



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Claire Falkenstein,
1965 Apr. 13

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Claire Falkenstein on April 13, 1965. The interview took place in Venice, CA, and was conducted by Betty Hoag for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

TAPE 1

BETTY HOAG: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on April 13, 1965 interviewing the artist Claire Falkenstein that is spelled F A L K E N S T E I N, in her home in Venice, California. Miss Falkenstein is one of the leading sculptors of this country and is in fact as well known abroad as she is in America. She has been an easel painter, a maker of jewelry, a teacher, as well as a sculptor. She is a friend of mine so I will be calling her Claire on the tape. She is also a friend of the Archives because she has already made available to us a very exciting tape on Mark Tobey, which is a tape interview of an evening she had with him in Paris about ten years ago. She is the sculptor of the most exciting piece of work which was recently put in place on Wilshire Boulevard at the California Federal Savings and Loan Company and everyone in our community is very thrilled and proud of this. Claire, you were on the project in San Francisco for a very short time a very long time ago, which I want to ask you about. But before we begin I'd like to ask you a little about your own life, where you were born, and when, if you want to tell us, and where did you receive your education.

CLAIRE FALKENSTEIN: I grew up in Oregon in Coos Bay, which is a small town on the seacoast, in fact it's the second harbor; there's Portland and then then Coos Bay, and then you come on down to California and I think Eureka is next, so I've always been close to the sea and in a way adjusted to nature, I have a feeling for nature because having been reared on the coast with big trees and the sea and then also spending much of my younger days on a farm, which was the family home in the country really in Oregon, and it wasn't until I was twelve years old that I came to a city at all and had any kind of touch with culture you might say because we moved from Oregon-- this small place-- to San Francisco...

BETTY HOAG: When you were twelve?

CF: Yes. When I--I remember now-- this is a very, very strong impression--I came down on a ship--that when we got off the ship, having come from this meager, cultural environment to the great, marvelous grouping of buildings on hills, I never forgot it actually. I think I had a feeling for environment in the sense of the "bridge" (if you want to call it that) of concrete assemblage of buildings and streets with the flow of life through them--at that time (I never thought much about it until now!). Having lived in Paris and New York, and having really been a city-dweller for quite a while, I have a feeling for the "flow of life".

[TAPE 2]

BH: This is Betty Lochrie Hoag on April 13, 1965 interviewing Claire Falkenstein. This is our second tape, something happened to the machine on the first tape. Claire, it breaks my heart to ask you but I think we'd better repeat some of that if you don't mind.

CF: I'll do a...

BH: Good. Wonderful. I don't want you to get hoarse or anything.

CF: Let's see--let's start at the beginning

BH: Good.

CF: Now that I remember my beginnings probably up to the age of twelve the most important thing in my life as far as any kind of--how do you say--awakening through the senses in any way was through visits that I made to a house which was like probably you can think of it as a kind of museum of things, marvelous things from all over the world. Of course I lived in Coos Bay, which was a small town on the seacoast in Oregon. I was born there and had all my early life in this small town, it was a wonderful nature experience in that I was close to the woods and close to the sea and had a sense of being in the country and realizing growing things and seeing animals and plants and so on in sequence of seasons and so on. But as far as art went, there was nothing except, as I say, this one house and it was built by the owner of the mills in which my father was the manager, and because it was a very class cleavage town...(Machine and end of tape squeaking)

[Break in taping]

BH: Now we have it on again.

CF: ...in that you had the owner, the manager and certain other officer of the mills being the leading families and then you had this great mass of workers who were mostly Swedish people brought from Sweden to work i the mills. And at a certain time, well when I was twelve really, Mother was very progressive, and felt that we weren't having the proper kind of possibility and she insisted that we leave there and go to San Francisco.

[Break in taping]

BH: At this point it was obvious that my machine was broken. Miss Falkenstein had started a tape with me and it had broken down, so then I put on this new tape and she had gotten to just about the same distance in her life when it broke down, so we had to conclude it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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