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Oral history interview with Gussie Du Jardin,  
1983 October 11

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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Gussie Du Jardin on October 11, 1983. The interview took place in Roswell, New Mexico and was conducted by Sharyn Rohlfesen Udall for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The Archives of American Art has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. 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

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: —October 11, 1983. We are in the studio of Gussie Du Jardin, in Roswell, New Mexico, where we're conducting an interview, an oral history, for the Archives of American Art. Thank you for allowing us to come to your home and studio.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: You're most welcome.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: We've already had a little look around your house, seen some of your work, which is on display, and you've given me a bit of an introduction about where some of your painting ideas come from. Let's talk for a minute about the paintings that we're seeing here in the studio. The one on the easel to our right looks as if it's one of your algae subjects.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Uh, one of the lichen ones.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: The lichen, okay. Tell me about those.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I started doing these about eight years ago. We had had a very severe winter in northern New Mexico, and I hadn't been able to get out to do landscapes. At the time, I was doing many of the maces [ph] of the great [inaudible] north and west, Las Vegas, New Mexico. We had many wonderful lichens on the rocks around that area, which occur in magnificent patterns. So I planned that the next winter, I wouldn't worry about the weather, and I would just stay home and paint lichens. I started one, and I hadn't even finished it when a man came in the house and said, "I want to buy that." Which was almost enough to turn me off of this line, because many artists are perverse enough to think that if something becomes popular, there's something wrong with it. [00:02:01] You know, if it's salable, it's immediately—it's the ivory tower attitude. But I liked very much this man who wanted to buy it, and he said, "And I want that rock that you're working on." So, he still has the painting. And I did many more of them, and it was an extremely profitable winter. I got lots done. I think because I've lived a life of great solitude, for several reasons—one, it started out because of health—that perhaps I get more involved in the subject matter than a lot of people. And the lichen, being a symbiotic relationship of an algae and a fungus, is the perfect relationship, because they mutually give to each other. They rest. They'll be attached to a tree, to a plant, to the earth, to rocks, but they take nothing from that. All they take is moisture from the atmosphere, and then there's this miraculous thing that happens, that they're feeding each other as they grow, which is a nice thing to think about as you paint them. And then there are just endless designs. I did become interested in learning more about the lichen then, and bought some books so that I could know the names of these, just as if you're painting a still life of plants—and these are plants—you like to know if you're painting a rose or a pansy. [00:04:02] It's sort of the same idea. Again, I was very successful with these. I think that, for about five years in a row, I was alternately in the New Mexico exhibit in the biennial at the museum. I sold most of the lichen paintings I did. And then, when I applied for the grant, I said I was working on two themes, and one was the hexagon in nature, and the other were the lichen paintings.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: I'm going to stop you here for just a minute. You're talking about the grant here in Roswell? Would you—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, which was—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: —identify what it is?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: That was six years ago. We came down here in '77. It was a double-grant. My husband, Elmer Schooley, and I had these grants, which, I imagine, is about as nice a grant as is Santa Fe's. For one year, we were given our quarters, which were very nice. Two-bedroom apartment. Everything furnished, and two enormous studios. Everything furnished, except frames the [inaudible]. This carried with a stipend. It was, I think, probably the best year of our marriage, except the first year, when we went to Iowa and got our master's degrees, right after we were married. But that was overshadowed by the fact that the war had started. We were

there during Pearl Harbor. So this was an extremely wonderful year on the grant, and then we purchased this house, which is across the street from the artist-in-residence compound. [00:06:00] And I did stick to those two themes during the grant, because I felt I had committed myself to do this. So, when I had my exhibit at the Roswell Museum, it was entirely paintings on these two subjects, the hexagon in nature and the lichen. Then I started—I went back to an interest in painting what could be called landscapes with people in them. I had done—you saw the painting of the nuns, of the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, Kansas, at the old brick hospital in Las Vegas. I did probably a dozen paintings of New Mexico women with their houses, and they were all along—one was called *To Dust Returnest* [ph], and it showed an old woman out sweeping the bare yard of one of these buildings that has grown along the earth, with that gentle decay where the—on one end, it's decaying, and the adobes are returning to the earth. The next one is maybe being used in storage, and then a unit that is now occupied with the geraniums at the window in tin cans and the lace curtain and whatnot. That was one. I did another, in the Pecos [ph] Valley of women sitting on their front porch, shelling peas. And I did this with these different houses that fascinated me, but I was also very interested in the women that lived there. And an adobe house not too far from where we lived was the old maid's house, and I painted that with the old maid out sweeping her very neat front steps, and there again, lace curtains. [00:08:13] All very meticulous, but still, it was New Mexico architecture. I enjoyed that series a great deal. In fact, I simply love to paint. I had a number of years, when the children were young, that I couldn't paint, and when I did try and paint, their interruptions, their waking from a nap, would irritate me, so I didn't even prepare a canvas for about six years. Just totally gave it up. But sometimes feelings of resentment on being a woman invariably happen. So Elmer had made his choice of teaching as being the best answer how to make a living, and he wanted children, and he wanted a family, and this is the best answer how to do it, to have an income. And he always took a term—one quarter off when he could paint, and he preferred winter, when there would be less interruptions. So usually he taught through the summer. We both liked to garden, and the health problem that led to a different way of life for me was that, from the time I was a child, my engineer father had lived two places that affected my health. First, the Mexican border, where I had infant diarrhea and was an invalid. I don't remember this, but I was very ill for over a year after that. [00:10:01] So we left there and went to McGill, Nevada, which was a smelter town, where I developed severe asthma. My mother would take us to the family ranch in Colorado every summer. One year of my life, I was in bed all winter with deafness, because both my ears were draining from infection. And so I learned to live with books, with making paper flowers, with drawing, and painting. I think that I probably would have done this anyway, but it surely helped to intensify my interest in all sorts of crafts and painting.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: During the time that you were—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: During the time that I was an invalid. And then I would bloom every summer, but there, I was living on a very isolated ranch, where my brother and I—we were the two closest in age. I had a sister five years older, another sister seven years younger. So my brother and I explored the ranch. My mother thought we had guardian angels. We would walk through swamps. We knew where the quicksand springs were. And she didn't worry about us. Then, as we were older and we both had a horse, we would explore the mountains, even being permitted to camp out overnight with our bedrolls in the high mountain country in Colorado, where I developed a keen interest in nature. My mother came of a naturalist family. Her great-uncle and her great-grandfather were both naturalists, Townsend and [inaudible] so that she had, in this isolated ranch, through her books—there was an extensive library. [00:12:05] Every book available on nature, encyclopedias and all. My grandmother would take me out and teach me all the native plants, and I knew their common names, and some of their botanical names, so that I would feel that it would be very un—it would be dishonest for me to try and keep abreast with current movements in art. I understand how certain types of painting that I enjoy come from city life. I do not like only realism, but because of my deep interest in plants and animals, which takes me into the lichen, this is what I want to do, and I still enjoy, more than anything else, being out in nature and/or painting. The two are related. And one of my very worst allergies is cigarette smoke, so I was—had a hard time in college to try and find a living place, which I never did, without cigarette smoke. But I survived that, but it meant that I was saved bridge clubs, and I tried faculty wives once, and I was saved faculty wives, and I was considered a very peculiar woman.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: [Laughs.] Because you were saved by your allergy to cigarette smoke.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I did try PTA, but they smoked in PTA. [00:14:02]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: [Inaudible.] Well, you've described a number of your early childhood experiences, and the sense of isolation, or the actual isolation that you encountered not only because of your health, but also several places that you lived with your family. But it sounds as if your interest in nature was developed very early, through your family associations, and also through—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And the art world, too, because my mother's mother had been a painter. She went to school at Syracuse, New York. I have a stereopticon view of her, in front of this old building, which still exists, I think. And then I have two great-aunts on my father's side who were painters. Did very, very good watercolors. Some of them are in the California—the San Francisco Historical Preservation building there [ph]. So that there was

this interest, and it was time when I was in bed, these great-aunts sent me all kinds of kits. You know, the kits to make the paper flowers. Oh, I was really indulged. I was just a princess that whole—whole winter.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Did you get any early artistic encouragement in school at all?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes. Then, mostly because of my health, my father decided to leave Nevada. They began to get some idea that it was the smelter smoke that was—because a tree wouldn't grow in town at that time it was so bad. So he went to Hawaii, with an engineering firm there, and we went and stayed in Southern California for a year, which was just a delight. [00:16:05] We lived in Monrovia.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: That's near Los Angeles?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes. It was a lovely, small town there. Then, when my father decided that this was—I was very well then, except if I were near a pepper tree. And my mother was beginning to figure these things out, what made me ill. And we went to Hawaii then, and I bloomed. I became a beach bum. I swam. I—my children are so amused to see pictures of ma with a surfboard, this great big balsam and redwood surfboard. Very different from today.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Now, how old were you then, when you were in Hawaii?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I would have been, I think, 11 when we went, and stayed there until I started college. My father was a snob and didn't want to have me go to the University of Hawaii. I cried and begged to go. But it was because Hawaii was 60 percent Japanese, and he didn't want me going. And there, we went to a private school, Punahou, which was started by missionaries. There couldn't be a better school anywhere. It had 12 grades. There was great attention to your health, attention to your morals. It was interdenominational. It had been started by missionaries in 1842, and it was so famous that Forty Niners sent their kids over by ship to go to school there. There, we had art, and plenty of art. We had dance, and we did wonderful programs. We had to take swimming so we could swim 25 meters in 20 seconds. [00:18:03] This was—and I was good in backstroke, and I got to be on the racing team. All of us, except my older sister, became an athlete, and very involved in this.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Quite a transformation for you—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: —to then go into that.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And as my mother had later said, I had, evidently, a very strong constitution, finally came through. But still, when they would go out to dinner, I would stay home because of the cigarette smoke. My eyes would swell shut. So there, I took painting, I did some sculpture. We cast some things in lead. We made models in the casting processes. It just was a marvelous school. My freshman year in college was extremely easy. So the four years of college, I went to University of Colorado, and spent the summers at the ranch.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: In Colorado?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yeah. And after I graduated, my family was very concerned—let's see, this was in '39—about my interest in this penniless man who just—all he had was being an artist. So I went back to Hawaii, and a very strange thing had happened. I had terrible asthma. I had one winter I was back there.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: After you returned to Hawaii?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: After I returned to Hawaii. The rainy season started. There were no planes then, and I was so sick, my parents were too afraid to put me on the ship, which probably would have worked fine. As soon as we were away from land, I probably would have been fine. So, I painted then, and I went to the art institute and did night classes when I could, and kept right on with my interest in painting. [00:20:08]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Now, was this the art institute that's connected with the Honolulu [inaudible]?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, with the museum there. Then, Hawaii knew something dreadful would happen with the Japanese. The Japanese fleet would come within miles of the Hawaiian Islands, and my father had decided to send us all back to the ranch. Well, my brother was at the University of Colorado, and my sister was teaching. So back we came, and Elmer and I got married and left in September for Iowa, to get our master's. My father gave us enough money to do that, as a wedding present, and that was the year of Pearl Harbor.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: I see, so you were away?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: So, we had left. My father was still over there. But soon after, he sold—he had his own

engineering firm by this time, and he sold that and returned to the ranch.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Before we get too far beyond this, let me ask you about your impressions of Hawaii and the long-term effect that may have had on you. For one thing, coming from the mainland, from sort of a grim smelter town, to Los Angeles, and then to Hawaii must have been a tremendous—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Oh, it was so beautiful, because—people were still a little resentful of this pink hotel on Waikiki, the Royal Hawaiian. They thought it rather ruined the beach, and what it is now, it's nothing—and as we—we lived up in Manoa Valley, up where we could see all over clear from near Diamond Head, clear around to Pearl Harbor. [00:22:08] Beautiful place. And when we went to the beach, on the streetcar—there were those open streetcars that had a rail on either side, and when it was going one way, this rail would be pulled up, so you could get on the streetcar at any one of the seats. You see, there were steps the whole length of the—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Along the whole side.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And after work, the secretaries would run out carrying their shoes, and they would be barefoot, because everybody would go barefooted. At school—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So they'd take off their shoes?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —they tried to—they said, when we were in senior academy, we really should learn to wear shoes. Limousines would drive up to the chauffeur, and these children would get out all barefooted. [Laughs.] So it was a beautiful place to live, and on the way to the beach from our home, there were still taro patches that were being filled with water buffalo.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Goodness.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: So you'd see—I saw a truly beautiful Hawaii, and I don't want to go back.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Because it's changed?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes. Why do it?

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Did you ever try to paint Hawaii?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, I painted some there, and I don't think I have any of those paintings left. My mother saved some for a while, and then my grandmother—you know, I'd give different people ones. So I don't know what ever happened to all of them. I think maybe it's a little too hard there, with people like Gauguin [inaudible]. I didn't much care for my major professor, Philip Guston, because he had a very strong influence, and people started painting small Philip Gustons. [00:24:15] The painter Stephen Greene was in our class. In fact, we had a large class with many people that later made quite a name for themselves.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: This was in Honolulu?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: No, this—I'm sorry, I've jumped to the University of Iowa, when we got our master's. Stephen Greene had been Solomon Goldberg the year before, and there was another Jewish boy from New York that just hated Steve Greene. That he would have denied his Jewishness. As easily as he threw away his background, he could throw away a type of painting. He was doing Fletcher Martins the first week of class, and very quickly switched to Philip Guston. So my line of thought had been there what you can learn in a negative way. And I immediately was so determined I would not do a Philip Guston at that time, you know, what he was doing then. But he did show me one thing. I was doing a picture that I—I had seen two nuns walking along in their black habits against a red brick wall, and they were carrying umbrellas, because it was raining. And this was the painting I was doing. The mood of this was lovely. One thing Philip Guston pointed out to me, he said, "Now, with that rain," he said, "still focus in some place on a couple of bricks." You know, this idea of not letting them all fade away. [00:26:03] And this was—it's a funny thing to remember, because it was very successful, this idea that he gave me. But I really didn't have much rapport with him, and this was his first teaching job, and he was not an articulate man. I noticed this in the TV program, that he still was not very articulate on that.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Let me ask you how you go a path and choose Iowa as a place to go and get your master's?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: It had quite a big name at that time, and so we decided we'd go there. I guess I'm going to let him—

[Audio Break.]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So these years at Iowa were about when?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: We left in the fall of '41. Then Pearl Harbor happened. And the year at Iowa was really important to both of us, because all our teachers at the University of Colorado had come from Philadelphia—the Academy of Fine Arts, I believe. They were teaching in what Skinny [ph] has since called a renaissance fashion. We had four years color and design, four years of drawing, interior decoration, perspective. A very rigid type of education. There were even prejudices about color. There was one teacher that never wanted us to use black, and said, "You should never make a shadow purple."

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So lots of rules.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: So that whether or not I really had rapport with Philip Guston, we both learned so much about color. [00:28:05] We both learned that we could be very free, that we didn't need to do all these rigid things that we'd been taught. So it was a wonderful year for us. And we both got our master's all right. We had about a month cut off of the program, and started going to school on Saturdays. They were bringing in a language class for the services—Chinese, Japanese, Russian, the whole thing—and they wanted the graduates out of their way. So we got through in May, much earlier than we intended to, and Elmer enlisted in the air force, and went in in September. And he had wanted children. This was as good a time as any, so our next child was born in—our first child was born in April of '43, and of course this was a period when neither of us painted.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: He because he was in the service?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: He was in the service, and I because of having babies. We just—our child baby was such a joy to both of us that, when he was made permanent party in Lowry Field in Denver, and we were staying there, why, we decided to have another free [ph] baby, and I think I got pregnant the night before he left for overseas.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh my.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: So the next 23 months, I think, he was gone were a really grim time, because my only brother was killed. My older sister's husband was in Italy fighting. My younger sister's husband was in the Battle of the Bulge. [00:30:03] And it was just very, very bad times for everybody. And yet when Elmer came home in the middle of the year, got a job at Silver City, we went—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: That would have been '45?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: That—yes, I think that—we went there in January, and he taught there at the university. We took our babies and went down there. And I did do two very small paintings during that time. Then he went to Highlands University, where we stayed 30 years. By this time, I had been to an allergist, and I did have—I continued to have a lot of allergy problems, and he said the best thing to do was get in one place and stay there and get desensitized to the things that bothered me. Then I started painting, and—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: After the move to Las Vegas?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes. And we had exhibits together, twice, at the—when they used to have Alco [ph] shows. They'd ask us at the same time. People seemed to be interested in this concept of a married pair of artists. And I think it would have been better if we could have exhibited singly, because I really have—I have felt this very different attitude that they have toward the female of a pair of artists.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: You're talking about museum staff?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Everybody. Yeah. [00:32:00] And one of the things is that they would see our paintings together, and the response would be, to me, "Oh, you do paint like your husband" or "You don't paint like your husband." You see, I am always compared to him. The thing that I have to fight is not getting angry with him. You know, he—the other people leave, and here's this person right there [laughs] that—I think that's why I feel this strong affinity to the few women I've known who are artists married to artists. They can recognize some of the problems involved with this.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Yes, you were mentioning earlier an affinity that you felt for Barbara Latham.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, this is it.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Howard Cook. The same situation.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Because she would put—she would—it was almost a self-effacing attitude, because she'd refer to the work she was doing as potboilers.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Did you feel that way about your own work ever?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Once in a while, I did. I think it was when we'd both been with a gallery in Taos, and Elmer

started painting quite large, and they said they just couldn't handle such big paintings, and I realized that I was willing to continue to paint in an acceptable size. People would want a car—a painting they could put in their car. I would know that we needed some extra money for this or that, and I'd be willing to hold down my size, with the result that the painting in here that I started of three nudes in the sauna—it's the biggest one I've ever tried, and I'm still having a real hard time with it. [00:34:03]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Moving from—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, that I painted—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: —long time smaller scale.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yeah, there had been things—I thought I'd like to try one of these lichen paintings very large. There was a huge rock at Montezuma that had a fossil of epidendrum across it, with this marvelous pattern of this old fossil tree in the sandstone, and then there were lichen on it beside. And it was just a marvelous pattern. I thought, gee, if I could just do that life-size, that would be fun. Now I find it's very hard for me.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: To work that large?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, how is the process accomplished where you transfer something that is a relatively small size onto a larger canvas? Now, these are obviously magnified many, many times. How do you complete that? How do you go from looking at it to—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I have a very wonderful dissecting microscope [laughs]—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, really?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —that I got just years and years ago, when I was studying plants. And many of the alpine flowers are so tiny that just a magnifying glass isn't enough, and so I'd need to dissect them to find out what they really were.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So you would actually take a sample and look at it under your—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, I have the rocks. I have, right here, the rock from which this painting comes. We were up on Sierra Blanca a year ago, and they were putting in a new part to the ski area. We rode up on the gondola. And they were disturbing the soil, so that I just picked up some of those rocks and brought back.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: This rock is, roughly, let's say, six-by-eight inches, and relatively flat on the surface. [00:36:01] The dimensions of that painting are about what, Gussie?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: It's 40x44, I believe, inches. And you can see the different general types. Some of them truly are to get the forms of—you need the microscope.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, yes, I can see that. The general color areas that you can see on the rock, and bits of contrasting color and form. But it's certainly not easy to pick out the details.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: The details that are so nice are very often the fruiting bodies of the lichen, which, in many cases, have a mushroom shape, which, you see, repeats the fungus shape—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, yes, I see.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —you see, of the—you think of that as you go into it.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So it is sort of a true microcosm kind of thing that you're looking at.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: And one of the things that is fun is that some of them look like aerial maps. One that was—a lady in Santa Fe has looked like an underwater scene. It just happened to look like maybe some water plants. And just as you keep finding the hexagon in things, you keep finding repeats—some of these lichen could be part of the Greek motifs in that the fringe [ph] on that one, you know, in the columns and whatnot.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: That's right. That's right. They certainly do recall that kind of thing. And while, when we know what the subject is and where it came from, we can pick out forms in it that relate to other ideas, obviously this is, overall, a really abstract kind of painting. Do you think of it consciously as being abstract, or is this—[00:38:02]

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I think so.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: —realistic to you?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I think so, that it is very abstract. And people that don't know anything about lichens, I believe, think it's a pure fantasy, that it is an abstraction that I worked out.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Rather than based on something that was originally a visual image.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. You know the hexagon one that was there in the bedroom, with the capital form? That is the head of horsetail that you find growing along creeks, and it's a very primitive plant. Do you know the plant?

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: I don't believe so.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: It's stem is jointed, and you can pull that apart.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: You do know it?

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: I do.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Children love to play with it.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, exactly, that joint.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Years ago, they were used as sandpaper to sharpen oval reeds. They're rough, just—but a fine roughness. Those look just like some sort of Greek capital.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Wonderful.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: That's the way they grow up. And so, people have always gotten ideas from things like this, you know, for thousands of years. A young man was here. He had an exhibit at the museum. He liked the lichen paintings so much, he said, "Do you mind if I do lichen paintings?" [Laughs.] I said, "I have no copyright on lichen any more than you can have copyrights on a bunch of flowers." You know, they just exist. Wherever you go, you find different lichen. People have been so nice since seeing these. They will send me lichen.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. They think you might be interested.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I have a wonderful old friend who was touring Baja when she was about 84. [00:40:03] I think she's 88 now. And she sent me a rock. I got this gorgeous rock through the mail that she'd picked up in Baja.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: You seem to pay attention to and appreciate old—older kinds of primitive forms in nature, or simplified plants and animals, such as the lichen and this primitive kind of plant that you were mentioning to me, and the rare plant that you discovered recently that you showed me a sample of in your house. Is this a conscious kind of thing? Do you appreciate the primitive and other aspects of life, too?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I believe so—

[Audio Break.]

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —that I was extremely interested in all of the primitive Hawaiian art when we were there, and I have seen exhibits of the Australian Aborigine art. I think I do feel very drawn to it, and of course, here in New Mexico, our wonderful pictographs, where you can go to various places and explore. We've photographed them a lot.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Have you used photography as a tool in your painting at all?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Ever worked from photographs?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I took a lot of pictures when I was doing that big view at Sabinosa of the Canadian River. In the studio, I found I was—I had done the sketches of nature, but I found I was making all of the juniper trees look alike. And so I had a Polaroid, black-and-white, and I just went out and took probably 20 pictures, just of juniper trees, just to get different outlines, because you find yourself repeating it. [00:42:07] So I find that photography



can be a tremendous help.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Sure. That's certainly a legitimate use for it. It's difficult to conjure up in your mind the different possibilities of shape that you could find in trees.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And yet, I am old-fashioned in that when there was a person on the grant doing huge etchings that were involved—it was only a photographic process. She would make a collage using some photos, some materials, and she would photograph it, and using photolith [ph] make a negative, and project it onto a sensitized plate and etch it. When we were in school, we were not to use photographs. You see, this was cheating. And it was almost like a moral thing that was—this young man that admired my lichen paintings so much does his big landscapes by projecting right onto the canvas, and then you—the slides. Then you can see where he's drawn it. Well, that's all right. But still, in the back of my mind, there's a little something that isn't quite right. We bought a book recently on Remington. It's his stories, with his illustrations. He did very little work out in nature, and he used photographs extensively. [00:44:00]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: I don't know that too many people are aware of that.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: He died very young, and he weighed something like 300 pounds, so you know it's hard really [laughs] getting out in nature.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: [Laughs.] Couldn't do it—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: He was educated in art. He was highly educated. Anyway, I have no objections to it, and in this painting, the view from the front bedroom window, I took pictures of that hanging plant. I don't know the name of it. I bought it in Albuquerque, because it was just what I needed in the painting. Because I was so afraid it might go out of bloom before I finished the painting. Now I've been waiting for the bougainvillea to bloom again. I have—want to do it up this side, and I'm going to put a different plant over in the corner there. Many changes yet to do.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: In this painting?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: In this painting, yes.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So you're actually going to change this? Which looks, to my eyes, like a finished piece. Well, it certainly is—seems to be botanically correct. You can identify several kinds of plants in that, and I think that exhibits your interest in botanical specimens. I know another of your interests is in birdwatching. Have you ever tried to paint birds or incorporate them?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes, I have two paintings of birds. I have a woodblock I did some years ago of a black-crowned night heron, and the two paintings I've done were of an egret—that one isn't finished—and then of the American bittern. This winter, we took photos with a telescope. We got a Celestron photograph—telescope—originally just for birdwatching, but then we got seduced into trying some photos, and now we've done some for ourselves, and did—a roseate spoonbill was flown up here, evidently, by Hurricane Alicia, from the coast. [00:46:15]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Goodness. That's a bird that's not usually found—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Never. It's a tropical bird. So we took a lot of photos of it, just—some will be for the refuge, to prove that it was there. Yes, we're both ardent birdwatchers, and really enjoy plants together.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Wonderful.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: We used to do a lot of gardening, but here we are doing much less, because of Bermuda grass. And just because we want to paint. I think as you feel that your years are running out, and you have all these ideas that you still want to paint, just as backlog, that then you—

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GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —eventually meet with so much in their backgrounds that are alike. We're both of families of four children. Elmer's family was made up of Dunkers and Quakers in his background.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Hmm. What is a Dunker?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: They're, uh—were another—very similar to the Amish and the Quakers. They used hooks and eyes for their clothing, because even a button would be adornment. And they wore the little white caps and the black clothes. We have a picture of some of his great-grandparents all—they did not deny the flesh as to food. They were Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Then—that was his mother's side, and his father's people, the

Schooleys, were Quakers. They came about the same time that my Townsend Quaker ancestors came to Long Island, and were persecuted by the pilgrims and Puritans. You know, freedom of religion. We have, both, a great interest in Schweitzer, Albert Schweitzer, and his philosophy. When our younger son was quite little, he started writing to Ali Silver, the Dutch nurse at Lambaréné. This painting of the black faces, vaguely seen through surgical masks, was done from—it was an idea I got from a photo of Schweitzer's surgery in Lambaréné, Africa. [00:02:03] There had been a white doctor in it that I didn't use, and after I got my idea, I then put the photo away, so it would not influence me in any way. The surgery was boards, just—it was just like this shack, more or less, painted white. That's where that idea came from. And Teddy corresponded for years with Ali Silver, and after Schweitzer's death, she went to Gunsbach, France—Ali Silver went to Gunsbach, France—to look after the archives there. This is a house which Schweitzer built with his Nobel money. She's still there. I think she's probably about my age. She's a Dutch nurse, and another Dutch nurse lives there. And Teddy went there in '76 and spent the summer there. And in '77, Elmer went there, too. I didn't go, because I wanted to pack to get down here, and I wanted to get rid of him so that I could do it systematically. [Laughs.] Schweitzer's philosophy has been very important to both of us. His reverence for life, and all life. We wish we could be vegetarians, as he was. And we do control our beef-eating. And it ties in with all our other interests, that Schweitzer said we must have a broader ethic that includes the animals, too. I swat flies, and he wouldn't, but. [Laughter.] [00:04:01]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: It would be difficult to be that—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I try to look with a kindly eye upon snakes, and roadrunners, as they devour all our baby quail.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, yes. Wonderful. Tell me about—another theme in your work that interests me, and this is the hexagon in nature, which you've mentioned a couple of times. I'd like to hear some more about how that idea came about and developed. You were telling me a bit about it in the house earlier. Can you—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I think the first painting I did was when I had gotten well into the lichen and began looking at more and more things under the microscope. And the paper wasp, the field wasp, chews up wood to build that little hexagonal nest. And I had one that was a local one there, and it was very gray, and I was wondering what this might be, because a friend brought me one from Mexico where the wasp nest was an earth-red, as if it had chewed the bark of a tree that was red. [Coughs.] And then I thought I'd paint this. So I painted the nest that I'd picked from scrub oak. I even had the larch—scrub oak leaves in the back. And I had so much fun with this, because this was an acrylic painting, and I painted it on raw linen, directly, without any priming, and let the linen be one of the colors of the paper nest. And it just worked real well. It was a wonderful way to paint. [00:06:01] It did bother me about preservation. I later used a matte varnish on it to try and cover the linen cloth, because there was so much of it. And then I got further into the hexagons and began to see them more and more, and did the honey bee. Then I did one, when I was on the grant, of the brood chamber of the honey bee. Elmer was so brave. He put on his coveralls, but he didn't have a bee veil on, and the people were robbing the bees of the honey. This man showed them where the queen bee was, down in the brood chamber, and he took a picture of that, from which I could see a lot of detail that most people, even a beekeeper, would never see. And about this time, I tried something that has worked well for me. I put the slide under the microscope and viewed the slide with an excellent lens, and saw detail that you don't see when you project something. Elmer has since used that on some of his grass paintings. He'd take the microscope in there and look to see some of the structure—grasses that you'll see when you talk to him, and found out things like the larva of the honey bee doesn't have any eyes. It's just this little wiggly grub that sticks up this insatiable mouth. Then I asked people—the wax that eventually the larva is covered with is reddish, and it's a very different color than the ordinary wax in the other cells. [00:08:06] I asked several beekeepers about this. Nobody knew anything about this, until I finally read that sometimes they use rosin in the—see, the wax they manufacture and pull out of little places on their tummy. That they have little plates here, and the wax comes out from in there.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: But the mixture of the rosin would color—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Was evidently this pinkish color. And that was a very patterned abstract painting, with some cells—with the little grub showing. I made it—the cells were probably three inches in diameter. And then some cells that were capped, and other cells where the bee is emerging. And from this picture, I found that the eyes of that little emerging bee are close together, jammed up together, and then later, you see, this whole head shape changes. This is how I get so involved in the things I'm painting.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, I can see that. Such careful observation goes into this, and care. That is very unusual.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: I was really hurt and perplexed by a young lady that was here on the grant, and normally it's rather hard for me to talk about my paintings and what I'm trying to do, particularly, I think, to another artist. But I liked this woman very much, and I knew she had just been through a lot of grave problems, so I sat and talked to her, and I talked to her along this line, about this pleasure I get not only from the painting, but from

knowing about the things I'm painting. [00:10:08] That it's really very important to me. When I had stopped for a minute, she said, "I don't believe in intellectualizing my painting. There's just me and the material." And it really—it set me back, and I thought, I'm not intellectualizing. I'm enjoying it, and I'm enjoying these things that go into it.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Seems to add a whole extra dimension for you.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yes. I have met enough retirees down here that are so bored in their retirement, and there are still so many things I want to read about, and know about, and see, that it just—I just think if I could have their time, too, that they're so bored.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Yes, you wish.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: See, while I'm sitting here talking to you, I just noticed something I really dislike about that painting, and that's that sharp edge of that tree trunk.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Bothers you?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Yeah. So there's something to change. I already knew I would change that upper corner, where that architectural detail is too strong, but that's going to be done by—the plant will be higher, and will cover some of that, and I think I'll darken—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Some of those edges.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: —under the eaves there, too.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you often go back and rework a painting after a period of time?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And we used to, both, take paintings into one wall that was in our dining room, and hang a painting there so that we could study it over a period of time, and this would keep happening. [00:12:01] As you'd live with it for maybe a month, then you could note all these things that you'd rather have done a different way, and take it back. What's really bad is if you get them up and see them in a museum, and then see the things you'd rather change. [Laughter.]

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Only then it becomes—

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And there was—I don't know if it was Turner that supposedly would go into the museum and paint. There was some English artist, would go in and paint on it, right there in the museum.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: That's later. How interesting. I notice, on your studio door over here, a photograph of Georgia O'Keeffe, and you have a Monet poster also on your door.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Oh, we went to St. Louis to see that big Monet show. And we were acquainted with Georgia O'Keeffe. For years, she did not have any relationship with the Santa Fe museum. I don't know what had caused that. But Elmer planned different paintings—exhibits—for Highlands, and he wrote to Ms. O'Keeffe, and asked if they might possibly borrow a painting, and she wrote back and said yes. So we went over there, and I can about place the year. It would have been 26 years ago, when our youngest son was two.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: So you went to Abiquiú?

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: So we went to Abiquiú, and we visited. And I mostly walked around with Teddy. Elmer got to talk with her a great deal more than I did, but she was very friendly. We left with this painting in the back of the truck that was appraised at \$4,000 and I was just terrified. [00:14:06] I thought, what if a car rams it? And it's that black cross against the red. Do you know that painting?

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh, yes. Oh, I do.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: That's the one. And we had it for a month. I can always remember her age. She was born in '87, the year my mother was. So we had a very nice relationship with her. We took the painting back when she was away that day, her companion was there. The thing happened then I'd been afraid of, and that was Teddy had walked across those adobe floors, and his shoes were dirty. Her couch was all along one side of the living room. It was like two single—maybe three single bare mattresses just on a frame, covered with black. Everything was black and white. Teddy ran—saw that expanse, jumped up, and ran the whole length of it [laughter] leaving a trail of dusty footprints. But her companion was very nice, and talked to us about a recent trip to South America, where they'd been served what they thought was squab, but it turned out to be cuy, which is guinea pig.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Oh my.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And it was a real nice visit. On the other side of the living room were tables made—they had had steel laid up in the wall that went outside also. So there were cantilevered tables inside, and cantilevered tables outside, with no legs. I thought it was a wonderful idea.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Supports right through the wall.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: And two complete sets of—then it might have been only hi-fi. [00:16:04] It was some phonographic thing, two complete sets of it. This was the living room, this long black couch, and these two doors, door tables, with all of this music equipment on it. On the patio there was a tub of Chow hair from her dogs that they would learn to weave.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Her house sounds very much like a painting.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: It was, very much like it. She told us—we had stood out and admired the view across the valley. She had said that they were going to put up a big "A" on the hill for Abiquiú, and she paid for—I think it was band uniforms or something. She bribed them not to put—

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Not to do it. [Laughs.]

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: Not to put the "A" up. And she had offered an exhibit to Elmer if they would paint the walls white. There was some administration hassle. We almost, ourselves, decided we would paint them ourselves to have this opportunity. And then another time, she lent another painting, and always very gracious. And it was nice.

SHARYN ROHLFSEN UDALL: Wonderful, yes. That's marvelous. Well, I think I have worked you long enough for one day. Thank you.

GUSSIE DU JARDIN: My voice is starting—

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]