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**Oral history interview with Alice Baber, 1973  
May 24**

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# Transcript

## Interview

**Interview with Alice Baber  
Conducted by Paul Cummings  
On Broadway in New York City  
May 24, 1973**

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Alice Baber on May 24, 1973. The interview took place in New York City, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

[Throughout the interview, there is considerable traffic (and construction?) noise, diminishing the quality of this recording and hence my confidence in the accuracy of the transcription.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the 24th of May, 1973, Paul Cummings talking to Alice Baber in her studio on Broadway. [That's not so bad. Let's not go back.] You were born in Illinois, right?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To start with. [meaning to start the interview with]

ALICE BABER: To start with.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where's Charleston?

ALICE BABER: Central Illinois. Where can I say? Sort of right in the middle state, but on [the] eastern border.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All right. It's not a big town [all right], isn't it, not big?

ALICE BABER: No, Charleston was really not my home town. It was a town. It was a town that some of my mother's family had come from, but it was [not] the largest town to be born in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Well, you didn't grow up there, then?

ALICE BABER: I'm really from Kansas, Illinois.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, from Kansas, Illinois.

ALICE BABER: Kansas is a tiny town of 900 persons, but I really didn't grow up in Kansas either, I grew up in Miami, Florida. Sort of going back and forth between Florida and Illinois.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, what were you, just born in Charleston?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. Born in Charleston, and then my family took me to a town which was the other side of Kansas, which is a town about the size of Charleston called [Catus], Illinois. We lived

there for a couple of years, then we started going back and forth to Miami.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How old were you, about, when the Miami activity began?

ALICE BABER: When I was two.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so it was right away. [chuckles]

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And how long did you go back and forth?

ALICE BABER: Until the War. And then we couldn't go anymore.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, you were what, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen?

ALICE BABER: Something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you like this, living in two places?

ALICE BABER: Well, I liked it very much. First of all, when we went in the early days, we went by tent and that had a certain kind of romance. And later I always felt a bit like a nomad. I liked the... [In a] way I liked the idea of uprooting myself every year, but I also had the slightly uncomfortable feeling of not belonging to any one place. But that had advantages too.

BABER, ALICE

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

ALICE BABER: I have one sister who is [three, two] years older than I am.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And why did your family travel all the time? Was it....

ALICE BABER: Well, it was really my fault because I was ill.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: Yes. And the doctor suggested that we go south.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For the wintertime?

ALICE BABER: Yes. Which, of course, doctors don't do now. But that was a long time ago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you summered up north and wintered in Florida?

ALICE BABER: Well, we did, except that eventually we started really living in the South. We lived in a part of Miami that was near the Everglades in those days.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Whereabouts was that?

ALICE BABER: It was near the [Hialeah] Race Track. It was 79th Street. Of course, it's now sort of the middle of Miami, but in those days it was right on the edge, in the middle of the avocados and... [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Country still?

ALICE BABER: Yes, very much so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did that affect your school, your education? Or was it all in Florida as you grew up?

ALICE BABER: Most of it was in Florida. And in the third and fourth grade I went to school in the tiny little town where I come from, Kansas, Illinois. And the result of moving was that we were in a different school each year, more or less, so.... Or at least I had a feeling that there was no continuity, that I was always in a new school. And the main problem was that I was always studying South

America. Wherever I went it was on the agenda for the year. As a result, I don't know anything about South America.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: At one point, though, I knew very well how it looked, you know, the shape of it and what products come from the different parts, [and all that].

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's incredible. Well, if your sister was a couple of years older, she was still in school. Did that make any difference—the fact that you were kind of both going through these different schools?

ALICE BABER: No, because we would usually go to the same grade school. Because this was all sort of grade school days. And the main result of my sister being treated as older was that when she learned to read, I was very competitive so I learned to read, too. And if she learned to recite a poem, I learned to recite it at the same time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, [I] see.

ALICE BABER: So, I was slightly ahead of myself.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Well, how old were you when you began reading, then?

ALICE BABER: Oh, very young, I suppose three. I remember reading at four, when I was supposed to be taking a nap. That sort of thing. But I don't remember when I couldn't read. I do remember learning the alphabet, because I loved the shapes of the letters. And most of it had to do with a kind of formal quality. I liked the letters when A through M went straight down, and then N through Z, that sort of thing, like all the forms.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, the shapes and everything.

ALICE BABER: Yes. And I liked them.... When I studied them sort of in secret when I was not supposed to be reading, I would read them by the kind of yellow light that you get through blinds, and I was \_\_\_\_\_.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Well, now how did this affect you as a student? You were relating to a whole new group of students every year. Was that difficult or easy to....

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes, I was really unhappy. [chuckles]

PAUL CUMMINGS: It didn't work well?

ALICE BABER: Not too well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there any friends from your home town that you got to know, or was that difficult too?

ALICE BABER: No. I don't remember having.... I do have childhood friends, as a matter of fact, that continue. But, in a way, I don't remember anyone sort of all the way through. Or I found them, and then I'd be friends for a few years and then I'd lose them. So I do have a very strong sense of friendship, and I do feel that there's a mystique involved in friendship. But there are sort of interruptions.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way?

ALICE BABER: Well, I think it's perhaps the only thing in life that really communicates, kind of the loyalty of friendship but I do think it is interrupted. Once in a while or fairly often.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, was there any art interest or literary interest, things of that nature, in your family, that you grew up with?

ALICE BABER: Yes. When I was five years old, I decided that I would be either a poet or a painter. And I remember the day that I decided, and I'm sure that I really didn't know what it meant to be either one of those.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what precipitated that, though?

ALICE BABER: Well, I don't remember the sort of the epiphany just before the moment....

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: ...but I do remember saying to probably stamping my foot, you know "I shall be" or "will be."

PAUL CUMMINGS: But had you seen them up close? Had you seen paintings?

ALICE BABER: Yes, I was....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know what the words meant?

ALICE BABER: ...I was very good at art. I could copy things. For example I think of this now when I have students when I went to kindergarten and they gave us all those horrible little blocks to use and they gave us Listerine ads to cut out and I could cut out the Listerine ad absolutely perfectly you know, the nose, the mouth, the gargle, everything and the little kids who weren't good at art would be two or three inches off. They couldn't sort of zero in on the shape. But I don't know why that should make you artistic, you see. [laughter] That was my first clue. And then, as far as poetry was concerned, I wrote it all the time, and was encouraged mostly from my father, I think. In a way, I think my mother encouraged the painting more and my father the writing, but I think that was just because it happened to fall into their interests a little more.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why, was your father literary?

ALICE BABER: He was a writer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things did he write?

ALICE BABER: Well, he is a full-time writer now. In those days he had not started writing. He writes... He is an authority on the [Hanks] family.

PAUL CUMMINGS: On...?

ALICE BABER: On the [Hanks] family. Lincoln. Lincoln's material.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Yeah. And that's his....

ALICE BABER: The reason that he started writing the material is because he read a great many books and he found errors in them that he knew were incorrect, and so he started doing his own research and writing his own books.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you must have grown up with a lot of books around the house.

ALICE BABER: Oh, lots of books.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All kinds of topics, or literary mainly?

ALICE BABER: All kinds, really. I liked the books enormously, and when we lived in Florida, there were no book stores in the town. In other words, a town.... Even now, you can go to the South and there's no book store at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: So I spent most of my time in the library, reading my way through. So I read almost anything I could get my hands on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what kind of things do you remember reading that were particularly provocative—either in terms of subject or particular books?

ALICE BABER: Well, Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare, which I then did my own plays from, and so forth, not realizing that I was really watering down the material considerably. [laughter] The library, which was on Biscayne Bay, was full of mold.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? [chuckles]

ALICE BABER: And so when I think of the books in those days, I smell this sort of enormous library full of moldy books. But it was a pretty good library, and they didn't object to a child wandering around, sort of reading almost anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what about your mother's interest in art? Was she involved with it, or was it kind of an acceptable interest to have or....

ALICE BABER: Well, my mother, I think, looking back, must have taken art history in college. And we had on the walls of our home in Illinois, Madonna of the Chair and a Botticelli, and things like that, which I didn't like as a child, but they were there to look at. I did look at them. I didn't like them because they didn't look like the people that I knew, and that bothered me. It doesn't bother me now, but it bothered me then.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They weren't real in other words. I mean, like the photographs in the magazine look like somebody.

ALICE BABER: No, no, it had nothing to do with a magazine. They didn't look like the people that I imagined. You see, I had already read the stories of the paintings—Madonna and Child—so I knew what that looked like, but it didn't look like the version that we had on the wall.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

ALICE BABER: I don't think that I ever wanted it to look like people that I knew.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, now, but it.... In other words, it didn't concur with the imagination.

ALICE BABER: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, when did....

ALICE BABER: It also had something to do, I think, with the great refinement of the eyelid. I was very concerned with that somehow. I mean, looking at the eyebrows, the eyelids, and so forth, because I was not aware at that time that that would be such a good way to show form.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, because everything's [just so].

ALICE BABER: But I mean I spent a spent a great deal of time looking at them.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, what about the drawing which you have mentioned you had done—from the beginning almost? [chuckles] When did that start?

ALICE BABER: Well, I always drew. And I don't remember when it started or why it started. But I was encouraged, which I think is very important. And I was obviously given paper to work with, which was also important.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you draw in school? Were there classes ever any place you were?

ALICE BABER: Yes. I always had in art in school, and most of the time I think it was unfortunate. Not really because I was taught the wrong things, which is what everyone says now—you know, we're always taught the wrong things—but I think.... It's interesting, I can't remember. So obviously all kinds of blocks about my relationship to art in school. But I do remember that I was kind of teacher's pet in the situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do all the things they would do at Thanksgiving or Christmas?

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes, and I was always better than the other kids. And I remember once that I did the clouds for another child, and then when the teacher came and said

those were marvelous clouds, then I told the teacher I had done them. so, you see, I do have a serious problem remembering those things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs hard] But it sounds as if your childhood was very active, with moving back and forth across the country and reading and....

ALICE BABER: You know, I always thought it had been very sedentary. [laughing]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

ALICE BABER: The way you look at it, it does sound active.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Were you aware of the Depression at this point? You know, when you got to be ten or thereabouts?

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. We were poor, properly poor. I remember that we would go for Sunday dinner at noontime to a restaurant where we got everything for thirty-five cents and it was one of those.... [telephone rings] Hang on a second please.

[Interruption in taping to answer telephone]

ALICE BABER: What I started to say was that the restaurant was like a grotto. It was marvelous. It had waterfalls, and it had obviously fallen on evil days, having to serve people for thirty-five cents, lunches or dinners. But I think that may have been the average in those days. But I was aware of what it cost to go out and that it was a big event and so forth. And yes, I mean, you know, there was a certain amount of discussion about it, about the Depression— including the fact that it's not polite to talk about money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. [phone rings again]

[Interruption in taping]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about your sister? Did she have art interests, or culture interests?

ALICE BABER: Well, we were, both of us, offered lessons in anything that we wanted to do, but my mother always said if we wouldn't practice, then we wouldn't get the lessons. And the examples held up to us of children that were obviously behaving properly were a sister and brother who both played the piano something like fourteen hours a day....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: You've got to know someone like that. Well, my sister and I somehow didn't fit into that. So I'm not quite sure what areas my sister interested herself in up to a certain point, but I know that.... I was taken to a dance class, and I was not interested in practicing dance— tap dance— and a number of other things like that. And then, I was offered perspective lessons by a man who taught painting. This was in Illinois. He was our local famous painter, Paul Sargent. And he was really quite good. Looking back now, his painting was a combination of sort of Courbet, impressionism, and so forth. But enormously talented and very much, say, a product of some other time, some other place. But he taught me perspective and I adored it and I was eight years old and I took a lot of lessons and I practiced. I mean, I did all of my assignments in between. My sister didn't. By the time I was ten or twelve, we both went to have oil painting class lessons with the college class that he taught, and after one class she threw in her brushes, and I was very pleased because I grabbed them and I then had.... Again, back to the financial thing— you see, I was only allowed so many brushes, to see if I was interested, and I had double everything and I felt this marvelous largess.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Right, right.

ALICE BABER: And I was very very pleased and then she went off and played the violin.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, where did you go to high school, and was that still traveling back and forth?

ALICE BABER: No. I was ready for high school when the War came. And then we had to decide, and we decided it would probably be better to stay in Illinois— for a number of reasons and, including, amusingly enough— the threat at that time was submarine warfare, Florida coast. We'd been



through a certain number of blackouts and things like that, practice wars in Florida, and it was a question of gas rationing. I mean, you just couldn't move, so we decided, well, all right, we'd settle there in [Catus], back home, as it were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, and stay there. Well, did you have a house there in Illinois where you....

ALICE BABER: Yes, my great grandfather's house.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was kind of the family house?

ALICE BABER: It was always available. Well, it was empty because it was my great grandfather's house, so we stayed there whenever we wanted, and it's still there and it's where my father lives.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you spent how many years, finally, really living in one place? Through high school?

ALICE BABER: Yes, through high school. Then I went on to college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you keep.... You kept painting and drawing through high school, right?

ALICE BABER: Yes, but I didn't have classes. It was a very small high school. They didn't teach art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you just do it.... You did it when you had an opportunity, right? Or did you have some kind of program?

ALICE BABER: I think I took a leave of absence. [laughter] In a way. You see, these painting lessons had somehow disappeared. I'm trying to think why. I don't know whether Mr. Sargent died, or what it was, but.... I didn't paint. I was sort of biding my time until I got into college and then I knew that I would be an art major and that I would start painting immediately.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, had you gotten to any museums by this time? I mean, had you gotten into anyplace or had you seen any....

ALICE BABER: Well, not completely innocent of museums. I remember the Ringling Brothers Museum, of all places....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right, in Florida.

ALICE BABER: ...in Florida, which had some rather good things. And I remember that when I walked into that museumÄthis was not the first museum I'd been into, but I'm not quite sureÄnot a great many, actuallyÄand one of the books.... [telephone rings]

[Interruption in taping]

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...unfortunate. You were going to mention a book.

ALICE BABER: Oh, one Christmas two different people gave us the same book, which was Great Masters in Art, chosen, as I remember, by Rockwell Kent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that book, right. There is one.

ALICE BABER: Do you remember it? Did you have that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's a large book.

ALICE BABER: But it was the joy of my life for a couple of years, because I looked at each painting very carefully and.... Of course, it's funny, I didn't like the Van Gogh watercolorsÄI mean, the Van Gogh flowers, sunflowersÄbut I liked almost everything else in it. Of course, later I liked mostly the Van Gogh flowers. [laughter] But that's life. But when you're stuck in the middle of America, and you're not near a museum, books are very important.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you have any friends who were interested in art, or was this a sort of private activity that you pursued through to school?

ALICE BABER: I think it was private. That may have been a virtue. I never knew anyone that wrote or painted or anything else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was like your own....

ALICE BABER: My friends were, I don't know, they were athletic, something I wasn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] You mean you didn't do all those Midwestern American things of running around?

ALICE BABER: Yeah, I played basketball. [chuckles] Not very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Good. And your family sort of approved of this, as you went through high school, that your interest maintained itself in the arts?

ALICE BABER: Yes, they did. I don't think that they knew what being an artist meant, any more than I did, but they did believe it was a good thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think there was any effect of the Depression on that kind of attitude? You know, because everything was so leveled that you really could do what you wanted to do, and potentials being so limited in so many ways that....

ALICE BABER: I'm not sure. I think that I received contradictory advice as a child. I remember being told because of the Depression that I would have to work my way through college, and that seemed perfectly normal. And this other point of view, that one would be an artist, seemed perfectly normal. But I think it was a combination of a number of attitudes, some of them from the nineteenth century. And I think it was totally without a consciousness that it was difficult for a woman to do it. And there was no suggestion that because I was a woman there would be a problem in getting a job or being an artist or anything else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that everything was really [unquestioned].

ALICE BABER: In the sense that you've just asked the question, yes. And for all I know the Depression might have made some difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or possibly everybody really had to work?

ALICE BABER: But I mean it broke down sort of all the barriers. And I didn't feel that there was any one path that I was expected to takeÄexcept that I was expected, in a sense, to do something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's very interesting, because that seems a rather typical pattern.

ALICE BABER: To do something, you mean?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I mean that attitude coming out of the Depression period, when you were.... Because other people I've talked to around the same age area have said pretty much the same kinds of thing. You know, they knew they had to work because everybody had to work to survive.

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And families didn't often impose, saying, "You've got to do this," or "You've got to do that." But that happened occasionally, too.

ALICE BABER: You'd think that the families, in their fear of the survival of the child, would have made suggestions. I remember at one point thinking that it would've been easier if there had been some kind of suggestion that was definite. There never was. So I could've at least reacted against it. [said tongue in cheek]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they really let you sort of....

ALICE BABER: Drift along.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, and follow your own imagination and inclinations.

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you speak any.... Were there any languages at home? Did your parents speak a language other than English, or were there any around that....

ALICE BABER: Not in the sense of having any experiencesÄin the sense that immigrants have languages, you knowÄbut my mother had studied French in school and she was very proud of it, and she would often use it when an occasion would arise. My father spoke French from the First World War. Very badly. Except when I finally got to France, I found the expressions that I had learned from him were very useful.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Yeah, I'll bet.

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's marvelous. Maybe there isn't as much change as one expects.

ALICE BABER: Exactly. On the other hand, living in Florida we were very, very aware of the Spanish as a second language, and I did study it in college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you learn any languages before college or in college?

ALICE BABER: No, I didn't go to a school that taught it. I remember feeling that I was very poor because I couldn't go to a private school that would teach languages.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What is Lindenwood College? And what.... [chuckles]

ALICE BABER: Where'd you get that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: My source is gone forever. [laughter]

ALICE BABER: It's in St. Charles, Missouri. It's quite beautiful. It was, when I went, a woman's college. I think it's now coeducational, or bordering on it, like many schools. And I had an absolutely splendid art teacher there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was that?

ALICE BABER: Well, her name was Elizabeth Watts and I don't know where she is now, but she had come straight from Iowa, and she was full of the kind of information that I needed very much. And she taught us to understand and appreciate modern art and all those that you don't learn at home. Her painting style was probably a moderation of early [Philip Ed.] Guston, which was all right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Early.... In what....

ALICE BABER: Well, the figures with the hats and the....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you mean the, his early....

ALICE BABER: Yeah, early, early style.

PAUL CUMMINGS: From the....

ALICE BABER: From the forties.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...forties, yeah. So that means he was....

ALICE BABER: But it was never [from] \_\_\_\_\_ Piero della Francesca and....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but she was very contemporary then, if she was doing that kind of thing.

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes, enormously.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick that school? Was it easy or handy, or what led you there?

ALICE BABER: Well, it was a woman's college that had a very high reputation in the Middle West. And it was the selection of my family, for the first two years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you lived there then?

ALICE BABER: Yes, because it's near St. Louis.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was it, in a dormitory situation?

ALICE BABER: Yes. It's a small college, completely enclosed by a high wall, as I remember. Probably a low wall, but, you know, that kind of feeling.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, how'd you like it? You know, moving away from home and surrounded by dozens or hundreds of other girls? [chuckles]

ALICE BABER: I was very pleased to be sort of starting on my own ventures, away from home. I wasn't sure that I really liked the woman's college, with its.... The atmosphere was.... It had one advantage: We all studied quite a bit. But the social life was such a problem for everybody, somehow. See, I had an advantage. My sister was then going to Washington University, which was only twenty miles away. I would not have gone there if I had not had sort of a way out of the

situation, outside the cloistered walls \_\_\_\_\_....

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...of the school. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: And, of course, at the end of the second year I went to Indiana University.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you have other art instruction, besides the one woman you've mentioned?

ALICE BABER: No. She was the only one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: She was the one.

ALICE BABER: And she encouraged me to leave as quickly as possible. I would actually have gone my sophomore year, but it was hard to get into schools right after the War, and so forth. So she said that I should go to a university. For one thing, we'd have nude models, which you weren't allowed to have at Lindenwood—not that that, of course, makes great art, but it's a step—and if I would just get to some place where there they had more teachers, more facilities.

PAUL CUMMINGS: More people involved.

ALICE BABER: It's interesting. I've always been encouraged by people to move on, which has been my own inclination. I mean, no one's ever held me back, which I think is quite nice, now that I think about it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's unusual.

ALICE BABER: Yeah, it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There was no imposition of a particular idea or style?

ALICE BABER: That's right. I mean, if she had said to me, "You must stay here so that you will paint," I would have left, but it would have made it harder.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, it's interesting, you mentioned her relationship to early Guston. Did you have art magazines? Were there many.... No, there were not very many art magazines then. But there was Art News, and [Arts, arts] was around and a few other things. Were you interested in what was going on in the immediate art world of contemporary things, or were you interested in art history, or....

ALICE BABER: Oh, I was very interested in what was going on. And I remember that my first trip to New York, when I was nearing the end of college—or at least one of the trips to New York—and I went to the Guggenheim Museum, and I was looking at a Klee show. No, I don't know, Klee or Kandinsky. Anyway, I was buying a book, and they said, "Oh, you're from the Middle West. Have they heard of Kandinsky in the Middle West?" and I was very enraged. So we had whatever publications there were.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you go to Chicago ever? Or was that not a place to go?

ALICE BABER: No, I didn't want to go to Chicago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? [laughs]

ALICE BABER: I had a feeling it was a trap.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Well, that's [kind of odd]. It's interesting.

ALICE BABER: Well, I always had the feeling that if you went to Chicago from the Middle West, that you'd end up in Chicago, and that seemed to me to be a disaster. I mean, looking back, it probably would have been all to the good, but at the time no. But I had been to Chicago and I didn't find it a very appealing town. I still don't, as a matter of fact.

PAUL CUMMINGS: For what reason?

ALICE BABER: I'm sure I'd like it better if I knew people there, if I'd ever gotten involved.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see; it's just a big town.

ALICE BABER: But visually I really like New York, strangely enough. In its own way, it's ugly, but there's a response.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you never found that in Chicago?

ALICE BABER: No. Not even going to the College Art Association two years ago. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, didn't you go to the museum there ever? The Institute?

ALICE BABER: Oh, sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's really quite a fabulous museum. [de Kooning]...

ALICE BABER: Oh, splendid. The Grand Jatte is not to be missed.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] And a few other things they have there.

ALICE BABER: And as a matter of fact, you see.... Of course, the museum in St. Louis is quite good, which I had for those first two years of college.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how did you select Indiana University? Was that because it was there, again?

ALICE BABER: Well, I always say it's because I was working my way east, but there was a problem in getting into colleges at the time, and if the college was bordering on your own state, you would be accepted. So it didn't occur to me to ask for colleges really far, far from my home. I did apply, I think, to New Mexico and decided not to go. I thought that was a little provincial—I mean, even more so than where I was. But I liked the county in which Indiana University was; it's quite beautiful. And the atmosphere there is, from the point of nature, much superior to Illinois. Illinois looks like a sort of Dutch landscape; it's very flat with a few trees.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, how did you like this? Because this was now a large school compared to the other one, wasn't it? Did you find that \_\_\_\_\_ ?

ALICE BABER: Oh, I thought that was all to the good. The bigger the better.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Greater variety.

ALICE BABER: My only complaint at Indiana was that I thought it wasn't a very intellectual place. I mean, the people there were....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why was that, do you think?

ALICE BABER: The exceptions were the English department, the art department, and the anthropology department. And of course Kinsey\* was very big on campus. But generally speaking it was a college that was not really concerned.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what were their main activities there then?

ALICE BABER: The business school was quite important there, and they have a medical school, and I think most of the money went to these branches because, I mean, that was what was considered important.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was in the art department when you were there?

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\*Alfred Kinsey, author of The Kinsey Report.

ALICE BABER: Well, Dr. [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed. Hope was the chairman and he's an interesting person and we always had this.... We always knew that Dr. Hope would defend any student in the art department. Any bohemian activity....

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: ...such as having beer on campus.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: Yeah, it was marvelous. And the teacher that we all sort of gathered around the group that I was involved with was [Alton] Pickens, whom I have not seen for, what, twenty years or something, until the other day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Oh, really? Fantastic.

ALICE BABER: And then when.... Well, he's been teaching in the East, and finally old friends got us all together and it was really quite nice to see him again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who was in that group of students you referred to?

ALICE BABER: Well.... [pauses, thinking] I don't know, you see, I don't know that in a way that this whole, this group.... I mean, we don't really exist as a group of students the way you might say that, technically, the year that so and so graduated.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Art students never do.

ALICE BABER: They never graduate.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but they never form a cohesive group that continues either.

ALICE BABER: Well, in one way we did. Most of us, because of Pickens, came to New York. You see, again, being encouraged.... I asked him, "What do I do next?" and he said, "You must go to New York City," with some sort of poetic remark like, "where the great ships go out to sea," which I thought was splendid and which keeps you going in New York. And then he said, "Go there, and work until you have a group of paintings that are all one group, and this will be your start as a painter." So I did

that, and some of the other students also came to New York, and for the first few years we would meet together and sketch and talk to each other about painting. And I advise my own students now to do this, to not get lost when they leave class, but to get each others' names and become friends, because you need some kind of peers or someone you can talk to [when you leave school].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Also it's continuity, and so forth.

ALICE BABER: Exactly. And in a way you're working your way out of the same problems with style and whatever your background.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who were some of the other people who came to New York with you, do you remember? [Pam]?

ALICE BABER: I'm trying to think, because there are....

[Interruption in taping]

ALICE BABER: One of the other students was called Dick Ireland and he is now at the Maryland Institute, and there was a photographer called Bob Forth, and then he and another student called Barbara, who got married, are I think in Maryland, and there was a painter whose name was Ansel Chastine, who was from the hills of Indiana, who is now living outside of New York City and still painting. Everyone that I knew is still paintingÄone way or another.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it means you had a very highly motivated group of people then?

ALICE BABER: Yes, we did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, so many of them....

ALICE BABER: I would say that many of them are still painting figuratively, because of their own inclination or the influence of [\_\_\_\_\_ÄEd.] Pickens, who is a figurative painter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did you study with him? One or two years?

ALICE BABER: Oh, three years.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Three years. With anyone else, or was he the main....

ALICE BABER: He was the main teacher. We had a number of other teachers. We had Arthur Deshaies, who taught graphics. He was very good. And we had an interesting man who was a sculptor, whose name was Leo Steppat, who later died. And I didn't take from [Rickey], who was thereÄGeorge Rickey. I was really.... Everyone thought he taught art history at the time, but I wish I'd known him better because I think he is a splendid artist at this point. There was a man called [\_\_\_\_\_ÄEd.] [Engle, Engel] that I did not take fromÄhe taught drawingÄwho represented really the conservative element in the school. And of course we all took art history from Henry Hope. I think my favorite art history course was from Theodore Bowie who taught Oriental art. And I think it was the only class I ever made A+ in. I really enjoyed it enormously. And of course....

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the appeal there?

ALICE BABER: ...I've been to India twice now and I keep looking at things that Bowie said to look up. I feel like I haven't forgotten a single word that he said. And he was brought up in the Orient so he



was really an excellent teacher.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see. What was the appeal, do you think, in Oriental art, to you? I mean, at that point what was....

ALICE BABER: Well, I think I've always been interested in the Orient, and the esoteric quality.... Of course, we had all the books at home of travels through the Gobi Desert, and that sort of thing, and I decided at an early age I would do that. And India always represented to me a country that would be extraordinarily beautiful, which it is. I haven't been disappointed at all. I think I decided that I would always travel and that I would go to places that appeal to me. I talk to my students about this sometimes, the idea of what you're born with that interests you. Nobody influences you. You suddenly know that that's for you, the minute you hear it or see it. And the East always interested me. I remember, at Lindenwood, when they asked me to take the religion course and I didn't want to take the time out to do it, I said, "Well, I'll say that I am a Buddhist." And I remember they were very upset about that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [chuckles] Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: And I wouldn't say that now, because I'm almost a Buddhist, so I wouldn't sort of play with the idea, but I remember thinking that this would be my way out, and so maybe in some strange way, you see, I thought this was the escape from our world into something else better, more interesting and fuller.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that.... Oh, I don't know. Actually, what I wanted to say was, it's always intrigued me that in the middle of the country there's a line of people who seem to look towards the Orient as much as they look toward Europe. Were there other people around, or would you really get your interest from the books, do you think?

ALICE BABER: I think that people look to the Orient more from the West Coast, but I think you have a very good point, and I had never thought of it before.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, but even....

ALICE BABER: But it was my father's collection of books that I read. The travels of [St. Hedens] and so forth in the Orient. And in a way he had a kind of contempt for Europe, which you find in the Middle West—Or shall we say almost a feeling of separateness from Western European culture, which seems to have been almost a conscious decision, I think, somewhere in the late Edwardian period. You'd have to look into the.... But from the point of view of your question, I don't know. I think his position in our particular region was isolated. And I don't know where he got it. I must ask him sometime.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anyway, going back to Indiana University, how did you cope with Henry Hope as an instructor, your professor?

ALICE BABER: Well, I liked him very much as a chairman. I remember asking him for all kinds of recommendations through the years, and he was always very helpful. For example, I told him that I would be interested in being an art critic—which I have never been—because I wanted to combine writing with art, and he encouraged me enormously. I've never been a critic because I don't really have a critical position, but I sometimes write things when I feel positive about the situation.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A critical position, then... "Position" then being negative?

ALICE BABER: It seems to me that a critical position at least requires what Mary McCarthy called "a cold eye," and I'm not sure that I'm willing to write about a cold eye. I frequently have one, but I think if I take the trouble to write, then I want to write positively.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it has to be a more passionate engagement then?

ALICE BABER: Yes, and this may be out of fear, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you have any other professors at Indiana who were of interest to you in literature or other areas?

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. I had a splendid teacher of poetry. Let me think. A very good poet, if I can just remember his name, and I was sent to him by Alton Pickens, who was a good friend, because Alton sensed that we were very isolated in Bloomington, Indiana, from certain things that we wanted and needed, and he would tell me of other professors who were of interest. For example, the summer that I went on a dig we dug at Hopewell Mound, Alton suggested that I see the head of anthropology and I... That was a fascinating experience and one which I recommend now to my own students, if they get into anthropology, go on a dig and possibly will be able to go and work abroad, if necessary.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what do you think that did for you? And which summer was that?

ALICE BABER: That was the summer that I had graduated from college, but before I went back for a year of graduate work. What did it do for me?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. I mean, where did you go and what was the...

ALICE BABER: Well, we went very close to where we were that is, it was a hundred miles from the University down in a region where, I don't know, where the various rivers meet Mississippi merges into something else and the Indians built a number of mounds in that neighborhood. They had not been and I think they have not yet found a village site connected with a mound, so that we are aware of the kinds of burials in the mounds. You know, a lot of mounds have been dug but a village site has not been found. That was our goal for the summer and we didn't succeed. We didn't find the village.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there are a lot of mounds that are not near villages.

ALICE BABER: No, that's the problem, you see. What our professor had tried to do was decide where a village ought to be in relationship to a mound, and we didn't find one. [laughs] Well, the women were put to work on the disturbed burials in the sand, so that I dug for the whole summer. I was actually assigned as an artist, but it turned out that they really wanted photographic realism. None of us were trained in that or interested in that, so we were given a shovel, put to work. And I enjoyed it enormously.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Scrape and scrape and \_\_\_\_\_.

ALICE BABER: Exactly. You obviously have done that, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I know, I was into those things.

ALICE BABER: When did you do that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, when I was in high school one year I discovered one of those things. [laughter] But why do you recommend it to your students now? I mean, for what purpose? As just sort of a life exploration, or....

ALICE BABER: No, no. Because I think that sometimes you can get to Greece and Turkey and so forth on these digs, as a way of getting out of the country when you haven't got a penny. And of course they just feed you; I mean, you don't make any money.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: And I guess because I care passionately about it. I like anthropology, archaeology, and I like bones.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think any of those things relate to your work, or influenced it in any way? Or is it a peripheral influence, so that a major interest....

BABER, ALICE  
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Tape 1, side B

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...influenced it in any way? Or is it a peripheral influence, a major interest?

ALICE BABER: I've never thought of it as having any influence. I would have to think about that. I don't know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it's an interest that's continued obviously.

ALICE BABER: I think it's possible that anyone who's a painter or a sculptor might enjoy digging in the dirt and might enjoy the whole revealing of the bones as they emerge. And then even the very careful work, when you end up finally with a spoon, you know. The whole thing is related, really, to the process of painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In what way, do you feel?

ALICE BABER: Well, you start with a big shovel, and then you get down to sort of refined [parts, portions].

PAUL CUMMINGS: The finer, finer, finer, finer, and pretty soon little.... Well, what was your painting like while you were at the university? What kind of things were you doing, or was there so much class projects to be done that....

ALICE BABER: No, I'm happy to say that I managed to go through school with.... And I probably was assigned no more than one or two projects the whole time. And I just painted. And I painted all kinds of things. I painted abstract paintings, semi-abstract paintings, figures, figures in environment, figures in flattened space— you know, whatever. And my move into color was related to trees. One spring I said to Pickens, "I don't like the colors that I'm using. Aren't there any others?" And he said, "Yes, of course, if you'll just go and.... You know, there are other colors." And that's when I realized the limited palette that most students are given, and I bought all of the reds and purples and brilliant colors that I could find in any of the art supply stores, and from then on my palette pleased

me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But did the subject matter change then?

ALICE BABER: Oh, no. Not really.

BABER, ALICE

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it just became brighter and....

ALICE BABER: I think that the change in subject matter comes, with the use of color, in a tapering off of interest in rendering. Because you no longer have to gray down the forms or find ways of making a third dimension or reproducing reality in some fashion. And as your own sense of color approaches your own sense of poetry and fantasy, I think the priorities begin to change.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, when did that start for you then? Was that after school, or in graduate school? Or was it slow and then all of a sudden you saw it in retrospect?

ALICE BABER: I didn't do anything in any kind of continuity really. I tried lots of things. And as far as isolating one element in painting to be interested in, I didn't at all. Sometimes I'd be interested in line, sometimes form, sometimes color. And I would try to work with that to find an interest. But I was not the kind of student that found something immediately. I had to really search very hard, through everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you make sculpture there, too, or not?

ALICE BABER: I made one sculpture under Leo Steppat, and I decided that I would do a gibbon because I liked it in paintings, you see. And so, then I had to go and get a book on the great apes, and then I got all involved with the great apes....

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: ...and I decided to do a series with great apes, and I started with my gibbon, which of course was quite abstract. And then, Mr. Steppat said, no, I couldn't do any more great apes, and so I discarded sculpture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like that.

ALICE BABER: Well, obviously, you know, I wasn't a sculptor at heart. I was easily discouraged. And so, when I take it up again, I will continue with my great apes. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about graduate school—because you said you went back for a year of graduate school?

ALICE BABER: Well, I knew it would be a good idea to continue painting in an environment that I knew. And I talked to Alton Pickens about it and he said, "Fine," you know, "but also going to New York," or whatever, and I did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you just paint that year?

ALICE BABER: That was the year I took nothing but painting and Oriental art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That sounds marvelous. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: It was [probably] the happiest year of my life. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you get involved in any student activities while you were there? Or were you so busy with painting that university life in general got lost?

ALICE BABER: Do you find any artists that admit that they were into activities?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes.

ALICE BABER: Name three. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, three is a large number. [laughter]

ALICE BABER: Shall I take the fifth amendment? I don't know. Yeah, I did everything. But what I enjoyed the most was not an activity, because I thought that was a little bit superficial. I wrote for the newspaper, and I have always been sort of interested in journalism. I like the idea of going to press, and I like the idea of being able to describe things. Also, you see, if you have a press card you can stay out late and cross fire lines. Again, it's a feeling of freedom. It's like being a Buddhist; it's the same thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Opens up a lot of doors.

ALICE BABER: That's right. I never use it for that, but I think, you know, it's some kind of...

PAUL CUMMINGS: The potential.

ALICE BABER: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. Well, you came to New York, what, 1951 or something, I had?

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why that particular year?

ALICE BABER: Incidentally, you didn't ask me the year I was born.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In 1928.

ALICE BABER: Oh. You shouldn't have said that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: No, because Colette Roberts started when she was working at my gallery, started sending out everybody's birthday, and I commented to her about it, and she said, "Don't be silly," and she promptly sent it out for everybody. [laughter] So it's never been a secret.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Anyway, but back to 1951. Was that the end of the graduate school year?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It was? So....

ALICE BABER: I went to Europe the summer after I had the graduate year, and I went to Fontainebleau [Ecole des Beaux-ArtsÄEd.], for which I got graduate credit.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that would be the summer of '51 then?

ALICE BABER: '51, yeah. So I was in New York the fall of '51.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you go to Fontainebleau? Was that part of your school?

ALICE BABER: I was looking for a place to go in France, and apparently I had their brochures and so forth, and another art student also wanted to go and so we.... Well, actually, there were three of us, and then one of the three of us got draftedÄinto what would have then been the Korean War.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Well, Paris was very spartan then, wasn't it?

ALICE BABER: Yes, it was.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because it was still with a lot of signs of the previous war.

ALICE BABER: It was spartan, because I remember at a cocktail party that we had at Fontainebleau that the sort of elderly French that were attached to that school came, and they were very thin and they ate all the tarts very hungrily. I mean, there was a sense of sort of devastation in the land . . . wind or something. Very much so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you still saw it.

ALICE BABER: Absolutely.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, you know, bomb sites and piles of rubble and things.

ALICE BABER: Yes. But Fontainebleau was back on its feet, and Walter Damrosch had started it or something, with American friendship to France, and it was run by a very powerful woman, whose name was Madame Boulanger,\* who happened to be in music. But I mean the art department wasn't terribly important, but it was good for our purposes. And what I did actually, instead of just going upstairs in the chateau and paintingÄthat looked a little dull to meÄI joined the group that was touring France. I really joined the architects. And so we were given buses and we went all over France and that was quite nice.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so you saw a lot of....

ALICE BABER: Well, I also asked Bowie what I should see in Europe, and he said that I should see London and Rome and Florence and Venice and Paris. So George and I went to London and Rome. We got as far as FlorenceÄwe didn't get to VeniceÄand then we went back to school, and then we took all these bus trips. So we did very well in Europe in terms of seeing things, except that it was many years before I'd seen the Prado and I wonder now why Mr. Bowie didn't tell me to see the Prado. I would probably have worked it in that first summer, if he'd said to.

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\*Nadia Boulanger, teacher of many contemporary composers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, that was also your first trip to Europe.

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you like it? Did you know French? Did you speak any French?

ALICE BABER: No. Well, the last year of school I had taken beginning French, and then I tried to get the French teacher to teach me more and my French was very bad, of course, and I just struggled along like everyone does. But I tried to stay there and work, but I couldn't get a job. And in England I thought, "Well, at least I can stay in England and work," but the English were not encouraging work permits.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Very difficult.

ALICE BABER: However, they would've given me a permit if I had gotten a job working at Harrod's Department Store, but I couldn't pass the test for picking out buttons. It was sort of an IQ test, and I flunked it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? That's marvelous. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: It had to do with matching, like.... No, I could match the green buttons and the red buttons, but I couldn't do it by size, or something, so it was all very embarrassing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. That's wild.

ALICE BABER: And I was offered other jobs in London, but for something like two pounds a week, and you couldn't live on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, no money, nothing....

ALICE BABER: Even the English couldn't have lived on it, living at home. They said, "Well, it's for people living at home." So I really was forced to come back to America, and I thought.... Well, I mean, New York was all right. I mean, I didn't object. But I did sort of try to stay there while I was there. Well, again, the adventure of travel.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was really the fall of '51 that you came here and set up.

ALICE BABER: Yes. Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you come to in New York when you got here?

ALICE BABER: Well, I had a very clever idea for getting a job, which I wouldn't have now. I looked in magazines, and if I saw a product that I thought was interesting I would call the company and say, "Can I sell this product?" And I got a number of people who were willing to hire me, but I ended up in a modern importing firm. It was Italian design: furniture, and \_\_\_\_\_. They said that I didn't have the strength of character to sell anything, but they did hire me, but not on the floor.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So what did you do? You worked for them doing what?

ALICE BABER: Well, I was hired, amusingly enough, to do publicity, and I learned something about doing it. And I lasted about a year and a half, and then I decided I really couldn't do any more sales \_\_\_\_\_. So I quit and I painted for a few months, which I loved doing. I went home every evening and painted anyway. I mean, the job was simply a way to keep things, keep going.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Maintain, yeah.

ALICE BABER: And I had always believed, and I still do believe, that it's a good idea to avoid having

an art job during the day.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, absolutely.

ALICE BABER: So my jobs have always really not had to do with art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, were you living in the Village then, or [Uptown, uptown] or where about?

ALICE BABER: When I first came I went to the Chelsea Hotel, and I stayed there that first winter, and I had met Colette Roberts on the boat.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In coming back?

ALICE BABER: Coming and going both, I think. She was on the same boat. And she taught a little class.... We were all very seasick. She taught a class for, I don't know.... She asked.... We could all ask questions and I said, "Where are the galleries? What do artists do in New York?" And so she could see I was interested, so as soon as I came back she invited me to go to an opening at the Hacker Bookstore.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, I [remember].

ALICE BABER: So that was my first opening. And then that week I made the rounds of the galleries. I was also looking for jobs at galleries—I mean, I didn't know what else to do—just to see what the story would be. And one of the galleries—I've forgotten the name now; it's no longer open—sent me to a person at the Chelsea Hotel who wanted to share the cost of her hotel room, and so that's how within a week or two weeks I was in the Chelsea Hotel, and I had met a number of people in the art world. And then in the late spring I found a place in the Village that I still have, in the West Village.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that was '52. Well, did you paint in the Hotel Chelsea then, that first, say, winter that you were here?

ALICE BABER: Yes. I had a little trouble getting started, as a matter of fact. Right, of course I did. It was a big apartment, as those Chelsea Hotel apartments are. And I was around other people who were painting. We were all painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that it helped.

ALICE BABER: Um hmm. And there were all the ghosts of all these other painters there, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughter] That's a great tradition, that place.

ALICE BABER: It is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, and you had worked.... What other kinds of things did you do? I mean, you couldn't come home and paint every single night, you know, and work every day.

ALICE BABER: Why not? [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, people do it, but not....

ALICE BABER: It sounds good. [laughter]



PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, did you go to the galleries on Saturday, or the museums on the weekend, things like that?

ALICE BABER: Actually, you know, I don't.... We didn't go to the galleries on Saturdays then as much.... I mean, in the sense of.... That whole Saturday thing started a few years ago. I probably went to a lot of openings on Tuesday nights, go up from work. And I must say I don't remember. I mean, when you're in New York and you've just arrived, you do all kinds of things. You go to the theater, which you don't do later on, and, you know, you just generally indulge yourself. I spent a great deal of time in the Metropolitan looking at various artists. Sometimes I would look at Rubens, because although I didn't like RubensÄI didn't like many aspects of RubensÄI felt that there was a great deal about drawing that I could learn from looking at [him]. And I would sort of go from museum to museum. I think the museums in New York are part of the learning process as much as anything one ever does. And the Frick Museum is fantastic. There are a few things that I am still involved with from the Frick. One is Fragonard's The Swing, which I just love. I like the idea of something swinging through space. I don't think that's such a great painting anywayÄthat particular shoe, and the whole thingÄbut I like the idea of the swing, and I have made paintings with swings. And I think that The Blacksmith by Goya is probably the most complete painting of the figure that's ever been doneÄthe combination of a leg silhouetted against the red fire, the black lines, which are created both by the costume and also the artist just deciding to use a black line. In other words, I looked at that painting when I was trying to decide: Do you use line or don't you use line? You know, you have to decide at some time. And then, the.... Well, there are half a dozen key paintings in that museum. And of course the Modern Museum. I spent hours and hours there. The painting that was the biggest problem for me when I came is the Klee painting of the fish? I never remember the title of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the Modern, yeah.

ALICE BABER: Yes. And what I always wondered was, what is the backside? Each one of those shapes, what does the backside look like, if they're flat?

[Interruption in taping]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Side two. Let's see, we now have you in 1953, roughly. You never studied in New York with anybody or anything, did you? There's no [institution] or school here [in the document PC is consultingÄEd.].

ALICE BABER: Well, by the time I arrived in New York, I felt that my student days were overÄnot my learning days. So I did a lot of drawing at the Art Students League. I'd go thereÄyou know, the dollar-a-model....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, right?

ALICE BABER: And some way or another, I stuck my head in one place or another around town. But, no, I didn't study with a master in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And you never got involved with any of the teachers at the League, particularly?

ALICE BABER: No. As a matter of.... And certainly not Hans Hofmann. He would have....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you say that?

ALICE BABER: He would have been much too severe for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: I could never have survived his teaching. I observed him teaching once. I think he was a great person. I admire most of his paintingsÄenormously. I mean, I think he had [a] great spirit, there's no doubt about it. But I observed one class that he taught, and I would have been very upset if someone had come and drawn over my drawing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, he would do that, wouldn't he?

ALICE BABER: And now I notice they're even doing shows of students of Hofmann that Hofmann drew over, and I still feel so strongly about it that even when I'm itching to put something on a student's workÄsimply because to show someone how to do it is easier than to say itÄI don't do it, because I think that it \_\_\_\_\_.... I know how I used to feel when a teacher would paint on somethingÄand it did happen to meÄI would have to destroy the painting. Oh, I have one painting to this day that Pickens painted on. And when I saw him after twenty years, I told him that the painting still existed and I would like for him to sign it, so it'd be the two of us.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: And he remembered it and he said he would be happy to.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, fantastic. That's marvelous. But it's very interesting that your reaction towards somebody else doing something to a surface that you have worked on is.... And it's fairly typical. There are some people who'd just say, "Well, you know, the student, who cares about the student?" But most people reject that kind of instruction. You know, it doesn't make something; it destroys something, it seems. That's really what happens.

ALICE BABER: I ran into an interesting problem last semester. I had a music student who was obviously very sensitive, who had had no art training, and he kept drawing things in the wrong direction. If the shoulder seemed to go to the right, he'd draw it to the left. And someone said to me, "Well, maybe, you know, he has that particular vision where everything's reversed." And I sort of tested him in a number of ways, and he didn't, but I had this enormous desire just to even take his hand and say, "Look, it goes that way." And I think the music student expected it, because many of them I'm sure that the music professors will say, "Look, when you hold the bow of the violin, you hold it this way." And the only thing as a teacher of drawing that you can do is to demonstrate how to hold the chalk. I mean, you don't go up to someone, really and show them how.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah.

ALICE BABER: I guess you could, but....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, a music teacher would bend your finger in the way....

ALICE BABER: That's right. Or hit them with a little hammer or something. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, they really bend your fingers in the way....

ALICE BABER: Oh, really?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yes, to hold the bow, because you have to hold it a certain way to control it. Otherwise, you don't....

ALICE BABER: That's right. Well, I discovered that some of my music students wanted me to literally bend their fingers, and they could not learn by copying.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you, but you can't.... What if.... Holding a bow is a sense of feel....

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...and you can't get it by looking.

ALICE BABER: No, but, holding a piece of chalk is also a sense of feel....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: ...but the angle at which you hold it can be observed by looking, and you can't make somebody hold a chalk with the kind of delicacy that it requires to get that line. I think. Although I'm perfectly willing to try on somebody someday.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But a bow is such a mechanical....

ALICE BABER: Yes. I think that the difference between performance and sort of trying to pull it outside, from the inside or something, must be different.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, it is.

ALICE BABER: You obviously played, what, the violin?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Once, yeah, hmm.

ALICE BABER: [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I have a note here you did something at the Ecole des Beaux Arts at one point, but no dates. Is that fiction, or bad dates, or....

ALICE BABER: Well, that's interesting, because I didn't. Unless I.... I used to go to theÄI still do sometimesÄto the Cafe des Beaux Arts. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, no, no. The other one's in Paris.

ALICE BABER: Or the Hotel des Beaux Arts.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, this is in Paris.

ALICE BABER: Ecole de Beaux Arts? You mean, the Beaux Arts verit,, the real thing, huh?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, in Paris, yeah.

ALICE BABER: No. Yeah, I think it might have been interesting to do that. Where'd you pick that up?

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't know. I get all these bits of material some way; I don't always keep the source. You spent really quite a period of time in New York before you started to travel, didn't you?

ALICE BABER: Yes. I was here straight through, I guess, until '58.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's like five years?

ALICE BABER: Umm.... Well, it was longer than that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Roughly.

ALICE BABER: '52 to '58. Is that '59? Can you read that bio?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ALICE BABER: Is that five years?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Seven, yeah.

ALICE BABER: It seems longer than five.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Seven. When did you start showing? Because the earliest thing that I've been able to find is in a Stable Annual of 1957.

ALICE BABER: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was the first kind of public adventure.

ALICE BABER: Um hmm.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that happen? Because those were....

ALICE BABER: Although, I think it.... I'd have to look at my biographical notes. I think I was in the Stable Annual before '57. Earlier. Somewhere along the line.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you must've known somebody who'd been in it, because it was usually people....

ALICE BABER: Yes. I was selected by David Hare. Let me see what I have written here. This is for [last year], of course. Group shows. Here we go. That's what it says, '57. That must've been where you got it. Well, for whatever.... I think it was a little bit before that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ALICE BABER: I really should change that, that's true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Should find out. Well, let's see, because you lived, where, on Leroy Street? [So you were \_\_\_\_\_, Or were you already gone from].... Not Leroy Street?

ALICE BABER: No, I lived, and still do, on Bedford Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Bedford Street, right.

ALICE BABER: Bedford Mews, the courtyard behind Bedford Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. I know lots of art people who've lived in that area.

ALICE BABER: I know very few. The Village by then was sort of depleted. All the artists [that] lived and worked on 10th Street.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, but there were not a.... Well, there were literary people who lived over

there, that's right. I knew writers.

ALICE BABER: Not that many.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, I mean, I knew writers who lived over there in that....

ALICE BABER: Well, let's see, on my block we have Elizabeth McCausland and.... Yes, there were and are a number of writers. But in a way, you see, it wasn't such a good neighborhood for painters, because those rooms are not....

PAUL CUMMINGS: They're little.

ALICE BABER: ...and the ceilings aren't high enough for painting. My place happened to have a high ceiling, but it was small, and as soon as I could I got a studio on Thompson Street, I think it was, across from the church. Which I had for a number of years, until I was thrown out by the City Marshall, which is an interesting experience.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that happen?

ALICE BABER: Well, it was my own fault, because I didn't pay the rent for a month—I forgot to pay the rent—and apparently they can come in and tear the door down and take out your stuff, anything that isn't on the bed. And I had removed the bed. So they did something that was illegal. They couldn't take the big paintings out, so they chopped them apart and destroyed them. And little paintings, though they took very carefully and painstakingly down to the garbage center where they preserved them, they would've sold them at auction—a week early, which would also have been illegal—but I did luckily find out in time, went down, retrieved my paintings. And the shock was pretty great, because I did lose some work [in that].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Incredible. Yeah, that whole....

ALICE BABER: I paid my rent more faithfully.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, that whole city marshal business is a real disaster.

ALICE BABER: You mean it's happened to you?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but I know of so many people who have had problems.

ALICE BABER: It's happened to people, I think, who for one reason or another have gone to Europe, and their letters gone astray, or whatever—which was sort of my situation at the time. I wasn't here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, what did you do those first few years, besides working and painting? You know, what was life like in New York for you?

ALICE BABER: Well, I lived near a.... As a matter of fact, there was a sculptor from Indiana who moved in near me in the Cherry Lane property. His name is Jack Squier and he now teaches at Cornell. And Jack said to me one day, "Why don't you go The Artists' Club?" And I had been to one session a year before, and I hadn't known anyone, but someone had given me Peter Grippe's name, and I had called Peter Grippe. They knew Peter Grippe because he had been connected with.... Oh,

who's the man who does the graphics in Paris? You know, the graphics man. But he'd had...

PAUL CUMMINGS: [Stanley Ed.] Hayter.

ALICE BABER: Yes. They said, you know, Grippe's.... I don't know what the connection was, but it was connected in someone's mind. So Peter Grippe, of course.... A perfectly strange voice called him on the telephone, and he said, "Yes," you know, I could come to The Club. So I did, but I really didn't know anyone. And I sort of observed and it was interesting, but I didn't go back for a while, and then Jack sort of said to me, "Well, why don't you go up to The Club," and I did go quite faithfully after that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When would that have been?

ALICE BABER: Well, The Club sort of fell apart in one of those years, but I kept going anyway. Let's see, I went sort of all the way.... As soon as I started going I kept going.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you remember where it was when you first started really going to it?

ALICE BABER: Well, that first session was on 8th Street, and then the next time when I started going faithfully every week it was on Broadway. And then Philip [Guston Ed.] quit, and then about that time we moved to 14th Street, and John was running it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: And I did a lot of program planning at that time, with Irv Sandler. I did a program.... I suggested a program on color, and I did a panel in which I asked museum directors to come and speak, which was very amusing, [I must say]. I did a panel that I enjoyed enormously and some people did and some didn't. To this day, they still complain. It was a demonstration of a Noh play....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really?

ALICE BABER: ...done in brown kimono, which is, you know, tuxedo for Japanese, with what [the] gestures mean and with an interpreter from the Japan Society. And naturally this was too far afield for some artists, and others remember it well. So I did do a lot of work, and I also helped do the mailings to get people to come and all that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think The Club meant to you as a young artist coming to New York, having access to it in those days?

ALICE BABER: Well, as Wally Reese said to me once, it sort of proved that we existed for that week. You know, I mean, in the sense that you existed in terms of other people. He said, "You know, there we are in our studios all day long and all night and it's fairly lonely, and then you come to The Club and you just say 'Hello' to somebody else and then you go home, but you feel that you've met some other people." And I liked it because, well, first of all, in those days all the artists that I had heard about or read about or whose work I admired went to The Club, so I could go and look at the face of the sage. It was one of my pleasures. And then people would get in [panels] and they would sort of scold each other, and it was very interesting. There was always that lively quality. Then there were a couple of people, like Louis Finkelstein and John Ferren, who would use expressions that I had never heard before, and I am not sure I've still heard them, but anyway....

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: I was intrigued by this extension of my vocabulary. And then there was a way of talking that I had never heard, that Milton Resnick practiced, a kind of an ellipse of, you know, ideas. And I asked Marca-Relli once why so many of the artists did that, and he said, "Because they got it from Picasso," which is really hilarious.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Of course, de Kooning is I think one of the great speakers of all time—you know, he's absolutely fabulous. He has a tendency to make abrupt statements, which have a certain life of their own. I don't know if other people were involved. I think everyone was just involved in their own language, really. And it was interesting to hear how they talked about art, or how they.... Or even how they felt about language, because sometimes they didn't want to talk about art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: And then there were the ones who were drunk who would come in and insult other people, or.... Some of the younger artists who felt upset; I think they didn't feel that they were very important. I didn't suffer from that, because I had all this proper humility, you see. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did you get to know people like [Landes—Ed.] Lewitin?

ALICE BABER: Oh, sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...who, you know, [is some part of it].

ALICE BABER: And then of course Lewitin would always come to look at your work and to tell you what was wrong with it. I didn't have a tendency to invite people to my studio—either was shy or I didn't feel I was strong enough for that kind of thing—but I know my first show [\_\_\_\_\_—Ed.], on 10th Street, Landes came in and he looked at one of these paintings, and he said, "Now, this is interesting, but...." And he talked about the division of the space. He said.... It was, as a matter of fact, a cow's skull, which was sort of placed diagonally on the canvas, and he said, "This space in the corner, of the horn on one side, and this space over here are too similar," or whatever. You know, we talked about that kind of thing, and [he, it] was very interesting. And he.... He's the one who said that you can't use green. I was very upset by this, and I asked Ray [Placewicz]. I was at Ray's studio and Ray was using green, and I said, "Ray, do you know you're not supposed to use green?" And Ray said, "Oh, aren't you?" So that was the end of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: But what I found out much later was that I think Landes got the idea of green from Mondrian himself, whom he must have known, or from reading Mondrian. Because Mondrian's the only artist I know who said, you know, green is not to be used. So there was all kinds of, you know, that kind of thing, where you were sort of pursuing other people's madnesses; it was always very interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, did your first one-man show at the March Gallery, on 10th Street.

ALICE BABER: Right. Yes. That's the show that Landes criticized the cow's head.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. And those are really kind of the high years of 10th Street, weren't they?

ALICE BABER: Well, I caught 10th Street as it was going slightly down.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I mean, but this was.... What was that, nineteen-fifty.... What was the year of the show? '58.

ALICE BABER: Well, let's say it was in its Golden Age then. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because I know by '61 or '2 it was pretty old.

ALICE BABER: Well, I was gone. The Tanager Gallery had been such an admirable place. And my only complaint about them now is that I feel that they did help destroy 10th Street, for purposes of their own, as they got more and more irritable with other galleries starting. Okay, so they accepted the Camino and the March and all these other galleries. But they finally would not open the same night, and if you don't have a kind of festive night there's not much point in it. Do you remember when they changed their night?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, right.

ALICE BABER: And I think after that it just couldn't be the same.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I think also that the generation was changing, the economics were changing, that people who had struggled through 10th Street, who were being picked up by uptown galleries—they were leaving New York, in some cases—that.... You know, the Tanager did exist for ten years, shoot.

ALICE BABER: Well, they were the pioneer, that's what I mean, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ALICE BABER: And they may have felt a little exaltedly. The other galleries I felt at the time were serving a very important function, and I think it's happened again in SoHo and I find it very exciting. I think that cooperative galleries are absolutely essential for an art scene, and I, like the others, I was just in the process of being asked to be in an uptown show—out of 10th Street. But I believed in 10th Street, a lot more than most people did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I don't know. I think a more people did than really wanted to admit it.

ALICE BABER: Well, I never understood why they even had lip service against it. Because people do. They feel in some way that the whole thing was sort of murky. I don't know why.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I don't think so. I think it served a great purpose, and I think the fact that they would do those Spring shows or Christmas shows, you know, and deKooning would always lend a little not-for-sale drawing, and things, you know....

ALICE BABER: Yes, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...brought a lot of people there.

ALICE BABER: Well, sure it did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, because those festive nights the street was jammed with people. You couldn't go anywhere without running over somebody.

ALICE BABER: I think that the art world is alive as long as we have that—as long as we have a club, a night, a place to go—and we haven't had it for a few years. And I think that we ought to have it



again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, one thing that's always intrigued me is that there's never been a cafe life in New York the way there has been in Paris, or even in London or Rome.

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And the Cedar Bar, which was the place.... [laughter]

ALICE BABER: The place, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...where everybody went, served a purpose, but it seemed to really cut off at a certain point.

ALICE BABER: The trouble with the Cedar Bar, as I look back on it, was that, unlike a cafe in Paris where if you're rather shy you can always go take the table in the corner and sort of sit there and it's all right....

PAUL CUMMINGS: You couldn't at the Cedar.

ALICE BABER: The Cedar Bar, if you walked in the door.... Like you made your grand entrance, complete with remarks. Friends had to come to your aid, your enemies hitting you, and whatever. But it was.... Because of one night I was brave enough to go and sit in the Cedar Bar, and sort of take my medicine by making myself sit there—I feel the same way about going to movies so.... you know, everyone else's pleasure is my pain. But, that was the night that Phillip sort of went round and asked all the people that he saw and knew if they'd like to be in the March Gallery. And I was very pleased. And then I asked [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] Zogbaum.... You know, we thought it would be nice to get some of the other artists who didn't have a gallery at that moment, or who did, or whoever would be interested in showing. And Zog asked Elaine de Kooning, and so forth. So it quickly, you know, increased. And of course our rent was thirty dollars a month, or something like that, so that your dues were three dollars a month. And I was.... Pat [Catalog] called me one Saturday and she said, "Come over and help sweep the floor." And I had worked all week and I didn't want to sweep the floor on Saturday, I wanted to paint. So I worked out a scheme. I said I'll be treasurer. I knew it was the one job everyone hates. As a matter of fact, I'm terrible with figures, I can't keep my own books, but I did a very good job there. And I think I made both friends and enemies, because I sent out humorous notes about.... I can't imagine how they were humorous now, but they really were. You know, "Pay up now, or else," that sort of thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: And everybody paid except Paul Georges, who was an honorary—because he couldn't help it—member of the March Gallery for about a year. And Felix [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] would not take him off the list, and I don't.... Maybe Paul finally paid.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how could he be an honorary member?

ALICE BABER: Well, because he didn't send his dues.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see, that way. [laughter]

ALICE BABER: Yeah.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So by not paying you become honorary?

ALICE BABER: [laughter] Well, naturally.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not honorable.

ALICE BABER: That's exactly.... There is a difference. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, the March was, what.... Was that organized by Felix, then?

ALICE BABER: Yes, absolutely. And Felix's energy did the whole thing, because it was in his building. He was sort of snooping around his own building one day, and he found this basement....

PAUL CUMMINGS: The space, yeah.

ALICE BABER: ...that was filthy, that was thirty dollars a month—and everybody perked up at that. I mean, what could you get even then for thirty dollars a month? So when he called us all together, he said, "Here's the deal...."—you know, we all met in this horrible space—and he said, "All right, now we have to paint it and fix it up," and that had to do with sweeping the floor, too. Well, we all did. I mean, a few weekends were spent, the painting, fixing it up.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Putting it together, yeah.

ALICE BABER: And I remember Felix saying, with his particular way of speaking, complaining bitterly that he had collected together a bunch of intellectuals who couldn't hammer a nail. [laughter] But someone must've hammered a nail. We finally, we got it. It went very well.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How long did that exist then, with those people?

ALICE BABER: Well, I don't know. It's funny, you see, I can't remember when it ended. It's sort of open-ended for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you were associated with it how long?

ALICE BABER: I was associated I suppose two or three years. And then I was in Paris, but I was.... I mean, that's the kind of thing where I would have sent my dues if it was still going on. But I think the people who started it probably managed to stay with it for a couple of years. Felix then got disinterested at some point and later went off to Mexico and whatever. And I don't really know. But like all the galleries, you see, people who were in them changed fairly frequently.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Do you think that a similar kind of ambiance has developed in SoHo now? I mean, the galleries are larger and there's international.... I mean, there's a lot more money, which is about as different as you can be from 10th Street. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Yeah, right. Yes. That's what I like about SoHo now. As I said, I think....

PAUL CUMMINGS: The community.

ALICE BABER: I think it's absolutely essential to be able to go out in the street, see other artists wandering around, buying their art supplies, or whatever they're doing. And the galleries that are somehow unofficial—and even unsung—where if you have a show and if you can get your friends and your peers to come, you can still have a show that people will remember and talk about. As a few friends still do about my show at the March Gallery. I mean, people will still say to me, "I

remember such and such a painting," and of course I think they're wonderful that they can remember, and I find it extraordinary. But I think it is true in SoHo. I wish there were more galleries. And I think the problem now of course is probably press coverage. We desperately need, I think, writing and press and small magazines printed on the same level as SoHo itself—magazines that have to be backed and, you know, whatever. And there isn't one and never has been.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there was It Is at one point.

ALICE BABER: Well, sure, but It Is, you see, was in itself really a rather well done magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Grand.

ALICE BABER: Yes, exactly. And so its intention was that it would be.... I have always thought that it would be good to get everybody writing, for better or worse, about each other. Artists writing about artists on a level where if the, we Xerox it, you see. Because I think that by the time it finally, the whole thing, gets in the magazine—of course, right now the magazines are in crisis because.... Apparently they're in crisis, because they don't review very much—or the reviews are like three lines.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, either that or they review four people and they each get half a column and the rest of it's photographs.

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some of their \_\_\_\_\_ production costs have gotten to be horrendous.

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. I mean, and just the paper, that used to be the least expense, now when you get an estimate from a printer, it seems to cost more than anything else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I talked to an editor friend of mine this morning, and he said in the last year their paper prices have doubled, and they have to reserve paper now for books that they're going to print in October and November. [chuckles]

ALICE BABER: Well, yes, you see, in my January show I had a brochure that was done in Pennsylvania by a printer recommended to me [\_\_\_\_\_ Ed.] Sothegar and he had done all this research around town and he found a splendid printer. And I called the printer and I told him, "Stand by for the brochure," and when the time came to print it he put it on coated stock on both sides, and I said, "Well, my people don't like that because the stamps don't stick." And he said, "Well, you either get that or nothing, because that's the paper that I have left over from something else, and I've ordered the other kind, but it hasn't come in." So now that I'm having a show in about a week, at another gallery, they said, "Would please get hold of the printer," and so forth, because they had liked the brochure. So I called them up and, yes, the price had doubled for the whole thing—in terms of quantity. I mean, I had like 3,000 in January, and for this show there's 2,000. And I think it's the paper cost as much as anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, paper and printing and everything.

ALICE BABER: Oh, everything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, it's.... The art book for forty dollars, with lots of color plates, you've seen the last of them.

ALICE BABER: Not if they're remaindered.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but they're not even possible to produce them anymore.

ALICE BABER: Oh, I know. I mean, the rumor is of course all around town that all art books are stopping. And I think that's terribly sad because....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Unless they're subsidized.

ALICE BABER: ...in a way we have had this art reproduction kind of world of art that we've lived [on]....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, portable art world.

ALICE BABER: Portable art world, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's terrible. I mean, through my activity with publishers, I'm astounded at what's happened to costs within the last three or four year. It's really incredible. And now with the devaluation of the money it's no longer cheaper to print in Japan, or Italy or....

ALICE BABER: Oh, really. Oh, is that's what's happening?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, sure, I mean, that's the other thing that's happening.

ALICE BABER: Well, I can tell you, a terrific printer up in [Lancaster], Pennsylvania, now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Good. Anyway, getting back to the March Gallery here, what kind of reactions did you have from your first show? You know, what was it like, I mean, having....

ALICE BABER: Well, first of all, I think that my friends in the art world were very positive, and they were very pleased that I had a show, and there was that whole feeling that you have when you've done something, where you're getting enormous support and encouragement. And I was just very glad that I had had it. I found that it was hard work to have a show. You know, there were a lot of things, a

spellcheck done of draft???

...hm .66"

Tape 1, side A (continued)

lot of obstacles, but I was very.... I've been very lucky, and I really should knock on all kinds of wood. Generally speaking, I've had good criticism when I've shown. And I always feel terribly grateful that I've never gotten....

Tape 2, side A

[The traffic noise on this tape side is substantially increased and some of the nuances of conversation are lost.ÄTrans.]

ALICE BABER: ...[severe or harsh criticismÄEd.] at least at any time when I'm particularly vulnerable, and I think one is usually vulnerable, you know, one way or another?

PAUL CUMMINGS: You sure are, sure. Because there's your life.

ALICE BABER: Yeah. And in a way, I mean, you're putting up these things and you're saying that this is what you do and this is what you care about, and so you're absolutely a sitting victim if anybody wants to let you have it. And so I've always been very grateful, really, that I've had people

write about my work who often gave me an insight into what I had done. In other words, it had added a dimension to it in some way, rather than the business of saying....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? That's interesting, yeah. That's unusual, because so many people seem bitter about the criticism they've gotten, even if it's good.

ALICE BABER: [laughs] Yeah, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: "I only got two columns," you know, "It should've been a full page." [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Well, I'm trying to think. I remember John Ashbery wrote something for me in Paris once, in which he described my colors, and he talked, I think, if I remember, about the cool... Something like the cool blue and purples of the yeah, expressionist palette. And I didn't think of myself as an expressionist, and yet I've always like expressionism, I mean, you know, but I'm always sort of intrigued byÄparticularly of poet-writersÄby the kind of vision that they have of this.

BABER, ALICE

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, just to kind of go through the exhibition aspects of all of this, you then went off to Paris, right, sometime? When did you go off to Paris?

ALICE BABER: In '58, I believe.

PAUL CUMMINGS: '58. And you had exhibitions there at various places, right? You had one there?

ALICE BABER: I had one at the....

PAUL CUMMINGS: '63.

ALICE BABER: Right. The English Library was the first one-man show. I had a four-man show at Carl [Flinger], and I was chosen to be in the [June] Biennale one year, when that was just getting started. It was the second year of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Second one. How did you like being a young American artist in Paris in those days? Because the New York art "mafia" were taking over the world by that time, almost, and my experience through correspondence and things is that European artists were very defensive about their position.

ALICE BABER: Well, that's interesting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...and you were there, and you were exhibiting and sort of had become involved with the French arts world to some extent, and what happened, what was the kind of reaction about?

ALICE BABER: [You] didn't find them defensive, I mean if anything I was defensive. I mean, Paris was a very tough, strong town, and I felt like they were in it, you know, they had the barricades already there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but still you exhibited, you were in some of the important group exhibitions there.

ALICE BABER: We were always the etranger, there's no doubt about it. And the international art world there is very amusing, but you know that you're never part of, the sort of the French scene

[because] the French scene is itself basically the bourgeois family life, which isn't leading anyway. So one always feels in many ways a kind of marvelous sense that you're outside of the society. And I think when you're not in your own country that it's quite pleasant in a way, to feel that you're your own person and that you're sort of untouched by all.... In France I think you always feel that they don't really want you, you see, but then you're not sure that you want to take on all the responsibilities that are involved with being one of them. So I think that this has always been the advantage of being in the so-called international world in Paris. And when I went, I suppose there was probably an advantage in the fact that American art had achieved some recognition because possibly we were reported to respect that—you know, that at least we'd come of age in America, or something like that. But I didn't have quite the sense that you've described. I mean, I felt very much.... I was absolutely unknown and felt sort of unwelcomed. However, as soon as I did show, I remember getting a very nice critical article in Le Monde describing again the color in my work. And when I went back many years later with another show—I think it was four or five years later, which in New York is a length of time where, you know, you might as well be dead—and the critic from Le Monde—another critic, actually; I mean, a different set of initials—described my work and described how the yellows were different from the yellows four years before or the reds were different.... I mean, it was incredible, this kind of precision and memory that was involved. So you see once you're established in Paris they don't forget you. And so it's well worth making this effort to be part of that scene, whatever it is. In New York, I mean, you constantly sort of have to keep showing up. But what I didn't like about Paris was that I thought I could never do anything there. I could never get a bunch of people together and start a cooperative gallery. You know, the activity always seemed limited to me. Except, one night, Pierre [Soulage, Soulange] also agreed that not enough was going on and that we ought to do something at one of the restaurants, like they used to have in the banquet years, kind of thing, something a little more on the cafe, where the artists could get together and perhaps.... Again, it was the American artists offering like the idea of the club night, and Pierre and a few artists who, like Pierre, were in favor of this. And we just sort of didn't get it done. But of course Pierre was also the person who was very instrumental in getting the big show of all the artists in for a time called [Les Sirens de Pendon], which was a show like the [Salon de May], only it was a.... The museum was being used by artists nobody knew, and the show had no spirit or wasn't known about, so we all sort of took over and everybody put a painting in that show. And then it became a lively show. ]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you meet Paul in all of this?

ALICE BABER: I met him in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Soon after you were here?

ALICE BABER: No, no. Not until about '58.

PAUL CUMMINGS: '58. [writes a note?—Trans.] I can't remember all those years. [laughter] But you know.... Well, he had been to Paris before, hadn't he, if I remember?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that he knew people there. Was that advantageous? I mean, did it make life simpler, do you think? Or not?

ALICE BABER: Well, he had, he had already met and fought with Dubuffet. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: So, yes, in a way, of course. He did know a number of people. But I don't think you ever know as many people in Paris as you know in New York.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Why so?

ALICE BABER: Well, I think that one's circle in Paris is always fairly small.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Maybe people aren't as gregarious, or something.

ALICE BABER: Yes, for some reason. I mean, in spite of the cafe life.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's more ritualistic, yeah.

ALICE BABER: That's freer, but.... New York is a continuous floating crap game, there's no doubt about it. And in Paris they have all these things—closing the doors at night, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Lock up the city.

ALICE BABER: Um hmm.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, how'd you like living there? Because you didn't live there for one period, didn't you, and sort of going back and forth?

ALICE BABER: I didn't like it when I first went there, and then I liked it very much at the end. But I think for me Paris is a city that it's slow to get to know. I was never enamored of it as many people are when they go and they think it's very beautiful—umm, compared to Venice, I mean, well, Paris is beautiful. [embarrassed chuckle] I mean, it doesn't seem extraordinary to me, Paris, it always seems.... It got so it felt like home, or a perfectly natural kind of place to be. And since New York is kind of monumental—I mean, everything here is so heavy—the buildings and the size and.... There's something sort of totally grandiose here, so that you tend to fall into it and then you don't think about [what has happened, what's happening]. In Paris, the fact that the buildings are only so high and there are a certain number of trees, seemed normal—like that's the way one ought to live. But I think have a bit of Mondrian in me. I really like the city. The country doesn't appeal to me. I think just because the place has trees is not enough. And after all those vistas in Paris [are from the] nineteenth century, so....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: I think I would've like Paris when it was all like the Marais, you know. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really early.

ALICE BABER: A mess. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Well, you had a show in London....

ALICE BABER: Yes, that was an interesting thing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...at the New Vision Center, which was always a rather interesting place, I understand.

ALICE BABER: Very much so.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that come about?

ALICE BABER: Well, I was in London for a show of American artists at the Embassy. And we had then a man in London who was superb, called Stephan Munsing. He still is. He still is involved with art one way or another at the State Department, and so forth. And sometimes he gets sent off and in sort of an ambassadorial something or other. I think he's back in Denmark at the moment. Usually he's involved with art. And I met him because [AdolphÄEd.] Gottlieb told me in Paris that.... He said, "There's this wonderful man in London who is so helpful." He said, "When I had a show in London, he helped me to do a lithograph that was in the Tube," or something like that. Anyway, I knew in advance, because of Gottlieb, that Stephan was there. So I went over to see him as soon as I got to London, and he was very friendly and he said, "I'm having a cocktail party here tonight. Come." And of course, all the English artists were there. And I met some of my best friends, still very friendly with. For example, Anthea [Alley], who is a sculptor and whose husband is the Deputy Keeper of the Tate. But anyway, I mean, like all the.... And you see he created this scene where the British artists got to know any artists that were traveling through town. And then he had a show of American artists at the Embassy. And I had a painting in that show. And I was in London and Dennis Bowen, who is from the New Vision, showed up and said to me, "Would you like a show?" and I said, "Sure." So we did that, shortly after that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You really didn't show then in New York till you got involved with Abe Sachs, did you?

ALICE BABER: No, I didn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it was quite a while in between shows.

ALICE BABER: That's right. You see, when I left it would have been about the time that I would've really....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Kept on.

ALICE BABER: ...probably kept moving in the New York scene and.... I didn't.... No, I didn't have a place to show and so when Abe started the gallery I was asked at some point if I would like to show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did he find you, do you know? Or did you find him, or....

ALICE BABER: Yes, I do. It was Sigmund [\_\_\_\_\_ÄEd.].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, really? Oh, that's right, you worked for him for quite a while.

ALICE BABER: Ruth worked for him at that time, and she called up some of her friends, and she and Abe had long since stopped working together. By the time I went to the gallery. But he, having met the artists and so forth, would continue of course to talk and.... At one point I said, "Well, I'm going to Paris and I'd like a show when I come back," and he set the date and I had it, oh, I think that.... About a year after he had opened.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you like having him as your dealer?

ALICE BABER: Oh, he's a very good dealer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, he's done well for you and been able to keep things going?



ALICE BABER: Yes, he's done well for me and I think he has done well as a dealer and for all his artists. I mean, I think he has a very good eye. He has a good eye for color when he looks at paintings. And I think his choice of stable has by and large been quite interesting all this time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some of the people I know he's done astoundingly well for, they merit their own terms....

ALICE BABER: Right, right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...you know, what he's been able to do.

ALICE BABER: Well, I've always felt that he fulfilled one of the needs of the kind of galleries we ought to have in New York. I mean, when I started, he was beginning, and I was beginning to show, too, so it was a good moment. But he also has never had a sort of rigid policy about taking only new young swinging artists or old established artists, or whatever, but he has always had a sort of melange of various people whose work he's liked. And I remember many times when I've been pleased when he'll tell me that someone is coming into the gallery—like Nick Marsicano, I mean, I'm terribly happy. You know, he shows Nick.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find he's been able to get pictures into museum collections or major exhibitions for you, or do you find a lot of people come to you directly on those, these kinds of requests?

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. Well, he does a lot of that work. A gallery has been all along quite essential to that kind of thing. I know museum directors who simply believe in the gallery system as a way of selecting the people they show. In other words, they wouldn't show unless....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Pre-selection, right.

ALICE BABER: Yes. I think that's a little discouraging, but it does exist. And it's so very convenient to have a gallery for people like that. And of course I'm downtown, the gallery's uptown, and a lot of museums' work is done by someone visiting the gallery uptown. You know, the work is representative. And of course the gallery's in touch with lots of people that I'm not because of all the correspondence. On the other hand, there are a number of museums that one way or another do write directly to the artist because they've seen the name, usually in an art magazine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah.

ALICE BABER: I get a certain amount of that kind of mail. And then I arrange with the gallery and I—you know, we arrange about sending a painting—or whatever it is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you continued showing abroad very much, or not? Recently?

ALICE BABER: Yes. I do continue showing abroad. I had a show in Paris three summers ago. Time does fly, doesn't it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um hmm.

ALICE BABER: That's when I went back to see that people had not forgotten at all. And that.... I think the next summer I had a show in Germany, in Hamburg. And I would like to have a show soon in India. I have a gallery there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which one?

ALICE BABER: It's Menderashen. That's the name of the owner. The gallery is in the Akbar Hotel. And it's I think a very good gallery. I was very pleased. I just have to tell him a few months before I come. [laughter] Which we're going to do, then come, we have to think. I've been now three.... When I go this fall—you see, I've got it all planned in my mind—that'll be my third trip.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you first go there?

ALICE BABER: In '64, I think it was. I went to Japan and India. And of course I was very pleased because it was sort of the desire of my life to go to India. Of course, I didn't object to going to Japan either. I thought it really incredible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you showed with the Gutai Group there, didn't you?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How was that?

ALICE BABER: The Gutai was.... It's a fascinating place. It's run by a man who was doing abstract art in about 1931. And he has run this museum for a long time. It's sort of.... It's his interest and he backed it in every way. His name is Yoshihara. And they usually.... I think at that time there were about twenty young artists working there, showing their work. It's a cooperative kind of thing. And they had done very interesting things in the middle '50s, for which they only had eight-millimeter films. They really ought to have made them bigger. But where a lot of Japanese artists have done happenings—about the same time as here, or before. It certainly was almost the same moment. I found that the Japanese artists that I met believed the myth about themselves, that they were copyists, and I tried to tell them that I thought that that was nonsense and to not bother mentioning it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Copyist in what way?

ALICE BABER: We got.... Well, the Japanese are very famous for copying things and then for being able to duplicate something they have seen somewhere else. And I became very interested in the whole problem of shibui in Japan. The fact that by the late nineteenth century the German dyes had hit the entire world so that you have it in Kabuki posters, and you have American Indians using [diamond] dyes in buffalo robes, and God knows the trade cloths going to Africa and whatever else, in South America. I don't know if it affected weaving in South America. I still have to investigate it \_\_\_\_\_.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like those designs....

ALICE BABER: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...that came from Scotland and \_\_\_\_\_.

ALICE BABER: Yeah. And I think that's very exciting because that's the kind of color I happen to love. And when I'm in India I feel as if I have really come home because....

PAUL CUMMINGS: The color.

ALICE BABER: ...I am surrounded by the color that seems to me to be the way life really is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, you know, it's interesting to kind of talk about color, which you've mentioned so often. The March Gallery show was similar to these, wasn't it, but they were softer.

ALICE BABER: The first show at March Gallery?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Let me see, I can't....

ALICE BABER: Well, yes and no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I trying to.... I can't remember. I must've seen it but I wanted to....

ALICE BABER: They were as abstract as they are—almost. Most of them, except for the one Penny and Atlantis [\_\_\_\_\_ Ed.] picked. They were still lives, sort of floating in space. One painting, called The Battle of the Oranges, was a series of circles floating in.... Struggling in.... Without a kind of gravity. And the colors were reds and yellows and oranges. And I think they related to the painting that's over there....

PAUL CUMMINGS: [The top]....

ALICE BABER: ...which is all red, which was the next step, really. But they were also still.... The paint was still fairly heavy. In places. It would be thin and then it would be thick.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that's fairly thin, [that one].

ALICE BABER: Yeah, by that time it was thin. And that's '59, '60, '61. And those were also done in Paris.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So that when you began showing it was really abstract?

ALICE BABER: Well, I showed a painting, a still life, at the March Gallery in a group show, that Tom Hess picked up and mentioned in an article in which he was making a distinction between manner and style. And he said something about my painting had style and Rocco Argento's sculpture, had manner. So....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

ALICE BABER: You know, for example. And so I.... And that the painting that I showed at the Stable Gallery was a red man, so I would say that the first work that people saw was figurative.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But then it went.

ALICE BABER: No, I don't think it's gone. I think it's still.... I think my painting still has a feeling of passage, or something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um hmm. No, but, I mean that you haven't followed a very obvious figurative tradition. In other words....

ALICE BABER: Well, my intention from the very beginning was to try to find a way that didn't remind me of a thousand other people that I had seen. And I think that that's one of the problems that we have today. I was on a panel that Will Barnet called at the Art Students League last year about quality in art. And I thought and thought about what I thought quality was, and finally I decided it was that repetition is not quality. And I think that.... I think I am easily bored by something I have already seen. So my ideal is to do something that's off the beaten track and even if I can

eccentric—something really unusual. I don't think that one has to, that you attempt it consciously, because then it becomes sort of a goal in itself. I think you keep searching hopefully for a metaphor that just doesn't sound too familiar. And in doing that, I think all kinds of things happen to the visual material.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it's interesting that you had made a choice like that. Was that an intellectual choice or a choice that came through working and reading and looking and talking, or was it a.... I mean, were you....

ALICE BABER: You mean, the sort of the multiple metaphor kind of way?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Was that....

ALICE BABER: Well, for example....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or did it kind of develop, and then all of a sudden it became apparent to you?

ALICE BABER: Probably a little of both. I remember doing a series of figures when I first came to New York, when my friends and I used to pose for each other, and we all would be tired, so that by the time you get around to posing, usually we would be in a sleeping position.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: So I painted a friend of mine, which I called Ursula Sleeping, because of my admiration for the Carpaccio. And the only connection with the Carpaccio that has anything to do with composition was that it was a recumbent figure. And I think that that figure, as I look at it now, as.... It's horizontal and it resembles really a mountainscape. So you see everything for me is not one thing, but a dozen other things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it's metamorphosis, in a way?

ALICE BABER: Yes. A metamorphosis that retains all of the images along the way, so it doesn't actually.... You don't end up with a conflict. Hopefully.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It can be this today....

ALICE BABER: [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...and tomorrow something else, and next week, "Oh, it's...." possibly something else.

ALICE BABER: Not in the sense of finding these new forms as you look at it, only in the sense of finding them as you're painting it. Because I was reading in Picasso's obituary a remark of one of the French poets—was it Valéry; I can't remember now which one—that said, "I write half a poem and the reader writes the other half." And Picasso wrote, said something to the effect of, "Well, that's nonsense. I paint the entire painting and that's it."

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: "Nobody's supposed to read anything into it." I think I would pick a percentage somewhere between that. I think that if I paint something I paint it 80 to 90 percent, but I certainly leave some leeway—not for Rorschach testing so much as for the movement of the.... When you're

working on movement in color and form—or something of what I call the whole idea of colored wind moving across the canvas—then when you have a number of ideas a lot of things happen that may create their own kind of ambiguity within the structure, that may or may not lead to a reading of it in the sense of subject matter, traditional subject matter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you're not really involved with using traditional subject matter as a starting point, are you, in any way? Or a reference? I mean, you can look at these and just experience them—as movement and color and shape and all of the various things that happen—without having to look for specifics, can't you?

ALICE BABER: Yes. One of the things that I am interested in is the idea of the painting.... I feel that an abstract painting is outer space, and I am in front of it, suspended in outer space, so that there isn't any horizon line. However, there is probably a sense of up and down, and side to side. There is a sense of infinity, which I like very much. And I like the idea of infinity coming way forward, so that you have reverse infinity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm!

ALICE BABER: Which I just discovered in a Sonia Delaunay tapestry. I'm writing an article on her. I know her and I admire her work very much. And she just had a show, and so I'm trying to write about it. And I realized that she had this pink circle that really.... At first I thought, well, it goes back in, and [then I thought], no, it doesn't, and so forth. You know, then I got this other feeling. But I realized that I do like this idea of space doing all kinds of crazy things. And in that sense I like Baroque space, or at least shall we say broken Baroque—something. The unexpected. And I like an undulating surface instead of a picture frame. I like the feeling of light or wind flowing on an uneven surface, like the golden surface of a reliquary, so that here you see the saint's leg, there you don't. And I think when you get involved with these kinds of interests, that the subject matter is there certainly. For example, that painting over there is a called—it has a terrible title by mistake—called Icon Rock. And it came from an icon. I mean, that was sort of my influence. And I liked the rocks in Cappadocia, which is a place I like to go. I like the idea of the hermit in the cave, of course leading to El Greco figures and so forth, or the curved space behind the shape. So you have the figure, and the space comes around it. So in that the hermit is the dark shape, the cave itself is a light cave, and the rocks are sort of floating in the air. I mean, they're not underfoot; they're all over the place—sort of defying gravity. But it does have a definite reference to me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you think that that's apparent to somebody who comes across it somewhere?

ALICE BABER: Only if they ask me. Which is why I think it is a good idea to ask a living artist what they're doing. [laughter] I think that they would, that someone who knew me well would know. And I think.... First of all, you can read that painting: It's centered. There is a sense of figure in the middle. There is a sense of rock, in a way, because the shapes are not floating that much. They have some weight. And so maybe you don't think of it as actually a praying hermit, but it has some aspects of that, I think. You see, I'm not so sure there are so many subjects in our history anyway. For example, I frequently use my own version of a kind of Tiepolo curtain. I mean, there are all kinds of things—that I think you find as you're working. I don't think you start out to say, "Ah, today Tiepolo," at all. Nothing could be worse. But I think you should.... I think it's a good idea to recognize it when it appears.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, sort of going back again to the color and the use.... Color and the different things that happen with it. Didn't you develop a theory about your use of color over the

years?

ALICE BABER: Yes, I have, in the sense that I believe in using color from really the materials that we have. Unfortunately, we're limited in our colors. We have the rainbow, in various forms, and I think that what interests me in painting are the kind of transitions that you make from one color to the next. And if.... I'm interested in a way in a kind of.... The problems of halos, but not halation. I've never used flat patterns of color, say in Alber's technique, so forth. I have nothing against it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you mean you use pure colors, then?

ALICE BABER: Yes. I like the idea of color heightening as high as I can get it. I like warm colors, obviously. I like the problem of whether red will dominate, or it won't. Many of those paintings that were done in '58 are called Red Triumphs Over Green, and they were real struggles, you know. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: "There's green again," yeah.

ALICE BABER: Right. And then finally Green Triumphs Over Red. And I think that you start the day really thinking about a color. I decided one day that it all has to do with color memory, that anything that you remember well you remember in very vivid color, and anything that's particularly sort of gloomy becomes very gray. This has nothing to do with dreaming in color; that's something else. Either one does or one doesn't. My most interesting memories are in very brilliant color. I remember a day when I was four that it rained and it was green, everything. The rain was green, everything was green. And I remember looking at a sea shell when I was about three and everything was yellow. The whole world. And I think other people probably have somewhat similar feelings about color environment. You get it once in a while in a movie. Remember that Italian movie that attempted to do all the scenes in certain colors and ended up looking a little garish. I mean, it's not unheard of. It's Red Desert, or something. But it hasn't been experimented with very muchÄor written about.

[Interruption in taping]

PAUL CUMMINGS: This is side three. Anyway, continuing on the color, which there's a lot of, and you said you liked high....

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...color. And even, what, The Triptych, which is very dark colors, they're still very intense.

ALICE BABER: Well, intense may be a better word. The reason for that is that I have never been very interested, up until now, in the kind of color set in which you get in paintingÄlet's say, all gray and one slash red.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

ALICE BABER: And it's probably because as soon as I put in the slash of red I have immediately painted out all the gray bright red.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughter]

ALICE BABER: So having this problem, all I could do was use as many colors as possible with their full

intensity.... In other words, I like their full intensity.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't use black, do you?

ALICE BABER: No. I haven't used it for years. And I think, you see, that black in a way is not color. I find.... My theory is that I can get with a dark purple anything that I would get with black. I described that in that catalog that I wrote for a Color Forum show that I did at the University of Texas.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When was that?

ALICE BABER: Oh, three years ago. You haven't seen that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Uh uh.

ALICE BABER: I wrote an article about color, in which I described colored memory of my own that I thought would relate in a way to my work, going through each color. And later on I read something or other that Kandinsky wrote, which is not the same as mine, but I thought it was such a good way of showing it when I was doing it. But getting back to the black, I described black as reminding me of seeing a flag with a black stripe—I think one of the few flags that have a black stripe is a German flag—flying in a tulip garden in Amsterdam, and the sort of shock of the black stripe. And it's very exciting, but, again, it's like the red and the gray; it really stands out. It either comes way forward or goes way back in the painting. And somehow within my concept of the undulating surface, I'm not really into what black does.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there's one thing in again the—well, that triptych particularly—there's hardly any white ground visible....

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...whereas, in some of the other paintings, it seems to be, you know, it remains, or it's apparent, or it's [used].

ALICE BABER: I use the white ground in a number of ways. I often paint a painting until it tells me to stop, and sometimes the white ground still shows. In most cases, I try to make the white ground either a pattern, so that it can be both negative and positive space, or if not that perhaps an atmospheric wind moving the other colors and shapes around, or in a number of ways, but if it doesn't happen to appear, that's all right, too.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, one thing you use is the word "wind." How do you bring that into what happens on a canvas?

ALICE BABER: Well, I relate it to movement. Since I don't use very much line in a traditional sense, having that day, with the Goya Blacksmith, decided that line is very interesting but must be used wisely. I use a circle form, which I became interested in because of the oranges and so forth, I use [it—Ed.] in such a way that the elongation of the circle implies movement, and movement always in a line.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. It becomes an ellipse.

ALICE BABER: Yes. And the ellipse itself becomes a line, pointing across the space. And I prefer to have this look as if it's really been moved, or is moving, rather \_\_\_\_\_....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, there seems to be constant kind of charges of energy in certain directions through the paintings.

ALICE BABER: Yes, I guess that's what I mean by wind.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I see.

ALICE BABER: Another thing I think that the reason I use that term is that I went through a long thing trying to decide about the source of light, and the day that I decided that you didn't have to have one source, I was painting a series of blue men and dogs, out of The Marriage of Canaan, my own version of it, and in some way the dogs and the figures were all white and blue, sort of splotched all over, and it was in that painting that I realized that I didn't have to bother with the rules, in the sense of the source of light. On the other hand, I also would not get a three-dimensional painting, in a traditional sense.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When was that?

ALICE BABER: Oh, I don't know, '53 or so, '55.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, so it was an early discovery.

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes, yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fascinating. Well, I remember, seeing Oriental art objects around. Do you think they influenced you, or do you look at them for visual ideas, or are they just things that you like to have around as.... I've forgotten what you call that one right there, but.... Do they work in that way, or not?

ALICE BABER: Just one more thing about the man and the dogs picture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Okay.

ALICE BABER: Leo Steinberg saw it and he didn't think much of it at the time, but then, he was teaching drawing. But in his drawing class I think he was getting much better drawing out of his students. Anyway, back to the Oriental art. I don't use it consciously, but I think that it does have not so much an influence as the way I do a kind of critical analysis on my own work or on it there's some kind of tie. For example, in the tanka at the end of the room, in the center part of the mandala there is a square, and that particular tanka is rather recent—it's only fifty years old, I suppose, give or take a few years—and it's rather bright in color, compared to most tankas, and Bob Slusky looked at it and commented immediately on the positioning of the white diagonal, and the green and then the orange, you see, because he immediately read into the kind of thing that he loves in a painting. And I hadn't seen that before, and now when I see it I'm delighted with what Bob has seen in it. But I usually see something in it that's in my own work. I mean, whatever your eye starts picking up, you pick up wherever you're looking....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: ...and of course the other thing that you're looking at may be so great that you stop imposing any kind of prejudice at all. I mean, you're just sort of spellbound and timeless. But I think generally speaking the things that you have around you get sort mixed into your work in many ways.



PAUL CUMMINGS: What about drawing? Do you make drawings? Did you make drawings at one point, or....

ALICE BABER: Well, if anybody's doing a drawing show, yes, but actually, no. [laughter] I do lots and lots of watercolors, because, again, I'm not usually involved with line. And I sometimes.... And I'm not involved with black, so I don't really sort of run around doing charcoal circles, that sort of thing. However, I just got an idea for some drawings, and I'm going to do some very soon. And sometimes I'll do a kind of a sketch with an oil crayon. You know, if I'm in somebody's house and there's nothing else to work with and I'm desperate, I might use whatever is there, and I find that I've ended up with a kind of drawing. But it isn't something that I do systematically in my own studio. But I used to draw, and about three weeks ago all of my old work was suddenly returned from a place it had been in storage. And it was sort of a shock, as a matter of fact, because Ursula Sleeping emerged, and all those paintings suddenly showed up again, including the men and the dogs. And I saw lots and lots of drawings. And now I remember the experience that I had when I was drawing them. I had sort of forgotten them. But I tended to draw, you know, go to drawing class, and I didn't do finished drawings as much as.... I loved painting—I have always loved it—and the first day that I went into painting class in Indiana, I just picked up a brush and started to paint and Pickens said, "You must've been painting for years." Well, in a funny sort of way, I had—I mean, off and on—but not in the way he thought. But and I had friends who drew very well, and they never learned to paint. So I think, you know, one is talented in one way or the other.

PAUL CUMMINGS: There are a lot of American artists who draw very well who never really get going with their painting.

ALICE BABER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I've noticed there's a lot of very good people in the academic world, for some reason or another.

ALICE BABER: Well, you see, once you think of something in the sense of drawing, it's for some reason very hard to see it in a painterly way. I don't know why.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Except that, I guess that some people make very painterly drawings, you know.

ALICE BABER: I don't know if it's because of the problems with the edge, or what. I often feel, with students, I wish that more of them knew the work of Balcomb Greene. I think he's done a marvelous job of attacking the figure with light. That kind of thinking is painterly. So many people who draw well don't think that way, and it takes.... It's a big struggle to get students that have, who draw very well, to open up their form. They don't know what I mean by opening it up, and then I have to think, "What do I mean by that?" And I've been using the term without defining it for so many years, then I give them an oral history of the open composition, and they are very surprised. And by the time I have finished, I am a little surprised with my own definition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: But I know that a continuous line usually closes the form, and I think, you know, it's very simple little things can make the difference.

PAUL CUMMINGS: When did you start teaching?

ALICE BABER: About five years ago. I taught first at Queens, in the ACE Program. I taught art history and I did it the way my teacher did—Elizabeth Watts—taught it. She taught primitive art first,

and then Modern, and then back to the old masters, and of course we really.... Well, I have never been certain what happened right after the Renaissance because we didn't get to it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Got lost in there.

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you like teaching?

ALICE BABER: I like teaching very much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What are you teaching now?

ALICE BABER: Well, right now I'm teaching painting and beginning art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where is that?

ALICE BABER: At Purchase [SUNY at PurchaseÄEd.]. And let's see, after I was at Queens I went to Minnesota and I taught a graduate seminar and a painting class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: At the university?

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Tape 1, side A (continued)

ALICE BABER: At the university. And then I went to Santa Barbara, to the University of California to do a section called creative studies, where I taught painting.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you like moving around the universities like that?

ALICE BABER: I like it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find....

ALICE BABER: I don't like being away from New York for too long a period, so I usually commute. So the universities, the ones I travel to a lot could be a little closer than Minnesota or California.  
[laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you find the students at the various schools?

Tape 2, side B

PAUL CUMMINGS: [probably asked something like, "Are they all alike?"]

ALICE BABER: No, not really. In California, they're all into the figureÄsort of early Diebenkorn things. I mean, it depends on what kind of teachers they have had and what the environment offers. I know I ran into one of my friends from Indiana, who's teaching there, at the College Art Association this year, and he said to me that there's nothing like the work that I am doing now among the teachers at Indiana because they've continued in the tradition of the figure, and there's no interesting color. He himself paints in black and whiteÄtotally. And I'm trying to think. Around New York, of course, there are all kinds of influences, so in some ways it's easier to be near New York because you can send people to the galleries. But then again they never have time to go, so there's this frustration of knowing it's right there, and they don't go. And in Minnesota the students would say, "Where should

we go?" and I'd say, "Well, you ought to go to New York or California." And then when I got to California [when, if] the students said, "Where should I go?" I don't know what to tell them. [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] New York.

BABER, ALICE

ALICE BABER: Yeah, the main thing is to get out of where they have been.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, Minneapolis has two good museums.

ALICE BABER: The art scene is not as strong as it ought to be, and I tried to start one when I was there. I mean, a lot of other people were trying to start one. Ray Hendler was busy organizing a new art association, which was interesting because the head of the.... Oh, what is it.... Which museum is \_\_\_\_\_?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not the Walker?

ALICE BABER: Not the Walker, no.

PAUL CUMMINGS: The Institute?

ALICE BABER: Martin Friedman showed up later onÄyes, the InstituteÄcame along to one of the first meetingsÄyou know, I mean, it was the first time that sort of the museum directors had really showed up. Then Martin bought a local painting, and it was a great celebration that week, which may or may not have had to accompany the meeting. Probably not, knowing him. The scene is lively, but it's not very deep, for the reason that, I was told, it's so cold in the winterÄand it wasÄthat people do not go out and sort of congregate anywhere.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I don't know. I went to school there.

ALICE BABER: Did you? Did you congregate a lot?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, constantly.

ALICE BABER: [laughs] I wish I had know the people you knew, when I was there.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But people.... It was....

ALICE BABER: What's your explanation into the art scene [there]?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there are just too many other things competing, and there are not enough important people interested in it to, you know, take the people who are sort of half-decided.

ALICE BABER: You mean, some of the people who are interested in Culture, with a capital C, are into the....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, music....

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...symphony and everything else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. It's the symphony and the theater, the ballet....

ALICE BABER: Well, you see, that's what I feel that people....

PAUL CUMMINGS: And they go out, I mean those....

ALICE BABER: ...in these communities, though.... You know, I met some of themÄmostly through, oh, like women of the faculty and things like thatÄwho had a series of going around looking at people's, collectors homes and, you know, whatever, the kind of thing you get into when you're new in a place.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: And some of these women told me that they were involved with thisÄa neighborhood program where they were teaching people in tenements and so forth, and how exciting it had been, and children. And I think there ought to be more of thatÄin all communities.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that always seems to go on, you know, it.... But then.... And there are a lot of big collectors who live there, but they don't buy local art. They buy international people, phenomenal collections. Tremendous Oriental collections in Minneapolis.

ALICE BABER: I didn't know about that. Whose? Whose did I miss?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Old ones. I don't know about new ones.

ALICE BABER: I'll call you before I go back.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: I've got an invitation to teach at one of those colleges, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But, you see, the people there built the railroads, and it was as easy for them to go to China as it was to go to Europe.

ALICE BABER: Fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you have this enormous collection of stuff.

ALICE BABER: Well, some of the things that I tried to do, I'm trying to get the art historiansÄwho were separated from the studio students because the departments had all fallen in years ago, for their own reasons. I try to get the art historians to write about the artists that will work.... I mean, you know, the other students....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not interested, they're competitive.

ALICE BABER: But they did. They got started....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, they did?

ALICE BABER: ...but I had to supervise it. And one of them showed up.... She's now at Cleveland. She came from the Chicago Association. She's still writing. I mean, she was writing anyway. I mean, there were other reasons for writing. But I mean I got my students in my seminar to write, and of course they didn't want to. They were artists and they wouldn't dream of writing. And I had them interview each other, and I got marvelous things. And I think, you know.... But you really have to....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Also there's a great shyness towards any kinds of intellectual activity out there.

ALICE BABER: Well, I guess, you see, I just ignored that. But I think you're right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. Oh, it is.

ALICE BABER: But.... I think that I find that very disturbing, and maybe that's why I left the Middle West as soon as I could, and why when I go back.... I understand everything about the Middle West except that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I understand.

ALICE BABER: Why?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because.... Well, first of all, it's not a very old part of the country. Indiana's older than, say, Minnesota or the Dakotas, because the move west was to the middle of the country. The northern states were settled very late. I mean, the town I was born in was only 102 years old.

ALICE BABER: You don't think a hundred years is time enough to....

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's very little, you know. I mean, it's unusual. It has a Carnegie Library. It happens that it's the place where two rail lines cross, and there are many state highways that juxtapose there. So that's why a lot of it's the county seat and a lot of other things. So that there are a lot of reasons why it's more active than, say, Fargo, North Dakota, which is [50, 60] miles west. It was bigger, it was richer. There's not really another good-sized town until you go 200 miles east. That's Duluth. You know, the distances are so great.

ALICE BABER: You think the distances from place to place sort of prevent cultural....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, I think it's a....

ALICE BABER: ...conversation, or what?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, yeah. Because there are not that many, you end up with such a tiny percentage of the population who is interested anyway. And you've only got a few thousand people.

ALICE BABER: [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It gets to be a very small group of people, and usually all those people know each other.

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They really all do.

ALICE BABER: Well, it's very interesting because the newspapers do not cover the art world.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Hmm.

ALICE BABER: So I complained and I know Mrs. Friedman said to me very quietly, "Well, we don't

have any trouble being covered," and they did not, you know, as a matter of fact. But I didn't think that covered the art scene. And then someone's slightly mad student, who wasn't mad at all, decided to design an airplane he was going to fly across the river. And so everyone gathered and we all waited, and like he ran out with his wings and he ran backward again, you know, ran away, and the whole thing. And of course the paper covered that, and I realized it's only news if it's amusing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, that's right.

ALICE BABER: But they simply couldn't conceive of writing more about art. I think, though....

PAUL CUMMINGS: It gets too personal, you see, and life out there is very impersonal, because the main kind of groups of people are Germans and Scandinavians....

ALICE BABER: Impersonal, you say?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

ALICE BABER: Well, that's what I was told.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it's very impersonal.

ALICE BABER: Well, it was put to me another way, that because of these long cold nights and the tendency of the Scandinavians and Germans to go home at night rather than to go coffee houses, say, like in an Italian community might very well—At the women would be home, but the men would be in the coffee houses, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But they always find time to go to road houses and beer parlors and saloons that go on until three and four in the morning. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: That's true.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So it doesn't hold true. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: No, it doesn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Anyway. Have you taught painting at most of these places?

ALICE BABER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You did?

ALICE BABER: Um hmm.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do you like that, from your point of view? Do you find that it takes a lot of your time and energy and you can't work when you're traveling around the country teaching? Does that affect you a lot?

ALICE BABER: The only place that I had any trouble painting at all was in Minnesota. And I found....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Got too cold. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Yes. The snow was so white there was no color. And I ended up painting dark

paintings with sort of flames, red flames, as if they were fireplaces, you know. Or all-white paintings, with just a few colors. And what saved me that winter was a trip to Santa Barbara where I went in advance for the next year. As soon as I saw all the tropical things I was alive again. And then I went back and I painted like crazy. And I did a painting that I like very much which is now, as a matter of fact, in Santa Barbara's museum, but it was done in Minnesota. The rest of the time I have no trouble at all painting. It's just a question of having to time one's schedule in a way that's just a little bit artificial—you know, sort of being able to work every day and so forth. As far as my students are concerned, I have always had a policy. I don't—unless I am asked to do this—I don't assign problems, and I let each person work the way that they want to work and try to do my critiques within their frame of reference. At the same time, getting them to the library to look at the art books. I mean, very few of them have any art history background, so it's very hard to say, you know, "So and so has been involved with this problem." For example, beginning students always center things. So if you say to them, "Well, this was solved in the Renaissance," or whatever, it doesn't mean anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: So I wish most of them had more of a background in that sense. But as far as imposing on them a kind of system—say, like the Albers system—I think it doesn't work, because then when they get out of school they don't know what to paint. And I think that you have to do.... I believe, I suppose because it's been my own path, that you work your way from looking at the world toward your own vision. And I told a student the other day something that I decided that I didn't mean—I mean, you know, later, that it worked out to have more of a meaning than I had intended. I said, "If what you're painting is more interesting than what you're looking at in nature, fine. If nature is more interesting than your painting, then you'd better go back and look at nature again.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Right. Well...

ALICE BABER: Incidentally, I had a very good class this year and I... They did so well that they're going to have a show, five or six or eight of them next January. And I was very pleased with that. Because I do like to get people into the next level, of not only being able to work on their own—you know, no questions and so forth—but also how to show and all those mysteries of art world, which don't have to be mysteries at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, I'll bet. Well, do you find that when you go to a university and you are like the visiting celebrity for that year or that term, that you have problems with other faculty people who maybe had been there for twenty years and wish they showed in New York and don't show in New York and that whole, you know, facet of life?

ALICE BABER: Well, no, not really. First of all, in Minnesota I was considered sort of unique because I was a woman. And they had very few members of the studio faculty that were women. And I don't think that there was any surprise about my working style or anything like that. Enough other New York artists were there, so that it was sort of like old home week in a way. As far as my being considered an outsider, in some ways it's good to be a visiting artist because you don't get involved, too deeply, into the....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Local politics. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: ...local politics scene, which is very painful. I'm not good at it and I am not interested in it. And I don't even care that some of the other people are. I find it just extraordinary that they have the time and energy to really bother with the paperwork—you know, of like sending around, oh, I don't know, changes in the curriculum for the sophomore year. And then nobody does anything

about it. I mean, I couldn't possibly send a paper out. I would try a different kind of.... You know, if I wanted to change the sophomore year, I'd go talk to people. But I wouldn't.... I just can't do things in that sort of ordinary way, so I suppose in that sense it's just as well that I have frequently been visiting. And I don't find any sense of "they're there and I've been in New York." I think mostly they feel superior to me. They tell me that New York is a terrible place to be; they wouldn't want to live there. And they're very happy locally usually. They show quite a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some of them sell very, very well, too.

ALICE BABER: Yeah. They really have the advantage over me as a visiting artist. And then the next problem sometimes comes from the students who will say.... Some of whom will be very pleased and expressive, and then there'll be a couple of sort of discontents who will come up and say, "Why can't we get a hard-edge teacher around here. Something like that, so then you suggest some hard-edge types to be invited.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: So what I'm saying is the general standard discontents of the student body and of faculty and the administration remain very much the same across the country, and so you deal with each of those levels in their discontents very much in the same way.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah, right. Something I was going to ask you about was artists of any period who particularly interest you. Like you've mentioned looking at Rubens at one point for a particular reason, and the Goya painting. Are there contemporary artists or older artists—famous artists, ancient artists [laughter]—who interests you particularly, in the sense of a half a dozen or three or two or whatever?

ALICE BABER: Well, I made a list once of about 35.

PAUL CUMMINGS: My goodness, that's a lot.

ALICE BABER: Because what I used to do, I'd get involved with someone for about two or three months—or longer, I mean, I wasn't capricious. Of course, I think [of] Cezanne as the beginning. And I once asked Sonia Delaunay who her influence was, and she said, "Gauguin," and I think he's enormously influential to anyone interested in color. I remember the first flat color that we have, you know, those pink beaches, and I mean what could be greater? And then I think you immediately, you know, you get into all.... Well, I think you start with the post-impressionists, when you start learning, and the Fauves, and the German Expressionists. And then I think at some point you really have to look at the old masters, like Piero della Francesca, for a kind of formal pattern, and a number of old ones. But from that point I think you get involved with the kinds of space—world space, if you will—and so forth. And I mean influences just come from all directions. I remember once being very excited about Soutine's trees, probably following a visit to the Phillips Gallery, which I think is a splendid museum. And I like the way the wind blows the trees.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: [That's what I get.]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: Who else? Of my close contemporaries, I find that many of them have such a limited, possibly powerful statement, but it is has been, it's so reduced now, so refined, that I really don't



know that there's anything I can learn from Rothko except to admire him. And for our part of admiring him, I knew him, but I wasn't really knocked out by him. I think I am more now. I mean, the surface I will always find very intriguing. I wasn't quite sure [how] he got all that glow and the whole kind of magic of the painting. It's still the main mystery. But it's very, very simplified format, and I think it belongs to him. And I don't really.... I don't know what I could really sort of pick up from it, you know. I mean, there's a kind of a stealing the fire of the gods, as it were....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: ...which is a very high level of stealing. And I think that you really should try to cover your tracks after you steal. I think you should know that you have taken something from somebody else. Your eye has caught it. I think it's like borrowing somebody's dream for the analyst: It's perfectly valid, but I think the next person along the line should enjoy it. For example....

[Interruption in taping]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Speaking of contemporary painters, who are your kind of favorite friends in the art world, the people that you see frequently? Do you have a circle in the art world....

ALICE BABER: [laughs]

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...or out of the art world? Does it change a great deal?

ALICE BABER: Well, it depends on the day you ask me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Some days I don't think I have any friends.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You know, the kind of friends and associates, kind of....

ALICE BABER: Friends and associates....

PAUL CUMMINGS: I mean, there must be some people you've know for years, over the years.

WATCH DASH PLACEMENT

ALICE BABER: Well, I have know the Lassaws since I first came to New York, and have had thousands of talks with lbramÄI would say usually though about things- [\_\_\_\_\_ÄEd.] Suzuki and that sort of thing, as much as talking about art. And I always feel very much at home in East Hampton. Until this summer, I have always visited the Lassaws when I've gone out, which has been marvelous because I've felt immediately sort of brought into the art world as one sometimes is. This summer I am taking a house for one month, and then I'm having a show at the Bensen Gallery, so I may have to do some cooking of my own, which will kill me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] But have you maintained friendships with the European artists? Did you spend time in France?

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. For example, for two summers I've gone to Austria to work in a symposium, which started out as a sculpture symposium, done by [Karl, Carl] Prantel, who brings in artists from the Iron Curtain countries, which is really a very good thing. But the problem is not their, the getting out but they don't have any moneyÄyou know, I mean, like five centsÄas many nationalities do these days. You leave your own country and you haven't got much to spend. Which is going to

happen to us soon, right?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. Where is that?

ALICE BABER: In Austria. At Eisenstadt, which is the capital of Burgenland. Outside of Eisenstadt is this place, tiny village, called San Marguerite. And there was an old Roman quarry there, and so they used the marble.... Well, it's not marble. I think it's limestone? It's the same stone that's used in the cathedral there, and it's very grainyÄthe cathedral in Vienna. But still it's an interesting kind of marvelous old whatever it is. You can see I am not a sculptor. Anyway, his wife Uta did a big.... I take credit for saying, "Uta, you must have a painting symposium." So, she wrote me, "We've found the Orangerie at the Schloss in Eisenstadt," and we had a beautiful place to paint that summer. And they were just here. He's doing one of his symposium things in America. And....

Yes, I think, you know, one sees all one's European friends. I just got out my address book for someone going to Paris, and most people don't move there as much as they move here, so you can pretty much send people from here to there with the addresses and the whole phone number.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have a lot of Europeans visit you when they come through, or call?

ALICE BABER: Oh, sure.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find that it's increased over the years, or it stays pretty much the same?

ALICE BABER: Seems about the same. In Paris, when I lived there, there was always this frantic time in the late spring and summer when all the Americans came to Paris, and the phone never stopped ringing then, but that's because so many people visited quite regularly. I think Europeans come here less regularly. I mean, why should.... If I were a European, I wouldn't come to America. I mean, I'd go to Africa.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] They all come here. Well, used to come here.

ALICE BABER: Well, they come for business.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: But I mean there's no real reason to come here for things visual....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some do.

ALICE BABER: ...except for the abstract quality of the spaceÄour mountains, our rivers. I mean, everything is so big and grand here. I think you do get a sense of the large canvas. I think it does explain our painting to them. You know, I wouldn't prevent anyone from coming to America, but it's.... For example, I went to the Caribbean for the first time this winter. Ellie Poindexter loaned me her house, which is just marvelous, on St. Lucia. I went down, and I loved it, but there wasn't any art. I mean, it was like some kind of fantastic holiday that I had never been on before, because.... In some ways it was like IndiaÄyou know, there was a lot of color and it was....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Tropical.

ALICE BABER: ...very warm, and so forth. But in India you have all those temples. And so I feel when you're traveling you might as well have theÄbesides the natural wonders, shall we say....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Um hmm, yeah.

ALICE BABER: I've naturally, you know.... I spend.... And I think many artists do not, but I am a museum freak. Wherever I go I rush around looking at the art. And I'm sure you do, too, but I do know artists that don't, who....

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I do too.

ALICE BABER: ...simply refuse to go to museums. And I think.... And talking about friends, it's a little bit the same way. I think the older that you get, the more protective you get of your own ideas, and I think that's why many older artists don't go museums. They've gotten over the student stage of learning the kinds of things that they learned from museums. And I think also the problem of having friends who either criticize your work or—I think, what I call the Jackson Pollock problem, whether it really was a problem or not—which is.... Everyone always said the problem is success. There is a certain amount of hostility which you get when something good happens, there's a certain amount of pity that you get when something bad happens, and I think that your ability to put up with other people's reactions gets thinner. Now I don't what happens in a few more years. I mean, I may end up in an ivory tower someplace.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: But you know that's what happened to The Club at the end. A lot of the people couldn't face going there and saying to their friends, no, they didn't have a show this year. They'd find it just too tough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It became a social problem.

ALICE BABER: Right. And even today, I called a friend on the phone. I didn't say to her, "How did your show go?" I said something like, "Have you recovered from the show, from all the work?" Because I think those questions are really rough to answer sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's true. I mean, I ask them all the time because I have to.

ALICE BABER: [laughs] You mean, "How did the show go?"

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. I mean, sometimes people know and sometimes they don't. Also I think it depends on how divorced a person is from their work once it's [passed, past].

ALICE BABER: Oh, now that's a very good [point, question].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Some people never are. And other people, after three months it could've been done five years ago. They don't cling to their work in a way.

ALICE BABER: Well, I don't cling in the sense that it's very important when you've finished painting for them to be able to release it and not hold onto it. Obviously. But I do care very much what happens with paintings. Someone came up to me at a party the other night. He works for a corporation, which will remain nameless. And he said, "Several of the paintings were just kicked in recently." Didn't say whether mine.... And then he's a restorer and he obviously didn't know anything about it. And then he followed this by saying, "Oh, well, I think all art ought to be destroyed anyway."

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

ALICE BABER: And I see that.... You know, I hear that attitude. I don't know whether he was trying to be funny or not.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yeah. No, a lot of people believe that.

ALICE BABER: You know, I have no sense of humor about that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Well, how can you? [laughter] You know.

ALICE BABER: Well, I don't know. Because I think that in recent years a lot of the students who have believed in process art are not concerned with survival of the art object.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but they're concerned with documenting it and they're concerned with their place in history about it, which is not very far removed from the object.

ALICE BABER: Yeah, but they didn't put their documentation on rag paper.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, but they do a lot of it and they make photographs, which are printed on pretty good paper.

ALICE BABER: And off-set those photographs, \_\_\_\_\_ .

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Oh, they'll have copy prints and they make Xeroxes of them and everything.

ALICE BABER: [No.] they have to do stuff. They have to have parents that live to ripe old ages. Maya Derrin's mother, who's something like 95, just called up people and said that Maya Derrin did a marvelous film in Haiti, and she knew everyone. And her mother.... She died, and her mother was looking at this and realized that it's disintegrating in the can. This marvelous film and it's got to be saved. Someone has to like do it now, quickly. But, no, someone has to care. That's a real problem for the artists.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Because it's....

ALICE BABER: It's [like] Hans Hofmann leaving his paintings to one museum. I mean, you do have to.... You have to think about survival.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, he left a lot but there's still a lot of other ones, you know. [laughter] Shrewd man. Also, it depends; some artists are very good business people about their work, and that seems to make a difference.

ALICE BABER: What do you think about Picasso leaving no will? Have you been reading about that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I think.... No, I think it's perfectly in keeping with, you know....

ALICE BABER: Yes, but I mean some friends of mine who bought one were very annoyed. They said, "Now all the prices will go down because they'll all get dumped on the market."

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, no.

ALICE BABER: You happen to know they won't? [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, yeah. [\_\_\_\_\_ÄEd.] Kahnweiler is not that young anymore.

ALICE BABER: Right. [laughter]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But it will happen. You know, one thing we haven't talked about is Paul Jenkins, who I want to ask a question about. You know, he is another practicing artist and.... You know, how is that? Because I know that so many relationships like this have lots and lots of problems with two people who are in the same business, same activityÄwhether they're actors I know or bankers or whatever.... It's a....

ALICE BABER: I don't think that it's a....

PAUL CUMMINGS: ...seems to become a career problem at some point.

ALICE BABER: I don't think it's insurmountable, really. Because I know a lot of artists that are together. And as far as being with other artists, I feel that.... I suppose there's a problem in a way of work being chosen by museums and all that. I heard an interesting story, that Motherwell always requested that Helen's [FrankenthalerÄEd.] work be shown when he was asked, and I'm sure vice versa because Helen was certainly well on her way when they got together. It sounded nice. I mean, I don't even know if Helen and Bob would like the story that I.... Have you heard that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

ALICE BABER: I think that what you have to do in the art world is really like defend your friends and suggest them for other things, and so forth. But it does get to be a tight little world sometimes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: It certainly does. [laughter] No, it's interesting, because I have known so many theater people, where they're both actors.

ALICE BABER: Well, of course, you see, with acting, there's a real problem, because, I think, they're both always on stage, in a way. And then there's the other thing about traveling. And that does begin to happen when you both have shows in different cities. Definitely a problem.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or you go off someplace for four months to make a film, movie, you know.

ALICE BABER: Right. Well, I think though, you see, that if we are assuming like traditional living conditions and values, where two people are always together, something like that, that's one thing, and that can be a problem, but I think this ideal ultra-sophisticated idea of not always being together should be worked out perfectly well.

[Interruption in taping]

ALICE BABER: ...[That's a] question that Paul and I were always asked. And the King of the Netherlands once asked us that. They were having a show there. Peter Stuyvesant was putting it on. The Queen didn't show up, but the King did, and the very first question he asked was, "How do two artists get along," which we answered very well with something like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] Like two princes, right?

ALICE BABER: Right. [laughter] Wish I'd thought of that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: To go back to the painting again, what kind of colors do you use? I mean, do you

use acrylic, oil paints....

ALICE BABER: I use oil.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You use oil. Do you use acrylic?

ALICE BABER: No. I haven't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't have any interest in all the new things that seem to be constantly appearing in the stores?

ALICE BABER: What's new?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, there's always another medium or something coming along. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Well, no, that's not true. Because twenty years ago Lenny Bocour called up, and I said, "I'd like to try your...." whatever it was.... What was it? Is it oil plastic jobs? And he said, "I'll deliver it right now." I didn't know him at all. But he was always the artists' friend, and delivered it that Monday, or whatever it was. I tried that. It dried too quickly for me. [loud engine noise] In the early days, I used a lot of heavy paint, and I used oil, so I didn't need it to dry quickly because I kept painting into it, often for a month or two. But now that I work thinly, I've used Shiva for a long time. I like it very much. I'm very annoyed with them for making only student grade now. It may force me into Windsor & Newton. But I don't think so. I like Shiva very much. And I work over a, usually a triple-primed canvass. There I use an acrylic gesso, thinly applied a number of times so that I have an absorbent surface, the way you have in a French watercolor, like papier darche. It's a triple-plied paper with glue between so that once it absorbs you have a feeling of it really soaks into the surface. So sometimes I use that; sometimes I work without a triple-prime, on just a normal prime, a store-bought prime glue, on the heaviest duck that I can find. I prefer duck to linen because linen—French linen—and I certainly had years of trying to find duck in France. And then I'd get used to linen and I'd come back here and I couldn't buy it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]

ALICE BABER: But linen generally has a kind of greasy surface that does not absorb [quickly].

PAUL CUMMINGS: Slippery, or something.

ALICE BABER: Exactly. And that whole.... You feel like you're sort of skating around in grease, you know. And what I've found on that, though, is this canvas, for example, is on linen, where it's oxidized beautifully since '54—[5]2, whatever it is, you see. So I'm thinking maybe I will go back to linen at some point, look into linen. But linen with an American prime, not a French prime. Of course, you see, portrait linen in France is fine and is absorbent, but it's so thin that with a large canvass....

PAUL CUMMINGS: It falls apart, yeah.

ALICE BABER: ...it splits before you can get started.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you do a lot of work in the space of a year? Because, I mean.... You know, the number of canvases you'd might produce.

ALICE BABER: I'd like to do even more than I do. And I have a friend who really got into painting rather recently—let's say in the last five years. I mean, she painted all her life, but she really started

showing. And she paints stairways, and she says to me, every time I see her, "Well, I can't paint fast, like you do," and, "It's so hard for me," as if that's a virtue. So I was reading a book on Magritte the other day, and you know the painting, what?, The Assassin Betrayer, The Assassin.... what? The big painting at the Museum of Modern Art now, in which everybody is carrying a club, and you don't know what it all means. Well, it's huge. And I read in this book that at the time that he painted that he painted one painting a day. So the next time I see her I'm going to say, "Never mind your fine style! Magritte could do one a day." I'm all in favor of one a day, but I mean if one has the energy. What you have to do though is really drop everything else, because you have to stay with it while the surface is wet. I think again Picasso's schedule—whether it's true or not, but one read—you know, start at eleven in the morning and work through 'til midnight—is about right. But when do you go to the openings?

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs] After a while you don't have to; they come to you.

ALICE BABER: That's right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But does that mean then that you would do a painting, which is what that [signifies], historically, sort of once through, or does it get worked on, and then worked on, and then worked on?

ALICE BABER: It depends on whether the painting works or not. I have another friend whose name is [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] Hagedorn, who is from East Germany and I met him in Minnesota, and he is moving to New York, and he said the other day that when he's asked if he'd plan a painting, the answer is, yes, he plans it, but it doesn't get interesting until the painting begins to go awry and he's got to save it. At the point that you save it is when it's not a piece of wallpaper. So I would say that, yes, I do run into all kinds of interesting problems as I'm painting. And of course you can't paint one a day. I can't even.... I think that was a misprint in that Magritte book. What I am trying to say is that I don't believe in this business of belaboring a painting for months at a time until you finally get, like the Balzac story, you know, the messy masterpieces—and particularly since my students tend to think that a painting is better the more you paint on it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Students always seem to think that, for some reason.

ALICE BABER: Well, I finally discussed this with some kids from Drew University a couple of weeks ago. Lee Hall is, you know, the director there, and her class came, and I mentioned that my beginning students, I couldn't stop them, and they were, you know, like, they ruin everything, and they said, "Oh, that's because...." It has something.... Well, what I got out of what they said was it had to do with not having a knowledge of your own adrenalin. If you get going and you get attached to the picture, you can't stop. So it's like making somebody go home from a party before they're ready. In other words, I would just destroy these people if I said, "Stop." And so I thought about that, and an interesting thing happened when the [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] Crandalls had a sculpture symposium here in America two years ago in Vermont, and so Pavia [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] went and so forth. And so I went up to observe what was happening, and there was an Austrian... poet, really—a conceptual poet—who had done some wood sculpture, and he had been asked to go at the last minute because someone else had dropped out. And he did the most extraordinary piece of sculpture up there. Almost. It was good. And it was a very simple block shape, and then like a megaphone going into the center of the stem or an hourglass shape starting from one side and all the way through and looking out, but the point is not \_\_\_\_\_ so little. So you are not aware of the letdown you have when you quit. And he got in such a slump he practically had to be shipped home. I mean, he couldn't move or talk. And his stone was beautiful. And every other sculptor, including [\_\_\_\_\_] Ed.] Nozuma, you know, was.... Well, they were all polishing at the last minute. They

didn't quite finish, including Ken Campbell, that didn't finish his for another five years or so. But it was in a monumental kind of Stonehenge thing and he.... He got a truck and got his carted down to wherever he lives. So each sculptor responded differently to the time it took them to do it and how they handled their slump. You see a lot of the whole problem of painting, I think, is the psychological problem of getting into the painting; [but] surviving the crisis of the painting without going into crisis yourself; how you feel about the painting when you're finished—whether you hate it or whether you love it; not loving it too much, and if you hate it, why? You know, it gets very complicated.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How does that relate to your interest in meditation and Buddha and all those things?

ALICE BABER: Well, the last time I was in India, I called up Borenda Kumar of the Kumar Gallery, and we were going to go to [Dashrau, Ashram] together for the morning, which I had not done. And so I called up the gallery the morning we were supposed to go up because of course he hadn't showed up. And people tend to be late, but after a couple of hours.... So, I call up and I said, "Where is he?" And they said, "He's in meditation." [laughs] I said, "He's not supposed to be in meditation there; he's supposed to go to the [Dashrau] and be in the meditation." [laughing] I think the way it's part of the Indian life is sort of interesting. I don't practice meditation. I'm sure I should, but no I'm not....

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get interested in all of those? I mean, to the point of pursuing it \_\_\_\_\_.

ALICE BABER: Well, as I said, I think those books I read on crossing the Gobi Desert when I was a child. I mean, what has the Gobi Desert have to do with \_\_\_\_\_....

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but how you kept up with it. You still want to go across the Gobi Desert.

ALICE BABER: Oh, yes. I mean, there are not enough museums on the way, but generally speaking that would be an interesting experience. I think it's still.... I think in some way it has to do with the fact that I like other societies. I found Japan an extraordinary change over, to a totally organized and sophisticated society that was the exact opposite from ours. I mean, like every gesture that we've been taught is the wrong one.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

ALICE BABER: I found that quite wild and very exciting. A little exhausting. And I very much want to go back to Japan. In India just the feast of all the colors is enough, you see. There are things about India and its religion that are unfortunate. I mean, the caste system has—however noble it starts, I mean, how it emerged—has not been convenient for many people in many ways. As have our religions in our society. Often lent, you know... preserved feudal society, shall we say. The other day someone was here talking about [Palm Tree] garden and all and commenting on it, and one must say that it has been a product of feudal society. One would like to figure out a society in which the people who sponsor the art and the artist.... You know, that there could be some very beautiful world in which there's no feudal system. I've just been thinking about it because I went to see the films of the Han Dynasty art found in China. The Metropolitan had a film of it. It's on in Paris now; I'm dying to go over. And the woman who did the reportage in the film kept saying, "And so you see that the Socialist people of China....", that the workers did these tombs. And she's right, but usually in history or art history one identifies with the pharaoh, rather than the slaves who filled it, you see. So for the first time I perfectly happily identified with the slaves.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughs]



ALICE BABER: But it still doesn't solve the problem of who wins, slave to slave?

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's the difference, too, between the man who developed the idea and the man that might have executed it, when they're not the same.

ALICE BABER: Oh, well, that of course takes us into another whole thing that the lady with the Han Dynasty film wasn't getting into at all. You know, they certainly simplified it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are you interested in politics? Do have an interest in politics or is it one of those prevalent persistent....

ALICE BABER: Well, I'm interested in reform. I'm ready for reform on all sides. [laughter] During those two years ago when everyone was into art and politics and all, I was at Minnesota then, and I was asked to moderate a panel on art and politics and Lucy Lippard came out and we had some people. And I sort of.... I bought that book, Social Radicalism in the Arts, which is quite good, but angry. And it had just come out and I had noticed an ad, and it's a splendid book. I have since recommended it to people to get into this, and they call me to say, "It's wonderful; I'm on Chapter 22, but I can't...." I mean, it's a thick, thick book, you know, it's a life's reading. And it's quite good. And I decided that this whole idea of art and the revolution is kind of silly, but then....

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ABER, ALICE

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Tape 1, side A (continued)

Tape 3, side A

ALICE BABER: ...but then I... There is a book called something like Art and Politics, again, which Jean Cassou got together. It's a pocket book, which the New York Graphics Society put out here, and it's a very good analysis of the attitude of the art world in Paris during the recent revolution—whatever—there, and the artists were in many ways asked to take a position. The last show that I had in Paris, the critic that called me said, "What is your political position in your painting?" and "What are you saying politically?" And I was asked to respond in French and so I decided I would say that it was tension in my painting, or that it was tension that interested me, and then she said, "I'll call you back and we'll have a much longer interview." And then [\_\_\_\_\_ Éd.] [Aragon] died, so the entire magazine, you know.... But you must have a position in Europe, you must know where you stand. I think here a lot of people are irritated by politics, or into it. I was annoyed with Max Kozloff's recent article about my interpretation of [quick] reading. Did you read it by any chance? The post-war painting in America—post Korean War, I don't know.... See, and what he did was, he picked all the artists, like Jasper Johns' [Flag], and, I don't know, all the artists who have gotten the attention in the last twenty years, and pointed out that they really weren't saying enough about our life and times. But why didn't he pick his friends who do have a political commitment and who could talk about it all the time and have been painting about that, you know?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Maybe they're not saying enough to hear. [laughs]

ALICE BABER: Well, I mean, and then his friends would have been mad at him.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right. A political career being a career.

ALICE BABER: You know, the artist as Brahmin, the artist as elitist. You know. There's a kind of nonsense in that because.... I think Harold Rosenberg's position, in so far as I understand it, is a good one: the attitude about bohemia as another class.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You mean just hanging around with the guys, huh? [laughter]

ALICE BABER: Well, you ask Harold if that's what he means.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Part of it.

BABER, ALICE

ALICE BABER: His book on it hasn't come out yet, so when it is we can listen to it. I think that if we assume that society has been structured in certain ways, that we should all be aware of these structures and all that, but the only place left to run is bohemia. And don't look too carefully there either.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

ALICE BABER: [laughs]

[End of interview]

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