



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Luchita Hurtado,
1994 May 1-1995 Apr. 13

The digital preservation of this interview received Federal support from the Latino Initiatives Pool, administered by the Smithsonian Latino Center.

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Luchita Hurtado on May 1, 1994. The interview took place in Santa Monica, CA, and was conducted by Amy Winter for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. A second interview conducted by Paul Karlstrom is also included, which took place on April 13, 1995. The interview occurred in Santa Monica, CA, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

AMY WINTER: It is May 1st, 1994, in the subject's home in Santa Monica, California. The interviewer is Amy Winter. Let's start with your family background.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was born in Venezuela in 1920. And we came to the States in the '30s, early '30s.

AMY WINTER: What did your father and mother do?

LUCHITA HURTADO: There were three sisters. My mother was one of the sisters. And my father remained in Venezuela. And these three sisters took off and decided to live in New York, which at that time was a difficult thing for a woman to do. And we came along of course. I came later. I stayed with my aunts in Caracas. But my mother and my oldest sister came to New York.

AMY WINTER: Right to the City?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Right to the City. These three extraordinary women made their own life there.

AMY WINTER: Was there a man in the house as you were growing up?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, off and on but not often.

AMY WINTER: So it was a woman's house?

LUCHITA HURTADO: In Latin America at that time, it was women who had the house and the men came and went. The men had their friends and had their other lives. Most men in Latin America had mistresses I remember.

AMY WINTER: But you were in New York at this time, weren't you, being brought up in New York?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I mean, but still--

AMY WINTER: Still, the cultural ways were maintained.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, in New York my mother lived with this man. He was a Cuban. The three sisters had husbands. My mother's husband was a Cuban. His name was Moreno [?]. There were three sisters--Tiolinda [?], my mother, and two other sisters: Margot [sp?] and Marietta. Marietta's husband was Spanish. Margot's husband was Columbian. It was an amazing group.

AMY WINTER: It must have been an amazing Latin American mix. What did these women do to earn a living?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, my mother did sewing. She was a seamstress. She always loved clothes and she made her way.

AMY WINTER: That's where you got your talent.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But I never actually did any sewing--

AMY WINTER: Until later?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Until I had my first son, until I had Daniel. Then I decided I would try it, you see. And I did. And it worked.

AMY WINTER: And you took to it like water.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I loved it, of course. I love fabric.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And it's the only way to use beautiful fabric. And I married very young. I married Daniel del Solar, who was a Time magazine editor. He worked for the Associated Press. I met him during a summer. I volunteered to work for the Spanish newspaper in New York called La Pensa. I met Daniel because he was a part of the newspaper. AMY WINTER: How old were you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was fifteen, sixteen, something like this.

AMY WINTER: And you say you had been educated in the States?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. And so this man, I think, fell in love with me and pursued me. And I was intrigued. He was much older, twice my age, three times my age, and an intellectual. And a very extraordinary spirit.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So we married. I was eighteen when we married. Trujillo, who was the dictator of Santo Domingo, came to New York. Trujillo invited him to help start a newspaper in Santo Domingo. So we married and went to Santo Domingo.

AMY WINTER: The island of Santo Domingo?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, the capital.

AMY WINTER: Is that on the other side of Haiti?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. It's the other side of Haiti.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: At that time, the Spanish war was going on, all the refugees were coming from Spain. And there were these most extraordinary people: painters and writers and journalists. And they were all arriving in Latin America, in Santo Domingo--

AMY WINTER: The New World.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Right. In the New World. And Daniel bought the presses, started the paper.

AMY WINTER: What paper was it? Do you remember the name?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't remember the name of the newspaper. The first editor had been one of the top journalists in Madrid. So he had very fine people on the paper right off. Then there was a misunderstanding because Trujillo was not appreciative of Daniel's--

AMY WINTER: Attitude?

LUCHITA HURTADO: --attitude towards his politics, you know?

AMY WINTER: Difficult, the politics--

LUCHITA HURTADO: And at every table, the first thing would be like toasting the queen; you would toast Trujillo before you started dinner. And Daniel never did that.

AMY WINTER: He was not sufficiently ingratiating?

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's right. So, we found ourselves-- It was wise to leave. We left.

AMY WINTER: And returned to--

LUCHITA HURTADO: We went to New York.

AMY WINTER: What year was this, about? If you were eighteen, then it was around 1938?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. It was the year that Daniel [Jr.] was born. It was 1940 when we arrived in New York. That's the year Daniel was born. And I had made a very good friend of Trujillo's daughter, who was an extraordinary girl. Her name was Flora de Oro, Flower of Gold. And when she was born, there had been a competition in the country to see who could come up with the most attractive name for this little girl. And it was Flora de Oro who won, you know.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She had so many stories, Flora de Oro. Her attitude towards her father was incredible. She

loved him and she feared him. And she had this great apartment at Sutton Place in New York. We became very buddy-buddies. And she was married to a doctor, a Pinbrea Messina [sp?] at that time. Her first husband-- She was very young and fell in love with someone that her father didn't approve of.

AMY WINTER: Yes. But you got connected to her in New York?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This was-- No, this was before I arrived on the scene. When I met her she had been married to Pinbrea Messina [sp?], you see.

AMY WINTER: I see.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But she told me all these stories of her life and her relationship with her father. And her love life, you know. She had a very interesting life. She was educated in Switzerland. She spoke French. She was, as I say, a very special and beautiful-looking girl. She was very tall and thin and elegant. And what was the name of this "playboy of the Western World"?

AMY WINTER: I can't remember it. That was before my time, I'm afraid.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Porforio-- That was his name. Porforio Rubirosa.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And Flora de Oro had fallen in love with a man her father didn't like, disapproved of. So he told her she could not go out. He actually put two soldiers at her front door so she couldn't leave the house to see this man that he disapproved of. Well, Flora de Oro-- One of the soldiers turned out to be Rubirosa.

AMY WINTER: [laughs] Oh no. That's a great Erroll Flynn [sp?] story or something, isn't it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, one of these people turned out to be Rubirosa. And they fell in love, of course. So, her father, you would think he would be very discouraged by this. He wasn't. He thought it was the funniest thing that had happened. So he sent them off to the embassy in Paris. And that's how Rubirosa began.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Anyway, when we got back to New York, Flora loaned us her apartment, then we got another apartment.

AMY WINTER: So you were in New York. Now, when you were in New York as a young woman, a teenager, where did your family live? Where did you study. Did you go to a public school or did you go to a private school?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, I went to Washington Irving, which was an art high school.

AMY WINTER: Oh yes. I know Washington Irving. On Irving Place, sure.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's where I went to high school. And then I did go, but not all the time, to the Art League, you see.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Off and on I would go.

AMY WINTER: That would be in the '30s?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Bob Hale [was the head of the Art League]. I was very intrigued with his philosophy and his approach to art. Actually, the art instruction was not teaching. But when Tamayo [Rufino]-- At that time we were very close friends--

AMY WINTER: Tamayo, Daniel and you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Tamayo, Daniel and I and this Latin American group of artists and journalists.

AMY WINTER: In New York City.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In New York City. Olga [Rufino] went back to Mexico during the summer. She would leave in the spring. Tamayo was teaching at Dalton, at the Dalton school. And he would come and live with us. And very often we'd spend the whole evening talking about art. And then we'd play a game of looking at the rug or looking at something, and how would you mix that color? We never actually did. But we'd have these great times talking. [laughs]

AMY WINTER: That's amazing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, it was great fun. Anyway, I learned a lot from Rufino. And we were very close. And then Olga would come back. And as a matter of fact, he would paint in my kitchen. He painted [the painting of] those dogs in the Museum of Modern Art--

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --those wild dogs. When Olga, at one point was very ill because she went out of her head. She went off and bought a piano, bought fur coats. They didn't have that much money. Then she went to d'Avila's house. D'Avila was the ex-President of Chile. She was very aggressive and upset. They knew there was something very wrong, and they called Rufino. And she was sent to Bloomingdales, which is a mental institution north of New York. And Rufino came and lived with us and would go and visit Olga. And I'd say, "How did it go?" And [he'd say that] she would throw things at him. She was really violent.

AMY WINTER: She was gone.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She was gone. And so at that point--

AMY WINTER: How did he take that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: At that point, he painted those dogs.

AMY WINTER: Oh. How interesting.

LUCHITA HURTADO: His painting was, oh god.

AMY WINTER: He had a studio up at Dalton's?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. No, dear, he painted in my kitchen.

AMY WINTER: Oh, you said that.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. [laughs]

AMY WINTER: My god.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, it was a very sad time for Rufino. Then, of course, he took her back to Mexico and years passed. Then I saw them again in New York. I said, "Olga, what happened?" She said, "Well, I came back without--exactly the same way I left. I was sitting in a garden, sitting next to a doctor. And I looked down at my skirt and said whose skirt is this, you know? And who is this man sitting next to me." And she said that whole period in her life had not happened. Incredible.

AMY WINTER: Yes, that's very interesting.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So, I don't know what triggered it or how she came back or--

AMY WINTER: And she was fine after this?

LUCHITA HURTADO: She was fine. I haven't seen much of her because I haven't been back to Mexico.

AMY WINTER: And you didn't see them when you went there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I never went back to Mexico. I lost a child in Mexico and--

AMY WINTER: But, oh, what are we talking about? We're talking about your first marriage with del Solar.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh no. I see. When I went to Mexico [in the `40s] they weren't there. And they-- Rufino and [Wolfgang] Paalen didn't get on too well. They were not the same kind of people, you know.

AMY WINTER: Yes. Different--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, different.

AMY WINTER: OK. So, Tamayo is there and is a tremendous influence, I would imagine, having a person like him around painting his paintings, wonderful paintings.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Was he doing anything abstract then, too, or a little more--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, they would be very typical Rufino: those figures, women, and the dogs and animals, very poetic in very beautiful colors.

AMY WINTER: And so what was happening with you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I had my second child, [Pablo]. I had Daniel and Pablo. And Daniel went to work for Time magazine. He became a Time editor. And then he was sent to Washington, DC. And we moved to Fall-- What was it called? Falls Church, Virginia.

AMY WINTER: Yes. Falls Church.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I went back to Falls Church with Daniel and it wasn't at all-- It wasn't there anymore, you know, the part that I remember. Or maybe we missed it somehow. It was gone, this beautiful little village. It was a small village.

AMY WINTER: Things have really changed.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. It was a very big Latin American community.

AMY WINTER: Right. International community.

LUCHITA HURTADO: International, right. All the embassies and the newspaper people.

AMY WINTER: And how long were you there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We weren't there too long. That's where, actually, we broke up, Daniel's father and I. He became very abusive and he married-- I mean, there was this other woman, let's put it that way.

AMY WINTER: The other woman. The proverbial--

LUCHITA HURTADO: The proverbial-- Yes, there was another woman, who-- Well, he married her before we were divorced.

AMY WINTER: Well, that says something about him--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Which was very strange.

AMY WINTER: --or her.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Which was very strange.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. She was a psychiatrist, which amazed me always.

AMY WINTER: Very interesting. So what did you do? You went back to New York--

LUCHITA HURTADO: I went back to New York--

AMY WINTER: And took the children.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --with the two boys, the two children. And I decided I'd never worked in my life, so I--

AMY WINTER: And were your mother and aunts--

LUCHITA HURTADO: My mother had gone back to South America, to Caracas. And so I decided I would get a portfolio together. I got a job in the window display section at Lord and Taylor. And I did murals, a couple of murals for them.

AMY WINTER: So this was in 1944?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was 1944, something like that. In the evening I would get my portfolio together, you know.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And then I took it to Condé Nast. And they gave me work right away.

AMY WINTER: Sketches?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I did illustrations.

AMY WINTER: Yes, but your portfolio was various--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Just various things. I looked through the magazines to see what was being done. And I did the opposite. [laughter]

AMY WINTER: The oppositional strategy. I know someone else who does that. All the time you were married, in DC and also in New York, you were drawing and painting?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. Well, as much as you can.

AMY WINTER: Right. With two children, right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: With two children and a half. But suddenly I was able-- It was about this time-- Isamu was a very dear friend. Isamu [Noguchi], who I'd known forever, since the time when he came back from the concen-- the camps, the Japanese camps.

AMY WINTER: Right. He went over to Japan for a while.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He went to the-- No, the Japanese camps here.

AMY WINTER: Oh, really? They sent him--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, in the States.

AMY WINTER: I didn't realize that.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He went on his own and he was part of that. So when he left the camps, that's when I met him.

AMY WINTER: What year was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: And he was so handsome.

AMY WINTER: Forty--

LUCHITA HURTADO: And his sister, you see, was a very dear friend, Ailis.

AMY WINTER: From earlier years?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Before I met Isamu, I met Ailis. And when Isamu arrived in New York, he came and visited us because Ailis was living with us at that at time, you see.

AMY WINTER: You and del Solar?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Del Solar and Daniel and--

AMY WINTER: But how did you come to meet Ailis in the first place?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Because she was a friend of the d'Avilas that we knew.

AMY WINTER: Oh.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The d'Avilas, the former Chilean President.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So, you know, people knew everybody.

AMY WINTER: I see.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's the way it works.

AMY WINTER: So, Noguchi voluntarily went into the camps you say?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, he did.

AMY WINTER: And stayed there for how long?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't remember how long this happened, but he was--

AMY WINTER: But she [Ailis] didn't?

LUCHITA HURTADO: She didn't, oh no.

AMY WINTER: So it wasn't mandatory?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, no, it wasn't. He did it on his own. He didn't have anything to do with the West Coast. And these were the people who were sent to these camps, you know.

AMY WINTER: So what did he--

LUCHITA HURTADO: He went to give support, to lend his name to this--

AMY WINTER: Sure.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Anyway, just at this point, we became very good friends. So, that's how I met Paalen.

AMY WINTER: So, he introduced you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Isamu invited me-- He said, "I have a friend who is going to take us to the museum."--I forgot what museum they were going to--"Do you want to come?" And they were going to go to the theater. I said, "Lovely. I'll do it." So I got a baby sitter and I took off. And we had a very nice time. And I liked Paalen very specially. He was very bright and he had this passion for things, you know, which I shared. I had tremendous, tremendous--

AMY WINTER: Love and energy.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Energy.

AMY WINTER: Love for--

LUCHITA HURTADO: These things.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, beautiful things.

AMY WINTER: So that's how--

LUCHITA HURTADO: And that's how I met him.

AMY WINTER: At one point did you live at Noguchi's home?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, no. I never-- I never lived with Noguchi.

AMY WINTER: I didn't mean with him.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. I got my old apartment when I came back from Washington. I lived on 85th Street between 2nd and--what was it?--2nd and 3rd, yes, on 85th Street. And that's where I started to work and where the children went to school.

AMY WINTER: I'd like to get back to Noguchi, but when you were at Condé Nast, you were working for Vogue?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was working for Vogue, for different magazines. You see, they had different magazines. And that was the only stipulation. I could freelance with them, with any magazine they owned, but I couldn't work for the competition. I couldn't work for Harper's Bazaar, et cetera.

AMY WINTER: Did you enjoy that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was freedom. It was freedom because suddenly I had a means of being able to look after these kids, because I had no other means of support, you see.

AMY WINTER: No child support?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Nothing, nothing. I was very alone. It was a real challenge. I was awfully young, too.

AMY WINTER: Yes, twenty something.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was in my early twenties.

AMY WINTER: Yes. You and the three strong sisters, right?

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughter] Yes.

AMY WINTER: Having three strong women--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Helped.

AMY WINTER: I would think so, yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's in the genes. Anyway, you know, for instance, I'd see an object--this wonderful muslin for painting--and I couldn't afford it. So I put \$5 down on it. It was all the money I had. It was \$100, which was a fortune in those days.

AMY WINTER: For the muslin for the painting?

LUCHITA HURTADO: For the muslin for the painting. And then I finally got this job. I think they paid you \$100 a page. I had five pages. So, I went and got my muslin. That was the first thing I did was get things that I really--

AMY WINTER: Were a priority.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --really loved. The kids could go to camp-- This is what I liked about that job. It's a dreary thing, you know.

AMY WINTER: What was it? Sketching?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Sketching. I mean, it was fun up to a point, but--

AMY WINTER: Design?

LUCHITA HURTADO: There was a bit of designing. You know, you freelance--

AMY WINTER: Do you have any examples of that left?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, god, no.

AMY WINTER: What vintage of Vogue would I look at? What would I find?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, god. Now, there was another magazine. It-- What was it called? They owned several magazines.

AMY WINTER: Vanity Fair?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no.

AMY WINTER: That was a different-- That was a competitor.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I can't think of it. Anyway, I did most of my work then.

AMY WINTER: Were you doing all kinds of figures?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Figures. I remember when the divorce with del Solar was coming through, and I thought, "I don't care. I'm getting a divorce. This is fine and wonderful." I had a job to do. And I had about three pages of bathing suits or something. And the editor said to me, "What's wrong? What's happening with you? What's going on?" I said, "Nothing, nothing." I mean, I'm fine. She said, "Look at this." And I looked and all the figures had their heads bowed. The arms were at their side. They were almost weeping.

AMY WINTER: That's wonderful, a marvelous story.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I was completely unaware of it. I was saying to myself, "No. I mean. You're fine."

AMY WINTER: That's wonderful to have that capacity to let it come out in your work.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She said, "What's wrong?" I'll never forget that.

AMY WINTER: You'd be an art therapist's dream. [laughter] Isn't that funny? That's amazing. So you were doing that and then you met Paalen and-- When you were in touch with Noguchi at this time, was he in touch with New

York School people like Motherwell and Rothko? How close was he to them?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, you see, I had a very good friend. Ann, Ann Alpert, who was Matta's first wife. We took a house together in East Hampton, in Amagansett at that time. So I met all these people who were very friendly and very interesting. Jane Bowles was there and Katherine Yarrow.

AMY WINTER: She was the magazine editor, wasn't, Jane Bowles?*

LUCHITA HURTADO: Jane Bowles was a wonderful writer and a very marvelous woman.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And Rothko--Rothko came. I went to his opening, I remember. And he said he had pinned up the review next to the elevator. I think it was at Betty Parsons. And he had pinned up the most damning review. And I remember he took me over to look at it. He said, "Have you seen this? Isn't it marvelous?" [laughter]

AMY WINTER: He had a good sense of humor.

LUCHITA HURTADO: "Isn't it marvelous?" he said.

AMY WINTER: It's like the old adage: It doesn't matter what they say as long as they say it in print.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, he was a fantastic person, too--he and his wife.

AMY WINTER: What year was it that--

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I met Ann when her twins were just babies. And my children were very young, too.

AMY WINTER: This was before you met Paalen?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This was, oh, way before. I was still married--

AMY WINTER: To del Solar.

AMY WINTER: So it was the early 1940s?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, '43, '42, forty-something. It was really interesting because the characters were-- Katherine Yarrow was an Englishwoman who was an artist. She had this great isolated place [in Amagansett,] and had great picnics and lobster. And I remember [Frederick] Kiesler was the only one that had his hat on and an umbrella. Everybody else was in bathing suits or naked or however they wanted to be. And he was the only one who was fully dressed with his hat on.

AMY WINTER: So some of the Surrealists had arrived?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. And I remember Jacqueline Lamba [Breton] was there--

AMY WINTER: And they were in the Hamptons.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes, they came and went. And Matta was there. And everybody was there--

AMY WINTER: And was Ann Matta-- Yes, of course. She had the twins. So they had already-- They had met over in Europe, in France.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She was Ann Clark. And she was touring Europe. And Matta met her and followed her--

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --until he--

AMY WINTER: Got what he wanted. [laughter]

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Right. And then they came back [to the States] together.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There was interaction, then, a lot of interaction between the New York painters out there and the Surrealists. André Breton would hold court sometimes at that delicatessen on 57th Street, you know. It was one of those--

AMY WINTER: Wolf's?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. It was--

AMY WINTER: An automat?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Automat.

AMY WINTER: The Horn and Hardart?

LUCHITA HURTADO: The Horn and Hardart, that's the one. [laughter]

LUCHITA HURTADO: And Breton would be there talking--

AMY WINTER: Holding court.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --holding court there instead of the Cafe [Deux Magots?] It would be the Horn and Hardart.

AMY WINTER: And the New York painters would come there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. Off and on people would come and go. I don't really remember that much of the-- whether there was that much interaction, you know. I remember, when was that? That was later that they had this club down in the Village. And we would go and sit on the floor on newspapers. I remember one evening the Julliard Quartet had been invited to play and they played. Then Bill de Kooning and I forget who else came up to them at the end of the performance and gave them a drawing or a painting. And one of the musicians did this with it: Turned it one way, didn't know what was up and what was down. In fact, everybody was very friendly. You know, it was--

AMY WINTER: Spirited.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --spirited, a very spirited evening that we spent. But that was much later.

AMY WINTER: Later, like, '48.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was staying then with Jeanne Reynal when this happened. This was after I had married Paalen.

AMY WINTER: Yes. You said you had already gone to Mexico and come back.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Right. I had gone to Mexico and I went back.

AMY WINTER: Because The Club I remember being around 1948. Well, let's go back to Long Island. Who else was there. Was Noguchi--would you say that he was tighter with the Surrealists than the other people of the New York School? LUCHITA

HURTADO: Noguchi knew everybody.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I have very close friends from India. And I met these friends through Isamu. So Isamu, I think, knew practically everybody. He, of course, knew all the Japanese in New York. There were quite a few that were there.

AMY WINTER: Yes. So you met Paalen through Noguchi.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: He was considerably older than you, too, wasn't he?

LUCHITA HURTADO: What?

AMY WINTER: He was considerably older than you, too?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, yes. He was older than I. I never thought of age. I still don't. Sometimes I think I'm in my twenties. You know, it's sort of turned around.

AMY WINTER: Yes, I understand. I really do.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, I never paid much attention to age.

AMY WINTER: So, were you swept off your feet by him?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, no, it was a gradual thing. He invited me to the theater. He had an opening and he invited me to the opening. And that was, I think, the first time he sort of held my hand and sort of--

AMY WINTER: Tried to get closer.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. This was-- Where was it? Nierendorf Gallery, I think had [an exhibition].

AMY WINTER: So, he was in town for his opening?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was in town for his opening. That's what it was, yes.

AMY WINTER: And that's the first you knew of him at that point? That was 1946 he had that show at Nierendorf's. Nineteen forty-five he had had a show at Peggy Guggenheim's. Did you know him then?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I think that's where the show was.

AMY WINTER: At Art Of This Century?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: So was everybody at that show? Do you know who--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Gosh it's so hard to remember. I remember the kind of strange walls that they'd put up.

AMY WINTER: Yes, Kiesler's design.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was very strange. At that time, especially.

AMY WINTER: Yes. The walls, the biomorphic walls.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. It's all-- You know, it was so long ago.

AMY WINTER: And they displayed Paalen's art in that environment? Do you remember his art, being impressed with his art at that time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. It was all of a piece, you know, his passion for pre-Columbian art and his work were all connected. And his thinking--he was very verbal and was able to express extraordinary ideas in words that were even beyond the paintings and the objects.

AMY WINTER: Vocalize them?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: That's interesting. So he was as articulate vocally as he was on the page?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Amazing.

AMY WINTER: Yes. He was a kind of prodigy, a genius I think.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, he was. He was really an extraordinary man. And when he was in--

AMY WINTER: In form?

LUCHITA HURTADO: --in form, he was great fun.

AMY WINTER: He had a sense of humor?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Well. So, you finally married.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So, we married. We married in Mexico.

AMY WINTER: You went down to Mexico together first?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He invited me to come on this trip to see the big [Olmec] heads in the jungle.

AMY WINTER: Oh. San Lorenzo?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, we went to San Lorenzo and I have all these pictures somewhere of that trip.

AMY WINTER: Yes. They were published in France--in 1952 in the Cahiers d'art article.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The Cahiers d'art article. Those are my photographs.

AMY WINTER: Right. And you're credited for them.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I was credited for them, yes.

AMY WINTER: And they're wonderful photographs.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. That was also the first photographs I ever took. Eva Sulzer loaned me her little camera and we went off into the jungle and it was a great adventure.

AMY WINTER: I'll bet. So, this would have been, what, '46, '47?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I have no idea. Probably.

AMY WINTER: Was it after the Nierendorf show, the second show Paalen had in New York?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, I think.

AMY WINTER: It's hard for you to remember.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I mean, it's hard to put what came first. Anyway, in Mexico, the children were-- You see, Paalen liked children to a point, only to a point. But it made him nervous to have them around. So, I put the children in [boarding] school. And I always felt guilty about that, particularly, you know, when Pablo died.

AMY WINTER: I know.

AMY WINTER: Well, but then-- You were pleasing your husband and you had your own things--

LUCHITA HURTADO: I mean, it's--it's youth.

AMY WINTER: Yes, absolutely.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's very, very difficult to--

AMY WINTER: Know what--

LUCHITA HURTADO: --know what to do--

AMY WINTER: To always do the right thing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --when you're in your twenties.

AMY WINTER: That's right. And also you were under pressure. You know, you're in a new marriage and--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, and you're very much in love and--

AMY WINTER: That's right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's very difficult.

AMY WINTER: So let's go back to San Lorenzo. That must have been really an adventure, going into the jungle. Was it virtually jungle at that time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes.

AMY WINTER: Did you have a guide?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I'll tell you. The trip started in Mexico and we went to Tuxtla Gutierrez. At that point we went to visit a friend of Paalen's. I don't remember how they met, but Giles Healy and Sheila were in San Cristobal de las Casas. He was going into the jungle. He had just discovered Bonampak.

AMY WINTER: He did discover Bonampak?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, he did. He discovered Bonampak.*

AMY WINTER: Paalen had not told him about Bonampak?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Paalen had-- Paalen-- No, no. Sheila and Giles had this house in las Casas.

AMY WINTER: Where is that now? What state was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This is a place called San Cristobal de las Casas, which is I think in Tuxtla.

AMY WINTER: In Tuxtla?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's in Chiapas, maybe. It's in Chiapas, because Bonampak is in Chiapas. But this is high. This is where this uprising has taken place recently, in that area, San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas, all these places. Anyway, we went to visit them. Giles developing the film in this old colonial house that he'd taken of this discovery. And Sheila and I liked each other instantly and we're still great friends. She's living in England, in Sussex, and we go and stay with Sheila.

AMY WINTER: So Giles was developing--

LUCHITA HURTADO: So he was developing the Bonampak film that he took, which is still being shown. You know, it's a documentary.

AMY WINTER: A 16mm film?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Interesting.

AMY WINTER: Was he an ethnologist or an archaeologist or just an amateur?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Giles, was one of those special people who are very knowledgeable and good at whatever they choose to do. For instance, Giles was one of the great experts on beryllium, which he took up late in life. He was a great polo player. That's how he and Sheila met. And Giles, whatever he chose to do would do it beautifully. And so he chose to--

AMY WINTER: Explore.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And then we went on. Paalen had heard of a place in the mountains where there was a teacher who lived in a very isolated schoolhouse, but who had pre-Columbian textiles. And Paalen was looking for this pre-Columbian textile. So we flew in. It was a one-passenger plane. We were flown in by the students of this Mexican colonel and landed on a cow meadow. It was all very primitive. There were horses waiting and we took off to find this man. And we did. We slept on school benches, you know, school benches at night. And I saw Paalen drink a glass of water that had things swimming in it. I said, "You're going to really get sick." Nothing happened to him. [laughs]

AMY WINTER: He was already injured. The bacteria had already been overcome--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Nothing, nothing happened to him.

AMY WINTER: That's interesting.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And then we went on to San Lorenzo. That was amazing--

AMY WINTER: Matthew Sterling had already uncovered or been excavating?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. But we had to chop away. There were people with machetes in front of the horses chopping away. And we lived in the houseboat.

AMY WINTER: Oh, you took a picture of the houseboat. It's in that article.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The houseboat. And then there were white moths. I remember we sat and had dinner and we had put a lamp on the prow of this boat. And the white moths were about an inch thick on the water all around the light. And it was so beautiful. Like snow in this heat. It was an extraordinary trip. And then we visited a school there and the people looked like the Olmec people--
[End of tape 1, side 1]

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. So, this was a wonderful trip.

AMY WINTER: Did you leave from Mexico City originally?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: You usually went to Mexico City with him and then went on from there, or met him in Mexico City, because he was living in Mexico at this point?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh no. I went directly to Mexico City. And I'd never met Eva, Eva Sulzer. And we met and liked each other.

AMY WINTER: Eva was his patron, wasn't she?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes.

AMY WINTER: She really kept him afloat all those years.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: And a dear friend and everything.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. And then I went back to New York and we wrote and then--

AMY WINTER: Did he come back to New York?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't remember, but I don't think so. I went back and got the children and decided, you know-- I always did things like that.

AMY WINTER: [laughs] Yes, spontaneously.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Spontaneous. Close the house. Take the children. Go back to Mexico. Live with this glorious man.

AMY WINTER: It's called "risk-taking" now. [laughter]

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, so that's what I did.

AMY WINTER: It just sounds glorious and I'm sure it was.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So I went back to Mexico and put the children in school and lived with Paalen. And we had a great life. And he had this wonderful studio--

AMY WINTER: Was this Villa Obregon?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, Villa Obregon. And he had this great studio and was doing these beautiful paintings. And I would also work occasionally in the studio.

AMY WINTER: Painting?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Let me backtrack a little bit. Were you aware of DYN when it came out in 1942, his magazine?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. The first time I heard of DYN or "dine" was in, let's see, I think it was through Wittenborn that I first--

AMY WINTER: George Wittenborn?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. George Wittenborn-- He had a bookstore.

AMY WINTER: And everybody hung out there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: And everybody hung out there. And I remember, you know, having thirty dollars for a raincoat; instead I went to Wittenborn's and bought the most beautiful Bosch book, which I lost somewhere along the line, one of my trips.

AMY WINTER: But Wittenborn's was a center?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was sort of.

AMY WINTER: So-- Were people-- I'm trying from my own interests to get an idea of how people were receiving DYN at that time.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, everybody was very intrigued I remember, yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Bob Motherwell, Harry Holtzman, all these people who, at that time, I think they were writing. There was another book--what was it called?--a magazine, a series of books.

AMY WINTER: Motherwell was editing his series of Documents of Contemporary Art for Wittenborn.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, that's it.

AMY WINTER: That was after he-- That was after DYN. That was about 1945 I think.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I certainly wasn't aware of DYN when it was first published--in '42 was it?

AMY WINTER: Well, '42, '43, '44.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was certainly not aware of it.

AMY WINTER: Yes. But were you friendly, really, with the New York School at that point? At that early date, through Isamu or--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Yes.

AMY WINTER: I see.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Daniel was a baby.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And that was in '40 he was born.

AMY WINTER: Right. I see. That's a good way of measuring.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The children are the only way I have of--

AMY WINTER: Situating where you were in time.

LUCHITA HURTADO: You know, is it pre-Daniel or post-Daniel? Is it pre-Pablo or is it pre-Matt [Mullican].

AMY WINTER: Right, right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Even then it's hard--

AMY WINTER: I would say that children are milestones.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, even then it's hard. But it's the only way that you can sort of keep [track].
(Tape recorder turned off and on)

LUCHITA HURTADO: To begin with, Daniel's world, you see, was the journalist's world.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I mean, there were these extraordinary people, these newspaper people that I never had come in contact with. They were hard drinking.

AMY WINTER: Reporters? Essayists?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Reporters, yes, that I never before met in my life. There was-- I'll never forget this woman. Her name was Mary McGray McLucas. And we had this apartment on 95 Christopher Street in the Village. And Mary McGray McLucas could drink half a bottle of scotch in one sitting without blinking an eye. And I remember her spending the night once. It was a big party and she couldn't go home for some reason. She re-did one of the newspapers. I don't remember which one. But she re-designed the-- She did the graphics for the New York Post or one of the big newspapers.

AMY WINTER: One of the big dailies--

LUCHITA HURTADO: She was a big designer, a big designer. And she was tall and lanky. And she was so

opinionated, she devastated me. I mean, I could never get a word in--

AMY WINTER: Edgewise.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --edgewise when she was around. And I'll never forget her. And she stayed that night. And in the morning she got up to have her coffee stark naked, which floored me. You know, with a Latin American upbringing I thought, "My god, what's happening to this world. [laughter]

AMY WINTER: The Catholic schoolgirl. So, it must have been quite extraordinary in Mexico, too, the people around Paalen.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. people like Josef Albers would come and spend the whole afternoon with us. You never knew who was going to--

AMY WINTER: Pop in.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --pop in, so.

AMY WINTER: Albers. That's interesting. How did Paalen and Albers get on?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He wanted to meet Josef Albers because he-- I remember he loved some weavings and some things that, knowing his work, you would never think he would respond.

AMY WINTER: Well, his wife Annie was a weaver.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Was a weaver, yes.

AMY WINTER: A very fine weaver.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. But he responded to these things, too.

AMY WINTER: Yes. Was he less austere than his paintings as a person?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. He was very nice. A very sweet man.
(Tape recorder turned off and on)

AMY WINTER: We were saying how you felt like you had gone through many different lives as you went through your different marriages and your children and so forth.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And different persons in completely different places. I do have friends like Anne Alpert and Matta; we go back 40 years or more, 45 years. And I have a friend here, Barbara Poe, Barbara Poe Levy, who is the daughter of Bernard and Becky Reis.

AMY WINTER: Reis was one of the people who helped Matta and Seligmann and had a salon in New York when the Surrealists first arrived in New York in the '40s.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The Reises, yes. And that's where I met Barbara. I met Barbara before she was married in New York. She was a friend of Anne's too. And Sheila in London I've known all my life, practically, because I met her in Mexico. So there are people who're sort of both-- But then there are the other people that you lose contact with.

AMY WINTER: You went to Mexico to marry Paalen, say, 1946 1947.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Was he in and out of New York in the '40s or--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. We never really lived in New York. We would go there often. We would have, maybe, shows and things.

AMY WINTER: Were the Surrealists still there or had they gone back to Europe?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Some were still there.

AMY WINTER: Oh, because some of them stayed in the States.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Some were still there. But some had gone back.

AMY WINTER: How much contact did you have with the Surrealists when you were with Paalen?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, certainly, there was this misunderstanding with Breton that was resolved when Paalen went back to Paris, but only then. But he was a very good friend of Matta's and everyone else.

AMY WINTER: And down in Mexico you-- Did you ever go to visit Gordon Onslow Ford and Jacqueline Johnson?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. They would come to town, you see, and it would be a big thing. I remember they would go and have an ice cream soda, which was a big deal.

AMY WINTER: At Sanborns?

LUCHITA HURTADO: At Sanborns, have an ice cream soda. Jacqueline was a very extraordinary woman, too. She was a fine writer and they would visit the studio and Paalen would show all his work and they would talk and then go and see Alice Rahon's studio and see all her work and talk.

AMY WINTER: Did you take any other trips besides that one to San Lorenzo?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes.

AMY WINTER: Where did you go?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We went to different places. I mean, to the coast. We would go to Acapulco, south of Acapulco. Or we would go different places looking for objects. It got to the point where there were runners who would come with objects also. And I always count on the touch of things. That's very important for me; even as important as the look of things is the touch of things. We would go, for instance, to a town and I would say, "I have a feeling there's something here. There is something here." We'd go first to the jeweller and then to the doctor. There are certain people who might have collections, you see, in a small town. And I remember this one trip we made. It was very hot. It was tropical. I forget the town. And I said, "I know there's something here." And we were staying in this beat-up hotel with a bare bulb hanging over the bed. No mosquito netting, nothing, and bugs and we couldn't sleep. And so we decided to go out and look for "Flit." It was a kind of insect repellent where you have a bomb, you know. [laughter] We would at least be able to get rid of the mosquitos. So we went out looking for the "Flit." And there was this little pulqueria, this little store, open. Again, no light, very little light. And there were several people in this tiny little store. We we're waiting our turn and suddenly as our eyes got used to the gloom of the place, I saw this big hacha, along with the cans and things in the background. And there was this absolutely beautiful hacha.

AMY WINTER: Of jade?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Stone. It was stone, dark stone. And I poked Paalen and said, "Look, that's it." [laughter]

AMY WINTER: It was sending out messages to you.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Paalen had a way about him. He was able to buy it. Most places start off by saying, "Oh no. That's not for sale," etc. Paalen had a way of getting these things, too. And he bought it.

AMY WINTER: Was he a charmer?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was very, kind of, go along and talk about the weather and talk about the mosquitos and talk about-- You know, never saying exactly what you wanted, but suggesting.

AMY WINTER: How interesting.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So the two of them would get together and we stayed at this pulqueria for quite a while getting this hacha. And he took it. We took it with us.

AMY WINTER: So, what kinds of things were in Paalen's collection at that point? You once told me that Miguel Covarrubias would come up [to exchange]--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, they would trade. It was for my birthday, you see. They kept their own things.

AMY WINTER: But they knew each other's collections?

LUCHITA HURTADO: They knew each other's collection and they admired each other's things and so on. And each one had--

AMY WINTER: A sort of mutual admiration?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. This exchange was because I had seen a jade that Covarrubias had, a pectoral. And I wanted it. And Covarrubias didn't want to part with it. And then Paalen said, "But it's for Luchita." So he got it.

AMY WINTER: Well, when you say "jades" you mean all kinds of different pieces. Not just jewelry--

LUCHITA HURTADO: No.

AMY WINTER: --or axes?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes there were all sorts of things, beautiful things. And a great collection of Northwest Coast masks and a great collection--

AMY WINTER: Was that all in Mexico then?

LUCHITA HURTADO: One New Guinea piece absolutely terrified me. It had a really wicked atmosphere about it. I didn't want to live with that one. I told Paalen this. I said this is a wicked, wicked piece. It's not to be lived with like this. He exchanged it or he sold it to Ralph Altman. You know, Ralph Altman died cancer and it was a very painful death.

AMY WINTER: He died in Mexico?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was teaching at UCLA.

AMY WINTER: I don't know who he was.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was a dealer. Ralph Altman was a dealer here, one of the very, very good dealers.

AMY WINTER: Of modern and pre-Columbian art?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. Just pre-Columbian. Just objects: pre-Columbian, New Guinea--

AMY WINTER: I see. So-called "primitive" art.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --Northwest Coast. And he was teaching at the end of his life at UCLA. His wife, Pat, is still at UCLA. She's been very involved in the new museum. What's it called?

It's the new ethnic museum. It opened not too long ago and it's a very handsome museum. And Pat Altman has been teaching I think.

AMY WINTER: At UCLA?

LUCHITA HURTADO: At UCLA. And lecturing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But I think it was Ralph Altman who bought this--to get back to the collection in Mexico--who bought this New Guinea piece. And I was glad that it left the house, because I think all these objects have auras to them. They have energies that either are black or white. And there are some very strong dark ones from New Guinea.

AMY WINTER: Oh.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And not necessarily because they're dripping in blood, because there are some that are dripping in blood that I don't have this-- But there is something else. It's the spirit of the thing that I respond to.

AMY WINTER: I understand. Walter Benjamin talks about the aura being a sort of collection of history, a receptacle--

LUCHITA HURTADO: The history of the object.

AMY WINTER: The history of the object and everything that touched it or it came into contact with--is collected in that thing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I'm sure that's part of it. That's part of it.

AMY WINTER: The spirit.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There are certain things I wouldn't touch. And they're the things that, you know--

AMY WINTER: What was it like having that [Tlingit] screen?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, that screen was superb, superb.

AMY WINTER: That was in Paalen's studio?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was in his studio, yes. Amazing. I think it's one of the great masterpieces, that screen.

AMY WINTER: Yes. It's the most important screen of the most important chief of [Alaska]. It was Chief Shakes. He was one of the most important clan chiefs of the entire Northwest Coast. So, it was a very rare piece and unusually important piece made for an unusually important person.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was a birthing screen, with that open mouth.

AMY WINTER: Mouth, orifice.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, the whole thing was amazing. But then I read somewhere, where the Indians had a ritual of going into this steambath--

AMY WINTER: The inipi.

LUCHITA HURTADO: They had to be very small to get through this opening. There again is the birthing [image].

AMY WINTER: Yes. A symbol.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Symbol, yes.

AMY WINTER: That's interesting. I've done inipi but I didn't know that it had that symbolism.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, don't you think?

AMY WINTER: Oh, yes. Well, I think, yes. It's built somewhat like a womb. It joins with the earth. There's a pit that's dug into the earth in which heated rocks are placed.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. And it's--

AMY WINTER: It's all one. Well, your work, like this painting here, is also related to some of those ideas isn't it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. Well--

AMY WINTER: Does that have a title, that one?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. You see, this painting was done when I joined the women's group. We had a very interesting group here in California. A very interesting group. They were all artists. Alexis Smith and Mako Idemitsu, who is Sam Francis' wife. And Susan Tittleman and myself and Vija Celmins. And we remained friends, which is nice.

AMY WINTER: It's a whole history.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The image in this painting is also a part of it, you see. It's a beginning. It's kind of a circle.

AMY WINTER: It's all women.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And it's all women.

AMY WINTER: Joined to the earth and to the sky.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Finding themselves and their spirit.

AMY WINTER: That's lovely.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In spite of the crack in the ground. [laughter]

AMY WINTER: Which could be prophetic.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Which could be, yes, being this part of the world.

AMY WINTER: But cracks in the ground are like lines on the palm of the hand, too. And it's a very nice image. So, back to pre-Columbia. To me that's a very Latino or very Latin American image because of the earth, the presence of the earth in Latin America and volcanoes and the arid land and you know-- Back to pre-Columbian objects, what kinds of influences were coming in or back to Mexico? Did you all socialize with Diego and Frida at

that point?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, Paalen and they didn't get on too well. I knew Frida in New York. Again, Isamu. Isamu was her lover. [laughter]

AMY WINTER: Among others, many others.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But I knew her through Isamu, you see, in New York. She was a very vital, interesting woman who loved life, in spite the pain, in spite of all. I remember seeing her in the hospital in a tijuana costume propped up, about to be operated on in a New York hospital, with a half a dozen people around her. Somebody singing and-- It was a party. And these tijuana costumes--I had one in Mexico and they're painful, you know. This stiff lace around your face. It's beautiful to look at.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: This kind of outline, but it's very starched. It's almost like wearing a corset around a corset around your face. It's very painful.

AMY WINTER: That's interesting. It's an interesting image, metaphor for the whole of her life: the pain, the beauty and celebrating in the hospital. It's like the Day of the Dead.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And the Surrealist element, too, of being in a New York hospital wearing this costume in a hospital bed, surrounded by people who are having a great party.

AMY WINTER: Is it theater?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's theater. It's quite theater, absolutely. It's a special kind of theater. It's not--

AMY WINTER: It's not the proscenium arch. [laughter] It's more Brechtian, maybe? Getting closer, getting closer. Surrealist theater, Jarry or Artaud.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's right. That's what it is. Well, her painting is very much that isn't it?

AMY WINTER: Theatrical.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She shared it all.

AMY WINTER: And it's also that Mexican spirit that the Surrealists loved so much. Working with death or celebrating death.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. Being aware of it, yes.

AMY WINTER: First of all being a Latin American person, but second of all living in Mexico--how did you feel as somebody coming from another Latin American country into Mexico and how do you see the Mexicans?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I'll tell you. When I arrived in Mexico City, I'd always heard about guitars and easy-going people, et cetera. I arrived in the Valley of Mexico and I said there is something here that exists nowhere else. And I collected the headlines in the newspapers. For instance, there was a blind man who had a friend and he had a birthday coming up. And the blind man said he wanted a gun for his birthday. So his friend made the effort and got him a gun. And this blind man was so happy to have this gun that he went into the middle of the street and started shooting and killed three people.

Or, there's a game going on in a club: cards. Two friends, one man bets everything. He loses his wife, he loses his home, he loses everything. The other guy says, "I'm generous. I'll give you back your life. You can play with it again." So he plays with his life and he keeps winning and winning until the first man is down to playing for his life. So, he says, "All right. I'll bet my life." And then his friend gets up, takes out a gun and puts a bullet through his head and says, "I'm not that generous." This is in the headlines. This happens in Mexico.

The goddess of the earth, the Aztec goddess, has a death's skull, eagle claws, and a skirt of rattlesnakes. You feel this in the earth. You're riding in a car and there's a pedestrian--I don't know how it is today--but then driving down Insurgentes [Boulevard]. There's a pedestrian who is crossing the road. The taxi you're in aims for the pedestrian, misses him--

AMY WINTER: It sounds like New York.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And the pedestrian looks back and stares at the taxi driver who looks at the pedestrian and they both smile. And he drives off.

AMY WINTER: Interesting sense of humor.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's something-- It's a terrible game that's played. And it's a game inspired by this goddess with the rattlesnake skirt. There's something very sinister in that Valley. And it may be that I lost my child there, but somehow I knew there was something there that was very--

AMY WINTER: Heavy.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --heavy.

AMY WINTER: Yes. Well, Paalen talked about the telluric forces.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it was there. So I told Paalen. I said, you know, all this this is-- This is very, very heavy stuff. Well, he told me when he first arrived there had been people who-- There was a big wall around Villa Obregon, and a big gate.

(Tape recorder turned off and on)

AMY WINTER: Well, thinking about Mexico and the place.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. What the atmosphere was.

AMY WINTER: Do you think that Frida's character came out of that cultural character?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I think so. I think it was all-- Besides having that personal experience, you know, with her health and her pain and her life. And it couldn't have been easy to live with Diego. You know, he was--

AMY WINTER: Difficult.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was a difficult man.

AMY WINTER: So you and-- Did you ever see Benjamin Peret and Remedios [Varos]?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. Remedios and Leonora Carrington and-- What was his name? He was supposedly one of the offspring of one of the British Kings. Edward James.

AMY WINTER: Oh, really. Oh, the bastard, that's right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Edward James was hilarious.

AMY WINTER: Prince Edward.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. He was such fun to be with. He had the most extraordinary stories to tell. And he was a very good friend of Leonora Carrington's and Cheekie's [sp?]. Leonora was married to a photographer, Cheekie [sp?], and they had two children. I remember, Leonora made a house for the children, which she painted, the house of the sun and the moon. I'll never forget it. That was one really beautiful object. And Leonora was a fascinating woman. I haven't seen her in these last years. I'd love to see her again, but somehow--

AMY WINTER: She's moved back to Mexico.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. She has a son who is now a doctor in Chicago. I hear about her through a mutual friend in New York.

AMY WINTER: Well, when I was down there, Marianna Perez-Amor, Ines Amor's daughter, said that Leonora's just moved back to Mexico.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She has?

AMY WINTER: She's in retirement, yes. She likes living in Mexico.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She's living-- She wants to be in Mexico?

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Amazing. Because her children don't live in Mexico anymore, do they?

AMY WINTER: No.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think they live here in the States.

AMY WINTER: I guess she feels like it's a nicer place to retire and the flip side maybe of--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Is she in Mexico City?

AMY WINTER: Yes. The other part of Mexico is the gracious Spanish colonial society. I think you know that there are elements of that culture, which make Mexico a different kind of place to grow old--more gracefully.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I think Leonora had a very nice life in Mexico with the children; and there is something there that is intriguing. Yes, I remember Leonora had out-of-the-body experiences where she would find herself floating over her body and suddenly she would have great fear that she couldn't get back into her body. I remember her telling me all these stories. I was very impressionable and I would think perhaps I could do it and then be terrified that I could do it. [laughter]

AMY WINTER: Did you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Never did it, fortunately.

AMY WINTER: It's interesting when a person can do it at will. And you say Leonora did it at will.

LUCHITA HURTADO: At will. Well, this is what she told me. And the way she described it, it was at will. But as I say I never attempted it.

AMY WINTER: Mind over matter.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I never attempted it. But these things, you know, there's more than we suspect going on.

AMY WINTER: Well, I feel that Paalen was trying in his theory, his DYN theory, to rationalize phenomena--rationalize not in the psychological sense but in the literal sense-- explain things through physics, through processes, these energies and the way in which energy does move everything.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I know. But we can't even rationalize electricity. And there are all these things-- We've lost it. It's a real Garden of Eden that we left when we lost our powers. I think people have powers that they have no idea they're using or tapping into. But I think people--I can understand when-- [Isak] Denison writes about this man who is [devastated] by being locked up in this small space and kills himself with his thoughts. I think you can. But he does it very quickly, you know. It doesn't last. This man is able to do this, to destroy himself--

AMY WINTER: Mentally.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --without using--

AMY WINTER: Anything.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --anything.

AMY WINTER: Except his mind.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Except his mind.

AMY WINTER: And his spirit.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's it, you see. And there are people who can travel all over the universe without leaving the room.

AMY WINTER: It's amazing. I mean, that there are people like that. And they are the oddities. But that there are--

LUCHITA HURTADO: I'm sure we all had that at one time.

AMY WINTER: They are sort of vestiges of--

LUCHITA HURTADO: The surviving vestiges of a past time.

AMY WINTER: I've always thought myself--I don't know what you think. Maybe you can comment--I've always thought that animals operate on this non-verbal, intuitive, instinctual level. And that when people live closer to nature, closer to the earth, like Native Americans, native peoples, that they're closer to those things, to those senses, senses which are both god-like and animal. That there's a lack in Western society. Go ahead. I'm not the philosopher here.

LUCHITA HURTADO: We haven't terms for these things. We can just guess that's what's happening or what actually happens. Paalen was certainly very intrigued with this whole approach, you know. And that kind of discussion would get him out of his terrible depressions. It was amazing. It was the only thing that worked.

AMY WINTER: Was to stimulate his interest--

LUCHITA HURTADO: To stimulate his interest in these things.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Then he would come out of it.

AMY WINTER: Would he go into a reverie?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He would come out of this kind of black-- I always visualized it as a black hole he'd tripped and fallen into, not knowing these terrible, unhappy, depressed moods.

AMY WINTER: But the objects around him also-- He seemed to always be very driven. My sense of him is that he would be in something like a manic state. When he was doing something he was in it entirely, body and soul.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes.

AMY WINTER: Is that how he was when he painted?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was very passionate, very passionate. And that's the way he painted, that's the way he did it all, he led his life.

AMY WINTER: Do you think your years with him-- How many was it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Not many.

AMY WINTER: What, 2, 3?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Not many, about 2 or 3, 3 years together.

AMY WINTER: Do you feel as if you developed from this experience, like with del Solar all of a sudden you became very political and intellectual. Was it a combination of both?

LUCHITA HURTADO: But you see as a child in Venezuela and all through my life, I've had strange experiences this way, with things that I don't understand. As a child I saw an uncle who was being killed by a Venezuelan Indian tribe. And I saw the whole thing happen and I woke up screaming. I must have been, what, six years old.

AMY WINTER: You mean in a dream you saw this.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In a vision or a dream or whatever it was. But that's exactly how it happened. When I learned of his death, that's exactly what had happened to this man and I saw it.

AMY WINTER: When did it happen? Before or after you saw it.

LUCHITA HURTADO: As it did.

AMY WINTER: As it happened?

LUCHITA HURTADO: As it happened.

AMY WINTER: So you're clairvoyant or telepathic.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's-- There are certain things. I can't control it. I cannot control it, but I have had experiences. We were at a party of an English professor, and many people were writers, professors. And there was a game being played at the end of the evening to find a word for-- It was description of the word, of the meaning of the word. And nobody could get it. So I said well I can get it. And my host, who was sitting at my right said, "You? A Venezuelan woman. Never mind." And then, sort of what you do is, you empty. That's the approach. You either get it or you don't. And I said, "The word is such-and-such."

AMY WINTER: And you were right?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was right. And it was a word I never used. It was a word I was unfamiliar with. I forget what the word was now.

AMY WINTER: When you say you "empty" you mean you clear your mind?

LUCHITA HURTADO: You clear your mind.

AMY WINTER: So it's like a tabula rasa.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. And then I came up with it--

AMY WINTER: Is it visual or is it aural?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, it just comes out.

AMY WINTER: It just comes out. You neither see it nor hear it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. It just comes. I said, "It's so and so."

AMY WINTER: Back to this uncle. What happened?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, he was killed. He was traveling in the interior of Venezuela in the Orinoco Delta and he was killed by these Indians. And they found him buried by the side of the river.

AMY WINTER: Why was he in the interior? Was he an archeologist?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't know what he was doing. This goes way back. This is what happened. This is what I was told. And there was always this kind of strange thing about my being an artist and different. I was different, [laughs]

AMY WINTER: Artists always are.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Which was not always--

AMY WINTER: Easy.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Easy or acceptable.

AMY WINTER: So at a very young age you were different.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Were you drawing at a very young age? Did you start to draw or paint?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think I started to draw when I was about 10 or 12. I don't remember. I had a very stern grandmother. And if she saw you, you know, idle, idling, she'd say, "Idle hands tempt the devil." And she would make you undo a hem of a skirt and do it over again, because you were not supposed to just be dreaming or thinking or-- So it was not approved of. Especially women. Men, you know, that was another matter. If a man was doing--just sitting, looking out into space, oh, he's dreaming up something fantastic.

AMY WINTER: A double standard.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Completely.

AMY WINTER: Were women not only not supposed to dream or be artists, but did they have their tasks assigned to them, and expectations.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. When I first married, my mother said to me, "You have married your cross, now you bear it."

AMY WINTER: Because of who he--

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. Because this is their attitude towards marriage.

AMY WINTER: Well, they were right. [laughs]
[End of tape 1, side 2]

AMY WINTER: Part Two. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with Luchita Hurtado on May 1st, 1994 at the interviewee's home in Santa Monica, California. The interviewer is Amy Winter.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Anyway, to get back to Mexico.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: When I left Mexico, when I lost my son there, I never wanted to go back, because I felt that there was this aggressively violent presence in that Valley. I blamed the death of my son on this power, whatever it was there. My son died of infantile paralysis.

AMY WINTER: Was that polio?

LUCHITA HURTADO: From polio. And so we left.

AMY WINTER: You and Paalen?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. The whole thing changed. By that time, Eva had found another place in San Angel, I think it was. I never saw the house. And Alice Rahon had found this movie person. I forget what his name was. It was Murphy or something like this. It was an Irish name. And she had found a house. And so we left and went to California. By then Gordon and Jacqueline had gone to California.

AMY WINTER: Why did they decide to go there in the first place?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, Jacqueline was from California, from San Francisco.

AMY WINTER: That's right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I think the time had come to leave Mexico. So they found this marvelous apartment--

AMY WINTER: In San Francisco.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In San Francisco. Where that famous photograph was taken of the Dynaton.

AMY WINTER: Yes, that's a great photograph.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Jacqueline used to giggle and say, "They're not real, those people. They're spirits. [laughter] They're ghosts. We all look like ghosts in the picture.

AMY WINTER: You're all very somber.

LUCHITA HURTADO: We're all very somber looking at the camera. I remember the day. Suddenly we had the idea of photographing the mirror. Some of those pictures were taken photographing the image in the mirror.

AMY WINTER: Oh, well, no wonder it looked ghostly.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Because there was this huge mirror in their living room.

AMY WINTER: So did you live there? You said it was a huge apartment.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, no, no. Before we moved, we went to visit. We visited Gordon and Jacqueline in California. And on the spur of the moment we said, "Let's go look for a place." So we went to Sausalito.

AMY WINTER: This was about 1848 or 1947?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't remember, '47 maybe or '48. So, we went to Sausalito and Gordon was promoting or buying this boat or this-- It was on the water there in Sausalito. It wasn't a boat. It's now one of the famous restaurants there. It had been a theater before. And he wanted us to get that. But we couldn't see ourselves living on the water there. So, we looked around Mill Valley and found this marvelous place on 95 McGee. It was a marvelous, big place. It was haunted, a Victorian house with big porches all around it, and a lot of land and a brook that went through it, water ran through it, and these tall--

AMY WINTER: On the property?

LUCHITA HURTADO: On the property, yes. It went from one street to the other, a higher and lower street. And great trees. The trees were redwoods, beautiful, huge redwoods. Of course, it was wonderful to have the redwoods. But it would get dark about 4:00 in the afternoon because we were surrounded by these trees.

AMY WINTER: Those are interesting spirits to live among, I would imagine. Because they're ancient, those trees.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In certain times of the day when the sun is really hot, they smell like strawberries. A marvelous smell. And there were times there when I was sure there was some spirit living there. I remember we had a little cat. I had a cat. And while I cooked, I would walk in the garden and the cat would follow me of course. And coming back to the house-- there were several entrances to the house. The lower part of the house-- you went in through the kitchen. And then there were the stairs. And there was another way to go around to the first floor, the floor that faced on the street. And suddenly, as I was watching this little cat, it looked at the stairs. All its hair-- I see nothing--it's coat is standing on end. And it's tippy-toeing the way they do and backing up and watching something slowly descend. I said no, I'm going the other way. So I turned tail and the cat followed me and we went around to the front. And I've always had a very acute sense of smell. And I would smell things in

the house. Suddenly there would be this very strong perfume of mimosa.

AMY WINTER: That sounds like a movie from the '40s. Did you ever see that movie? It had a fabulous romantic music score.

We were talking about the apartment in San Francisco, and moving to Mill Valley. Were you painting more then?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, I was.

AMY WINTER: A lot?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, I was painting. I had Daniel, who had forgotten all his English and was speaking in Spanish. He went to public school in Mill Valley. Made friends in the neighborhood. Lucien Bloch lived across and up the road a bit. She had these three children. And they all became very good friends. And Daniel played with them after school. And one day I knew he had learned English. He came home one day and he said, "Oh mother--" In Spanish he said this, "Oh mother, they're so rude. They're so rude. The children here are so rude." Because in Mexico children play, you know, "After You: ? usted, ? usted, you command, tell me what to do." Whereas here they call each other names and--

AMY WINTER: Hit each other over the head.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, push each other around. So, he joined a group.

AMY WINTER: He learned fast.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He learned fast. No.

AMY WINTER: So, did you get to know Lucien at that point?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. Lucien and Stephen and the children, all grown now, and Cita [sp?].

AMY WINTER: They had worked with Diego, both of them?

LUCHITA HURTADO: They both were muralists and they worked with Diego and Frida. Frida was the godmother to their oldest son, who is now a professor in Seattle, Washington, I think. And they're still lecturing on mural painting, Stephen and Lucien.

AMY WINTER: How interesting. Up there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Last I heard, they were lecturing in Santa Fe on mural painting. They exchanged paintings for frames with Paalen.

AMY WINTER: Oh really?

LUCHITA HURTADO: They had a frame shop in Mill Valley. And I'm sure Steve and Lucien still have a few Paalens from that period.

AMY WINTER: Yes. I think Daniel sent me a picture of one, at least one. What was it like for Paalen to live here in California at that time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it was a different group of people then, of course. Grace Morley was the director of the San Francisco museum. And Sybil Moholy-Nagy was then living in San Francisco. There were quite a number of people, James Broughton, oh, a big group, the Stauffachers, Jack Stauffacher--

AMY WINTER: A publisher.

LUCHITA HURTADO: A publisher. And Frank, who was--

AMY WINTER: The Greenwood Press?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, the Greenwood Press, and Frank, who was a filmmaker. That was the immediate circle.

AMY WINTER: And Grace Morley, was very interested in Native American art?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Interested in painting and Native American art. She later went to India and was very active in museum work there.

AMY WINTER: It seems like there was a real interest in Eastern philosophy at that time.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. But, you see, it's always been like that. Many people gravitate to California who are involved in, you know, Zen Buddhism, you name it. Alan Watts was part of the scene there.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Alan lived on the ferry [Gordon Onslow Ford bought] and was very present in San Francisco. And Varda was there. Varda and Paalen were very close friends from Europe.

AMY WINTER: I think you told me the story of how they met on the beach.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: That's a great story. Since our potential audience has never heard it, why don't you tell it again?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, Paalen was on the beach in the South of France and he was writing a poem by Sappho on the beach--

AMY WINTER: In the sand.

LUCHITA HURTADO: In the sand with a stick in Greek. And along came Varda and saw this and was delighted and took up another stick and finished it. And they were friends from then on.

AMY WINTER: That's a great story.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I can see the two of them. They were so unlike each other, you know. Varda was an extrovert. I think that's a good description. He performed. And he had a court of young girls, always, surrounding him. And he sailed his boats in the San Francisco Bay with flying colors. You know, his mast was pink and blue and rainbow colors. And he was a great cook and a very colorful--

AMY WINTER: He was a collagist?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He did collages. But life was really his art. He had a marvelous life.

AMY WINTER: So, they met again in the New World?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. I remember Varda lived on the second floor in the Italian section of San Francisco. And we came by to pick him up--I don't know where we were going--and honked the horn. And Varda's head popped out the window. And the affection that was exchanged between these two people, one sitting in the car and the other one half out of the window. It was wonderful to see. They really loved each other. As I say, poles apart, but they communicated. So it was an interesting community. It was an interesting mixture of people. And then the people who came and went, that was another thing.

AMY WINTER: Like who, came and went?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I don't remember exactly, but sometimes there were people who came from the East Coast and stayed very briefly and left.

AMY WINTER: Was Paalen writing to Motherwell during that time or from Mexico?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. They saw each other. When we went to New York, we would stay with him in East Hampton-- Bob had a Quonset hut in East Hampton and we stayed with him and his wife occasionally. We would see them. But there wasn't this correspondence. Nierendorf was a constant correspondent. And there were people in Europe who corresponded. There was a wife of a diplomat.

AMY WINTER: Sonnery?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think so.

AMY WINTER: Madame Sonnery?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. They corresponded. He wrote her long letters. And she wrote him long, long letters. And only occasionally, when she was in New York and we were in New York, we'd see her.

AMY WINTER: There was a point at which Rothko was in out in San Francisco teaching.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. No, no, that was--

AMY WINTER: That was a different time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, that was a different time. We weren't there together.

AMY WINTER: Yes, it was a totally different scene than New York.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, very different.

AMY WINTER: And were you aware of what was going on in New York at that point in terms of the New York School, like '47, we're talking about '47, '48, '49--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, well, you know, as I say, we'd go to New York and see people. But we lived a very quiet life in Mill Valley, so we didn't really see much of anybody.

AMY WINTER: So, you were living in Mill Valley and Gordon and Paalen and Varda all were painting on the ferry boat?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. That was a different time. Varda had his studio in San Francisco itself around, as I said the Italian quarter. Gordon and Jacqueline were living on the ferry boat then. They had bought a ferry boat after they left the apartment; they went to live on the ferry boat. And that was lovely. What was it called? The ferry boat had a name.

AMY WINTER: I know. Gordon has mentioned it. I forget.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I forget the name. And then, of course, Harry Parch was there.

AMY WINTER: The musician.

LUCHITA HURTADO: You know, these things come back to you.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Harry was there and--

AMY WINTER: He was the person who built those fantastic musical instruments?

LUCHITA HURTADO: The instruments, yes.

AMY WINTER: And then improvised on them?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Gordon showed me.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Marvelous music. Very, very personal--unique. The instruments were like sculptures, you know.

Now, this was before-- You see, Harry, I think, came later. It's very difficult to remember what the times were. But Harry, I think, came later. Once we were here in Los Angeles, then Harry appeared.

AMY WINTER: I see.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But at that time it was Sybil Moholy-Nagy and friends like that and James Broughton and theater and--

AMY WINTER: So, you were living in Mill Valley, but did you have a lot of contact with people in San Francisco in the city?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, yes. We would all go in. I mean, you know, you saw people in the city and you went to dinner and you went to the museums and they had shows and Paalen had a show and we had a show.

AMY WINTER: What was that like, those shows? Were they large?

LUCHITA HURTADO: They were fun, large shows.

AMY WINTER: Was that at the old San Francisco museum?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Well, it still is. I understand they're going to have a new building, are they?

AMY WINTER: I heard that, yes. Well, so was it very eclectic, would you say, the prevailing influences at that

time? It seems like the Dynaton gathered together the ideas of Native American art and native arts and Eastern philosophy and was a very synthetic, eclectic sort of--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: You said earlier that you and Paalen would get involved in long conversations about things.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. He talked about certain things like the natural rhythm of things. Lunar tides and menstruation, for instance, was a fascinating subject.

AMY WINTER: Yes, body fluids and tides.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But all of this--

AMY WINTER: Fascinated him.

LUCHITA HURTADO: When you think of humans--the water, we're--

AMY WINTER: Plasma.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Our percentage is very high.

AMY WINTER: Yes. I heard a funny comment on a movie I saw with the Australian actor, Mel Gibson. A young boy asked him what's really the difference between men and women? And he said that, "Well, they have more water than we do and that's the basic difference. They're waiting for us to catch up with them. [laughter]

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. They respond to lunar forces.

AMY WINTER: Gravity, magnetic pulls.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Well, at one point, crossing the border, they took my papers away.

AMY WINTER: Really?

LUCHITA HURTADO: When we were still living in Mexico. We were on our way to New York. And they took my papers away, so I couldn't go back to Mexico. I was like a character out of Kafka. I had to hire a lawyer in Washington, DC. And the lawyer called and said, "The case is being handled by a Texan, so you have to come and meet him." It was curious, you know. Why would I have to meet this person. So, he said, "Well, he's a Texan. I want him to hear you speak English."

AMY WINTER: Oh, you mean, they thought you were a wetback or--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, you know, it was strange-- I'm sure that it's changed, the attitude in Texas. But there was great discrimination against Mexicans. You know, bathrooms said: black, white and Mexican.

AMY WINTER: What year was that? That was in the late '40s.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: Did Paalen stay with you or--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. You see, he went back to Mexico and I had to stay on in New York. And I went to live with Jeanne Reynal on 11th Street.

AMY WINTER: You couldn't go back into Mexico?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I couldn't leave the country without papers.

AMY WINTER: I see.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I had no identity.

AMY WINTER: I see. You weren't stuck the other way?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, no. This was it, you see. If I'd left, it would have meant going back to Venezuela and then starting from scratch.

AMY WINTER: How long did that go on?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This went on quite a while. I seem to remember it must have been four, five months.

AMY WINTER: And so you went to live with Jeanne Reynal.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So, I was staying with Jeanne.

AMY WINTER: And the children?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, the children were in Mexico, you see?

AMY WINTER: Oh my god.

LUCHITA HURTADO: So it was very, very difficult. But it was at that time that Paalen wrote his-- He had written his play. And I was showing it in New York to different people.

AMY WINTER: Oh, "The Beam of the Balance"? What kind of response did you get to it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: There wasn't that much response. People wanted-- I think what they wanted was something similar to what they were familiar with. They were familiar by then with DYN. And so what they expected was a kind of intellectual--a long intellectual dialogue of some sort. And it wasn't. It was a comedy. It was funny. It was hilarious, the whole thing was crazy.

AMY WINTER: It was sort of science fiction, too.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The [weight?] and the description of this countess or baroness, I don't remember which, talking about how she shot her husband that she mistook for a walrus in the middle of the ocean.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I mean, this was hilarious.

AMY WINTER: Surreal.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Very surreal. And that play was first read at Bob Motherwell's in Easthampton. Because his wife--he was married to Maria then, his first wife. And Maria was involved in the theater. She was an actress. So, she and a group read this. And Bob-- I remember when I read the scene with the baroness shooting her husband in the middle of the ocean, I remember Bob-- He had to stop reading because he thought it was so funny. He kept screaming with laughter. It was hilarious.

AMY WINTER: I have no sense of him as a person.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was very-- I remember-- What was it he said once? "When I was young my father said you can do anything, but keep your name out of the papers." [laughter]

AMY WINTER: Meaning that he was a little conservative, careful, cautious?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. "Keep you name out of the papers." I'll always remember that about him.

AMY WINTER: But he didn't succeed entirely in keeping his name out of the papers. It just happens he got into the right papers in the right way.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The right section.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I liked Bob. I always thought that he was a very bright and--

AMY WINTER: Genial?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Genial and kind and all of those nice things people can be. And there was, again, you know, a very close relationship--

AMY WINTER: Between Paalen and Motherwell?

LUCHITA HURTADO: --between those two, yes.

AMY WINTER: And that had started early on, you know, when he went to Mexico with the Reises [in 1941].

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, with Barbara Reis, yes. Well, he went. That's where he met Maria, on the boat going down.

AMY WINTER: Right. Didn't he know Jacqueline also before?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. They were very good friends.

AMY WINTER: Yes, before Gordon met her.

LUCHITA HURTADO: They were very close.

AMY WINTER: She had been in New York also?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Jacqueline, yes.

AMY WINTER: Did she study there? No, she studied at Stanford.

LUCHITA HURTADO: At Stanford, yes.

AMY WINTER: So, what kind of reception did-- You weren't really married to him. You were just getting involved with him with the second show, probably, the Nierendorf show, in 1946.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: What kind of reception did his painting get from the New York School?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, it was very positive, but he didn't sell very much, you know.

AMY WINTER: Did anybody?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. There wasn't much going on.

AMY WINTER: It was tough.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was tough, yes. But there was, you know, intellectual success.

AMY WINTER: Yes. But he didn't show-- I guess it's hard to have a show every year. Even now, it's every other year, isn't it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's according to who is promoting you and Paalen always felt neglected, which he was. And at one point in New York, it was after a show and it hadn't been very successful.

AMY WINTER: You mean saleswise.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He said, "I'll give them away. If I don't sell them, I'd like people-- If you really want a painting, I'll give it to you." So I said "That's the wrong approach. And he said, "Well, I'm going to do it anyway." So I said, "Let's call René d'Harnoncourt," who was a very good friend. "I'll call René and whatever René says, why don't you just listen, because René knows this whole thing."

AMY WINTER: Because he was at the MOMA?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. He knew much more than we did about what-- "Oh," René said, "don't do that."

AMY WINTER: Did you know Rene first and then--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. I met him York. That's where I met him first, in New York.

AMY WINTER: Before you knew Paalen?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. It was after. They were friends.

AMY WINTER: They were close friends. Well, you know, their biographies are so similar. You know, that they're both Viennese and from families who were really wiped out during the war. They both went to Mexico and were totally given over to Native American art.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, René was a charmer. And his wife, Sara, is 90 now and she's going strong. I talked to Anne d'Harnoncourt last Sunday. Her mother was going to the movies on her own. Can you imagine? I want to be like that at 90, to take off on my own and go to the movies.

AMY WINTER: Well, there are people who are very hearty, even into--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it's fine to live to a ripe old age if you have all your--

AMY WINTER: Faculties.

LUCHITA HURTADO: --faculties and the strength to get around.

AMY WINTER: Absolutely.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Otherwise, it's a drag.

AMY WINTER: So did they ever talk about Native American art?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. And compared. It was exciting to see what someone had just found, because things were still available then. Things turned up. And you could find things still. So, it was very exciting.

AMY WINTER: Did you ever go with Paalen to Julius Karlebach's shop?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. Julius Karlebach was very present. As a matter of fact, he became a very top dealer, one of the top dealers in New York. But we knew him when he was just starting.

AMY WINTER: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And he had wonderful things. He picked things up.

AMY WINTER: So, did the collection travel with you everywhere that you went.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh no. The collection stayed in Mexico.

AMY WINTER: It did?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It did. But you would take things with you. For instance, Paalen's pockets were always full of things. Suddenly he'd have this absolutely beautiful rock crystal skull that he'd play with on the way up.

AMY WINTER: That you held in your hand?

LUCHITA HURTADO: That would fit in your hand, yes. He would take it with him.

AMY WINTER: I didn't realize that-- I have a couple of photographs of them, but I didn't realize they were that small.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, they're different sizes, you see.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There're some that are too big to keep in your pocket, but there are some that you can.

AMY WINTER: Was he dealing things then?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, he sold, bought and sold and exchanged. If he saw something that he wanted, he pursued it.

AMY WINTER: We started talking earlier about Spinden and Covarrubias. You had told me a long time ago that you used to be good friends with Herbert Spinden, "Joe" Spinden.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. Joe Spinden. When Joe first came to Mexico he was very involved in Mexican archaeology and in the dates, especially.

AMY WINTER: The calendars.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Calendars, yes. And Joe came to Mexico City and persuaded the government to celebrate Quetzalcoatl's birthday or god knows what it was, but it was something to do with this, you see. And it was big. Oh, they loved the idea and it was going to be done. And about two days before the great festivities, Covarrubias suddenly was aware of this and said, "My god. We're confirming his calendar. We're confirming his--" He almost did it. And it was Covarrubias who caught him and they didn't do it, of course. Everybody was--

AMY WINTER: Was that right when the Goodman-Thompson theory had come up as a challenger?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't think so. But Joe was a very clever, extraordinary man. I thought he was like a big bear. Everybody who came to Mexico City was out of breath because it was so high. People had a hard time walking, really. I mean, too long, the days were long. And anyplace that is that high--what is it? 11,000?

AMY WINTER: I think that it is 6,000 feet.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, it's more. Anyway, everybody but Joe had a hard time with the altitude. Joe didn't have any problems at all. He walked and walked and tired everybody out.

AMY WINTER: Was he doing digs at that time down there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, that had long past. No, he would talk about the dig he'd been on. He'd been everywhere in Latin America. He told the most wonderful stories. He told a story about doing work somewhere in Central America. I don't remember whether it was Costa Rica or one of those countries. And he had written a thesis on this particular lightning bug, with these lightning bugs in a bottle. And with the light he had written-- I mean, it was very poetic. It appealed to me, his stories.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And then stories about Venezuela, I had no idea. He travelled-- He literally walked across Venezuela when no one else had. And this was the time of the Dictator Gomez in the-- I guess it was in the '20s. And he had seen these long necklaces of the Indians. And he looked and the women weren't wearing them. And he wondered, how did they use these beads? They were all wearing these long, straight, Christian outfits that had been introduced by the missionaries I suppose. And he talked to one of the women and said, "These beads. How do you wear them? Where are they?" "Oh," she said. And she lifted up this dress, this straight dress. And there it was all wrapped around her body.

AMY WINTER: As body decoration?

LUCHITA HURTADO: As a body decoration.

AMY WINTER: Oh, how interesting. What were they made of?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Seeds, I'm sure. Some kinds of seeds and whatever.

AMY WINTER: It's like Anita Brenner's thesis, *Idols Behind Altars*, so literally. Do you know?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes. That's what it is, yes. At the same time he told me that Gomez suddenly heard this man was walking everywhere. And what was he doing? So, he had him come and tell him. So, "What are you doing?" "Well, I'm an archaeologist and I'm studying the Indians. And there was a city at one time and how it evolved and about the water and the lakes and the pottery and the--" He brought it all in. And he said, "Well, that's very interesting. You have my permission to go wherever you go, wherever you want to go." And that made it very easy for Joe.

AMY WINTER: Was he collecting at that time for the museum, for The Brooklyn Museum?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, he was with the Museum of Natural History at that time I think. Or maybe even before then. I know he was with The Brooklyn Museum in the '40s--

AMY WINTER: Did he borrow something directly from Paalen for The Brooklyn Museum?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, he did.

AMY WINTER: That piece, that Olmec piece?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. He acquired those things for the museum.

AMY WINTER: Do you remember which-- Was it the one with the leg cut off, broken? Do you remember--

LUCHITA HURTADO: If I saw it I would remember, but I don't remember now whether it had a leg. They were very imperial figures. They were Maya pieces. A lot of them were Maya pieces, marvelous--they sat like so, the Maya pieces.

AMY WINTER: Made of?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Clay. There were many clay pieces.

AMY WINTER: Yes, I was astounded by the extraordinary Maya pieces down at the Museo Nacional, down in

Mexico City.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Marvelous, great, dignified--

AMY WINTER: Very regal.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Wonderful pieces, yes.

AMY WINTER: Was that kind of stuff available--?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, you see there were people who realized that Paalen collected. And they would call and they would come and they would bring things-- and just arrive with whatever it was that they had found. And then they were building roads there, too. I remember there was a road going to the coast, to the west coast, to Acapulco and that sector. They went through burials. All this material was popping out of the sides of the hills and the ruins. And people went behind the bulldozers and picked things up.

AMY WINTER: Amazing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But, you see, you fly over Mexico and you're aware of all these things that are untouched.

AMY WINTER: Still?

LUCHITA HURTADO: There are so many sites still untouched.

AMY WINTER: It's like that lost city that was just discovered on the Veracruz coast.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Exactly.

AMY WINTER: On the Gulf Coast. I'm not sure if it was Olmec, but that territory.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I'm sure there's so much that hasn't been touched.

AMY WINTER: So you were living with all of that stuff down there.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes.

AMY WINTER: In the house, too.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

AMY WINTER: That seems quite amazing. Well, you have some very nice pieces here, too. They aren't Maya. Do you still have any Maya objects?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, I have two very beautiful bowls that I have from that time. I have a few things from that period. I'll show them to you some time.

AMY WINTER: Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And a lot of them in there and all kinds of places are stuck away. The earthquake [Northridge, CA, 1994], you see. That New Guinea housepost, you see, lost its wing. I still have to find a way of gluing it back on. But that fell off that bookcase. And so much broke. So I'm glad we have not put things out yet. We're not going to put things out again that are breakable. It's a shame.

AMY WINTER: Yes. So, back to-- We kind of went back to Mexico--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it's the only way--

AMY WINTER: Back to Spinden and Covarrubias who was down there at that time too. You were living in San Angel at that time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: At San Angel Inn. And it was a corner house. And there was very little outside. I mean, it went straight into the country; it wasn't built up. But I understand Mexico now is so-- I mean, it's probably all gone. That whole section is built up so that you don't--

AMY WINTER: Right. At that time there was probably still land around.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. It was country and little shacks. We were practically the last house on the block on that corner. But it happened-- It's been happening. I remember the last time I saw Rufino and Olga, they said, "Oh, do

you remember Insurgentes?" Because Insurgentes was the way you went into the city. When you were going into the city--

AMY WINTER: It's like the Boston Post Road--

LUCHITA HURTADO: --you took Insurgentes. Yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. They said it's all city, all around it, it's all city. The city has reached out everywhere.

AMY WINTER: Yes, I know. It's a big city and very urban. I think we're both getting tired. [tape turned off] --even though we're a little off the chronology.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't know where we were.

AMY WINTER: Well, just-- We were-- We had gone into San Francisco for a while. I recall that. And then we had gone back to Mexico, just in relation to Herbert Spinden and Rene d'Harnoncourt.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, right, right. And then New York. Well, we did a lot of travelling. I think Paalen would have liked to have worked or lived in New York--He wouldn't have minded--

AMY WINTER: At that point.

LUCHITA HURTADO: At that point living in New York, but it just never happened.

AMY WINTER: Well, was it because of the citizenship thing, do you think?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. I think partly that. He was very much at home in Mexico and his studio was in Mexico. And only when it came to be that I couldn't live in Mexico-- You know, it was a very painful experience to lose and child, so I really had to leave.

AMY WINTER: Well, I think we should end here. This concludes the interview of Luchita Hurtado, May 1, 1994, Santa Monica, California, by Amy Winter, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.
[End of tape 2, side 1]

**Interview with Luchita Hurtado
conducted by Paul Karlstrom
At the artists' home,
April 3, 1995**

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Luchita Hurtado on April 13, 1995. The interview took place in Santa Monica, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Interview

Tape 1, Side A (30 minutes per side)

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, an interview, actually a second interview, with Luchita Hurtado at her home in Santa Monica Canyon. The date is April 13, 1995, and the interviewer is Paul Karlstrom. I say second interview, Luchita, because, as you know full well, your interview was just about a year ago, May 1, 1994, for the Archives by Amy Winter. That interview dealt primarily with you, of course, but an earlier part of your life and experiences and your marriage/relationship with Wolfgang Paalen, some of the Dynaton story in connection, but with a certain emphasis, shall we say, somewhat pre-California. But, on the other hand, you've been in California since--- When did you come? '48?

LUCHITA HURTADO: The first time? To California? It was in '48.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So there were a good number of years. Now it's 1995.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, that's quite a while ago.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So much of your life and career has been spent here. So what I would like to do, as we have discussed, is to fill in a little more of the later decades. I guess we have to cite with your move to California and then eventually down to Southern California and establishing yourself here in the Los Angeles area. I would like to also touch on aspects of your own career, I don't know how much of that got into the first interview, and not

discuss you simply in terms of your spouses, as interesting as they are and that subject is. So, why don't we start in '48 at that time and maybe revisit a little bit of those years and circumstances you find yourself.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Right. Well, what happened was that Gordon Onslow-Ford and Jacqueline [Johnson] had left Mexico and decided to live in San Francisco. And encouraged Paalen to leave Mexico and try living in San Francisco. At that same time, I lost a child in Mexico and the whole thing seemed to point to making the exit.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How old was your child?

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was 5 years old.

PAUL KARLSTROM: 5 years.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh. 5 years old, and it was polio. I think it was probably the last epidemic in Mexico. And so, we decided to visit the Onslow-Fords. And we loved San Francisco, and it was a wonderful city. We were both very taken by the whole group of people that we met. Instantly Gordon took us to look for a house, and found one in Mill Valley, which we bought on 95 McGee.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good memory.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, [laughs] 95 McGee. It was a beautiful house, very Victorian with a porch that went the whole width of the house and a garden that was filled with redwoods and a stream that went through it. And, we bought it and left. We decided and went on to New York, and we would go back to Mexico and then we would make the move. Which is exactly what happened.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did you do with the house while you were gone? You bought it and left?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, we just left. We bought it and I forget. There was someone living in the house, but I forget who it was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you never really moved in, you just--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Until we came back. No, we didn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We came back, I think, this was probably in January and we moved back in June, or something like this. It wasn't that long. And we came back and started to paint the house. Gordon and Jacqueline lived in San Francisco on Telegraph Hill. They helped us get furniture. We came down and bought a lot of things from an antique dealer here that had beautiful things. Paalen didn't have a studio proper. He worked in this very small garret room that was above the house and I worked in the dining room.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were painting already?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was a painter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know you must have talked with Amy a bit about this, but I am eager myself to hear this part of your story that you already were an active artist.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was an active artist, but--

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of under the influence in anyway of Paalen or the Surrealists, at least. Not really.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, but Surrealists perhaps, yes. I loved Matta's [Roberto Matta Echurren] work, and I was a very good friend of Aben and Matta. I had known them. We had been very close friends in New York. I had known that whole group of artists. East Hampton, Amagansett, Motherwell [Robert], Jane Bowles was one of the people who came to Amagansett and Kiesler [Frederick]. At any rate, we were in San Francisco and then the Dynaton show. Let's see, there was Sybil Moholy-Nagy, who was a very interesting woman and--

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me ask you your impressions of California art, specifically the Bay Area. When you arrived you were really an international person with an international husband. In a way, from his perspective, it certainly seems that it would be an unusual choice to make as a destination for an artist to settle in the Bay Area.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I remember being in Point Lobos, I think it was, and we were with, I think it was with Gordon. As a matter of fact, he was showing us the coastline, when suddenly we saw a school of whales. This was magic. And somehow I thought it was a very fine omen. I thought this is the place to be, of course. Nature is so important in California--

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, I gather from what you're saying that you refer to the setting, and to the place and to

nature, but not to art. Very often artists, of course, are attracted to art centers where they rub elbows with famous artists or there is an active art scene going on. Is this something that you expected there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, Gordon was here and this was part of the art scene in Mexico that had arrived here, and there was, as I say, Sybil and Varda [Jean]. Varda was a very, very important element, because Varda and Paalen had been very close friends and Varda was a kind of a magic individual who, no one like him, told the most fantastic stories. Wonderful person--

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you go to his famous parties on his boat?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We went to his famous parties and I will never forget the first time I met him. He came by with a friend, a very lovely girl, and we were-- He honked the horn and Paalen went to the window, and they spoke in French, "Lovely friend, here I am," etc. And then he said, Paalen said, "I want you to meet my wife," and sort of pushed me out the window. And Varda started to throw kisses. It was really opera. Varda was one of these wonderful spirits, that wherever he went he had this gift of great joy around him always.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you socialized with him a fair amount--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That would describe a kind of circle then. Who else would you count in that your own--

LUCHITA HURTADO: There was Jimmy Broughton, who was really a very fine poet, who is a very fine poet and film maker and ... and as I say, Sybil Maholy-Nagy and there were all these people coming and going. Like Tiné[?] Matisse would come and stay the night and then someone else would come and we'd, ah, there were always visitors from out of town. And there was Dr. Morley [Grace McCann] was at the museum. She was a very interesting woman, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Indeed. What about, so this is '48, '49, '50? What year did you leave, just so we have that set. You left? The group sort of split up--

LUCHITA HURTADO: '50!

PAUL KARLSTROM: 1950. So this really is just a very short period we're talking about.

LUCHITA HURTADO: 1950. Yes, just two, three years.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, at that time, there was a lot of activity going on, of course, at the Art Institute, California School of Fine Arts. Did you and your friends have any contact with--

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. Well, no, there wasn't, it was a completely separate group. I had friends in New York and didn't see them. No, there was no contact between the California group, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then, of course, the Bay Area figurative group was just about to emerge--

LUCHITA HURTADO: They moved here just as we left.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Just about, it was about 1950, actually. David Parks, the famous painter--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You didn't know any of them, either Park or Bischoff [Elmer], or Arnautoff [Victor]?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's interesting, you really had your own, I won't say isolated, but very much self-contained creative community.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And all built presumably around or revolving around the Dynaton and Paalen's ideas.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you, how did Lee, your now husband, Mullican get involved? When did he appear? Do you remember? You must remember.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Of course, of course. Gordon wrote to Paalen and said, "I have discovered this very talented

young painter, and you must see his work," etc. And I remember, when we came to visit, Lee and the Stauffachers [Jack and Frank] gave a party and that was the first time I met them. Then we went on to New York. When we came back, Lee was looking for a place to live and he, this was a very large house, and he took the top floor, the very top floor of this Victorian house.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, it's none of my business, but I can't help but ask you, was it love at first sight?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: No? It took a little while-- What, I'm sure that you talked about the Dynaton show and such with Amy on that interview, so I don't know that we need to cover that.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, what brought about the separation, or really the going the different ways of the group? Of course, part of it was a marital thing, but how do you remember the sequence of events?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh, huh. Well, what happen was, you see, that I was going back to South America. I was going to visit my family and so, instead, on the way, I stopped off in New Mexico and then I decided that I wasn't going back to Venezuela. And I couldn't make up my mind whether I wanted to go on to New York or come back to California. It was in the fall of the year and I didn't have any winter clothes. [laughs] So that decided that I would return to California. But I thought I would like to live in L.A. So I had two friends where it's warm. I had two friends here, one, Shiela and Giles Healey, and the other was Iris Tree. Iris was a dear friend and I'd always written to Iris, The Merry-Go-Rounds, Santa Monica Pier. And I thought this was the name of a house on a street called Santa Monica Pier, and discovered that, by god, [laughs] it was a real merry-go-round and a real pier. So I stayed with Sheila until I found a place to live.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who is Sheila Tree?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Sheila Healey.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, Sheila Healey.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Giles Healey discovered Bonampak, the frescos of Bonampak.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And he was an extraordinary figure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you know them? From Mexico?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Mexico, yes, from Mexico. I met them with Paalen when we went to see the La Venta Heads. He was doing his work in Las Casas, so we met them there in Las Casas.

PAUL KARLSTROM: They were living in Santa Monica?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We were living on Chautauqua, here in the Palisades.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right near by.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yeah. In the Palisades and I was taken everywhere and I didn't know where I wanted to live, but discovered the Santa Monica Canyon, and this was where I wanted to live.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Way back in 1950?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Un huh. I knew this was the place. I didn't know how to drive and so I left Shiela's house. I was very pregnant. I was about to have Matthew [Mullican] and I decided to take a place down here, in the Rory's Motel, and walk the canyon and see if I could find a house. I knew exactly what I wanted. So the first, um, I guess it was that first weekend, I started to have birth pains. And I called Sheila, and Sheila came by and picked Daniel [del Solar, Jr.] up. Daniel was then 11 years old and it was his first day of school. And I called the doctor and he said, "Meet me at the hospital." I went straight from the motel. Shiela came to the motel, took care of Daniel, took care of everything else, and I had Matthew. And so I gave up at that point of having to have a place in the canyon. So I looked in the newspapers and there was an ad for an apartment 14th street in Santa Monica and --

PAUL KARLSTROM: 14th and what?

LUCHITA HURTADO: 14th and, I think, it was 14th between Arizona and, I think, it was just south of Montana. At any rate, I saw this ad and I called the house. I said, "Do you accept children?" "Yes." "Do you rent by the month?" "Yes." "Are there two bedrooms?" "Is there a place where I can have the baby in the sun?" "Yes." "Is there a garden?" "Yes." I said, "I'll take it." She said, "Well, you haven't seen it." I said, "That's not necessary. It's completely furnished. I'll come next week." So that's how it went. Shiela had a maid and the maid shopped. The house had everything except sheets and pillow cases and towels. So this maid did all the shopping for me and the following week I moved in with my two children.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It sounds like a pretty brave move on your part. What led you to abandon this presumed security of the place in Mill Valley? Or was it not so secure or comfortable any more?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. It wasn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Obviously the marriage was--

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, it had all-- When I left Mill Valley, I left Mill Valley. I wasn't going back, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so you left Paalen presumably at that point, and so you were really--

LUCHITA HURTADO: On my own.

PAUL KARLSTROM: --creating a new life for yourself. What happened then, because you somehow--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Then I learned to drive. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ah, that was next. [laughs]

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughs] I learned to drive and I got a car. And once I learned to drive, I would come down to the canyon, with the baby in the back seat, and come down into the canyon and I discovered Edmondson, who was a real estate man down on Channel Road. I told him exactly what I wanted. I wanted a house with a view of the sea, a garden (and the garden was very important), and I couldn't pay very much rent. And he said, "Well I hope you find it." And I would come every time I had time. I would run down to the canyon and see, and "Nothing," he'd say, "I have nothing." One day I went in and he was closing a big deal with a Malibu house and he gave me set of keys and said, "I think I found your house." He gave me the keys to this house.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really? 1951?

LUCHITA HURTADO: That was 1951.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Amazing. It sounds to me as if you fell in love with Santa Monica Canyon.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It's almost as if you left a marriage and a husband for a canyon.

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughs] Well now, where you live and the garden and all of this is part of having children. It has the best school in the city, which is a very important detail when you have children is the school.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did Lee get back into the picture?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, Lee was in Oklahoma.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He had gone back to Oklahoma.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, he went home. He went to Oklahoma and then he came. Let's see, I guess it must have been in January he came. He found his place up on Gorham Place. He had a studio and a house there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now did he, I forget--

LUCHITA HURTADO: He practically lived here, of course, but he didn't.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He didn't, well, that's proper. I can't remember from my interview with him if he came here with the offer of a job at UCLA or if that came after.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, that came after.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what did he have here?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, he painted. He had his studio, and I don't know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But he didn't have a job, a teaching job.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. That came much later.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Much later?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think so. I mean, he taught in extension, but he took a course, as a matter of fact, from Kenneth Bergalen, a playwriting course.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, I remember hearing about that.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. Yes, he did that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's his other career.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh. [laughs] He wrote fascinating plays.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Since this is an oral history, I get to ask anything. How did you two separately and together maintain yourselves, support yourselves at that time?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I tell you I had quite a collection of things. I've always collected and I supported myself by selling things occasionally.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you operate as a private dealer almost?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, I had friends in New York. I think I'll sell this drum and then they would be very interested. And besides, I also had a job with a designer friend here, Matilda Aches [?], and I worked for her. She had done costumes for the Saddler Wells and for all these-- She was English, an interesting person. Anyway, I did that and then I painted and I had a show with Paul Kanter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, that was in '53, '54. I showed with him. It was right after, I forget dates, but that's more or less. Then, of course, I was in a movie.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were? Now tell me, I didn't know about your career as a--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh no, I was just, you know, I was a court lady in a movie called, what was it called, The Egyptian. Curtiz [Michael] was the director, and I had a friend who was a very colorful character, Friedrich Eidelborg. And Friedrich said, I think we were at a party, and Friedrich said, "There is this great opportunity for you. You'd be great in this movie. Go and see my friend, Curtiz," or something like that. And they were casting, and I had never acted in my life. I had never done anything like this and I went and Curtiz looked at me and he said, "You have a face that is 100 BC to 100 AD. [laughs] You are in." [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I guess that was a compliment.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think it was very original. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do we know this movie?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't know, everybody seemed to be in it.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Who were the main stars?

LUCHITA HURTADO: The main stars, my god, what are their names? Oh, this big, well, Wilding?

PAUL KARLSTROM: Michael Wilding?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Michael Wilding, who was married to Elizabeth Taylor at that time, Peter Ustinov, all kinds of people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wonder if we could rent it. Maybe we could rent it.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't know whether you could even see me in it, but I was there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But that was--

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was an adventure. It was a way of earning money.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was when, in '53--

LUCHITA HURTADO: I forget, somewhere there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was just one--

LUCHITA HURTADO: That was fun, I mean this was what it was like, you had friends, interesting people around. And Iris had these great parties over the Merry-go-round and Charlie Chaplin offered to paint the house, and carried on in one group, and Ustinov in another group and--

PAUL KARLSTROM: You got to meet many of the Hollywood people.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: "The Industry," as they call it.

LUCHITA HURTADO: "The Industry", yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That must have been fun.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was a fun time.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, at that point, I think I am going to turn this over, because it's starting to flash. OK?

[End Tape 1, Side A]

Tape 1, Side B (30 minutes per side)

PAUL KARLSTROM: An interview with Luchita Hurtado. This is Tape 1, Side B. O.K., we were rudely interrupted here. You told us about your brief career in the movies.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Unique, unique.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Unique, one time.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, no. I'll tell you.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Another one?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, I'll tell you what happened. I thought, oh, this is a wonderful way to earn money and this is great. So I forget, how I came to see this agent. Oh, yes, it was Curtiz who said, "You could be in all these." They were making all these Biblical movies, and he said, "You could be in the movies."

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were exotic.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, something like this. And he said, "Get yourself an agent, photographs," etc. So I called the agent and went to see the agent. Oh, yes, he would love to promote this. This was very good, and then, of course, it was a very Hollywood story. He invited me to lunch and it was all very disappointing. I said, "No, I don't want to get into this one, thank you very much," and that was the end of my movie career, actually.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, at least, you had one, some people don't have one at all. Let's talk about something for you more significant and long lasting. You said that you actually had a one-person show at Paul Kanter Gallery.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, I was in a group show.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You were in a group show.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was part of his gallery and he would put my things up. They had just opened.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. Well, okay, let's see, how did you make that connection? How did it come about?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Paul Kanter was a very good friend of Mary Vesher.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, yes, sure.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And Mary Vesher was a very good friend of mine.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How did you meet the Veshers?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, they came to visit Paalen in San Francisco. Also, Sheila and Giles Healey were very good friend of theirs. Everybody knows everybody.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So what kind of work were you doing then?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I was doing these kind of ordinary, little figurative paintings, abstract figurative.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How would you characterize them in terms of--

LUCHITA HURTADO: They were kinds of, I don't know how to describe them, it's very difficult to describe. It's figures. They're figures. Well, I'll tell you, I always felt they were my figures. But, how else to describe them, not detailed, but obviously figures, in and out abstract and I did mostly a kind of ink, crayon, ink, watercolors.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now, is this work similar to the work you had been doing in Mexico?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, connected, but--

PAUL KARLSTROM: What's the difference then? How would you describe the pre-California work and work in Mexico and then California?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I'll tell you, you see, I was doing oil paintings in Mexico; here, I was doing mostly watercolors and ink and crayon.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Figures in both?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Figurative both, but different. I mean-- it's hard to describe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know it's hard to describe, but here I am without a nice catalogue--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Kind of landscape.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Sort of Arcadian figures, like maybe almost mythological or, in other words, what were they doing, or were they just being there?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, what were they doing? There were some that were sort of like comic book things I did, [pause] stories.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So, there was a narrative of some sort.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There was a narrative in some sort in them always, and some of them became so abstract and involved with flowers and involved with all kinds of other things, that, you know, very hard to describe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I know this is hard to answer, especially thinking back to then, was there any sort of esthetic or philosophy that you were bringing to these works, any particular goals in terms of response of an adage? You say there were stories in there, but were they generalized stories, ambiguous, or were they very specific?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Poetic. I mean, if you were going to find a definition for it, it was always very spiritual or poetic or in that vein.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you feel an affinity at all to, say, the symbolists artists of the 19th century? Those or maybe to Redon, for instance, Odilon Redon?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. If Redon had been born in Caracas, I think there would be a connection.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I see. O.K., well that's helpful.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that gives me an idea of sort of the quadrant you were working in. And I am also interested, although I already asked you this, but maybe get it from a slightly different angle. You were surrounded by Surrealism. You're very much aware of, and in Mexico, of course, this is very important. What, if any aspects of that attracted you, might have been reflected eventually in your own work, or not?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, Surrealism has always been sort of an undercurrent. But, to say, I'm going to paint a Surrealist painting, no. I admire it. Archin Boller[?] was a Surrealist without knowing it, but I admire all of the

Surrealists, Breton [André] especially, because it is a very intellectual approach. I think the Surrealists--

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, from what you say, it doesn't sound as if you think of your own work in that way.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Much more intuitive, as you say, poetic and in a sense direct, rather than calculated, intellectualized. Is that right?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, that's correct.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Has that always been the case? Do you still feel that way?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think we're all, you see, this was a group at one time, but I think we're all as painters. I think we're all such individuals, that it's a matter of [pause], it's a need, painting is a need, and a very personal kind of need. So that's why it's so difficult to explain what your intent is. It grows out of a need that you may not even yourself be aware of or familiar with, but it's there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You never looked around and saw, say, Frida Kahlo, or somebody like that, for instance?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Frida was a friend, but there again, I mean, I don't know if you would call Frida a Surrealist. I mean, she was very involved with her own life, that's what her painting was about.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about you? Do you feel that way?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Exactly, I think so, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now we're getting somewhere.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think so, too. I think that it's true of all painters. I think that, look at everybody.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, some more than others though--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Some more than others. But, you look at Rothko [Mark], and Rothko had the same kind of experience. I mean, talk about anybody, talk about Lee, talk about Paalen, also.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, except that some of them. Gordon--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Gordon, absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Gordon would be an example of an artist who's also very programmatic and he has very specific, rather, ambitious goals, and the little I know about Dynaton could be described this way as well, really transcended goals.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But there was a group then, you see, and they were all sort of speaking about this.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So they reinforce one another.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think that's what happens with--

PAUL KARLSTROM: When did you start studying art? When did you become interested?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, I was interested at a very early age. I think art has a kind of ritual element in it and it can be triggered by many things. I think nature, religion can be triggered by many, many things. I remember as a child, I had an extraordinary sense of smell and I remember being in the garden and this very pungent, extraordinary scent. I would follow it and I would see a butterfly breaking its cocoon. I could follow the scent, you see.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Really.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I could smell this happening, and I think this was one of the triggers, because it was an experience I didn't share with many people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And so, what do you mean that this would be a trigger? How would this be a trigger to release things artistically--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it's to explore a part of yourself that you're not even aware of.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Uh huh.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I think this is probably true of many people, if they just sat down and thought about it. Where does it begin? How does it begin? I remember, too, as a child the smell of the flowers in the church was an experience to me. Of the smell of black; black has a smell.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It does?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, absolutely. And I remember these processions, religious processions, and it's a very, very strong, this combination of sound and smell.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And lacquer, an unpleasant smell?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, kind of a waxy smell. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: Does it smell like death?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do other colors have smell?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I've often thought, I think that days have shapes and colors have smells, and all of these things are all around us and no one stops to, really.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You realize this is very symbolist thinking. I mean, this is exactly the way the symbolist writers and artists discussed congruities between different things, sound, and sight.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But, it's part of our life. It's not symbolism, it's part of us.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But they just emphasized that and tried to accomplish that same thing in their work, to try to make those connections. Do you feel that, from what you've said, I'm beginning to think that this is then something that you wanted to achieve in your work?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes, it's all part of it. Yes, it's all part of it. Sometimes it's easier to do with words, than to do with images.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let's be concrete. This is interesting to me. Black has, I guess, a distinct odor, because you mentioned that. You said black, and then you feel more strongly about that than some of the other colors. What about --

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, it's not that. It just goes back when I said religion, you see. There we go, symbolism again.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right, right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I say religion, instantly I go back to my childhood. I go back to the church, which is again a very important element in Latin America.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This was in Caracas?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This is in Caracas. And you go back to the experience, and experience is the women in black, the candles, the sounds, and with it I want to say lilies, then I say azucenas, because in Spanish it comes back. The flower is not a lily, it's an azucena. When the color black has a smell, I can smell it because I can also smell the lily.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, these are the connections. This, and also the power of memory, you seem to rely on, that plays some kind of an important role in your creative process or your thinking, memory, the attachment or connection back to early experiences, the Church, these smells--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, yes, it's all involved. It's all involved in what you are today. At my age, my life behind me, are many different people. I'm very different from that child in Latin America, or that woman who found this house, or that person who had her first child. I mean, they're different people. But in a sense they're different people, but, they all share the same roots and they're all growing. And that's what I'm about. I'm still growing. In ten years, you said the year 2005, I look forward to 2005. I think it's going to be an exciting year.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you think then that these senses, these sensual phenomena, provide the thread that runs through these different people that you've described? You said how you now are a different person--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes, oh yes, because I smoked, I smoked, I lost a lot of this sense of smell. I wish I still had it, but I smoked a lot.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Are these experiences for you close then to the essence of you in your own mind? These are the essential experiences and qualities and--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, but it's all connected, don't you see, Paul? I mean, also of nursing my first baby. Daniel was born the day that the Germans entered Paris. I had him in a hospital, the French Hospital in New York, the day that the Germans entered. Everyone around me was crying and here was my son, my first child, and my husband, the doctor, everybody was saying, "You shouldn't nurse him." No, at that time they didn't believe in women nursing children.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Wasn't as healthy as cow's milk?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. Oh listen. And so I went on a hunger strike. I wouldn't eat and I wouldn't drink until they brought my baby and they gave up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: 1940. And they brought my baby. I had so much milk that when they finally gave me the child, the milk just burst forth and this little thing began to lick at my breasts. I can see that, feel it, smell it, do that whole thing.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's amazing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And it's still with me, you see, all this is part of you. But everyday brings something new, so you experience that and you have the other besides.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This incredible sense experience that you describe, which may be more pronounced in you than in others, or maybe not. But I've got a couple questions, because it seems to be important to you and to your life and presumably then to your work. If you were asked to try to point to aspects of your work that somehow express this sense awareness of yours, what would those features in the work be? What is it about your work that you think then authentically or directly expresses this very heightened sense awareness? Is there anything?

LUCHITA HURTADO: You see, I think I really, you can't make a painting-- For instance, look, these are three of my paintings on the wall. This is my painting, that is my painting, and that is my painting.

PAUL KARLSTROM: All very different, quite different. Except there's a feather, no, one's a leaf and those are feathers. O.K., so?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Find the elements there. I mean, at a certain point, I said there is no way that I can express, let's say, except by painting myself. So I began to make portraits of myself, looking down.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this painting here, what's that called? Because this is a tape recording and they can't see it. It's feet, toes, one hand seen from above, and feathers on the ground and the feet around the margins or edges is--

LUCHITA HURTADO: There is no up and there is no down. That's a very important element.

PAUL KARLSTROM: O.K. Then there's a crack.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There's a crack in the earth, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: All right, so tell me about it. Is that you? Are those your feet? You said you did portraits of yourself.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, I'm not talking about this particular painting, but things that I did during that time. They were looking down at myself. I said, "This is a landscape, this is the world, this is all you have, this is your-- your-- you live there, this is where you live." You are what you feel, what you hear, what you, you know? So then I did things like this, which I actually, I think, I did this thinking of the earthquake.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So this is recent?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. That's a very old one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When's that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: The most recent one is that one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's a leaf. The feet one, when was that done?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think that was '75.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's not that long, 20 years ago. And then there's a leaf that is somewhat, looks like a horizon or something.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's an horizon. It's called The Last Leaf of Rachel Carson.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that is the sea?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is this in any way, I hesitate to ask, but is there a political aspect to this, an awareness of vulnerable earth?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, sometimes, just reading what is happening in the world gives for a very disturbed moment. Where are we going and why doesn't anybody pay attention? What's happening and we are responsible? You have children, too, and so why don't you listen?

PAUL KARLSTROM: And what about this very abstract sunburst almost? It looks like a centrifugal force.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh, that has to do, you know, like we are all involved in this [pause] experience and we're part of something that's very much beyond us. That is very important, I mean, it's spiritual. It has to do with beginnings and ends, and there is no beginning and end.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is that why the circular?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes. [pause] The spiral.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this painted?

LUCHITA HURTADO: That, I think, it was done in the eighties.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Mid-eighties?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh, somewhere there. [pause] No, it's very difficult to talk about certain things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's true, especially the meaning of things.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The more things seem to you, the more difficult it becomes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I suppose also, I found, there's an understandable self-consciousness about that which one creates, and that I certainly run into this when it has to be translated into verbal form. It's always a struggle and nobody gets it just right, but none the less it can point directions. That's what I think this does, and it's not up to me, of course, to interpret these works, your works, but it is of interest to me how you see them, and if you see anything. What's important about them? What for you is meaningful and can it be expressed? Setting that aside, right now, let's go back to your early training. Did you attend art school?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, I did. I married very young, so I had very little training actually and I think the most-- There was a very good teacher called Bob Hale at the Art Students League and I think he was very influential. And Rufino Tamayo would stay with us in New York and that was right after I married, after I had my first child. Olga and Rufino would come and stay in New York. He would teach at Dalton School and then Olga would go back to New York, and I guess it was January, February. And Rufino would stay on, because he was teaching at Dalton and he would move in with us, you see. We spent many, many evenings talking about art and playing games, like how would you mix that color? And how would you mix, mostly about color. And it was a kind of game. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's stop and turn this over.

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

Tape 2, Side A (30 minutes per side)

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing an interview with Luchita Hurtado. The date is 13 April 1995. This is Tape 2, Side A.

When we left the other tape, we were trying in three paragraphs or less to describe the meaning of your work and its connection to your life, which, of course is impossible to do, but none the less, we were--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I'll tell you, Paul, life has a way of holding up your work, too. And it has in my life certainly, I mean, it's difficult to-- I've never been able to pursue a career properly. I'm always involved in life too much. And so, I write poetry, I paint, I do all these things, but I'm not running in any way after a dealer, to show or to publish or to do any of these things. I don't think it's, in a way, I think I'm even afraid of this. When the women's movement came about here in this town, it was a very, [pause] very strange because Joyce Kozloff, who is a very interesting artist, who is here with her husband, Max, and she said, "The women have to get together, women painters have to get together." She invited all the artists, all the women that she knew, to an afternoon at her house. We all went around the room and everybody gave their name. You gave your name and you said what you did, you're either a writer, you're a painter, you're a sculptor. It came my turn and I said, at that time, I was "Luchita Paalen," I said, "artist." And I remember June Wayne from the other side of the room said, "Luchita, what?" [laughs] And I said, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, [laughs] I'm sorry, June, Luchita Hurtado." [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was this?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This was '71. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: June gives no quarter.

LUCHITA HURTADO: "Luchita, what?" I'll never forget it. So it's always been a problem to me, for instance, today's my life today. I have very little time to paint. We're either going to one place, or coming from one place. There's a lot of work involved in entrances and exits.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you're usually the one responsible for it.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And I'm the one that's responsible.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let's talk about that, because I think it's a question that interests many people, that we're much more aware of now. Here you thought of yourself, to some extent, as a professional, or at least able to operate in that capacity. You chose to be an artist, and yet you've lived a kind of life almost, I won't say a conventional one at all, but certainly in terms of your domestic life, mother, wife, homemaker, grandmother, all these things. And what about that? Men are in domestic situations as well. And yet, generally speaking, I in no way want to prime you for your own response to this, but I think everybody acknowledges, including most men, there is a difference in terms of demands upon time and the opportunity to either, within a domestic, a nice family situation, pursue a career. How did you find it through all the years for yourself?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I really haven't ever resented any time I've given, because I don't think it's time lost. I think it's bigger than any of it. I think it's important that I paint. It's important for me to read. It's important for me to write. It's important for me to hear music, It's important for me to have children. I knew at a very early age that children were very, very number one in my life. As a matter of fact, I told my mother, when I was in my teens, I said, "I'm going to have children right away, I want a baby," and I really think that's the most important. I said, "I'm not interested even if, whether I am married or not, if I need a child, I'll have a child." She crossed herself and she said, "What priest have I hit?"

PAUL KARLSTROM: What did I do? [laughs]

LUCHITA HURTADO: What did I do to deserve this daughter? And so I don't think you lose much by not dedicating yourself entirely to painting. I think we have more time than we imagine. This is just, I think, we know so little about everything, things, really important things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you see a basic difference between men and women--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. I do.

PAUL KARLSTROM: -- in this respect?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh no, no, actually, I think it's very important for me. I have a real nesting thing. We camped through Europe, right, and we had this tent that we could put up and take down in no time at all.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Was this recently or a long time ago?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no. This was, no, Matt was 7 years old. It was in '59, '60, when Lee had a Fulbright and we took off for a year in Rome. We lived in Rome for a year. And that summer we decided to camp, following the pre-historic sites from Spain to England. Exciting! Matt was just, what, 8 years old and we could-- This was a

beautiful tent we bought in Nice, with directions how to put the tent up and take it down in German-- And no one, and the mistral was blowing, the first time we put up that tent. So we walked around the camp looking for a tent similar to ours to see how it was done. It took us forever to get this tent up. By the end of the summer, we could put it up and take it down in minutes. But, you see, I would collect leaves and tape them around the inside of the tent once it was up, because, for me, it's important. I don't think men have this. I don't think Lee ever pinned a leaf to the side of the tent. I don't think it was important to him, but for me it was.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you feel that, in your experience anyway, and you know many creative people, that in general--

LUCHITA HURTADO: In general, women are much more sensitive to these things, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What I wanted to ask you, and we realize, of course, that it's always difficult to generalize too much about this, but, none the less, it's your story and your preception. I wanted to ask you, you strike me as a very sensual person, by that I mean, very attuned to the senses, unusually. In a way, that seems to embrace so much, whether it's visual or sounds, smells, your story about your child, finally getting your child Daniel in the hospital, and the way you described this is incredibly nurturing, sensual in a way. For instance--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, it is, it was, it was, it was. It's an earth experience.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And this perhaps is a simplistic question. Do you see this in general among your friends, men and women, that women tend to have a greater capacity or a greater sensual capacity in this respect than men? Are men more focused and perhaps less, well, I'm not sure exactly what I mean, but do you see where I'm leading?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh, I think I find that women are more sensitive in many ways to certain things, but then, of course, there are men who are as sensitive. I don't know. I think it's the individual. I think it's the individual.

PAUL KARLSTROM: But, you know, there is this, again not to try to simplify things, you and I aren't going to come up with a definite answer on this--

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, of course.

PAUL KARLSTROM: --but it does seem to be true, or many people observe that men are much more career-oriented and focused and define themselves in terms of their work. And then, if you're an artist and, in this case, you're an artist married to an artist, this works itself out in such a case that the male, the man, can often, must often, focus very much to the exclusion of certain other aspects of life, perhaps, whereas the professional woman not only can't, perhaps, because of the way our society is set up and our roles. But, in a way, perhaps, does it need to, because all self-fulfillment does not take the form of the career? There are others, so many others. That's what, I guess, I'm trying to get from you is that life is so rich and varied.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Exactly, exactly.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So I've got it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think so, I think you've got it. [laughs] I think so. At least with me, as I say, it's an individual thing, because I have friends who are women whose careers are as important as anything in their life, and it has priority. The career has the priority and very successful and so it is. After all, it's a matter of choice. Life is that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about with artists? Rather than generalizing too much, let's get back to artists. You gave me an example of you as an artist couple and both coming up within the art world. With not just creative people, with artists, would you say that generalization holds that the man's career one way or another ends up taking precedence?

LUCHITA HURTADO: There again, I mean it's a matter of couples. If I am sure that if this was that important to me to be a great success, to be number one, I would have achieved it. I would have, but it wasn't, so I didn't. So life, I think, was number one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You said the importance of children being a primary concern.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Exactly. And that is life. That's what's life. Uh huh, that's how important it is, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Having gone through this lengthy digression, very interesting, too, let's get back here to this house and in the mid-50s, I guess. Lee was living near by, but eventually--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Lee had shows with Kanter, too. Lee had real shows with Kanter. His art is very important. It's number one, and that I think is great.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I now think of those as great, your grandchildren probably would be number--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, grandchildren come out right there. Yes. Right there, [laughs] both of us. But no, that was very important and he had chosen and he still is so active. That's the way he is. He gets up at 6:30 in the morning and off he goes, and he goes to his studio, and that's wonderful. He's extraordinarily talented. I don't think Lee has the recognition he deserves. I think Lee in time will, he will. He has the amount of work. He could fill two museums, at least. And he's still excited about new things that he's doing and it's just fantastic how he has new things. Look around. These things, the energy in them, the energy in these things are just extraordinary.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I like that one very much.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Isn't it? No, just go into his studio. I'm overwhelmed, sometimes. I'll go in there, "Lee you couldn't have." Yes, he has done it, a huge canvas pinned to the wall because he hasn't had time to get a canvas stretched. And it's amazing, the energy in this man and this constant, I mean, he sits in that chair and he sketches, and look.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Now these are some of his sketchbooks.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, this is. Look, these are amazing things.

PAUL KARLSTROM: These April '95 sketchbooks and we're only midway through April '95.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's constant. It's an amazing amount of work.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I wonder if he's planning to give some of these to the Archives.

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I think so. I hope so.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He might, he might. Who knows. I think that's the future.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You know what strikes me and I want to get back to sort of a chronology on this in just a minute. But, what strikes me is that you have a wonderfully, mutually supportive relationship over these years. I don't sense on your part a competitive aspect to this.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, never.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I should tell you, although this is your interview, not mine, when I first visited Lee in his studio before we started our interviewing, he was very careful to point out several of your works that were there and said, "Now, you know who this is?"

LUCHITA HURTADO: Really! How funny.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's right. And he said, "This is Luchita. This is my wife. She is a wonderful artist." And I said, "Very interesting work. I hadn't seen much." But I wanted to share that with you.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's very nice to know, very nice to know.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And again, though, it indicates, I think, a wonderful and again mutually supportive quality that comes with a good relationship and a good marriage. We can't separate being an artist, I don't think, from being a human being and being in relationships.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't think you can, I don't think you can.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So that's partly what this is about.

LUCHITA HURTADO: But, you know, I don't think I could have ever lived with a bad artist. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs] Well, you haven't.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's another thing that I couldn't, I couldn't. It's a very strange thing to say, but it's the truth, Paul. I don't know what there is, I mean, for me that is a very important sharing experience. I don't think I could live with someone, where I would say, "This is a great painting," and they would say, "What do you see in that?" No, I like to share this, this is a very important part of life to go to a museum in Berlin and to both sort of be overwhelmed by things, to share this.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So part of your bond is aesthetic?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's an aesthetic thing, absolutely. I remember in Rome, when we lived in Rome, we furnished this place, part of it. There was no furniture in this place, but we gradually bought things at the flea market. And Lee and I, when we go to a museum or a flea market, we each go our way and invariably, this is ---, I would get something that he had seen and considered and wanted, or the other way round. I saw something and he would buy it, you see. And that's a very important element in our marriage. [wind howls, something breaks] Listen to that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: This is incredible.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The wind just came up.

PAUL KARLSTROM: There's an amazing wind storm out there. That's the storm up in the Sierra, Northern California, that is now coming down here. Now that's all a part of the taped interview, see, they're going to transcribe that. That's more interesting actually than, not this interview, but some interviews I've done. [laughs] O.K., we've established, it's pretty clear that you and Lee have a strong relationship, mutually supportive. You're both artists and that you feel very much that you have this bond which is a shared aesthetic value system. But I still haven't found out, for me now, I still have you two back in the '50s living near by, but separately. Tell me how you got together?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, I see, I see, I see.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What happened?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I'll tell you. My sister came north and she came from Venezuela and she said, "Why don't you come down? There are all kinds of possibilities in Caracas and you stay with mother. Mother is growing older." So I said, "All right." Matthew and I went down to Caracas and Lee stayed here. Daniel was going to high school, and Lee and Daniel and, I think, Paul, someone called Paul, also. They stayed here at the house. And when I came back from Venezuela, I went back to New York. I was there a couple of months and then I came back here. Lee proposed and we were married. As a matter of fact, Mary Vesher gave a party for us. She was the witness. She was a very funny witness. Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What year was that, when you were married?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh gosh. I don't remember. It must have been, I know it was February 27th and the year was, when was it / [pause] 50 something, was it '56? I think it was '56, '57.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How many years have you been married?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I don't know. I don't remember. [laughs] I don't remember. 50s, mid-50s, somewhere in there. '56? I think it was '56, '56.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then Lee moved in on an official basis.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That's right. That's right.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Why did you wait that long?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, you see, I think actually what happened was that Lee's family is very religious, and I was a divorced woman and I think that had something to do with it. And I remember his sister came out to meet me, a very sweet woman, and then of course we married. And we went and I met his family, very dear people and loving. And his mother was a painter. His mother was a painter and did lovely flower paintings and landscapes, lovely landscapes, very beautiful. And I think that was a very important element in Lee's life and his mother was very important, his family was. His sister, when you say good-bye, instead of saying good-bye, you say, "Love you good, honey."

PAUL KARLSTROM: Love you good, honey.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Love you good, honey. [laughs] For me it was a new world the sacattas[?], and the heat, and Chickasha, Oklahoma, a new world, a completely new world.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you, from all these exotic places that we think of, Oklahoma was pretty exotic for you?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Very exotic, very exotic, very exotic. Yes. And it seems like yesterday. And then, of course, his mother had a beautiful garden and she grew day lilies. She bred lilies, so that she had new day lilies and she gave them. There was a Lee lily. One of the last lilies she named was for our son, John, John lily. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: She really hybrid, I mean, she would create--

LUCHITA HURTADO: She would create these flowers. Yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Then you came back and established yourself here?

LUCHITA HURTADO: So then, yes, I came back. Lee at that point was involved with Rachel Rosenthal.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He told me about that in his interview.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Instant theater! And then very soon after that, he did get the Fulbright and we went off to-- No, no, it wasn't the Fulbright, we went off to Chile. It was an exchange.

PAUL KARLSTROM: I remember that, too, that was with UCLA, wasn't it?

LUCHITA HURTADO: With UCLA, the exchange.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So he must have gotten the UCLA job--

LUCHITA HURTADO: He got a job right after John was born, right after John was born. We'd been renting. I'd been renting this house from a Mrs. Berkel [?], who owned this place. At the beginning, she would always say, "This is your house, dear," and was very patient. Sometimes I was late with the rent, and she was very good about the ... But Lee got a job at UCLA, and then soon after that Mrs. Berkel called and said she had remarried and she was moving to Canada, and she wanted to let me have first choice, that she was selling the house. So it just was perfect, because Lee had UCLA and so we were able to borrow from the bank for the purchase of the house. And just then John was born, too. I mean, it all sort of came together.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Good timing.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It was good timing. I mean, this was unplanned.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So there you were, all of a sudden, with all this security?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Good plans!! Yes, well yes, I mean. There was this, you know, I never question life not being secure.

PAUL KARLSTROM: It wasn't an issue.

LUCHITA HURTADO: It wasn't an issue. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: It seems to have worked out O.K. Let's change this, 'cause we have our blinker again.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

Tape 2, Side B (c. 25 minutes)

PAUL KARLSTROM: The interview with Luchita Hurtado, this is Tape 2, Side B. And Luchita, we just determined two nice subjects, two good subjects to sort of wrap this up. One is to talk about your son, Matt [Mullican], and I think maybe certain qualities or values that would come, perhaps affect you through talking about him, and then also this special relationship you seem to have, you and Lee, with northern New Mexico, your place in Taos. Why don't you start talking about your son and grandchildren.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I think Matthew was born an artist. We always had extraordinary experiences with Matthew. He, in Europe for instance, was all of eight years old, seven, eight years old, and living in Rome and he enjoyed going to museums. He always did. He would be able at that age to draw the difference between an Etruscan helmet, a Roman helmet, and a Greek helmet, their very fine details, and he could do it easily, instantly. He loved all the gods and goddess, the Greek and Roman, and his favorite, I think, was Athena. He would paint these wonderful paintings with big black strokes. I would give him paper, long strips of paper, and he would take his brush and there was this wonderful painting, on one side was Athena and on the other side

was this whole army, and the army was devastated. And I said, "How is she doing it, how is Athena devastating this army?" And he said, "With her thoughts. [sigh] With her thoughts." And I remember going to the Picasso Museum in Antique and Lee would go through the museum. We would go separately. Matt and I would go together, and Lee would go and he'd be through way before us. And Matt wanted to see everything. Suddenly I was aware of this man who was following us from gallery to gallery, and I thought, oh dear, in Europe it happens often. And as we were leaving, he came up to me and handed me his card and said, "I have never seen a child react to art, especially with the kind of painting like this, before. I would love to know what happens to this child," and handed me his card. This was a very well dressed-- because Matt's excitement over the paintings and sculpture, whatever it was, was obvious. He would grab my skirt and say, "Come, look at this," and, "Look he must have sneezed when he did this drawing." I mean, it was an incredible experience to go to the museum with this child.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How old was he?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I'm telling you, he was eight years old.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was eight.

LUCHITA HURTADO: He was eight years old. His eighth birthday was in Paris and I said, "What do you want for your birthday?" And he said, "I want an Egyptian bronze." [laughs] So we found an antique shop that had Egyptian bronzes, they were right on the Left Bank, and we went in. He looked at all these things and he kept looking and he couldn't make-- He had \$30 to spend, which was a lot of money at that time, and he couldn't make up his mind. Lee and I said, "We'll come back. You go on looking, and we'll come back." Well, we came back and the woman was saying to Matt, "Yes, it is genuine. Yes, you can have it for \$30." And the only thing that she didn't say was, "Please leave my shop." [laughs] But that's what she meant.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He was in there the whole time bargaining.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Bargaining and wanting this particular piece that was-- He has it, he still has it in his loft in New York, this beautiful Egyptian bronze of a pharaoh with the two-- [laughs], with the upper, lower each. It was just incredible to see him. He still has this eye. It's wonderful to go to a museum with Matt. And for me, the icing on the cake is to see Matt being the father that he is. Such a wonderful father. He is so beautiful. I mean, you can see the relationship of those two people. And he has the same with the little girl. He looks at her and he touches her and he looks at this boy. It's this love and wonderful communication.

PAUL KARLSTROM: For the benefit of this tape and the people who listen to this or read it, Matt and his wife, her name is--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Valerie

PAUL KARLSTROM: Have twins--

LUCHITA HURTADO: They have twins.

PAUL KARLSTROM: --fraternal twins, a boy and a girl. Did you say eight or nine months now?

LUCHITA HURTADO: They were born August second of '94, so they will be, they're eight months old. And they're so special. They're so beautiful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You say that you realized early on that Matt had skill, talent, and awareness, an appreciation for art, an interest in art.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did you then at that point-- What steps did you take to help reinforce that or direct him?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I let him-- I gave him shelving paper. I would buy shelving paper, these rolls, and he would unroll them right here on this and I would give him--

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right where we're sitting?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Right where we're sitting and he would do these fantastic drawings, which I kept. I even traced some of the drawings he did on the walls. People would say... Before I cleaned it up, I would trace them. So I kept it all. We kept it all. Lee was just the same way I am. Then, too, what he did was he would make things out of the furniture. For instance, he would take all the chairs and put them there and then he would get into it and in and around. He would make great objects in the middle of the room with all of our furniture. We would borrow a chair to sit on, but it was just allowing him to do these things and to recognize the talent, too.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Did he always take art courses all the way through school? Was this an early avowed goal?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No. But when he graduated from Pali [Palisades] High and he was--, they have some kind of a competition here to discover the number one art student. Well, he was number one.

PAUL KARLSTROM: In the L.A. School District?

LUCHITA HURTADO: In the whole L.A. School District, he was number one. Then he went to Cal Arts and, I remember, they called him the "night and day man," because he was always in the studios.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The moonlighter.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The moonlighter never stopped. [laughs] He has wonderful eyes, bless his heart, yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, he certainly is having a wonderful career.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes, he is.

PAUL KARLSTROM: A lot of good attention, which I know is gratifying for you two.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes, to see his success is great and, you know, he had this great show in Munich.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That was just this last year.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Just this last year, uh huh. There he was, all these wonderful things around, and he was being interviewed and he had Cosmos strapped to his chest.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Cosmos, the little boy?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Cosmos, the little boy.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, let's shift to another, presumably another, love of yours from Matt to New Mexico. I don't want to overplay this, but it does seem that you and Lee have gone there regularly since when?

LUCHITA HURTADO: We used to, on the way to Oklahoma to visit his family. We would always stop. I didn't know New Mexico too well, but we would stop and go to Taos and visit friends there. And we both loved it. Then one day, we were on one of these trips going through and then-- We would at, one point, we rented a house for a while and then, one day, I said, "Why don't we-- We love this. Let's look for a place." And so we did. We found this great piece of land, right, with a view of the Taos Mountain and the Mountain of the Blue Lake, and bought it. It was all very fateful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When was that?

LUCHITA HURTADO: That was about 18 years ago, whatever, 18, 19, something like that.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, what, '76 or ?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Early '70s.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Oh, early '70s

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think so. I'm not sure, I think so.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you have the same place or did you get--

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh, it's the same place. We had somebody, an architect. It took two years to build. It's just two big rooms. That's all it is. It's nice.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And every year you go for--

LUCHITA HURTADO: We go back. We go for the summer

PAUL KARLSTROM: --the summer?

LUCHITA HURTADO It gets awfully cold in the winter, so we come back here. But in the summer, it's so beautiful. The sky, oh, the sky, and then the sounds, the crickets and you can see the walking rain.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Yes, yes.

LUCHITA HURTADO: And the smells, you can smell the rain before it rains. And the fall, I think its the most beautiful time of year, the fall when the air turns a violet color. Beautiful. It's like I always said, it was like crossing a border without having to worry about the water and

PAUL KARLSTROM: When you're there. Do you stay pretty much in Taos? Do you run down to Santa Fe a lot?

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, we don't. No, we don't go to Santa Fe.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You really go to Taos, you stay.

LUCHITA HURTADO: We go to Taos, we stay. We go to Santa Fe, we go to the opera. And when we go to Santa Fe, we go visit friends or there's a party or something.

PAUL KARLSTROM: We're going this summer.

LUCHITA HURTADO: You're going to the opera?

PAUL KARLSTROM: At the end of July, we're going to get tickets.

LUCHITA HURTADO: How wonderful. That's great. That's a fun thing to do.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Maybe we'll come up and visit you.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Come, absolutely. You're invited.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Right.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Absolutely.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So you go there. How would you describe your community in Taos? You've described to some degree your community here in the Santa Monica, the L.A. area.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, friends, there are so really many dear friends. The Prices are very close friends, and they have a place there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Ken and Happy.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Ken and Happy Price.

PAUL KARLSTROM: What about Larry Bell?

LUCHITA HURTADO: I'm really very fond of Happy as one of my closest friends. I do love her dearly. She's a wonderful woman. And Larry Bell and Gus Foster and all kinds of, wonderful group of people, fun people.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is there really much of an art life or art activity going on in Taos in the summer time, other than the sort of tourist type of thing? Or are you all in some sense trying to get away from that, you know, art world stuff? In other words, for you what is it about?

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's about being in this beautiful place and seeing friends, and, of course, art is involved, because everybody is producing art. All our friends are involved in their work. And now we have Agnes Martin, who is quite an extraordinary woman.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Is she up in Taos now?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes, she lives there year-round.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She was in She moved.

LUCHITA HURTADO: She lives there the year-round. She has a place. She's retired there and she has a studio. And she's fun to be with. I've always admired her work. I think she's so talented, so great.

PAUL KARLSTROM: She has a reputation for being, well, maybe, a little bit distant. I don't know about reclusive, but you obviously don't find her that way.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You have a good social relationship.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

PAUL KARLSTROM: When you get together with these people up in Taos, what do you talk about? I mean, you're in the midst of this beautiful place, and I know I go up there--

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughs] I'll tell you. I'll tell you. I mean, what you talk about is they're going to fire some pots. Lee is involved with ceramic things and there is this great kiln, it's a Japanese kiln, and it takes days to fire this pottery.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's in Taos?

LUCHITA HURTADO: This is in Taos. All of this is going on in Taos. I remember going to Kenny's and they were doing this high firing thing that was a performance, because there are these three people making these pots. They take them out of the kiln bright red and then they dump them in this pool of water and the steam goes up. Then they take them and throw them in the sand. You don't know what it's going to look like, and then, of course, the exciting thing is what color? What has happened to the glaze and what is going up? So there's always something like this going on that's exciting and wonderful.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you know of the Lumpkins down in Santa Fe?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yes.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Do you? Do you see them sometimes? Socialize?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Lumpkins? I mean, he's a painter.

PAUL KARLSTROM: He runs a school there, I think, or at least he participates in that summer program, and I thought maybe Lee was an artist in residency.

LUCHITA HURTADO: You mean the Institute of the Arts, run by Bauby.

PAUL KARLSTROM: May Olivera was in that recently.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Maybe I'm thinking of someone else. The Lumpkins?

PAUL KARLSTROM: They're down in Santa Fe. He was a member of that transcendental group, along with Agnes Pelton who has a big show out at Palm Springs now. These are people who associated with Santa Fe quite a bit earlier. Let me ask you another question. You're in an interesting position to answer this because, in a way, you're participating in a time honored tradition, in that, "as an urban, cosmopolitan artist," or, put it a different way, artist from urban centers, larger centers, discovering northern New Mexico, whether it's Santa Fe or Taos. Then coming, and obviously falling in love with it or the place, but then coming or sort of dropping in and then dropping out. And this is a pattern in some cases, like Mabel Dodge and some of these famous ones, D.H. Lawrence who came after, especially Mabel Dodge, who really based herself there. But, in almost every case, these are intellectuals or sophisticated, creative people. They would often go, I don't want to say refresh, that's not the right word, but would return to whether it's New York or Chicago, or maybe Europe or California. There's always this question of just how much did these people become part of that community, because they're internationalists. You're all internationalists and it's almost like a resort.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Uh huh.

PAUL KARLSTROM: How do you respond to that observation?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, I think wherever you are, you're just going through.

PAUL KARLSTROM: [laughs] Well, that's true. Life.

LUCHITA HURTADO: [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: I'll tell you, I'm anxious. That is a serious question and I don't know if I've put it very well. But, there's a certain tension that's very evident in New Mexico and it has to do with the "indigenous" people.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I'm home free on that. The Indians think I'm Indian, the Spanish think I'm Spanish. [laughs]

PAUL KARLSTROM: You can't lose. [laughs]

LUCHITA HURTADO: I can't lose. I can't lose. The Indians in the truck will wave to me. I wave back. [laughs] I

speak Spanish with the people at the shops, and they're kind of intrigued, because my accent is not their accent.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Let me put the question a different way, and this is not a value judgment--

LUCHITA HURTADO: It's there though.

PAUL KARLSTROM: --it's an observation.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think you are right. There is friction. Absolutely, there is friction and it can't be denied. I mean, there's friction between this group and that group, but it really, it isn't, let's say, it's not that important in our-- I think we go there and it has nothing to do with people. It has to do with the land.

PAUL KARLSTROM: The land.

LUCHITA HURTADO: The land and the sky and the mountains, and it's a very magic place. They talk about these electric currents underneath the earth. I'm sure that they cross there. I'm sure they cross there.

PAUL KARLSTROM: That's what I've heard.

LUCHITA HURTADO: There's something magic there. What happens is that friends come to visit and the second day there-- That's how we got our second, we bought a second piece of land right next to ours. And we found it through Sam Francis, who came to visit, and the second day there he was looking for a place to buy. He really wanted to buy a piece of land. And he found this piece of land and it was, we discovered, was a piece next to us. Well, at that point, he was married to Mako Idemitsu, who wasn't prepared to move or have a piece of land in Taos, so we asked Sam, "Are you going to buy it or aren't you," because, if you're not, we will. So we did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: So now you have two places.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, no, I mean, it's right next to ours. It's a piece of land, just added the land. So it's farm land, and they're long pieces, because there were several children in the family, and so each child got a long piece of land to farm. I'm glad we did.

PAUL KARLSTROM: And you plan to continue visiting?

LUCHITA HURTADO: Oh yes. We're residents there. We're residents there and we're residents here.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You're bi-state.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Yeah, we're bi-state. [laughs] Bi-state.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I hope this summer, or certainly in the fall when the conference is up there, I hope to see you there.

LUCHITA HURTADO: When will you be there this summer, in--

PAUL KARLSTROM: End of July.

LUCHITA HURTADO: End of July?

PAUL KARLSTROM: The third weekend in July or the first in August.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Well, we'll probably be there. I don't think we're going back. They'll still be in Berlin and that's their birthday. The twins birthday is August 2nd. So that's the only other place where we would be, where we might be, would be in Berlin.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, we'll check that.

LUCHITA HURTADO: I think we can't do it. We're going now to see them this coming month. We'll see them in May, so I think we'll probably wait until they return to New York in October.

PAUL KARLSTROM: You don't want to let too many months pass, the twins, they grow so fast.

LUCHITA HURTADO: No, we can't. We can't. We've done this, you see. We've decided this, that certainly the first year, we have to see them as often as we possibly can manage.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, I know you will, I can tell the enthusiasm and the will are there.

LUCHITA HURTADO: Um, um.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Well, Luchita this is great. We've done about two hours, not bad. So I want to thank you, it's been good.

LUCHITA HURTADO: That was fun.

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Last updated... *July 24, 2002*