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Oral history interview with Molly Luce, 1981
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Molly Luce on March 9 and June 19, 1981. The interview was conducted in Little Compton, RI by Robert Brown 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. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

March 9, 1981

MR. BROWN: March 9th.

MS. LUCE: Is it?

MR. BROWN: Well, it's 1981, Little Compton, Rhode Island, with Molly Luce. Robert Brown the interviewer.

I would like to begin by asking if you can tell something of your family, your parents, some of your early memories. I think you've told me that your mother had been an artist.

MS. LUCE: Oh, she had been - she was an art student at one time and she studied one summer with Chase down on Long Island [NY]. My father was interested in it too, but I don't remember exactly what his background was as far as the fine arts were concerned. I don't know that he had any. But we had - I remember a couple of watercolors, one big one of a woman and it worried me terribly because it looked as though she only had one leg.

MR. BROWN: Oh, my.

MS. LUCE: And that of course because of the foreshortening. But - and I never got accustomed that. It never looked right to me. That was my mother's.

MR. BROWN: Now you spent most of your childhood in suburban New Jersey, Northern New Jersey.

MS. LUCE: That's it. That's where I went to school.

MR. BROWN: And do you recall any special things about living there? You finally settled in Glen Ridge, New Jersey.

MS. LUCE: Yes. Well, we lived in Penfield [NJ] for a while and then we lived in Glen Ridge. But I remember mostly that I had always been chased home by a bunch of boys, and sometimes a bunch of girls, but I was not what you would call popular in my group.

MR. BROWN: Really? Why do you suppose that was as you look back?

MS. LUCE: I haven't any idea. I must have been a very disagreeable child. That's the only thing I can think of.

MR. BROWN: Were you pretty outspoken as a child? Were your parents quite permissive or were they strict?

MS. LUCE: It was not particularly strict, but it wasn't particularly - they weren't permissive, but they weren't not permissive. They were regular, New England background parents because they - my family moved out to Ohio when they - when the Northwest Territory was opened up you see in about 1800, early - later than that. Both my mother and father and their mother and fathers were born there. As a matter of fact Alan's mother was born in Ohio I think, or his grandmother. My grandmother, grandparents, were too, but they were born in Cincinnati rather than in the Northwest Territory.

MR. BROWN: So your family came from Kingsville, Ohio, and that's up in -

MS. LUCE: That's up -

MR. BROWN: -- near Lake Erie?

MS. LUCE: Yes, yes.

MR. BROWN: You spent, as a child you spent quite a lot of your summers there, didn't you?

MS. LUCE: We spent most of our, almost all of them. There was only one summer that we weren't there. I don't know why that was, I mean why we weren't there that summer. But I - but -

MR. BROWN: Those were very happy times, that you -

MS. LUCE: Oh, yes, I was very fond of the Kingsville house and the - I saw it not too long ago. The year that Alan died I went. I was still living with my brother here. I went back there and saw my brother, and then went over to the cemetery, which was - I saw the house and they had taken the porch off, which was all right. I think it looked it better without the porch. But I was interested because the architecture was very similar to what you see here, but taller houses.

MR. BROWN: They're taller? Huh.

MS. LUCE: It doesn't - I can't remember that they were much taller indoors, but they looked it. From the outside - now this house was a federal house, this and that.

MR. BROWN: You've said, though, to others that it was at that time that you became interested in botany and -

MS. LUCE: Oh, yes. Well, that was when I was seven. I became interested in botany at the age of seven.

MR. BROWN: That's quite early. How did that happen?

MS. LUCE: I fell out of a tree and dislocated my elbow, and my family had to find something to keep me amused, otherwise I would have been a frightful nuisance. So they found a series of little books by a lady by the name of Myra Clay. They were - and I think I have this right, I'm not absolutely certain, after all it was quite a while ago, but they were a series on the Greek Gods and botany, various information as to how it went. So when I got into high school I was able to pass my algebra marks and my botany figure just because I had the same man and he was sure that anybody that was as bright as that one in field couldn't be as stupid in another. It shows he doesn't know how

stupid you can be in algebra.

MR. BROWN: But you really did excel in natural history and in botany?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you begin making drawings quite young?

MS. LUCE: Well, yes, but not really very seriously, but I did of course as one does, because all kids draw.

MR. BROWN: Did you feel that this very early study of plants and birds and the like -

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think -

MR. BROWN: -- that it stuck with you?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: These are things that certainly crop up in your later work.

MS. LUCE: Yes, they do. I think they did.

MR. BROWN: It wasn't a romantic kind of outlook on nature.

MS. LUCE: No, it wasn't. It was a factual approach to - because I remember my father's brother - my father's father had a brother who had a place that was adjacent to our house, and it was a there was a pond in it. When they - we were there and they made syrup. That, of course, was a fascinating process. Then later on - and of course there were a lot of plants that I hadn't seen before that were interesting, but later on in July I believe it was there were things like Monarda that I had never seen as a wildflower, although you see them in people's gardens.

MR. BROWN: Managa?

MS. LUCE: Monarda. It's a mint.

MR. BROWN: These things really absorbed you, did they?

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: They consumed your interest. In high school did you, in New Jersey, did you do much work in art?

MS. LUCE: No, no.

MR. BROWN: Was it a basic academic course?

MS. LUCE: It was basic academic and I was more interested then in writing poetry, because the two things are not unalike.

MR. BROWN: No.

MS. LUCE: I wasn't at all sure what I wanted to do, but that was natural.

MR. BROWN: Were your brothers or sisters -

MS. LUCE: No, not at all. He was very interesting. When he went into high school there was - he was a bright child -

MR. BROWN: This was your brother?

MS. LUCE: My brother.

MR. BROWN: Is he older than you?

MS. LUCE: No, he's younger. He decided immediately that what he wanted to do was to be a research chemist, and he was. He became one - he started off with my father's company, which was a coal company at that time. My father began as a railroad man but he got sour on the railroads because they - he felt that they were unkind to his superior officer whom he was very fond of and approved of. So he - that was why we went out to spend the winter in Kingsville, because they had fired this gentleman whose name I can't remember.

MR. BROWN: So your father decided to leave the railroad?

MS. LUCE: He decided to leave at the same time.

MR. BROWN: And then he -

MS. LUCE: And then he looked around to see what he could find and he decided that he would help sell coal. It was satisfactory as any, so he went to Madeira Hill.

MR. BROWN: Madeira?

MS. LUCE: Madeira Hill. I don't know whether they still stand or not. They were a Philadelphia firm, but they also had outlets in New York. That's where my father was.

MR. BROWN: And your brother then ended up as a chemist with them?

MS. LUCE: He ended up as a chemist. He ended up in Ashville [OH], which is interesting because Ashville is a town next to Kingsville and there was - I suppose they considered it a city, I don't know whether or not. But anyway, it was interesting to me that he came from there and ended up there. My - let's see. One of his children is still there.

MR. BROWN: Were you very close to your brother when you were children?

MS. LUCE: Not very, but more so than my mother thought. She thought - she was much more fond of him than she was of me and she thought I treated him very badly, because when I was four years old and she couldn't understand why I wasn't interested in him. Of course I thought he was a frightful boy, as of course he was.

MR. BROWN: Sure. A little infant then.

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: When you finished high school in 1914, Glen Ridge High School [Glen Ridge, NJ], did you at that point know what you wanted to do?

MS. LUCE: Yes. I was - because the idea was that I would go to college for two years and two years of art school. That was the way my family arranged it.

MR. BROWN: Why had they thought you should go to art school?

MS. LUCE: Well, because that's what I wanted to do.

MR. BROWN: Oh, you did? During your later years in high school you decided -

MS. LUCE: Yes, that's what I decided to do.

MR. BROWN: Had you been doing some painting or drawing?

MS. LUCE: No, not especially. I don't remember how much I had done, but I didn't really begin until I went to the League [Art Students League, New York City]. It was a funny thing because I immediately started to draw from the model and I was all right, went without any trouble. I kept on drawing from the model, but I didn't - eventually I - you see I didn't draw very much from the model, I drew from my imagination.

MR. BROWN: But in the beginning, at Wheaton College [Norton, MA] where you went for two years, had you had any art instruction there or -

MS. LUCE: Yes. Yes, I majored in art.

MR. BROWN: What was the nature of that?

MS. LUCE: Well, I had studio experience, and then also I was taught the history of art. When I got to the League I knew a whole lot more about the history of art than my [inaudible] did, I will tell you that.

MR. BROWN: Was the studio instruction at Wheaton pretty interesting? It must have been or -

MS. LUCE: It wasn't un-interesting.

MR. BROWN: Was there one teacher? Do you -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- remember who that was?

MS. LUCE: Yes. Her name was Annie Otis.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.[Affirmative.]

MS. LUCE: She came from Philadelphia. She was actually a miniaturist. That's what she liked to do. She was pretty good and very kind, not exactly an overwhelming business but she was not at all bad.

MR. BROWN: Well, at Wheaton you were fairly isolated, weren't you? I mean, it's a very small town outside of Boston.

MS. LUCE: Well, yes, in a way I suppose we were, but I don't think we thought so at the time.

MR. BROWN: Because you -

MS. LUCE: We went into [inaudible] occasionally.

MR. BROWN: You did?

MS. LUCE: At least I know - I remember going to Mrs. [Isabella Stewart] Gardner's house and seeing Mrs. Gardner, which was a very exciting moment. She scabbled around.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean, she moved around very quickly and -

MS. LUCE: Yes, she was - she was disapproving of these - you see she - to get out of having to pay very much, anything in the way of taxes and so on why she had an open house for the - I don't know how much, but she did have - so she had the, I suppose not as many as Wheaton but always various - there were many places where one could go to.

MR. BROWN: And she was somewhat annoyed by the -

MS. LUCE: Well, she - it was just that she actually didn't like having to do this, but if she wanted to not pay so much in the way of taxes she had to.

MR. BROWN: Did she speak to you girls?

MS. LUCE: No.

MR. BROWN: No?

MS. LUCE: No. No, that was why I was saying she was - she was crawling from under the furniture, you know.

MR. BROWN: So it was exciting to you but on the other hand she wanted to be sort of invisible.

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't think we were particularly impressed. We should have been, but I don't think we were. Now we would have been.

MR. BROWN: By the time you had had two years at Wheaton did you - were you ready for art school? Was that -

MS. LUCE: Yes, I was ready.

MR. BROWN: You weren't interested in going on further with academic work?

MS. LUCE: No, no.

MR. BROWN: That never particularly appealed to you?

MS. LUCE: No, not at - well, I might have. I don't think I - I didn't disapprove of it or anything. If it had seemed - if I hadn't wanted to go on with fine arts, then I would have gone with Wheaton. But I think that - I think my family expected me to make up my mind to that, and so I just did it and I was ready to go on to fine arts. I was very, very fortunate because I met - [phone rings] people I met there right off and [inaudible] immediately because it was Katherine Schmidt and Ann Rector.

MR. BROWN: Ann Rector?

[tape stops, re-starts]

MS. LUCE: Yes. She would not belong in your archives because she's - she was a very gifted girl. Katherine said that she had more talent than any of us. I think perhaps she was right. But she was rather unpleasant really and she -

MR. BROWN: Was she about the same age as you were?

MS. LUCE: What?

MR. BROWN: Was she about the same age as the rest of them?

MS. LUCE: Yes, yes. I was several years older or a year-and-a-half older than most of them because of the two years at college. But I was a year younger than most people going to college, so I was only -

MR. BROWN: About a year's difference?

MS. LUCE: Yes, about a year or a year-and-a-half.

MR. BROWN: And you met then these - this was one of the nice things, you met these people and became close friends.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Katherine Schmidt, now what was she like as you remember when you first met her?

MS. LUCE: Well, she didn't change very much. Let's see. Katherine was a rather little girl and she was not exactly pretty, but charming looking and had a lovely figure, very bright, and more or less intellectual, much more so than most of us. She came from Southern Ohio. The only fuss I think that I remember that Katherine and I ever had was she came from Southern Ohio and I came from Northern Ohio and there was a certain amount of friction that developed over that one evening, and I don't know why. But I think - but she of course was awfully ill before she died and I think that's what it was.

MR. BROWN: What was that the - what was it, you mean in relation to her illness?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think that she had been taking some chemotherapy.

MR. BROWN: Chemotherapy?

MS. LUCE: Chemotherapy. Of course she hated it, it made her ill. So I was - I had reasons for being a little bit cross. When I was first married it was - I don't know whether this would interest you or not. Anyway, I was married in the church and one of my bridesmaids couldn't come so I asked Katherine, whose clothes would fit her, who would fit her clothes, if she would take the job. Katherine was inclined to be snooty about it, but not to me. She was very nice and said she'd be glad to. But then my grandmother who was a very, very modest person and very unsophisticated, had lived in the country all her life, was among those present, and we had a terrible time because the lights kept going out and blowing a fuse.

My grandmother said, "What is that Chinaman doing down there," meaning [Yasuo] Kuniyoshi, to whom Katherine was married at that time. I thought it was awful funny. So I repeated it, which was

- to her, which was not the thing to have done because she immediately jumps to the conclusion that my grandmother was being, thumbing her nose. She was—it never occurred to her among other things. She would not have - I don't know that she would have realized - yes, she probably would have realized that there was - that the Oriental was supposed to be a standoffish kind of problem, but not necessarily.

Anyway, she repeated that, what she thought that grandmother had said, and I was awful cross because it wasn't so. I believe that - I really think that people ought to tell the truth.

MR. BROWN: Yeah, yeah. But this was years later that she -

MS. LUCE: This was - oh, this was - yes. This happened just recently and years later, it was certainly 10 or 15 years later, maybe 20.

MR. BROWN: But Katherine Schmidt in fact became one of your closest friends at the League [Art Students League, New York City].

MS. LUCE: She was.

MR. BROWN: And then you were there, the first stint you were there for two years, beginning in 1916. What were some of the other people you became good friends with at that time?

MS. LUCE: Well, let's see. There's Dorothy Varian, who is in your book.

MR. BROWN: Yes.

MS. LUCE: And of course there's Lloyd Goodrich.

MR. BROWN: And he was studying painting?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Do you recall what courses you would take? Was it very structured?

MS. LUCE: Really you didn't, almost didn't take courses. You did of course but you - I mean, for instance when you studied with [George] Bridgeman that meant you were studying drawing.

MR. BROWN: And was he a good teacher?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he was very good.

MR. BROWN: Was he patient?

MS. LUCE: Very patient, I think. I thought he was good, he was - yes, I think so. I don't know that he was a marvelous teacher, but people say he was very good in his time.

MR. BROWN: And what sort of problems did he set up for the students? What did you have to do?

MS. LUCE: Well, he - let's see. Well, he had - he expected a certain type of drawing, the kind that he did himself I think. He was an adequate draftsman, very adequate.

MR. BROWN: Was he more interested in your getting a feeling for volume or for light and shade?

MS. LUCE: Now that's an interesting idea. I hadn't thought of it.

MR. BROWN: Or did he have you very carefully outline the forms?

MS. LUCE: I think it was an outline of the form. Dennis Miller was more for volume. Bridgeman was I don't think so much for volume as for shapes and size, as well as on the outside. He expected - he expected the regular - well, he expected you to know where the shapes were inside the outline.

MR. BROWN: So you probably had some study of anatomy as well, did you?

MS. LUCE: Well, yes, but it was not -

[End side A, tape 1.]

MS. LUCE: -- as much as we could have used. We could have used more study of anatomy I think because we didn't have that, we weren't given that, and I think it probably would have been a good idea if it had been.

MR. BROWN: How quickly did you go into painting?

MS. LUCE: Immediately.

MR. BROWN: Immediately.

MS. LUCE: But not really Bridgeman, but with Louie Morrow we did. He didn't expect people to stick to one class of thing. If you wanted to paint why you went ahead and did it.

MR. BROWN: Was he a good teacher, Louie Morrow?

MS. LUCE: Was he what?

MR. BROWN: Was he a good teacher, Lou, Louis Morrow?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't know that he was particularly. He wasn't bad, but he wasn't particularly outstandingly good. But I think for some people, probably he would have been. I don't think he taught me anything especially.

MR. BROWN: Did you find you had a knack for painting right away?

MS. LUCE: Yes. Uh-huh, I did.

MR. BROWN: Why do you suppose that was?

MS. LUCE: Well, I think it's just the way I was built.

MR. BROWN: What was it color, was it a chance to -

MS. LUCE: Well, not so much the color at the beginning. I had trouble with that at the beginning I think. Well, I'm not quite sure. I don't think I'm being very bright at the present moment. Well, let's see.

MR. BROWN: Did you paint usually still lifes when you were at the League?

MS. LUCE: Not when I was at the League. There were no still lifes.

MR. BROWN: No?

MS. LUCE: A lot of still life when I was at Wheaton.

MR. BROWN: But at the League what then did you paint from?

MS. LUCE: We painted the model.

MR. BROWN: The model. And were you given say one or two weeks to work on one painting?

MS. LUCE: One week.

MR. BROWN: One week. Who else did you have painting with? You've mentioned Kenneth Hayes Miller.

MS. LUCE: Oh, well, it was Kenneth and then there was Louie Morrow and Doris Whitman, and for a while I had Gordon Robinson. He - Gordon Robinson was sure that I was a puritanical New Englander. It seems to me an odd idea, but it was - I suppose he just looked at me.

MR. BROWN: And did that affect the way you got along with him?

MS. LUCE: No, I got along with him all right. I got along with all of them.

MR. BROWN: Were any of them more important in your education than others?

MS. LUCE: Well, I think Kenneth was the most important one because I - he had - he knew what he was talking about and made emphasis on the things that he thought were important. He also had an idea that - the Fine Art was extremely important of course and he felt that we should all realize it and respect it and be respected for our profession. That is not always something that you find with artists who are sometimes inclined to apologize a little bit for what they do, but not Mr. Miller.

MR. BROWN: Did he seem to make any distinction between the women students and the men students?

MS. LUCE: I don't think so, but we didn't - we went to different classes at that time. I don't think they do now, but at that time we did.

MR. BROWN: What were some the things that he tried to get across as a teacher, do you recall?

MS. LUCE: Well, of course with Kenneth what he was interested in was the form, the shapes, and the - well, form is what he called it and I suppose that's what it was. Some of them were not very - in some cases there weren't awfully - well, you know what Kenneth's stuff looks like.

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh, uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. LUCE: That was what he approved of, that was - for a while - there was a time when he was all in favor of the person who was original and didn't follow his particular bent. But finally he got so that he wanted to it look like Kenneth Hayes Miller. That was a time that I was out, stepped out because I wasn't interested in looking like anybody except me.

MR. BROWN: And that's the time you quit after two years?

MS. LUCE: I quit after - I think I had four years, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Yeah. But certainly noticeable among the work at that time to a lot of his students, which it does look a great deal like Miller's own work.

MS. LUCE: You think so?

MR. BROWN: Yeah.

MS. LUCE: I don't know whether it did or not. Of course, the one that was most like it was Isabel.

MR. BROWN: Isabel Bishop?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Was there some feeling among not just you but other students -

MS. LUCE: I don't think so.

MR. BROWN: -- that were - was there a little resentment or -

MS. LUCE: No, I don't think so.

MR. BROWN: No? But you felt you were being limited?

MS. LUCE: I'm not sure if I even felt that. I just thought that it was - I mean, if I had thought about it that's what I would have thought.

MR. BROWN: You did take a year off and worked in New York.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Do you recall why that was? You said it was at your parent's suggestion.

MS. LUCE: Well, it was - I think they thought that I had had my four years of higher education and that I should be able to take care of myself now, and of course I wasn't. So my father never expected me to if I didn't want to, but my mother thought I should - well, she was a little - she felt I should be educated at the end of four years or six years.

MR. BROWN: So that year off was, how was that? Were you very restless and fairly unhappy about that?

MS. LUCE: No, it was all right except that I didn't learn anything, I didn't really do anything. I had a job. I had a job doing mechanical drawing and it wasn't - I can't say that it amounted to much. I wasn't very good at it. I was adequate, but not particularly good at it. So I just went ahead and got myself - went to the League and signed up again in the fall and nobody raised any further objections. I don't know why not, but they didn't.

MR. BROWN: At that time - while you were at the League did you live in New York [New York City] or did you live with your family?

MS. LUCE: I think I lived with my family.

MR. BROWN: Were you with your fellow students quite a lot?

MS. LUCE: Not much, no. No, not a great deal.

MR. BROWN: Now you mentioned Dorothy Varian. Did she become a close friend?

MS. LUCE: She was quite a close friend.

MR. BROWN: What was she like at that time?

MS. LUCE: Well, she was an awful nice person. I don't know that I could tell you exactly what she was like. What do you say when you describe a person? She was - she was a very good friend of Isabelle Howlin's and Izzie was a gifted girl. I don't know what finally happened to her either. Dorothy Varian has a picture in Yale [University, New Haven, CT] I know, or at least she did have it. I suppose they still have it, it's still there. I don't know where Izzie's stuff is, if at all, but I know she was talented all right.

MR. BROWN: You stayed at the League, taking courses there until 1922, and then at that point what did you think you were going to do?

MS. LUCE: When I went to the League first of all I thought I was going to illustrate, do illustration. When I got through, you see, I was going to do fine arts, which I have done ever since, which I had done. I'm pretty sure that that was what I thought I was going to do by the time I was - at the points that you were mentioning, that I was going to do what I am doing now.

MR. BROWN: At that point what did you do then when you finished?

MS. LUCE: I just went ahead and did what there was in front of me.

MR. BROWN: Mainly in New Jersey, New York?

MS. LUCE: No, no, I - you see in the - during the winter I worked at the League from a model and during the summer we always went out to Ohio, and so then I did landscapes.

MR. BROWN: Which did you come to prefer?

MS. LUCE: Oh, landscape. Well, I - that's why it's turned out to be almost all landscapes now and very few of the -

MR. BROWN: You also traveled in Europe after you attended there.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Was that to be a trip to look at works of art?

MS. LUCE: That was, let's see, 1925 I think, 1925 until the following summer, July. I went to Italy first of all, and then back to England, and then I came back home on I think the 1st of July about. I went over about the 1st of October.

MR. BROWN: And did you do a lot of drawing or painting over there?

MS. LUCE: I did some, a fair amount. I did some in art classes, Julian's I think it was.

MR. BROWN: Did you travel with friends from the League?

MS. LUCE: No, I traveled with the man I was married to at that time.

MR. BROWN: Was he also in the arts?

MS. LUCE: Well, he wanted to be. He was an interior decorator.

MR. BROWN: So back in New York then in 1924 and you had your first exhibition.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Could you tell something about that?

MS. LUCE: Well, Mrs. Forest was the head of the Whitman [Whitney Studio Club, New York City], and she was doing all the dirty work. Howard Brook was her second in command or her first in command, I think. There were a few people who he thought were interesting and would be good - and one of them was Peggy Bacon of course, who was his wife at that time, and then another one was me, and there were several others, David Morrison, who was his most intimate friend. So David and I were given a show together at - well, it was on 8th Street, I think. It was 8th Street.

MR. BROWN: Was David Morrison an interesting artist or a good artist?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he was - he was interesting, he was interesting, and he was pretty good. I don't know - I don't think he ever had a chance to get a big body of pictures because he died very early, or at least fairly early. He was not as strong physically. He was rather delicate. I don't know what he did after I left New York, which was about - well, it was 1925.

MR. BROWN: From that exhibition did you get a bit of acclaim or did you get pretty well known from that first exhibition? Did it attract some notice?

MS. LUCE: Yes, it did. I mean, they - well, I mean, they ran cuts of the paintings in the newspapers here, *The Tribune*, *The Herald*. I don't remember what else. But anyway, for a first exhibition it wasn't a flop by any means.

MR. BROWN: And the Whitney Studio Club [New York City] was quite a prominent place for young painters to exhibit, wasn't it?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know a number of people who were associated with it or who exhibited there?

MS. LUCE: Well, not particularly I don't think. I don't know.

MR. BROWN: Well, like Alex Brook, do you know -

MS. LUCE: Alex Brook, I know him very well, but I met him at the League you see.

MR. BROWN: Oh, I see. What was he like then as a young man?

MS. LUCE: Well, he didn't change very much. Alex was a fair haired boy among the art students at that time and I'm quite sure that he was far and away the best of the lot, and some of them were

pretty good. I don't know that - is Alex dead?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MS. LUCE: When did he die?

MR. BROWN: Last year. But he was - so he was a fairly arrogant young man, wasn't he?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't think he was exactly arrogant, but maybe he was.

MR. BROWN: And Peggy Bacon, was she - what was she like?

MS. LUCE: Oh, Peggy was something absolutely unique.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MS. LUCE: She's not like anybody else in any way at all. But you can see what she was like by looking at her drawings. That's exactly what she was like. Of course, she was awfully good in her field.

MR. BROWN: How about Mrs. Forest, did you come to know her or -

MS. LUCE: Yes, I knew her pretty well. She came down here and she was around [inaudible], and of course she was working with Lloyd all the time so we knew her pretty well.

MR. BROWN: Did Lloyd Goodrich get involved with the Whitney quite early?

MS. LUCE: Oh, yes, quite early.

MR. BROWN: He gave up trying to be a painter?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. He decided he wasn't going to be, that he couldn't be a painter. Then he went to a publishing house for a while and after that went back to the Whitney, or I guess he went back, went to the Whitney after he had gone to the publishing house and not before. I think it was Macmillan, but I'm not certain.

MR. BROWN: Well, someone had - you said earlier to me, jokingly said the two of you should have gotten married because both of you weren't promising as artists or something.

MS. LUCE: That's what Ann Rector's diagnosis was.

MR. BROWN: What was Goodrich like at that time?

MS. LUCE: Louie was a very understanding young man. He never threw his weight around. I don't know if there was any weight to throw, but he - he certainly is much better company now than he was then, and much more fun than he used to be. He was rather dull I thought. I wouldn't have married him.

MR. BROWN: But in fact in 1925 you married Alan Burroughs.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: How did you meet him?

MS. LUCE: Well, I met him through his sister.

MR. BROWN: Really?

MS. LUCE: Bess [Burroughs] and I were bosom friends at the League. She - I met her the second day that I went there. I went downstairs into the lunchroom and there was Katherine Schmidt whom I had met, seen her the day before you see. So I naturally sat down there and then in came Bess, and Bess looked around and found - there weren't too many girls, and we were the most conspicuous, and sat down. She sat down there. So that was an understood thing from then on. Bess and I were bosom friends until I married her brother, and then she didn't like that.

MR. BROWN: Why?

MS. LUCE: She didn't like that.

MR. BROWN: Why was that do you think?

MS. LUCE: Well, I haven't - really I don't know. I just know she didn't. She found - but anyway, anybody will tell you that.

MR. BROWN: Did she speak with her painting? Was she a determined to be a painter?

MS. LUCE: No, she didn't. She quit it and turned to clay, and she's been a sculptor ever since. It's interesting.

MR. BROWN: So Alan you met fairly early too, had you?

MS. LUCE: Yeah, very early.

MR. BROWN: And what was he doing when you -

MS. LUCE: He was in the Navy. He was wearing a sailor suit.

MR. BROWN: Then when you got married what was he, had he -

MS. LUCE: He was out in Minneapolis [MN].

MR. BROWN: At the museum?

MS. LUCE: The museum.

MR. BROWN: And what was he doing there?

MS. LUCE: He was being - he was being a curator of paintings there, or at least they called it that. But it didn't - it wasn't particularly that. It was just that he was - [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: For what, the -

MS. LUCE: Anything else, anything that nobody else wanted he did.

MR. BROWN: So you began your marriage then in Minneapolis?

MS. LUCE: Minneapolis.

MR. BROWN: So you - did you like being out in Minneapolis?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I liked it. I don't know how long I would have liked it, but I liked it that winter. But then of course you see we were newly married and all new circumstances. It was very interesting.

MR. BROWN: Were you able to or did you paint very much?

MS. LUCE: I did some, but not a great deal. That was one of the things that what's his name, [inaudible] Gallery was interested in. They wanted some pictures of Minneapolis if I had any. Well, I had a few but not very many.

MR. BROWN: Who did your husband work with or work under in Minneapolis?

MS. LUCE: Well, let's see. Who was - who was that man? Oh, good gracious. Russell, Russell Plimpton.

MR. BROWN: Plimpton?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] He had known him before because he used to work - for a while he was working with the Metropolitan [The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City].

MR. BROWN: And your husband's father had been -

MS. LUCE: He had been the curator -

MR. BROWN: -- the curator of paintings I think at the Metropolitan?

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: What was he like, Bryson Burroughs?

MS. LUCE: Bryson was - well, he was - I'm probably clear more about what he was like than some of the others. He had a great deal of charm, but it wasn't the kind that comes out and floods you. He was just very, a very charming, nice kind of a guy. He liked young people and he liked their best friends, so that was fine. He worked every morning and went in to nap in the afternoon. That much I remember.

MR. BROWN: What sort of work was he doing in the morning?

MS. LUCE: He was painting.

MR. BROWN: Painting.

MS. LUCE: Do you know his stuff?

MR. BROWN: Vaguely. What was your estimation of his work, his painting?

MS. LUCE: He was an awfully good draftsman. I can't say that I think his work is world shaking, but I think it's better than it's been given credit for being.

[End side B, tape 1.]

MS. LUCE: One is up in the barn. If you want me to show them I'll show them to you later. I don't

think they're - I don't think they're the best.

MR. BROWN: Did he also have a scholarly interest as a curator of paintings? Did he - would he discuss art history and things like that with you?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he would. Yes, he knew his stuff.

MR. BROWN: Then you - after being in Minneapolis only about six months your husband was asked to come to the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard [University, Cambridge, MA]; is that right?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did he feel that would be a step up to leave Minneapolis?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't know that he thought about that at all one way or another. He just wanted to be here where his, where it was natural for him to be. I don't think he was ever particularly interested in steps up, as it were.

MR. BROWN: But he - but on the other hand he had sort of a neither here nor there position in Minneapolis, didn't he? You said he was sort of -

MS. LUCE: That's right.

MR. BROWN: -- the general -

MS. LUCE: He didn't have - he might have - he might have if he stayed around long enough, but I don't think he was particularly interested in -
[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: Side 2.

But was -- but was it easy working with Russell Plimpton? Was he quite an easy going director?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think it went well. He was fairly easy going.

MR. BROWN: Well, here at the Fogg [Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA] he came back to work with Edward Forbes; is that right?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh.[Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: What did that mean? What did that entail?

MS. LUCE: Well, Edward Forbes was interested in techniques and he was especially interested in what was happening with the x-ray business. That's why Alan happened to be embroiled with him.

MR. BROWN: Oh, really? Did Alan - had Alan done some work on this?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he had. In Minneapolis he had. He did some there and he did some in Cleveland too. Cleveland had a statute that he didn't know about and he was interested in, and it had modern nails in it as I remember correctly. Of course if I remember - didn't remember it correctly why I'm sorry, but I think it had modern nails in it. Anyway -

MR. BROWN: And his x-rays determined that?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh.

MR. BROWN: So that was why Forbes wanted him?

MS. LUCE: Yes, that was why Edward was interested in him, what he was doing.

MR. BROWN: And what sort of work was he set to do when he got to the Fogg, what sort, do you recall any of the particular projects he worked on?

MS. LUCE: Almost - let's see. Very shortly after - I don't remember exactly, but I know that one was, the most important thing he had to do was go abroad and take thermographs, pictures in the Louvre [Paris], and in the British Museum [London], and the National Gallery [Washington, DC]. That was the first, a very big job.

MR. BROWN: Was this - had he been commissioned by those museums or was this -

MS. LUCE: No, they weren't regular commissions, but on the other hand it wasn't not a commission. They were - what Edward wanted and what Alan was trying to do I think is get a body of work together, these things, so that they could be compared. That's what - let's see. What the - the first time Edward was in Brussels and I'm not sure if it's the same, the same trip or not.

MR. BROWN: And you would accompany him?

MS. LUCE: I went with him, yes.

MR. BROWN: And what would you do on these trips?

MS. LUCE: Oh, I pushed buttons occasionally and took notes occasionally. I did - the things I wasn't able to do because I didn't speak French, so that was unfortunate, and my German is not too good either. I think I've probably forgotten it all by this time.

MR. BROWN: So you spent quite a bit of time being his assistant on these jobs?

MS. LUCE: Yeah. That was theoretically what I was supposed to do.

MR. BROWN: But in fact you did just a lot of things on your own as well?

MS. LUCE: Not much.

MR. BROWN: Did your husband talk a great deal about what he was doing and what he was trying to accomplish?

MS. LUCE: No, he never did, never was very [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: So this routine then you did for several years, did you, or some years?

MS. LUCE: We were abroad three times and the last time was the day the bottom fell out of the stock market. We were on the boat then and it was too late to turn us back.

MR. BROWN: How did you like being in the Boston area? Did you spend much of your time - did you paint fairly steadily when you weren't with your husband?

MS. LUCE: I always have ever since - ever since I stopped running - I mean, well, I've always - I've

painted steadily right along once I got started, except this last winter when I haven't done very much.

MR. BROWN: You settled into a Boston suburb, Belmont, Massachusetts in 1928. Why did you choose to - had you been living in Boston or Cambridge before then?

MS. LUCE: Well, no, we had been living in Boston. We lived in Boston for two years, but we were looking for a place - we were looking for a studio, that's what I think, and in Belmont there was some people who knew some people who had a house that they were willing to sell that had been a barn and had an upstairs loft that would make a good studio. So that was why we went there. That was very satisfactory. It worked out all right except that it was too near the house next door, and there were too many reflections. Aside from that it was all right.

MR. BROWN: So did you do any teaching or anything during those years?

MS. LUCE: No. It was something I managed to escape. When I came down here in the summers they - a friend of ours managed to - I don't know whether - I don't know whether she actually did the running of the extra things at the clubhouse or not, but they began to do some - there was while when they gave lectures and everything here in the summer. Among the other things they wanted a sketch class.

MR. BROWN: So you did a bit of teaching?

MS. LUCE: And I did that for a while. But I don't think I was very good at it and I certainly didn't like it, so consequently I quit.

MR. BROWN: Well, before you started coming down here you would go summers sometimes to New Hampshire, you said.

MS. LUCE: No, we didn't. We didn't stay there long. We just - well, we went through. We had friends there. We would go through and I would make drawings and things of that sort, but we never spent a great deal of time there.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe some of your close friends when you were at Harvard?

MS. LUCE: Well, let's see. In Belmont?

MR. BROWN: Belmont or associated with the Fogg or whoever --

MS. LUCE: Yes, well there were the people from whom we bought the house and we were very good friends right along until - both of them are dead now. There was Charlie Coolidge, who was the son of the man who built the Harvard Chapel [Cambridge, MA], who was an architect.

MR. BROWN: He was an architect himself?

MS. LUCE: No, he wasn't. He was a lawyer.

MR. BROWN: Did you get to know Edward Forbes quite well?

MS. LUCE: Pretty well, pretty well.

MR. BROWN: Could you describe him as you remember him?

MS. LUCE: Well, he was something that was outside of my experience and -

MR. BROWN: What do you mean? You mean you had never met anyone quite like that?

MS. LUCE: Absolutely nobody ever quite like that, never have, never expect to.

MR. BROWN: Really? What do you mean?

MS. LUCE: Well, for a little girl from the Midwest he was experienced.

MR. BROWN: You mean very urbane?

MS. LUCE: No, he was not. He was extremely naive from my point of view and yet at the same time of course he wasn't. He was urbane in a way, but not in any way that I've ever encountered before. No, Edward was something absolutely unlike anything that I had ever encountered or ever expect to. He was a very sweet guy, awfully nice, and his wife was a nice person too, awfully nice.

MR. BROWN: What led you to come down here to Little Compton [R]? You began coming here in the early 30's.

MS. LUCE: Well, we were looking for a summer place because we thought that Belmont was, didn't give us enough room as it were. We came down here because the Goodriches were here and other people to, but particularly the Goodriches. That seemed to me a good reason.

MR. BROWN: Did you find here also other people that, artists or others that -

MS. LUCE: Well, a lot of people came down because the Goodriches were here. We weren't the only ones. Sue and Joe Walker and -

MR. BROWN: She had been a student, a fellow student with you?

MS. LUCE: Yes, at the League. She was especially a friend of Bess's because she knew her in Flushing when they were children, young children. Reggie's family had spent some time here when his mother died. Well, his father married again and she was not a Little Compton person. So consequently it was somewhat different and I don't know who -

MR. BROWN: Did you keep up with - you said you had known Reginald Marsh but he never was down here, was he?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he was here. His father—I think they were here because the Marshes had a place here. It was that kind of an arrangement.

MR. BROWN: What was it - was Marsh the sort of person that would attract other people? Was he very agreeable?

MS. LUCE: No, certainly not.

MR. BROWN: No?

MS. LUCE: No, not at all. Let's see.

MR. BROWN: You mean he was -

MS. LUCE: He reminded me of the person that - I think he was like was Charles II of England. Do you remember, remember him? He was not a particularly loveable guy at all. He married Eleanor of Aquitaine and he reminds me of a boy and also hell bent on having his own way. But Reg was very much like him physically I think, rather - not short exactly but not awfully tall, and red headed or almost red headed, not quite a red head, but freckled. Alex always thought he was malicious. I never though he was malicious, but maybe he was.

MR. BROWN: Who, Alex Brook? What was it about the Goodriches that attracted you? You know, you said that not only you and Alan, but other people came down here because they were here.

MS. LUCE: Just because they belonged here and it was a place to be, and the Goodriches - well, Edith of course she's quite a girl.

MR. BROWN: What do you mean?

MS. LUCE: What I mean is that she has - she has a bit of charm and a very warm kind of personality.

MR. BROWN: You eventually came in and became almost farmers here but at the same time you've continued to paint steadily and you had, I gather you had exhibitions pretty steadily through the 30's and the 40's?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I did, in Boston.

MR. BROWN: In Boston largely?

MS. LUCE: Mostly in Boston, once or twice I had them in New York.

MR. BROWN: Did you have a dealer in Boston?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Who was that?

MS. LUCE: Grace Horne Galleries [Boston, MA].

MR. BROWN: The Grace Horne Galleries.

MS. LUCE: They went out of business when - well, there were two young men and one of them died and the other I guess just didn't feel that he could keep it up without him. Then - well, I - Rob Rose was in Alan's class, in Alan's classes, and when - and then for a time you see they - I had contemporary work as well as - but they decided they wouldn't do that any longer. So I asked them if there was anybody in Boston that I could go to and they suggested Darlan Richards. Well, that young man was not particularly satisfactory and he didn't - and he wasn't able to do anything for me.

MR. BROWN: Was this some time ago we're talking about?

MS. LUCE: This was 15 years ago, maybe longer ago than that. I don't know.

MR. BROWN: But your most active time of exhibiting had been through the 40's then -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- particularly with Grace Horne Gallery?

MS. LUCE: Yeah, yeah.

MR. BROWN: Were they quite enterprising? Did they advertise broadly and were there -

MS. LUCE: I don't think they actually did. I don't know whether they did more for other people than they did for me or not. They didn't do very much [inaudible] intentions were fine. But that particular period was a period of yes and no's as far as the fine arts were concerned. They were - during the war and right after they did quite a lot of showing abstract stuff. People were actually sure - not sure, but saw it and there was a bunch of gentlemen - that was all right. But of course I don't fit into that at all, so out of - there weren't a great many people that cared about art but there were some. I think they just - as far as I was concerned I think they just couldn't make up their minds whether I was - or what I was, fish or flesh, a red herring.

MR. BROWN: Your fellow students at the League, though, the people that you've been close to, none of them really became abstractionists, did they?

MS. LUCE: No, I don't think so. I haven't seen any of Isabel's [Bishop] last work. I understood that she was interested in abstractions, but I don't know.

MR. BROWN: Well, you had moved down here I guess for year round in 1942.

MS. LUCE: That's right.

MR. BROWN: Did your husband no longer have to be at the Fogg regularly or -

MS. LUCE: No, he didn't have to be at the Fogg regularly. He went up occasionally. I know he finally, more or less dropped out anyway.

MR. BROWN: But he could spend his time writing and so forth down here, couldn't he?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you help him very much with his research or his writing?

MS. LUCE: Uh-uh. [Negative]

MR. BROWN: He did a well-known book on early American painting: *Limners and Likenesses* [Alan Burroughs. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936].

MS. LUCE: Yes, I know what it is. It was - it's - I get money from it every year, not much but a little bit. At least it's in print. The other one is too, the *Art Criticism from a Laboratory* [Alan Burroughs. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1938].

MR. BROWN: Was he a pretty modest person?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I thought so. A lot of people thought he wasn't, but I don't know what they wanted.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

June 18, 1981

MR. BROWN: Let me see how it sounds.

MS. LUCE: Well -

MR. BROWN: Okay, this is a second interview with Molly Luce in Little Compton, Rhode Island. It's June 18, 1981, Robert Brown the interviewer.

MS. LUCE: I'm delighted to know what the date is. It's one of those things I have trouble remembering.

MR. BROWN: It slipped by. We talked last time, pretty much just sort of went roughly through your life and training, and we talked about people you knew. Today I thought we could, looking at examples of your work from, beginning with some of the earliest things. Perhaps you could talk about what they meant to you or didn't mean to you, what you were trying to do. The first thing we're looking at is I suppose from about the time you were still at the Art Students League, which you entered in 1916. This one is dated as I recall 1918. It's a, probably a 16 x 14 oil sketch, a landscape with, it looks like a shack in the middle and some tall trees in the back.

MS. LUCE: That's what it looks like to me.

MR. BROWN: Now what was the - was this a common type of painting you did at that time?

MS. LUCE: I suspect as much. I don't really remember it. It's back quite a ways.

MR. BROWN: Oh, sure. Now would you have - do you see in this any of the training you were getting at the Art Students League?

MS. LUCE: No.

MR. BROWN: No? You were getting - you had gotten away from it or you were just improvising?

MS. LUCE: I was improvising. What I was doing I think was just painting as it came very - and then this one it is completely obvious that I was more interested in what was going on with the color than what was going on with the form. What I was learning at the League at that time I think - let's see - did you say that that had a date on it?

MR. BROWN: Yes, it's about 1918. Would you say here you were rebelling or just taking a holiday off from what you were learning?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't - I think I was taking a holiday off. I don't -

MR. BROWN: At the League they stressed more drawing and painting form?

MS. LUCE: No, they didn't really. Each man more or less had his own thing to say and to say to his students. Sometimes it was very acute and other times it was pretty sloppy. This obviously was simply going ahead and doing what happened to come to your fist at the time.

MR. BROWN: Did you enjoy doing this sort of thing more then than what you had, what you did at the League?

MS. LUCE: Oh, no, I don't think so. I enjoyed doing it, but it was - it wasn't awfully important.

MR. BROWN: This next one here is I suppose also a study.

MS. LUCE: Yes, that's a study.

MR. BROWN: And this is a study of a nude -

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- very heavy set. Now would this have been done in the classes at the League?

MS. LUCE: I think so.

MR. BROWN: And here too the stress seems to be on color and perhaps you could say to express volume as well, but it's - the drawing is minimal, isn't it? The emphasis here is on color and tone.

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think it is. I shouldn't have thought that that was what I was doing at the time however, the time that I did it.

MR. BROWN: At the time you were doing it, what was your purpose?

MS. LUCE: At the time I was doing that I think I was more interested in the volume.

MR. BROWN: The volume.

MS. LUCE: Certainly there is that.

MR. BROWN: Yes, indeed. Now would a study like this have been done over several days?

MS. LUCE: Yes, and then it would take about a week.

MR. BROWN: Who would you have studied -

[End side A, tape 2.]

MR. BROWN: -- figure painting with, who was the teacher?

MS. LUCE: It was Miller.

MR. BROWN: Miller, Kenneth Hayes Miller?

MS. LUCE: Kenneth Hayes Miller.

MR. BROWN: Was he a good teacher of figure painting?

MS. LUCE: I think so. Of course he was - he was an awfully good teacher of fine arts and he gave you the -

MR. BROWN: What, the history of art?

MS. LUCE: Yes, he gave you the - he gave you the feeling, the background, the whole thing as a whole.

MR. BROWN: Did he stress in your paintings that each one of them not just be the figure but also include background and good composition?

MS. LUCE: No, not particularly, although I think that he felt that way about it, but I don't think he

stressed it.

MR. BROWN: In the early 20's when you went to France, and this was after your time at the Art Students League, and we're looking now at a landscape which was made during that trip, wasn't it?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And did you travel there with a teacher, or with fellow artists, or -

MS. LUCE: Fellow artists. As a matter of fact with my first husband.

MR. BROWN: And what did you do, just look for interesting landscape?

MS. LUCE: I very well probably did. We went to Italy, Florence first, and then down to Sienna and Rome, and came back up the coast and went to - went into France. Then - and there I began to paint landscapes as you see. They were mostly, most of the things that I did were landscapes.

MR. BROWN: If you look at them what were you particularly concentrating on in these landscapes? What was it that interested you?

MS. LUCE: Well, I think it was the shapes, it was the form, because it was like nothing else that I had ever seen or done before.

MR. BROWN: You mean the hills, the fields, the continual change in contour? Because these are hills but within - even on the hillsides there's -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- lots of movement, at least the way you've expressed it, the way the crops are sown, and the fields run, and the roads go. You also don't seem to have been too interested in fine detail but rather the general appearance.

MS. LUCE: Yes. Well, I think that's so.

MR. BROWN: Would you say you were happy doing this, because of course this has sort of a lyrical quality to it?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I was happy. Very happy.

MR. BROWN: Now a painting like this, would you work on it for several days?

MS. LUCE: I'm trying to think. I think so. I don't know how much, but certainly a few days, not [inaudible].

MR. BROWN: What was the technique you were using then in terms of putting on the paint?

MS. LUCE: Well, the technique that I've used, have always used, was an underpainting and a glaze usually on top of the underpainting. I found that that worked best with what I was doing.

MR. BROWN: What was there about the glazes that appealed to you?

MS. LUCE: I don't know. It's just that -

MR. BROWN: There's a richness to this.

MS. LUCE: Well, it gives you - you get a fullness that you don't usually get when you paint directly. When I say fullness I wonder what I mean. Well, you're not going to necessarily -

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: Do you think by fullness you may mean through the richness of the colors the forms are -

MS. LUCE: I think so.

MR. BROWN: -- very, the volumes are very apparent and accentuated?

MS. LUCE: Yes, and the light and shade is brought out, at least I hope it is.

MR. BROWN: It is. Whereas if you had just laid on paint without the glaze over it -

MS. LUCE: It would be much flatter.

MR. BROWN: Did you at that time sense that you were developing a rather distinct style?

MS. LUCE: No, no. I don't think so.

MR. BROWN: You painted pretty much entirely unselfconsciously?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You always have?

MS. LUCE: I always have.

MR. BROWN: This next one is more or less the same time, it's 1926.

MS. LUCE: Yes. That's the same thing.

MR. BROWN: Again the glazes and -

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- but here it's quite a different subject. It's a great -

MS. LUCE: Yes, this of course is very direct.

MR. BROWN: It's a close up of some vegetables on a black Windsor chair. Why did you do this do you suppose?

MS. LUCE: Why?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh.[Affirmative]

MS. LUCE: Because I needed a change of scenery.

MR. BROWN: You mean you had been doing too many landscapes?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I had been doing little fuzzy businesses and landscapes.

MR. BROWN: What were the little fuzzy businesses?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't know, maybe something like that.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes.

MS. LUCE: Do you see what I mean?

MR. BROWN: Figures sort of partly from the imagination?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Do you do or did you do still lifes periodically throughout or just once in a rare while?

MS. LUCE: Once in a while, once in a while I would do it, not very often. A still life is fun to do because it - it isn't like anything else. I mean, it's straightforward stuff.

MR. BROWN: In this still life would you have fussed a lot with the placement of things?

MS. LUCE: Did what?

MR. BROWN: With the placement of things, the composition?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Did you -

MS. LUCE: Of course with a still life that's very important. That is part of the entertainment that you get out of it.

MR. BROWN: Because you weren't doing this simply to render a pepper, or an onion, or-

MS. LUCE: No, no.

MR. BROWN: It was the arrangement.

MS. LUCE: The purple turnip.

MR. BROWN: Several of them. Also about this time you did this one portrait of your husband, Alan Burroughs. Was this piece sort of a spur of a moment thing?

MS. LUCE: I think so. Let me see. That was in Boston on the third floor, as high up as you could get in that house. Alan weighed 140 pounds.

MR. BROWN: He was very spare.

MS. LUCE: Very spare.

MR. BROWN: What do you think you were trying to express in this? What do you think you were trying to express in this, for example in his expression?

MS. LUCE: Well, he certainly has one.

MR. BROWN: Oh, yes, very decided, a slight scowl and very piercing eyes.

MS. LUCE: That's very like Alan, at least as I saw him.

MR. BROWN: Was he a very serious person?

MS. LUCE: No, not particularly. He wasn't a very outgoing person.

MR. BROWN: What about the background here, the one woman up on the roof hanging clothes and then another one, a rather heavy woman looking out a window, were these just incidental to be slightly amusing or -

MS. LUCE: I don't know. I think it must have been, don't you?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]. It seems he is so contemplative and a thinking person, and then outside are these very trivial things going on.

MS. LUCE: Yes, exactly.

MR. BROWN: Maybe you meant to emphasize this -

MS. LUCE: Maybe I did.

MR. BROWN: -- the purposefulness of him.

MS. LUCE: It's perfectly possible. Did you ever see the other big one I did of him?

MR. BROWN: Yes, yes.

MS. LUCE: I thought I had shown it to you.

MR. BROWN: So you may have had unconsciously at least tried to - you may have been trying to emphasize -

MS. LUCE: Quite likely.

MR. BROWN: -- aspects of him.

MS. LUCE: Quite likely.

MR. BROWN: Did you do quite a few like this?

MS. LUCE: No, but there are - there are a few. There's this one and the one in the bedroom, and then there's another one which is seated, the same kind of thing.

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: Then from time to time you made portraits of other people and here's one. I believe you told me it was Professor William

MS. LUCE: William Yandell Elliott.

MR. BROWN: -- Elliott of Harvard and it's 1935. Now would such a portrait as this have been commissioned by him or would you simply ask him to sit for you?

MS. LUCE: I asked him to sit for me.

MR. BROWN: Why were you interested in painting him?

MS. LUCE: Well, because he was an interesting type as a person and as a - well, mostly as a person I think.

MR. BROWN: What kind of a person was he that made him interesting to you?

MS. LUCE: Well, let's see. Of course he was a ladies man, as is probably obvious.

MR. BROWN: Those eyes and brow -

MS. LUCE: Yeah.

MR. BROWN: -- black hair, lovely black hair. So he charmed you?

MS. LUCE: Huh?

MR. BROWN: He had charmed you a bit?

MS. LUCE: Not me.

MR. BROWN: No, but -

MS. LUCE: But he could if chose to put himself out. People either liked him a good deal or they didn't like him at all. Of course as frequently happened they didn't like him at all because they thought he was conceited and vain and various other unpleasant type characteristics. But on the whole he was an interesting person. He had quite a lot to do in the government off and on, but I don't think he was anywhere nearly as important as he thought he was.

MR. BROWN: So in this portrait you painted him for the way he looked partly but also I guess you could say that the quality of conceitedness about his looks is apparent as well from your painting. Why did you put the globe in, did that just simply happen to be there or -

MS. LUCE: No, because - well, because his interests were pretty extensive.

MR. BROWN: This is again an example of underpainting with glazing.

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: Here it seems more than in some of the others even, you're more interested perhaps in volume -

MS. LUCE: I did perhaps.

MR. BROWN: -- than in color.

MS. LUCE: Yes, there's very little interest in color there.

MR. BROWN: So you had a wide circle of friends then at that time among the faculty I suppose?

MS. LUCE: Well, yes, I suppose. One of the people we knew were the English department and this,

which was the -

MR. BROWN: What, history?

MS. LUCE: What?

MR. BROWN: Was this the history department?

MS. LUCE: Government.

MR. BROWN: Government.

MS. LUCE: Not so much history, I don't think.

MR. BROWN: So portraits then were a fairly unusual form for you?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: You didn't do all that many. This study here of people at a pond, I suppose it's combining what you really saw plus these the women undressing to go swimming. Was this painted on the spot?

MS. LUCE: I never painted anything on the spot I don't think it. At least I can't think of anything that I ever did.

MR. BROWN: This is about 1934 and it's from memory, or at least it plus - the nudes in the foreground are they simply from imagination so to speak?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: When doing something like this, was this a particular pleasure of yours to do such a painting as this or what were you trying to do?

MS. LUCE: Well, I was trying to paint three ladies undressing to go swimming.

MR. BROWN: And they're in considerable contrast to the woman in the middle ground who is in a swimming suit -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- and then the people on the far shore who are having a picnic or something and are fully clothed.

MS. LUCE: Yes, there is. I admit it I don't know why.

MR. BROWN: Had you always had a love of the forms from nature, the trees and leaf forms?

MS. LUCE: They were there and you had to do something about them.

MR. BROWN: So some of these things you painted on the spot, some of these things, or you had made studies?

MS. LUCE: Well, I sometimes made studies, but I didn't very often paint things directly on the spot.

MR. BROWN: Well, by that same time, this is about the same, 1935 I think, we have something that's quite reminiscent of your later work and in the foreground a number of weed forms, a large bluebird in the upper left, and then a snowy rolling field landscape with a gray sky above it. Here are these - is this a study in itself? Would you have sat in the field and painted from these forms, these seeds and other plant forms, or again is this a recombination of things in the studio from memory?

MS. LUCE: Well, mostly that but not all together.

MR. BROWN: You mean you would have painted, made studies of some these out in nature?

MS. LUCE: Yes, some of them I would.

MR. BROWN: What - because this is such a common type of painting in your late work particularly, what do you suppose you had in mind in doing this?

MS. LUCE: In doing that?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. Or doing things like this.

MS. LUCE: Well, I was doing a blue jay, not necessarily a blue jay, it could have been a cardinal in a different color.

MR. BROWN: To begin with, right.

MS. LUCE: It took up a certain amount of space both in line and in bulk, but why I had to do the - no, I know that I deliberately was doing a blue jay. I wanted to do a blue jay in this particular picture because I happen to remember it.

MR. BROWN: But you put him way over to the upper left.

MS. LUCE: Yes, I did.

MR. BROWN: So you presumably intended there to be a lot more than just that one jay in the painting.

MS. LUCE: No. No, I only intended the one jay.

MR. BROWN: But what did you intend to do with the rest of the painting?

MS. LUCE: What I did.

MR. BROWN: Okay, okay. And was this because of a particular interest in birds and in weeds?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think so.

MR. BROWN: Did you make something of a study, didn't you of botanical forms and birds?

MS. LUCE: Yes, birds, but more of plants. The birds are brand new. They were -

MR. BROWN: You actually had formally had studied botany or at least you read about it.

MS. LUCE: I had, yes. As a matter of fact I had studied it to some degree.

MR. BROWN: What was it - what about plants was it that interested you?

MS. LUCE: I don't know exactly but I know that they did, and from a very early age. I guess I - didn't I tell you this? I fell out of a quince tree, it wasn't a tree but it was -

MR. BROWN: A large bush?

MS. LUCE: It was a large bush, and dislocated my elbow. So my mother finally got the doctor and I - the doctor was very much impressed with her because she didn't go into hysterics. Well, neither did I as a matter of fact. I wouldn't have dared. She wouldn't have let me. She wouldn't have approved of my going into hysterics. But I - then they had to keep me amused. My father was there on his summer vacation. So they went and got some books by a lady by the name of Myra Clay. She wrote children's books of that type. They [inaudible] and also she wrote about myths. She was very impressive. I got a lot of information out of that. What I found out about plants stuck by, right from the very beginning. Actually I was then about seven and only just beginning to read. But it did make an impression and it's been very useful to me ever since, even here which has a different kind of - well, the plants are not the same as they are in Ohio quite, very similar but not completely the same. But anyhow, that's why I'm interested in plants.

MR. BROWN: And that interest took you so far as to give them a very prominent place in your paintings?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: Well, this next one here is actually a reminiscence of Ohio, isn't it?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: And certainly the plant forms are there but the people and I suppose certain buildings, the covered bridge, the church?

MS. LUCE: Yes, that's the church.

MR. BROWN: The distant factories, is this - again was this painted more or less from memory?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What is this one called or what is the church?

MS. LUCE: *Church at South Ridge* [1936], if I remember correctly.

MR. BROWN: This was done in 1936 it says. This - in this were you trying to express your love of Ohio, of the rural landscape or -

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't know. I certainly never thought of it at the time. There's another one that has the same title and it's very similar in a good many ways, but I think they - the landscape is turned around. I don't remember exactly.

MR. BROWN: So you had no clear intention when you did this, I mean no - you didn't want to express - things seem to be almost in pockets. I mean, we have this covered bridge and the buggy with the horse on a very small scale, and then immediately to the left of it this family walking towards the church. Then to the right of the church, sort of a vignette in the middle ground of a

factory. It's somewhat reminiscent of some of the mural techniques of that time, of the 1930's. Do you suppose - were you aware of some of those things that were going on?

MS. LUCE: I don't think so. I don't think I was. I think I was sitting on the top of Belmont Hill and just letting the world go by as far as I can see, as far as I remember.

[End side B, tape 2.]

MR. BROWN: There's this one over here of these people with Indians, white people with Indians, as though the Indians came back to them. This is another Ohio memory painting, isn't it?

MS. LUCE: Yes, yes. That's it.

MR. BROWN: What do you call that?

MS. LUCE: Something Indian Mound I think.

MR. BROWN: And here is it a matter of whimsy as well? I mean, these are contemporary people I guess in the 1930's or so -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: -- suddenly being attacked by these naked Indians.

MS. LUCE: Yes, who were there in 1900 or -

MR. BROWN: Were you trying to say something here or express something?

MS. LUCE: I think so.

MR. BROWN: And this one here probably also from the 30's simply is a painting from the grandstands of a ballpark, I suppose Fenway Park in Boston. Was this simply a record - again was this done from sketches?

MS. LUCE: I think it's Boston. Of course it could have been Cleveland.

MR. BROWN: It was simply a record of a pleasant afternoon?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: What about this one, this is especially I think lyrical and whimsical. It's a crossroads with a, not only -

MS. LUCE: That's exactly what it was. It's whimsical, *A Trip Down Route 128 -- 138. [Route 138 North of Somerset, 1936]*

MR. BROWN: 138 here in Massachusetts. And you have the cow grazing by the sign and then you have the dogs, and I guess the dog is taking its sweet time -

MS. LUCE: Crossing the street.

MR. BROWN: -- holding up traffic. Had you actually observed such things? And also the great crowding of the billboards, so much so at the intersection that you couldn't -

MS. LUCE: Yes, you couldn't see around them.

MR. BROWN: -- you could hardly see and you certainly can't see the farms behind them. This sort of thing amused you, or distressed you, or at least interested you?

MS. LUCE: Well, it interested me and of course amused me.

MR. BROWN: I see in this and in the preceding ones the same kind of round undulating earth that we saw in that landscape you had done, oh, 10 or 15 years earlier in France. That seems to be something you time and again extract from the landscape.

MS. LUCE: It does, doesn't it.

MR. BROWN: What have we here? It's several figures at the seashore and it's -

MS. LUCE: Buying lobster.

MR. BROWN: It's not quite the sweet and lyrical quality that we've seen in the ones just recently. It's a little harsher. It's probably from the 1940's. The colors are much higher key.

MS. LUCE: Yes, they are too and surprisingly because usually that degree of color comes out on the panels and not on the -

MR. BROWN: Not on the canvas?

MS. LUCE: Not on canvas.

MR. BROWN: What do you suppose you were trying to express here, the woman fumbling in her purse for some money, and another woman holding a lobster and then this man with his back turned to them?

MS. LUCE: Well, he's done his work. They can take care of the rest of it.

MR. BROWN: Right. So he's reading the paper and got his soiled socks up on the railing.

MS. LUCE: Exactly.

MR. BROWN: I guess that's the scene we just saw. The selling of lobsters was one thing that was appealing to you when you began coming down here to Little Compton.

MS. LUCE: It might be.

MR. BROWN: This next one we're looking at is - is this an actual scene in your home here? What were you trying to get across? There are two, it looks to be two maids, one watering and the other plumping up the cushion on a chair with a cat in the middle and the maid on the right fixing the - working on the chair has a real glare on her face. Now are you trying - was this an anecdote you were -

MS. LUCE: I don't think I remember.

MR. BROWN: Were you trying to show, leave a record of how your house looked or -

MS. LUCE: That's partly it I think.

MR. BROWN: Were you quite proud of this old house?

MS. LUCE: Oh, I am. In some way, it's unique.

MR. BROWN: Why do you show the painting over the mantel of the woman and it looks like she's about to have tea? It looks almost like a rather elegant painting.

MS. LUCE: It's the miller under the - let's see, a handkerchief or something. I've forgotten exactly, but I haven't looked at it for a day or two.

MR. BROWN: Did you do many such paintings like this of your -

MS. LUCE: No, this is unique. It's the only one I think I ever did of this kind of thing.

MR. BROWN: Did you have staff here? I mean, you would have people live in or come by and -

MS. LUCE: No. I always - I've always had help because I did not - I'm not by nature a housekeeper. I can do it and do do it but not usually from choice.

[tape stops, re-starts]

MR. BROWN: About when did you cease using canvas and turn to board for painting?

MS. LUCE: When did I?

MR. BROWN: Uh-huh. About 30 years ago maybe, 1950 or so?

MS. LUCE: Yes, in '50. I know the picture the first picture I did on a board. But I don't know whether it's here or not.

MR. BROWN: Why did you turn away from canvas to board?

MS. LUCE: Well, in the first place it was awfully expensive.

MR. BROWN: You mean canvas?

MS. LUCE: Canvas was quite expensive. Then in the second place it was - well, we - the board seemed to work just as well and in some ways better. At least I thought I would try it for a while. I know that other people were using it, so I went ahead and tried it, and I liked, and I kept on using it.

MR. BROWN: Well, I don't know whether it's the board but there seems to be a pronounced difference -

MS. LUCE: There is.

MR. BROWN: -- particularly in terms of the intensity of the color.

MS. LUCE: There is. It's extraordinary. I don't know why.

MR. BROWN: Because you were using the same underpainting and glazing techniques?

MS. LUCE: The same technique.

MR. BROWN: Do you suppose it was the unyielding surface, you had laid the paint on thicker or -

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't think you do. Maybe. It's possible that you do a little bit thicker.

MR. BROWN: The forms are much more crisp -

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: - and you don't seem to have the tonality that you had earlier, the grays and the silvery tone that we see in some of your earlier work.

MS. LUCE: No. I agree with you.

MR. BROWN: Now as for the subjects of the last 20 or 30 years, we see a great many pick up on the botanical interest don't they, there's a great many of plant forms?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative].

MR. BROWN: Do you recall in the 50's or 60's was there a particular phase you went through where you were greatly, even more interested than you ever had been in plants?

MS. LUCE: No, I don't think so. I don't think that I was. Maybe I was and maybe I went through that period. It might have been when I was interested in gardening, particularly interested in gardening, but I moved on here. I always have been in Belmont but -

MR. BROWN: Why do you have - so often in these paintings the plants, in this case it looks like daisies [*Beach Scene with Daisies*, 1969], very small things really, they're seen in such from such a low vantage point that they overwhelm everything else. Why do you very frequently sort of magnify the sort of small plant form and then behind it you have a rather vast seascape as in this case or landscape? Why do you suppose you do that?

MS. LUCE: Well, I don't think that those daisies are small.

MR. BROWN: No, they're on long stems but, I mean, compared with the - they're still comparatively, compared to the size of those rocks and the ocean they're small and you give them a tremendous prominence.

MS. LUCE: Yes, well, possibly because I thought they were more interesting, very probably.

MR. BROWN: You seem to be interested in the variety of directions in which the petals go. None of these are exactly perfect daisies.

MS. LUCE: Well, no. Daisies come in all shapes and sizes.

MR. BROWN: And you liked that?

MS. LUCE: Yes, of course.

MR. BROWN: I mean, the painting -

MS. LUCE: There's a nice variety in the daisies.

MR. BROWN: It looks as though the painting was done with pleasure.

MS. LUCE: Well, it probably was. Most of mine are, otherwise why should you do them.

MR. BROWN: And yet you do have a heavy sky here, a storm coming maybe or at least a shower.

MS. LUCE: That's right.

MR. BROWN: It's a wonderfully effective contrast with the daisies, don't you think? Would these be done from sketches or would you be out there painting for a good deal of this?

MS. LUCE: These would be done from sketches. No, I don't think I've ever done anything directly. That's a 22 -- that's 20, 24, and that's the size that -

MR. BROWN: That you used in the studio mainly?

MS. LUCE: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

MR. BROWN: Now at this same time you also have done a number [*A Strong Breeze*] with plants and the seashore but bird forms too as we saw in the 30's with the blue jay. Here are some gulls. Again is it the form, the motion, the movement of these birds that particularly interests you?

MS. LUCE: Well, I think seagulls are - herring gulls are particularly interesting because they're - I mean, there's a great variety in the movement and shapes, forms that the wings take and tails also. [Inaudible] one in the house is another one that's bigger than this.

MR. BROWN: In this painting here [*Mid Tide*, 1977] you have that same emphasis on rather small forms in the foreground. In this case here it's simply washed up seashells. Was this another form in nature that particularly interested you?

MS. LUCE: Well, I think it did.

MR. BROWN: Now this painting the middle ground and the background have more importance than in some of the others, particularly the sea coming in on the right and the rocks and then that wonderful clay or sandy road going off, winding in and then curving off into the background.

MS. LUCE: That exists.

MR. BROWN: This is here in Little Compton? Why did you put the seashells where they are? They almost seem like a still life within -

MS. LUCE: That's probably why they were put where they were, so they would seem like still life.

MR. BROWN: They don't quite seem part of the coastal scene.

MS. LUCE: No.

MR. BROWN: You meant us really to look at two things, and yet they're in one composition.

MS. LUCE: There was no reason why not.

MR. BROWN: No, I think they work together. They're put together very well. Again you have some rather fierce clouds looming up in the background. They're really bursting over the horizon. Do you think in your painting you're being here has played quite a part? I mean being near the seacoast did you come to love it?

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think it made a great deal of difference one way or another.

MR. BROWN: These paintings seem to me to be bolder than the earlier ones. I mean, the forms are much clearer, the juxtaposition of things is -

MS. LUCE: Well, they ought to be, after all one grows up.

MR. BROWN: And whereas earlier there were some of those fuzzy things you spoke of earlier, spoke of.

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: By the time you were here, say in the 1950's or so, you pretty much clarified what you -

MS. LUCE: Yes, I think so.

MR. BROWN: Was your output even greater too? Were you doing more?

MS. LUCE: No, I think it's always been about the same.

MR. BROWN: Would you do quite a few paintings each year?

MS. LUCE: Yes. I don't know how many but -

MR. BROWN: Would you put them aside, put a painting aside and then come back to it later?

MS. LUCE: Once in a while, yes. Not very often, but Virginia found that I did more than she expected because she found the ones I put aside mostly haven't been signed and dated, especially they haven't been dated. That she found awkward.

MR. BROWN: It's Virginia Lynch who has been taking care of you and getting your paintings -

MS. LUCE: Doing most of the dirty work, bless her heart.

MR. BROWN: Now if they weren't dated does that mean you might - you might have meant to go back to them?

MS. LUCE: Yes.

MR. BROWN: When you would go back to a painting what would you be looking for, trying do, do you suppose, change a color, or a form, or any of those things?

MS. LUCE: I would mostly change the form I think, but I don't know. I wouldn't guarantee it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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