, only at that point I decided I ought to do something more serious than Cooper Union and so it was the National Academy, where once more you had to enter with work. I was admitted, only I was demoted from life back to the cast drawing

and on my first day of instruction, Mr. Hitten walked in. We looked at each other and realized it was futile because in the Academy he couldn't promote me, it took a full committee to do that. So we were stuck with each other again. And so it went.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How long did you stay at the Academy?

LEE KRASNER: I'd say I was there about three years attending the day school and night classes as well.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then what, after that?

LEE KRASNER: Well, after the Academy, nothing – on my own, painting for quite a stretch.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You hadn't been painting in the Academy, had you?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, oh absolutely I was painting in the Academy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So they let you get to the life class eventually?

LEE KRASNER: Well, as a matter of fact, it was on the basis of this self-portrait which I did, which was shown in continuity and change at the Athenaeum quite recently. They chose to reproduce it, curiously enough. This particular self-portrait was – ahk! I can't find it – no, it wasn't that, that's Academy, it was just a little before that. This particular one I did my first summer vacation at the Academy, or the second summer. I nailed a mirror up on a tree out in the lower part of the island and spent the summer doing a self-portrait. Then I brought it in when the session started to try to get promoted to life class. Then I was told by the instructor there, that I was a dirty trick to pretend that it was an outdoor painting, that I had done it indoors. I said, no, I did it outdoors, and I was promoted to life on probation, they would give me a try there. At some point, I was fully in the life class. I don't know, I guess there was a year or two at that, at which point I broke from the Academy and just did my own work for several years.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Painting from the model?

LEE KRASNER: Painting from the landscape, city landscape or nature in terms of models or still lifes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What painters did you admire at this time?

LEE KRASNER: At this particular time? Oh, that goes back quite a way. As a matter of fact, it's very difficult to remember. This was before I became acquainted with – no, I had just seen possibly, the first show. Was it at the Museum of Modern Art, when they were in the Hecksher Building? No, possibly previous to that. I can't remember now. And I'd seem my first Matisse, my first Picasso, my first Braque and it was like a bomb that exploded because it was from the Academy to seeing these things at that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At the Academy, what artists had you admired, would you have liked to paint like?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, at the Academy I was very busy trying to do my best like everybody else was, only I never could made it. For the life of me it wouldn't come through looking like academy. Although I was exerting every possible effort to try to make it, it just kept pushing in different directions, so I was not what was considered, a good – I wasn't a prized student there by a long shot.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then when you say your first Matisse and Picasso, roughly what year would that have been?

LEE KRASNER: Well, this is hard for me to pin down. I was at the Academy as a student and this was a Saturday afternoon. A group of us went down and saw them and that really hit like an explosion. As a matter of fact, nothing else ever hit that hard until I saw Pollock's work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then did this begin to affect your work?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I imagine there must have been some affect. I don't know if it was immediate – only to this extent – as I said, there was a group of us, some eight or ten, that went down to see this show. When we came back on Monday to class, we did succeed in taking the model stand and pulling it out in the center of the room, away from the dark red of the background. We took the jacket off the man and put a bright colored lumber jacket on. On the first day of criticism, our instructor walked in and did about three criticisms, and then hurled the brushes across the floor and walked out of the room, saying, "I can't teach this class anything." So it wasn't that I was affected, I think quite a few people were affected.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Quite a story there, who was the instructor?

LEE KRASNER: A very charming, delightful man, who practically never raised his voice. He was extremely patient. I believe he was Mr. Sydney Dickinson who was our portrait instructor. I remember quite accurately what happened that afternoon, so I say, I wasn't the only one affected by the exhibition.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then you went on painting your own, following more or less in this direction?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I certainly seemed for the first time, to be a little more at ease with what I was trying to do. I couldn't fit into the school, either at Washington Irving or at Woman's Copper Union or at the Academy. At least there was some sort of identification here that didn't make me feel quite as foreign to myself.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you interpret, let's say, well, Matisse? I mean, did this seem to you to be a kind of permission to use color much more fully and flatly?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I wouldn't have been thinking in terms of flat, you see. I don't think I would have even know what flat meant in that sense. The experience came through directly, not through an intellectual source. I wasn't informed as to what has happening in painting in Paris at that time, which was the seat more or less. It was just that the thing came to life in some magical way. It would have been years later where I would have been able to speak in terms of flatness.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then were you working on you own pretty much after this period, or did you have other organizational….?

LEE KRASNER: No, I was working at the Academy as I said, and once I broke there I was working by myself.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This was still in Brooklyn?

LEE KRASNER: No, no, no I was long out of Brooklyn.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You lived in New York by now?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, in the Village, of course.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And did you have a group of friends that shared your interest in your new bombshell excitement?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, a small group that had in it six people like Gorky.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, you knew at this period?

LEE KRASNER: Just about that period. So that one would see him at the Jumble shop.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Are we now early, middle 30s, something like that?

LEE KRASNER: I would think so, I would think we'd be about there. It's still previous to my joining the Hofmann school.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Fine, that would located you probably around 1935ish. So you saw Gorky and talked to him, did you? You saw his work, of course.

LEE KRASNER: Of course. By that time one was becoming a little sophisticated. I'm making big jumps when I go from high school to –

DOROTHY SECKLER: Sure. What would your painting have looked like by this time, by 1935? Were you dealing with figures, abstracting them or landscapes, cityscapes?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, a little bit cityscapes or trying to do something that hit from Matisse. I would take a still-life and try to do it in that manner because of the impact that if had on me, so that by then one was using the color more boldly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How about Cubism? At that time were you affected very much?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I'd say the real impact of Cubism was after I started to work with Hofmann, who was one of the leading exponents in terms of explaining it in this country. I, at least, feel so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were something of a Fauve, I suppose at this point.

LEE KRASNER: I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know how to classify it. I think I was pretty much searching at this time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you make a living then?

LEE KRASNER: At one point, I was waitressing in the Village, where I lived and then I decided to do something practical about livelihood, so I took my pedagogy, so I could qualify to teach art. I got through with it – I took it at CCNY – did waitressing in the afternoons or evenings, did this work in the daytime. I got my pedagogy and decided the last thing in the world that I wanted to do was to teach art so I tore that up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How long did that take you?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I don't know. I think about a year – one or two classes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then you didn't have to worry too much about pedagogy with the arrival of WPA? Was that the next solution?

LEE KRASNER: That was the next stop, yes, by way of livelihood. I applied and was accepted by WPA and was on WPA, as a matter of fact, through the various stages it went through.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you begin? With what part of the project?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I think – now, let me try to remember accurately – I think that when I started I was assigned to a project that some professor was doing, drawing fossils. Yes, that was the first. So that I was working very detailed drawing. I don't remember how long it lasted as it was an extensive project with a loft full of artists working on these things. Then at some point that terminated, and I was moved into the so-called Fine Arts Section, in the Mural division and I was an assistant to various artists. I think I stayed in the Mural division until it became A War Service Project and then I was relegated to do a specific job. There was a coordinated move, they had a new president that was being inaugurated for CCNY and they were doing a large – trying to show how higher education was involved in promoting the war effort, with the classes they were teaching, so that I did this work for more than a year before WPA terminated.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And how about the murals in which you were involved? Is there anything that we should put on the record?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I never did do a mural of my own. I was promised a mural of my own by way of cleaning up lots of other murals that had been started so that I did a series of murals that were not mine. I and a group of people executed various murals. Always dangling in front of me that when I completed this job, I absolutely would get an abstract mural to do for myself. This would never come about before it became a war service project and then that terminated and that was the end of the WPA.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What year would that have been?

LEE KRASNER: Oh dear, dear, that takes us into early 40's I believe. Again it's hard for me to say, unless I have a bibliography in front of me where WPA terminates. And before it terminated I had already gotten involved with Hofmann.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, that's the interesting thing. You were studying at night with Hofmann?

LEE KRASNER: That's right, and then I worked with him a little more than that. When I had time I could come in and use his studio, in a sense, that is to say, if it was a still-life class, I could be doing any kind of abstraction at that point, using that as a take-off point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This must have had quite an important impact on your work and your ideas about painting.

LEE KRASNER: What?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Hoffmann, I mean.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, well, undoubtedly, it certainly did, because here again, when you spoke earlier about Cubism, I say I really didn't get the first impact, the full impact of it until I worked with Hofmann.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then you were not only growing but painting and working from the model a good bit, I suppose.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, he always had a model or still life that you worked from.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Who were some of the people who were in your classes at Hofmann's at that time?

LEE KRASNER: Let's see, at The Hofmann School – well, there was George McNeil, Fritz Bultman, Ray Emes, or

that would be Mrs. Emes. Who were some of the others….John Little, Wilfred Zogbaum….

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's good enough. And were you all intensely involved in discussions and….?

LEE KRASNER: At that point, I would say we were all intensely involved in art. I was also a member of the American Abstract Artists, so that there was a good deal of attention and involvement with art and the impact that the School of Paris had on the people painting in New York, or on some of us.

DOROTHY SECKLER: A good many of the people that you knew through the Project and then through Hofmann were functioning in the American Abstract Artists….?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, oh yes, we met once a week and arranged it. I think there was a weekly meeting and people like Balcomb Greene were there, although he was not connected to the Hofmann school. George L. K. Morris, Gallatin, Harry Holtzman, -

DOROTHY SECKLER: And were these sessions in which you thrashed out a question or questions?

LEE KRASNER: Questions of exhibitions and accepting new members, it was active. As a matter of fact, I can remember at one time we were picketing the Museum of Modern Art and were calling for a show of American paintings and George L. K. Morris and I, when we knew that there was a trustee meeting, were given the task of handing one of them, as they left the building, a leaflet saying, "Show American Paintings."

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's interesting. So that by the time you were finished with the Project – were you involved very much politically, other than that?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, I was quite active politically just previous to this, and I'm leading into this time when I was on WPA and there was a group called the Artist's Union which was organized, so that I was extremely active in that. Again that meant more meetings and fighting for artists' rights on the WPA.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you feel that its activities were by and large, successful? It was a necessary move then?

LEE KRASNER: I think as it happened, you know, it's a fact it happened and whether it's successful or not, I wouldn't know. I would say it gave me an opportunity to continue through a period of where one had a livelihood to deal with and/or painting. This allowed for painting and I'd say in that sense it was extremely influencing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you recall any of the people who were in charge of the Projects you were on in the WPA, you know, that come back to you as playing an important role there?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I'd say one that stands out was Burgoyne Diller. He, as a painter himself, had enormous sensitivity to the needs of the painters and I think he made it possible for more than one artist to continue painting. If I had to pick one name, I certainly would pick Burgoyne Diller.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What was his….?

LEE KRASNER: He was in some supervisory capacity which made it possible for him to – he was aware of the needs of the artist and painting and dealing with something called high administrative jobs. I'd say certainly he was one of them. Cahill was another, but my direct contact was with Diller rather than with Cahill.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then how did you happen to conclude the WPA itself?

LEE KRASNER: WPA itself ended after the War Service Project and by way of terminating, it allowed you to take one of several war courses that were being offered. After which you were supposed to be able to go into that field and ear a living. I took drafting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did you actually ever make a living for any period of time doing that?

LEE KRASNER: Well, the instructor there – I'm back to teachers again – the instructor there said I was one of the most brilliant students he had. I couldn't get a job. I got a job finally, but it lasted about five days and that was the end of that career.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then what did you do?

LEE KRASNER: Then what did I do?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, one thing we haven't covered is that you had been at this point – we've actually jumped….

LEE KRASNER: Where have we jumped?

DOROTHY SECKLER: ….ahead. We have, of course. We haven't involved yet the changes in your life that were inaugurated when you met Jackson Pollock and this seems to be in 1936.

LEE KRASNER: I explained that '36 thing – it's a date I'm not clear about and if I think what it is, it would have meant a meeting with him at the time I was a member of the Artists Union and we were holding a dance and I met him, but there was a passage of a few years before I really met him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So then in 1942….

LEE KRASNER: Actually my recollection of meeting him outside of this one incident, was at a show that John Graham did at the MacMillin Gallery. He invited someone called Jackson Pollock and myself, and, I believe, de Kooning. There were three unknown Americans put into that show and it turned out we were the three and it was through that source, my trying to track down the other unknown American who was painting abstractly at that point, as though I knew them all in New York City. The American Abstract Artists and the Artists' Union, one thing and another, I was very much in the art world. It was in searching out who this other person was that I met Pollock at this exhibition.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did you finally manage to trace him or meet him?

LEE KRASNER: Well, again, once I'd been invited to this show, I was thrilled about it, but on being told there were three unknown Americans in it, I didn't want to ask Mr. Graham, whom I'd only just met, and question, because that might have broken the spell and that wouldn't fit in the show. I proceeded at the American Abstract Artists to ask everyone there. "No, no, no," was the answer. Shortly after that, I was at an opening at the Downtown Gallery. It was then literally downtown and I ran into someone called Lou Bunce who I knew from the Project and we were chatting and he said, "By the way, do you know this painter Pollock?" And I said, "No, I have never heard of him. What does he do and where is he?" And he said, "Oh, well he's a good painter, he's going to be in a show that John Graham is doing called French and American Painting." I said, "What is his address?" And, curiously enough, at that point I was living on Ninth Street between Broadway and University, and the address for Pollock was Eight Street between Broadway and University, and I promptly went up to Pollock's studio and that's when I say I met Pollock for the first time, because the former incident is….And then, you see, after I saw Pollock, met him, saw the work, I said, "I understand the third painter is de Kooning," and he said he didn't know de Kooning and I said, "Well, I do and I'll take you over and introduce you." So I brought Pollock up to de Kooning's studio. De Kooning was in a loft at that time because he was something, and that is how Pollock met de Kooning.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How was Jackson Pollock's work at that time?

LEE KRASNER: Well, as I said earlier, a bomb exploded when I saw that first French show. The next bomb that exploded was this incident when I walked into his studio. There were five or six canvases around and they had the same impact on me, something blew.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you had already known de Kooning from the Project?

LEE KRASNER: No, I knew de Kooning before the Project. I knew de Kooning, I knew Gorky years before I knew Pollock, John Graham, who I got to know around this show, and then I went and saw his work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you took Jackson to meet de Kooning, was there a good rapport? Did they….?

LEE KRASNER: No, not necessarily. I don't think either one was impressed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And how did the show go off?

[End of Tape 1 – Side 2]

DOROTHY SECKLER: We were discussing an exhibition in the MacMillin Gallery in 1942, an exhibition which included, with some French artists, three unknown American painters. This was referring to your own work, and that of Pollock and de Kooning. We haven't talked about the show itself and what the reactions were.

LEE KRASNER: Well, my own excitement around it was overwhelming. I found myself flanked by a Matisse on one side and a Braque on the other and I saw Pollock's work, as I said before, when I came to the studio. I knew de Kooning's work – it didn't get much attention at all. Remember that in '42, American painting that was so-called "abstract" (I use the work lightly or loosely rather than not lightly) didn't get much attention from anybody or any place. It was really a few people who were painting this other way than the French painting, which we all, at this point, were very aware of, so that nothing much came of it in terms of outside reactions. Nothing that made a mark in any sense.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you obviously did get to know Jackson Pollock better?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, of course, I got to know him very well as of the time I walked into his studio, and it terminated in the marriage which was in '45 and we moved out here in November '45. We were married in October and moved out here and made this our permanent residence.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And did you mutually influence each other or did you explore certain directions together? Would you say your work was affected in a natural sense from '45 to be very different?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, our work was different. It was both – again, that word abstract – I think it was different. And I, for one, believe art comes from art and is influenced by art, just as I explained that some things very positive took place when I saw the first French paintings. Certainly a great deal happened to me when I saw the Pollocks. Now Pollock saw my work too – I couldn't measure what effect it had on him. We didn't talk art – we didn't have that kind of a relationship at all. In fact, we talked art talk only in a shop sense, but never in terms of discussions about art, so to speak. For one thing, Pollock really felt about it. When he did talk it was extremely pointed and meaningful and I understood what he meant. Naturally he was seeing my work as I certainly saw his.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now at this point, of course, he was, I assume, working abstractly and….

LEE KRASNER: Oh yes, oh yes, the first paintings I saw on the occasion I described – well, some of those paintings, The Magic Mirror which is up, and Birds, paintings that since then have seen by many people – have been in, well, quite a lot of exhibitions, and he was long since through with Thomas Benton. He only studied a brief time with Benton and that preceded this period by many years. As he himself said, quoting Pollock on this, that when he was through working with Benton, he went into his "black period," which I think he said was about three or four years before he emerged with the first of the paintings that we know today.

DOROTHY SECKLER: [Inaudible]

LEE KRASNER: Well, that's a damn word for it, no, no, you're talking about his paintings in the late 40s and 50s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He was using a brush and painting?

LEE KRASNER: Well, he was using a brush but he was using both ends of the brush so that it wasn't all that conventional, but he was not doing the so-called "drip."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what word would you….

LEE KRASNER: I don't know. I believe that's the problem for the critic or to the art historian to describe this aesthetically. The word "drip" – it just drives me – it makes me very uncomfortable. Actually, what is meant there is that it was aerial and it landed instead of in contact with the canvas, it was aerial. Now I don't know how to describe this aesthetically, but "drip" is a very bad substitute to try to explain it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: People have said, tossed stained paint and….

LEE KRASNER: No, I deeply believe – because it has not been described or defined by the art historian or critic, whose realm this is, it as been left with an absurd word like "drip" painting. Well, that doesn't describe anything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it simply states that he was using some unconventional means but had not yet arrived at the method which we often identify with is work. I was wondering if at this point there was a strong influence on either of you from primitive art, that is, I mean from Africa and Mexico or any kind of primitive form. I suppose it was all more or less in the air through all the pains you'd gotten through other sources.

LEE KRASNER: I'm not clear about this, what do you mean by primitive art?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, one of the things that I remember when I saw Pollock's painting of *She Wolf*….

LEE KRASNER: Yes….

DOROTHY SECKLER: It seemed to me, I didn't know, I guess, what he'd been thinking of, but as if he had been at that time looking at some form of primitive art.

LEE KRASNER: I wouldn't know. Pollock was highly conscious with regard to art.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Naturally you can speak for your own work….

LEE KRASNER: No, I can't speak for him.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I thought it might have been something you both were excited over.

LEE KRASNER: No, not as a common denominator and I doubt that he had that relation with anybody else. He was very much a solo individual in terms of exploring himself, so that he was not necessarily a person that joined groups with discussions about art in any form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And later, of course, when The Club was formed, he wanted to….

LEE KRASNER: No, no, he wasn't involved with The Club at all, because, as I say, he was not a person that worked in this sense. I believe, no, he had nothing to do with The Club.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, now in '45….

LEE KRASNER: You're talking of The Club on Tenth Street?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what they called the Eighth Street –

LEE KRASNER: I don't know, some place down there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, now come back to your exhibition program, you had an exhibition in 1944 in a show called Abstract and Surrealist Art in America at the Mortimer Brandt Gallery?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, that's the present Sydney Janis Gallery and it was Sydney Janis that did a book called *Abstract and Surrealist Art in America*, and he did this exhibition in connection with the book.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you were represented by at least one, or several paintings?

LEE KRASNER: I don't remember if it was one or more, but I was in the show and I am in the book. And as a matter of fact, I think it was at this point, if I'm not mistaken, that Janis came to see me. I, in turn, asked him if he knew Pollock and he didn't, so I gave him Pollock's address and told him to be sure to go up and look at this work while he was collecting material for his book. And he did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then he must have taken over the gallery soon after that.

LEE KRASNER: No, I think there's quite a gap of time between that. At the time it was Mortimer Brandt and Betty Parsons and then it became Betty Parsons. It was quite a period later that Janis began his dealing. At that time, not in the capacity of a dealer, as he is now. In fact, by the time Pollock had his first show, which was in '43, Janis was on a committee for the Museum of Modern Art, which was advisory to the purchasing committee, so that Janis was not a dealer at that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now this was the period, of course, when you were still on WPA through….

LEE KRASNER: I don't think so, I don't think I was on WPA.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How were you making your living afterwards?

LEE KRASNER: Well, afterwards Jackson and I merged our forces. He had a job at the Guggenheim Museum and what was I doing at that time? I think I was very busy keeping house.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of thing did he do at the Guggenheim?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, he would made frames and use something to count attendants as they came in and that kind of thing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then, when you came out here you had to give that up, I suppose?

LEE KRASNER: Well, before we came out here, Pollock was showing at the Art of the Century, Peggy Guggenheim's Museum. At that point, Miss Guggenheim (that is, Peggy Guggenheim, as distinguished from the other Guggenheim museum) gave him a contract, commissioned a mural, and the contract made a monetary provision until we were able to come out here, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then Jackson was able to give all of his time to painting out here, and you too?

LEE KRASNER: Except for holding the house down. I had my studio in the house and he worked out in the barn.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At that time, when you came out here, there were I gather, very few other artists, or practically none. Were you the first?

LEE KRASNER: I wouldn't know whether we were the first or not. No, as a matter of fact, when we moved out Motherwell was here, renting a house, but I believe he was here for about one season and we didn't see very much of him. We saw a little of him and then he went elsewhere and slowly the first artists came out here. I think Don Little came out first, followed by Wilfred Zogbaum, and so the colony started. But whether we were the first or not, I wouldn't know. I speak only of artists we knew or saw.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was the life in the community then very different from what it is now?

LEE KRASNER: Oh yes, quite different.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In what way?

LEE KRASNER: Well, to begin with, when Zog and Don were buying their houses, both Jackson and I were very involved with it and you know, went and saw the house they were getting, watched it getting in shape, saw each other closely, and so forth. Naturally, as it expanded it became a little more diverse. Today I'd say it's pretty much like New York City in terms of you know, trying to see everyone and being in touch with everyone – it's not any longer possible. At that point it was small enough to be personally involved with each person. Each artist that was added to the community was just more or less, in some general sense, sympathetic with our own feeling towards painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In this period of your early work out here, that was '45 on, how had your work changed in terms of either content or style, how would your characterize the....?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I would say that up to the point of meeting Pollock – as I said, I'd worked with Hofmann who certainly brought an understanding of Cubism. I'd say my work at that point was still very much under the so-called French influence and on meeting Pollock there was once more a violent transition and upheaval. And living with him and watching him work, well, certainly it had its effect and consequently the painting changed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In your case, how did this express itself? Was it a matter of a more vehement approach to the actual handling of the paint or was there any kind of oh, type of mystique that emerged?

LEE KRASNER: Well, in my own experience after it occurred it not only was more vehement, it became infinitely, well, one might say from a loud sound to a grain of sand. In other words, I went through a kind of black-out period or a painting of nothing but gray building up, because the big transition there is that up to that point, and including Hofmann, I had worked from nature. Now let me try to explain that in a more simple way. When I brought Hofmann up to meet Pollock and see his work which was before we moved here, Hofmann's reaction was – one of the questions he asked Jackson was, do you work from nature? There were no still lifes around or models around and Jackson's answer was, "I am nature." And Hofmann's reply was, "Ah, but if you work by heart, you will repeat yourself." To which Jackson did not reply at all. Now then, this is what was happening to me: as I had worked so-called, from nature, that is, I am here and Nature is out there, whether it be in the form of a woman or an apple or anything else, the concept was broken and you faced a black canvas. Well, with the knowledge that I am nature and try to make something happen on that canvas, now this is the real transition that took place. And it took me some three years and what began to emerge in the first of these, which was around '46, were very small canvases, these things around here, what I refer to as the little image, were the first and as I gained confidence and strength, it expanded – it grew bolder in time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The so-called little canvases seem not so little to me, actually. They run, I suppose, somewhere up to 36 inches or even a little more, and the characteristic thing to me of the earliest ones was the continuous flux of rather molecular structure, well, they're not patterns but figurations but very intricately fine and continuing – not undifferentiating but continuing without installment of any focus in the field and then gradually apparently that changes to a more hieroglyphic form and there was also the continuous – the tension was maintained across the whole surface with a series of small compartments, rather compartmentalized motifs.

LEE KRASNER: In the so-called Hieroglyphics....

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, in the hieroglyphics in which you had, you know, a sense of vertical, horizontal segments operating across the surface. Now that takes you through the later 40s, doesn't it? '47? '48?

LEE KRASNER: No, that break's in '49 – about '49 the last of those takes place and again there is what I call a break in the imagery of my work. One of the things I find rather interesting is a good many of the artists painting today, my contemporaries, seemingly came from one-image, and are with that one image as if it sprung, as Zeus had sprung from the shoulder of – well, I haven't got my mythology quite clearly enough – very unlike my own experience. I find myself working for a stretch of time somewhere between four and five years on something and a break will occur imagery and I have to go with it, so in that sense I find it a little off-beat compared to a great many of my contemporaries.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's the period when you began to feel this break coming in '49? You were with Betty Parsons at that time?

LEE KRASNER: No, I had no New York gallery at the time the break came. I continued work, more paintings accumulated and then Betty Parsons came out, saw the work and offered me a show, so I believe I had my first show, solo show with Betty Parsons in '50, '51, I'd have to check that to find out.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the character of this new work?

LEE KRASNER: It was in direct antithesis to this so-called image painting, in scale it went up to about that size, pigment applied thinly as against the so-called all-over continuum, was the title of one of those little paintings, this other form emerged, physically it was, the paint was applied very thinly and it went into, in the roughest and crudest sense, a vertical and horizontal distribution and that was the show I had at Betty Parsons. Also the expansion took place in the sides of the canvas as sell, because I believe I had one canvas, the largest one in that show, which was about, somewhere between 12 and 15 feet, and that, in a rough and crude manner, I'd say, was a vertical and horizontal distribution.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you had a more techtonic character than….?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I don't know how any one else would describe it. I'm trying in some way to make it clear to you that here was this great break at that time and since then there's been many other transitions in my work and I expect that as long as I continue painting – by now I accept that this is the way it moves for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, how did it move after that? Were there some important developments that followed Betty's show? There was a show I see at Harry Witfield's gallery in '45 but that was earlier of course, yes that goes back to an earlier period.

LEE KRASNER: And that was the show that Howard Putzel put on, which he called a challenge to the critic. Wanting the critic to identify what was beginning to happen to the so-called painting here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We're getting into the 50s now. By '49 you were involved in a man and wife show at Sydney Janis?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, I think the title of that show is rather gimmicky, but for some reason Mr. Janis wanted to put on a show of husbands and wives that painted. And as a matter of fact, he had a curious accumulation there. I don't know whatever motive there was. It was sort of a catchy thing, I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was your work still on this vertical….

LEE KRASNER: I can't remember which canvases I exhibited at that time. I really couldn't say. No, that would have been – what year is this Janis show?

DOROTHY SECKLER: '49.

LEE KRASNER: '49, that was -

DOROTHY SECKLER: ….when the break came….

LEE KRASNER: Yes, but I may very well have had one of these so-called small image paintings in it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, so another show comes along in '56 at Poindexter and by that time you were probably….

LEE KRASNER: Well, as I remember the show at Poindexter, she called it the early or late 30s, something about the 30s and I would have had a group of things. I think I have a catalogue of that show – here it is. The 30's is what the Poindexter show is called. You see? We have young Gorky and de Kooning looking very young at this point, was that de Kooning? Yes, he has a self-portrait, I don't know what I have in that show. Nice to go through these things sometimes to refresh one's memory of what was taking place such a short time ago in New York City in the New York art world. Oh dear, can't find it – here it is, well, no. This is even earlier and there's Pollock.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, now you're quite a different….

LEE KRASNER: Well, that precedes the image work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It precedes it?

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh I see, because it was the throw-back to the 30s, I suppose.

LEE KRASNER: Yes, but now it's a matter of whether it's the early 30s or the late 30s and this is obviously the mid-30s. It's given a date there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: '38.

LEE KRASNER: '38, the late 30s!

DOROTHY SECKLER: So here you were still thinking of the things outside yourself and you abstracted perhaps from still lifes or something of the kind.

LEE KRASNER: Precisely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it's interesting to see it.

LEE KRASNER: And that in contrast, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This phase of Jackson Pollock's work, this one called *Birth*, 1937, always seems to me to have a very strong Surrealistic overtone but perhaps I'm reading something in there.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I would say so. I would say it has strong Surrealistic overtones.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He seems to have been one of the first artists to have had a conviction of the importance of imagery arriving from the unconscious and….

LEE KRASNER: I think in some interview that he does – he answers that question for himself, stating that the Surrealists had a strong influence on him, the Surrealists that same over from Paris, not in regard to their work, but in regard to the content of where it came from from the unconscious.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you involved yourself at that time with interest in psychology and Freud and Jung and so on?

LEE KRASNER: Not then, later I became interested, not at that particular point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When would you say? In the later 50s?

LEE KRASNER: No, in the 40s.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In the 40s?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, by the time I'd moved out here, which was '45, I was aware of it and getting very much interested in the subject.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And at this point, had you had – you mentioned before your contact with de Kooning and I assume that in New York you maintained your ties with Gorky and de Kooning.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes. There weren't that many people that painted so that one saw one another even if it was not more than walking over to the Jumble shop and sitting down and having some beer and talking, you saw them in that manner.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The after you came out here, were you rather isolated for some years?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, but definitely. The only people we saw was whoever came out to visit with us for quite a little stretch before this place began evolving as a colony, an art colony.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And during those years – well, let's see, we've gotten through the Betty Parsons….

LEE KRASNER: Well, now Betty Parsons is '50 or '51, you see, this precedes it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The catalogue we're looking at now, yea, but to come back to the shows in terms of the late 50s there was the Whitney Annual exhibition in '56, '57, in which you were represented and what kind of work?

LEE KRASNER: I think in the Whitney, if I'm not mistaken, I had a collage there because I did have a collage show with Eleanor Ward of Stable Gallery and that was about three years work, all collage, that's it. I didn't do collage after that, but in terms of three years that terminated with an exhibition at the Stable Gallery, so I believe the Whitney then had one of the collages in the show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that doesn't seem to be listed here, the Stable Gallery, perhaps....?

LEE KRASNER: This is not complete. If you remember I did say it was a rough draft.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well then, the Stable show of collages must have been pretty important.

LEE KRASNER: That was in '55, that show, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the collages, were they collages of material that kept any of their character such as found material or were they completely – well, I mean, were they various kinds of surfaces and colors without reference to their being newspapers or cut outs?

LEE KRASNER: Right, well what I used was a lot of my own work which I destroyed and reworked into existing things. This is one of the larger collages that was in there. I had a series of these large ones, spacious as this is, and then I had small ones which were very dense, as the early image, so again, even within the collage there's a sharp break. They weren't uniform and I have quite a few in the studio which I could show you when we walk out there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is a very monumental one. Very large forms poised against stripings or vertical breaks and they're floating forms, they're very different from the oval type, swinging form of your late work. They're more angular. They remind me of forms one might see in primitive art some times, very strong, assertive forms. I'm only saying this to remind myself a little bit of what we are looking at because we could say we're looking at this painting and it doesn't help us very much on the tape – so that then, later on, this broke and you did collages with small forms too?

LEE KRASNER: Very dense and very small so that even within the collage there's a complete break of work. I have some of those in the studio.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then this brings us up into the period of around 1960 when you had a work show in Basel, in the Galerie Beyeler. It's called Panorama and what – was it a collage?

LEE KRASNER: I can't remember absolutely accurately as there was more than one thing shown there. One of them was a collage about his size and of this attitude, more or less, and then I believe there were other things there. I would have to get the catalogue down for that and find what the others were. But then there's by show at Martha Jackson's in '58 – '57 or '58, I believe.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That isn't in here either.

LEE KRASNER: It's not complete.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was an important show, I remember that one, and there you had broken into the more curvilinear, big, swinging, how would you....?

LEE KRASNER: And again, the pigment there very thinly applied, very directly applied with a minimum of change in it. I believe that would constitute the characteristic of that show and that was in '58, I believe.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The canvases were very large?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, that was another thing, the expansion of scale of the canvas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: More than in this one, of a similar unit appearing and dissolving and becoming interwoven with others and then extending to the frame as it contrasted with this one where each motif has a separate, distant characteristic.

LEE KRASNER: Right, right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is there anything that you recall that propelled you in this direction at this time? This was 1958?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, this show was '58.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now this was following the death of your husband?

LEE KRASNER: That's right. Jackson died in '56 so the question came up whether one would continue painting at all and I guess this was my answer.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you had been working in that way for sometime?

LEE KRASNER: Well, he died in '56, the show took place in '58.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the painting must have been an important way for you to pick up again….

LEE KRASNER: The question of whether one continues or whether I could continue was one I had to deal with and I assume this was my answer.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The particular form it took of the – one might say, in a sense, in contrast to the more aggressive shapes of this kind of work, seemed perhaps more fluid, more….

LEE KRASNER: More lyric, I suppose.

DOROTHY SECKLER: More lyric, too.

LEE KRASNER: Well, I do find that I swing from the lyric, to the dramatic and it doesn't – you know, I have no way of knowing which phase is going to take over.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I found that that was such an interesting shift there and I thought that anything you could recall about it would be important to get on the record. Then, of course, your life has changed a good bit out here in rebuilding your home and carrying on alone and you've had many new responsibilities in connection with your husband's work.

LEE KRASNER: Oh yes, indeed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which has been an interruption and a demand, an important task nevertheless. Is there anything you'd like to say here about traveling abroad or any important experiences may have affected you as an artist?

LEE KRASNER: By way of traveling abroad? Well, no, I don't think I could say anything that would shed any particular light. One is hard put to know what experience affects one, and how. I had never been abroad until '56, and I was in Europe at the time Jackson was killed in the automobile accident. I would have nothing to add in terms of knowing what part of my experiences were affected by one or two trips abroad.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well one of the reasons it perhaps occurred to me is you had said, of course when you say Pollock's work, it sort of freed you from your ties to Europe which had been very strong up until that time….

LEE KRASNER: Via Hofmann –

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then of course you had pursued this vein of work which was apparently cut off, at least consciously, from European sources and I wondered if being confronted again with Europe, you had….I would rather think you must have felt perhaps confirmed in being pleased at having won….of course, the whole group of American artists had won their independence from Europe but perhaps it was with other things.

LEE KRASNER: No, but at that point one knew that, so well, before one went over there that nothing – you didn't have to really go so that what I was looking for there would be the painting of the past for stimuli.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And here another thing occurs to me, you've mentioned before whereas many of the artists had strong ties, for instance, to the Eighth Street Club at the time when the movement of Abstract Expressionism was being launched and you and Jackson Pollock had had no contact practically with The Club and still you had come into your own focus on an American independent expression without the need of this discussion or the stimulation it provided for the people.

LEE KRASNER: I would say that's so, I really don't believe – I'm rather apprehensive about this term, "American painting." I think a good deal of what is happening at the moment, which in my opinion, is rather sad. I speak of the moment as now, when the art scene in New York is doing a little too much waving of American paintings. I think painting always remains an individual act, independent of national boundaries and other painters wherever they may be respond to this, so to characterize it by calling in American, which I resisted and expressed more than one time. I think you can't package it that way. The next painter may come out of Timbuktoo and the whole point is to stay receptive and see it and respond to it rather than call it by a national definition. Nevertheless, it is true that in a certain given moment, the life and vitality occur here in New York, and to capitalize on such a phrase, I think is dangerous.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I assume what we meant by that American artists, instead of giving themselves as kind of provincial country cousins, now felt that they were in a position to carry the ball as much as anyone or to….

LEE KRASNER: They were carrying the ball.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, they had no longer the feeling that they'd have to wait and see what is being done anywhere else. We now have our own idea, so it's a kind of independence whether or not it's American and I'm inclined to do so actually.

LEE KRASNER: No, I wanted to clarify it, you know, because one can then beat the drum and beat it out of existence. What's the point? One is still interested in painting wherever it may occur. One must, at all times, try to be in a state of mind that's receptive and this I think, is the important thing, otherwise it will bypass you and you won't know it happened.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This brings us up to the possibility of talking about recent events, things that have happened since the Martha Jackson show, and bringing us up to date and I would like to just use the last five or six minutes we have here for you to conclude it, in anyway you'd like to. What seems to be the important thing that you're headed for tomorrow, perhaps, is always the last thing, it's never looking back, looking ahead.

LEE KRASNER: What one is headed for and I wouldn't know what I'm headed for. I am at the moment engaged in assembling work from this so-called little image '46 to what I'm about today for a show at White Chapel, which would be the first so-called museum show that I have been asked to participate in. I find what has happened as I've, well, I have to deal with all the things we've been talking about, some interesting questions come up – why does my image keep changing as against so many of my contemporaries who seem fixed on an image? I don't know. I'm in no position to answer that question. I can merely observe it and say this is interesting phenomena. So a great deal of my time is going toward assembling. I continue to work on a much smaller scale now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: On a smaller scale?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, well for one thing, this broken right hand which was done a year ago last summer, made me start painting with the left hand, another experience I had to deal with which I'd never had before, and it takes physical energy to do an 18-foot canvas. It takes more than physical energy but it also takes physical energy so that I find my scale reduced for the moment, so I'm examining or looking over what has happened. I don' know what I am about to do.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How would you say that your work has changed in terms of, well, recognizable, let's say, stylistic approaches since the Martha Jackson show?

LEE KRASNER: Well, that was followed by two shows at the Howard Wise Gallery which was, I believe '61 and '63 and I find again, you know, another change taking place, but I do feel that is the job for the observer to state what is taking place. I simply have to continue with whatever – it's very difficult for me to say oh, it's changed again, but then I have to stay with that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The only way that I think you might get at it is in terms of what things were exciting to you at that time and new concepts that you may have, and you suddenly feel that now everything has to be very open, or everything has to be very precise or some such thing seems to float into these sequences as a must for one period of work or another. So apparently, you don't have any such road markers?

LEE KRASNER: No, I don't. I could force the issue and get a lot of periphery outside of the real issue, the real issue I can't touch, I simply go with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How do you feel that you relate to your, well, you know, the generation you were shown with back in that show of the art of the 30s, and your contemporaries who have now of course, reached their years of maturity? Would you say that your outlook is a very different one? You people just in general I suppose, very often tend to talk about the Abstract Expressionist as if they represented a kind of monolithic outlook and position which is very false.

LEE KRASNER: I believe it is, it's a very loose term.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And within it I find a great deal of variation in different positions and I wonder what you feel about the position of your contemporaries or if you'd like to say anything about – you just touched on the things that are happening in American art today, I assume you include Pop art, and anything you feel about these changes.

LEE KRASNER: I observe these changes. The so-called Pop art again, is as loose a term as "Abstract Expressionism." I wouldn't know what is today included in Pop art and what is not Pop art. I wouldn't know what to say on it in that sense. I know that they have their gallery situation very well fixed, they seem to be very preoccupied with getting there fast. In other words, the generation I came from, I spoke about the French and American painting show at the MacMillin Gallery. You asked what the response was and I said at that point and that was when? – '42 and that isn't a hundred years ago, you know, there was practically no response because there was so little so-called abstract work being shown. Now the Pop artists, before one even knows the name of

the artists, let alone whether they're Pop or not, they're publicized all over the place and they're going at a tempo which is to be reevaluated.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is to happen to some extent because of the later successes of your generation in bringing art to a large....

LEE KRASNER: Possibly that's the reason for it.

[END OF SESSION ONE]

[SESSION TWO
DECEMBER 14, 1967]

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Lee Krasner in New York on December 14, 1967. This is continuing a tape which we had begun – a series of interviews, I should say, which we had begun in Springs, Longs Island in....Was it 1965?

LEE KRASNER: I'm a little hazy about that, but it was a few years ago.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And, at that time, we had covered the exterior events of your career a good bit. We had, however, cut off at a point where you were involved in preparing for an important exhibition of your work that was coming up shortly in London at the Whitechapel Gallery.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I'm glad to have a chance to come back and do this now when we have a very fine catalogue that was put out by the Whitechapel Gallery in London for the show that was in September and October 1965. I thought it might be helpful for us to look through the sequence of pictures in chronological order and perhaps relate to them, since it seemed to me that in our first tape we neglected this aspect of your development or at least didn't go as deeply into things as I should like to. There is a self-portrait that was done in 1930 and another one done in 1933 when you were a student at the Academy.

LEE KRASNER: That's right. One in the Academy and one, I believe, just after I left the Academy.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. So I see what people mean, of course, when they talk about Lee Krasner – the reputation as being a very beautiful young lady and your technique. There is....what would you say? It's very capable. It doesn't seem exactly academic to me, but it's a very capable transcription of reality, I would say.

LEE KRASNER: If I might just state it in one sentence: I had a difficult time at the Academy. I was doing my best to make it like everybody else's, but it just wouldn't come through quite that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I would say there's a certain look of stubbornness and a bit of defiance in the expression that might convey that in this portrait of 1933. At least you're looking out at the audience with a kind of questioning eye. In the next one which is 1946, 13 years later, of course, this is a very crucial period in your life.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the first one here is a painting called *Untitled*. This was one year after your marriage and a time when I know what the whole explosion of new ideas, new possibilities in painting was very important. I remember in the tape you had spoken of this sense of feeling it was no longer necessary to relate to French limitations and a kind of liberating sense at the time. At this point here is a painting in which there is a sense of no containment within the frame. There is, of course, an underlying structure; but there's no sense of relating specifically to the frame, as being hedged in by a frame in any case – the limitless space that was going to be important in your work as in your husband's work in the next few years. You were, however, not at this point using the same kind of technique at all. This was executed with a brush, was it?

LEE KRASNER: The date on that, please?

DOROTHY SECKLER: 1946.

LEE KRASNER: In 1946 definitely working with a brush. I was definitely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. How would you have proceeded in making this kind of a painting, Lee? Were you working on an easel? Were you setting down a series of calligraphic strokes and then letting that suggest a second series and so on?

LEE KRASNER: More or less, in 1946 I would have been doing just that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have toned the canvas first with the color? Or would you have started on raw canvas?

LEE KRASNER: I rarely toned the canvas. Mostly I started on a raw canvas with my first markings and let it evolve.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you working with raw colors? Were you working with oil colors?

LEE KRASNER: Oil. I was then and still am. I like the material.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And was it impasto? Did you let things dribble and run a good bit? Or was it....?

LEE KRASNER: I didn't let them dribble and run. I believe at that point I was working in a more controlled way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It was a feeling of great density and of there being many layers so that you get this shimmering of light moving through one layer after another – or stroke.

LEE KRASNER: Which meant I kept working and reworking and reworking till I got what I felt I wanted to leave it at.

DOROTHY SECKLER: When you think of the date, that was a very daring painting certainly in 1946. Were your friends at that time shocked by your adopting this way of working?

LEE KRASNER: No. They weren't shocked, because remember in 1946 I'm married to Pollock and much of the focus and attention is directed to what's happening with Pollock. But there was interest. There was response. It was a tiny art world at that point so that one had just about enough response to continue.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In the comments that Pollock made about what he was doing around this time, I know that he has emphasized a good bit of reliance on the unconscious, on work that's gone from interior states, and so on. And I assume that this must have been something that was taken for granted in your own work as well? I mean, were you involved to some extent in Jungian psychology or Freudian psychology?

LEE KRASNER: I was interested in the subject in general, yes. I think the thing you're talking about here – we may have made reference to it in the earlier tape – is for myself. My own experience is as a Hofmann student which I always felt was giving one Cubism, then Pollock where we have another phenomenon taking place. And then I spoke of a kind of three-year period of just painting and nothing happening before the first of my little images begin emerging.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That three-year period was after this?

LEE KRASNER: The three-year period? Let me look at the painting you're talking about. Oh, yes. I have that canvas. It's in my house. No, I say this already happened after I'd known Pollock. Remember I had known Pollock very intimately and closely long before we were married, so that marriage date doesn't help very much. There were two or three years previous to that, and it was in this interim where I went through my own change, so to speak. Which means that, instead of working with an object in front of me, be it a still life of a landscape or a model or whatnot, and abstracting it – which is the process I had been working in via Hofmann, which is Cubism – I met Pollock who started with a bland canvas. And it took me some three years to digest this point. So, by the time I'm at this, I was working from that same source. That is to say , I'd confronted myself with a black canvas and started to make something happen on it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And yet you kept your own medium and your own way of painting?

LEE KRASNER: But, of course. But, of course. There's no reason why I wouldn't.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Can you remember at all what would have been your way of applying any kind of standards of judgment as to when you had finished in this kind of a painting?

LEE KRASNER: No more than I have to deal with right now in my studio next door – when to drop the brush and say finished. No difference.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a purely intuitive development?

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Have you any recollections of how long you would struggle to bring this....?

LEE KRASNER: Well, they would not all occur in the same time, and they still don't all occur in the same sort of

time sequence. One might come through more easily; others just wouldn't. And some obstinacy would hold me there until I do declare. In this instance, it does get heavily pigmented because it didn't some through. Let me state it in reverse. I would prefer to get it through instantly. It isn't necessarily so. Nor do I know which of the two is better as a final painting. My own preference would be to have it….

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you be working on several at the same time?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. Always. Because the medium is slow drying, as you know of oil. And I might want to go into a stage where I wanted that to be not totally dry but dry enough to proceed with. Consequently, I'd have something else going at the same time. And I still work that way, always keeping several canvases going at once.

DOROTHY SECKLER: At this point then there was no sense of relating to a….of the painting even responding to anything outside of yourself in any way?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. Well, this was the major transition that took place. Instead of starting off on a fixed position, I went through the process of starting with a blank canvas.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Even in that sequence, would you ever notice, for instance, whether or not you might find yourself reflecting at different seasons of the year a different kind of coloration, however unconsciously, I mean?

LEE KRASNER: I haven't noticed it, but it's fascinating now that you bring it up. I'd have to make notations. No, I haven't observed it that closely. I can only say that, for instance, this canvas here which was in the 1960 or 1962 show at Howard Wise – I can't remember – the entire show was reduced to this umber and white. That was done from a very practical point of view because I had insomnia that year. I came into New York and wasn't able to sleep, etc., I decided to hell with that. I rearranged my hours so that simply when I got through with my day I came in and worked nights rather than days in New York. So, in a practical sense, I knocked color out as I was working in artificial light. And that entire show reflects….You see, that entire show….

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That's right.

LEE KRASNER: So I couldn't speak of seasonal things. I have to talk of artificial light and working at night and so forth.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Right. We ought to, just for the record, put in what the time and the title of the umber….

LEE KRASNER: Well, the title of this painting is *The Eye Is the First Circle*, and it's dated 1960. And the dimensions are something like eight feet by eighteen feet.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And it's all in the browns and sepia.

LEE KRASNER: No, no, it's not sepia. That's burnt umber. And the entire show is all in burnt umber, but that's from a very practical point of view. I worked at night, and I don't like to deal with color in artificial light.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's a very interesting development. Then moving over to the page opposite, we have a painting of 1949 in this catalogue called *Stop and Go*, which has little compartments that are squares and then little triangular elements moving in and out of this kind of rectangular….It's, of course, a circular format. It's interesting.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Can you tell me anything about the evolution of that from the others? It seems like an unlikely series of developments.

LEE KRASNER: Well, it may seem so. But I include them in a body of work that I call my little image paintings. I simply move from the….How would you describe that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it almost seems pulverized in this shape.

LEE KRASNER: That one. Yes, it does – breaking down.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Everything is broken down.

LEE KRASNER: This becomes very concrete and moves into the rectangular.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Little bumps.

LEE KRASNER: Right. But there's a series that goes with this and both these. That's part of it, as is that, and they move between the two. But one always....At least I always do that. Whether you call it the lyric and the dramatic or the, you know, it seems to move either this way or that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So that these all related to vertical-horizontal compartments?

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Brush strokes in some cases that move through and along a sort of grid area, and here the grid has a little meander-like element within the grid, within the box.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then that continues into 1948, the black and white squares. And then there's one that looks almost like an Indian Navajo rug, a zigzagging pattern.

LEE KRASNER: Well, I think that's pretty much in the same format.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It brings back the triangle element that appeared in 1949.

LEE KRASNER: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: By the way, it's an irrelevancy; but someone suggested at some point that Jackson Pollock had been influenced to work on his paintings on the floor by having seen Indians do sand paintings. Do you think that was true?

LEE KRASNER: I wouldn't know. Certainly I know that he did see the Indians doing sand paintings. You know, that's a fact. But I don't know why he chose to work on the floor. All I can say is that he did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you never heard him say anything about sand paintings as being....?

LEE KRASNER: No. No. He would never have said, "That's why I am working on the floor, because I saw the Indians' sand painting." But I've heard him say that he did see the Indians' sand painting. I think by now that's been established. I wouldn't know why he worked on the floor, but obviously that was the way he worked. And that's that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And, of course, you never did in any case.

LEE KRASNER: No, I didn't work on the floor.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now here in 1949, you're introducing a curvilinear element into this series of grid-like shapes. And they are....

LEE KRASNER: A kind of a hieroglyphic which I think those little early squares are a preliminary to.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now the ideas of a hieroglyphic. Was this beginning at any point to be related to a kind of idea about myth as a content of painting? This is something that occupied Gottlieb and Barney Newman and so on. Was this anything that you were concerned with?

LEE KRASNER: No, not at all. Not as a theory; not in the slightest. It started by my finding I would do a lot of this in writing form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In what way?

LEE KRASNER: Well, just pick up a pen and write. Only I didn't know what I was writing, and it took this form. It may also have related to the fact that, when I was very young, I had to study Hebrew and I had to learn to write in Hebrew. Maybe it was a throwback from that. Which is, you know, for me indeed today a foreign language. I can neither read it today nor can I write. I lost track of it. But so that may have been a throwback, that, when you're sitting and talking on the phone and using your pen, one might have been, you know....But I have endless messages that go on indefinitely in a kind of hieroglyph of some sort which certainly isn't true Hebrew or any other language. And I can't say that consciously I can relate it to any specific thing. But suddenly it was there, so it shows up in a bit in the painting at that time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you been experimenting at all with automatic writing at that time?

LEE KRASNER: No. Absolutely not.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were not in analysis at this point? Or even later?

LEE KRASNER: No. We're talking now of what year?

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is 1949.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, 1949. No, no, not anywhere near analysis. I have not been in analysis.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, was Jackson' being in analysis at any point a factor which drew you into the ideas of a kind of automatism?

LEE KRASNER: No. I would say absolutely no. But I would say that Jackson's interest in Jungian – it turned out that he was in analysis and it was a Jungian analyst that he had worked with when I first met him – coincided with a great interest of mine in a kind of general sense but not specific. I was reading Jung on my own, but not from an analytic point of view. And much in it interested me. So we had that as a common denominator.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have been thinking in any of these forms of sort of….oh….you know, archetypes or mandates or anything of the sort?

LEE KRASNER: No, not at all. Because the one place I disagreed strongly with Jung was when he came to talking about painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really?

LEE KRASNER: I agreed with him enormously on every point until he touched painting. Then I couldn't disagree with him more.
DOROTHY SECKLER: In what way? I think that would be interesting.

LEE KRASNER: Well, where he uses patients' paintings for dream interpretation or analysis, I get very impatient with his whole attitude towards art. Mine was not, you know….

DOROTHY SECKLER: You have not found such image-making in your own work?

LEE KRASNER: Not consciously at all. Remember now I am outside of analysis at this point. And so, you know, this is happening on a different level.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It might be interesting to bring in here what we were talking about before when we didn't have the tape on, and I was noticing that in certain rather late paintings there was a suggestion of a kind of image that came through. And you pointed out that one might not see that in the large scale paintings and that very often, when you saw them reduced, there would be something that could possibly be an image.

LEE KRASNER: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you would prefer that that would not be pointed out to you by anyone while you were working on it.

LEE KRASNER: That's right. I rarely permit that process anyway – to have people look at work while I'm working.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But, if you had noticed it by yourself in the process of doing a painting, if you saw an image that became a face or something, you would tend to destroy it?

LEE KRASNER: That would depend entirely on how I felt about it. That is to say, there are times when I see the image and consciously hold it there. Other times, if I see and image projecting, I might very well destroy it. So I can't say honestly whether that's whim or mood or what.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would this be true – the fact that there would be certain ones that you would entertain or accept? Is that a matter of the period in which you were working? Or would that be true in almost any phase of your work?

LEE KRASNER: I think it's true in any phase of my work. I would say it's absolutely true right now. If we went into the studio next door, the paintings I'm working on right now where, let's say, an image occurs and I definitely hold the image. I don't know why in some instances I will be that insistent and in others where I would definitely obliterate the image.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Doesn't it make for a kind of psychological weighing of that particular area against others so that you….?

LEE KRASNER: I don't understand that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: If you have an image that appears, part of a face or part of a hand or something….

LEE KRASNER: Well, now wait. Let's understand what we mean when we say "image" to begin with. Image does not necessarily for me mean a hand or a face or related to the body. I think an awful lot of wish-wash occurs around this focal point of whether you're working from the figure or not.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I realize that.

LEE KRASNER: A square is an image too. Or a horizontal stripe is an image. So that when I say "image," I'm talking about image….

DOROTHY SECKLER: Figuration of some kind? No, that's even….

LEE KRASNER: No. Because we get down to, you know that nonsense that only a figure is an image. Well, this is tommyrot.

DOROTHY SECKLER: If I look at this painting here, for instance, I find many areas in which I can see eyes.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now were they intended to be eyes? I'm speaking now of the picture on the wall which we discussed before.

LEE KRASNER: Right. And as I indicated, the title of that painting is *The Eye is the First Circle*.

DOROTHY SECKER: Yes. So they were entertained as possibilities?

LEE KRASNER: But it was titled after the painting was finished, and then I saw those eyes, too. Consequently the line comes to me from the essay on circles from the opening line, "The eye is the first circle," which impressed me many, many years ago. And I'd read it and zingo! Because I saw the eyes after it was painted too; I didn't see it while I was painting it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It seems quite full of them.

LEE KRASNER: But it isn't as though that image was there while I was painting it. That's my point. Sure, when it was a finished painting, I too saw the eyes and consequently the title. But that's after the act.

DOROTHY SECKLER: If you had seen them in the middle of the painting, would you then have felt that you should destroy them?

LEE KRASNER: No. This is what I mean. In this instance, no. The tempo of the painting had taken over, and I didn't have much choice in it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The danger is that you will tend to focus too much on it as a specific thing, but, once you've overcome that danger, then it's possible to accept it because it's incorporated? Is that part of it?

LEE KRASNER: Well, it's a little more complicated than that. In referring to this canvas, the rhythm, tempo, or what-have-you is so insistent, I have to go along with it. Now that it's finished, I look at it and I see those eyes. But I have no desire to go back and remove them or do anything with it or about it. Now the question that, if I had seen what I was painting when I was painting it would I have done anything about it, is your question really?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

LEE KRASNER: I think yes I would; because, in the other cases where I do see the image while I'm painting it, I will damn well insist on leaving it alone if I can, if I can get the canvas through.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You'd leave it alone? You would not….?

LEE KRASNER: I would not necessarily…The only time I may be forced into doing it is if the canvas doesn't come through and I have to, you know, try to deal with a whole other image.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It would be to some extent then more a matter of disturbing the unity of a whole rhythm rather than an image becoming anything disquieting or you're saying, "Aha, that's come up out of my unconscious."

LEE KRASNER: Right. Exactly. Because I think that reality is, you know, that valid.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You, after all, are assuming that the material that comes up into the painting is basically

from the unconscious in any case?

LEE KRASNER: Right. Certainly it stems from that source. Now either one has enough confidence in it or one hasn't. Naturally you come in unconsciously as you're painting a painting. To the degree you can let it come through or not is what we're talking about.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Have you ever felt that the unconscious could be a trap to a certain extent where it could be running your fantasy over the same tracks too much or anything or that kind?

LEE KRASNER: I suppose anything can be a trap. We're dealing with painting, which is a very conscious situation – you know, in a conscious life, in a conscious world, and with conscious values to determine whether it's a good painting or not a good painting, removing the element of time as it isn't necessarily called at the moment. So that, in that case, anything could be a trap. Let me throw that back to what Hofmann said to Pollock on seeing his painting for the first time. I brought Hofmann to Pollock's studio, as I knew Hofmann, I had studied with him; and I thought he would certainly, you know, dig this. And this is the initial visit that he's confronted with Pollock's work. He said, "Ach! You work by heart, not from nature." And Pollock's answer: "I am nature."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, I remember.

LEE KRASNER: Now that, I think you know, sums up that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Well, one of the reasons that I am interested in exploring this is because so many painters today are working from a very opposite vantage point, quite consciously cutting themselves off from sources in their own unconscious and so on; and I am for that reason, interested in pinpointing as far as I can the way in which accepting the flow of impulses arising from the unconscious has been a valuable, rich and fascinating source certainly for artists of the preceding group. I mean that I'm going into this not because I'm suspicious about the unconscious but really because I think it hasn't been explored. I mean the assumption has been that, because one accepted unconscious imagery, there was, therefore, no play or consciousness and so on. The intellect....

LEE KRASNER: No. But whether one uses this as a source to take off from or not, there's always a conscious part of the painter who is making the decision of when to stop and what color to pick up, etc.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It would be interesting if you could remember, in the case of any of the paintings we're looking at here, points at which having initiated a rhythm, having begun with a few elements; there would then be the pause or the consideration or, you know, thinking about it or looking at it and so on.

LEE KRASNER: I think that process is there constantly. When one starts using the unconscious as a source to take off, it doesn't mean that it's an unconscious painting because the consciousness is there. The artist is there. You're aware. The point at which you stop or pick up or make your next move is a conscious move. And to speak of your painters today who rebel against this as a source – well, it's like saying I will only accept one part of myself. To hell with dreams; that's not part of me; that's not real. Well, it's absurd, you know, to conceive the total as self-fragmented. I just don't get it. It's of no interest to me. To me, it's backtracking. It's like where I came in a long time ago if we can't pursue a search further through this door that's been opened. And I'm not interested in a prior theory when I paint my picture, because I think you get an awful lot of dead painting, not interesting, dead, sterile. Well, that's not very exciting, for heaven's sakes. One wants to discover.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Exactly.

LEE KRASNER: And, if you say I cut off the dream part of me, well, that's like dealing with a part of yourself. And I think it's more exciting to pursue a total person, a total experience if you can reach it. So I say, you've got to let all parts of you work, not one part.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you say that in this process of setting up a series of, let's say, swing brush strokes, rhythms, movements, and so on – is there a change in the amount of conscious control as the picture progresses? Picasso said once something about, when he begins a picture, it always seems as if there's someone else working with him. And then at the end he is more conscious of being on his own. Is that to any extent true?

LEE KRASNER: Of course, it's true to a great extent. I think any painter knows this so that your take-off point is your take-off point, you know. But the minute you begin to say it can't do this and it's got to do that and it can't do the other, well, it's pretty boring stuff. And you're certainly not allowing for discovery of any kind. You're cutting that source quickly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were you ever aware as you work of saying certain things that it must be or must not be? For instance, as Kandinsky was aware, let's say, in saying, "but the corners have to be heavy" or something like that? Is there anything that would occur to you in painting such as – well, but it must go beyond the frame or

there has to be open space? It there anything like that?

LEE KRASNER: No. But I think that every once in a while one gets conjured up into – well, color excites me now, or I want to use the minimum of pigment or I want to use the maximum of….You know, some such thing is always present if you aren't rigid with some fixed idea before you go into your studio of what a painting should be. Because it seems to take all the joy out of living.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Lee, was there ever a point at which you and Jackson were pursuing very opposite tendencies – where you were really on some track that was very different and which was very strongly opposing?

LEE KRASNER: I don't know whether it would have been in opposition in that sense because remember the admiration I had for Pollock as a painter and it wouldn't have taken that sort of form. I could only go in the direction I could go. And certainly he could only go in the direction he went. So it wouldn't be a taking of a position.

DOROTHY SECKLER: No. I didn't mean of taking an intellectual position. I just thought possibly there might have been a point at which you were very different.

LEE KRASNER: I think we certainly worked differently. That's for sure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. The touch in the later work is very different.

LEE KRASNER: It couldn't be any other way. Two individuals, even if they are married, are still two individuals.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well now, I notice that in 1949 you were back again to a very pulverized type, all-over, very finely granulated.

LEE KRASNER: But still within what I call my little image painting. You see, within the little image it breaks into various….where they are free and open or close-knit, tight. So that this seems a natural process for me even within a certain period of work, and I think possibly will go on as long as I continue to live and paint.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What were they like in color at this point – 1949?

LEE KRASNER: Subdued in color compared to, let's say, a great many things that happened much later on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's one called *City* in 1953.

LEE KRASNER: That's a collage.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Very strong sort of forms that are like….not stripes but, oh, almost like fronds. (I don't want to put in an object there.) Would these have been more highly colored?

LEE KRASNER: All that I'd say is that the whole collage period is more colored than my little images which precede it. But still the period that follows is still more colorful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: After the collage?

LEE KRASNER: After the collage, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is quite a change certainly. Of course, I can understand it came out of probably the same logic. Can you remember what happened between 1949 and 1953? What kind of things were affecting you? What you were seeing perhaps around you in, you know, what other people, what your friends were doing?

LEE KRASNER: Well, of course, one saw what Pollock was doing, what all one's friends were doing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you remember what they were doing? I mean particularly?

LEE KRASNER: No. Nothing I can put my finger on. No. And, as I said, formerly on tape how I started collaging – it was from dissatisfaction with my work and starting to tear up some drawings I did and throwing them on the floor and then glancing at the floor and seeing that something was beginning to happen. And that led to the whole collage period over several years which terminated – and I was too preoccupied with that to know what was happening. Of course, one knew what was happening around, but you become absorbed in your own process or what you're involved with. And I can't point particularly to any incident that would be….

DOROTHY SECKLER: Your explanation is much more revealing. You actually had destroyed what? Paintings or….

LEE KRASNER: No. No. Someone had asked for a drawing for an exhibition or something. And I started to do a

series of drawings. I had them pinned up all over the studio and, you know, probably sent in the drawings to the exhibition that had been requested. And at one point I looked at these and was highly dissatisfied with them and just started to take them off the wall and rip them up – and threw them on the floor as I was doing this. And then my eyes fell on them, and I became very excited about what was beginning to happen there. Well, then I started going through a lot of work that dissatisfied me in the same process. But now it was going into collage so that I was tearing a certain way and cutting a certain way, and it was going towards something – destroying in order to recreate.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kinds of materials? Did you continue to work sort of with things that were drawn and then tear them?

LEE KRASNER: I started with drawings; but then I went into canvases, and cut canvases, and reglued, and painted on, and that led into a whole new process of work which apparently was very essential to me at the time – very necessary for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's fascinating about cutting the canvases and then applying them into other canvases. It must have produced some very interesting and certainly very large and expansive shapes. Now is 1951 and 1954, you have….

LEE KRASNER: That's a drawing.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's done with a brush. A very interesting drawing – big, strong, circular movements, sweeping.

LEE KRASNER: Much of which occurs later in a great many paintings.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's very nice. And here you have painted paper on canvas board.

LEE KRASNER: A collage again.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which again has some sweeping elements and a kind of all-over structure of things, almost compartments but not really breaking through. Now this is black and white, another one in 1954. Now you begin to get some areas in which there are different kinds of textures in sort of swatches of different shapes in this one.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then on the *Blue Spot* in 1954 which is very lyrical. And this is oil and paper on pressed wood as the foundation. Now here you almost have a space which, for the first time, almost goes back. I mean there are layers; there's a greater depth of space than we've had previously. Is there anything you like to say about that – what that meant to you?

LEE KRASNER: I don't know. Those are much larger collages.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It's 48 x 40 in this case.

LEE KRASNER: And again I'm using earlier paintings of mine for collaging on.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This has almost a feeling of a forest, but I assume you were not thinking particularly about nature shapes at all?

LEE KRASNER: No. Only insofar as they exist and because I have an awareness of them and I love them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then *Milkweed*. There's actually a nature name on this one, 1955. It's a very lovely one. And these must have been more colorful?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, they are.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see in this whole area we're now getting into strong contrast probably in color as well as dark and light. And the ones that follow called *Blue Level* of 1955 and *Desert Moon* of 1955, very nice spatial sense.

LEE KRASNER: By then, I'm having fun.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. You feel very free and easy.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. Opened up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And then in 1955 is *Bird Talk* which is very active and also very lyrical.

LEE KRASNER: It's quite intense in color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of color would that have been?

LEE KRASNER: Kind of ochre and magenta and black and, oh, I can't remember; I'll have to get it. But it's quite intense. I should really bring a few with me so I could see them.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this last period, when you were doing these things in much more intense color, going back to, let's say, 1953 and 1954 – wasn't this a period in which Jackson Pollock was working in black and white on unsized canvas?

LEE KRASNER: That was his – oh, dear, dates are getting complicated. That was his 1951 show, black and white.

DOROTHY SECKER: Oh, I see. It's a little earlier.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He had not been painting very much in 1955 – he had stopped?

LEE KRASNER: 1955? That's the year before he died. Not painting as much as he painted at other periods.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. If he did any painting at all at that time, what kind of thing was he working on?

LEE KRASNER: I can't jump that way. I have to get hold of his catalogues and try to set the dates.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. What was his reaction to your doing these collages and colorful paintings?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, he was very excited about them. He thought I had really opened up a great deal. He spoke enthusiastically about them.

DOROTHY SECKER: In some of the black and white paintings of that time, I remember there was an interesting thing about the positive and negative space.

LEE KRASNER: But you must remember that he painted *Blue Poles* in 1953.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. So that he was getting into a more colorful area.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. But he was painting, you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. He did some marvelous ones.

LEE KRASNER: He was so prolific that, even if the work slowed down a bit, he was still painting a hell of a lot more than a great many contemporaries were turning out at the time. But, by his own standard, he was painting less than at former periods.

DOROTHY SECKER: Yes. *Blue Poles* must have been a climactic one and a marvelously liberated one, it seems to me. Do you remember at that time what you were thinking about, what you were talking about?

LEE KRASNER: No. No. Not just like that. I couldn't answer it just….you know.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that concept of space which was broken across, although it kept the skeins and it kept the flow, but at a certain point attached them to verticals in this kind of falling almost rhythm. That must have been a very striking change.

LEE KRASNER: Not really. We have an awful lot of work of his that dates back much earlier where that pattern….

DOROTHY SECKLER: I remember a beautiful small one that I saw at Janis' in black and white – I think the word "moon" was in its title – with that same kind of beautiful….

LEE KRASNER: I know. *Blue Poles*, in that sense, is not exactly away from things one has seen in very small scale of his that date back 20 years before.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So that was simply a venture in a way in a larger, more monumental scale?

LEE KRASNER: Larger scale and more monumental, but not necessarily a totally new statement being made by him.

DOROTHY SECKER: You were not at that time tempted to paint on that large scale?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, heavens, no! No. No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is 1955. We also have *Burning Candles*.

LEE KRASNER: Although, in my Betty Parsons' show in 1951 I had a fairly large canvas in that exhibition, not quite this size but not a small canvas at all. I must unroll it one day and have a look at it. It's been rolled since it was dismantled.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is that in here?

LEE KRASNER: No. No. No, I have nothing of that period here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what kind of painting was it?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, well, it was a vertical-horizontal measurement of space in soft color.

DOROTHY SECKER: All painted; no collage?

LEE KRASNER: No collage; all painted. It still exists. I don't know the shape of it. I'll have to unroll it and have a look at it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In these shows, what kind of reception did you get from friends, artists, the public, critics? Did any of it mean anything to you?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. From a few friends, people who liked my work, it meant something. And response? In what sense does one measure response?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I don't know. I just thought perhaps some of it would stand out in your memory as having been interesting.

LEE KRASNER: No. A few people around liked the work and were very enthusiastic about it. Period.

DOROTHY SECKER: Jackson had been at Betty Parsons' too at that time?

LEE KRASNER: That's right. What time are we speaking of?

DOROTHY SECKLER: 1954. You just mentioned 1951, that show.

LEE KRASNER: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But you did not always show at the same galleries later?

LEE KRASNER: No. Just Betty Parsons.' And Jackson then went to the Janis Gallery. My next gallery was Martha Jackson in 1958 after Jackson died. So, Sorry, my next gallery was 1955, a collage show at the Stable Gallery while Jackson was alive.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

LEE KRASNER: So, we were not at the same gallery at all except for Betty Parsons.

DOROTHY SECKER: Well, I had just mentioned the *Burning Candles* in 1955 – oil, paper, canvas on linen, 58 x 39. Very interesting broken rhythm.

LEE KRASNER: Well, it's thrown back once more to my….

DOROTHY SECKLER: To the smaller…..

LEE KRASNER: That's right. I started moving both ways simultaneously.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And then in *Color Totem* in 1955, oil and paper on duck cotton, which is in the collection of Betty Parsons, a kind of more rolling, open….

LEE KRASNER: And, again, that's quite intense in color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is it? What colors are they? Orange, reds, yellows? Is that the background area that looks whitish, is that raw canvas? Or what would that be?

LEE KRASNER: I think it's pigmented canvas, but I haven't seen it for quite some time. I think it's pigmented.

DOROTHY SECKER: And then there's *Broken Graves*, 1955. Now in 1956….

LEE KRASNER: Something else happened.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Very different. Very, very different.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: 58 x 34 is a very large-size canvas, oil on duck cotton. This is not collage, and it certainly seems to have a very definite – to me – figurative image.

LEE KRASNER: Which are you referring to?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Here, the top one. Of course, I could also be talking about the one below.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKER: Would you want to say anything about how you came to that from the last one we were talking about?

LEE KRASNER: No, but that is a process….You know you trace my work from the very beginning. I work up to a certain point, then zingo!, something else happens. And this was again a turning point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was this before Jackson's death?

LEE KRASNER: This one was while he was alive. He saw this. This was painted before I left for Paris that summer he died. And he saw that and spoke to me about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What did he think about it? Was he interested in it?

LEE KRASNER: Yes, he was interested. I called him up and said, "Now look what's happened!" And he said, "Well, what about it? Whey don't you just continue. Never mind that the work's broken or changed. Just continue." Because I was again…. Every time this would happen I'd be thrown into a total state of….I don't know what. It's not easy to take breaks like that. Just as you get yourself geared to whatever it is and zingo!

DOROTHY SECKER: You knew already at this point that you were gong to London, going abroad?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. I was still working. I was going to work up until the time and zingo! This came out. And in great alarm I called Jackson up to say, "Now look what's happening with the painting." He just said, "Very nice. Continue. Nothing to be upset about. Just let it happen."

DOROTHY SECKLER: Was there a sort of feeling on the part of artists that you were close to at that time that to return to any kind of figuration was a betrayal in some way?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes. There was an awful lot of claptrap about that nonsense. I've heard it all my life. At least for 20 years, I've heard it: too much like nature, not enough like nature. It's still being thrown around as though….I don't know what they're talking about in effect. I honestly don't.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Lee, in this case, here is something that seems to be a figure with definite feet formation at the bottom and a kink of head.

LEE KRASNER: Are you talking about *Prophecy*?

DOROTHY SECKLER: *Prophecy*, yes.

LEE KRASNER: That one terrified me when it happened. I had to learn to live with it and accept it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How did it happen?

LEE KRASNER: It happened. It was the next canvas I started. That's what happened.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But did it start off being a series of lines and then suddenly the thing was there?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. That's right. Just as the one before it was a series of lines, and something very different was there. So the startling factor I had to accept and swallow first. Fortunately Jackson was alive and could say, "So, what? Proceed with it. Don't be alarmed because it's something else."

DOROTHY SECKLER: So he made you feel freer to go on with it.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. That's right. It was nothing to get into a state about; but, you know, this thing startled me so. And, of course, all around are a lot of paintings with fixed image. That's what gives one the thrust of anxiety. How come all their paintings are all one image? It's been that way for a long time; it doesn't change. And what's the matter with me? Why doesn't mine keep changing? Well, finally, or fortunately I should say, someone like Jackson could reassure me that there was nothing wrong with that process.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Now do you think that, with the painters that you were calling fixed image, do you think that this happens to them also, and they simply repress it and say no, I'll be damned if I allow myself….?

LEE KRASNER: I don't know what happens to them. Because it's totally outside of my experience. By change, I don't mean that this one will be blue and the next one red. That is change. But change on a scale that's size.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But one wonders sometimes if other artists don't also adventure into new areas and then possibly stop.

LEE KRASNER: Stop themselves? I don't know. How could I speak for any other artist? I think it's difficult enough to accept this when it's happening to yourself and certainly try to have courage to stay with whatever is happening.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. Now from this one, this first one, *Prophecy*….That title there is interesting. Then did you do a few others before you took off for Europe?

LEE KRASNER: No. Unfortunately, that painting was the last canvas I did before I left. And it was close to the time I was leaving. And it disturbed me so badly that when I came back from Europe when Jackson was killed, and then at some point I was able to go into my studio, I found that canvas standing face to the wall when I left, I didn't want to look at it. Well then, when I looked at it, I had to look at it and do the next painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And you continued then in the figurative vein at least because….

LEE KRASNER: Well, I don't use the word "figurative" at all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, what shall we use?

LEE KRASNER: "Image." Image is clear, but to call that figurative is so….

DOROTHY SECKLER: No, I know. Figurative is a subtle word. I'm thinking of figure not as human figure but….

LEE KRASNER: Well, you'll have to define abstraction there if you want to say figurative here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, let's say these are paintings which involve a kind of overall image – or image. Overall isn't quite right. What kind of color was *Prophecy*?

LEE KRASNER: The dark areas there in the painting are black or close to black, as I remember it. And there is a funny yellow and suggestion of flesh color in various tones, not one flat color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had you titled it *Prophecy* before you left, do you think?

LEE KRASNER: I think I felt when I did the painting it was *Prophecy*, as it was a new theme what was coming there. I think this is what, you know, the title was. In other words, when this canvas occurred and I left, I felt my work has changed again.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It had a prophetic quality.

LEE KRASNER: Now the fact that I wasn't able to do the next canvas right then and there, you know….

[Interruption]

DOROTHY SECKLER: Lee, it must have been a dreadful shock. I mean, there's no way of even expressing, I'm sure, the changes in your life and the tragedy of what happened in that summer, I'm sure. I remember that I was at Yaddo….

LEE KRASNER: It was in August.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes, it was in August. I was at Yaddo and May Rosenberg was there, and I remember her tears and her talking about it with me. It must have been very difficult to pick up your life again and go on as a painter as well as a human being. You apparently were able to go on with the ideas of picking up where

Prophecy had left you. I gather that *Earth Wing* follows in 1957. Is there anything that you would like to say about the way you thought about your work at that time or how you did manage to resume it?

LEE KRASNER: I don't think I thought about it. And I don't feel I had choice. It was just extremely difficult to get to do it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It must have been very necessary to get to do it.

LEE KRASNER: I had to is the only way I can put it, and it was not easy. That's all I can say. But I don't feel I had a choice. You know, I was not in a position to say I will not continue painting or I will continue painting. And, indeed, it was very difficult.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now is the first one the image simply appeared among the lines that you set down. Would that be somewhat the same way that the others developed? I mean, you would start off with a series of lines?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. By then that was the process I was working. That was the way the painting happened, as it does today. In other words, by then I had geared to confronting myself with a blank canvas and starting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You were not at this point covering it with a background coat of any kind? I mean, toning or….

LEE KRASNER: No. No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What kind of color were you working with?

LEE KRASNER: Again in *Prophecy* I have a break in color as well as imagery. And then starts a series of far more intense color in my painting that had appeared to date.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In the general look of these, I'd say there's almost a quality of, well, of black and white serving as a kind of….

LEE KRASNER: A great deal of the white you see there is the natural canvas that nothing has been applied to. There is no black in that. It's green, you see. That's due to reproducing it in black and white.

[End of Tape 1 – Side 1]

LEE KRASNER: It's not dark.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's not?

LEE KRASNER: No. It's green, you see. In other words, due to reducing it to black and white, it creates that sort of image. It's quite pale in color and very open and a minimum of pigment on the canvas. A great many paintings that follow are in that vein. It then becomes the Martha Jackson show in 1958.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now before that, you have one called *Visitation* in 1957 in which there seem to be birdlike forms.

LEE KRASNER: That's part of that series.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then the next one here in 1959. That's after the Martha Jackson show. The Martha Jackson show had included then?

LEE KRASNER: These canvases.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's right. I remember you speaking about that before.

LEE KRASNER: Now there's no black in this one whatsoever although in reproduction you have black.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. What would that have been largely?

LEE KRASNER: Rose, green, a kind of pale umber, a variation of roses and greens.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In this quite enormous canvas, 92 x 203 ¾, would that have changed a great many times and been reworked?

LEE KRASNER: That particular one again that came and I left it as is. The one below gets worked on more. But that would vary from canvas to canvas. One might come off and that's that. The next one might have to be worked on, would not quite come off and so one stayed with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Here again, we're in very large swinging rhythms, you know, big, flowing full curves.

LEE KRASNER: Well, this is the first tie I am to scale, you see.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did this very full curvilinear motif, did that have any particular association that you can pin down in any way or any association with….?

LEE KRASNER: No. No. You have paintings that are geometric form of work and others that are more baroque. And certainly I am in the baroque school and not in the geometric school. That's all I can say. Why I am, I'm not prepared to say.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, you became, however, baroque at this point. You weren't so much before. You know, I mean, back here, some of these are the little compartments.

LEE KRASNER: I know. But you're picking one little phase there, and even that isn't all that geometric.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it's true. It seems as if Lee is kind of sneaking though in perhaps little baroque ways.

LEE KRASNER: You wouldn't say that that drawing or those collages are exactly in a geometric….There are transitions there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But at least here it's very full and free and open, expansive somehow, too. You had, of course, in the years when you were working with Hofmann, you know, and knew the whole range of what was going on in Europe and this country, and you had left all that far behind you, were there any points of feeling of excitement about anything that was going on at this stage around you? Was there any other artist whose work….I mean, was Gorky anyone that you were close to? Or discoveries that you admired?

LEE KRASNER: Gorky is years before this. And once we moved to Springs, which was in 1945, we didn't see very much of the New York art world out there. We'd come in and there was some contact but, by and large, most of the time….

DOROTHY SECKLER: The influences were really going the other way, let's say. And, of course, you were really…. What was going on abroad? I gather you weren't very much concerned with….

LEE KRASNER: No. The big excitement had definitely moved here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And Pollock himself never went abroad I gather?

LEE KRASNER: Never did, no.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Had no desire to?

LEE KRASNER: Well, all he ever said on the subject was that you should either go when you're very young or very old but there wasn't time in the middle. And he was very much in the middle at that point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You had gone before?

LEE KRASNER: No. That was my first trip abroad.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The trip was interrupted because….

LEE KRASNER: Of Pollock's death.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So, the fact of his death was infinitely more affecting to you than anything certainly that could have happened abroad.

LEE KRASNER: That's right. And what I contacted abroad or the excitement was to see not what as happening in a contemporary sense but the old masters.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did any of that seem to change your feeling in any way at all?

LEE KRASNER: It was very marvelous to see the little I saw in that period of time. It wasn't very much, but I did get to the Louvre. One didn't get any further than that, or one got to Chartres and it's quite an experience.

DOROTHY SECKLER: If you had to remember just one important impression of something at the Louvre, what would it have been on that trip?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I know exactly what did happen to me at that the Louvre. There they were, all the

masterpieces I'd seen in reproduction all my life very much fixed on what I was interested in. And the three paintings that stopped me dead in my tracks, that startled me more than anything else because I didn't expect these would be the paintings that would knock me off my track, so to speak. They were not what I expected them to be.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What were they?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, those three I remember very vividly. They were Uccello's *Battle Scene* (and I did not expect that this would do what it did) and *Saint Sebastian*.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which *Saint Sebastian*?

LEE KRASNER: The one with the arrows shot through the body.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Signorelli's?

LEE KRASNER: Is that Signorelli's? No. No.

DOROTHY SECKLER: He did a very famous one. Almost everybody did one. *The Battle of San Romano* was in the London National Gallery.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's the one?

LEE KRASNER: No, not the one that was….

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, you didn't like the one in the National Gallery.

LEE KRASNER: It wasn't in London in 1956.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Oh, I thought maybe you'd been to both.

LEE KRASNER: By the time I got to London….Unfortunately, on my first trip to London, that one was in restoration and I couldn't see it. But on my next trip to London, I did see it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There is another Battle Scene in the Louvre. I'd forgotten that.

LEE KRASNER: Well, that's the one I'm talking about. And the third painting was while I was wandering through the Ingres section, because Ingres interested me. I came on this portrait of Goya's the Marquesa holding the fan. I can't think of the title of it, and that just did me in completely. Now don't forget, I'm walking through rooms of masterpieces. But these three paintings really….

DOROTHY SECKLER: I would never have prophesied….

LEE KRASNER: Well, I wouldn't in a million years. That's what I say; no one was more startled than I was to have these three paintings transfix me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's fascinating. You did a mosaic mural. I don't know whether we have that on the record or not. This was in 1958-59. I suppose we must have made note of that. That's at the Uris Building at 2 Broadway, New York. And it seems to have the same kinds of forms as the collages.

LEE KRASNER: That's right. More or less.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Large swinging prism shapes.

LEE KRASNER: That's a large one, 36 feet long.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's still there I suppose?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, very much so.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now coming into 1960 with *Celebration* and now there's a lot more vibration in the painting. How was that created? What kind of color…?

LEE KRASNER: That *Celebration* is very intense in color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It's a large painting, 92 x 184. Reds, greens, yellows, and so on.

LEE KRASNER: Quite intense.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Were they fragmented throughout the picture or are there large areas of concentrated reds, yellows, and so on? It's pretty hard to tell.

LEE KRASNER: I'd have to take a look at the canvas. I haven't seen it for awhile.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Would you have begun with color or begun with a single, some basic, perhaps darker tone in your original rhythm?

LEE KRASNER: Now I'm not sure. But I think *Celebration* may have been reworking some former canvas. I'm not certain of that. I'd have to look at the canvas and remember. But I would say, if I reworked a canvas, it was something that was much paler in color. I think it is. I'm not absolutely sure.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Then *The Eye Is the First Circle* is this one?

LEE KRASNER: Is the one right up here.

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is, of course, the painting we mentioned before which has a number of eyes which, as you said, you did not become aware of until the painting was finished and which you accepted, of course, at its completion. In thinking about it later when you discovered you were painting these eyes, is there any time when you can sort of sneak up behind yourself and say, oh, well, maybe there's this reason for that, or anything of that sort?

LEE KRASNER: Well, only this. The painting we spoke of earlier called *Prophecy* – that's the painting that terrified me so when it took place and, if you remember, I told you I asked Jackson to come up and look at it. Now I have scratched here in the corner that little eye shape which you can barely see in this reproduction. And Jackson liked the painting and approved it and said, "Continue, don't be concerned that the image changed, but I would take that out."

DOROTHY SECKLER: He did?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. And I said, "I will not. That stays just where it is." So that, to my knowledge, is the first of the eyes as they appear.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Isn't that interesting. And then they continue pretty much in that vein.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes. It remains very insistent for awhile. And they come back even now from time to time but not insistently as they were through then. It would be interesting psychologically to deal with it, you know, why at that moment that image persisted.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. You don't have to answer, but I was wondering if at any stage you were in analysis and would your analysis ever have cast any light on any kind of association with images in painting?

LEE KRASNER: I went into analysis in 1955. I would say again, as far as my painting is concerned, I never felt a direct relationship. Consciously I never felt it. That's about all I can say in a general sense. Now whether I learned a little more about myself or not, you know, and how it might affect one in his relation to one's work, etc.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, some artists have apparently found that analysis did make them aware that there was a kind of a recurring image of something of the sort. And others, I suppose, look at the paintings and do in very many different directions. And I don't know what it proves. It's interesting in any case.

LEE KRASNER: Exactly. I don't know what it proves either.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then there's a 1961 one. It's a very fascinating title: *What Beast Must I Adore*?

LEE KRASNER: Well, that came to me again from Rambeau. In other words, just as *The Eye of the Circle* is the opening line in the essay on circles, which is a throwback from something I had read which preoccupied me many years before. It was totally out of my consciousness.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Did we get that on the tape before? Would you like to repeat it?

LEE KRASNER: Oh I think we….Did we say all that?

DOROTHY SECKLER: I hope we didn't. I guess we did.

LEE KRASNER: So this painting was finished. I looked at it and suddenly *What Beast Must I Adore* came to me from something that meant a great deal to me many years back. And again, it was not there in a conscious sense, but it automatically suggested that to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. This is one with many tumbling, fastly revolving….

LEE KRASNER: Yes. The beast is peering at me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is it?

LEE KRASNER: It was for me, and that's why the title came to me after the painting existed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. It might almost be a whole jungle full of beasts.

LEE KRASNER: Well, it could be.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then *Cobalt Night* and *Night Bloom* of 1962 and *Night Birds*. And here we're getting more into the flux again where it softens and opens up and gets layered again as it does in 1962. In 1963 again is color still, in 1962 *Fragments from a Crucifixion*….

LEE KRASNER: That's still in this umber.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In browns, yes. And another *Storm* by 1963.

LEE KRASNER: That's in alizarin crimson.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And there you have again the circling movements but more open. In 1964, *Palm Garden* seems to become much lighter.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes, quite a different thing starts to happen there. One small something else starts to happen there. Something else does begin to happen. In the show that I'm planning in March, as I said earlier….

DOROTHY SECKLER: At Marborough?

LEE KRASNER: At Marborough. As I said earlier, since the last solo New York show is 1962 with Howard Wise, I would like to select anything done following 1962, following that show to show recent work up to now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So you might cover the whole period from 1962?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I won't cover it all.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But selections from….

LEE KRASNER: Yes. What year is *Palm Garden*, for instance?

DOROTHY SECKLER: 1964

LEE KRASNER: So, that might be in the show; might not. But again it's a breaking of mood, imagery, etc. And, you know, I've now learned to accept this phenomena in my life in painting. And, in a way, it isn't that unnatural in terms of one's living experience, you know. One always isn't on the same keel every day, every moment, every time you walk into the studio. So to me the mystery is why it doesn't always keep changing with everybody? I can't understand it any other way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, it keeps changing, but it keeps changing within a total outlook which remains rather consistent. The complete flux and flow which extends beyond the framework of the canvas, the repeated rhythm which is at no point arrested for a closed shape – at least it was perhaps a bit in *Prophecy* at most, but in general not.

LEE KRASNER: Right. Well, I suppose something Mondrian said to me has always stayed in a little corner somewhere. This is at the time I was a member of the American Abstract Artists. This particular year he had invited both Leger and Mondrian to partake in our exhibition. And they did. And I had the pleasure to walking around the gallery with Mondrian and hearing his comment on everybody's work. He asked, "Who is this?" and then made his comments. Now we come to Lee Krasner and he says, "Who is this?" And I say, "Mine," and, you know, feeling queasy. His commentary, incidentally, wasn't lengthy in relation to anyone's work; but he commented on everyone's work as we walked around. And, when we came to mine, he said, "Very strong inner rhythm. Stay with it." And maybe some part of that stayed tucked away some place. I don't know. I try to stay with it wherever it may take me. And so far I don't think I ever stopped being me and that about does it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I think that show will be an interesting one in seeing what you've stayed with and all the variations that you encountered on the trip, you might say.

LEE KRASNER: On the trip, right. That's putting it in a nutshell.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I wanted to say this. Of course, we've been speaking here as an inner development, as development of one stage promoting another stage and so on. And yet, of course, you have been living through a time in which the art world itself has been going through….

LEE KRASNER: Many stages.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Not profound, but at least enormously different.

LEE KRASNER: Well, in my own instance, it starts with those two portraits from the Academy. All right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But here you have been working through the period when we have had the sequence of Pop and then of Op and then Minimal.

LEE KRASNER: And color field.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Color field and so on. Now I know that speaking about other artists isn't the point, but in each of these expressions, except perhaps somewhat less so in color field, there has been the almost turning back to a kind of outlook on the way the artist works that precedes the adventure that Pollock was embarked on, that you were embarked on, that others – de Kooning and Rothko in various other ways – were involved with, and the least common denominator being the rejection of the unconscious mentation of the spontaneous toward a much more controlled, much more almost stylized, in some cases, conceptual kind of production and, in some cases, not even produced by the artist himself as in a minimal art where it's an impersonal production.

LEE KRASNER: Don't let your brush stroke show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Or sometimes even other people do it and so on.

LEE KRASNER: I know. Well, what about it?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is there anything you'd like to say about it? I don't know. Maybe you're so completely stable that you're not affected by it. I found that I'm affected by it very much in the sense of, you know, it seems as if here's where I came in and has everything been, really been, put into question? Did we live through this decade-and-a-half and nothing happened? I mean, where has it gone and so on? Does it ever affect you very specifically?

LEE KRASNER: Does it affect me?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I mean I suppose, one doesn't ever even know to what extent it may. I mean, is there any way you'd like to comment on it as an artist?

LEE KRASNER: Well, as an artist, it simply doesn't interest me. I'm sorry but there it is. And in a way it's a little sad for me to have lived through a period so vitally alive in painting to come into this arena now which is of no interest to me whatsoever. And until such time as I'm confronted with something that really is alive again one goes about one's business.

DOROTHY SECKLER: One of the things that has struck me occasionally in talking to younger artists is that some of them whose work is completely different in style sort of lay claim to the heritage of Pollock or to Pollock as a father figure.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, well. It's a good name to attach yourself to. Let's face it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: One of the recent ones I remember coming across was Larry Poons, and he said Pollock is so great because he owes nothing whatsoever to European painting – to Europe. He said he owes nothing whatsoever to Europe. I think that's rather a sweeping statement.

LEE KRASNER: I don't think Pollock would have said that. I think Pollock was very aware of the past, was conscious of it, and knew that his job was to break through a barrier. Which, indeed, he did. But that kind of denial seems adolescent to me. You know, you wish they'd grow up.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It leads to a kind of lack on continuity.

LEE KRASNER: Well, there's no such thing. Art has always come from art. I think what Pollock's example has

meant in a very valid way to many younger painters of all styles is a sense that the art is the man, or art is what you live every day although you may not put your everyday objects into it. In his case, he certainly didn't . But it isn't something separate from what you are. It isn't something which you go into a chapel and perform. I imagine it's had an effect in many directions. It's hard for me to say. So that when you say that Larry Poons said this about Pollock or that about Pollock, that may be.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's sort of nice that they have the hero worship. They'll learn later that there is continuity. But I do often find it bewildering that so much seems to have been lost, and yet I suppose it never is really.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, it may be seemingly lost for a moment, but I don't think it really is if you think of time on a little scale. So, to go back to myself for a moment, I still have to say that today the two painters that excite me most – or interest me most, or that still I can move from – are Matisse and Pollock, until I find some other. That's with all due respect to Picasso and other painters. But these are the two sources that still are the most meaningful to me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Is there any particular phase of Matisse that you're interested in or respond to?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I said that Matisse is a painter that's a particular favorite, you know, a personal situation.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I mentioned at the beginning of the tape that we had broken off before just prior to your show in London at the Whitechapel Gallery. And that was in the summer of 1965.

LEE KRASNER: The fall of 1965.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's right. September – October of 1965. I would like in your own words just to fill us in on the other shows here and in Europe between then and now.

LEE KRASNER: Well, following the exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery, the British Arts Council traveled not the entire show but a good section of it throughout England in museums, and more recently an exhibition at the University of Alabama. That was a short time ago, leading up to this show in March in Marlborough.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which will cover from probably….What? About 1962 to….

LEE KRASNER: No. No. 1962 is the Howard Wise show, you see. So it will be following that show. It may lead into 1965, 1966, 1967 right on up. I'll be painting right up till the show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I see. And that will be the date you mentioned.

LEE KRASNER: March 2, 1968. This being the middle of December, that's practically tomorrow. Curiously enough, the last time you interviewed me, I was getting all ready for the Whitechapel show; and now I'm hard at the same point only not quite. The Whitechapel show was a large retrospective and this is recent painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In either case, it's always good to get to you when you're in the middle of that kind of creative energy.

[END OF SESSION TWO]

[SESSION THREE
APRIL 11, 1968]

DOROTHY SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing Lee Krasner Pollock in New York on April 11, 1968. This interview follows one that was done this winter. The present interview follows shortly after the conclusion of the recent exhibition of Miss Krasner's work at the Marlborough-Gerson Gallery. That exhibition opened on March 9 and continued until about April 5. One thing we could put on record would be the very interesting critical response – since we've just been reviewing it – to your recent show including art article in *The Nation* by Max Kozloff in the March 25 issue and one in *Art Forum* in the March 1968 issue. By whom was that?

LEE KRASNER: Emily Wasserman.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. And then one by Lawrence Campbell in *Art News* in the March issue. And they're – all of them I think – giving very probing and comprehensive space to a review of the work and its intentions and contrasting the work of the recent show with earlier exhibitions. I was interested that all of them noted this strong contrast. I had asked myself whether I was exaggerating what I felt to be a very striking difference between these paintings and earlier ones. And apparently my feeling that there was a striking difference is confirmed by the opinion of all the writers we've mentioned. I wonder if in you own feeling there seems to be that much of a difference or how you would characterize it, how you would feel yourself that it reflects a change.

LEE KRASNER: Well, naturally I don't feel there's that kind of a difference. But insofar as I seem to go through a cycle of painting and then a change occurs, I'm not really aware at this point whether such a change has taken place. In other words, if I put up a retrospect now, I'd be able to answer that question more clearly. I'm not as conscious of it as was pointed out by the various people we've mentioned. I'm geared to a few years and then the work changes again. I'm geared to that kind of cycle, and so it's hard for me to say. I don't feel, for instance, that a painting like this, which is 1960, departs that strongly from what I'm doing now. However, I'd probably be the last one to see it or feel it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, the obvious change – just to stand in the gallery and look around – perhaps would be a departure in many canvases – certainly not in all – from a more monotone color into color appearing in some cases in broad swaths through the picture.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And, in other cases, more of a calligraphic fashion but certainly a stronger affirmation of color.

LEE KRASNER: I think what you say here is that perhaps, with regard to this show, there seems to be a stronger affirmation of, let's say, color; or, if it's calligraphy, of calligraphy; or, if it's monotone, of monotone. Whatever the conviction is, it seems to be clarifying.

DOROTHY SECKLER: There's an authority in each case. Of course, I realize, and I remember seeing paintings in East Hampton a couple of years ago – your collage paintings and things that had grown out of collage in which there also was....

LEE KRASNER: Intense color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it would seem as if we were, in that case then, not dealing with the calligraphic work. Whereas, here you seem to have been able to bring the two things together, to synthesize the calligraphic energy with the areas of color.

LEE KRASNER: The use of color, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And, in the same way, I think to really bring together things that were happening on the surface in the sense of also a limited spatial reference. I mean, I think it would be harder to say in terms of a painting like the one on the wall behind us. There I'm more aware immediately at least of energy, of the swinging gesture, the gesture of the brush, and the quality of the stroke, and of rhythms interlocking and sweeping over each other. And I don't get back into the painting or don't feel too much the even layer of space, although there certainly is always some. But I feel in the paintings, as I recall them there in the show, that, although they still held onto the surface obviously the way that a good Matisse would, too, that somehow you could focus more on what was happening in the space in many cases and not be so overwhelmed by the energy. The energy would seem to flow within it, so that you could sort of contemplate areas and see it all as one complementing the other. And to me that was a very feeling quality. No doubt it was necessary to have both of these separate strands in your work previously in order to have them come together.

LEE KRASNER: Have them come together. And that's possibly what you're saying as well as the various people.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That's what I feel. I feel that Max Kozloff said it in a different say, but here it would be interesting to see what your feeling is to his comment. He said that in previous exhibitions he felt that there was sometimes an incoherence in the relationship of parts to the whole, and sometimes there would be very energetic calligraphy without committing yourself fully either to the role of gesture or to contour. What would your feeling be about that? Were you ever aware that you were torn between considering a certain linear – you know....If you set down a sweeping line, was it really contour or was it gesture? I suppose an artist isn't out to analyze that way in any case.

LEE KRASNER: No, not at all. You know, I couldn't possibly analyze in those terms. I am aware that the separation, the calligraphy, and the so-called color do have to merge finally. And, in that sense, I think that's what is being referred to with regard to this show that's just closed. They do merge more.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Could you describe any of the stages by which they merged? I mean things that you actually did. Were many of the paintings inaugurated through collage elements, would you say?

LEE KRASNER: No, not through collage elements at all. I would say the gesture and then paint, painting rather. And I think this doesn't happen in a conscious sense. I didn't approach it and say I'm not going to use calligraphy or I'm just going to used color. I think this thing happens in a way that one hasn't a conscious control over. At least I don't have it; let me put it that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's a more emotional state?

LEE KRASNER: Exactly. It's a state of experience which I would hate to interrupt with regard to painting. I find all too often I'm aware that, when a conscious interruption sets in there or the will in that sense, you get paintings that....Well, I call them "buckeye." They're turned out mechanically rather than searching and trying to experience each thing. So it's in the realm of feeling or experiencing rather than consciously saying I'm now going to try to get these two opposites together.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But your way of working in every case in the last exhibition was completely with paint and not collage elements at all?

LEE KRASNER: I haven't used collage for some time. As a matter of fact, not since the last collage show, which was more than ten years ago. I've not "collaged" since then.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think another interesting thing is the way the color never seems to become any image, but it often does seem to surround an image or to suggest an image with a color intervening between that layer of space and another one. I know that's rather crudely expressed, but it's as if there were several layers and the image is on top. The color is in the middle and not on top somehow. Did that ever seem to you to be the way it was coming out? Or have you not analyzed it?

LEE KRASNER: No. I don't approach my painting nor anyone's painting in that analytic sense. And I consider that a rather private affair – my response both to my own work or to anybody else's work without analyzing in this sense. So I can only say it interests me when this is commented on, and then I begin to look for it. In some instances, I do find it's so. It's brought to me rather than my being aware of it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Now, of course, as far as I can see, your whole approach, as far as feelings about what your art might refer to or what might ultimately have inspired it, seems not to have really changed in the sense that you said before that there was always some awareness of nature in it. And living particularly as you do for a good bit of the year in East Hampton, it is part of your environment and the organic shapes that seem to recur a great deal. And, in this particular instance, many of the titles involve bird references. I assume that, in all cases, it was something that you discovered in the image.

LEE KRASNER: After the image developed, it suggested that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. But there are several possibilities when an image develops. One thing is you can, you know, press it further toward the image. The other thing is you can obliterate it as many artists have, of course.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And your decision is not apparently to do that, not to do either one, not to take it more toward a reference or a descriptive thing at all but just to let it be in this metaphoric state where it could have some feeling.

LEE KRASNER: Where it's implied rather than fully described.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And color in that case means you might have just started with any color that appealed to you one day without....Do you start, as you used to, with the calligraphic element in most cases?

LEE KRASNER: No. I think my initial contact with the canvas....To use the term calligraphic is not clear enough; because some gesture occurs – some sweep across the canvas before I take off, so to speak. And in that initial contact may be a suggestion which dictates then – color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Do you often find that you're staring at the canvas for a long time before trying to see where that gesture will be? Or do you just walk up to it boldly and set is down?

LEE KRASNER: No. I've know both experiences. Sometimes it's instant, and I start to work. And other times I have to take a sitting-out period, staring at that thing in the hope that it will begin to suggest something to me. And at some point something does, and that's the takeoff point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In a number of the canvases, I noticed that there were areas of the canvas where the ground was left intact. So apparently there was relatively little reworking or change.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. Well, that's my preference. It would be nice if it always worked that way. Of course, it doesn't. When it comes through that way, I very much leave it alone. And, when it doesn't, I reenter and rework.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does one rather than the other seem to be apt to deliver a.... Well, I mean, we would all, as you say, love this pristine experience; but I mean have you often found that, where you did a great deal of

reworking, it still comes out just as powerful or perhaps more so?

LEE KRASNER: Perhaps more so. And that one never knows in that case. I have done both, and that's a constant process in painting. In one canvas, it may come through in that immediate sense. And that makes me feel pretty good. On the other hand, I've reworked until I'm blue in the face and have gotten what I consider favorable results. So I can't say once it doesn't come through that I would automatically abandon it. It depends on what's in the painting and my obstinacy and that other element of something beginning to happen that you want to stay with.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Matisse, of course, once said that a painter often gets something very handsome almost immediately, but he distrusts it.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But, when he had his class in 1908 or 1909, I don't know when it was, he said that each spot that you put down on the canvas diminishes the power of the preceding spot, you know. So it would seem that those are two opposing ways of thinking about it.

LEE KRASNER: But I think that kind of dichotomy is constant in the whole process of painting until you declare it finished or abandon it or however you feel about it, and sign it, and say this is it. And I think those two things keep going all the time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes.

LEE KRASNER: Your second or third attack on the canvas may suggest, or even look, beautiful; but you feel a need to carry it further. In introducing the next step, you may already have killed something. Well, pretty soon you're in this combat with that thing, with the canvas. So that both of them exist. Either it can be abandoned immediately on first contact or there's need to really dig in.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I suppose that sometimes, when it does come off immediately, it may mean that there's been something sort of simmering in your unconscious for awhile; and it's just there ready to be tapped. Other times you can't get to it that readily.

LEE KRASNER: That's right. And it's a pretty mysterious process finally. At least for me it is. It would be hard to pinpoint just what does take place when the contact is instantaneous and when it's one where you really start a battle with that canvas. Both sides fascinate me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some of the commentators on your work have noted what they consider a kind of off beat or, you know, a kind of color which departs from what would be obviously tasteful, you know, raucous combinations.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. Yes. I'm aware of that. Your comment on that was what?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I just wanted to hear what you'd say about it. Some painters and the abstract expressionists hold in general that you can just take any color that's on the palette and work with it and the more unexpected the better. And it would certainly be the opposite of the kind of exquisite color that painters of an earlier generation would work over, mixing and so on. I don't see much of yours as mixed color, although you certainly don't feel inhibited from doing it if you want to.

LEE KRASNER: Yes. I would like to keep my pigment in its full intensity but again it's like: if it works, fine; if not, something else has to take place. And, with regard to this raucous color combination or inelegant color combination, I'm very conscious of it; and I really would like….I think now of getting started to work, and I really would like to push this as hard as I can go with it. I don't know if it will be so or not, but I seem quite preoccupied with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I almost wonder if there are any inelegant color combinations any more.

LEE KRASNER: Well….

DOROTHY SECKLER: I didn't feel that the color is inelegant. I didn't think of it either as being ingratiating, certainly not.

LEE KRASNER: Well, maybe you're giving a little definition there.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's vital and vibrant and right in that sense.

LEE KRASNER: Right. And, with full intensity – if it can be stated that way – it's really a matter of one gets used

to a kind of palette, and you want to disturb yourself at all times. At this moment, that's the direction I'm moving in. Jar it as far as you can but make it work. There's a challenge there or also a search there that's exciting for me.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I notice that in many of them there's also a very light area which has a kind of effect of breathing through the painting. In other words, it isn't much filled in. There were, however, several paintings which had larger closed-in areas than I have ever seen except in your collages or those recently following your collages in a much earlier stage. Is this something that you might depart from? Or is this a kind of basic thing that you must keep that surface pulsing through in some way?

LEE KRASNER: I would like to be able to keep it pulsing through at all times. I hope I can do it. I like a canvas to breathe and be alive. Be alive is the point. And, as the limitations are something called pigment and canvas, let's see if I can do it.

[looking at work]

LEE KRASNER: That was the last of that group. That was photographed before it was stretched. It was still tacked on the wall, and I was still doing the last stages of it when it was photographed.

DOROTHY SECKLER: What is the title of this one?

LEE KRASNER: Pollination.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And this was the very last one, and it is the cover of*Art Forum*. And then another one called Transition has very bold calligraphic elements and also a large form moving diagonally across the canvas, very large and almost enclosing, not….It really isn't a solid form, but it's more solid than most areas of your painting would be.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And the name of the third one we were discussing?

LEE KRASNER: *Is The Green Fuse*. And we don't have that reproduced either in black and white or color.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And that has a large division.

LEE KRASNER: Has a large division again.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And a form that goes all the way across the canvas in a solid shape.

LEE KRASNER: That possibly is a new….It may be that, in the last phases of painting towards this show, some transition was breaking; and I'm not aware of it as yet. That would refer to what we were talking about earlier. I'm not conscious of it yet.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well it's just as well. You always have a sense of continuing right on. And then later on you see….

LEE KRASNER: That something else in happening.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. In the case of, let's say, these last two, would there be more solid elements and the larger elements have come as a later addition? Would it have been more obviously a calligraphic painting in the beginning and then have areas sort of more filled in as you went along?

LEE KRASNER: Again, that's very difficult to put your finger on, so to speak; but, with my awareness of intense color or wanting or needing to use it that way, it dictates what takes place on the canvas. So that I don't say I'm going to have a large sweep of orange here. As the painting evolves, this thing begins. The need for the painting requires that.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You would have started with a bold….with one of the colors in any case at the very beginning?

LEE KRASNER: Exactly. Yes. It would start with a color, a form, and it begins dictating to me what's needed in terms of color as well as form.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's very reassuring, considering the success of you show, that there's still someone minding the store as far as the intuitive approach to painting is concerned.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I was never more convinced than I am now. I feel there on sure ground.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, one of the things we were talking about, I believe, just at the end of our last interview, was the discovery in your work of this eye motif that had become important for awhile. Now we still do have oval shapes and round shapes and, in some cases, having some sort of centers that could possibly have eye figurations. But does that ever seem to you to be the same now or do you just feel detached from that appearance of that image?

LEE KRASNER: Quite detached at this point.

DOROTHY SECKLER: You're not either afraid of letting it dominate or concerned when it does.

LEE KRASNER: Exactly. When it first began to appear, I was aware of it and wondered what it meant but didn't try to stop it from an aesthetic point of view, let's say. And I don't think I would now.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, they certainly seem to be more ambiguously used now. They could be all sorts of forms in nature. And yet the round, the oval, the spinning shape that loops and is….They're not necessarily as connected or as part of a gestural thing. In this case, I think you've allowed forms to close a bit more than you would have in an earlier state.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Does that feel like a kind of interesting thing to explore in the future?

LEE KRASNER: I wouldn't know what my next painting is going to look like. I literally mean that. And it's a phase that, you know….When I start working on that next canvas, I'll see what's going to take place on that next canvas; and then I'll know what I'm about. I seem insistent on that point, but that's actual definition of the way I'm working. I could no more tell you what direction the next canvas will take….Well, I suppose having painted all these years, I have a general idea; but it is a general idea and not a specific. In other words, I wouldn't look at this exhibition in terms of as we've been discussing it and approach the next painting saying, well, now I'm going to use large blocks of this or closed forms or open forms.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That would be disaster?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I think so. And, secondly, I like to surprise myself. I have to be interested in what I'm doing. Surprise, for me, is as important as it is to anyone that views it once it becomes a painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, then, hurrah for a surprise. Lee, a number of the people commenting on your recent show have made a point that you seem to have moved further away from the example of your husband, of Jackson Pollock. It's as if your more calligraphic paintings could be related more immediately, I suppose, to the all-over type of painting that he did; and, as you get into these shapes in which the color is more sustained and somewhat less calligraphic, it would seem to be more, let's say, your own thing from an obvious point of view. Is that something that you feel particularly rewarding or that you're happy about?

LEE KRASNER: No. I don't feel it. You know, I'm aware of the fact that it's been commented on a great deal. But I've never experienced this. I didn't feel I ever was painting like Pollock, and I don't feel I am now. Again, in the way I experienced what I've done, I've not had a consciousness of it. I don't say that it didn't occur, but it certainly wouldn't have been in a conscious sense. I've always felt I was going about my business, aware of Pollock, certainly, as a great many painters are aware of Pollock. But prior to Pollock, it was Picasso, Matisse; and further back it was Mondrian. I had as awareness of these painters. I still have an awareness of them, so that I can't see that. I may have a blind spot about it, but I don't feel that I've made a break of any kind.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I thought it was interesting at least to clarify it, since it was one of the things that occurred to a number of people apparently. And, you know, within the context, it's understandable that they should at least think about it.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, I'm aware that it's been commented on a great deal. But, as for my own feeling, I've never experienced it that way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: I think it's rather phenomenal the success and the critical attention paid the show in the middle of a season in which most offerings were either geometric abstraction, Op art, Minimal, Pop or sort of things in which the artist would be working much more conceptually as opposed to intuitively and in which the forms would be, in most cases, more geometric. Certainly your painting is exceptional; the element of something being intuitive and spontaneous and keeping many of the elements of abstract expressionism is an unusual thing. Have you any idea of why this could happen?

LEE KRASNER: Why what can happen? The attention?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, the particular response to the paintings.

LEE KRASNER: No. I don't know, except I feel something like this: the attention is there because the response was there. And, as Ashberry said when he came in and saw my show and spoke to me for awhile, "It's very nice to see painting again." That was his term – "again" – meaning there's been an absence of painting. And I'd like to think that's the reason why it got the attention it did.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I think it may turn out to be very encouraging to people who….Of course, I suppose any artist of any real stature doesn't get discouraged by fashion in any case; but there has been a kind of climate to hopelessness about painting – that really no one is going to care if we're still involved with this thing of putting pigment down on canvas when there's light art and kinetic art and all this show going on.

LEE KRASNER: I know. I know. Well, I think there's room for all of this. But I think there's room for painting, for what I call painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, that's what's good about it. It doesn't shut out anything else, and I have a feeling that it will be heartening to many people.

LEE KRASNER: And, as for fashion, well, that's dictated; and I doubt that you can push that sort of thing too far. And it isn't as though it's been stifled or pushed underground. It's gotten the full treatment in every direction, and possibly there was some response to this in terms of it's good to see paintings again.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And painting, where the adventure and the surprise elements are there and very evidently there too, is what I think makes a lot of difference.

LEE KRASNER: I would feel pretty sad if that were gone forever. I'd hate to feel I was in a world so closed. And also, it's as though you're still in school and learning your ABCs, this is art, blah, blah, blah. Well, that's pretty boring stuff. If you can't get out of school and get off the campus and experience life in the world of reality, that's pretty depressing. There's a lot of what I call campus art around now. And I think campus art is fine while you're in school. But that's your early stages of learning. If you're a pianist, you have to learn your keyboard; but then you've got to get on with it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I think that there's a kind of misunderstanding of things like the Bauhaus movement and sort of returning to it on a watered down basis, you know, oversimplification of what the Bauhaus originally meant. Because originally, of course, it was enriched with people like Klee and Kandinsky and a whole ferment of things that were in contradiction to each other.

LEE KRASNER: Right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then when it comes out all ironed out smoothly a decade later….

LEE KRASNER: And called avant-garde to boot! Well, you know it's a bit much.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We have an interesting example of how complex people can be with a man like Kepes who can produce some very beautiful luminous and lyric paintings and at the same time be teaching experiments in light and kinetic art at MIT. He's a man who can embrace a whole range of things and not feel the kind of limitation of what I think you mean by campus art very often, you know, not reduce it to that level.

LEE KRASNER: That's a reduction that's rather sad, I think.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. You feel that young people are….Now that there's so much happening in the world that should have a possibility of being expressed….Just what we've been through, let's say, emotionally….

LEE KRASNER: The past week!

DOROTHY SECKLER: Not to have a way of using this experience in some intuitive form in your painting….Every bit of your experience could be used in some way.

LEE KRASNER: I think, if one is a painter, all you experience does come out when you're painting. And, to the degree you restrict it, I don't get it. I get it, but I don't get it, if you know what I mean.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Of course, it's been often said that your work is very female because of all of the roundness.

LEE KRASNER: Indeed, I hope it is. I am female. However, I've heard very often how male it is.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Really!

LEE KRASNER: So I stopped with all that nonsense. I stopped with all that a long time ago. It disturbed me in my elderly days.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It did?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Which one? Or both?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I can remember as a student at the Hofmann classes coming up one day to whatever I had on the canvas and his saying – and this was by way of giving me like a high compliment – saying, "This is so good you wouldn't know a woman did it." Well, I had to go deep down and thing about that one. But at this point, if I'm female, I expect my paintings are female if one can speak in those terms.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, his attitudes were very complex there as I became aware, but I guess it would be a sidetrack for us to go into those now.

LEE KRASNER: Yes.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And I certainly agree that it doesn't help anything to approach it that way. But I just thought, since it had been discussed, that it might be something to clear up for the record in any case.

LEE KRASNER: Now I'll tell you something Mondrian said to me about my painting which does interest me enormously. This was at the time that I was a member of the American Abstract Artists. And this particular year both Leger and Mondrian partook in the exhibition. And I had the pleasure of walking around the gallery which Mondrian. Each artist had two or three canvases up. And Mondrian would ask, "Who did that?" And I gave the name, and he commented on each one. Well, then, pretty soon we were in front of mine and he said, "Who did that?" and I nervously said, "I did." And he said, "You have a very strong inner rhythm. You must always hold that." Now that makes sense to me rather than the male or female bit in relation to the painting.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That was a very, very profound comment.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, it was beautiful, just beautiful.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Just marvelous. Which one of your paintings was that? What stage of your painting was it at, at that point?

LEE KRASNER: Oh, well, this would be the work I showed in the American Abstract Artists, and that would date back to the late thirties. And so I don't remember which one, but it would have been a group of those. It would have been three of that kind of thing. I've remembered that for a long, long time and still indeed remember it. And isn't it a nice comment to make?

DOROTHY SECKLER: And coming from a man like Mondrian.

LEE KRASNER: From Mondrian. And of course, mine was full of curves. I mean, much as it is now, it was curvilinear. And he said just that. And I remembered it and felt good about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: It's interesting, too, that is shows that here's a man who didn't allow curves in his own mature work at all, but he was perfectly able to see something in curves and see the strength of it.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, absolutely. He commented on all the paintings in just that brief way.

DOROTHY SECKLER: That's marvelous.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, it kept me going a long time.

DOROTHY SECKLER: We've never really talked about your painting in terms of space. I know you don't think too consciously about space concepts, that you're really caught up in this basic rhythmic thing, and yet the paintings come out with....Well, I mean it seems to me a very structured space, certainly in the late ones very evident in which I feel a very controlled space actually in which the layers are very compressed to me. And it's not obviously within a Cubist reference, but I would think perhaps that none of us could arrive eventually at this kind of space without having been through it. I mean, it's part of our baggage we grew up with. And yet it's wonderful to be able to break out of it and open it all up so that the energies are moving within the plane at all times. But that always seemed to me to be true of Pollock, too. And lots of people do look at a Pollock and say that they don't see any sense of space in it at all. But to me the layers of space are always right there.

LEE KRASNER: Right. Clear. Absolutely.

DOROTHY SECKLER: So it's all part of the same thing. And then, of course, people do see Matisse about your recent things. I supposed that's pretty much apt to happen when you are using particularly strong color after a period of being associated more with monochromatic painting. It isn't really specifically Matisse-like color. In one respect, I think it's quite different. It often seems to me that Matisse – that the amount of color, the saturation of enormous areas rather than small areas – is very important. Whereas, the size of the color area doesn't seem to be as important in your work. You don't, so far at least, feel inclined to sustain one color over an enormous area.

LEE KRASNER: But I still have tremendous admiration for Matisse, so I have a strong consciousness of him. I daresay in that sense, there is as much influence of Matisse as there is of Pollock.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And, of course, he was also very famous for his color having gone beyond what was immediately acceptable at that time.

LEE KRASNER: Acceptable color. The word I was looking for earlier, when we were speaking about inelegance and elegance, was "acceptable." We get used to a certain kind of color of form or format, and it's acceptable. And to puncture that is sticking your neck out a bit. And then pretty soon, that's very acceptable.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. That's why I was saying I don't know really whether we can….Even in dress and in all our surroundings, we're surrounded so much with patterns on top of patterns and colors on top of colors; and it seems as if you can't do anything, almost, today that isn't in some way acceptable. Then you have young artists working sometimes with….You know, like Rauschenberg and Red Grooms, who take the position of all color or no color, just deliberately never repeating a color, or just keeping on sort of additive color, you know. Start with yellow, brown, greens, purples, and go on to peaches, tans, violets, and so on. You just keep going. You never repeat or harmonize. You never work for harmony, but you always work for a going beyond. I think this is not typical of you at this point certainly. I mean you do feel that there is some kind of a color chord.

LEE KRASNER: That's right.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But it is there? There is a chord of some kind?

LEE KRASNER: Yes. There's a chord of some sort. I would imagine so, yes. Because, even if you say color – no color, you're stating that as a position.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. I often wonder what makes it work.

LEE KRASNER: We'll leave that as one of those mysterious notes of what makes it work.

DOROTHY SECKLER: But I think it depends a lot on size and spotting myself. But that's another story.

LEE KRASNER: Exactly.

DOROTHY SECKLER: How do you feel that you relate to the present day art world at the moment, outside of feeling pretty good about what's happening? We've just touched on it a little bit in talking about campus art and going beyond that. Is there anything more that occurs to you?

LEE KRASNER: No. I think the present scene is a little heavily loaded with what I call campus art, just a little heavily so. But I don't feel, you know….

DOROTHY SECKLER: They're young yet.

LEE KRASNER: Oh, yes. And they have to go through the mill a bit. And then they'll get out of college and get into life fair enough. That's generally the way it is. At twenty you know everything.

DOROTHY SECKLER: And then you find out that the next ten years….

LEE KRASNER: They're not quite so sure about it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Some artists are very much affected by other arts, not that their painting would reflect it. I was thinking of those who are very much involved with literature or with music, dance, and so on. Have you ever felt there was any connection or that you're aware of a certain correlation or parallel in what you're doing with anything else that's going on?

LEE KRASNER: In other realms?

DOROTHY SECKLER: Yes. In other fields. What other arts are closest to you? What do you enjoy most when you go from painting to another field of enjoyment?

LEE KRASNER: Well, I take that as sheer delicious recreation if I go to hear….I went to hear Borgaz the other night. Well, this is sheer joy. I don't find new truths, but it's nice to hear truths restated again. And it gives beautiful confirmation – beautiful. I'm not turning to any particular thing – poetry or dance or theatre – for this. But wherever one sees it, it's a confirmation again. And we all need confirmation from time to time. I wouldn't be able to relegate it. A few years back, I felt cool jazz….I got a lot out of it. Today that's sort of receded for me. Now I don't know whether that means that jazz today is not as good or whether I simply have moved away from it a little bit. I should really get some of the reviews of that show, and you can read them for yourself, you know, the London show.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, I can read them. But it's nice to have them on the record. We were talking about the fact that at one time American art got relatively little showing, in fact, almost no showing in New York City back in the early fifties and before that even less, and that today there are so many shows of American art that this is no longer a real issue. But there has been, as a matter of fact, less acceptance on the part of the dealers and galleries to painting that was painterly painting or not in any way involved with startling materials or moving parts and lights. There has been so much exposure recently to art expression beyond painting itself that now the success of a show with is painting in the grand sense, you might say, is a very interesting phenomenon. And then you mentioned that, in England, there had been considerable interest not necessarily in the fact that you were an American but….How did you express it, Lee?

LEE KRASNER: Well, we were talking about the fact that there was a point when one had to fight for exposure in this country. Except one must remember at that point that the really so-called grand painting was coming from the School of Paris. That was true. It turned. It became….It was happening here. And it was acknowledged that is was happening here. So I think, in that sense, one has to watch and see where painting occurs and acknowledges it rather than taking a chauvinistic attitude of New York School or what-have-you, or American painting. It seems to me the phrase is absurd. There's no such thing as painting that's happening here or there. One has to stay alert and see where it's happening and acknowledge it. And with movement today, the way they speak of being able to get over to London in two-and-a-half hours on some new machine that's being built, it's available in terms of any place in the world rather than in a specific place. Now it did happen in Paris at one point. It did happen in New York at one point. But I think to squeeze it too hard is probably some of what you just expressed, and I think this is terribly bad. One must take a more open view.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, tell me about the reaction of the English to your show at the Whitechapel Gallery?

LEE KRASNER: It was very well received. And, certainly, there was no commentary on the fact that I was American. That was not introduced. It was received beautifully there. And the commentary, on the contrary, was….How refreshing it was to see this so-called type of painting going on today when we're geared to getting Op, Pop, and color field, and I-don't-know-what painting. It's refreshing to see that this is going on as well. I felt their attitude was extremely open.

DOROTHY SECKLER: In your recent show, it would seem to me that it was your most clearly lyric expression in your work perhaps. For instance, one might have thought, given the directness and the furious energy in much of your earlier painting, it would have taken a turn, let's say, toward forms which had a king of aggressive energy or even toward the kind of thing you see associated with Dubuffet, you know, a brutal for of art consciously intended so. But instead, as your forms have become….As there's a new element of color, it's not only, I think, the color….In fact, sometimes the color is more pulling toward a tension, and the forms are more lyric. It seems to me there is that possibility, too.

LEE KRASNER: You mean in the current show – work?

DOROTHY SECKLER: The current show, yes. And the word "poetic" certainly could be applied to it, not in a sweet sense but in a sense of what is vitally poetic. But the play between the color being offbeat and going toward the dissonance or as far out as you could go with provocative oppositions of color at the same time that the forms become somewhat less furious, I would say, more lyric in a general sense. Does that seem at all possible to you?

LEE KRASNER: I suppose it is possible. In one sense, when I said earlier that I had an awareness of the color and wanting to move it as far as I could, I'd agree with what you're saying at the moment. Perhaps I'm more reconciled to me form, and the color now becomes a challenge. Perhaps there's a concentration in that sense. I'm now playing with the idea, because we're talking about it and perhaps clarifying it to some extent. But I'm not prepared to say that's it.

DOROTHY SECKLER: Well, we've almost come to the end of our tape. Looking toward the future, I gather that it's going to be continuous adventure, discovery, open-mindedness, no sense of directions having been set even by the success of the current work. Would you care to hazard any kind of guess as to what will happen when you get back to the….?

LEE KRASNER: Well, as I said earlier, I have no idea what the next canvas is going to look like. But, as we're sitting here and talking about it, the feeling is I'd like to push this as far as I can.

DOROTHY SECKLER: The color thing you are particularly interested in.

LEE KRASNER: Right. Yes. Just about as far as I'm capable of pushing it. I hope it comes that way. You know, that's the best I can do with it; because, when I say I hope it comes that way, what I really mean is the other night....I made reference to having heard Borgaz at the Y and caught a sentence where he was commenting on one of his poems and he said, "It was given to me." That stays pretty much with the way I feel about painting. He was speaking as a great poet. So one can only hope it will be given to me.

END OF INTERVIEW

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