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Oral history interview with Beatrice Wood,
1976 August 26

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Beatrice Wood on August 26, 1976. The interview was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'm delighted that I have a chance to talk with you and learn something about your own background and something about your work as a potter. Maybe you could tell me a little bit about your family and where you were born, and the early days.

BEATRICE WOOD: I'll do that briefly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: O.K.

BEATRICE WOOD: I was born in San Francisco.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh really?

BEATRICE WOOD: And I tell everybody in 1703. That solves the question. And I was very unhappy in my family. We moved immediately to New York and then I was taken over to Paris and I learned to read French before I learned to read English. I was in a convent for a year. Then they brought me back and put me in a private school. I went to Miss Ely's, which was the fashionable finishing school in those years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that in the New York area?

BEATRICE WOOD: In New York. It's now completely nonexistent. And I was a very proper, shy little girl and enchanted because one of the girls climbed out the window to meet a young boy. Oh, I thought it was so marvelous. And then I was three years at Shipley's and in between, summers, we always went to Europe. And that, quickly, is that period of my life which doesn't, too much, interest me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You won't tell me when you were born, apparently. But maybe you'll tell me when you first went to Europe, when your family took you to Paris, what year . . . ?

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't know the year. I was -- oh, it was probably the beginning of the century.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were about five or six years old?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Aha!

BEATRICE WOOD: And I was seven, eight, I think, when I went to the convent. I was one of the . . . there were three people, three girls who weren't Catholic. Five hundred girls in the convent, I remember, and I liked it because they give you these beautiful watered ribbons every week for good conduct, with medals. And then the Catholics had little wax figures of Christ and cradles. And with my interest in objects, it bewitched me. I loved it. But I'm not a religious person, and though I learned to memorize the New Testament in French, I'm very anti-religious. Very.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what about your family? You don't want to dwell on your family background, apparently.

BEATRICE WOOD: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But I am curious to know what your family situation was, what your father did. What your circumstances were.

BEATRICE WOOD: In New York he was in real estate. They were very comfortably off. They weren't millionaires, but they were very comfortably off, so that we had a Cadillac in those days and we took trips to Europe. But I was very, very unhappy because my mother was very charming and generous, but to me, very dominating. And from the time I'd been fourteen I remember saving my allowance in boarding school and saving half of it to buy art books and books of poetry. Why, I don't know. I had all kinds -- I had a wonderful library. But disaster struck when I was in my twenties and, even though I didn't understand a great deal of what I read, I began to know that there was a great world of literature and art that existed. And I kind of hoped, well, even if I read these things -- I remember, I had a book by Clive Bell. [Laughter] Read it, and I didn't understand a word, but I said,

well maybe it will take place in my unconscious. Then, when I was nineteen, oh, I always want to get away from home. When I was sixteen I was sent with an old woman to chaperon me to Giverny. Do you know where Giverny is? It is -- it was -- a small town out of Paris where Monet lived. And only peasants and models. [Laughter] And, this old woman -- she couldn't organize herself to work. I'd be ready at nine o'clock and I'd go out in the fields and paint. Every morning I'd do a thing of the fields and the trees and afterward

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you were painting then already at that time. You are obviously

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, I went for a year to Julian's in Paris.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, did you?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ah, that's interesting.

BEATRICE WOOD: And then she . . . uh, we had a fight. She was thirty. I walked out on her and went to the inn. And they said, "Well, we have no place left. There's only an attic, and you'll have to climb a ladder." Well that, to me, was something grand. Everything I'd ever hoped for. So I climbed the ladder and had a beautiful attic room lined with canvases. I did three a day, all horrors. And my mother, of course, heard I'd run away from this old lady of thirty, and came down to find me. And I can still see her climbing this ladder with her high-heel shoes. She was very elegant. A black satin dress with real hand embroidery at her throat. Wonderful hat with feathers. And I thought she'd be so happy when she got into the attic to see my industry -- these things lined up against the wall. And she said, "Look at the cobwebs." And I never said a word. And she took me back to Paris. So that is symbolic of what happened between us until she died many years later, around 1935, I think, of cancer. The last months we had a real understanding, because she gave up all her worldly values and she realized that she'd been wrong about me. Well, then I wanted to go on the stage. Not because I was stagestruck but to earn money so that I could get away from home. Because I was a good little girl. Nothing is more revolting. And all my underwear had real lace on it. And I curtsied every time I met an older person. Well, since I was reading Dostoevski, Balzac, and Turgenev, it didn't take. So I'd been threatening to run away and my mother then made a deal with me. She said, "If you want to go on the stage, I'll take you to Paris, and you'll study under the Comedie Francaise, with the understanding that in two years you'll come back and make a debut. And then, if you . . . we'll see what happens. But I'll cooperate with you that far."

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess she figured even the stage, even the theatre, was better than being a painter.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes. And also in French and studying with the Comedie Francaise had a cachet

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see.

BEATRICE WOOD: But I found the Comedie Francaise very academic and I heard about Gordon Craig. You know who Gordon Craig was?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No. I don't.

BEATRICE WOOD: This is terrible!

PAUL KARLSTROM: How so? Go on.

BEATRICE WOOD: It shows what fame is. Gordon Craig was the illegitimate son of Ellen Terry, the father of one of Isadora Duncan's children, and the great innovator of scenic design in the theatre. He abolished the terrible, stupid stock canvas, and he brought in lights and curtains. And I'd read about him. I don't know why . . . how it was I had this direction towards culture. And I said to myself, "Well, here's a real great person, a genius. If I can study with him, he'll make up for the Comedie Francaise academic thing." So my mother arranged with his wife for me to fly from Paris to Italy -- I think it was Florence -- where he was starting a school. And I was terribly happy because he really was a genius. And whether genius teaches or not is not important. The important thing is when one is in the aura of a genius something starts in the cells of one's thinking, and later it'll bloom. Well, the day before I was to leave, she came with a very long face and said, "Did you know that Gordon Craig is a very immoral man?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "You're not going." And I wept twenty-four hours. And my life that day was ended. I really thought it was. Well, then I returned to America and I was accepted in the French theater, which was repertory, in New York. That was the ingenue. And I spoke French in those days perfectly. And I acted about sixty ingenue parts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How old were you then?

BEATRICE WOOD: About

PAUL KARLSTROM: Nineteen?

BEATRICE WOOD: Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two. And, ah -- this is all fresh 'cause I've written so much about it in my autobiography, Comes to mind.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's good!

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, I studied for a while with Yvette Guilbert. By the way, I have a book of hers in which she's -- ah, do you know who Yvette Guilbert . . . ?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh yes, absolutely.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, what I missed out in telling you about Gordon Craig -- part of my disappointment was not only that I would not be near the genius, but I had thought in my great youthful innocence that, since one day I had to be seduced, maybe he would seduce me. And far better to be seduced by a man of his stature and charm than by some jerk whom I might have met. I didn't tell that to my mother!

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course not.

BEATRICE WOOD: But that was one of the greater things in my grief.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So didn't Isadora Duncan herself, as part of her romantic view about the Bohemian life in the beginning, want to be seduced properly by a European?

BEATRICE WOOD: I think it's very important.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yeah. Could be.

BEATRICE WOOD: Henri Pierre Roche taught me that. And I think this is vitally important. And younger generations who feel they can just go and experiment with anybody for the sake of experiment make a great mistake because

PAUL KARLSTROM: A bad start.

BEATRICE WOOD: After all, there's no getting away from it. We are . . . what is sex? Sex is energy. We're sexual people. And I don't think anybody quite understands what it's all about. But, if one uses that energy for a beautiful experience, it gives you an entirely different outlook if you're a woman, an entirely different outlook than if your first experience is an ugly and shocking one. I feel rather sure of that because so many psychologists write about that. Well, I was in the French theatre and I know -- oh, my mother made two great mistakes at that time. I knew a journalist, a woman, by the name of Elisa Frank. She lived in Greenwich Village and I enjoyed going to see her because she was well read and she was a creative person. And -- I'm trying to put this in order -- one day she said to me, "There's a Frenchman who's broken his leg in the hospital. Why don't you go see him." And I said, "Well, no. I'm not interested." And she said, "Well, yes. He's very lonely and you speak French." So I went. And, you see, all this period now I was very shy, and the Frenchman was Edgar Varese, the composer. And I was a little bit shocked because one leg, which he'd broken, was in a cast and the other was hairy, staying outside his bed and that rather embarrassed me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

BEATRICE WOOD: And while we were talking something worse happened. A fly flew into my mouth.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh!

BEATRICE WOOD: And, being the well-brought-up young lady that I was [laughter] I didn't know how to deal with the crisis so I swallowed the fly [laughter], wings batting. Which was heroic. And I never told him till I met him years and years later and it didn't impress him at all. Well, anyway, the second time [laughter] -- you understand what a situation that was to be in. The second time I was there I met Marcel Duchamp, and we immediately fell for each other. Which doesn't mean a thing because I think anybody who met Marcel fell for him. He's just a . . . Did you ever meet him?

PAUL KARLSTROM: No. I wrote a letter to him once but it was shortly before his death and I don't know if he ever got it.

BEATRICE WOOD: He was an enchanting person.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you remember what year it was? You must.

BEATRICE WOOD: I could tell you. I think it was around 1917. I have all this in my diary. I kept three lines a day. I could check back. And we immediately tu-toi'ed each other. And, in talking he said, -- he knew I was in the theatre -- he said, "Why don't you paint?" And I said, "Oh, there's no room in my mother's house." We were then in a very nice apartment. Later she owned two brownstone houses which were remodeled. Well, so he said, "Come to my studio and paint. Phone me first. If I'm busy, I'll tell you. If not, come." So for a period, I think about two years, around twice a week I went to his studio. Sometimes he was there, sometimes he wasn't. And I just did a series of terrible sketches, and ah . . . oh! The first one I did he immediately had published in *Rogue*, a very avant-garde sheet of Allen Norton's, who was married at that time to Louise, who later married Varese. And, to return to my mother's mistake, two mistakes. Liking Elisa Frank, I invited her for Sunday luncheon. Now, every Sunday we had open house with a turkey and either homemade ice cream or ice cream from Sherry's. It was just a feast, and more or less open house. And after she left, my mother said, "She's common."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh!

BEATRICE WOOD: That hurt me terribly. So I never invited Elisa a second time to the house. I went to see her. Well, then I met Henri Pierre Roche, through Duchamp. And I saw him -- I'd forgotten, but in looking over diary notes I saw him several times. Liked him very much. He was quite a good deal older than I was. I think he was under the French government at that time and I don't really know what he was doing in New York. But he'd travelled extensively, even in India, which -- he and Marcel were the first two who had really bought the first Picassos and Brancusis. And they collected them. And later Marcel, I think, influenced Walter Arensberg and sold him quite a few things. Well, so Roche was invited to dinner. And after he left my mother said, "You're in love with that man!" Well, I was still so shy and so innocent in spite of all my reading, I had no idea whether I was in love with him or not. It was possible. But the next time when he called he was very gentlemanly. I said, "Oh, I'll come to see you." And he was a little taken aback, a young girl coming to see him. He said, "Oh, no, no, I'll come to see you." And I said, "Not at all. I'm shopping. I'll be in your neighborhood." "But I just live in a simple room." "That's all right, I don't mind; I'll be near there. So I went to see him and the -- what is it? -- the fat was in the fire. So that was the second mistake my mother made. But a very wonderful one, because I was very much in love with him and he with me. And we . . . I was also very much in love with Marcel. And Roche . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: It sounds like Jules and Jim.

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, it was . . . he's changed. I told him that to change the thing. And Roche loved Marcel, too, and I used to dream of Marcel and Roche. And Roche would just laugh and say, "Oh, you're in love with him." And the three of us, for I don't know whether it was a year, a year and a half, were very close. And, of course, we put out *The Blind Man* together. Then Marcel introduced me to the Arensbergs. They were in the house below him, I mean the apartment. They were in the same apartment building on West 67th Street. And I was at their house, oh, probably three times a week at evenings. Marvelous evenings. But unfortunately I was so much in love I never paid any attention to the discussions about art. It didn't mean anything to me. And so I have very little that I can contribute. I can say this: The great ball for which Marcel had me make a poster -- and I have a copy of it still . . . We all left at around three o'clock in the morning and went back to the Arensbergs for refreshments. Mrs. Arensberg, Lou, always brought out trays of all kinds of liquor and she didn't drink and I didn't drink, so she had also trays of chocolate eclairs. This was continual. And then it was so late I hesitated to go home because my parents knew when the door was unlatched. They would wake up. So Marcel said, "Why don't you all come up to my room." So Mina Loy, Demuth, there were five of us, myself and Marcel, all went up and slept on his bed fully clothed.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Big bed.

BEATRICE WOOD: A big double bed, yes. And the next morning when I went home my mother, who had evidently phoned Mrs. Arensberg, said, "You spent the night with Marcel Duchamp. How could you!" As if I were a slut. Well, maybe I was acting as if I were a slut, but I didn't like my mother, ah . . . you just . . . can't do that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It doesn't sound very "slutty" the way you described it. [Laughs]

BEATRICE WOOD: No. Well, anyway, I said, "Yes." That was all. Now, my mother was very, very difficult for me, but I was very difficult for her. Young people do not understand what older people go through, or what mothers go through. But she really was very much in the wrong. I knew Norman Hapgood intimately. He and his wife. He was editor of *Collier's*, a close friend of President Wilson's, a theatre critic, and he knew everybody in the theatre and gave me letters and I had second parts offered me. Not star, the second. And my mother interfered over and over and over and wouldn't let me take the parts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why was that?

BEATRICE WOOD: "My daughter will be a star or nothing." That kind of thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Immediately.

BEATRICE WOOD: Immediately. So, but anyway, the Arensbergs then, that circle, made up to me for the loss of Gordon Craig. And I never gave him another thought. The seduction was taken care of, happily, otherwise.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Laughing] I'm delighted to hear that. What were Duchamp and Roche like? Or perhaps one at a time. But I think that's fascinating, the relationship that you describe where, as you say, you were in love with both of them.

BEATRICE WOOD: I really was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And they apparently were in love with you.

BEATRICE WOOD: And the three of us just were (unintelligible) good friends.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was that the inspiration? When was Jules and Jim written?

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't know. I think it was written quite a few years later. I never saw it, but people tell me it's marvelous film . . . that I should see it. But I never heard about it up here in Ojai. I'd love to see it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But do you suppose it was based on that . . . ?

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, definitely. And then, Mrs. Matta gave me a few sheets of paper about a little book, something else that Roche wrote in which he even used my stage name and Victor being Marcel. And later in one of the letters I saw where he referred to Marcel, called him Victor. Roche was a very interesting man, but I have had the unfortunate experience of feeling that all men are bastards.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh?

BEATRICE WOOD: Because I'm a monogamous woman in a polygamous world. [Laughs] Well, Roche -- now this is really very interesting -- he was a complicated person. We just had the most marvelous relationship. And the same with Duchamp. He was a part of it. But we were always talking, talking, talking. You know

PAUL KARLSTROM: Umhmm.

BEATRICE WOOD: It was just out of this world. With our great interest in life and in art and in people. And he said right from the beginning, he said, "Look, I can't marry you. I must tell you. Because I have an old mistress in Paris. I haven't lived with her. We've been like brother and sister for five years. I can't . . . I couldn't marry her because she was of the lower class, but she's a lovely person. I was her life. And I promised her I would not marry, but she would have to give me freedom." Well, I wasn't the least bit jealous of her. She was 3,000 miles away and I felt very kindly towards her. Well, he wanted a son. But we separated because one day I went . . . he was living then in a basement apartment, had its private entrance and the sun came through the lace curtains. To me it was heaven; a simple little room after the over-luxury of my parents' house. And one day I came in and he was typing. And I said, "You've been unfaithful to me." And he said, "Yes, but it was nothing." And I said, "Elisa Frank." And he said, "Yes, but I assure it meant nothing. I was having tea and the light shone on her throat and it happened." Well, now I know these things happen and that they're really not . . . they are important to a woman -- but they're really not.

[PAUSE]

You see, I've been battered around enough to know that. [Laughs] But at the time it completely crushed me. And I said, "I can't see you anymore." And I stayed in his arms weeping and he wept. And we parted. And then I think I didn't see him for about a year. And then we took on a friendship. And we wrote for years, three or four times a year, until the Second World War. Then we wrote often. But in the meantime . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: He went back to France then?

BEATRICE WOOD: He went back to France. In the meanwhile he had a son. And he married this mistress after all the years. Gave her status so that he could have a son with someone else. And finally the mistress died. And . . . this was just after World War Two -- and he married the mother of his son. And she told me when I visited them in Paris -- she said, "You can imagine what it was like during the War when we had coupons and I was not the legal wife and the son was not legitimate." And Roche should have straightened out his life and not allowed that. So he got mixed up. Marcel was very much greater. I got much closer to Marcel after I broke with Roche. And Marcel shocked me because he said that sex and love are two different things. And of course I was so romantic and I didn't agree and most of our conversations were around that. This is the thing of the world. You know, God, the power that makes life, whatever it is, had just to make two things, masculine and feminine, for all this mischief. And made them so there is this entirely different point of view about love and sex. And I think maybe all women, if they just had a chance, would be romantic and believe in love and not sex. And men believe in sex and not love.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Umhmm.

BEATRICE WOOD: So that's why I say [laughs] love is just cauliflower and . . . you know what?

PAUL KARLSTROM: And sex.

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't want to say it on the . . . [laughs] tape.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Everybody's adult, usually, who listens to these things. But your relationship with Duchamp obviously continued for some time in one form or another.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh yes. Oh yes. And whenever I went back to New York, I saw him and then when he came to California to visit the Arensbergs -- he came twice -- I saw him. And the last time he came in '63. He was married then to Teeny, who's a lovely person. And he had a big exhibition at the Pasadena Museum and I was invited as a guest for the dinner beforehand. And then he came to visit me here in Ojai. When he came with Teeny, the last time I saw them was then in '63. But before that he came, I think, twice when he was visiting the Arensbergs, to visit me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What do you remember about the days in New York with Duchamp? You spent time together, went places, things like this. Where did you go, and what people did you see? Arensbergs, of course, but what were the interests and activities that you shared, shall we say?

BEATRICE WOOD: He took me to Stieglitz. I was with him when he discovered Eilshemius. That was in the Grand Central Palace exhibition. That's not the Armory.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No, that was the Independents show. I'd like you to tell me about that, as a matter of fact. As much as you can remember and the circumstances.

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, that's all connected with Blind Man. And these -- the groups at the Arensbergs -- Walter Pach, Gleize, Picabia and all the people who were there -- they were against the jury system. So they decided finally to start an exhibition where if a person sent in six dollars they could exhibit two things. And the day before it opened I was in the statue section, and Kent -- it just possibly could have been George Bellows -- but I'm pretty sure it was Rockwell Kent and Arensberg were fighting. And Kent said, "We can't exhibit it." And Arensberg said, "But we have to. It's in our by-laws that anything a person chooses . . ." And Kent said, "But it's obscene." And Arensberg said, "In the eyes of the beholder only." And then Kent said, "You mean to say that, if a man put horse manure on a canvas, we'd have to exhibit it?" And with great sorrow -- his tongue in his cheek, I'm sure -- Arensberg said, "I fear we would." And then it became so belligerent I fled. Well, of course, the article they were disputing was a very beautiful white porcelain oval shape. And it was on a black stand, sent in by R. Mutt. And we all know it was a man's urinal put upside down and really very handsome in form. Well, R. Mutt, naturally, was Marcel testing the by-laws of freedom, knowing perfectly well with his Gallic wit that Anglo-Saxons wouldn't be as free as they pretended. So then I went with Marcel to Stieglitz who took up the -- what is it, glove -- and photographed it. Then Duchamp and Roche were hell-bent to have a magazine with the same freedom as the exhibition. First I must say, Marcel said, "You must send two things to the exhibition." Well, I was still on the stage then, not interested in being a painter in any way, though I painted in his studio. It was as much to be near him that I painted. So I did, I think, one of the first abstracts ever to be shown in America of a woman's torso with a piece of soap at a very tactical position. And Duchamp said, "You must get a real piece of soap and you must shop for the right color and shape," which I did. Then he helped me tack it on. Well, this one was sent in without any mischievous thought. Attracted a tremendous amount of attention. I walked away with practically all the reviews and the serious artists were neglected and many left calling cards on it. Why, I can't imagine.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What was the piece called? I didn't know about it.

BEATRICE WOOD: I meant to say, "Un peu de Savon Dans de L'eau, A Little Bit of Soap in the Water." And, instead of that, I said, by accident, "Un peu de L'eau Dans du Savon." In other words. "A Little Bit of Water in the Soap." Well, Duchamp just hit on the play on words. Also, another thing that comes to mind. He and Roche -- their great delight was to teach me all kinds of utterly vulgar French words. And then to sit back and hear me accidentally bring them out in conversation at the Arensbergs. And I not knowing what I was saying. I can still see those two rogues exchanging glances [Laughter] in delight.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Laughs] Waiting for another one to come out, so to speak.

BEATRICE WOOD: [Laughs] Oh, so to come to Blind Man. They wanted to have a magazine with that freedom . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which the Independents exhibition actually didn't have.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes. And Mrs. Harry Paine Whitney gave five hundred dollars and Frank Crowninshield, the editor of Vanity Fair, which has since become defunct, gave us the money and Walter Arensberg had something in it and Picabia and fine galleries took out ads. And I wrote the editorial. And then I wrote a letter from a middle-class woman. We thought it'd be fun to have a woman objecting. So I pretended to have two children and be in revolt against all the smut in art. So we had fun over it. Well, the day it -- the form -- was to be put on subway stands, I went home at three in the afternoon. By accident my father was there. Our apartment had an entry hall. And to the ceiling it was piled with magazines. The Blind Man. And my father said, "I was so curious about this. I've never interfered in your life. And I opened one of the packages and saw your name as publisher and I'm appalled. You don't know what you're doing. You're going to be put in jail. And I beg you not to put this out publicly. There're three words in it no young girl should ever hear." So I phoned Crowninshield and rushed back and said, "Look, my father's never interfered with me. He's an honest, middle-class, typical American man and, if he feels so really strongly, maybe others would. And your name and Mrs. Whitney's name might be dragged through for pornography." Well, we went over all the things and we couldn't find those three words my father objected to. And of course, the little folder is utterly mild nowadays.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, sure. [Laughs]

BEATRICE WOOD: You know. And so it was distributed by hand. We never sold it. And I never gave it much thought till years passed and then people began asking about it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was there just one issue?

BEATRICE WOOD: No. There were two issues. The first issue I don't have. It was very dull. Called Blind Man. I even forget what it was. Just a few pages. But the second issue, you see, had Stieglitz's picture of what he called "The Fountain."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which one had the interview with Eilshemius? I can't remember if it was the first or the second. It was entitled "No comment, Mr. Eilshemius" or something like that. Mina Loy did it.

BEATRICE WOOD: Mina Loy? I think it's in The Blind Man.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right. But I was wondering which one. There were two.

BEATRICE WOOD: The second one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, that takes us back to the Independents. To the show itself. And you mentioned -- which interests me very much -- that you were actually with Duchamp when he supposedly "discovered" Eilshemius.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh yes. Now that was at the Grand Central Palace.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

BEATRICE WOOD: We were walking through it and suddenly he said . . . he turned and he looked at this little painting -- it seemed to me it was about this size -- and I thought it was a Chromo. And he said something. I can't really quote him, but the feeling that it left with me, "There is a real artist." And he took me twice to call on him. And I think Walter Arensberg was with us once. I get that from looking over notes of my diary.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, actually the Eilshemius that he discovered in that show was a rather large painting of this very, very eccentric blowzy nude with great big bosoms.

BEATRICE WOOD: Was that what it was?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Called Rose Marie. Rose Marie, yes.

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't remember at all because I thought he was out of his mind and I paid no attention.

[PAUSE]

Well, I'll say this about Duchamp. He was very, very penetrating as to what was real and what was false. And the dealers thought a great deal about his opinion.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, Let me ask you this. You were with Duchamp, of course, when Eilshemius was discovered. The artist subsequently received a certain amount of attention and actually got his first one-man show though the Societe Anonyme and the efforts of Duchamp and Katherine Dreier. The critics felt -- were convinced -- that Duchamp was not out of his mind, but that this was certainly another Duchampian prank. That he couldn't possibly have been serious. They couldn't see any merit in this man Eilshemius. I was wondering, well first of all, if you have any recollection of his, say, sincerity or, short of that, his attitude about such things.

In other words, was he more interested in, say, a prank, a dada joke if you prefer, or was he really interested in young or unrecognized artists?

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, I would say from that I've read, that he was anti-art. And from the things that I would draw in his studio and he'd look at them and say, "Good, good, bad, bad." At the time I never understood. But he chose -- for instance, I made a painting of a nightmare. I still have it. A perfectly revolting, terrible thing. And he chose it to be exhibited in the Grand Central Palace.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why, do you suppose? As an attack on the traditional values . . . ?

BEATRICE WOOD: I think possibly so. You see, the First World War had a very shocking . . . it shocked all that generation of young people, including the artists. It was the first time I think we've had a world war on civilians and children. And I think the young people of that day wanted nothing to do with the old world as it was established. And, therefore, they became anti-art and anti-everything. But, in their anti-thing issue -- look at the great masters, such as Duchamp and Picasso and Matisse and all the really great ones -- that there was something very marvelous in their revolt. It took an entirely different direction. But you have to be attuned to understand what it's about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it seems that Duchamp -- of all of the great figures of the early part of the century -- was the most iconoclastic . . .

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: . . . perhaps, in some ways, the most intellectual of the lot.

BEATRICE WOOD: For instance, he was wonderful to me. We just had a marvelous relationship. But, until I was close to him, he was sleeping around, so people told me, with weird women. And he said, "An ugly woman is much better to sleep with than a beautiful woman." And he more or less . . . I got the impression that he liked, kind of, tramps. Not exactly prostitutes, but women who were maybe decadent. And there was one very strange woman that I once saw . . . Well, however, years later when I saw him in New York and he was with Mary Reynolds, she was a very refined lovely person. Certainly I was relatively a refined person. No way a tramp.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Despite what your mother thought.

BEATRICE WOOD: In spite of what my mother thought. And then when you take Teeny Matisse, whom he married -- is a very delightful, wonderful person. So, for certain kinds of relationship he didn't . . . maybe he just separated sex and love as he said.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Of course that raises the whole interesting question. But I view that as basically unfortunate for him. Unless in the later years he could obviously combine them.

BEATRICE WOOD: He was very happy, I think, with Teeny. And she came to see me shortly after he died and she said she was so happy he'd gone as he had in his sleep because he had cancer of the prostate. And he would have been faced with a great deal of pain and he feared death. And so it was a great relief to her because she loved him, that he was spared that. Now, to show you -- Marcel wasn't really very interested in traditional pottery, such as I did. Yet when I had two exhibitions in New York America House . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

BEATRICE WOOD: Around . . . I could tell you exactly, but I'd say around '47. He came each time to the opening as a friend, because he loved me. And he said, "Oh, ca c'est tres bien," you see. And then he introduced me to Rose Fried. And he was very interested in what I was doing. Now, in pottery I make figures. And a lot of people think they're perfectly horrible. Maybe they are. I've no idea. But I enjoy doing them and museums sometimes have shown them. But my dear friend, where we're dining tonight, finds them so disagreeable that she didn't want to be in the room with them, you see. And curiously enough, most of my friends here in Ojai -- there's a dearth of artistic communication. But I purposely keep these figures unschooled. Now, I've been told that my pottery is elegant, has elegance. Tradition and all that. But these figures are something entirely different. And I think that's the impact of Marcel in a certain direction that I don't want to keep them schooled.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You don't want to make beautiful pieces . . . ?

BEATRICE WOOD: No, no. I just had fun ideas which I make.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well that is Duchampian, I think. When did you start the ceramics?

BEATRICE WOOD: Pottery.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, many years ago. I was engaged to be married. And the young man pressured me into becoming engaged. I wasn't really in love with him. And I went over to Europe to hear Krishnamurti in Amen. He'd invited me to the (unintelligible) and then I had three days with friends who had a car and we drove through Holland. And I said to myself, "Good God. I've been looking at museums. I'm engaged to be married. I must think of things for my home." So I walked into an antique shop and bought five luster plates. And sometime after when I returned to America I went to get a teapot to go with them -- buy a teapot -- and I couldn't. So somebody said, "Well, why don't you go to the high school and make one." And I thought overnight I -- over the weekend -- I could make a luster teapot. So the next day I went. And gradually became more and more interested in pottery. In '54, incidentally, I had an exhibition at the de Young. I wish they'd give me another one now because my work is so much improved over what it was then. Three years ago I had an exhibition at the Phoenix Museum. It was very successful, but it was not things for sale. I don't like to sell my finest pieces. And museums I don't think care too much.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There is a growing interest in pottery and ceramics. There's a whole movement. So you don't remember exactly when -- well, you must remember when you were engaged.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, when I was engaged

PAUL KARLSTROM: Because that's when you started with your pottery.

BEATRICE WOOD: Goodness sakes. I hate to tell you; it was in 1930. No, it was after I started in pottery, not then. Oh, then I had this free, wonderful trip through Holland. Then I went down to the south of Germany where my dear friend Elizabeth Hapgood, Mrs. Norman Hapgood, and her husband were living. She spoke Russian; was translating Stanislavsky's books. And she later became his executor of his estate. And I saw Stanislavsky every day and he was very intrigued by the lady from Hollywood who spoke very freely, devil language all the time. Very naughty. And he wanted me to meet friends of his in Italy. Now, I'm going to prove to you that a promise should not always be kept.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good.

BEATRICE WOOD: I had promised this young jerk who had pressured me into becoming engaged that I would return in three months from Europe. I said, "I'm committed to go. I'm going. But I will come back. I promise you." Well, I woke up one day after a delightful evening with the Hapgoods and Stanislavsky realizing that I really wasn't at all in love with this young lad. I couldn't possibly marry him. He . . . his interest was in an avocado ranch about an acre wide. And here I had interests all over the world. But I promised. And I could not write him. And I gave up a trip to Italy. I returned to America to tell him that I couldn't marry him. He met me at the station and I saw his vacuous sweet young face that had no relation to me. And he drove me to my apartment and I said, "I've come back to tell you I can't marry you. I'm really not in love with you." And he looked at me a minute and he said, "Oh, that's all right. I'll go get myself another girl."

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Laughs]

BEATRICE WOOD: So a promise should not always be kept because, if I'd been really intelligent, I would have known that this young man had no depth of feeling. You see, I'm rigid. I think one should keep one's word. And yet, here was a time I gave up Lord knows what might have happened if I'd stayed in Europe. Having a marvelously interesting time. Just to keep my word to that (Sighs)

PAUL KARLSTROM: You, I take it, met him here in California. How did you get from New York back to California, since that's where you came from originally? You were born in San Francisco. How did that come about?

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, everything in life seems to be motivated by one love affair after another. And

PAUL KARLSTROM: What could be nicer? [Laughter]

BEATRICE WOOD: You'd say just a connection of broken hearts. So this was another time that my heart was broken. And I had a hundred dollars left and enough money to take a train ride to California. I'd heard that Krishnamurti, an Indian teacher, was very wonderful, and I'd wanted to hear him because I'd really -- I was really very sad. So I came out here and Oh no! Yes, that's why I came out permanently, but before then, this young man who broke my heart, who was incidentally Anais Nin's illegal father-in-law, or perhaps legal father-in-law, Reginald Pole. I mentioned earlier that his son was Beardsley -- he would come out every summer and have me come out and join him. Well, after the second summer, the Arensbergs had moved out here so I used to see them. And part of my decision of coming out was I knew I would be near to hear Krishnamurti, but also that I had these dear friends, the Arensbergs, living here. So that was . . . must have been about 1927 - '28 that the Arensbergs moved out and they moved out because -- all this I've written in my little biography -- Walter was an

altogether charming, outgoing person. Part of it true, part of it insincere. Lou, Louise, was not pretty, was not magnetic, but was very forthright, very "two by two makes four." And I loved her. I love them both. But Walter squandered his own fortune lending money and drinking. And all the ladies of New York would make a beeline for Walter and pay no attention to her. She'd had enough. So she read the riot act there and she said, "We stop this completely." She had a fortune. "And you come out to California and we start anew or I leave you." And when she died -- she died two months before he did of cancer -- he was completely destroyed. He would phone me once, sometimes twice a day. He had no . . . he'd been a Harvard poet with money. You can't stand up to life if you're a Harvard poet with money. And when this dear creature whom he loved so much left, he couldn't take it. And he died two months later. I was to visit him on, ah -- I was to visit him. That was it. And he said, "No, wait till your exhibition at the de Young is over." So I made a date to see him right when it closed. And I was going to see him, let's say on a Thursday. I talked to him Tuesday, and Wednesday he phoned me and he said, "I'm in no condition. I can't see you." I think he went back to drinking. She'd stopped him. But he was lost completely. And the day that I would have gone to spend the night at his house -- because I occasionally spent the night there, particularly with her if he was away. And he died. And the maid found him. There's just a slight rumor that he might have ended it himself. I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Umhmm.

BEATRICE WOOD: But they were very close. And they were very lonely people. And I used to go to see them because I felt so sorry for their emptiness inside. Except where the collection was concerned.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which they brought with them from New York.

BEATRICE WOOD: And we . . . my relationship with them was not an art one. It was more like a family one. And they used to listen with absolute delight to all the little peccadillos that I would tell, and any man that I would meet I would dramatize for them. And then the real love affairs they would listen to so interestedly. They almost lived vicariously. And I loved them very much, though I know there was this emptiness there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they . . . though they had you and they obviously had other friends and contacts . . . ?

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh. Once their collection came out -- they were in California a few years, maybe three or four, I don't really remember, before the collection came out. But then they were very generous in letting people see it. And then socially their life revived. But for a while there they were very isolated.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did they have dinner parties?

BEATRICE WOOD: Dinner parties?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes. Was there sort of a salon situation?

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, definitely a salon. Now let me see. My impression is that I often had dinner with them alone. My impression is that the parties were usually after dinner. I never thought. And continually . . . oh, about, I would say eight to ten people were continually there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who were some of the regulars in their circle? Any interesting people? I'm sure they were interesting.

BEATRICE WOOD: In California?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Umhmm.

BEATRICE WOOD: Cheryl Shell [sp?], a photographer who's now dead. Of course, Edward Weston would come twice a year and show his new pictures. Helen Freeman, a very dear friend of mine now dead. She was one of the founders of the Theatre Guild. Merle Armitage. Oh, and Ruth Maitland, who became a very close friend. Ruth Maitland lived in Beverly Hills and she was a collector of art. So they had a great deal in common. And then, of course, Galka Scheyer. And I met Galka Scheyer in that house. And the first time I met her I thought she was so rude and so ugly I didn't want to speak to her. And I took myself to task. I said, "I mustn't feel like this about another human being. Terrible." And the second time I jumped through her rudeness and I loved her. She was a most stimulating woman; she became beautiful -- she had a real beauty. She was a wonderful person. And the Arensbergs immediately went out to her and arranged, I think, the exhibition of Vine Street at, ah, very well known -- he's very well-known now in the book business. I can't think of his name this moment. [Jake Zeitlin].

[END OF TAPE ONE]

[BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO]

BEATRICE WOOD: This was in '50, around '52 and '53.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is now . . . We're talking about the Arensberg collection.

BEATRICE WOOD: Louise, Lou Arensberg died in '53. Walter died in '54, two months after. And I remember I got my exhibition at the de Young -- it was in '54. They talked a great deal about both exhibitions -- about both collections being together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The Scheyer and the Arensberg?

BEATRICE WOOD: The Scheyer and Arensberg. Then they gave the collection to UCLA with the understanding that a wing of a building would be put up for the whole collection, as a whole. And UCLA instead put up a medical building first, which has become a very wonderful thing. Now, I met one of the directors of the UCLA and I cannot quote him anyway, the words. I can just give you the essence. This man, I've forgotten his name, I've forgotten what he looked like, but he said the Walter had been very difficult and very unreasonable. And I'm sure of it. Because I knew them intimately. A rich poet from Harvard has no sense in his mind, except the aesthetic. Walter knew nothing about business. And I'm sure that he was unreasonable. Much as I loved him, I could see that. Well, then Fiske Kimball, the director of the Philadelphia Museum, came out and I sent him, after they died, pictures which I've taken of them; he used them in the catalogue on the Arensbergs. Fiske Kimball took me to luncheon. He's a first-rate, charming rascal. The kind of man who should be head of a museum because he knew exactly how to handle rich people. And if I'd had any money, he would have gotten my shirt off. He's that kind of person [Laughter] So I could see immediately how, of all the people, he got the collection for the east. But before they died, the Arensbergs told me -- it must have been near '53, that they regretted it. They never saw it, but they got pictures of it. And when I went to Philadelphia I was terribly disappointed because, after seeing the collection in their home where it was lived with, with all kinds of primitive furniture, wonderful furniture, Oriental rugs, Mayan princesses, Mayan masks, the whole thing was so alive and so marvelous that it was cold and dead in a museum. But, of course, people that never saw it in the house did not feel that way.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's a famous collection and Philadelphia's lucky to have it.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh! They're lucky to have it. Then the Pasadena Museum -- I should really . . . I keep thinking I should send them a bill because they have the Scheyer collections due to me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: All right!

BEATRICE WOOD: Absolutely. I was with . . . I got to know Scheyer very well. Helen Freeman, Ruth Maitland, oh, another friend, and myself were very close to Scheyer. We loved her. The fact that she was rude never made any difference at all. She should . . . I was with her in the hospital and she said "I have cancer. They just told me." She no sooner had cancer and shortly after an operation that she told everybody she didn't have cancer. And Ruth Maitland -- oh, it's a shame I can't think of this other dear friend who's an actress, who was with us so much, and Helen Freeman. Galka Scheyer lived up a hill with curved roads, and I'm suffering so much with this neck injury I couldn't take the drive with the curved roads. So I phoned her every day. And I could tell how she was thinking. "No! I haven't cancer. What is this?" And Dr. Knauer [?], whom I met on Hollywood Boulevard one day, said, "Tell Galka," -- he'd also quarreled with her -- "tell . . ." Everybody quarreled with Galka except me and Ruth Maitland. "Tell Galka to try the Kuch." It was a treatment for cancer. So I told her. And she blew up. She said, "How dare he send such a message to me. I don't have cancer. Certainly I'm not going to try that." But Dr. Knauer, ten days before she died, decided to bury the hatchet and went up to see her. And he said, "Galka, stop this nonsense. You have cancer. Face it. You have very little time left." And she accepted it. And the last ten days of her life she was completely resigned to the fact that she was dying. Now, it was shortly before that -- before she accepted that she had cancer -- that in conversation she said, "Oh, I'm working on my will. I want to give all these things to the Pasadena Museum, and I don't know how to word this and I don't know how to word that." And finally I said to her, I said, "Look, Galka, if you're serious, you sign that will today. You could die tomorrow. So could I. Life's absolutely unpredictable. You've been going on like this for days. If you really mean it, I beg you, sign it." The next day when I'd phoned she'd signed it. So I'm going to send a bill to the Pasadena Museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You should. You should, because that's, you know, the great treasure of that place.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's a wonderful collection. Well, how did Galka Scheyer come down here -- come down to Hollywood? Was it the . . . were the Arensbergs involved in that?

BEATRICE WOOD: No. I don't know how she came. But . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: She was in San Francisco for awhile.

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't know anything about that. I just met her at their house because they had me

constantly there. Lou said I had to keep the conversation going. Probably I did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: If Galka Scheyer was so difficult, and so rude and unattractive, one wonders how she could have been such a pet, such a darling of the Blue Four. [German Expressionists].

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, because just as I got over it and realized what a beautiful person she was inside. This absolute devotion to art. This great generosity to art. She was just a wonderful person. This was when Los Angeles was beginning to wake from slumber and the museums were beginning to become alive. She was not invited, usually, to the meetings. So one day I said to her, I said, "Galka, look, dear. I think you'd be invited, but you know you shout often. And you dominate. And I think that's why you're not always invited." "Well, why shouldn't I shout? I'm more intelligent than them! I know everything! Of course I'm going to shout! Nothing's going to stop me! I have something to give and they should know it." That's the way she was. So I never said another word to her. [Laughter]

PAUL KARLSTROM: And she was never invited, of course.

BEATRICE WOOD: [Laughs] Oh, as she was dying, this dear friend whose name just escapes me [Marjory Eaton], whom she was devoted to, was with her quite a few days. The day before she died she got a new nurse. And the morning that she died -- this is immediately after what was told me -- she said to the nurse, "Now I'm all alone." Friends had left her for the night, you see. "And I'm going to die." And the nurse said, "You are not alone, God is with you." And she put her -- crossed her hands over her chest and died. But she also made one other statement. And I don't know whether it was before or after. And the statement was, "Tell Walter there's no afterlife." Her mind to the very last minute was alive. You see. But how did she know? She wasn't dead.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know.

BEATRICE WOOD: I happen to believe that there is an afterlife.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it sounds like maybe she was just being difficult again. Scare 'em a little bit.

BEATRICE WOOD: But her last -- her very last thought was stewing. Her mind was alive until the end. Lou got annoyed with her. I think it was really her shrieking. It could have been a slight jealousy, because she and Walter had such wonderful times talking about art. But I don't think that was it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it certainly couldn't have been jealousy in the usual

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't think so. But Lou for a while there would not see her. And then there was a certain reconciliation.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Didn't Galka Scheyer have a long-time companion? I can't remember her name. Sill living, I believe.

BEATRICE WOOD; Yes, Kamen [sp?]. No. I have two of her paintings in my bedroom. Scheyer had love affairs, I think, with some of these painters. I don't know which ones, but Dr. Haas has written a book which has put a great deal on Scheyer and I told him some of the things I've told you. And in my bedroom later I'll show you those two paintings. They're probably signed. She's from Scotland, but she did primitive paintings. I don't think it was a lesbian relationship. I don't know. I doubt that Galka was lesbian. I really don't know. And if she was, she was really heterosexual, because I know that she did have love affairs with some of the painters. But I don't know which ones.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You mean some of the Blue Four?

BEATRICE WOOD: Blue Four. Because they found letters from her. So I'm sure of that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, obviously they were very fond of her and had a great deal of confidence.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, she was the inspiring person.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, getting back to your own work, you've obviously been working in ceramics here and probably getting more and more involved and more serious about your work.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh well. I never meant to become a potter. It happened very accidentally. I became more and more interested in it. I worked for two years with Glen Lukans [sp?] at USC and it was only when the Natzlers, who were superb potters, came to America -- I saw a picture of their work and really liked it and asked if they'd take me on as a pupil. And, to my astonishment, they did. And for almost a year, twice a week, I'd take the long drive -- I was in Los Angeles then and Hollywood -- to their place. And Gertrude Natzler very patiently -- I'm not a natural craftsman -- taught me to throw on the wheel. And Otto Natzler tried to teach me chemistry but he

couldn't. I haven't that kind of mind. But they showed me an approach that has been invaluable. And we had a marvelous relationship until about the last month. They were very generous. To me it was just heaven. And then something went wrong. They began getting success. Now, a reporter came to see me one day, and in interviewing I said, "I've studied with two people, Glen Lukans and the Natzlers. And what a marvelous thing it's been for America, and I hope you print this. All the great artists that have come from Germany and shared their culture with Americans." But when the article came out the reporter mentioned Glen Lukans and not the Natzlers. And they didn't like it. And before then, you see, my work began to resemble theirs. Naturally, they were teaching me. And, in fact, they once said, "We have an order for a tea set. We don't do it. You make it for us. So you make it." You know, it was a very wonderful relationship. Then, it changed. I've never been able to find out why. And they told people that I stole their glazes. And they've been very, very bitter about me.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Just on the basis of one omission in an article?

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't, I really don't know. So, the moment I heard how they were feeling, I never used any of their glazes again. And, oh, I have a record of every glaze I've made for time back which would practically prove it. I've tried to reconcile and they wouldn't have it. And, you know, all of us have to be very careful. We can get off on a little tiny speck of suspicion about a friend and it's like turning on to the wrong radio. We would go on and rant on and add on till there's a cancer. And they had built up something, I don't know what it is. And I feel I've failed that I've never been able to dissolve it. In '52, I think, Otto Natzler came here to Ojai and I saw him. He was very sweet. And I said, "Otto, I think the thing that has come up between us was on account of business." He said, "Yes." And he kissed me when he left. And I wrote his wife, who since died, inviting them to luncheon. They never answered. And I wrote her when I heard she had cancer. I wrote him when she died. No answer. So, I don't know. But, you know, psychologically, they came over here as refugees with the horror of Hitler. And they got great success. And Europe is not as generous as we are in this country. And suddenly they resented that my work was like theirs. Not as beautiful, but like theirs. I was their pupil. Naturally. But since then I've done everything I could not to be like them. I won't even look at their work. I've never gone to an exhibition of theirs, so as not to be influenced. All right. Now, since then the Heinos, Vivica and Otto Heino, who are fine potters -- Vivica's one of the greatest teachers of ceramic in America -- she was head of USC--Chouinard, of Rhode Island School of Design. She loves to teach. I'd had a few lessons on the wheel with them, and they've helped me a great deal. Not with glazes but with throwing. And I'm really not a craftsman at all. I'm an imaginative person. And, if you'd see my drawings, they're entirely different from pottery. But I got involved in pottery. It's very fascinating. And I could sell pottery because when I ran away from home I was without any money. And so I became a potter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, running away from home was essentially running to California, is that right?

BEATRICE WOOD: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: No?

BEATRICE WOOD: It was after the break when Roche became unfaithful, because the firelight shone on Elisa Frank's throat.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Laughing] I remember that.

BEATRICE WOOD: You know, I couldn't understand that a man would throw away a marvelous relationship for such a thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: For sunlight on somebody's throat?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes. That was it. Oh, I was terribly unhappy. And my mother had interfered with every role offered me. But one after another. And Norman Hapgood was all on my side. And he'd give me letter after letter to these great stars. So a woman from the National French Theatre in Canada approached me for three weeks to go up there. And I said to myself, for only three weeks. If I just had the strength to break from my mother, you say do it. And if I don't finally take this for just three weeks I won't have the strength to defy her and fight her anymore. I was about 24 then, 25, I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were still living at home at that time?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes. So I left. And my father said, "You're killing your mother. She had a nervous breakdown with the nurse." And I said, "She's killing me. And I'm younger, and I have a right to live." And I left. It took tremendous fortitude, because I really loved my mother. It was a love-hate relationship. She was beautiful. And I'd been brought up so correctly. And I knew nothing about life in another world, in spite of Mr. Roche and even Dostoevski. So, I left home with fifteen dollars in my purse. I thought that was plenty. And I arrived up in Canada and the manager of the theatre took me to a room where half my equity was gone. I had to pay \$7.50 a week. And it was a terrible room. It had chromos of the King and Queen of England, a washstand with a dingy towel.

Well, this after a person who'd been brought up like a rosebud, a little princess. And I said to myself, "I've done it to find out about life. This is it. I have to stand it." So I wept a little bit out of loneliness. And I went to bed. Had an iron bed, a little dingy white cover. And I woke up very soon scratching. And I don't know how I knew because I'd never consciously heard about them, but I knew what they were.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And there they were.

BEATRICE WOOD: Bedbugs all over the bed. So I moved out the next morning, losing my \$7.50. And went to the hotel and said, "I'm at the French Theatre. We're rehearsing. I forgot that we didn't get paid during rehearsals. Will you let me stay here for ten days? Then I'll pay you." They did. I had a lovely room with sunlight. And for a week I lived on bananas and crackers and I thought it was marvelous. And I was free from home.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well then you went back? No?

BEATRICE WOOD: Never went back.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Never went back?

BEATRICE WOOD: No. And I went through very, very, very difficult times.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you abandoned, really, the thrill of the theatre, I guess.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh yes. You see, I was never stage-struck the way most girls were. I had too much of a literary background and all the . . . so many of the managers were caught up with the couch. Which didn't interest me at all. I was interested in the theatre as an art and, after a few years in it, gave it up. You know, acting is very fascinating. But being an actress is not, because you become so concentrated on yourself. And your smile and the way you move your head and the way you look. And really, it's a pain in the ass.

[Laughter]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Which you didn't need.

BEATRICE WOOD: Really! There's so much more to life than that, though I think that acting is fascinating because you can forget your own sorrow as you act and become somebody else. But it's only fascinating to me with a man like Stanislavsky. I used to go to hear him, to see him, his performances every night. Didn't understand a word of Russian, but because he was so great. It was art. But, you see, the theatre is not always art in America.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, so then you'd really turned to pottery, I gather, to support yourself?

BEATRICE WOOD: Well no, I went through several years of doing really nothing. And living on I think it was \$63.00 a month for eight years. That was very hard. And I was then suffering a great deal with this neck injury I have, which kept me very tired, and colored the activity of my life. It's been a handicap. Very great handicap.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, besides that, I'm sure that in the beginning you weren't able to really make a living on pottery anyway. That's something very few people can do, right?

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, I was one of the first to go in for pottery. And I had a very difficult time. First of all, I'd like to say here the fact that I'm not naturally a craftsman has made me work very hard. That ever since I've been a child I've been interested in art and been dragged through all the museums of Europe and had the sense to buy art books. For instance Meir Graph [?] Do you know Meir Graph [?]? I bought Meir Graph [?] -- the first book on art, I think, when I was fifteen, ah, sixteen. Why, I can't tell you. And I have exposed myself to art so that my work has something beyond just the usual potter. Now what was I trying to say about pottery?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, you said that you had to work, I think, especially hard because you're not a natural craftsman.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh yes. So, I had no money. And I was in California. And Mrs. Hapgood, Elizabeth Hapgood, the translator When we were children, my parents were very well off, and her father had gone through her mother's fortune. And my parents, thereby, were very generous. Both of them were very generous people. And they did a great deal for Elizabeth and her mother. So, when I was older and had no money, and Elizabeth then was extremely well off, she did a great deal to help me. She wanted me to get on my feet. So she sent me a hundred dollars to have a kiln built. I wrote her -- we wrote until she died. She wrote me about twice a week. And I have her letters -- every day until she died. And I wrote her about every ten days. And the man was a crook. And the kiln was no good. Then, after a few months, she sent me a check of two hundred dollars. She said, "Go get a kiln. You must get on your feet. A friend of mine has just died and she wants you to have this money." I'm sure the friend never said a word. But anyway, Elizabeth sent me two hundred dollars. So, I got a

second kiln. And, to cut a long story short, after great difficulty with a friend, I became his tenant. We bought a house. He built a house and I became his tenant. And two friends built me a workroom. So all I had to pay for was the wood. They were both trained. One was an engineer; one knew carpentry. And I was in it a week when I had to have a major operation. I was in the hospital three weeks. And when I got out I was ten days in the workroom and I had wholesale orders and the flood of 1938 came and took the trees, took the workshop, took the house. And I was left without anything, except a hundred dollars in the bank. And I was rescued by one of the men who helped build the workshop and his wife. And they took me to the Arensbergs. And after seeing my home, my life for which I'd struggled, go down the flood All I had was a necklace of tissue paper around my neck. Thus, I was taken to the Arensbergs erudite home. They were very sweet, and at dinner that night Walter was speaking and he said, "You know wall paper; we're shopping for wall paper, and the right wall paper, the color, is very important." Now nobody knew that more than I. It is very important. But when you've lost everything that you've owned and all you have is your life, such a remark is out of this world.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How insensitive.

BEATRICE WOOD: Not really, because . . . no, he was a sensitive person. But you can't realize, you can't know what another person goes through. You know.

[PAUSE]

But now, let me tell you, I was not in despair. Mrs. Archipenko took me in. I don't know whether I was stunned or whether it wasn't something else. I had nothing to worry about except breathing. And the sky was blue and the trees were green [Laughs] and friends smiled and I was down to the very essence of life and I was absolutely relaxed and happy. But then the Red Cross came in to my rescue and that's how I got on my feet and got a third kiln. That and the fact that I'm not a natural craftsman, but that I'd studied, that I'd exposed myself . . . I got museum shows. And a lot of these students with whom I originally worked, who had a great gift like nobody's business to throw on the wheel, hadn't gotten anywhere.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, imagination, probably.

BEATRICE WOOD: It might be imagination. And, at the Phoenix Museum . . . I have a photograph. They had, at the entrance, "Beatrice Wood in Retrospective" all over their courtyard and underneath "Picasso in Memorium," and underneath that, "Festival of Folk Art."

PAUL KARLSTROM: You ranked top bill? [Laughs]

BEATRICE WOOD: I could not believe it! And I hesitate even to talk about it. But the show -- not my work in despair. Over and over I'm on the point of giving it up. Until I have a museum show. And this Phoenix show was really beautiful. And they had about eight of my figures shown and they looked nice the way they were shown. But four years ago the Zachery Waller Gallery came to me and I'm associated with them. And several galleries -- two had asked me and I said no, because I didn't want to leave things on consignment. But these two young men for some reason made a great impression on me. One was a lawyer. I knew nothing about them. And I said, "Yes. You can have my pottery." Then I found out they had a beautiful gallery on La Cienega [Los Angeles]. But since then they've given up the gallery and act as my agents. And they arranged the Phoenix show and the Tucson show and several gallery shows. They just arranged one at the Hartler Gallery in New York. You know that?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Hartler?

BEATRICE WOOD: Hartler. It's on East 20th. I don't know anything about it. And they

PAUL KARLSTROM: There are so many galleries there.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, so many galleries. And they did have it in Hammer's. Hammer's had never carried a potter. But they found that Hammer's weren't displaying it well, so they took it out. And they come about every three months and pick up whatever I do and price things. I have no sense of price at all. And they pack things. And it's been a very happy association as far as I'm concerned.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's good. That's a continuing thing.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes. And the boys -- they have three Continentals and a four-story house. One's a very successful lawyer. So they're not doing this to earn money. They're doing it out of love of art. And it gives a certain freedom. And the other day, last week, one of them was up, and he said he'd also put some things in Washington. And I said, "Oh, then you must need some more bowls, and I'm just on a trip full of ideas to make some crazy figures." He said, "You make the figures." He said, "You do exactly what you want. Never feel under pressure." And I said, "Well, this is very extraordinary. And a wonderful relationship." I really thanked him. They

leave me completely free.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's perfect.

BEATRICE WOOD: It's perfect.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When did you start to receive some recognition as a ceramic artist? I mean, obviously you didn't just emerge on the scene after the flood, after you got your third kiln, and then gathered somebody's attention.

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, now, let me see, if I can think. I had a tea in my North Hollywood house with a weaver, Maria Steinhoff [sp?], and publicity. And, you see, I started before anybody was doing pottery, practically. Which was a great advantage. Then Donald Bear of the Santa Barbara museum gave me an exhibit at the Santa Barbara museum. And then Elizabeth -- what was her name, at the de Young? Begins with "B" I think. She was the director of crafts.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I don't know who that is, actually.

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, she heard about me, and we corresponded. And she said she would show a few things and would choose them when she came down. She died many years ago. So she came and, instead of a few things, she chose ever so many. And my first museum show was at Santa Barbara, then the de Young. And, I think it was after the de Young, I had a show at the Los Angeles Museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's the old museum in Exposition Park?

BEATRICE WOOD: The old museum. And there's been a political thing going on in Los Angeles. Not too sympathetic towards me. And I don't want to go into it. It's just one of these unfortunate things that happen. But the director, Paul Donahue, is it?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Kenneth Donahue.

BEATRICE WOOD: Kenneth Donahue said, "We can't find any record that Beatrice Wood ever had a show here." And my records -- I didn't have a folder, and I was very upset. Because, whatever faults I have, I am more truthful than the average person, and certainly very concerned with truth. So I called three friends, Cornelia Runyon who's now dead. I said "Cornelia, do you remember ever seeing a one-man show of me at the Los Angeles . . . ?" "Yes, of course. And what I'd remembered so clearly of it was a case, like this, with fish in it -- white -- with copper spots on it. I remember that clearly." Then I phoned Greta Davidson [?], the wife of an architect. She remembered the show. And I phoned Carolyn Barrows, whom I haven't seen in years, in Santa Barbara. She remembered the show. Then I concluded that Evelyn Badell [sp?], who was director of Raymond and Raymond Galleries in Los Angeles, gave me an exhibition -- she had a group. And I was part of that group. And my show, which was absolutely a one-man show in this huge room -- saw it, but it may have been under the group's name. All right. So, that's the only museum that's ever questioned me. After that . . . oh, let me see . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, they certainly had no reason for doing that, either. It could have been just a straight . . .

BEATRICE WOOD: No. The Natzlers said a lot of things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I see.

BEATRICE WOOD: So I think Donahue thinks badly of me. You see. And let it be. I don't want . . . I feel clear, and that's it. Well, then I had an exhibition at the Pasadena museum. Twice at the Phoenix museum. I had a . . . it's all listed on there. And then a great thing in my life was going to India.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, tell me about that. Because you're obviously very much involved with India and Indians and things from India.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The walls are covered with miniatures and tapestries and you have bronzes and such, folk figures.

BEATRICE WOOD: Well, I don't go out much socially. I don't enjoy going out. I enjoy working. And I went to a tea given by the wife of the publisher of the Star Free Press in Ventura, because I liked the woman very much. And I was still . . . I'm no longer shy, but I was in those days.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's hard to believe.

BEATRICE WOOD: That I was shy?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, yes. Running around with Duchamp and that crowd.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, very, very, very shy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But I believe you. I take you at your word.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, because when you're in love, you are shy. With your friends -- men, you see. And you're not aggressive. Well, anyway, I went. And I was standing aside, and Mrs. Hardy Andrews -- Robert Hardy Andrews -- Irene Andrews, young, with black hair, who'd once been a movie star, came up and talked to me. And she was very sweet. She's since died. And she called me up the next day. She said, "Sunday we're having a luncheon at the Inn, and a very illustrious Indian woman will be there. Will you join us?" And I don't know why I said yes because I never go out on Sundays. We were at a long table and opposite me was this Indian woman. Very grim, in a red sari. I had a fantastic, beautiful hat going in all directions. I'd made it myself. And I smiled at her and she didn't smile back. So I thought I guess it's the hat that threw her. Well, after, Mrs. Andrews brought her to my exhibition room at my old house. And she said, "This is the most beautiful pottery I've seen. Would you consider coming to India with it?" And I said, "Oh yes." She said, "I will arrange it." And I said, "You make it sound as easy as crossing the street." She walked out. And I forgot all about it. Months later came a letter from the State Department that I was being sent with my pottery on tour. So a year later I arrived and was ushered into this woman's office -- Kamaladevi Chattunadhya [sp?]. She'd been very close to Gandhi, adviser to Nehru; gossip even says she was one of his loves. I don't know. I just hope so. They'd all been imprisoned together after the liberation. She was at her desk and I went and I said, "Kamaladevi, here are two lipsticks Irene has sent you." I don't use lipsticks." "Well Kamaladevi, I was asked to give them to you." "I don't use lipsticks. I'll give them to a friend." I'd just had an exhibition in Japan. And in Japan I had a wonderful review saying I could -- it's just ridiculous -- that I could teach the Japanese, which is ridiculous. But it's because my work was different and feminine and they appreciated that. And then I said, "And here's a little vase from my Japanese exhibition." she took it. She put it to one side. She didn't say thank you or anything. And I walked out and I went back to where they'd made a reservation. And I said, "This is terrible. I'm not going to put up with this. I can't. I can't act with something like this going on." So the next day when I was ushered into her office I went up to her. I threw my -- she was standing then -- I threw my arms around her. I held her tight. I kissed her and I said, "Kamaladevi, I want you to know how grateful I am that you've arranged this trip and how happy I am to be in India." And from that time on she melted and became my friend. And three times when I was back there in India she came where I was having exhibitions and to hear me speak. Well, I was -- my pots were being shown and I was going to lecture with slides on American craftsmen, which was easy. But instead of that, I found it was a very official thing, and that in every city our embassy, the USIS and the Indian government collaborated, had tremendous publicity, beautiful arrangements, and I had to make a speech. The first time was in Pahope, and I was really concerned, because I'll say anything that comes to mind. And the naughtier the quicker, you see. And I said, "I can't. I'll have to watch my step because I'm representing America." So I got up and I made a lot of -- what was it, platitudes -- "My country loves freedom the way your country does," just like any visiting fireman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, right.

BEATRICE WOOD: And after that first time it never bothered me at all. And I can talk on any subject now, from birth control to Mars, anything you wish. I just open my mouth and talk. [Laughs] And also, when I was in India -- I had no interest in protocol. I know nothing about protocol. I made up my mind I was just going to be myself. And I met them that way and I had a tremendous success with the Indian people. And one friend, a member of Parliament, she said, "I don't understand it. My friends joke with you as if they'd always known you. No Indian ever jokes with a foreigner. You just seem like one of us." And of course that pleased me very much. And I had a lot of fun. And I've written this up, my two trips, in a book, but I haven't been able -- I don't know who to send it to -- to get it published, and I'm very bad because I'm always doing things, always making pottery, always writing books and then it's over. I'm not a promoter and I don't care, unfortunately. I do care, but not enough to bother. So . . . but the book is good and, I think, great friendship between our two countries. And I just hope, if my autobiography gets accepted, it will open a wedge.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It should.

BEATRICE WOOD: I'm not too interested in books about India. But it's a good book. It's much better than my autobiography. Well, Indians have all kinds of taboos. And the men generally are together and the women together. And one talk I had to give was to a group of scientists. There were a hundred in the room. I have no idea what I said. How could I talk to a hundred atomic scientists? Lord knows what I said. And I insist always upon talking spontaneously because nothing to me is more boring than a person who reads a speech. And at the end a venerable old director, bent over and white-haired, probably thirty years younger than myself, got up and said, "Miss Wood, would you mind telling us where you get all your ideas?" And for a moment I didn't know what to say. I looked to the right and I looked to the left, and finally I said, "Sir, since the beginning of time men have

always wanted to know how women think. And I'm not going to tell you." And they just rolled in their aisles laughing. Well, you see, a foreigner usually wouldn't be that informal. And because I was just myself, it went over. And I became very interested in folk art and made a second trip, where the Indian government also assisted me, just to photograph folk art. And I knew nothing about photography. I bought two good cameras, a Nikon and a Bronica and started off. And when I came back, my teacher, who has a photographic shop, said, "You had your nerve going off on a government trip. You know nothing about photography." I didn't know what he meant for a year. Then I found out that I'd taken all the photographs with the camera set at 125. I didn't know one could change it. But because I had such a good camera and such an eye, I have wonderful slides. And when I showed them to him he couldn't believe them. And I'd lectured all over on universities and museums. I've lectured at the Los Angeles museum.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You never changed the F stop at all?

BEATRICE WOOD: Never changed the stop. And I still really don't know what the shutter is. I don't care. I know that there's something I touch. Now I know that I must change from 30, 60, 125 to 250. I know. But there it doesn't matter. And it's the same with pottery. You see, I'm not a chemist. And I do the whole thing by hunches. Now, due to the Natzlers who showed me their system, which has been invaluable, I keep records. I've a record of every single pot. But they're just jumping off things because, with reduction firing, in which I work a great deal, it's intangible. You cannot be sure how it's coming out. And these first plates that I bought, being luster plates -- what I have always wanted was to do the old majolica luster ware. That's my ideal. And, when I was in Paris, Artigas [sp?], the Spanish technician who works with Miro, gave me several formulas. But they don't work out because my fire, my water, my materials, everything -- my kiln -- everything is different. And thank God they don't work out because it's forced me to do my own thing, which has developed interesting lusters.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you really had to experiment and develop your own things.

BEATRICE WOOD: They're all experimental. Quite a few friends have given me formulas -- basic formula -- or I'll read formulas in books. But I do what is the forbidden thing for a real good ceramist. I cook. In other words, you're supposed to do the thing according to a chemical formula, which I can't -- I don't know what it's about. So I take a basic formula and I add ten percent of tin, which is pepper, five percent of ground glass, which is sugar. And then maybe half a percent of copper, which is oats, you see. It's not the way you're supposed to do, but why not? I get

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you think of it all as a recipe for cooking a dish.

BEATRICE WOOD: It's a recipe for cooking. And the books warn against that. You're not supposed to do it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But it works.

BEATRICE WOOD: It works. And then, of course, most potters, they go in for earth tones and subdued things, and I like color. And when I -- I got two exhibitions in Japan, which is really very good luck. Good luck. And one very erudite Japanese said to me, "But Miss Wood, your work is very beautiful but you use a great deal of color." And I said, "Yes sir, I'm not a Japanese, and I live in a pink and blue house in bright sunlight." He bought a piece. He laughed and bought a piece. And they said something very interesting. A friend had tried to get an exhibition in Japan. This was before I went to India. Her husband was head of the Rupa Islands in Okinawa. And it didn't work out and we didn't know why. In the meanwhile, I studied Japanese, because I'd heard that Americans won't bother to study foreign languages. So I just got some records and studied Japanese for about eight months. And I loved it. Very logical language. Every night I'd work at it two or three hours. I was fascinated by it. And then I found out I'd studied GI Japanese, which is entirely different from the way Japanese women talk. But it didn't matter because I didn't then get the show. Well, finally, on my way to India, I was passing through Tokyo. And I knew I was going to meet the Minister of Culture, I think, or Industry. And, having a somewhat devious mind, I put six little vases in the suitcase. And a friend, who was director of Eastern art at the Santa Barbara museum said, "Don't take that blue one. It's not shebui [sp?] enough. And at the very last minute I looked at that little blue pot and I said, "Why, I love that little pot. I don't care. I'm going to do what I love," and I took it. And when the Minister saw it, he loved all the pots because they were entirely different from what the Japanese did. He particularly loved that little blue pot. And he said, I'm going to immediately take you to the Takishemia [sp?] where is the finest gallery, and where the Hamada is always shown." And the manager said, "What you do it so interesting. So different from what we do. We haven't any opening for a year, but what we're going to do -- when you return from India," in, I think, five months, "We will dismantle our conference room and give you an exhibition." And it was the little blue pot that threw him. Because they don't do these brilliant things. So I've said this quite a few times to potters when I've lectured. And I said, "Do be true to yourself, whether it's bad doesn't matter. The important thing -- you have to copy while you're studying. And culture is -- each of us -- is like one pearl added to another to make a chain. We each contribute to the other. And that's all right. But once you're on your own, do that which comes from within." And I feel this very strongly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you feel that you've received, in your work, any influence from your contact and visits to Japan and the Orient, India, or did that come too late in your career?

BEATRICE WOOD: No. I think it came too late. If anything, I influenced the Indians. Because they're not making . . . Here in America we're doing the most wonderful crafts. Possibly in Italy, but I don't think so. And I was going to go with Tony Prieto who was head of Mills, and his wife, to Spain. And I couldn't make it, and then I hoped to join him and I didn't. And when he came back he said, "We're glad you didn't come because in Europe they share nothing." And the great thing about America in medicine and all kinds of ways -- but in pottery, of which I'm talking, we've had great teachers in our universities. They open up everything. And that's how our craft has grown so. And our young people are doing very, very interesting work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I was going to ask you how much contact you have or how aware you are of the tremendous amount of activity, especially in California, in the crafts movement?

BEATRICE WOOD: Hardly at all. I must again refer to my neck injury. It tires me a great deal to drive. For instance, yesterday this little ordeal I went through -- my neck jammed on me. The vertebrae are moth-eaten. There's hardly any cushion. And when I get overtired or anything, instead of the vertebrae being like this, they go like that. So I came home, and I'd gone through this so many times I knew. I was like this. And this morning when I woke up I was almost on the verge of phoning you that I wouldn't be able to go though the day.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And now, look at you!

BEATRICE WOOD: And I'm all right now since luncheon. And the wine. It was so nice talking . . .

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I'm happy that I brought the wine.

BEATRICE WOOD: But I was miserable this morning.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sorry.

BEATRICE WOOD: All right. Now, I'm faced with this all the time, the moment I get tired. So, I practically never go anywhere. I don't go to any of the marvelous exhibitions in Los Angeles. The trip takes three or four days out of me. And I just don't do it. But instead of that, I have only one extravagance in my life. I wish it were a gigolo, but it's not. It's art books. Every month I buy art books. Two or three.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know you have a nice library.

BEATRICE WOOD: And now I've exposed my eyes. And what I don't see in a museum I do see in a book.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, and reproductions now are so good. In some of these books it's just amazing.

BEATRICE WOOD: Oh, they're wonderful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I don't want to tire you out any more. You've been talking a remarkably long time nonstop. But, there was one other thing that I wanted to ask you, and that's . . . we were talking earlier about your friendship with Anias Nin.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And how she was sort of a . . . provided the model or encouragement, stimulation, for doing your autobiography.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And I was just wondering if you could tell me anything about your contact with her.

BEATRICE WOOD: She was very nice. We have kind of a real tie together and yet we don't see each other often. She hasn't been well for years. And, you see, she's been very kind. She's come to my exhibitions at the Zachary Waller Gallery and when her illegal or legal father-in-law, Reginald Pole [sp?] died, she wrote me a letter telling me of his death. And I phoned her. And she recommended my autobiography to her agent, Schulmann [sp?]. And I wrote it under protest, not wanting to be an exhibitionist. And just before I went to Europe, that was five years ago, he turned it down. But she wanted to help me. But since then it's been rewritten three times. It's much improved. And I think now, I think it should be published.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were in Rome?

BEATRICE WOOD: When I was in Rome a masseuse said that the happiest marriages she knew, the only happy

ones, were with older women and younger men. And I said, "Then they must be homosexual." She said, "Not at all." She said, "They're jealous of their wives. They love their wives." An in Europe an older man appreciates a younger woman. But, as I was saying, since I've been older, I've had to eat my words, because younger men have been interested in me. And I know one thing, that after the first impact age doesn't matter at all. One is unconscious of age.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think that's true.

BEATRICE WOOD: Once in my shop when I was in my old house a doctor and his wife came. They were a young couple. They've come several times and bought. And she was sweet. She showed me a ring he'd just given her and I thought, "I bet that's a repentance ring." And I crossed over to wrap the bowl she'd bought. It was -- you see, that wall. That glass wall and to here. The room was here, it was that mirror, so she could have heard everything. And her husband followed me, and he said, "Why is it you don't have a boyfriend?" I said, "How do you know I don't have a boyfriend?" And he said, "Well, we've been here several times and I've never seen one and I'm sure if you had one I would have seen him." And I said, "Well, I'll tell you. I'm very fussy about a man. A man has to have imagination an humor and sensitivity." And his eyes got very big and round. And he said, "I have imagination and humor and sensitivity." And I said, "So. I'm writing the story of my life and this is what I'm calling it: All Men Are Bastards." And I walked out.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [Laughs] That was the end of it for him.

BEATRICE WOOD: [Laughs] I've never seen him since.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, but the interest always must be flattering and kind of fun. It is for all of us. Well, let me ask you just one more question, and then we can take a rest. You were around in this area for a good number of years and you've been in Ojai, what, thirty years?

BEATRICE WOOD: Twenty-eight.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Twenty-eight, and then prior to that you must have been in the Los Angeles area for a good number of years?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, umhmm.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And ran into a number of interesting people. And I was wondering if you have any theory why a surprising number of creative people, and a number of Europeans, chose to come to this area -- especially around the Second World War -- come all this distance? Are there reasons for this? What was the attraction?

BEATRICE WOOD: I don't know why the Natzlers came or Thomas Mann or any of them. I have no idea, except the Second World War which is what opened up California. I used to come to California, you see, in the Twenties and Thirties and when the Arensbergs were here it was very quiet and very different. And I've seen all the development and a great deal of it has been since the Second World War when GIs passed through and saw how beautiful it was and how wonderful was the climate. And I think that is what has brought so many people to California.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But you think this includes -- the creative people I mean, obviously it wasn't the most active art community. There were a few important people around from the early days, it's true. But one wonders what - - maybe the same things -- attracted men like Aldous Huxley or Thomas Mann, Schoenberg?

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, Igor Stravinsky.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Umhmm, right. It's rather remarkable.

BEATRICE WOOD: Yes, I've never thought of that, but it is. But of course I think that California is so much more alive than possibly the rest of America, though Arizona and New Mexico are beautiful. But there's something very wonderful. And even in Ojai. Ojai is a very alive place.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's because you're here.

END OF INTERVIEW

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