



Smithsonian
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**Oral history interview with Helen Frankenthaler,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Helen Frankenthaler in 1968. The interview was conducted by Barbara Rose for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[with reference to Bennington College, Bennington, Vermont]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Paul [Feeley] had enormous vitality. I mean his whole style was energy, curiosity, appetite. Everything interested him. Which is one of the reasons I think he didn't express and dwell on all his particular talents. He was splayed out too much. But he was extremely intelligent, skilled with new literature, politics, the fighting world, was a husband, a father, very complex, drank like a fish, was a real narcissist, very handsome, very giving, very humorous.

MS. ROSE: What do you think you got from him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Cubism. I think he was a competent minor satellite of the American Cubists. And I think they were all also. But he really understood the origins of Cubism, and not late [Pablo] Picasso, [Georges] Braque, but the early, I mean the 1910 period.

MS. ROSE: Well what were some things he would say, for example?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He would never teach or give out with any dogmatic perceptions but just in dwelling on something would reflect his own praise of it and pull the feeling out of you, which I think is what great teaching is, that only when I teach myself at certain carefully chosen moments will I emphatically say, and usually as a rhetorical device, "I know this is better than that" or "This so-and-so that seems to have shapes and stripes is phony. And that, also with shapes and stripes, is a beautiful picture." But generally you don't do that.

MS. ROSE: So what were your qualities that you liked or that you learned to like or were important?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, as I said before, by the time I graduated I really understood how to paint a Cubist picture. And by that I mean, if you push me further, I don't mean that I could paint something that had split up planes but I understood far beyond that about something black can be up close or can be miles away and the same size and the same density. A line can do this here and it can do that there and maybe the line can be taken away altogether. What do you do with corners of pictures.

MS. ROSE: What do you do?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, over the years I've done different things at different times with corners, even using them or ignoring them or pretending they're not corners, or feeling very grateful that there are four corners, or painting as if the corners were miles beyond my reach or vision and that they were only centers of periphery, at other times feeling I want edges and limits defined. And

you can [inaudible] filled or void centers.

MS. ROSE: What were you painting at Bennington?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I was a student and learning and I painted still lifes and landscapes and portraits and always drew from the model.

MS. ROSE: You couldn't [inaudible].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, it was strict.

MS. ROSE: [Inaudible].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. And for years, before, during, and after Bennington, I mean all the years I knew Clem [Clement Greenberg] and after that, no matter what my major concern in the line of painting was, at the same time I always did easel pictures either out in nature or in my studio.

MS. ROSE: Do you still do this?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. And for years I've been saying I'd like to. But I have a feeling I really don't want to. But it isn't that I'm shying away from the need: I think I really don't have the need. I mean I know I can draw you just the way you look, or anything else. I mean I can do a tree or a face or a chair. And it's an exercise and a challenge that I love. And it's also very restful. And it also teaches you a lot. But I think for a while to concentrate and relax with realism then at some point it freed me to let my wrist and heart and eye go to do something enormous and abstract. I don't think it would serve that purpose anymore. I think it would just be, well, for instance, just something to knock off [inaudible]. But it used to be thrilling. They weren't all [inaudible], they were also [Chaim] Soutine-y. Not Soutine, [Alfred] Sisley.

MS. ROSE: So what artists did you like at this point? I mean what were you attracted to?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, at Bennington I would say mainly Picasso, Braque, [Henri] Matisse, [Fernand] Léger, [Piet] Mondrian.

MS. ROSE: But you painted like --?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I painted like, in the Bennington development I painted like Picasso, or tried to.

MS. ROSE: Really?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, yes. I mean that picture I did called *Woman on a Horse* [1950, 50 ¼ x 40 ¼"], which is really a terrible picture. It's about, oh, let's say, 3 1/2 by 4 1/2 feet, or 4 by 5 feet, - well, it's large but still easel size, and painted in, you know, Grumbacher's oil paints with a brush. It's an attempt at that you know, this is flat and a side view but in depth and a full view. That whole thing, that fascinated me. The full face profile in every muscle. Not so much color. But drawing, always all my learning had to do with drawing. And I never really thought about color at all. When I first started thinking about color it was sort of out of perversity. In other words, say around '50 and '51, it occurred to me that something ugly or muddy could be a color as well as something clear and bright and a nameable, beautiful, known color.

MS. ROSE: Why did that occur to you? Do you know?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't know, sometimes I think it came out of something very saving in me. I find, for example, that I will buy a quantity of paint but I hate it when it dries up and I haven't used it. Or if I have a pot of leftover green and a pot of leftover pink I will very often mix it just because I want to use it up. It's like leftover food in the icebox. And of course if it doesn't work on the picture - well, that's a loss. And I'm saying all this and also saying that I throw out I can't tell you how many paintings a year. I mean for every one that I show there are many, many in shreds in garbage cans. But the attempt and the result is often from what's around and is available that I can invent with. And people have often said that there seems to be so few materials around. Well, I have all the colors and all the tools and all the canvas but I like to - not for the sake of money or retentiveness - but I like to play with the possibilities of the limits I've made for myself. [Inaudible.]

MS. ROSE: With what's around, in other words?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. And then I can feel - well, this is all wrong, throw it out, open all that.

MS. ROSE: It's a very American thing, though, to use what's [inaudible], and it's very anti-European, you know more [inaudible]. That you use what's there. Whatever, that you use it, and that's how, in a sense, the whole boundaries of art are pushed out. Because there isn't an everywhere notion of "This is art" and "This isn't." It's like, whatever's around.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Exactly. Well it's the way a caveman might use the wall, and if you don't have a brush you use a pan, and if you don't have linen you use sailcloth.

MS. ROSE: But that's American.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah.

MS. ROSE: Did you know any early American painters at that point?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I knew [Marsden] Hartley, [John] Marin. Looked at Marin a great deal.

MS. ROSE: Where and why?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: At Bennington. I think because he interested Paul in relation to the weather thing.

MS. ROSE: Oh, you see this is very interesting because I feel John Marin and you were --.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I have some early watercolors of 1951 that are, well, what fascinated me, I said before, it was Picasso and then there were all the others that I was learning to see and digest. But I think what got to my particular sensibility was, aside from learning Cubism, [Wassily] Kandinsky.

MS. ROSE: Where did you see Kandinsky, at the Guggenheim [Museum, Manhattan, New York]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: They were reproductions in Paul's classes. And they'd always be arranged from the very tight later Cubism, sort of Cubist Kandinskys and the early small Redonesque ones that I have always liked and responded to much more. But it was Kandinsky. I looked hard at Marin but I didn't have any of the feeling for him that I had for Kandinsky.

MS. ROSE: When you graduated from Bennington what happened?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I'll finish this line of paintings I looked at which interested me. Because

during college I didn't see [Arshile] Gorkys at all. But it was beautiful that what followed from my real interest in Kandinsky was an opening up, an awareness. [Inaudible] which is a logical step. Already [inaudible] Cubism, and you can just take off from there. The first full Gorky show I saw was at the Whitney [Museum of American Art, Manhattan, New York] on Eighth Street in '51 I think and I loved it.

MS. ROSE: What did you see?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh the whole show – [inaudible]. And it was very exciting then because within one season I saw that '51 show of Jackson's [Pollock] at Betty Parsons, and that was in the early fall. The Gorky show at the Whitney, [Willem] de Kooning's studio and that whole Egan ambience, and I had a few people like Friedel [Dzubas] and Harry Jackson to relate to. And it was a whole new world and I couldn't get enough of it. And I was introduced to it by Clem.

MS. ROSE: Tell me exactly what happened.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, what happened was that, and I never know in this where and when and how to mention names or sentimental things, but I'll do it as it comes. When I had been out of Bennington for a year, well, I had gone to Columbia [Universtiy, Manhattan, New York] to get my M.A. in Fine Arts, and that was because --.

MS. ROSE: Art history or painting?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: History. I studied with Meyer Schapiro. And didn't want to stay in school, as I said before, to learn about studio drawing. I mean I could do it but I really didn't feel like it. I did it largely because I wasn't sure about painting myself, and if I was sure, I had to prove to my family that I was also doing something legitimate and serious, and that sounded like a master's degree at Columbia. But by the middle of that winter I gave up because I thought it was a silly challenge and I would do what I did and take it from there. But at the end of that winter a woman named Mrs. Cartier at the Seligmann Gallery, which still exists on 57th Street, called and said would I organize a show for Bennington graduates, not for fund raising but sort of to show how advanced Bennington work is. There were a lot of people that had been awfully good students of over the years, many painters that were giving off stuff that was as good as most of the stuff in New York galleries, certainly not the avant-garde. And I said yes I'd do it.

Anne Poor was one of the girls in the school, Henry Varnum Poor's daughter. And I got a few pictures together. And then I forget how, where did the money come from? I dont know where the money came from but we had enough to have drinks at the opening; which nobody ever did. And then to get publicity I called up Aline Saarinen at the [New York] Times, and Elliott. All of the people from Bennington came. Paul was very happy about the whole show, all his students. And then I called Clem because I had along with many other people, Sonya [Rudikoff] and others, always read *PR* [Partisian Review]. No, I'll correct that. I didn't read it but I was always aware of it. Just the way I was in a certain groove at Dalton [School, Manhattan, New York], I was in a certain groove only that much later at Bennington, and that had to do with the power and mystique of the *Literary Quarterly* and we were all sort of immersed in this. And *The Kenyon Review*, *The Tiger's Eye* and *PR* and all the names and the poets and the literary critics and the fights, and you know. So I called Clem and I explained. And he said, "Oh, I love Bennington! I love Bennington girls. But I'll only come if there are drinks." And I said, "Well, it just so happens that we have enough money to have a lot of liquor and we're not only going to have drinks but we're having both martinis and manhattans." I was 20 then, 21.

MS. ROSE: Had you met him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, I had never met him. And he said, "Well, then I'll come." Anyway, the entire art and literary world of the New York avant-garde showed up for this Bennington show. I mean you can never get a crowd like that together anymore. Everyone got plastered. And Clem walked around the show with me. And I had in that show that picture called *Woman on a Horse* which I had painted in the studio I'd shared with Sonya Rudikoff. There was another painting in it by another girl named Jane Meyerhoff which was far less ambitious and a much better picture, and not trying half as hard as my *Woman on a Horse* which was gleaming with Demar varnish and retouching varnish. He said, "I don't like that one." And I said, "That's mine."

Anyway we were extremely interested in each other. And that was that. The party was over. And I went back to the gallery a few days later to pick up my picture and straighten stuff at the first gallery. And Mrs. Cartier said there is a message here for you from Mr. Greenberg. He called to get your telephone number. I was very excited about the idea; and did nothing about it. Forgot it. I was living at home at the time and my mother had just gotten a television set, which was very, I mean it was unusual to have a set then. We had a baseball game on. The phone rang and it was Clem and he said would I have a drink with him. There was a lot of noise in the background because the game was on. He said he was a baseball fan which surprised me very much. And we had a long phone call in which it was very clear that we shared a certain humor and interest. And we made a date for drinks. And that was the beginning of a five-year relationship. Then that summer he had accepted a teaching job at Black Mountain [College, Black Mountain, North Carolina] and suggested that I study with [Hans] Hofmann here in Provincetown [Cape Cod, Massachusetts]. By then I'd met, you know, Bill and Elaine [de Kooning], Charlie, you know, all the whole group. Benita Manry, who was a painter, a sort of realistic-looking expressionist out of Hofmann.

MS. ROSE: How do you spell that?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: M-a-n-r-y, Benita. She's still around. She was his secretary. Ran the school for him. She had a house up here, it was a shack really and four other students shared it. She was a severe alcoholic with an alcoholic boy friend. And I lived there, went to Hofmann, was a, I keep using this word "star" in everything all the time, but I was a favorite pupil of his and he liked me personally very much. And I liked him. I mean he was a tough geezer but very straight and very human and very bright.

MS. ROSE: Do you feel you got anything particularly from Hofmann?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. It was just the way I felt at Columbia. I'd had all the teaching I wanted because I really was a student at Bennington and I really milked learning and that experience for a lifetime. In other words, the next step was just to do it myself or teach it, or do something else. But not to learn anymore except in my own terms. So that while I was very interested in the push-pull because of Paul and Wallace Harrison, and all I was learning through Clem on my own, it was sort of axiomatic that that would seep in and be part of me without my taking up painting with a Hofmann criticism class. But I enjoyed knowing him. Anyway I'd been there only

MS. ROSE: What were you painting at that point?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: More abstract pictures but taken from nature. I would stand out on the porch and do the [Cape Cod] Bay. Clem has a painting of mine which he loved and begged me to give him, which I did gladly. I think it looks just like Provincetown Bay but abstract. And I remember [Aristodimos] Kaldis coming out on the porch while I was painting it, I think in 1951, and trying to tell

me how to make the picture look as if the piles of the wharf were really in the water. And what he didn't understand was that that I didn't want the Bay that much in perspective. I wanted it to be a little flat, parallel in relation to the canvas itself. Anyway, Clem has that picture which I'll show you sometime. But I did more abstract things and larger things. And just since I was still young, and learning, and energetic, some of them have a Hofmann feel.

MS. ROSE: Did you see Hofmann's paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. And since he was both very clear and very inarticulate and I felt sort of impatient with the style of it I never quite knew if it was that I didn't go for his style or that I had been temporarily sated in that ambience.

MS. ROSE: What did he say about your painting? Do you remember?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He liked it. He used to pick them out from, he had a very big class and very often he would take one of mine as an example of this works, say. Which I never knew myself so that I would become florid and pounding with excitement that this had come off in the terms of the work [inaudible]. And that's very encouraging. And I would respond so much to it.

MS. ROSE: Can you remember the kind of things he would say?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: That he would say? Well, that's what's very difficult about him.

MS. ROSE: Suppose he had one of your paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, there was so much mitha [?] in it, so much broken German- English that it was mostly through looking at what he chose to like best of his pupils.

MS. ROSE: I mean what would he praise, or what would he put down?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I think generally pictures that had the Cubist push and pull space were the ones he responded to most. I think what I missed from him, and I made it work despite the fact that I missed his emphasis on color, I didn't push and pull it with color. I happened to pick colors fortunately that fit into the push and pull because I drew them that way. But I had been drawing them with color. I was filling in the drawing. By that I don't mean filling in the line.

I went to visit Gabby at Abington, Virginia, and that was very near Black Mountain, North Carolina. And then I went to visit Clem. And there I met Stamos and, oh, I don't know, somebody Carl Ward. But that, if Ken was there then, I don't think I met him then. But Ken did study with Clem at Black Mountain. He might have been there that summer but I only stayed at Black Mountain about --.

MS. ROSE: Oh, I know he actually studied with Clem.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah, at Black Mountain. I think so. Yes. And Black Mountain was so depressing and nobody had a car. And there was no water; there was a swimming hole, and if you got a ride with the one or two people who had cars you made it there. Clem was there with Danny. And nobody had any money or largesse or freedom, including myself except that I could get from New York and to New York. I was very young and it was sort of dreary. The food was terrible. Most of the people were dingy. The barracks were unspeakable. Most of the personal situations were nightmares. And there were snakes. I decided to go home. I stayed there about, well, 5 or 6 days.

And then I went back to New York. By then the summer was over. I went to my grandmother's

place. My grandmother used to say to my mother and all her grandchildren, "What do you want a new bathing suit for? June, July, and August and the summer is over." There was August and the summer was over. That fall one night Clem and I were having dinner at the San Remo and John Meyers came over. I had never met him. He said to Clem that he was starting a gallery and described it, and described the most chichi, fag, impossible enterprise in which he was going to have shows of Blake and shows of Marie Menken's paintings and light up the garden, and it was going to be wild camp; which he designed himself. And Clem that evening convinced him that it would be much more important and would fulfill his role to gather up some of the young painters around and show them. And those young painters were Larry Rivers, Grace Hartigan, who had then broken up with Harry Jackson. Married to him but was living with Al. So it was Larry, Grace, Al, Harry who --.

MS. ROSE: Al who?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Leslie.

MS. ROSE: Oh.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And the two of them, Al and Grace, both modeling to make a nickel at the Art Students League [of New York, Manhattan, New York]. [Inaudible]. Harry was painting beautiful, very Matisse-ish abstract pictures.

MS. ROSE: Whatever happened to those pictures?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He still has them in his studio. [Inaudible] around.

MS. ROSE: I've been to his studio once. It was a nightmare.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I'll take you sometime. And I was painting and changing and developing and going through that bridge from early Kandinsky and Gorky to my own thing. And just soaking up de Kooning and Pollock. And still had, by this time Sonya had left the studio. She had married and was living in New Hampshire. So I had the place to myself. And while Bill and Elaine [de Kooning] and Charlie [Egan] and such would maybe come to my studio, there was no thought, this must have been in September that we had the San Remo meeting, there was no thought of my going in with those four or five young ones.

And the other thing which Clem and I always honored, and do to this day, though now it's become a ridiculous extreme, and I question what I just said, but, let's say, in those days and for many years after our immediate relationship we never involved or used each other in terms of the work. For which I am very grateful, and at the time never ever wanted, and always understood. And felt like Clem I will do it on my own for painting, not because Clem and I are living together and I'm being included with the bunch.

MS. ROSE: Did he look at your paintings and criticize them?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Um-hm.

MS. ROSE: What kind of things did he say?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It was much more "go to it" rather than, you know. And I had done watercolors at Black Mountain and some paintings in my studio that still really hold up beautifully and that are only mine. And Clem has such a good eye that very often his astonishment, I mean here was, look at what he was living with but I was knocking out paintings that were pretty terrific.

MS. ROSE: And you think he was surprised?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. It went hand in hand. It was very beautiful. I was off on my own. I had my own history. I was developing, but I was also developing suddenly in the context of the New York avant-garde of 1951.

MS. ROSE: Did you go to galleries with Clem?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: We went to galleries all the time. Saw every show. And I became very friendly with Grace and Al so it wasn't just Clem. And I became very friendly with Frieda so that I made new friends that were --.

MS. ROSE: How did you meet Friedel?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Through Clem.

MS. ROSE: What would the talk be like? I mean what was liked in painting and what wasn't?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, for me, and very often Clem and I would disagree on individual pictures, and it wasn't just because I was a mirror or an echo, but he made sense and was right and we liked, and I saw it first through him, but I agreed with him. Pollock followed intensely de Kooning, but I did not go for the de Kooning satellite group.

MS. ROSE: Well, that was really Al and Grace, though, very much.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Not then. There was a split finally, I think when, what happened was, well, I'm, too many different stories, that split occurred when Grace before a show once and this used to happen with many artists all the time, say, a week before the show Clem would be invited to take a look at the choices or to help make the choices and then would let the artists know how he felt about it. And Grace had all these pictures that were going to Tibor's and she was riding high and powerful, I don't mean successfully but willfully. And Clem didn't like it at all. And Grace burst into tears. And there was a terrible scene at the [inaudible]. And the choice was either to take his advice or reject him completely. And she rejected him completely and went to the other camps. Some other time I'll go into my appraisal of Grace's talent and personality. I mean it doesn't fit this context. But that's what happened then. But we were very aware of Rothko and Still. I looked hard and long at pictures and I would go back and I would decide which of a certain artist's pictures worked better than others, or why none worked at all. But there was a whole range from [Earl] Kerkam to [Franz] Kline, [Giorgio] Cavallon, [Milton] Resnick, [Robert] Goodnough, and then the awareness of names like [Jean] Dubuffet and David Smith and all the sculptors, [Seymour] Lipton, [Ibram] Lassaw and so on.

MS. ROSE: Well, what kind of qualities did you like? I mean what, for example, would you have liked?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, what really hit me were the Pollocks. I learned from the Gorkys but the Pollocks just thrilled me.

MS. ROSE: Did you know Jackson before you saw the paintings? Describe your relationship with Jackson. How did you meet him? What was he like?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I had not met him until I saw his show. I think he might have been at the Gallery. And we went up to Betty Parsons. I was very nervous because I knew what it meant to Clem. He wasn't nervous about it. But I had no opinion and I had no experience and I had an interest

and I was on guard. And it was as if I suddenly went to Lisbon and knew no Portuguese but had read enough and had a passionate interest in Lisbon and was eager to live there; I mean I wanted to live in this land, and I had to live there but I just didn't know the language. I mean I was learning it. And Clem, who has a great sense of timing, mostly because he doesn't know he has it, as we got off the elevator, it was before Janis had taken over part of that gallery, it was enormous, as we got off the elevator he said, "Now you're on your own. Just look around at the show and tell me what you think of it." And I was suddenly blinded as if he had put me in the center ring of Madison Square Garden. And you're on your own. And there were those pictures like *Number 1* [1950], *Number 14* [1951]. The one that's at the Metropolitan [Museum of Art, Manhattan, New York] now.

MS. ROSE: Laboule.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't know if Laboule was in that show or not. Many that were in the recent Pollock show. The one that the Modern just acquired was in it. And it was so new, and so appealing, and so puzzling, and powerful, and real, and beautiful, and bewildering. And then Clem and I went around the show together. He clearly thought it was a beautiful show. And we discussed which ones we liked better or worse than others. *Number 14* was one I always remember. And in fact when people say to me how do you title your pictures and I give all the reasons why I don't number them, that number is one exception I always reference because the painting hit me so much that I could never forget *Number 14*.

MS. ROSE: Why do you title your paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Because I never, I think when there are hundreds of numbers, your own or somebody else's, it's too confusing to refer to them, I mean opus 63 being a number I don't remember. Whereas *Blue Tide* [1963] I do remember. And I think that's a whole load of other subjects and a fascinating one because a title has to have a meaning, and how much meaning do they have, should they have, do they really have, where do they come from. I think that's a most fascinating and relevant and irrelevant subject.

Anyway, the *Number 14* picture, and this refers to something that has always crept into my own painting, had in it something that was a strong element in Jackson's, and not the element that Clem and many other people have seized on but they honor the most in his oeuvre. I mean there are many other strains of Pollock's aesthetic that are more important than the one I'm about to talk about. But this particular one and in reference to *Number 14* was that I saw very clearly the drawing of something like an animal or a fox, in a wood in the center of it, which if we had a reproduction I could point to. That was a game which I used to play as a child which we were talking about yesterday that I loved. There was a magazine for children called *Child Life* and there was a puzzle, a familiar game of what seemed to be a perfectly plain garden with a tree and a lake and if you --.

MS. ROSE: Find the faces of --.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Right.

MS. ROSE: Like [inaudible], like hide and seek.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And there was a rabbit and there was a, you know, and all that. And of course another association as an adult would be the whole Rorschach experience, which was also important to me.

MS. ROSE: Why?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, by this time I had had Rorschach, and I don't connect my painting with Rorschach at all. I think they're totally different, nothing to do with each other. But to get back to what was I saying.

MS. ROSE: About this painting of Pollock's that you saw. It was *14*.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It was more than just the drawing, webbing, weaving, dripping of a stick held in enamel, more than just the rhythm. It seemed to have much more complication and order of a kind that at that time I responded to. Something maybe more baroque, more drawn and with some elements of realism abstracted or Surrealism or a hint of it. In other words, you could certainly look at that picture and not see that at all. It is a totally abstract picture but it had that additional quality in it for me. There were pictures I liked equally well that I could see nothing in that had anything to do with subject matter. But this one I particularly responded to.

And at that time I was just starting to part totally with subject matter. I have a couple of pictures that, well, one of them looks like a design pattern all over. I mean it's not a painting, it's a motif. And I was experiencing many changes and experiments during this time. I was then working in a medium of, and this was brief, I have maybe ten pictures of this, plaster of Paris, enamel house paint, tube pigment, sand, and probably kerosene or something. It was all very cheap.

MS. ROSE: What gave you the idea?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I have no idea except that I wanted something thick that would dry hard and fast that was flat. And of course what I discovered, and I have three of these pictures left, one is very large, very abstract, is that it chips off. But one of them, which, when they were successful there was no hint on the surface that there was any plaster of Paris in it. It was just like thick paint. But one of them was at Clem's on Bank Street that I brought up to show him or something. And Adolph Gottlieb was there for a drink one day and he saw it. He was picking a show of new talent for Kootz and he loved the picture and put me in it. I mean Clem certainly did not. Would have gone out of his way almost [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: Gottlieb must have a fantastic eye. You know that he picked Frank, the first picture of Frank's that was shown in New York Gottlieb was responsible for having it shown. You know, each great master picked some young painter.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: That's interesting. Because I think he had two. I think maybe the one other was Friedel but I'm not sure, I'm not sure. Anyway, it was after that that John Meyers came to my studio to look at pictures and he decided, he'd opened the gallery in, let's say, October and it opened with Marie Menken Mans with the life mounds and all that. And he was, he'd had the Lake show too, but then it got on a serious groove, and by then he'd have, I have the first announcement framed: Larry, Grace, Al, Goodnough and me, he had decided in December to have me to the first group show of all of us. So they did all the picking in September and October. I joined in December of course, or January or something like that. And by that time, it was, you know, we were all in each other's studios and everybody was commenting with love and excitement about everybody else's pictures. The Painter's Club [The Artist's Club, or the Eighth Street Club] was in full swing and all the seeds of --.

MS. ROSE: Did you used to go to The Club?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. Every Friday night.

MS. ROSE: With Clem?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. We used to go to The Club and then to the Cedar Bar. We used to do every show and every gallery usually more than once. We would go to the Schrafft Bar or the Ritz Tower Bar. And the immediate Clem posse, Saturdays, starting early would be me and Clem, Friedel, Sidney and Gertrude Phillips, sometimes William and Edna Phillips, William was editor of *Partisan Review*. And then we'd hook up with, we'd usually pick up Charlie Egan and Elaine [de Kooning] usually at the Egan Gallery, and we'd all go off for drinks, give or take whoever was in town, you know, [inaudible]. But that was really the hard core. Then on my own I would see Grace and Al. Harry was around a lot.

MS. ROSE: Tell me more about that Pollock show, though, what it was about it that hit you? And when you met Jackson?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, after that show I would go out with Clem to Springs and [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: You met Pollock at the show?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, I met him at the show. But he was, I must have been terrified. And he was always terrified. He would be either very shy and drunk, or sober and shy, or aggressive and drunk. Never aggressive and sober.

MS. ROSE: What was it so much about the paintings that hit you? Do you remember?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I think the thing that hit me most of all was that while I knew it was a fact, it became a physical necessity to get pictures off the easel, and therefore for me not even on a wall but the reach or fluidity of working from above down into a field.

MS. ROSE: Did you know how he was working at that point?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: When I saw the show I don't know if I did. I might have seen a piece in Life on it, with that roundtable at some museum. But while I might have know it, it didn't register. But it really registered when I saw his studio and he unrolled his paintings on the floor that he had painted them on.

Now I was never drawn to the idea of a stick dipped in a huge can. One thing I have never liked is a drip, I mean --. And I think that's one reason that, I mean, I took pictures off the wall. Because if something is upright, and liquid, it drips. But he --.

MS. ROSE: It drips. Why didn't you like the drip? Do you know?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: His drips, even though they're on the floor, he wanted the drips. I think a number of reasons. One is it's a kind of boring accident to me, a drip. There are many accidents that are very rich that you use, but if you exploit a drip it's very boring and familiar to begin with. Drips are drips. Whereas blocks have never been drips, and haven't been, but, people don't know blocks the way they know drips.

MS. ROSE: Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And blocks can become lines, and drips become lines in a very facile, easy way.

[BREAK IN TAPE.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: [Inaudible] when you do it.

MS. ROSE: I wonder if you'd go back to it when you were a kid. And you were telling me those things about puttering around. Like, what did you do? When did you first start drawing and painting and caring about art.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: The other thing, is this on, this thing?

MS. ROSE: Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Being an egomaniac I feel very self conscious about having or talking up my own thing. So you will have to milk me so I don't sound self effacing, I think. You see what I mean? What did you say? How did I start? Is there also a limit on how much tape you've got? A lot?

MS. ROSE: Well what was it like as a kid? What did you do?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, when I think of what I did that has to do with painting now, there are a couple of stories that I told Bob that I don't make anything out of but that always fascinated him. One was that at five or six I would be taken to Central Park, with chalk, like every other kid, and for a winter insisted, I used to play behind the Met, on that playground, on going home, we lived at 74th Street and Park, and the Met's at 82nd and Fifth,, I'd start with one piece of chalk behind the Met, they had a statue of Adonis, I would start from him, and without standing up, creeping all the way, with the nurse walking at half pace, draw one line until we got to our canopy and doorman, across the street, around the corner, through the, you know, so that everybody moved aside you know, and I wouldn't be stopped. I was very willful. And when I think of lines if I pursue it and go way back, that's the first line in my memory.

MS. ROSE: Did you go to the Met a lot as a kid?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. Oh, I used to go with other kids to look at the naked statues. And that was all. I had no interest other than the body.

MS. ROSE: Were you encouraged to paint or draw?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. And my family, I mean my parents since I was a third daughter and I was probably loaded with both real love and real joy thought I was the most wonderful, gifted, complicated, hopeful creature in the world. I mean my father would walk behind me with my mother and say to her sometimes audibly to me, but she would tell me about this years later: "Watch that child. She is fantastic." And I think in a way I was fantastic. But if somebody, if you have something in you and you have parents who project it, then you're armed in many ways, that you have some special quality, and they also think you're a super child, it follows, it also does terrible things. You know, I loved to draw and paint and make designs and write stories. And until I was, oh, a senior in college there was still that conflict: did I want to do something with writing or reading, or paint. I mean I was editor of the college paper, and an Eric Fromm star and a Kenneth Burke star and Stanley Hyman pal and Howard Nimrod, I mean I was adept in literature and poetry.

MS. ROSE: Did you write poetry?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, but not much. I was much more involved in criticism, working really with Burke, I mean --.

MS. ROSE: He must be an extraordinary.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, he was just fantastic. I mean he really changed my life. In my last year between [Eric] Fromm and Kenneth [Burke] for the first time I was aware of what symbols really mean and how language and rhetoric can really be used and the devices of dialectic fascinated me.

MS. ROSE: How did this change your life?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, let's say the seeds of it were always there and that my last year at Dalton, which pushes this kind of thing, opened up, you know I would go down to the New School in the early 40's, which was somewhat unusual for an 15-year-old Park Avenue Jewish girl, you know. Because at Dalton, Gilbert's eldest daughter was my best friend, so that I was in touch with a liberal Bohemia along with the all right country club thing. And the other was very much more my thing. Bohemia was where I lived and had fun and the rest was where I belonged with my family.

But the other thing I remember, and I didn't remember it, I'm getting back to the chalk line, until I told the chalk line story to Bob, and this came up in a discussion about what you did on rainy days. I had my own bathroom and a very small sink and on rainy days I would take my mother's nail polish, and in those days women wore that blood red, you know, different kinds of bloody red polish. And I would fill the sink with cold water. And nail polish is essentially enamel. I would put droplets of it on the surface and watch it spread in this Paul Jenkins endless thing, endless fascination. Then I would let the water out and you'd get different designs depending on how much of what color you put in. And then a maid comes in and threatens to hang [inaudible] [laughter]. But I don't think there's any connection between that and my spilling Duco enamel 20 years later. But it was something I remember that fascinated me so there must be some connection in it.

And then I had a game with beads, different colored beads, each bead the same size, glass beads but brilliant colors, had a pocket, a cup for it on a board so that you could make any design, star shape, circle, or whatever. And that used to fascinate me. And that game ended because I, I was very young then, I finished the design one day and then put the beads in my mouth. [Laughter].

MS. ROSE: [Laughter]How old were you? Do you remember?

[TELEPHONE RINGING.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, I don't know, maybe four or something. And they were way, you know, way up my mouth. And I remember my grandmother taking me by the ankles, my grandmother had visions of my having to be operated on, she made the beads drop out. She shook me upside down.

MS. ROSE: Did you spend much time alone as a child?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Very little. But some. But I had 2 sisters who were 5 1/2 and 6 1/2 years older, Marjorie and Gloria are eleven months apart. Marjorie and I, Marjorie is older than Gloria, were always much closer, even though for years I was the baby. But now I'm 39 and she's 45. I mean for a decade there was just that little difference. Whereas Gloria and I have never made it and never will. In fact, I'm not at all close to her. I'm close to her in that she insists on talking to me on the phone and keeping in touch but it's her insistence and my allowance that sustains it.

MS. ROSE: I get a feeling that you were your father's favorite [inaudible]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, yes, and I had real freedom. I mean I could at nine or ten send away for

anything I wanted. I mean I had a period of writing away for -- .

MS. ROSE: Such as?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, these crazy boxes. At one time a complete exercycle set arrived. But fortunately they took it, they came back. I got into every contest. When I was ten I won the honorable mention, I still have the certificate, for the Saks Fifth Avenue cover of the annual talent show for children. And my parents couldn't get over it. And, you know, there was this show with the deputy mayor to give me the certificate, typical high school, elementary school deal. And my father taking me in Atlantic City that summer to buy a tower charm for my gold charm bracelet. [Inaudible].

MS.ROSE: [Inaudible].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: So that I was really encouraged. And if I wrote stories or, you know, I made cards for anniversaries and birthdays. It was a big production and they would make them into a book. [Inaudible]. So that everything I did I wanted to have original and perfect and get attention and got a response.

MS. ROSE: Well I know that newspaper headline that you showed me when you were born. I mean it was sort of like you were born with a bang and you were special [inaudible].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. Well, my father being a Supreme Court judge and --. I mean those were the days of Tammany Hall and Farley and [inaudible] Johnny Walker [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: Did you know these sort of guys?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: My father was strictly old-fashioned family. And he worked terribly hard. He got up at dawn, came home at seven. No evening social life. His only pleasures were a box at the opera, dinners at Denny Moore's. Denny Moore was one of his very close friends. Taking us to the Plaza, going to Atlantic City weekends. It was all family. Every dinner was the three of us, the three children and my parents. We never ate apart at dinner, even when I was two. And the problems would be "What happened?" Marjorie needed help with Latin. I couldn't do math problems, you know, or something else. He loved it. And he thought that was what life was about.

And he had great trouble disciplining. But there really wasn't terribly much that was necessary. And my mother was, as he wanted her, totally involved in the children, ménage, and being his wife and the wife of a New York figure. And he was an adored man. I mean when he died there was a turnout for a hero who was gone too soon. He did fantastic things for the people in the Depression. [Inaudible.]

MS. ROSE: How old were you at this point?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Like eleven. Terribly upsetting. I had been at Horace Mann [School, New York, New York] which is a very good school, and part of Teacher's College. It was a Rockefeller experiment with Lincoln and one of the few good experiments in progressive education. Unlike Dalton [School, New York, New York] at the time which was just a mess. And then Horace Mann merged with Lincoln [School, New York, New York] and my mother didn't want me to stay there. And I was not doing very well, and I was a year ahead of myself. So in the ninth grade I left and I went to Brearley [School, New York, New York] which was then the epitome of academic, good tradition, society. They have a Jewish quota. You wore a gym suit uniform, you were athletic, you did your logarithms and Greek before you could paint or write.

And the period between ten and fourteen I was really a wreck. Nobody knew it the way I knew it because I had all kinds of ways to cover it up and be endearing and fit in. But it was then that I developed migraine and had them all the time, the kind that just flatten you for two days. The war had just started, my father had died, I was changing schools. My sisters were just off to college. Marjorie was a sophomore at Vassar [College, Arlington, New York], Gloria was a freshman at Mount Holyoke [College, South Hadley, Massachusetts]. My mother was beautiful, in her early 40s, with three young girls, and widowed, [TELEPHONE RINGING] and had never had another man, no other man would ever do and never did. And she was patrician and really beautiful, she was lively, youthful, earthy but with class. You know, in a way very vulgar and in another way had great taste. A splendid, large woman. And they really did love each other. It was a marvelous marriage. And I say this also knowing after my own analysis all it wasn't marvelous, but essentially the memory and the feeling of the memory you can't fool yourself on. And it was unusually positive, for that period.

But I had been a year ahead of myself and when I went to Brearley which was a great coup to get into, because the Jews were Warburgs and [inaudible] and the Lehmans --.

MS. ROSE: Our crowd.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. And we missed our crowd by a couple of rungs in the hierarchy.

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION].

MS. ROSE: What kind of --.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: So I went [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: Should I [inaudible].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah, go ahead. And I failed terribly. And the school's headmistress was Mildred McIntosh --.

MS. ROSE: Yikes.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And I think a tremendously awful woman.

MS. ROSE:

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, really a terrible woman. And I failed more and more and more. At that time I thought, and never let anybody know, I guess because of the migraine, but I thought I had a brain tumor, and kept it to myself for two years. And I would get these terrible, stomach panic attacks of, I must not see a doctor, I can't. I don't want to know. Nobody must know. I would spend hours during class testing my side vision. I had something in my eyeball that since then I've learned from my eye doctor, when I don't wear glasses. It's very common, it's just a sort of strain thing that passes across and if you're tired and you look a certain way. And I can bring it about now and pointing you see a certain configuration of wrinkly designs. There's a name for it, I don't know what it is. But it's nothing. I mean it's something one isn't aware of.

And I used to dwell on this until it was all I could take. And of course thought it was unique because one doesn't know. I mean it's like discovering along in a later life some nodule or lesion or double-jointedness or something, it's one of the most common. I mean I never knew what a migraine was. I thought I was the only one who had these attacks, which would leave me literally the way a man is when he's had a stroke. Interesting, [inaudible] yeah. I couldn't speak. I would look at a chair, know it

was a chair, know it had a word, know it was a word I used all the time, and would through some garbled way say to my mother to give me the name of what that thing was. I mean in a severe attack I would just go to pieces.

MS. ROSE: Didn't your mother take you to a doctor at all?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: The idea was that I was, and in those days these were the words, high strung, nervous, upset about my father's death, sometimes a bad child, had headaches the way my father did. My father I discovered years later was also a migraine sufferer. And this is psychological and hereditary. Let's say I had a leaning toward that weakness.

Anyway, I went back a grade at Brearley and failed just about everything and after two years they didn't want to take me back, they said they would if I went to summer school, a French camp. Which I did, miserably. And I was a mess. I just couldn't think. I had no sustained observation powers because I was so wrapped up in being frustrated. In other words, at Brearley you can't paint or write stories unless you do the other stuff first. And I was not a good athlete. And I was not --.

MS. ROSE: But you're such a great swimmer.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: But there you're a member of a team, and I'm not a competitive athlete. I don't, in fact up here in the summer we've sort of called tennis off. Bob and I together played very well. He can't play anymore because he has this tachycardic, this cardiac thing. The doctors made him stop playing. But the last migraine I had was in a doubles match with the Kunitzs about six years ago up here. And the sun was going down and the score was something like 23 to 22, 24 to 23. And suddenly I kind of blind-spotted, called aura, which is the beginning of a migraine. And I couldn't see. I had to quit, and I was in bed for days. But it wasn't just that it was a competitive sport. There was a lot else going on that had to do with children and summer drama. But I'm a good swimmer because it's my thing alone in the water. I don't like chess or, you know, games competition. I mean if I'm going to compete it's like it's on a loftier level. In other words, I want to be good at what I do myself.

Anyway, it was a disaster, and I was probably in a good breakdown. I mean I was not functioning. I had left camp. I was terrified my mother was going to leave. I had lost my father. If my mother went to the grocery store I would sit trembling and crying, at the age of eleven, that she wasn't coming back. And terrified of letting her know I felt that way. I was in very bad straits. Anyway, my great luck, which I won't go into in detail, I went to Dalton. And the headmistress there was an extraordinary woman who got me immediately. I was then fourteen and was failing and was almost thrown out of Brearley as a sophomore. And she took me in and I skipped my junior year in high school. She put me right into the senior class. I was fifteen the middle of May, no, sixteen. I graduated from Dalton, one of their special students, one of the heads of the class yearbook with friends I still have.

MS. ROSE: Who is this woman?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Her name was Keith, Charlotte Ann Keith. Now [inaudible] she's left there. She married very late in life. And she knew that while I would graduate at sixteen and that I had no record that would let anybody in their right mind let me go from a failing sophomore to a senior at the age of fifteen she banked on it. And she was absolutely right. And I studied with [Rufino] Tamayo, that was when I--.

MS. ROSE: Let's talk about that. I mean what happened when you studied with Tamayo.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, the luck was that I had him that year, and then in order to get into Bennington I had to wait until the winter term. I didn't start there until the following March instead of entering in September. And in the meantime I continued with him even after I graduated from Dalton. So I had a big dose of painting and beginning to look at paintings in New York.

MS. ROSE: What was he like? What did he emphasize? What did you do with him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Did I tell you we saw him in Mexico?

MS. ROSE: No.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He was lovely. He was very nice. He's not well liked but he still has that sort of beaming, loose, proud smile and he was very proud of me. And he was on the jury with Malraux and a couple of others of the first Paris Biennale in 1959. And I won it, you know. And he almost died with joy. And in Mexico he embraced me [inaudible]. It had been years and years and years. When I first met him he was 44. And he's now seventy or so, probably.

MS. ROSE: What did he teach you?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He really, well, I'd gotten very good instruction at Brearley from a demon woman whose name was --. Her name was Carpenter, and some other man.

BREAK IN TAPE.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: With Tamayo I did things like *Starry Night* [Vincent Van Gogh, 1889], reaching for the stars, sort of Picasso, *Watermelon Eater* [Tamayo, 1949], ultramarine blues and oranges and things. Some of them are quite good. He helped me make the scale bigger. I mean I worked on big pictures. I did a life-size portrait of our maid when I was then [inaudible] 15 which I think they still have at Dalton. I might have that at home. I did it on cardboard.

MS. ROSE: Did he realize what a good kid you were?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He thought I was pretty good. There were a number of pretty good painters. But I'd say that by the time I left there another girl and I were sort of the favorites, and the other girl was slightly dippy, so that he and I had the real relationship. He didn't care too much about teaching but I think he was interested and very helpful.

MS. ROSE: What do you think you learned from him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I learned more about the ambience and the seriousness of it. It was more of an attitude. Specifically I can remember his demonstrating on my own pictures, which was something I always, always used to resent and I remember physically feeling on my shoulder that I didn't want him to touch the painting itself but to show me on a separate piece of paper or on something he was doing, or --. But not to paint on my painting.

But he would show how to make an apple look as if it were resting on the table. In other words, where and how much to put the crescent-shaped black line. But I, without knowing it, I think unconsciously I really never bought it. That is, if you look at the way [Paul] Cezanne makes an apple sit on a table, whatever is dark or light, or whatever shape it is, it is part of the painting. It's not a trick of chiaroscuro or a fake perspective to make it look as if it's resting. Whereas his black line wrapped up the package rather than the line functioning both as a shadow between the apple and the table cloth but also being a black sliver on a flat square. And he was not concerned with a black

sliver on a flat square. But, you know, at that time I didn't think that much about it. And he had humor.

MS. ROSE: Would he say anything explicit? I mean did you get any plastic ideas, he probably --?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, he taught Tamayo. So that when I was at my best, I used his medium literally. I mean a third, and a third, and a third: a third turpentine, a third linseed oil, a third varnish. Used his color palette.

MS. ROSE: Which was -- ?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Sort of Mexican blues and reds. Black, cadmium, orange. Didn't use his subject matter in the Surrealist sense. But I do have some pictures of still lifes and such that, you know, show you who your teacher was very much. And he was encouraging. But I didn't need much encouragement. He was no star teacher but very good for me at that moment.

MS. ROSE: Well what did you get from it? Did you study with him that summer?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, I graduated from Dalton in, let's say, June of 1945. And Bennington, because of the record, and like Dalton with great faith, accepted me, and I have a cuckoo high school record, for not September but, because I was sixteen and had this funny record, accepted me for the winter term after the nonresident term. By then I was seventeen. And the meantime I stayed in touch with Dalton as sort of a post-graduate student and continued with Tamayo. Maybe I had French or Latin or math or something to make it look creditable. [Laughter].

And that summer I went away with my mother to someplace [inaudible] and that was when I met, well, really I had met her before. But not, we didn't become really bosom pals 'til then. Gabby Luther Rogers. And I was already, you know, just mad about the idea of Bennington. And my mother, with two minds, was very proud of "my Bennington girl," you know, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, and Bennington. But also very wary of "those Bennington girls" they do wild things, they bring Greenwich Village into the house, they write things you can't understand, they paint things you can't, yeah. But also very happy for me. My mother was, she was very encouraging. And when insecure terribly threatened. So that if it involved her losing face in her social setting then she might deliver a hysterical monologue about how terrible that kind of an education was because somebody might think I was sleeping with somebody, or hated my family, or went with Communists or something like that. But generally it didn't really concern her at all. And when she wanted some face-saving would say with great pride, "Oh, my Bennington girl," you know. And just turn the whole thing around.

MS. ROSE: At what point did you become conscious that you were going to be an artist?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I think I knew it that last year at Dalton.

MS. ROSE: That you were going to be a painter?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Not that I was going to be a painter, but that I loved painting and things literary and loved involved language visually and in words. And had two or three friends who were very serious, Marion Doty was one of them. And we would really talk like passionate 16-year-olds. And were very, very close girlfriends, picked each other up for school every day and had our own language and we'd spend hours taking off --. Cy [Twombly] was then a very important, well, more than a cartoonist with his figures. And I devised a game of, without showing anything recognizable would draw a state of mind: you're frightened, you're jealous, what happened yesterday, your sister,

weather -- .

MS. ROSE: That early you were doing this?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, my last year in high school, 15, 16. And I still have those someplace. They're on tiny scraps of lined, you know, the kind of pads you get for homework assignments in your pocketbook. And it was a takeoff from Cy. Or the idea of, remember those cartoons where the character is nonplussed and in the balloon that usually contains the message there would just be a scrambled line?

MS. ROSE: Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, it took off from that and it was fascinating and fun.

MS. ROSE: Um-hm. Were you aware of automatism of Surrealism at that time?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, no. The first show I remember seeing was the Surrealist show at the [Metropolitan] Museum. What year was that?

MS. ROSE: Good god, that was '36. It couldn't be --.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, Marjorie took me and the first picture I remember talking in front of, and I'm sure that there were many before it, but my first memory of talking about a painting with somebody was Marjorie taking me to either that show, though I think, I know the painting is in the permanent collection of the Museum, is the melting watch [*The Persistence of Memory*, 1931] of [Salvador] Dalí. Yes.

MS. ROSE: Dalí, yes? Did you go to the Modern [Museum of Modern Art, Manhattan, New York] often?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, uh-uh. I remember going to the old Guggenheim [Museum, at 24 East 54th Street]. It was in a private house and that was really in my neighborhood. But not --. And there were few galleries. I think I went to an opening of Tamayo's at Valentine Dudensing's [Gallery, New York, New York], if it was still called that, it might have been just Valentine then. But it was 'cause it was my teacher and I was invited to it. I was seventeen and it was a party, it was fantastic, special. It was, you know, great then. But I didn't go to galleries. I've still never been to Peggy Guggenheim's. I didn't know anything about any of them.

The first time I really looked at reproductions of old masters and began to get into the dissection of the aesthetics of different kinds of pictures was when I got to Bennington and had Paul Feeley. And there was a permanent Celotex rolling easel [inaudible] and on it would be tacked, oh, sometimes for ten minutes and sometimes for ten weeks one of a series of maybe a hundred *Art News* mounted on cardboard reproductions. They might have been *Venus and Adonis* [1555-1560] by Titian, [Paul] Cezanne's [*The*] *Cardplayers* [1890-92], Matisse's [*The*] *Blue Window* [1913], Mondrian's [*Broadway*] *Boogie Woogie* [1942-43], lots of [Juan] Gris, [Georges] Braque, Picasso. A lot of bad stuff put in just because it was not up to great master level. And we would really sift [inaudible] every inch of what it was that worked, or if it didn't, why. And cover up either half of it or a millimeter of it and wonder if without it what was effective in it. And where you could take off from there. Talking and roasting it endlessly in terms of the paint, the subject matter, the size, the drawing, what it came out of, would it matter if you put it upside down, what moved, all of that. I mean, and as adults talked about it.

MS. ROSE: Tell me about Paul Feeley who was tremendously important.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I started to say that one of the delights in Bennington with Paul was that he gave so much and inspired so much and also learned from his students. That, if he pushed an idea about a picture you weren't aware of what he wanted you to think or say or how it the seminar should keep it going. And sometimes he didn't know himself. But then, say, Sonya [Rudikoff] or I would say something about a Mondrian and he would do a complete double take in the middle of it, I mean he would turn and go like this and "ahh" and for the first time in his life a thought crossed. So that there was a real dialectic and thrilling and really brilliant, actually.

MS. ROSE: What was his intellectual context? I mean what did he bring to you?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: His vocabulary was Cubism and he himself painted a quasi-Max Weber, Feininger, Villon, and what I call American Cubism, as I said before. And he really looked at Braque, Picasso, Gris. And was one of the hundreds of people painting in that way. But he was also filled with curiosity. He had a tremendous appetite and always sent students during their non-resident term to [Hans] Hofmann or Wally Harrison.

MS. ROSE: What did you do?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: The first year I studied with [Vaclav] Vytlacil at the Art Students League [New York, New York]. It was in 1946. It was during the GI Bill and I was one of two women in a class of scroungy guys who were just going to school to use up the bill. Do you have no [inaudible]upstairs?

MS. ROSE: Yeah.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Something like that. And it was, I'm not exaggerating, easel to easel so that if you --. I mean a good-sized easel picture is 18 by 24 or else a corner of it overlapped the next guy. And Vytlacil was a lousy teacher. Kind of plump, very jerky. And the whole school was nuts, I thought. And at the same time for ten dollars a week I was a reporter, and I was 17, for Maude Kemper Riley's *MKR's Art Outlook*.

MS. ROSE: [Laughter].

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And I reviewed [Theodoros] Stamos's show at Betty Parsons [Gallery] and wrote a little column and also reshuffled her filing cabinet. It was a serious job. I wouldn't ask a high school student to do what I had to do with filing cabinets and paper clips [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: But you went through a lot of stuff and you went to a lot of shows.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, yes. I remember writing about the [inaudible] by Stamos and, you know, his calling up and having a fit and saying, "Who is this?" you know. A 17-year-old Bennington girl. And it was good. And I looked at it. And I still have it. And I would write it verbatim today.

MS. ROSE: It must have developed your critical faculties.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. And I had already done an awful lot of critical writing.

MS. ROSE: But not about painting?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. But I mean I was already in the Bennington swing of myth, ritual,

criticism. I knew the names and I knew the approaches. You know, it was just a beginning. But the next winter I, no, I'm wrong. The first winter was Wallace Harrison. No, start again. I had no first winter period because I started the winter after the non-resident term, I started college then. So that my first non-resident term I worked at the desk, the front desk, of A.A.A., the Associated American Artists Gallery [New York, New York]. And that was in '46.

MS. ROSE: Any art that was interested you?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Terrible. Glen Luck. The Soyer Brothers [Raphael, Moses, and Isaac Soyer]. What's his name, what was it, Fletcher Martin.

MS. ROSE: Did you know that it was god-awful?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. I knew it was just dreadful. And they were making match boxes and actually playing cards instead of [inaudible]. A guy named Parker who ran it. It was dreadful. But interesting. And I was 17. And it was one of my first jobs. And it was in a gallery. And it was just temporary. But I went there and to the Art Students League.

The second winter I worked for Maude Riley. I can't remember the third one. I'll have look it up. Anyway, one of the winters I was reporting for *Art* [inaudible]. The second winter, I only had three because I did it in three years, I went to Boston [Massachusetts] and took a job on the *Cambridge Courier* which was the newspaper and I was, that was when something called prime newsprint came out, it's still run that way, it's the council of government in Cambridge. And I was a newspaper reporter. It had nothing to do with art at all. Didn't paint. And lived on Newbury Street with two other girls in a renovated portrait gallery. It wasn't even an apartment. We paid something like, we split it, it was 28 bucks a month and a three way split. It had a two burner stove. And we had a marvelous time. Then the last winter I studied with Wallace Harrison on 14th Street. And his school was, it was either that or Hofmann's. And I chose Harrison. Not to be confused with the architect.

MS. ROSE: No. What was it like? Did you learn anything?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, it was marvelous. That was my first taste of French culture really. And he's an Australian. But he and his wife both had taught at Cooper Union [for the Advancement of Science and Art, New York, New York] for years. And he was a mad Francophile and crazy about Picasso and [Jaques] Lipchitz.

MS. ROSE: Where was this?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It was on Seventh Avenue and 14th Street [New York, New York].

MS. ROSE: Was anybody else there?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Jim Brooks. And Charlotte. And it was a whole life. He would make Chinese shrimp dinners for all the students. And we'd go to shows. He would take us to the Peridot Gallery which was then on, oh, deep in the Village. And I knew Weldon Shoes. And Wallace was crazy about Lipchitz drawings in pencil, very chiaroscuro, figurative but abstract, small drawings. And his method was to have you work in a Cubist tradition. I have those drawings and they're marvelous. You could work with a greasy pencil and one of those crumbly erasers on white typewriter paper size mounted sheets through the winter, erasing and re-drawing and making it darker, making it lighter until it moved. It was essentially the same language of Feeley and Cubism. So I would say, blanket, from the time I was 17 until I was 20 when I graduated from Bennington as far as painting went I had a depth analysis of what made Cubism work and its revolution, and all it opened up. And in history it

was just the right moment to get it.

MS. ROSE: But what were you yourself doing? What were you attracted to?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: When I started at Bennington I painted realistically. I used to go out and paint the tombstones and the landscape around the graveyard, or have other students pose for me, or do the still lifes that were set up in the studio.

MS. ROSE: Why did you want the graveyard?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It might have been a peaceful place to sit down, or it was both landscape and man-made. Nothing, I mean it wasn't particularly any more or less quiet or beautiful than [inaudible]. Or romantic. I just said that because I do still have that picture.

Oh! I know what I did one winter. That, the last winter, the Wallace Harrison winter, and I shared a studio with Sonya in the Gramercy area in a railroad flat. And we paid \$14 a month, it was cold water. And we got this little railroad flat two flights up. [Inaudible] white and it was very Bohemian. She had gone to music and art and with a year in it [inaudible] she was terribly serious. I mean she was blue stockings [inaudible]ugh. And painted and we painted together. It was marvelous.

MS. ROSE: What did you paint?

[BREAK IN TAPE]

END OF SIDE A1

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, I did a wonderful little picture of the inside of that place. And I did an enormous Feeley-type picture called *Woman on a Horse*, you know, the profile three different ways and full face. I mean I really understood, I did in my senior show two little pictures that are every bit as good, though I think ex post facto, nothing can be every bit as good ever, the way the best drip Pollock made four years later than the best drip Pollock is not good. But I could do Braques and Picassos that were angelic and completely understood, I mean really. I mean Paul really honored me and by that time it was a friendship, it wasn't a --. I mean our lives were in each other.

MS. ROSE: Did you meet any working artists while you were at Bennington, did you --? Were you involved in--?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Just the Wallace Harrison work period, and that was only through him, and I mean Jim and Charlotte.

MS. ROSE: What impressed you at that point? I mean in terms of art? Still Braque and Picasso?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, I remember bringing back to Paul a catalogue with a reproduction of, one show, [Jean] Dubuffet and [Henri] Matisse. I think it was Matisse. And also a torn-out picture from the [*New York Times*] of the painting [*Cyclops*, 1947] that won [William] Baziot's the [Art Institute of] Chicago [Chicago, IL] award, and it was in 1947 or 8 which is when Baziot's was at his best. And we had, along with all these reproductions you walked up [inaudible] and tacked up your own stuff. And you said, what about this in relation to that? And it sort of laid an egg up there.

MS. ROSE: What did you like about it?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It was new. I didn't like it. It puzzled me. Because Paul was still somewhat

my mentor I--.

END OF SIDE A2

SIDE B

MS. FRANKENTHALER: They came to town --. Ken [Noland] had known Clem and brought Morris [Louis] to Clem and Clem told them about me, introduced us and they saw the *Mountains and Sea* [1952] picture. And Ken was painting sort of traditional abstract rather heavy cuisine easel size pictures. I could say academic but they weren't because they were--.

MS. ROSE: [Inaudible.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. They were like, he was determined to get on to himself and another thing and transcend it and become a first-rate painter. I mean just determined that he was going to make it and had the feelings to do it. But when he saw *Mountains and Sea* they really admired it, admired me, wondered at it, and were going to lick it. Darn it and lick it both. And I liked that. I mean, we had --. In those days with many people I think, because money and power were out in a certain sense, that they were real useful joys of [inaudible] of sharing.

Where, you know, you made that and it's great, he says. Now I'm gonna run home and make one and show you, don't you love it? You know?

MS. ROSE: Did you talk about art?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Not much. No. The relationship was mainly Clem and Ken and Clem and Morris and mostly because they lived in Washington [D.C.] and wanted his eye.

MS. ROSE: Did you see their paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, whenever I went there. Yes.

MS. ROSE: You went to Washington with Clem?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, all the time.

MS. ROSE: The next sort of big break I guess comes when you break with Clem and you were completely on your own?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. And then I investigated something which is related to what I talked about in *Number 14*, Pollock, a side of me that --. Well, I always use this word and I'm always dissatisfied with it because it's not what I mean at all, but a surreal side. There are two words that are applied to me often that I think are very wrong but there aren't any other words that I can think of at the moment that would --. But one is "lyrical" and the other is "surreal."

MS. ROSE: You don't think of yourself as a lyrical painter?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I understand what's meant when that word is used in relation to my pictures. And I don't think "lyric" is a put down but "lyric" never implies the profound enough. I mean, most of [inaudible] are "lyric." But, because of the break up, I don't know, that's not really what I'm trying to say. In other words, "lyric" can imply light, untouched, angelic, witty. Which are

marvelous qualities. But "light" can also imply simple, which is not a marvelous quality. I don't know, I'm getting too tired.

MS. ROSE: Well, I have a feeling that what you're trying to say is that there's some kind of equivalent of a spirit that you're trying to get in your painting.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I started to say I went in '56 and '57 I think I let a lot of things come out in pictures. But I would sort of --. What happens to me, things get simplified and simplified and simplified. And then I go through a period where either they become more baroque or in a bad way I divvy them up. Or in a good way I reverse it and I mean the way I destroy. I had been doing things like [inaudible]. Well, I did not want to become minimal, it's not my gestalt. And just did something else.

MS. ROSE: Did you consciously do that? Like make a painting that was more [inaudible] then--. Try, you know, to get a different quality?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Than another?

MS. ROSE: Yes.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: You mean and then go on to another picture for another quality?

MS. ROSE: Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. And I think you can always see my work, or signature whether I do a painting that's very fair or one that's very poor. It isn't that I want to experiment with style. I often want to experiment with the different ways I know myself.

MS. ROSE: After breaking up with Clem did you feel there was a change in your painting? Did it make a difference? Or did you feel differently that you were over your style?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I think it made a difference. But I think for a number of reasons. I think I was older. I at 26, having made the pictures I had made between 21 and 26, one inevitably shifts. In other words, I no longer wanted to talk to Al and Grace about the blue at the corner of my pictures or theirs. That had been passed. I still wanted to see everything that was going on and being shown. And I felt lonelier because I was lonelier. But, well, now one picture I painted then was *Blue Territory* [1955] which certainly is different from a lot of the pictures I had done in the early '50s. But I don't know, I think we'd have to look at the paintings.

MS. ROSE: Yeah, the pictures, yeah. Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I had no feeling that now this is a break and I'm forgetting that aesthetic. Not at all. That was entrenched.

MS. ROSE: Do you see--? Yeah. Do you see any breaks in your work? I mean specific things, kind of crucial things happened?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I went through something around '59, '60 where I was really using --. I mean when I think of the titles, something like orange green [probably *Orange Breaking Through*, 1961], black with shadow [probably *Winter Figure with Black Overhead*, 1959?] And then one that is clearly a nude [*Nude*, 1958], I mean anybody who knows pink and breast shape, the feeling of body being seen. Now it isn't a figure in a room or in a landscape, but it is very much that feeling of

[inaudible] in surrounding. I did much of that but I use, say, surroundings to take off on a play of drawing. In other words, you might look at a room full of chairs, two identical chairs without ever referring to the "chairiness" of it on paper, you might put a yellow S-shaped thing there and below it a yellow S-shaped thing there, and they're very much the same. They're totally different. They're placed on different spots on the paper. Then you might forget the whole point of departure would be chairs to begin with and look at the picture and things and think, "Well, it needs a blue rectangle," let's say.

MS. ROSE: Did you ever use landscape as a point of departure?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. Clearly.

MS. ROSE: When?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, I have a whole series of pictures that are, I mean in a sense, landscapes. Well, I wouldn't hold the landscape in front of me and translate it more abstractly into the painting, no. But I would, again in that American expedient thing you were talking about, thinking ideas in my language. Sort of like today. Hm, bunch of roses, hm. Flags out the window, hm.

MS. ROSE: Yeah, what's the feeling when [inaudible]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, not the feeling so much what's repeated in a shape in this room: leaves, chairs, shoes. But once it got down on the surface I would say in 99 times out of a 100, out of 101, nobody would come along and say how come you put shoes in a picture. I mean it would be too brown or too green.

MS. ROSE: Well then, of course I guess it would be Bob next that happened.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, no. I mean lots happened. I mean there were many trips to Europe. Lots of painters.

MS. ROSE: Oh! I want to ask you a question. Did you ever look at [Arthur] Dove? I often find similarities between you.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, but without any connection.

MS. ROSE: Um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I mean I feel no connection with other women painters of the past or present any more than I --. You know, I mean I feel a connection with painters of the past or present but none you could say are women. And have very little sense of early American heritage. I think that analogy is often forced and easy.

MS. ROSE: Um-hm, um-hm.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I mean the Dove thing irritates me sometimes. Kandinsky I could see. But Dove and [John] Marin, no.

MS. ROSE: How about Old Master paintings? What were your favorites and what did you see in them that you liked?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I think I really learned --. I became, not a connoisseur, but I really

learned how to look at a [inaudible] before 1960. And in a sense that sharpened my eye for abstract pictures. Because, it's light in the painting that makes it work. It's light in the painting that makes it work.

MS. ROSE: Well, who were your favorite Old Master paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, do you mean the Renaissance? Or [inaudible]--?

MS. ROSE: Either. Yes.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, certainly Piero [della Francesca], Dello [di Niccolo Delli]. Not [Hieronymus] Bosch [inaudible]. Titian, [Diego] Velasquez, on and off, but now more. The [Peter Paul] Rubens, most of the [inaudible].

MS. ROSE: When did you see the Rubens sketches?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Uh, '56. But generally I mean if you see the sketches for the Rubens Medici series in the Louvre [] it's another world and they are divine. And I liked, there was always something about [William-Adolphe] Bouguereau, [Jusepe de] Ribera, [brothers Antoine, Louis, and Mathieu] Le Nain. That whole thing that I go for, the light line drawing. I never cried, really, by heart. I mean, when I close my eyes you can say, "Well in all mankind, where is the dreamer folding?" [Inaudible.]

I like many Rembrandts [van Rijn] but I often feel about Rembrandt the way I feel about Beethoven. I honor it but it's not my frequency.

MS. ROSE: Well, what do you feel interested in? What do you feel at home with that we haven't done?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Things that are not overworked, that are in essence light. In other words, the great Cezannes that are not all filled in.

[SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION]

MS. ROSE: [Inaudible.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: [Inaudible.]Yes.

MS. ROSE: When did you first see?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, not that I can ever commit. I had looked at Cezanne, I mean [inaudible], five *Card Players* in a room, the heavy one, but I think now [inaudible]. [Inaudible.]

But generally, while I can recognize a master piece that is heavily painted or darkly painted or painted in layers as great and sublime, it would not be my choice to hang a [inaudible] for five years if I could instead perhaps have a Cezanne of the kind I just described. Or a certain kind of Matisse. Or one of those large Rubens sketches, where the first breath of feeling is the picture rather than the labor and the gift.

MS. ROSE: What do you think painting should give? I mean what should painting be able to give?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: For the painter? Or for the world?

MS. ROSE: Both.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, me I think it depends on who you are. Of course you're asking me, so I can say. But I think it gives different things to different people depending on their--.

MS. ROSE: Well, what do you want from art? What's your--?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I think it's a life measuring stick. And I'm concerned with being myself, getting to know more and more what that is, what is possible, and what the real meaning of beauty and development is. I'm concerned with development and growth. But I am in my everyday life. I hate to feel dead. But that does not mean that repetition or experiment isn't in the total picture of growth and development. And I think that pace and place differently at different times for each person.

MS. ROSE: When did you meet Bob [Robert Motherwell]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Bob [Motherwell]. Once when he came to New York from Long Island [New York] to have a drink with Clem and I stayed for a little while because I knew their relationship was a kind of code, and different, unusual.

MS. ROSE: Why?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well they had their own system. Clem probably said something like stay to meet him. And then I felt, now they speak another language. So I did. And Bob doesn't even remember meeting me then. Whether I was Clem's girl or was somebody else there or not, you know.

But I didn't know because he wasn't living in New York. And I admired his painting. But the rest of the painters I was involved with --. I mean I didn't know [Clyfford] Still either and therefore Still didn't come up in my life as much. But I liked to look at Still. And I went of course to all of his [Robert] Motherwell shows. But Bill de Kooning and Jackson [Pollock] were all around all the time. And it wasn't just following a career and a gallery and a social scene then, and a party scene, and the peripheral part of it at all.

And I knew Bob not personally at all. I had met him up here in Provincetown the summer of '57. He was married. I came up to stay with the [Hans and Miz] Hofmanns. And in the usual part of the social life of the, with the Hofmanns, ran into the Motherwells. I think they asked me for drinks. Of course I was staying with the Hofmanns. And they knew I had been in the context of Clem [inaudible] and painted. But even then it was, you know, very casual and brief and without much exchange. It was ironic that when we really did meet to confront each other that fall, late that fall, Thanksgiving, that many people thought that he and I had known each other very well before. And we didn't at all. I'm not sure but there are people who connected that.

MS. ROSE: Well when would you say you first really did meet?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I had met him well one night when I had been teaching an adult education painting course at Great Neck that was run by a very good guy who got the whole Cooper ménage and I think the New Gallery or Stable [Gallery], a lot of people from those three galleries, to come out and teach.

MS. ROSE: The what gallery? The New Gallery?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: The New Gallery. It was fabulous. Joan Mitchell showed there. [Inaudible.]

MS. ROSE: [Inaudible.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: [Inaudible.] That was the Joan Mitchell show. And a couple others. [Inaudible.] Are we still on?

MS. ROSE: Yeah.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And I was teaching there, and getting done one night. And the Friedmans, who are old friends of mine, asked me to come to the dinner party that they were having, a lot of people. I said I might go, I don't know, I had other things to do, we weren't close any more. I said I can't and they said well come when you get back on the train and we'll pick you up at the station, you know.

MS. ROSE: [Inaudible.]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: [Laughter.] And the guest of honor was the man who now runs the American Museum in Bath [England]. I forget his name. And Bob was there, recently separated. Oh, it's a long, long story.

Anyway, after a real exchange we went out and had a drink around the corner. [Inaudible] I don't know, two blocks [inaudible]. He was in bad shape and I thought his psyche, his ego, his total ambience needed somebody hip, in other words, a real perceptive to shake it up eye to eye directly. And for some reason, probably enough beer, and the hour, and a real interest in this person, I, out of habit, saying, "Why do you think you're doing this," "Why is that?" I think I put it in such a way and what came through was this passionate interest not just a stupid kid [inaudible]. I mean, I think in one sense he thought, "Who the hell are you to come up with it?" And also, he would listen because it would make a, sense.

And then all kinds of things happened. I was then very involved through the beginning of December. I was going to marry Reginald Pollack.

Anyway, the night Reginald Pollack went back to Europe, Bob, out of sheer ennui and restlessness and wanting to take somebody out to dinner, and he was not dating or involved, he had been involved with somebody who had been away for a publisher that fall [inaudible], called, and I used to hang up the phone on people. He trotted out an exhibit. And it was opening night at Castelli's [Gallery] of a group show of paintings that Castelli didn't show. I had a picture in it. I forgot what the name of the show was. It was in 1957, the end of 1957, it was painting [inaudible]. And I wanted to go to the opening, a night opening. And Bob called me and said sort of out of the blue, he was going to try once more and then give up. And I hung up the phone finally and headed for the door, late for some place. And the phone rang and I went back and he said, this is [inaudible], how would you like to have dinner. And I did. And I said I wanted to go to the Castelli Gallery. And we did.

And I had had this very neurotic drama with Pollock and was very upset and crying and said to Bob, do you mind, I want to get out of there, the gallery was packed. And he said, no, let's go some place to drink. And I said I don't want to go any place where there are waiters, people, noise. Would you mind coming back to the house? I lived on 94th and West Broadway. Let's go there and have a drink.

And we sat and talked all night long about what life is like in a way that most people would think that profound adolescents might. But it was a sort of very accurate and real but fantasy night of this is the way life is, this is the way I think it could be made, these are the problems, these are things I don't know about and wonder about, these are the horrors of experience. And there was a fantastic recognition and a permanent road into each other. And it developed from there. We were married in April but we still celebrate December 15.

[BREAK IN TAPE]

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And then I first started working on the floor --. In fact, one of the reasons I might have used the plaster of Paris was that I wanted that thing that you get on the floor but I didn't know yet that it had to be on the floor. And plaster of Paris, that was it, you could smack up and then it dried in a print rather than drip down. I mean according to how much water you put in it. But of course the problem was that it then flaked off if you used quantities of it. But I think I was heading towards that need to make something that eventually had to be made by being put on the floor.

MS. ROSE: A kind of an imprint instead of a

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't know. The fall of, let's see --.

MS. ROSE: Well, it's really the difference between an image and a gesture in a sense.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, what I'm not clear about right now is, are we going to talk about history and development or about aesthetics.

MS. ROSE: Both.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Ok. Yes. I'm trying to pick up where we left off. I had the studio with Sonya. And then in the winter of 1951 I had my first show at John's. And that spring David Hare, who used to be sort of in and out of the Painter's Club [The Artist's Club], I was looking for a bigger studio because the railroad flat was suddenly too small, he was going to Europe and wanted to rent his studio on 10th Street. And I rented it for a year. I worked there. That was when I became very friendly with Grace and All and Harry and Friedl and had a real studio life there. I still lived at London Terrace but went there daily and that was my existence. Fortunately I had some income because my father died and I didn't have to work, and just painted and looked at pictures and had a life with Clem and my friends.

MS. ROSE: Yeah. Two things: What is the first painting you painted on the floor? Do you remember?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't. But the first two --. These were not the first I did on the floor but the first two I remember that were done on the floor were *Mountains and Sea*, and that was in October '52. And then I was in a studio with Friedl --. No I rented the, no --. I think, I have to look this up. I don't know if I did *Mountains and Sea* in the David Hare studio or in the 20th --.

MS. ROSE: Friedl said you did it when you shared the studio with him.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah, well, I have said I did it then, too. But did Friedl and I have the studio in 1952-1953? No, I have a feeling it was 1953-1954 maybe. No, I know what I'm doing [inaudible]. Anyway, that was one of the first times that I remember. And then a much smaller one that is, you saw it at the house, it was on the top floor. That you liked so much at that moment.

MS. ROSE: You saw Pollock when you went out to Springs [East Hampton, Long Island, New York] that summer of 1951 but you didn't really start working on the floor until 1952?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I probably didn't get out to Springs until the fall-winter of '51 - '2. And the winter of '51 - '52 --.

MS. ROSE: Were you with Friedl in the spring of '52?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, in the fall of '52.

MS. ROSE: You brought him into the studio in the fall of '52.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I got the studio and it was --. What I decided, it was too much rent and too much space. And Friedl had broken up with his wife and needed a place to live. He had broken up with his [inaudible]. So we split it right down the middle. And it was large but it was narrow and long and dark, very dark. It was on 23rd between 7th and 8th on the south side of the street. And we divided it. I had half. When I had David Hare's studio Grace and Al helped me build screens with old parachute surplus cloth stapled on a frame so that I could hide all his work. And I carried this screen over to this place as a divider between Friedl's studio and mine. Friedl was also living there and I used to go back and forth to London Terrace.

MS. ROSE: Did Friedl paint on the floor at that time?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. I don't think Friedl ever was. I don't know. Anyway, since I had met Grace and Al and that whole gang everybody went to Boyle's on Wednesdays [inaudible] so that I had already been sizing and priming huge bolts of duck. But I had never decided not to size or prime it. We always bought Dutch Boy White Lead and glue and paint and for two cents we would do the whole big job usually all together to make it less expensive. But again the way I was telling about using the expedient thing at hand, I might have been very impatient to paint and a combination of impatience, laziness, and innovation decided why not put it on straight? Without the sizing and priming?

MS. ROSE: Well, Pollock didn't put sizing on either.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No.

MS. ROSE: Why did you do it like that? Did you get the idea that way?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I know that Pollock's pictures and his method and material affected me greatly. I do not remember, though I don't think it matters, looking and thinking I am going to now use unsized duck. I might have thought working on the floor is the way to do what I've got to do and keep doing it and I'm going to try it. But I don't remember, say, coming back with a decision of, this is my mentor and I'm not going to do it. But if it did come from someone certainly it came from him no doubt.

MS. ROSE: You started to say before about going to the National Gallery I presume with Clem.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh. Well, I was telling you about the way Clem worked, leave me on my own to learn pictures and then we would discuss it and share it and give each other insight and very often I would bring out something that would change his view of it. And we always bought catalogues and usually bought two and checked them, had a different, very often I would point out something --.

[BREAK IN TAPE.]

MS. ROSE: You were talking about some specific historical things. I read an account by Larry Rivers of the time that you visited Pollock in 1951. Do you remember?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I had forgotten about it until a few years ago when he reminded me. So that now when I think about it I'm never completely clear as to whether I remember it because he refreshed my memory or if it is that clear.

MS. ROSE: How do you remember it?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, as he described it, we had been to visit the Pollocks in Springs and we were so moved and overcome by Jackson's work and genius and the pictures we'd seen that we vowed and made a sort of mutual promise that we ourselves in homage to his urge would work and be true and produce and transcend. That this was the message in life and what we owed this master.

MS. ROSE: So what was it really like?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't remember. When I think about it now it seems like the most schmaltzy, pathetic, embarrassing moment, as Larry remembers it, with the two of us standing on on sort of Heathcliff dunes of East Hampton romantically swearing into the future.

MS. ROSE: How do remember it? I mean you remember going?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: My early memories of going to the Pollocks were with Clem.

MS. ROSE: What's the first time you remember meeting him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: The first time I met him was when his show was on. Or I might have met him at Clem's, say, in the spring '50. But when his show was on at Betty Parsons the fall of, I think it was '51, was that it? Yeah. Then when his show was on he would come into town and stay at Alfonso Ossorio's. Clem lived on Bank Street. And they came for a drink. At that time he was on the wagon and he sat on the floor in Clem's apartment and was sober and totally silent, withdrawn, probably very depressed. Affable, pleasant, but non-communicative, and not the image I had of him later, somebody drunken, wild, angry, demonstrative, wanton. I mean he really was two different people.

MS. ROSE: He left the impression that he just was a kind of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Exactly, yes.

MS. ROSE: But did you ever have any idea of what was eating him?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I think he could not relate to people. And was very depressed. And Lee [Krasner, Pollock's wife] really functioned beautifully as the mother who held him together, that he could be angry at, that he needed, that he could reject, who kept his particular sick syndrome going.

MS. ROSE: Well, what was his relation to Clem?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It was very dependent. Jackson would call up every so often in the middle of the night and in a drunken quandary or rage or appeal assume that Clem as an authority figure or

friend would be at the end of the line to receive him, and Clem would always say, "You have one hell of a nerve calling me at three a.m. Call me in the morning after ten."

MS. ROSE: Did you see a lot of each other?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, a lot meaning they lived in East Hampton, we lived in New York. But they would come in and we would always see each other. And we went out fairly often to see pictures and to have a weekend. And they were pleasant weekends, cordial, a very nice household, whatever money or comfort was available in terms of food, guest rooms. And everything was sure done with real grace and style and exchange.

MS. ROSE: Did you ever watch him work?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. But, say, if we arrived in mid-afternoon the activity would be going out soberly, everyone, to look at Jackson's new pictures. He always had a very immaculate studio in that barn and would unroll one after another of what he'd been working on and each would walk around it on the floor and occasionally hold a picture up and talk about it. And then, say, if it was a Friday, we'd do the same thing with the same pictures Saturday. And then look again Sunday. And maybe something that didn't look good Friday afternoon had a double take on Sunday.

MS. ROSE: Would he work and change things I mean as you talked? Or didn't he think about it?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, he did not. He didn't take suggestions. I mean there was no issue about taking them or not taking them. He just did what he did.

MS. ROSE: So the first time you actually saw his paintings was at the show at Betty Parsons? I mean the physical paintings? And what did you feel?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Right. Well, I think I described it before, that rightly I was naive with a learning, growing eye and Clem in a sense said, now you're on your own, you know. Walk in and see what it does to you. And I was overwhelmed and puzzled and knew that this was my message, that this was a, what do you call it? What do you dive off from?

MS. ROSE: A diving board?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes.

MS. ROSE: You'd take off from there, in other words?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes. That to me it clicked because really having looked at Cubism, been in New York in 1950, knowing de Kooning, etcetera, this was a clinching point of departure to me.

MS. ROSE: Did you see how it was different from de Kooning?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, yes.

MS. ROSE: What's the difference?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I've always thought that with de Kooning you could assimilate and copy. And that Pollock instead opened up what one's own inventiveness could take off from. In other words, given one's own talent for curiosity that you could explore, originate, discover from Pollock as one might, say, Picasso, or [Arshile] Gorky or [Wassily] Kandinsky in a way that de Kooning was a

closed oeuvre.

MS. ROSE: Were you interested in Kandinsky?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, at a certain period. Right now I wouldn't be, but in the 40s at a certain moment, that opened a more fluid period that one might relate to Gorky. It was very interesting to me, putting down color and things.

MS. ROSE: After you saw Pollock's paintings did you immediately start painting in a different way?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't remember. I think I'd already been using enamel but probably knowing he did but maybe not having seen him with the paint pots. I think working on the floor came from Pollock. In other words, the whole idea of all sides of pictures being possible, bottom, top, sides of the picture came from him. And the whole idea of the painting being in a sense choreographed came from him, and that once one made a move toward the canvas surface that there was a dialectic and the surface gave you an answer back, and you gave it an answer back. But that was a Pollock notion of --.

MS. ROSE: It's just to say the mark you left on your paintings.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: That your plans made accidents, demanded something else and then something else hinged on something else. You made a picture in a way that was a -- .

MS. ROSE: Critical revisions of [inaudible]. In a sense it was a truly dialectical way of making a picture.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Exactly.

MS. ROSE: Was that really in his mind? I mean, have you read any of Mark? I mean, do you have this as a notion about painting?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. I think he was very intelligent, very nice and since relating to people was impossible that he really did come to grips with relating with freedoms in the aesthetics and that's where he lived, making pictures.

MS. ROSE: I mean, if you had to say, if you could say what you learned from Pollock, what would you say?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: In the most positive sense I think it was a sense of being as open and free and surprised as possible, with a magic sense of -- .

MS. ROSE: In other words, listening to yourself.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: And being able to know when to stop, when to labor, when to be puzzled, when to be satisfied, when to recognize beautiful or strange or ugly or clumsy, and to be free with what you are making that comes out of you.

MS. ROSE: Did you start painting in the rectangles after seeing Pollock's paintings?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Not immediately. But in sequence, I didn't paint new long canvases until I had seen his and I'm sure that Pollock's ambience affected me tremendously. I was much more drawn to Pollock's painting on the raw canvas than I was to de Kooning's easel cuisine and there

it's a matter of sensibility. Aesthetically, socially, in every way the de Kooning thing seemed to be much more productive, planned, admirable at the time. But I didn't think so. I thought that Pollock was really the one living in nature much more than Bill [de Kooning].

MS. ROSE: Were you in a minority among your contemporaries?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Friedl and I were about the only ones. I mean loads of people thought Pollock was a terrific figure and to be respected. But when it came to an entourage they camped with Bill. They both might have been stars but Bill was the real star.

MS. ROSE: Also he was more available, wasn't he?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yes, I mean Bill was a 10th Street, Cedar Bar guy. And Jackson was protecting himself and working in East Hampton.

MS. ROSE: Do you think that Clem had much of an influence on Pollock? I mean nobody ever talks about it. It's a very sticky thing, whether he really --. What was his role in Pollock's life?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, Clem really recognized and appreciated Pollock's pictures and was one of the first to read them for their real value. And Jackson appreciated, needed, and relied on this. I mean there were very few people around, very few dealers who were around, very few critics around, not very much that was positive.

MS. ROSE: Well, let me put it this way: Was Clem's relationship with Pollock, like his relationship with Ken, where it's a very erotic relationship?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No. I don't think Clem really liked Jackson. I mean I think in many ways Jackson was a pain in the neck.

MS. ROSE: Why?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, Jackson was not a very pleasant, giving, easy person to be around. I mean, one wouldn't seek him out for general social camaraderie.

MS. ROSE: What was he just quiet, [inaudible]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: He was either sullen and withdrawn and fairly, as I said, affable. Or wildly blotto, drunk and a mess. And one doesn't have a civilized or interesting friendship to exchange with somebody like that, I mean unless you're dragged down into it.

MS. ROSE: Did you ever talk about painting with Pollock?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No, not very much. Jackson was not inarticulate. He just didn't choose to be or couldn't be. I mean I have a real sense that the right moment he could be very verbal, clear, and brilliant. I don't remember experiencing that. Maybe, but nothing sticks in my mind. I mean we used to have many, many lunches, dinners --.

MS. ROSE: What did you talk about?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: It would usually be art world gossip, and general banter, or what then for them might have been amusing, you know, Peggy Guggenheim, or *Partisan Review* matters, or the New York scene, Parsons [School of Design, Manhattan, New York].

MS. ROSE: Do you feel you really [inaudible]?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: About Pollock?

MS. ROSE: About the --.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Oh, a great deal.

MS. ROSE: Did you used to go around to shows and things?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, it was our Saturday ritual and habit. I mean there wasn't a show that we didn't see or talk about, and often go to again because if something had puzzled us and we would check catalogues with a rating list of one check to three checks.

MS. ROSE: What were you interested in, say, the 50s? What looked good to you?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: What came off. Do you mean specifically?

MS. ROSE: Yes.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: In the early 50s the pictures I remember seeing in shows, for example, might have been Ryan at Parsons, all the Egan [Gallery] guys, all the Parsons [Gallery] people, Janis, Herban, Kootz [Gallery], [Adolph] Gottlieb, Motherwell, [Barnett] Newmann, Vytlacil, David Smith, the shows at Willard [Gallery], always got [inaudible], Tibor [de Nagy Gallery].

MS. ROSE: Did you think of yourself from the beginning as a close color painter? I mean did you feel you were more interested in color?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: No.

MS. ROSE: No? Well, how do you feel, say, your vision differed from what other people were doing?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't think I thought about it then. I knew that what I was making was not like in general the Gestalt feeling, emphasis, of what Al, Grace, and the others were doing. But it didn't make us separate. In other words, I felt, for example, that Joan Mitchell was still involved in the cuisine of Cubism. I was getting away from that. I also didn't want to paint figures in my pictures. I also didn't want to make de Kooning kidney shapes. And I was embarking on sort of discovering what I was about. So that outside of a mentor like Jackson or people dead in the past --.

MS. ROSE: Like who?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Gorky or Picasso. I say Picasso is dead because I mean Cubism. Kandinsky. I was on my own but within a context of first and second generation New York.

MS. ROSE: Well, at what point did you become conscious of being a color painter?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Only when the world put those labels on it. In other words, I mixed funny shades of colors and used them but I used them because they made the drawing in my picture move. It wasn't because I was in love with the idea of putting color down. But these colors were the expedient things to use for the way I drew and I say "draw" not meaning line, though it might have included line. But the way I drew or envisioned or made my work. And it happened that it came out stressing color. But I did not have a vision or a notion about color per se being the thing that would make me or my pictures work or operate.

MS. ROSE: But the colors get much more vivid as the work goes on.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I think as in anything involving work, experience, trial, error, accident, that suddenly there is an oeuvre and you read signs in it and then you either pick up or follow those signs or reject them and a strain or a sensibility or a wrist or an eye develops that becomes what a style is.

MS. ROSE: But the wrist really goes out of your work completely in a visible way.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Wrist?

MS. ROSE: Yeah.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: You mean in color --?

MS. ROSE: I mean, well, I guess I mean really the drawing element disappears at a certain point.

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Well, I think the lines disappear. I don't think the drawing does and I think that for me any picture that works even if it is in the guise of pure color application, if it works, involved drawing. That is flat space on a flat surface. And for me, and I always say this, whether it's a Titian or a [Kenneth] Noland, the ones that come off work in that depth and the color perhaps it is divine and the thing that makes it work, but it is line color. If it doesn't work then it's decorative or dead or just applied colors on a surface. That's what wallpaper is. And that's the difference between the striped wallpaper and a great Noland.

MS. ROSE: The difference is between applied and drawn color. That's very interesting. Did you ever work in watercolor?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: A lot.

MS. ROSE: Were you ever conscious of transferring a kind of watercolor technique to oil painting?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: I don't know. I think there was so much thick painting around that I was very drawn to thin blotches.

MS. ROSE: In other words, it was a kind of reaction to painting you didn't like?

MS. FRANKENTHALER: Yeah. That sort of dragged through with a palette knife.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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