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**Oral history interview with Elaine de Kooning,
1981 August 27**

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Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Elaine de Kooning on August 27, 1981. The interview was conducted by Phyllis Tuchman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview was conducted as part of the Archives of American Art's Mark Rothko and His Times oral history project, with funding provided by the Mark Rothko Foundation.

Interview

PHYLLIS TUCHMAN: About when and under what circumstances did you meet Rothko?

ELAINE DE KOONING: He's one of those people that once I knew him, I seem to have known him always. So I don't remember the exact—there are some people who remember the precise time you met them. Mark was one of those people. I seem always to have known but I know I didn't see him always to have known him before 1950 and that was the advent of the Artists Club. It also was the year that I met Jeanne Reynal who was a mosaicist, a wonderful artist who was much better known as a collector, to the detriment of her reputation as an artist. And she collected [Arshile] Gorky was her big artist, but she also collected [Isamu] Noguchi and she had Mark Rothko and Barney [Barnett] Newman. I would meet Rothko at parties. Jeanne Reynal gave the most superb parties. She'd have perhaps 18 people and have drinks before dinner—wonderful, luxurious drinks—and wine with dinner and drinks after dinner. And the walls were covered with Gorkys and then she had a superb painting by Mark Rothko. And later she bought some paintings of Bill's [Willem de Kooning]. So I would meet him often at Jeanne Reynal's and also at the Artists Club, and at parties of Yvonne Thomas's. Yvonne Thomas had a huge apartment up on Park Avenue and she also gave wonderful parties. So it was a great period for parties. Really scintillating, sparkling parties when the conversation was just absolutely wonderful. And Mark Rothko was very social, very smooth socially. He had kind of an aloof manner. He would stand up very straight with his head tilted back looking down and with a little archaic Greek smile on his face and make these dry little wisecracks. And I found him very witty and also a very attractive man. He had an atmosphere of sensuality that I found very appealing. So I would say I met him in 1950.

MS. TUCHMAN: You were aware of his paintings?

MS. DE KOONING: I saw the first show, the breakthrough. His earlier work in the '40s that was influenced by [André] Masson and had those contours and had a tension to his work. But then when he came out with the first paintings of the floated on areas, the turpentine washes where there were no contours and the edges were indistinct, one color floated over another. And I was absolutely captured by the magic of the presence of the colors, the fact that they did not inhabit shapes. That interested me very much. The shapes, they weren't really shapes. They inhabited areas and the areas were approximate. It was, to me, very enthralling. So I wrote Rothko a letter explaining my response to his work, and he told me that he was very touched by the letter, that it meant a great deal to him, that it was the most intelligent sense of a response that he had received to his paintings because, of course, they had been covered by critics. So from the day of that letter forth, we were fast friends. He was always very flirtatious with me. And his relation to certain women was one of—you know, the kind of flirtation that's not intended to lead anywhere, but up in the air is that sense of, wouldn't it have been wonderful?

MS. TUCHMAN: You started by saying that the paintings that were influenced by Masson-do you think that was apparent at the time?

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. I mean, I thought so at the time. Someone once asked me if by looking at a painter that was new to me, if I had an instinct about that painter or if I had to think about it and develop it. And I said instinct. My instinct is irrevocable. I've never changed on my-the painters have changed, so I've liked certain painters' work more or less. But the earlier work that was analytic and so on didn't have nearly the presence, the grandeur of the style for which he became famous.

MS. TUCHMAN: Someone within the last two years wrote an article suggesting that in those transition paintings, when Rothko went from the more surrealist water colors to his signature works, that part of what he was doing was turning Clyfford Still on his side.

MS. DE KOONING: I don't think it had anything to do with Clyfford Still, in terms of looking at the paintings. Anyone who said that is saying that in terms of what they know of Mark Rothko's social life, because Clyfford Still and Rothko at one time were friends. But Clyfford Still's surface, his shapes, his attitude as exemplified by his painting, had absolutely nothing to do with what Rothko was doing. Mark Rothko was interested in transparencies. Transparency is a word that Clyfford Still never heard of. I mean, Clyfford Still was not only opaque, they're dense. And they're not only dense, they're impacted. So there just is no relation. Possibly, philosophically, there was a relation. People can influence an artist. Other artists can influence an artist, not in terms of the work but in terms of words-what we were just talking about. And Rothko was very influenced in certain ways by-what's the name of that artist who paints beach scenes?

MS. TUCHMAN: Milton Avery.

MS. DE KOONING: And Avery influenced Rothko. Rothko explained to me that Avery was the first person that Rothko knew who was a professional artist 24 hours a day. And he gave Rothko the idea that that was a possibility. But also Avery's attitude toward color-I mean, Rothko had much more to do with Avery. Of course, what Rothko had that Avery did not have was scale. And also Rothko freed the color from shapes. I mean, with Avery the color always inhabited shapes and, you know, logical divisions. So Avery was a very powerful influence on Rothko's life. However, when I mentioned that in my article about Rothko, he wanted me to delete it. He had this curious lack of generosity that certain artists have toward people to whom they are in debt. I mean, I was a bit disappointed in Rothko that he wasn't more accurate. I mean, where generosity was a matter of accuracy, he wasn't more generous. He should have been generous, but he didn't want to give credit where credit was due, which is very characteristic of a great many artists.

MS. TUCHMAN: You have also earlier described a kind of role that Rothko seemed to have at parties. I was wondering, someone has described that Rothko was somewhat of a frustrated actor. And in our conversation about two months ago, it sounded as if Rothko would play roles in the way that I've heard Gorky played roles.

MS. DE KOONING: No, they were very different. Gorky had a role in mind that he played, but Rothko was hypnotized by his own role and there was just one. The role was that of the Messiah-I have come; I have the word. I mean, Rothko had a very healthy self-worship and he did feel that he had discovered some great secret. He felt that this was of universal import. Gorky in one way seemed more arrogant, but on the other hand, Gorky also had streaks of humility. He had tremendous reverence for other artists. Rothko became totally involved in his own mythology, more than anyone I know except Barney Newman. They both were tremendously involved with their self-image. As the Kennedy White House was-where everything was done in terms of its fitting in with the self-image.

MS. TUCHMAN: You just mentioned Newman. Can you account for why there was, say, a Rothko/Newman/[Adolphe] Gottlieb connection?

MS. DE KOONING: They were friends. They all were protégées of Milton Avery's, the three of them. They all adored Milton Avery. Oh, I don't know if they adored him, but they revered him.

MS. TUCHMAN: Newman too?

MS. DE KOONING: Oh, yes.

MS. TUCHMAN: I never knew that.

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. And Milton Avery was the big powerful mover in their lives. Of the three in terms of professionalism, Gottlieb was the most professional always. He never took unto himself this role of, "I have the key to the absolute," a term that Barney Newman was very fond of invoking. In a sense, it was pretentious, raving about oneself instead of leaving that to someone else.

MS. TUCHMAN: I had always wondered whether there was some kind of cemented friendship, because of art school allegiances -

MS. DE KOONING: They knew each other all along. And if I'm not mistaken, all three of them were married to school teachers. MS. TUCHMAN: I was just going to ask you if their wives were friends.

MS. DE KOONING: The wives were kind of shadows of the husbands. And now Annalee Newman is a three dimensional shadow. She's becoming more three dimensional by the year. Of course, this is all to be released posthumously. [They laugh.]

MS. TUCHMAN: Do you think, just in passing about art schools, that the art schools of the '40s were different from, say, the Parsons of today?

MS. DE KOONING: Oh, tremendously. The art schools then only employed people that had diplomas. People that had diplomas were extremely likely not to be practicing artists. It was almost as though the authentic practicing artist was excluded. There were a few. I mean, Ad Reinhardt had diplomas and was teaching. Balcomb Greene had diplomas and was teaching. But they were very rare. Most of the artists had evolved their body of knowledge on their own and through meetings with other artists. There was a tremendous amount of shop talk that went on in the '30s, engendered by the WPA, and in the '40s it continued. It was a constant mulling over of questions, and no art school even dealt with it, nor was there any of this mountain of critical-

MS. TUCHMAN: Apparatus.

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. Well, not apparatus but material. Now there is so much written. And in the '40s and the late '30s there was nothing. There wasn't much interest. And most of what was written was about European artists, very little about American artists.

MS. TUCHMAN: As I understand it, Rothko's studio became the Subject of the Artists School, where that was located. And then that became the Club?

MS. DE KOONING: No, no. The Club was totally separate from this Subject of the Artists group. This has been documented. The Subject of the Artists, that was something that was formed I guess by [Robert] Motherwell, Reinhardt, I guess Rothko, and Barney Newman. And they had discussions. They may even have had workshops. I don't know if they had workshops. But they would have

Friday night panels, discussions. The Artists Club was formed in a totally separate way based on the fact that artists would meet in cafeterias and Philip Pavia [editor of *It Is*, a journal of writings by artists that included contributions by many Club regulars] thought, if only there was a clubhouse. Instead of going to a cafeteria to have coffee, artists would come to this clubhouse and have coffee and continue those discussions. Well, it didn't work out that way. Nobody came to the club. They had the coffee pot there and so on, and the space, but nobody came. And Pavia realized that the way he would have to lure people in was to have specific events. So he began a series of Friday night panels that were very much like the Studio 35 panels where they had *The Subjects of the Artists*. The two groups were different people and totally separate even though a lot of people from Studio 35 would come to the Club. Studio 35 was first. I think it may have begun in '47 or '48, and the Club began in 1949, at the end of the year.

MS. TUCHMAN: Someone, well, it was Jack Tworkov, once told me that what he most liked about the Club was the dancing. I mean, that's the only person I've ever heard refer to entertainment there.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, they would have these panels and after the panels they would pass the hat and buy liquor. And then everyone would have a very tiny amount, like half an inch of a paper cup. And they would have records of polkas which Philip Pavia liked, so everyone would dance. And that would go on for hours. It was a great deal of fun. After the panels there always was a party. I mean, it became very, very festive and people tried to come after the panel discussion was over, but Philip outwitted them. He simply made the panel discussions later and later. They were supposed to begin at 8:00, but he would wait until the audience came in, hoping the panel was over with, and then they'd be confronted with this speaker of the evening, whoever it was.

MS. TUCHMAN: Do you ever remember Rothko participating in a noticeable way at the Club?

MS. DE KOONING: Oh, yes. He was always very much part of it, very animated conversationalist, and amusing, as I say.

MS. TUCHMAN: How about at the Cedar Tavern? Do you remember him going there?

MS. DE KOONING: He would come in occasionally, not that much. I would meet Rothko much more at private parties than in public places like the Club or the Cedar Tavern. There were a great many parties and openings. He would go to openings like all of us. And then there were a great many parties after the openings in the '50s. Sometimes there'd be three parties in one night. We'd go from one to another and they were kind of arranged to synchronize and so on.

MS. TUCHMAN: Can you recall whether there was a public image that Rothko presented and then a private person or public persona?

MS. DE KOONING: He was not inconsistent. He was a dignified man, very dignified always-dignified privately and dignified publicly. He was a secret drinker. You know, at parties you didn't feel that Rothko was drinking more than anyone else. He never got drunk, and his secret drinking also did not make him drunk. But he would start at 10 o'clock in the morning. I discovered this when I went to write the article about him, I think in 1956. He offered me a drink at 10 o'clock in the morning and I said, "No, I haven't had breakfast yet." And Rothko said that he took one drink an hour all day long. Of course, that's really deadly drinking, because it makes liquor part of the bloodstream. But he never, ever got high. You never saw Rothko so that you felt he'd had a drink. It was always completely contained.

MS. TUCHMAN: You wrote at the time of your article that Mark Rothko has on various occasions been professionally explicit in print. Did you find that he was as articulate in conversation?

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. He was very articulate. He spoke slowly and would give anything he said a great deal of thought and spoke in well-rounded sentences. And he formulated his ideas. He didn't- Willem de Kooning or Arshile Gorky or Franz Kline would leave whole areas that they didn't feel it was necessary to pin down in words. But Rothko felt-and Barney Newman felt-that it was necessary to pin things down in words.

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, they were both college educated. Could you be aware of that difference with them?

MS. DE KOONING: Well, Gorky and de Kooning to me were much more learned, so I don't know. College educated to me doesn't mean a thing. It means that they had a predictable kind of education determined by whatever college they went to-a state college, or like NYU, or I think Rothko went to a college in Alabama.

MS. TUCHMAN: Yale, too.

MS. DE KOONING: He studied at Yale, yes. But the people that taught were predictable, and there wasn't anything that they had read that de Kooning and Gorky hadn't read. But there were things that Gorky and de Kooning had read that Rothko and the college educated artists had not. In a way, it seemed, they were less natural. They were less like professional artists. Bill, Gorky, Franz were much more entrenched in art, and I felt that Rothko and Barney came to it through a much more intellectual avenue.

MS. TUCHMAN: When you think about the kind of books they read, what kind of books do you have an image of?

MS. DE KOONING: Well, whatever. I know that at one point there was a magazine called Tiger's Eye and they invoked Greek mythology and so on. And it was very forced, let's say. It did not come naturally, and they named a painting of Bill's-one of his black and white paintings that he was doing at the time-Orestes. It was not inappropriate. The painting did have this sense of possibly of the furies and so on, but Bill was in no way thinking about Orestes or Greek mythology with which he is not acquainted. So they just kind of imposed it.

MS. TUCHMAN: Herbert Ferber has talked about Rothko's habit of reading detective novels.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, we all did during that period. Bill and I were passionately involved with-that was around 1950. I would say from 1945 to 1950, Bill and I just had a bottomless appetite for detective novels, and we just all had read all of them. Bill Baziotis was the real expert and he would keep discovering them and saying, "Have you read-." And Bill and I would read them, and then exchange them, and Rothko too. And often at these parties at Yvonne Thomas's, the discussion would not be about art. It would be about the comparative merits of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler.

MS. TUCHMAN: Would you think that was like the equivalent of someone of my generation watching television?

MS. DE KOONING: Yes, or playing tennis. It was definitely relaxation. It was just to get away from the involvement with our own thoughts. And we thought they were hilarious. I mean they struck us so funny. And also the kind of the building up of suspense and then the release. That was all kind of

satisfying.

MS. TUCHMAN: I'm going to turn this over.

[END OF SIDE 1.]

MS. DE KOONING: Asheville, North Carolina, yes. And Black Mountain is right near Asheville, which is kind of a desolate little town. And Bill did this painting that summer-one painting. He spent the entire summer on one small painting. But the [William] Faulkner connection occurred the following year, when Bill was working on a huge canvas. It was black and white. And I said to him, "It's very curious." You know, I came into the studio. I had my separate studio and I walked in and I said, "It's very curious. There are no treelike shapes in that painting. The forms are all like animals more or less and organic shapes that don't resemble the forest at all, but I get the feeling of Faulkner forest from that painting." Bill said, "That's extraordinary." And he went over and lifted up a pile of papers and underneath was a book by Faulkner and later he named a painting Light in August [1946]. But it was not in terms of a specific painting and it had nothing to do with Asheville. You know, it's people who read something and make their connections which are incorrect.

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, I think I might just buy this book.

MS. DE KOONING: Beg your pardon?

MS. TUCHMAN: I wanted to have this confirmed before I read the Faulkner book. It's a big one.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, he read Light in August. He adored Faulkner and he loved Faulkner's endless sentences. He just was lost in admiration over how much would happen in one sentence. He talked of a sentence where a man was failing and then there was a great deal of memory involved before Faulkner got to the end of the sentence, and Bill just loves that. His way of reading is to become totally immersed in an author, and back then, in the late '40s and the early '50s, he was very much involved with Faulkner. In his adolescence it was [Fyodor] Dostoevsky. But we're wandering from Rothko to this.

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, I mentioned to you before we put the tape recorder on, about somebody who was trying to establish a connection between content and form of Rothko's subway paintings in the '30s with his later work.

MS. DE KOONING: I just would push that aside, as far as I'm concerned. Every artist returns to things. The drawings that you make as a child or as an adolescent and the ideas that you have as a young beginning artist, no doubt they crop up again and again. But I think it would be forcing something to make any such connection. I think Rothko really made a break with his past-I've made this point before-and Franz Kline also made a break with his past. They just changed completely in a way that Gorky and Willem de Kooning never did. Their work was always a continuity and one grew out of the other. Let's say, paintings that de Kooning was doing in the '70s had very little to do with the things that he was doing in the '40s, ostensibly, but it was a smooth continuous flow. It was not like saying, "I repudiate that." And I don't feel that any of Rothko's earlier work informed his signature work.

MS. TUCHMAN: Do you get disturbed by the-well, that's too strong a word.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, you say it.

MS. TUCHMAN: Do you get, let's say, annoyed now at the kind of revisionism that's going on with

that period?

MS. DE KOONING: Very, yes. It's sickening to me. But of course, it can be dealt with. because there were so many horses' mouths around, including me.

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, in the article that you wrote on Rothko in the Art News Annual ["Two Americans in Action: Franz Kline & Mark Rothko," Art News Annual XXVII, 1958, 86-97, 174-179] you predicted that probably his paintings would be interpreted differently in the future.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, I interpreted them differently from his self-image right then and there. We argued about the significance of his paintings because he felt that they had a certain sense of foreboding and so on, and I didn't feel that at all. I felt they were very involved with comfort and luxury and they looked very natural in Jeanne Reynal's luxurious house, and people looked very well against them. They made a wonderful graceful decor, all of which was anathema to Rothko. I think in his very last paintings that he had down at the Rice Institute that there he got what he was talking about to me in the early '50s, but I don't think he had it then. I think when he got away from the pretty colors, beautiful colors and he got into those mysterious blacks and nameless deep, dark colors, that then the paintings did have this sense of foreboding. And I think they're his most magnificent paintings.

MS. TUCHMAN: In the Rothko Chapel?

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. I think they are, definitely. When I saw the retrospective at the Guggenheim, his paintings, as far as I'm concerned, shrank tremendously from when I saw them fresh. I mean the colors had dimmed. Well, that happens just physically with turpentine washes. The turpentine is not a substantial enough vehicle to maintain the color. Also, they didn't have the impact that they did at that time. But those big black paintings, they took me by surprise, because I had had them described and I doubted it. I mean, I didn't think that I would be as impressed as my informant was. But I was. I was tremendously impressed. I found them very grand and the scale of them, the size, it was just quite amazing.

MS. TUCHMAN: Did you feel that they were like facades, a term you used in '58?

MS. DE KOONING: No, no. I felt that they had this sense of content and awareness of death. He didn't specify whether it was death, but this is the kind of thing in back of what he was talking about.

MS. TUCHMAN: Can you explain at all what you meant when you first used the term "facade" in regard to Rothko's paintings?

MS. DE KOONING: Do you have the sentence that I-

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, you pretty much said that they were like facades, and then that was picked up in an article in Arts magazine.

MS. DE KOONING: By someone else?

MS. TUCHMAN: Yes.

MS. DE KOONING: In what way?

MS. TUCHMAN: They were like walls. They had something they presented.

MS. DE KOONING: Well, I just wonder about how I used the word. Maybe you could read the sentence right now. You could read it to me.

MS. TUCHMAN: "This sense of privacy in a profound way actually reaches into the painting itself. It is no accident that a painting by Rothko is a facade, almost as though his art were trying to hide behind itself."

MS. DE KOONING: In that sense then I can see using the word facade, that his painting is trying to hide behind itself because he did have this sense of-I felt about Rothko that he wanted to remain in-I mean that was the dichotomy or conflict of Rothko-that on the one hand he wanted to expose himself and on the other hand he wanted to hide. So, in that sense, facade would be what I would mean. But in physical terms, in other contexts, I would think of facade as something very two-dimensional, flat, and a surface; whereas Rothko's paintings to me were without surface. They are atmospheric. You can feel the colors hover, but you don't feel the paint describes a surface, the way the paint on a Clyfford Still canvas does. I mean, in Clyfford Still you see the actual surface. But with Rothko, there is no surface. There were no brush strokes and that color is definitely very atmospheric.

MS. TUCHMAN: Earlier I mentioned to you a term that someone used to refer to the painters of Rothko's generation as being versed in night school metaphysics. And yet today some of Rothko's statements get matched up with quotes from [Friedrich] Nietzsche and [Carl] Jung. Do you think that that's stretching it?

MS. DE KOONING: Well, I think it's stretching it, very definitely. And definitely it was night school metaphysics, that [Meyer] Schapiro was definitely making a crack at specifically Rothko and Barney Newman. That was part of their act, their kind of pretentiousness, let's say. But the painting itself was not pretentious. The painting was what it was.

MS. TUCHMAN: When you spent a few days in Rothko's studio while he was working, do you feel he was comfortable in his surroundings, that he moved about with ease?

MS. DE KOONING: The place was very tiny at that time and I remarked on it. I said, "Mark, I can't understand how you can work in such a small space." And he said, "I'm very nearsighted," which he was. He wore these extremely thick glasses. I said, "How lucky." He told me at that time-that was again in '56-that he was lonely. He enjoyed my coming there and he enjoyed our discussions. He enjoyed talking about art from 10 o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon, which is what we did. And he liked that one-to-one discussion. And he told me that an ideal life that he would conceive would be for-if he and Mel and Bill and I were off somewhere together in some isolated area but meeting every day and seeing each other every day. And toward the end of his life he did have that. He had these close friends that he would visit and so on. Of course, I think his attitudes were not really philosophically grounded. It was chemical. He was a sick man, as a result of that drinking, I think. And probably had had some strokes and so on. And [Theodore] Stamos, who saw quite a lot of him at that time, felt that he was definitely not all there.

MS. TUCHMAN: Did you run into him in his later years?

MS. DE KOONING: I didn't really see too much of Rothko in that depression period, no.

MS. TUCHMAN: Were you at all surprised by the mess with the estate? That that could happen to Rothko?

MS. DE KOONING: No, not the tiniest bit surprised. I admire Herbert Ferber for blowing the whistle and exposing the whole mess. But I think a good deal of that goes on.

MS. TUCHMAN: Can we return to when you were in his studio for a minute? I was wondering were you interested in how he worked on stretched canvas or the way he primed his pictures?

MS. DE KOONING: Well, as for the painting, all of that is self-evident. I've been involved with art since I was seven years old, so whenever I look at a painting, I can tell all of that immediately. Technically there was nothing new about the way he worked. Philosophically it was something new about the idea of staining a canvas in the way he did, and getting that kind of resonance in his colors. When the paintings were freshly done, they did have a kind of luminosity that was absolutely lost. The Guggenheim critics talked about his color, that half of it was gone. They were considerably dulled by time, unlike-

MS. DE KOONING: Raphael and Vermeer.

MS. TUCHMAN: When you wrote the article in Art News Annual, you referred to Rothko as an "action painter." And I was wondering if you think that term was adopted, because it was coined in an article in Art News and became a part of Art News mythology.

MS. DE KOONING: That wouldn't have mattered to me. What did matter was that Harold Rosenberg, who was a very close friend of mine, used it. As a matter of fact, I had written a year before Harold wrote a piece on the action painters. I wrote an article about Arshile Gorky called "Arshile Gorky: Painter of His Own Legend" [Art News, January 1951, 38-41, 63-65]. And I talked about how Gorky used his own autobiography in his work. There's now a recent book that came out on Gorky talking about the symbols, the implication of the symbols in Gorky, which definitely was inspired by my piece but not so credited. But Harold, who understood art only in terms of words, definitely picked up a concept from the Gorky article-the idea of an artist using his own travail and also Gorky's role playing. The term "action painters," I used because it had simply been kicking around the art world for some years and people knew then it didn't exactly mean style. It meant an attitude. So it became a convenient term.

MS. TUCHMAN: When you were in his studio, did you think that he did anything unusual in painting?

MS. DE KOONING: No, nothing at all unusual.

MS. TUCHMAN: When you look at one of his paintings today, are you still struck by the same things, the spirit that you might have related to 25 years ago?

MS. DE KOONING: Yes. Well, just the ideas I had then, I still have. I mean those were my responses to his work.

MS. TUCHMAN: I was just wondering, do you think about the man at all?

MS. DE KOONING: In the course of a week or so?

MS. TUCHMAN: No, in the course of looking at one of his paintings, do you get flashes then of the Mark Rothko you knew?

MS. DE KOONING: Always when I look at anyone's art, I get flashes of the person. If I walk into a room and there's a painting by Joan Mitchell, I say, "There's Joannie." Or Grace, if it's Grace Hartigan. And to me all art is self-portraits.

MS. TUCHMAN: Well, when you have that reaction with a Rothko, can you pinpoint what the image of Rothko is that you have at that moment?

MS. DE KOONING: Well, as I said, a dignified man standing off in the distance, aloof, would definitely be the word I would use. And vulnerable, on guard, extremely sensitive, complex, witty, truncheon; you know, an admirable person.

MS. TUCHMAN: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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