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Oral history interview with Betty M. Asher,
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Transcript

Interview

**Interview with Betty Asher
Conducted by Thomas H. Garver
In Beverly Hills, California
June 30 and July 7, 1980**

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Betty Asher on June 30 and July 7, 1980. The interview was conducted at Betty Asher's home in Beverly Hills, California by Thomas H. Garver for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was made possible by funds from the California Arts Council, The L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation, and the Bothin Helping Fund.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Betty, tell me a little about when and where you were born and your early life.

BETTY ASHER: I was born in Chicago in 1914.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Could you give me the specific date?

BETTY ASHER: May 6th.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Not quite a Gemini.

BETTY ASHER: No, Taurus.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did your family do? What sort of business or profession was your father in?

BETTY ASHER: My father was a pharmacist and my mother assisted him in the drugstore. For most of my life as I was growing up, we lived behind the drugstore, so I was in constant touch with this drugstore business.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Working there?

BETTY ASHER: I did help out, during meals particularly, so my father could sit down and have a meal without interruption. They used to tease me and say that the only thing that I could sell was a 60 ¢ bottle of Rem cough medicine.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When did you go to school?

BETTY ASHER: I went to school in Chicago, and I went to normal college for a year and then I went into nurse's training.

THOMAS H. GARVER: To Normal – was that a school in Normal, Illinois?

BETTY ASHER: No, it was a school in Chicago. I think it was called Illinois or Chicago -- Normal College.

THOMAS H. GARVER: For teacher training?

BETTY ASHER: Right. And I didn't like it at all. I really wanted to be a nursery school teacher. Nursery school was just beginning to come into being at the time, and I could neither sing nor play the piano. They told me that if I could do one or the other I could get by, but I couldn't, so I had to go into the grammar school education program, and I didn't like it at all.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Where did you take your nurse's training?

BETTY ASHER: At Michael Reese Hospital in Chicago.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you came out of that as an RN.

BETTY ASHER: Right, I graduated and I did private duty nursing for about four years.

THOMAS H. GARVER: In Chicago. Was there any active art interest at all in your family at that time?

BETTY ASHER: No. The only thing that happened as I was growing up was that we would make frequent visits to the Art Institute, but mainly for travel lectures or to look at the Impressionist paintings. I was not aware of any

contemporary art as I was growing up.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You would make these visits with your family?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, mainly with aunts of mine who lived on the other side of the city.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was there a large group of—what was your unmarried name?

BETTY ASHER: Michael, Betty Michael.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And so there were a lot of Michaels in Chicago?

BETTY ASHER: Right, and my mother had a large family also. And I frequently visited them because we were the poor relatives, so during summer vacations I was sent for two or three weeks at a time to visit the other members of the family on the other side of the city.

THOMAS H. GARVER: In Chicago. So you liked looking at the pictures but there was nothing special. Do you have brothers and sisters?

BETTY ASHER: I have an older brother.

THOMAS H. GARVER: There were just two of you in the family, and he had no art involvement.

BETTY ASHER: None whatsoever.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What happened after you were graduated from Michael Reese and were getting into private duty nursing? How did you make the transition from Chicago to the West Coast?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I decided to marry Leonard Asher, and both his father and my mother lived here in Los Angeles, and so we came out here to be married. And it was then I got my introduction to contemporary art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now when did you and Leonard get married?

BETTY ASHER: In 1939.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you had met him in Chicago?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, he was an intern at Michael Reese.

THOMAS H. GARVER: At the same time you were taking your training?

BETTY ASHER: No, at the time I was doing private duty.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But working at Michael Reese. And his parents lived out here, you say?

BETTY ASHER: His father. His mother wasn't living and my father wasn't living.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Your mother had moved out here.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you came to California to get married?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, and then we lived in Boston for two years where Leonard had a residency, and then came back here to live.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You liked it?

BETTY ASHER: California? Yes, it just seemed logical, since his father was getting old and decrepit and he was here, and it seemed like the logical place to come.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So after the two years in Boston, this brought you back here during the Second World War, the early forties?

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And what was happening to you and to the area at that time? I'm sure it was a busy wartime scene. Did he go into the service?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, he was inducted into the service when we were in Boston, and he was actually called up but because his father was ill, he asked if he could wait until he got back here to go into the service, to go into active duty, so that he'd be stationed somewhere in the West. And so we came back and after two years he went into the army. He was on reserve but then he went into active duty.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was he stationed here in the West?

BETTY ASHER: He was stationed at Fort MacArthur in San Pedro.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How convenient.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, it was. Well, we moved down there then, and lived down there while he was there, but then he went overseas and I moved up to West Los Angeles.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you continuing to work?

BETTY ASHER: No, I didn't work after I was married.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I thought you worked for him in his office.

BETTY ASHER: No.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you have two children, the first of them born during the war?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, Rayna in 1942 and Michael in 1943.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So he was overseas and you had two small children to take care of.

BETTY ASHER: That's right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: As a wife and young mother were you at all involved in art, other than the art of the nursery?

BETTY ASHER: Well, when I got married Leonard had about five AAA (Associated American Artists) prints that he had purchased - lithographs - for five dollars each. They were very popular at the time. He had a Grant Wood, a John Stuart Curry, George Schreiber, Thomas Benton and people like that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Rockwell Kent?

BETTY ASHER: No, no Rockwell Kent. These were lithographs that Associated American Artists published in editions of about 250, and they were signed and numbered. So we were married in Los Angeles and we drove to Boston, we stopped in New York and we went into Associated American Artists, and in addition to their prints they also had paintings by these artists, and that was really my first exposure to contemporary art. When I walked in that gallery I just was completely overwhelmed, and something clicked inside and I just loved it, I was so excited by it. We got on their mailing list and every time we got a catalogue we would buy one five-dollar lithograph, or maybe two if we were carried away, and so we accumulated quite a few of those lithographs from the early days. And then every time Massachusetts had a state holiday we'd drive to New York, where they frequently did not have the same holiday, and we bought our first painting from Associated American Artists, which was a Raphael Soyer, called Kathleen Resting for \$150.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This was 1940?

BETTY ASHER: Probably late 1940. And the gentleman who waited on us is still there, Mr. Cole. I've often thought I should go in and see him for fun. But I asked him if we could give him ten dollars down and then pay the rest whenever we could, and he said, certainly. And I said, "When we finish paying, would you send it to us," because we lived in Boston, and he said, "No, take it, take it with you." And we took it and gave him \$10 and just whenever we had a little money we sent it to him until we had it paid for.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Where you looking at any other galleries at that time? Were you visiting any others?

BETTY ASHER: While I was living in Boston I started reading a lot, and I started going to all the galleries and to bookstores and rifling through the books, and even buying a book or two. We didn't have very much money. And I also started trying to do a little painting, I took an adult education class at one of the schools, and so that's really how I got started.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What were you studying? What was the course you were taking, Appreciating Art, or something of that sort?

BETTY ASHER: No, painting, actually, watercolor and oil painting.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you enjoy that?

BETTY ASHER: I did like it, yes, and I did quite a bit of that at home. And I continued after we moved out here, to read and go to galleries. I couldn't when we were in San Pedro because there wasn't very much I could do and couldn't drive; I learned to drive while I was down there. And with the two small children I didn't do very much.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So let's say the early to mid-forties you spent pretty much in a wartime way—he was in the army, Leonard?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, and he was overseas about 22 months.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Where, Europe?

BETTY ASHER: England.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And then you moved to Westwood and were raising the kids. Were there any galleries here in Los Angeles at the time? Was there any art activity, aside from your continuing to paint watercolors and so on, that you remember at that time?

BETTY ASHER: Well, yes, there was a gallery called the Little Gallery that was run by Vincent Price and George McCready—they were both actors but they had this very small gallery on Little Santa Monica where La Scala is now.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The restaurant?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, and I went in there frequently. And while Leonard was overseas I purchased three John Sloan etchings from them and some Jean Charlot color lithographs, and I bought books on art. And while Leonard was overseas he spent all his money that he didn't spend for cigarettes on etchings. He went into London and bought 10 or 12 etchings by British artist.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Such as—

BETTY ASHER: Well, the one I remember is Brockhurst, and I just don't remember all their names, I may be able to think of some of them later, but at the moment I can't. And we've since sold those.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you've sold most of these others—the Soyer and so on, did you?

BETTY ASHER: Right, sold them or traded.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Would Leonard be sending this back to you or did he just hold on to it?

BETTY ASHER: He sent it back.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you pleased with what he bought?

BETTY ASHER: Oh, yes. I had everything framed and hung.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were there other galleries or other art experiences that you can remember? Had you met any artists yet? I assume that you met Vincent Price and his partner and were dealing with them. Were there any other galleries or artists, or was there anything going on at what was then the Los Angeles County Museum or any other place that comes to mind?

BETTY ASHER: I don't remember much about what went on during the war. Gas was so scarce I sometimes had to walk quite a distance to the grocery store, so I really didn't have gas to go look at galleries and museums. My father-in-law became very sick when Leonard was overseas and I had to run around the city on a bus looking for a nursing home for him. And so it was difficult. I do remember going to Bowinkle's in Westwood Village, but I think that came immediately after the war.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Bowinkle's was a gallery?

BETTY ASHER: Gallery and frame shop. And they're still in existence, on Little Santa Monica in Beverly Hills.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did you see or get, or what caught your eye there?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I think again it was Mexican art, Charlot, Diego Rivera, and things like that that interested me that they had.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You were not at all aware of or caught up by the more formal, maybe the more French aspects of art, as opposed to the more Mexican or regional aspect. It seems you began collecting first in figurative art and art that would have a very distinct or important theme or message.

BETTY ASHER: Well, there wasn't anything else at the time. Of course in Europe there were, like the Constructivists and people like that. While I was in Boston I did become acquainted with Klee and Kandinsky, but I was really mainly interested in Americans, and at that time those were the most famous people, Benton and Wood.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You weren't seeing people like George L. K. Morris, or Sheeler, maybe, or some of the other Precisionists out here. Where had you seen the Klee and Kandinsky in Boston? Did you come to know them through reproductions in books or by exhibitions?

BETTY ASHER: No, in a bookstore, an art bookstore, actually. And this man also had a few prints for sale, and he had things like that. But I think one reason I probably wasn't exposed to the people you mentioned like Sheeler and Morris—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Macdonald-Wright lived out here at the time.

BETTY ASHER: Right. My horizons were very limited. I was at home with two small children.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The end of the war came and Leonard came back, and what began to develop from then?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I did want to say that I was aware of those people that you mentioned through reading and looking at magazines and books, but I had no way to actually see those works in the flesh. After Leonard came back I continued much in the same way. I did get out more and I did get to galleries. There was a gallery called the Green Gallery on Wilshire, down near Western that I liked very much, and that was where I bought a Julio de Diego. He was married to Gypsy Rose Lee. For some reason or other I like Mexican painting, and it continued when we made a trip to Mexico, when we purchased quite a bit of work.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did you buy then, Tamayo, Rivera?

BETTY ASHER: No, younger people, drawings and paintings by Merida, and people like O'Higgins and we bought some Charlots after the war. We bought a large watercolor and a small oil. Also, just after Leonard got back from the service, the Stendahl Gallery on Wilshire Boulevard was going out of business and was selling things very reasonably. We went in and we saw these two Charlots and they were not on sale, of course, but he said that his son was in the military, too, and he appreciated everything the boys were doing overseas, and so he let us have them rather reasonably. And also the Green Gallery on Wilshire went out of business, and that was when I bought a painting, a watercolor—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Of Charlots?

BETTY ASHER: No, by Julio de Diego.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you collecting any Americans at the same time?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I was beginning to get acquainted with artists in town. I became acquainted with Clinton Adams and with Burr Singer. I took some painting lessons from her, from Burr.

THOMAS H. GARVER: A woman? What was her work like?

BETTY ASHER: Well, her work was pretty representational. And then I continued to go to shows like the Watercolor Society Show, and I bought a Bill Dole and some of Burr's work. I didn't buy a great deal because we didn't have the money to buy a lot, and also I got involved with New Orleans jazz and bought a lot of records. So for a number of years I really wasn't involved any more other than just reading and going to an occasional gallery show. And then I started to go to New York, but very sporadically.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was this now the late forties, early fifties?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I'd say 1947 - 48.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You'd give up your kids for a while and get on the Super Chief.

BETTY ASHER: No, I flew. And I did go to galleries, and that's when I was introduced to Abstract Expressionist Painting, which I loved. But we didn't buy any that I can think of, anything major. We - I had a diamond ring my father-in-law had given me that belonged to his wife and we sold that and bought a Tony Rosenthal sculpture. On the same trip to New York we had seen an Arp that we liked for about the same price, but because Tony was

a friend and we had told him we wanted to buy something of his, we bought that instead. And we liked and admired and always looked at Motherwell and Kline, and we visited the Janis Gallery when we were in New York if we were together or if I was alone, so I was well aware of what those people were doing.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did Leonard share your enthusiasm?

BETTY ASHER: He did, but he was unable to keep up with me because he had a job to do, and I had a lot of spare time to pursue it. But he never discouraged me and he never told me not to buy anything that I thought I could buy. And he always seemed to like everything I bought.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you buying anything at this time? This was the early fifties, I would say.

BETTY ASHER: I became interested in folk art and I bought some Haitian paintings and Haitian sculpture. Those things were less expensive and easier.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Even then.

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you were appreciating and enjoying Abstract Expressionism but not buying it, buying other things.

BETTY ASHER: So many of them were so large. You know, it was just the beginning and there were large paintings, and it just seemed like an impossibility to buy something like that in New York and have it shipped out.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was any of the energy of New York making itself felt out here at the time? Did you know anyone out here, artists or collectors, who were responding at all to this, or was it really just an interest you felt you just had with yourself?

BETTY ASHER: I really didn't know any other people who were interested except the few artists that I met, and Clinton Adams always had collected so I saw the things he bought. He bought mostly prints, however. But I didn't have any contact with collectors as such.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So your connection was with two or three dealers here and a small group of artists working primarily in the representational style. And then – I don't want to put words in your mouth – your interest in Abstract Expressionism was sort of vicarious. You'd see it at a distance but you somehow thought you would never get it back to Los Angeles.

BETTY ASHER: Also I think it seemed very expensive at that time. It wasn't as we look back, but I remember when Leonard and I were in New York together at the Janis Gallery they had a really nice small Motherwell collage, and the young man didn't know how much it was but he said he'd call us at the hotel and let us know as soon as he found out and he called and said it was \$450. And we thought about it for a long time and decided we just couldn't do it, so we didn't. I always remember that. It was really beautiful. I remember Guston and I remember seeing all those people, but to me, it was a sort of phenomenon, and it just didn't seem like something one owned at that point.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That's an interesting concept, I think, that it was quite literally bigger than life.

BETTY ASHER: Of course there was the interim, too, of the Copley Gallery here in late '46 and early '47, when he had a gallery here for six months and had six shows, and I went to every one of them and I loved them. And I remember going twice to his Cornell show, and those things ranged in price from about \$15 to \$75. I remember a couple of them that I really was crazy about and really would have liked but I had a feeling that my friends would think I was crazy if I bought something like that. I was really worried at that time about what my friends would think. I think I got over that, but at that time—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you ever buy anything from Bill Copley?

BETTY ASHER: Nobody ever bought anything from Bill Copley. I think he sold one item and it was never paid for. So he kept a lot of the things so he wouldn't have to send them back to the artist. And I remember that Cornell got very angry with him because he raised his prices so high, because he said he probably would never sell anything, they were too expensive.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Cornell was angry at Copley because at \$75, they'd never sell.

BETTY ASHER: But I remember loving one at \$75.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What else did he show?

BETTY ASHER: Well, he showed Magritte and Matta, Man Ray – he had six shows. Two other Surrealists.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did he ever show Ernst?

BETTY ASHER: I guess Ernst was one, yes. So that leaves one. I think Tanguy was the other.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now did you get to know him?

BETTY ASHER: I didn't get to know him. I remember seeing him but I talked mostly to his assistant, whose name was Ployard. And Ployard intrigued me because he went around with a little parakeet on his shoulder at all times, a parakeet called "ZuZu".

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Ployard French?

BETTY ASHER: I think he was probably French descent. He was American. He was, I believe, Bill Copley's brother-in-law, and he was the one who introduced Bill to art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So Ployard introduced Bill. Was Bill painting then?

BETTY ASHER: No, he wasn't painting. He had just gotten out of the army and he was sort of, trying to find something to do, trying to find something that he would enjoy doing, that he could make money at, that would interest him.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was he a native of Los Angeles?

BETTY ASHER: I believe he was a native of Chicago, I'm not certain. But his family lived out here at the time, they lived down in San Diego. And he married soon after he got out of the army.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Noma?

BETTY ASHER: No --

THOMAS H. GARVER: Somebody named Ployard, I guess.

BETTY ASHER: Right. I just know her by her present name – I can't think of her first name but I'll think of that later too. Her last name was Starrels, because after she divorced Bill Copley she married the man Josine is married to.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Oh really. Made the rounds in art circles of this sort. So you went to the gallery and it was open only a short time and attracted, one gathers, little attention. There was no art reviewing, I gather. From what one reads, precious little attention was given to art by the establishment out here.

BETTY ASHER: Well, Arthur Millier—it seems to be he was always an old man. I remember him going around and in each gallery, or most galleries, they'd give him a little shot of whiskey when he came in and he carried that around with him while he looked at the show. He also was an artist, and there weren't too many things he liked. He only liked representational art. I don't exactly remember when Landau and Esther Robles started, but I suppose it was late forties or early fifties.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When they started, you would go there as well; Millier would be writing about this in the paper, and you would go over. Were you buying anything from them at the time?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I started slowly then buying things, yes, from all the galleries. I visited all of them—

THOMAS H. GARVER: –on quite a regular basis –

BETTY ASHER: Right. I also went to Frank Perls and Paul Kantor -- I think that that was all about the same time.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Had they just opened up or had they been in business before, earlier?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I remember Paul Kantor when he had a gallery with his wife on Beverly Boulevard, and they showed Park and Diebenkorn and Motherwell, and I didn't buy any of those then either. But I used to go and see them all. And I can't remember if I bought anything of Ynez Johnston's from Kantor, but that was some time later, and I bought a Marini gouache from Perls.

THOMAS H. GARVER: No Calders?

BETTY ASHER: No Calder's.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He handled Calder out here, I think, or his brother did. As you've described this, could I characterize the fifties or the late forties and mid-fifties as you're continuing to buy in much the same style as you had, primarily figurative work, with an emphasis on, say, the Haitians and the Mexicans, but an increasing awareness of other styles, other ideas as well? And I would suppose if you were looking at Diebenkorn, that would have been at least the mid-fifties, and he would have been painting in that rather free-flowing Abstract Expressionist style. Did you like that?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I did. Also, I had bought a couple of Karl Benjamins, and those were abstract paintings.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Hard-edge?

BETTY ASHER: Hard-edge, yes. I'm trying to visualize my wall at that time. I think it was late fifties when I really became more active as a collector, and didn't have as many other things taking up my time. I concentrated a little bit more. I gave up painting myself because I realized I'd never be able to compete with any of those people, and it was such fun to buy the things and to own them. It was in the late fifties that I really began buying more.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What were you buying then? You mentioned the Benjamins, and of course you were moving away from the representational or social commentary mode, perhaps, to another kind of interest, it would seem.

BETTY ASHER: Well, probably the first large painting I bought was a Lobdell, and it was a large black painting. And then I bought Bob Irwin and Frank Stella and Ellsworth Kelly.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now this is not the late fifties.

BETTY ASHER: That probably was early sixties, right. But late fifties was Lobdell. And I got interested in Kenny Price, and the entire group at Ferus, you know. Do you remember the show in the late fifties that Ferus had? I remember Ferus. Also, Maurice did a little installation at the Los Angeles County Museum, called "Late Fifties at the Ferus," that included Altoon, Kienholz and those people.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now, were you any more aware of the Ferus Gallery than the other galleries? Apparently yes, because you were acquiring Ferus artists.

BETTY ASHER: Well, the first show I saw at the Ferus Gallery was a Billy Al Bengston show of the heart paintings. And Leonard and I walked in and walked out. We just sort of circled around.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You didn't like them.

BETTY ASHER: I was very quizzical about them I think. I wasn't sure of them. I didn't know what I felt about them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This would be 1960 - '59?

BETTY ASHER: Probably '60 - '61—something like that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who was running the gallery at the time?

BETTY ASHER: Irving was.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Irving Blum.

BETTY ASHER: Prior to that, if you think we didn't finish up the fifties well enough—the late fifties—I was still going to Esther Robles and Felix Landau. I liked McLaughlin very much. I didn't buy one at the time. I bought quite a few things from both of those galleries, and I'm trying to think what other galleries there were. I would go down to Dalzell Hatfield's, but he had a lot of French artists, and artists I wasn't terribly interested in.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He was sort of the local Impressionist gallery in town.

BETTY ASHER: Right. He took on a few young people. He showed Michael Frary very early. And I also went down to the Biltmore, there was a gallery, Cowie Gallery, and of course, Bowinkel's.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But it really would seem, then, that in the early sixties, with the arrival of Ferus, that your present sensibility or present collection began to take shape. And who were you dealing with there? Pick up, if you would, from that point where you and Leonard walked out after a Billy Al Bengston show.

BETTY ASHER: We weren't angry, we were just curious, and Leonard didn't like it, I don't believe, and I just didn't understand it, which is something I now object to when people say they don't understand it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That makes it more interesting.

BETTY ASHER: But it was curious. And then I did start going back and going to every show, and I went to one of those lectures that Walter Hopps gave for UCLA, but I had the feeling they were too elementary for me because I had been doing so much reading and looking, and it was after one of those lectures I went in and asked them if they had a Frank Lobdell painting, and they brought it out and I think that's the only time I ever said that I wanted to look at it at home for a while, because it was a big step for me, a big black painting called February, 1959 I think.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You no longer have it.

BETTY ASHER: No, I gave it to the County Museum. And I did keep it, obviously, and then I went back and, as I say, I became interested in Billy Al and Irwin and Kenny Price, and Larry Bell (a little later), and I went to visit their studios and became very well acquainted with all of them, went to all their shows. I continued to go to Landau, continued to go to Esther Robles, and Paul Kantor, and I always looked at every show and I did still buy from all of them, because I can remember, I always paid for everything on time, and whenever I had a little money, I'd walk down La Cienega and just give each one of them fifty dollars or seventy-five dollars or whatever I could spare at the time. And they never sent me statements. They kept track and I kept track, and that's the way I did it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you remember what you were paying for any of these things at the time?

BETTY ASHER: Oh, I probably could remember. I remember Kenny's cups being like twenty-five to fifty dollars. I remember Bob Irwin was very ill at one time, and needed money and so Kenny gave a series of cups and Irving had a silent auction, and I'm sure there were less than ten people. We put our bids in envelopes, and stated which cup we wanted, and then he opened them all—

THOMAS H. GARVER: While you were there?

BETTY ASHER: No, a few days later, and the money was given to Bob Irwin and the cups were given to us and I remember Betty Factor's mother had offered more than anybody, I think, something like thirty-five dollars, and she really got the best cup and saucer. And I got the ugliest—I think I had given fifteen dollars.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did you get at that time—what sort of a painting of Bob Irwin's?

BETTY ASHER: I had one of his stripe paintings. It was just two or three little narrow stripes on a solid ground.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Very similar to the one that Sterling has.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Let me ask you about your friendship with Sterling Holloway. Had you met him yet at this time?

BETTY ASHER: I met him just about that time, I think.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This was early sixties.

BETTY ASHER: I had been going to one dealer I forgot to mention, Ernest Raboff, who was a very persistent and dedicated and enthusiastic young man, who really influenced me quite a bit, and convinced me that his artists were the best of the artists. And I bought a lot of things from him, very inexpensive things, mostly drawings. He always had these great enthusiasms for one man he thought was the greatest man since Rembrandt, another was as great as Van Gogh.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you remember who some of these people were?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I remember a young artist named Standish, whom he really touted. I bought a few drawings of his. The painter who was as great as Rembrandt was someone named Probst—I can see the paintings very well. And I bought one and Michael Blankfort bought a couple. He (Raboff) was very fond of Burliuk, too, and he—as I say, he was just so enthusiastic. He opened a gallery on Beverly Boulevard, I believe it was just across from where Chasen's is now, right near here.

And he told me about Sterling. He'd been selling to Sterling and he said, you would like him, and he told Sterling about me, and tried on several occasions to get us together but never did. And then one day I walked into

Landau's gallery and Sterling was in there and Felix said, "Betty, I'd like you to meet Sterling Holloway." Well, we actually fell into one another's arms and he said, "What are you doing?" and I said, "I'm just going to the galleries," and he said, "Well, that's what I'm doing, let's go together." And so it became a fast friendship from then on. And we frequently did the galleries together and I really was responsible for getting him to go to Ferus and getting him to meet Irving and those artists. At that time he was collecting Bill Brown and Wonner and that other fellow who still paints up in San Francisco - does the landscapes - Gerald Davis. And Cremeans, lots of Cremeans, so he was a good customer of both Landau and Esther Robles. And a lot of Burliuks from—

THOMAS H. GARVER: They've disappeared, I think.

BETTY ASHER: Well, he had a few little ones in a basket, those little teeny ones in a basket. So then he started going more the way I was going, which was mainly toward the Ferus artists.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who was showing at Ferus then? There were the locals, Irwin, Bell, Price, Kienholz, Altoon—was Ruscha there then?

BETTY ASHER: Ruscha came a little later and Bell was a little later, a bit before Ruscha. Bengston was there. There were a couple of other artists, one who has since died, and Ed Moses and Craig Kauffman. That's about it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Some you acquired and some you didn't.

BETTY ASHER: Right. I've liked Kauffman. I had one of his vacuum-formed pieces which somebody begged me to sell because he loved it so.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you did.

BETTY ASHER: And I did. And I never bought a Moses. I was very, very fond of his large drawings that were sort of like Johns, with the short black pencil strokes - I loved those. They were \$900 at the time and I just didn't have \$900. He only did about four of those, I think.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I've seen a couple of them at the UCLA show he had that Jerry Nordland organized two years ago. How did Ferus then begin to acquire some of the things you have now? You bought a Stella in the early sixties. Did you buy this Stella that you have now, the Concentric Squares?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I did, I bought it in '72, and I bought it from Irving. He began showing New York artists and having an occasional show, and since I went to New York very seldom—at one time there was a period of five years between visits—I really missed a lot by not going to New York. So I was dependent on Irving if I wanted to see the work of New York artists.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was anyone else outside of Irving Blum showing New York artists here at the time?

BETTY ASHER: I think that Frank Pens was, and maybe Paul Kantor, but they didn't appeal to me at the time. It was the artists that Irving was showing that I really liked.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You were then beginning to look at the Post-painterly Abstraction, the Pop and people like Stella, rather than the Abstract Expressionists, whom you had seen in New York. But you had never seen a Stella when you went to New York; you bought them from shows here, I gather.

BETTY ASHER: Right. Except I did begin to see them when I went to New York, and I bought Fastest Gun from—well, I actually bought it from Ileana Sonnabend, but I saw it at Castelli's first. That's a long story.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When did you buy that?

BETTY ASHER: I bought that in 1965 - '64 or '65.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How much did you pay for it?

BETTY ASHER: \$2500. That was one of the most expensive paintings I ever bought. But I wanted it so badly, I hadn't even asked the price of it, I just—I had spent almost ten months trying to get it away from Ileana and she finally let me have it. Nobody else seemed to want it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: She knew a red hot collector, I guess.

BETTY ASHER: No, it's more complicated than that. You don't want to hear that story, do you?

THOMAS H. GARVER: Sure.

BETTY ASHER: Well, when I saw it at Castelli's, I told him I wanted it and he said, "Well, this show is going to Ileana and when it comes back from Europe, you can have it." But Ileana was trying to develop some European collectors of that kind of material, and I happened to know the secretary who was working for her. I had never been to Paris at that time, and I didn't know her gallery. But the secretary at one time had worked for Irving, and so she was advising me on how to do it, and I would write to her to see what the status of the painting was from time to time. And at one point, Bob Rowan had put a "hold" on it, and that seemed to be all right with Ileana, because he was a famous collector, and so she decided she'd sell it to him. However, Bob let his "hold" go and decided he didn't want it, and my daughter even went to Paris and went to visit Ileana, but I instructed her not to say anything about the painting because I didn't want to spoil this little intrigue that I was going through to try and get it. And she saw Ileana in her office and she said it was right behind her as she sat facing Ileana at the desk, but she didn't say a word about it. Then the secretary wrote to me and said, "Now is the time to write," so I guess she felt that Ileana was ready to let it go, because nobody in Europe had been interested. So I wrote a long letter to Ileana, and told her how much I loved it, and one thing I can do fairly well is write a good letter—I've learned a lot of that since, of course, at the museum, but I wrote a very long letter and Ileana wrote back and said that she had talked to Bob Rauschenberg and he felt that I was the best person in Los Angeles and she decided she'd let me have it, but it had to go to a show first; it had been promised to a show, so I didn't get it for fully ten months.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But then you got it.

BETTY ASHER: I got it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now, during the course of that discussion you mentioned two people you haven't before, and I'm wondering how you came to know them, and if there was—this is now the mid-sixties, and there certainly is now a — the County Museum opened in 1965?

BETTY ASHER: That's about right, I guess. I'll have to look that up.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, there's a new art interest. There's enough interest to move the museum out from under the stuffed bison and stuff. How did you come to meet Bob Rauschenberg and Bob Rowan, for instance? Was Bob Rowan collecting busily and were you all involved with the Pasadena Museum, Walter or Jim Demetron, or even Tom Leavitt?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, what happened was I began to be more visible and to actually be buying, I went frequently to the Ferus Gallery and I met people there. I met Bob Rowan probably in the gallery, and I met other collectors. I met Don Factor, Don and Lynn. Walter Hopps began moving away from the Ferus Gallery to Pasadena. I went to the Pasadena Museum and I saw all the shows that they had. At the time I had acquired quite a number of Kenny Price's things, and then as I began to get interested in Pop art, they had one of the first shows of Pop art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I think it was a show that had come from the Guggenheim that was expanded by an addition.

BETTY ASHER: No, that show was called "Six More"; that was at the L.A. County. Walter had done a show before that in which he had Hefferton, O'Dowd, and people that I had met and knew. I'm not exactly sure how I met all those people. I think it was from going to the galleries.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Bob Rowan a heavy on the scene at that time, in his support of Pasadena? Were you aware of him, really?

BETTY ASHER: I really wasn't, I don't think. I don't think I was too conscious of what he was doing.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And where would you have met Bob Rauschenberg, at the Ferus?

BETTY ASHER: Probably at the Ferus, or—well, there was the Dwan Gallery, too. My activity with Dwan was, I believe, before I became as involved as I did with Irving Blum. And Virginia Kondratief, who with Eugenia Osmun ran the—Eugenia Johnson she was at the time—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Before she got married to Bill Osmun.

BETTY ASHER: Before she married Richard Klix, before she married Bill Osmun. They had evenings with the artists. They would ask the artists to talk. I probably met Bob Rauschenberg either at the Dwan Gallery or at parties Virginia had, because she showed Rauschenberg very early, the combine paintings.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This would be in 1960 — a little later?

BETTY ASHER: I hope not. I wouldn't think it would be later. I'd say about '60, or maybe '59, '60, '61.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was the gallery out on Lindbrook where—

BETTY ASHER: No, first it was on Broxton, and then it moved to Lindbrook.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you buying from Dwan?

BETTY ASHER: At one point, as a matter of fact, I bought my fifth item there, a very small thing, and Eugenia said to me, "Betty, you've bought more than any other collector in town," and I said "You can't tell me that. You can't tell me that I've bought more than Gifford Phillips, for instance," and she said, "Well, in quantity—," which is something I'll never forget.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did you get there?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I bought my Oldenburg cup and saucer there. Eugenia Osmon sold it to me. I saw them delivering it and I had to have it; it was like my first cup and saucer. And she sold it to me and then it turned out, she found out later that Virginia had bought it for herself and hadn't intended it for sale.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you already had it.

BETTY ASHER: I had it. They had some young artists who worked around the gallery, and I bought some of their things.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you remember what they were?

BETTY ASHER: No, but I still have some of them. And I remember they showed Yves Klein, he came and talked, and they showed Reinhardt and I bought a Reinhardt from them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Really? Do you still have it?

BETTY ASHER: No, I don't. What happened was that they closed usually for about three months during the summer and they had just had a Reinhardt show and they were much too expensive for me, but I asked if I could have one at home over the summer while they were closed—they were just in storage. So they let me take one, but the only one that I could find that didn't have some damage on it was not a five-foot square painting. They all in some way had some spots on them, except one that was five feet by about four feet. And of course, when the end of the summer came I couldn't give it up, so I had to buy that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you don't have that any more.

BETTY ASHER: No, frequently, if I wanted anything else I had to trade or sell. So that's how I lost a lot of good things.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, to acquire a lot of good things, though. You haven't done badly, my dear. You were buying more; obviously, Leonard's medical practice was burgeoning. How was he taking to all of these new arrivals?

BETTY ASHER: Leonard would go to those evening things with me and he always seemed to enjoy them, and he never objected to anything I brought into the house. He usually said he liked it whether he did or not, I don't know, but he had no objections. About that time, or a couple of years before, an aunt of mine had died and left me a little money so that I was able to indulge myself a little bit on my own.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So from the early sixties you had a small legacy.

BETTY ASHER: A small amount of money, right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So that you could maneuver a little bit on your own.

BETTY ASHER: Right. And I had a little trust that brought in about a hundred dollars a month that I used. But Leonard did do some sculptures of his own, and frequently they were take-offs on some of the artists that - for instance, Yves Klein - that he probably didn't appreciate, that he thought was a charlatan.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You mean he was doing some sponges—

BETTY ASHER: Right, some blue sponges, and—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Leonard doing this in a serious, if misguided way, or a satirical—

BETTY ASHER: A satirical way, yes. Most of his sculpture was humorous. And he was obviously interested because that was what he built in the evenings in the garage, and he often gave them as presents to people

who really enjoyed them. As a matter of fact, one of them was reproduced in Rickey's Constructivism book.

THOMAS H. GARVER: With credit to Leonard Asher.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So then during the mid-sixties you were an art collector, making acquisitions about evenly divided, I would guess, between local artists and artists who lived outside of Los Angeles—Europeans or primarily Americans, I guess like Reinhardt. What had happened to the Mexicans and Raphael Soyer and the AAA prints? Had they been sold or traded?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, the AAA prints I actually sold to Vincent Price when he was at Sear's. I think that I had about fourteen of them left, and I sold them all to him for very little money.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now, of course, those things of the WPA style are much in demand.

BETTY ASHER: Right. What were the others?

THOMAS H. GARVER: The Raphael Soyer.

BETTY ASHER: Of the Mexicans I still have a few. My daughter has some in her home, and the Raphael Soyer I sold not too many years ago, about five years ago, because I wanted something else.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you don't have a lot of things in storage. What you have you like to see.

BETTY ASHER: Yes. I have a lot of drawings in drawers, and prints and a few things in a cupboard because I don't have room for them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you becoming involved at all in this time in any, say, support activities? What was going on in Los Angeles to benefit contemporary art? I think today, of course of the Fellows of Contemporary Art and the Modern and Contemporary Art Council. Were there any similar programs then?

BETTY ASHER: Well, yes. I became involved at the museum when somebody came to me and asked me to contribute to the building fund of the new museum, which I did. And so I became known to a few other people, other than the group that hung around the galleries, and then when the Modern and Contemporary Art Council was formed, I was in the second wave. It was formed by five couples, I believe, initially, and then each one of them invited one or two other people to join, and that's when I joined. I was invited by Michael and Dorothy Blankfort.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you paid so much a year and you helped acquire work for the County Museum. Was that also the group that sponsored the Young Artist Award?

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And still does. So were you active with this group?

BETTY ASHER: I was very active. I always served on a committee, usually as chairman of the committee. I think I was chairman of the Young Talent Committee for two or three years, and on the Acquisitions Committee—I served on all the committees at one time or another.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When would this have been—1965 - 6 - 7?

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When the Museum had opened. Was there anything that you would say characterized Los Angeles of that time, that would be worth noting? The Modern and Contemporary Art Council came along with the—who were the five couples who founded it, can you remember?

BETTY ASHER: Well, the Blankforts, the Rogerses—that's Henry and Roz Rogers—Betty Freeman and Stanley, her husband at that time—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were any of the Factors in there?

BETTY ASHER: No, I think Don Factor came in later. I don't believe he was one of the initial ones. There was a couple, a fellow - the man has since died - they had a Dutch name that I'll have to look up for you too, and I believe the Hirshes, Pauli and Mel, were also among the original group.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, you were very active in this.

BETTY ASHER: Oh, and the Phillipses, Gifford and Joann.

THOMAS H. GARVER: They don't really spend much time there any more.

BETTY ASHER: Not any more.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The purpose of it was to support modern and contemporary art at the County Museum, and —

BETTY ASHER: —and in the community.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Rick Brown still here at that time or had he left?

BETTY ASHER: Jim Elliot was the moving force of the council. He was the one who organized it. I believe that—yes, Rick was still here, Rick Brown was still director.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So it may have started just before the new building opened, or about that time.

BETTY ASHER: About that time. Come to think of it, I remember having meetings in the old building, so it was before. So it probably came into being about the time that Jim became more interested in doing something about it, and also because the building was probably in the working stage.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You were working on creating more of a support structure for the programs. And were you and Leonard both active, or were you more active than he was, did he just sort of come along?

BETTY ASHER: No, he didn't come along, he went to one meeting and that was enough for him. That reminds me that also, early on, the Sherwoods, Harry and Phyllis—Phyllis has since died—but they were among the original group.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Any relation to Richard?

BETTY ASHER: They're cousins.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Richard Sherwood. I guess he's still chairman of the board of the County Museum.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, if that's what comes after being president.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes, they fly up. So you were taking a more active interest and Leonard was something of a satirical observer, but not as full a participant as he had been when you were collecting earlier. You really had taken very much the dominant position in collecting in the family, and in acquisitions, buying things, even with your own money. Was Michael, your son, showing any interest in art at this time? This was mid- sixties, so he would be in his early twenties in age. Was he involved in art at all?

BETTY ASHER: He didn't become really interested until he was at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where Norman Zammitt was his teacher. He was always interested in what I was doing, interested in the paintings and liked talking to the artists, and liked the work. He had an active interest in it but he didn't know until then what he wanted to do or what he wanted to be. And I think it was there that he decided that he wanted to go into art, and then he came back and he went to—he was in the first class to graduate from UC Irvine. He was the first graduate, because his name began with "A," in the first class.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He majored in art, studio art.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And he had been collecting, or had he been giving you any encouragement or said, "Mom, I like that" or "I don't like that"? Had he ever commented much about the things that you collected?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, he did, he suggested things, and he went to New York for a year at one point to work and to paint and just to stay close to the scene, and he bought things or suggested that I buy things.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This was after he graduated?

BETTY ASHER: I believe it was.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Can you remember some of the things that interested him, that he suggested to you?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, as a matter of fact, he bought, or had me buy, some Don Judd woodcuts, and he got a Don Judd drawing, and he was interested in Flavin and suggested that I buy some—I bought an early lamp that

Flavin made.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, you had two early Flavins, a flower pot and a tin can, I believe.

BETTY ASHER: Right, it was a tin can that he arranged for me to buy when he was in New York. And he became acquainted with Richard Bellamy at the Green Gallery and visited that gallery very frequently, so those were artists that he liked.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you ever look into Robert Morris, or, of course, you had an Oldenburg, and you have a couple of drawings in addition to the cups, don't you? You have the Nose I know.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, that's a multiple. And I have a cup print that he gave me and I have the Cake—Coconut Cream Pie I should say.

THOMAS H. GARVER: On the table, on the dining room table. That's an early piece. So there was an exchange and encouragement between you and Michael, more so than you and Leonard at a certain point, anyway. That is, Leonard was not really—

BETTY ASHER: —not actively interested.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But not—I mean, he wasn't putting you down for what you were collecting—

BETTY ASHER: No, he never did that, not until toward the end—he did a little bit.

THOMAS H. GARVER: All right, here we are about 1966-67. When did you go to work for the County Museum, and if there's something that I've left out between your increasing involvement with the Museum on the Contemporary Art Council and so on, let me know. Were you doing anything else that I might not have known about? Were there any major shifts in your collection or anything of that sort, or involvements with art and artists, let's say from the time you really became quite active in collecting a certain period to your becoming involved on the staff of the County Museum?

BETTY ASHER: I think it was all very gradual, and I kept meeting new people and also I got involved with more galleries and more artists, and of course I met a lot of artists through the Museum.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Through your involvement with the Council.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you get Annie the Ed Ruscha, from the Ferus.

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Obviously, because it was in that show.

BETTY ASHER: Right. Irving had gone to visit Joe Goode, and this was in his studio. Ed had given it to Joe, I believe, was letting him hang it in his studio, and Irving just said that he had to have it and he brought it back to the gallery and showed me and I just took it right away.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Ed in the gallery at the time?

BETTY ASHER: I don't believe so. I think Irving was just getting interested in him, and in Joe, but he didn't take Joe on.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Joe was never in the Ferus Gallery?

BETTY ASHER: No.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Right, Joe showed at Nick Wilder's. Now when did Nick Wilder arrive on the scene? Maybe we should talk about Nick a little bit before we get to the County Museum, because I think he had been here before you went with the County.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, also Henry Hopkins had opened the Huysman Gallery, which was in existence for a short time, and he had a show of the "war babies" in which—he was the first one, actually to show Joe Goode and Ed Boreal and people like that in this little—

THOMAS H. GARVER: He ran that for little less than a year, I think.

BETTY ASHER: I think so, right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Apparently, the “war babies” poster sort of put him out of business.

BETTY ASHER: Oh, is that right?

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, he said he got terrific flak. There was a Japanese artist who was there with a Japanese flag, and Ed Boreal was black, and he had a slice of watermelon. There were all these stereotypes that were photographed that way on the poster. Did you buy anything from the Huysman Gallery? Did you ever have any dealings with Henry that way, other than it just being one of the places that you went by?

BETTY ASHER: I don't think I did. I can't remember if I bought anything or not, I just can't remember. I know that Betty and Monte Factor did because Walter Hopps, I think, picked up something there of Joe Goode's and took it over to them. I don't remember buying anything from Henry.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How did Nick come into your sphere?

BETTY ASHER: Well, Nick started and I remember at that time I was purchasing one of every group of paintings that Joe Goode did. Joe worked in series. He did the milk bottle series and I bought one of those. And then he did a series of skies, and he did steps. I bought one out of every series that he did until he got too expensive. He went with Nick and then he had a series of unmade beds, which I loved, but they were \$1600. They were tremendous, they were really large and they were just beautiful, but I didn't buy one because he just got too expensive for me. My income didn't increase as prices went up, so I had to keep looking for younger people, less expensive people.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you have any Goodes here?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I have one in the back room, and I have a Spoon and Glass - that was probably the last that I bought. He did those in London and I bought one of those, but recently traded it for something else.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you traded the Milk Bottle?

BETTY ASHER: The Milk Bottle belongs to Michael. I bought that for him and he still has that, I believe. They were selling for \$400 at the time, and because he knew us and liked us he gave it to us for \$300.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Nick?

BETTY ASHER: No, Joe. That was before he was with Nick.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I suppose the Ferus, or later Irving Blum, and Nick Wilder were always thought of—at least when I came here—they were locked in tandem the way perhaps other galleries were thought of in tandem, like Esther and Felix.

BETTY ASHER: —Paul and Frank—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes, right, exactly, and so they were handling art of different eras and different character and style, different ages of artists. What can you remember about Nick's coming here—when was it, and was it a real flash upon the scene, or did he just sort of come on more quietly?

BETTY ASHER: I think it was pretty close to being a flash because he picked up a lot of artists that were very, very good, that Ferus couldn't handle because Ferus was beginning to have New York shows in between, so that limited the number of local Los Angeles or Southern California artists that they could show, somewhat in the way we operate, in that you can only do so many of those, if you're going to show New York artists also. So Nick picked up people that I liked. Like he showed John McCracken and I liked John. The first time I saw John McCracken was at Nick Wilder's.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was Nick also showing New York people as he did later, or was he—

BETTY ASHER: I just can't remember. I know he showed Tom Holland early. I can't remember if he showed Olitski, I have a vague feeling he did show Olitski.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I can remember that Rowan apparently acquired so much of his color field painting, and a lot of the Louises.

BETTY ASHER: I know that he had a Morris Louis show, but I think it was after he moved from La Cienega. He may have had Noland in the early days of the La Cienega gallery.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did he open up at the gallery across from Irving, was that his first space?

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That's the space that I remember when I came in 1968.

BETTY ASHER: And he possibly did have those color field paintings.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you didn't respond to that, you didn't buy any. If you bought anything from Nick it was local people.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What about your arrival at the County Museum? How did all of that come about, and maybe before that, when did Maurice [Tuchman] come out here? Had he been hired by Rick Brown?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, he and Kenneth Donahue were hired at the same time by Rick, and by the Board of Trustees at that time.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So he came out in the mid-sixties then.

BETTY ASHER: Yes. He's been there now I'd say about fifteen years, so—

THOMAS H. GARVER: How old is Maurice?

BETTY ASHER: Maurice was twenty-eight when he arrived, so he's about forty-three now. He came just a few months before the new Museum opened, and his first show was the Kienholz show, I think. I started working there at the end of the Kienholz show.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You arrived at a very exciting moment. That was a show in about 1967, the Kienholz show, because it came to the Museum of Contemporary Art in Boston, and of course his Back Seat Dodge 38 was preceded—its arrival in Boston was preceded by this storm of outrage and scandal from Los Angeles, because it was such a smutty piece. I can remember I was so let down when I finally opened the door.

BETTY ASHER: Those two wire figures.

THOMAS H. GARVER: It had never been photographed, it had simply been described, so they had door attendants, I think. If there was someone eighteen or over they would open the door—

BETTY ASHER: Otherwise it was kept closed at all times. There was a great deal of notoriety. Maurice was asked to remove the piece from the show, and of course he and the artist refused and said they would then close the entire show rather than remove one piece. And there were lines all around the block. It was the first time that happened at the County Museum.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Had there been no uproar made about it, of course, the show would have received no notice and been lightly attended.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How did you become involved with the Museum? How did you make that transition from collector and friend of the artist, lady about art, to being a staff member and working with Maurice?

BETTY ASHER: Well, about the time that Jim Elliot was leaving the Museum, and Maurice was there and only had a secretary to help him, Jim suggested that I come in a couple of days a week and help Maurice. About that time my funds were so low that it became necessary for me to consider dropping out of what was then called the Contemporary Art Council because the fee was \$500 a year, and I no longer had that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You had run through your legacy.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, so Jim suggested that I come in a couple of days a week and that something could be worked out whereby I would then get my Council membership free. In other words, the Council would in essence be paying me \$500 a year.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you were not exactly a volunteer.

BETTY ASHER: No, I really was never a volunteer at the Museum. Actually, the Associates started paying me right away, I believe, a small amount, but it was supplemented by the Council, by that membership. And I did liaison work for the Council with the Museum and with Maurice, and sort of carried the messages back and forth.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Tell me a little more about that and what you started doing. Now you were liaison with the

Modern and Contemporary Art Council, and you said the Associates.

BETTY ASHER: No, the Associates paid me. You see, I wasn't put on a County fund. The County paid most of the employees, but the Associates supplemented some salaries, and also paid for positions that were necessary that the County did not have on their roster.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What was the principal title of the Associates?

BETTY ASHER: I think it's the Associates of the Los Angeles County Museum of Modern Art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Is it a membership group?

BETTY ASHER: It's essentially the Board of Trustees.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So this was a slush fund, a fund of private contributions which would be able to help underwrite publicly financed salaries for creating positions that could not be paid by the County.

BETTY ASHER: Right. Now whether some of that came from membership or not, I don't know.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But you were paid, anyway. What were your early duties there?

BETTY ASHER: Because of the move from the old museum to the new, and the packing and moving, there was a tremendous accumulation of correspondence that had to be taken care of. So I wrote letters for Maurice, and a lot of artists sent in slides and I responded to those, and I just did various and sundry duties that came up that he didn't have time for, or that his secretary couldn't do or didn't have time to do. The position just sort of grew.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You started as an administrative assistant, I would say—you were not a secretary—

BETTY ASHER: He called me his assistant.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now this is in '67 - '68 - '69. When I first came up to the County Museum, I suppose it was in late '68, you were there, Maurice was there, and there were - I'm trying to remember who else was there - Jane Livingston. Was there someone else?

BETTY ASHER: Gail Scott.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Gail Scott, yes. And then Jane left fairly shortly thereafter.

BETTY ASHER: Jane left six or seven years ago. She was there for seven years.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was she really?

BETTY ASHER: What happened to me was that as the workload grew heavier and heavier, the man that was in charge of administration asked me to work three days a week, and then they asked me to work four days a week, and then five—

THOMAS H. GARVER: This was Rex Stead?

BETTY ASHER: No, it was one of the administrators.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Herb Golden, or one of those—

BETTY ASHER: The man before Golden.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What were your official duties, I'll put it that way, as the workload went up? What were you doing?

BETTY ASHER: Well, besides taking care of all the correspondence, I did research for shows, and I did catalogue listings for the publications, and I occasionally helped hang shows, that is, lay them out with the curator.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you would work with Maurice and Jane and Gail as well?

BETTY ASHER: Right. They came later, of course.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes, but you'd start first with Maurice.

BETTY ASHER: Right. And then I did things for the Council, like very often he was too busy to talk to people and I'd talk to them and pass messages on to him and get the answers, and in general I was sort of like a girl Friday.

I just did all the things that the other people couldn't do or wouldn't do.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I think I'm going to stop here and we'll pick up next time.

[END OF FIRST SESSION]

[BEGINNING OF SECOND SESSION]

[July 7, 1980, recorded at Betty Asher's home in Beverly Hills.]

THOMAS H. GARVER: Let's see, when we left off last week, you were just describing the beginnings of your employment at the County Museum, and if I remember, you said that you were not a County employee at first, you were a part-time employee, working for the Modern and Contemporary Art Council; you were paid by them to assist Maurice?

BETTY ASHER: Well, the first job I was called in to do for the Council was to do the New Talent Award work. I had been chairman for several years, and then, as we did at that time, we would rotate the job and somebody else would take on the chairmanship. Normally, the awards were given in May. It was April, and they hadn't even begun to see people. Normally, you would begin in September or October or November and then they would give the award in May. So they asked me if I would take over and try to pull it out of the mess it was in. I said no, I wouldn't, so they said if they paid me, would I do it. So I said, yes, I would. I think, as I recall now, they paid me just a flat fee, like \$200 or something like that, to take the committee and go out and see people, and instead of making the award in May, we made it in October, because it took that long to see everybody.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you beginning to feel that you wanted to work for money, rather than be a volunteer matron, as it were?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I had never really done any volunteer work at the Museum. But my financial situation had deteriorated, and I did want to do some work for money. And about that time, as the Museum moved and was in its new location, and Jim Elliot was about to leave, he suggested to Maurice that he have me come in and help with the backlog of work that they had accumulated in the process of moving from one building to the other. Jim Elliot was leaving and Maurice was going to be alone there in the Modern Art department.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Jim Elliot was sort of curator of the whole place, wasn't he?

BETTY ASHER: He was chief curator, and also curator of Modern Art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Oh, he was? So Maurice had been his assistant?

BETTY ASHER: Right, but just for a short time before he left.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did Maurice come to the Museum before it moved?

BETTY ASHER: Just before, just a few months, I think, before.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you were still out on Exposition Boulevard, where the Natural History Museum is now.

BETTY ASHER: Right. But then after he moved up, and he was alone in the department, he just had a secretary. So they asked me to come in two days a week, and they paid me through the Associates.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You were not paid by the Modern and Contemporary Art Council, but by the Associates like is done at the Fine Art Museums in San Francisco, where the Museum Society will pay for some salaries that the City and County cannot. So at this point you and Leonard were still married, but Leonard's investment had not proven to be fortuitous.

BETTY ASHER: True. That's a good way to put it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you were looking for ways to supplement your income and also, I think - let me ask you this, too - also to continue to be able to acquire works of art?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, because that money I could use for that purpose, anything that I made on my own. I didn't really have to contribute to the household, although I did lend money to the household when it was necessary, but usually made every attempt to pay myself back.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But Leonard had also been losing interest in modern art, I think his interest had moved elsewhere, isn't it correct to say that—or his involvements?

BETTY ASHER: Well, he was never really completely involved. He still seemed slightly interested in what I bought, and usually said whether he liked it or not, and he continued going to art parties and occasionally to a

museum opening with me, but I would say yes, he was less interested.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, I remember that the basis of your collection was the AAA prints that Leonard had when you got married.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And that you and he had acquired a Raphael Soyer together, and in early times you and he had been working much more closely together.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you came into the County Museum just as—had Jim Elliot left for Hartford when you started there?

BETTY ASHER: Well, when I started, I just did a lot of letter writing and filing and I helped do the catalogue listings for exhibitions. I did some research for Maurice, I did a lot of little odd jobs that didn't take a lot of intelligence, or just took dedication and hard work. I was also a liaison for the Contemporary Art Council, and that was what they paid me for then, and they paid me by just not charging me for my membership on the Council.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You remained a member, right? And while at the same time a staff member at the Museum. Was Maurice also a member?

BETTY ASHER: He was, I suppose you'd call it *ex officio*.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The Contemporary Art Council—I guess the name was later changed to the Modern and Contemporary Art Council, when people thought they wanted to get involved in more historical art? Why was the name changed?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I think that was it. They wanted people to know that they were also interested in modern art, although the department was called the Modern Art department, so I always thought it should be the Modern Art Council, because the Modern Art department encompassed contemporary art too. Also because Modern and Contemporary Art Council was a rather cumbersome name.

THOMAS H. GARVER: In your capacity as both Museum staff member and liaison with the Modern and Contemporary Art Council, what would you be doing for the Council, or for the Museum or Maurice?

BETTY ASHER: When I started working, yes, Jim had left, and the department consisted of Maurice and a secretary and myself, and I was there just two days a week, and the workload just kept getting heavier, so they asked me to work three days a week and then about six months later they asked me to work four days a week and then about six months later, five days a week. So pretty soon I was working full time.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were you always paid by the Associates in the twelve years you worked there?

BETTY ASHER: For about the first nine. And then we had a new administrative man who decided those positions – there were about thirteen of them – should be paid by the County. So he worked with the County to make those County positions, and we were then all transferred after the usual examinations and so forth.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You had to take civil service examinations?

BETTY ASHER: Well, not really. We had to go down and be interviewed, we had to have physicals, and there are various ways of getting around that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So this was in 1976 or so?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, '75 or '76.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Tell me about your duties there, and how they changed over the years, and what you did and maybe some of the high and low moments that you can recall. Because I think you were very much on the firing line of that interesting and controversial institution at that time.

BETTY ASHER: Well, frequently it was just making contact. Very often they couldn't get through to Maurice, so they would tell me their problems or what they wanted to say to him, or ask him, and then I would relay it to him, get the answer, and call them back. And I also helped any of the Council members or committee chairmen who needed help. If we had some sort of event at the Museum, then I would set up the necessary room and get the personnel lined up and get the equipment that was needed – if they needed a projector or film. I also sat on

the Museum side of the New Talent Award Committee, because the Museum personnel, that is, Maurice and I, made the final decisions. Then when Jane Livingston and Gail Scott were there, they were also on that committee, so that Museum staff made up half of the New Talent Committee.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So there would be four committee members from the Modern and Contemporary Art Council and four Museum staff members: you, Maurice, Gail and Jane?

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And after Gail Scott and Jane Livingston left, well, they were replaced, of course.

BETTY ASHER: —with Stephanie—

THOMAS H. GARVER: —Stephanie came in, and did she sit on that panel, too?

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you made the final decision of what - three finalists, or something like that - you'd be offered?

BETTY ASHER: Well, at one time, it operated with the committee members meeting with the staff members, and we would usually meet at someone's home. And each person was supposed to have his or her list of the three that they thought should get it and then we would eliminate—come to the final decision by arguing for our people, talking about them. Then we had a secret ballot, and we did that for many years. That was the way it was determined. Some of the sessions became quite heated, and as a matter of fact, two Council members quit the Council because they felt that the Museum personnel had come with predetermined notions, and a single front, which was not so, because we had not discussed it prior to the meeting. And I found out later that they had met and they had sat down and decided who they wanted.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So it was four to four, in effect?

BETTY ASHER: At that time, I believe, there were four of us. It may have been three.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But it was a tie vote? The members of the Council wanted the one group and the Museum staff members wanted another group?

BETTY ASHER: No, there was some mixture, but the Museum staff—as a matter of fact, I wasn't in complete agreement with Jane and Maurice, and Jane was not in agreement either. We had not decided on the ones we wanted, but the Council had. Anyway, it was quite unpleasant, so after that, a new method was determined, and that was that the Council committee visit the artists. They usually visited between eighty and a hundred artists a year, or saw their work in galleries. Then they suggest at the midway mark in the year any number they think that the Museum staff should see - it might be ten, twenty, or thirty, something like that. Then the staff attempts to visit those artists. Then, at the end of the year, this process is repeated - after which the New Talent Committee gives the staff a list of ten names, and from that the staff must select—now it's two artists.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So that of the twenty or thirty that might have been recommended, hopefully the staff would have seen them, and then the Modern and Contemporary Art Council would say of those thirty we finally recommend to you, ten, any one or two of whom we would be pleased to support, and then the staff makes the final decision.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And how much money were they getting then and now?

BETTY ASHER: Originally it started with one artist at \$1500, and gradually became three at \$1500 and then three at \$2000, and now it's two artists at \$3000.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The effects of inflation.

BETTY ASHER: This was the first year the Council decided just to give two awards because of inflation. For many years they've appropriated \$6000.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The \$3000 is a purchase award, isn't it? The County Museum acquires work and the artist gets the money for the work and they also have an exhibition, right?

BETTY ASHER: Not necessarily. The artist doesn't have to give a work of art. He or she has—it was originally up to three years to give it, and then they increased that to six years, and at the present time, I don't know if it's

still six or if it's gone back to three.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now wait, I'm not clear on that. The artist receives a gift, a grant, in a sense, or an award for which he or she—that's a purchase award?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, but the artist doesn't have to give the painting or sculpture or artwork until—

THOMAS H. GARVER: —a later date?

BETTY ASHER: Any time within a three-year period, let's say. Or it may be six.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And the show is—

BETTY ASHER: They don't always have a show. At one point I did a show of New Talent Award artists who had never been shown. There were about ten or twelve artists. They had never given their gifts either, so I went to the artists who were delinquent in giving their gifts, got them, and had a little show of them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So these were in a sense like new acquisitions. But if you didn't give your painting and it really, I suppose, wasn't a gift, you had been paid for it, but if you hadn't given your work, you didn't get a show?

BETTY ASHER: No, there was no show connected with it at any time. Occasionally if there was a time that was open, and Maurice felt inclined to do so, he gave them a show. But they didn't always have shows.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So the chief benefit to the artist was that recognition from the Council, and then a certain amount of money for which he or she would have to eventually turn over a work of art.

BETTY ASHER: Right, and then they would be in the permanent collection at the County Museum, which is an honor.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Right. Maybe that may have been more of a big deal then than now, but you never know. And it's open to artists who are 35 or under?

BETTY ASHER: 35 or under, right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Residing in Los Angeles County.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What else does the Modern and Contemporary Art Council do?

BETTY ASHER: Well, they sponsor exhibitions; they frequently give money for catalogues. Practically everything the Modern Art department does is sponsored by the Modern and Contemporary Art Council. They have an Acquisitions Committee; they buy work for the Museum. They give two public lectures a year. That is, they hire or invite an artist or museum director, some art person, to come to the Museum and speak, and those lectures are free to the public. And they have meetings, informal evenings, in which they also ask an artist or any art person who happens to be visiting in the city to come to an informal meeting where he or she will speak, maybe anywhere from ten to twenty minutes, show slides if they want, and then have questions and answers.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I can remember speaking at one of those on the Christo Valley Curtain

BETTY ASHER: Oh, I remember that. That was up at the Smiths'.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I can remember Michael Blankfort saying, "Well, it may be all right if so-and-so spends three quarters of a million for a Jasper Johns," but he thought that the three quarters of a million that Christo had spent on that was too much money for a work of contemporary art.

BETTY ASHER: Didn't he say, "Is it art?"

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, he might have. I remember there was a whole issue of the evanescence of it, but I was very startled by the negative reactions of the collectors there to the project, and to the idea that somehow there was a top dollar amount, you know, and that this project had exceeded it.

BETTY ASHER: It was a surprising evening. It was a small evening, fortunately, or you might have been in for a few more surprises.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, how is it—you have been a member almost since it was founded?

BETTY ASHER: Shortly after it was founded.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you see it as a beneficial organization?

BETTY ASHER: Oh yes, I have. They do a lot of good for the Museum. But I think the people who've joined have learned a few things, and they do like to come to those meetings, and sometimes there are special openings and various other privileges that they have.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I know that some of the artists have tended to curl their lip at this group of Brentwood and Bel Air and Beverly Hills types descending on their studios to sort of parade through. But I suppose that's one of the problems of mixing patronage and creation in that way. One of the earliest grants went to Tony Berlant, and he spent his \$1500 on, of course, a painting by Roy Lichtenstein and a drawing by Bob Rauschenberg. And there was apparently some response, or reaction, from the members of the Modern and Contemporary Art Council. Do you recall that?

BETTY ASHER: I don't recall that. All I know is that one of the purposes the Council has in giving this award is to keep the artist in Los Angeles and give him the money he can live on for a while. So many artists were talking about leaving for New York and so forth. And there are no strings attached to it, but it's the hope that they'll stay and work here in Southern California, in Los Angeles County. Tony obviously didn't need the money, and I knew that he had a Lichtenstein but I wasn't aware of the fact that that's the way he got it. But—

THOMAS H. GARVER: He sold that, but he still has the Rauschenberg.

BETTY ASHER: —there's no reason why he shouldn't have.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, he's continued to live and work in Los Angeles County, so it worked.

BETTY ASHER: Well, he now has a loft in New York, so he spends half the time here, the way some other artists do.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I didn't know he had a loft in New York. Are there any other vignettes or experiences that you can recall in dealing with the Modern and Contemporary Art Council and its relationship to the artists of the community?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I do know that the artists who won the awards were always very pleased, and I frequently heard complaints that the questions they asked were not very bright and showed lack of information, or that sometimes some of the women would riffle through the paintings that were obviously turned toward the wall so we wouldn't look at them. But all in all—I know it was difficult for the artists and they were often very nervous, but I do think that it's been worthwhile and a good thing, and it's been good for the Council members; they liked to do it, and I think a few of them have learned a little bit.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were there many acquisitions, do you think, by Council members from studios—work that they'd seen there?

BETTY ASHER: Well, it was a rule that they weren't supposed to buy anything when they made the rounds until after the Award was made because there might be a conflict. And it did happen occasionally that somebody would buy something, and in one case I remember that the Council member told the artist he was going to win. She bought a piece, she thought he was so terrific. But she told him he was going to win, and of course, he didn't. There were some bad times like that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did he then tell other people that he was going to win?

BETTY ASHER: Oh, yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who was it?

BETTY ASHER: I'm not even sure. He's a sculptor. I'll think of his name later. He hasn't been around very much, so I'm not conscious of him.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You mean he's faded from the scene?

BETTY ASHER: A little.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Your tenure there, at the County Museum, and Maurice's have nearly coincided, I guess, although he did come a little earlier.

BETTY ASHER: Right, he came a little earlier. I came perhaps six to nine months after he did, or a year.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I think he had a long tenure there. The Museum has taken a certain stance in terms of modern and contemporary art, and it's been a controversial one, and I think Maurice has been controversial. I think it would be very helpful if you could discuss some of these, maybe the high and low points of the twelve years you were there and working with Maurice, maybe in reference particularly to some of the biggest shows, or things that were done well or were not done well. I think this is very important because this shows the dynamic of the institution as regards to contemporary art. You may not have been privy to decisions at a high-up level, but you were down there, below stairs, carrying them out, you know. Maurice, I think, has—or let's just say the County Museum has lost some friends—I'm not sure if I mentioned Marcia and Fred Weisman. I know they started out as supporters of Maurice and are no longer that. What had been some of these problems?

BETTY ASHER: Well, to begin with, Maurice's position is different, say—well let's compare him with Henry Hopkins of San Francisco. Henry is director of the museum—well, perhaps he isn't a good example—but if I could just take some director or a curator who is given funds to entertain and to go out and talk to members of the Board of Trustees, to visit them—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Jim Speyer?

BETTY ASHER: That would perhaps be a good one, right, but somebody like that who can court these people and can spend pleasant evenings with them, and perhaps flatter them or whatever is necessary to do to get support. Maurice was never invited to the trustees' homes. He was never allowed to go out to a trustee and ask for money for a gift or invite them out. He was not allowed to have contact with the Board of Trustees, so he was sort of isolated.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who made this decision? Was this the Board decision, or was this a County decision, that employees will not—

BETTY ASHER: No, I think it was a decision from the Board of Trustees.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Clark Polak wrote a series of articles in the Free Press. What was their nature generally, as you recall?

BETTY ASHER: Well, they were very critical of Maurice, and of the fact that he was not only taking money for writing articles for Marlborough, but he was also recommending purchases of works of art, of artists who were sold by Marlborough.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He was also recommending these purchases to museums, or to private collectors?

BETTY ASHER: To museums. And that he was acting as—I'm not sure there was anything in his articles about this, but some people criticized him for taking fees for recommending purchases to private people, I think mainly like corporation people who were building their own private collections.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was there any response to these charges from the Board of Trustees?

BETTY ASHER: I think that they decided to ignore them. As far as I know, they didn't write to Clark Polak, write a letter to the editor, or anything like that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was there any internal criticism of Maurice from the Board that you knew of? Or any reaction one way or another, maybe support as well as criticism?

BETTY ASHER: I don't think any member of the Board read the Free Press but somebody might have brought it to their attention. I imagine there was some discussion about it, but I don't remember their doing anything about it. And about that time, you know, Maurice was spending a lot of time in Europe, and that was one thing he was criticized for, because he would go for two or three weeks or a month, come back for a short time and then go again.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What was he doing in Europe?

BETTY ASHER: Well, he was supposedly working on a show, doing some research.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That was the New European show from which you showed me the catalogue?

BETTY ASHER: Right. "European Art of the Seventies."

THOMAS H. GARVER: Right. A group of younger artists. Was he also doing any work for the Centre Pompidou, or anything of that sort?

BETTY ASHER: Not to my knowledge, I don't believe he was.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You mentioned that he had given the idea of the New York/Paris, and perhaps, coincidentally the successor shows, New York/Berlin, Paris/Berlin, and Paris/Moscow to Pontus Hulten and that Hulten had taken it as his own.

BETTY ASHER: Well, he developed it and presented it, but he did give Maurice credit for the idea in the catalogue.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was any of this criticism making itself felt among other staff members of the department?

BETTY ASHER: Well, perhaps other staff members of the Museum, not in the Modern Art department. We were all very loyal and faithful, and we were working hard. Jane was doing her Bruce Nauman show and we were doing mini-shows—I can't remember what other show came at that time. But Maurice always came back and worked for a while and then went away again.

THOMAS H. GARVER: There was a good deal of criticism, I think, among some local artists, at any rate that Maurice – or the Modern Art department of the Museum – was not paying sufficient attention. I think this kind of criticism is endemic in any museum that is involved in contemporary art. Local artists will always be simmering.

BETTY ASHER: A lot of local artists complained that their work wasn't shown, and it used to be my contention that very often it was because their work wasn't good. But they always were hurt and upset because they weren't included in shows, or didn't have a one-man show.

THOMAS H. GARVER: It's sometimes hard to say to an artist, "We're not showing you because you're no good," or, "I don't like your work."

BETTY ASHER: Because frequently, even though a lot of those mini-shows were young artists, people forgot, and they would say he wasn't doing anything for the art community. He did a Wally Berman show – that was the first of the mini-shows. Wally was alive at the time, and it was the first time Wally was shown out here, other than in a commercial gallery.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What were some of the other shows, the mini-shows?

BETTY ASHER: Well, he did David Gray. He also had done larger shows of Irwin and Price and Bengston and Westermann—Westermann was not a local artist. He did one on "Late Fifties at the Ferus" which included a lot of the Los Angeles artists. He did—he showed George Cohen, who was from San Diego.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That was where the computer was sent across the floor with sort of a marking device, isn't that right?

BETTY ASHER: It was a computer that drew lines.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But they were drawn on the floor, weren't they?

BETTY ASHER: No, they were on a table, I think.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Then he has expanded the device to use sort of a crawling device connected by cables to—

BETTY ASHER: Oh, no, this was a small machine out of which the drawings were spewed.

THOMAS H. GARVER: There would be so many of them produced per hour?

BETTY ASHER: Right, and then he signed them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And sold them, or gave them away, or—

BETTY ASHER: He gave a lot of them away. I can't remember if he sold them or not.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, I remember that in perhaps 1971, or early '72, Maurice had scheduled a show of Chris Burden. Do you remember that?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I do.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Tell me about that.

BETTY ASHER: Well, Chris made a proposal of what he wanted to do, and he wanted to sit in that upstairs corner gallery on Ahmanson where we held most of those mini-shows, and he wanted to camp there with his wife for ten days, and sleep there and eat there and so forth. And the Board of Trustees would not approve it because they were afraid that something might happen to paintings in the Museum. They couldn't leave them in there

overnight without guards, and they worried about having people living in the Museum. It probably had something to do with insurance rates, also.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I have been told, true or not, that the Board was concerned—it was one of those times when Norton Simon was being wooed again, and they were afraid that if Simon got wind of some artist camping out in the same building with his works of old art, he would withdraw his support.

BETTY ASHER: Well, it probably was at a time when they were wooing Simon, because they wooed him for many years, so almost everything was included in that period until the time when he took over the Pasadena Museum, or until maybe a year before. So that may have been. I hadn't heard that, but that was very possible. Of course, they didn't know Chris, so they didn't know but that he might walk around damaging some of those paintings or taking them down or moving them, or almost anything. They just didn't know him well enough to know that he wouldn't do that, that he would stay in his own little spot. But that's part of his art.

THOMAS H. GARVER: One of the parts of the art was that in fact he would camp out on the spot, and not get off it or move off it for ten days or two weeks or whatever the period would be. Were there any official or non-official relations during the late sixties and early seventies between the County Museum and the Pasadena Museum or other local museums in a contemporary, in a modern way? Was there anything from your standpoint you would be aware of?

BETTY ASHER: You mean that we worked together?

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes, you might work together or share something, or participate in something other than just, say, a loan of a work.

BETTY ASHER: I can't recall anything that we did together. One of the reasons Maurice said he took the job at the County Museum was because Walter Hopps was at Pasadena and he wanted to work with Walter and he wanted to be cooperative. But Walter, as you know, I love him dearly, but he is strange, and Maurice claims he, Maurice, tried to do things with Walter and tried to make contact with Walter, and Walter just ignored him, had nothing to do with him.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I'm glad you brought up Walter Hopps because you, of course, had been a long-time friend – I guess, starting by buying things at the Ferus when Walter was involved there?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, the first large painting I bought was a Frank Lobdell. I think I mentioned it. I bought it from the Ferus Gallery, and Walter was there at the time.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What sort of relationship did you have with Walter when he was living here? Was it anything other than just a casual acquaintance? Were you involved in any projects together or anything of that sort?

BETTY ASHER: No, I wasn't involved in any projects; it was just a casual acquaintance and friendship and I had him over for parties. But Walter is very elusive and he had his own life. We just liked one another, and he call me periodically. He still calls once in a while.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Tell me about your trip to Las Vegas with Walter and Marcel Duchamp. How did that come about.

BETTY ASHER: Well, Marcel Duchamp was in Pasadena for the opening of a show – that must have been 1964 – and Bill Copley was out here. Bill was a longtime friend of Marcel's, and he wanted to take him to Las Vegas because Marcel Duchamp had never been there and he thought it was just the sort of place that he would love, that it would just fit into his kind of thinking and his esthetic. So Bill invited Walter and Richard Hamilton, who was out here for the opening of the show, and Betty and Monte Factor and me to go with the Duchamps—Mrs. Duchamp, Tini, was here also. So actually I think Bill took us all, and we went out to the airport. In those days the small planes that you took to Las Vegas had observation seats in the back, curved seats—or maybe it was called a lounge—

THOMAS H. GARVER: Were there big windows or something that you could look out, so that you could truly observe?

BETTY ASHER: I don't think that they—I called them observation because I was thinking of the train, but they may not have called them that. I think it was sort of a lounge. So we all sat back there and we all fit into the circle except for two people who had to sit on the arms of the chairs in front, and I sat next to Duchamp and after we were about ten or fifteen minutes into the flight and I had been talking to him, I just got up and left my seat and somebody else moved in, and that person stayed for just about ten minutes and then got up. We had no previously arranged plan or anything, but that way we could all rotate and we all got a chance to sit next to

him and talk. And when we got there, we decided we all wanted to do something different, so we decided to split and meet for dinner. So that's what we did, we all came back for dinner and then we just did what we wanted to do in the evening and then we met for breakfast and came home. At dinner we went to the Stardust and they have the follies or something, a girlie theater, and I was sitting next to Marcel at the table and the picture is a result of one of those girls in short skirts coming around with a big camera to take pictures. And just as she was about to click, I put my arm around Marcel, my fingertips very gingerly touched his shoulder because I didn't want him to know that I was doing this, so I have this nice picture of Marcel with my arm around him.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you remember anything from that occasion, his observations? Putting Duchamp in Las Vegas would be quite interesting.

BETTY ASHER: Well, we all went downtown together to see the lights, and he was very, very excited. It was like a wonderland to him. He'd never seen anything like it. And he sat next to Walter Hopps at the roulette table quite a bit, and they thought that they had some sort of system to beat the roulette wheel, and he would advise Walter. He claimed he didn't gamble at all, but I thought I saw him putting a nickel in one of the slot machines at one point.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you were just there overnight. But he enjoyed the experience?

BETTY ASHER: Very much. He was very thrilled. We all had a good time; it was a great weekend.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What did you do?

BETTY ASHER: I played poker. And I played poker quite late at night, and as each one of them went to bed, they came over and said good night to me as I was sitting there at the poker table.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you win?

BETTY ASHER: I don't remember. Probably not?

THOMAS H. GARVER: How has your poker game been recently?

BETTY ASHER: It's been all right in the small game I play in occasionally, but there's one larger game that once in a while I play in, and I haven't been able to win at all. I've given it up.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I can't believe that. Maybe for the moment. So you would see Walter, and you would go over to the exhibitions at the Pasadena Museum, I assume.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, I went to them frequently.

THOMAS H. GARVER: While Walter was there, anyway. After he left and—who was in next, Tom Leavitt, I guess, and then Jim Demetrian?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, and then Coplans.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes, although Coplans was never director. He may have acted like he was director.

BETTY ASHER: He was never director?

THOMAS H. GARVER: He was curator under Demetrian.

BETTY ASHER: And then Tom Terbell.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Right. You would see these, but you weren't involved in any other way than a friendly personal way; there was no museum involvement at all.

BETTY ASHER: No.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I remember when the County Museum was asked to take over the Pasadena Museum and wouldn't, which is too bad.

BETTY ASHER: Right. It's too bad because that would have been a solution to everything.

THOMAS H. GARVER: To get back now to your involvement in the department at the County Museum, was Maurice ever supplied with an expense account or ever encouraged to hobnob with the trustees, or had this continued, up until the time you left?

BETTY ASHER: To my knowledge he was never encouraged to do that and never given any money. He received

some money from the Council for entertainment, but it was a very small amount, budgeted so that he could—you know, other curators or directors would come to town and he had to have some sort of funds from which to draw.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He seems every inch to be successful, drives a Mercedes convertible and dresses well and so on.

BETTY ASHER: The Museum for a while did supplement his salary. Then when they were angry with him or provoked with him, at some point they discontinued this. But I think the Council now supplements it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He can do no wrong after the Russian show, I would say. It was quite an exhibition.

BETTY ASHER: It was beautiful.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Before we go on to your life after the Museum, after you left, is there anything else that you think should be important for history to know about your work at the County Museum, those twelve years of your life?

BETTY ASHER: Well, somewhere I had to write up, at some point, a job description of what I did. I should have refreshed my memory with that. I had that all written out exactly step by step what my chores and duties were.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You know, tapes like this usually fill in the gaps between what's been written officially.

BETTY ASHER: That's right. You have that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That is accessible material, but the—you, I think, essentially worked in a trusted capacity. I think at times you functioned as a curator and at other times in an administrative capacity. Would that be fair to say? I mean, you would be a technical—answer these letters, get these people off our backs sort of thing, while at the same time your input and viewpoint would be, I presume, both sought after and respected in the department.

BETTY ASHER: I suppose that's a safe way to say it. Another thing that I did that Maurice liked was that I knew art people from all over the world because of my activities as a collector and my presence in galleries — I didn't travel a lot but I went to New York occasionally, and I met a lot of museum people that way and also other collectors from all over the world. So Maurice always liked it that I was able to drive them around or entertain them and be on hand when they were present.

THOMAS H. GARVER: When they came to visit Los Angeles.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you fulfilled some of the effort of taking care of visiting firemen, and I would imagine you enjoyed that, too.

BETTY ASHER: Oh, sure.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You left the County Museum now about two years ago?

BETTY ASHER: That's right. Just about exactly two years ago.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And why did you finally decide to leave? Was it the thought of Proposition 13?

BETTY ASHER: No, Proposition 13 had passed, and there was a lot of uneasiness among the people in the lower echelons. My job could be dispensed with, I felt, and I thought that probably if they did ask people to leave according to seniority, I would be one of the first, because I had only been on the County for about two years or maybe a little less, and it would be the County that would be firing people. However, nothing happened. But because of the unrest several people came to me and offered me jobs and made suggestions of things that I could do or maybe should do. And then Patty came to me with this idea for a gallery that seemed a little bit different from other galleries. It sounded as though it might be a good thing.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This is Patty—

BETTY ASHER: Patty Faure, Patricia Faure. So I decided to do it. I worked for a few months longer while she did a lot of the initial work in forming the gallery, and then when I felt - in about August two years ago - that she was getting to the point where she needed full-time help, I decided to leave.

THOMAS H. GARVER: This is then August 1978 that you left, and you had been discussing this for a couple of

months then, the idea of opening a gallery.

BETTY ASHER: Oh, for more than that probably.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Had she left Nick Wilder at that point?

BETTY ASHER: That's why she had come to me. She had to find something to do to support herself and so she thought of this idea. I think she left Nick in June.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Of 1978.

BETTY ASHER: Yes.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you left in August of 1978.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, and we opened in May of '79. And in the interim between the time I left the Museum and when we opened the gallery, I did private dealing at home while we were working at forming the gallery.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now while you were still at the County Museum, were you continuing to collect actively, would you say?

BETTY ASHER: In a small way. When I could I bought very small things, inexpensive things. Unless I had to sell something. I could sell or trade larger things.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You left Leonard in 1976 or '77?

BETTY ASHER: I think it was actually in about 1974 that I told him I was going to get a divorce, but it was at least a year and a half or two years later before the divorce was final.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And with the divorce you sold that house?

BETTY ASHER: No, I lived in it for about a year, I think, and it just became too expensive for me to keep.

THOMAS H. GARVER: It's over there in Brentwood. I know vaguely; it's over near where the Grinsteins and the Factors, Betty and Monte Factor used to live. Then this condominium was being built and you moved in, in '77 or so?

BETTY ASHER: —in December of 1976.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you sell anything from your collection at that time, during that difficult transitional period?

BETTY ASHER: No, nothing major.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So you continued to acquire, and of course the condominium you moved into has been adjusted to accommodate the works of art.

BETTY ASHER: After I got here I sold one or two large paintings.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And you've sold some things, of course, in your role as dealer.

BETTY ASHER: Of my own? I think just one painting.

THOMAS H. GARVER: You were continuing to collect, anyway, while you were—what was your title at the County Museum? I don't think I ever asked you.

BETTY ASHER: When I went on the County payroll, it became "Curatorial Assistant." Prior to that it was just Assistant to Maurice Tuchman. He called me various things. He called me "executive assistant," or "administrative assistant," just whatever he could think of when he was writing something in a catalogue.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So how did you feel about going into business? You were then in your early 60's—

BETTY ASHER: I'd say middle 60's.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Here you were taking on a new, and clearly probably one of the most daring ventures of your life.

BETTY ASHER: Well, I felt I had to do something to make some money. I had to have some income, so I had to do

something and the only other thing would have been to take a job, maybe in an art gallery.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you ever think of private consulting? That sort of Tamara Thomas role?

BETTY ASHER: Well, I don't think I could do that the way she does it. She's a real power-house. I thought of doing private dealing as I was doing out of my apartment. That was working fairly well. If I had continued, though, I would have had to get another location or more room, or send all my own paintings out to storage so that I'd have room to show things. But I did think of that. But then I decided to try the gallery, and it was exciting. I don't know, I didn't think about the fact that I was pretty old to be starting out something new. It was the natural thing to do.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The gallery itself has a couple of interesting ideas about it, I think—both its intended purpose and also the way in which it's been financed or underwritten. I think your putting out a prospectus for the sale of shares was actually not unknown, but perhaps an unusual way of financing a gallery.

BETTY ASHER: Well, I had never been involved in any other gallery financing, except I'm sure that some of them are financed by the dealer's own private funds or family funds, or one or more backers who just are friends. But we didn't have anyone like that so we knew we had to get money from prominent people in the area. So we did write up a prospectus and originally were asking for \$50,000 from, we had hoped, each of maybe six people. But in talking to people we realized that the sum was too large so we reduced it to \$10,000 and ten people. So we cut down the money we had in the bank considerably.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you get those ten silent partners.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, we did.

THOMAS H. GARVER: We trust they're silent.

BETTY ASHER: Right. They're silent as far as we're concerned. It's wonderful. If they lose their money they might not be so silent, but they don't give advice and some of them don't come near the gallery. They don't ask how we're doing. At the end of June, the end of our first fiscal year, we will make a report to them. But they never have asked any questions, which has been very good.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Yes it is, it's very nice to find a board like that.

BETTY ASHER: Right.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What is the premise of the gallery, the Asher/Faure Gallery at—what is the address?

BETTY ASHER: 8221 Santa Monica Boulevard.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Over the James Corcoran Gallery and adjacent to Dagny Janss Corcoran Art Books.

BETTY ASHER: —Art Catalogues—

THOMAS H. GARVER: —Art Catalogues, with a couple of other galleries in the same building. Just talk a little bit about what you wanted to do and why this would be different from another gallery.

BETTY ASHER: Well, the idea was to have not only our own small group of young artists, or artists we represented who wouldn't necessarily have to be young. In addition to that we wanted to work with New York dealers in a way that hadn't been done before. We wanted to bring work that we liked and that hadn't been seen for a long time, or ever, in the Los Angeles area, to our gallery, working with the dealer, and listing it as presented by that particular dealer—because Patty felt that if the dealer's name was attached to the show as his show, he couldn't just send us work that was left over from a show in New York that had been hanging around the gallery that he hadn't been able to sell, or old work that had been in storage and was uninteresting. Because his name would be on it; it would say, for instance, "Andre Emmerich presents Morris Louis at Asher/Faure." Therefore he had to bring his best Morris Louises because people knew it was his show. And it's worked out very well, except maybe in one instance.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What was the instance?

BETTY ASHER: Well, we didn't feel that Knoedler show was really up to par. Perhaps it was our fault because we should maybe have chosen one artist from Knoedler's.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I was away. Who came out from Knoedler's?

BETTY ASHER: Mr. Rubin.

THOMAS H. GARVER: He came out?

BETTY ASHER: He came out and it was very pleasant, and he loved the gallery and had a good time while he was out here, but he had no conception, although we had sent him a plan—he didn't realize that the gallery was as large as it was.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Was it large? Because it's not a large space.

BETTY ASHER: I know, but two of the girls who worked for him had been out and had seen the gallery and had described it as a very small gallery. So he sent out a Calder that was really much too small for the space, and then we had Motherwell, Olitski and also drawings of David Smith and two David Smith sculptures.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And there was simply not enough material to fill the space?

BETTY ASHER: They looked small and they looked skimpy and they didn't look like they were the best materials we could have gotten, so that was a little disappointment. But otherwise everything else has done very well, I think.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, you've had shows of Artschwager—

BETTY ASHER: —with Castelli—

THOMAS H. GARVER: —and Louis, your first show was Morris Louis from Emmerich.

BETTY ASHER: And then we had drawings of Kline and Guston—that was David McKee. And then we had one of our own artists, we slipped them in about every third show. We had Nicholas Africano and then we had the Knoedler show, Castelli, and then we had John Okulick, and who else did we have—

THOMAS H. GARVER: You represented in your own stable, I know, Michael McMillen, Natasha Nicholson, John Okulick, Nicholas Africano, from Illinois, and the others are from this area.

BETTY ASHER: Paul Dillon.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Paul Dillon from here.

BETTY ASHER: Elaine Carhartt.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Now she's a relatively new addition, and she has won the Young Talent, or New Talent Award this year.

BETTY ASHER: Oh, and Katherine Halbower.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I don't know her work. There are some dealers who have said that the fix was in, that Elaine Carhartt won at the County Museum and the fact that you had worked there at one time apparently, or had some involvement with the Modern and Contemporary Art Council so—

BETTY ASHER: Well, I can tell you that we were as surprised as Elaine was that she won. We had no idea that she was even being considered, and as a matter of fact, someone—one of the other dealers in the building came up before and asked me if I had heard anything because she was very nervous because one of her artists was one on the list of ten and he'd been getting a lot of attention. And I said, well, I haven't been paying any attention to what's going on because we don't have anyone who's eligible, forgetting about Elaine. So, believe me, I knew nothing about it.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That's very nice, and her work in ceramic figurative sculpture is very nice. How has the gallery worked out? How has the system worked out? Has it been - aesthetically successful, you feel, with perhaps the one exception of the Knoedler exhibition. Has it been financially successful enough?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, we've paid our expenses and we're holding our own. I think for a first year for a gallery I would venture to guess that we probably grossed more than any other gallery in Los Angeles, maybe with the exception of Ace, but his first year probably wasn't large, either.

THOMAS H. GARVER: But of course you have to share some of the high-ticket items with other dealers, you share the commissions.

BETTY ASHER: Yes, we do.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you sell a Morris Louis?

BETTY ASHER: No, we didn't, and I guess you know the story about the man in your part of the world, Newport Beach, who went to an auction and bought a Morris Louis Unfurled for \$180,000, and then he has to pay an additional 10% so it came close to \$200,000 and he had to bring it back to New York. And it wasn't nearly as good as the Unfurled that we had for \$160,000.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who was that?

BETTY ASHER: I don't remember his name. It was somebody I didn't know, but you probably know.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Had he come to look at the paintings at the gallery, do you know?

BETTY ASHER: I don't know. I don't know him, so I don't know if he was in or not.

THOMAS H. GARVER: What has been the most successful show in terms of sales, the Kline and Guston?

BETTY ASHER: You mean other dealers', of the big shows? No, I would say probably the Joel Shapiro, because we sold four of those.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who had you done that with?

BETTY ASHER: Paula Cooper.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And I know Artschwager was not very successful. You finally sold one, didn't you?

BETTY ASHER: Right, we did. One thing I was going to tell you about the Morris Louis exhibition is that some people said we wouldn't get the best material—we would just get the leftovers. This was disproved during this show. A man came in and saw the show, a collector from Santa Barbara, and he decided he wanted a Morris Louis, so he got on a plane and flew to New York and went to see Emmerich and said he was interested in buying a Morris Louis and would he show him what he had. And Emmerich said, well I don't have anything here, the best paintings that I have are in Los Angeles at the Asher/Faure Gallery. Well, he looked at other things, he bought two or three other things, I think he bought a Noland and a Helen Frankenthaler and something else. So that worked out very well for Andre Emmerich, better than for us. But it showed that he had done just that, he had sent the best things.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Who was it who related this story to you, Andre or the collector?

BETTY ASHER: Andre. But the collector has become a good client of ours, because evidently he liked the show, so he comes in and sees every show and he's bought quite a bit from us.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Good. So the system is working, really.

BETTY ASHER: Well, over the summer we're not going to have as many—usually it's a good time to get a New York gallery show, but we sort of got backlogged with our young people who needed shows or who are ready for shows or wanted shows, so we have two or three of those in a row coming up.

THOMAS H. GARVER: The main gallery there. Who will you be showing?

BETTY ASHER: Well, this month we're showing Masashi Matsumoto and Lew Thomas, who are two San Francisco artists, and then the following month is Elaine Carhartt and Kathy Halbower, both young girls from here, and Dale Haven Loy; she does collage and comes from Washington, D.C. She's only been working for about ten years, but she's a slightly older woman, probably in her late thirties.

THOMAS H. GARVER: She lives here now?

BETTY ASHER: No, in Washington. Then we're going to have a Paul Dillon show and then a Michael McMillen show.

THOMAS H. GARVER: That will be in September or October?

BETTY ASHER: October.

THOMAS H. GARVER: And what Eastern gallery show, if I can phrase it that way, will you resume with.

BETTY ASHER: Good question. I don't think we've set anything up. Patty's going back probably in September or October and she'll work on that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How have you picked your artists? Did you have any specific criteria, or was it a matter of people you liked and Patty liked? Did you necessarily have to agree?

BETTY ASHER: Well, when Patty and I were organizing this gallery, as I said, I was doing private dealing, so I had asked several young people that I liked if I could have work of theirs here at the house and try and sell it. I explained very carefully to each one of those artists that that didn't mean they were going to be in the gallery, that that only meant that I was interested in them. Still, they all just took it for granted that they were going to be, and Patty liked them all, and so that worked out. A couple of times I've just said yes to people, well, maybe once, but usually then I—if Patty didn't like it, I'd have to do something about that. But we generally agree.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Has she also selected artists or suggested people with whom you've agreed?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, she chose a photographer, Benno Friedman, whom I may not have chosen on my own, and I agreed because I thought they were pretty, I didn't think we'd be able to sell them, I didn't think they'd have any appeal.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you sell any?

BETTY ASHER: No, we didn't. Do you want to buy a Benno Friedman?

THOMAS H. GARVER: I've known him for years. One of the more arrogant art types. I knew him at Brandeis.

BETTY ASHER: Also, Patty inherited Gwynn Murrill from Nicholas Wilder. Gwynn was a good friend and wanted to be in our gallery, and I've always liked her sculpture. I'm not as keen on her oil pastels, but we did have a little show of those at one point.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How do you get along with the other dealers in town? Has there been any problem? You have gone from being "one of them" to "one of us" in a sense; perhaps at one time you would have been courted as a client and now suddenly you're looked upon as a potential and actual competitor. Have you felt that change?

BETTY ASHER: Well, the only change I've felt is actually one of the women dealers, Margo Levin—because before we opened the gallery I was in New York and I heard from innumerable people that she was worried about the fact that I had opened a gallery and she was very nervous and very concerned. I always get invitations for her openings and she always has a dinner afterwards for the artist. As soon as I made it known that I was going to be a dealer, she stopped inviting me to the dinner. She has the artist, then, and the potential collectors, so naturally, she doesn't want another dealer there, you know, with all these collectors around. But she's been very friendly, and I did see her in New York one time when I had heard all this so I said, "Margo, when we get back let's have lunch together and we can talk," and we've never done it. But she's still very friendly, very pleasant, very sweet, but for some reason – and she has no reason at all to worry about competition – we show different people and it seems to me, the more galleries the better. If you can get somebody enthusiastic about collecting, they'll go to her or they'll come to us or they'll go to another gallery. I know when I started I went to four or five different galleries, I didn't concentrate on one. But there are some dealers in town who do have their own clients who don't go to anyone else, and I think she has a few of them and is jealous of them and wants to keep them.

THOMAS H. GARVER: She's very protective. But otherwise the response to your opening a gallery has been favorable?

BETTY ASHER: It's been favorable. Most of them are happy about it and we try to work together. We've sold some things for Peter Gould, we have some things from one of his artists in our gallery now, and we've sold some things for Tortue.

THOMAS H. GARVER: How would you be selling some of those things—because they fit into some other program that you have?

BETTY ASHER: No, with Tortue it was a collector that Patty knew who needed a certain type, a piece that he wanted for a particular place and she thought that a Michael Todd sculpture would be good, so she went to Tortue and asked them if she could show him one that she'd seen that she'd liked, and so she took it and it worked perfectly—

THOMAS H. GARVER: —Patty took it and showed it to your buyer.

BETTY ASHER: Right. And I sold some things to Peter. Also, I recently sent a client to him who was interested in Sandra Rubin, and I think she's going to go this week. We do have this one lady who comes to us exclusively for advice, but she goes to the other galleries, she reads all the books and magazines, and anybody who has it, she'll go to them. We don't try to keep her to ourselves.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Does she buy from you, though?

BETTY ASHER: Yes, she does.

THOMAS H. GARVER: So how do you feel on July 7, 1980, about the gallery scene or the art scene in Los Angeles? You've now been here since the early 1940's; you've had a chance to look at it for a long time. Maybe as a summary you could comment on how you see things now.

BETTY ASHER: Well, I know when I started buying from Irving Blum at the Ferus gallery in the late fifties and through most of the sixties he felt that he could count his regular collectors on the fingers of one hand. There were very few collectors. I think the art community has grown consistently and there are more people looking, more people interested or getting to be interested but not buying, but there are a lot more collectors, there are a lot of people who are buying, and I think it's getting better all the time.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you find you're selling younger people, or people whose work is less well known? I know one of the complaints in New York is that the big names will always sell, but it's very hard to get people to take a flier and take the leap of faith on somebody whose reputation is not well established.

BETTY ASHER: Well, there's always a group of people who are looking for the less well-established, the younger people and like to watch the artists grow and watch their development. But there are certain people, like this man I mentioned to you who flew to New York to buy a Morris Louis. We tried to interest him in younger people and he won't even bother looking at them, he just doesn't understand them. He has to have that name. So there's a whole group like that.

THOMAS H. GARVER: I've heard it said that every time an artist's work doubles in price from a certain point it brings out another kind of clientele. The people who won't give house room to an artist at \$10,000 or \$15,000 begin to consider him seriously when he hits \$20,000 or \$30,000. Like your client in Santa Barbara. They're always ready to spend six figures, but not interested in buying something for four, or \$1,000 or \$2,000. So you see a lot more people collecting and more people willing to take a flier, do you think?

BETTY ASHER: I think many more than there were, say, twenty years ago, even ten years ago.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Did you see that on the Modern and Contemporary Art Council as well?

BETTY ASHER: A few of them are buying a little bit. They aren't all collectors, they're people who are interested in contemporary art and interested in supporting it in the community but they're not necessarily collectors. A few of them are buying, but not too much.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Because it's a tough time, a recessionary time now for people to buy art unless it like gold perhaps, a real hit.

BETTY ASHER: There's going to be an article in next Sunday's Calendar by Barbara Isenberg about how the recession has affected the art market. She interviewed Irving and she talked to Patty and I don't know who else, probably several other people; that may be interesting.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Do you have anything else you'd like to add or say?

BETTY ASHER: I agreed with you so rapidly about our client in Santa Barbara, but he doesn't fall into that category. He will buy things at \$1,000 or \$2,000 as well as buying Morris Louis at six figures. But I do agree with you that there are people who will not and I do know some that aren't interested. They're too cheap.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Their reputations aren't made yet.

BETTY ASHER: They're too cheap.

THOMAS H. GARVER: Well, it's a way of determining the relative market value. Well, good. Thank you very much.

BETTY ASHER: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

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