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Oral history interview with Marian
Hettner Grunbaum, 1980 May 14

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Marian Hettner Grunbaum on May 14, 1980. The interview took place in Bellaire, Texas, and was conducted by Sandra Curtis Levy for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

The original transcript was edited. In 2024 the Archives retranscribed the original audio and attempted to create a verbatim transcript. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose. Additional information added to the original transcript by the narrator has been added in brackets and given an -Ed. attribution.

Interview

[00:00:16.82]

SANDRA CURTIS: I'd like to say that this is Sandra Curtis talking with Marian Hettner Grunbaum in her home at 3605 Newcastle in Bellaire, Texas, on May 14, 1980. And I thought maybe we could start talking about your life in Germany before you came to the United States, and your hometown, and your early influences in art. I know that's a big subject to start with, but—

[00:00:45.88]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:00:46.59]

SANDRA CURTIS: Why don't you start by telling us about when you very—when you realized that you could paint, or draw, or even as a child, your early childhood memories of art.

[00:00:57.09]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I had been painting as a child all the time [laughs] just childish paintings.

[00:01:05.12]

SANDRA CURTIS: Were you encouraged by your family?

[00:01:07.16]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No.

[00:01:08.71]

SANDRA CURTIS: You just did it on your own.

[00:01:10.26]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I did it on my own. I think most children like to paint and draw. But what I really wanted as a girl, I wanted to be an accomplished violinist.

[00:01:21.89]

SANDRA CURTIS: And where was your home then?

[00:01:23.39]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: My home is Dresden. That was the capital of the German Kingdom of Saxony—

[00:01:31.35]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:01:31.91]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: —at that time.

[00:01:34.23]

SANDRA CURTIS: And you were born there.

[00:01:35.46]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I was born there and spent a lovely childhood there. Dresden was a beautiful city at that time.

[00:01:45.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So you were all—like your other European cities, the fact that you even live in a beautiful city is an artistic environment in itself.

[00:01:53.87]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, it is. Dresden also was, artistically, very much interested in—the King contributed vastly to the culture in Dresden. They had an opera house that was built by [Gottfried -Ed.] Semper, who built the Vienna Opera House, and Richard Strauss conducted his premieres there [in Dresden -Ed.].

[00:02:27.02]

SANDRA CURTIS: Fantastic.

[00:02:28.61]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And the Royal Orchestra played Sundays [in the Hofkirche Cathedral -Ed.]. They performed the music for the high mass. That is a memory that I will never forget, that old and simple and kind of severe old church music.

[00:02:48.56]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And so you were mostly influenced by music, rather than the visual arts as a child.

[00:02:52.95]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. Dresden had also that Dresden Gallery that was famous. I think it still is famous. [Dresden is now situated in "East Germany and has a Communistic regime. -Ed.] I don't know where the paintings are now—and the royal collections. I don't know whether you saw. They made a broadcast—broad broadcast a few years ago. They had sent over those titles here to this country, and you could see it on [PBS -Ed.] Channel 8 here.

[00:03:21.72]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, but I saw the catalog from the Dresden show. They had the Dresden exhibition.

[00:03:25.62]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:03:25.98]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:03:27.18]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, my father's father was a director of some of the royal collections.

[00:03:35.19]

SANDRA CURTIS: Incredible, in the museum then. He was a museum—

[00:03:37.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, not the museum.

[00:03:39.15]

SANDRA CURTIS: Just in the royal collections.

[00:03:42.03]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: [One of the royal collections, the Antiken-Kabinett. -Ed.] The "Picture Gallery" was the Dresden Gallery, but the other collections of various kind of art—

[00:03:49.71]

SANDRA CURTIS: Were royal collections.

[00:03:51.56]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, royal collections. And there was an antique collection with old Greek and Roman art. And my father's father was the director of it. And he was married to the daughter—one of the daughters of August Grahl. August Grahl was a painter of miniatures.

[00:04:12.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, I see.

[00:04:12.95]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He painted miniatures on ivory with a self-invented paint.

[00:04:21.14]

SANDRA CURTIS: Wasn't it oil?

[00:04:22.34]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, it was not oil. I would think it was a kind of an egg mixture, but I don't know. I just know that he invented that paint and didn't want to give the secret away.

[00:04:34.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: For Pete's sake.

[00:04:34.79]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. [Laughs.]

[00:04:35.24]

SANDRA CURTIS: Was it ever discovered or did he—

[00:04:37.16]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't know.

[00:04:37.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: You don't know.

[00:04:39.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: His miniatures are hanging in many of the Dresden museums, European museums. And he painted all over Europe. He painted in England. I think he painted Queen Charlotte, and as far as I know, he painted the Queen of Spain, and the Empress of Russia. And he painted Napoleon's mother—

[00:05:00.83]

SANDRA CURTIS: For Pete's sake.

[00:05:01.82]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: —and Napoleon's stepdaughter, Hortense de Beauharnais, but also, many artists—he painted Felix Mendelssohn, and the sculptor Thorvaldsen.

[00:05:13.92]

SANDRA CURTIS: How exciting.

[00:05:14.88]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:05:15.48]

SANDRA CURTIS: And were you aware of his work? Did you have any—

[00:05:18.13]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes. My father owned some, and that painting was an old tradition in the family. The son-in-law of my great-grandfather was the very well-known Romantic painter Alfred Rethel. I don't know whether you heard of him here.

[00:05:38.49]

SANDRA CURTIS: I don't know of him, but that doesn't—

[00:05:40.05]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, he was very well known in Germany. And there are several other painters in my family, two cousins right now. One is living in Paris and one is living in Italy.

[00:05:51.92]

SANDRA CURTIS: So you have a long tradition of painting.

[00:05:53.33]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: A long tradition of painting in my family, yes.

[00:05:56.21]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, that is—

[00:05:57.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:05:58.28]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did you know your grandfather or your great-grand—I mean—

[00:06:01.19]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, I did not know my great-grandfather, but I knew his widow. She was 94 when she died. And, of course, I knew her home and all those paintings.

[00:06:16.58]

SANDRA CURTIS: And heard the stories.

[00:06:18.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Heard the stories, yes.

[00:06:21.65]

SANDRA CURTIS: And so, well, that's exciting. Then what made you decide that you liked violin better than painting?

[00:06:28.22]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, that I wouldn't know.

[00:06:29.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: You don't know.

[00:06:30.18]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. I remember I heard a concert by—I think it was Mischa Elman as a child. And from then on, I just hadn't anything in mind but to learn to play the violin.

[00:06:46.35]

SANDRA CURTIS: And what, did you take lessons? Did your family provide lessons?

[00:06:49.69]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes. I studied very hard until the First World War came.

[00:07:00.88]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then when you—how did that progress then? During the time you were taking music lessons, were you still drawing and painting? Or had you sort of abandoned it?

[00:07:11.11]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't think so. I always painted when we had vacation. And then I made sketches. But, of course, I was untaught.

[00:07:21.14]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:07:21.64]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:07:23.77]

SANDRA CURTIS: And when you met your husband, were you then still playing the violin?

[00:07:27.20]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No. When the war came, all our world was changed, and way of life was shattered. And I lost my brother, and all the young people I'd been dancing with did not come home. And I used—we were also hungry, and we had no heat, you know? But I used the time to prepare for admission to a university. And then I left for Heidelberg.

[00:08:02.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: And you went to the University—

[00:08:03.53]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: University of Heidelberg. That gave me my first taste of freedom.

[00:08:06.66]

SANDRA CURTIS: Wow.

[00:08:07.35]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:08:07.98]

SANDRA CURTIS: And Heidelberg was—

[00:08:09.27]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And then I met my husband. That was my first act of non-conform. [They laugh.]

[00:08:16.89]

SANDRA CURTIS: You met your husband.

[00:08:17.71]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, he was a young Jewish doctor and still in uniform. He had served the Army as a physician. And I thought he was less prejudiced and not quite as straight-laced as my own upbringing had been. Yeah.

[00:08:39.15]

SANDRA CURTIS: And what were you studying at the University?

[00:08:42.92]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Humanities. You know, it was my first year at university. I also attended some art course—I mean, History of Art, which was very interesting.

[00:08:58.60]

SANDRA CURTIS: And your husband wasn't associated with the University, or was he?

[00:09:01.45]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, he was not, no. He was associated with—I don't know exactly how to express that. He was an assistant to one of the prominent physicians. And he was also involved in veterans work. "Veteran" is maybe not the right word—the people who came back from the war and were injured.

[00:09:32.65]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:09:33.02]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:09:33.47]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah. And then did you finish the University, or did you get married?

[00:09:36.98]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I did not finish. I was not that advanced at that time. [Laughs.] We married and had a very hard time. There was revolution and the inflation, where finally a loaf of bread cost a billion mark—D-Mark.

[00:09:57.75]

SANDRA CURTIS: Incredible.

[00:09:59.79]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, this is hunger and poverty our first years. But after a while, we recovered economically. But then already, the intimidation and the humiliation of the Jews had started. And after Hitler—Hitler came to power in '33, and we decided to leave at that time already. But it took some time to prepare, and we left in '37. We came to Houston in spring of '37.

[00:10:28.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: From Heidelberg—did you live in Heidelberg when you were married?

[00:10:32.10]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, part. Later, we lived near Frankfurt in a resort place.

[00:10:38.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: So you came to Houston in 1937. That must have been a very different Houston than 1980.

[00:10:43.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Was a very friendly city at that time. We could leave our back door open—

[00:10:48.69]

SANDRA CURTIS: What made you come to Houston?

[00:10:49.89]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: —without a fear of burglars. Mostly practical reasons. It promised to be economically developing, and my husband had to start a practice, so that's mostly why we came. Also, was one of the few states who allowed a foreign physician to work only with the first papers taken out.

[00:11:13.03]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, I see.

[00:11:14.29]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Many other states demanded citizenship.

[00:11:18.55]

SANDRA CURTIS: I see.

[00:11:19.24]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: So that was Houston.

[00:11:21.31]

SANDRA CURTIS: And Houston was friendly enough to leave your back door open.

[00:11:23.83]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, we could leave the back door open, and the neighbors tried to be nice and helpful, and they really were.

[00:11:29.62]

SANDRA CURTIS: What part of Houston did you move to?

[00:11:32.26]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We lived in University Village, was our first—

[00:11:37.93]

SANDRA CURTIS: First home.

[00:11:38.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: —home, a little bungalow.

[00:11:40.77]

SANDRA CURTIS: And were you still—then did you do take up the violin again?

[00:11:44.29]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, I played with the [Houston] Symphony for three years.

[00:11:47.17]

SANDRA CURTIS: How interesting. What was the symphony like in 1937?

[00:11:49.66]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The symphony was located in an old, dilapidated city auditorium next door to the Fat Stock Show. And whenever the Fat Stock Show took place, they took precedence. Anybody who wanted to attend the concert couldn't park their cars at that time.

[00:12:08.65]

SANDRA CURTIS: Because the Fat Stock Show was happening.

[00:12:10.27]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: For the Fat Stock Show. Yeah. But the orchestra also was at its beginning. It was partly amateur and partly professionals. But we played the full repertoire.

[00:12:24.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: And how often did you meet? I mean, how often did the symphony play in those days?

[00:12:28.99]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, every two weeks. But we had rehearsals three times a week.

[00:12:36.35]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you played for three years?

[00:12:38.20]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, I played for three years.

[00:12:39.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: And by then, were you a mother or contemplating children?

[00:12:44.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, we came over with our two children.

[00:12:46.98]

SANDRA CURTIS: You came over with your children.

[00:12:47.98]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: My daughter already was 16, and my son was much younger. He was 7 years and started school here—his education here, yeah.

[00:12:56.68]

SANDRA CURTIS: So he got to really be raised a Houstonian.

[00:12:59.05]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, right.

[00:13:00.49]

SANDRA CURTIS: Do your children speak German?

[00:13:02.38]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes, both of them speak perfect German. And my daughter teaches German literature now at the University in Washington—in Pullman, Washington.

[00:13:13.69]

SANDRA CURTIS: Fantastic. So when did you start thinking about painting and drawing after you got to Houston?

[00:13:23.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, I'll tell you. After I left the symphony, I first worked for the women's Zionist organization here. That was before the establishment of the Israeli state.

[00:13:36.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:13:36.91]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And we tried to provide medical care. And all those children who still wandered over Europe, orphaned and abandoned, we brought them over to Israel.

[00:13:51.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: Fantastic.

[00:13:52.90]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I was very much involved because of our experience of that monstrous persecution of the Jewish people.

[00:14:01.01]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right.

[00:14:02.18]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But at the same time, I painted for my own pleasure and exhibited some of my things at the Houston Artists Show. Mr. Chillman was Director [of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston -Ed.] at that time, and he was very benevolent. He offered that Houston Artists Show every year.

[00:14:17.93]

SANDRA CURTIS: Was it a competition? How did you enter?

[00:14:19.64]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, it was a juried exhibition.

[00:14:20.81]

SANDRA CURTIS: A juried exhibition.

[00:14:21.68]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But partly amateur and partly professional, just like the Symphony Orchestra, submitted their paintings. But it was a very nice experience. And some of the painters—the favorites at that time still were bluebonnets and Texas landscapes.

[00:14:37.79]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right.

[00:14:39.20]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But some of the painters are still working now.

[00:14:44.54]

SANDRA CURTIS: Which ones are those?

[00:14:45.41]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, I remember Buck Shiwetz, for instance. I think he's still working.

[00:14:49.14]

SANDRA CURTIS: He's still working.

[00:14:49.76]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And Robert Preusser, of course, exhibited there. So you see, it's a very mixed bag. [Laughs.]

[00:14:56.24]

SANDRA CURTIS: Bag of painting.

[00:14:56.99]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:14:57.35]

SANDRA CURTIS: It must have been exciting, though, to see all the different sort of—

[00:15:00.33]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It was very exciting.

[00:15:01.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:15:02.04]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It was—

[00:15:02.42]

SANDRA CURTIS: About how many artists exhibited in the Houston area shows?

[00:15:05.06]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That I couldn't tell you anymore. I still have the catalogs, and I could look it up, but I don't know exactly.

[00:15:12.47]

SANDRA CURTIS: But what got you back involved in painting?

[00:15:15.20]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, after my children left home, my daughter married, and my son went to the University. And I had time. I enrolled at the University of Houston for a design course that Robert Preusser taught. And that was one of the happiest times of my life, I think, when I discovered the different possibilities as you could express yourself in paint.

[00:15:40.23]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:15:40.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: So I tried quite a few different ways to paint. And I still have some of the paintings. They were very personal—a concentration camp, the destroyed city, and the H-bomb.

[00:15:56.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: All that, yeah.

[00:15:57.12]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:15:58.10]

SANDRA CURTIS: Emotional paintings, then.

[00:15:59.45]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:15:59.93]

SANDRA CURTIS: Very emotional.

[00:16:00.62]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That is right.

[00:16:01.40]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. And was Robert Preusser a good teacher?

[00:16:04.49]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He was an excellent teacher—an excellent and very inspiring teacher.

[00:16:09.47]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did you have—how many courses from him?

[00:16:12.99]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Mostly, I had also some—took a painting course later. But what I loved most was that design course. It was three mornings every week. And that really was wonderful.

[00:16:28.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, Robert Preusser was one of the early founders of the Contemporary Arts Museum.

[00:16:31.93]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, he was involved at the same time in the founding of the Contemporary Arts Museum.

[00:16:37.41]

SANDRA CURTIS: Were you involved in that?

[00:16:38.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He and his friends, they hoped they would find some outlet for their own painting.

[00:16:44.82]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Sure.

[00:16:45.24]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But then John de Menil took over and made some splendid exhibitions at the CAA. I remember a large Van Gogh show.

[00:16:57.74]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:16:58.40]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And a Miró—one of Miró's magic world. And I painted a little casing [ph] thing of my impressions of that Miró show, that it was bought later at the auction for the Contemporary Arts when they tried to raise funds after the flood had demolished the basement and all its contents.

[00:17:22.82]

SANDRA CURTIS: The 1976—how interesting.

[00:17:23.33]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Somebody bought it.

[00:17:24.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: That's terrific. Well, then you saw sort of the change of the early Contemporary Arts Museum from being sort of a space where they had—where they utilized local talents and local people to a space that began to show international artists.

[00:17:40.88]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, that's what they had hoped for. But it was mostly big shows. But let me first say, it was what you probably know. It was just a little shack downtown.

[00:17:53.54]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:17:54.65]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And later, they moved it, with a big fanfare all through the city, to the new location at this house, main—

[00:18:03.39]

SANDRA CURTIS: By the Prudential Building.

[00:18:04.60]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, Prudential building. And at the Prudential building, Jermayne MacAgy—she was a lovely person. She installed some shows, very interesting ones. But they also offered what they called a rental show. That was a juried exhibition for local artists, and it was hung, and then people could rent paintings that they liked and eventually buy them.

[00:18:34.35]

SANDRA CURTIS: How did it work?

[00:18:35.04]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That's why they called it a rental show. They had it for several years.

[00:18:37.80]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did the rent go to the artist or did—

[00:18:40.92]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, to the artist.

[00:18:42.21]

SANDRA CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then after they had rented it so long, it was paid for?

[00:18:46.56]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: If they wanted to buy it. They also could return it.

[00:18:50.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right. And that lasted how many years? Do you remember?

[00:18:53.91]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't know exactly about the number of years.

[00:18:56.46]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did Jeri MacAgy start that or was it—

[00:18:58.83]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Pardon?

[00:18:59.10]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did Jeri MacAgy begin that?

[00:19:00.93]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't know who started it.

[00:19:03.24]

SANDRA CURTIS: And did you participate?

[00:19:04.32]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's all so long ago.

[00:19:05.85]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did you participate in the—

[00:19:07.31]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes, I did. Yeah, in several of them.

[00:19:11.02]

SANDRA CURTIS: What about in the exhibitions at the Contemporary Arts Museum before they turned to, say, big exhibitions? Did you hang in those exhibitions?

[00:19:18.97]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: They were at that rental show.

[00:19:21.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: The rental show was at Contemporary Arts.

[00:19:22.27]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:19:22.67]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah.

[00:19:24.13]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Then, I think, I don't remember anything else for local artists there, except that rental show.

[00:19:30.43]

SANDRA CURTIS: Was the Houston Area Show still happening at the Museum of Fine Arts under—did James Johnson Sweeney—

[00:19:36.13]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The Area show came much later. In the earlier years, they had the so-called Texas General that was shown in Houston, and Dallas, and I think in Austin. It went from one city to the other.

[00:19:52.37]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:19:52.90]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And in '53, I had a painting there that Smith College bought. Mr. [Henry -Ed.] Hitchcock was here and saw it in that show.

[00:20:03.34]

SANDRA CURTIS: In the Texas General.

[00:20:04.48]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: In the Texas General, and bought that painting. Now, that painting—I don't know whether you want to know a little bit about that painting.

[00:20:12.29]

SANDRA CURTIS: I'd love to.

[00:20:12.58]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's very much different. The style was very much different from what I do now. It was developed from a painted surface that dried overnight, and what the pattern inspired. You know, it was kind of what the Surrealists do.

[00:20:36.87]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right, by a lot of it having to do, then, with chance. And you found—

[00:20:40.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. And what came out of it was destroyed city, where the moonlight shone through the gaping holes that once had been windows. And I called it, "Let There Be Apathy Under the Stars."

[00:20:57.90]

SANDRA CURTIS: And Smith—

[00:20:59.43]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Maybe that's—I think that success came maybe too early, and it scared me. But I still think it's a very good painting, in spite of—you know, an early style.

[00:21:17.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did it relate to your earlier—when you said you studied with Robert Preusser?

[00:21:21.84]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, it related to that cause.

[00:21:23.46]

SANDRA CURTIS: To the very emotional painting period.

[00:21:25.94]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. Right. Yeah.

[00:21:28.41]

SANDRA CURTIS: And when did you change? What made you change your style? Did you become less emotional—

[00:21:35.46]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, you see—

[00:21:36.30]

SANDRA CURTIS: —about your painting?

[00:21:41.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: After finishing those courses, then you try to find a style that really expresses what you like most, and what you feel is your own. I developed a pretty anonymous style—flat paint and geometric patterns. And that's about what I exhibited at the DuBose Show in '72. And to my surprise, some of them, after they were finished, suggested some surreal meanings. I remember that I called one "Vietnam War" and another one—let me see—the "End of the Earth," something like that. ["Finis Terrarum" ("End of the World") - Ed.]

[00:22:35.84]

SANDRA CURTIS: But you came to the titles after the work was finished?

[00:22:38.45]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: After the work was finished. And I have one that I called "The Moon," that was at the time of when they flew to the moon.

[00:22:50.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right, landed on the moon. Mm-hmm [affirmative].

[00:22:51.78]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And I think that's a very lovely painting. It's black and white on a gray background and a yellow moon. It's a pretty large painting. And at the same time, I did some collages that were a different style. It expressed my—oh, more my feelings, so—and irony. [I called them my painterly sins! -Ed.]

[00:23:25.38]

SANDRA CURTIS: Are you still painting in the same sort of style then?

[00:23:28.71]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No. In a way yes, but not quite. [They are still abstract and geometric. -Ed.] After—when I saw the show, it was kind of the end of a chapter for me. I wasn't satisfied, and I wanted some peacefulness and beauty. And for a while, I couldn't do anything. And then I came across a book of Japanese design. And I loved the simplicity of it—

[00:23:56.74]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:23:57.28]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: —and the peacefulness.

[00:23:59.96]

SANDRA CURTIS: Especially after—

[00:24:00.64]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: So I started painting these paintings that hang there that were inspired by a Japanese paper door, for instance with those different—

[00:24:13.85]

SANDRA CURTIS: The screen doors.

[00:24:15.29]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The screen doors, yeah.

[00:24:17.51]

SANDRA CURTIS: The paper screen doors.

[00:24:18.74]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:24:19.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. And do you still—do you still?

[00:24:24.01]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That is still what I am painting now.

[00:24:27.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: From the Japanese inspiration, of their simplicity.

[00:24:30.06]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. I have made some notes here. It's kind of hard to—
[Pause.] I developed the style I'm painting in now and that I showed at the Molina Show.
[Roberto Molina Gallery -Ed.]

[00:24:52.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: Molina Show, right.

[00:24:53.43]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:24:54.90]

SANDRA CURTIS: Then it's a big shift from your very emotional beginnings, and the causes,
and the paintings that expressed all the—

[00:25:04.61]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, that is right.

[00:25:05.96]

SANDRA CURTIS: —the horrors that you had experienced, too—the serenity of the Japanese
is a big shift.

[00:25:11.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, it is.

[00:25:11.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: Have you changed, then, in your general philosophy of painting?

[00:25:14.91]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, I did. [Pause.] As I say, I wanted beauty and
peacefulness, and I wanted to get away from everything.

[00:25:35.03]

SANDRA CURTIS: And it was a more serene period in your life, too. Your children now are
grown.

[00:25:39.11]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, I wouldn't say that.

[00:25:40.19]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, you wouldn't say that. You wouldn't go that far. [Laughs.]

[00:25:42.57]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I wouldn't say that. I think—still think that life is very difficult. And I use the time—I never had very much time available, having a family, and a house, and a husband, you know?

[00:26:00.47]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:26:00.76]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But the time available, I tried to get away from everything and paint for my own release—give me a release and a sense of fulfillment. And the paintings were my own. I created a life for myself, a life that only belongs to me, you know? So if you want me to talk a little about the style, I mean, my style now?

[00:26:34.04]

SANDRA CURTIS: I'd love you to.

[00:26:43.31]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: You know, critics trace my way of painting back to the Bauhaus. My design, however, was suggested by Oriental art. I talked about that book of Japanese designs.

[00:27:00.92]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:27:01.13]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The Bauhaus taught me the knowledge of the effects of color and laws that every artist knows, has to know. But when I paint, intuition takes over.

[00:27:20.33]

SANDRA CURTIS: Intuition.

[00:27:21.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. They say I paint—I use color for color's sake, but that's not just that's quite right. I think I want more than to just explore the color.

[00:27:34.50]

SANDRA CURTIS: What do you believe about color how do you use color if it's not for color's sake then.

[00:27:41.99]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, it's partly true. But it's more than that. I quote one of the Bauhaus people, who said that when intuition would take over, after the knowledge of color, you know—and I paint with my heart [inaudible] you know?

[00:28:04.37]

SANDRA CURTIS: And when you finish something, sometimes does the color not do what you want it to do? I mean, are you surprised sometimes with what the color does after the painting is finished?

[00:28:15.07]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's a very difficult technique. I use acrylic colors, and they dry in different hue than when you put them on.

[00:28:27.31]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:28:27.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: So I always first try to dry some dry sample, you know? But very often after a painting, I think it's finished—it's not finished. I have to change some hue or some color.

[00:28:48.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: To make it do what you want it to do.

[00:28:50.05]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: To make it do what I want it to do. Yes.

[00:28:52.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right.

[00:28:53.96]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's not an easy technique.

[00:28:56.67]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, especially when you have to wait to see for sure how it's going to look.

[00:29:01.49]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. Yeah. And I like simple designs and flat surfaces. And I sometimes do paintings where color appears or disappears. But I do not paint to produce optical sensations, what one of those reviews claims. I don't.

[00:29:21.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah.

[00:29:25.32]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I made a statement for the Molina Show. "I believe a painting should be like music—abstract in its appeal, inexplicable, though it is rendered by men according to logical rules, just like music is," you know.

[00:29:41.19]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:29:42.84]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And it's, of course, for the observer to decide if I reached that goal to any degree. But, as I already said, you know, I paint for my own release and for my own fulfillment.

[00:29:58.80]

SANDRA CURTIS: Wasn't it Braque who said that if we could explain paintings in words, we would destroy the magic anyway—that there has to be a certain ineffable quality about the work that we can't say is due to any one thing. It just works or it doesn't, and that's the sort of thing you can't put into words. Which is sort of what you're saying, too, that when you proceed from intuition—

[00:30:20.79]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:30:21.33]

SANDRA CURTIS: —and when then whatever makes it work—

[00:30:25.38]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I always want to express a certain feeling, a certain—

[00:30:33.16]

SANDRA CURTIS: How did it work, then, when you say, for example, the Vietnamese—the Vietnam painting?

[00:30:39.11]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, that was the old style. That was what I did before the DuBose show. Yeah.

[00:30:43.57]

SANDRA CURTIS: And that's why you were pleased with it?

[00:30:44.41]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't think that my paintings now suggest anything other than I—paint.

[00:30:51.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Because, I mean, if you—you painted those paintings for the DuBose show from intuition, too, or—

[00:30:58.00]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, of course.

[00:30:59.02]

SANDRA CURTIS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then the painting after it was finished suggested something to you.

[00:31:04.12]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Right.

[00:31:04.42]

SANDRA CURTIS: So that you didn't start out with, say, the horrors of Vietnam, and paint a painting.

[00:31:08.50]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, I only gave it the title later.

[00:31:11.46]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So that is—

[00:31:13.95]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It was quite interesting, and I don't know the reason for it.

[00:31:16.83]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right. That's what I wondered about, sometimes if it had to do with the way suddenly the colors worked together, or the images worked together—

[00:31:25.86]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The images worked together, yeah.

[00:31:27.96]

SANDRA CURTIS: —that suggested something to you after.

[00:31:30.30]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:31:30.42]

SANDRA CURTIS: Do you think you were in—say when you painted the Vietnam painting, were you feeling necessarily all the anguish and horrors of that Vietnamese war or—

[00:31:43.47]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, I did not.

[00:31:47.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: So you—

[00:31:47.57]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I did not paint it with the intention to—as I say, the titles suggested themselves later, after I saw—after the paintings were finished.

[00:31:57.38]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Why do you—what I'm trying to get at is why do you suppose you painted a painting that suggested Vietnam?

[00:32:04.94]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Maybe the subconscious. I wouldn't know.

[00:32:08.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: Because now, your paintings do have the Japanese serenity, and the peaceful, and the—

[00:32:12.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes.

[00:32:13.67]

SANDRA CURTIS: And the colors and everything don't suggest any of the—

[00:32:18.26]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I use a different means. These were I think what you call "minimal" paintings. Would you say that?

[00:32:29.07]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yes.

[00:32:29.49]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: For DuBose. But later, as those Japanese designs are more intricate and small, and they also provide not the hardness of a flat surface, because the colors suggest a certain texture.

[00:32:52.92]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:32:55.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It takes away the possibility of suggesting anything else than what I paint, I think. It makes also the painting—talking to us from a painterly point of view, it makes them softer. I use very often colors right next to each other [on the color wheel - Ed.], and it gives an iri—how do you call it? [Vibrancy and a floating quality -Ed.]

[00:33:27.66]

SANDRA CURTIS: [Coughs.] Excuse me. When you use colors next to each other and it gives a—

[00:33:32.75]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It gives a feeling of [pause] transparency, or no, you don't—

[00:33:42.09]

SANDRA CURTIS: Of transparency?

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well—no, not transparency. I don't find the right expression. It's—

[00:33:52.14]

SANDRA CURTIS: Do you ever have the colors overlap so there is transparency in one color sort of leading into another color, or do you always use—

[00:33:59.31]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I did that in the DuBose show, those overlapping colors. Yes, I did some of them, those wave pattern paintings I had at the [Molina -Ed.] show. [Arabsesque" pattern paintings -Ed.] They overlap and suggest transparency.

[00:34:17.10]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Wow. Do you often utilize color—say, one color that will advance, and one that will recede? Because even though it's not—you're not painting for optical purposes, it can't help but do that sort of—Do you use colors that sort of make your eyes work anyway, or do you try to avoid that?

[00:34:39.80]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't know whether you remember those paintings, three [triptych; three canvases -Ed.] paintings that hung on that big wall. Those are different backgrounds. And I put in the middle the—I don't know. I don't know the technical expression now. Each color—yellow, for instance, has as the opposite, violet.

[00:35:08.87]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right, complementary colors.

[00:35:11.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, the complementary colors in the middle, and then in the just right colors that are adjoining on both sides. So the two colors on the sides disappear, and the complementary colors stand out.

[00:35:26.81]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:35:28.97]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: A kind of mimicry, I would say. [Laughs.]

[00:35:32.81]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, and they were beautiful, and they worked beautifully. Then tell me a little bit more. I know your husband was John de Menil's doctor, and so you had some

involvement with the de Menils for a long time.

[00:35:45.69]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, we knew them when they were still young, and very charming, and not quite so imperial.

[00:35:50.90]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:35:51.68]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: For instance, I remember that John de Menil was very proud of his desk. He had a desk, a big board that was supported by two trusses. And he was terribly proud of it.

[00:36:04.48]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Where was this desk? You mean in the museum?

[00:36:07.75]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, no, no.

[00:36:09.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: In his house.

[00:36:09.46]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: His own desk, in his house. They had a comparatively modest house in River Oaks.

[00:36:19.48]

SANDRA CURTIS: Before the [inaudible] time.

[00:36:19.63]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The children were still small.

[00:36:21.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Right. Were they collecting then? I mean, how did the—because I've only known the de Menils during their imperial stage.

[00:36:31.79]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. [Laughs.]

[00:36:31.88]

SANDRA CURTIS: I didn't know them in their earlier ones.

[00:36:35.18]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, they were full of enthusiasm [to change Houston's provincial outlook, to further spiritual life and also racial tolerance -Ed.] and thought they could reform—not reform, but bring to the city many things that weren't there at the time.

[00:36:46.90]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:36:48.68]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: European art—and I know that they first started buying a little movie theater in River Oaks Center, I believe. And they tried to bring a modern theater.

But that ended in disaster. I think it had to close after a very short time.

[00:37:05.72]

SANDRA CURTIS: You mean they brought movies to Houston?

[00:37:07.46]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, not movies. Unfortunately, I don't remember what kind of place. They want a living theater, I think.

[00:37:15.59]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, actual live theater. Uh-huh [affirmative].

[00:37:17.54]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:37:18.68]

SANDRA CURTIS: In River Oaks—and that didn't last very long.

[00:37:21.18]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, it didn't last very long.

[00:37:23.42]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, I think that she was involved—Mrs. de Menil was involved in theater before she was involved in the visual arts, wasn't she?

[00:37:29.15]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It seems so.

[00:37:29.84]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah.

[00:37:30.14]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:37:31.55]

SANDRA CURTIS: And John was more involved with the visual arts, do you suppose, since he got involved in the contemporary arts—

[00:37:37.19]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I think they already started to be involved with painting, according to what they told us, in Paris. I remember that Mrs. de Menil told about her portrait that Max Ernst had painted, and they didn't like it a bit when they were young. And it got lost somehow, or they sold it. I don't know. Anyway, they found it again in a dealer's window, shop window in Paris. And they bought it back. And they got started at that time already in art.

[00:38:10.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: In art, right.

[00:38:11.87]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah. They came here from South America.

[00:38:15.56]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. After having done the oil fields down there.

[00:38:18.12]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But when they—they already had many wonderful paintings. They had had them hanging in their house, I remember—Max Ernst and, I think Braul was his name—no, Brauner.

[00:38:40.76]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah, Victor Brauner.

[00:38:41.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Victor Brauner. And I was—

[00:38:46.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. But it was just—

[00:38:47.07]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I remember the parties they gave. They gave wonderful, large, and gracious parties for a large number of guests, honoring people like Max Ernst. We met him there.

[00:39:07.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: They brought—

[00:39:08.81]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Duchamp.

[00:39:09.23]

SANDRA CURTIS: —Duchamp, Magritte, Buckminster Fuller.

[00:39:14.60]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Rossellini.

[00:39:15.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah, Rossellini, right until his death was one of their constant people.

[00:39:19.58]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:39:20.73]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:39:22.43]

And did she—

[00:39:23.57]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And I also remember very well the first show they had installed at an old movie theater they had bought in the Fifth Ward. [a Black neighborhood - Ed.]

[00:39:35.72]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right, the Deluxe.

[00:39:36.79]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The Deluxe Theater.

[00:39:38.75]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:39:39.13]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And Clement Greenberg was here for that occasion, and we had—

[00:39:42.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: That was a big occasion. It was Black art. Right.

[00:39:46.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, and we had long—

[00:39:47.44]

SANDRA CURTIS: African art, Black—

[00:39:48.43]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, no. That first show, I remember that.

[00:39:51.83]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, it was Black artists, wasn't it?

[00:39:53.65]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Not Black artists. That was—

[00:39:55.14]

SANDRA CURTIS: No?

[00:39:55.39]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, they brought European art.

[00:39:57.34]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, really? I didn't know that.

[00:39:58.27]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And also New York art.

[00:40:00.07]

SANDRA CURTIS: They brought it to the Deluxe Theater.

[00:40:02.02]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: To the Deluxe Theater. Yeah.

[00:40:03.91]

SANDRA CURTIS: For Pete's sake. Because I—

[00:40:04.69]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I remember the painting of [Ellsworth] Kelly, for instance, and [Jules] Olitski.

[00:40:09.40]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, I didn't know that.

[00:40:10.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes. And Clement Greenberg was here for that occasion.

[00:40:14.71]

SANDRA CURTIS: The show? Because then I know they had some Black artists, like Joe Overstreet, and various people hang there.

[00:40:20.56]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, they did.

[00:40:21.12]

SANDRA CURTIS: And then they had the Black, African art exhibitions there.

[00:40:24.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That is right. Yeah.

[00:40:24.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: But that sort of is finished, too, as I understand, the Deluxe as a center. When did—didn't the de Menils buy some of your work?

[00:40:38.83]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. They bought—John de Menil bought one of my paintings from the DuBose show.

[00:40:46.15]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did they involve themselves much with local artists?

[00:40:50.65]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I know that they owned a painting by Frank Freed. He is one of my favorite Houston painters, with his ironical and humorous social comments.

[00:41:03.85]

SANDRA CURTIS: Now, he was a very—

[00:41:05.50]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And they owned a painting by Leila—

[00:41:08.77]

SANDRA CURTIS: McConnell?

[00:41:09.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: McConnell—Henri Gadbois' wife. I don't know what else they owned.

[00:41:16.18]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. So they did support some local people.

[00:41:18.67]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, they did. Yeah. Gertrude Barnstone. I think they had a sculpture that she did.

[00:41:25.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yes. Well, what artists did you—did you associate with the artists, or was

there an art group, the local artists who met with each other in the early days?

[00:41:37.66]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No, not very much.

[00:41:38.96]

SANDRA CURTIS: Not very much.

[00:41:39.82]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No. I knew Frank Freed very well. They were friends of ours.

[00:41:45.25]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. But in general, it was sort of every artist was doing—there was not a lot of camaraderie with the Houston artists?

[00:41:53.11]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: There may have been, but, you know, I was older, and—

[00:41:55.66]

SANDRA CURTIS: And you had a family and a husband.

[00:41:57.12]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And family and a husband. And maybe they considered me also too bourgeois, you know? [Laughs.] I never—

[00:42:07.78]

SANDRA CURTIS: You weren't suffering enough as artist in Houston.

[00:42:11.11]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Maybe. [Laughs.] And I didn't dress like one.

[00:42:13.19]

SANDRA CURTIS: You didn't dress right. Yeah.

[00:42:15.34]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: There's a certain feeling that an artist has to dress like, you know, like an artist.

[00:42:26.89]

SANDRA CURTIS: I think in the early days of Houston, there was some of that, right, it seems with other artists—

[00:42:31.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: There probably still is, I think.

[00:42:32.55]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, I'm sure.

[00:42:33.39]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And, of course, the younger people. I don't know.

[00:42:35.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah.

[00:42:36.78]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I have been very handicapped for quite some years, cannot drive at night. And I cannot participate in the meetings because I cannot drive at night. They are mostly taking place at night. But I'm a member of Artists Equity.

[00:42:50.70]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. What do you feel about the art environment of Houston now? How do you feel it's developed since 1937?

[00:42:59.62]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It has developed very much, I think.

[00:43:02.11]

SANDRA CURTIS: Do you think it's any easier to be an artist in Houston in 1980 than it was in the—

[00:43:06.32]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That I wouldn't know.

[00:43:07.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: You don't know.

[00:43:08.98]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No.

[00:43:09.70]

SANDRA CURTIS: Do you feel that—how do you feel that the support from the museums has been for the local artists?

[00:43:15.73]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I think after Mr. Chillman retired, there has been very little support, as far as I know. The Contemporary Arts Museum, Mr. Harithas has showed some local artists, or Texas artists. But it was kind of just a certain group, kind of.

[00:43:42.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: He had his favorites.

[00:43:44.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, that's what I think.

[00:43:47.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah, because I know generally, there's some feeling that it's very difficult to be an artist here, that no one will look at your work unless you show in New York.

[00:43:55.64]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's not much encouragement here. The papers are paying very little attention, I think. Of course, they bring reviews, but I think, for instance, The Chronicle still brings the reviews under "Amusements." I think that is quite characteristic. [Laughs.]

[00:44:16.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: It's an "amusing"—yeah. It's true.

[00:44:18.47]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, for the attitude.

[00:44:20.36]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yes.

[00:44:21.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: You don't have the intelligent writing up of art that, for instance, New York has—and it probably can't be expected. It's everything too new here.

[00:44:29.87]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Well, it can be expected. We're big enough now.

[00:44:32.57]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Houston also, I think, prides itself of being non-intellectual.

[00:44:41.30]

SANDRA CURTIS: Probably.

[00:44:42.14]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. And that is not very favorable for artists.

[00:44:50.13]

SANDRA CURTIS: For developing any sort of cultural community.

[00:44:52.22]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes.

[00:44:52.53]

SANDRA CURTIS: That's true. Do you see what has happened to the—I mean, now, have you followed the progress of the symphony since you were involved with the symphony early?

[00:45:01.50]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The symphony had quite some very famous and some less famous conductors. But I think they always were dependent on the people who provided for the funds. None of them stayed here very long. And I remember that a very young and gifted conductor was fired [Andre Previn -Ed.], and then I was told that—well, I was told by some lady that she didn't want her daughter to meet him in society. I mean, that's kind of her characteristic for the attitude—

[00:46:06.27]

SANDRA CURTIS: Of Houston.

[00:46:06.87]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But you know, it's a very conservative establishment, and they expect the same from others whom they—

[00:46:21.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right, and you won't get a very dynamic artistic environment if all the artists are conservative.

[00:46:28.52]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, I think so.

[00:46:31.37]

SANDRA CURTIS: It is—

[00:46:32.36]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I wouldn't say—I think they are not aware of artists. I don't know.

[00:46:43.27]

SANDRA CURTIS: You don't know? Do you have any favorite memories about being an artist in the early days in Houston, or—I mean, I don't know if the differences of, say, having seen Houston from 1937 'til now, is there anything that particularly stands out in your mind as being sort of a unique—obviously, they're all unique experiences, but a special experience.

[00:47:09.10]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: In which—

[00:47:10.08]

SANDRA CURTIS: In either—in either regarding music, or art, or your life as an artist, or just as an observer of the art scene.

[00:47:18.28]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, I think I've always been pretty much of a loner. So—

[00:47:23.89]

SANDRA CURTIS: So mostly you felt like an observer of what was happening.

[00:47:27.07]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: You know, I painted really just for myself.

[00:47:33.52]

SANDRA CURTIS: Did you get support from your family? I mean, did they encourage you in your painting?

[00:47:37.33]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Oh, yes, of course. Yeah. My family owns a lot of my paintings and they enjoy them.

[00:47:47.46]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah. Right. We're coming to the end of this tape. Let me turn it over.

[END OF TRACK AAA_grunba80_4187_m]

[00:00:03.68]

SANDRA CURTIS: You were just going to tell me a story about Mischa Elman.

[00:00:07.85]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I went there when I was about 12 years old. I went to the concert with my mother.

[00:00:13.34]

SANDRA CURTIS: And how old was—

[00:00:14.27]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And I was absolutely enchanted. And I remember that an aunt was there at the same time. And she said something about the human voice, that I would like the human voice still better. And I already, at that time, told her it couldn't mean

the same to me than the tone of a violin. I think it's kind of characteristic because the violin is kind of abstract and the human voice is not abstract.

[00:00:44.12]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. So how old was Mischa Elman then when you saw him?

[00:00:47.21]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, he must have been 12, or 13, or 14 or so.

[00:00:52.72]

SANDRA CURTIS: He was just a child prodigy.

[00:00:54.47]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: A young boy.

[00:00:55.09]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Did you go to many concerts with your mother, with your family?

[00:01:00.46]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Quite a few, yes.

[00:01:02.11]

SANDRA CURTIS: So they were—

[00:01:02.89]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We went to the opera. And we went to concerts. And one of my teachers, violin teachers, was Henry Petri, at that time very well known. He was the first violinist of a quartet, the Petri Quartet, played all over Europe.

[00:01:24.98]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Have you been back to Dresden since then, since the wars, since you've been here?

[00:01:30.41]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I have not been back. But I have been told by a friend that it's a dead city now. I still have relatives living there, but I don't hear from them. Many of my relatives were killed in the Dresden fire bombing. It was three days bombing. And the whole city was destroyed.

[00:01:51.67]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, a horror in American history.

[00:01:52.84]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I think more people died in Dresden than died in Hiroshima.

[00:01:58.25]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, it is one of the true horror stories for America—

[00:02:01.58]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That's right.

[00:02:02.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: —and the world that ever was.

[00:02:04.07]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes.

[00:02:05.26]

SANDRA CURTIS: No, I'm sure you were—

[00:02:06.82]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And I, of course, still can't get over the destruction. Many of my relatives were killed.

[00:02:15.99]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. And so, I'm sure—no, I'm sure it would be—compared to the Dresden before World War I and the Dresden as it is now, there could be no way to compare the two.

[00:02:24.54]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: No way to compare it. I have some friends who have been there photographing. I guess you know them, through Mrs. de Menil, [inaudible].

[00:02:35.16]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yes.

[00:02:35.76]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And he is going to show me some photographs he took. He hasn't showed them to me yet. But he said it was a dead city now.

[00:02:42.93]

SANDRA CURTIS: That's too bad. No, I didn't know he was taking photographs of Dresden, too.

[00:02:46.86]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:02:47.12]

SANDRA CURTIS: But he was in Europe.

[00:02:47.85]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I think he took them on his own.

[00:02:49.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:02:50.01]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:02:51.73]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, you were going to—we forgot to talk about the Alley Theater. Were you involved with the Alley Theater when it was—when Nina Vance just had it in the Alley?

[00:03:02.47]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We liked very much to go there. And we went quite often. The plays were well done, and modern and interesting. And we liked it very much.

[00:03:14.29]

SANDRA CURTIS: What kind of theater did she have? I mean, was it comtemp—

[00:03:16.39]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: She had a small theater in a very modest location in a side street. And that, I think, is the reason it was called Alley Theater.

[00:03:26.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:03:27.49]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We didn't go that often after it was located in that new building.

[00:03:34.69]

SANDRA CURTIS: Was this at this—

[00:03:35.65]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It was not as intimate, you know?

[00:03:37.18]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. No, it's not. But what about, I mean, Mrs. de Menil's theater in River Oaks?

[00:03:42.88]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, that, unfortunately, I don't remember what kind of theater they wanted to bring there.

[00:03:47.20]

SANDRA CURTIS: But was that the same time as Nina Vance as the alley—Alley Theater?

[00:03:52.47]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That I cannot tell you, either, whether she—Nina Vance already had founded her little theater or whether she did it later. That I don't know.

[00:04:00.00]

SANDRA CURTIS: Yeah, because that would have been curious to have those two ladies in theater at the same time.

[00:04:04.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes. And I also don't remember what kind exactly the de Menils wanted to bring there, probably New York place. But I'm not sure.

[00:04:14.94]

SANDRA CURTIS: What kind of plays did Nina Vance bring?

[00:04:19.35]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I wish I could tell you.

[00:04:21.42]

SANDRA CURTIS: It just was a dynamic place.

[00:04:22.56]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's all so long ago. But we enjoyed it. [They were modern and well-performed. I remember a play by Tennessee Williams -Ed.]

[00:04:25.41]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Now, Houston's beginnings, when you think of the Alley Theater being founded in the alley by Nina Vance and the early beginnings of the Contemporary Arts Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, and it was—it's a big change in 20, 30 years.

[00:04:42.58]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's a very big change.

[00:04:43.50]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. It has certainly become more impersonal and more professional.

[00:04:47.53]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: More professional, more impersonal, and more conscious of their own merits [the institutions' -Ed.], I think.

[00:05:00.61]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right. Somehow I think they must lose a little of the enthusiasm and the dynamism that comes with being at the beginning of something and that—where everyone is working together.

[00:05:13.74]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Right. Of course, I was young at that time, myself. So when you get old, you get more detached.

[00:05:22.56]

SANDRA CURTIS: But yes, I'm sure that might be true. Right.

[00:05:24.93]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah.

[00:05:26.60]

SANDRA CURTIS: What do you predict the future of Houston's culture will be? It will get more and more professional and less and less personal?

[00:05:34.91]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: That is very hard to say. I think it depends on the development of the whole country, of the economic development here.

[00:05:42.27]

SANDRA CURTIS: That's true.

[00:05:42.55]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: It's, of course, right now, it's an international city. And it has become a very tough city—very tough. And it depends on the prevailing interests, what will prevail here in Houston and also in—

[00:06:09.47]

SANDRA CURTIS: Well, and now you're about to move to Washington.

[00:06:11.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Now whether—it depends on where the money will take over or—money usually brings some culture [if people wish to have it, and whether "big business" will decide that art is a civic benefit -Ed.], so it's hard to say.

[00:06:17.75]

SANDRA CURTIS: It's hard to see which direction it will take now.

[00:06:19.52]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: [Laughs.] Yeah.

[00:06:20.27]

SANDRA CURTIS: But you're going to be moving to Washington. So, after 40 years in Houston, you're going to be moving to Washington State.

[00:06:26.96]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We are going to Washington State where my daughter and her family lives. My daughter teaches at the university.

[00:06:33.71]

SANDRA CURTIS: It will be a big change for you after seeing Houston grow.

[00:06:36.59]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes, it will be a big change. We don't—

[00:06:39.41]

SANDRA CURTIS: I want—I'll be curious—

[00:06:40.76]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: We would like to stay here if we would have any family here.

[00:06:43.97]

SANDRA CURTIS: Right.

[00:06:44.39]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: But we are getting very old and—

[00:06:46.91]

SANDRA CURTIS: I would like to see what changes your paintings will take now when you change that—

[00:06:50.88]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yeah, I hope I will still be able to do some painting.

[00:06:53.72]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh, you will more than ever now probably.

[00:06:55.70]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I hope I will have some peace and quiet. [Laughs.]

[00:06:58.86]

SANDRA CURTIS: You should. You should. Well, I wish you the best luck.

[00:07:02.33]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: And they have an art faculty, of course, as every university has. And I have often been there. And I know some people who are very interested in art, perhaps more understanding than the people here are.

[00:07:17.06]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, good.

[00:07:18.68]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: One of the painters there was—and I knew him quite well. And he, unfortunately, he made experiments with glass blowing and—

[00:07:29.34]

SANDRA CURTIS: What kind of experimenting did this person do with glass blowing? Because you said, "unfortunately."

[00:07:36.61]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: The chemicals he used.

[00:07:38.86]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh. Did something to him?

[00:07:41.98]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He's very sick.

[00:07:43.39]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh my goodness.

[00:07:45.21]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He can hardly walk anymore.

[00:07:48.26]

SANDRA CURTIS: Oh. That's a high price to pay.

[00:07:50.23]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: He goes to his study with the help of his wife, and she helps him. And he cannot do what he used to do. He was a very good artist. He exhibited all over the Northwest.

[00:08:01.37]

SANDRA CURTIS: What was his name?

[00:08:03.57]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Leyser. [George Laisner -Ed.]

[00:08:04.65]

SANDRA CURTIS: Laser, like a laser beam?

[00:08:07.08]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't exactly know how he spells it. I would think L-E, either Y or I, S—Leyser, L-E-Y-S-E-R.

[00:08:20.22]

SANDRA CURTIS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Well, at least you'll have some environment there, some artistic influences.

[00:08:24.51]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Yes.

[00:08:24.93]

SANDRA CURTIS: So that it won't be completely—

[00:08:26.02]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: They also have a little gallery there.

[00:08:27.81]

SANDRA CURTIS: Great. So you have a whole new future ahead of you. That's very exciting.

[00:08:34.00]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I don't know, at my age. [Laughs.] I hope.

[00:08:36.19]

SANDRA CURTIS: Why not? Why not? Of course.

[00:08:37.36]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: I hope.

[00:08:37.87]

SANDRA CURTIS: You will for sure. And thank you for your time. I've enjoyed talking with you.

[00:08:41.65]

MARIAN HETTNER GRUNBAUM: Well, thank you very much.

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[END OF INTERVIEW.]