



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Federica
Beer-Monti, 1967 November 1

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Friederike (Federica) Beer-Monti on November 1, 1967. The interview was conducted by Butler Coleman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2023 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

[00:00:02.01]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: You will soon see.

[00:00:06.28]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Right?

[00:00:08.41]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: I wonder—now, that's going inside that little shield. I think that's right, though. [Audio cuts out.]

[00:00:16.87]

BUTLER COLEMAN: It's going to be an absolutely brilliant take.

[00:00:20.34]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: [Inaudible] Is that worse and worse [inaudible]. And this is when it's difficult to—if you've got somebody across the room talking—[inaudible].

[00:00:36.24]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: Yes, what is very annoying is when somebody gets up and moves to point to a painting across the room.

[00:00:44.25]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Right.

[00:00:44.57]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: Suddenly, there's just a hole.

[00:00:46.23]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: [Inaudible] So if somebody gets up, you quickly grab them.

[00:00:51.81]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: You chase them.

[00:00:55.02]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But the thing is, is it's not a very long extension.

[00:00:57.93]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: That's why I say the first thing you have to do is get an extension.

[00:01:00.81]

BUTLER COLEMAN: There is an extension cord. But the other thing is the problem with the mic isn't all that long. I suppose it would be far enough, if shoving it in the air.

[00:01:11.15]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: You know, somebody told me that if you do a [inaudible]—[audio cuts out]—and talk. And while we're talking, see if this thing, you see, doesn't do anything. But that's—

[00:01:29.15]

BUTLER COLEMAN: That little needle doesn't do anything at all.

[00:01:31.49]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: If you put this right at my mouth, then it's doing it. Yeah. [Cross talk.] But I think that there doesn't seem to be any need for it, do you?

[00:01:41.60]

BUTLER COLEMAN: No.

[00:01:42.08]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Because we are picking up is—Now it goes away.

[00:01:44.49]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But you have to keep your volume up here quite high, at six or at seven, I think.

[00:01:48.89]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: I think it's better, too, for the person who's being interviewed, if they don't have that problem. They get so self-conscious.

[00:01:55.40]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I know that's the whole thing of the mic. If the mic is right, if they can— [Cross talk.] —yeah, right, exactly.

[00:01:59.87]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 1: I think this picks up very well, don't you?

[00:02:01.58]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Yeah, it's pretty good though. [Inaudible.]

[00:02:08.18]

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

[00:02:25.09]

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER 2: Keep it about five. And again, when you're starting with someone, it's best to test a little bit. Just be sure your mic is in a position—that they're sitting in a position that you can hear them. If it's a woman, their voice may be lighter, or stronger or something. Jimmy, you haven't seen an empty reel that size, that big? Unfortunately, we have about 12 tapes this size, which Butler will be starting with.

[00:02:59.77]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But there's no smaller size tapes. That's the whole thing.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

[00:03:21.54]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: I began to have an interest in art through Hans Waller, who was a painter. And he took—he and his brother and I, my sister, we went together for museums. And he—through him, I got interested in art. And then from then on, I think that was—I must have been 18 years old. Then it started. And it has never left me. And I think it will be my last thought, will be art.

[00:04:00.49]

BUTLER COLEMAN: So when was that? About—

[00:04:03.40]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh—

[00:04:04.99]

BUTLER COLEMAN: He was in art school? Or—

[00:04:07.03]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, he was the son of wealthy people, and went to an art school, and was there for two or three months. And then he realized that he can afford to pay for a model himself, and he's going to work alone, and took a studio, and worked alone. And from that time on, he was an independent artist.

[00:04:33.43]

BUTLER COLEMAN: And he was friendly—you were speaking earlier of, what? Kokoschka? And—

[00:04:38.56]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, he and Kokoschka and Klimt, and Schiele, and Johannes Fischer, and Josef Hoffmann, the architect of the Wiener Werkstätte, and who did the Stoclet Palace in Brussels, where Klimt made the big frieze. They were all very friendly, had their club evenings, as I said, bowling?

[00:05:08.00]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Bowling.

[00:05:08.38]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Bowling, yes.

[00:05:10.37]

BUTLER COLEMAN: All together?

[00:05:11.42]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: All together. And they met. And he, very often—he very often arranged trips to Krumau, where Schiele loved to paint. And he and Schiele painted there.

[00:05:25.55]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Is that the country? I'm sorry, I—

[00:05:27.71]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Beg your pardon?

[00:05:28.19]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Is that the country?

[00:05:29.48]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: That's in the country, yes. That's Austria, Lower Austria.

[00:05:35.88]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you go with them?

[00:05:36.90]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, no. I never—no. I always had the feeling that artists have to be very free and very themselves, and never asked him what he did. Also, he was a great flirt of mine. But I never, never, never asked him. I only wanted to see the results. And—

[00:06:00.06]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you go to theater together, or—

[00:06:02.10]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: To—beg your pardon?

[00:06:02.79]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Theater.

[00:06:03.31]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No. Mostly, he was not interested in the theater, but he was a great music lover. And he really—with him, I went to hear Bruckner. And that was marvelous. Oh, by the way, last week I heard a Bruckner performance here under Leinsdorf that was magnificent. Did you hear it?

[00:06:25.78]

BUTLER COLEMAN: No.

[00:06:26.49]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, that was marvelous. Bruckner, yes. We heard very little Bruckner when we came here in the '30s. But now you hear more Bruckner here. At that time, we heard here more Sibelius. And Bruckner, we didn't hear so much. And his father, Böhler's father, was a doctor of chemistry and was known as a silhouettist. You say silhouettist?

[00:06:56.47]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:06:57.76]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: And he had made silhouettes of all the famous conductors and virtuosi of that time. And they are in the Vienna City Museum now. Before I left, I took them there.

[00:07:16.45]

BUTLER COLEMAN: What were you reading? Do you recall what interested you, as far as literature?

[00:07:24.07]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes, if you would say the names of what I was reading—it is so long. It is 50 years ago [laughs], no? Well, I was reading—

[00:07:38.14]

BUTLER COLEMAN: French?

[00:07:39.58]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: French, German, Italian, and English. Yes, I speak those languages. Of course, Freud. I was reading that. But that is not what I meant to say, because that is a specialized field. What I—oh, Jung's Freud, I was reading here.

[00:08:07.90]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Are there poets of any kind?

[00:08:09.26]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, yes. Verlaine. Oh, then Alban Berg's music—You know, I was in a concert when Alban Berg's music was brought. And he was, at that time, in Vienna, also very opposed. And I was there when two people started to slap each other, because the one was applauding and the other one was against it, you see? But Alban Berg was very interesting. And I knew him personally, too. And the opera—I think *Tristan*, I think, I have heard 37 times in Vienna, as long as I was in Vienna.

[00:09:06.52]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Vienna was quite a city then, in those times?

[00:09:08.62]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, yes. Yes.

[00:09:09.73]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Very active, lots of activity.

[00:09:13.48]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes. I think here, it is also active, only that here—you see, at that time, money didn't play any role with me. So I could go to the opera whenever I wanted. But here, I guess if I would go, and I say I pay 25 dollars for a ticket, I could go, too. So I think it is only more expensive here [laughs]. But the culture, I think, here is also—

[00:09:41.65]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Were your parents very cultivated people, would you say?

[00:09:45.91]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, my father died very early when he was 48. And my mother was a very energetic and busy woman. No, no. She was the youngest of 14 children, from Salzburg. She was more from the country. No, she was not.

[00:10:03.68]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Were you brought up strict, would you say, or—?

[00:10:06.80]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, well, I went—

[00:10:08.35]

BUTLER COLEMAN: More free?

[00:10:08.69]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: I was brought up in Vienna. And then I went to—I wanted to learn French very well. And I said I would like to go to the country. And mother had some idea, France is awful. She wouldn't let me. So I went to a convent in Brussels, and I learned French there.

[00:10:33.80]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Hmm. For how long?

[00:10:35.10]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, I was there two years, yes.

[00:10:39.69]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Two years. And then you went back to Vienna?

[00:10:41.31]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Then I came back to Vienna, yes.

[00:10:42.63]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you work then?

[00:10:43.71]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, I was a volunteer at that—in 1918. 1918, I would have been how old? I'm 91. 1918—it's always—twen—I would have been 28, I think, something like that. Well, at that time, I went as a volunteer to the Nebehay Gallery. And that was the year when Klimt died. And Schiele died before, you see. And they had a big exhibition of Klimt.

[00:11:16.89]

And for instance, whenever you see a Klimt drawing that has an estate stamp where it says "Nachlass Gustav Klimt," regardless how badly it is placed, I was the guilty one, you know? I placed those stamps on those papers. Today, I think I would be more careful. But at that time, I must have placed them sometimes in places where, today, I would hate to place them. And that was a beautiful exhibition of Klimt drawings. Of course, I don't know whether I told you, I have been painted by Klimt.

[00:12:03.61]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Yes, you did.

[00:12:04.29]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: You see?

[00:12:04.99]

BUTLER COLEMAN: When was that?

[00:12:06.16]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes. But before that, I was painted by Egon Schiele.

[00:12:15.47]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Oh, tell me about that.

[00:12:17.39]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Well, Egon Schiele, I knew from Hans's stories. And Hans is Hans Böhler, you see. And he had also already acquired some Schiele paintings. He liked to help him. But also, he esteemed his work. He loved his work. So he had his work in his studio. And I came very often to him. And I saw it there. And I got very interested in Schiele. And Schiele was only one year older than I. So a young painter at that time—I think it was 1916. So I was, I think, 25. And I went to him and I asked him whether he would like to paint me. I would like to commission him. And he did.

[00:13:10.11]

And of course, he didn't charge any price, which I wouldn't be able to pay. So I was able to do that on my own. Didn't tell anybody. And I went out there to his studio. And he painted

me. That painting has been shown here at the Guggenheim exhibition of Klimt and Schiele. And it is an upright painting, you see. I was lying on a mattress on the floor because I wouldn't have been able to keep that pose standing.

[00:13:48.60]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Clothed?

[00:13:49.53]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Beg your pardon?

[00:13:50.08]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Clothed?

[00:13:51.10]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Clothes?

[00:13:52.23]

BUTLER COLEMAN: With your clothes on? Did you—

[00:13:54.81]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: [Laughs.] Yes, yes. Yes. With my clothes on. I'm wondering now—he never even suggested I shouldn't have my clothes on. You see, a commission in those times, I was like a client. I don't think he would have dared to say anything of the kind. And of course, I would not have. I would have said, I am not interested in myself otherwise, but I'm only interested in a painting by you. So I wouldn't be interested to see myself without clothes. [Laughs.] That's what I would have told him. No. But excuse me, I'm a little bit—a little bit astonished, because I have never been asked whether I—[laughs]. Don't forget, I was a young woman at that time.

[00:14:56.86]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I know.

[00:14:57.31]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: So—and don't forget, those times were different from today where you go without clothes on the street, you see. So—[laughs] no, no. It was with clothes. And it was a very good painting. And I came there with a Wiener Werkstätten dress. And oh, I must tell you that I—the Wiener Werkstätte, I don't know whether you know, it was a movement of artists. They designed silverware. They designed—Professor Josef Hoffmann was the founder. The architects designed houses and interiors. You could buy there by the yard, hand-blocked silks.

[00:15:55.69]

It was a movement where everything was done by artists, designed by artists, you see, and I was from the very beginning—I had everything from them. As I showed you this flatware silver just before, that was by Professor Josef Hoffmann. And so when I came to Schiele, I said, I have a dress which I think you would like, and I will wear it when I come for the first sitting. And he liked it very much, and then he told me just to lie on the mattress on the floor, and he painted me lying on the floor on that mattress. And then when the—and the painting was upright, you see? Therefore, I am in—did you never see a reproduction of that?

[00:16:48.52]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Probably, probably.

[00:16:50.26]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: I have it somewhere. I will once try and get it.

[00:16:54.86]

BUTLER COLEMAN: What did Hans think of the painting?

[00:16:58.53]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Hans was—oh, he was tickled to death that I surprised him. Once I asked him, "You come this evening, we have supper together," and then I had it on the wall. I didn't tell him before, you see? And, well, Hans was very pleased, and after I had this painting by Schiele, I got—I was painted by Klimt.

[00:17:26.49]

And, well, as I told you, Hans and I—we were very close. We didn't marry because he thought an artist shouldn't marry, and I thought an artist should be free. And there was an occasion—I think it was either Christmas or my birthday. They are very close, January and December—and he thought that he's going to give me a marvelous present, a necklace, a pearl necklace.

[00:18:05.55]

And I said to him—whether I could select the present, and he said, "Of course, if you don't like that." I said, I would like to have a portrait by Klimt. And that's how I got the portrait by Klimt. I myself couldn't have paid for the portrait by Klimt. And Klimt was a very famous artist at that time, and he knew of me because I was at that time—First of all, I was a friend of Hans Böhler, who was a known personality, and besides, I was at that time quite good-looking. So people—they knew about me.

[00:19:01.52]

And when I came to him, and he had his studio in a garden pavilion—in the pavilion in the garden—the house of the—belonged to a cousin of my father, but in the garden was a nice beautiful pavilion. And there was Klimt's studio. And he opened in—you know, he was—You will have seen pictures of him with a beard, and then he had a blue linen toga, you know, and he opened the door. I called him first and said I would like to talk to him about a portrait. And he said, all right, I can come that afternoon.

[00:19:46.67]

And then when I came, he opened the door, and he was still standing in the doorway. He said, "Warum? Sie sich gerade von einem sehr gut Maler gemalt worden." That means, "Why? You just have been painted by a very good painter," you see? [Laughs.] So I realized that he was a little bit offended that I first had Schiele and then Klimt, but he was the painter of Austria, of Vienna. So I could understand that. And I said, "Yes, that is true, but I do hope you, nevertheless, will still want to paint me." And then he painted me. And—oh, but does that interest you, the interior of his, of his—

[00:20:40.53]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Yes.

[00:20:41.61]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: He had— A whole wall was a wardrobe full of silk Japanese costumes, marvelous Etles shiny silk, embroidered, and all that. And he took one out after another, and he held it up to me. And he said, "Do you think you would like to have this and that," until finally, I told him, "Professor, you know that quite some time ago I have seen a hand-blocked silk where I stopped and said, 'this silk is a Klimt silk,' because that is something that you would have painted." He said, "Oh? I would like to see that. You have that silk?" I said, "I have a dress of it." Because when I went with Hans on a world tour, we went to South America, to all the states of South America, and to Bolivia, to Rio de Janeiro, to Brazil, to Chile, and came up to New York, and from New York to Vienna. And I only had six evening dresses with me, and those were all by hand block silks from the Werkstätte, all the same style, exactly the same style. And one of them was this, and I said, "I will bring it."

And I brought it, and I took it on. And I put it on, and then I said—This fur coat—he said, "Put your fur coat on." And it was such a three-quarter fur coat, you know? And I said, "May I put it on, as I would like to always, only don't have the courage?" And he said, "Go ahead." And I

put it on inside out. So the fur was inside, you see, and outside was a hand-blocked silk, the lining. And he said, "Stop, that's how I'm going to paint you." The only thing he changed was that my coat was an iltis, which is brown and yellowish, and he made it gray, here, just around the neck, you see, and the border. Otherwise, it's exactly like that. And the background, you know, where you have the feeling—just wait. I'll show you the picture.

[Recorder stops, restarts.]

[00:23:28.98]

—immortalize you, and he put my name up there. And of course, you see, I was young then. And my name is Federica, but at home and everywhere they said "Fritzi" to me. So I said, please don't put "Fritzi" there. Put my name, Federica, there, so he put Federica, Federica Beer, Federica Maria Beer, you see. That was my maiden name. And that is the picture. This is a marvelous picture.

[00:24:00.33]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Marvelous. And this was a vase?

[00:24:03.81]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: And this was a vase. You see, the background was on a big vase, a Chinese vase, which he took off, you see. And he did this picture in 190—

[00:24:19.40]

BUTLER COLEMAN: —3?

[00:24:21.21]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: What?

[00:24:22.50]

BUTLER COLEMAN: No, 19—

[00:24:23.94]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: 1916 or '18.

[00:24:25.24]

BUTLER COLEMAN: '16.

[00:24:26.01]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: '16, 1916.

[00:24:27.55]

BUTLER COLEMAN: '16.

[00:24:28.09]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yeah, 1916, yes. And once I have to find the reproduction of the Schiele and give it to you. So this is about Schiele and Klimt, what I can tell you.

[00:24:43.39]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Tell me again about meeting Kokoschka.

[00:24:46.48]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Kokoschka?

[00:24:47.11]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Yeah.

[00:24:48.34]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, Kokoschka—he was a young painter then. He was—as I told you, I always was dressed by the Wiener Werkstätte. And that was very outstanding, and it was beautiful. So for an artist—My mother hated it, of course, you see. She thought it's terrible. She thought I should be dressed like the last Parisian style. But this was just artist-designed, and I loved it. And I was once going on the Kärntner Strasse. That is—I don't know. We don't have anything like that here in New York. New York is too big. [Laughs.] So he saw me in a blue silk dress and in a hat which had three shades of blue veils, you see. And the light came through blue, I guess. And he saw me, and he stopped me. He said, "Gnädige Frau, so muss ich Sie malen." That means—I don't know how you say, "gnädige Frau" in English. [Laughs.] It means, "like this I have to"—"like this I have to paint you." And I said, I would love to have a painting by you. Tell me when you can paint me. And at that time, that was war, you know. It was the First World War. And he was in a palace in Vienna.

[00:26:33.95]

Have you heard or seen *The Third Man*, that film? That plays in a palace. In that palace there were in the yard, soldiers who were sick. That was a kind of a hospital. And he said, "I am there." Although he was well, he had to come back there in the evening. He was still not quite discharged. But he wanted to make preliminary sketches there as long as he was there. And I went there once, and I went there twice in that dress. And I felt so out of place, and I felt so ashamed. I thought it was so horrible. All at once I felt ashamed that I was dressed like that when there was the war going on and the soldiers were in the hospital. And so I told him, "I can't come anymore. I can't." And I didn't come anymore, and I haven't seen him since. I think he must have gone to England. He is with the Marlborough Gallery. He had a marvelous exhibition. I have drawings of his which I have from Hans because Hans was a great admirer of his.

[00:27:54.02]

And, oh, by the way, only the other day I came across a card which Kokoschka has written to Hans from England about four or five years ago or something with the repro—with some drawing and saying he sends him his best regards and he hopes he publishes this drawing. I don't know what he meant with that. But I just came across it yesterday.

[00:28:23.31]

BUTLER COLEMAN: When was the first time you saw what was happening in Paris, say, Picasso and Braque and all that? Do you recall?

[00:28:35.16]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes, I do recall, but you see, everything is—as it was my life, art, so everything is one big thing. So it is difficult to date it. I knew what—well, I was in Paris. I was in Paris in '13. I don't think—I don't think in '13. Well, where is that marvelous "Guernica"? Where did I see that first? I don't know.

[00:29:10.30]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But the earlier period was the early Rose, and Blue, and you know, the circus people. Did you see those in Paris?

[00:29:18.61]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I have—between—I came to this country here. I was the first time here in '13, 1913, and then I came definitely in '36, and I—since '36 I'm in this country.

[00:29:48.68]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But during the '20s, you were in Vienna?

[00:29:51.80]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: During the '20s?

[00:29:57.82]

BUTLER COLEMAN: After the war. After the war until you came here.

[00:30:01.81]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: You mean after the First war. You always have to say "First" and "Second."

[00:30:05.65]

BUTLER COLEMAN: After the First war until you came here, you were in Vienna.

[00:30:10.62]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, not always. I was in Italy from '29—[pause] I think from '29. I was in Italy for about—or from '28, something, until '32. I was four years in Italy. I lived on a small island of Procida, of Ischia, yes. I was in Italy. I married an Italian sea captain, and I went to live on those islands for four or five years, I think. And then I got a divorce, and I went back to Austria. And I was in Austria until '36, until '36, and then I came to New York.

[00:31:23.13]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Were you following what was happening in modern art, though?

[00:31:27.48]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Not in Italy. I didn't even have a daily paper. No. At that time, that was an old—it was a country house. It was—absolutely I did not, no.

[00:31:41.20]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But before you went to Italy, were you aware of what was happening?

[00:31:45.01]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, yes, yes. I was aware with all the exhibitions in Vienna which we could have. But don't forget, of course, Hitler I did not experience. That I did not experience. No. I remember—because I was traveling. I remember I was in Florence in '33 when, in a pensione, two American schoolteachers all at once stopped me, and told me, "You have to come here and listen. This is Hitler's speech now." He had a speech over the radio. There was no TV at that time—over the radio. No. I don't know. I only know that during the war, when I was here, I sent food packages and clothing packages to Europe.

[00:32:40.81]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Well, when was it that you were telling me about—you were in the cafe.

[00:32:45.73]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, when Hugh Stix—

[00:32:46.66]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

[00:32:48.07]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, that was '30—I think '34. '34 or '35.

[00:32:59.32]

BUTLER COLEMAN: And who were you with there?

[00:33:00.67]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: I was with Hans, Hans Böhler. I was with Hans Böhler when an American young man came into that bar and asked for a Clover Club. And the barmaid didn't

know what it was, and Hans knew. So Hans explained it, and we started to talk with this man. And this young man was Hugh Stix, who was a student from Harvard and on a world tour. He wanted to see Europe and Russia and then come back here and teach.

[00:33:44.41]

And he met Hans, and he met me. And somehow he liked us, and he was impressed by our—I think by our life, or something. And yes, but I don't want you to think that Hans and I were, at that time, as we were before. No, we were only always very good friends, but—Hans never married, but he was absolutely free. So—and Hugh Stix came to his studio and saw his work, saw his collections. He had beautiful collections of Viennese pottery, and all that. And I was with Nebehay for—at that time, not anymore, but before I was with Nebehay, which was a gallery in Vienna.

[00:34:50.50]

And we spoke about gallery and artists and exhibitions, and that was when Hugh Stix then decided that he is not going to teach, he's going to open a gallery. And he went back to America, and then he asked me—he wrote me whether I would be interested in taking charge of a gallery. And I was very pleased. I wanted to—we would have gone away from Austria anyway. We wouldn't have wanted to stay, Hans and I, and I—

[00:35:32.81]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Were you being persecuted and—

[00:35:34.73]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, no, not that, but even if it—I mean only to be—it was a terrible—it was so inhuman, the whole thing. So we would have gone away, either to Switzerland or to France, or I would have gone away. I don't know about Hans because he had his life there.

[00:36:00.92]

So I came over here. And then Hugh Stix brought—I brought Hans' drawings. Hugh Stix showed those drawings first in the Hotel Lafayette. That was on Eighth Street and Ninth—Eighth Street. And what is that, University Place or something in the back of it there? There was a Hotel Lafayette, and there he showed those drawings. And the other day I came across a book where the people wrote their names who came and looked first at that exhibition. And then we—Hugh Stix took number 33 West Eighth Street on the first flight up. He took that loft, and he made a gallery. And that was the Artists' Gallery, and that was the first place where the Artists' Gallery functioned as an artist gallery because at the Hotel Lafayette it was Hugh Stix who brought that over.

[00:37:04.35]

And that was a non-profit organization, and you know from all these how this functioned, how Hugh Stix got sponsors, and interested people, and they kept the gallery going. And I know the first year, our schedule was daily from 10 [am] to 10 [pm], because in the Village, on 8th Street, in the evening, there were many people, and I realized the other day when I came across a guest book which we had at the first exhibition of Hans Böhler, we asked the people to put down their names. They didn't put down their addresses. You see, we were so silly that we didn't realize that this is important, so that we can write them again or something. They only just put down their name. What we wanted to know was which painting did they like. And so we got the whole list, and they put down two paintings they liked best. And I went through those—through that list the other day, and amazing, really, how most of the people, they have the same taste, because at least 60 percent had the same two paintings. Only a few had some other paintings, which—

[00:38:35.93]

BUTLER COLEMAN: What were they, figurative or—

[00:38:38.30]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Beg your pardon?

[00:38:38.84]

BUTLER COLEMAN: —representational?

[00:38:39.34]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, they were all—Böhler was never Abstract.

[00:38:43.37]

BUTLER COLEMAN: No.

[00:38:43.70]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, he was Expressionist. Yes, there were azaleas—and I still have the painting here right in my apartment, one of them. The other one is in a private collection. One of them is here. And that was just to show you how absolutely un-businesslike we were. [Laughs.]

[00:39:06.39]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Who were you showing to begin with?

[00:39:08.57]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: We showed—[background noise] the first was Hans Böhler because this I could bring with me, and then from then on—yes, Louise Nevelson was one of them. She showed that these—what she has now in the Whitney Museum. You see these walls of black-painted wood carvings. We showed that. We showed Nevelson. We showed Schanker. We showed Margules. We showed Baizerman, both Baizerman—Eugenie Baizerman and Saul Baizerman then.

[00:39:54.72]

BUTLER COLEMAN: How did you come in contact with De Hirsh Margules?

[00:39:58.23]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, you see, we told the artist that we—first of all, they can bring us work to the gallery. We are going to look at it. When we think that we would like to show it, we shall show it without any fee. We shall—when it is sold, we shall have the check made payable directly to them. We didn't take any—

[00:40:28.38]

BUTLER COLEMAN: —commission.

[00:40:28.71]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: —commission. Well, the artists talked about that among themselves, so we had quite a lot of artists coming in, asking me to come to their studios.

[00:40:40.44]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I read something. You went to see—who was it, Golub?

[00:40:45.35]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Golubov.

[00:40:46.71]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Or somebody, and you looked across, and the door was open on the other side. Who was that? And you said—you went to some studio.

[00:40:56.52]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, yes, that I would have done.

[00:40:58.59]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But you looked across, and you found another painter.

[00:41:02.19]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yeah, yeah.

[00:41:02.40]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Was it Byron Browne? And you turned around and saw somebody on the other side?

[00:41:06.33]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: That is possible. I don't remember who it was, but a thing like that happened, yes, yes. Yeah, because we did not have any scheme by what to—we showed abstract, we showed expressionist, whenever it impressed us, you see. Of course, it was very—I must say, it is just as—how do you say that? Oh, for instance, Golub, when he came, and he threw his canvas on the floor because it was rolled up, you see—Leon Golub. He came in, and said, "Would you like to see my work?" And he had such a big roll, and I was terribly—although it was the gallery, and gallery hours, I was terribly curious. So I said, "Please," and he [imitates rolling sound] just threw it like this on the floor, and it was a marvelous painting. It was so good. And the better a painter was, the more I felt I had to tell him he has to go to other galleries where he can be taken up as a member and be pushed, and get higher prices because we only could ask what he asked. And as I tell you, the public had the feeling, as we didn't—as it was a non-profit organization, it was something like a poor house. And it—they had to have their own taste in order to buy at our gallery, you see, and so quite a number of collectors did buy in our galleries.

[00:42:58.43]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Tell me about—were you there—in '54 I think you gave Golub a show.

[00:43:05.87]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes, we gave Golub a show. I can't tell you exactly the date unless—

[00:43:09.88]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I think it was.

[00:43:10.40]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: —I look it up.

[00:43:10.91]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Were you there when Martha Jackson came in?

[00:43:15.39]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Martha Jackson?

[00:43:16.59]

BUTLER COLEMAN: She came in and bought a lot of paintings, didn't she?

[00:43:20.58]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, the gallery owner.

[00:43:25.53]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Something to do with a show with the Guggenheim, where Golub had very good review.

[00:43:33.63]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes, yes, yes, yeah. I know Betty Parsons came, for instance. I think—was it Lester Johnson, whom she bought? I don't know. She came. But I was always very happy when they came, and I was very happy when—I would have—I told her, if you want to give him a show now, I take the paintings off the wall and we give—it was for the artists. It was just walls for the artists, what we were, you know.

[00:44:11.45]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Tell me about Baizerman.

[00:44:13.43]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, Baizerman—he was a marvelous person, and she. There was a difficulty. She was a marvelous painter, beautiful paintings, but she put prices which were almost as high as a gallery on 57th Street which takes 33 [percent] or 40 percent. So we tried to tell her that she must realize that, but no. And so, of course, we didn't sell so much of hers.

[00:44:57.35]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:44:58.01]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: But the Whitney and the Modern Museum bought a painting.

[00:45:03.26]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Who was Sasha?

[00:45:05.54]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Sasha? Sasha Berman.

[00:45:08.42]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I saw a letter concerning—you got a very angry letter from somebody.

[00:45:14.30]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, I got angry letters from many. Yes, from Winter I got terrible letters. Yes. He was—you see, then at the end we found that, when we sell something, the check should be made out to the person, but in care of the gallery, so that we have something that we did give him. And he said no, he wanted to have it only directly to him, not in care of the Artists' Gallery. So there was some—but it wasn't so important. You see, I have a—I don't know whether that's a quality, or whether it's a mistake. I forget so easily, you know. So if somebody wrote me a terrible letter a week ago, the next week I really had forgotten it. I don't know why, but I just had forgotten it. I forget easily.

[00:46:25.10]

BUTLER COLEMAN: How did you come in contact with Albers?

[00:46:28.37]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Albers? I think Albers came to us. Albers—but Albers was a known person and a known painter.

[00:46:37.97]

BUTLER COLEMAN: He was at Black Mountain then.

[00:46:39.62]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: He was Black Mountain College. But he, at that time—now, of course, that would be—10 years ago, 15 years ago, that would have been a very good show

to sell, but at that time, it wasn't. And so he came to us because he was not so—it was not so important for him to sell as to show. He was a very fine person, very interesting. Werner Klint was a very, very good artist, a very, very interesting person. Oh, we have shown an Austrian painter, Mopp—Oppenheim—

[00:47:32.33]

BUTLER COLEMAN: —Oppenheim.

[00:47:33.07]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: —Max Oppenheim. And he has painted in Vienna, a wall-long painting of the Philharmonic in Vienna with portraits of all the—what do you call that in English? I can't speak English anymore since we don't have the gallery. [Laughs.] He made the portraits of all—of the first violinists, and so forth, all the—

[00:48:04.60]

BUTLER COLEMAN: —orchestra.

[00:48:05.20]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: —orchestra, yes. And of Schalk as a director, and that's a huge painting. And he had that here in this country, and I would like to find out what happened to that painting. I hope it doesn't—it isn't in some storage. He died, of course. He was a fine painter, known in Europe.

[00:48:28.81]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:48:29.62]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Then whom else? And Gütersloh, we showed. But here, of the American painters, Golubov is a fine—Peter Reinholt, Max Reinholt, and Adolph Gottlieb had his first two shows with us.

[00:48:44.37]

BUTLER COLEMAN: How did he come to you?

[00:48:45.93]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: They just came in and said, "Ms. Beer, can I bring you, or will you come?" And I said, "What size are they?" And at the moment when they said they were big, I said, "I come." And it wasn't easy at that time.

[00:49:08.92]

BUTLER COLEMAN: How was he painting, Gottlieb?

[00:49:12.10]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Abstract, of course, yes, yes.

[00:49:21.74]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you visit artists in the country or travel with them or—

[00:49:26.54]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No, not in the country. I didn't have the time because I only could go before we opened the gallery. After we closed, it was too dark, so—or during the lunchtime I could go and see them. But I went—I remember down here where I am living now there is a street like Gansevoort Street. There was an artist. I don't know anymore who he was, and I went to visit him. And at that time, my heart was still better, so I could climb those stairs. But I remember once there was a staircase. There were two—those were wooden staircases, of course, and there were two steps missing. And now, you know I'm small, and I

didn't know how I'm going to make that step over there. But I managed it, but just to show you it wasn't always so easy. But it was so interesting. I tell you, it was a wonderful, wonderful thing, and it was a wonderful life. And I still think—although nowadays everything is much easier, I still think somebody should have like Hugh Stix had this idea to do something like that.

[00:50:45.51]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I agree.

[00:50:45.78]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Don't you think there would—

[00:50:46.47]

BUTLER COLEMAN: I agree.

[00:50:46.62]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: —be still room for that?

[00:50:48.15]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Yes, definitely, definitely.

[00:50:50.19]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Because Hugh Stix—he really sacrificed a lot to keep this going, because it didn't always go only by what we got sometimes.

[00:51:03.82]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Who was Ms. Pritz? Who was that?

[00:51:05.64]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, Mary Pritz. She was a darling girl. She came to volunteer. She is now in, I think, New Hampshire. She has an antique shop. She wrote me about three or four months ago that she will come to New York and visit me. Mary Pritz was one of our first assistants, yes. And we had—no, the very first was Thad Clapp that was—Thaddeus Clapp, that was a fellow student of Hugh Stix in Harvard. He is now Reverend—uh, he has—

[00:51:50.66]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Minister?

[00:51:51.29]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yeah, Minister at St. Mark's Church, also in Massachusetts somewhere, yes.

[00:51:58.82]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Because this is, I believe, something to do with—Kaldis came, and Mr. Barnes—can you tell that story?

[00:52:08.54]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, Barnes bought something. We had a Negro who was cleaning the gallery, and he was sitting there and looking at the painting. And Kaldis said that he's going to paint him like that, admiring art, and that was when we were on 13th Street, yes. I remember Barnes came in with a lady, and he had a few paintings. And his painting was so original, so direct. It was primitive. It was very, very charming. And he painted Edmund admiring art, yes.

[00:52:47.07]

BUTLER COLEMAN: The painting was called what, "Absorbing Art"?

[00:52:49.26]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: "Absorbing Art," that's it, "Absorbing Art," Barnes for the Barnes Collection bought it, yes. You really looked through these things, I can see.

[00:53:01.44]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did Ad Reinhart show with you?

[00:53:03.30]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yes, he showed with us, yes. He was a—he's a very nice person.

[00:53:14.40]

BUTLER COLEMAN: But you always stayed pretty much representational or non-abstract.

[00:53:18.15]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No. No, no, really not. If you go through this, you will see it almost—on the—Because, you see, it was a time when the expressionists suffered very much, because the critics almost didn't come to see them because it was the big—the powerful abstract wave. There were marvelous abstract paintings, of course. I am not—I can't be against abstract, and I never was. But for instance, Akiba, Albers was an abstract painter. Milton Avery we showed, you remember. That was [inaudible]. You knew Maurice Baker?

[00:54:08.64]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Mm-mm [negative].

[00:54:09.32]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: No? Ben-Ben? Ben-Zion?

[00:54:13.70]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Ben-Zion.

[00:54:14.84]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Ben-Zion was figurative too. Sarah Berman was.

[00:54:21.81]

BUTLER COLEMAN: That was Sasha?

[00:54:24.80]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Sasha, yeah. That was Sasha.

[00:54:27.65]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you have any great friends, people you spent a lot of time with out of your artists?

[00:54:32.09]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: The artists? No. When Hans came over—Because, you see, I was alone. Hugh Stix was in business. He was with White Rose Brothers, you see. That is a food firm. He was busy. He only came Saturdays to the gallery, and I stayed there until about from morning until we closed. So in the evening, I just—I lived on 56 Seventh Avenue. I just went home. And my sister lived here, so I went to her place. And when Hans came to live in America, he had a girlfriend. She was a musician. And we went out together, and she and Hans and I went over to my sister. But I never—I don't remember any of the artists that—they came, and we talked in the gallery. But we never met outside. I was not that strong that I could have such long days. [Pause] Pousette-Dart was a very good artist that we

showed.

[00:56:28.77]

BUTLER COLEMAN: When did you move from 13th Street to Lexington Avenue?

[00:56:33.69]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Oh, the other day I made a note of that. We started on Eighth Street, and from there we went to 13th Street. And then we were closed for two years during the war, and then we went to 55th Street. There we were only one season, I think in '48. And then we went to 55 West 57th Street, and were there two seasons, and from there we went to Lexington Avenue and stayed there until we closed. So those were the places we were.

[00:57:22.28]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you know Rebay?

[00:57:23.96]

[Side conversation.]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: What is going on [inaudible].

[00:57:25.85]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Did you know the Baroness Rebay, von Rebay?

[00:57:28.76]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Rebay? Yeah, yeah. Now, where was she?

[00:57:32.06]

BUTLER COLEMAN: Guggenheim.

[00:57:32.99]

FEDERICA BEER-MONTI: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, Baroness Rebay, yeah, of course. I never—I didn't know any of them intimately or more—or better. I knew Director Messer more, because he came and spoke more often with me more about my works I owned by Klimt and Schiele, than about what we had in the gallery, but—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]