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Oral history interview with Eve Babitz, 2000  
June 14

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# Transcript

## Interview

**Interview with Eve Babitz  
Conducted by Paul Karlstrom  
At her home in Hollywood, California  
June 14, 2000**

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Eve Babitz on June 14, 2000. The interview took place in Hollywood, California, and was conducted by Paul Karlstrom for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

PAUL KARLSTROM: Archives of the American Art, Smithsonian Institution. An interview with artist/writer, one-time model, Eve Babitz. The date is the 14th of June, year 2000. The interview is being conducted by Paul Karlstrom at the subject's home in Hollywood, California. And this interview is part of a series that we are doing for the Archives on the subject of artists and models. This is great, I just met you the day before yesterday, and here I am interviewing you.

EVE BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: We're really fast workers, aren't we?

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you were being-just to put this into a bit of context-you were being interviewed for a video for a documentary over at Castle Green-

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: -Green Hotel in Pasadena

MS. BABITZ: About the Duchamp photograph.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm. And the-

MS. BABITZ: You know, I'd never thought of myself as a model in that thing, but I guess I was volunteering for that job.

MR. KARLSTROM: Why don't you -

MS. BABITZ: I thought of myself as, I was like an art groupie/art model and I wanted to-I never modeled for anything like that and never again did, and really most artists, you know, when they have models they really are drawing them basically, like in sculptures, not taking photographs, so I don't know who-and it wasn't Duchamp's idea so I figured I was the artist and the model in that one.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, Julian Wasser was the photographer.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And I gather that this was something, aside from the official events around the-it wasn't at the opening.

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: Some people think it was at the opening.

MS. BABITZ: That's good.

MR. KARLSTROM: And then that's not right. It really was kind of-what should we say-it was kind of a guerilla act it seems to me.

MS. BABITZ: That's right, it's a guerilla act. It happened in the morning, 7:00 in the morning.

MR. KARLSTROM: Why don't you tell me just, you know, what led up to it, how it came about?

MS. BABITZ: Well, Julian came and there was the—they had the big party at the Green Hotel, even though Julian doesn't remember it; he has photographs that he took there at that time. And so I didn't get invited to it because Walter Hopps [curator of Duchamp retrospective at Pasadena Art Museum, 1963] was mad at me.

MR. KARLSTROM: Why was that?

MS. BABITZ: Because his wife was in town, basically.

MR. KARLSTROM: Is that Shirley? [Art historian later married to dealer Irving Blum.]

MS. BABITZ: Yes. I mean she came back, she suddenly did come back in a flash the minute that Duchamp thing happened and I was like not allowed in. So, but then I found out Jim Elliott wasn't invited either, so maybe nobody under 20, maybe 21, under 21 you weren't allowed in. So, so, he didn't invite me, so, and he wouldn't call me back, and he wouldn't call my mother back. And so I decided that if I could ever, like, you know, create any vengeance or havoc in his life I would, even though I was pretty powerless because I was only 20 and there was no way I could get to him. But, this Julian came up to me at the opening, the public opening, which I went to with my parents and—

MR. KARLSTROM: That was at the museum?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. At the Pasadena Art Museum, and he said he had this great idea that I should play chess naked with Marcel Duchamp and it seem to be such a great idea that it was just like the best idea I'd ever heard in my life. It was like a great idea. I mean, it was, not only was it vengeance, it was art, and it was like a great idea. And even if it didn't get any vengeance, it would still turn out okay with me because, you know, it would be sort of immortalized. I would be this, you know, here's this *Nude Descending the Staircase* guy and now he's going to be *The Nude in the Pasadena Art Museum*. But, of course, I said, you know, I didn't think that the Pasadena Art Museum old ladies would go along with this. So—

MR. KARLSTROM: Was that part of what attracted you to the idea?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Yeah, because it was like the *Little Old Ladies from Pasadena*, you know that Beach Boys' song.

MR. KARLSTROM: Right.

MS. BABITZ: So, I thought well, you know, this will be, you know, and it is kind of like, you know, it'll just kill them to find out that this happened there. So, but, I thought that he should tell Walter so Walter would know what we were doing, that we were going to do this. Because, it didn't seem like—I mean, it was okay to do it, but they ought to know basically. But, I know that Julian did not tell anybody because he probably forgot it the minute he agreed to do it. But he did call me the next day and say "Now, you're not going to chicken out are you?" Because we were supposed to do this two or three days later when they came back from Las Vegas, maybe the next day. They went to Las Vegas; they came back, Duchamp shows up at like, I don't know, it was a Thursday morning or something. It was like seven o'clock. Julian comes to get me at, like, seven in the morning. We drive out to Pasadena to create this, you know, rape. And Gretchen meets us there. She doesn't know what's going on. No one has told her.

MR. KARLSTROM: This is Gretchen Glicksman?

MS. BABITZ: Right. They just—Julian just, likes to, you know, play it by ear, basically. So, you know.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did he just tell them that he wanted to come in to do some photographs?

MS. BABITZ: Of Duchamp. Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: And Duchamp didn't know what he had in mind either?

MS. BABITZ: And he brought, and he said "Put that chess table there". You know, we're going to do the chess table. So, Duchamp, he had no idea. I mean that maybe he would of chosen someone else basically. He'd never met me before.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, I don't know, you look pretty good.

MS. BABITZ: He'd never met me before. I'd never met him before.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you know who he was though?

MS. BABITZ: No, I didn't know who-I mean, I had an idea when I went to the art opening that he was probably great. He was one of those great people like-

MR. KARLSTROM: But you hadn't heard of him before?

MS. BABITZ: No. I mean I'd never heard of anybody except Ed Kienholz. That was as far as my-I knew who Ed Kienholz was and I thought he was great. So, I didn't even know who Joseph Cornell was at that time. So, and I knew that everybody was like in love with him because they had this huge party and they had two ballrooms and two bands. That I didn't get invited to.

MR. KARLSTROM: And that really pissed you off.

MS. BABITZ: Yes. So I knew, I figured I-there's got to be some way to get to this deal, some way to like, you know-

MR. KARLSTROM: To be part of it.

MS. BABITZ: Right, to be part of it. So-and Julian, you know, figured out this idea. So we got there and I ran upstairs to John Altoon's studio. He was teaching art up there. It was an upstairs room. I changed my clothes and put on this like artist smock. You know, one of those blue worker shirts that guys have on and nothing else underneath it. Gretchen was like, she wasn't going to say anything because the whole thing was to be cool then and not ask what anything is going on and it's still that way today.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-uh.

MS. BABITZ: So Julian sets up lights for a million years and I'm sitting there, like nothing to do, smoking cigarettes. Like, 8:30 or 8:15, Duchamp shows up with his beautiful suit and that hat from Las Vegas, that straw hat. You know, Gretchen had closed off the gallery so that they could take these pictures so that, you know, the public wouldn't be allowed in.

MR. KARLSTROM: You mean the museum was-

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: -open already?

MS. BABITZ: No, it wasn't. It was suppose to be open like 10:00 maybe. Maybe this all happened later. But it seemed to be that is was seven o'clock in the morning. But she closed them off, so that the public wasn't allowed in. That had been decided before when they knew they were going to shoot Duchamp there, they were going to do Julian. So-

MR. KARLSTROM: Did the museum engage in-

MS. BABITZ: -the people who were in there were teamsters marching back and forth with big pieces of art. That's who was looking at this.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you had an audience?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: It was like a performance piece?

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you feel that way about it?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's cool. You actually were in many respects the artist, but, on the other hand, the concept [that] was Julian [was watching you]?

MS. BABITZ: Right, but he didn't think that anyone would go along with it, because he's always thinking up ways to get girls to take off their clothes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, I see. Does he photograph a lot of nudes?

MS. BABITZ: He photographs a lot. He gets a lot of girls to take off their clothes and takes pictures of them, and

he's a great photographer, so, they don't mind.

MR. KARLSTROM: Right, and you felt sort of the same way?

MS. BABITZ: That's right. He'd already taken pictures of me naked before.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, he had photographed you?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, so then you-it wasn't just this one time?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, but not for like anything, just for me. Just to see if I'd look okay.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well.

MS. BABITZ: You know. It wasn't for selling or posterity.

MR. KARLSTROM: He didn't think that any of the photos that he took of you as doing artwork?

MS. BABITZ: No. All the pictures that he takes are, like, he never releases them unless you sign something.

MR. KARLSTROM: Right. Did you sign a release?

MS. BABITZ: That's how he gets trust by people. No, not for the first ones but for the second ones I did.

MR. KARLSTROM: You mean with Duchamp?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: So he had-this is interesting because you said you hadn't modeled, but, in fact, you had, you posed nude for Julian.

MS. BABITZ: Not-

MR. KARLSTROM: At least on, what was that? Several times?

MS. BABITZ: Well, no, once.

MR. KARLSTROM: Just once.

MS. BABITZ: And it wasn't posing.

MR. KARLSTROM: Then what were you doing?

MS. BABITZ: It was getting naked pictures of yourself so you could show guys.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, I see. So that's what you were doing?

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you said, "Julian I need some naked-"

MS. BABITZ: I don't want to go, like, work in some horrible magazine. This is what all girls did at that time.

MR. KARLSTROM: It was an [inaudible]

MS. BABITZ: And Julian was famous for doing the best ones. Beverly Hills High was his stock. He had-everybody who went to Beverly Hills High went to Julian.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you go there?

MS. BABITZ: No, my friend Marva did and she told me about him. That's how I met him, from Marva.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so you wanted to have naked pictures of yourself to show guys?

MS. BABITZ: Gorgeous ones.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah, gorgeous, right.

MS. BABITZ: Yes. That's right. Gorgeous-

MR. KARLSTROM: Because you were proud of your body.

MS. BABITZ: Right. I think at that time in *Harper's Bazaar* there was this beautiful picture of this Italian countess with this gorgeous hair. Who looked like a Botticelli and we all-that's what we all wanted. We wanted that. We wanted, like, high-fashion model, gorgeous pictures of ourselves and Julian would do-he understood this. He even had frames in his house which were like Rococo Italian frames. I mean, he knew that these girls wanted this picture. This was the picture that they wanted of themselves.

MR. KARLSTROM: What would you do, just-

MS. BABITZ: They'd have their beautiful hair.

MR. KARLSTROM: -have them?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, we'd just have them forever.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah.

MS. BABITZ: To look at ourselves. I don't know if that would be called modeling. It was like for ourselves. It was like going to one of those portrait places.

MR. KARLSTROM: You're posing nude in front of a camera.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: So, you know, in effect-I don't think we need to glamorize too much the term modeling because there are different levels of posing or modeling and we're talking, of course, in this context, about artists and models.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you know, Julian is a very capable photographer. I would say he's probably, he's an artist.

MS. BABITZ: Did you ever see that beautiful picture he took of Madame Nhu and her daughter? When they heard that their husband had gotten killed and there was like 500 photographers in this-coming out and Julian stood at the very end and got everybody. All these flashing cameras and then these mother and daughter crying?

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm. I didn't see. I don't-

MS. BABITZ: It was a famous picture. It was one of the-

MR. KARLSTROM: He was working for *Life* at that time?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, yeah. He's-

MR. KARLSTROM: He's a journalistic photographer in some respects.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: But, you know, within that area there are different levels of artiness about it and it sounds-

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: -to me like photographs taken with these young women, I mean there are a lot of different reasons going on there but-you know that perceives to at least stand in for works of art because that's what you guys wanted.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, that's right. That's what the girls want. They don't want a sleezeball.

MR. KARLSTROM: So that's how you met Julian?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Why did he choose you then for this, what turned into an extremely famous photo session? You playing chess.

MS. BABITZ: Because he likes me.

MR. KARLSTROM: You were friends?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: He said you would be the best.

MS. BABITZ: And he knew I wanted, you know, he wanted me to be part of this deal and I wouldn't go to the party with him when he wanted to take me because Walter didn't invite me.

MR. KARLSTROM: So, what were you, Walter's girlfriend or something?

MS. BABITZ: I thought I-I deserved respect.

MR. KARLSTROM: I would say. This story is much more interesting than-

MS. BABITZ: That's right. I was 20 years old and I wasn't invited to this party. So, I took these pictures. That was it. You know, I got to Duchamp. We started playing chess.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was that the first thing you did? That's how this photo session started?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did he seem sort of taken aback when you took off your shirt?

MS. BABITZ: No. He floated into it.

MR. KARLSTROM: What did you do? Did you just go by the chair and take off your shirt?

MS. BABITZ: No. He said, Julian said, "Okay, blah, blah, blah" You know, sit down [inaudible] you know, [inaudible]. "Okay, Eve, take that shirt off". There was the chess table. Duchamp goes to the two little chess pieces. Julian kicks that shirt like 30 feet away, so I have nothing on.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was it fun?

MS. BABITZ: It was hot. I was sweating like a [L.A.] Lakers [basketball] game.

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: You mean it was hot in there?

MS. BABITZ: I was sweating. No one else was. Everybody else was delightfully cool.

MR. KARLSTROM: I see. So I guess it's called nerves.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you enjoyed it?

MS. BABITZ: Well, it was-I mean it was like work, I'll tell you and I don't like work. Work is not my thing.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so Marcel just took it in stride.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. He beat me three times at Queen [inaudible].

MR. KARLSTROM: Are you a good chess player?

MS. BABITZ: No. Horrible.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh.

MS. BABITZ: Obviously.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because he's supposed to be. I guess he was brilliant.

MS. BABITZ: I know.

MR. KARLSTROM: He did it a lot any way.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you-so most of the photos-I mean, we seen the proof sheet like reproduced during *West Coast Duchamp*, that book, you know.

MS. BABITZ: I thought he only spoke French. I had no idea he spoke English so I tried to speak French to him. I asked him if he knew Mr. Stravinsky, the name of my godfather, and he said yes that he had been to that 1910 Firebird suite thing in Paris.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did he seem sort of impressed that you had that connection?

MS. BABITZ: Well, he seemed like-he just seemed like the world was at his finger tips and everything was always perfect all the time.

MR. KARLSTROM: Sort of everything-

MS. BABITZ: He wasn't losing chess, at chess.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well you didn't care did you?

MS. BABITZ: No, I didn't really care. I wanted to get it over with.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you wanted to get your clothes back on.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you basically-

MS. BABITZ: I wanted my cigarettes. I wanted my glasses. I wanted my clothes on; I wanted Julian to take me to a Chinese restaurant.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you-

MS. BABITZ: I knew exactly the one he wanted to go too. Chow Yung Fat. It's down on Main Street.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you really weren't all that comfortable?

MS. BABITZ: No. No.

MR. KARLSTROM: But it was worth it.

MS. BABITZ: It was worth it because Walter came in and he dropped his gum.

MR. KARLSTROM: So Walter actually came in to see how it was going.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: And he didn't even know you were there.

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: Wow. So you won.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't win at chess.

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you won in terms of taking control of the situation.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: I mean, did you think of it a little bit that way? Because I'm thinking of motivation.

MS. BABITZ: I said, "Hello, Walter" and he dropped his gum.



MR. KARLSTROM: Literally?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. He always chewed Double Mint gum.

MR. KARLSTROM: So what, did he hang out and watch?

MS. BABITZ: No. He was even more ashen than he already was. He ran into Gretchen's office-

MR. KARLSTROM: "What's going on in there?"

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: So he left.

MS. BABITZ: "I don't know, I thought you hired her -well, no I thought it was your idea."

MR. KARLSTROM: But Marcel probably thought it was great.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: I mean, who wouldn't, you were 20 years old and voluptuous.

MS. BABITZ: You could just like, they were just like, I mean, he thought he was running everything and I finally got to run something anyway.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you know this interests me because it does seem to have something to do with this idea of using a situation for control-power is too strong of a word. You know in our relationships there is this interaction of position. How you present yourself.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: I think that's power, and did it strike you at all that you were using your feminine wiles-

MS. BABITZ: I was trying to get back in his good graces because he wouldn't call me up or my mother.

MR. KARLSTROM: How would that get you back in his good graces?

MS. BABITZ: Well, because I had thrown my body in for art, I would say.

MR. KARLSTROM: Ha-ha. I love it.

MS. BABITZ: You know, I had thrown myself into this game for art. You know, I was not a very good artist. But this was like one thing I could do.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you do make collages-we'll talk about here in a minute.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did it work?

MS. BABITZ: I didn't make collages at that time. I couldn't draw.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you-

MS. BABITZ: Did it work? Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because you did get back, I mean-

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: It sort of rekindled Walter's interest?

MS. BABITZ: It made him return my phone calls, which was what I wanted out of life.

MR. KARLSTROM: Isn't it interesting. This famous-this is actually one of the most famous photographs certainly in California art history.

MS. BABITZ: I know, I know, and the reason is so bad. So bad.

MR. KARLSTROM: What did you talk with Duchamp about? You said that the-

MS. BABITZ: About the *Firebird Suite*.

MR. KARLSTROM: That was the main thing?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. I mean, I just was basically sweating and wishing it was over and I couldn't believe he had beat me three times in [inaudible] spades which mean you move like two pieces and then the person check mates you.

MR. KARLSTROM: In other words it gets it over faster.

MS. BABITZ: Right. Well, I know, but, I mean, it doesn't get the photo shoot over because Julian is still taking pictures. And also I wanted that hair in my face. I didn't want my face to show up and Julian kept saying "Your face, your face, your face". I had just had my hair cut the day before so it would fall over my face for this occasion. Before that my hair was long.

MR. KARLSTROM: You cut your hair just for this?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: You thought it looked better?

MS. BABITZ: I thought I wanted my face not to show up.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so then this hairstyle allowed-

MS. BABITZ: My face, my hair was usually like this, long.

MR. KARLSTROM: Like in that photograph.

MS. BABITZ: Right, and I had it cut short with my bangs over my eyes. I let my friend Marva do it.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you know a lot of these photos show your face.

MS. BABITZ: I know, but those aren't the ones to be used.

MR. KARLSTROM: He chose the one which didn't show it.

MS. BABITZ: And I showed Duchamp which one I wanted. He let me choose. We went back to the museum a couple of days later, or the next day. Julian stayed up all night making proofs and the next day Duchamp was leaving so we got there before he left and we showed him these pictures and I showed him which one was the one I was going to allow out in case he hadn't cared about my opinion.

MR. KARLSTROM: You signed a release, right?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, but, I mean-I said I don't want ones with my face in it.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because then people would know who you were.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Of course everyone knows now.

MS. BABITZ: Well, I know, but at the time I didn't want to. I wasn't sure. My mother didn't like the idea. My mother thought I could get blackmailed.

MR. KARLSTROM: Hmm.

MS. BABITZ: She was from the Mary Astor School.

MR. KARLSTROM: Where did you live at the time?

MS. BABITZ: I lived in Hollywood on Bronson Avenue.

MR. KARLSTROM: You were what? You were 20?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. I lived with my mother, my mother and father. So they didn't know if this was a great idea. They figured it was art.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, it is. It was.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: You, I'm sure, had no idea. I bet you didn't have any idea of how iconic that became for modernism. Was this such a key of-

MS. BABITZ: I didn't know what modernism was. I knew they gave him two ballrooms at the Pasadena. You know, that beautiful Pasadena Green Hotel. So I figured they must know something I don't.

MR. KARLSTROM: So did you see Duchamp again, you said a few days later?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Before he went to New York.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was that why you were doing the choosing-he was doing the choosing on his part.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: "Is this okay?"

MS. BABITZ: Right, and that was his favorite. He said "Okay", and that was the one. That was the one that he always used.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you never got anything out of it? Except fame.

MS. BABITZ: Except, you know, my usual fame.

MR. KARLSTROM: Fame and a little bit of power over Walter.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: So it had nothing to do-

MS. BABITZ: That's how I got exactly what I wanted.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so you really had nothing to do particularly with Marcel Duchamp.

MS. BABITZ: No. No. No.

MR. KARLSTROM: There was no-you were both models is what it amounts to.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. Right. Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And he had his clothes on.

MS. BABITZ: It had to do with Walter.

MR. KARLSTROM: How did you feel, maybe not so much in that situation, but perhaps, about your own sexuality? Were you sort of very much aware of that at that stage? You were 20 years old. Did you have that kind of self-awareness or self-consciousness as a sexual young woman?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yes.

MS. BABITZ: I went to Hollywood High.

MR. KARLSTROM: And so, this then, would, in some ways fit very neatly into that.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Like another outlet or venue for what you did already with Julian and those naked photos.

MS. BABITZ: Yes. That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: But this was just a more public-

MS. BABITZ: Right. But, I mean, you know, Marilyn Monroe was my role model. I loved her and they-I was living in Hollywood, which was-it was just about sex.

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well I guess so, but that's an interesting statement because you grew up there and we think of, at least in a representation in the industry, but are you talking about the linking of films-

MS. BABITZ: No. Girls. Girls. The girls. The girls on the Sunset Strip. The girls that would go every night and get all dressed up and wear gloves and fake eyelashes, and you know, Jax dresses, like décolleté like those bras.

MR. KARLSTROM: What's changed? Not much, has it?

MS. BABITZ: Well, no one wears bras anymore.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah they do.

MS. BABITZ: No, it has, but now it's ironic and then it was serious.

MR. KARLSTROM: You don't think that it is serious now?

MS. BABITZ: Well, I mean, I mean-

MR. KARLSTROM: The way to play the game.

MS. BABITZ: I mean the Madonna thing.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah. I see what you mean. Because sex still is, one would imagine anyway, very much an ingredient in the choice of clothes, how you present yourself, how you make yourself attractive, sexy.

MS. BABITZ: I guess today, but I haven't seen what they're wearing lately.

MR. KARLSTROM: Not much.

MS. BABITZ: I know. I mean, everybody wishes they lived in Brazil but Hollywood was the only place where they had sex in those days. Now it's every place.

MR. KARLSTROM: You think the only young people who had sex were in Hollywood High School?

MS. BABITZ: No. I mean, it was the only place that admitted sex existed.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh. It was part of the curriculum.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: Unofficially.

MS. BABITZ: I mean the Sunset Strip.

MR. KARLSTROM: I remember that.

MS. BABITZ: I mean the thing about getting into movies and being an actor was you had to be sexy and beautiful.

MR. KARLSTROM: To succeed.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: You had to be sexy and beautiful.

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Right, so that was what everybody was doing. That was Hollywood High, that was my school and we'd hear rumors that this one girl had run off with this artist who was 40 years old and she'd taken him away from his wife and they would move to Rome. That was Hollywood High.

MR. KARLSTROM: I actually know a case like that more recently, from visiting Pacific Palisades High School.

MS. BABITZ: Well, Palisades is no Hollywood High. The Valley is no Hollywood High. It was like being Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*. That was Hollywood High.

MR. KARLSTROM: So your role models, your images, were very much out of movies and that ambience?

MS. BABITZ: Yes, even though-

MR. KARLSTROM: And it was right here.

MS. BABITZ: -even though Stravinsky was my godfather and we had all that culture trying to filter into my brain. There was no way to get around the James Dean factor.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was he your hero?

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: I wanted to be like him too. I imagined myself like him sometimes.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Right, I know.

MR. KARLSTROM: Misunderstood, sort of a loner, but intriguing to women.

MS. BABITZ: Right, right. Beautiful.

MR. KARLSTROM: Like Natalie Wood.

MS. BABITZ: Gorgeous hair.

MR. KARLSTROM: I had a crush on Natalie.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. I love that movie [*Rebel Without a Cause*].

MR. KARLSTROM: Wasn't it great?

MS. BABITZ: I used to go up to the [Griffith Park] observatory and try and find James Dean.

MR. KARLSTROM: You never did?

MS. BABITZ: No, but I found Dennis Hopper.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, that's right. In fact, Dennis was being interviewed day before yesterday, just as you were [at Castle Green, Pasadena].

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: I'm going to turn the tape over in moment. I'm interested in the responses of people you knew at the time to do this. That's pretty dramatic, that's pretty interesting that you did that. People must have found out in your school.

MS. BABITZ: No. I didn't tell anybody.

MR. KARLSTROM: Not even your friends?

MS. BABITZ: No. I had the photograph. My mother hid them.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you-

MS. BABITZ: My mother hid those pictures.

MR. KARLSTROM: Were you proud of them? I mean, in a way weren't you proud of the fact that it was you up there with this famous artist?

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: You're deflating all my-

MS. BABITZ: I considered it that I'd gone too far trying to get Walter back.

MR. KARLSTROM: But it sort of, what?

MS. BABITZ: It was just sort of like proof that I'd-to what lengths I would go. You know, sort of like an embarrassment.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you got-well, at least he returned your calls, but did you get him back?

MS. BABITZ: Kind of, for the next three or four years.

MR. KARLSTROM: You guys going out together?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. He took me up to San Francisco, to Europe. Michael, you know that guy, *The Beard*-

MR. KARLSTROM: McClure.

MS. BABITZ: We saw the preview of that play. The first time it was ever done.

MR. KARLSTROM: Then it got busted here on La Cienega [was playing it].

MS. BABITZ: Right, yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Let's turn the tape over.

MS. BABITZ: Okay.

[Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

MR. KARLSTROM: Okay, Archives of American Art continuing this very interesting interview with Eve Babitz about her life as a model, a photographer's model and a chess player with Marcel Duchamp. What interests me, well, just before we turned the tape over you said that you actually did not tell your friends that you had done this.

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: Of course, I would have imagined that would be almost irresistible, at least [with] some of your friends, [to] say, "God, guess what I did."

MS. BABITZ: No. I was not, like, going out with James Dean. That was weird . . .

MR. KARLSTROM: That would have been cooler.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you thought it was a pretty weird thing-

MS. BABITZ: Yes. I did.

MR. KARLSTROM: So it wasn't-

MS. BABITZ: I mean he was old, you know.

MR. KARLSTROM: Okay, what about that?

MS. BABITZ: It was like kind of depressing.

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Tell me about that. Tell me how you felt about that. That's interesting. Because that suggests a kind of connection in a relationship, at least visual, between you and your self-conception, then brings in your partners shall we say. How did you feel about that? You said he was old.

MS. BABITZ: Well, I mean, I just, I mean he was old and he was too old for me.

MR. KARLSTROM: Okay. Well, but you know what that suggests is very interesting to me. Taking off your clothes and, in a sense, because you were paired with him that there was that, even a sexual connotation to him. Is that right?

MS. BABITZ: Yes, there wasn't a sexual connotation.

MR. KARLSTROM: There wasn't?

MS. BABITZ: That's right, and there wasn't with Julian either.

MR. KARLSTROM: But still you said that he was too old for you.

MS. BABITZ: Right. That's right. He was, I mean, it was like, I mean, if he were like, you know, Nureyer, you know, and some sort of like insanely gorgeous looking, you know, stunning type of person like that it would have been much more fun.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you see what that implies. That does suggest -

MS. BABITZ: That I'm a shallow person?

MR. KARLSTROM: No. No.

MS. BABITZ: I am a shallow person.

MR. KARLSTROM: No, Eve, that's not what I'm suggesting. But if you are, you are.

MS. BABITZ: I would be much more eager to show it to my friends. But now I'm glad it wasn't. As I've grown older I've realized that it was like a smart move.

MR. KARLSTROM: You would have preferred a James Dean.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Then, you would of really-

MS. BABITZ: Then I would've shown my friends.

MR. KARLSTROM: So it wasn't you being naked that you were unhappy with.

MS. BABITZ: No.

MR. KARLSTROM: It was about being paired with this old guy.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: I understand.

MS. BABITZ: How would you like it? I mean, if it were like Louise Nevelson or something and you were 20 years old?

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you ask a real interesting question because then that's, of course, reversing the dynamic because the fact of the matter is you're nude, you're in a picture -

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: -with a clothed *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Where you've got these nude women-

MS. BABITZ: Right. That's right. I kind of like that too.

MR. KARLSTROM: You like the idea.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: So did you see yourself in any way as an object of desire. This is a term that they use. I mean, did nudity at all for you equate with desire, with sexuality -

MS. BABITZ: Not there. That was like the work place.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: That was like-it was-I mean, it was like nine in the morning.

MR. KARLSTROM: Right.

MS. BABITZ: It was, you know, I wasn't drunk. You know, I had a hangover; it was like, you know, it was not desire time.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, I don't mean that you desired; but I guess what I mean is when you're creating images and it's the image, finally, that lasts and that carries-

MS. BABITZ: I know, but you don't know when you do that. You just don't-nobody who does that knows otherwise they would never do it because then they get hounded by manic fans.

MR. KARLSTROM: You know it doesn't sound to me as if you were particularly vain in this situation.

MS. BABITZ: No, I was embarrassed.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because in talking about the-having Julian make these other photos and other girls did this, they liked to do it. It seems to me that there is an implicit there, kind of vanity, self-image awareness but you-that didn't play a role in the Duchamp session for you?

MS. BABITZ: Well, Julian asked me and I figured, you know, it was like one of those things.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, it was like a dare.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you were up to it.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: But you were proud of your body, you've said so.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, but not at that hour.

MR. KARLSTROM: Okay. The good thing is the photographs can be viewed at any hour.

MS. BABITZ: You know, also I, you know, I was on those birth control pills and my breast were like, they hurt.

MR. KARLSTROM: That's not very sexy.

MS. BABITZ: No, and, you know, it was like they blew up like, you know, they wouldn't fit into any of my dresses. I had to quit taking those birth control pills.

MR. KARLSTROM: Now, was that the one when, when you got the 36, double D, bra?

MS. BABITZ: No. That's what I wear normally.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, Lord.

MS. BABITZ: This-that's what, when I'm, like, average.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm.

MS. BABITZ: This was like-I mean they were like, I thought they should be photographed really.

MR. KARLSTROM: They never were?

MS. BABITZ: I mean at that time, so they were for immortality.

MR. KARLSTROM: I see what you mean, yeah. It was a record, it was a document.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And it was all about you.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, see, that's important.

MS. BABITZ: Isn't that funny?

MR. KARLSTROM: I mean, do you feel that way? That it was-well, of course, you were the participant. You said earlier something very interesting.

MS. BABITZ: Most of [the time] my breasts are much softer, but this time they were sort of like, I thought they



were sort of curious.

MR. KARLSTROM: You mean like they were almost not you.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: They were other.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. Isn't that funny?

MR. KARLSTROM: It is funny. You've said earlier that -

MS. BABITZ: You don't find that photograph in this book now do you?

MR. KARLSTROM: No. For the tape-you have to say what that book is. It's one of your books.

MS. BABITZ: Oh, my first book, *Eve's Hollywood*.

MR. KARLSTROM: *Eve's Hollywood*, when was that published?

MS. BABITZ: Twelve years later.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm. So, '75?

MS. BABITZ: Well, actually, 19-it was, like, before I was 30.

MR. KARLSTROM: '74, '73.

MS. BABITZ: There's Hollywood High.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm.

MS. BABITZ: I wrote a big piece about Hollywood High called "The Sheik" about the girls and how beautiful they were.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm. Do you think of yourself as sort of a popular culture writer?

MS. BABITZ: Yes, I do. When Tom Wolfe came out I was so happy.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you-how many books have you published?

MS. BABITZ: About five or six or seven.

MR. KARLSTROM: I noticed a lot of them are collections of stories, short stories.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. That's what I'm good at.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you do think of yourself as a short story writer?

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And are they pretty much based-the ones I know about are based [located] around here.

MS. BABITZ: My memoirs.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah, you write about your life. That's a smart thing to do.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: No one else can know [as much] about-

MS. BABITZ: Right. Right, and even that you don't know about.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, that's true. Some people-some of the models I've interviewed for, well, for that piece I wrote, "Eros in the Studio". And in fact all of them seemed to think-they obviously thought before they posed, they were asked to pose, in this case by a friend which is not unlike your situation, somebody whom they liked and trusted, but he was a painter and drawer and he would ask them to pose in his studio alone usually, just one on one.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And invariably they would say that part of the-I would ask them why did you agree to do it, you know, trying to get at motivation as we have been with you.

MS. BABITZ: Mm-hmm.

MR. KARLSTROM: There were several answers. One of them was the idea of being a muse. That they somehow provided energy or inspiration to make a nice picture.

MS. BABITZ: Right. I like that muse thing too.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you think of yourself at all in that way?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. I did.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you think-

MS. BABITZ: But, I couldn't like sit still for actually having things painted so this was my one chance. I figured if I was ever gonna be a muse this was it. If these things turned out then I'd be a muse, but I wouldn't have to be there.

MR. KARLSTROM: You know, when you think about that image of you-or the images of you playing chess with Duchamp. You know there are so many ways, of course, that that itself can be analyzed and investigated in terms of symbolism and to a metaphor, you know, what does it stand for? It stands for art representation. One can go on and on.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: I gather from what you've said that that certainly was the furthest thing from your mind.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And yet-

MS. BABITZ: But, I knew what art was and we were artists in the City. My mother was an artist.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah, that's right she did wonderful-a lot of drawings.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: And prints and buildings.

MS. BABITZ: We knew a lot of artists, and we'd been to New Mexico, and I met Georgia O'Keeffe.

MR. KARLSTROM: You had?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you went to Rome?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah, I went to Rome. I've been around. I wasn't as dumb as I pretended.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you know-did you hang out with the Rudi Gernreich crowd at all at that time?

MS. BABITZ: No, I didn't.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't know Leon Bing [Gernreich model]?

MS. BABITZ: No, I didn't have black hair.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't [know] Peggy Moffit [Gernreich model]?

MS. BABITZ: I knew them-I knew that he took great photographs [inaudible] of jazz people.

MR. KARLSTROM: Mm-hmm.

MS. BABITZ: But I didn't hang around with them. I was not skinny enough.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah. You said something to me the other day about that.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: That, in part-

MS. BABITZ: I was standing up for the Rubenesque crowd.

MR. KARLSTROM: Is that it?

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was that part of your thinking?

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: You didn't like the skinny ones?

MS. BABITZ: Well, I mean, you know, I could never do it myself.

MR. KARLSTROM: Not the body type.

MS. BABITZ: No. It just doesn't look good on me. I wanted to stand up for the other kind which I'm sure people like just as well.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yes, those photos of you are great. Everybody thinks they are terrific.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. I know, but, you know, at that time like all the skinny girls were coming out and then when the Beatles came the skinny girls took over.

MR. KARLSTROM: So this was partly your chance to -

MS. BABITZ: That's right. Marilyn had died, you know. She had died like two years before.

MR. KARLSTROM: She wasn't skinny.

MS. BABITZ: Nope. She was my-I'm telling you, she was my ideal.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you were really a standard bearer for your body type?

MS. BABITZ: Right, for the Hollywood, for that, in Hollywood and also I loved Anita Ekberg too.

MR. KARLSTROM: You said that earlier, yeah.

MS. BABITZ: Right. I mean, I think that woman, like, stick-it's funny because most of my friends all my life have worn the same size bra I have.

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: Yes, isn't that funny? It's like, I don't know why.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you would hang out with people who had the same size boobs?

MS. BABITZ: That's right. Isn't that weird?

MR. KARLSTROM: I've never heard of such a thing; is it true?

MS. BABITZ: It turned out to be true when I thought about it. I thought I better get some other friends 'cause this is just like, you're just sticking to your own body type, isn't that weird?

MR. KARLSTROM: So did you ever think-this may seem a little strange as a question, but you know, we're so much now even, perhaps more than ever, young people are into body image-[even] and boys a lot.

MS. BABITZ: I know, isn't it horrible?

MR. KARLSTROM: It is horrible. But, did you feel that you were more-you were voluptuous, more womanly as a result, did you equate that with your-the whole idea of being a woman? That if you weren't curvaceous-that these stick figures really weren't real woman?

MS. BABITZ: Well, I thought they were very stylish and I wanted to be stylish too but I didn't know if I could, like, bear to be that skinny in order to be stylish.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you would've had to -

MS. BABITZ: I mean, I love fashion. I spend, like, you know, I was a model when I was 12 years old downtown in the *schmata* business. They'd have these things in the Biltmore Hotel like model clothes. I just absolutely loved clothes. When I was 14 years old Bess Cooper who ran The May Company, she was the number one buyer for the woman's department, she hired me to help her figure out clothes for the girls because I was like really smart at clothes. But, I didn't want to be, like-I didn't want to not have tits. Let's face it. If you get one or the other it's hard to choose.

MR. KARLSTROM: You can't have them both.

MS. BABITZ: Well, clothes, you know, everybody in clothes is flat-chested.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, speaking of tits, as you used the word, one of your writings; you used to write for *Ms.* magazine. You told me that on the phone yesterday, because of the rich collection of the Archives of American Art, we were able to-actually it was '76, April of 1976.

MS. BABITZ: Isn't that funny?

MR. KARLSTROM: You said sometime in the '70s, mid-'70s, you wrote an article. I guess you were in your early 30s. You were like about 33.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: And you wrote a wonderful article, I haven't finished it yet, but it's amused some friends of mine already since yesterday afternoon. It's called "My Life in a 36-DD Bra".

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was part of the-well, besides selling a piece, you were a writer. You wanted to sell a piece.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Was part of the motivation again to make a case for buxom woman, bosomy women?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

MR. KARLSTROM: That is an okay thing.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: But, of course, these are the same women who were not burning, but at least doing away with their bras.

MS. BABITZ: Well, I went over there to *Ms.* magazine one day and I was wearing this hat, you know, that I got in Laguna that was made out of horse hair from Brazil, it looked like it was from *Gone With the Wind* and this fuchsia outfit and wedgies and ,you know, grape purple nail polish, pedicured nail polish and I sort of like wander into this place looking for work, and she says, well, you know, this was like 1976-she says "You know, Eve, we have learned here now lately that the way you dress can stop, you know, can attract certain attention and if you don't dress that way, you won't get that attention". I said, "That's why I'm wearing this".

MR. KARLSTROM: Duh.

MS. BABITZ: She was dressed like a Yukon miner.

MR. KARLSTROM: What do you-obviously you were never a feminist in the sense of early '70s activist.

MS. BABITZ: No, I hated that. I hated it.

MR. KARLSTROM: But-

MS. BABITZ: I hate direct political confrontation. I think it's just, like, horrible. Maybe it's necessary, but I don't know.

MR. KARLSTROM: I mean, it does-I'm trying to think within the framework of feminism because people, of course,

aren't interested, now it's like a historical movement. It's transforming-

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Now it's gone.

MR. KARLSTROM: The new feminism is something quite different. You've got these young women who are really keen on being sexy and attractive and yet they are also feeling very strongly about the importance of equality in the work place and all that, which is right. You know, equal pay and so forth. They focus on those important issues. But in terms of that period in the history of feminism, even though you were writing for *Ms.* magazine, you, again from what you've said, had-you didn't buy it, or you didn't buy aspects of it.

MS. BABITZ: I thought it was ugly.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh. It was an aesthetic thing-

MS. BABITZ: Groupo [ph].

MR. KARLSTROM: Was it an aesthetic thing as much as anything else?

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Uh-huh.

MR. KARLSTROM: A matter of style.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. I mean, I cannot believe when, like, people expected me to remember their name when they didn't wear lipstick and didn't dye their hair blonde.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: I mean, well, I've met you 14 times before; why don't you remember me? Well, you look like a door mouse. You know.

MR. KARLSTROM: It does seem interesting-

MS. BABITZ: I mean, I am pretty obvious. People-I can recognize obvious people. You know, people that are trying.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: Everybody else I can't see. It's a terrible flaw. It's part of my shallowness.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, I don't know you don't have to remember so many, it's better for your mind. You don't have to remember so many people.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. I remember stars basically.

MR. KARLSTROM: They have to earn it.

MS. BABITZ: Right. That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: They have to have some style.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. They've got to do something.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well you certainly positioned yourself to be remembered in that photograph. Does it sometimes maybe annoy you?

MS. BABITZ: I don't-I didn't know that that was going to work so well but I'm glad it did.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah. So, you don't mind at all.

MS. BABITZ: It hardly took any-I considered it work at the time but I guess it was worth it.

MR. KARLSTROM: But, it does interest you that how you're-I won't say best known-but certainly within a narrow field, which is Duchamp studies.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. I think it's great.

MR. KARLSTROM: But, here it is. Why are you well-known? Because of your body?

MS. BABITZ: That's right. I think it's great.

MR. KARLSTROM: You have a voluptuous body and here's this chick playing young [inaudible].

MS. BABITZ: I think it's great. I'm sticking up for Hollywood.

MR. KARLSTROM: Image is everything.

MS. BABITZ: I told you, it's the Marilyn Monroe thing.

MR. KARLSTROM: Marilyn Monroe, there she is again, she's the best. Did you ever meet her?

MS. BABITZ: No, I didn't. I saw her on Hollywood Boulevard putting her hands on the sidewalk, wet cement.

MR. KARLSTROM: What year did she die? I forget.

MS. BABITZ: Sixty-one.

MR. KARLSTROM: Okay. So, she was already gone.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Did you go to her funeral?

MS. BABITZ: No. I was in France.

MR. KARLSTROM: You were also-you said you went to Rome, to Italy. You were also in France; huh?

MS. BABITZ: Uh-huh.

MR. KARLSTROM: How come?

MS. BABITZ: My father had a Fulbright and a Ford grant.

MR. KARLSTROM: What did he do?

MS. BABITZ: He was a Baroque musicologist.

MR. KARLSTROM: Wow.

MS. BABITZ: Stravinsky was at our house all the time.

MR. KARLSTROM: You had a really interesting life. You make yourself sound-you actually make yourself sound sort of superficial, in a way. I kind of like the way you do it.

MS. BABITZ: I can be superficial because I know what I'm turning down.

MR. KARLSTROM: What I like about it is you're most comfortable with this image, even though I think if you scratch your superficiality you'd find something quite different, but you seem to think that that's worth declaring. You know, that this is, hey yeah, these are the things that I was interested in. Instead of making it sound like you were into, you know, your favorite subject was the harpsichord or something.

MS. BABITZ: No, I hated it. Anyway, I had a horrible-I was a terrible musician. I saw this movie called *River of No Return* which is like Marilyn Monroe's first movie, with Robert Mitchum. I went and saw it like five times. My mother was a big enabler of obsessions. My first obsession was Tony Curtis, but, you know, he only made one movie that I could see over and over again. Then I moved on to Marilyn Monroe.

MR. KARLSTROM: What was that *The Thief of Baghdad* or something?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. *The Prince Who Was a Thief*.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah, yeah, that's what it was called.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. Piper Laurie.

MR. KARLSTROM: I remember that.

MS. BABITZ: I talked to Piper Laurie recently and told her about that movie. She said she was 17 and a Hassidic Jew and her family disowned her when she made that movie.

MR. KARLSTROM: You never think about these things.

MS. BABITZ: I do.

MR. KARLSTROM: One doesn't.

MS. BABITZ: I know. Isn't that wild?

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, what about the, I mean, there are very interesting parts to you in your life and Duchamp was an incident and just *is* the thing that everybody knows about you.

MS. BABITZ: I know.

MR. KARLSTROM: And I know about you also because you wrote a nice essay for my friend Peter Alexander's catalogue and such.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: What was my question here? I like the-you were in the art world even though you are saying you didn't know what modernism was, you didn't really know modern art.

MS. BABITZ: I went to the Ferus Gallery. The first time I went I was 18 years old.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: This girl named Myrna Riceman took me. She knew I was Stravinsky's goddaughter so she-said she had a Porsche and she was going to take me over to meet these Ferus Gallery people, that I had to meet them. Other people had told me I had to meet them. My mother, too.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because she was an artist.

MS. BABITZ: But she had a Porsche. This girl had a Porsche so she convinced me.

MR. KARLSTROM: That was the reason.

MS. BABITZ: I'll pick you up in a Porsche. Yes. I'd never seen one. I'd never been in one. I wanted to ride in one. You know?

MR. KARLSTROM: Well. So, were you at all interested? Do you remember what you saw at the Ferus Gallery?

MS. BABITZ: She took me to-first she took me to her boyfriend's house. Her boyfriend was Jim Elliott [art historian; museum curator/director].

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, really?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: I know Jim.

MS. BABITZ: And he was living at the merry-go-round [Santa Monica pier].

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: So we smoked grass and she taught me the Twist. She taught me everything that night.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, wow. Everything?

MS. BABITZ: She taught me the Twist. She turned on the merry-go-round because you could turn it on. He was out of town. I never met him actually.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: So, we watched the merry-go-round and then we went over to the Ferus Gallery and I don't remember anything about the art there but it was like a scene and then we went over to Barney's [Beanery, West Hollywood] and we went in the back, you know, in that, the room with the bar, way in the back.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: And I met Ed Kienholz, Robert Irwin, Billy Al Bengston.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, wow. Everybody all at once.

MS. BABITZ: Kenny Price, Irving, Blum and Walter Hopps, and Wally Berman.

MR. KARLSTROM: Wow.

MS. BABITZ: And we went over to Ed Kienholz's and they played poker and Walter gave me his card.

MR. KARLSTROM: And the rest is history.

MS. BABITZ: Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Sort of.

MS. BABITZ: That's right. That was like -

MR. KARLSTROM: And you were 18?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: So you must have been hanging out with Walter for a few years then. Hmm?

MS. BABITZ: The first movie he took me to see was *Liaisons Dangereuses*.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, of course. You mean he wanted to encourage you.

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: How old was he? How old is Walter anyway?

MS. BABITZ: He was, like, 10 years older than me.

MR. KARLSTROM: Yeah. Gee whiz. Do you keep in touch with him at all?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Uh-huh. All the time.

MR. KARLSTROM: Do you?

MS. BABITZ: Every time I call, he calls back. Sometimes he calls.

MR. KARLSTROM: See there, you really did succeed. It lasted up to-

MS. BABITZ: That's right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, you know, it's interesting. I don't want to delve into the-yes, yes, I do-into your life and so forth but, you know you really do live, have lived, the art life. I mean, there is just no question about it. And your medium [inaudible]. But, you've been a long time friend of Paul Ruscha, Ed's brother.

MS. BABITZ: Yes. Right.

MR. KARLSTROM: Is Paul younger than Ed?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh. That's what I thought.

MS. BABITZ: Like six years younger.

MR. KARLSTROM: So, how did you meet him and when did you meet Ed?

MS. BABITZ: I met Ed later on, after that night. I don't think Ed came to the Ferus until later.

MR. KARLSTROM: Probably not.

MS. BABITZ: Although maybe he just was there. Although, you know what? I met Ed before that because I knew a girl who was going out with him in L.A.C.C. [Los Angeles City College].

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: She used to talk about him all the time; so, I met him like once then. But then I met him at the Ferus Gallery. Then he would come over to our house all the time. He would come over for Thanksgiving, and my



mother would make these huge, you know, meals, and Ed's thing was, "May Babitz sure is good to her boys."

MR. KARLSTROM: Really?

MS. BABITZ: That's after he finished eating like five pounds of everything.

MR. KARLSTROM: He made a work called that?

MS. BABITZ: No, that's what he called-that's what he would say to her. "May Babitz sure is good to her boys."

MR. KARLSTROM: Every time he-

MS. BABITZ: Because, I mean, the food was so great. My mother is such a great cook and his mother was such a horrible cook.

MR. KARLSTROM: Wow. And, so, what? He was eating over at your house?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: How did that connection come about?

MS. BABITZ: He was my boyfriend for a long time too.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, oh, oh.

MS. BABITZ: I had, like, other-no, Ed.

MR. KARLSTROM: Ed?

MS. BABITZ: First Ed was my boyfriend. I didn't meet Paul until much later.

MR. KARLSTROM: I know a lot of Ed's girlfriends but I didn't know that you were one of them.

MS. BABITZ: I was one of the 1965 girlfriends. Did you ever see that book? That piece that he did, *Nineteen Sixty-five Girlfriends*? The odds of one of them me, Danna [later wife], and others.

MR. KARLSTROM: Who were they?

MS. BABITZ: I don't remember. It's in one of his art objects. '65 was a fun year.

MR. KARLSTROM: Sounds like it.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. So, then I met, I didn't meet Paul until like 1972 or three or four.

MR. KARLSTROM: Much later.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. Paul lived in Oklahoma City.

MR. KARLSTROM: Who was-oh, really? Paul came out later?

MS. BABITZ: Uh-huh.

MR. KARLSTROM: I didn't realize that. I see. Okay. At this famous party.

MS. BABITZ: Ed was at the party.

MR. KARLSTROM: He was there.

MS. BABITZ: I was not at the party.

MR. KARLSTROM: I know.

MS. BABITZ: He brought Patty Callahan. We still see Patty Callahan, she's friends with Paul.

MR. KARLSTROM: So, is she one of the girlfriends-

MS. BABITZ: She was a girlfriend from Oklahoma City.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh. What a complicated life.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah. But we had fun.

MR. KARLSTROM: Ed's going to think it's interesting that I met you and that, because we're pretty good friends. A couple times I've stayed out in the desert with him just the two of us. We're on the same board, the Noah Purifoy Foundation.

MS. BABITZ: Oh, great.

MR. KARLSTROM: Noah lives out in-he's this famous African-American-

MS. BABITZ: Uh-huh. Well, I don't think Ed's suppose to mention me anymore, 'cause I'm Paul's girlfriend now.

MR. KARLSTROM: He's not supposed to mention you?

MS. BABITZ: I don't know what the deal is, but, you know.

MR. KARLSTROM: Well, alright. We'll respect all that, of course.

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Absolutely. Well, tell me a little bit about your-oh, look at that. Looks like a Ruscha from '63; and it says "Eve". But in very broken line, block letters. Wonder what that means?

MS. BABITZ: Blocking it out.

MR. KARLSTROM: Oh, yeah? It was 1963.

MS. BABITZ: Yes.

MR. KARLSTROM: You've got your own Ed Ruscha. Did you start, tell me, let's just talk a minute about the collages; okay?

MS. BABITZ: Yeah.

MR. KARLSTROM: Because that is, we've determined, we've talked about your brief career as a model.

MS. BABITZ: I love Ed's book.

MR. KARLSTROM: His books are great.

MS. BABITZ: So funny. The first time I ever saw the one *Twenty-six Gasoline Stations*, we were driving down to have dinner at La Esperanza downtown in the Plaza, downtown.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

MS. BABITZ: That was my favorite place to go and I took him there and once he went there he would never stop going. So, we used to go get enchiladas rancheras, which he couldn't believe, you know, like, sour-cream, melted cheese, avocados, you know. Wow. It was a lot better than Oklahoma City.

MR. KARLSTROM: I guess.

MS. BABITZ: So, I look at this book and I said, "Why did you make this book?" and he said "Somebody had to do it".

MR. KARLSTROM: That's his artistic statement. Were you inspired a little bit by that to start making your collages?

MS. BABITZ: I didn't make collages until after I saw Joseph Cornell's artwork in 1966, in New York.

MR. KARLSTROM: Uh-huh.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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