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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Darthea Speyer,
1976 June 28

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Darthea Speyer on June 28, 1976. The interview took place in Paris, and was conducted by Paul Cummings for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Transcriber's note: At beginning of tape, interviewer remarks what a fine view they have of the Eiffel Tower. Unfortunately, in this outdoor setting, the exchange between the speakers was often unclear or blocked out by a nearby pile driver, saws screeching on metal, occasional cries back and forth of workmen, and (most disruptive of all) several dogfights.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I think we could do just a little background -- how you got interested in art. I know your brother's been involved with it for a long time. Could you start with the family's interest?

DARTHEA SPEYER: My mother collected art. She was very interested, she even collected contemporary paintings. She collected, mainly, decorative arts, furniture, silver, and Old Masters -- not great Old Masters -- paintings. Then she got my father interested. She was also a painter and then became a sculptress. She still sculpts; I'll show you some of her works. She has showed a lot. That's how we got interested.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Kind of grew up with it all.

DARTHEA SPEYER: My brother studied to become an architect. He studied with Mies van der Rohe. Built a great deal, then went into the museum field. I have a sister who's a painter; you may have seen her work. I studied to be an art historian at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. That was in 1945. I almost got my Master's; I just didn't finish the thesis. My period was 12th and 13th century Italian painting. And I really think that's why I learned to look at paintings. I studied with Richard Offner -- perhaps you've heard of him -- who, I think, was really a great, great teacher. So, that's my background, briefly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you want to be an art historian to teach? Or was that just an interest, or . . . ?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I wasn't sure, but what I wanted to do was stay in art history. Then, I went into USIS, in a sense as a cultural attache. But, to double back, I began to collect from the time I was fifteen.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of things?

DARTHEA SPEYER: The first piece I bought -- I'll show you; it's in there. But when I was fifteen, I went to Gump's in San Francisco and bought a Siamese statue which was quite good. Then the first thing I collected was German Expressionism -- Nolde, things like that. I collected a lot from the time I was in my teens, so I was always very much interested in art. Then, when I went into USIS --

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get into that?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think that was when . . . after the War, you know, you thought you should do something useful. I decided to be a cultural -- and I wanted to travel.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Good combination!

DARTHEA SPEYER: I was sent here as a cultural attache and with no idea in the world that I'd do anything in the art field.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you start first to go?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I was supposed to be sent to Lyon. When I got here, they kept me here for about four months. Then I went to Lyon, stayed a few months, and came back. I was here about 15 years, from 1950 to 1965. I managed to get the people here interested in exhibitions of American Art. I don't remember how I got the idea to start it. I was sent here to do something totally different in the cultural process.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of program? Did you have one, or did they give you one?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I started to look after women's activities -- lectures, being in contact with people -- nothing to do with art. Then I really created the whole art program here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What got you going?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think, first of all, there were a lot of artists here after the War, and I got interested in them. And then I started to collect, myself, and then I realized nobody here knew anything about American art. The first show I put on was very important, at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, which I arranged with the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Really, it was René d'Harnoncourt who said that, in Paris, we started this whole international program, you see, because I was working with them at the time.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That was the "Twelve Americans" show or something?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Right. But, I convinced the people in Paris, at the Embassy, that this was a good idea. Meanwhile, in Washington, they thought it was terrible, and they were against the Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., and they kept sending telegrams, "Don't have anything to do with them; they're communists."

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic. Really?

DARTHEA SPEYER: It was just crazy. And of course, I went ahead; that was just ridiculous. That was my first big painting show. But, I'd say the first important show I had here was on Frank Lloyd Wright. That was at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts. And that was marvelous; he came over for that. So, I did some major exhibits here, and I was very interested.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you do all those things? I mean, did you have help? A secretary?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I finally got a big staff. In the beginning, I was alone, and it was hard to get anybody to listen to me. But, I finally convinced the people here in the Paris USIS and the Ambassador that it was such a good thing. So I had a great deal of money to work with and I had about 15 people working for me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, you had a good sized staff.

DARTHEA SPEYER: At one time, it was marvelous what I could do. Also, there was a big show at L'Orangerie, a French show, the first time the Impressionists came back to Paris after they'd gone to America. And that was financed by a lot of Americans. What I did, I brought a lot of people together, and they financed most of these shows. And the Museum of Modern Art financed many. René d'Harnoncourt got people together for that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, he was marvelous at that.

DARTHEA SPEYER: He was just great.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What kind of reaction did you get here in France. Were the French interested?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did all Europe respond?

DARTHEA SPEYER: France was very interested. Actually, the intelligent thing was, then, to send these exhibits, which were major, somewhere else. But because USIS in Washington was against this, the shows were only in France. Also, I had shows circulating to provincial museums all the time, four or five. I had a major program. I have a list -- I didn't realize until I left -- of about 150 shows of various kinds I put on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Heavens, that's almost one a month.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Right. And the reason I know is, finally, a few times they cut the credits in Washington, and then I'd have to dismiss everybody working for me. Then, they'd restore them. And that was so ridiculous. Secondly, I thought I'd been there long enough.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find working with the whole government system? Was it difficult here?

DARTHEA SPEYER: It was very difficult. I was ready to stick my neck out, so that's why I could do something. I mean, I wasn't going to fall over if they did fire me. So I went right ahead and convinced a great many people. The French were the most interested; they circulated all these shows to provincial museums under their auspices.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, I see.

DARTHEA SPEYER: And they put up quite a bit of money, too. I got a whole thing going which was fascinating.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were all these exhibitions of American Art? American oriented?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Oh yes. Except for two that I think of -- I'll look at the list. Another thing: after I'd gotten started, then we got a cultural center on rue de Dragon, which we now have, and where I put on exhibits, René d'Harnoncourt put on a show on Northwest Indian art which was just marvelous. I'd say that was not pure USA.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, it was Canadian and everything.

DARTHEA SPEYER: And then, we had this big French show of Impressionist paintings at L'Orangerie. Then there was another show we out on, of drawings. That also was French, at L'Orangerie, which Carl Schniewind of the Art Institute, Chicago, did.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did the French like the Impressionists coming back? They hadn't seen some of those for a while.

DARTHEA SPEYER: And then there were many Americans interested who gave money for the whole social thing, too. People came to Paris. It was very exciting. And also the fact that contemporary artists were showing for the first time, like "Twelve Americans." that was the first time Jackson Pollock was shown here. David Smith was in that show, and John Marin. Maybe he'd shown before; I don't remember. I, also at rue de Dragon, put on a show of Mary Cassatt, who hadn't been shown for years. And John Sargent.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, fantastic.

DARTHEA SPEYER: So I had shows in museums going on in Paris, in the provinces, and in the Cultural Center here,

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you were only in France? Your exhibitions didn't go into Germany or anyplace else?

DARTHEA SPEYER: That's it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Politics.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But we also had restrictions. I was supposed to look up the politics of everybody in the show, which I never did. Can you imagine that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Yes, political in the 1950's. That's incredible. Most of that was in the Senator McCarthy period.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I never had any of that. But I must say, everybody supported me. Here one couldn't have done it, obviously, if they hadn't.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What was the kind of response you got from the French? Were they curious? Did they think it was important? Or was it just in things American or . . . ?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I have a lot of clippings of what they said. But I would think, in general, a lot of people were very interested. Others couldn't stand it, you know, because it was the first time they'd seen it. But others thought they were looking at major works of art. But of course, many only wanted to look at French Impressionists --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- but in general, people were very interested. So I would say that really started interest in American Art.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I don't think anybody really showed -- certainly, there were no dealers who were showing anything like that.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Gallery Arnaud was good; they showed quite a lot of the young Americans.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Arnaud had younger men like Jack Youngerman.

DARTHEA SPEYER: He showed some. One of the things I did as soon as I got rue de Dragon -- I made my own rules, by the way, I always did. One of the first rules I made was I thought we shouldn't have one-man shows in the Cultural Center but have at least two artists or a group. We usually had two or three. And my first show there was marvelous; it was Sam Francis, Shirley Jaffee, and Kimber Smith. That was a very good show. And then I had people like Leon Golub. Then I showed Beauford Delaunay, Joe Downing, and Caroline Lee. That gave a start to these artists the first time they'd showed. We had beautiful catalogues and colored illustrations.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Could things be sold from there or not?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, but most of the time they weren't. Lots of people came. They got so they'd come to the Cultural Center and they'd --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh terrific. What was that -- from mailing lists or publicity?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I got a big mailing list of about 3,000 people. And people really used to come, and it was terribly important then. Like today, it's not that important. But at that time, it certainly was, and for these younger people, like Joe Downing has been at Arnaud for 20 years. I think I showed him before he was at Arnaud, so it can't be 20 years. But that's how he got to the Arnaud. Golub had his first European show at the Cultural Center.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Arnaud had a lot of people who had studied here with Leger and various people. Did they find you, or did you find them, or was it kind of mutual?

DARTHEA SPEYER: It was a mutual thing. It was mutual; a lot of people found me, and I'd be happy to have them. And some I wish had found me. But then, there were a lot of mutual meetings which were fine.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you do literary things there?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I did a great show called "Les Années Yungt." Have you ever seen the catalogue? It's all about Sylvia Beach and Shakespeare & Company. This show was French and American. Remind me, I'll find the catalogue. It was very hard to set up. I had the most wonderful man to set up exhibits. Imagine all those photographs and books; a simply remarkable show. Alice B. Toklas was still alive, she came to the opening.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh my heavens. [laughing] With cookies?

DARTHEA SPEYER: And they way she looked -- I have photographs of her. That was a literary show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did they have poetry readings, lectures, things like that?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, they had that, but I didn't handle that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You just did the visual arts.

DARTHEA SPEYER: You know, it's so hard to make a literary exhibit, a show. But that was most remarkable.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there certain critics who were interested and very supportive? Did you get a lot of --

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think in general the critics were very interested. And one of the newspapers that supported me the most was a Leftist newspaper called Les Lettres Francaises, which was supposed to be Communist -- run by Aragon, very open -- and ran articles in depth about the shows at all times.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh fantastic. [laughing] Which was more than Washington was!

DARTHEA SPEYER: Exactly!

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did he come to the gallery much -- Aragon?

DARTHEA SPEYER: No, Aragon never came, but the people who worked at the paper -- I'm sorry, but the paper closed about six years ago, and that's been a great lack. But there were many more newspapers and magazines then than now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Like everywhere.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I have books -- one day, the curators at the Musée d'Art Moderne wanted to see these clipping books. I took them with me when I left the Embassy, and I never looked at them until six months ago. I have ten books. They thought they were fantastic because the clippings relate to the opening show they're doing. Have you heard of it, called Paris-New York, at the Pompidou Center. Well, they wanted to know about the shows that I had had. And I had ten books of clippings; I was surprised myself. I didn't read any of them, but they were looking at them. I always did a poster and a very nice catalogue, and if possible, I had somebody write an introduction. For instance, Peter Seltz wrote Golub and Balcomb Greene. Not every time because I would only want a serious writer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrific because you were doing that many shows and catalogues and posters, prefaces -- very busy.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I was terribly busy. You know, Rothko had a show here; Jackson Pollock had a one-man show.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Who supported you in the States? The Museum of Modern Art, obviously, was a great source of strength. What about other museums?

DARTHEA SPEYER: The Art Institute sent me several shows, sent me a big show -- my brother had done a painting show one year, a Chicago show; I brought that. Another year I got a drawing show from Carl Schniwind who I knew. And then Carl Schniwind did this big French drawings show at the Louvre -- you know, I served as a catalyst, I'd get a lot of people going. And all kinds of smaller museums. I mean, I would have to pay for certain things, we would, but they would select them for me. So many museums just helped a lot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's terrific.

DARTHEA SPEYER: The programs were very well done.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did it continue in the same way or not?

DARTHEA SPEYER: No. Even if there was money today, I can't see where the program is necessary because so many American dealers here are showing American Art. There could be a lot more, and a lot better, but --

PAUL CUMMINGS: And there's going to be a new American gallery in January. Zabriskie is going to open a photography gallery.

[Temporary hiatus: Darthea Speyer goes to get Paul Cummings a Perrier.]

DARTHEA SPEYER: (resuming). . . You knew who Edgar Kaufmann was?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Used to be at the Museum of Modern Art, head of the Design Department.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So you did exhibitions that were not really always in the rue de Dragon?

DARTHEA SPEYER: The major shows were in the Musée National d'Art Moderne.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did that happen? Were they really that open?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes. I had a very close friend at the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Jean Cassou, the director. So that worked well. And also, I knew people in the Cultural Affairs. I knew people at the Louvre. I never had any trouble getting a place for my shows. But, like the design show -- I'm trying to remember -- I think that was at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. Then, another show I put on was a photo show, you know, The Family of Man. That was also at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville. I'll attempt to look for the last list. I might think of a few more in other museums.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was Cassou interested in American things generally?

DARTHEA SPEYER: No, but what was good, I'd get people to listen to me. And he wasn't really interested in American art at all in the beginning.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it politics that got him interested? Or you just --

DARTHEA SPEYER: No. I think I got him interested. Like, in the government, in USIS, when I talked to the Public Affairs Officer, when I first talked to him about it, he almost died.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughing] Why?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I had to really work hard. But then, he was my firm supporter.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think it's always so hard for the government to make any gesture like that?

DARTHEA SPEYER: When I first approached him, he was totally against art. But finally, it was just fantastic the way he supported me. The same way with the Ambassador. And the ambassadors I had were a very good group; they always -- I mean, if I asked them to do anything, they would do it. If I said, "Would you go to an opening?" And by the way, since I left, one rarely sees them at cultural events.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

DARTHEA SPEYER: That sounds ridiculous to say, but a lot of the places there's no reason for them to go anyhow.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Were there any who had any particular interest and would, you know, do more than just appear at an opening?

DARTHEA SPEYER: They'd give parties when people came through or for openings. Really, they knocked themselves out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's terrific.

DARTHEA SPEYER: So I would say I had a very good group.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All those years and all those exhibitions?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Right.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's fantastic. Fifteen years, I suppose, is a long time, and you wanted something new --

DARTHEA SPEYER: Well, I was sick of having my budget cut, when it was cut by one person And I couldn't do anything. But sometimes, the money would come back, and I'd say I would resign. They wouldn't even accept my resignation for two years [Paul Cummings laughs]. Most of the time, people would pass right on; I was there fifteen years. But I was very glad because it was time for me to do something.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Did you know what you wanted to do?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I knew I wanted to do something in the art field. And actually, I would have been just as happy to have done something for a foundation in the arts if that had existed here, rather than have an art gallery, which was commercial. But it was absolutely impossible to work out.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Have you decided on something _____?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I wanted to be in the art field, so what else could I do? I was very excited about the idea, and I tried to think what I could do in the art field in Paris, and it seemed to me the only thing was opening a gallery. So then I started to look for a gallery, which was almost impossible.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you find the space and everything?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I looked for two years. I finally was ready to give up. Just as I was about ready to give up, I found a gallery, just by sheer force, no agency or anything.

PAUL CUMMINGS: _____

DARTHEA SPEYER: No, a man who had already had an option on the gallery couldn't pay for it. So, he found me and other dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Was it a gallery before you?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, it was a gallery before me. It was a Montmartre-type gallery. It was one of the craziest galleries. It looked nothing like it does now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But your brother designed it the way it is now?

DARTHEA SPEYER: So, I opened the gallery during the revolution of '68. After waiting this long to open the gallery, three days after everything started.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What happened? Because they were running up and down the street . . . ?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Tobey was due to open his show at the same time -- so he opened his show the night before; I think he opened on the 25th of May and mine on the 26th of May. His gallery was right nearby and called Jeanne Bucher. And it was just terrible that night -- the bombs and the smoke. The show we could hardly see. But the next night, everything was quiet in the street, and people came from all over. It was a big success; although some people were warned not to come into that part of town, they came by foot.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you pick your artists? Once you found the space, you had to have some people.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I picked the artists. I picked what I like. You know, I'm very eclectic. In fact, eclectic in English is a French word to say "I like everything all over the lot." That's the easiest definition.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Where did you find people? You'd obviously known lots and lots through the years.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I'd known a lot but --

PAUL CUMMINGS: It's different, though, when you want to start doing business with them.

DARTHEA SPEYER: That's one of the problems. I opened with Deborah Remington. As soon as I opened, all my colleagues told me to close because they were so frightened by what happened. The most important galleries said, "You'd better close right away." I was not going to close; nobody ever came in the gallery, but I didn't close. But nothing happened in May and June; you know, pathetic. And then in the fall, I was to have a show of Pierluca -- a sculptor, he died about seven years ago; I have a piece downstairs of his. He had worked in stainless steel, and I was just crazy about his work and had been buying it for the last couple of years. And one of the major reasons, also, that I began with his show, I wanted to show his work. He drowned during that summer after the Revolution; I got a telegram that he had died. So the show turned into a posthumous show. You asked how I found people. François Stahly was to be my third show, in '68. You know him --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I was his first collector, practically.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really!

DARTHEA SPEYER: That took care of three people that I showed in '68. I'm now trying to remember who were the other first people that I showed. . . . But quite a few people that I showed I had collected. Not everyone. Like Étienne Martin. I was one of his first collectors, too; I was not showing him. George Segal I showed, three shows of his, because I'd seen his work and I thought he was an extraordinary artist. Actually, I was originally more interested in sculpture than in painting. But I haven't found enough sculptors.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Is it difficult to sell sculpture here?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Very difficult. I have a feeling sculpture is sort of going out now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? Why?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I just don't find enough good sculptors here, of the kind that I'm interested in.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But Paris is such a hard place to put even, you know, a piece of sculpture this size, which is by Arp. Aren't you limited a great deal by that?

DARTHEA SPEYER: You're limited by size, but also, I no longer think people are interested in, you know, the academic type marbles that people are doing. A lot of people are working like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Free form.

DARTHEA SPEYER: And then, in France today, there's what is called the "one percent." Do you know what that is? Sculpture being done for public places --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes.

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- one percent of the educational buildings have to be for art -- painting or sculpture.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, some critics have that in the United States.

DARTHEA SPEYER: It's a marvelous idea, but today in France, it's going more and more to mediocre sculptors because a committee picks them out. For instance, they'd have never picked Delfino out, he would "upset" somebody. I mean, they pick up people who are following Arp or abstract sculptors, and that's the kind that I think today is of no interest -- a whole group. Now, I don't know whether they exist that much in the United States as here. But I don't find enough sculptors here today, as I consider sculpture. Maybe it's just me or maybe that's --

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you've shown Europeans and Americans simultaneously, there was no point ever that --

DARTHEA SPEYER: I've shown more Americans than Europeans -- about three-quarters Americans. I show a German artist called Ursula who's very good, she's a surrealist; so, there's a surrealist art group. Delfino is a French sculptor. Stahly. I show a few other Europeans, and I show a few Americans who live in Paris. But it's very hard selling Americans from abroad because of the transportation, it's simply killing.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But then, three large pieces of sculpture cost a fortune.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But to send a painting show over costs at least \$1,500 to get a show here. To gather things in America, what that does -- so that's one of my problems. That's one thing. Another problem is, living over here, I can't keep in close contact with the artists all the time, so I don't always get the best work.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You can't just be there to see.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I can't be there the minute somebody else is there. But I still prefer to show American art because I think it's so good. So, I show a lot of different kinds of people. I show quite a few Californians --

PAUL CUMMINGS: And Chicago people, too, right?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Right. It's a totally different image from, like, obviously like the anatomical shows.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find that as other galleries have represented more Americans here that helps you, or doesn't make any difference?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I don't know that it makes any difference at all. Virginia Zabriskie, by the way, is opening a gallery on photography.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, all photographs.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I would say -- someone would ask me if there are any American galleries -- the only really American gallery is Larry Rubin. And mine isn't purely American, but it's three-quarters American.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, this is about that, too.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, that's what it is. And there are other galleries here who show some American artists. And also the museums that show American stuff.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you travel your artists around, if you can? To Germany, Switzerland, France, other places?

DARTHEA SPEYER: If I can, I do. But that's not easy either.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Difficult. You run into a price problem; the "pie" gets so thin after a while.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But aside even from that, forgetting that, well, take George Segal; he's very, very well-known. Even when I had the last show here, an Italian dealer wanted to show it after, but how can I arrange that because what if I've sold them? The people to whom I've sold them are not going to want them to travel around. And they may get damaged in transit. There are all kinds of problems. It's not as easy as it sounds, you know, arranging things.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But you sell to clients all through Europe, don't you, other than just France?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes. I sell to people in France and in Belgium, mainly. Those are my two. Also to Americans. I do not sell to many Germans. I think most Germans go directly to the United States.

PAUL CUMMINGS: How do the French like -- do they buy enough? Are they interested? Can you keep them interested?

DARTHEA SPEYER: No. Most people are very interested in my gallery and they -- they see unusual work because every show is different. And I don't follow any line. So they come in -- sometimes they don't like it, but at least they've seen something, they feel that something's going on. And I get all kinds of comments on what's going on, and that's very interesting. But it's very hard economically in a gallery like mine because I don't have a Picasso in my back room.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You don't trade in blue chips, "out of the back room," as they say, so it's really just the exhibitions.

DARTHEA SPEYER: No. I don't do that. If I were doing blue chips, I would have to have a whole lot -- I mean, I'd have to know about what I was doing. And I'd have to have somebody else to handle it, you know.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Then it turns into another kind of business.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I've thought that rather than do that, why not work in stocks and bonds? I mean it; what's the use? I'd be just as happy to do something else. This, for me, is something totally different than trading like that.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you find the French will get interested in a particular artist and buy a work every time a show comes around and support them in that way?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I have not found this. Sometimes, but I would say not to any degree. But let's face it, I haven't had that many shows. Well, I had Deborah Remington; I've had Deborah three times. The first two times Deborah sold very well. The third show didn't sell well. But I don't think that means anything. But people think very, very well of her work, they like her work very much. But some people don't. Like people who would like Roy De Forest or --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Or people who like Segal wouldn't necessarily.

DARTHEA SPEYER: That's right. Certain people I have sold very, very well. Now, take this artist Lynn Foulkes; he practically sells nothing except to museums. There's something about his work that puts people off -- ordinary people that come in and buy. Plus, we don't expect them to buy a piece that big.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why would a museum buy if there's no private clientele interested?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Why wouldn't they? They think it's good. French museums bought two or three of his works. They think it's very important, which I do, too. Do you like it?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes. So that you really have a broad range of collectors.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, I have a broad range, and I have a broad range of what I'm showing. Because, after all, I'm showing Ed Paschke from Chicago, Deborah Remington and Sam Gilliam. (Paul Cummings laughs) I mean, that's where we are. And what happened, I like to plan it so it's a mixup. I mean, I've had, let's say, Segal and then Gilliam. The last three shows have been abstract. I'm not usually representing an abstract image. That's really gotten people upset! Because the first one -- the French have a program called "aide à la première exposition." I showed an Irish artist who's very good, and they give aid with a slight subvention. She was abstract. This season, I started with Hugh Weiss, who's an American, related to the Chicago School, who's been here 25 years. And I think he's very interesting; he's figurative. Then I had Anne Madden, an abstract Irish artist. Then Clinton Hill, do you know him? He's at Zabriskie. He did the big painting in the little gallery. And then Sam Gilliam. I'm opening in October with Craig Kauffman who's done some marvelous new work in wood, painted rather than plexiglass. Very, very interesting. Then Ed Paschke, and then Rafael Ferrer from New York, do you know him? So that's my season.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, diversity!

DARTHEA SPEYER: Well, I think it's better. I'm more interested in diversity, too. But, I mean I think I have some stars in the gallery, like Deborah; Paschke I think is a great artist, fantastic. Let's see, who else? Oh, Lynn Foulkes for me is just a great --

PAUL CUMMINGS: I love the painting you have here. The big double one.

DARTHEA SPEYER: That is just great. And so is a little one I'll show you. I also show my sister, who I think is very good. She's had three shows. I have seven shows a year, which is too many for here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why is that? In New York, they're only for three or four weeks, you know.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Six would be plenty. But between my older artists who need to have another show, and bringing on a few new people, I can never get out from under. . . .

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think exhibition time is longer here?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Because there's less activity here. But I'm keeping them on only a month this year. And this year, there's the Paris Art Fair. I am going to go into that. I've never gone into an art fair.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've never done Basel or any of those --

DARTHEA SPEYER: I'm not looking forward to it, but I decided to try the experience. That's in mid-October, in the Grand Palais. And I think the new museum, the Beaubourg, is going to do a lot for me. You asks who buys from me: Musée National d'Art Moderne buys a lot from my gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They have a government stipend or something here, don't they, to buy? You know, a fund or something to buy, then, what's sort of funneled through the museums then?

DARTHEA SPEYER: They buy directly. Like, the director of the museum comes in. Then they submit it to a committee, and they buy. They've bought a lot from me. For instance, from Deborah's first show they bought one. What I think, they should have bought one out of her newer participation; she's much more interesting than, let's say, her first show. They just bought a big painting, and they bought a drawing. So, they're very active.

PAUL CUMMINGS: So, they have a lot of American art in their collection.

DARTHEA SPEYER: They bought a Segal from me six years ago. So they buy a lot. And the Marseilles museum buys, and also a museum in St. étienne buys. So those are people -- also the Rotterdam museum buys from me quite a bit. Those are important clients. By the way, as you said, nobody can read this except by writing; I don't want to hear that my clients have read it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughing] I don't think they could do that. Do you find that -- apropos the Pop art book that disappeared, is there a great interest in all the phases of Pop here, or in New Realism, or --

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think what there is now, there's an interest -- I think it's like it is in America: the interest is all over the lot. For instance, I mean they were terribly interested in what they call "hyper-realism," you know --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, "super-realism."

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think it sounds so much better in French! [both laughing] Now, I think, Pop art, like any movement, has had its crescendo, and now there are few people staying. I have the most wonderful painting; it's usually in my back room, but it's gone to the Venice Biennale. It's, I think, "hyper-realism," it's sort of connected with it, by a young artist called Tom Palmore of Philadelphia. I'll show you a photograph; it's fantastic. It's about five meters horizontal by four meters high. I can only get it into one room in the house, and when you get it in the room, you have to take in off to stretch it. [Paul Cummings laughs heartily] Your question about the movement made me think of it. He is a young artist, I saw the painting late at night and thought it was great. I showed him in September and bought this painting. The head of the Musée National d'Art Moderne here liked it so much; he was on this international committee for the Biennale in Venice, so he selected him to be in the show. Here in Paris, they're pushing this new movement which is totally boring --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Which is what?

DARTHEA SPEYER: It's called the "super-surface." Don't you know, all these French artists are into that?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No. Who are they?

DARTHEA SPEYER: They're doing painting without stretchers. And it's a whole movement, but there's nothing new about it. It's like Sam Gilliam did about ten years ago.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, it's just a loose-canvas thing.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh heavens.

DARTHEA SPEYER: That was in the last two Biennales here for artists under 35.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I hear from some of the dealers that it's very difficult for them to find French artists that are interesting.

DARTHEA SPEYER: That's why -- I mean, I would have more European artists, and probably, I could find more if I traveled more in Europe, but I haven't found that many.

PAUL CUMMINGS: All the ones I've talked to -- a dozen now, I guess -- have all said that, since I've been here. Even in the States, they come to Europe, they go to Basel, they say, "Same thing we saw last year and the year before."

DARTHEA SPEYER: In Basel, they show the commercial things. Basel every year has some artist or somebody who's in all the galleries.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You have said you sell things to Americans. Is that much of what you do? Are these people who come through frequently?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes. There are certain people who come through frequently, and they usually buy something. So that's a good thing. I think some people come abroad who like to buy, they don't get time at home. You know, come to a gallery and they look --

PAUL CUMMINGS: When on a holiday or something, business --

DARTHEA SPEYER: You know, also, two of my artists don't even have New York galleries, which is very sad. I think Sam Gilliam, he doesn't have a New York gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: I thought he did at one point.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Never had a New York gallery. And then Foulkes never had a New York Gallery. He had one show at Willard last year, and he's going to have a show at a new gallery this fall called the Grünbaum Gallery. But quite a few of them don't have eastern galleries. So that's another reason people buy from me.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They don't get to California, but they get to Paris. That's true of a lot of people who don't get to California [laughing].

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think more and more are going to California. I think my brother sort of started the California -- one of his first American shows, he had a lot of California people. Now I think almost every European that really wants to look at anything goes to California.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I mean dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, that's interesting. Ten years ago, they never would have thought of it.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Nobody ever put their foot into California.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They hardly would go to New York. What do you think all of this exhibiting of American artists is doing? Do you see any effect in the art by the European artists?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Well, I think [tape goes bad for several phrases]. An exhibition at the Pompidou Center next spring is called "Paris-New York." And they're trying to show the relationship between what's American art and French art, and vice versa. For instance, take an artist like Peter Saul who's in my gallery now. Peter Saul lived over here about 15 years ago. He was an influence on French artists. They even admitted it, which is more fantastic.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's extraordinary.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think that quite a few of the artists have been a direct influence and otherwise an indirect influence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, right. So all of a sudden --

DARTHEA SPEYER: All of a sudden --

[END OF THIS SIDE]

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- it's been -- so I think it's had a tremendous -- well, look what's -- I mean, American art has influenced, I think, the world ever since -- for a while, we were following French art. Then along came Abstract Expressionists. And that was the beginning. So I think even if they don't want to admit it. I don't mean that everything anybody is doing -- but I think it's had a major influence.

PAUL CUMMINGS: But do you think the Abstract Expressionists became so important because they were, you know, picked up by the Museum of Modern Art and sent around to all the exhibitions --

DARTHEA SPEYER: Well, they weren't sent around till much later, but they were sent around -- we had a lot of them here.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have dealers come to see you very much about things, or not?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, quite a few. I work with quite a few dealers. Some galleries work exclusively with dealers. In the field I'm in, I don't work that much with dealers.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Not possible. Yes.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Let's say if I were handling Bacon, Francis Bacon, I'd be working with dealers. That's what I'm saying. But the people I work with, I don't work that much with dealers. Sometimes with dealers who buy paintings --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Well, these people's prices aren't really enormous, either. I mean, even Deborah's prices are low --

DARTHEA SPEYER: Very low, but Deborah's are higher than most of the people I handle now.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Are they really?

DARTHEA SPEYER: But they're low. We think they're low. I had a Tobey show here --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes, that was recently, wasn't it?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I had the show in December, and the prices were low for Tobey.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Really? How did you do that?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I didn't -- but they were low -- but then you cannot tell, the way people act. Some of the people thought they were very high. I don't go by what the people say, anyhow. I decided on the prices when Marian Willard was involved. They were high for people who were used to getting them for nothing at one time. Or Tobey used to give away a lot of paintings, that's probably why you couldn't get your list. Everybody thinks, "Oh, I bought that once for \$1,000," you know, or something. The highest painting in the show -- they were small paintings, I think the biggest painting in the show was about \$26,000; which is nothing, I think, for a Tobey.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But I don't think Tobey has gotten on all the museums' lists, which he will.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Too bad it took him so long to even get anything going.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But what a great artist! Maybe it's his own fault, too -- living in Basel and -- but he's a fantastic artist.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What do you think is going to happen? Do you think this eclecticism is going to continue? Do you think a new "ism" is going to appear?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I have no idea. I think right now there's no movement today, and I don't think there's a new movement in the United States. And the French have picked up this super-surface movement because they have wanted to find a new movement. And I'll show it to you, and _____ what it is. It's nothing. I don't see any new movement. I think, all over, there are many trends. Like, my brother in his last American show, in Chicago, he showed a lot of different trends. And I think that people feel that many different things are going on. Conceptual art, let's say; this is going on --

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've never shown Conceptual art?

DARTHEA SPEYER: No, I don't feel conceptual art. There are certain movements that don't interest me, like conceptual. And also the Vasarely type of thing. There are a few -- I mean, I distinguish on that level. But I don't think anybody will know what, where the new movement is.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Why do you think that's sort of happened now? Everybody talks about it, you know. . . .

DARTHEA SPEYER: Everybody's doing different things. I mean, there's, like, color field going on, let's say. Look, Peter Saul is going on at the same time that Sam Gilliam -- you know. So I don't know. Maybe more individuals around. But I don't know. I can't answer that. No idea.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you have a lot of American artists that want to show with you? Or more Europeans?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I have all kinds of people I show. [Paul laughs] I tell anybody to just leave me their photographs; anybody. And you can't tell from everybody's photographs, but that gives you some idea.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you go to studios?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I go to studios when I can, but the trouble is, it's much better to go to a studio than look at photos. But since in all the time I've looked at photos, I've only discovered two people --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh really?

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- in eight years, so if I'd gone to everybody's studio, I might have been dead ___ and had no time. A good idea would be -- at some galleries, one morning a week, they let people bring in paintings. And I think that would be the best. But I think just to organize that is very difficult.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Too complicated.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But I try to look at new work because that's the most important thing. If you're not going to look at new work, you might as well not have a gallery. But it's very hard to have enough time to go to studios.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you travel much for business, or not?

DARTHEA SPEYER: First of all, I'm gone two months in the summer. This year, I'm closing earlier than usual -- last year, I stayed open until July 15, which was ridiculous.

PAUL CUMMINGS: And it's so hot these days.

DARTHEA SPEYER: It wasn't hot, but there was nothing happening. So, I'm gone two and a half months, let's say. And then I'm in America about five weeks in the winter. So, I just can't leave the gallery enough to travel. Actually, I'd be better if I'd travel a little bit more, I'd find more things. I think I would. But since my gallery is such a personal business, I can't be away too much.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You only have one assistant there, don't you?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, I only have one assistant -- I can't have more than one, there'd be no place for it. And it's very, very hard, because whenever I'm not there, nothing seems to go on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh yes.

DARTHEA SPEYER: So, I've said I just have to get married in order to run the gallery [Paul laughs heartily] because all the people who have husbands and wives -- it's so much easier for them to share the responsibilities of owning a gallery.

PAUL CUMMINGS: In the summer, you go where? To Crete.

DARTHEA SPEYER: My brother and I have a house together. So a week from now, I'll be on the Island, on Saturday.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Fantastic.

DARTHEA SPEYER: And I don't think about art for the first few weeks. After that, I'll be willing to go to somebody's funeral but not to the first --

PAUL CUMMINGS: [laughing]

DARTHEA SPEYER: You asked if people come to see me all the time -- you know, send me photographs. But actually, I think you find out more about people through other people, not the people who come to the gallery. I think it's rare that somebody who comes in the gallery, unfortunately, has anything to offer.

PAUL CUMMINGS: That's what so many dealers tell me, that their best sources have been other artists, whether they're in their gallery or not.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, that's a good source. Very good. But a lot of the time I find it is not good, because they're pushing their friends.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right, yes. Have you had any American museums buy things from you? Or, is it just too complicated?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, I've had American museums dropping in. The only thing that's complicated, they have to pay the transportation. So, I've had several. So that's good.

PAUL CUMMINGS: They keep their eyes open a little.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Right. A lot of museum people come into the gallery. For one thing, Germans don't come, and I have a feeling they go directly to America. Because also, France got a very bad name for a while, you know -- that nothing was going on.

PAUL CUMMINGS: You've never had prints in the gallery? You have drawings --

DARTHEA SPEYER: Very little. Because I think -- the only time I've shown works on paper was that Gilliam show. Did you see the Gilliam show when it was on?

PAUL CUMMINGS: No.

DARTHEA SPEYER: A whole show of gouaches and prints. And it was a beautiful show. But one, I just think it's not worth it for me to show prints in a show like that; and two, I'm not known for showing prints. If I was doing prints

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PAUL CUMMINGS: Right, you have to specialize in them.

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- I'd have to have another gallery, with one person looking after it.

PAUL CUMMINGS: What about drawings? I noticed the other day that we looked at drawings.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes. I love drawings. I've shown a lot of drawings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do they buy them here?

DARTHEA SPEYER: Yes, they buy them. Like Roy De Forest, I've sold many of his drawings. And Paschke. Remington's drawings I've sold. And I love drawings.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Do you think that's more accessible, or the prices are lower?

DARTHEA SPEYER: I think prices don't make any difference if the work is around three or four thousand francs. Then, I think if the work is around ten thousand francs, I don't think prices keep people from buying. I think then when you get up into the twenty-five thousand franc, or fifty thousand, bracket, sure, people are going to think about it. But I don't agree with people who say, "Oh, your prices are too high." First of all, the prices are very modest. The people know it. Something else keeps people from buying. I mean, people go out and buy a beautiful suit or a dress --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Cars, mink coats. So if people want it, they want it; if they don't --

DARTHEA SPEYER: Exactly.

PAUL CUMMINGS: One thing that intrigues me, some dealers have said that one can really "sell art to people." Do you think that's possible? You know, if somebody shows a certain interest you can really sell them a painting --

DARTHEA SPEYER: A real salesman's technique?

PAUL CUMMINGS: Yes.

DARTHEA SPEYER: I wouldn't have that so I can't say. I do my best with my abilities, and I'm sure that's not my best point. And maybe they can; that's what people say. I mean, you could sell a pair of shoes as easily as a painting. We certainly have to be pleasant and do certain things. When I'm not in the gallery [at this point, a dog fight takes place nearby, completely obscuring several sentences following; Darthea and Paul continue speaking nonetheless.] I don't think it's just sales technique.

PAUL CUMMINGS: No, but it's also people want to buy some of the names in the gallery.

DARTHEA SPEYER: But I don't think "anybody" can sell a painting. I've decided that. One would think that if people would come in off the street and buy from anybody, why would they care who's there? That's what I can't see. Unless the person sitting there has no technique at all.

PAUL CUMMINGS: A friend of mine who worked at Marlborough and big establishments says that people who spend a lot of money want to buy from the director, even though they might like the assistant --

DARTHEA SPEYER: But in Marlborough with all the people running around, there must be someone that's sold by somebody else.

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh, that's true but never truly major works.

DARTHEA SPEYER: [laughing; dogs still fighting]

PAUL CUMMINGS: But I think it's the same way at Janis and Castelli. If you go there, you want to buy from Leo.

DARTHEA SPEYER: Why don't I show you around the house?

[presumably picking up after the tour]

PAUL CUMMINGS: How did you get interested in the West Coast people? Was that through them, or through your brother, or --

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- it's hard to remember how I got interested in people -- sometimes, I've seen some people at my brother's shows. Now, Lynn Foulkes -- I went out to Los Angeles about 12 years ago, and late one night, I saw that big painting, and I bought it right away for myself. I react immediately whether I like something or not,

and I've followed him since. He was one of the first shows in my gallery. You'll see another painting of his downstairs. Now, Roy De Forest, I think I might have seen early work in LA, and I didn't like it. I followed him for a while; now I'm really crazy about his work. Craig Kauffman, I forget where I first saw him, because before I had the show, I bought that "Bubble" that's here --

PAUL CUMMINGS: Oh right.

DARTHEA SPEYER: -- so maybe I saw it in the gallery. I've gone out to the West Coast, but I went out to the West Coast after I was interested. So I saw the work before. Now, the Chicago work -- I always went to Chicago. After seeing Paschke . . . I went overboard. I must have seen that at my brother's house. I showed Roger Brown, and I think he's a good artist. But to me, Paschke is the best. And Golub, I first met him when I was in the Embassy. And Gilliam, I first saw in one of my brother's shows

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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