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Oral history interview with Elsa Schmid, 1968
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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Elsa Schmid on August 1, 1968. The interview was conducted by Butler Coleman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. This is a rough transcription that may include typographical errors.

Interview

BUTLER COLEMAN: So we have to go back over the same things again, so now you can push it the other way--

ELSA SCHMID: How do you--now how do you know it's going to work this time?

MR. COLEMAN: It's--it's okay now because the light is on now.

MS. SCHMID: Oh.

MR. COLEMAN: So it should be no problem now. I'm sorry.

MS. SCHMID: It's all right.

MR. COLEMAN: But, anyhow, so--

MS. SCHMID: So you know most of this anyway, don't you?

MR. COLEMAN: Well, no. The thing is I just wanted to put it down and what was the name of it? It was called St. Paul the Apostle.

MS. SCHMID: The name of the church is St. Paul the Apostle.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: Lyford Cay, New Providence, Nassau.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah. Right.

MS. SCHMID: New Providence, Bahamas.

MR. COLEMAN: Right.

MS. SCHMID: And--

MR. COLEMAN: Testing 1-2-3-4. Testing. It was at what point you came in to the whole picture and it was that the Chapel was already done.

MS. SCHMID: It was--it--the roof was on and the landscaping unfinished and, well, the walls were there, the windows were in glass, and at the--it wasn't--there was no Mass said in the church.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm. That's all--

MS. SCHMID: Maybe I should be further way.

MR. COLEMAN: No. I've got the volume turned up so we don't lose anything because otherwise all--everybody's accent comes through one way or another. You know, we all have an accent of one kind or another.

MS. SCHMID: Surely.

MR. COLEMAN: But, in other words, had the architect decided he would have stained glass in here from the beginning?

MS. SCHMID: Yes, this was the plan because the church would be colorless. The walls are white. The church would have no color. This was the only decoration really in the church.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: They had ordered some stained glass, some 14 Stations of the Cross,--

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID:--and there was nothing.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: None of this was in. The benches are very lovely but simple benches, white walls. So it really was a perfect setting for--for designing the stained glass, not designing it, designing the stained glass.

MR. COLEMAN: What was your reaction on when you first, say, drove over there from Lyford Cay, I mean, just kind of--

MS. SCHMID: Lyford Cay.

MR. COLEMAN: Hmm?

MS. SCHMID: Lyford Cay.

MR. COLEMAN: Lyford Cay. I mean, what was your reaction, I mean your physical kind of reaction when you first saw the building?

MS. SCHMID: I thought it had--I thought it was a lovely challenge because it had simplicity and it wasn't a big commercial job and that's the kind of jobs I don't take on. It's something I really could manage.

MR. COLEMAN: Was it a rainy day? Was it a sunny day?

MS. SCHMID: No. It was sun and there was quite a bit of glare out. So I took a suitcase, heavy suitcase full of stained glass that I had carefully chosen downtown because I thought it would be a wide range to be able to eliminate as I went along, and I put the glass, taped the glass, these samples, on to the paned glass, on to the paned white glass, and very quickly the reds, the purples, the lavenders, and I came down to the Caribbean colors. When you fly over the island, you--you soak in these wonderful turquoise and blues and certain yellow-greens and I felt these were the relaxing colors and the colors I wanted to use really.

MR. COLEMAN: You say relaxing--testing, testing, testing, testing, testing, testing, testing, testing, testing.

MS. SCHMID: Inspiration or helping to be able to relax, you might say, and the reds are in some way irritating down there. You see, you have the book-ending of doors and when you come in, you want to--somehow it's cooling, these colors I used, and when you see what Matisse did, the same waters, tropical sun and so on. He used cools, pale yellows or really almost the same kind of approach, you might say. Not that I put myself in the same class with Matisse but this is--you know, it's--it's the natural thing that came about. The whole thing really grew out of the material, the way I always feel things must grow, especially in stained glass where many designers, and I hate the word "design," I like the connection with mosaic or stained glass, but it's the same approach with mosaic. Most mosaic jobs now grow out of a water color.

The artist or the designer or people who have never done mosaic produce a water color the way Chagal did, say, for mosaic and then the worker in Ravenna cuts this water color into mosaics at the Contemporary Craft Museum and it is always a water color. It's not really like building--making a building with bricks but it's mainly building from a water color.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah. I see what you mean.

MS. SCHMID: So this is what I--my approach is naturally. It must grow out of the material. That's how it must come out. Are you missing something?

MR. COLEMAN: No, no. It's just your imagination. That's what everybody thinks with these things.

MS. SCHMID: Oh.

MR. COLEMAN: No. The question that--I don't know quite how to get into it because it's an aesthetic question. In reading about stained glass, the thing that fascinates me the most in a sense, my personal fascination is with light, not with actually the glass itself as glass, if you understand me, but the whole question of light, what the light does to the glass, and did you find this, I mean, when you first started playing with samples? Is this a fascination for you?

MS. SCHMID: This is why you cannot take a job without in place trying the glass and then seeing what it does in

the morning, evening, and, of course, it's always different. It's like mosaic, too. You can't go to Ravenna and look at the mosaics in the morning and just go in there like tourists do and have an idea what it's all about. And you see it in the evening, it always renews itself and I think that's glass.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: It's so naturally light is the medium, you might say.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: So this is what you have to take in place, you must choose the glass and you have to visualize it, feel it in place.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: And when I went to [inaudible] to choose a glass, they have six floors of great glass, hand-blown, it's all hand-blown, coming from generally France, and I now know the difference between the English and the French, so forth, and--now I lost my--what I was going to say.

So when you see this glass and you choose these various colors, you realize that it's endless, but when I was there three or four artists came in or designers who work for a stained glass firm and they brought in a foot tool, an inch to a foot or three inches to a foot designs and when I first went, this man, the head, was very intelligent, tremendously cooperative, after he realized I had certain ideas in mind. He said, now look, why don't you simply bring us your design and we'll do the rest? We'll match the glass and we'll take it to the technician and they'll finish it. I said, well, that's not the way I do it. When he realized I was very--knew exactly what kind of colors I wanted, he was more than cooperative. He was wonderful, and then I did the full size collage in my studio and the--and I worked all winter, really, on it, several months in the winter to translate every single piece of water color on the full size collage to choose the glass and they had endless patience because they knew just--I knew just when I wanted it and which part I wanted. It was cut immediately, put in, and we went on to the next--

MR. COLEMAN: I see, I see.

MS. SCHMID: --piece, you see. In other words, I really controlled this to the end.

MR. COLEMAN: I see, I see.

MS. SCHMID: Which was the--it took me three times as long as I would have done it otherwise if I was covered by a contract which was very pleasant.

MR. COLEMAN: Right.

MS. SCHMID: Nobody--no one to interfere.

MR. COLEMAN: How did you determine, say, the size of the glass? What I mean by that is it seems like you have rather large areas of your blues and your greens, rather than--than tiny little, you know,--

MS. SCHMID: Yes.

MR. COLEMAN: --cube-like things.

MS. SCHMID: Well, the only thing that I didn't change, and that may be the most important thing in this, is when I--I had no design or no pattern or no water color to work from. So what I did is to cut the half-inch or quarter-inch or whatever size the glazing was, the leading. I cut this, improvised this in paper, and just threw it on the floor, and this whole full size collage grew out of improvising it as--as it came, you see, and I had no preconceived notion, except I knew where I wanted the pomegranate, where I wanted the butterfly, and I knew the motion I wanted in the whole thing, but the calligraphy part of it was to me the most important thing. To move the lines and then to move the color into the lines, you might say, along with it.

MR. COLEMAN: Yes. But aren't you determined in leading--I mean, isn't your calligraphy determined by what you can do with joints? I mean, you can't have kind of a K form--

MS. SCHMID: Yes. That you--that you have to thoroughly understand before you start and then it gets so into your system--

MR. COLEMAN: I see.

MS. SCHMID: --of what you want to do--

MR. COLEMAN: It's natural.

MS. SCHMID: --it's almost natural--

MR. COLEMAN: I see.

MS. SCHMID: --and when I finished in New York with this one very good technician who helped me and who also was more than cooperative, if I said one color, no, then he'd cut another sheet and we'd try whether it should be the dark part or the light or the light into the dark or dark into the light at that particular point, and he was endlessly patient because he realized that I knew how I wanted it and so that was very productive to work with this one man which was in this--they do commercial work and they do some very fine work--

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: --but they mostly work from the three inch to a foot photograph and enlarge it and the whole thing is done mechanically after that.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: But they didn't mind that I came in there and did the whole thing, you see, the way it was done.

MR. COLEMAN: What would you change if you were approaching--I'm saying not the same project but say a similar kind of project, I don't know, not necessarily even a chapel, but a window, I mean, in your approach in the beginning?

MS. SCHMID: I'd have to see how the color fits into that particular place and I couldn't preconceive--

MR. COLEMAN: Yes.

MS. SCHMID: --this or predetermine this.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: This has to be completely spontaneous, growing out of the material and the place. This is important and also in mosaic, when I did this Jewish Community Center, fresco mosaic, I did all the colors in place on this--on this wall. I tried them, you see. I pinned them and I knew--then I knew subconsciously exactly what--how I would go on the oranges,--

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: --knock a hole in the wall and so forth.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: And this is the only approach that you have to consider the place and the light and you can never say this is what I do. On some jobs you might go all dark and it depends only on--on really the place and Mitch Vanrow [phonetic] is--is one of the great teachers.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: And he felt so strongly that you cannot do a building. The brick has to be on top of the brick and this, as you know,--

MR. COLEMAN: Right, right.

MS. SCHMID: --is the law.

MR. COLEMAN: How did you determine the symbols you were going to use in the windows? I mean, did this--did somebody say something or did you actually have your own--

MS. SCHMID: No. This--I wanted to use the butterfly and the pomegranate is the old pagan symbol of Persephone and thousands of years old, you might say, and I--symbols are always especially attractive to me, you see, and anyone who--these people want especially to know about symbols and the book will help them to understand something about those six symbols.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: Of course, the--the sun and the circle is as old as Egypt, you might say, and this is--some people

want/need to know that.

MR. COLEMAN: Not to put words in your mouth but do you feel--this is a very direct question. Do you feel that you have any kind of approach which is panapanaic to--to--to--to religion or, I mean, do you feel God and trees and flowers and bushes and the pomegranate and naturally in your day-to-day living?

MS. SCHMID: That's even a very limited--would be very limited feelings. It's so universal you can't even understand it and I think that somehow one of the older people in the church who gave money said, well, where's St. Paul? Generally, the feeling is quite happy. I had a great many phone calls and so forth and people. What I want is the feeling that comes out. You sit down and want to contemplate or you're in trouble, to get the joy of--of color rather than the narrative story and I think that to me is very important. To make it beautiful, in other words, and how to define beauty? Of course, everybody has a different idea. You can't define it.

MR. COLEMAN: Therefore, you feel that in our time, I say our times, a general term, that we don't--that the narrative isn't so important? Is this something that you feel at all? Is this--

MS. SCHMID: I feel the narrative is separate. I think the narrative, people can be taught, like children, for instance, they can be taught the narrative but the important thing is exactly opposite to the narrative. I mean, the narrative, if it's a deep, you might say, fable or tradition--traditional, symbols are tied to all that, to--to our tradition, to our human tradition way back, but narrative is only something superficial, you might say.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: It can change in so many ways and it means really nothing.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm. But there is an absence obviously by not including a paso or scenes from the Stations of the Cross. You, in your decision, you have eliminated people. I mean, you have everything that you have chosen is either eternal or is, you know, symbolic or one thing or another. I think you see what I'm getting at.

MS. SCHMID: Yes, because this--

MR. COLEMAN: This concept of--of the Crucifixion and Paul and, you know, these various things, your approach has been much more natural.

MS. SCHMID: I think the whole trend to bring religions in relation to each other and if you--the narrative always is only the Catholic and this is more universal, to use--that's why I love the idea of Persephone and being a symbol and a wider feeling of religion, of various religions can enjoy.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah. I see what you mean.

MS. SCHMID: And I think that, see, for instance, Matisse Chapel, people could go in of all kinds of religions and really be thrilled by the color and the conception and the feeling the color generates. They don't have to be Catholics or Protestants, all these various factions, which I think, say in a thousand years or whatever it is, hopefully the division will not be so great to divide people--

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: --through the various narrative things they've been taught as children. This may be nonsense but--

MR. COLEMAN: No.

MS. SCHMID: But symbols are the only thing that would fit into--I've been a Phoenix, for instance, and this was almost a self-portrait, this feeling of--of religion and yet joy and everything, a self-release, and I love the idea of the butterfly, the resurrection and the rebirth and--and ever-lasting, really ever-lasting life in the sense, the spiritual sense.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: I know I'm terrible about defining things.

MR. COLEMAN: No, it's not a question of--I would--do you have any reaction to the phrase, I don't know where it came from, Cicero? It's Latin. Do you have any reaction to this, you may not, but "the restless spirit is the enemy of talent?"

MS. SCHMID: Well, it almost explains itself, doesn't it? The restless spirit. Think about that. I think the intellect, the intellectual cold approach is the enemy of spontaneity, and especially if you're so sure that this is right and

[inaudible] said something that I--I love. This is the--in German, the word is [German word] which means what comes to you as you work. This is to me the greatest thing in--something comes somewhere. No artist could really--comes subconsciously as emotional release. Let's come quickly. Look. Just look. Now they generally go first and when they land, it's maybe a 150 feet, they will land near but one--one wing has a six-foot span touching the next wing.

MR. COLEMAN: Incredible.

MS. SCHMID: There's one there that's a lonely--

MR. COLEMAN: Leading them, yeah, leading them back towards the water. Look at the--this is the thing I'm talking about. The pattern of the clouds playing on those fields, you see the various light patterns?

MS. SCHMID: Yes. You're very sensitive. Yeah.

MR. COLEMAN: Which--which are coming there.

MS. SCHMID: Well, you know, some days this is unbelievable. I have this landscape. I have a big landscape. But you see now they're going to--

MR. COLEMAN: Now they're going towards the water.

MS. SCHMID: They probably--they probably knew there were too many to get into that place.

MR. COLEMAN: It's all right. No problem.

MS. SCHMID: You see, now--now they all--I don't know whether they'll go in or not but they generally fly. It's very rare they really go in there. There must be one leading goose.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: They're safe until October 1st, beginning of October, and then--and then it's shooting for one week--

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah, yeah.

MS. SCHMID: --and then they know--they know it's--

MR. COLEMAN: They feel it right away.

MS. SCHMID: It's very rare and they must know there are too many to fly here because I've never seen them do that.

MR. COLEMAN: They just like go in in fours.

MS. SCHMID: They generally go just like that, just like an airplane. They go and circle and then they fly either here or there, you see.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: And then this is--I've never seen them do this. This is fascinating because when you see them close by, it's incredible.

Are you going to talk to me some more now?

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah, yeah. No, I don't think we have very much time.

MS. SCHMID: No, but, you know, the only way is just work me a little bit and maybe something comes--some milk comes out, you know.

MR. COLEMAN: No, but the definite--my feelings, and I'm just--I'm trying to see how you feel because my feeling has been that this is again something which is unrelated to a biblical story, you know. There's an absence of the Bible in this, and I may be pushing a point too far, but isn't there kind of an absence of the Bible in the Caribbean, if you know what I'm getting at? There is an absence in the whole feeling of the Caribbean approach of sand and water and we're dealing with much more natural elements, the imposition of academic or book-learning or the Bible as the story--

MS. SCHMID: Right.

MR. COLEMAN: --that's on there. Isn't this right?

MS. SCHMID: I think so.

MR. COLEMAN: My concept.

MS. SCHMID: At the moment you fly in and see these waters, it's so beautiful in these Caribbean colors, that I felt that you must take that from the--from the water--

MR. COLEMAN: Right.

MS. SCHMID: --and from the view and somehow it ties with that and that could comment on that when you've seen the windows.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: But the most important thing to me was when I went to New York to translate these windows, and I have--I have cortical, I mean, I have pictures,--

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: --of the exact thing I did here, the collage, I didn't change except where I wanted to, really one little piece, I didn't change anything in--in the calligraphy part of it.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: It had to go where I worked it here. I worked here all summer on this, just the brave emotion of it goes, and that was not changed and the color, every single color was rechosen.

MR. COLEMAN: Did you know Frank Lloyd Wright at all?

MS. SCHMID: Yes, I--I saw him in Arizona and he was so brilliant, I wish I had one of his tape recordings.

MR. COLEMAN: I mean, what--what is your feeling about, I mean, his whole approach, you know, his--in simplified terms, his approach was called the Organic One, Organic Architecture.

MS. SCHMID: Well, of course, he explained at great length, he just felt great that day, [inaudible], and he explained how a house must sit to be the continued line of Camelback Mountain and it was so brilliant, I felt his primatur was greater than his architecture almost, you know, really. He was a man who really could explain. You interviewed him and you had a tape recorder. Perhaps some of his family were explaining--I--I'm very bad about it.

MR. COLEMAN: Were you--what I'm asking you, are you in agreement with his general approach, with his general thoughts?

MS. SCHMID: I think that this could be--I think this would be proven in 10 years or 20 years, how good it is. I don't think we're able to judge that now.

MR. COLEMAN: No. What I'm taking--what I'm looking at here, and this may be too much of an art historian point of view, he has been defined as the Dionysus as opposed to the Vanderow, a plinian [phonetic]. I'm sure you've heard these terms before.

MS. SCHMID: Yes, yes.

MR. COLEMAN: I just wondered if you felt you yourself lay in any direction, whether you thought--

MS. SCHMID: I think--

MR. COLEMAN: --you were closer to--

MS. SCHMID: I know--

MR. COLEMAN: --to Meese--

MS. SCHMID: --Meese very well.

MR. COLEMAN: --as to the Wright point of view.

MS. SCHMID: I think Meese has something more of our--more of our time in a way and I'm really no judge of that, but I think that somehow Wright was such--he was not able to really move out of himself. He was such an individual in his own right. It's not like Art who believes in the, and preferred, you might say,--

MR. COLEMAN: Right.

MS. SCHMID: --the--I don't like the word "inspiration," but in what comes to you from God knows where at the moment and this is the best you--you do is--and I think that that's where Wright is always Frank Lloyd Wright first. He was such a great personality, I think I prefer him.

MR. COLEMAN: That's what I'm wondering, you know, as far as--

MS. SCHMID: I think his furniture is atrocious, dreadful. I mean, you see [inaudible] and--

MR. COLEMAN: Does it appeal to you?

MS. SCHMID: It doesn't pull me as much as the ocean does.

MR. COLEMAN: What pulls you about the ocean?

MS. SCHMID: Well, space.

MR. COLEMAN: Space?

MS. SCHMID: And what happens. That's why I like--I like St. John the best.

MR. COLEMAN: The best.

MS. SCHMID: That is a great statement to make about the ocean. I don't know if you're familiar with it.

MR. COLEMAN: No. The line, I don't know whether I'm quoting it right, you may know is *Je suis un grain qui se developpe au printemps des monstres*. I think that's the line that has always appealed to me. You know, I'm a grain who grows in the spring time of monsters.

MS. SCHMID: Well, he's so evocative and so stimulating to me. When I was in Washington, Mrs. Dudley Phillips, you know, bought one of my--one of my mosaics and Mrs. Phillips took me and opened the glass case to show the Breck [phonetic] Illustrations of St. John--

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: --and I said how much I liked his things, you see, and she also had felt very strongly how beautiful these things were and so I liked Neruda, too, his books, images, and I just--I just think that we never, never--you only ever accomplish a fraction of your potential or your talent. This is what bothers me. You never--what I could do if I--if I were fully functioning is so far ahead of what I'm able to accomplish that--that you might as well be humble about it and not--but I love so much what art says about this thing that comes to you and [inaudible] and the--the improvised. I don't think there's a word in English or French for that.

MR. COLEMAN: The thing that I go back to, the first thing you mentioned about the ocean was space rather than, say, mentioning, say, light.

MS. SCHMID: Well, of course, light is--without light we wouldn't have space, would we? It's not only space, it's the--it's the--the impact that this space has. It's almost more than the stars in the sky. You see, you feel the whole thing, the cosmic sense that you get from the ocean, it's so strong.

MR. COLEMAN: Do you feel it's something positive then rather than something negative?

MS. SCHMID: Yes. Of course, death we have to face once--I've never felt the way my husband has always talked about death so much and he was--he felt it was better not to have even been born. I never could understand that. I think the more--the more you wake up, you--I can't even remember what I've dreamt because the impact of the color the moment when you wake up is so strong that you forget. Now this is something that I--that's why I never wanted to be psychoanalyzed. I never remember my dreams.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: That's nonsense, of course, but I went to a psychoanalyst once. I told this--told him this. He said, well, because you're ashamed of your dreams. You want to forget them.

MR. COLEMAN: How was your feeling--I'm not saying today. How was your feeling 20 years ago, your reaction,

say, your approach, this question of man and death? Very general question.

MS. SCHMID: Well, that I couldn't answer because I was then too involved in--in other things and the difficulty of--of--20 years ago,--

MR. COLEMAN: The '40s.

MS. SCHMID: Yes.

MR. COLEMAN: 1948.

MS. SCHMID: Yes. It was a struggle to--the art world and all was so--the immediacy of--of all that and not being able to sell the Kandinskys that we had and the Klees and so forth and this was so upsetting that I didn't really get into these kinds of things and so forth. I mean, I'm absolutely incompetent to comment on that. You are much more literary, much more cultured than I am.

MR. COLEMAN: No, not at all. I'm just--I'm playing around with these things.

MS. SCHMID: No. My feeling about anything I do is the best at anything I do all my life is my intuition works very acutely and you may call it perception and--and my feeling, my intuitive feeling about people and all is so strong that I believe in--in this--in not thinking too much, think but then forget about it and then work, and I think this is--I think the person who makes better comments on all this than anyone I know of or read about is Cézanne. He's so--he--the moment he begins to think, when he begins a canvas or so, he must be all in it but not with his intellect. He must be all in it with his heart, with his feeling, and so many people have--have functioned that way. That's why if you make a little design and you cannot--can't stand the idea of design with mosaic, for instance, and then have somebody else interpret it, it's a commercial thing. It's not a real contribution that way. I don't know. I'm just--

MR. COLEMAN: No, no. This is very interesting thing here obviously to me because not knowing enough, I can't feel I know all the years, but to be--have--having been so close, you see, there's two things running side by side. Having been so close to a world that's, let's say, like the art world with all its--what it's evolved into today, with all its kind of its approach to what is art and your own personal feelings which are so much more immediate and individual--you see what I'm getting at?

MS. SCHMID: Mm-hmm.

MR. COLEMAN: Did you kind of have to shut up about one or the other or have they always been able--were they--were they--let's put it in past tense. Were they always able to go along with no compromise one way or the other?

MS. SCHMID: Well, I--I was--when I first met J.B. before 1930 and we started--we started out in a duplex in New York, he had--we had in our house, we had [inaudible], we had the Fleu de la ne Cathedral [phonetic], we had all these people, these various people, and a small Klee, and the so-called art world came to see J.B. and they said, well, you're crazy, you see, and he--this--this was not--and--but then he had to sell these things for nothing really because we--it was impossible to pay the rent unless you sold something, you see.

MR. COLEMAN: Right, right.

MS. SCHMID: And then he tried to find people here who he could promote and at that time, this was 1923 he first came here, it was difficult to find people equal to these great things, like the cathedral and all. So I was really on the sidelines. I was watching and observing and when I got this job to do the 14 Stations and then they were showing [inaudible] which was just luck I walked in there and they gave me a wonderful show and--and then--then you have a child and you have to pay attention and--and that's very important and I felt that you just can't be an artist and neglect the fact of having a family. So I was not ambitious in that way, those days, at all. I'm not now. I don't have a gallery either because I just don't produce it.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: I'm lucky if anyone comes who wants--who wants a job which I've been very lucky, you see.

MR. COLEMAN: A complete shift completely away from that at all. Do you have any comment at all about the Black Power or the black problem presently in America? Do you have any comment, reaction to such people as Rap Brown and everybody going around saying, you know, it's around us every day, you know, this great thing, so many people criticize my attitudes about black people? My feeling is, is that, I judge you, I judge anybody on that which is on the wall rather than I don't care whether you did it or, you know, a Negro did it or a Chinese or a Chinaman or--or, you know, a robot or a monkey or anything. My personal feeling is that we judge it on what's there and, you know, this is not a very fashionable attitude. The attitude is that we must judge things in regards

to the Negro which they now call the black. We must judge them on a completely different scale of values.

Do you have any comment?

MS. SCHMID: Well, I think that I've seen so many collectors seen via J.B. who used--in Europe, people used to buy art more because they looked at it and liked it and loved to have it and more and more and so fast this has taken hold that collectors buy it by ear, not by eye, by names, and this is--shows in--in art auctions or schools for benefits. They want a name. If it's Milton Avery or whatever it is, then it's worth so much, but they see a perfectly--I put this Klee of mine here in--in a charity show, it might get \$20 or so. Somebody said, well, that's cute and that's nice but the moment you put Klee, it's worth \$12,000, you know. So I think very few people, and this includes so many collectors who have absolutely no judgment whatsoever, they acquire a number of catch words and two months they're experts, this happens with J.B. all the time because I see it, so the result was I didn't go to some of these Nouveau collectors you might say.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: I couldn't see it, couldn't look at it. So I don't know whether that's off the--off the--the--

MR. COLEMAN: No, no. That ties in with the -

MS. SCHMID: And, of course, I think that with also now we must cater to the blacks, you might say. Well, I think this is all so ominous that still a large segment of people live in a kind of a dream. As long as they make--have their own--have their children taken care of and maybe enough money to have all the luxury they need, they don't really care, and the fact that even they put a person like Wallace and Reagan and so forth, I think it's--it's detrimental to--if any one of these people would get in, this would be really a very backwards spot for America. This is a very selfish approach for people who care about their children. They over-indulge in the--this is very bad and naturally it's the trend in the whole world, I think. If we really thought about what's happening in the world, we couldn't sleep, couldn't eat, if we really knew what was going on this moment in Africa with these marvelous people and in Vietnam. We couldn't. We really couldn't function. We'd have to do something immediately.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: I think it's selfishness but I'm nobody to comment but I feel terribly strongly about all this.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: Yeah.

MR. COLEMAN: I think everybody has the right to comment because this is the point.

MS. SCHMID: No. Because you only can see one--one very small facet of it.

MR. COLEMAN: Yes, but it's part of a larger thing. You see, the way I feel about education, education is not the salvation. Education is the most important thing that one man can do for another man.

MS. SCHMID: Yes, but educates who?

MR. COLEMAN: However, education is terribly dangerous because if you educate--start educating the masses and I say that in not a pejorative way at all, but if you start educating people who have not been educated, it's dangerous because you can control people who are not educated because as soon as you start to educate them, they start to think and you can't control a man's thinking processes because he may not think what you want him to think. He may think in exact opposition, but this is the only--this is the only--this is the only way man can ever progress because once you all want him to start thinking in a particular channel or once you don't have the mélange and the mixture and all of the other thoughts which are coming forward, once you have accepted a particular way of thinking and this is the way of thinking, then your society, your civilization begins to crumble, doesn't it? I mean, this is the whole point.

So once you--as people say, well, once all those--those black men in Africa begin to think, well, it's the only--it's the only future for a continent, such as Africa, is that these people do begin to, in a sense, I don't--I don't mean for them to--to become--live in a--in a wallpaper society in which, you know, their refrigerators and their Madison Avenue--

MS. SCHMID: No. They must create their own--

MR. COLEMAN: Create their own way.

MS. SCHMID: --way, yes.

MR. COLEMAN: But you have to--but isn't that creating their own ideas and their own thoughts and their own progression and then we all kind of make compromise? I think you see what I'm getting at, but it's very dangerous. This is very, very dangerous because they--they may throw a bomb at you, but isn't that part of the consequence is that you have to go through? Isn't eternity or time more important than the five or 10 years now? Isn't 50 years from now, if you don't do--if we don't go through these five or 10 years now, you may not have that kind of hopefulness in 50 years from now?

MS. SCHMID: It's very--it's very perilous, the whole--the whole way the world is going, but I have--I am an optimist. I think that this will come out with really devastating set-up. It will somehow come to something productive and positive, I'm sure.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: Africans have to--have to create their own leaders and they're doing it. The Chinese, for instance, some of the most brilliant Chinese have been to American universities.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah, right.

MS. SCHMID: They go back and contribute--

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: --even to the atom and all this American-educated--

MR. COLEMAN: Right.

MS. SCHMID: --and still they remain Chinese for China--

MR. COLEMAN: Yes.

MS. SCHMID: --and we don't know what's happening in China nor really in Russia and I just read the Schindler book. I lent it to someone. And I think this is a statement about Russia.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: It was published in '63 and I bought it then but I just reread it. It's really quite so genuine about all the intellectual observations. It's--it's--it's really loving Russia and understanding what Lenin had to say and being very critical of what's happened afterwards of the people who think of themselves rather than the people.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: In other words, Communism and Lenin served the people and afterwards the leaders need to serve Communism.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

MS. SCHMID: This is the great statement.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah, yeah. Very true.

MS. SCHMID: So, anyway, in art, the artist also has to be humble and--and know his limitations and the artist begins to be ambitious and all involved and I think that the artist somehow--something stagnates there and I think that the talent mustn't be magnified, must be humbly used and I think this is a great example. Of course, Matisse also avoided all these great fascinations of his--of his great intellectual prowess and so forth but he was really--you put roots and--and a flower comes out. This is really what--what--an ideal way.

MR. COLEMAN: Mm-hmm.

MS. SCHMID: You know, I don't know. All this nonsense, I don't know if you get anything out of it.

MR. COLEMAN: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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