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**Oral history interview with Lita Albuquerque,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Lita Albuquerque on July 9 and 19, 1990. The interview took place in Los Angeles, Calif., and was conducted by Bonnie Clearwater for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Lita Albuquerque has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

BC: This is Bonnie Clearwater, interviewing Lita Albuquerque in Los Angeles, July 9, 1990. First we'll start with some biography. You were born in Santa Monica.

LA: Yes.

BC: In? [chuckles]

LA: Oh, I was born January 3, 1946.

BC: And was your real name Lita Albuquerque?

LA: Yes. Yes, it is.

BC: Really?

LA: Yeah.

LA: It's my father's family's name.

BC: Is Albuquerque.

LA: Uh huh.

BC: Where would. . . .

LA: It's a Spanish name. It's a big Spanish family, and in fact our ancestors founded the city of Albuquerque, New Mexico.

BC: You're kidding!

LA: No.

BC: So is your family Sephardic, or. . . .

LA: Yeah. Completely Sephardic. What's interesting is that both my mother [_____]—Ed.] and father [_____]—Ed.] originally came from Spain. And right after the Inquisition, his side of the family went to Turkey. And my mother's side went to Tunisia, North Africa. And then they met in Elizabeth, you know, that much later, obviously. But I'm Sephardic.

BC: And then which part of the family came here to found Albuquerque?

LA: My father's side of the family.

BC: When was that?

LA: In, well, it was founded in 1592, I guess, you know, a long time ago.

BC: That's interesting.

LA: Yeah, he's like a great, great, great, great, great, great uncle.

BC: That's amazing, that Albuquerque is a Sephardic community.

LA: That's right, that's right.

BC: Very interesting.

LA: Yeah.

BC: Lita Albuquerque sounds like a stage name.

LA: That's what everybody thinks, but it really isn't.

BC: And your parents were born in Tunisia?

LA: No, no. My mother was born in Tunisia. My father was born in Turkey. But he lived most of his life in Paris. When he was nine, his whole family moved to Paris.

BC: Why did they come here?

LA: Okay, it's complicated. He was a diamond dealer, and my mother was a playwright. And my mother in the thirties was in the whole underground scene, writing scene, in Paris. And then the war broke out and she had to be evacuated from Paris. And she was on her way to Tunisia, on her way back home. She had quite an exciting life. She was married before to a pilot, whose best friend was Saint Exupéry, you know, the guy who wrote *The Little Prince*. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: And they had gone around the world together in a small plane, and she had been in the United States in 1936, and loved Hollywood—she was a writer—and she decided instead of going back home she'd go to Hollywood. So she ended up in Lisbon. And she was stuck there, because every time she wanted to take a ship to come out to the states they would give priority to the military. And at the same time there was this couple, who were on their way to Brazil, and he. . . . It was my father and his wife, at the time. [laughter] We won't go into details. And anyway, they were in the same hotel for about a month. And they did go to New York. . . . They were both going to New York, and then they were supposedly going to Brazil, and my mother _____. The whole thing, you know. . . . He fell in love with her and he followed her out here and they lived here [in Los Angeles—BC] for five years. And then just a few months after I was born, they broke up, actually, and then they [LA's father—BC—Ed.] went back to Paris. And my mother went back to Tunisia with me—and my brother.

BC: Did she actually write the screenplays _____?

LA: She, well, you know, she did. What happened to her is that her French was so much better. . . . She had her first play produced in Paris at the age of twenty. In French, under a man's name.

BC: What was that?

LA: It was called. . . . Oh, her name? Fred [Arlen, Harlen].

BC: With that. . . .

LA: [Arlen, Harlen], yeah. And her writing in English was really never good, so she never pursued it. And she became interested in his career, which was really, you know, dealing with all these gems and making these beautiful. . . . He had a shop off, actually on Beverly Drive, and they lived in Bel Air, and had the whole forties L.A. scene going.

BC: Very grand.

LA: Very grand, you know, going in horses down Sunset Boulevard. I guess at that time he did that.

BC: Oh! Do you remember much of that time?

LA: No, I was newly born.

BC: I know you were. . . .

LA: No, no, I mean, I was just a few months old when they left. But I've seen pictures. And [he was—BC] very involved in the Hollywood scene and selling these incredible diamonds and, to all these movie stars and. . . .

BC: Were they involved with the writers who were out here at the time?

LA: My mother was, yeah.

BC: Yeah. Was [Julian, Aldous] Huxley and [_____]—Ed.] [Roth]. . . .

LA: Yeah. She was. . . . No, she wasn't involved with people, unfortunately.

BC: Did they know [Marcel—Ed.] [Duchamp] when he was here?

LA: No.

BC: No, that's too bad.

LA: No, that would have been great.

BC: Let me just make sure that we're getting this. [referring to the recording—Trans.]

[Interruption in taping]

LA: Actually, it was more like. . . . I don't know how much you know about Rachel Rosenthal's life.

BC: Rosenthal, yes, which was very interesting.

LA: But her family and my family, I have the feeling knew each other. Her father was the pearl king.

BC: Oh, my.

LA: And from France.

BC: Right.

LA: And they went. . . . She actually lived, I think, in Brazil. Or in South America. And I know. . . . I mean, I don't know for a fact, but I could find out. I wouldn't be surprised if my father's family knew his family. Because that was the world. You know, it was that kind of. . . . I mean, now it doesn't even exist, but that world was just so amazing.

BC: Well, it sounds like a fairy tale. Does that intrigue you and trigger your imagination?

LA: Yes, one day I really want to write a book about the whole family. I mean, I have stories. I'm going to have to rely on some other sources. In fact, interestingly enough, a woman who's in the art world [_____—Ed.], her mother. . . . I knew her from the art world, and I found out that her mother was my father's—her mother and her husband and her father [the art world woman's father or grandfather??—Ed.]—was my father's best, best friends. When they were here. And she's like 84 now, so I'm going to go and talk with her and find out more historical details. Because I'd like to write a book. For instance, I mean, talk about the fantasy, this is a story—I don't know if it's true—but the story is that my father's grandfather was like the right-hand-man to the Sultan in Turkey. And he was involved in diamonds and gold and all that, and he was on a ship that was sinking, and he had these gold bricks that he put around his waist and he didn't take them off, and he. . . . I mean, that kind of greed. . . .

BC: It sounds like a parable.

LA: Yeah, that's what I was going to say, that kind of greed, you know, and lust. It's a story of. . . .

BC: [laughter] That would be a fascinating book.

LA: I think so. Plus the other thing is that my mother grew up from a very upper middle class, very bourgeois family in Tunisia. Her grandmother. . . . Her mother was a singer. All the women in her family were artists, of one way or another, but very restricted Jewish family, really. And she [LA's mother—BC] really broke out of that. You know, first of all, to put on a man's name at the age of twenty, have her play produced in Paris, all that thing. So just in terms of historically, the story of a woman in the world and with her life. . . .

BC: Is that a model for you?

LA: Is it a model for me? Umm, a difficult model. Because there's a lot of, a lot of things. . . . I mean, I grew up in the fifties, where, you know, the model of the fifties was. . . .

BC: The stay-at-home model.

LA: Yeah, right. Yeah, you know, the mom and the dad and the. . . . There was a TV special, Doctor. . . .

BC: But now when you look back at it, do you feel that you actually had a special role model?

LA: Yeah. Very much so.

BC: Yeah.

LA: But . . . Yeah.

BC: _____ be more admiring of what she did, at [the, this] point.

LA: Yes. Yeah. For sure.

BC: But growing up, it was difficult.

LA: Growing up was difficult. I wanted Mommy at home to bake cookies, and have a daddy at home, and that kind of thing. [laughs]

BC: Yeah. Did you know your father at all?

LA: Well, I knew of him because she was constantly talking about him daily. She never had [another] relationship the entire I was growing up. . . .

BC: You mean this was her only marriage?

LA: No, she had married before. But I think in terms of real love, that was like the big love of her life. And when they split up, I think she just was really completely torn apart by it. And she never really recovered, and that's why the model is not. . . . You know, she didn't continue to make her life extraordinary. She had an extraordinary life, and then that happened and she couldn't quite get out of it—although she's still kicking around.

BC: Is she still alive?

LA: She's eighty years old and doing amazing things.

BC: Oh. Is she living in Paris?

LA: She's going to be. She's been living between Tunisia, here, and Switzerland, actually, and now she's going back to Paris.

BC: Why did they separate?

LA: [laughs] Very long involved story. And again, it had to with political reasons, and. . . . He was involved in some, she felt some. . . . He was very wealthy and was getting more and more wealth during the war. And she felt that the money came from very dirty, dirty things.

BC: Oh, then that was particularly conflicting, at that time. Was it through Germany?

LA: [nods]

BC: So that was a major conflict there.

LA: Yeah, yeah. Again, I don't know how much of it is true, and if I ever write the book, I don't know, unless I get some real sources, I may have to do it as a fiction, I don't know. But what I hear could be great novel, but so that she just couldn't go along with that.

BC: So it was really her leaving him because of political conflicts.

LA: Yeah.

BC: Yet it tore her apart emotionally.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: That's very sad.

LA: Yeah, that's right.

BC: And did he remarry?

LA: He never. . . . [chuckles] He had never divorced [his first wife—BC], so he was. . . .

BC: Oh!

LA: Yeah. [laughter]

BC: So they really weren't married.

LA: Right, right. Right, that's what I mean, the story's very complex. But his wife died a year and a half later. And then he remarried, and he had daughter. And. . . .

BC: Uh huh. But you had no contact with him?

LA: No contact. Except, like I said. . . . My mother was going to Paris all the time.

BC: So how did you imagine him?

LA: Well, from her descriptions I really imagined him as this monster. You know, hated someone [who] simply abandoned [us]. It was too bad in a way. She painted this really kind of picture of abandonment. But I met him. . . .

BC: Oh, you did meet him?

LA: Yeah, twice. Once when I was five, which I was really too young to make my kind of decisions on that. And then once when I was nineteen, and when nineteen, you know, I mean, he was this very elegant, soft-spoken, very aesthetic kind of . . . not really artist, but I mean he did design their jewelry, and I wanted to spend time with him, but I didn't, and he died a few months later. So, I think, a lot of my art—initially, not now, but initially—came from a lot of imagining and wanting to create a presence. . . .

BC: . . . that wasn't there.

LA: . . . yeah, of an absence.

BC: Well, that kind of situation seems to be something that would really stimulate fantasy and imagination. . . .

LA: Completely, completely.

BC: . . . as a child, trying to imagine what this father was like, and trying to put all these stories together. But you could pretty much design your world.

LA: That's right. You could do anything. That's right. And on top of that, because it was very difficult for her [LA's mother—BC], all of that, she felt it was better if I wasn't living with her, so she put me in this convent. It wasn't that far from the house, but still I was not living with her. So on top of that, I was like not even with her. I was completely with the nuns.

BC: Right.

LA: In Carthage, which. . . . I mean, talk about fantasy.

BC: [laughing] Here you were Sephardic. . . .

LA: Sephardic.

BC: . . . in a convent in a Muslim country.

LA: Exactly. And in this great historical, beautiful setting—all the myths of Queen Dido. I don't know if you know much about Carthage, but this, how she [Queen Dido—BC] got to. . . . I forgot exactly all the details, but someone said, "Okay, you can have—you know, it was a war—and you can have the land if it's no bigger than the height of a cow." So what she did, she transformed the height of a cow in string, right?

BC: Oh!

LA: And then she went around the whole perimeter, and got this huge region, which became one of the seats of the Roman Empire.

BC: Oh.

LA: You know, there's all that, and I used to play among the Roman ruins. And there was a coliseum there, and I remember I would look for the blood where the Christians had been thrown to the lions.

BC: Oh. So there was this real sense of being connected to a history and. . . .

LA: Definitely connected to the history, connected to the earth. The convent was on a hill overlooking all these ruins from the Roman times of Carthage, and the rocks and the pigments. . . . It's no surprise I do what I do because it was right there, like this incredible, rich. . . .

BC: Right, the idea of the red blood on the land.

LA: Yeah, and the rich, rich earth. And being raised as if I were a Catholic, so I went through the rituals. . . .

BC: Catechism. . . .

LA: Oh, the whole thing. Chapel three or four times a day, confession. . . .

BC: Really?

LA: At three! I started at three, I would, you know. . . .

BC: [laughing] What could you possibly confess at three?

LA: I know! Looking back, I'm going Catholicism is, you know. . . .

BC: So, well, how did it affect your identity?

LA: Well, I thought I was Catholic.

BC: And your mother didn't. . . .

LA: She didn't really say anything, but then I remember once I was home during a weekend, and I was on my way to church, and I said, "Bye, Mom. I'm going to church." And she said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm going to church." She said, "Well," she says, "You don't need to go to church." I said, "What do you mean?" Said, "Well, you know, Jesus Christ doesn't exist." No, I said, "What do you mean? It's a mortal sin if I don't go to church." I was like ten years old. And she said, "Jesus Christ doesn't exist." At which point—I think that was my first crisis of belief or whatever you want to call it—I was just shocked. Because I was completely indoctrinated.

I mean, can you imagine, at three years old, there was this very good looking priest. I remember his name; I remember what he looked like. He had a wooden leg and white robe, and he would. . . . I don't know what I would report to him. [laughter]

BC: Ohh. Well, he almost became a substitute father.

LA: Probably, probably, that's true.

BC: Now why did your mother take so long to tell you that Christ didn't exist?

LA: She wasn't that religious, so it wasn't that. . . . We did celebrate all the Jewish holidays, with her father.

BC: You did.

LA: Her father was a famous surgeon. He had his own hospital in the city of Tunis. And so all the holidays we would have. . . . But I never thought of it a religion; it was just kind of a family. . . . BC: Festival.

LA: Yeah, it was a family get-together.

BC: So you were close with her family.

LA: Very, yeah. [But—Ed.] completely alienated from my father's family. So in terms of seeing him or what did I think of him, she was in contact with him legally, because she was trying to get stuff to him.

BC: Did he support?

LA: No.

BC: No support?

LA: None at all. And that's why she. . . . I mean, that was a lot of the. . . . It was like a complete, complete cut of support. And she. . . . You know, he was raised in Turkey, where the woman's nothing. And she came from that kind of background anyway. And here she was this very independent creature but she was stuck with two kids, and there was a lot. . . .

BC: Right. Well, how did she make. . . . Did she make her living as a writer, or. . . .

LA: No. By then she taught. She did some teaching, and we lived minimally. I mean, we had a beautiful house on the beach. She had inherited that from her mother. And there wasn't a lot of needs. So we were able to live minimally and get by. In fact, it took her eight years to come back to the United States—to just get enough money to bring us. And then she immigrated back with us, and she really always wanted to come back here. So it's quite a . . .

BC: Oh! Well, so her family did provide you some sense of stability and. . .

LA: Oh, and they helped her too.

BC: And you were close with your grandparents.

LA: Yeah. Her mother had died by then, but—I never met her mother—but her father was the head of household, and she had sisters and brothers, and they were married and had children. So we were definitely, [sort of] family.

BC: And you weren't bored out there isolated or. . .

LA: No.

BC: . . . just completely separated, other than this feeling of. . .

LA: No, no.

BC: . . . not living with your mother.

LA: Not living with her but there was the family, absolutely, yeah. And then having to move! I'll never forget that.

BC: Moving from where?

LA: From Tunisia to the United States. That was shocking.

BC: Now when did you move?

LA: In 1957. And I didn't speak English, you know.

BC: You speak it so well! Without a hint of accent.

LA: Yeah. At that time, it was. . . Kids, you know, it's hard for them to move, to move a lot, and this was. . . The completely different culture, different food, different everything, and all of a sudden in this huge country, and. . .

BC: Was it scary?

LA: Uh. . .

BC: Or exciting?

LA: It was exciting. It was exciting. But it took me a while to get adjusted to the little things, like food and the way people relate. Completely different.

BC: In what way?

LA: It's really hard to explain. It's more English than Mediterranean.

BC: More reserved. . . .

LA: More reserved.

BC: Yeah.

LA: And I lived in a small town, right.

BC: Knew everybody.

LA: Where you knew everybody, the grocery, all these people, so it was like that kind of easy-going. . . . Nobody was a workaholic, so it was like a very much easier kind of very—what would you call it?—it was very colorful life. I mean, there was music all the time. The Sephardic Jews especially from the Mediterranean are, not so much now, at that time it was all about pleasure and living and just having a wonderful life, a lifestyle. In the United States it was about work, the Protestant ethic, and so just those two things was like. . . .

BC: Well, why did you emigrate here?

LA: My mother thought that it was [an] opportunity for us. And the fact that she liked the United States.

BC: So, being born here, you were a U.S. citizen.

LA: Yeah. I had a choice. I could have been. . . . I was half French and half American. But because I was born here, I had U.S. citizenship, so I just gave up the French citizenship.

BC: So you speak French fluently and. . . .

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: . . . what would they speak in Tunisia?

LA: They spoke French at that time, as a French colony. But they also spoke Arabic, and I never learned it and now, it's like I could kick myself.

BC: But you still speak French?

LA: Oh, yeah. But I don't speak with anybody, so it's getting. . . .

BC: A little rusty? [laughing]

LA: Yeah.

BC: How long did it take you to learn English?

LA: Well, I understood [it] before I could speak. So I went to school immediately. I remember going to sixth grade, I guess it was, and I got. . . .

BC: Where was that?

LA: In Arizona, in Scottsdale. That's where I met Frank Lloyd Wright, early on.

BC: Okay, when he was doing the. . . .

LA: Taliesen West. And I remember going to the classroom and getting a hundred percent on this spelling test, and I didn't even know English, so it was like. . . . [laughter] I had certain, a good ear. It took me, to really speak, about a year. That wasn't a problem so much. It was just my mother had to struggle a lot to really just. . . . Because she gave up the writing.

BC: So was she still teaching, is that what she was supporting. . . .

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: Why Scottsdale?

LA: Scottsdale because she only had one contact in the United States, and he was an inventor from Chicago, he and his wife [_____—Ed.], and they had a summer place in Scottsdale, and they were friendly with Frank Lloyd Wright, because of the Chicago connection. But we didn't stay there long. We stayed there about six months. Then she came back here. First we went to Berkeley, which I loved. And she didn't like it. So we came back to Santa Monica, where she had lived, and. . . .

BC: Well, the colors are sort of similar. . . .

LA: Very.

BC: . . . to the Mediterranean.

LA: Oh, very! Malibu is like, you know, _____.

BC: So do you consider this home?

LA: Oh, yeah. Now. Yeah. It took me a while; it took me a long, long time. But interestingly enough, my brother [_____—Ed.] went back, and my mother went back, but. . . .

BC: To Paris or Tunisia?

LA: To France and Tunisia. But I stayed. And my brother lived in Europe for fifteen years. Now he's here, but it took him. . . .

BC: Now is your brother younger than you?

LA: He's older.

BC: Older than you.

LA: Older.

BC: Right, okay. What is his name?

LA: Fred [Albuquerque??—Ed.].

BC: Fred.

LA: Yeah. [laughter]

BC: What does he do?

LA: Interestingly enough, he was born the day that her play opened, so I think maybe that's why she did that [named him Fred, like her nom de plume—BC]. He's in real estate.

BC: And now he's here?

LA: Yeah, Laguna.

BC: Oh! Oh, nice!

LA: Laguna Beach, yeah.

BC: And are you close?

LA: Yeah. We're really close. I mean, we were always really tight.

BC: When you moved originally to Tunisia, where did he go if you were living at the convent?

LA: He stayed home. She sent him to a Jesuit school at first, and he hated it. I guess he could express himself a lot more—I was kind of the obedient child—and so he stayed home.

BC: Well, was there resentment there for you?

LA: For me? From me? May. . . .

BC: Yeah. [That], or jealousy?

LA: Completely unconscious. Probably, but really unconscious, and I was not aware of it. I mean, I wasn't aware that I had a choice. Actually, it was better for me, I think, to have had Jesuit education.

BC: Gave you a chance to be more independent?

LA: Yeah.

BC: To have some structure?

LA: My whole life, I think, was set up, that gave me a tremendous independence. I mean, in way, "You know, Lita, you're very lucky not to have had this father [image who] gave you a certain direction in life, because now you don't have anything. . . . You can do anything you want." Which is true. A good way of looking at it is that I didn't have that kind of an input.

BC: I also had an unconventional childhood, and I think I think very differently from other women of my generation.

LA: What was it like?

BC: Well, the women were very strong, and all had their own businesses and. . . .

LA: That's great.

BC: . . . it was a very creative family, and I was involved with my father's dbusiness, and my uncle

was a psychologist in creativity. . . .

LA: Oh, that's wonderful. That's wonderful!

BC: . . . and I was involved with what he did. And there was never this idea, "Oh, you're a woman. You shouldn't be involved with this." You know, so it was completely different.

LA: Right.

BC: And this was in the fifties, when women were supposed to stay home.

LA: Yeah, that's right.

BC: And so I had different role models.

LA: Yeah. With me, like you said, it was complete emptiness, so I could fill it with anything. And I think he [LA's father—BC] would have the tendency, probably, to have said a woman has to stay home. I know that was his attitude. So I did pick some of that up just because of the culture. So it gave a tremendous amount of independence. It's really exciting. Now I love it.

BC: Now it's great! [laughing]

LA: I really love it.

BC: Now _____ it's fortunate for you.

LA: Oh, yeah.

BC: Did you make a lot of friends easily in Tunisia at the school, at the convent?

LA: Yeah. Yeah, I was sort of a little ringleader. And in fact I got in trouble a lot. I liked being the leader; I was kind of bossy. Because at home I was the opposite. At home I was the little sister, and I think I was the littlest kid of the neighborhood. And so I was sort of like a crybaby, but there. . . .
[laughs]

BC: You were the boss.

LA: Right. I mean, that's part of why I liked it.

BC: Did you have a good relationship with the nuns?

LA: That is hard!

BC: Were they as scary to a young child?

LA: No, it wasn't that great. Now, looking back, they were medieval. They didn't know anything about love.

BC: [laughs]

LA: But I mean no maternal. . . . Realizing a little three-year-old, who's living with them, and if you cried, they'd say, "You better shut up and dry your tears. You'll need them when you grow up." You know, that real, that kind of view.

BC: Well, most mothers say that anyway. [laughs]

LA: Well, that's true. [laughter]

BC: Were they aware that you were Jewish at the convent?

LA: I don't know. I don't know. I never. . . . I don't. . . .

BC: They didn't treat you differently.

LA: No, I didn't think that. But I remember some of them, particular ones. I used to take piano lessons from this very fat, fat nun who had a mustache. It was great. I mean, I can do funny drawings, cartoon drawings of all that, and then there was. . . . I remember all of them. . . . I wasn't attached to any parti[cular]. . . . There was a real pretty one, I remember. There were just all these different. . . . I didn't attach myself; they didn't let you quite do that. But it was a community. It was a nice community.

BC: And a sense of women being in charge again, too, running things.

LA: That's right, that's right. That's right! I hadn't thought about that.

BC: That women can be leaders and administrators was also a different concept than. . . .

LA: That's true. Yeah, [I'm, and] living with my mother, who is alone, who ran pretty much what she did, and then the nuns. That's true. I never thought about that. And they also took on like the. . . . At that time, there was a king of Tunisia. This was in the early fifties. And during the day—they weren't sleepover—but during the day the children of the king, who was Arab, went to school. It was the best school, so that's why they had a lot of different religions there. I remember having to have. . . . [What] was it? Oh, I remember the prejudice there was. We had some English girls, American girls, and the French girls attacked some of the English girls for having burnt Joan of Arc.

BC: Oh, no! [laughs] That's an old grudge there.

LA: It was like that. It was really a very French. . . .

BC: French, yeah. That's interesting.

LA: So it was pretty international. It was very, now that I think about it, there was. . . . My best friend was actually English. And then there were a lot of French girls from France. I think there were. . . . There were some from Tunisia, just a mixed [bag], and then some of the Arabs. So it was quite international. And then when my. . . . I did go to Paris when I was five, and I lived there for two years. And there I was in an all-boys boarding school. [laughter]

BC: Now, that's interesting!

LA: That was really interesting.

Tape 1, side B

LA: You should cut me off, by the way, when we have, if it gets into. . . .

BC: Oh. No, no, these were just questions if we ran out of things to say.

LA: Yeah. _____ going into, you know, funny details.

BC: Well, this is fascinating, this is great. So, how did you end up in an all-boys boarding school?

LA: Well, again, my mother was looking for a place that was convenient while she was doing. . . . And there was a Jesuit school, and she wanted me together with my brother, and they accepted me. And it was one of the best schools, actually. But I was the only girl boarder. I think there were girls during the day; I'm not sure. I'm not sure. Oh, the pranks they did.

BC: [laughs] They were aware of the fact that you were a girl.

LA: Oh, yep. Very. . . . Now this was completely different than the convent. I mean, this was very French, had amazing meals, like [sounds like: shoo-coot] and wine.

BC: And this was in Paris in some. . . .

LA: In Paris, yeah.

BC: What was the name of the school?

LA: L'Ecole Pascal. In fact, do you know who [Claude, Claire] [deLoff, Deloef] is?

BC: [shakes head no?]

LA: [Claude, Claire] [deLoff, Deloef] was. . . . I think she moved back to France. Her mother was a big collector, and she comes from Belgium and has gunpowder kind of wealth, and was a dealer for a while in France for Picassos and that kind of. . . . Anyway, I met her here, and her daughter wrote about the art scene here in LA for [Paris, Paris].

BC: Ohh.

LA: This is way before your time, actually. Anyway, her husband went to the same school.

BC: At the same time?

LA: Yeah, at the same time, yeah.

BC: So what was that experience like?

LA: Well, I loved Paris. I loved Paris. And it was intellectual, and there was theater there, and I remember I wanted to stay and become part of the children's theater, and had I begged more, maybe I, who knows. And my father was there. I only saw him a few times, but it was. . . . I didn't live with him, obviously, but I saw him. And I liked it a lot. It was tough, with all the pranks. I mean, they really. . . .

BC: Well, like what?

LA: All kinds of things. [laughs]

BC: Give me an example.

LA: You can imagine what they would do to a little five-year-old girl, all these big boys. Oh, common things like pigtails down the inkwell.

BC: Oh, really?

LA: Yeah. But other things too, like tie me up and. . . [gestures?] [laughs—suggestively?]

BC: Oh, is that what. . . . But it was a fun experience all told?

LA: Yeah. It was fun.

BC: How did you respond to going from an all-girl to an all-boy. . . . I take it you got along really well with the boys. Other than the pranks.

LA: The pranks were tough.

BC: And you weren't intimidated.

LA: It was tough.

BC: Did you become stronger towards them. . . .

LA: I think I did.

BC: . . . or become a little girl?

LA: Boy! I don't know if I remember. But I do remember that from that time on I skipped a grade, so something happened there.

BC: You're becoming more interested in school work.

LA: Yeah. Something happened but I don't remember. . . . I mean, I don't know if I cried home what they're doing to me. I don't remember. . . . Some of them were kind of tough to take, but my brother was there, but he didn't participate in the pranks. He didn't know they were happening.

BC: Oh.

LA: They would do things like, you know, the boy [who ____ian], you know, ____ boys do.

BC: Yeah. But were you interested in art when you were in Tunisia or. . . .

LA: No.

BC: . . . did it start in Paris?

LA: No. Actually, what was really interesting is that when I was—at that time, which was only five—I was interested in the theater. And I was really serious. I really wanted to study theater.

BC: At five, really?

LA: Very serious.

BC: Your mother obviously had taken you a lot to the theater.

LA: Yeah, she would take me to the plays. And also in Tunisia she would take me. And I was also interested in dance. And that's really what I wanted to do. There was absolutely. . . . I was not surrounded by art of. . . .

BC: She didn't take you to the Louvre?

LA: No, my mother was never a visual person. In Tunisia there was no art around me. Strangely enough, her family—even though she was a writer and her mother was a singer—was the typical bourgeois where art is like. . . . They had this wonderful sculpture I remember; it was like thrown in a closet, right. They just had no awareness. They wanted to, it was more like they wanted to be. . . . I guess it's sort of like nouveau riche, I guess, in a way. They wanted to be part of the kind of social scene, but art was not. . . . [You'd think]. . . . So I wasn't around it, certainly not at all in Tunisia. France, no. I don't remember her taking me to museums. So it was mainly theater and dance, and I came back and I really wanted to take dance lessons. But it didn't happen. And the art really came out here.

BC: Really? How?

LA: It first started coming out when I was thirteen, and I lived in Malibu. And. . . . Actually I got sick. I think I broke a hand, and I had something where I was sick all summer. And so I just started doing a lot of drawing. And I lived in this incredible ranch on the sea. In fact, strangely enough, I don't live that far from it now. I just moved two months ago. [said with amusement] I moved back in that area. Not on [the sea]; I live in the hills, but then it was right next to Matt Dillon, remember the guy?

BC: Uh huh.

LA: He was my idol. He was like six foot seven, and I used to take care of his cats. He had a ranch there too. But we lived on this ranch, and it was wild ocean. I mean, it's north of [Trancas, Trankus], you know, between Trancas and Leo Carillo Beach, I don't know if you know. Just kind of the Pacific and wild and sea. Seals used to be washed up on the shore. And there were horses and. . . . So there was a lot of nature and a lot of beauty. And I just started drawing. Now that was then. And then it really came out when I was nineteen, when I left home. When I no longer lived with my mother, I went to visit the site of my father's family in Spain, and in Portugal.

BC: Where was that?

LA: Actually, the family really came from Portugal, from Lisbon. So I went to Lisbon and. . . . There's two branches to the family. There's a Portuguese branch and a Spanish branch. But it was the first time I really was away from home. And I just burst with painting and drawing, which was really interesting.

BC: And you were completely untrained?

LA: Completely untrained. It looked like two-year-old painting, at that time. And then. . . .

BC: Was it figurative or abstract. . . .

LA: Figurative, kind of expressionistic. And abstract. Both. The ideas I had were more abstract but _____.

BC: What had you seen that might have triggered that type of work?

LA: I think it was just. . . . Oh! Okay, well, this was already. . . . Thirteen, I was, this was 1965, right. I'd already seen the [Marcel—Ed.] Duchamp show? I'd seen. . . . Now when did I see all that stuff?

BC: '63 is when the Duchamp show was.

LA: Right, '63, I was. . . . I saw. . . .

BC: Did you attend a lot of the shows that were at Pasadena?

LA: Yeah! I did! I saw all those shows.

BC: So you saw the. . . . There was a Jasper Johns. . . .

LA: There was a Johns, I remember the Johns show.

BC: Did you see the Pop Art show in '62?

LA: Yeah.

BC: Which is the first Pop show ever.

LA: [May be. Maybe.] I think I did.

BC: The museum show.

LA: Yeah. I wonder who brought me there?

BC: There was the _____, and there's [Kurt] Schwitters, whose. . . .

LA: Possibly. Oh man, I have to. . . . You won't believe it. I think I do know. I get it; I know what it is. My brother used to work for Gifford Phillips.

BC: Oh, you're kidding! Gifford's a good friend of mine! [laughter]

LA: That's what it is. Oh, my gosh! _____ him _____ _____? Oh, God! I had no idea of the connection.

BC: They were living on Mesa [in Santa Monica—BC].

LA: He was living on Mesa, and he had an office on Westwood Boulevard.

BC: Right.

LA: And my brother was like an err[and]. . . .

BC: And he was on the board of Pasadena.

LA: I guess so, yeah. And my brother was about seventeen at the time, or something.

BC: Uh huh, what was he doing for Gifford?

LA: Oh, I don't know. Errand boy, I don't know, I really don't know. He was. . . .

BC: Oh, that's wonderful.

LA: Yeah. And I remember we stayed at his house in Palm Springs. And I went, "All the art books!" And we were going through all the art books. Oh, yeah, yeah. So wait, wait. Let me go back a little bit.

BC: And they had a wonderful collection too.

LA: They did. They had a great collection. You know, I never realized that that's probably. . . .

BC: That's [wonderful]. Does Gifford know that? I just talked with him.

LA: I should tell him. Because when I run into him, I remind him that I. . . .

BC: Oh, he'd be thrilled to know that.

LA: I honestly think. . . . Because, okay, let me just do it. Another interesting thing. When I was thirteen in Malibu, I drew a lot. Thirteen, I was in junior high at, in Santa Monica. . . .

BC: At. . . .

LA: Lincoln. And I took drawing classes. And I did some lemons, and the woman said, "These don't look like lemon." And it turned me off so much, I decided to quit all art. So whenever I had an elective I would take theater or dance or music. High school? I went to Santa Monica High School, and they have a very good art department. I was there at the same time as Guy Dill, Maria Nordman, and. . . .

BC: Oh really! [laughs] Did you know them when you. . . .

LA: I knew them, we were. . . . Laddie [John Dill—Ed.] was a very good friend of my brother's. I didn't know them as artists. I don't think they were artists then, but I think they. . . . Art, I mean, I hated art. I remember actually hating art. That's right, I really did. It just completely turned me off. I never drew again. Just one comment: It's amazing how sensitive one can get, but. . . . And then, I guess, yeah, Fred worked for Gifford, and I saw the collection, and I went to all the shows, and then in '63 I graduated from high school, and I started working for a French bookstore that had a lot of posters of French Impressionists. Believe it or not, I didn't even know. . . .

BC: The Impressionists.

LA: . . . and I was like seventeen, and I didn't even know that stuff. And I started training myself. I started, whenever there was nothing to do [chuckling], I would look at the cards, memorize the names, and, you know. . . .

BC: Oh, with flash cards. [laughs]

LA: Yeah. _____ and doing that. And from then on I found that all my friends were artists, and all I read were art books, and I was a literature major. And finally, in sixty. . . . 'Five is when I started painting. But it's sixty. . . . I guess, '65, '66, I switched to art history.

BC: And where did you go with that?

LA: UCLA. But the connection was really through Gifford. That is really interesting.

BC: That is wonderful. What a lovely story.

LA: It was great.

BC: Oh, and I can understand how he would make you forget those first bad feelings. Because he's such a true collector and really involved with the avant garde and. . . .

LA: That's right.

BC: . . . a fine person.

LA: So, I saw all the shows in Pasadena, at UCLA. . . .

BC: At LACMA [Los Angeles County Museum of Art—Ed.], LA County.

LA: And at LACMA, right. There was also another. . . . My brother at that time was also going with an older [woman], who was very involved in the opera and in the arts, and I think maybe through her too, although I'm not sure how direct that was. But I think that was part of it. So my brother, you know, it stuck, through my brother, which is interesting.

BC: So what was some of the art that you saw at that time that was influencing you? You say abstract. . . .

LA: Well, at that time. . . . Okay, at that time I didn't even think of myself as an artist. I was just expressing myself that way.

BC: But your work was looking like something that already existed.

LA: Yes, it was more. . . . Well, of course I knew Picasso and the Surrealists. I think Johns was a big influence. I mean, the Duchamp show of Pasadena, although my work didn't have anything to do with Duchamp, but. . . .

BC: But later it does.

LA: Yeah, yeah, definitely those Matisse, when they had the big show at UCLA—there was a big show there. That's pretty much what I remember. Then in '65. . . . This is fascinating; I never really delved into this material. In '65, when I went to Europe, then I went in the Prado, and to all the museums.

BC: And so that's when it all opened up for you.

LA: Then it really, really opened. The Prado just. . . . [slaps hand on desk] But I don't know, you know, I knew people like Goya. I guess I was looking at a lot of art books, and it probably started with Gifford.

BC: That's nice.

LA: Before that I really wanted to be a poet. And I'd write a lot, and I don't think I had access to art.

BC: So did this open a new world for you? Once you started doing it, did you feel that this is what you were supposed to be doing?

LA: Well. . . . No. No, no, because you have to understand that I came from. . . . I mean, there's a lot of positive things, but the negative things is all this difficult childhood, and then moving away from one culture to another and thinking that. . . . I was also brought up as a French little girl in the fifties where America was like the thing. And thinking I couldn't have "the thing," right? And being an American was the most free thing you can be. And being an American and an artist was as free as you can be. And I didn't even think that was possible for me, so it wasn't even—you know?—that I could possibly do that, so I went to art history, and then, when I finally looked around me, and I saw

all my friends were artists and all I read were art books, I still didn't have the guts to think that I could make art.

BC: It's intimidating.

LA: I was, it was intimidating. So I went to art history. But I had a boyfriend who was an artist, who was actually a photographer, but he was a real artist at heart. He was raised. . . . His father was quite a famous astronomer, from Holland. And so he was raised in a very kind of cultural setting. And he was also a musician. And he pushed me. Because he saw my paintings. And he just. . . . You know, to do them. . . .

BC: What was his name?

LA: Paul [Koyper]. No, you wouldn't know him. But he started the whole idea of having a graduate program in photography at UCLA.

BC: Oh, wonderful.

LA: Yeah, because it wasn't there at the time, and he really did a lot of, wanting to do a lot of work. And through him I met a lot of filmmakers. All his friends were filmmakers. And we would get together, and we would go up [to] the Big Sur constantly. He was a student of Ansel Adams, and he would shoot photographs and I would paint. And he was very, very encouraging, and I think he taught me a lot of things. He brought me a lot of books. This was around, um, sixty, after the trip to Europe.

BC: Okay, I have it somewhere in the chronology.

LA: Yeah, after Europe. And so Europe, yeah, I mean. . . . Well, you asked me, my very first thing was the impressions of being alone. I went to London, and I remember. . . . Oh! And I went to the Tate. I had a friend who was an artist, when I was thirteen. I had an English girlfriend who was an artist from day one. And I think maybe through her I knew about Francis Bacon, early, early on.

BC: Really, that's interesting.

LA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

BC: Like when you were thirteen you knew about Francis Bacon?

LA: Yeah, I think so. _____ I was thinking about.

BC: That's interesting.

LA: Because then she went to RADA, the Royal Academy. . . . I mean, not RADA, but [_____—Ed.]. . . . That's right. And I wanted to go. . . . See I was also interested in acting, so I wanted to go to the drama school in England.

BC: Where was this?

LA: In England, in London. And I investigated it. But I met her. I was nineteen. I met her in England, and she took me to the Tate. [Joseph Mallord William—Ed.] Turner was like number one for me at the time.

BC: Um hmm. Those, the Turners look great there.

LA: Oh. . . .

BC: At the old installation.

LA: Oh. Yeah, I haven't been to see the new one. So there was. . . . She probably was. . . .

BC: What was her name?

LA: Caroline. . . . Oh, I'd love to see her again. Caroline. . . . I don't remember her last name [_____—Ed.]. Caroline someone. She was good friends with Maryanne Faithful.

BC: Oh, really? So you met up with her again when you were in the. . . .

LA: I met up with her again, but I think she was such an artist back when she was young, when at thirteen we lived on the beach together.

BC: Did she become an _____ artist eventually?

LA: Yeah. I've lost track with her, since '65, but she was at school, she was studying art.

BC: Well, what about the fact that your mother being alone and having to make her own career and be a provider, did you have the sense that you were going to have to have some kind of job that you could be self-sufficient in. . . .

LA: Well, you know, that's. . . .

BC: . . . or any fear about survival?

LA: Oh, yeah. Now that's a really big issue, and it's a continuing issue with me now. What was interesting, even though she was doing that, she kept saying, "One day you're going to inherit millions," because my father was very wealthy. And in fact he's putting away a carat of diamond a year for you, so by the time you're twenty-one years old, you're going to have 21 carats of diamonds, and. . . .

BC: [laughs]

LA: And so it was this very, you know, we lived. . . .

BC: The treasure trove. . . .

LA: Completely. We lived like she couldn't really afford to even, at one point she couldn't afford electricity. This was in Tunisia. And I remember I had to study by candlelight. And I remember going on. . . . This is when I was no longer a boarder, and I went to school and I had wax in my hands. And somebody said, "What's that?" And I remember being embarrassed, because I realized we didn't have the money for electricity. On one hand we lived like paupers, but. . . . Not, no, we didn't live like paupers. We didn't, she taught paupers, and the difference. . . . I remember reading their stories, what they ate for breakfast and stuff [like that]. No, we didn't. But, I mean, she came from a wealthy family also, so I have that background. It was definitely a background of wealth, but we didn't have it. You know, that kind of thing. But thinking that, to expect it. And then the reason she didn't keep going. . . . I mean, she could have been a brilliant writer or a successful diamond dealer, or whatever she chose to do. Because she kept thinking that she was going to get it from my father.

BC: Oh. Oh, that's sad!

LA: You know, that's the sad part. That's the sad part.

BC: Did you get it, or were you ultimately disappointed?

LA: I remember my brother went to Europe before I did. I went in '65 and he went in '64, and he came back and he said, "You know, Lita, it's not going to happen the way you think." He says, "You know, this, I think, what mother keeps saying isn't really happening." So he told me that back then. And then, no, it was a long process, a long process with me, of still. . . . I mean, I was raised so much with that kind of Cinderella complex.

BC: That expectation.

LA: Completely. And that's, if I have anything the way I'm raising my children—I have two girls—is that, well, first of all they have a model of somebody who's definitely completely taken care of herself, and that kind of thing. But also verbally, you know [chuckling]. . . .

BC: Verbal reinforcement. There is no Prince Charming. [laughing]

LA: They're probably going to have complete damages the other way, who knows. But. . . .

BC: So was it devastating when you realized that there wasn't this trove?

LA: No, it didn't devastate me. I think, again, because I lived in such fantasy for so long. Then what happened is that I got married. I actually supported myself from the age of about. . . . Well, I got pocket money from fourteen, but from the time I left I left high school, I supported myself completely, not with the thing of "I need to make my way." It wasn't that. It was just. . . . I didn't have a choice, but even then I didn't even think that I didn't have a choice. So I did support myself completely. And I had jobs like working in bookstores—I was very bookish in a way—working in bookstores, being a secretary, a lot of bookstores. A bibliographer/researcher at the library. In a design office. Then I got into the arts more, but. . . . What was I going to say? I was going to say something about that.

BC: But there was never this expectation that someday a man would come along and take care of you?

LA: Yeah. Completely. Completely, completely. So then. . . .

BC: You did have that expectation.

LA: Completely! I mean, just recently I'm finally getting that that's not going to happen! [laughs] Even recently I'm getting _____, yeah.

BC: You just remarried.

LA: Even if I just remarried, now I'm really getting it. Now I'm realizing. . . . And it's so liberating. Ten years ago is when I really got it, but now I'm still getting it again, because I thought, "Oh yeah, I just got married and I thought that was. . . ." No, that's not, it's just not my path, which is great, because the [unfling, unflame], that's true liberation, completely.

BC: Um hmm.

LA: But I had to go the hard way.

BC: I think but also knowing that you can survive, that you aren't dependent on anybody.

LA: I know. And I think that was instilled in me.

BC: Um hmm, that no matter what you will survive?

LA: No, I think. . . . Well, I didn't even know this. Someone brought that up to me. She said that, "probably around the time you were eight, you made a pact with yourself that you weren't going to do what your mother did," you know, what, I mean, it won't. . . . You know, thinking it was going to happen. And that you were going to be independent and you were going to take care of yourself, but I was not aware of that—until this person said that to me. I wasn't even aware of it. I kept wanting the man to support me, so when I was twenty-five I got married. And then [rueful chuckle], of course, as, you know, fulfilling my fantasies, he inherited a ton of money, right?

BC: Oh!

LA: And so, by that time I had started my career. But at that time. . . . What happened to me, as soon as I started showing, people wanted to buy my stuff, and [sotto voce:] like I didn't want to sell. And I wasn't very realistic. He didn't have the money yet, right, and he kept on pushing me to get jobs, and pushing me to do things, and I just wasn't getting it. But my career was already going by the time we got the money, but still we inherited all this money—he inherited all this money. And so it was right what I expected, right? So what happened is I really got into a very. . . . I mean, on one hand, it was wonderful. But it was very unreal. I wasn't very grounded. But it made me able to do all the ephemeral work that I did. I didn't have to make a living, and so I was able to do things that there were [beautiful].

BC: And that's interesting, so that would be the origin for the. . . .

LA: Yeah. I mean. . . . Well, that wasn't the only origin.

BC: But it made it possible.

LA: No, it wasn't because I had sold a lot of paintings, and so I was living off of that, but the, also knowing. . . . I kept thinking, "I don't have to [bend]." Four months into all that we got divorced.

BC: Oh. So how long did your marriage last?

LA: Well, it was a long marriage, but he didn't get the inheritance till the end of the marriage. It was twelve years, but he got it like two years before we separated. And we built a building, we did all these things. But I was really on a. . . . I mean, that question is a big thing in my life. And which is really interesting. And it was, I just wasn't very realistic. I didn't know, I just had no sense of it. And so when we got divorced. . . . The California law is inherited money is not community property, right? [laughs]

BC: You could move to Louisiana.

LA: Right! [laughs] Which was the worst and the best thing that could have happened to me. And because it took me about ten years—not quite ten, but about [eight].

BC: So it's always been as soon as you're about to get something, it disappears.

LA: Yes! Yes!

BC: The constant disappointment.

LA: Yes. Until recently. Yes. Knock on wood.

BC: [laughs]

LA: Yes, exactly, exactly. So, but I was reliving the past! It was like, as if you. . . . I remember thinking, “Oh, my god, this is like this mirror effect,” like “this is too much.” But what happened is. . . . And then I found love, met someone, and then I had two children—who couldn’t support himself.

So not only did I not have that [the inheritance—Ed.] but I had that [supporting the new partner—Ed.] and the children, and I was able to, through a lot of [rambling] about, but. . . . So I wish he had said, you know, I wish I had had that plum. But in a way it’s even better to have had that struggle, because I understand it so well. And now, I’d say the last two years, is when I’ve really, really worked—like everything you have to work at, I think—and really worked on that particular problem and made great strides in that. And I’ve finally . . . really getting it, you know. [laughter] It’s about time; it’s only a few decades. And it’s such a free feeling, because then you can really do what you want to do anyway.

BC: Um hmm, no more waiting.

LA: It’s no more waiting.

BC: There’s no more expectations.

LA: But it’s amazing. It’s a big part of my life, that whole, that thing.

BC: Well, one of the things that just occurred is, you know Roni Horn?

LA: Yeah.

BC: Her father was a [porn, pawn] broker.

LA: Oh, really.

BC: And her work deals a lot with gold.

LA: Oh, interesting. Ohh.

BC: She works with this idea of what gold looked like and understanding what a pound of gold was. And to her the gold had absolutely no meaning, because it was around her all the time, yet it was this beautiful material. And I’m wondering, with the idea of [your] father being the diamond merchant, whether your use of beautiful gold and the sort of lapis lazuli blue. . . .

LA: Yes!

BC: . . . whether that has some relationship?

LA: I’m sure. I did not think about it until this moment but he was. . . . One of the things they got into a fight, when my mother split up with him, he came home with these suitcases full of gold bricks.

BC: Oh!

LA: Right? I mean, real gold, you know. That’s interesting. Yes, I bet you it does, because, I mean, gold, the way I see it, why I use it is completely different. I mean, I use it really. . . . I totally believe that

whole notion of artists being the antennas of the race, that kind of. . . .

BC: Um hmm.

LA: And they're just, it's a very much, I work very intuitively. And it's so much about light and a spiritual kind of. . . . It's light, more than anything.

BC: Well, that is what attracts people to gold in the first place. . . .

LA: Yeah, exactly.

BC: . . . is the light and the color and. . . .

LA: Exactly.

BC: . . . the purity.

LA: Right, it's what comes out. But that's a very good point. I would not be surprised.

BC: You know, this, here is your treasure trove.

LA: I made my own. [laughs]

BC: Yes.

LA: There's my twenty-one carats. That's funny, that's funny.

Tape 2, side A

LA: [But] my father was the kind of man that when she wanted to invest money that she earned into—like there was property in Pacific Palisades back in the forties for like nine hundred dollars—he refused. He wouldn't let her.

BC: Oh, my.

LA: Right? I mean, it was her money; he wouldn't let her. So, you know, _____

BC: And she didn't protest.

LA: And she didn't do it. But coming from that kind of thing. . . . But she didn't resolve that, and I think that's been her, that's what's not, you know, why she wasn't able to. . . . I mean, she had a lot to offer. She was very talented and extremely intelligent, very different kind of intelligence. And so it's a big issue. I mean, I find it a big issue when I teach, that's never raised.

BC: What?

LA: How do you support yourself?

BC: Oh. I know one of the students [laughing] just spent a fortune in all the video equipment. And it was like, "How are you going to survive?"

LA: I know.

BC: [You, And you] have to do what you have to do!

LA: You do, you really do.

BC: It's very interesting. . . .

LA: Now what I did, what's interesting with me, is that I was making money with the paintings, and I guess. . . . But I always pulled back from commercial success, which I don't think was a positive thing, you know, I think. . . .

BC: Career wise, yeah.

LA: Exactly. I think I didn't realize that a career is a road to getting financial success, and financial success is freedom, you know? I didn't quite catch that.

BC: But at the time, in the seventies, when you were doing [site specific work]. . . . That was pretty much the thinking of most artists, so it's that. . . .

LA: Completely.

BC: . . . you subvert the gallery system.

LA: Exactly. And I really did.

BC: And you believed it.

LA: I mean, as soon as I started making money, I stopped. . . .

BC: Everybody else was making money. . . .

LA: Right. [laughing]

BC: . . . [off of it], [and] you believed it.

LA: I believed it, [I went up]. And then the reason I stopped doing those pieces, unfortunately, really I was like, I mean, I was going broke. In fact, that's one of the things for the divorce. My husband was going crazy. I mean, it was my money that I was spending; it was, I never used his. But it was like the thought that I was that out of touch, you know. I mean, it was like. . . .

BC: Well, why did that marriage. . . . Now your first husband's name is. . . .

LA: Steve Kahn.

BC: Stephen Kahn.

LA: He's a photographer.

BC: And why did that marriage dissolve?

LA: Why? Umm, couple of things. The change, actually, from the kind of life we led. We were both artists and we were both doing our thing, and then he inherited this money, and we all of a sudden built a house. I wasn't ready for that kind of shift.

BC: Was he?

LA: Yeah. Because he expected it, you know.

BC: Yeah.

LA: So it was a very different thing. I thought his values were too much into money, that kind of thing.

BC: Almost the same reason your parents separated.

LA: No, no.

BC: Almost a. . . . Not political reasons, but of money being too important.

LA: Yeah. [hesitant]

BC: Overriding other principles.

LA: But that wasn't the main reason. I think we just hit a real bump, and we could have maybe survived it, but just. . . .

BC: Being that you were both artists, was there competition between you?

LA: Yeah, see what happened is. . . .

BC: Whose career was going ahead faster?

LA: Mine. Mine was going ahead really, really fast, and it was right at the time when I did the piece at the Washington Monument and. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: Not the Hirshhorn show [_____]—Ed.]—by that time we had broken up—but the Washington Monument [_____]—Ed.]. And I was getting national attention on magazines, and also I was getting attention for this building that we built, right? But it was not from me; that was from his efforts and his money and all that, but it was Lita Albuquerque's studio not Steve Kahn's. In fact he became, you know, [really] Lita Albuquerque's wife—I mean, husband.

BC: Husband.

LA: And that had something to do with it: The fact that I was completely into my career. I remember at one point he said to me, "I didn't know I had an artist wife."

BC: Oh.

LA: And here he was an artist. And he pushed me and he helped me tremendously. He was a wonderful. . . . He had fantastic eye. He was kind of like Jeremy. Very intellectual. . . .

BC: Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe.

LA: Yeah. That kind of personality, very much alike in personality. The opposite of me, you know. Very intellectual. I learned. . . . I mean, I would look at a painting, and I hadn't had to think, I never thought about the painting. I mean, I had feelings about it and I could talk about it, and he would have to know about the painting before he could tell me what he thought about the painting. You

know, it was that kind of. . . . But I learned a tremendous amount. He had fantastic eye, and he encouraged me, so he was very helpful, tremendously helpful, with my career.

BC: Didn't his career go anywhere?

LA: No. He was a great and wonderful photographer. But he wanted, he had the problem of, he needed, he wanted a certain kind of life. At that time, I was like every other artist; I could live like any. . . . Art was more important to me than anything. I didn't care where I lived. I mean, we lived in a fantastic place in Malibu. You know Richard Hertz?

BC: Um hmm.

LA: You've been to his house?

BC: I haven't been to his house.

LA: I turned it over to them. That's where we lived. On 132 acres of land in Malibu.

BC: Oh my!

LA: We paid \$180 a month rent. It was like that kind of thing. And he wanted more of a lifestyle. He was kind of an original yuppie. And so he went into commercial photography, to make money. He needed that.

BC: Does he still do that?

LA: Yeah. Unfortunately, because he was really talented.

BC: You would think that with the inheritance, he'd be even more liberated from it.

LA: I know, and he was really talented. In fact, teaching, I always want to use his work, because it comes up over and over again, the issues that he was dealing with. So on one hand he supported [me] till I learned. . . . He was one of my first mentors, I'd say.

I learned a lot from photography. One of my influences was photography. All our artists were friends. You know, we really had like. . . . In fact, do you know Celia Shapiro?

BC: No.

LA: She's a video artist. She at the time was a curator, and organized an exhibition in 1973 called CA 90291. It was about eight famous artists.

BC: Right.

LA: It was my first group show I was in.

BC: Oh.

LA: And I ran into her at the international sculptural conference, and she told me that when Steve and I broke up, it wasn't like a couple breaking up; it was like a whole scene. Because we really had, it was a whole artists' thing.

BC: Who were some of those artists in the scene?

LA: Well, like Loren Madsen. . . .

BC: Um hmm.

LA: Do you know? He's in New York now. And Elyn Zimmerman. . . .

BC: Right, [to stay with friends up there, to see _____ garden [referring to Elyn Zimmerman—BC].

LA: . . . and George Rodart, and Eugene Sturman, and that. . . . It was early seventies and. . . .

BC: And what kind of work? They were probably. . . .

LA: They were conceptual. . . .

BC: Conceptual.

LA: Very, coming out of, you know, Carl Andre and the whole minimalist ethic. Most, just about all of them from UCLA. UCLA graduate students from the 1970s.

BC: Really? What was at UCLA that encouraged that?

LA: That's a good point. I wasn't there, so I don't know, but they all did things with tension, and Guy Dill was there at the time, I think. I don't know who it was that was that [route]. Robert Irwin was a big influence at the time.

BC: James Turrell?

LA: James. . . . The whole, all of the light people. The ACE Gallery and everything, of course, that they showed at that time. So we really. . . . Yeah, it was that early seventies when Cirrus [Gallery—Ed.] would show people like Eric Orr, who was Eric Orr back then, who didn't do any objects, you know, and no color. He did all these rooms. And Doug Wheeler and. . . .

BC: And they were all showing at Cirrus.

LA: Yeah.

BC: With Jean Milant.

LA: Yeah, yes, yeah.

BC: That's great.

LA: And I knew Jean Milant. Another thing that I did—again in, I guess later, in '68—I worked at Tamarind [print workshop—BC].

BC: Right. With June Wayne.

LA: Right. And I met Jean then. I mean, I knew Jean. . . .

BC: Because Jean was master printer, and. . . .

LA: Yeah, he was the printer there, so. . . .

BC: . . . he printed all the great works.

LA: Right.

BC: All the [Ed—Ed.] Ruscha most of Ruscha's prints and _____ Jean.

LA: Right, right, yeah. So from that, it's that early seventies. Connie [Llewellyn] was involved.

BC: Is that how, why _____ went to Jean [Milant—Ed.], to Cirrus afterwards? Is the connection through Tamarind? Did they start showing, were they involved with Tamarind. . . .

LA: Well, I don't. . . .

BC: . . . first before they went on to Cirrus?

LA: No, I don't think so. I don't know.

BC: Yeah. So he was very much involved with the artists. . . .

LA: Oh, you know where all the influence came from, actually? A lot of it came from [University of California at—Ed.] Irvine.

BC: Right.

LA: From, I guess Turrell was teaching there, and Craig Kauffman, and that whole. . . .

BC: Um hmm.

LA: So that's the generation I come from.

BC: Was Barbara Rose there at that time?

LA: Who?

BC: Was Barbara Rose teaching there at that time?

LA: I think so. . . . I'm not sure.

BC: Or is that later? Moira Roth was there.

LA: Moira Roth was later, I think.

BC: Yeah.

LA: So it was a time when. . . . Jean was the one gallery that was showing all that kind of stuff. And that's completely what I was involved in. Not my work. My work didn't reflect that really. You know, it's interesting how of all these influences around me. . . .

BC: But so you were still working primarily painting and more traditional way?

LA: What was I doing? At that time, I was. . . .

BC: This is when? Sixty. . . .

LA: This is seventies. This is early seventies. I was doing a lot of drawing. I was influenced by Larry Bell, actually. [mild chuckle] There was a big show of Larry's.

BC: Where was that show?

LA: At the. . . . No, that was later that he had a show at the County [LACMA—Ed.]. No, but he had a show at, I guess at Ace.

BC: Um hmm.

LA: All the shows at Ace. . . . All the minimalist sculpture. . . . I'm not telling you what the influences are as much as my interests at the time and who I was surrounded with.

BC: Yeah, right. So that it was primarily, at that time, the galleries that were doing the more interesting—for you—the more interesting types of shows.

LA: Yes. Yes, yes. Because. . . .

BC: And because by that time Walter Hopps was gone from Pasadena. . . .

LA: He was gone. And all there was was the County, was. . . . [coughs] As we know now. . . . Boy, did you see that Japanese show [at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art—BC]?

BC: Not yet.

LA: Oh, you've got to see it.

BC: Yeah, I will.

LA: I was bowled over completely.

BC: Really? It was great?

LA: Completely bowled over. Yeah, I had no idea, I had no idea, yeah. So it was a real, it was a real burgeoning kind of thing happening. What happened is that a lot of those people moved to New York. . . . You know, who also is in there is Alan Kaprow?

BC: No.

LA: That was before. [meaning that Alan Kaprow is not the right name; makes several starts at names looking for the right person—Trans.] He's all over the magazines. He does all these multiples. [McCollum].

BC: Oh, Allan McCollum?

LA: Yeah, McCollum. He was here. Jay McCafferty. You know, it was all that kind of grid. . . .

BC: Um hmm.

LA: The grid was in. . . .

BC: Systematic [work].

LA: . . . systematic. I would go over to Cal-Arts. I wasn't a student there, but I would go over there. It was just beginning; Paul Brach had just taken over, and it was kind of the beginning of that, so it was. . . .

BC: And was John Baldessari there yet?

LA: Yes, yes, I think he was. So. . . . Yeah, [Eugene Stern, eighteen _____ was], let me think who else. So on one hand, you know, we had the big blue chip people showing, and then there was that kind of minimalist. . . .

BC: So the idea is that the scene died down in the seventies.

LA: It really did.

BC: It did?

LA: No, no, not in the seventies. In 1980 there was a. . . . Well, 1978, I saw a real shift—including in my work. And '78 was a real turning point. And everywhere. But you didn't see it in the art until I think like 1980. And then all of a sudden the whole neo-Expressionist and. . . . Up until 1980 the galleries, if I'm not wrong, either '78 or '80, never showed figurative work. It was never expressionist work; it was real minimalist. Right, and then, and that's what I was raised on, completely a minimalist kind of aesthetic. And then all of a sudden The New Image [show—BC], that Richard Armstrong, I think, curated. . . .

BC: Right, right, and then the neo-Expressionists.

LA: And then the neo-Expressionists and then all the Europeans, and then everything that's happened since. But the stuff that was my ground was pre-. . . . But what was interest[ing]. . . . Pre-all that. But what was interesting with me, what happened is that my work took a complete turn in '78, and it had to do with a number of internal reasons. But then, looking back, I see that everybody else was changing too. And it became figurative. But I couldn't handle doing figurative work, so I decided to take those figures and do them out in the desert, and that's when I started doing the ephemeral pieces. But that was the shift away. . . . Yeah, I mean, that's when [Michael—Ed.] Heizer was big too. Elyn Zimmerman was always talking a lot about people like Irwin and all that. Again, that was more conceptual. But then everybody started doing figurative things. But I did and I didn't. And then I started getting involved with all the earth pieces. And a lot of that was very compelling. . . .

BC: So that's around '78?

LA: Yeah. Yeah, and the [pigment]. . . .

BC: Getting back to some more biography, because we'll. . . .

LA: Yeah, that's fascinating. . . .

BC: _____ the notion of your work.

LA: Yeah, yeah. It's fascinating, all this.

BC: After your first marriage, you went into another long-term relationship?

LA: Yeah, that just ended two years ago.

BC: And that was with. . . .

LA: With Richard Croissant. Croissant?

BC: Croissant. [laughs, thinking back to first tape about their own names—Trans.] Yes.

LA: [laughs]

BC: Did you say that croissants were named after him?

LA: [unintelligible because they are laughing so hard] Actually in French the reason they call a roll a croissant, it's the crescent moon, the rising moon, and he's German background but from Alsace, and that's where the name comes from. But my name means white oak, and his rising moon, so we thought, "God, we should change it to this American Indian kind of thing. [laughs]

BC: Well, not many people have. . . .

[Interruptions in taping]

LA: Actually I met him when I was still married.

BC: When you were doing the. . . .

LA: When I did the [piece at the—BC] Washington Monument, because I think that had a lot to do with the divorce. I mean, our marriage was kind of falling, and I fell in love. And, yeah, he was part of the team. Walter Hopps was involved in the international sculpture [contest, politics].

BC: Oh, so that's how that happened. Okay, because Walter has been such a major. . . .

LA: He really has been.

BC: . . . role in getting the West Coast artists recognized.

LA: Yeah. I think Marcia Weisman had a lot to do with it too, my getting there.

BC: How, in what way?

LA: I think she recommended me. . . .

BC: Uh huh, to Walter, and then of course there was the early connection between Marcia.

LA: Yeah, right.

BC: Now Walter was at the National Museum [of American Art—BC] at that time?

LA: I think at the Corcoran [Gallery—Ed.].

BC: Was he at the Corcoran at the time?

LA: Right.

BC: Okay.

LA: I'm pretty sure. But I think it was Marcia's kick that got me there. I don't remember who she talked to, probably Walter and a few other people. Anyway, and then they gave teams for everybody, they assigned Washington, D.C., people to help the artists coming from the West Coast, and for me it was a woman named Lee Fleming, who's a . . .

BC: Uh huh.

LA: Do you know her? She's a writer.

BC: The name's familiar.

LA: Yeah, she's a critic for the Washington Post, I think.

BC: Oh, uh huh. Art critic?

LA: Yes, yes. And one of her friends, who is a scientist, was Richard [Croissant—BC].

BC: Oh. . . .

LA: And he helped me locate the shadow of the monument.

BC: Oh, I see.

LA: Yeah. And so then he moved out here six months later.

BC: Oh, I see.

LA: He was from Washington, D.C.

BC: Oh, and he's a scientist?

LA: Yeah, a molecular biologist.

BC: So did he come out here to do work?

LA: He came out, but. . . . No, by that time he had quit his job and. . . . You know, a midlife crisis kind of thing, and got involved. . . . He was lost, essentially, which was too bad. Brilliant, brilliant guy, but with just a lot of things that got in his way. But that relationship. . . . He moved here six months later and that lasted till two years ago.

BC: So it's something like '80 to. . . .

LA: It was eight [years]. From 1980 to '88.

BC: But you never married.

LA: We never married. He didn't want to, which was a big. . . .

BC: Could you?

LA: Yes. [You] don't go around having children and. . . . Yeah, I really wanted to. I really wanted to. Because, again, a replica of my mother, you know, it was like. . . .

BC: But you did have children. . . .

LA: But then he wanted to [get married—Ed.] later. And I said, “No way.”

BC: Too late.

LA: I'm [getting out]. It's still kind of a sore thing with him, because I broke up with him, and he. . . . And in fact my children right now are with him in Washington, D.C., _____ back.

BC: And you had two children, two daughters.

LA: Yes. Two fantastic daughters, yeah.

BC: And when were they born?

LA: They were born in '81 and '83.

BC: And their names?

LA: Isabelle and Jasmine. Yeah, incredible.

BC: Yeah, I've seen them, beautiful.

LA: You've seen them, yeah, yeah, they're really kind of wonderful creatures. And so we were together—I mean, it was a marriage, except for not a legal piece of paper. We were together from 1980 to 1988. And then there was just too many problems. I mean, we broke up '88, and then I went to India.

BC: Mm!

LA: I was sent there. I was in a show. It originated at UCLA, Inhibitions?

BC: Oh, yeah! Right. And Lee Mullican was in it?

LA: Yeah, right. And they sent two of the artists, Max _____ and myself.

BC: Well, did. . . . What's her name? Who's the director of the Wight [Gallery—Ed.]?

LA: Well, Elizabeth Smith. . . .

BC: Uh huh.

LA: Smith? Elizabeth who's the curator went with us.

BC: Right.

LA: Edith. . . .

BC: Edith Tonelli.

LA: . . . Tonelli [did, didn't] come with us. It was great.

BC: It was great. Was that your first time to India?

LA: It was my first time to India.

BC: Did that have a major impact on you?

LA: Completely, completely.

BC: In what way?

LA: In a number of ways. First of all, just being washed over. . . . Have you been there?

BC: No.

LA: . . . by that culture. I mean, people would tell me “You’re either going to love it or hate it.” And some people I heard just got there one day and flew back the next, it’s that kind of place. The way I described it is, if you think of the earth as an organism—like the whole Gaia theory—and if every part is a living part of an organism, India is the subconscious. You know, everything exists simultaneously. Everything! On the street. You know, you stand—you don’t have to do anything—you just stand on the street, and birth, death, da da da da da. . . . [“da” meaning “et cetera”—Trans.] It all happens at the same time. Everything happens on the street! So the whole time my mouth is like [claps hands and illustrates]. I mean, con. . . . And it’s so stimulating, because there’s so much, you know, colorful and everything.

But I think what affected me more. . . . It’s not. . . . Two things. One, I really expected to find kind of a spiritual thing there, and it wasn’t there! And I realized that it wasn’t out there. I really got that, that it wasn’t out there, that it was in here, number one, which was interesting. But then, the other thing was that it may not have been out there directly, but later, who I still remember are the people constantly. . . . Everywhere you went there was chanting. Everywhere you went there were prayers you could hear. There was this kind of a group thing of reverence.

BC: Yes. I had that when I was in Jerusalem hearing the chanting, the Arabic chanting and the. . . .

LA: Well, a lot of the chanting I heard was Muslim, actually, was the Islamic ____.

BC: Yeah, and it’s really very moving.

LA: It’s very moving. And I grew up with that, in Tunisia, so I had that. And also going to India I learned a lot about my roots, because there’s a lot of Islamic influence architecturally. . . .

BC: Right, um hmm.

LA: . . . besides religiously and all that. And the looks of the [people]. I just fell with the look, colors. . . . But I think what I did come away with was the spiritual affect of the place, even though when you’re there, I certainly don’t feel, you know, it’s like. . . .

BC: But it’s the sensation and the sounds. . . .

LA: The sounds, the colors. The movement, constant movement.

BC: . . . smells, yeah.

LA: And then I wanted to become a scholar, because, just in terms of all the different religions. It was so fascinating to me, and I started reading all these things about all the different aspects. And it’s so there on one hand, and there’s so many different kinds of. . . .

BC: And at the same time it seems so hopeless.

LA: At the same time it's [the sewers], you know. I mean, it's. . . . I never saw a blue sky.

BC: Really?

LA: Yeah. I was shocked. I expected some beautiful nature, and I find out the smells are like. . . . You know, if you can live through that. But it's so teeming with life. And then that same trip I went to Nepal and also went to Egypt. I mean, can you imagine. . . .

BC: Cultural shock.

LA: Cultural shock. And then I went back to Tunisia—my mother had my kids—and to Paris. And to have traveled, you know, like India which is such a big part, which is full of people, and then Egypt, which again is people. You know, it's just the mass. And I was there during Ramadan, in Egypt, so there was all that kind of overtones. And the influence is still definitely coming out in the work.

BC: Yeah, and it's coming out here.

LA: It's very subtle. It's interesting, it's not like. . . .

BC: How so?

LA: Probably the use of gold more and more and more and more and more. Which, you know, really. . . .

BC: Was there so much gold color being used in India?

LA: No, not necessarily. In Thailand. I was in Thailand this year, I couldn't believe it. Everything is gold and red, and they do a lot of gold and red things, but. . . . So they have a lot of gold there. No, I think just in terms of that light, the spiritual kind of light.

BC: So the gold is sort of like a spiritual light?

LA: [pauses, thinking] Yeah. It's something else, too. I think it's the metal itself. I mean, there's just that. . . . I don't know what it is, it's that attraction. I mean, people walk in and you can tell they're reacting to the gold. There's something that happens to us perceptually when you look at so much gold. And so I'm playing with what that is.

BC: And that's actually gold leaf that you're using?

LA: It's real gold leaf, real gold leaf. As opposed to. . . . Before I left, I didn't use real gold leaf. That's _____ience; that's not real. That's [pointing to another? artwork: _____—Ed.]. . . . They don't have real copper leaf; it's a composite. But the gold has that kind of. . . .

BC: Yeah, there's nothing like that.

LA: Yeah, and then the combination of the two. I mean, what's interesting, with all the different things that have happened in my life, and all the different influences, the work is pretty steady. You know, there isn't like people say, "Whoa! Did your children influence your work?" and here I'm about to have another one. It doesn't really change. You know, it's interesting. It's more I'm on a particular road with it that's not so personal. In fact, I'm not that interested in doing personal work—where I used to do very personal work.

BC: So that would be the major change. It's less about you and more universal?

LA: It's objective. It's objective. It's more objective. I'm more interested in, yeah, a universal thing. Which is. . . . You know, in a way, sometimes it gets confusing to be at Art Center [in Pasadena—BC], and do the kind of work that I do, because. . . .

BC: Yeah, because there being intuitive is taboo!

LA: Oh! Oh, I know. It is.

BC: I keep telling the students, "Oh, you have to take this and this and this." They say, "Well, why?" Why can't there be intuitive?

LA: I know. It's very interesting for me to be there. I mean, if I looked at my work from the point of view of what's being taught there, it just wouldn't even exist. You might as well. . . .

BC: Um hmm, but I think having conflicting views, having Stephen Prina and you there, is a balance.

LA: Right, right, yes. I know, I've tried to quit many times, and they say, "No, we want you there. We need you," you know, it's like. . . . [laughing]

BC: And then the stu. . . . Yeah. And I come in and tell them, "Forget everything you've learned." [laughing]

LA: What do you tell them? [laughs]

BC: I want to know what they really think, you know. You know, when they give me their theory, "Is it okay?" "Let me know what you really think about it."

LA: See, what I'd like to get to, Bonnie, I'd like to get to a point of complete understanding of the intellectual part. . . .

BC: Well, that's been very interesting for me, yeah.

LA: It's wonderful, right. And then. . . .

BC: Does that introduce more intellectual rigor into your work?

LA: Yeah.

BC: Do you find yourself thinking more about theory?

LA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. But to do that. . . . I wish I had the time. See, this is where having to support myself and everything, that's where it really gets in the way of the work. I mean, this is where I feel very conflicted. Because I think if I could just be in here and think about theory and come up with the work, you know. I get very taken with a lot of business, and I don't think that's. . . . That's something I'm working on to try not to. But my goal is to really get a handle on the theory and all that. And then go at it from an intuitive point of view. Because I'm an intuitive person. I think that's my strength. In fact, one of the things that happened is that I made a decision a few years ago, where, especially at that time—my ex-husband included—I mean, my way of being and my way of thinking was completely against the norm. Now I think we're linking into a more intuitive age anyway. Not in the art world, but in general. And so I made a point to trust where I was coming from. And to completely do things from that space. Which is completely against—still—the art world. Now if I can also construct what does exist in the world and in the _____, and I think I'm doing that. And

I'm doing that through, actually business, you know, through understanding. . . .

BC: [Where?]

LA: Yeah, through having to deal with all that, I'm understanding a lot more of a real. . . . It's hard to verbalize what I'm trying to say. But if I can bring both a real intellectual grounding and theory grounding with an intuitive then, then I feel _____.

BC: Well, one of my feelings about the theory that is taught at Art Center is it's really providing the students with a reason for creating art. That, and then they probably get all that once they start doing. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . but it provides them with a platform that's going to sustain a career.

LA: Right.

BC: You know, something that they'll be searching for for the rest of their lives.

LA: And [this is, it seems] very important.

BC: And I think that's good because some of them who came there as painters, arrived here as painters, were just painting. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . so now they feel the need to get up in the morning and have a mission.

LA: Right.

BC: And they realize what they're doing.

LA: Right.

BC: And eventually it'll probably become more intuitive, where they don't have to just stick to the theory.

LA: Right.

BC: But I think that it does seem to work, yeah.

LA: Well, I think it's terrific, yeah.

BC: So that it gives them something to work on.

LA: Yeah, well, it's a structure. It's a structure. And I think with structure comes freedom. You know, most people think that commitment and structure, you know. . . .

BC: That's been one of my feelings with Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, that what I find fascinating with him is that he has found a way of opening up possibilities formalistically without. . . .

LA: Formalistically.

BC: Formalistically. Without being considered outmoded. You know, that it's possible to paint.

LA: That way.

BC: You know, that there's still things to do. Not so much what he's doing, but the theories that he's been bringing to the students, really seems to stretch the envelope.

LA: Right.

BC: And his new ways of looking at art from a formalist point of view.

LA: Right. What's fascinating is now, all of a sudden, I'm getting a feel for what's coming up, aren't you? I mean, it seems that now it's all social [issues—BC], there's a tremendous amount of. . . . It sort of has taken me by surprise. I'm not talking about Art Center.

BC: Oh, Art Center, yeah.

LA: Oh, no, no, no, I'm not talking about Art Center.

BC: There's [almost like] few at Art Center who are social [dealing with social issues—BC].

LA: Oh, no, not at all. No, I'm talking, you know, going to the Hirshhorn and seeing. . . .

BC: Oh, yeah.

LA: . . . what's his name from Russia, all the Russians. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: . . . and now Tim Rollins, and all that.

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, it's interesting what's. . . .

BC: [Alfredo Jarr].

LA: Yeah, the people who are being swept up now, in New York and all that, are very. . . .

BC: Yeah. Well, yeah. . . . Well, it's interesting because it. . . .

LA: . . . very opposite of what I'm doing.

BC: Yeah.

LA: What I'm doing doesn't deal with the world; it's not with the human world as you see it. It's with more. . . .

BC: But I'm also sensing amongst the students a need for ritual, the idea that art should have some kind of magic to it, and I've seen that Sigmar Polke is a real big influence on a lot of the younger artists who are here in L.A.

LA: Right, right.

Tape 2, side B

LA: That's an interesting. . . .

BC: I've been telling every[body], people about Art Center because everyone still thinks it's the Cal-Arts, and they don't know about Art Center and the real interesting program. I think one of the really good things that they do is that, having the students do a paper. . . .

LA: Yes.

BC: . . . a master's thesis, as a way of really trying to come to terms with theory and what they're doing in their art.

LA: Well, did you see the last show? Are you still out there?

BC: Yeah.

[Interruption in taping; possibly erasing a sensitive section as the only sounds are of car noises and birds.]

LA: Do you teach there?

BC: Well, I do private [tutorials—BC], where I go and visit with the students for about an hour.

LA: As. . . .

BC: Just a guest lecturer. . . .

LA: So you do it all the time. [expressing surprise]

BC: Excuse me?

LA: You do it regularly.

BC: I've been doing it for. . . . This is about a year and a half now.

LA: And you go every week?

BC: Well, no, three times a semester.

LA: Oh, oh.

BC: Yeah, so they [the students—BC] sign up for me. I do a whole day and. . . .

LA: So you do what we do, but you do it as independent. . . .

BC: As an independent. I'm not grading them, they don't. . . .

LA: Yeah. And it's a completely different view.

BC: A different point of view.

LA: How do they react to you? Do they give you feedback which would like compare it to all of us?

BC: Well, I'm not a threat to them, because I'm not there judging them.

LA: Right.

BC: I'm airing them feedback about what they're doing and how I see it from an outsider. . . .

LA: And from your critical point of view.

BC: And then from the other experiences I've had.

LA: Right.

BC: You know, I've been able to bring sources to them. . . .

LA: And from the historical. I mean, you have an art historical view.

BC: I tell them about shows they should be seeing, or artists that they should know about. You know, like Sally [Parsons—BC], I've introduced her to some Chicano [traditions]. The aesthetic of excess.

LA: I wonder what's going to happen to Sally.

BC: Yeah. [laughs] So she really liked reading about that.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: It made sense to her. So it's bringing another perspective. And for Jeremy [Gilbert-Rolfe—BC] I was someone else with some formal background. [laughs]

LA: Right.

BC: You know, as an ally. But I'm equally attuned to what Mike [Kelley—BC] and Stephen [Prina—BC] do as well. And to you. And so it sort of balances everybody.

LA: That's good.

BC: I don't take any sides.

LA: That's good. I wonder if they, I don't think they have anybody else who comes in like you, though.

BC: Well, occasionally they'll have someone like Colin Gardner.

LA: Oh, Colin Gardner.

BC: Colin, yeah.

LA: And Buzz [Specter—BC]? But he teaches too.

BC: So I give them more art historical references than theory. I think they were getting quite a bit of theory.

LA: Right.

BC: I also tell them whether I think that they're being convincing or whether they really believe in what they're doing.

LA: As a critic. . . . I don't know if you consider yourself a critic, [but, more of] a writer.

BC: More, or art historian. . . .

LA: Art historian.

BC: More of an art objective view.

LA: What I'm really trying to say is the value of being able to really talk about your work from a theory point of view. I think it's kind of important, don't you think?

BC: Oh, it is, too, but as an art historian I also weigh what they're telling me and what they're doing. And also put it in a context with what else is happening. And my basic theory is that all art is a basic misinterpretation of other theories and other art. [laughing]

LA: Uh huh.

BC: And it doesn't matter if they get it wrong—if they get Lacan or [Jean—BC] Baudrillard wrong or [Mark—BC] Rothko wrong. It's what has provided them with a stimulus for their own imagination and thinking.

LA: Right. I just got a catalog from . . . [Mike—BC] Kelley? I took it home. I forgot the name of the guy. He's Spanish, I think, or Italian, and [he's, it's] kind of wonderful. His biography was all his influences.

BC: Oh!

LA: It was a whole list. I got it at the L.A. Art Fair last December. You'd know his name; I just can't think of it. Anyway, but it was just like all the influences, you know, Laurie Anderson and. . . .

BC: [laughs]

LA: I mean, from that to Schubert to, you know, [Andy—BC] Warhol to. . . . I mean, it was fascinating to make that the biography. But he put it in kind of a very poetic way.

BC: That's interesting.

LA: And it is about that. Really, I think it's important to. . . . I mean, that's what you do as a profession, it's that historical. . . .

BC: Well, also, I don't. . . . Because I come from an art background, art training, artist's background, I also know it's not as logical as a lot of art historians make it seem.

LA: I know. That's the thing that drives _____.

BC: And what interests me the most, as an art historian, is putting things in a context.

[Interruption in taping]

BC: So, let's see. Now, you've recently remarried.

LA: Yes.

BC: To Carey Peck.

LA: Right.

BC: Son of. . . .

LA: Gregory Peck, right. [laughter]

BC: How did you meet?

LA: I actually met him through. . . . The daughter of the Chinese prime minister is a contemporary artist, and she had a reception at MOCA a couple of years ago. And I was invited to this reception. She wanted to meet woman artists, and he had just separated from his wife, and his sister-in-law, who was also invited to the reception, brought him there. And we met there. It's really kind of strange place to meet.

BC: That was in '88?

LA: Yeah. We've moved fast. That was in October '88. And then he asked me out just a few days later, and I was like completely surprised because I hadn't really, I had decided I wasn't going to date for a long time. I'd been about six or seven months separated and I didn't want to have anything to do with. . . . [laughs] And so we went out and it was pretty intense from the beginning.

BC: Really.

LA: [Rather, Very] intense, yeah.

BC: And he's a lawyer?

LA: He was a banker, and he's shifting over to real estate.

BC: Is this the time to go into real estate? [laughs]

LA: No. It's not. I keep telling him that.

BC: It's probably not the time to be a banker, either. [laughs]

LA: Right! Not at all. So he got out of that. More than anything he's a skydiver. I mean, that's what he. . . .

BC: Oh, no. And you also skydive, don't you?

LA: Yeah, yeah. But with him it's like a real big passion. He does it all the time. So he's pretty excited with that.

BC: So here you are again in a marriage, where you thought things were going to be. . . .

LA: Yes! Yes!

BC: Had he given up banking when you met, or after?

LA: No, no, only. . . .

BC: Recently?

LA: Well, a few months before we got married, but I thought he was still kind of going to do it. [laughs] And it's been the most wonderful lesson for me, because I thought that's what I was [getting]. And we're just completely. . . . I mean, we're just very, very happy with each other. And I realize it's not about that other myth.

BC: Right.

LA: But it's been a hard one to. . . .

BC: But yet he's also lived sort of a fairy-tale life.

LA: He had the same myth, you see, that's the thing. [laughs]

BC: Right. And you have very similar backgrounds.

LA: Very similar backgrounds. We have very, very similar backgrounds. We also had. . . .

BC: I mean, his father is probably the way you imagined your father. [laughs]

LA: Exactly. Exactly, exactly. So we have, I mean, we're so connected on so many ways.

BC: Last year, when I worked on the Art Against Aids, Gregory Peck was the speaker. That impressed me. He is really impressive.

LA: He is. He is, and when I first met him, I remember telling myself that he's a legend for a reason, and I was always. . . . When I was a little girl, I was completely in love with him, of course. But what's nice is I'm not intimidated by him, not at all, but he is very impressive, and he's kind of wonderful.

BC: And they are also into the arts, aren't they?

LA: Ummm, a little bit. Not that much. A little bit. I mean, they know some. I mean, that's why. . . . In fact, Carey's sister-in-law is an artist, and she met her husband—Carey's brother—at the Venice [California—BC] Art Walk, through Greg. I mean, Greg I think was there. . . . I can't remember what story she told me, but anyway he was at the Venice Art Walk, so he does get involved. And I'm not surprised that I married into that kind of a family with my kind of background, my kind of fantasy _____. [laughs] It just makes sense.

BC: I mean, his life is probably the only other one that could match the life you had.

LA: That's right! That's right. And in fact it really matches it on many levels. I mean, it was a tough way to grow up for him. And, because his. . . .

BC: Being in the shadow of the father like that.

LA: Yeah, and also his father remarried, and so he's not completely accepted by his stepmother.

BC: Did they continue having a relationship?

LA: Yeah, completely. Yeah, in fact when I met Carey, he was living with his father because he had

just separated, and he was there, but. . . . Yeah, so we have a lot of similar issues. But I do remember one thing, though. Last year around, I think it was Father's Day, I went to his house, and here I was in a bikini, like lounging in the sun, and it was just Greg, Carey, and myself, and our children. And I was going, "Never in my life would I think that I would be in a bikini in front of Gregory Peck."
[laughter]

BC: That would be intimidating.

LA: I looked good, so that was. . . . [laughs] Yeah, that's funny.

BC: Oh, that's great.

LA: That was really funny. But, yeah, so now it's become more. . . . It's nice. There's a lot of things to it, but it's. . . . But it isn't surprising, because. . . . BC: Yeah. Well, so it fulfills a lot of your fantasy?

LA: It really does. Yeah.

BC: This man, he's definitely royalty in this [town]. . . .

LA: It's true. It is. Right, right. And fame and wealth and, you know. . . .

BC: And so you did marry Prince Charming, after all.

LA: Right, I married Prince Charming. And the thing that's terrific is that I really did marry the real Prince Charming. He may not have all the accouterments, but it has the real stuff, and that's what's been the real surprise. I mean, it's just a real heart relationship. He's just a wonderful man, he's really great.

BC: And now you're expecting another child.

LA: And now I'm expecting. We're so excited.

BC: When is it due?

LA: In a month.

BC: Really? Oh, you're so tiny!

LA: No, I'm not so tiny. I'm big. [laughs]

BC: Oh, and here I thought maybe you were six months.

LA: No, no. And the doctor said it could be early. That's why this morning I was going, "Oh, my God, you know, this is not happening." Very excited. It's a boy.

BC: It is? Wonderful. Have you picked out a name?

LA: Christopher, Christopher Jonathan Peck. And, yeah. When we first met that was Carey's first things was to [whispered:] have children, you know.

BC: He doesn't have any other children?

LA: He has one. He has one, and he always wanted more. I'm like at the biological limit, and I

thought, "We gotta try right away!" [laughs]

BC: Well, you are courageous.

LA: It's a lot. . . . Yeah. I always wanted, I really did want a third child. But, it was so. . . . When I met him and he really wanted one, it was just hurry—I didn't think realistically, however. And now I'm thinking. . . . [laughing]

BC: Well, how does that affect you at this time of your career? The fact that you're going to have to go on leave from school and. . . .

LA: Yeah, that's the part. I mean, when I met him, I remember it was such an incredible passionate, you know, madly in love and of course, I'll do anything, you know, _____ baby and all this. And then when I actually got pregnant, which took a while, I thought it could. . . . I thought, "Okay, it wasn't going to happen." And when I actually got pregnant it was. . . . By that time, I was completely on a career, you know, I mean completely. Very male oriented.

BC: Right.

LA: So it's a real challenge. Because the energies. There's just going to have to be another thing. I mean, I handled it greatly with my two girls. But I'm at a different level.

BC: Right.

LA: And especially now with the _____

BC: There's tremendous demands on you career-wise right now, too.

LA: Yeah. Oh, I mean, I haven't even shown you what we're doing in there. I mean, we're doing a tremendous amount of work. We have six, I think, public projects going, and we have, I have exhibitions, I have all kinds. . . . I mean, it's really. . . . For me 1990 was going to be the year, "whew"! [untranscribable sound representing a plane or rocket taking off].

BC: Just take off.

LA: Right. [laughs]

BC: Well, you are.

LA: I am. I just have to get help and. . . .

BC: The baby's just going to have to go along with you.

LA: Exactly. So, but it's interesting. Everything in my life has happened like that, though, where there's. . . . I always have polarities, I always have. . . . You know, like on one hand being very interested in conceptual/theoretical kind of work and my work being different. You know, I'm always kind of grappling two very opposite things. And I think. . . . And this is a lesson, because it was something I wanted so much, and then. . . . And also to do something, to say, "Okay, I want this," you know, "I can have a career and another child, and I'm going to make it happen." You know, the opposite of what happened in my whole life whenever I came close to wanting something it didn't happen, so it was like a real positive thing in saying, "I'm going to make this happen and it's going to happen." But. . . . I forgot what my point was. That to learn to be able to do both the male and the

female energies. Because I really think that the work and career is very male oriented. I mean, very mental and outward-going. So it's going to be another challenge on doing it.

But my two other children, I never stopped with them. But I feel I'm in a different place, because I really wanted to kick off. . . . Oh, what I was going to say is that I'm learning that it's in mind that I can't do both. Or that being pregnant gets in my way. You know, it's really in my mind. I mean, it's all how I. . . .

BC: But it hasn't, really.

LA: But it hasn't, no. But if I start thinking negatively, well, then it's. . . . It's only what I think about it, very much that.

BC: Well, will he be sharing in the child-raising?

LA: Yeah, yeah. He just, I mean, he was flipped out when he found out. When he found out I was pregnant he was delighted; when he found out it was a boy, I mean, he was just jumping up and down. [laughter]

BC: Oh. Gee, and it still happens, huh? [laughter]

LA: It still happens. Because he kept saying, "Well, four girls would be great." He has a girl same age as mine, right. We have six. . . . Today is actually my daughter's birthday. We have two seven-year-olds and an eight-year-old. Girls. And so he kept saying, "Four girls would be great." And then when it actually turned out to be a boy, I said, "Carey, you didn't tell me you wanted a boy that bad." He said, "Well, I didn't want to be disappointed."

BC: Ahh.

LA: Real macho, you know. [laughs]

BC: Now you got married in January.

LA: We got married in January.

BC: January first.

LA: Berlin. Yeah, thirty-first, midnight, yeah.

BC: At the Berlin Wall.

LA: At the Berlin Wall. It was unbelievable. It was a celebration of the decade. You know, there were four hundred thousand people there.

BC: Really.

LA: And celebrating the wall, the liberation. And there were fireworks and champagne and it was. . . .

BC: And you thought it was all for your wedding.

LA: It was all for us, you know. I mean, it was just all for us. [laughs] It's a great way to have a party.

BC: Way to celebrate and not have to pay for everything.

LA: [laughs] Really.

BC: It was a bash.

LA: It was really extraordinary.

BC: That's wonderful. So it was a very emotional. . . .

LA: Yeah, it was.

BC: . . . for many reasons.

LA: And we went there just for that. We went there because we wanted to be in a place of high energy. We wanted it to be a place that really celebrated the decade, the coming of the decade.

BC: Right. A happy place.

LA: Yeah, and to think of. . . . And freedom and, you know, this had just happened. And what an extraordinary moment, you know.

BC: Did you feel it? Yeah.

LA: I was. . . . Yeah. I had never been to Berlin. And it was. . . . I guess I've never been in that kind of a crowd. I mean, four hundred thousand. . . . I didn't even, we didn't expect. . . . I mean, we were there a few days before, you know, we didn't know. . . .

BC: You only invited ten people!

LA: . . . we didn't know they were all coming to our wedding. And the Germans know how to have parties. I mean, they really celebrate. It's not. . . . People are like dead drunk on the street, and it's like, "Okay, they're just. . . ." And they really, I mean, they went on till six in the morning, you know, it was unreal, it was fantastic.

BC: Did you get a piece of the wall?

LA: Yes, yes. Some wonderful pieces. I've made some, I made some paintings. . . .

BC: From the pieces of the wall?

LA: Yeah, yeah. About two o'clock in the morning under twenty-degree-below-zero weather, Carey was out there with. . . . He had a friend, a skydiver friend from Berlin. And at first we were out there with hammers, and it just disintegrates into dust.

BC: Oh.

LA: Then this guy had gone out there many times and finally figured out the way of doing it, which is to go down to the rebars, and then pull the rebars like that [gesturing], and then the big chunks would come out. So we got some nice pieces.

BC: It's thrilling. . . .

LA: I only have two left, and I'm going to make some pieces—with graffiti.

BC: Oh, yeah. Did, did your family come to the wedding?

LA: No. No, this was like. . . .

BC: Just for the two of you.

LA: No, yeah, this was like a real private thing. Then we had another ceremony here when we came back.

BC: That's great.

LA: And then we went to Thailand on our honeymoon, and it was a skydivers' meet.

BC: Oh my.

LA: You know, they all. . . . We call it a boogie. And there were 180 people from all over the world and they actually stopped the airport in Bangkok fifteen minutes so that they could skydive down into the stadium.

BC: Oh my.

LA: Yeah, it was kind of amazing. So he was skydiving a lot, and. . . .

BC: And you were right. . . .

LA: I went on the airplane, but, no, I didn't.

BC: You do hang-gliding or sky. . . .

LA: No, I've skydived, yeah.

BC: Skydived, yeah.

LA: But I just didn't go, didn't go there. So it was great.

BC: That's wonderful.

LA: And then the other thing is we had just recently bought a four-acre house in the hills in Malibu, close to where I used to be, and it's incredible. It's like a real sixties kind of. . . . By sixties I mean kind of Big Sur. I mean, it's a very unusual place, and it's beautiful mountains and ocean view.

BC: Oh, that's right, you could see the ocean. . . .

LA: Yeah. Yeah, from a distance. It's really great.

BC: That's exciting.

LA: Yeah. And I've always wanted to be back out in nature, and so [we're doing this]. We've done a lot! You know, we're [laughing] _____ and we've only known each other. . . . We've done all these things, you know, very fast.

BC: Get it all in, very intense.

LA: Very, very, very fast. And it's good.

BC: So having been at the Berlin Wall, would you consider yourself political?

LA: I'm becoming more and more political. I've never considered myself a political person, and now there's. . . . I don't know that I'll ever do political work; I don't see myself doing that. But the more I travel, the state of things is so devastating to me in so many ways that one can't be apolitical anymore. This is how I feel. And I really was very apolitical and _____.

BC: Really, even during the sixties and seventies.

LA: Well, I had political views. . . .

BC: I understand there were group meetings among artists here during the late sixties and seventies about how to protest the Vietnam War. Were you at all. . . .

LA: Yeah, no, I wasn't. . . . No. I didn't participate in that.

BC: What about. . . . You received a number of NEA [National Endowment for the Arts—BC] grants in the past.

LA: Oh, in the past. . . . Now when I think about it now. . . .

BC: How do you feel about what's going on [with the new restraints on the NEA—BC]?

LA: Well, I think it's a disaster, what's going on now. I mean, I heard that Rachel Rosenthal turned back hers.

BC: Turned her grant down.

LA: And I think I probably would too. You know? I mean, I didn't apply for one, but to have that kind of [censorship]. . . . You know, it's insane. I mean, I think [Robert—BC] Mapplethorpe has raised consciousness in so many people and in a very powerful way. And not be able to have. . . . I mean, it's much more involved than that. . . .

BC: Well, the idea that that all might disappear as well, something that. . . . The grants that helped you during your career. . . .

LA: I know. Oh, I know.

BC: . . . might not be there in the future.

LA: Exactly.

BC: It's a very sad possibility.

LA: Yeah. Now I've always been quite an idealist politically and socially, and now I'm kind of very wary of what's going on, which is, you know, [even] walking on the streets and. . . .

BC: Especially in this neighborhood [where there is a large population of homeless people—BC].

LA: Well, this neighborhood really does it.

BC: . . . Wall Street and 5th Street.

LA: But I, because I . . . On one hand I think there's so much incredible things that are going on on a positive level and towards human consciousness and that kind thing, and then, at the same time, there really is, the culture's completely breaking down.

BC: Yeah.

LA: And it's hard to take. You know, in order to protect myself and my work, I've always kept away from it [politics—BC] so I could do the kind of work that I do.

BC: Yeah, your work itself, even by being in the seventies when it was subverting the gallery system, you didn't see that as a political stance?

LA: Yeah, I guess it was. It was. I guess I have more of an understanding of my stand now.

BC: Well, would you say that your feelings of being in tune with the environment is more of an optimistic or hopeful attitude?

LA: Mine? Mine is. Mine definitely is. And I've always thought that everybody else was following, right? You know, in terms of that kind of view. And then I see what's actually going on, and it's discouraging. Now I don't make art about what's going on. Right? My work falls into something completely different, where. . . . I don't think we [can] go into it today, but it's something. . . . We can go into it, you know, I think it's important to go into it. But. . . . I forgot what you asked me.

BC: Whether your work has a . . . For you, in order to exist in this world, if it provides you with a sense of hope and completeness that you might find is missing in the world itself.

LA: Yeah. And in fact that's probably why I do the kind of work that I do. Again, it's the oyster, and whatever, rubbing against, the opposites. That the kind of work that I do is very internal, and I bring out an internal process, an internal vision, and the reason I go that way is because what's out there is so overwhelming to deal with. You know, do you use art as social change, all that kind of thing. That it's a way out. And it's something I really believe in. And now there's more and more evidence of that kind of. . . . I mean, Joseph Campbell and all that. You know, even the guy who wrote on addictions. [Funny] the name of the book, but something about like the need for drugs or alcohol or some kind of an ecstatic state is part of our nature. I mean, my work is about that ecstatic state, that need. And so I try and put myself, as much as I can, through this kind of ecstatic state and come out with. . . . As opposed to what's out there. [laughs] Which I didn't feel before.

BC: Yeah.

LA: You know, I didn't feel there was that much. . . .

BC: Yeah, so before you might have been in tune with what was happening, and now it's almost in contradiction to what's happening.

LA: Um hmm. A contradiction in one. . . .

Tape 3, side A

BC: Where does great music come from? [prompting LA re interrupted conversation—Trans.]

LA: Yeah. I think great inspired works of art—the real inspiration, not things that are just socially commentaries—great music comes from going inward and touching on different levels of

experience.

BC: And which is again in response to your environment. And the changes in the environment. But although you weren't politically active, were you involved with the feminist movement here in the seventies, which was very active then. . . .

LA: Yeah, yeah. I wasn't involved directly. I was working at the time in the Woman's Building, and so I was very. . . .

BC: So you were involved with. . . .

LA: I was in it, but I wasn't involved in it. I was working as a director of one of the galleries. But I wasn't that politically involved at the time.

BC: So were you involved with Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro. . . .

LA: Well, I knew them all, and I would see them, but I think I was pretty young at the time, and I didn't have. . . . I mean, now would be a different story again, in terms of that kind of involvement. I have much more of an understanding of what's going on. But, no, I wasn't politically/socially involved with it. But I was around it.

BC: Did the Woman's Building at that time have an effect on you?

LA: It affected me.

BC: Yeah, it did?

LA: Yeah, it did affect me in fact. I remember one of the things that kicked me on doing the kind of work, that gave me permission to doing the kind of work that I did was something that I read in a journal that came from the Woman's Building. It was an artist who had written some things about the kind of work that she was doing, and it gave me permission for that kind of personal way of working. And in fact I got a Vesta Award from the Woman's Building last year. And I remembered that, and I told them that story. Again, it's like all this stuff happening around me, and it filters through. It may not be, I may not take it on as a stand. Now, the older I get, I can see definitely taking things on.

BC: Well, how was the Woman's Building perceived at that time? Was it really part of what was happening, or is it sort of like now, so peripheral.

LA: Yeah, no, no. It was really happening. I mean, there was a lot of stuff. . . . Anaïs Nin used to come and visit.

BC: Oh really?

LA: Oh yeah, yeah.

BC: And she'd do readings and. . . .

LA: Yeah. Yeah, and speak. And it was at the time I think right before Judy and Schapiro and Arlene Raven and Sheila de Bretteville, didn't they do Womanhouse, that thing?

BC: Right.

LA: It was a real center of things. And people listened to it, although there obviously some people didn't take it seriously. But the people themselves within it took it so seriously that it became something that one did listen to. Not like now. I mean, now it's definitely peripheral. I mean, the whole woman's movement. . . . I mean, look at what's happened just in films in terms of the kind of characters that are portrayed.

BC: Oh yeah. Yeah, this year, this summer, they were all prostitutes in all the films.

LA: Completely. Are they?

BC: Yeah.

LA: Oh God, really?

BC: Yeah. [No], they're all prostitutes.

LA: The trashy movement is in a. . . . Definitely. _____.

BC: It's so amazing. [laughing] Well, but what I'm finding, though, among the students, particularly in Art Center and at Cal-Arts, there is a resurgence of feminist theory, at least.

LA: Yeah.

BC: A theory, at least. I don't know if they're living as feminist attitudes, but at least it's in their work.

LA: Well, at that time it was a lot of the beginning of the feminist theory, and a lot of the things didn't work.

BC: Like?

LA: Rejecting men, that kind of thing. I mean, now we're seeing the backlash of, you know, the romantic thing is back in. . . .

BC: Well, do you feel that it's necessary for women to develop an artform that's distinctly their own? No.

LA: No. I'm really not into that. No. And in fact when I see work that smells of feminist work, I just look the other way, it's so boring to me. Because, again, I think it's a lack of theory, in a way. It's so obvious. I guess I'm talking about certain kinds of work.

BC: You know, I'm finding among a number of the younger artists that they'll incorporate stitching or embroidery of some kind, and it's a woman's statement, and I'm telling them, "You're just reinforcing male stereotypes of what women's art should be about."

LA: Right.

BC: I said [to these artists—BC], "When was the last time you embroidered?" [laughs]

LA: Right, right, exactly.

BC: But yet because they're incorporating stitching or knitting, it's being considered a pure woman's artform.

LA: I was just thinking, as I'm talking to you, part of the reason I think I never got involved with the feminist thing, especially in the work, is that I was not raised by a quote "normal" kind of woman, so I don't even know what. . . . It's like it's more. . . . And therefore I don't think there really is. . . . I mean, those issues just aren't part of my vocabulary because of that kind of upbringing.

BC: That makes sense.

LA: Yeah.

BC: I'd say the [same] for you. I have a lot of trouble understanding where these other women are coming from because I don't have the same hurdles to overcome.

LA: Exactly, exactly.

BC: I didn't have the same limitations.

LA: And also, for instance, I was also awarded, it was called something like a Woman of the Year Award in the Visual Arts from the small museum here, Palm Springs Museum, and they asked me to nominate someone the next year. And I nominated Suzanne Caporael, and her reply was "I don't do anything that has to do with just women." And I thought that was a really good. . . . I completely respected that, because then you get pegged into. . . . And I've tended to shy away from. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, obviously I did accept the Vesta Award, and _____ things like that, but I have turned down being in books sometimes with just women because it's. . . . You know, it's. . . .

BC: It's ghettoizing.

LA: Yeah.

BC: But at the same time, the other thing that I've noticed is in L.A. there are a lot of really good woman artists, and they get shown here. Yet the shows of L.A. artists in New York in recent years, it's all men! And I'm trying to explain to the people who are curating that they were creating a warped sense of what's going on here and in addition, once you start doing those shows—I'm talking about the new artists that are coming up—once you start doing shows, it [the list—BC] keeps replicating itself.

LA: Right.

BC: Those become the artists that get canonized.

LA: That's right.

BC: And therefore, once again, the women artists will be excluded.

LA: That's right.

BC: And so it's more the sense of history and how history is formed that concerns me, rather than say, "Oh, you have to have a show of woman artists," but making people aware of this is how history gets made. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . and you should do your job to make sure you're being conscientious of a . . .

LA: Right, in the beginning, yeah. Yeah, there's still, oh, there's definitely still prejudice or. . . . It's a hard one to know. It's the same, you become canonized like that, or you can become canonized for being political about being a woman.

BC: Or being a feminist artist.

LA: Yeah. Right.

BC: Yeah. Well, someone like Nancy Spero, who had a large following in the feminist art movement, is only just now being recognized by a wider audience.

LA: Right.

BC: Which was a shame because her work is really strong, very good, and. . . .

LA: Right, exactly.

BC: . . . I don't think it's limited just to feminist ideas.

LA: Right. And that's the kind of thing that we were talking about in terms of the Art Center students, to know what your art is about.

BC: Right.

LA: And [when] you get pegged that way, then you get pegged that way.

BC: Yeah. So. . . . Well, what about your camaraderie with [male] artists during the seventies? Of course, with your first husband, you were succeeding beyond him. What about the other artists that you were dealing with? Eric Orr or. . . . Were they supportive, competitive, or felt they were your equals or. . . .

LA: No, [I don't think] they felt we were equals, no. I think there was always kind of patronizing, a slight edge of patronizing. To this day.

BC: I mean, because before I came out here, one thought of L.A. artists as being that group of men.

LA: Yeah.

BC: It was a very old-boys club.

LA: Absolutely. Oh, yeah, I mean, what woman is in there? They do tend to support some women. And all those guys are very friendly with me, and we are equals on some levels, but not really. I mean, there's an edge of the patronizing thing to this day.

BC: Yeah. And so you feel you were at a disadvantage being a woman in the art field?

LA: I didn't feel it that, you know, I'd never felt it. I did not feel it to that extent then. I'm feeling it more now.

BC: Really. Do you feel it might be working in reverse now, or. . . .

LA: Sometimes I feel that, I always feel that.

BC: Do you find that it does work in reverse now that there might be more attention on you, the idea of trying to correct history in saying that “here you were doing this interesting work in the seventies. . . .

LA: Yes.

BC: . . . and then, and telescoping time. [Correcting], as it were.

LA: Yeah, yes. Yeah, that.

BC: And you just had a retrospective. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . that because some people’s consciousness might be raised, then you recognized that, that they should be counting women in the artists here.

LA: Right, exactly. Yeah. Now I don’t know if I’d take it as being just because I’m a woman.

BC: No, no, but. . . .

LA: Yeah, but there is a lot of that that happens where the work was being done. It’s real interesting. Now a lot of people are doing the same kind of work, or similar work, and the person that first did it doesn’t get recognized.

BC: Right.

LA: But that’s an artists’ syndrome, in general.

BC: Well, very often someone who’s taught for a long time and has gone unrecognized, and their students start becoming recognized, then people go back and look at the teacher. It happened with John Baldessari. . . .

LA: Right, right.

BC: . . . and then another artist. Did you, were you all connected with Mowry Baden at all?

LA: No.

BC: He’s probably too early. He’s at Pasadena. I think he was the teacher of Chris Burden and Peter Shelton and Charles Ray. He’s now in from Victoria, in Canada, British Columbia.

LA: Huh.

BC: And, you know, here’s someone who when you look at his work, it’s fascinating, yet he was overlooked and his students are all now being recognized.

LA: Yeah, the one thing that happened to me recently that just really got me—and I don’t know how one avoids this—is I went to see a dealer of mine in New York, and I hadn’t been showing with her, and she’d just come back from the Venice Biennale, and she’s known my work for years, so she knows I’ve been doing this for a long time, and she said, “Well, to tell you the truth, I couldn’t really

show those pieces now because I just came back from the Venice Biennale, and now Amur. . . . Whatever his name is. . . .

BC: Oh, Anish Kapoor.

LA: . . . Anish Kapoor is like the rage with that. And I was doing it at the same time or even earlier than him, but I wasn't in New York, where it was seen. And that's a really big one. I mean, that it is. . . .

BC: Yeah, to be before your time.

LA: Yes! And actually now people are picking up on these pieces, now, whereas before they were looking at them but they. . . . But that is an artists' syndrome. I mean, that's a real problem, but I don't know what one can do. But I think that's important, just to rectify those kinds of things.

BC: Right.

LA: You know, that kind of thing that is happening.

BC: Or. . . . What's his name? Another German, a German artist.

LA: Wolfgang Leib.

BC: Yeah, Wolfgang Leib.

LA: Yeah, yeah. And I'm sure. . . .

BC: And even Roni Horn is doing pigment, too.

LA: I didn't. . . . Is she?

BC: Yeah.

LA: Oh God, I haven't seen those yet.

BC: Well, actually, Rothko. . . .

LA: Well, now. . . .

BC: . . . Rothko painted with dry pigment.

LA: Oh, did he? Okay, good.

BC: In the 1950s, it was dry pigment mixed with rabbit-skin glue.

LA: Whoa. Which is the other one? Roni. . . .

BC: Yeah, Roni Horn.

LA: What about the one. . . .

BC: Oh, Rebecca Horn.

LA: Rebecca Horn.

BC: Yeah, she [uses, mixes] dry pigment, too, with it, but Roni Horn—I think—does some areas of pigment.

LA: Yeah, well, Roni Horn, we have very similar. . . . I did just a single ball, with gold. I mean, it's just. . . .

BC: Right. With hers it's a sphere.

LA: Yeah. Well, it's definitely a different thing, but it's. . . .

BC: But it's also a different theory. You know, what would happen, you know, you put those two balls together, and no one knows what the two theories are.

LA: Exactly. Exactly. See that. . . . In fact a woman from San Francisco just called me, and she said that she wants to put together a show of people who work with pigment. And I thought, "That's great!" Of course she's not very historical. I mean, I said to her, "You should do a catalog and. . . ."

BC: Where is this?

LA: Kelley Hames Gallery.

BC: Oh.

LA: It's a gallery, so I doubt that she'll do that kind of a job, which is too bad because, again, that's the role of the art historian, to bring in, and to show. . . . I think those things should be shown together, and see them. That's where art historians sometimes lose it, in a way, where they don't see that. . . . I mean, I'm sure—certainly between that Pollen guy [means Wolfgang Leib—BC] and Amur [probably means Anish—Ed.] and myself, probably came to it independently. I'm not saying [you know, he]. . . .

BC: Oh, yeah.

LA: But at the same time, or one before the other or whatever. And so it should be recognized as some kind of a. . . . What's interesting with him is that he's from India, and, I mean, when you see those sources. . . .

BC: And that makes sense, because you [would] apply all those rich materials.

LA: Right. And the same in Tunisia, where they have all that.

BC: Yeah, yeah, so it's a similar source.

LA: Yeah, similar kind of source. And so [it should be] really interested in terms of putting that together. By the time I was showing in the late seventies, people didn't know what to do with them, you know?

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, they were fascinated with the kind of. . . . But they didn't know what to do with them, because it was not. . . . You know, it was right after the Minimalists and before the Expressionists [had, have]. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

LA: . . . or Yves Klein, you know.

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, I was not directly influenced by Yves Klein. I mean, you would never know that, because of course this comes from Yves Klein. But at the time I started doing [there, these], there was no monograph on Yves Klein. All his monographs came out after the eighties and like 1980 and afterwards. Indirectly, I was [influenced by Klein—BC], because someone did a blue wall against the sky, and somebody had told her that Yves Klein had done that. So who knows how all this stuff comes across.

BC: Right. Well, we'll later on talk about being in California, how that affects the career.

LA: Oh yeah. For sure. Yes.

BC: But that has a lot to do with it as well.

LA: Yeah.

BC: And that too is changing now.

LA: But I think the one thing that I find that I'm missing, and it could be just my own situation, is that I wish I was more in an [art community—BC]. And I think it has to do with. . . . When you're younger and a student and just starting to show, you have much more of a community of artists around you.

BC: Yeah.

LA: I'm missing that. I'm not doing a lot of talking with other artists the way I used to. And I think it could just be what happens.

BC: Is that just L.A.?

LA: No, from everything I've heard in New York, no one has. . . . [coughing]

BC: No one's seeing each other.

LA: Yeah, they're not seeing each other but it could be L.A. It could be because of the distance.

BC: Well, actually, my last few trips to New York. . . . I forgot how much gossip goes on there. That I'd come back saying, "L.A. is an intellectual center." [laughing] Because it was really that here I was being stimulated with ideas.

LA: [sotto voce:] Too much gossip. [normal voice:] And there it's just. . . .

BC: And there it was, you know, "What's going to happen at the Whitney?" or "What's going to happen here?"

LA: Right.

BC: There was nothing about talking about art, other than who was hot and up and coming.

LA: That's true.

BC: So I found myself coming back and saying, "L.A. is an intellectual center." [laughing hard] For a poor New Yorker to say that.

LA: That's true. Are there any artists getting together these days and forming groups, and. . . .

BC: Well, for me, one of the nicest [things] has been going to Art Center and feeling that I have [that] connection.

LA: Yes, I feel connected with.

BC: Yeah, then they are all reading theory and trying to seek things out, and I find that stimulating. Because I'm very good at getting into whatever they're doing and imagining it. So that I find that very lively, and. . . . Don't you find that L.A. is rather cliquish?

LA: Oh, yeah.

BC: And we tend to transcend the cliques.

LA: Yeah.

BC: And end up introducing the different artists to each other.

LA: Right. It's totally cliquish, it's true.

BC: Like, "You two have never met?"

LA: Yeah. That's true.

BC: What happened is the Cal-Arts students do have a sense of community.

LA: Yeah.

BC: Art Center students do.

LA: I think people coming out of schools, they tend to stay with each other.

BC: Yeah. But the UCLA students, though, felt that they were completely lost when they came out of school, and they're just. . . . Two years ago, when the Dennis Anderson Gallery opened, that became a place where everyone sort of hung out. I don't know, I don't think that's happening anymore.

LA: What would you say is the place now?

BC: I don't think there is one, which is too bad.

LA: Yeah. I know. _____ to them.

BC: Yeah. Magazines are necessary here to stimulate ideas and let everyone know what's happening around town. But as soon as you have a magazine focusing locally, everyone says, "Oh, it's too regional."

LA: I know.

BC: Or that this fear. . . . Not realizing that this is the place, and therefore it should be focused on _____; this is an exciting time.

LA: Right.

BC: They get afraid of the idea of regionalism, which is too bad.

LA: Although the scene has changed so much when you think. I mean there's so many New York people showing now.

BC: Oh, yeah. And there's so many L.A. people showing in New York.

LA: Yeah, right.

BC: And so, yes, it's quite different.

LA: Well, anyway. . . . I'm winding down here.

BC: How are you doing?

LA: [chuckles]

[Tape 3, side B, is blank]

ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART

WEST COAST REGIONAL CENTER

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

LITA ALBUQUERQUE

TAPE-RECORDED INTERVIEW WITH LITA ALBUQUERQUE

IN HER STUDIO IN LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

JULY 19, 1990

INTERVIEWER: BONNIE CLEARWATER

LA: LITA ALBUQUERQUE

BC: BONNIE CLEARWATER

Tape 4, side A

[According to BC, LA gave birth to her son just shortly after this portion of the interview was completed, so LA understandably had some difficulty in finishing. This difficulty is reflected in a tendency to at times speak very softly, making it impossible to catch everything she said.—Trans.]

BC: I thought we'd start with Otis [Art Institute—BC].

LA: This whole thing [the interview process—BC] is auditory, right? I mean, this is oral history.

BC: Yeah.

LA: So this is for people. . . . What do they do?

BC: It'll be transcribed, written out.

LA: It's written. It's not oral.

BC: Well, you can hear the tapes if you want to, but they do transcribe.

LA: And then it's written . . . where?

BC: At the Archives of American Art they'll do a typescript.

LA: Yeah. So, I mean, let's say people want to get information, they go in there?

BC: Yeah, and do research.

LA: And it's like a book they get, or pamphlet?

BC: Yeah, like a little booklet, or sometimes they are microfilmed. So you can see it on microfilm.

LA: But there's no visuals.

BC: No visuals, so we'd have to describe and title, or refer to a catalog. Yeah, so. . . .

LA: I do want to talk about my last piece, so I'm glad you brought up the _____ section.

BC: Yeah. Oh, good. Yeah, and these interviews are great. I was doing research on [Marcel—BC] Duchamp this week, and I was going through some interviews that were done in San Francisco with some other artists, and there was a lot of information there. I'm wondering, maybe we should move closer to you.

LA: Okay. [moving sounds]

BC: Okay. So you went to Otis.

LA: Um hmm.

BC: You had already decided seriously to be an artist at that point.

LA: Yes. I'd actually been painting quite a few years before that. And at that time I was torn between acting and painting. And then, yes, by the time I went to Otis. . . . That's why I went there, as I said, I made that decision to do that.

BC: And who was teaching there, that you were studying with?

LA: At that time, it was really quite a different school than it is now. I mean, to think about it now, it's like antiquated.

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, we were learning anatomy and. . . .

BC: Oh, is that what they were teaching then?

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: It was very traditional.

LA: Right. And in a way I wanted that. I really wanted to learn how to draw, and that's sort of the way I was, what I wanted to do, of course, by the. . . . I realized that that's not really what I wanted to, but I wanted that kind of intense training. And I wasn't there very long, because I actually got ill and I had to be in bed for a year.

BC: Oh, my goodness. What was wrong?

LA: I had pelvic inflammatory disease, and I had to be on my back.

BC: Ah, that's terrible.

LA: It was. . . . Yeah, but, you know, it's really funny. There's so many stories of artists that get completely turned around because they have to stay in the hospital, like Sam Francis and. . . .

BC: Right, or Frieda Kahlo.

LA: Right. And it really did change me.

BC: It did change you? How?

LA: Yeah, in that I realized that I didn't need to go back to school, because I had a degree in art history and this was going back to an undergrad, so I had to go through the whole program again. And I only went for a semester. And then I decided that what I really needed to do was just to do the work. And, yes, it made me really focus on what it was I was interested in. And I started drawing furiously, quite extensively. And right after I got well again—it was almost a year in bed—I focused on large drawings. I mean, things I could do out of bed. And very gestural. And the [mark]. I mean, I just started with. . . . For about a year and a half, I worked on one format of paper—it was three by four feet or something—and charcoal. And just doing marks, and then from the marks things came. But it was that kind of focus that was really. . . .

BC: Well, being ill like that, did you focus on your body a lot?

LA: When I was doing some small drawings in bed. . . .

BC: Yeah, yeah.

LA: . . . yes, yes. Yeah, they weren't real . . . that completely, but they weren't real interesting.

BC: But did it affect your thinking afterwards, being so focused on what was happening with yourself?

LA: I'm not consciously aware of it. I remember being very influenced by this student from Cal-Arts, who. . . . See, I wasn't really trained in a lot of contemporary things. Even though I'd seen the Marcel Duchamp show, I hadn't seen a lot of things, [and, when] I was around it. But she came to me, and she had this little pad, and there was just these scribbles. And she was like talking about it like it

was like really important. And at that time I thought, "What? This is just scribbles." And that's how I started, by scribbling, thinking that it was okay to start doing that and following the mark and seeing what happened. So that was more of a change than really would happen by being sick.

BC: Do you remember who the student was?

LA: Yeah. Her name was Bobbie Roberts.

BC: Is she still working?

LA: I don't know. I haven't heard. I haven't heard what's happening.

BC: Let me just make sure this [tape recorder is working—Trans.].

[Interruption in taping]

BC: So the influences on you weren't really from school. They were from outside sources.

LA: They were from outside. All my friends were artists. I think I told you.

BC: Um hmm.

LA: In fact, I think. . . . I'm trying to think if it was before I got sick or after, probably after, we formed a group of artists where we would meet every week.

BC: Oh, yeah? And who was this?

LA: And at the time. . . . It started out being woman artists, and then they shifted to the group I told about—Loren Madsen. . . . Did we get into that last time?

BC: A little bit, yeah.

LA: Elyn Zimmerman.

BC: Right.

LA: George Rodart.

BC: What would happen. . . .

LA: And we'd talk about art. And they were all graduates from UCLA. And they were steeped in minimalism. Most of them were sculptors.

BC: Were there organized topics to discuss?

LA: Uh, I can't remember. I think so, I think so.

BC: Yeah.

LA: It was very stimulating. And so my influences came a lot from them, who had gone through a whole master's program in that kind of, like I said, the Minimalist. . . . So that was really my influence. Yeah, so it wasn't school, since I didn't pursue it. And we really became a community. I mean, then not only did we meet, but we started having shows together. I think I told you about the shows.

BC: And that was at Cirrus?

LA: No, the very first show was at Cal Tech. At the Baxter Art Gallery, a young woman named Celia Shapiro, who is actually a video artist now, curated a show, and she called it the zipcode CA 90291.

BC: Okay.

LA: And all of us who were in the group were in that show. And that certainly launched me. From there, a lot of things happened. There were dealers who were interested, and I got into a group show at that time at Barnsdall, was for emerging artists, [24 _____ Who Sculpt], and I was thrown into the professional, really without the school, but with being surrounded by artists. And not only were we meeting every week, but we were seeing each other practically [every] [day].

BC: So it was a real scene.

LA: It was a real scene. It was a real. . . .

BC: Which is something that's missing now.

LA: Which is completely missing in my life. Now, I don't know. . . .

BC: And it's completely missing every. . . .

LA: Are other artists saying that too?

BC: . . . everything, at every level.

LA: Really?

BC: Yeah. I mean, there's some occasions to get together but there is not that kind of intensity.

LA: Yeah, I mean, I don't know if it's a function of being in mid-career and at a certain level but I really miss it. I mean, it was a completely, burgeoning of ideas, and also I was married to an artist, and all our friends were artists, and we would have dinners, and, yeah, so it was definitely a scene. I didn't come out of myself, you know. [meaning she had came out of a group—Trans.] And that was terrific.

BC: And being a part of a scene helped get you recognized.

LA: Completely. Had I not been part of that scene, I wouldn't have been recommended to be in that show. That's how it happened. All my friends mentioned me. In fact, at that time, I wasn't even living in Venice by then. And she included me in the show anyway, because she really liked my work and. . . .

BC: What was your work at that time?

LA: At that time, they came from those large drawings. And they were, I had worked on those drawings. . . . Like I said, I was working fifteen, sixteen hours a day, just on charcoal drawings. So they were very gestural, but they were very textured, and they looked like the Earth, so there was always that kind of concern, of. . . .

BC: Are there any reproduced in here [the retrospective catalog from the Santa Monica show—BC]?

LA: Not in there, no. We started, we started here in '78.

BC: Okay, that's in the catalog for the Santa Monica show.

LA: And I had an entire room to myself, which was kind of wonderful. [speaking now about the CA 90291 show—BC] It was almost like having my own show.

BC: Oh, that's great.

LA: And I had quite a few drawings. In fact, one person came up and wanted to buy the entire show. And at that time, I really wasn't thinking that way and I thought he was kidding me.

BC: So do you know who it was?

LA: Yeah, he was. . . . I can't remember his name, but his wealth came from cash registers, I remember that. I could find out through Celia, who curated the show. She knew him.

BC: Oh, that's great. The other thing that seems to me missing now is any kind of interaction between the artist and collectors and critics. There's not that much interaction between the different parts of the art world here. Was that going on there? Were the collectors hanging out with the artists?

LA: Umm, yeah, that's true. I mean, I have quite a bit of interaction with collectors, because they come to my studio. That kind of thing. But—you make me think about it—we used to. . . . In fact, our group a couple times met at Mickey and Ruth Gribbins' house, who were collectors. They were very involved with the L.A. County Museum.

BC: Right.

LA: In fact Mickey Gribbins was head of the Fellows [of Contemporary Art—BC] for a long time, the people that gave me the show [retrospective—BC]. And so we had our art meetings at their house. Which I couldn't even imagine doing that now, that's true. I mean, I have interaction, but I guess it's because they want to buy the pieces, means that's a different thing.

BC: Um hmm, rather than this feeling that they want to be part of the scene. . . .

LA: Yes. Yes, you're right.

BC: . . . and be sort of hip. [chuckles]

LA: Yes. And then sometimes we invited them into our group, into our meetings.

BC: And was there interaction with curators in town or critics?

LA: Umm, I don't think as much. I'm trying to think if. . . .

BC: What about people. . . . At that point, were you involved with the Grinsteins, Elyse and Stanley?

LA: Oh, yeah. Yes.

BC: Were they involved in this type of group?

LA: They weren't in that particular group, but consequently we got. . . . Yes, they were. . . . No, I think

we did go to their house, probably. Yeah, they're unique, they were just fantastic. Yeah, they were part of that whole scene of involvement.

And at that time, I think Marcia Weisman for me came a little later. Very close to both Marcia and the Grinsteins. But in terms of my meeting her, I think I met her in '75 or '6, and I'm still talking about '73.

BC: Right. And then, as you said, everything sort of changed in '78.

LA: Oh, then there was a complete shift in my work.

BC: Yeah. In your work, and also the whole scene.

LA: And the whole scene. And the whole scene.

BC: Yeah. Did it die down?

LA: Well, for one thing, in terms of my own group, many people left for New York. Sort of pathetic, actually.

BC: Why did you decide to stay in L.A. as opposed to go to New York?

LA: At that time I was married, and he didn't want to move to New York.

BC: Oh, okay. [chuckling]

LA: And then a couple years. . . .

BC: Would you have, otherwise?

LA: Absolutely. But then the strange thing is a couple years later we divorced, and he ended up going to New York and I ended up staying here. So. . . .

BC: Oh, no. But do you feel that if you had gone to New York, your career would have taken different turns?

LA: Of course. Completely. I mean, who knows where we'd have gone, but we'd have completely taken different turns.

BC: You would have been considered differently than you are.

LA: Completely. I started showing back east in 1980, and for about a year or two. . . .

BC: Where did you show?

LA: In Washington, D.C., mainly. I had a show around the Washington Monument—I think I told you about that. And also at the Hirshhorn, and with the Diane Brown Gallery. And I was just amazed how differently artists are looked upon. At least this was back then. And it felt that they were respected and their ideas were. . . . I mean, what was important is what they had to contribute. Here, what it felt like is that you were more of an art star. You were either kind of crazy, or an art star. So we were like, we had groupies, you know, or [were] not understood. Even the people who were the groupies or the collectors who wanted to touch you because you're an artist, it wasn't for your intellect [chuckles] or for what you had to really contribute. So it's that star system, and that I miss.

In fact, just recently a friend of mine from Washington, D.C., came here, and it was just great just to interact with him. It's a much more. . . . I think in New York, and, I mean, again, the scene has changed in New York so much, but it's so much about this is what you have to offer. Here it's so much about the [sob, Saab, sop]. So it's very different in that way.

BC: Hmm.

LA: I could have moved very easily. I wasn't quite ready ten years ago. But a couple of years ago, but then I. . . . Again, I met someone [chuckles] and we were married right here. And I'm very involved here. I mean, that's not the only reason. I'm so committed to a lot of things, but it's in the back of my mind. It's something that I do intend to do. Of course, by that time I'll be. . . . [laughter] Who knows? But it's such a different scene. And unfortunately the two don't meet, really. I mean, I'm more realistic about it now than I used to be. Because I'd go there two or three times a year. And I have just as many friends there. . . . I could almost say I have as many friends there [in New York—BC] as I do here. I mean, you know that. In the art world it's a small world. But I just haven't made that shift. When I split up with Richard [Croissant—BC], he went back to New York, and he tried to do things. He wanted to get in, to set up things there, so we could move there. At that time, I was starting this huge project here, was having the retrospective, a lot of. . . . There was no way I could move until like now.

BC: Right. And you don't think. . . .

LA: And I didn't want to get back together [with Richard—BC].

BC: Yeah. You don't think Carey [Peck—BC] would want to move to New York?

LA: Uh, it's possible.

BC: Yeah.

LA: But right now we're taking on another, you know, just another completely opposite, where we just bought all this acreage in Malibu, and we're living that kind of life, which is wonderful and something that's very important to my work. But I can see. . . .

BC: Well, your work is so bound up with nature and you. . . .

LA: With nature. It's completely about nature. I don't know what my. . . .

BC: What would you do in New York?

LA: See, I don't know what my work would be like in New York.

BC: Yeah.

LA: And that's probably why I haven't moved.

BC: Do you feel that being out here was a major influence—the thing with the nature?

LA: Completely.

BC: And the things that you realized came out of observations of the environment here?

LA: Yeah, completely. Completely. In fact, I just had dinner with someone last night who's

interested. . . . She's been in the south of France a lot, and she sees a lot of relationships between California artists and artists who are from southern France. And I grew up in Tunisia, which is right across the way from southern France. And I could, I'm sure, if I did this kind of work there, it would be just. . . . Because it is; it's the same kind of feeling for the environment and the earth. So, yeah, my work. . . . I wouldn't do this kind of work had I been in New York, and who knows what I'd be doing.

BC: What are some of the things that came out your experience living in L.A.? Or living closer to nature?

LA: There's so much, you know.

BC: Well, just. . . .

LA: The main thing. . . . Couple things. One, it's that whole idea of the—what is it?—the oyster and the pearl? That there was such a lack, it feels like such a lack of connection, here in L.A.

BC: Connection with. . . .

LA: To a symbolic. . . . I mean, that's true in New York, too, but one of the things [was] that I was working against what there wasn't. You know, I needed to create work that would give me a sense of wholeness, which I didn't feel in the culture. [Now, You know] that could happen in New York too. But in terms of nature, all the work really, especially since '78, came from the direct observation of. . . . I lived in Malibu where, facing south, I could see the sun go from east to west and the moon go from east to west, and I also made a point of isolating myself from a regular hustle-bustle city life, to be in that kind of an environment, and then the work became about that. So it's so interconnected that, to answer that question, everything.

BC: Everything stems from that.

LA: Everything came from it. The lights, number one. And the relationship to nature and. . . . I can see, you know, I could sure find a little path. You know, being in New York and finding something that was just as. . . .

BC: Um hmm, Central Park. [laughs]

LA: Yeah, right. Or just as, you know, that has the essence, because I'm interested in the essence of things. But my work is. . . . I mean, in New York very few people do this kind of work because we're, it's so impacted.

BC: The spiritual side of your life is very important, and that also manifests itself in your work. Would you say that that stems from your childhood experiences?

LA: Well, I'm sure. . . . That, I'm sure. I mean, it was so incredible to be raised. . . . First of all, everyone in Tunisia, when I was growing up—even the smallest little Arab in streets—is very poetic. Very, very poetic. It's—it was—a very sensual country, with a lot of wind and smell of jasmine, flowers, music, and. . . . Matisse and [Eugene—Ed.] Delacroix and [André—Ed.] Gide, and a lot of these people, when they call [it] the exotic, right?

BC: Right.

LA: I mean, that was north Africa. And I grew up in the fifties where there was still a lot of that, so it was these waves of, you know, sensual kind of influences—number one. Now that doesn't say

spiritual, but it's a connection to the environment. And the environment itself was, you know, I mean, people—everyone—picked up on that kind of easy life and they were just having a good life. And then, of course, it's an Islamic country, so if you're ever been to an Islamic country. . . .

BC: [Oh, Well], yeah.

LA: Everyone prays at a certain time. . . .

BC: Um hmm, it's an incredible experience.

LA: Yeah, it's an incredible [experience—BC]. You know, that piece [pointing—Trans.] comes from that, by the way.

BC: Right, the. . . .

LA: Yeah.

BC: The name of it is?

LA: It Takes One Thousand Masters Praying to Melt One Heart of Stone. And there's three panels, and one of the panels is an abstraction of having seen all these Muslims at prayer at Mecca. You know, all these kind of Arabesque kind of shapes.

BC: Um hmm. Yeah, that definitely has the arabesque. . . .

LA: Right, that was the feeling. And being in India and hearing chanting and—a lot of Muslims actually there—praying at certain intervals of time.

BC: Yeah, the sound is amazing.

LA: The sound is constantly there.

BC: Even. . . . What's, when they call, with the call to prayer, when they get up in the. . . .

LA: Um hmm. It's called the [Mitt Suing, midswing], yeah.

BC: That sound itself can pierce right through you.

LA: It does. It pierces right through you. And imagine this. . . . I started out three years old in this convent, and on a hill, in Carthage, which in itself has all these. . . . Talk about religious. . . . The Christians were thrown to the lions back then. And at night, and at twenty of four in the afternoon and at twenty of four in the morning, from the Mosque these chants come out right in the middle of the night, and you hear these chants. And I didn't know, I didn't associate them with God necessarily, you know.

BC: Yeah.

LA: But it was that kind of. . . . And then on top of that we'd go to mass three, four times a day.

BC: And that has sort of the same chanting. [laughing]

LA: Right, the same kind of thing. And then celebrating all the Jewish holidays.

BC: Right.

LA: So I was completely immersed in that kind of a life, that whole culture. And also the earth itself there. There's a real beauty and history to the earth. So, sure, I was completely impacted from childhood. But I'm not a religious person. You know, there's a real difference between religion and. . . .

BC: Um hmm.

LA: Even the word "spiritual," you know, it's so hard to. . . . We're really talking more about a kind of a connection to a source, to. . . . You know, the fact that we're not just this planet, with nothing else. We're in a much greater context. So when I left Tunisia, I was completely impacted with that as an early childhood, and so it gave me a sense that there was something greater than just my own self. And that was very powerful.

BC: And especially coming here where there was nothing.

LA: There was not. And the culture doesn't have that. So you sense it in every kind of relationship between people there. It's like you go to the grocery store and there's. . . . At least then. Now it's different. But there was that kind of sense of connection. And so, yes, there was that. And then how it came out in my work. It's funny, I was talking to a friend yesterday about something entirely different, something personal, and I realized that. . . . I think it came out really from my own personal life of realizing that I had to deal with certain things in my life, that the only way to deal with it was to find a way of dealing with my life. And it really just came to me. I mean, it came from taking walks in nature. I was very influenced—I don't know if I told you last time—by a movie that William Herzog did, called *Agire: The Wrath of God*?

BC: Hm mm.

LA: It's about the conquest of Peru.

BC: Oh.

LA: Fantastic film.

BC: Really? Oh.

LA: And the first scene was. . . . You just see green on the screen. And then the camera comes in tighter, and you realize there's some movement in the green, and then tighter and you realize there's people. And then you realize it's like these Indians in the Andes, you know, crawling up this mountain.

BC: Um!

LA: That kind of perspective really affected me at that time. I was living in Malibu, and there was a hill. And so what I would do is I would take a walk in the hill, and I would imagine myself like those Indians, this dot in this green. And so I started thinking in terms of looking down from space, and having that kind of perspective. I take a lot of trips—for career, as in _____ of it. And I love looking down, I love that perspective, looking down at the earth. And when you do that, you just see. . . . Like "It's all nice down there," you know. And that perspective is so wonderful. So my interest in the spiritual came a lot from that. Came a lot from that kind of a perspective. And just seeing the context that it's. . . .

Another thing is I remember where I lived in Malibu there were [more than one] house, and there were some friends of mine in one of them, and it's all country, and then you'd go in. And at night I'd love to look at the lit houses from outside. And then I could see this guy at the kitchen [who] had no idea I was watching him.

BC: Ohh.

LA: Right? That kind of thing, of that beauty of. . . .

BC: Un, being not conscious.

LA: Right, and the home life. But being able to observe it. It all has to do with observation and seeing it from the outside. And so that when I was then myself in that position again—you know, being in the kitchen and the sink at night, I would imagine again being observed. So that there's always something greater than what we see.

BC: That's an interesting way of putting it, yeah.

LA: Yeah. So that's really. . . . I mean, I don't call it spiritual like, you know, it's just that. It's almost like instead of being a five-sensory human being, it's a multi-sensory experience, that there's much more. . . .

BC: Um hmm, of being really aware of yourself, being in touch with it.

LA: Yeah, yeah. Of experience.

BC: And also you were involved with the Tassajara Zen Center?

LA: Tassajara? Yeah.

BC: In Carmel. Near Carmel.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: Since 1970.

LA: Right. We'd go there every year and _____ the Zen Center.

BC: Still?

LA: No. We did for about ten years. [Was it] ten years? And it was a Zen meditation center. And, yes, well, meditation, that. . . .

BC: Is still very much a part of your life.

LA: Yeah. And, again, that's about observation. It really. . . . In a way, it's funny, because I like to think of it. . . . One can think of it in one term, but the other thing is very, very physical. It's very almost scientific. You know, it's about observation. It's about just seeing what is and being aware of the greater context. I mean, all meditation is really is being able to observe your mind. You know, as it goes through all these different crazinesses. [laughter] And seeing it as this. . . . You know, what I'm amazed is it's just this organism, whether it's in you or me or in anybody else. It just has a life of its own, and it does the same thing. It will do what it's supposed to do. And it runs on itself. And if you believe in just it you're in trouble. [laughs]

BC: Do any of your works come out of your meditation?

LA: Completely. I would say all of them. I would say all of them.

BC: Are they visions that you see, or just a coming out of a state of mind?

LA: A lot of the things are things that I see. For instance, this piece right here, which is from the [Earth/Sun, Earth-Sun] series, and it's called Beneath the Blue. That definitely came from a meditation where I saw. . . . This one right here. [pointing]

BC: Yeah.

LA: And this one also here.

BC: That's just beautiful.

LA: Well, I saw this blue, there was blue really beneath, like beneath thought? You know, behind thought, behind consciousness, was this blue. I mean, I saw the blue just everywhere. And, you know, I've been working with blue for like thirteen years, but it was in front of the source, which is gold. And so, yes, I would say that my work is the visualization of an inner process. And now that's fairly new. That [process is—BC] new I would say since '85. And I could go into the evolution of the work, which is kind of interesting.

BC: Yeah, let me change [the tape—Trans.].

Tape 4, side B

BC: This is Bonnie Clearwater interviewing Lita Albuquerque tape four, side B.

Okay, so now you went from figurative work, doing drawings. How did it develop?

LA: Figurative? No, I started out. . . . When were you referring to?

BC: Oh, very early. Well, when you were at Otis. Were you doing figurative work?

LA: Well, no, I was learning to draw, so we went through the anatomy.

BC: Oh, okay.

LA: No. Right after Otis, when I did just the drawings, they were abstract completely. Abstract Expressionist.

BC: Oh, really.

LA: Yeah. And I was main. . . .

BC: And what were your materials at that point?

LA: They were charcoal and then pastel, and then oil pastel. So it was really a drawing material. And they looked like Turners. It was like an accumulation of marks, but they were very much about like natural forces—and light. I was always interested in that. And the first series that I did had the format of a square. It was almost like. . . . It was a window, or a pane of glass or a square. It'd then disintegrate into pure light. So it was that kind of conceptual base. So it was completely abstract.

And then it was abstract until '78, and the work from about '73 to '78 was more of an abstract expressionist, but minimalism _____ you imagine all that. [chuckling] Nature. And then in 1978, I had a real shift. I started teaching in Santa Barbara, and I would drive three days a week on the coast highway, where I had the cliffs on one side, vertical cliffs, and the ocean and then the horizon line, and the sky. And they were rocks everywhere, and I started gathering rocks, and I started thinking a lot about nature. And then a couple things happened. The work kind of split into two different areas. One, I started. . . . I saw a piece that really influenced me—which, again, had an indirect influence from Yves Klein.

BC: Oh, really? What was it?

LA: A young student again from UCLA, but she is showing. Susan Kaiser Vogel? Did an MFA [master of fine arts—Ed.] show where she had done a room of bricks outside an outdoor room, and she had put blue pastel in it so that it just kind of disintegrated into the sky. And I know that—later, because I became friends with her—that another artist—I could mention his name, but I don't know if I will—had told her, "Well, Yves Klein used blue," and got into. . . . So it came from Yves Klein. I think I was really impressed with that kind of connection of something human into the sky, into the blue.

BC: Um hmm, and merging.

LA: Right. And so. . . . That was a little later, but what I had started to do was using these rocks that I've accumulated for years, and just pouring pigment on them. This was before I saw her piece. And I think that came out of my culture, that came out of Tunisia, because when I went back to Tunisia I saw it all over the place there. Like looking at the blue and gold, you think, you know. . . .

BC: Right. It was very subliminal.

LA: Yeah. Completely. And so that was one of the things that was happening. The other thing is I'd been Rolfed [body straightening—BC], and one thing that came out from that; it really changed me. I realized the need for another [type of project? person?—Ed.], and I started doing figure work, which completely took me by surprise. It was something I was never interested in doing.

BC: Uh huh. Actual figure work or just. . . .

LA: Figurative.

BC: So it was identifiable as a figure.

LA: Oh, completely, yeah. And at that time—this is when I was telling you was a real shift everywhere—a lot of people started doing figurative work. Which, you know, like the whole _____ abstractions and the. . . .

BC: Yeah, and the new image painting?

LA: Right. Right, _____ before the new image, and [then—Ed.] the new image, and then it got into, you know. . . . So. . . .

BC: Right. We talked a little bit about this before: Why do you feel there was this shift?

LA: I think we go through. . . . You know, as humanity there's an on-going consciousness and artists pick up on why particularly. . . . It was both a shift in that and also an awareness of the earth more. And now, you know, there's that much more of an awareness about the Earth. Now, it's like that's

all we hear; we have ecology and all that. So I think it's what's in the air. I really do. And I think what happened there was the need for a break between the minimalist ideas that were going on and . . . something, you know, to say, "No, painting isn't dead." And to go back to that.

BC: So you were painting with these figures?

LA: I was painting on. . . . This is what I was doing. I was painting in, I was doing a whole series on desire. Before that I did a series of parts. The same time as [Jasper—BC] Johns was doing it.

BC: Oh!

LA: I didn't know he was. On body parts. And I had this box where I had all these body parts. And so it started slowly coming there. Mine always come from a personal kind of sense. Although there was another influence. It was seeing an Ed Kienholz catalog of work he had done in Berlin. And the culmination of all that made me say, "Well, it's okay to do the figure." And I wanted to this series on desire. Now what happened is I couldn't really complete it, in the paint. And that's when I started taking the figures out in the desert. And I did the outdoor pieces.

BC: And that's when you started doing the ephemeral [work]?

LA: The ephemeral pieces.

BC: And those were the first ephemeral pieces that you did?

LA: The first one. . . .

BC: With the rock.

LA: . . . was the rocks, and like the Malibu one was actually the very first one.

BC: Right. And that's when?

LA: In January '78, right. And. . . .

BC: So while you were becoming figurative, you were also doing these. . . .

LA: Completely abstract symbolic.

BC: . . . abstract symbols.

LA: Yeah.

BC: Did you see a connection between the two?

LA: Yes. . . .

[Interruption in taping]

BC: . . . the connection between the figurative. . . .

LA: . . . figurative and the abstract. In the ephemeral pieces, what the connection was, was that all the pieces that I did initially in the beginning had references to either the horizon line or the moon or the sky or mountain range, so it really. . . . The pieces were about the human experience of

connecting to the environment. It was done abstractly with the blue line. The rock pieces that I did out in the desert actually had to do with the constellations. They were placed in forms of constellations, and it's as if the constellations had fallen on the earth. And the figures were the human. You know, it was almost like a, just a literal translation of the human experience of going toward the horizon line. It was more of a literal connection, and obviously not a formal connection. So it was about the experience, the human experience.

BC: So in a way the viewer became—or you yourself—became the figure in these works.

LA: Yes. Right, right. And then. . . . Let me think what happened from there. But I didn't pursue the paintings, which is kind of too bad. In fact, I have one that I'm not [selling] and which is one of my favorite paintings [_____—Ed.]. But I didn't pursue them. And what was interesting about them, is I had figures that were couples, and the whole series was called object of desire. And they were really the idea that they were continents. So, again, it wasn't just figurative. It was. . . .

BC: Related to the earth?

LA: Right, it was related to the earth and, yeah, the beginning of the awareness of the earth as a living organism, and then the object of desire also being about the earth. And gravity and. . . . It wasn't just figurative. The concept was much larger than that.

BC: Hmm, and so you stopped painting completely after. . . .

LA: I stopped. . . . Well, what happened is I stopped painting, but then I would go outside—I would do these pieces outside—and I would do some pieces. . . . I didn't completely stop painting. It was back and forth and back and forth. And the paintings were figurative for a while, and those pieces were really about. . . . I mean, each one informed the other. And it was about the experience of my going out to these desert places, surrounded by the horizon of the earth. . . . Let's say, in a dry lakebed you can really see the entire 360-degree horizon of the earth. And they taught me a lot of things. And, again, I would do something, then I would observe, "Oh, that's interesting," and then I started reading things—like Vincent Scully, I remember had an article that—the Architectural Historian—and I was surrounded by mountains in this dry lakebed, and he had an article on Pueblo architecture, and he was talking about the Greek temple and the triangle as being, for the Greeks, the notion of the sacred mountain. And then he went into Hopi architecture and what that was about. And then I started doing pieces that dealt with the sacred mountain. I would go out and look for triangular-shaped rocks that were symbols for that sacred mountain. So it was a back and forth. And then later all the pieces outdoor. . . . Now that I think of it, the ephemeral pieces really are like, this would inform the current work, and were like the seedbed of a lot of what's going on now—which is internal, but it's based on external observation. [I don't know—Ed.] if you can see how that can be connected, but it is.

BC: Well, so with the work being ephemeral, was the photodocumentation become part of the work?

LA: Yes. Yeah. That became the work. The documentation was the work. And what I did, actually, is every time I would show them, I also did an installation—an indoor installation, which was ephemeral, but an indoor piece. And those I can see now as transitional work from the ideas of the pieces that were outdoors, which was about the connection to the environment, to more a combination of that and the internal process. I did a whole series on the sacred mountain, and I did a lot. . . . They had the red. . . . And, oh, I had a dream of where I saw a red pyramid in the interior of the earth. And for years I worked on that symbol.

BC: Well, the Washington Monument became that.

LA: Yeah, the Washington Monument was a lot about that. And then [Axis Mundi, Axis Moon Deep]. Really, since '78 on—even though before there was some. . . —it was all about notions of the earth—and the human experience. Human experience connecting with the notions of the planet.

BC: Was this related to work that Jim [James—Ed.] Turrell was doing?

LA: Uh. . . .

BC: Do you see connections between [them]?

LA: It certainly. . . . Yes, now. At that time. . . . You know, it was just a connection; it was not an influence.

BC: Um hmm. Yeah, I know. That's what I'm just saying, in the kind of thinking that was going on at that time.

LA: Completely, completely. Yeah.

BC: And was the work complete only when the viewer was involved?

LA: Um hmm. I would say so.

BC: Yeah. So it was participatory type of work.

LA: Yeah.

BC: And what kind of experience were you anticipating the viewer to have?

LA: That experience of the awareness of the greater context. For instance, at the Washington Monument to realize that that's how fast we're rotating around the sun.

BC: Um hmm. There was nothing political about that statement?

LA: No. It was not a political statement. People could see it as a sexual statement, they could see it as. . . .

BC: As sexual?

LA: Yeah.

BC: Was it a sexual statement? [laughs]

LA: No, I'm not a feminist, you know, and per se. And it wasn't that. It really truly was about the idea that the earth rotating around the sun, casting shadows at the directional lines, revealed the hidden geometry. . . . That was a source of tremendous power. Now I don't mean external power. I'm really talking about an internal power.

BC: That's one of the things that Turrell is trying to make people aware of with his Crater Freedom. . . .

LA: We're completely on the same, on the same plane.

BC: . . . is to make you aware that you are on a planet that is moving.

LA: Right.

BC: And that there are stars around you and how it all interacts.

LA: Right. I don't know where my interest of that came. I mean, I do a lot of reading in astronomy, I do a lot of. . . . I'm completely into the space program. I'm completely involved in it.

BC: Oh, really.

LA: Yeah. I mean, it's something that fascinates me.

BC: What about phenomenology?

LA: Um hmm, completely.

BC: . . . [Maurice—BC] Merleau-Ponty?

LA: Yeah, yeah. My work is phenom. . . . pheno. . . . I can never say it. [laughs]

BC: Phenomenological. [laughs]

LA: [speaking in a comical distorted voice, perhaps to "impending" baby?:] [You're not] phenomenological. Completely.

BC: Yeah.

LA: I literally almost close my eyes when I. . . . You know, it's really about. . . . It doesn't go through. . . . It's not about the intellect through the mind. It's really through the senses. But it's even more than just the five senses. That's one of the things that I'm playing with now: That it's not, so that the reading doesn't come through the mind or just the eyes. The reading comes through all the senses, and then that's where intuition comes in and feelings and taboo subjects—in the art world. And I'm very fascinated by it, because I think as a humanity we're evolving from being a five-sensory being to multi-sensory being.

BC: You know, I'm finding though, among a lot of young artists, that they are seeking that again.

LA: I think so too.

BC: Partly because it was taboo. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . and therefore rebelling against this puritanism that was in the arts in the last ten, fifteen years. And realizing that that's why they want to be artists in the first place is this idea of transformation.

LA: That's right. And I think, talking about transformation, I think that's another thing I think. I mean, I do think, quote, "politically," in that way, now that it's almost an obligation. Of bringing out that kind of a vision. I mean, in a way the work really does have to do with bringing out visions from other senses besides just the five senses. And that has been taboo for a long time. But I think, like I said, as a humanity we're shifting into that anyway. And I think it's important politically—on a broad scale,

politically—to bring that out so that. . . . And I understood the effect when people look at the work. Those who see it not just through the mind really do. . . .

BC: It obviously played on me subliminally, although I want, we want _____ [goals]. [laughing; both talking simultaneously]

LA: It did subliminal? [laughs] I love it, I love it. And also, I've been working with the whole notion of alchemy. But again, not consciously, not through the mind. No, I really do it. . . .

BC: Does that relate to like the Arte Povera use of alchemy? The sense of transformation and regeneration?

LA: Um hmm, um hmm. I not familiar exactly how the Arte Povera people used it. But it is definitely about transformation. And, again, what I do, my work comes first, and then I start reading all these things and I see the connections. But there's something that happens with colors, certain color, the vibrational level of certain colors, and metals and geometry, that literally affect our perceptual system. I think of our bodies as a perceptual system. And so now I'm really playing with that more and more. And so that when you ask what I want the viewer to take that's different than before, is to have a certain energy, so that the energy system is triggered, a certain energy system is triggered into the awareness of a multi-sensory experience. So that's how I see it.

BC: With the ephemeral pieces, did people go out with you when you did them, or were they done by yourself?

LA: Well. . . . They were done with some, sometimes the whole crew. When I first did it, the very, very first pieces I did by myself, then I would take. . . . I've always relationship with students. In fact, one of them was a young student who is quite a Marxist was a student of [John—BC] Baldessari's, who's now doing some fantastic things on her own. Diane Buckler?

BC: Uh huh.

LA: Yeah. And she used to resist me like crazy. [laughter] She used to say—I mean, she was so Marxist—she says, “Well, if you do these things, why don't you just do them for yourself? You know, why bring back the documentation?” You know, it's like. . . .

BC: Well, that was one of my questions, whether your turn to ephemeral material had anything to do with subverting the consumer/gallery system?

LA: It did. It did. I don't know if we talked about it last time.

BC: A little bit, yeah.

LA: A little bit. I became very successful with my painting. And I guess. . . . Maybe it was just my own immaturity, I don't know. But I just, I didn't like it. You know, I just didn't like that; it felt like the whole consumerism thing. But then there's the other side of it, and I couldn't go on doing my ephemeral pieces, because then I could no longer afford to do them. But I did have to do both. . . . That wasn't the only reason, but it was definitely a reason—to not want to do things. And that also came from. . . . I mean, while you're in the desert. . . . I mean, had I not been part of my generation and seen people like Michael Heizer. . . . Our work is not related, but the fact that he's [gone] out to the desert, and a lot of people did that.

BC: Um hmm, Jim Turrell. . . .

LA: I don't know that I would have done that, but then I came from a country that had a lot of desert, and I was influenced by that, and people doing these pigment things. But it definitely had to do with the times.

BC: Was the photodocumentation for sale right away?

LA: Um hmm, um hmm.

BC: So in a way it wasn't completely subversive, because there was something that could be consumed.

LA: Yeah, that's true.

BC: Yeah.

LA: But, again, I don't think I did it just to sell. I didn't. I mean, I did it because that was the only way to bring back the. . . .

BC: Were they black and white pictures, or color?

LA: No, they were color. I have a whole slew of them in color. And they weren't very financially rewarding, because they cost so much to print.

BC: Right.

LA: You don't make _____. It was that kind of thing.

BC: How would you support yourself at that time?

LA: Well, at that time I had money from the sales of paintings, and. . . .

BC: So that gave you the freedom to do that.

LA: Yeah. Yeah, and I didn't completely stop, so it wasn't. . . . I guess that was a thought, but that wasn't a major political thrust that I did. Actually, it was more of a drive. It was something I. . . . I remember fighting with myself, that I had to do. And that's what I mean when [I say—Ed.] things changed around that time. There was the shift of an awareness of the earth.

BC: How do those pieces compare to Anna. . . .

LA: Oh. I can't think of her name either.

BC: Carl Andre's late wife. [embarrassed chuckle] Ana Mendieta.

LA: Ana Mendieta.

BC: Yeah.

LA: I had seen her work, yeah. We were doing it at the same time.

BC: But when you saw it did you feel there was a connection?

LA: Yes, there was. There was.

BC: The [body] pieces that she did in nature.

LA: Yeah. I think hers. . . . Mine encompassed other things besides just the notion of the personal. . . . Even though that was definitely the same root—kind of the personal, body, human, to the earth. Hers were more concentrated on one aspect. And I think mine took on other ideas of connections. Because hers was mainly with the earth. Mine really dealt with the cosmos. I love her work. I think it's wonderful.

BC: Yeah. And also with the pigments, they would react to the environment. . . . So it really did connect it to the rest of the world.

LA: Yeah.

[Interruption in taping]

BC: Now you work symbolically—or you make work that has symbols in it. . . .

LA: Um hmm.

BC: . . . and what was the evolution of some of these symbols?

LA: I think. . . . I consider it more that I work symbolically, rather than I work with symbols, per se. I'm interested in the essence—a distillation of experience into essence. And the need. . . . Again, I think it has to do with triggering, the need to trigger a certain vibrational, almost electrical, that effects a change in the energy system of the viewer. But also. . . . [sotto voce:] I'm trying to think [what] my thoughts [were] on symbols. [normal voice:] Oh. One of the things: When I first did that, again it really came intuitively. When I did the first piece, which was the Malibu Line, which essentially was a trench that was on a cliff going out toward the ocean that was filled with blue pigment, the idea came from an observation that I had. . . . A few years before that, I did a whole study about the horizon line, and my relationship to the horizon line. And through that, one of the things that came to mind as I was walking on the mountain, the verticality of my body walking, and I noticed that my body against the horizon line formed a cross. And from that. . . . To me, it really was like one of those “eureka,” you know, intellectual kind of discoveries for myself, in that I realized that symbols are formed through the interrelationship of man and his environment. You know, the cross came from that idea.

BC: So therefore there are archetypes. . . .

LA: There are archetypes, and they come. . . .

BC: . . . and that's where the archetypes come from.

LA: Again! That was what all those pieces were about. Those ephemeral pieces were about the human experience. That's why when people say, “Well, how can you do figurative and abstract?”

BC: Um hmm.

LA: You know, but it was really kind of a way of showing that it was about the human experience, or one's experience in the environment. And I'm interested in archetypes.

BC: Do you read [like, Blake]. . . .

LA: Yes, yes.

BC: . . . [Joseph—Ed.] Campbell?

LA: Yes, yes. Campbell, not so much at that time. Now. But I've read Jung ever since I was seventeen years old. I mean, he was such a pioneer in that [exploring archetypes—BC]. I mean, when you think about it now, I mean, what's our awareness now? It has been so formed by what he brought up. And again, I think that comes from my culture, from the culture I grew up in. I don't know why I say "my culture," because I don't know what culture I am, but . . . [laughter] I'm really American, you know. So the need for the power of archetypes and symbols to move through consciousness—or to move consciousness.

BC: And you feel that because these are archetypal forms people will recognize and then will respond to them.

LA: Yeah. I think we've really lived through a dark age for two thousand years, and that within us we are the fully evolved, soul-connected, multi-sensory human being, and so when we see something, even if you're completely clouded with a lot of, you know, two thousand years of Western culture, that you do. You do recognize it.

BC: You still recognize those forms.

LA: You can recognize them. And it gives you a pathway towards another way of perceiving the world.

BC: And you also use numerology.

LA: I don't use numerology, but I use numbering systems. And that is something of a mystery still, to me. I use it as. . . . You know, I mean, we all know about the ideas that. . . . I've. . . . It comes intuitively, in that there is this whole, like a wall of information that's all numbers that's in the universe. And it's a way of. . . . Right now, I'm just at the point of presenting it, maybe even to myself. And then that there's a way of cracking into it and. . . . Again, it's almost like a symbol. I use it symbolically—or archetypally. Talking about archetypes. One of the things that came to me, which I haven't completely evolved yet, but it came from one of the meditations. I was in Egypt. And I had just been to India, and in one of the meditations I saw this giant golden bee, that was encrusted in the earth.

BC: A bee?

LA: A bee. Zzzz. Like a bee bee, yeah. And it was just this flash, right, just kind of wonderful. And I started doing pieces that were of this series, the [Sun-Earth-Moon, sun-earth-moon], of The Remembrance of the Golden Bee. And one of my students saw it and said, "Oh! Where'd you get that from, what book is it from?" And I realized that I have a feeling that somewhere in there it is an archetype.

And right around the time I was doing that, which was a couple years ago now, a lot of things came with beehive. . . . Phil Glass came out with A Hundred Airplanes, and there was the whole thing about the beehive in there. I just saw. . . . A lot of musicians [were] doing beehive. The beehive is an incredible symbol. It could be that it's the structure of the universe. I mean, a lot of scientists have talked about the hexagonal kind of structure.

And so I don't know. I'm in the middle of exploring that, what the golden bee is. Someone once saw one of these pieces and said, "Maybe what you're really saying is the verb "to be." I thought

that was great. [laughing]

BC: There's one student that I met with last week at Art Center. . . . I think [Dolan]. Do you know him?

LA: Tom Dolan?

BC: Tom Dolan.

LA: Which one is he?

BC: He's the one that was using text. But he's very much into numbers and number theories, in his work.

LA: [Amazing that I haven't seen him]. Where, is he at Art Center?

BC: Yeah. His studio. . . .

LA: Not Tom. I know who you mean. Oh, yes!

BC: And he taught at. . . .

LA: And words!

BC: . . . New Orleans.

LA: Yes, yes, yes. [I] [know] what he's doing. I mean, he's doing very similar things that I'm doing actually. Did he tell you where the text came from, from that piece that was in that show?

BC: Uh, no.

LA: From a Tibetan master.

BC: Oh.

LA: And it's a whole. . . . In Tai Chi. And, see, these systems, like Tai Chi. . . . And I do _____
_____eenie yoga, which is a system of opening up, you know, all those other senses anyway. But anyway, the words had, came from that. But he's very interesting, very. I like his work a lot. But there's a lot to it, more than meets the eye. And he doesn't talk about it much.

BC: Yeah. That was interesting talking about the number.

LA: Yeah. So, again, yeah, it is. . . . You know, symbols is a key for change or. . . .

BC: Oh. I have to change the tape now.

Tape 5, side A

BC: About the use of symbols in '78. . . .

LA: In '78/'80 there was a whole flurry of people, you know, the circle, the square, this, the triangle, the spiral. Again, I think it demarks a shift in consciousness from just being the five-sensory human being to almost going back to ancient traditions, where they would use symbols to go into other

ways of perceiving the world.

BC: Who were some of these other artists?

LA: Oh. . . . God, I mean all the. . . . [I'm] thinking of the New Image people.

BC: Like Joel Shapiro?

LA: Yeah, and more. Actually there's a whole slew of people all using. . . . Shapiro would be one.

BC: Sculpturally.

LA: Yeah.

BC: Let's see. Robert Moskowitz, but I don't think he's so geometric.

LA: Somewhat. There was a woman; I'm trying to think, I can't think of her name right now. Not Lois Lane.

BC: Oh, yeah, Lois Lane.

LA: She did. . . .

BC: Louisa Chase?

LA: Louisa Chase. That was [just] who I was thinking of. Suzanne Caporael, who I know is using it, not quite like that, but there was just. . . . Whereas before there wasn't, really. . . . I always look at it not from just the individual artist, but again these huge shifts.

BC: That's what interests me. I like making connections that aren't so much visual. . . . [laughing] Like putting Jeremy [Gilbert-Rolfe—BC] and Mike Kelley _____ in the same article.

LA: Right. Exactly. It's fascinating _____ [really] of course.

BC: What about someone like Alfred Jensen? Was he of any interest to you?

LA: Yes. Very, very much so. He's very little known, really, on the west coast. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: . . . and [I] got a hold of a catalog that I just loved.

BC: Linda Cathcart [Gallery—BC] recently did a show of his.

LA: She did?

BC: Yeah, about two or three months ago.

LA: I have got to go to galleries more. [laughs]

BC: Things are happening in the galleries, you know. The galleries are pretty good here.

LA: Oh, really! I missed that, yeah.

BC: Yeah, yeah. Well, there was a catalog. . . . Was that the Guggenheim show?

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BC: Because he deals with numbering and. . . .

LA: Yeah, it's the same as [me], and symbols.

BC: . . . also he had these inner-square forms were from his trip to, I think, Machu Picchu. The idea of seeing the pyramids from above, the scheme that it would result in.

LA: I know they have. Yeah, absolutely.

BC: Yeah.

LA: So it was very wonderful.

BC: Yeah, he's one of these artists that you don't see much [around].

LA: No, you really don't, you really don't.

BC: There are a lot of gaps here [in Los Angeles—BC].

LA: There's a lot of gaps. There really are a lot of gaps. He's one guy who just. . . . No, very few people know him really here. Mentioning Machu Picchu, my travels had a lot of influence on me. But that was almost later, because I was already on the road of what I'm doing now. But just as I'm affected by the environment, I was definitely affected by all the traveling.

BC: And then you do a lot of writing.

LA: Yes.

BC: [Poetry]?

LA: Yes, yes.

BC: Oh, so it gets incorporated into your work.

LA: Completely. Sometimes, that's where I start. I start the process, the creative process, by writing. In fact, most of the time. And it just gets the juices going, and sometimes the words—a lot of the times the words come first, actually. And then the ideas come from that.

BC: How do they relate? The words and the. . . . Like in this group?

LA: Well, it depends. In this group, the way I've done it. . . .

BC: And this group, the title again?

LA: Earth-Sun-Moon/Spheres of Influences is how I _____ [of] that. For instance, this one [_____—Ed.] had a whole poem that came to me before I did this piece. And then I'd break up the poem so it's not so obvious. And this one, too [_____—Ed.]. It's a sentence that I then break up, so, again, what I'm really saying is not obvious.

BC: What is the sentence?

LA: I don't know if I can find it now, but it was about. . . . Have to find my note. Something like, "Scanning to see the golden bee through. . . ." No. "Scanning the remembrance of the golden bee through the third eye." Right.

BC: Each section has some words. Do they relate to the image itself?

LA: How do they work? Well, in this case it's like. . . . [LA points to individual segments:] "Scanning," "the third eye," "scanning," "remembrance," "the golden bee," "through," "the golden bee," "through the third eye," "remembrance of." Yes. The images have to do with, this was. . . . Because when I came up with that image, I was concentrating here, and I saw this golden bee _____. So this is the idea of scanning, and through the third eye, in remembrance of the golden. . . .

BC: So each image is a round circle like an eye.

LA: Right, exactly. This whole series—there were twelve in this series originally—all had to do with the planet as a third eye—not just an eye, but the third eye. I do another poem called "Dark Iris." Which was about the planet as an eye _____.

BC: And you did a whole series of works called The Dark Iris. And what was the symbolism there?

LA: That the planet was actually the iris of an eye in space. That whole idea. Taking in light, and reflecting light. And inhaling life from the background of the universe, and then what it's spewed out. But in this case, it was all, that each one was the planet as a third eye rotating through space, and having these experiences. As an object of observation. You know, the third eye. . . .

BC: So again, it's the idea of looking back to Earth from space.

LA: Right. But in this case it's also the third eye, which means it's an inner eye. So it's both on a meditative level, and it's both the inner and the outer observation.

BC: What about the colors? Do they have symbolic meaning?

LA: Completely, completely. The blue is about the planet and it's about space. The gold is the source. Now it's both the source of light, and I also think of it if I were to visualize the breath, which is the source of life. Of life—source of light and source of life, I also represent by gold. The red is energy, and I use these three colors is really what I use the most.

BC: And what happens when they overlap or combine?

LA: They deal with that represents—like the energy over the earth, or the source.

BC: In this one on the right, also from the same series, there's eclipsed forms [like moons—BC].

LA: Um hmm. This is real interesting. This is very much about an inner kind of vision. It was the idea that. . . . It was definitely about an eclipsed form. It was the feeling of wanting complete darkness and complete blackness—which was also very sensual and very seductive. You know, on one hand it's an obstruction of light, but it has a seductiveness about it. But it was about moving away from the darkness and going toward the light. And this relates to the very latest piece that I've done. It's at the [Osborne, Osburn] Art useum, and it's called Carbon [Ore], which I used a wall. I made a wall nine feet tall by fifteen feet long with numbers on it, and it's all gold leaf, so it's a wall of gold. And on

the ground there's two tons of coal. . . .

BC: Oh! [laughs]

LA: . . . with a gold disk in the middle. And it's about the two most elemental—you know, the highest and the lowest denominator. Coal, which is carbon, which is, you know, you can't get lower in terms of physical matter, and then gold, which is the highest kind of metal, and both. . . . It's about matter and spirituality and it has all these kinds of combinations. And the play of light, and light and dark, which is something that's. . . .

BC: And this one's just so beautiful.

LA: Yeah, it's something that's always been fine.

BC: But it's also possible to just look at your work without. . . .

LA: . . . knowing anything.

BC: . . . the conscious. . . . No, not only that; having conscious thought. That it overrides having to play some kind of mindgame and theory, that you can just respond to it directly.

LA: See, I love that. People have always told me that, and it's like they don't, they just. . . . Yeah. Now somebody like Jeremy [Gilbert-Rolfe—BC]. . . . [laughter] He'd say, "I can't see anything here."

BC: Yep. Although he is very. . . . I mean, he _____. . . .

LA: Because it isn't about. . . .

BC: But it is pleasure as well. . . .

LA: Yeah.

BC: . . . and that's something that he believes in, so that it. . . .

LA: That's true. But it's consciously that, because it's consciously conceived. Consciously. I mean, it's not. . . . Conceived not through the mind.

BC: Right. But that's fine. It is what helps you to get that point.

LA: Yeah. Right.

BC: . . . one does not have to go through all these mind complications and. . . . I was sure there were other ways of reading it, but you can also just absorb it.

LA: Yeah.

BC: And be transfixed by it.

LA: Which is kind of wonderful.

BC: Yeah, it works like a [Mark—BC] Rothko. Where you don't really have to think it all out. It is and you do respond. And it's not like a sappy thing either. It goes beyond the conscious.

LA: I love that kind of response. I mean, to that's like the ultimate. . . .

BC: It's a release. It's definitely a release. You find yourself floating in there.

LA: Right. But that idea of the eclipse I've worked on before, and the idea of the dark and light is a fascinating one. This took a long. . . . It was a long time conceptually actually in coming, and I think a lot of pieces will come out of that one idea.

BC: And the gold that you're using now is all real gold leaf?

LA: Is real gold leaf, yeah.

BC: Yeah, right. Definitely has a different feel than the gold paint.

LA: It does. But sometimes the fake one actually is more interesting, because it does change. And I like that. But I'm using the real gold leaf because of the effect—of gold on the red _____. . . .

BC: And also thinking about it when you read it on the label that it is real gold.

LA: Um hmm. Which is important. I'm really very interested in the elements. And, again, talk about symbols, I think transformation can occur through. . . . Well, it does. _____ [long]. [laughter]

BC: Right.

LA: Talk about somebody who thought about, how can transformation occur through playing of the elements, you know?

BC: Right, [and then] it does.

LA: But, yeah, it's interesting because on one hand my work, when one looks at it, gets it, you know, through the body, but on the other hand I almost have a scientific approach to it. I love, I'm very interested in astronomy, but more than astronomy. I think things are occurring in the planet right now [in] its relationship to the sun that I think need to be talked about and. . . . A friend of mine just came up with something really extraordinary. He's another artist [_____—Ed.]. And he's kind of dealing with the same kind of issues about the axis of the earth in relationship to the sun and how that's affecting extinction, and [then] he's going into this whole thing, which is fascinating.

BC: Who?

LA: [But he told me he'd just spent the last six months just reading all this. . . . He had to become another person, for this idea that he had. or??: But he told me he'd just spent the last six months just reading all this—he had to become another person—for this idea that he had.] And I feel the same way. And I do a lot of that. I have this idea and then I get into reading things that have nothing to do with reading art. Actually, I don't do a lot of art theory reading. I do a lot of scientific reading. You know, because the ideas are more geared. . . .

BC: Um hmm, to what you're doing?

LA: . . . for that kind of observation, yeah.

BC: Yeah. Well, has the work changed since the early eighties?

LA: Since the early eighties. . . . That's a good question, how it's changed.

BC: Are you still doing ephemeral work?

LA: Well, I guess if you think this is ephemeral, it's not as ephemeral as what I used to make, because I make _____.

BC: Um hmm. It's a sculpture, this wood, stone with some red pigment.

LA: In a steel ring and steel base, so there's a lot of technology, and it's not exactly ephemeral. [chuckles] But the pigment is ephemeral.

BC: Right.

LA: And I just redid a piece, actually, for KCET, the public television. Which was interesting, because I did a piece that I'd done before—redid it in the environment. I'm not doing so much ephemeral pieces right now, so that's how it's changed.

BC: And why the shift?

LA: Couple of reasons. The main. . . I couldn't keep doing ephemeral pieces. It just, I mean, there was nothing . . . left. I mean, in a way, you know. And the ideas that were in the ephemeral pieces, I'm now doing in more permanent pieces. I'm not answering your question. I'm making. . . Because I have a need to [make] objects.

BC: Um hmm. You find it very satisfying.

LA: Yeah.

BC: And you're doing. . .

LA: _____ visual arts _____ [every]thing else.

BC: You're doing painting. . .

LA: . . . and sculpture and also. . . Oh, I haven't talked to you about major installation work.

BC: Installations of. . .

LA: Yeah.

BC: Yeah, that's the other major part of what you've been doing.

LA: Right. Yes. Definitely. That's what's shifted since the eighties.

BC: So that's, in a way, still the ephemeral side. . .

LA: Still the ephemeral side.

BC: . . . because those are site-specific?

LA: Yeah. But they're not ephemeral anymore.

BC: Well, they can be reconstructed. Oh, they're permanent installations, I see.

LA: They're permanent.

BC: And so what are some of the installations you've been doing.

LA: We should probably talk over there, so I can show you what I'm doing.

BC: Sure.

LA: Let's do that.

[Interruption in taping]

LA: Well, actually I'm involved in a number of commissions, but the most major one is this one that I'm doing right now for the Cole Development Company. They're a real estate company in Los Angeles. And it's part of the One Percent for the Arts program. In fact there's a big article in the L.A. Times this Sunday, and they mentioned it.

BC: Oh, wonderful.

LA: And there were other articles in there; they were doing the whole thing on public art. And with this. . . .

BC: How did I miss that? [simultaneously:] It was in the real estate. . . . [rueful chuckle]

LA: It was in the real estate [section—Ed.]. This huge, huge. . . . A friend of mine brought it over, but she took it back so I had to make copies. [LA is walking around, sometimes away from the mike]

BC: Ooh!

LA: So what we're doing here. . . . I had quite a major complicated space to work with. They originally hired a think tank of artists from the East Coast and from here to deal with this case, and then nothing happened out of that, and then the art consultant on the job, Loni Gans, had come to my studio for something entirely different, and I showed her [phone rings, obscuring phrase]: _____ work _____. So she introduced me to the owner, and he loved the work, and I got it! It was one of those things where it wasn't a competition or anything like that. And essentially, my part of it was the entire art program, which included designing the street itself and then. . . .

BC: And the address is at 550 South Hope Street, downtown L.A.?

LA: Right. Which is quite an area of a lot of development right now.

BC: That's right near MOCA?

LA: Yeah, yes. MOCA is here. [pointing to map]

BC: To the left.

LA: Yeah. And I. M. Pei's building, The Tower, is right there. In fact, the building you're seeing right there is this building, _____ [Young, Yung].

BC: Uh huh.

LA: Okay. Hope Street is becoming completely redeveloped right now, and it deadends into the library. And right around the library are these very tall buildings, so it really becomes this real focal point, which it always has been. But it's becoming that even more. And I always knew that this was

a real M.G. [magnetic gravity—Ed.] center. And so what I've got. . . . I was really lucky when I found out. I found out that this is where Hope Street deadends, right into the library.

BC: Right.

LA: And then what I had to deal with was this very narrow corridor here and here. [pointing to map] And they wanted me to do something.

BC: Around the building.

LA: Right. So what I did. . . . I call the piece Site, Memory, and Reflection. And it's really an entire piece. Again, I'm connecting—just like in the ephemeral pieces I was connecting to other things—I started out by connecting it to the library. There's a design on the pyramid of the library, which is a sunburst. . . .

BC: Oh, another pyramid.

LA: Um hmm, another pyramid. And I modified the design somewhat, and I pulled it out and made a medallion in the street.

BC: On the street, uh huh.

LA: Here. And also here. Which you see right there.

BC: Right.

LA: And what that does to the viewer, again, is it forms a triangular relationship of the library, the pyramid itself, to himself, and back to the library, so that through the alignment and the geometry, again there is that trigger of, you know, it goes back to the viewer. You know, it's the site and the viewer. So the street is the first part of it.

BC: And what are the materials?

LA: The materials right now are getting. . . . Started out being granite and bronze. And the budget. . . .

BC: Yes.

LA: . . . has cut it down to colored concrete, though we can. . . . We're thinking of making something pretty magnificent. We _____; we're going to try for, to make [it _____, a pop].

BC: It looked like it's beautiful.

LA: Yeah. There's still going to be a white granite line, and it's going to go _____. Then the street itself is scored in these radial lines. And then have these bronze-like metals in the street. And then you're pulled into the building itself, on—this is the sidewalk—this blue material that looks like a [bull], with a blue line—which, again, you know, relates to my very first ephemeral piece—going up these black granite stairs. And end up in a fifty-two-foot-high monolith. . . .

BC: Whoa!

LA: . . . that has a sun disk on it. So, again, there's that relationship [of this to that]. . . .

BC: And the monolith is yours as well.

LA: Yeah, it's mine. I designed this whole. . . . I had to work within the confines of the architecture, but I designed this, this, and that [_____, _____, and _____—Ed.]. [pointing to sketch/map] And this is just regular granite, and this is black polished granite, with gold leaf. So there's that aspect. Then on this side, this way. . . . [walking around mockup] Let's see, this is. . . . This goes like this. The monolith is here [_____]—Ed.]. [pointing]

BC: So you're looking down one corridor? In the other corridor, I designed this kind of [gate] piece, or side piece. This is the model for it right here.

[Interruption in taping]

LA: . . . another kind of pyramid. . . . and step kind of in there. [walking toward another mockup or model?] . . . where it's [the pyramid—Ed.] thirteen feet high, and you don't necessarily walk through it, but you come up to it and you site along here all the way to this fountain, which is at the other end, [turn and, turning] fifty feet away, that has this negative shape cut out where it will be the same material as this. [The artwork being talked about is _____?—Ed.]

BC: Um hmm, and what's that called?

LA: Copper.

BC: Copper.

LA: It's a verdigris. And originally water was going to come out at that particular site, but it's not going to do that anymore. That's on one side, and then the other thing we had to do was that the building was on the site of the Jesus Saves Church, and they had to do something that commemorated the site, so what I came up with was I thought something pretty wonderful. Underneath the stairs, where the landing is, I've built this small room. See, this is black polished granite. All right, so it's this beautiful thing. I put this path that starts from the interior lobby to these doors, that are nine feet by eighteen inches—they're a real beautiful scale—and they have numbers on them. And they open up. . . . They close like this, and then they open up into a small square room, and it's domed.

BC: Oh!

LA: That has a gold leaf dome, with directly on the ground the same diamond or black polished granite, with a photo emulsion of the Planet Earth.

BC: Oh, how beautiful, yeah.

LA: So you go in there, and it's not—again, it's not about religion, you know.

BC: Right. It's connecting.

LA: But it is about spiritual kind of connection. And that it's about the earth itself, so it's for everyone. And to pass this through all these evangelists. . . .

BC: So it's all been approved?

LA: Yes.

BC: Has construction begun?

LA: The construction has begun on the monolith. We're fabricating the blue right now. This [_____—Ed.] hasn't begun yet. But the building is, as you can tell, is already quite up there.

BC: Yeah. So it. . . .

LA: So I'm really happy with this.

BC: Is this working with city or developers?

LA: It's working with the corporation, which is private; it's working with the city; it's working with the CRA (City Redevelopment Agency); with the commission, the arts commissions; but mainly I'm hired by the private corporation, and it's so political. And it's been very interesting in terms of what I can and can't do.

BC: Um hmm, yeah. How does that affect the creative process?

LA: It affects it quite a bit. You have to be so strong to maintain your vision. Because, honestly, they—bureaucrats, you know—they honestly don't see. . . .

BC: They don't get it.

LA: . . . the need for the art. They don't get it. They think it's extra money, and it takes a lot of support. . . . It takes a lot of strength from me and a lot of support from other people to maintain what it is that I want to do, because they think art should be somebody on a horse in bronze, you know.

So. . . . Still, there's some of that. Not everybody. I mean, there's somewhat of a division. And when you're dealing with a corporation, you're not dealing with an individual; you're dealing with a group mentality. And I've never. . . . This is the biggest project I've done, involving more people than I ever have. I mean, I've had architects fly in from New York, and designers and meeting people. The company is owned half by Japanese, and, you know, all these people involved. And it's been quite an experience for me, of dealing with the corporate world.

BC: Would you do it again? [laughs]

LA: Yeah, because I really do like altering [so it works out]. . . .

BC: Plus, it's something that's going to be there forever.

LA: It's going to be there forever.

BC: Or for a long time.

LA: And it really is doing the same kind of thing I'm talking about in my other work, but on a public, permanent way. I mean, it's almost like a gift I'm giving in terms of energy. I'd much rather be in my studio and just do my own stuff, but I am pulled to doing them, because I get very affected by public spaces. And I find, again, that in this culture we don't [get—BC; have—Ed.]] enough that are. . . .

BC: Particularly in Los Angeles.

LA: Particularly in Los Angeles, that are ceremonial places where you can [get] in touch with

yourself. You know, with the greater context and yourself. So the ideas are very consistent all the way through everything that I do. They look very different because the medias I use are so different—you know, from a very intimate poem/book to something like this. But I find it very exciting. And, yes, I'd do it again if I can do something like this.

BC: This is a very grand scale.

LA: It's a very grand scale.

BC: The materials are wonderful, the. . . .

LA: It's very grand scale.

BC: Yeah.

LA: So I'm really very, very excited with it, yeah.

BC: That's great. Do you want to sit down again?

LA: [Yeah.]

BC: Go ahead.

[Interruption in taping]

BC: Yeah, that's the other thing. I think you want to mention something. That's actually probably more important than the retrospective to discuss. So why don't we talk about collaboration.

LA: One aspect of the work that I've loved doing are more stage-set kind of collaborations. I've done a couple of stage sets that have been minor collaborations, and then I've done a huge collaboration with an architect and a composer, [now, you know] Brian Eno.

BC: Right.

LA: Not Brian Eno. I'm fading. Somebody who collaborated with Brian Eno . . . Harold Budd. And the architect was a very dear friend of mine, and we're very similar in our ideas, and so what happened is that we met every day for seven months, and the first four months was all conceptual. I would work on my own, he would work on his own, and then we would come together with getting the idea put together. And then we'd decide on the kind of media we were going to do, and then we actually did it. And the entire show was called a [Baw-shaw, Bah-shah], which is a Sanskrit term that means image-bearing light, and, again, it was the idea of, in a way, human life looking down from the point of view of the cosmos. You know, that kind of grand scale. I am really panting. I don't know if I can do this.

BC: Okay.

LA: Let me see. And we were dealing a lot with the male/female archetype. You came into the gallery, and there were these two very tall chairs—that he designed—that were sixteen feet high. The seating part of the chair was ten feet high. They were very simple chairs, facing one another, and that was, in a way, the male/female kind of thing. And then one side of the room was the female, and what we had was a projection. The whole piece was really, the sculptural elements was really the music, the music that kept going on and going. . . .

BC: Filling the space.

LA: Filling the space. And we had some sculptural elements, and then we had these huge slide projections of images that we took for all those months, and that we put together and that came in slide dissolves. So what we ended with was an hour-and-a-half-long visual and musical narrative, which was a story, a narrative. And so you walk into the right side of the space. What you first see, diagonally across the fifty-foot wall, is what looks like a galaxy. But actually what it was was an image of the Planet Earth projected on a pregnant woman's belly, and it looked like a galaxy because of the way we tilted the projector and all that, it was completely distorted. So, again, that notion of. . . . And then there was a narrow staircase that just went right into one of the corners. And then we had these horizontal projections in an hour-long narrative. It was really kind of a love story, but it was about birth and creation in the cosmos. And then it came down to human life, and the human life that was asleep. It's not hard to [catch, tax] my mood. There, it was really kind of very moving. On the left side, we had these three huge rooms. With a huge bed—again, ten feet high—with the bedding kind of at an angle, falling all the way down to the floor, with a huge projection of the moon on it, so it was really creating a dreamspace. And the slide projections were vertical, and they all had to do with destruction, and going back, you know—extinction, really. So it had from birth and creation to that. But it wasn't as black and white as it sounds. And what was wonderful about, what I loved the most about it, was that it was a way of utilizing my storytelling—you know, the kind of wonderful ideas I wanted to do—and also working with the music, where I was the one technically who coordinated the music to the images. And the music was written for our piece. We met with the composer, he saw my work, he saw Bob's work, we told him our ideas, and then he came to us and gave us a 28-minute tape, and he says, "What do you think?" And we went around the city, day and night, two of us, in our car, for months, just listening to his music and doing pieces that inspired us from the music. And then, then connecting the images to the music. To me it was a tremendous thrill. I loved doing that, the combination.

BC: And where did this take place?

LA: At USC Galleries [University of Southern California—BC]. And _____ [through] and they made a grant.

BC: And the year?

LA: That was 1983. And it was an NEA. . . . There was another collaborative show at LACE and LAICA at the time.

BC: Were you involved with LAICA?

LA: Yes, very much so, in the beginning, from the beginning.

BC: It was Los Angeles. . . .

LA: Los Angeles Installation. . . . [LAICA: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art—Ed.]

BC: [laughs] It was an alternative space.

LA: Something.

Tape 5, side B

LA: One of the things I liked about it, and I think deep down I really have this. . . . Every body of work

that I do could be like a novel or a book. You know, it really is kind of self-contained, has a story to it, and it's a narrative, in a way. And so doing something like that, which was even more directly narrative was kind of exciting to me. Then I've done some other collaborations with dancers and singers, musicians. Joan La Barbara was the vocalist—who's worked with Phil Glass and John Cage and then went out on her own, where her instrument's her voice. Really wonderful woman. Wonderful creative work. And I worked doing stage sets for her. So I wouldn't call it exactly a collaboration, but we worked together. You know, it wasn't from ground zero collaborative.

And we did something at the L.A., a performance at the L.A. Theater Center. And then we did something in Santa Fe, at the Center for the Arts, Contemporary Center for the Arts in Santa Fe. [Might have done, I think we did] another one. I can't remember. And I've also worked for Leslie Linka Gladder [BC has Becker??—Ed.], who was a choreographer, and did a couple of stage sets for her. Again, I love doing visuals to music. And that was really wonderful.

BC: Did you do anything with Eric Orr?

LA: Oh, yes! Yes. And I'm trying to think _____ if _____ _____. I have. That was more of a design collaboration. Fred Fisher was the designing. . . .

BC: The architect.

LA: . . . an architect who was designing an 8,000-square-foot gallery space for Security Pacific Corporation, and he wanted to have artists involved, and so he interviewed artists, and he chose three: Eric Orr, Judd Fine, and myself. And we collaborated in. . . . What it was is that we each said we were going to do this, and we worked on each other's ideas, so that they fit into the permanent. . . . We had to work with the idea that this is a gallery space; we can't have our work be there in a latent way.

BC: Dominate, yeah.

LA: But that it would still be part of the design. And that was terrific. I loved working with Eric and Judd. It was very different than the other kinds of collaboration I'm talking about. The other kinds are much more creative and free. This was more a design kind of collaboration. But I got a lot out of it. And we came up with a beautiful space. You know, it's really kind of great.

BC: I'll have to go see it.

LA: Have you seen it?

BC: No.

LA: It's nice. It really is.

BC: I haven't spent too much time in the buildings downtown.

LA: No, it's not downtown.

BC: Oh, oh, oh.

LA: It's in Costa Mesa.

BC: Oh, it's the Security bank that's in Costa Mesa.

LA: Yeah. Yeah, it's [fine].

BC: Is that were the Noguchi Sculpture Garden is?

LA: Yes, close.

BC: Yeah.

LA: And the night of the opening they had a Jim Turrell performance. Which was fantastic.

BC: What kind of performance does Jim do?

LA: It's completely different than you'd imagine. It was a whole hospital scene.

BC: When was this?

LA: Two years, a year ago?

BC: Really! Jim doing a _____ performance?

LA: Well, because, yeah, he had personal experiences, so. . . . It was wonderful. It was like the whole doctor scene, office. . . .

BC: Oh, yeah.

LA: . . . and you were greeted by the nurse, and then you go up, and you thought they were like one of his pieces, but it's actually like the idea of being anesthetized and. . . .

BC: Umm.

LA: It was really wonderful.

BC: Oh, that's interesting.

LA: Yeah.

BC: That comes out of his health situation?

LA: Yeah, yeah. Excuse me. [said to a passerby?] Anyway, it came out of that. And so that was. . . .

BC: Oh, that's interesting. I think. . . . I can remember talking [to him when—BC] he was going to do this, and I thought he was kidding around.

LA: Yeah. It was really terrific. It was really terrific.

BC: Yeah. Oh, that's incredible.

LA: So we kind of skirt in and out of each other. . . . Yeah, he's _____ [good]. And I've done other things. . . . I'm trying to think. Well, like the piece I just described to you, the Cole Corporation, in a way that was a collaboration in that I worked with the landscape architects. Originally—I mean, there's so many ideas—I designed a rain forest back there, and, again. . . .

BC: For?

LA: For the Cole Corporation.

BC: For the Cole [people].

LA: But their budget. . . . But I worked with the design _____ and the architects.

BC: Oh. Do you see that that's going to become the major part of your work?

LA: No. [laughing]

BC: No. It takes up too much of your time.

LA: No. No. No, I don't want it to be. I don't want it to be.

BC: Yeah, it takes time away from the studio.

LA: It really does. This, to me, is the central part, because I wouldn't have the ideas for those pieces if I didn't have the time to develop the smaller pieces. The large projects come from the studio work. So what I'd like it to be. . . . I had a meeting with this friend of mine who just did a piece for the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency—Ed.] that. . . .

BC: Oh!

LA: . . . that what's-his-name turned down; Matt Mullican turned down.

BC: Oh, yeah.

LA: His name is Jim Sanborne; he's from Washington, D.C., and he did this wonderful piece. And we were discussing doing these public art projects, and—[actually] from Washington [and all that]—and there's, it's a real problem for artists, in that usually you don't make much money from it. . . .

BC: Right.

LA: . . . it takes a tremendous amount of time, there's all these compromises. . . .

BC: And frustrations.

LA: . . . and it takes you away from your studio. And yet there's something that's fascinating about doing large permanent pieces that are public. So I'd like to see it being twenty percent of my career.

BC: Right now it seems like it's fifty—or almost a hundred [percent—BC]?

LA: Not right at this moment. Last year I was going crazy.

BC: Yeah.

LA: Last year it was a hundred percent, and the retrospective was coming up and it sort of squeezed each other. It was really difficult.

BC: Oh, yeah. Plus teaching.

LA: Plus teaching. [chuckles]

BC: Gee, what a schedule!

LA: Right. But now, because it's in fabrication and it's really the. . . . I have somebody who fabricates. Right now it is about twenty percent. Even though it looks like it's more. I do other commissions that are small commissions, but they're really like pieces and they just are on a bigger scale, but. . . .

BC: Do you produce a lot? During the year?

LA: A whole lot, yeah. Nineteen eighty-nine was, I coun. . . . Looking back, I made a list of—it was kind of a phenomenal year—I completed about five public. . . . Not completed, not completed. But almost. I did a forty-foot obelisk outside of Las Vegas. We're completing it this year. I'm going to have the shadow of the obelisk as falls on the winter solstice, and marking those signs. From the piece in Washington, someone asked me to do an obelisk.

BC: Right.

LA: I said, "Wait a minute. I did the Washington Monument piece. I didn't make the obelisk." And it really, you know, I resisted it at first and it was a wonderful project.

BC: That's a riot.

LA: I worked on it for quite a few years. And then I, we did the collaboration with Eric [Orr—BC] and Judd [Fine—BC]. I did about five or six major, major large pieces. Plus about two or three bodies of work, plus seven months of eighty hours a week on [Cole], plus the retrospective. It was really kind of. . . . It was a very intense career year.

BC: Well, what about with the retrospective? Did it give you a chance to really think about your career, and did anything come out of that experience?

LA: Yeah. [Well], the main thing that came out of it was understanding how important it is to, because of the different aspects of my work, to. . . . How I talk about my work, how I present it, is how it's going to be seen. And at that time I didn't have full hundred percent concentration of time to do. That was a little frustrating. But it made me see how much it's another piece, it's creating another piece, to create a show like that, because especially with how varied the different media that I work in. . . . And we couldn't, we didn't do any paper pieces, we didn't do any of my installation pieces, the older pieces.

BC: Yeah, there were some more recent installations.

LA: Some recent installations. We didn't do any of the big public art; we didn't present the fact that I do public art.

BC: That _____ complex.

LA: Yeah. But all the public art projects, we didn't even mention it. It really wasn't. . . . It's historical; it didn't really take the work historically. So there was, it was more. . . .

BC: Um hmm, nor placed within any kind of context.

LA: Any context. And I was a little disappointed for that, but there was a reason for that. There was a lack of space that they had. And also what we decided to do because of the amount of time that we had and the space that we had. . . . And Henry Hopkins, who curated, decided that, and I thought it was a brilliant solution. I mean, in a way, the whole space was twice the size of my studio, or maybe the size, with the other, no more. And fifteen years of work is more than what's here. So

he decided to make like an installation itself. One piece of itself. So we just chose a few pieces on which everything kind of floated.

BC: Right.

LA: So I don't think of it really as a retrospective. It's made me think how—again, if I had the time—what I need to do now, I would like to make documentation of the different aspects of my work through books, or something, and have it like that. So it definitely has made me think how to do that. And it's a project in itself. And you have to take time. . . .

BC: Next year. [laughs]

LA: Yeah, next year. Next year, take. . . . But you have to stop everything else you're doing and go into documentation, and into. . . . Which is wonderful, which is something I definitely want to do, and I will be, you know, I will do, but it takes. . . .

BC: Now is the show, the retrospective going to the New Museum in a year?

LA: That didn't happen.

BC: Oh.

LA: So they're still working on other places.

BC: How many places all together?

LA: Two more.

[Interruption in taping]

BC: So that the major shift that's occurring in your work is going from ephemeral to work in the commissions that you're doing that are long-standing.

LA: Right, and working with other people. Yeah, and working, in collaboration, really with a lot of people.

BC: So it's gone from working really in isolation. . . .

LA: Right.

BC: . . . out in the desert and along the ocean to be involved with engineers and architects. . . .

LA: And I think that has to do with the nineties, you know. I mean, before it was an individual artist, now I'm like a whole organization. Yeah, employees and the whole. . . .

BC: Right. How many assistants do you have?

LA: I've got three full-time, and at times it's been five, so. . . .

BC: And all keeping the machine going.

LA: And keeping the machine going. And it's a different kind of a. . . . I mean, I can't just be in here and. . . . It's a different energy, being in here alone and being in here with other people, so. . . . That's

been the big shift.

BC: Yeah. That must be a completely different mindset.

LA: It is. It is.

BC: Does it take you away from being more in tune to yourself, or meditative?

LA: Yeah. Yeah, it does. That's why I'm thinking of building some of kind of a space where I live, and so spend some time there to get—again, to get that grounding [back].

BC: Yes. And then having a new baby and a new husband and. . . .

LA: [Right]. [laughs]

BC: . . . on top of the two other children, so you can't even escape at home, really.

LA: That's right, that's right.

BC: So in a way you've become a lot more connected with the human universe.

LA: Completely. Whereas before I wasn't that connected with it. And that's nice. That feeds. . . .

BC: So we'll probably see some changes in your work in the next few years.

LA: I think so. I think there will be.

BC: It will be exciting time?

LA: Yeah.

BC: Well, thank you!

LA: Thank you, Bonnie. That's fantastic.

BC: This is very, very interesting.

LA: That's fantastic.

BC: Good.

[End of interview]