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Transcript

Preface

Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Liliana Wilson on July 13, 26 and 27, 2004. The interview took place in Austin, Texas and was conducted by Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Recuerdos Orales: Interviews of the Latino Art Community in Texas.

This transcript has been lightly edited. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

CARY CORDOVA: All right. We're recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution. I am here with Liliana Wilson and we are going to do a slideshow of her work. And with that, Liliana, I'm just going to let you lead.

LILIANA WILSON: Okay, I'm starting with this piece that is called *Desaparecidos en el Cielo* and it's - the way that I have the slides - the order is chronologically. This is a piece that I did around 1977. It could be earlier. I can't quite remember exactly, but it's - the name of the piece is called *Desaparecidos en el Cielo*. That means disappeared in heaven and it's a piece that is showing two men that are asleep in the beach and the name, sleeping - disappearing heaven, and the reason why it's called heaven, because the beaches in Chile are so beautiful that they always remind me of heaven. Like that's what I think heaven must be like to look like that.

And so the story with these two men is that they're disappeared because in 1973 we had a military dictatorship that took over the government - the socialist government of Salvador Allende - and they - there was a civil war where the military took over the country and they killed and tortured all the people from the opposition that were - [inaudible] - and all the people that was behind Salvador Allende. So these two men were men who were taken to a ship called - [inaudible] - where they were tortured, and to get information about who else was involved in being against the government - the military government they were trying to put into the country.

And so these two men were taken to this ship called - [inaudible] - and they were tortured and then they were thrown overboard and they were - what they would do with people, they would put weights on them - on the bodies, so they would like go to the bottom of the ocean and then were eaten by fish and then nobody would find them, but these two men for some reason washed ashore and they appeared on the beach and so at that time they had - the news were very censored and everybody - I mean, they were saying that there was no truth what they were doing to people, and we knew, of course, that it was true and so this came to prove. So that's another reason why I think that they're in heaven. Because they made a statement with their death about the fact that they were being - they had been tortured.

MS. CORDOVA: And how did you find out about their bodies?

MS. WILSON: Well, they -

[Cross talk.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah. They couldn't - it came out in the news and also I live close to the beach so actually we went to see them.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, really? You went to see their bodies?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I did. Yeah, it was because they both started rotting right away and so people started going down there. It's really sad. I mean, they didn't look as good as that, but that's the idea.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you learn who they were?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I mean, I don't know who they were, but they had names and I don't remember their names, but it always stayed with me.

MS. CORDOVA: So you were still living in Chile at that time?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I stayed in Chile until 1977.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah – [off mike] – so this is also part of the situation that happened. When the military took over in 1973, they will go and do raids on apartments and these buildings that were close to La Moneda, what is the White House in Chile – it's called La Moneda, the coin – and there were all these buildings and so there were people there that were living and so the military would come in and so then they didn't want it falling to their hands so they would jump would be shot at and killed, so that's why the buildings have all the blood and the man is falling down to his death and then there's like blood all over the city, so –

MS. CORDOVA: That's a powerful image. That was strictly from the 1973 coup?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that was – yeah because I was actually there. I was in Santiago – had gone to visit a friend of mine who was studying law at the time and my university was on strike. There were – everybody was on strike at the time and there was lots of commotion, so I went to visit these friends of mine in – Santiago – I didn't live there – lived in Valparaiso and the military coupe took – happened right in front of her stairs, so it was really difficult. Actually, I went and stayed with this friend of mine that was actually assistant to the minister of economy. You know, he was a leftist so he was like against the government, so it's like, you know, a great place to be. So it was pretty scary and they will be getting name – I mean, they will be getting phone calls from friends that will be screaming over the phone and all this stuff happened within that one day and then we were on a military curfew for about three days where we couldn't go anywhere, so –

MS. CORDOVA: So you continued to stay at your friend's place?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I mean, we couldn't go anywhere, so three days later I couldn't even go back to my hometown.

MS. CORDOVA: But you were actually in Santiago –

[Cross talk.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I was actually in Santiago, yeah, when they bombed the La Moneda, you know, was there. Yeah, I mean, I saw the planes and everything and the fire and we were like driving to my friend's brother's house. That's what we were doing. He came to get us because we were young. I mean, I was probably – I must have been 21 or 20-something like that, so this piece over here is again same from that period. It shows this man that is holding this man's head and he's going to break his neck.

And there's a woman to the left that is looking without being able to do anything because that was pretty much the situation when, you know, there's a war. I mean, this is the only war I've ever seen and the only thing that you can do is just watch, you know. There's not much you can do. That's how I felt, so that's the idea.

MS. CORDOVA: And why a woman?

MS. WILSON: I guess maybe me, you know, because I didn't – you know. I mean, some people took up arms, but I'm just not that way. I just didn't do it. I didn't – I mean, I also – I mean, I was studying law. I really was – I was more of a spectator, you know what I mean? I don't really jump into political parties and stuff for many reasons, so mainly people that were in the parties that were kind of going out and fighting, but I just don't believe in violence too much.

So this is a picture that shows the world. There's a crack and through the crack you see the image of this man that has a gun to his head and this is the idea of this is how the world was at that time in Chile. It was a world of hell and there were like – you would hear about these things, so that's what the crack represents. It's like a view to the hell world that was happening and the man has a gun to his head and you don't know if the man is going to be shot by somebody or if he's shooting himself because either way he probably would want to die in the situation he was in. And so there's a lot of cracks happening everywhere and that's because his world's being shattered and he's about to die and this is like the moment he approaches death.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you do that one?

MS. WILSON: That must have been like '78, '79; after I got here. Also, you know, also I had drawings while I was there, but it was really dangerous to have anything that meant anything, like even books they would come in and they would pick people up. They will burn all the books – Marxist books or any book that – anything that they thought could be dangerous, so – and they would burn anything, so, you know, I had a few drawings that I just never brought them because I was afraid to, so I left them there.

This piece is called *The Gatekeepers* and it's – there are four dogs showing their teeth. What are they called?

MS. CORDOVA: Teeth.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Fangs. And they actually represent the military junta and they were – because the government that took over were four men from the military, the navy, the air force, and the police, so that’s how I represented them with – you know, like I was with dogs.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that was sort of your visual language was shifting –

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: – a little so that you weren’t obvious in your representation?

MS. WILSON: Exactly. Yeah. This is very interesting, but you know, there’s a lot of that in my work because you and Chile in that kind of a state, you know, where you could not say things as they were. You had to – and the plays were being done the same way, where you symbolize something but you don’t quite say it, which I think is very useful because I really don’t think that it’s a good idea for you to be that open about what you think because you never know what can happen. You know what I mean? It’s like who knows who is in power who may not like what you do? So you can always do it where you send a message without being that open about it. And that was the point with this one exactly.

There’s a big painting in that. I gave it to a nephew of mine and he loves it, but whenever – he lives in Santiago and whenever he – people don’t like it at all. They’re like, oh, that painting’s so scary, so I think it’s funny.

MS. CORDOVA: I think it’s beautiful.

MS. WILSON: Okay, so then now I am moving into being in the U.S. This piece is called *The Immigrant*, which I have a lot of pieces like that. It’s basically me or my experience that I have is it’s a very lonely experience to be an immigrant, especially because I just had a sister that came and then a brother that came later, but it’s like I had to leave my family and then I watched a lot of TV and I didn’t speak English either, so – I mean, not that well, so the drawing – there’s a boy that is covering his face from sorrow and next to him is his companion. There’s a television and then the block of kind of bricks that he’s sitting on symbolizes kind of like the lack of movement on that – the lack of life, and then now there’s that hen in the back that is pointing to hope and I tried to do that in a lot of my drawings or paintings where I’m really looking for hope.

And the other thing I do a lot is I try to do my – even if my themes are very dark or sad, I made them real beautiful so people are going to want to look at it because I also believe that in life there’s beauty and sorrow in suffering, so I put them both together and I try to make it appealing so people will want to look at it and enjoy it while they have it. I just don’t like to do dark things where people are just going to get depressed by looking at it; even I have done them where they were beautiful, but so sad people couldn’t even look at it, so I try to stay a little lighter now. You know?

This piece is a – also a piece about immigration. It’s actually – these are two people that are being drowned by this two men that have fish heads and they represent the people that are in power that are not allowing people to come across, you know, from Mexico or wherever other country because people are coming here to have a better life and so they’re – a lot of them die on their way here and so the red is from the blood of all the people that have died crossing and they’re being drowned because they – they wanted to come and so the reason why they have suits on is because they feel that this is part of the – you know, the people in power that are kind of giving these orders that end up directly killing people.

MS. CORDOVA: And they’re men, too, or are they –

MS. WILSON: Oh, they’re men. Oh, definitely they’re men. Yeah, they’re definitely men because most people in – most of the human beings in power are men, and also they have – the reason why I made them have fish heads is because of trying to look for a face that was very flat. Like I didn’t want like a monster, and I wanted to – because I really do feel that these people that do this lost and they really don’t – I wouldn’t say they don’t care, but they don’t know. They may don’t care and so they don’t have a feeling whatsoever and I’ve always thought to me that fish looked like a very – with out expression. They’re kind of flat, so I wanted to do that that way they would show how a lack of feelings they were. They could just be drowning these poor people trying to come across and trying to have a better life – young people, and without any feeling whatsoever. It’s like what does it matter to them, you know? They have nice suits and they have things. They don’t have to worry about it.

And then in the back, there’s a figure that is holding her head down and it’s me because I’m seeing this and I’m just – and again I’m a spectator of seeing the horrible things that happen in the world.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, it’s also interesting just because it had a lot of imagery. You could have – I don’t know. I couldn’t imagine an interpretation that was dealing with sort of baptism.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, a lot of people have done this and they come and they go, I can relate to that. I’m like, uh.

Because they think it has to do with being baptized, but – you know, the baptism of the blood or something. That could be. You know, it's like – yeah, before they die they get baptized and then –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, but actually it's much darker.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and it's about being – you know, it's about dying. It's about dying because of trying to change your circumstances. This is a very big painting. It's a four feet by eight feet long.

MS. CORDOVA: How long did it take you to do something like that?

MS. WILSON: Like about – it doesn't take me that much longer. It's just mainly the drawing. Once I get the drawing done, it's not that much, but I guess it will probably take me a month or something like that.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you pencil it out or –

MS. WILSON: Completely. I mean, I'm totally like everything is down before I do anything. I mean, I have a sketch and then from the sketch I go to a drawing. From the drawing, I go to the big sketch and then I trace it into the canvas and everything is complete. There's no – you know, I'm very, very regimented when it comes to this. I have – there are no changes after I draw because I like real tight compositions, so I don't want to deal with the composition once I'm painting. You know, that it has to be – it's kind of like a blueprint. You know, like to me it's like if you build a house you have to have all the blueprints of the – *el mapa*, you know, plan, *quiero decir*, and so that's what I do – the same thing. And so then the rest is mainly execution.

MS. CORDOVA: In fact, it looks like it has the traditional sort of V, you know, like the – you know, like the –

MS. WILSON: The triangle?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, most of my work is very it has to do with harmony. It's very harmonious, so it's always stable and peaceful even though it's showing something that's not like that. That's another thing I do kind of on purpose. It's nothing really disturbing. It's kind of peacefully – like a peaceful, horrible death.

This piece actually is in San Antonio – [off mike]. The University of Texas at San Antonio bought this piece for their collection. It's a really big piece and it's called *Men Running from Themselves* and so it's a piece – this is the same man that is in front and in the back and so he is a man that is – thinks that happiness in life is going to be given to him by material things and so he's dressed very nice with a pinstripe suit and he's kind of almost pushing himself to the side trying to get ahead and trying to go and get all those things that are never going to make him happy according to me because I don't really believe that things are going to make anybody happy. We do think that and we keep fighting for them, but they really don't. I mean, I'm old enough to know, but I kind of knew it early on, so that's the idea, you know, that he is – he has a blank look on his face because he is so lost that he thinks that's where he's going to find his happiness or his goal in his life.

MS. CORDOVA: Is he a recurring figure for you, or just this one painting?

MS. WILSON: I think I have like the idea of, you know, what do we want to do in life – you know, the things that we want? And I think it may come some other times, but at that time that's what I was doing. I did a lot of that and I have a couple more – I don't have the slides for that. I had a man that had like money coming out of his mouth and he had a suit too. I went through like a little pair of men in businesses, but I'm over that.

MS. CORDOVA: About when did you do this?

MS. WILSON: This was at the end of like – [inaudible] – I would say like '91, '92. Yeah. I guess I should have been telling you the dates, but that's okay.

MS. CORDOVA: We can include them later.

MS. WILSON: Okay. Okay, this piece is a girl holding a red fish and it's called *Girl and Red Fish*. My friend Gloria Anzaldúa used to always tell me, you know, Lilita – I used to go work with her. When I lived in San Francisco, I would go work with her for like a week and then I would go – she would go, "What is it going to be called?" And I would go, *Girl and Red Fish*. And she would go like, "Oh, you really have to work on this." [Laughter.] And so I started getting better later and then she would even help me – give me titles and stuff. I'll show you one that she gave me a title.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: But the idea of this painting was I had this friend of mine that was here from Texas actually and she

was very young and her father would always take her brothers fishing and he never took her, so one day she wanted to go with them so she got up and she walked all the way to where they were. I don't know how far - it was kind of far, so when they saw her get there, they let her fish and then she caught her fish. I don't think it was as big as that, but the idea was that she said, you know, I don't see the point. Why cannot I get fishing like the boys do? I don't see that I need to have anything extra to be able to throw in a rope and get - or whatever that thing's called. You know, whatever you throw in.

MS. CORDOVA: The fishing pole.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, the fishing pole - the line, the line. So that's the idea - on that one.

MS. CORDOVA: But does the fish have any of the same meaning as the work that we just saw?

MS. WILSON: In this case, actually - and the other one was - no, it doesn't have the same meaning.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And actually I have to just say that I loved doing fish. After I did that painting, I like fell in love with doing fish because I love the scales from them. It's like I'm totally fascinated by them on the colors and so I just started putting fish in all my paintings because I love scales so much and the way the light hits them. So, I mean, in this case these fish represents her power. You know, how she was able to say, you know, I'm going to do this and I don't care who doesn't want me to do it. And there's so much of that for girls that - I mean, at least in children I think that's somehow here too.

MS. CORDOVA: But what was her name?

MS. WILSON: Yvonne.

MS. CORDOVA: Yvonne? Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

So this piece is called *Self Portrait*, and I was - I just did this painting and this is how I was feeling, you know, and there's a house that is on fire and there is fire coming from every window and there is no doors and so that's how I felt. I was having a hard time with life at the time and I - this is how I saw myself - like a house on fire.

And actually, there's a lot of meaning being done by Carl Jung or whoever those people are - that they talk a lot about the self. I mean, actually Gloria told me that. When she saw this she was talking about the self that is represented by a house and I mean, I had no idea. I just took - most of the time my work is very, very intuitive. I don't - I just get a piece of paper and then I do a sketch. I'll show you some - a sketch that I have right now that is going to be a painting later and I'll show you the first one. It's really a horrible sketch. I mean, it's like I normally don't even show them, but that's how it starts.

I work kind of like the surrealists. You know, where they just sit there and let the paper talk or just - you know, normally I'm having an emotional feeling or something and then I just do the sketch and then I work on that. I make a really good drawing and then after a good drawing I make it into a real good painting.

MS. CORDOVA: And about when did you do this one?

MS. WILSON: This one must have been like '93, '94.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay and it is a pretty violent self portrait. Is there anything -

MS. WILSON: What kind of a portrait?

MS. CORDOVA: Violent.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I just felt like that, you know. I mean, yeah. I mean, I guess you start getting affected about all the things that you see and it's so frustrating because in a way it's like you're not doing anything to the outside, so you just keep it in you, you know? I mean, one of the things that happened to me in Chile was my sister - my younger sister was tortured and so that really was very, very difficult for me because I have a painting that will come out soon that is - I did in her honor, but you know, so this is kind of like that. You know, that desperation of being - well, being an immigrant, I didn't have papers for a while and so that was very hard and all the stuff just starts affecting you and then you feel like a house on fire.

This piece is called *Organic Barbed Wire* and actually I donated it to Esperanza [Esperanza Center, San Antonio, Texas], so you can see it there. They have it there. And it shows a man that is kind of bending over and there's

barbed wire wrapped all around him and – see, he actually is an undocumented worker and what is happening to him is that no matter where he moves – because when you don't have papers or the ways to get them, it's like you have an organic bubble around you because you can't get things. And then it shows up everywhere, you know. And then you get caught and then your work gets vanished and then you have to leave, and so you get wiped out of your world, so it's almost like it grows around you. That's what it felt like.

And then I always think of the families of people that get picked up and what happens to the kids and all of that.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: This is another piece on immigrants and it's about the three men that have just been picked up and they're in detention for immigration and they're like being – feeling the sorrow of their worlds being broken down or taken away.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that –

MS. WILSON: It's a pencil drawing. Yeah, it's a pencil drawing. I do a lot of pencil drawing. See, these are the two things that I do: I do pencil drawings and I do acrylic on canvas or wood, and the pencil can be black pencil or lead pencil and then – [inaudible] – colored pencils. I'll tell you when they come up. I haven't been remembering to describe that.

It's actually you can see it – yeah. This is a piece called *The Fish Tree*, and I guess you need to see it – there you go. So you get the idea.

MS. CORDOVA: Mm-hmm.

MS. WILSON: And I was actually – with this piece I was drawing a tree – I like to do nature sometimes – drawings since sometimes I get ideas and then I learn to look at life. You know, when I studied art – I mean, I studied drawing when I was eight years old and I drew – I mean, I had like piles and piles of copy books of mainly ball point pen because all that I could afford. And – to copy books – you know, my school books – they would let me use them or they would give me that for me to draw in and I would just fill them up completely. I mean, I would be – actually, I feel like I was an artist already, so I did research and I would go look for other images, like if I needed a chicken to be in it, I would go look at it – somebody else done it and stuff like that. I mean, it's just amazing to me how I was working already so early.

Anyway, when I was doing this, I was doing the tree and then the leaf started appearing to me as if it was a fish, so then the next leaf I made as a fish and then I made it like it was a fish tree, you know, so I thought that like if they were in the ocean, but they were in the tree, so I don't know. I thought it was just kind of interesting and –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, it's so wonderful. I mean, it's just surreal. That's the only word for it really.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, so I really had fun doing these things.

Okay, this piece is called – it's acrylic on plywood and it's called *The Wedding*, and my sister married a man that I didn't like, and so the picture shows a beautiful woman with a white dress that is next to this man that is wearing a tuxedo, but he has a bird head and so – and he looks very pretentious and I really didn't know how to take a revenge on him except for doing this painting, which I tried to give to my sister, but she didn't take it.

MS. CORDOVA: I can't believe why. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: So that's what I thought of him. And then the dog inside of the door there is like smelling – somebody said he's smelling urine, like it smells bad and this is a place where things are not going to go well. And I wasn't trying to curse her, but I really didn't like her husband, so that's – I mean, I don't really – I shouldn't be saying this in the Archives. Now everybody's going to know this, but I should have said that it's somebody I didn't like. And I'm getting along with him by now. They're still together and I guess I had to resign myself that I was going to have to be tolerating him.

MS. CORDOVA: And why a bird's head?

MS. WILSON: I don't know. I guess he's just kind of pretentious. And I don't think birds are pretentious at all, just kind of – I guess I'm sorry, I'm not trying to insult birds, but it's sort of like I didn't think he was very smart and he was just – you know what it was? It was all talk – like all – like not real. Like all talk and just pretentious. I really don't like pretentious people, so I think that's what I was – you know. And he's very macho too, like –

MS. CORDOVA: And the curtain – it's almost like a theatrical scene.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. I was trying to do that. I was trying to make it like a – yeah. It was like the theater of

their lives, so – so this is when the family later. This is the development of the family, so I'm persecuting my brother in law.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh no. More birds.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, so this is what happened actually. You see that he – because he's a very macho man, you know. Like he thinks that men are superior to women, as many men in Chile believe, and so he raises two kids to believe that they were superior to women, so of course they become bird heads and then the girl is regular because she's a woman and she knows better because she doesn't have that much power. And now there's a boy that's holding a fish and that little boy – he's not going to be a bird head because I don't think that all men are bird heads, so people don't think I'm a man-hater. I am not. I mean, I have a nephew that I adore, you know.

And so anyway, this kid – he's going to be different. He knows that he's the same as women, so the red fish is representing again his power. Like he's – it's just showing that he's going to – even though he's been given all these privileges for men, he's not going to do that. And then the husband of course is all sitting there in his little kingdom and then the dogs are kind of ridiculous because – see, it's – there's a thing about Chile that people in Chile they try to pretend they're European so like the velvet curtain, the expensive rugs, they're not that expensive, really, but it's sort of tacky – and so it's like it's a pretend rich kind of thing and then the dogs are closing into his empire, so I was like really laughing. It's a humorous piece, you know, because the dogs are so – I mean, you thought they would be like huge dogs, but they're little dogs that probably won't do anything.

And then there is the wife that is very submissive. I guess I should explain this is a couple, not my sister. If she ever gets to see this, she'll kill me, but oh well.

MS. CORDOVA: So she hasn't seen this?

MS. WILSON: Well, I – whenever I show it to her I tell her that it's somebody – that it's somebody that I didn't like and you know. And this is not the same amount of kids that they have, so it's not quite literal, you know. That's just my inspiration. It's not quite them actually, but – and there's again another self portrait.

I mean, actually not a self portrait. I think it was called – this is called *Housewife – Desperate Housewife*. That's what it's called. And it is a woman that is in a home that is – she's not very happy, so she – her house is on fire and she's screaming because she doesn't want to be there. And I figure that's the situation of many women, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So this one has a door.

MS. WILSON: That one has a door, so that means – and she's screaming, so she probably will be able to escape, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah. Is there anything for earrings? I can't quite tell.

MS. WILSON: There are like loops – several loops, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And here is – this piece is called *The Lovers*, and this time – this must be like 1997, '98. I started drawing on wood and actually Gloria Anzaldúa again – I went to – that's when I met her and I became very good friends with her. I went to a retreat at – outside of San Francisco at the –

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, was that the – 1995? Is that when you did that?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that one.

MS. CORDOVA: The MACLA [Movimiento de Arte y Cultura Latino Americano] – sort of the –

MS. WILSON: The MACLA exhibit that they did. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, sure.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So that's when you met her?

MS. WILSON: I went – that's when I met her.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: So then we became really, really good friends and then she always used to challenge me a lot. I'm like very kind of uptight person, so I like to do things one way and I don't change from that and that's that. And so - and she told me, well, then you work on wood or in something else. And I'm like, no, I only do paper or canvas. That's it. So then we were - in this show we had gone to a lumber store and then she showed me this beautiful wood that was called birch wood - what I just showed you earlier - and it was just so incredibly beautiful that I thought I could really draw on this. So then I took it to the studio and I started drawing and then I did like about 10 drawings and then I did like work in wood. I stopped doing everything in paper and canvas. I did wood for like five or six years, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Wow, and she inspired you to do that?

MS. WILSON: She totally inspired me. Yeah. She was very challenging. I mean, she - we would - she would like get on my nerves sometimes because I would be doing a painting and she would go okay, Liliana, leave it like that. It's ready. And I'm like; I do my paintings all the way from the beginning to the end. I mean, they have to be in my eyes. They have to be completely perfect. And she's a little more loose. I mean, you know, the way she writes, she writes here, she goes there. She goes all over the place and I'm totally the opposite of that, so we would have these discussions and then she would go, I know you're not going to do it, but I'm going to keep telling you, so in this case it worked because she took me to a totally different - you know, she always would come - [inaudible] - Nepantla, you know, between worlds, so there's never a definition of anything and I'm always wanting to have them back. She did teach me that, you know.

So this is a piece about two lovers that are - have just fallen in love. It's actually two women and they're they just met and they're swimming and then they have this - the - [inaudible] - and then the roses symbolize their love.

MS. CORDOVA: And did she ever inspire you in terms of subject matter too?

MS. WILSON: Not too much, no. The subject matter was always mine. It was more like technical and - yeah. Well, she - actually, you know what I think - no, no. She did start like really pushing. Like I used to do a lot of men and she was like why don't you do women, and you know, I'm from Chile and Chile's a very male oriented and so it's almost like everything's men, men, men. Men are the ones that do everything. And so in a way it stays in your head. So then she started pushing me towards doing women, and after that that's all I do, you know. So that - she was really pushing that and that was very helpful for me because it was kind of like self hatred - or internalized oppression, you know, where I would do mainly men.

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sorry, let me just - and are these two women?

MS. WILSON: They're two women, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: I just wanted to be sure. And the roses - you had told me what they just symbolized.

MS. WILSON: Their love.

MS. CORDOVA: Their love, okay. And is it sort of a tropical setting that you -

MS. WILSON: Sort of. I just wanted it to be a beautiful setting, so if it looks tropical, that's okay. I didn't mean it that way, it's just what I thought would be beautiful.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Great, thanks.

MS. WILSON: This piece here is called *The Meaning of Life* and what I was - okay, there are three men that have bird heads. There are two inside of a cage and one outside of the cage. So there's one in the bottom of the cage that he's sitting there resigned to have a life of nothingness - a life of no meaning like doing whatever he's been told and not question anything. The one in the middle is playing in the columpio - how do you say that in the - I don't know what that's called, but -

MS. CORDOVA: Swing?

MS. WILSON: Swing. It would be the swing, and so he's at least kind of - within what he's been given, he's having a little fun. And the one on the top, he's got out of the cage, but he's scared of going anywhere. He doesn't know where to go, so he's still in the cage outside of it and I don't know if he's going to jump or not because I really - that's just where I got to and so there's a way where I was just trying to show like the lack of understanding that we have about life in general. You know, I just feel like nobody knows what we're doing here, and I do try to be spiritual and all of that, but overall I think there's just what's in front of you and you do what you can, but then there's a lot of ways where we just - the teachings that are given to us are kind of wrong, so you end up stuck in the bottom of the cage like that - men. And I really do believe that you can move away from that, you know.

That's what I try to do even if it's very hard for me because I have a tendency to be like him, and so I want to be like the person on the top of the cage, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So at least reach the top of the cage.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and be outside of it, you know, and maybe jump, but I didn't get that far, so -

MS. CORDOVA: And, gosh, this one I don't know why, but it really does put me in mind of someone like Magritte.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, I kind of - it's really - I don't even look at his stuff because I'm so afraid that he - because like my stuff comes up naturally and I feel like I'm trying to copy him and I really try actually not to make it - if like I have an idea I even change it so it won't look like his stuff because it's just not funny to be - you know, people to think that I'm trying to do that. I mean, my stuff is my own stuff and I don't copy anybody and I don't want to even go there. It's just that - it's kind of like what comes out of my mind, but of course I'm sure I'm influenced by him and all the surrealists.

MS. CORDOVA: I don't think of his; I just think that there has some feeling to him.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, definitely. Definitely, yeah. So this is a piece called *Proposition 187* and it was - it's a piece of color pencil on wood and it's - actually, it's a homage to the Mexican people and that's the reason why I have the maguey on fire because it's very symbolic for Mexican people - the maguey - as part of their culture. And the way that this drawing came to be was - for one, there's a woman laying on the floor tied with her hands tied an in front of her a maguey is burning.

And so what happened - I was watching television and I saw this truck. I don't know if you saw this story, but there's a - they actually filmed this where there's a truck full of undocumented workers that were driving and the police was following them and so at some point they stopped them and the police came out of the car and there was a woman in the car and they grab her hair and they smash her face against the truck. And they had that on video. So that's when this drawing came about because I was so - the hatred from those men was so horrendous to somebody that was, well, was just trying to have a better life. I mean, I know that's not how they look at it, but that's what it is to me and that's why I did this and so she's powerless and in her - a symbol of her culture being burned down, you know, like her integrity and her dignity.

MS. CORDOVA: And what's really interesting is how the wood texture comes through on this one.

MS. WILSON: Well, the reason is because this is a color pencil and my color pencils I do them real light so the wood will show through. So there's - in a way, I'm painting nature twice. You know, like nature of the wood and then nature scene that I'm putting there. And a lot of the things that I started doing were where I used acrylic, so you couldn't see through. And what - I did this pencil drawing for a long time because it was just really sweet, but then I went into acrylic and then I didn't do it anymore. Yeah, that's what I was doing. I was trying to show the wood through.

This piece is also on wood and you can still see how the wood goes - his suit there - and this is called *Lies* or *Mentiras* and so this - [inaudible] - is that this man - okay, this is what happened. I was trying to imagine what was the - what is a lie? And I was trying to understand what is a lie, so I thought that a lie is when you tell a lie to somebody and they believe you, you cage them because they are trapped in something that is not true that you made up or somebody made up, so I was trying to see how that would be represented visually a lie - visually.

So then I did this man with this cage that was coming out of his mouth and then at that point I didn't know anymore if he was telling the lie or if the lie was being told to him, because he may be swallowing the lie, and I have a feeling by the way he's dressed that he's been told a lie and he's believing it, but then it could be the opposite too. Because of the way he's dressed, he could be telling the lie too.

MS. CORDOVA: I was going to say. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah, so a lot of times it's like I start with something and I don't know where it's going to go, so that's the story.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I guess in looking at it, I'd think, well, he's wearing a suit, so maybe that makes him an authority figure.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: But at the same time he looks very young.

MS. WILSON: And innocent, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: And so he could just be some young boy or man that believes – he's dressed like that because he believes everything. And you have to remember I'm older, so like when I grew up – I mean, suits were worn a lot more than they are now, you know. I mean, like people wore suits all the time. Like to school – to everywhere. So that's changed a lot now, especially here. You know, people are very relaxed in their dress here.

Okay, this piece is called *Luciano* and it's also an acrylic on wood. And I went to visit a friend of mine. This must have been like 1993, 1994 or maybe later. Maybe later, like '96, '97. No, '95. It's in there somewhere.

MS. CORDOVA: All right. Mid-'90s. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: And so I went to this town on the border called Acuna. It's next to Del Rio. And this boy was selling wooden fish in the street, so I started talking to him and then I asked him if he'd pose for me. So I started drawing him. And I did a drawing of him and then I came up with the drawing and then he sat on a bench on the plaza and then I drew him and I give him like \$5. Then the fish that's on his lap is not the fish he was selling; it's like one of my fish, but it's also represent like his power and at this point it's kind of dubious like what's going to happen to him because he was – he was like nine years old and obviously he wasn't going to school and who knows what kind of a life he was going to have. And so he's looking to the future and the fish is looking at him and you can't really tell what is happening.

And then I had a lot of fun doing the tennis shoes and stuff like that. That was fun. And then I played a little with the light and the dark in this painting.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, I know what I was going to ask you. I was – just in sort of thinking about the Maguey that you had on fire and the sort of being at the border and do you find yourself either having to use a lot of Mexican imagery or Mexican-American imagery or do you – I mean, does living in the United States –

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Well, see what happened to me is that I – all my friends are mainly Mexican Chicanos, you know, so I kind of set it – kind of picking up – I mean, I'm sorry if somebody thinks I'm appropriating, but it wasn't that. It's just that it becomes kind of like part of your culture. And also like I will go a lot to the border, so these are the things you see there and then you see how important it is – the Maguey. So that's kind of what starts happening. It wasn't on purpose, but I started doing this.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. And yeah, I was very influenced by them. And they, you know, they really were the people who really helped me too, you know. Even as an artist they would like invite me and I would be invited to their shows, and then some of them, of course, when I got to California they didn't think it was so cool and they didn't want me to be part of the shows because I wasn't a Chicana, which is fine. You know, I mean, that happens and it's valid. So everything is very separated, so, yeah, that's what happened.

This is another piece about an immigrant woman and she's probably coming from like Central America and let me show you the whole thing. [Off mike] – put this up higher.

MS. CORDOVA: That's fine.

MS. WILSON: So she is standing between some green leaves and looking over to – it's kind of like she's looking from her land to the land that she's coming to that is actually the U.S. And that she looks a little scared because she doesn't know what is ahead, so she is going to do it because she's strong and beautiful, but at the same time she doesn't know what is going to be coming for her in her life, and it could be very difficult. And as we know, sometimes it is.

MS. CORDOVA: And about when did you do this work?

MS. WILSON: This must be like '97, '98.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: It's funny how the experiences that you have – they start coming up later. Like the images from Chile came later after I left there and the immigration piece – you know, because I already have my papers here, but I'm still back to where I didn't have it and I know what it's like, so it's –

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And of course – yeah, I mean, so much of the sort of Central American wars were during the '80s, so –

MS. WILSON: Exactly, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So are you sort of reckoning with that at this moment in time?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Definitely yeah.

This is a more surrealist piece. This piece is called *Tiempo* or *Time* and it's actually comes from a Pablo Neruda poem that he wrote. I can't remember the name of the poem, but he's walking down the street and he's talking about this woman that he used to live with in this house and he's looking at and she doesn't live there anymore, he doesn't live there anymore, but he remembers how he was and it was like a completely different life, right? So there's an image here with a man with a clock on top of his head that says 3:00. I don't know why. I just put it at 3:00. I like what 3:00 looks like. And then all the shoes are floating around him. Every one of the shoes represents a life that he lived - [audio break] - I mean, he'll have more later but until now every shoe is one of the lives that he had. And I'm always amazed by that. Like, how my life changes: And then I'm living in a completely different place, completely different surrounding. And that's how I am. I'm in a new life.

[END TAPE 1, SIDE A]

So that's the idea on this and he's looking a little scared because, you know sometimes - he must be starting a new life or something. It's scary when you start a new life.

MS. CORDOVA: Beautiful.

MS. WILSON: Thank you. Okay, this piece is the piece I showed you earlier and it's a piece about a man that has - his head is on fire and then there is fish around him looking at him kind of in a humorous way. That's what I was trying to do. The piece is called *Shift* or *Transformation* and so it's talking about how human beings - so how tortured we are. You know, we're always in conflict - inside conflicts. I don't know if everybody, but more people I know - they're very tortured and so I believe that there's a way where nature, which we're a part of it too, but because of our minds we can't relax like nature do and so the fish are making fun of him because like humans that we're so tortured for what? You know, so then we die. You know? But we're always like, oh, I've got to do this, blah, blah, blah - all this stuff.

And then we become somebody else, but then that's not good enough either, so it's this constant struggle without a goal or an understanding, you know? I mean, I'm getting a bit more of that now. Zen Buddhism is really helping me to get a greater understanding, but sometimes not even, you know, so -

MS. CORDOVA: And he's water - is that to be with the fish or -

MS. WILSON: Yeah, just to be able to have the fish and also because it means transformation, you know - the fire and the water.

MS. CORDOVA: And the fire almost becomes like a hat of some kind, or - but it's just that piece of him.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that piece of him. See, after he burns, he's going to become somebody else. You know? That's what he's doing. He's burning himself to become a better person.

MS. CORDOVA: So this isn't as dark as some of your works because he has a future.

MS. WILSON: Yes, he has a future and he has a good future, and the fish are looking at him kind of laughing because they think it's not that complicated, but he's making it more complicated than it should be. Actually, this reminds me of Gloria, though, because that's how she used to look at me. In a way I kind of think she's the fish and I'm the guy because she'd always laugh at me and - because I was so tortured and she would go, it's not that complicated.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Okay, so this piece is called *El día en que le hicieron pedazos la corona* and this also comes from a poem, and the poem was a poem about this boy - there was a king in his home, you know, there's some people that have had good homes and they were loved - [phone ringing] - oh no.

MS. CORDOVA: I can pause it. Let's pause it. [Audio break.] All right, we're back recording, so we're good.

MS. WILSON: So this piece is called *El día en que le hicieron pedazos la corona*. It means this is the day they broke his crown, and it's kind of the day the world breaks your heart, because as we all know, the world sometimes is not a good place and this is the story with this boy - that he was - that he's wearing a crown that he had in his home where he was thought of as a little king and then he went outside and something happened to him and this is what is happening. This is the moment because all the pieces are breaking and he doesn't - he can't believe this is happening to him. And there's this moment of sadness; you go, oh, my God, I cannot believe this is happening. That's the moment.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, so it's actually – even though it seems like a standard portrait, it's an action portrait.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I guess you -- I never thought of it like that, but yeah. Yeah.

This is another drawing. Oh, the piece that we saw earlier, the day they broke his crown, that's actually a silkscreen. So –

MS. CORDOVA: And when did you do that?

MS. WILSON: This one I would think is 1996 or '97. This is a pencil drawing – lead pencil drawing. It is called *Casi Gomez* and it comes from a book that I read that is a Peruvian writer that wrote the book *Casi Gomez* and it's the story of this man that was an accountant for a profession, but he was an artist and so – and he had a wife that was very – like a social climber. You know, she wanted money. And the wife was making him work even though he didn't want to do that job, so what he would do – and I loved this part of the book – that in the breaks he had, he would go to the bathroom and do these most incredible drawings inside of the bathroom, and so the reason why he's in a half is because he's half of himself. He can't be all of himself. So that's what name is – *Casi Gomez* and so he became a half of a man. That's the story.

This piece is called *Man and Leaf* and *Hombre y Hoja*. And it's a piece about a man that is remembering. This is the same idea about the lies drawing that I showed you earlier. I was trying to represent, I mean visually, what a memory would be like, and he was having a memory of his homeland and it's represented by that transparent leaf. Because, see, the leaf doesn't belong to the world where he's at, you know, because everything in there belongs to – you know, tries to be realistic or representational, but not the leaf. It's just white lines. And he's remembering something from the past.

MS. CORDOVA: Why did you end up choosing a leaf?

MS. WILSON: I guess I thought because nature really defines where you come from, you know, and I guess that's the reason why it was. I don't – yeah. It just – you know, I just was drawing one day and then the leaf came in front of his face. That's how it appeared to me, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Really, it just was sort of a natural thing? But you knew you were going to put the leaf there?

MS. WILSON: No, I was just drawing him and then the leaf came and then I realized what it was. I mean, sometimes I may even be making up the stories because, you know, it's just what it is and I have to think what is it I'm trying to say here? And then that's what it feels like to me, especially when I start painting them because once I start painting it I get in the feeling, you know, and that's when I have to think of really what he's feeling because he's really kind of sad and nostalgic over something that's already happened and will never be again. Like his land that he left behind, you know?

And so the idea – the image comes out and then I have to understand it myself, you know. It's like I send my own messages that I have to figure out.

Okay, this is the picture that I told you I did about my sister because my sister was taken in and tortured for about a week, and so she told me that when she was there she would think about like the most beautiful things she could think about and leaves were – beautiful autumn leaves were what she was thinking about – something from the outside because, you know, she has a bandana on her eyes and – it's called – actually, it's called *Memories of Chile* – this piece. And the reason why I picked the bandana is because they had her with a bandana for the whole time she was there. She could never take it off even when she took a shower, you know, and it was like the soldiers would like look at her. It was really horrible. So, you know, it's like that's what she had the whole time and she was very young – so she was like 17. She was a student.

MS. CORDOVA: And –

MS. WILSON: In Chile.

MS. CORDOVA: – you – where were you at that time?

MS. WILSON: In Chile.

MS. CORDOVA: You were also?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I was there.

MS. CORDOVA: And so you knew she had disappeared?

MS. WILSON: Oh yeah. Yeah, we were waiting. You know, I was in law school at the time and I would go and talk

to all my professors. I mean, I was trying to get somebody to help me and nobody could help because they suspended habeas corpus. That means that nobody has any rights whatsoever, and so it was really incredible. I mean, I remember her boyfriend – he was so nervous he would bite his fingernails and they were bleeding from biting them so bad. He was thinking what are these people doing to her in there, you know, and she was going to come alive.

MS. CORDOVA: And so had people seen her being taken away?

MS. WILSON: Well, what happened was that they called the house and they said that she needed to go to a police station and she needed to report there, so she reported there and then that's when they took her. They took her in a van and we didn't see her for a week. And they took her to a navy place – to a navy facility.

MS. CORDOVA: Did she have any sort of politically active background?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, she was a student. You know, she was a – probably hanging out with kids that thought to do – I mean, it was nothing big. I mean, she was 17, you know. There were just kind of different movements. I think they were more cool than anything. You know, she didn't have a clue what she was doing. And it was just – I don't know how serious it was for her, but they were very serious, so –

MS. CORDOVA: But they released her?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, they did. I mean, we did a lot of work. Believe me, if we hadn't done this much work, she may never come out or – you know, I mean, that all has to do with class and we were sort of like middle class and you can get a lot of help if you're middle class; you find a way. You know, if you're poor, it's like a lot of people never came out of – you know, they didn't have the power to get people out.

MS. CORDOVA: Who did you turn to to help you? I mean, besides your law professors, who was –

MS. WILSON: Friends of the family. People even from the navy that we knew, so it was everybody was doing it because we knew how dangerous it was.

Okay, I don't remember the name of this piece and it's kind of an older piece. I think I've got it out of context here, but it's a piece about the way that the things that have hurt us stay with us, you know, and that's what the cage is – he's sitting there and he still has – he's a prisoner of the pain that he suffered in the past, and it's in the blood that is piercing his skin is because he's still suffering from that and, you know, it's kind of going away because maybe he – probably it was covering his whole body, but at least it's – a lot of it is gone and it's funny because – I just did a piece that's at the Esperanza – it only has it in the face, so I think it's kind of interesting. I have thought of this, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And just in terms of – is this one also on wood?

MS. WILSON: Mm-hmm.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and you can see the wood through also.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and the shape of it is just really reminiscent of like a stained glass window, right?

MS. WILSON: Oh, you mean the arch?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I started doing a lot of arches for a while. I just thought that they were kind of – I love like the Florentine paintings and all that time. I loved that. And so I guess I was just trying to make it look like – it's just kind of like a little window, but contemporary, so yeah.

This is also an acrylic on wood and it's a piece about a girl holding her power up, you know. And it's a young girl. She must be about 12, that in a little bit of a scary way she is – but she's still holding it, you know, so actually I just redid that piece. I'll show you that drawing. I have it here somewhere. I just redid the drawing and I kind of don't like this one anymore, but –

MS. CORDOVA: Why not?

MS. WILSON: Oh, I just – I don't like her hair. I just don't like what it looks like. And then the one that I did she's nude and I think it looks much better and it's much more powerful and she's also holding it with much more strength, so maybe I've grown up. You know, it's always you one way or the other.

This is a very funny piece. I just didn't know what to do with this. And actually I was just kind of playing. I had bought like this little toy. There was a pig toy and it looked just like - [inaudible] - so I started drawing it and then I started moving it on the page the way - I started moving the page itself, so I made him floating. It's called *The Floating Pig* and it's an acrylic on canvas. And then I didn't know what to do - how to hold him to the Earth, so I added the rope and I tied him to the Earth because there's a way where - see how I do these things and then I start thinking what am I trying to say here?

And I think what I was trying to say is that there is such an arrogant way of human beings with nature in general. What do we think we own everything and we can just eat them, you know. And just - you know, and keep them captive and, you know, I mean, I don't care about the rights of animals or anything, but there's something about it that we're like kind of a little bit arrogant. You know, like we think that we're so much better and that we can keep them in horrible conditions and eat them up and all of that.

So that was kind of like - and he has - it's sort of like he's dreaming of escaping. You know, he's dreaming of escaping. That was the idea.

This piece is called *Denial* and it's a piece that I did - when I left Chile I was gone for like about 11 years and then when I went back I saw a lot of things that disturbed me even - I mean, there was still the dictatorship and people were like so - I mean, there's a lot of things that were kind of disturbing to me, and that's what she's doing. She's like - there was a moment that I just couldn't take it and when I feel like I just wanted to cover my face. And that's what she's doing. You know, she can't - she's like trying not to look to see what is there in front of her.

MS. CORDOVA: What didn't she like or what -

MS. WILSON: Well, I think I went to a talk at the Catholic University [Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile] in Santiago and I don't know if you know Marjorie Agosin. She's a Chilean writer and I work a lot with her too.

MS. CORDOVA: I love her work.

MS. WILSON: She uses a lot of my paintings for her covers.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, I've noticed that.

MS. WILSON: She really loves my work and so she's been very helpful also. Her and Gloria have been very important to me. And what happened was she was doing a presentation and then I went to the Catholic University in Santiago and she was there and she was doing a presentation and then she started being attacked by people like - I don't know what they were attacking her about. Like - you know, that her stuff wasn't good enough. And it's like, you know, who do they think they are? They're all academics and very - I'm sorry, I know you're an academic, but -

MS. CORDOVA: That's all right. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: I mean, I don't have anything against academics, it's just that I have a problem against the arrogant ones because I feel that, you know, if people want to create, just let them. You don't have to be one way or the other. I just think that anybody should create and - you know, so they were being very critical of her so what I did is I just got so mad that I left. I just walked out and I was making a lot of noise and I was leaving to let them know that it was such a - [inaudible] - you know, to like put people down because they had done well somewhere else, and I think that's what's the point. And they thought they were so much better than her and they were criticizing like her Spanish. You know, she went there when she was young, so she had made a mistake, you know, but it was like, oh my God, you know, you can't make a mistake in Spanish because, you know - like Gloria got that all the time. You know, if you said the wrong word and they were like you don't speak. You know, it's very, very hateful and I think that's what I was covering myself. I didn't want to hear this, you know, so -

You've seen this piece? Yeah, *The Latina Letters*. Yeah, I have a poster if you would like it. I have a lot of them.

MS. CORDOVA: I'd love it.

MS. WILSON: This piece is actually an old piece and I redid it, and it's a piece about the fact that sometimes in life you are suffering so much and especially people - you know, a lot of people suffer, but I was thinking more about immigrants and people without - you know, with economic hardships and stuff. And it's like you can't really go there and so the pieces are falling from inside of you. So that's -

MS. CORDOVA: And I mean, do you remember getting the idea for this kind of piece or -

MS. WILSON: I was feeling like that completely. I mean, where I would just like - you know, your face can't show

anything but inside you're completely falling into pieces, so it was a -self portrait I did.

MS. CORDOVA: And so were you first inspired to create a hollow within her and then the pieces came later, or did you know that that was all -

MS. WILSON: No, it all came at once. I was just like I did a drawing and then she had an opening and then there were flying pieces. Actually, the flying of the pieces was the most important part. What came later was the thinking of her face as a flat expression like, you know, sorrow, but flat. Like almost in stone, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I tell you what. I'm going to switch out this tape and put n a new one.

MS. WILSON: Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: So let me stop it here. [Audio break.]

All right. We're recording again. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, sort of with a slideshow by Liliana Wilson. Today is July 13th, 2004. This is disc two of session one, out slide show.

MS. WILSON: This piece is called *La Quinceañera*. And now this is a totally Mexican thing - I mean, because I don't - I mean, I think they may have some parties like this in Chile, but they're never like this, you know, wonderful way that the Mexican people that I've met here celebrate it, so I was - I went to this friend of mine's daughter's quinceañera and it was just so beautiful and all the cakes and it was just beautiful and that's that. You know, I was just really enjoying seeing all that.

MS. CORDOVA: But how funny that you ended up focusing on the cake. [Laughter.]

MS. WILSON: Well, it was just about that. There were just so many cakes and there was so much - you know, I mean the beauty of it. I really love that cake. I think I saw it and I'm like I've got to paint this, so I think I did a little sketch and then I did it later. Yeah. I mean, to me it was like about that more than anything else, but I guess it is more about the girl in the dress and all that, but for me I just at that point I thought it was about, you know, curtains and cakes.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Well, it's about that, too.

MS. WILSON: This piece is called *Barrera* and that means barriers. And this person has in front of him like a metal net in front of his eyes, so it's about prejudices and so people looking at him where they look at him like one way or the other and for him it's the same, but it's a way of trapping him where he's - like, you know, he's not free to just look because the things that other people had put it on him and he's putting that - it's making him not to be free.

This piece is called *Balance* and it's a piece about sometimes in life - rarely - things just go really well and they just go really well and this is what's happening to this boy at this moment. He's having a very balanced life and he's playing and he's - yeah, basically he's playing. And like the leaves represent things - different things in his life that he's able to - you know, to do well with. And then floating, which is like - you know, you can't really float, but if you could it would be like beautiful - you know, what a life, you know, to just float around.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I guess what I'm struck by is, yes, he's doing so well, but it seems like it could all so easily fall apart.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, thank you. That's true. It's very, very true where that's kind of like in life. It's just like you have that and then everything falls apart and that's why I said rarely you get there. But then again, you know, I've been reading - [inaudible] - and he said that you can get it a lot more often than we think. It's just like an attitude. So maybe it's just my attitude to think that it's always like that.

This is another piece and it's called *The Immigrant* or something like that. But this is like a 19 - no, like a 2000 thing. Yeah. And it's about the loneliness of the immigrant and how he's leaving everything behind and he's in this vast land that he also doesn't know and all he has is what he carries with him. And he's - in this moment he's missing his home. It's just when you leave, you just never get home, you know, so your home is inside of you.

MS. CORDOVA: You do a lot of work about solitude. In fact, are most of your works like single people?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, they are. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So that family portrait was actually really quite rare for you to be combing all these people together.

MS. WILSON: True. Yeah. Yeah. I – yeah, that is – if you look around here, everybody is like on their own. So I mean, I guess that’s kind of what I try to do. You know, it’s like I try to do a human being and their – and whatever happens to her or him in life in different cases. I mean, I think we are born alone and die alone – even though we spend all of our life trying to find somebody so we won’t be alone; or most people, though Gloria didn’t though. You know, she didn’t want to. I would tell her, well – she was all, I can’t have a lover or partner because I don’t have time and that would take too much time. And I’m like, I’m sorry I have to go 50/50. I have to go 50 percent art and 50 percent somebody that I share my life with.

So this picture is not very clear here, but it’s called *Divided Woman* and it’s a woman that is split in a half and –

MS. CORDOVA: Speaking of 50/50.

MS. WILSON: So she can’t actually – you can’t really see this, but I – you know, from where her lips are there’s like – you know those bubbles in the cartoons? And so it’s like what she will be saying. You know, and be like in the comic strip that you have – so there’s that in there. You can’t really see it, but – and so but there’s nothing in it.

MS. CORDOVA: Should I pause?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, pause it.

MS. CORDOVA: Let me pause it. [Audio break.] All right, we’re recording again.

MS. WILSON: Okay, so the problem with woman is that she’s trying to say something, but she can’t, so she is – she has an empty speech – you know, that – what is that called? The thing that –

MS. CORDOVA: I don’t know. Bubble? I –

MS. WILSON: Yeah, like the bubble I was talking about. Well, it’s empty and she can’t seem to say what it is that she needs to say. So it’s called *Mujer Dividias*; and acrylic on wood, and that’s it.

This piece is called – I can’t remember the name of it. Anyway, it’s about war and women and girls and how, you know, most of the times I was reading about how so many women get raped, so many women get taken in war and also actually I was thinking about specifically – a war that is happening in Juarez against women and the maquiladoras, so that piece – I had this piece at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center and that was an invitation piece. I have actually a little book that I’m going to give to you. So the tone of it represents the suffering and –

MS. CORDOVA: It’s very much in the tradition of a portrait of Christ.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that’s – I mean, I wasn’t thinking like that, but I’m so Catholic that – you know, I grew up with all of the –

MS. CORDOVA: You are. Okay. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah, actually I think there was this woman – Kathy Vargas. You know her work? She did a – she curated a show that I was in and she said the people that I painted looked like saints and I thought surely it’s all that Catholic influence – you know, where I saw it so much growing up and I still love looking at it. I mean, I love looking at it today. So – and that’s the painting of that piece. See, I always do a drawing and then I do a – and they’re very different because the technique is so different. It’s very different. I mean –

MS. CORDOVA: You will always have a drawing for something like this?

MS. WILSON: Always. Always. And a good drawing, too. Like, if I cannot do a good drawing, then it won’t be a painting. So I do a sketch and if the sketch becomes a good drawing, then it will be a good painting.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, her face kind of changed from the sketch.

MS. WILSON: Yeah – [off mike].

MS. CORDOVA: She looks a little older maybe.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, she looks older. Okay, I remembered the name. It’s called *The Calvario*, and, you know, the

Calvario means the Calvary that Jesus went through, so that's the idea.

This piece is like from the year 2000. I did this in San Francisco and the bottom part is just *Lottery Dreams*. And this piece is about the lottery and when I used to live in Chile all my uncles and aunts – everybody in my family – always bought the lottery and I hated it because for one thing the lottery always was – you bought it in the week and then on Sundays the lottery winner will be shown and they never won the lottery – never. And it was like they all had their hopes and they would always – okay, this weekend. This Sunday. And I just thought it was so depressing that every – it was like that and then no, it didn't happen. It's like we waited for the lottery forever, so the – this piece actually was in the Mission Cultural Center [Mission Cultural Center for Latino Arts, San Francisco, California]. Yeah. And then the boy, what he's doing – he is – his hands is kind of *como, en Español están manjado*. You know, *está manjado*, so like he's just like twisted like a pretzel trying to get this money that will never come to him, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And this is – I mean, speaking of Catholic imagery – this is very much like a retablo.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, so –

MS. CORDOVA: But I haven't seen you using that before I don't think.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I –

[Cross talk.]

MS. CORDOVA: – because of the text at the bottom.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I think I saw it somewhere and I thought, oh, that would look good and so I did it. I mean, I've been kind of wanting to do it again. I think I need to get a better – you know, like a better – I don't know what that's called. [Off mike.] But anyway, I haven't – yeah, that's actually the only time I've used it. And I put the name of the piece on there and then the dollar bills, of course, I had a lot of fun doing that so I made them look exactly like – [off mike] – real pretty, you know.

This piece is called *The Periodos* and it's a piece about how sometimes we were big human beings or we're good human beings, but for whatever reasons that we have been conditioned or the environment has made us believe that we're not as good as that, so we feel as if we were way, way smaller than what we really are. And so this is the idea here where there's a face in front of a face that is behind and the face – the small face is what we believe, but the big face really who is us is behind. And the peace is just because you're not complete when you feel that way. You feel that you're not complete. There's so much that you want to be. You want to be different. You want to be the big person or the good person that you are, but you can't.

MS. CORDOVA: So you're kind of making the inside visible on the outside?

MS. WILSON: Oh, yeah, right. That's right, yeah. I mean, actually, that's what we even show to the outside. Even though it appears that it is the big one, it's really the way we present yourself or feel about yourself and it shows, you know. And it shows through our actions, too, you know. And we think we're so small. And that could be for many reasons, you know: class, race – you know, trauma, whatever.

This is an acrylic on wood and it's called *The Three Sisters* and I have three – it's – I have two sisters, so we are the three sisters, so it's a picture of me and my two sisters and we – it's a picture of us older looking back at what happened in Chile and the fire that we – the three of us saw and we're remembering everything that happened and then my sister that was – that is in the middle is the one that was tortured, so we're protecting her and we're looking back into what happened there. As women – as young teenagers or younger women.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, and so where do you fall in the line of children?

MS. WILSON: I'm the second.

MS. CORDOVA: You're the second.

MS. WILSON: And I mean, in the whole children I'm number three, but in the three girls I'm number two. I have an older sister and a younger sister and then we're five kids and then there's my sister and my brother, me, and then my sister and my brother, so I'm totally in the middle. That's why I'm such a good artist, because I had to get attention somehow, somewhere. I'm not kidding. It's true. I was – see, I started drawing since I was real young and I used to go to a – can I tell this story?

MS. CORDOVA: Please, go ahead.

MS. WILSON: I was in a French nun school and so I started drawing and I started noticing that I got a – people

really liked my drawings. I mean, I was doing it anyway, okay. I mean, this is what I did all the time at my house at home. I was hitting it back of the bed and I would be drawing for an hour – but then I went to school and I started showing them and people were like, wow. They were really impressed, and I really liked it. I'm like, wow, I'm different.

And one day they – it was – [inaudible] – what is it called?

MS. CORDOVA: Easter week.

MS. WILSON: Easter, right. And so they came to the class and they said – one of the nuns says we're coming to look, we're coming to take – or we're coming for Liliana because we want her to do a mural on the blackboard – on the outside. And I swear to you, I felt like God had put like a light on me because imagine – I had the right to leave the class and they came to pick me up and so I walked back and I was smiling and I felt like I had a light. You know, I was going to draw Jesus anyway, so I felt like I was in this light of God and I was walking outside and I was kind of really short compared with the rest, so I was totally important at that point, so I was like – you know, my ego went – but I mean, I didn't have a big ego or anything. I really needed it, so it was very good for me.

So I went and then I drew for hours and I had a great time and everybody had to be in class, which I mean it's so sad that maybe that's all that I should have been doing because that's really what I wanted to do, but now I had to be studying things that I didn't – I mean, I did it well, but, you know, anyway. But so that's how my – that – I remember that moment so clearly when I was like struck by God, you know, to be the one that was taken out of the class. I was so special. I said, I like being an artist.

See, I have the arch again. This piece is called *Bearing Witness* which – this is a title that Gloria gave to this piece and actually she is – you know, she just died and she is having a book that is going to be coming out soon that is called *Bearing Witness* because I told her that the name I had was *El Ojo Perdido*. It was *The Lost Eye* because there's a way where in this – I explained to her the meaning of this is that there is a way where she is looking at something that is happening and she is being a witness of it. I mean, I didn't say that, she did. But she's just looking at something and then there's a way where there is her seeing it will become something separate because she will tell somebody, so unless this gets expressed it will be a lost eye, but the explanation she gave me was better that – and I said yes, that it was a bearing witness. She's bearing witness and then her eye that saw is the art or the writing. You know what I mean? And that's how it gets expressed. It's the eye that – she seen it for herself. That other eye that is showing through this or any of these paintings or her writing is the eye that is letting everybody else see it. Am I making it clear, or –

MS. CORDOVA: I think so, though maybe we could go back over it again, because what I see here is there is like a floating eye, right?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that is the eye that everybody will be able to see through. You know, what an artist does to me is they take life experiences and turn it into something else and they kind of like encapsulate, you know, something. And so people can see that through that eye. You see?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Because the eyes of this woman or her eyes that are witnessing something, so I guess that's the eye of the artist behind. They eyes that looks and makes something out of it. Not just look – you know, like you can just see somebody getting murdered and you go, oh, somebody just got murdered by the police or somebody or – but an artist will go and will show it in a poetic way or in a beautiful way where other people go, you know, people are getting killed. Or something like that. I mean, that's kind of simplistic, but that's what I'm – and so it's kind of like the eye of the artist, so we're witnesses.

And actually that's the article she wrote for me and it's in here. It's called *Bearing Witness*.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that also on your website, I think?

MS. WILSON: Yes, that's the same one.

MS. CORDOVA: I think – yeah, okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And what I think may be kind of funny and indicative of you two is like *The Lost Eye* really becomes much darker than *Bearing Witness* which sounds much more positive. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. She was very positive. We were like completely like that. Like she would always say one thing and I'm like, no. It's all the opposite like that and it was always like kind of more negative on my part. I mean, I was a little more bitter. And she was very hopeful, you know. She's amazing. She was almost like a child

in her way, so hopeful that she was.

And then not only that, she says – she called it *Bearing Witness: Their Eyes Anticipate the Healing*. You know? And I was like, what healing?

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: And so but she did, and she was right. And actually after she died I was like why didn't I say "yes" all the time, but oh well. You know, she knew. She knew.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: And she was older and so in a way it was like her role to kind of show me the way, and so now that's what I'm doing.

I think that this is called *The Masked Man*, and it's kind of an obvious piece. It's about – and I have a drawing on – [inaudible] – colored pencil here and then the next one is the – it's too bad here. You cannot see. I have a lot of stars in here because I started – see, that's the other thing that she kind of helped me look at was at the universe. And then I have another friend that helped me do that too, but it's just like I started turning into looking at nature and as you see here a lot of stars and so there's a way where the beauty of earth I want to show now and that's the part of my work that I'm in right now. Anyway, in this case it was – it was a lot of fun, you know, to – *El Diablito*, but he's not a bad person. He's just like sometimes we do the wrong thing and maybe that's what he's showing there, but this is not an evil person or anything. It's more like a fun piece.

MS. CORDOVA: But it is *El Diablito*.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, but it is definitely *El Diablito* and then what's so interesting is like his face – the mask looks like his real face. You know, it doesn't look like a mask. It's – so I thought that was kind of interesting that it came out like that. And then I worked a lot on his hair. I wish you could see it because it's really a beautiful piece. I really didn't want to sell this piece, but I did, so now I don't have it.

MS. CORDOVA: Is it hard to let go of them?

MS. WILSON: No, not at all. I mean, later it is, but at the time it's like, yeah, I need the money so –

So this piece is called *Mekaya* and it's this story about a boy that had a very tragic life and it's an acrylic on canvas – on wood I mean, and it's a very monochromatic. I only used like black, white, and terra cotta and then I mix everything else. And it's about how this boy – it's a boy that I really did love and he's dead now – he could never find escape out of this mental cell he had, so he – this cell always hanged over his head – always and he could never let go of it. So it was an homage to him.

MS. CORDOVA: When did he die?

MS. WILSON: He died like about two years ago.

MS. CORDOVA: And when did you do this painting?

MS. WILSON: About a year later after he died.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, so it was sort of a memorial to him.

MS. WILSON: A memorial to him, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And why wasn't he ever able to – what was –

MS. WILSON: The conditions of his life were very – he had like really bad circumstances and so it was too overwhelming. He was too young to be able to stand it, so it just broke him. He never recuperated, and I used to love him because I knew him when he was young. It's a very, very tragic story.

MS. CORDOVA: How did he die?

MS. WILSON: He died in – he died in jail. He died of – he was like 25 or 26. I think they said he died of a heart attack, but it's not clear.

This piece is called – this actually is a piece that – I don't really have an explanation for this piece. I was drawing this man and then I put a leaf over his face and then I did two more leaves and that's it. And then I call it *The Invisible Lover* because I was trying to make something out of it and I'm like tired of saying that because I didn't

really mean it. It's just like I – I think it's really interesting how there's something about these leaves that are like, you know, not letting him see something, so I think that's much better than *The Invisible Lover*. I don't like that title. I think I may – you know, sometimes I change titles, which drives some people crazy because I'm like, no, it isn't called that anymore. But if something is about – like something is not letting him see. That's what it's really about. You know, he cannot – he's – you know, and then he sees sometimes because he lives in the past so he sees sometimes and sometimes he – [inaudible] – so –

MS. CORDOVA: All right. Well, we'll see what it ends up being called. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: This piece is a dedication to my father. That boy, for some reason, when I drew him he looked like my father. I saw this picture of my father when he was eight and he looks a lot like him. My father also had a very tragic life and his mother died when he was very young and – you know, anyway, and the shell floating is like one of his dreams, so it's called *Boy and Shell*, or it's called *La Concha*. That's what it was called: *La Concha*.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Now this is when I started taking a turn in my life and I started – this piece is called *The Goddess of Love* and it's about this goddess that is flowing love into the Earth. And so it has the four elements, you know, so I started looking at flowers at some point in my life which I hadn't done too much. And nature, you know, like the volcano and the water and, you know, all of that is here, so it's not all suffering, you know, so that's kind of what I've been moving towards.

MS. CORDOVA: Actually, can we go back for a second?

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So – I mean, it does seem more uplifting, actually, than some – or more hopeful than a lot of your earlier work and – but of course the volcano in the background.

MS. WILSON: It's got to be something.

MS. CORDOVA: It's got to be something I guess.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, you know, certain themes that – themes like the water, the body is far more submerged than I've seen in some of your other work.

MS. WILSON: Right.

MS. CORDOVA: And the – I guess I'm just trying to sort of read some of the images. The flower is much more different. It's much more tropical than – or maybe I haven't seen – no, we saw the roses in your earlier work.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I used to never do flowers. I used to never look at flowers. I thought like flowers were like some generic thing that – I never paid attention to them and then somebody when they – you know, started showing me flowers and then I started seeing them and now I'm like doing lots of flowers. They're so beautiful, you know, and they're so – I mean, they're like there and you can paint them and it's just incredible. So that's why I'm really excited about flowers right now and, I mean, they're amazing, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: But you didn't like them for a while.

MS. WILSON: It's not like I didn't like them. I just didn't see them. You know, I didn't pay attention. I just was somewhere else. I mean, look at it in that piece – how important they are as an element, you know. So this is more advanced than that one. Of course, I just started doing flowers there and that was stiff, but now I've learned to do them and – you know, it's like everything. And then the bird symbolizes freedom moving and the beauty of the color, so – yeah, and it –

MS. CORDOVA: But of course this is very different from the other birds that we've seen, too. Right?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. This is like a real bird sort of. The other thing is that this piece is an illustration board, so I did – the technique is very different. It's like an illustration board that I did a wash of different colors, so I didn't – I let some of them show through and then I went over with acrylic – but overall it has that.

MS. CORDOVA: Right, well, I'll hope the goddess of love come out of the volcano. [Laughter.]

MS. WILSON: So this piece is called – I think it's called – it's like it's – I know where they are. It's called *El Camino*. So this woman is in the water and it's like she's walking the path of her life, but she was just in the arm,

the shoulder, so you can see how the bullet came. But she keeps walking - [END TAPE 1, SIDE B] - I - because there's nothing else that she can do. She's still walking, you know, and with the pain it's all the beauty around there.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, is it shot with a bullet, or, I mean - [off mike]?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, with a bullet. Yeah. I mean, it's not like somebody really shot her, but it's just one of those painful things that you experience and it sort of feels like a hole.

MS. CORDOVA: It also is the term trajectory of coming down.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah. I -

MS. CORDOVA: Rather than -

MS. WILSON: Yeah, well, I meant it to be kind of like a little bit and not like a hole what it was coming out of, but it was meant more to be like that. I mean, it's just like a source of pain more than anything, so maybe that's why that came out like that. You know, words are so hard to describe these things. There's so much more than - you know, like the old saying.

And that is this piece called *Las Amantes* and it is about these two that are in love and they're in a little paradise, but as you can see, they really totally look like they're terrified, and so in a way it's kind of they're turning around looking at the world - at the heterosexual world that is looking at them, you know, in their little heaven and they know that they're not thought - nobody else thinks that it's heaven except them. And everybody else is left out, but it is a scary thing. It's sort of like they were caught in there.

MS. CORDOVA: And it looks like - you know, again, I don't know if I'm relying on my Catholic imagery too, but it very much has the Adam and Eve quality to it.

MS. WILSON: That's true. You know, it's so funny that Gloria talked about that in this. Yeah. And also there's a sacred heart in the chest of one and a cross in the other, so I just love those images. I just have to put in there sometimes.

MS. CORDOVA: And the flowers.

MS. WILSON: And the flowers, yeah. I cannot see - I was kind of just starting to do flowers, so I kind of made up those flowers to the right. You know, I think I bought some flowers that were like those craft pieces, and it kind of didn't look like that so I made it bigger and it looks like a real tropical, tropical flower and I really liked what it looked like, but now I kind of try to copy the real thing. I buy like little flowers to look at and it just makes a big difference, you know. I can't stand looking at artificial flowers now, so -

This piece is called *Rocio* and it means "dew." And it's a girl that has fallen in love and she's offering a flower and the flower I believe is a gardenia or - what is this called? I can't remember the name if it. Those flowers are -

MS. CORDOVA: Gardenia?

MS. WILSON: Gardenia? No, I don't think it's a - it's a magnolia. That's what it is. It's a magnolia.

This piece is called *The War* and it's a piece - I was actually watching television and I was watching this news from Israel and there was this boy that all these people had been blown up and they just focused on him and it didn't look like this, but that was the idea. That's what I felt. You know, that he was holding whatever like he was wearing a jacket or whatever and then he had been hit by some kind of a something and there he was.

MS. CORDOVA: So are we talking the most recent - the current war that's happening?

MS. WILSON: In Israel and Palestine, yeah. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. All right.

MS. WILSON: And I'm not taking sides either. I mean, I think that is a horrible situation. I'm just saying that this is what I saw, you know. I was - yeah, war is war.

MS. CORDOVA: His shirt - I mean, is that intentional? The texture on the shirt looks really interesting.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I just kind of played with that. I love this piece. I love the way that he's holding his - that you cannot see his face, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So he could be anyone.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that's what it - yeah. It's just - yeah. And it's just that horrible moment of like - you know, where you just - you know.

I guess that was it. Oh, no, there's one more.

MS. CORDOVA: There's three more it looks like.

MS. WILSON: Three more?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Okay. This piece is called *El Invadido*, or *The Invaded One* and it's a piece about how sometimes human beings are - might not be good to one another and sometimes we don't know that, you know, and so sometimes we let other people invade us, especially if you're young and that could be having very bad consequences, you know, like it could destroy your life and so on the right hand here you see there's a skull - [inaudible] - skull on his arm and that means that he's probably going to - he may die as a consequence of this invasion. And it could be any invasion.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, what a remarkable idea to put the little ladders next to his body.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and that's what is invading him.

MS. CORDOVA: So it's not necessarily a human that's invading him.

MS. WILSON: Well, I think it's human. I meant it as human. It's just that - [inaudible] - has to be the size of a human, but it's what it meant. The invasion was meant by that, but it's most likely would be - I mean, most of the times we don't get invaded by anything else than humans, you know, unless it's a disease and then we don't think of it as invasion. You just get sick. But most of the time - has to do with invasion of countries or other countries, like I've heard about that. [Laughs.]

MS. CORDOVA: I'm sure you have. [Laughs.] But you've learned to keep these thoughts to yourself, haven't you? [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Exactly, I'm talking about in the Smithsonian files now. Like nobody's going to hear this, so this is called *The Drowning Man*, and I really love this drawing, you know. And this is another case of somebody that can't seem to get away from drowning and whatever it is - the reason that he's drowning. But he's really beautiful and I think maybe that would help him not to drown so much. Maybe he would come out of it. But this is the moment where you're completely drowning. That's - see, that's kind of one thing I do. I love to do the moment of something. The moment of this happening - that little special moment or horrible moment or wonderful moment.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and I'm suddenly realizing how much action is implicit in these still life.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, because they appear to be real steady, but they're not.

And this piece is called *The Tear* and actually I heard a song by this guy Pedro Guerra and - I love his music and he says that rain never goes up and then I thought, you know, tears never go up either. They go down, so it's a piece about a moment where you feel that there's no hope and - but the hope is being given here by nature - by the moon. You know, it's just a moment, you know, and then she would cry those tears but then she would get up and look at the moon and be close to the planets.

Because if I didn't put that - I mean, I was going to leave it out. If I didn't put that, that would have meant that there was no hope and that's why I put the moon in. That's why I'm putting the moon in a lot of my pieces now, because I think that there's a way where you turn and you look at the universe. It sounds kind of new age-y - but it's true that, you know, you just - I mean, like if I do a painting that has a lot of stars it's just so hopeful. It's like you cannot really get depressed looking at stars, even if you try. Don't you think? That's what I think. And there's so much sadness today, you know, so I feel that I have to give some hope.

This could be the last piece.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, well, so we can probably wrap it up here for now. Should we do that and then just plan on having another session?

MS. WILSON: Sure, or I thought maybe I could talk a little bit about these pieces if - you know, because they're -

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, that would be great actually. Should we do that?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I think so.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Let's do it.

MS. WILSON: Do you want to pause it so we can -

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, or - yeah, let's pause it for a second.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. [Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. We're recording again. Do you want to go ahead and pick a painting to tell me about?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. We're looking at this piece here called *Sleeping Beauty* and there's a nude woman sleeping on a couch - on a red couch and then you can see a window with many flowers, calla lilies, tiger lilies, and leave and the moon and the stars and so this is a new shift that my work has taken on lately where I've gone - I've decided to start looking at the universe and as a part of the human experience, so the woman is nude because it's like a flower. She's showing herself as a body as like a flower is or as like an animal or like the moon. It's like a nature thing and that's why I put her without clothes.

Now, of course I put her in a inside environment because I actually saw that couch and I really liked it and I thought it would be really beautiful and I really enjoyed doing the velvet and all of that, you know. But basically the idea is I wanted to do a painting of pure beauty where there was like no suffering, but also was not light, you know. This is a serious, serious painting, but it is very, very beautiful and peaceful and that was my intention. And then I did the stars and I enjoyed doing the moon and it gives it this other touch.

Okay, so -

MS. CORDOVA: It is very luxurious, but you've also kept your sort of theatrical curtains.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. You know, I had this friend of mine that she has - her mother had these curtains and then I took pictures of them because I said I really have to do this. I mean, I - it was her couch and her curtains, so I felt this would be perfect for this, you know. I have - really I haven't really thought intentionally about the theatrical thing, but I think that it's true. That's kind of - I mean, the composition - I love the composition in this piece. It's just so - you know, like sometimes your composition comes up so great and it's not because you really meant it, it's just the way - I mean, I try to have good compositions, but for some reason this one is almost perfect. I'm not bragging, I'm just very happy with the composition of this piece.

MS. CORDOVA: You know, it just suddenly also - I know you don't want to be influenced by anybody, but I am suddenly struck by a resonance with Henri Rousseau.

MS. WILSON: Oh, yes. Yeah. Other people have told me about that, and the one with a lion, and I love that piece, so I'm definitely - it's in the back of my subconscious somewhere because I absolutely love that piece. The woman is wearing all this - this like a dress with a lot of colors and that lion, it is really beautiful, so yeah, definitely I must have that influence in me because I look a lot at that painting.

I think I saw it for real either in France or in New York. I don't remember where, but I know I've seen it. It's a huge piece, you know, so - okay, so then I'm going to talk about this piece that has a young woman with a crown floating above her head and it's called *Mi Reina* or *My Queen* and it's a young woman that has this crown floating on top of her which is going to make her the queen that she is. And I really enjoyed doing this because this is the first time I ever did jewels and rubies and pearls and I really love doing that and then I found this kind of ornament in a sheet of music and I incorporated it into the painting, which makes it kind of more royal, and then of course I incorporated the flowers and all the elements that I did in these paintings are very - are things that I absolutely love to do and for instance the water - the water drops on the leaves are very - I just love them.

And also, you know, I get a lot of attention for that, so it's both. Like, it's a little bit of a show-off piece. You know, hey, I can do rubies and I - but it's because I never done it before. You know? It's like I started looking at flowers and then I started looking at rubies. All these things that are around and I never saw them. And then when you paint them, they're like so easy to do. Like those rubies are - and I'm not kidding you, you just make it darker in the top, lighter on the bottom, and two dots of white and that's it. And I'm like, I can't believe I can make a ruby look like a ruby. I've never done it, so I was like so happy.

And then I put the sacred heart. And the sacred heart in the chest means, you know, everything is beautiful around her, but that little bit of sadness that we all have to go through and endure to be able to be here because we just have to, and that's the part of the pain that - you know, everything else is beauty, but we have to remember that we have to be strong and brave and do what we have to do and sometimes it's hard to do.

Sometimes we don't want to and we want everything to be easy, and we just have to remember that it has to be both.

MS. CORDOVA: And the floating crown gives her a certain element of sacredness I guess, or -

MS. WILSON: Oh, yeah, like a virgin of some sort. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I didn't think of that and, yeah, that would be great. I will accept that. Yeah, I mean, I didn't think about it, but you know, so many times I really don't know what this is about, so I figure it out once it's done, you know. But it also had to do with the fact that it's going to come down on her when she's ready - completely ready and she will have her crown, or that she had this incredible - [inaudible] - that's just floating on top of her head.

So after I discovered that ornament - and the sight of it, it's like I can't get away from it. I love it. Everyone calls it my baroque period - like everything is baroque. And I have this friend that has influenced me on this because her house is full of baroque things and I loved it. It's like all this gold and - you know, which I never really looked at before, so I started incorporating that.

And so the next piece was this piece over here that is called - I think it's going to be called *Girl in Calla Lily* unless somebody helps me with the name before the exhibit, but it's the same thing. You know, I did - you know what this piece is about? Actually, it's - I just remembered I had a real name. This is actually who is going to receive you at the enter of paradise. This is called *Entrada del Cielo*, so this is what it is and so the golden ornaments too are like - you know, when you go in there, that's heaven.

The spiral on her is the symbolism of development or growing or something like that. It's a very important symbolism. I just happen to really like it, but somebody was explaining it to me, so that's why she has that. It's her transformation.

MS. CORDOVA: And so - what is paradise to you?

MS. WILSON: Just a beautiful place that you go after we die and there's a way where - this place is so beautiful, you know, that she's guarding paradise with that calla lily - like her weapon will be a calla lily and I love that.

I mean, it could have lots of meanings, you know, because she's like a little bit hiding behind it and she's not sure she wants to let you in, so there's lots of meanings that I really don't know, but I thought this would be a good - I mean, I would like it if this heaven was being guarded by her. It sounds right to me, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: The calla lily has a lot of symbolism attached to it, doesn't it? Or -

MS. WILSON: I haven't really looked into that.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: I mean, I guess I should, but normally, you know, like I said, I just - you know what happened to me? I started drawing calla lilies or painting them and they look to me like birds somehow. So in a way I just want to have them everywhere and then I did my little show with the water again - you know, the drops. And so I'm very happy, too, with that piece.

MS. CORDOVA: And they're not quite the same woman, but these two paintings that we just discussed, they could be sisters.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, they would be like the younger sister and the older sister. They just came within the same time and so I think that's why. And there's a way where I draw - like the people of my paintings, they're all like the same - like it's like a race of people and in a way what I've done is I've put the most beautiful features of everyone and put it together. And a lot of them actually they look like Chilean people, you know - a little more indigenous and - you know. That's - I love that look, so that's kind of what I'm trying to get.

And then over here we have the painting called *The Fool*. In this painting there is a boy wearing a dance hat and he's wrapped in ropes that don't let him move and even though all around him there's a universe with all the stars and the moon and this beautiful ornament is framing the piece. And he has like one of the most beautiful faces I've made and he's also crying. And I'm really happy with that, too, because the tears - I've gotten so good at doing tears - if you can look at it, I mean, I really worked really hard, but see I did one piece before that I don't have here called *La Prisionera* and that's when I did tears for the first time and it was really hard. And I figured out how to do them now, so this took me like five minutes to do it because you don't really use color. You use the color that is underneath, you know, and then you just do like a little touch of white and you let it be

because they're really transparent.

But you know, my eyes have changed, but they're much more full of life and so the story with this boy is that he cannot let go of all the things that have hurt him and he's trapped by them, but he cannot be able – he cannot see the moon, he cannot see the universe, he's stuck, but because he's crying, that's the opening for him to be able to see that he can really let go of those ropes and he can be free to be in this beautiful universe.

And –

MS. CORDOVA: In just hearing how you talk about drawing tears – what was the other thing? The –

MS. WILSON: The water on the –

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, the rubies.

MS. WILSON: Oh, the – yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: But I would imagine you would be a very good teacher. Do you – have you ever taught much?

MS. WILSON: Not that much, no. Not that much. I just – I don't think that – actually, when I was in San Francisco I was part of a – I got a grant because I was working at a home and I just needed to have some community around and I went to a school to – I wanted to be around kids, but it was not a very good experience because there's so much fighting going on in the school. The people were all fighting and I was like what is wrong with these people? They were all like fighting for things. They all were scared. Like the woman that was teaching the other art class thought I was going to try to take her job and, you know, I have a regular job that I do. I work for a foundation. I do graphics, so I kind of – I'm covered a little bit that way.

And then I sold the paintings, so I really didn't need the money. I mean, I could use it, but it wasn't about it that I wanted to be around the kids, but it was impossible for me to be there. And I loved the kids and we had a good time and then, you know, I'd get criticized because I didn't want to do like regular pieces of paper on the table. You know, like we build – we got a bunch of cardboards and we built that school inside of the classroom, so we moved all the chairs and they thought I was making a big mess and then I got a bunch of Styrofoam and they – I made them do sculptures. And then another mess and everybody's complaining about the messes, so I just didn't feel like I could do it. I mean, like I'm just – you know, and then this woman sent me a memo. Like I've never worked places where I get memos. I'm like what is this? You know, I'm an artist. I don't get memos.

And it was – you know what I mean? And I was just – it's – she was trying to like frame me and I'm like I don't – I can't work like this, so I said I'm leaving and – I mean, I gave up the grant. I was like there for two months and I just couldn't do it. It was so negative. I don't know. I mean, I guess these people have a really hard life, but even the janitor I would talk to him and he would tell me the horrible stories that would be happening to him and I'm like – you know what I mean? Like people were mean to him and they would make a mess and they would blame him. Like people would go and they'd take pictures of the stuff he had done like he didn't do it right, you know. And the poor guy – how much money could he be making, you know?

So anyway, it was – I just didn't really enjoy it at all. And also I worked for like – by myself for like 25 years. All of a sudden I have to deal with these other people. It's too hard, you know, and their little games or whatever. I just wasn't going to do it so I left.

So then this takes me to the last painting and this painting is called *El Cisnel* or *The Swan* and this has been a very difficult piece because normally in all the pieces I have something that is – you know, something about the suffering of the world that is showing and in this one there isn't. It's all about beauty and her and enjoying, you know, the beauty of Earth and she's looking at us like what are you looking at? But, you know, it was all about beauty and this is probably the last painting that I'm going to do like that because it's – you know, it's just very difficult.

MS. CORDOVA: It's too difficult to do beauty. [Laughs.]

MS. WILSON: Yeah, well, not beauty, but just peacefulness and no suffering. You know, it's like only beauty and peacefulness. It's very difficult. I don't really relate to it that well, you know. I almost find it a little trite or trivial and I don't want to do trivial paintings, but – I mean, I don't think it is, but it could be, you know, and I don't want to have that doubt that what if I'm doing trivial paintings, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I don't know. I mean, for me in looking at it, it has that sort of Scheherazade, *1,001 Arabian Nights* kind of look to it.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's – yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It's sort of romantic. Kind of I don't know.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that is true. It's romantic. That is true. I'm not done with it by the way, you know. I'm missing some stuff in there, but yeah, so maybe I should look at it that way and that would be better, you know. Like I can really understand that much better than that. Like the dance painting is so much more me than that painting, you know. I think that's part of the deal. And I'm trying to move towards that, but it is difficult. It's ahead of me - way ahead of me, so - but you know, I guess this is - after I've done this slide presentation for you today, I can - you know, I started with dead men in the beach and I went all the way to romantic beautiful and peacefulness, so I think that maybe there's a truth that there's this transformation in human beings, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: I think clearly. [Laughs.] If that's proof, right?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I mean, I never even saw it because I haven't talked about this piece to nobody. They're all - nobody's ever seen these pieces except that one in the website, but I haven't exhibited them or anything. You know, they're all pieces that are ready for a show, so it is my new kind of period of you can call it that.

MS. CORDOVA: It does seem like a definite transition for you.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It's very interesting to see where you're going, where you're going, where this will take you.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I mean, I'm trying to get to heaven. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. And on that note, I think we'll - shall we stop the tape there?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, this is great.

MS. CORDOVA: Perfect. You're trying to get to heaven. [Laughs.] Let me stop it there. [Audio break.]

All right. We are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Arts, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Liliana Wilson on July 26th, 2004. This is our first sit-down session following a slide presentation. And this session two, disc one, and with that, Liliana, I'm going to start with some of the basics like when and where were you born?

MS. WILSON: I was born in Valparaiso, Chile, in 1953.

MS. CORDOVA: And were your parents from there as well?

MS. WILSON: Yes, they were from there. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Did your family have a long history there?

MS. WILSON: Yes. I mean, yeah. They're from there and my grandfather was from there and they - yeah. Yeah. I mean, actually it's interesting - the question - because I never - now that I've lived here, I can think that where people would come from, but, you know, when you lived this like you thought that was really common that everybody was from there and you never think back of, you know, who - where they came from or anything, so I don't really know any of that and their history. Like, you know, we're all Chilean from, you know, generations, so I mean, my last name is Wilson, so I'm sure that I must have some kind of English blood or something like that because how could it be Wilson?

But, you know, a lot of English people went down there in the 1800s and earlier and later and so there's a lot of Germans, English, Italian people, so it's very mixed population.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I'm glad you brought up your name because I know you sort of bounced from using Liliana Wilson Grez to Liliana Wilson.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And so maybe you could tell me how that's happened. Grez is your mother's maiden name?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, Grez is my mother's name and then the way you do it in Chile is that's how you go. You - when you write your name, it's like your mother - your father and then your mother, and so I was doing all these exhibits and my mother said, "Why do you leave my name out?" So I said, "Okay. I'll put it back in." So I started calling myself that and people were so complicated with this last name it was like they couldn't get it. They didn't write it right and they would like - you know, like if I sold a painting they would write it to Grez. I couldn't cash it. So I thought, you know what, it's too complicated, so I just left it out. You know, I was just Liliana Wilson.

Yeah, that's it, you know, because it's just too much.

But Wilson, you know, like I said again is probably – it's not for sure either who had any English blood there because like my grandfather didn't speak English at all. I mean, we have no trace or roots to anybody that had any kind of a tradition or anything – heritage from England, you know, which would have been the case, but – and then Grez is a Spanish name from Spain I think, so – I know that from my mother's side they were kind of from Spain, so – but –

MS. CORDOVA: But who knows how long ago?

MS. WILSON: Who knows? Yeah, who knows how long ago and you know, how mixed we were and all of that?

MS. CORDOVA: And what kind of work did your parents do?

MS. WILSON: My father was a merchant marine, so he was an accountant in the ship. He was in charge of supplies and menus – all of that and then accounting. And my mother was a housewife.

MS. CORDOVA: And you were the third child?

MS. WILSON: The third child, right.

MS. CORDOVA: So you had an older brother, an older sister –

MS. WILSON: Yeah, an older sister and an older brother, and then a younger sister and a younger brother.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: So we were five: three girls and two boys.

MS. CORDOVA: And so would you call yourselves a close family?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, we're a very close family – very close family actually between the kids. You know, the five brothers and sisters were very close, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: How close in age were –

MS. WILSON: Very close in age. I mean, everybody's – like I have I think about 10 months and my sister is a year younger than me or 10 months younger and then my older sister is like three years older than me and my brother two years older and my younger brother's like three years, so it's very close. We're all very much the same age, very little difference.

MS. CORDOVA: And were you – let's see, were you raised practicing a religion?

MS. WILSON: Oh, definitely. We were Catholic – very, very Catholic. I mean, everybody in Chile's Catholic, so – yeah, I mean, I went to a nun French school and so we went to mass almost every day and actually I believe that the Catholic Church has really impacted my art because I look at so much of their images in the church. That's what I would do when I would go to a church. I would like love Jesus and all those images and I think that there's a way where all the people I do – they all look like saints or they all have this religions vein and I'm like love the sacred heart. Actually, the school I went to was called Los Sagrados Corazones. That means the sacred heart. And the emblem was two sacred hearts that were locked in each other, so, you know, I was very, very, very – I mean, the images were great, so but at the same time I think that's kind of influenced my images, you know. Like the Christ on the cross, you know. I think a lot of my pieces are versions of that – of the suffering of the human being, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you still go to church?

MS. WILSON: I go sometimes; not very often though. Actually I consider myself a Buddhist now. I have my own –

MS. CORDOVA: That's great.

MS. WILSON: – religious – yeah, I just kind of – but I do, you know. It's helpful to go. I just think that it's important to have a spiritual outlook on life because I just don't see that we can be here without doing that, you know?

It's just life doesn't make any sense without that, to me you know, because I feel that – but I think the religious – religion does or at least the Buddhists, you know, it's like it makes you realize that you're going to be here for a little while and then you're going to die and if you don't have that, you'll just think you're always going to be here – that, you know, material things are going to make you happy and they never do – never ever.

And so I try to think of myself as a soul. I mean, I forget all the time, but I want to think of myself as a spirit walking the Earth and that way I can remember that I'm going to die, you know. That's why I love Buddhism, because it always reminds you that life isn't permanent; that you're going to die. And I always forget it and so I keep trying to remember it so I won't have a stupid life, you know, like where I get caught up in things that I don't need to – you know, where I can make – have a life that makes sense and –

MS. CORDOVA: Though looking at your art it seems like you at least for as long as we've looked at your art there's always been a sort of very serious element to it. Would you call yourself a serious person, or how would you describe yourself?

MS. WILSON: That's to put it lightly. [Laughter.]

MS. CORDOVA: That's lightly.

MS. WILSON: I think that, yeah. You know, I think that my father was an alcoholic and I think that really has marked me deeply, you know, to the point of view of looking at life because here's a man that he would get very depressed, and so that's what I saw growing up and I think that – not that I became depressed, but it really marked me, so I have had to do a lot of work in terms of – you know, being or remembering that I don't live in that atmosphere anymore – in that environment.

So I think that's kind of made me serious or – you know, or sensitive. I think it's more like I'm really sensitive at the suffering of other people and normally – since I saw a lot of that growing up, what I do is I – or I used to more than now – I used to paint about it and, you know, I'm very sensitive about the suffering because I've suffered. I mean, I don't think I've suffered more than anybody else. I mean, I've been very blessed also at the same time, so I do want to say that I am very grateful. I have a lot of gratitude for the good life that I've had. I mean, so I don't want to forget that either, but I think that's – and also the fact that when I was in Chile that – you know, the fact of the military coup – that really marked me a lot, so I think that marked my artwork a lot.

I was telling somebody that when I was young I used to draw and I would draw since like I was eight years old. I started drawing when I was – actually, I had a motorcycle accident. I got run over by a scooter actually and I had to be in bed for two months.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were you?

MS. WILSON: I was eight. I just – what happened that I was coming back from school and I went across the street without paying attention, so I got hit by the motorcycle and it – and so I had to be – because it hurt one of my legs, so I had to be in bed for two months and that's when I started drawing because I had nothing else to do, so I started drawing and that was really great, you know, that it took me there.

So but then – what I would draw then, they were like really nice drawings, like I would draw little kids doing things. I mean, like lots of them. Like there would be like 20 or 30 kids in the drawing, you know, doing group things and I would draw animals, but always was people doing things.

And then when I started getting older, I started – like one time I remember I picked up this magazine – this cheap magazine about the Second World War and it was talking about the Jewish people and what happened to them and I was very upset by that, you know. I was like I can't believe they did this to these people. I was like 14 and I started drawing about it. I started coming up with drawings because I just couldn't believe that that had happened. I mean, I was very upset by that. So there's a way where I was sensitive already, without – you know.

My mother is not somebody that would take me to a museum or anything, you know. I never like went to a museum. Art was not part of our lives. I mean, we had some paintings at the house, but they were like landscapes and very irrelevant and very bad paintings really, you know – like of no relevance whatsoever. And I mean, they were not even good, so it was like – you know, they didn't think much of that even though my father was actually a very good artist. He could draw anything. I mean, he was like incredible how he could draw, you know. I mean, perfect drawings.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you remember seeing him draw?

MS. WILSON: Well, he never actually drew. Actually I had a – only one time that he drew for me. I was kind of mad at him because he – you know, this was like – I mean, I was eight and I was like drawing. I had like tons of copybooks that I would use just regular – you know, the copies with the lines and I would – every page would be a drawing and I would fill them up and then get another one and that's what they would give me to draw. Or I used a lot of ballpoint pens and sometimes they would give me colored pencils, but I would use them up, so ballpoint pens is like one of my favorite things to use because I'm so good at it because I used it so much.

And but my father came to me and he said, you take too long with your drawings. You need to do it fast. This is

how you do it. So he picked it up and he did like a sketch of all – it almost looked like a caricature and I was so mad inside of me because nobody ever messed with that in me, you know. It's like this was my job as a kid, like I would do this research. Like I would go looking for things, you know, just like I do today. It's amazing. And so he came and he goes, "No, this is not how you do it. This is how you do it. Just do it fast and you take too long." And I was like – I didn't say a word to him and I said I'm never going to ask him anything ever again because – you know.

And it was funny because actually he did not draw like that. He drew with a lot of patience and some of the drawings that I saw – like one time he went camping and he had this drawing of the tent, all the utensils, the pots, all perfectly drawn. So I think that – I think that that – I just never talked to him again about it and it's sad because, you know, he did have like a couple of drawing books around the house, but you know, it's not like anybody ever noticed that I was drawing. I mean, it's like they need to be blind, but you know, when people don't know, they don't know, and so nobody thought maybe I could take an art class, you know what I mean? I just did it on my own. It was like no support from – I mean, the support was that my mother's very nice and stuff, but in terms of saying maybe she could take a class, you know, or something – never.

And but you know, it's not like she could afford it either, you know. We were five kids. We were always struggling, so it wasn't like – and they wouldn't thought anything of it either. I mean, actually even today they're like, okay, you're an artist, but they would probably much rather that I stayed being a lawyer because, you know, it's more status and stuff like that, so I think that that has always been like that, you know. And I guess probably for artists it's like that. It's always like that. And the crazy thing that you want to do. You know what I mean? Because it's not that accepted really. I mean, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you finally get to take an art class?

MS. WILSON: I actually got to take an art class when I was here in the U.S. once I had moved here. And the school – the classes that they had were like terrible classes. I mean, they would give us tempura without teaching us how to draw. I mean, you know, drawing is the basis of all art, so you have to learn how to draw before you paint, you know. It's like it's ridiculous. And they would just say, okay, here's tempura and this cheap tempura that it was like horrendous. And of course it was a miracle if you came up with anything good.

And at the time, you know, I was in this kick against the Nazis because I was so upset about the Jewish – what they had done to the Jewish people that I remember I drew this swastika and it was dripping with blood, you know, and they were like really upset. They told me I was not allowed to do that kind of stuff. And I said, "But look what they did." And they go, "It doesn't matter. We can't have this kind of drawings." And I'm like I'm opposed to them. And they go, "It doesn't matter. We just – you cannot do that anymore. Do flowers. Do anything, but not that." So I just didn't, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And that was in school, right?

MS. WILSON: That was in school, yeah. I was in a class and so they told us do whatever you want and so I did this and so the nuns were like terrified and – you know, and I just – so my experience in art school was pretty – I mean, not in art school. I mean, it was in high school or even younger. I mean, we did –

MS. CORDOVA: It's like 12 or 13 when you did that?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, around that.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and they were very useless classes. They were not helpful and it was just discipline and just like they were not teaching us. I mean, anybody that was teaching me was not somebody that loved art or anything because I know everybody can do a drawing, you know, and especially me. So for me to be turned off with my own art classes, that was pretty bad.

So it's kind of like that in my life. You know, I've always done things my own way and with not very a lot of support, you know. It's like I decided to do this and I'm going to do it on my own and that's just the way it goes, you know. As a matter of fact, in Chile people say to me like if I was drawing or something they would go, "Who do you think you are? Do you think you're Picasso?" or something like that. And I think it has to do with woman-hating, you know, because it's a very male-oriented country, so – it was then. Maybe it's change, but – you know.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you become conscious of that quality about Chile?

MS. WILSON: I think when I started going to the university because before then I went to a – the French nun school and they were all girls. We were all – that was our world, you know, so there were like no males around and – which was great. But then when I started going to the university, I studied architecture for one year

because it was related to art, so I figured, well, if I can't get towards this – actually there were no art schools in my – like from the university in my hometown and I couldn't really go and study outside of the city because my mother didn't have money; my father had died.

And so I didn't have money to go, so I thought, well, I go to architecture. That's close, but – you know, we got to draw a lot, but it wasn't what I wanted. I mean, I passed. I did really well because I'm really a hard worker, but it wasn't because I loved it. I mean, I couldn't understand the – it's not in me the concept of space – you know, the concept of space was not something that I could – I mean, I would do these observations that we were – you know, the sketches – go to the city and observe how the people move in space, but I wanted to draw. I didn't want to care about what people were doing within the space and all of that, you know.

So it was something that I realized that I had made a mistake and then I thought, well, I have to find a career that I can do that will give me enough money to survive and then so I decided to go to law school and I quit. I went from architecture school to law school.

MS. CORDOVA: And is that the way the schooling was organized that you – for university you would already select your subject from the start, or –

MS. WILSON: Yeah, like in law school you don't do – we don't have a four-year program – a liberal arts education or something like that. It's just you go straight to whatever you're going to study. You go straight to it. Medical school, straight to medical school. Law school. Everything is like that. There's – you know, so I think you go to law school for like six years. I went for five because I just could take summers, so I came out early, but I – yeah, that's how it's done. It's like straight to it, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: How – as a kid, how were you doing in all those other subjects that you were taking in school?

MS. WILSON: Actually, I was not a – when I was in as a kid in the school I was an okay student. I didn't really study a lot, so I had good grades without having to study too much, and so I – really kind of liked to play more and stuff.

Now, when I went to the university, that's when I started – I really started studying a lot. I mean, that's all I did – just study all the time and I had great grades, so I loved that because I loved to be focused on something and do something really, really well especially if it's one or two things. My life is very happy when I do that. If I can just do a couple of things and I do them perfect, that's – I don't like to do too many things, you know, and so that's why I enjoyed so much going to law school because that's all I did.

MS. CORDOVA: What did you want to do in law?

MS. WILSON: I wanted to be a judge. Yeah, because it was interesting – the theories. It was very interesting to study that. Actually I enjoyed it a lot – the philosophical ideas behind it, you know.

Now, when it came to reality and I started going to the trial, I was like, oh, my God, I made another mistake here. This is horrendous. You know, I don't care about this stuff. Well, you know, like I said, I wanted to be a judge, but – and by the way, I used to like be drawing the whole time in all the classes. You know, people were – the teachers were talking and I would be drawing, drawing, drawing the whole time because I was listening, but I would be drawing at the same time.

MS. CORDOVA: And gosh, it's amazing that you – inside yourself were you ever thinking, I just want to be an artist, or had you not come to terms with that?

MS. WILSON: I had not come to terms with that because, you know, you have to understand that when you come from a third world country, money is the only thing that there is. And so, I mean, like if you don't have it, it's like really hard. I mean, I'm sure it's like that here too, but especially there. Like if you have like bad jobs – not a bad job, I'm sorry. That sounds terrible, but like a job that doesn't pay much – you know, like if you're a clerk at a store you might as well, you know, still live with your family because you cannot afford to go live on your own and I mean like in very poor conditions. You know, no money for busses. I mean, it's like really bad, so you really have to make sure that you can study something that will let you have a little bit of a more of a decent life.

And that's why art was never even a possibility for me. I just knew I was a good artist and I loved doing it, but as a possibility in Chile there was no way. So that's what that – why that happened when I came here.

MS. CORDOVA: And what about sort of – let's see, so what years were you in high school exactly?

MS. WILSON: In high school I was probably – I got out of high school in 1969, so it was probably from – I guess I will get from like '64 and to – I don't know how long. It's like actually we – the way that it's divided there was kind of different. Like you go for the kindergarten to sixth grade and then it was from – then it was another six

years and then you were out. It was 12 years.

MS. CORDOVA: And of course I guess the late '60s was a really turbulent time in Chile.

MS. WILSON: Yes, actually it was. It was. There was a lot of protests, you know, from the leftists, but at the time I wasn't very involved because I was going to that private school, so it was like – more like that's what those people do. I didn't participate or anything. It was more when I started going to university and also when Allende got selected.

MS. CORDOVA: Right.

MS. WILSON: That – you know, also the other thing that happened to me was that I was in a private school until I was like in – two years before I got out of high school and I changed schools. I went to a public school, so in the public school I got to meet a lot of much more interesting people than the people that I met in the private school. I mean, the people in the private school were like – I mean, I kind of didn't like them. You know, it was very surface. People were about things, you know, and in the public school it's not like that at all. You saw people that had ideas and people that had to struggle to go there, so it was a completely different environment. You know, and I really enjoyed that. I was really happy being there. I felt much more comfortable with them than the people at the private school, you know.

First of all – [END TAPE 2, SIDE A] – my family didn't have the amount of resources that the people in the private school had, so I was at a disadvantage there, and so when I got to the public school I was like fine. I'm fine here, you know. I was like if anything, I will have more than the people there and so it made me feel more even like I belong there, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And so from there was it a natural step to the university? How did you select your university?

MS. WILSON: Well, I selected it on the basis of – you know, we had to do an SAT and then wherever you get in, that's how it's selected, but basically I selected the universities that were in town. That was, you know, like the best university – I got into that one and that's the one that my sister had gone to. My sister went to study – she studied to be Spanish teacher, you know. Professora Castellano. And so she was the one that kind of also was paying attention for me. She was going to help me say, you know, that she would give me books to read and I remember that she started giving me Albert Camus, you know. He's an existentialist and so she started giving me his books when I was 15 or – I got out of high school really early, too. I mean, I was in the first year of architectural school I was 16 years old, so I got out like when I was 16.

But anyway, she gave me these books and I started like memorizing and I became an existentialist just because I really liked his writing, but what did I know, you know? And so like I knew his – I had all his books. I had his picture in my room and he had these diaries. He had a bunch of diaries and he would talk about things like how meaningless it was to have a job for eight hours a day for 40 hours a week for the lifetime, so I knew I would never do that, you know. I said to myself, that's right. I'm never going to do that, and so it's just kind of interesting, you know, how people influence you.

And then I would be going around telling people that life was absurd, you know. [Laughing.] It's like – and so it was kind of – it was just funny that my sister got me into that, but –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and that's interesting because I think that still exists a lot in your work.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, maybe. Yeah. Nothing makes any sense.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, or that sort of existential quality is still – perhaps I'm reading into it. I don't know.

MS. WILSON: No, it's probably true because I still – I mean, I'm trying to look at it in a different way now. You know, I want to look at it more in a more positive way and then kind of more like with the Buddhist look. You know, life is what it is and you don't try to make it what you want it to be and you accept everything that comes to you and you do your best, you know.

And so there is – there's a way where I always think that the existentialists – they have like kind of a little bit of a despair view and I think it comes also that philosophy came after the Second World War and I think it marked those people where they were hopeless, which is the same thing that happened to me actually because after I went through the military coup in Chile. That was really hard. I mean, besides having a childhood living with an alcoholic, then going through what happened in that military coup was pretty horrendous, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and even before that, what year did your father die?

MS. WILSON: My father died in 1969.

MS. CORDOVA: So right at the tail end of your high school. Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, he died like right – yeah, like I think he died maybe when I was – maybe it was '68. Like it was right around there. I think it was in – actually, it was in 1968 or '69.

MS. CORDOVA: What kind of impact did that have on your family?

MS. WILSON: Well, it was – it had a big impact in terms of economics, you know. And then – but then the good thing was that he had – we had bought a house and he had insurance, so we got the house for free so my mother didn't have to pay for it and it was a very nice house, but it was hard economically because my mother was the only one that would support us and she was like being a substitute teacher or – so it was – and we were five kids, so that was really hard. I mean, not that we ever went hungry, but you know, like there was a lot less and, you know, we were very limited and you know. So that made it very difficult, but even like that, you know, she sent us all to school and we were able to do it, so I'm grateful to her for that. Have to remember that, you know?

I mean, like I was going to architecture school and using all these supplies that were so expensive. I don't know where she was getting the money. Like every time I think of that, I send her a check just to make her – you know, like I want to pay for the past because I help her every month, but I'm just so – I mean, I'm like where did she get the money? I don't know where. You know, it was amazing because I know how little she had and she would always find a way, so –

MS. CORDOVA: And how about the university? How were you managing to attend that?

MS. WILSON: You mean in terms of paying for it? Actually, when I started going to university, Salvador Allende was in power and he was giving people – you know, he had the concept of socialist education, so I didn't have to pay; also because of my grades. I mean, I had so good grades and also because my mother was a widow, so I didn't really – I would – I paid very little. I mean, very little over there. So that was really helpful.

MS. CORDOVA: So tell me about that. Being like right – coming into your university right at the time as Allende was coming into power, which was this remarkable time period in Chile and what was that like for you?

MS. WILSON: Well, it was very chaotic, you know, because first of all I never really participated too much in politics. When I went to my first year at law school, not in architectural school because when I was in architectural school it was a school that was separated from the main house where all the other faculties were. And it was kind of a bunch of crazy artists. There are artists and architects. They were artists, but architects, you know. And, you know, they were like – it was like the most liberal and creative school, which it was very good for my art because they – there was something that influenced me from them. I know that, you know. And they were very in their own world. I mean, they had – they had bought like a piece of land by the beach and they were building their own houses there. Like all these strange houses and they had all these very interesting ways of looking at life and everybody knew that all the crazy people went to architecture school – to that school.

So I was there for a year and I – you know, like I said, I really did well, but I didn't like it. I'm like I don't really care about buildings that much. I mean, like what am I doing here? So I decided to leave it and then I thought, well, I've got to make a living at some point, so I go to law school.

And so that was – went well because I just like to be focused on something that I like, you know, and architecture just wasn't it. Like there was like math for one and then there was like a drafting and I hated that with a passion because, you know, you have to do it with a – this kind of special paper – all the compasses like – you know, for me being such a good artist, it's amazing how much I detest to do all that kind of work, you know. It's like very geometrical and so I just thought, you know, this is too much. I'm really not doing myself a favor, so I left.

And then so when I went to the university, that must have been like 1971, I think, when I went to law school – when I moved from that – that year – the next year I went to the first year of law school and that's when the things were really beginning to fire up in terms of politics and it would be like a lot of people in the class, except that the school that I went to, the Catholic University of Valparaiso, was a very kind of conservative and kind of a little more like upper class than the other one, so most of the people there were more like right wings or middle center, you know. So you didn't get a lot of like the communists and especially – even though they were there, so I didn't really like any of these people. I didn't believe any of their politics.

Even like – I will – in agreement I will probably agree more in the terms of thinking of the socialists and the communists, but then they would invite me to their meetings because everybody was trying to recruit you to go into their party, and I would go and everything was great. Like justice, solidarity, and everything, until it came time to lunchtime because when lunchtime came they would turn to their women and go, "Fix me a sandwich." All the boys and all the boys – the men directed the whole thing, right? Like the women – some of the women

would every once in a while talk, but I'm like watching them and I'm like going, okay, now it's time to eat and the women are supposed to go cook. I'm like, I'm sorry. I just don't believe in this.

You know, and they also always wanted to date you and if you didn't then they would like get mad and I'm like, I don't want to date these people, you know. For one, I'm a lesbian, so I'm not – you know. And they were like – supposedly they were like liberals and stuff. You know, like it was just all to their convenience. Truly it was nothing. It was very hypocritical. I think that they just wanted to have as much sex as they could and I wasn't willing to do that or make their sandwiches, so I was not very well received, you know. Or maybe I just kind of told them, you know, you make your own sandwich. I'm not making it, or whatever. I'm not going to go help the women make – you know, for the little communist party. It's like it's ridiculous, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: So all of the organizers were male?

MS. WILSON: Pretty much, you know. Yeah. And –

MS. CORDOVA: Or it seemed like it at least.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and then the women would be in the same place as any of the right wingers. I mean, they're the same. I mean, the only differences with the people on the right wing, they were more like conservative that, okay, you know, the woman and whatever and more like opostata [ph] people. So I never really belonged in those groups, so I just kind of – pretty much I just stayed on my own again and I just studied a lot and I didn't participate in any of their groups and the only times I would confront this would be when they would be fighting with each other with chains and sticks and hitting each other. Like one time I was in the building and I had gone to the library and I'm going up and then the group of the right wings are coming from here and the left wings are here, and here I am in the middle of them so I just went up and I crossed through the right wing people and I just went through them and then I went down from another side, but it was scary because they had chains and they really did hit each other and – you know what I mean? And it was really hard. I mean, it was very scary for me.

They're all men, too, so it was like I –

MS. CORDOVA: So it was like political gang fighting?

MS. WILSON: Totally. That's exactly what it was: political gang fighting. Yeah. And they were ferocious. I mean, very, very, very – their ideas, you know, they were going to kill the other one for what they believe and I'm like, this is stupid, you know.

I mean, I guess if you're a very poor person and you think that communism is going to get you out of your place, then you want to do that. But I didn't believe that. I didn't believe any of them.

MS. CORDOVA: Why not?

MS. WILSON: Well, because, you know, they were just – they just – it just didn't seem to me – you know, like the thing with the what I was telling you earlier. Their meetings were just so – you know, it was like only talk to me. They all –

MS. CORDOVA: They already practiced inequalities.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly, so it's like I'm not going to believe this. And so I stayed away and I figured, you know, I'll just study and do my thing.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and it sounds like your lesbian identity sensitized you already to certain – or to the hypocrisy of the politics.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, and also the women in general. You know, women in – at the time, you know, women are just not – they were like – I don't know. Sometimes I used to feel that they – not only men hated women in Chile, but also women. So it felt like a very like hateful place for women, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you come out as a lesbian?

MS. WILSON: Well, I mean, I didn't come out there at all. I mean, I was falling in love with women there, but I could never find a lesbian. I'd always be falling in love with my straight friends. It was very painful and it was a torture because, you know, of course I couldn't tell them and I just kind of kept it to myself and so I was like the oddball all the time and, you know, I dated like one or twice and I'm like, oh, I'm sorry. But like I went out on two dates – and I feel like I'm – and I was not abused as a child in that sense, you know, like is common, but I wasn't. I just – I've always felt this way that I'm not attracted to men and I just like women. I just fall in love with women. That's all. Not men.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were you when you were realizing this?

MS. WILSON: I was young. I was like – I think I probably fell in love for the first time when I was seven. You know, we would go to church and this little girl – we were like in – I don't know what was the grade, but probably the third grade and so these girls that were younger would come and pick us up and there was always one that came and picked me up and she was taller and she would like hold my hand all the way to the church and I was in heaven. I mean, I was seven and already I was feeling that way. I mean, every day I would wait for her to go to mass and so, you know, it was just that early. I mean, what am I supposed to do, you know, and it then it just went on like that for the rest of my life.

So, and then I met this guy that had been living in the U.S. and he was gay, but he was closeted, too. He never told me he was. I found out later, but he did tell me that I could live here and I could have a relationship and I could even have a place and it wouldn't be a problem, so I thought, okay, that's it. I'm leaving. You know, I'm not going to live like this anymore.

MS. CORDOVA: How old were you when you had that conversation?

MS. WILSON: I was about – I was like in my fourth year of law school so I thought in a couple of years I'm out of here. I'm not staying, you know, because it was impossible. I mean, it was just so difficult that I thought, you know, I'm not going to live like this, so –

MS. CORDOVA: So that was even before the coup, or was it?

MS. WILSON: No, it was after. It was after.

MS. CORDOVA: It was after. Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. It was after. Yeah, because I graduated like in '77 and the coupe happened in 1973.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Wait, so you went into law school in 1971?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, '71.

MS. CORDOVA: And you graduated in 1977.

MS. WILSON: '77.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: It's five or six years.

MS. CORDOVA: Six.

MS. WILSON: Okay, so maybe then I had maybe gone in '72.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And –

MS. WILSON: Actually, it's – I left early in '77, so I graduated in '76 actually. That's what it is. So I did go into '71 and then I graduated in '76 and then I left to the U.S. in '77.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. And so it wasn't the – or why did you leave?

MS. WILSON: Well, it was many reasons. It was many reasons because in – like I said, in 1973 I was in my, I think, third year of law school and there was a military coupe by Augusto Pinochet. The military took over the government – the socialist government of Salvador Allende and they completely – it was like a civil war, you know. They took it over and they killed and tortured a lot of people.

They – it was just horrendous what they did and I had to see a lot of this and I had to – I mean, I know like when the military took over the day that it took over, my school was on strike, which I hated that because I just wanted to be going to school, but the whole school was stopped and so I didn't really have anything to do, so I went to Santiago to visit my friends that were in Santiago and these friends of mine were kind of left wing, you know, that this is some people I had met and I was just visiting them.

And they would go to – they would even invite me. You know, I remember I would go to these big, huge

demonstrations and to me it was really interesting, but I never really belonged. I mean, that they were in like stadiums where they have and they would be talking politically. It was really interesting to me.

But anyway, so when I was there, that's when it happened and so I got caught up like for three days where we went to this friend that had a brother that was in the ministry of economy and he was an economist and he kind of had a high position job in it and he called us to the apartment of my friend and said you better - I'm going to come and get you because the White House or the La Moneda in there is being bombed, so I need to go get you. And we were like young. I mean, we were like 21 or something. So he took us to his apartment with his wife and then they - Allende spoke that morning and said, you know, I'm not surrendering, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you hear him on the radio?

MS. WILSON: No. They told me. They woke me up and they said, you now, they're invading - they have taken over the La Moneda, so it was really sad. I did hear it later what he said, but it was really sad and so people were very confused and anyways, so I got to stay there for like about three days because they did a curfew and nobody could leave. And -

MS. CORDOVA: What were those three days like?

MS. WILSON: It was pretty horrible. I mean, to be locked up in a place where - also I couldn't call my family. Somehow the phone communications were cut to my home city and I couldn't talk to my mother, so they didn't know what had happened to me, which of course I was doing well, but - and so that was really hard and also because the people that I was staying with, they were very connected and they would be hearing - they would be calling and saying they're coming, they're coming. Then you would hear a shooting. That's what the person that was on the phone that was my friend's brother and he would say, you know, they just killed them. Or they will hear a scream, you know. I mean, it was so incredible what was happening, you know.

And then I mean there were like - there's a river that - El Rio Mapocho de Rancho Santiago and there would be bodies floating down the river, so shoot them then throw them in the river, so -

MS. CORDOVA: You saw that?

MS. WILSON: I didn't see that, but, you know, that's - it was like people would be calling and saying, you know, we're seeing people in the Mapocho and stuff like that. Yeah. So then I finally - after the three days I went home and then - but you know, on the way down I took a bus and then some people got taken off the bus and they were detained for whatever reason. It was crazy. Anything could happen.

And then you would always be hearing - like the curfew started at 9:00 and then you would be hearing shootings, you know. And it was really hard because you knew that somebody was getting killed and if you went outside you couldn't know. Your life was going to be over, so - you know.

And then of course I have a lot of friends of mine that were tortured, and that I knew. You know, they were like - because we would try to get them out and would try to help them and that was the part that I did. You know, I would go and talk to people to get them out and we knew where they were. At first, you didn't know where they were but then somehow you would get a voice of where they were, so we'd be trying to get them out. And they would come out and they would be like another person. I'm telling you. Their eyes were different. They looked like demacrados [ph] how you say that, but real pale and like sunken, you know. Some of them didn't come out at all. The women were all being raped and tortured. I mean, the men were raped and tortured too. I don't know if the men were raped. Probably some of them, but tortured really horribly.

So you know, I just kind of started losing my hope there. Like I'm thinking to myself, you know, I don't - I mean, I can't believe the world could become this. You know? I didn't know. And so that's what happened.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you change politically at all?

MS. WILSON: Well, I just - actually I didn't. I mean, I was always kind of a - kind of a left kind of way of thinking and that just means really not even that. It just means that I have - I just feel that that's what identifies that you are kind of for the people - you know, that you wish that all the people will have what they need. And I feel that people from the right wing don't care about that. You know, they have - they just want to have more money than anybody else and they don't care about sharing or anything, so that's why I consider myself a left - that I just want other people to have what they didn't have.

So actually it made me be more of like a - more of an existentialist than ever, you know, because it was such an absurd what was happening and - I mean, like I remember I went to see this friend of mine and this friend was a friend from the French school and so there was these soldiers at her house. I mean, people from like high academy of military and they were making this comment about like, you know, we were pulling this guy's eyes

out and he was still screaming for the leftist government. I was like I thought I was going to get sick.

And this was very common. Like very common. I mean, like it was nothing. Oh, well, you know, it's kind of like, oh, well, that's what happens. You know, you can torture them and they'll still believe in what they're saying, so it's - and then you know, there's a lot of the stories of people that got like in the north part of the country it was like these young military guys went and they lined up all these people like I think - I don't know what's the whole story about this. And they lined them all up and they just shot them all down.

And like that - stories like that coming up all the time everywhere and people that you knew they were - you know, they would be calling, we're trying to escape the country because they're going to kill us. And they would kill them. And some of them they would jump into the embassies and they were taking refuge, you know, so it was like a crazy, crazy time and it's almost like living in hell. That's what I feel; that I lived in hell.

So - and so that made me feel that there's no difference what you do in the world. It's like there's always somebody in power that you have very little that you can do about it, so I kind of - I mean, I still - I think that way sometimes, but there's another way where I'm trying to think through a Buddhist way of thinking that says that there is suffering and there is non-suffering and you have both, you know. So it's not always like that, but then -

MS. CORDOVA: So you were - so after those three days, you were in Chile for another four years?

MS. WILSON: About three or four years.

MS. CORDOVA: Three or four years.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, three or four years and I finished my studies and - you know, actually I had - I had some people come over to my house from the government that were trying to ask me what I was doing because I was so - you know, I never belonged to anything, so in a way I was like a little bit of an outsider, but I had two other friends I would study with and what would happen was that sometimes people would be getting tortured or some people are beaten - and they will denounce other people, so they put me in as a person that I maybe was a leftist or something.

And then they came and I'm like, you know, no. And I had to say that I liked the government and all of that because if you didn't then they'll take you in and who knows when they were going to see me again, so I said, no, I like the government. I think they're doing a good job and - there's nothing else you could do. I mean, if you said the opposite that would be like - you might as well just say take me to jail. You know, so you're like -

MS. CORDOVA: Did they have you sign a form?

MS. WILSON: No, they just asked me. They were like scaring me actually. That's what they were doing. They were like, well, we have heard things about you and - you know, they checked all around the house. You know, throwing drawers out. They were just - you know, to see if there's anything there.

MS. CORDOVA: So they actually came into your home and did a search?

MS. WILSON: Oh, yeah, completely. And I was like I don't have anything. You know, I'm like I'm always studying if that's a problem. But then I couldn't be sarcastic either, but I really wanted to because I was very angry, but I -

MS. CORDOVA: When did that happen?

MS. WILSON: That happened when I was like - probably around '75, '76. Yeah, like I was kind of almost finished. I remember that. And they were asking me for names of people and I said I don't know anybody that's doing anything. Because that's how they would get their information, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Did the disappearing seem to slow down at all, or was it just a constant terror?

MS. WILSON: For a long time it was a constant terror. It was - it went on for a long time. Even all the way through when I left, you know. I mean, it was just a free for all. They would be having prisons anywhere. They would just open up a house and just throw people in there. And that really bothered me because, you know, when you study law and they have all these ideals and they go, you know, there's a thing called the habeas corpus where nobody can be detained, and it wasn't true. And that's why I thought, you know, why am I studying this? It's a lie, you know. And I think that's one of the reasons why I also left; because I didn't believe them anymore. I didn't believe anything, you know. I'm like these are liars. These people are liars.

And so everything kind of crumbled and I just thought, you know, I'm just going to go to the U.S. and check it out there, you know. I just left everything behind.

MS. CORDOVA: I didn't think of that, but of course, yeah, you must have seen this incredible contradiction between studying the law -

MS. WILSON: Absolutely it was ridiculous. There was nothing that they had taught me that was true, and I was believing it. I was like really - like I was really into it. You know, I loved this stuff. I was assistant to my professor of civil law. That's how much I studied, you know. I mean, normally this is what I do. When I do something, I go all the way. And he was lying. They were all a bunch of liars and that's what I felt. I don't want to be around a bunch of liars, you know. I don't care if I'm going to make money or not. I just don't care.

So that's the other reason why I decided to leave. I mean, I was going - it was so hard to be around this thing. It's like - and then the economics were getting worse. You know, the economic in my house was like terrible. I mean, my sister's renting this house and it was to the point that we were like taking - like we had like these ornaments from the - [inaudible] - we would just take them and go sell them to have some money. I mean, that's how bad things started getting for us.

And so at that point I said, you know, there's nothing else for me to do here. I'm just going to leave and I'll leave all this studying behind. I'll just find a way.

MS. CORDOVA: Were the economics radically different? I mean, one of the things I guess I've been taught or learned is that there was this incredible inflation that was also going alongside Allende's government and that supposedly Pinochet was supposed to correct that inflation. Was there any real difference in the economics before and after?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, it was because what happened was that before - when Allende was in government, all the investors stopped investing. You know, the people with money they just wouldn't. And then they had this big huge strike with the truckers, you know, because they were getting paid in dollars actually not to work, so things were not moving. Things were not being sold.

And then once the - and then there was like a lack of everything. Like there were things that disappeared that you couldn't find these types of foods. You know, they were like - and so once they government of Pinochet came into power, everything came back out. You know, there was like lots of everything except that in my case, because of my family - you know, because my father had died two or three years early, you know, my mother was like really having a hard time giving us what we needed, so it was more - in my case - I mean, if we were to have my father alive, probably wouldn't have been as bad, but at that point it was just really bad. And so - because when he was alive we had enough. Not a lot, but we had enough, but then we didn't have enough anymore, so it was really difficult, you know. And then my sister married this guy that was like a yoga teacher and so they didn't make any money at all either and so it was really hard. I mean really, really hard.

So all of that, you know, made me think. Plus the fact that I was a lesbian, you know, and I just decided I need to go find another life. I just can't - I mean, I didn't even know. I just kind of jumped. You know, like it was more like an instinct than this friend of mine that was coming to Austin to see her brother who was studying physics at UT said, you know, you're going to come with me. And I said, sure. So that's when - in '77 when I decided to leave.

MS. CORDOVA: How difficult was that to leave?

MS. WILSON: Well, it wasn't that difficult because, you know, I had a law degree and I had studied law and then I - there's a whole system how you do this, you know, so you just know the way. And so also my last name is Wilson, which really helped. So I'm not like a regular person there. I'm like somebody that don't have any means it would be a lot harder for them to do it, so it was hard, but not that hard.

And the fact that I had studied law - like they knew I wasn't going to try to come and stay here, so that made it easier. And so -

MS. CORDOVA: Little did they know.

MS. WILSON: Right, exactly. And at the time I really didn't know if I was going to stay because I wasn't sure, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: So and what opinion did you have of the United States before you came here?

MS. WILSON: I really had no opinion whatsoever. I just kind of saw it in the movies. I had like - it was like a mystery to me and it was not - you know, the things that you knew like, you know, everyone was on drugs and all of that - the women didn't mind their husbands. All this stupid knowledge that you have, you know. And also because when I went to law school we didn't really study much of any of the laws of the U.S. because the laws is based on a jurisprudence and the Chilean law is based on Napoleon Code and so it's a very different system and one means that you're really restricted by the law and the other one is like the courts have a lot of power to

change the situation, so we – all of our like people that would go study abroad would go to France or Spain and not to the U.S.

So I had no point of relation except for my father coming when he was a merchant marine, and I had come myself, too, with him when I was 14. I took a trip with him in his ship. Me and my sister came and I loved it. I was like so excited with the U.S. I mean, we went to different ports. We went to New York. And that was – I mean, it was huge. It was great and so in a way I think that also made me think, you know, I really want to go there. I think that this is a place that I could go, but, you know, as to understanding what the U.S. was about I had no idea. I mean, like no idea.

I mean, to the point that I didn't even know that Chicanos lived here. I remember when I got here and I went to UT one time to wait for a friend of mine and this guy started talking to me who was a Chicano and so I said, "Well, so what part of Mexico are you from?" And he goes, "I'm from here." And I said, so – like and then he explained to me that there's a lot of people that this used to belong to Mexico and they took over the territory and they stayed and they kept their customs, their culture, and their heritage, but I didn't know that. I mean, like people think that it's all black and white, like there's like mainly blacks and mainly whites and then a few Asians and then – I mean, by now I'm sure they know, but it used to be like that. You know, there was like not even VCRs at that time. There were no videos.

It's pretty interesting now, the difference. I mean, the world was not – I mean, when I got here I remember it was so expensive to call Chile I would call like once a year. I mean, that's how expensive it was. I mean, and now I talk to my mother every other day. You know?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: So it's –

MS. CORDOVA: Did that make you more of a letter writer or did you –

MS. WILSON: Yeah, actually it did. Yeah, I wrote a lot and then I would do the drawings and send it to them. Yeah. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So – and in terms of U.S. involvement in the coupe have you had any knowledge of that or opinion on that?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, well, it all came out later, you know, that they were involved and they were rumors and stuff and so there were rumors that they were involved.

MS. CORDOVA: I was just curious. You mentioned paying the truckers with dollars and I thought that was interesting.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I mean, that was that we knew about that and different things, but later on it came into light that they had had meetings and they planned the whole thing. Yeah, so there's definitely an influence from the U.S. in that sense, but at that point, you know, it's like I could care less. I just needed to go get myself a better life somewhere else. You know, more than be thinking about my ideals. When you don't have anything, your ideals kind of have to stay to the side in a way. I mean, I don't know. I mean I try to live in a decent way, but you know what I mean. It's not like I was going to say – [inaudible].

Also, I had an aunt that lived here, so I thought that would be like a place where I can start or at least, so it was – and then my friend who was calling, so you just had to have a place where you're going to go.

MS. CORDOVA: Your aunt was living here in Austin?

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. So – and so your friend had her brother here in Austin, so you had a potential support network here?

MS. WILSON: Right. Yeah, exactly. So that's kind of how I did it. So yeah, so I left in 1977. That's when I decided to leave and –

MS. CORDOVA: Were you the only one of your family to leave?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, my – I was the only. Actually, my brother-in-law he had left a year before and then so he was here when I came. He was in Houston, so I saw him and then my sister came the year after. So then I have a sister and I have a brother in Houston.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay. Is that the younger?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, they're the two younger ones and actually my brother came way later. So - but also the same kind of way - looking for a better life.

MS. CORDOVA: So what did you think of Austin?

MS. WILSON: I thought it was a great town. I loved it. I thought it was really beautiful. I spent a lot of time around the university and so that was - you know, I enjoyed that and I loved the Drag. I used to go there and so it was really great.

MS. CORDOVA: And what did you do when you first got - did you decide that you were going to go to school again? Did you get a job? What was -

MS. WILSON: Can you stop it?

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, let me just pause the tape right here. Hold on.

MS. WILSON: Okay. [Audio break.]

MS. CORDOVA: All right. I'm just going to - just having had a little chat here, we're just going to take a short break and actually since it's coming to the end of this tape I'm going to close this tape and start a new one. So with that, stop.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B]

MS. CORDOVA: This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, on July 26, 2004, interviewing Liliana Wilson. This is session two and disc two and with that, Liliana, I think I was just asking you about your coming to Austin and what that was like?

LILIANA WILSON: Well, there was some - that was very hard period - I mean, it was actually good and hard - well, and both actually, because there's a way where I could really - I was fascinated by the way the U.S. worked and all of that. At the time I didn't - English - I didn't have English as a language. I mean, I knew a little bit of it so I had to do a lot of jobs that I kind of - you know, wouldn't have had to do if I had my English better. You know, so I like sold flowers in the streets and then I worked for these people for like about seven years taking care of their kids, but they were very nice people so in a way it's a good experience too, and it was like a family so I - since I didn't have a family while I was here it was kind of helpful. I mean, I loved the girls and I took care of them and so that was really good, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you stay in touch with them?

MS. WILSON: Actually, I haven't and I have been thinking about doing that because I'd really would like to see them and they moved to Houston and I could totally find them there, so I think I'm going to - I've been thinking about doing that.

Anyway I -

MS. CORDOVA: Well, what about learning English? How did you learn English?

MS. WILSON: Well, actually I didn't really take classes. I just watched TV and - I mean, like I used to watch Johnny Carson to understand the American sense of humor and I thought, well, if this is why these people laugh at these things, whatever, and then - I mean, with - you know, so the people that I was living with, they would - you know, I mean, it's just - it's kind of like I did a - you know, when you're going to a place and you immerse yourself? That's how I learned it. I was going around with dictionary and stuff and then I watch "Electric Company" and just all these children's program that would help me because they had the hard words and stuff and so -

MS. CORDOVA: Have you studied English at all?

MS. WILSON: I did like for a couple of semesters when I was in Chile - two or three and it just wasn't much. I mean, you would learn things like that's a window, that's a woman, this is a door and stuff like that. You know, that is what I had when I first got here and it's like it wasn't helping me at all, but, you know, within six months to a year or two I was like speaking it really well. You know, it wasn't that hard, but it just took time, you know, so that was different and then after that I started going to school. You know, I started studying art and actually I did a few -

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, maybe you could tell me about that decision to finally study art or -

MS. WILSON: Yeah, that was very, very important because since I have told you I have - I studied law there and I wanted to be a judge and at the time I wasn't really sure that I was going to stay here because, you know - of course my economic condition would have been a lot better had I been in Chile, but I decided that I - you know, I was drawing a lot in my spare time and so I decided that I was going to start going to art school and so I started going to Austin Community College. And that was really great, I mean I studied drawing, I studied printmaking and I was like - I was in heaven. Figure drawing and then I made friends, too, that were artists, so that was so helpful. I mean, I loved that school because it really - you know, and I already had the skills; I just needed to develop them. And I had really good teachers that kind of let me go on my own way of what I wanted to do, so I went to Austin Community College for like years. I would just keep taking classes and classes. I wasn't so interested in a degree as much as I was interested in getting - you know, to really get to know how to draw really well.

MS. CORDOVA: What kinds of work were you drawing?

MS. WILSON: Well, I was doing - I think I have in the images - like for instance, like that image of the boy with the TV and the hand. You know, that's the kind of stuff that - I mean, first of all I did very basic work; like we did a lot of still lifes to learn, you know, and then a lot of - like we look at things, so you look - because that's one of the things that you do in art school is they teach you how to look at space and stuff and so I did that and I did a lot of, like, you know, studies of, you know, shoes, fruits - you know, all of that and it was really helpful because then - because I have a lot of ideas, but then you - and figure drawing too because then you can, you know, make them real with all that you have in your head, like you can put it together and so that was very important.

And then the techniques too, I had good teachers, you know, and a lot of - I had this teacher, Jesse Treviño - that he's an artist. I had Daniel - what is his name? He was very important too. Daniel Traverso. He studied at - he taught at Austin Community College and these were people that were very important because - they were like - they drew kind of like the way I did, so I followed their traditions, you know. They were both Mexican and they were incredible artists, so - especially Jesse Treviño taught me my technique of drawing. As you can see my drawings today - the way the texture looks on it - he was the one that taught me that. And then Daniel, I studied with him for a lot of years too, because he was an incredible draftsman.

So I kept going and taking classes for a long time. I mean, at first I was trying to take government and all of that and I thought, you know what? I already did this. I don't need to do this anymore, so, I'm just going to keep - I'm going to keep just taking the art classes that I want, you know, so that is what I did a lot. I took etching and then I -

MS. CORDOVA: So, were you going to school and then also working sort of as a nanny?

MS. WILSON: Yes, exactly.

MS. CORDOVA: At the same time?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. As a matter of fact I would go straight from my - at 4:00 I would be taking classes like in the evening. After I was done, I would go take my classes and I was so happy. I would wait all day to go to my classes. You know, I was so grateful to be able to do that.

MS. CORDOVA: And how - let's see, what years were those that you were at Austin Community College?

MS. WILSON: Oh, that must have been like 1980, '81, '82, and '83. It's like I went for about five or six years. You know, it would be - every semester I would take - I love to take classes, so I'm always taking a class. So I'd take two classes a semester or whatever. Yeah, I took like - and I would repeat the classes, too. I would take them over, so - you know. I would take them over and over. And actually - after that, actually, I went to - after I studied that, I went to Southwest Texas State University and I was trying to go to learn to do lithographs and I took one class and I really didn't like the teacher. I took two classes: I took lithograph, photography and I took - I mean, I was printmaking I mean. And then I took acrylics.

And what happened was that I fell in love with my acrylic painting teacher and - I mean, not really in love, but I mean with his teachings and so he was incredible. I mean, he's like - his name was Neil Wilson and he taught me everything I know about painting. As a matter of fact, I'm going to invite him to a show that I'm having in November because now he's going to see what he taught me like now - like after 15 years. Because when I first started studying with him, I could draw so well, it was really hard for me to paint, because I didn't know how to paint and it's like - you know, it's kind of like if you know how to walk and then you have to walk in another way and you can't, so I would go, "Neil, please come and help me. I can't do this." So he would come over, look at my canvas, and he'll do it and okay, this is the way you do it and then two minutes later back - "Neil, help me. I can't do it." And he was like - but I stayed, you know.

Actually I -

MS. CORDOVA: What did he teach you?

MS. WILSON: Well, he would teach me colors. He told me like how light hits things, but like, you know, sometimes you – warm and cold colors, composition. He taught me how to paint, like how to paint a canvas – like the distance you are supposed to stand in front of it. Like, you don't stand in front of the canvas. You have to be really far because you have to see the whole picture. And that is very important because he would always tell me that like in life you cannot get stuck in the details. He would always be giving me all these messages about how to do my life, which is incredible, and it was all coming from art, you know. I mean, he gave me books to read. I mean, it was just incredible here. And then I would go and see exhibits and we'd paint the work and we would talk about it.

And see, the thing is that I was, like, at the time already I was – when I did the studying of acrylic painting I was already 35 years old, so all the students in the class were 18, 17, so – you know, and they were like – you know, like young boys or some few girls that were like throwing painting around. You know what I mean, like a typical artist. And I was like real clean and neat and I took the same – all the classes that he was teaching. I would go and I ask, "What is he teaching this semester?" And I would ask him – I said, "Do you mind? I want to take all the classes with you."

So I would take his beginnings, advanced, and more advanced and then I – like I would go like three days a week and study with him like all day, and then I work like a couple days and then the weekend. So at that time already I was doing graphic designs, so I didn't – I was working for myself, so I could just take the classes that I wanted. You know, so I would go to – when I was registering – so the people in the school would go, "What are you doing?" Like, "Why are you doing this?" and I'm like, "I want to be a good painter." They'd go, "Well, what about a degree?" and I'm like, "I don't need a degree to be a good painter. I know when I'm a good painter. I don't need to have the degree."

So they couldn't understand why I only take this one class with him, like they thought I was supposed to take the whole thing and blah, blah, blah, and I was like, "No, I don't want to. He's the one teaching me; I'm studying under him." So they thought it was kind of funny, you know, but I didn't care. I just – because, you know, at that time you had to go register in person and the dean even would ask me like – like he couldn't understand. I was older, you know, Latina. I was like an oddball again, right, and I'm like, okay, this is what I'm having to do and I figure always my way to do things, right? So that is what I did and I think I have become a really good painter. I'm not as good as a drawer. I draw better than I paint, but I'm going to get there, you know. I'm almost there.

Right now, actually, I'm getting pretty close where I can paint anything, you know. I don't have – [inaudible] – paintings. I mean, if I do, I'll catch them before I go to canvas, you know what I mean? Everything is already set, so I can paint just about anything if I have a good composition, you know, and a good study of the process. So that was my experience with that school and it was a good one. It was just like amazing because it was so – I was so not from the school, you know. Like I always went to this class, and, you know.

It was just like everybody else knew other people and I didn't know any other teachers or anything because all I knew was Neil and, you know, whoever was in his class, but he was incredibly helpful. And what I would do to – he would do – mix the colors on the paper palette and I would take them and put them at home in my room on the walls so I could memorize them, but – because I always thought there was a formula. And he would tell me, "There's not a formula. It's whatever fits – whatever feels right – whatever fits." And so I always used to laugh because I was trying to memorize his palette and his palette was not my palette so – you know what I mean? But I didn't know, I was like, okay, what's he doing? How do I do it the same way? Because he was so good at it, you know? Like in the mix of the skin. You know, the mix of the shadings, you know, and all of that. It was just – it was really hard. I mean, it's like at first you have this bunch of colors and – [inaudible] – this other stuff that works, you know. It's very difficult.

MS. CORDOVA: When did you find your palette?

MS. WILSON: I found it pretty much right away. I just didn't know how to do it. You know, I didn't know how to execute it. So, I guess the question would be when do you feel like – I think now? Once I started now going to canvases – the big canvases, I think that now I can – I say that I have found my way in painting, you know? I mean, I still think I could be better, but you know.

MS. CORDOVA: But when did you – did you have this system immediately of first a drawing then maybe the next drawing and then the painting?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I think that – you know, because images are so about something – they're so representational that basically I always start with a sketch and then I work the sketch until I get the composition perfect. And then I can go from there to the canvas or to the wood – whatever I'm painting on. But, yeah, I always do a very tight sketch because I don't want anything to come up while I'm painting except for the color.

Now, that's what I work when I'm working the painting itself. It's like I'm dealing with color, but the drawing itself is already done – complete – and there is nothing extra or nothing less or more. You know, I don't ever add anything to it. Only it's about color. It's about kind of rendering and that's really easy, you know. I mean, sometimes it's hard to get the colors that you wanted to make and be harmonious, you know, like in that *Cisne* – because there were too many elements which I'm not used to, so I think that was hard, but I pulled it off by the colors too. And like I didn't know what the leaves were going to look like and then with the gold, it really worked.

MS. CORDOVA: Would you have a description of your palette?

MS. WILSON: No, I wouldn't know how to describe it. I mean, I guess I could just say that I love red. I use a lot of red. Red is – you know, red and gold, but red is really – I'm very good at red. I know red really well. Maybe that is what it is. And then I use blue a lot. I know blue really well. I use two colors. I usually use taylor blue and ultramarine blue because it makes it more atmospheric because taylor blue is warmer and ultramarine is colder.

The same is with the red, you know. I use two reds, or more than that, but I use a lot of cool and warm reds and that is why my paintings are so atmospheric and that's one of the things that Neil taught me. That's why I want him to see the exhibit, because then he'll see that I really learned, you know, so I'm hoping that he will go.

MS. CORDOVA: Why do you think you're so drawn to that red? Which I actually have noticed it, but if someone were to ask me, I would have said that those were the colors that come out.

MS. WILSON: I don't know why I love red so much. It's like – it's almost like a need that I have to have red. It's not even intellectual, you know. I just love red and it's like whenever – I have to make an effort not to put red in the painting, you know.

Like I guess she doesn't – there's no red in her. Maybe that's why I had such a hard time with that painting because there's no red.

MS. CORDOVA: I mean, I immediately think of like *Girl with Red Fish*.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And red fish, that's fairly unusual, but there it is.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly, or – yeah, or the fool – with his hat and that was my way to put red in – I used the red a lot in backgrounds, you know, like that – where people come from places where there's a lot of turmoil.

I mean, that's probably another reason because most of my early work was so much had to do with politics and the horror of the things that I saw in red – you know, representing blood and, you know. Probably that's what it is. I haven't really thought about it, but that's probably what it is. It's like – you really – definitely it's not a common color, even if it is beautiful. There's something that is not quite right. And there's a lot of red in the background, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, then of course there's your *Sleeping Beauty*, which has that luxurious red.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: So I guess it mutates – changes.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, it's different. I mean, in that case I just love that red and that's why painting that too because I love that red couch.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and so let's see. With Neil Wilson – I just realized you have the same last name.

MS. WILSON: I know. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Funny.

MS. WILSON: That was funny, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: That took me a while. You studied with him for how long?

MS. WILSON: For about five years. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: That's an intense amount of time.

MS. WILSON: I know. Absolutely, I really – I realize that. But I knew he was the one that was showing me how to do this. You know, that's why I would go. And he liked it too. He liked that – you know, he would give me books

to read and the courage to create and so we would talk a lot about art and stuff. So for him it was like I – in a way, I feel that I was doing kind of like a graduate studies, you know. And –

MS. CORDOVA: Right, but now you didn't get a degree for that?

MS. WILSON: I didn't get a degree, no – not at all. I just took a bunch of classes. But what will it good will it do me? You know? That's what I used to think, you know. I guess I could teach, but I don't know that I would want to teach anyway. I'm not that interested.

MS. CORDOVA: And what about finally stopping? What – how did – so how did – you know? I mean, I oftentimes students will just take all the classes they need to get to that point where they have the degree, but for you it wasn't about the degree. So, why did you stop?

MS. WILSON: Well, I stopped because actually I moved to San Francisco. I was moving there and so I was like I couldn't – you know. And also by then I felt – I really didn't actually. I still could like have taken more classes, but I just – kind of life forced me to let it go, and I just kept painting there – I just kept painting there and then I just got better on my own. Like he had given me – and actually, he always used to tell me, which this is great, he says my job as a teacher is to disappear. So, he was taking me to where I needed to go and then I need to go out on my own. And I'd go no, no, because, you know, I never wanted him to go because I was so – I needed him to paint and I sort of – I used to think that I couldn't paint with out him, but then once I got – I moved to San Francisco, then I realized that. And I worked a lot while I was there because I didn't go out that much. I painted a lot, so I got – I got really to practice what he had taught me, and this is what you're seeing now this show. I think that this is really showing what I've learned.

MS. CORDOVA: So what years were those that you were working with him?

MS. WILSON: I think its like '90 – it must be like I think '90 to '95.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: About five years, yeah. Maybe '89.

MS. CORDOVA: And why did you move to San Francisco?

MS. WILSON: Oh, because the girlfriend that I had at that time had graduated and she was wanting to live there. And I really didn't want to go but, you know, I figured that – you know, I had helped her. I put her through school and then the idea was that we were going to be together and then she was going to support me as an artist and then she would be working and so – but it didn't happen that way. I ended that relationship after eight years, so –

MS. CORDOVA: While you were in San Francisco?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, while I was there.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that was – you were in San Francisco from 1995 until –

MS. WILSON: 1996 until like last year, and – like 2002 or something like that.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, but you kept moving back and forth?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, well because I had – I worked for this foundation here in town and I do their graphics and so I do brochures and newsletters and stuff like that and so that's how I have made my living through all this time, for about 15 years now.

MS. CORDOVA: Which foundation?

MS. WILSON: Foundation for a Compassionate Society. So I will have to come to either get work – I mean, they would send me the work there and I will send it back, but basically I – you know, sometimes I had to come. They had a conference and so I had to come – you know, to do whatever I needed. And so I never really left Austin, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: What about graphic design? You had mentioned just in passing, I think, that you had started doing your own graphic design even – was it while you were working as a nanny or –

MS. WILSON: Ah, no, it was – actually that's the job that I had after that. After that job, I had – I started working in a supermarket doing like Styrofoam paintings of their products. It was this place called Tom Thumb and they were huge paintings. Like I would do like a huge Kraft mayonnaise jar with people around it on a picnic or

something and they were really beautiful actually and then they pay really well. And a friend of mine worked there and so she got me the job. And they would like have these contests and they would hand these in front of the display isles and stuff. So that is what I started doing first.

Then I met this woman from Las Manitas. I don't know if you know her. Cynthia Perez that she owns a restaurant and she started asking me to do her ads and I said I have no idea how to do this and she goes, well, go take a class. So then again I went to Austin Community College and I learned how to do ads on the computer. I learned PageMaker and just in general Microsoft and Word and so I started like doing her ads and then from there I started volunteering at La Peña and doing a lot of their - I would organize their exhibits and then do their posters and so that's when I started doing my own graphics, and I did that for a long time. And then after that I got the job at the foundation where they asked me if I wanted to do their graphics. I do a lot of posters and illustrations for them, too.

MS. CORDOVA: So would that have been starting around, like, mid to late '80s? Is that fair or -

MS. WILSON: I would say late 80s. Late 80s, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: I mean, the studying that I did Neil was about parallel to all of this.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I mean, actually I was working at the foundation already when I work for him, because that's what allowed me to be able to do that, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I guess another thing that has gone alongside that is your book covers?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, well, that - the book covers - well, another job that I had while I was working for La Peña doing graphics, I met this guy, Victor Guerra, that he had been an editor for Macmillan in New York and he got me a job doing illustrations for them. So it's another period of my life that I worked doing like a lot of illustrations. That was really fun and they paid really well. You know, they were - it was really hard though because it took all my time from my art. Even though they pay really well, it was just - like they would give you 16 drawings to do in two weeks, so it was like a drawing a day and then you have to send it first in black and white and then they will return them to you marked and corrected. You know, corrected and then you had another two weeks to send them that with color. And that was hard because a colored drawing's different than black and white. I can just do that, but, you know, rendering it so after awhile I just thought, you know, this is taking too much time from my work, so I've got to stop doing that.

And I did a lot of illustrations. I'll show you some of the stuff. Like educational books for Puerto Rico, so - and they were real nice stories like, you know, native people and so that was fun to do.

So you were asking me something. That's why I came up with this. Oh, the book covers. Okay, so what happened was that I went to a program at the Guadalupe Cultural Art Center in San Antonio and Gloria Anzaldúa and Marjorie Agosin were talking there and they were - everybody was going, go talk to Marjorie. She's Chilean. And I'm like, no, no. You know, I hate to go to famous people and whatever, so they dragged me over there and I met her and then we - she said send me your slides. So I sent her my slides and this is - we've been connected since then. I mean, she loves my work and she's used me on a lot of her covers. And then other people that have seen the covers want to use them and so that's been really helpful.

And the great thing about it is that they - I don't make the drawing for the cover; they choose from my slides what they want because my work and her work are so compatible that she doesn't even - I don't even have to make it. I've done it like once, maybe, that - the letters - the letters. I think I did that one on purpose, but the rest - it was just mainly just - they just used my covers to - I mean the paintings as they were already.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I feel like I'm - I've asked you maybe - I'm thinking I want to save some stuff for tomorrow and I'm feeling -

MS. WILSON: That we're going to far ahead?

MS. CORDOVA: Well, not - or just that I think we can - there's a lot here and I'd like to let it sink in and so I'll just draw this interview to a close right now.

MS. WILSON: Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: And we'll come back tomorrow.

MS. WILSON: Okay, wonderful. Thank you.

MS. CORDOVA: Sure. [Audio break.]

Hi, we are recording. This is Cary Cordova for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, interviewing Liliana Wilson on July 27th, 2004. This is session three and disc one. And with that, Liliana, I have a number of questions and I was gearing up to ask you today, but we were just talking about San Francisco and I thought maybe I would start there as sort of a place, and your arrival, what that was like settling in, what you did first, and the community that you found there maybe.

MS. WILSON: Okay, I went to San Francisco in 1996 after I had lived in Texas for 22 years. And actually I went first to a residency program at Montalvo outside of San Francisco at Calistoga and that's where I met Gloria Anzaldúa and we became very, very good friends. So I decided to move to San Francisco because the girlfriend I had at the time got a job there so she asked if we would move there, so we did after I had done the residency like two months later.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, maybe just to sort of slow you down, what was that residency like or -

MS. WILSON: It was a residency that was a program from MACLA - Latinos -

MS. CORDOVA: I have it.

MS. WILSON: I can't remember what it means, but it's like - it's a Latino organization that promotes Latino art. And it was really was a wonderful program because I was - first of all, I got to work with Gloria Anzaldúa and become - which came out to really a friendship with her and she was the one choosing the artists and - through MACLA and they were promoting - they were supporting the project. And then there were five artists, and Gloria was one. Two writers and three visual artists. And they other visual artist were Santa Barraza - [inaudible] - I respect tremendously. And then the other artists were Cristina Barrera and she was from - I believe it was her last name - she was from Mexico City. And then there was another writer - there was a woman from Chiapas. So it was very interesting - the whole project.

We got together and we discussed the - [inaudible] - was called Nepantla. That is one of Gloria's theories about being in between or being many worlds. And she - we would discuss it - her ideas and then we would create, you know, based on those ideas, so we were creating, I did like about - I don't know - about seven paintings.

The place where we stayed is a place that some governor of California set up there. I don't remember his name. But it was beautiful - it was like a mansion with beautiful gardens and we got our own rooms and then we got a studio and my studio was shared with Cristina and then Santa got her own place with her own studio there. And then Gloria got her own place too. I was just - it was really great, too. I would go visit her and - you know. So we met every day for like - we stayed there for like five weeks and -

MS. CORDOVA: What work did you produce while you were there?

MS. WILSON: I produced acrylics on canvas - about seven of them. And then also at the same time that I was there is when I started working with wood because -

MS. CORDOVA: That's right.

MS. WILSON: - Gloria actually asked me if I did anything else than paper and canvas and I said, "No, absolutely not." And then she said, "Well, why don't you try wood?" And I looked at these pieces of wood that were - we were at the lumber yard store and I tried this birch wood and it was just incredible and so I started drawing on it. And so I did like about ten drawings on it, too, so I had it for the exhibit because the whole point was that we discuss the theories, we did our work, and then at the end we would have an exhibit at MACLA in downtown San Jose. And then even Gloria had her writings - you know, they were blown up on the wall, so it was a pretty incredible exhibit. You know, Santa's work, Cristina's work, and mine.

MS. CORDOVA: How did they integrate together or what could you see in terms of reverberations?

MS. WILSON: It was definitely a lot of echoes in between the works, even though we were very, very completely different; because I work smaller, Santa worked on the big canvases, and then Cristina was very, very loose, which I'm not. And she used like these pieces of paper that she would just do this hand drawing kind of an ink. It almost looked like pen and ink, and huge - kind of like a scroll that she would use and they were hung up from the wall, so it was really beautiful. And like I said, she was into markings and the mark and, you know, so representation - [inaudible] - there was representational - very representational, so it was very, very beautiful.

And then Santa's work, of course, more - [inaudible] - like mine, but her pieces were bigger and completely different because she bases her - art on mainly Mexican history, so it's - you know, it's sort of different from

mine. But they also have this sense of the border lands, which is kind of part of what we were discussing, so –

MS. CORDOVA: And so maybe some of work that you were showing in that exhibit was the “The Lovers” or no, that’s later?

MS. WILSON: See, I don’t think that I took any slides of that work.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MS. WILSON: Uh-huh, and I don’t think I have records of it because I sold all the pieces and then I don’t have – I think I have one piece that I have a record in only because there is an article in a newspaper, and so there was – but know who bought that piece, so I could get a slide from her.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, just maybe describe some of the work.

MS. WILSON: It was a woman. It was like a – I did one woman; there was like a huge giant woman coming through the horizon. Like you could see her face, so it was this kind of spectacularly huge woman that was coming through. And, you know, giving the writings that Gloria had done where she was talking about Chicanos, Latinos, and so like their meeting in the horizon how she was – and she was looking sideways and there was like a sunset in the back and very arid landscape, kind of like the border, so that was one of the pieces I remember.

Oh, then I did another piece. Yes, I did another piece that actually Gloria has. I don’t have a slide of that. I gave it to her because I dedicated this painting. I was so carried away with her that I was like I couldn’t – I can’t tell you; like I was in love with her as an artist, you know? Like she was so creative, so unbelievable as a human being that I did a painting on her. You know, it’s a painting of a woman that had her arms wide open and there’s an opening in her chest just like the one with rocks, you know. I think I have it, the Stones – right here in the bottom of the –

MS. CORDOVA: Like that one?

MS. WILSON: Mm-hmm, but instead of having the stones, there were leaves coming out of her and the leaves represented the creativity of her life, you know, and the way she was very in touch with nature, which it caught my attention, you know, because it was very different from me. And so there were these leaves flowing. There was like a black background, but it was these leaves coming – beautiful green leaves coming out of her stones and her hands were wide open like that, so like receiving the world, you know. And so the idea was that Gloria would receive the world and then these leaves will be like her writings that will come out of her, you know? So, I gave it to her because I was just so impressed with her, you know. So they still – the family still has that painting and I could probably get a slide from them too and then – those are the pieces that I remember.

Oh, there was another one, too. I had this – this is another one that it was in the – another newspaper. It was in kind of like a – it was a color because they came and they took – they interviewed us and they took a picture of me while I was painting it. And it was a painting that is kind of a recurring theme in my work that is a man that is standing there and there’s a ladder going up to his chest, so – and then I have another piece that is called *El Invadido*, the invaded one, that I think I described there, too, that sometimes were are invaded by different things and in that case I don’t remember what the invasion was about, but, you know, that’s what the theme of the painting was, yeah.

It was a very nice painting and I just – I know I sold it and I will remember who, because nobody I remember – because I’m always so grateful that people want to pay money for my paintings that I always remember who the person was, you know, who has it.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you write it down? Do you keep records like that?

MS. WILSON: No, I kept some, but I not – I’m not very good at recordkeeping at all, you know, which is probably not a good idea, right?

MS. CORDOVA: Well –

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Everyone’s different.

MS. WILSON: So, yeah. So that was experience that was really great and after that, you know, I moved back – I moved back to San Francisco like a couple of months later. I went back to Austin and packed everything and moved in two months. And then when I moved back, I started – I mean, I guess I could tell you that my – [inaudible] – in San Francisco was Gloria because I’m not very friendly or social person so I really didn’t go to much, to do anything. I just kind of wanted to work. So, now, she was somebody I already knew, so I’d drive and

at first we would just go for a day. And we would like, you know, spend time.

MS. CORDOVA: Where was she at at that point?

MS. WILSON: Gloria was living in Santa Cruz.

MS. CORDOVA: Santa Cruz.

MS. WILSON: She has a house in Santa Cruz, so that was an hour drive, so I would drive. And then later when I started going and I would spend like a week with her. And I would bring my – actually I left an easel there and she loved it because we worked together, you know. I would get there and stay and then I will set up my whole painting system in the living room and then she would work in the bedroom. And then we would like take breaks. Usually I would cook for her when she was ready to get up, and it was lunchtime. And then – then we would work all the afternoon and everybody in their room or sometimes she would come over and read close to me.

Of course, she would always be making her comments about my work, were like – she wanted me to be a lot more loose than I was, you know. Like she is so not structured and I'm so structured and she would go, "Just leave it like that." Like if the painting was half the way made and I would get really mad. I'm like – [inaudible] – even ask me this because it's going to be so perfect. There's going no – nothing missing. And she would start laughing at me, you know, so that was really great because even though I never did that – now, the other thing she also questioned me a lot was on like the ideas that I was having for it, so – and the titles. She really would help me with the titles.

She told me – [inaudible] – so I would – no, like, it was not poetic. And I said, "Well, you're the poet, not me." But that was very – that was huge for me in terms of community that she was there because she really is not a very – was not a very sociable person either, but with me it worked because I didn't go there to socialize with her. I went there to work. So then at the breaks we would talk, and so it was a lot of – it was like we were back on the retreat. So in a way that put us in that sense.

And also for me, it was the fact where I could learn from her the way that she worked because this is somebody that you would say, "Let's go to a movie," and so she would think about it and then she'll go, "Well, in a movie, it will take about 30 minutes to get there, and then walk to it." She would calculate that the whole thing would take about three hours and in three hours she could read I don't know how many pages of her book, write something, and then she'll go, "No." Do you know what I mean? So like her whole life was like – her life was about working and everything else that would distract her she wouldn't do it. Like this is not somebody that will go and spend an afternoon drinking beer or anything like that. She would like – could not do that. So I loved that about her. Because –

MS. CORDOVA: So her house wasn't exactly like a lot of artists coming in and out or anything like that?

MS. WILSON: Oh, not at all – not at all. She didn't have assistants, though; like young women that would be going to – usually Chicanas that would be going Santa Cruz University and they would work with her, but, you know, it was work. And so pretty much she arranged everything – her socialization, was all around work. Like she would have a day – a writing day so that we would go and talk for a little bit and then there would be writing. So, for me that was really good to know that somebody could have so much discipline, which I didn't have, you know, and so that was part of my community.

And then the rest, you know, I really didn't have a big community when I was there and I kind of was sad about that because I really miss my community in Austin, you know. And I felt that the Chicanos in Austin were way more friendly than the ones in San Francisco. And I think its probably really competitive there, you know, it's a big city, for me I mean. Gloria always used to laugh when I talked about San Francisco is a big city because she didn't think it was, but for me it was. You know, it's competitive and expensive, so – you know, there is no parking so things are harder, you know. Like you have to – you know, things – you have to make a bigger effort so people are not as free to, you know, be so friendly. You're like having a hard time. I don't know, that's what I experienced, you know. Like things were hard, you know – like you have to live next to other people that were making noises. Your home life was not that pleasant, you know. There's a lot of homeless people.

MS. CORDOVA: And you moved there at a time when the prices were going up dramatically.

MS. WILSON: Oh, yeah. It was amazing. Yeah. Yeah. Things were very, very expensive. So, you know that's – I mean, actually I lived in the Mission when I first moved there. And, you know, first of all I moved when I was kind of older. Like I was like about 43 I think. And it's very different when you move there and you're 20, you know, and – you know, I was living in Austin. I had a normal little house that we were renting but it was – you know, I had a yard – back and front and – but over there we moved into these tiny spaces with like my wall – I looked out the window and I saw a brick wall. It was completely dark, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Where were you?

MS. WILSON: That was in – I can't remember the name of the street – in the Mission too.

MS. CORDOVA: It's okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. And then –

MS. CORDOVA: And then you moved somewhere else?

MS. WILSON: Then I moved somewhere else. I moved to Park Merced apartments next to San Francisco University, but first I moved to the Mission – to – what's the name of the street? I can't believe I forgot already. I can't remember. It's was a very short name. But anyway, it was pretty sad because I would – you know, first of all we moved into a low apartment that was in the underground. I mean under the ground. So, to be able to go there you had to walk through the garage. It was like a dark black hallway. And then the apartment was like a one-bedroom, kind of – like the kitchen was in the living room. And I had a little piece of yard outside. It was like not a yard; it was like a little terrace. And so that was – and they were owned by Chinese people. I really enjoyed that because – you know, and I had – by that time I had gotten with this Chinese girlfriend of mine, Kit Quan. She was also a writer and that's how I met her, through Gloria.

MS. CORDOVA: Her name was?

MS. WILSON: Kit Quan.

MS. CORDOVA: Kit Quan?

MS. WILSON: Q-U-A-N. She's a very smart and creative writer and Gloria worked with her a lot and she – anyway, we lived next to this place and it was like we would walk out the door and there would be people thrown in the streets, you know, that had been doing crack or alcohol or something and that was like – I was not used to that at all. It was really hard for me to see this. And there were many Latinos, which was really sad, you know. They were like – I guess, I don't know really who those people were, but, I would guess were people that went there to work and they just got discouraged, or maybe they were Chicanos – yeah – and I didn't know. I don't know, but it was very sad that so many of them – you know, it was like thrown in the streets and so that was not that great for me.

I mean, at first it was great because I was, you know, enjoying the fact that I'm in another city and then I loved the Mission because, you know, all the Tienditas and their life there, it's just really, really wonderful, but it's a hard life, you know. I mean, it's not easy at all and I'm always very aware of poverty and I'm always very aware that nothing cute about poverty. You know what I mean? I was not trying to slum down. You know how you call it when you go live with people –

MS. CORDOVA: Slumming.

MS. WILSON: Slumming. I was not slumming. I wasn't doing that. I just – this was the place that we could find there. So then after like five months of living there I said I can't live with her anymore. I've got to go. So we moved to Park Merced and that turned things because it was green and it was quiet and peaceful. And then I got a studio at the Hunter's Point Shipyard, you know, and that was really good because even though there is nuclear waste there – you couldn't drink the water or anything – I had my first studio ever. I usually have always worked in my house, like in a corner, you know, in the kitchen, you know. So this is the first time in my life I had a studio so I was totally thrilled and that was really nice. I had that for about a year and it was so great. I mean like, it was like I had a job, you know. I would go and work there and it was just total happiness. And I would have my radio and play the music and just paint till 11:00 or 12:00 at night. So it was – there were very happy times there.

MS. CORDOVA: What is your work environment usually like? Do you like to play music while you're painting?

MS. WILSON: I do, yeah. I love to play music or I love to – another thing I love about San Francisco is their programs on the radio, NPR – all this Pacifica, you know. They had these great talk shows all day long – people discussing different problems, movies, ideas. I mean, that was like – I could not believe, like that went on 24 hours. I was like this is like heaven, you know.

And anything I did there, too, that I loved too was nature. Me and my girlfriend we would go out to like different places to walk or, you know, we would take the Highway 1 to go to Santa Cruz to see Gloria but also McNeil Ranch was one that we used to go walk on the way to Santa Cruz and different places in the area, so in terms of other socializing, I really didn't really do a lot. I got to be familiar more with the Asian community because of my girlfriend. She worked in the Asian women's shelter. So that was – you know, I got to understand a lot more of

that. That was really an eye-opening to me about the different Asian cultures and – you know, it was – like it’s another world, you know. And then –

MS. CORDOVA: Like what did you learn or what stayed with you?

MS. WILSON: Well, the – just the way that how different they are from each other. Do you know what I mean? And I can now – and not in even just in culture, but in the looks. You know what I mean? Like they look completely different from each other. And then also knowing about Kit’s family and their – like her father was a Buddhist. But a very restricting or rigid Buddhist. Like kind of like a Catholic, you know. But still she had the principles of a Buddhist. She had them. She was a very principled woman.

MS. CORDOVA: Is that when you started investigating Buddhism?

MS. WILSON: Actually I had studied already. I think I had always been reading about it and then I just found the center there that I started going to and – but it was – you know, it’s mainly white people. It wasn’t like there were Asian people at all. The Asians, they have – like in Canada, they have their Buddhist centers, but they are all in Chinese. It’s not like you can really go there. I mean, they’re – not that they’re not welcoming, but it’s their own thing, so basically the Buddhist centers I would go to were more run by whites. So that’s another story – [inaudible] – was with them because I went their meditations and I took a lot of classes, and, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: And the Zen Center is out there, too.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I really never went to that. I just went to the other one – to the center that was really helpful to me – their principles. Pema Chödrön is one of the main writers for them. She’s a lay woman that became a Buddhist nun.

MS. CORDOVA: What was her name?

MS. WILSON: Pema Chödrön. She has these great books: *The Wisdom of No Escape*, *The Places That Scare You*. She’s just incredible. That was very helpful and I think that was my transformation in terms of my ideals about life, you know. Like, I had – until then I had a very despairing view of life. I thought that the world was really a hell and you were here just to survive and to make it through until it was over, but through going to these programs I started realizing – and my experiences with Gloria too because Gloria loved the world, loved nature, loved trees, you know, loved all – everything, and so, you know, she really changed my mind about a lot of things because I was so skeptical of everything. And so, that’s when my transformation started and she always used to tell me, “You’re in Nepantla, you’re in between.” And I would go, “I just don’t want to be here.” But anyway, she was very, very important in that sense of so was Kit.

And so, I read a lot, you know and then – and then also I [END TAPE 3 SIDE A]– I didn’t really make that many new friends except for Gloria and then this other woman Migdalia Reyes, that she teaches at San Jose State University. She’s a social worker. She’s the dean of the social work department there, too, and she’s Puerto Rican and she collects my works, so – and she also likes to paint, so she would go visit me and paint with me and so that was really nice, but I – while I was there I took this class. It was called “Taking the Lead” and this is a class that helps you promote your work because I’m really not very good at it. It’s like not something I really want to do.

And then, you know, I took this class for like about six months and it was very helpful because after submitting my slides, which is not something I normally do, and so I got a show at San Francisco State University. I got a show at the Jewish Center in Palo Alto. I got a first prize on that and then I went to the Mission Cultural Center and they gave me a one-woman show [“Gestes”]. And that – you know, when I had that show at the Mission Cultural Center when – I think I sent them the slides and then they called me and they said, “Well, come over, we want you to have a show.” So I went and it was very good for me. It was one of my best shows ever in terms of the reception that I got from the people that – there were a little more Latinos from everywhere in Latin America. I mean the Chileans who first came because they – I said please put in there that I’m Chilean so they will see, you know. And so they were very, very supportive and they were right in there, in the guest book, you know. They understood what I was saying. Not just the Chileans. I mean, the Latin Americans in general, and so that was really, really helpful for me.

These beautiful dedications that they would write in the guest book, and I was amazed because I never expected a lot of them were in Spanish, which I never had, too. So, you know, it was really great. So I participated with them for a while in the Mission Cultural Center. And I can’t remember there was this man that kind of – And his name, I think, was Andres. I think he was –

MS. CORDOVA: A filmmaker and a poet, maybe?

MS. WILSON: I think so, yes. That was him, yeah. He was very nice. I loved that man. He’s so helpful.

MS. CORDOVA: Or Adrian or –

MS. WILSON: Maybe Adrian. Yeah, something like that. I'm trying to remember but I can't. And I –

MS. CORDOVA: And then Patricia Rodriguez was there as well. Did you work with her?

MS. WILSON: Who?

MS. CORDOVA: Patricia Rodriguez, or maybe she wasn't there yet.

MS. WILSON: I don't think that she was there. If she was – I just mainly dealt with him. He was the director of visual arts, is I dealt with him. And then I got invited a couple of more times to have piece or two in there, so I did that.

And then early on I had met Mia Gonzalez that used to run the store, Galería de la Raza. And so there – I had a show too. You know, I submitted there so I had a show there and she was very supportive of my work. And she left there and she opened this gallery called Encantada Gallery. It's where I designed her logo, you know the little bird. Those – she wanted it like that. It's not like I did it, but she – I did it for her and then – so we will always have this real nice relationship because I was really happy to help her, you know, with that. And she was always – you know, I had like about two or three shows at least there and – with her. And that also gave me to – I mean I sold the work and I got to know a lot of the people there.

And the other person I got to know there was Rene Yañez. I really liked that man too. He was so supportive, you know. He was like a lot of the Chicano men are not that supportive, you know, they just don't think much of the women. Well, maybe men in general don't think much of women, but he was completely not like that. He was not threatened by my work, which some people are because I think I'm really good and I'm very detailed and I think that some people get threatened. They think I'm better than them or something. I don't know, maybe that's arrogant, but I don't feel like that. I feel like anybody can have their peace and you know. I think probably every human being should do some kind of art.

But, you know, some people are like that and I don't really participate in that. Like I'm not – I don't really like to mingle too much. Like, I don't want to play that – like if somebody likes my work and they call me, okay, I'll do it, but I don't want to necessarily go and be with important people that would move my career ahead. It always happens with me by coincidence, you know? Like somebody says my name to somebody else and then they call me. And, or they see my work and they look for me. But it's not like I'm going to go stand there with my slides in their face. You know, I just find that so depressing. It's not why I'm doing my art, you know. I'm not trying to pretend here that I'm a humble human being, but it's painful for me to even approach somebody that could get me ahead in my career. I just don't like it, you know. So I figure this is not why I do it. I – you know, not that I mind, you know, when I get good invitations, but that's not what moves me.

And, you know, actually it also based in good Buddhist principles, too, that, you know, fame. It's not something you should look for at all. It's actually you should not look for it at all because that is not the goal. The goal is to be happy and to be happy you have to take a look at yourself spiritually, you know.

So, yeah, so that was, you know, a little bit of my community there, but like I said, I pretty much stayed working alone in my studio, and then I would go visit Gloria. That was really my community there, you know, so I really didn't participate too much in the – now when Rene started inviting me – you know, he started inviting me to the show for the day of the dead that he does, and I loved that. I mean, that was so great because I loved – you know, we would – all the artists started meeting like around July or June. Oh, you don't know how happy I loved that. We would meet and so we would plan what we were going to do. I mean, normally in my case it didn't need that much planning because I'd just put up paintings. They would give me a wall. He would put me like in an area of the installation that was like called El Museo – you know, whatever. And so I would just have my pictures straight up there.

MS. CORDOVA: You didn't create an altar?

MS. WILSON: I didn't create an altar.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: No, I don't do that. I don't – I'm really not that interested in that. I mean, I paint, you know, I draw and – and so I would kind of have subjects that would have to do with the exhibit, but not create for it.

MS. CORDOVA: Like what would you consider would be a good painting for Day of the Dead?

MS. WILSON: Well, for instance I can remember one that I have and I think I showed to you. This is called *El Tiempo*. And this is a painting where it has this boy that has a clock on top of his head. And there's all these shoes floating around him. And so the idea on that painting was that each one of the shoes was each one of the lives that he had lived. So Day of the Dead is like you live and die within life.

And you know, actually all my pieces have to do with life and death one way or another. You know what I mean?

It's how we live our lives, you know. That's - you know, that's how it is. So that was one I can remember. I think I have shown that big painting that I told you - the red fish painting where these people are being drowned crossing - going across the border. So that was one too that, you know, they were dying and why were they dying? You know, so there's no way - my work, you know, always finds something that has to do with somebody innocent dying, you know, except lately, of course, that I have turned my face to the universe and so I'm trying to portray the beauty of today. I mean of the world today. And so that - it's not in the same direction, but at the time that's what I was doing.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I'm glad you brought that up because I was wanting going to ask you a little bit about this sort of shift that you have going on in which I think you are - beauty has always been a theme of your work.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Right? Like that's not necessarily new. But you're attempting to ease off a little bit on the sorrow maybe. Is that -

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I mean that's a way where - I want, you know, I mean I feel that what I do besides that I love doing is a contribution to other people or, you know, I feel that - I mean especially people that like to look at it. It's always been very important for me to give them something that is good, which in many cases is the beauty of it. So I really want to give them beauty and I think that is a gift.

But the other concept is kind of like - and especially these days I feel that with all the chaos that is happening in the world because we have this situation happening now with the war and I feel that it's very - a lot of people are very much depressed and, you know. So, it's kind of like a given now that that's happening. So I wanted to shift it to the place where - well, okay, there's a war and there's all of people suffering and dying, but that's not that there is, because there are still people falling in love. There's still the sky. There's still nature.

And really to me it's nothing but a mismanagement, you know. It's like I think the world is just being mismanaged. I think that's it - there's a wrong mind - mental construction of what the world is about because if we really wanted to live in a different way it's - all of it is out there. There's abundance. There's plenty of things for everybody. I'm thinking - I'm not trying to be like I'm a goody-two-shoes here, but I really believe that this could be completely different if we had - like let's say instead of having this person that we have as a president, which I don't have one way or another to say, but his goals don't look too spiritual to me.

If we had somebody that was very spiritual, like, okay, let's say if somebody that thought that the goal in life was to be a better human being - like that was the president, somebody - a woman or a man, either way - that thought, okay we're going to really become better and we're going to be compassionate. Okay, we put the Dalai Lama or Pema Chödrön as president. Can you imagine what the world would be like? And that could happen. It's just that we are used to thinking that it all has to be backed by money, you know. And it doesn't have to. It can be backed by love.

So, I feel that my contribution - I don't want to contribute too much to the negativity, which I never really have, because I never really meant it to, to - it's not like I was going to that point of view. I was showing, you know, look at the sorrow what happened and you feel bad for - maybe we could do something about it so these people are not dying, suffering, and being tortured. So, but in this case I'm just trying to give it the twist of, you know, there is other way to believe in the world: a world of light, a world of happiness, a world where people may even want to share with each other and not just try to consume as much as they can for themselves and leave everybody behind; you know, like, be the number one top person. Why don't we all be a little bit more, you know, where our goals have to do with our spirits, which is - that is all we have, you know, really. I mean, we can have as many things as we want, but they never make us happy. Nobody I know - a lot of people have a lot of money and they're not happy. I can tell. You know, they tell me. And so obviously to me, happiness is not to be found there. And actually the people that have the least that I know are the happiest, you know.

So, I think that my change there has been that. And I also think that - I met this woman, you know, Mary Margaret Navarro, that she has been very influential in my work because she's a feminist and believes in the matriarchy and so there's a way where it's kind of made me realize that part of the problem in the world, that it's very directed by patriarchy - capitalist patriarchy where, you know, the values of the men are out of balance and they are too powerful. They have - I mean, you only have to look at the Senate. I mean, you see bunch of white men sitting with each other. They all look alike to me. You can't tell the difference between them, so they only like each other, you see.

So instead of that, what if they were half women and half men, and half of all the people of all colors? I don't - you know? So that would be very helpful to - you know, maybe people will have different ideas but they are all the same. They don't know. They just have this one point of view. So, the way - the point of view of the matriarchy is that it's not like the one, you know. It's everyone and it's a sharing; it's like nurturing.

So that's what I'm trying to promote in my work now; like the growth of the spiritual, the growth of the importance of nature, you know, like the girl holding the calla lily. You know, the woman of color being crowned, you know, having a place in the world as a queen. The *Sleeping Beauty*, you know, this – it's just that painting, *Sleeping Beauty*, was a painting just about beauty and serenity, you know. That is possible in life. There is such a thing as serenity, not this desperate need to go and have more and more things, to impress people or, or to –

MS. CORDOVA: I do, and one of the other things that I guess it brings up is that as far as I can see or as far as I know, this is the first time it's really the nude female figure in your work. And when did – how did that happen?

MS. WILSON: Well, this has a little bit of a story. I was doing – actually I was getting ready for the show – for a show in San Antonio about two or three years ago and I was doing a drawing and I was doing a drawing that was called – I can't remember the name of it, but it was a drawing of – do you know how this is called: "A lo que le paso a Jesus Cristo?" You know the suffering of Jesus?

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, the – his last –

MS. WILSON: Well, yeah, but how he suffered has a special name.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes.

MS. WILSON: I was doing a piece on that. I was doing a piece on the suffering of human beings as Jesus. I was using this young girl that – I was also representing what is happening in Juarez – you know, all these women that are getting killed and I wanted to show how so many towns' young girls or women are the number one target of a war – you know, a war against women. They get raped in wars, you know. So, I was trying to refer to that and so I just drawn this girl and I made her like she was going to be naked, but I didn't want to make her naked. I just drew her like up her neck.

But she looked like a boy, so my friend, Migdalia, told me, "Why don't you go ahead and do the breast?" And I said, "Well, I don't normally do that. I don't even know that I can do breasts." And she goes, "Well, why don't you try?" And I did, and I – so I did and it really – yes, that is the one.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, the one with the thorns?

MS. WILSON: Yes, thorn. Yeah. And I still can remember the name – *Calvario*.

MS. CORDOVA: *Calvario*.

MS. WILSON: *El Calvario* – instead of Jesus, it is el Calvario. And so then I did her breasts and they really – I was like amazed. Like I thought, you know, I have always been doing these people with clothes. It just never occurred to me. I mean, I did take figure drawing classes, but there is something about the fragility of a body without clothes that really moved me at that point. So then after that I just started doing nudes all over the place, you know. Like, because it's so non-threatening, you know, and so open, so – you know, who we are really like as human beings. We are always – you know, our clothes are so symbolic. We don't even realize that we don't need to have the clothes on, you know. Like it's so important.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and I guess just it seems to me a large theme with your work has also been portraying the vulnerability of humans.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And I see that from the very start; even from that first painting we saw of the bodies dead on the beach.

MS. WILSON: On the beach, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And – and so I guess it would be a natural evolution for you to move into something that would make the human figure even more vulnerable.

MS. WILSON: Yes, right. That's great. I mean, I really have not thought about it, but it's true. That is what I have done. It's like showing the vulnerability of the human beings and their fragility. And so when I discovered this, it's like, you know it's just beautiful. I'm just so happy that human beings, you know, don't have to have clothes on and also – you know, I guess it's just the fact that I grew up so Catholic. You know what I mean? They just make such a big deal. I mean, I remember we couldn't even go through the church with like short sleeve – sleeveless shirts. We had to cover ourselves because – I don't know why. I don't remember, but you couldn't go in. And so like I always wear shirts with sleeves on because I guess I don't – I don't have a problem with sleeveless. So then I think that part was stopping me from doing the nude figures and now I'm like I don't worry at all about it, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and that brings up another question for me is when did you start moving away from the Catholic Church?

MS. WILSON: I think I started moving away from the Catholic really early on. I was just like, "No." I – you know, I just found a lot of hypocrisy and so that was pretty early. I was like totally into it until I was 15 or 16. Same when I went to the university; it's like I never when back, I mean, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, yeah. I really was very – and then what happened in Chile, even though they were very helpful to the people – actually the Catholic Church in Santiago especially really helped, so that was good, but it wasn't because they were from the Catholic Church. They were just very good priests on their own, you know, and so I – you know, really my thing with the Catholic Church? It was never really their ideas. It was a lot more their images. That's really what I like. I used to go and look at Jesus for hours, but it wasn't because of the religion. It was because I loved the image. So it was kind of like my first touch with art was through the Catholic images. And it's very clear in all my work it has this sense of – the saints are – you know, doing different things.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and I've sort of been thinking a little bit about your devils and angels. Maybe that there's something thematic there perhaps.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: That even as you're moving, maybe, more towards this issue of beauty the women that you're portraying is sort of angelic beauties.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, they're – yeah. They are saint-like. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. And of course a piece that you are working on at the same time, which you sort of showed me the drawing for, is the image of the young boy with the little devils in different windows, so –

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: – I mean, there seems to be this constant depiction of heaven and hell for you.

MS. WILSON: Exactly. This is so great that you're saying this.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, because actually I've been thinking about that. I think I want to do like two big paintings. One is going to be heaven and the other one is going to be hell. Because it's actually what I feel like life is about, you know. Life is about both. And there's the times when I really want to show the fact that there is heaven in the Earth – that it can be and it could be a lot more. But there's always still this suffering part. You know, like our pain and suffering that we already experienced, and that, to me, appear like in that drawing as our evils. That they're really not evils; they're just our issues that we're stuck on that we can't let it go and they don't let us be as clean, pure human being as we want to be. Not clean; that sounds really bad, but I mean just good human beings. You know, with good hearts and, you know, stuff like that.

So I think that that – and then also, I mean, the war that is happening, it really kind of affects me. Also the war in Israel and Palestine. It really like affects me. I mean, I just feel so – it just really bothers me that what is happening there is just like it's never ending and it goes on and people are being blown away or people are being rolled over by bulldozers, you know. So it's – it's just – I can't not think of it. And so those pieces have come through also. You know, like I just did a piece of a boy that is angel and it's a boy that was throwing rocks and he just got killed, so there's wings coming out of his back because he's about to go. So he's covering his face, but he's about to leave the Earth.

MS. CORDOVA: And so that figure is a Palestinian or an Israeli boy?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, it could be either way. It could be either way. Because I don't really want to say just because I don't really – I mean my philosophy is non-violent. And a lot of my friends would probably say, you know, that can't have that posture, but I really do. I just – I don't know. I'm sorry I don't have a solution to give them, but I just don't think that shooting each other is going to do it, you know. I think they need to talk about it. They need to figure it out. And I know when you're in that area and I don't really touch into that too much, it's like, it's either one way or the other.

But I, unfortunately, cannot go there because I don't believe in that. I don't want either one of them to die, you know. So that boy could be an Israeli boy that got blown away by a suicide bomber or it could be a Palestinian boy that was throwing rocks and got run over by a tractor. The whole point is that the war kills young people

that will never have an opportunity to have a life and to have all the things that other people do.

But – so that’s the idea. That and – you know, that exhibit that I’m doing is going to be called “Divine Universes” and so there’s a way where the ornaments in the side that have these golden arches. They kind of represent to me a little bit the entrance to heaven. So like there’s a girl that’s holding the calla lily and I thought maybe she’s the person that’s going to say hello to you when you go to heaven. So this is all like a little bit related, you know, that this boy has the arches too because he’s about to – he’s going there. He’s about to leave and then he’s so beautiful and he already has his wings that are going to take him there.

MS. CORDOVA: And I – I’m probably blanking on the artist, but it does make me think of a Guatemalan artist, I think, who attaches the wings?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. He uses photographs.

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, exactly.

MS. WILSON: Luis?

MS. CORDOVA: Luis. Yeah, he’s an incredible artist. My God, I love his work. He’s black and – I mean, brown, kind of sepia tone

MS. CORDOVA: Yes, exactly.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I love his work.

MS. CORDOVA: I do, too.

MS. WILSON: But I mean I don’t – I mean, this is probably a Latin American thing, you know, because we grow up with so much Catholic teachings that have so many angels. I mean, you’re bound to come through with the angels, and so we appropriated them into the present life. I mean, it’s been done a lot, you know. It’s not like it’s something I’m doing that is, you know. I mean, sometimes I don’t mind revisiting old images that other people have done because they don’t come from there. They come from me with something that I’m experiencing.

It’s like I’m doing the one with the egg. There’s a woman that is coming out of an egg and in that piece it’s about like – it’s sort of like about growing or giving birth to your own self because, you know, we don’t come from a real egg and I would never use a real egg, but that was – it’s a take – from Hieronymus Bosch, and I love his work and so he has a lot of those and I think this is kind of in the back of my mind where Hieronymus have influenced me because he’s one of the artists that I love the most. I mean, I don’t try to do his work. Do you know what I mean? But I love his work so much, you know, so –

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and if you were to sort of select a – you know, a catalog of artists or – that you would say have influenced you over time, is – are there certain names that come up for you?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I have some – I don’t know if you know the work of Terry Ybanez? She has really influenced my work. I mean, I always look – I know that we do the work alike, but there’s something about what she does that is so beautiful and so creative, and she puts like a lot of diablitos in it and so I feel that we’re – you know, I always look at her work and it’s very inspiring to me.

And there’s this artist, and I think he may be dead, his name is George Tooker. He was an artist from like – he must have been born like in the 1930’s. And his work – if you can look him up – if you can go on there under George Tooker and look him up, I mean, this is like I – this is who I want to be. Like if I wanted to be an artist, that’s who I want to be painting like. I mean I love his work. I mean, I used to paint with his paintings next to my canvases so I could look at what he was doing. And because I just – his light was incredible, the way he does hair, the way that he – it’s amazing.

So that’s – yeah, then of course I love Frida Kahlo. I mean, I know it’s very overdone, but I’m sorry. I still love her work and you can’t even mention it because I’m using her for everything possible. It doesn’t matter. I think it’s okay. I love her work too. I mean I would have loved to paint like her.

And then there’s this artist – Italian artist. I cannot remember his last – his first name, but his last name is Cucci, and that’s C-U-C-C-I. And he does nothing like what I do. I mean like he does this kind of like one-line things. I wish I would have shown you the book. It was at my house, but – and I can email you the name and maybe you can find that book. And it’s not so much which he does in terms of technique, but the ideas behind his work is what I love. I mean, he’s amazing.

There’s another artist – a Cuban artist that I cannot remember his name right now, but I look at his work all the time. It’s just really amazing.

Then, let's see, who else do I really like?

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and when you look at their works, do you – is it just a matter of looking at the subject matter, or looking at the technique, or what is it that is drawing you?

MS. WILSON: It's both. It's both actually. I mean, a lot of it – like there's another artist, who – she's from Austin. Her name is Julie Speed. I don't know if you know her. I mean, I actually love her. That's probably one of my favorite artists in the world, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: I can see a lot of connection between you two actually.

MS. WILSON: She's unbelievable – her work, and so – and – but you know, like in her case, it's technique what I love – technique and all her subject matter too, but technique and subject matter. Then there's other artists like Tooker; it's more technique, you know. Then in that other guys, Cucci, his ideas, not the technique because I think the technique is not that great, you know. I mean he is what he is, you know. I could never do something like that, you know.

But yeah, so it's mainly – actually I look like, for instance, Paul Klee. He – I love his thinking behind the painting; not so much what he paints, but the ideas behind it. I mean, I am like so blown away by him.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you ever read artists or their writings or is that –

MS. WILSON: I read his biography of Paul Klee. I read about him and I love reading about them, actually. I also – Dali; I love his work. I mean, I really do. I think he was just incredible.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and that's a good segue for me to ask you about – I mean, mentioning both Frida Kahlo and Dali, to ask you about the sort of surrealist content of your work. I mean, I'm not quite sure why I would bring that term up, but somehow – maybe it is the image of the young boy with the clock over his head and the shoes floating or, you know, there are a couple of images that – the young man's head on fire – that definitely suggests surrealist techniques. And would you call yourself a surrealist or what does that term mean for you?

MS. WILSON: Well, I think that for what I have read of surrealism, what I do with that is that I use part of their techniques and I think what they did was they started with a blank piece of paper and they let their subconscious come through and that's how I do my work. Now, I can't really – I mean I'm not trying to be a surrealist at all. I just do what I do and – I mean, I'm sure that I have given myself permission to do some of the things that I do from what I have seen that they do, you know. I don't think that people work in a vacuum. I think we're also influenced by each other.

And – but basically I think that it's just – for me, I started with – you know, I have a feeling of some sort and I just start drawing it and then all of a sudden there you go. There's the image and normally comes from real deep in my subconscious – something that I'm having to deal with or I've seen or I'm experiencing and so it comes through. And I think that is what they did, you know. They kind of worked like that and there's probably other things that they did, but I'm not sure. I haven't studied a lot of theories on art or everything and it's kind of difficult for me because I like – I just think that – I mean, I don't really don't know.

I mean, I don't – I'm not comfortable also with like labeling people and – you know, I think maybe that has a place, but I just feel that what I do is so not intellectual. It's so intuitional and it comes out of – you know, like I remember when I was being taught how to paint my teacher would say, "Don't paint; just look." You know? Don't – you're not thinking because that means you're thinking of the past or in the future and the point of your painting – you're reacting to the painting in the present right there. You're looking at the whole thing. What do you have? You know. You're looking – looking and reacting to that; looking and reacting the whole time and letting it take you to where you need to go because basically you don't really control the painting. It takes you – I mean, you know, when I do my basic sketch, that's what the whole thing comes up right away, you know.

And I even – for the purpose of making it look more perfect or prettier, I fix it and then I have to go back to the original because that is where the idea came from. So, it's like it has its own life and you have to let it grow kind of like a child: organic, where it develops and you follow it. It's kind of you're running after the painting touching it here, touching it there. So that's how I'll start to work and that is how I do it, you know. I don't – you know, I'm being – I'm trying to be very aware of what is happening and, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Are dreams ever a root for creating your paintings?

MS. WILSON: I don't think so, no. It's very much like – it's a funny thing, you know. It's kind of like just happens to me. Like I just let it – and I guess I've been doing it for so long that I – I mean, I guess I learned to let it listen to in my hand and my head together, you know. I just would sit there with a sketch and then – and sometimes they don't work. Sometimes they're just – I just be – I would just be drawing for awhile and most of the stuff I

wouldn't use, but then sometimes – always usually – always I have one that comes through and I'm like okay this works.

And it usually has to have that little surrealist thought – I mean touch, where there's something happening that is kind of awkward that is – that is telling you about what is happening to these people in a kind of a funny way or in an outrageous way. Not outrageous, just kind of non-ordinary way. It's kind of a little bit a change of the environment that doesn't quite make sense.

And that's another thing I do a lot. I don't never – when I do a drawing, I don't never know what it is that I'm doing clearly. I kind of – by intuition I do, but it is not something like, okay, this is exactly what I am doing. It can be interpreted in so many ways, you know. I mean, it could be anything, but there's something that is saying that is indisputable, but it's not clear and I think that's okay that – you know, I'm not doing a pamphlet with – you know. It's just kind of complex I guess, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, would you ever consider yourself a portraitist?

MS. WILSON: I don't think so. I mean, I guess that's kind of what I do, but I don't really like doing portraits of people. I mean, like people that ask me to do them. And I can do them but I don't really like to. I don't like draw like real people. I like to draw my own people – you know, people that I make up because they are from another world. I guess I never thought about that, but it even bothers me when people ask me, "Can you do my portrait?" I'm like, "I don't do portraits." I really – I get kind of mad. It's like there's people that do that; I don't. Don't you see what I do? So, I mean, I'm never rude or anything, or maybe sometimes, but I just don't like doing that, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I mean, I – in looking at all of you work, I would say only – only a very few are perhaps actual people. Right? I mean, I know that the image of your sister and then the – or maybe that's her; maybe it's not.

MS. WILSON: Well, I mean, they're all people. I mean, they don't look like real human beings. They look like – it's my version of the human beings, you know. I stylize people and that's what I was meaning by that. Now, you know that a lot of them are people. A lot of them are probably me, you know. But in the sense that they don't look like me and they look like a – kind of a idealized version of human beings, you know. I just make them beautiful and saints and – you know, I just have this sense of human beings as just kind of pure and –

MS. CORDOVA: Has anyone ever critiqued you for not being more accurate or something not being more realistic in terms of your depictions of people then?

MS. WILSON: Not that they've told me that, you know, but probably some people would, you know, because it's like – I'm just not, you know, I mean, I'm not like – there's this guy called Lucien Freud that he does people of all the muscles and stuff. I'm not interested in that. That's not what I'm doing, you know. The people are just like a little door to what I want to show and it's not – I'm not trying to get, you know – that's – I – you know, some people think that stylization is not that great. You know what I mean? But I don't really care. That's just what I do.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I mean, I don't know. I mean, for one you don't see a lot of this type of work in like big museums and stuff, you know. It's like – it's like a lot of – you know, now it's becoming to be more representational and stuff, but don't think that what I do is like – there's another artist that I forgot to mention. His name is Mark Ryden and he is an illustrator. Now, that – to me he's probably the – my most favorite artist in the world and if you see his work, you will think like I'm nuts, but it's not that. It's just that I love his technique. His technique is incredible.

MS. CORDOVA: What was his last name?

MS. WILSON: Ryden, it's R-Y-D-E-N. And you can look on his, he has a web site, so you can look at his work and it's like – but he's an illustrator, so – but also he's doing fine arts now. I mean, he's like having shows and as a matter of fact I think I saw like in *Art in America* he did all these series and, you know, his people look kind of like cartoons, but it's just really interesting what he does. I just – you know.

I remember I took a class in San Francisco with this guy and his professor was kind of an abstract painter and stuff and I said – I brought this magazine and said, "This is what I want to paint like." Of course, I've been painting my whole life. This was not that long ago and I just wanted to take a class to just refresh myself and be around artists and stuff. And I said, "This is how I want to paint." And he says, "That is not good." He said, "That is only – let it be just one of them." He hated his work. Because, you know, he's like – [inaudible] – and abstract and all of that. And I was like, "I'm sorry." Like he uses a lot of symbols like the sacred heart and, you know,

even Jesus in the paintings, so it's very, very interesting.

There's this magazine called *Juxtapose*, it's J-U-X - I don't know how you spell it.

MS. CORDOVA: *Juxtapose*.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, like the word. Have you - do you know the magazine?

MS. CORDOVA: I don't know it.

MS. WILSON: Well, you should probably get that magazine because it's got a lot of like kind of a new work that people are doing that are younger. A lot of them are males and it can be a very sexist magazine, but some of the artists are really good and they're kind of - in a way it's called like low-brow art. They call themselves - there's a lot of like tattoo art and - and it's a big movement of this happening in L.A. and it - but it's really interesting.

There's this gallery called La Luz de Jesus Gallery [Los Angeles, California] that I went to see when I was there. It's like one of my dreams is to go there and I really think that if all that I have to is to drive my work there and they probably will show it. I just haven't had the time, but I think I'm going to do that at some point because I like that crowd and they're like - not the crowd; I like the artists that they are putting in there. They are kind of like what I do a little bit. You know, their ideas are different, though. You know what I mean? A lot of sexist stuff and, you know, very male - very, very male, but it's a technique that I'm going for.

And like Mark Ryden - he had this incredible painting that I love. It's a little boy in a tricycle and he's driving the tricycle and he has like this beautiful blond hair and beautiful blue eyes and he's like in a little suburban home - all kinds of pinkish colors and his tricycle is pink and he has a cap and in the cap has a Nazi swastika in it and he's - the cap is pink and then he has another swastika on his arm and he has shoes that are like - you know how kids used these shoes that are like that and then they have a little correita like that?

MS. CORDOVA: Like a sandal with a -

MS. WILSON: Like a sandal, but really like - I mean he's like a angel and he's wearing a swastika. I mean, he's wearing a Nazi uniform and to me that is like unbelievable because you can't find a better portrait of the contradiction of - he probably - I'm not saying that a lot of people are Nazis or anything, but the ideas, you know, the - and so the way he did it was like - it's just like you - it's just make you have chills to look at this.

And not all of his work is like that, you know, but there's a lot of that. And when I saw piece, I'm like, I'm in love with this guy. I'm in love with his work, you know. This is the most beautiful pink pastel tones and his beautiful pink swastika and he's looking at you with this intense kind of mean eyes, but transparent blue eyes. It just like blew me away, you know, so - his name is Mark Ryden, so if you get a chance like I said, you know. Maybe we'll meet at some point and I can show you - bring some of his books to show you. Now - [off mike].

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughs.] Well, and I guess what's striking about hearing you describe it is that I - often I - you know, I guess you're images are often sort of beautiful, but again meant to disconcert your viewer.

MS. WILSON: Exactly. Thank you.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, and so he's doing that as well and so can see how there'd be that crossover.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. And then he uses Abraham Lincoln a lot for some reason, so he's like always putting him in there and there's little things that he does that - I just follow everything he does. I'm always reading, looking at what he does and he's just probably the top artist for me at this moment.

MS. CORDOVA: Interesting.

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: And actually you had mentioned briefly, like, that you didn't see work like yours in museums and I thought I'd go back to that and sort of say, well, why isn't work like yours in museums? Or what would you see as why your work wouldn't fit or -

MS. WILSON: Well, I think that people that are in charge of museums are mainly white people and they just have their own ideas about what art is and it's normally something that is not what I do. You know, why would they be interested in immigrants or - but you know, or they - what I - the idea I get, you know, it's that they - I mean they have too many people to choose from, but basically it's, you know, very white oriented and I don't think that their ideas are the same as ours, especially being that I'm an immigrant. So they just think differently and they think their aesthetics are just different and they don't probably think that my work - they probably think

my work is kind of sentimental maybe – too something. I’m sure they would like probably destroy it completely, you know. I’m totally sure that, “Oh, man look at this.” Whatever. But I don’t care, you know. That’s just what they do. But, I mean, it’s basically that and then you have to fall in the grace of these people and I’m not going to.

I mean, like, they could come and like my work if they would like, but I’m not going to make an effort to go find them because, you know, it’s just – their ideas are – you know, and mainly it’s their own people and they pick a couple in between, you know, people of color to just – I’m sure to throw them in there to say, well, at least we have them, you know, but it’s very, very not open in that sense, you know. It’s like, I mean, you can even see it with the Chicanos. You know, they have like a tremendous – you know, struggle to be able to be recognized and they just like completely trash their work. I mean, I remember even being here where we had an exhibit and I was like the only Latina in it and they were like – most of these people were Chicanos and they were like – they were like these people can’t do a thing. This is about 25 years ago and they were like saying that this makes no sense and so it was pretty exclusive, you know.

They think that this one thing goes and they’re also like – they have their abstract ways of doing things where they go into this intellectual trip and, you know, I don’t understand personally. I mean, I’m sure some of it is good, but it’s not very human to me. I don’t know why these people are doing it. To tell you the truth, even some of the Latin American artists can go that way too, you know, where they start copying what is being done in Europe and there so they can – they fight with each other who can be more conceptual than the other and it’s like, I just could care less.

I don’t – you know, I don’t – I don’t understand it and it’s like it’s just kind of like trying to be witty – to outwit each other, you know. It’s like that’s not – I mean, it’s just that I can’t relate to them. Maybe that’s really what it is, you know, but they always seem to be in there because it’s like – it’s sort of like very selective. It’s like – you see, when I have my work I can go to a class of five-year-olds and they – I can show them the slides and they would have an opinion about every one of my pieces. I mean, there was a friend of mine that has a daughter and she came and asked me – she goes, “How come your pieces are all sad?” So we had a long conversation about that, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Would you agree with her?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, a lot of my pictures are sad. And then when I was in San Francisco I worked a little bit at doing a grant as an artist-in-residency, and I worked with kindergartners and so I would do a slide presentation of my work and I would ask them, “Okay, you know, I’m going to show you and you tell me what it means.” And they were like – they couldn’t wait to tell me what it was. They had their own ideas. They were funny. They were like whatever. But you see, they can look at the work and they can tell me something. And these are like kids that are like – you know, they’re mainly brown kids that they have never seen art in their lives. You know what I mean? And they can look at my work.

Well, now, one of these museum people – they can’t understand my work at all because they think it’s lower than what they do. I don’t know; maybe I’m too negative.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughter.]

MS. WILSON: I mean, do you get that impression?

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I haven’t seen any negative criticism of your work actually or –

MS. WILSON: Well, I mean, most of my work has been exhibited in non-profit organizations.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. Well, and – I mean, I think that’s part of it, right?

MS. WILSON: Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It’s that you haven’t maybe even been exposed or – it’s not like you’re the only one doing the – it’s not just coming from you. It’s possibly not being looked at from museums. I don’t know. I mean, but it’s true: you’re – in looking at your résumé, it’s mostly what I would say are small galleries; sort of like Women in their Work, the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, the Encantada Gallery, Galería de la Raza, La Peña – these are all –

MS. WILSON: Yeah, the universities.

MS. CORDOVA: – small niche galleries and pretty much I’m not sure if there any museums here. Maybe there are a few.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, there is. I have been in a –

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, there is, because there is MACLA.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and then in the Museum of Austin and also that exhibit that went to the museum of El Paso, but overall they're like - you know, they were done - actually, those exhibits - they were done through this non-profit, you know, activist organization, so - I mean, I just - I also have not applied to much to those places, but I just have a feeling that they really wouldn't go for it anyway. Maybe I should try.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I wonder if you're not pushing yourself in that direction or you're already sort of, you know, shutting the door.

MS. WILSON: That is true. I mean, like actually that's kind of little bit what's going to happen now because this gallery at the Blue Star, where - you know, in San Antonio there's this guy. I don't know if you know him: Arturo Almeida. He is the - he is like the art buyer for the University of Texas at San Antonio that is directed by Ricardo Romo and he has a huge collection -

MS. CORDOVA: So at UTSA?

MS. WILSON: At UTSA, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay.

MS. WILSON: And they actually are buying my work. And they - so he connected me with this woman at this gallery and most of the people there are going to be white and stuff, so I don't know how this is going to go because mainly when I show - not that I never show to white people, but, you know, like I thought they were all liberals and people kind of with similar ideas, so these are people that just collect art. I don't know what they are like, you know, but I just don't know that they're going to relate too much and if they don't, well, you know, but you know.

I mean, then again I've had - like I - when I was in the Esperanza, this guy came and he was a - he used to be a major in the Air Force and he came in there and he bought three pieces, you know. Like, he said, "I want them right now." And he just wrote me a check and at first when I saw him he was wearing like a tee-shirt and he looked like - kind of like - he said, "I want these three paintings." And I'm like, "Do you know how much they are?" And he goes, "How much?" And I said, "Twelve hundred." And he said, "Okay." So he wrote a check and I was like wow! I mean that was great - [END TAPE 3, SIDE B] - but it overall -

MS. CORDOVA: Twelve hundred for each piece?

MS. WILSON: Each piece.

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah.

MS. WILSON: And he bought three of them, so it's like he gave me a check for like \$3,000 or \$4,000. Something like that. But so I don't know. Maybe - but you know, I just - I really do know that the way that the people that work for these institutions are very elitist. I mean, they really are.

I mean, I actually was part of this college art conference in San Antonio and I just - I could totally sense it that - you know, that they were - you know, the art historians there were like, you know, they could care less and they're not even artists, you know? I really shouldn't talking bad about the art historians, but - [laughter] - do you know what I mean? It's like if they could paint maybe they could come and tell me, but you know. But they always have a way where they choose within their ideologies, you know, and I think that's -

MS. CORDOVA: Well, yeah. I think there's a definite history there, so your criticism is not alone.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, right.

MS. CORDOVA: You do not stand alone in terms of your sense of being on the margins.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I mean, not that I really tried to go into it, but, you know, also there's no place for you to try. I mean, like how do you get in there? I'm not going to go talk to a curator that, you know, probably wouldn't talk to me anyway, like so it's - I mean, I've had that sense, you know, so -

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I see I'm getting to the end of this tape, so I'm going to close it here, but I'd like to continue for a little bit.

MS. WILSON: Okay.

MS. CORDOVA: Okay, let me stop it here. [Audio break.] All right, we're recording. This is Cary Cordova for the

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, on July 27th, 2004, interviewing Liliana Wilson and this is session three and disc two.

And with that, Liliana, I want to go back in time a little bit. We talked a little bit about your San Francisco community, but I'm not really sure we covered your Austin community before that and how maybe they were supporting you or what institutions you found here that were supportive of your work.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I have a long story of - in Austin because I worked - I lived here before I went to San Francisco for about 20 years and that's the reason why I'm back [already ?]: because of this community.

The way that that happened to me was I was pretty much being an artist of my own without ever showing anything until I met Cynthia Perez that is the director of La Peña and that's a Latino arts organization in Austin. And she was the first person that, you know, started promoting my work and she really liked it. She gave me an exhibit. She went to a party at my house and she saw the work and then she told me why didn't I show? And I said, well, you know, it's just the only thing I have, so I don't want people to criticize it because it's just too important. She goes, no, you don't have to worry about that.

And so she gave me a show and then, you know, I started selling and then -

MS. CORDOVA: That was your first big show?

MS. WILSON: That was my first big show and that was at Las Manitas ["Vuelcos/Shifts" Austin, Texas]. That was a restaurant. And that went really well and I started getting to know the Latino artists in the community.

MS. CORDOVA: Do you remember the first piece that you sold?

MS. WILSON: Yeah, it was actually the piece that was the first piece that shows in the slideshow, *Desaparecidos en el Cielo*, and that was the first piece I sold. Actually, a lot of people wanted to buy it, so I was surprised because I had never sold anything and I was like this is amazing. You know, people actually want to buy these pieces.

And so then I started working with them; I started kind of helping around because I just was part of it. You know, organizing shows, so I became kind of a curator, so I organized a lot of shows. And then I worked with Modesta Treviño that is Jesse Treviño's wife. Jose Trevino is another artist that is - he was my teacher, actually, at Austin Community College and is somebody I admire a lot and he's also been, you know, supportive of my work and I love his work.

And so I started getting to know a lot of people in most of the community were Chicanos and they were very, very open to me and they really helped me, so I figured I needed to contribute, so I started working and I learned how to do graphics. I mean, I took some classes on PageMaker and so I started doing their invitations and laying them out, so I really liked doing that. It was really basic. It's not a big deal.

And then I would do like posters. Like, you know, we brought - they brought Tito Puente, or Tito Fuente?

MS. CORDOVA: Toto Puente.

MS. WILSON: Tito Puente to Austin and I did the poster. I did a drawing of him and it was really like a real cool poster. Then I did a poster of Mercedes Sosa when she came. I got to meet her. So it was like a huge - you know, I lived in Austin for 10 years until I met her and it's like she opened all these doors for me, you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Really?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Oh, yeah. It was -

MS. CORDOVA: Mercedes Sosa?

MS. WILSON: No. Cynthia Perez.

MS. CORDOVA: Cynthia Perez.

MS. WILSON: From La Peña . Yeah. Well, you know, getting to know Mercedes Sosa would have been impossible for me. I'm Chilean and I love her. I would have never gotten to meet her there, you know, so this is - I'm talking about the doors that she opened and actually she - we gave her the drawing of the poster and she took it and I think she has it in her museum or whatever people that have done drawings of her.

So I -

MS. CORDOVA: So La Peña was actually a very important -

MS. WILSON: Very important.

MS. CORDOVA: - place for you. And you were also curating there.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, I was curating so I got to know a lot of artists - [inaudible] - in San Antonio. We did this show called "Lo Mejor de Lo Nuestro," that was the best of us, and we had people like Jimenez from - you know, Luis Jimenez from - Luis Jimenez was in it. Not because I knew him, but it was Modesta knew him, so he would get - [inaudible] - so like people that were kind of big and so we would do these really great shows. You know, we would pick really good work.

What I would - I would also go and select shows sometimes where I would pick all the art and I would go to San Antonio and go to studios and go, okay, I want that piece. And I really enjoyed doing that because - you know, the only thing is is that I would normally put myself in the shows because I figured I'm doing all the work and I wasn't really getting paid, so I'm like, okay, I'm not going to do this for free. I want to put my - so I would put work that I liked next to my work, which was great, but then I got criticism because they said that it's not objective for me to put - you know, I should have just been the curator, but I didn't want to be a curator. I wanted to be an artist and I figured, well, if nobody's offering me shows, I'm going to put it in myself, so that's what I was doing.

And it took a lot of time and so I didn't really want to keep doing it, but I did it for like seven years. I mean, I really worked and I would hang the shows and we would have people that helped us, but, you know, I would take the invitations, the graphics, and you know. So that was a really good - and I met a lot of people through there and a lot of people in Austin got to know me because my work was - you know, they - it was in the posters and it was in so many ways that that's why some people started buying my work a lot from that, so I think that's my following.

I mean, absolutely I credit La Peña scene especially because the other thing she would do was like I was very much of an anti-social and she would drag me to the openings. I didn't want to go to my own openings. I'm like, no. Why do I need to go? The pieces are going to be on the walls. I don't want to talk to anybody. And she would tell me, you have to go. You have to meet these people. So I started going once a month and that, you know, gets for you to meet a lot of people and so that's how I did it, you know. And then other people came and they would sometimes go. Like one time they came from the Austin Museum of Art and they chose a couple of my pieces, so I was in there, but all coming from here. You know, they didn't find me, but they would find La Peña , so that was really helpful. And they were very supportive of artists and so that was really great.

MS. CORDOVA: And when did you start working with the Esperanza?

MS. WILSON: Well, that's how I met them, too. I met them through Cynthia and then I think like in 1991 they gave me a one-woman show, so doors in San Antonio were opened to me by the Esperanza and so they have been - I mean, that's probably my top organization. You know, they're always like principled people. They always have like a focus on what they're doing, you know, including people of color and then their principles are amazing and then they're very respectful of artists. I mean, the last show that I had there was in like 2002. I had the - my second one-woman show there. First of all, I sold everything. I had like 18 paintings and they were not cheap either. They were - most of them were like \$1,200. I sold everything. I mean, everything. I mean, I was like I can't believe this.

MS. CORDOVA: Did you keep records of everything?

MS. WILSON: Like who has it?

MS. CORDOVA: No, or just the images. Did you -

MS. WILSON: Oh, yeah. No, I have - they're actually in that catalog that they put out, so that is. But also, at that time, since I was still friends with Gloria I - she told me she would write an article for the newsletter, so she wrote an article for the newsletter and so that first - and then Marjorie Agosin too, I asked her if she would write an article, so she wrote one in Spanish that ran in one of the newsletter and the second newsletter was Gloria's article, so you can imagine. And then to put my image on the cover, so when the opening happened, it was packed and people were like buying left and right.

And really, people that - mostly a lot of the people actually they bought in - like they wouldn't pay right away, what do you call that? Monthly payments in installments. So I usually do that. I mean, sometimes people take two or three years and pay for a painting, but I just get my little check every month and -

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, some artists actually like that. Some artists actually like that that there's a sort of -

MS. WILSON: Oh yeah, that money that's like a money - free money that keeps coming in. It's just great. Yeah.

So, you know, that happened with that and then I just - you know I'm always offering illustrations too for the newsletter, I do that because I feel they do so much for the artists. And in that show actually I think they pay me like \$2,000 just to be in the show, which I was amazed because I never get paid to be in a show besides getting paid for the paintings. And so I think it was a plus. Another \$500 for something else, you know, and then they had a practicum where I did a slide demonstration and then I went to work with Mujer Artes, you know, and that was really -

MS. CORDOVA: You worked with them?

MS. WILSON: Yeah. I went - no, actually I did a slide presentation for them and then I went to Fuerza Unida and did a slide demonstration and they loved my work. I mean, it's like - and, you know, I did them in Spanish, so to me that was like so what I wanted to do. You know, that to - and you know a lot of these women are immigrants, so they completely know what I was talking about. They were like - they were totally there, so it was like I can't tell you what a pleasure that was. And they way that I was treated and everything. They're so respectful and it's like -

MS. CORDOVA: And we haven't exactly talked about that. Maybe I could - I mean, we've talked about it within your art, but that feeling of being an immigrant or feeling of - I know a lot has been written about the Chilean exile experience and I thought maybe you could talk a little bit about that or what - you know, do you feel like you're in limbo or do you feel -

MS. WILSON: Well, you know, the truth is once you're an immigrant or you're a foreigner, you know, you're always a foreigner. There's a way where, you know, I have an accent, so that makes you different from other people and then I grew up in Chile, so I came here when I was 23, so I was pretty formed by the time I got here, so a lot of my ways are kind of Chilean - that they're kind of different from the people that I hung out with here or that are my friends, so there's a very - it's very - it's marked that I'm not from here.

Also, I'm not from here, so - in a way, though, I'm not from there either because when I go there now, it's like it's another place. I mean, every time I go I'm like a - so in a way you are - so like you said, I'm in limbo because I'm not here nor there. I mean, more here because I found my community here, but at the same time there's this sense of kind of not belonging anywhere that is very strong, and especially since I'm a lesbian and never had any kids. You know, even from my marriage I never had any kids. I just feel that I belong nowhere in here and it's like - you know, sometimes I feel really alone even though I have a sister and a brother in Houston, you know, they just think that - they have families, you know, and since I don't, that makes it a little weird.

MS. CORDOVA: [Laughter.] I'm going to pause it there a second. [Audio break.] All right, we're back.

MS. WILSON: So what I was saying is that because I don't really have kids or a real family here, it's been difficult sometimes when I - you know, when I'm alone and I'm not having a relationship because it's like - you know, it's like kind of makes you wonder, you know, what is it that I'm doing here?

Or maybe it happens to all the other immigrants that are straight and that are - you know, it's just kind of hard, but at the same time I cannot think that there's a way that this is a mental construction, really, because the truth is is that I don't know how different I am from like my friends here. And there's also a lot of my friends that are not from here either, like Lourdes Perez. She's a singer and she's here from Puerto Rico and so - but then again, there's things that like - you know, some - I don't know. It's -

MS. CORDOVA: I know coming from the Bay area there's a very strong Chilean exile community there and I think it, you know, was sort of led by Fernando Alegría, but also Isabel Allende being there and just a - Rene Castro the artist there. Did you ever find a Chilean exile community? Did you ever feel a part of one?

MS. WILSON: No, I never did. And the reason is because first of all they're very straight and also there is one here in Austin and they were like also like extremely political and I didn't want to participate in that just in case. And so I felt that - you know, and mainly it was really heterosexual, so I - you know, like there were like - a lot of the things were parties where they would go. I'm not that interested in going to a party with heterosexuals. It's like boring to me. So I just didn't really have a place.

And they're also - even though there may be people with liberal ideas, they're conservative in their ways, you know, and so very male kind of and very male. And I - you know, I didn't have a husband to go with and so it's just not - I didn't really never found that, so I feel much closer to Latina lesbians than Chilean people.

I don't - I just kind of lost that. I lost my connection with them that way, so I didn't really - and sometimes they probably didn't either. I mean, I was very overly formed, you know, by - I mean, I got there when I was 43 years old. All these people already had all their friends. I met this one guy that was really nice and friendly. He was a

teacher at San Francisco State and I can't remember - Carlos Baron. I don't know if you know him.

MS. CORDOVA: Oh, yeah.

MS. WILSON: He was extremely friendly and I liked him, but then, you know, kind of pretty heterosexual, too, and I'm not - it's not that I'm not interested in that, but I just kind of live kind of my own world and I don't - you know.

MS. CORDOVA: And a very female space, too.

MS. WILSON: Yeah. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: It sounds like you tend to surround yourself with a very female community.

MS. WILSON: Very. Very. And like I work for women only. I don't - I think I have like one man in my life that is my friend Peter that he's an artist and then a nephew, but - and then my brother, but I never see him, so I don't really have a lot of males in my life. It's - yeah, it's interesting. This is what I love about the U.S., you know - that I'm grateful because there's a way where in this country you can find pockets of people that get together. There's enough economic resources where you make your own world and other people don't go in there, which this doesn't happen in Chile. I mean, every time I go visit there it's like very, very heterosexual; very conservative; very male; very anti-woman, you know. And so there's - I mean, maybe I haven't found the pockets where people can go and get together. Most likely I haven't, but I will assume that's like in the big cities,

And then since I haven't been there for so long I can't find that connection, but I know that this is the case here and I think that is great about the U.S. that you can really find the kind of people that you want and you can live in this worlds where you never cross paths. Maybe in the streets with other people of other lives, but you can completely just be in those worlds, you know. And I really like that.

And, you know, you can get work within this world. You can get people who bought your work and all of that without having to belong to the big organized society, kind of, you know?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, I know I'm supposed to try to wrap us up here a little bit so maybe in a way of doing that it's sort of coming full circle and your decision to come back here to Austin and what that meant and why that happened.

MS. WILSON: Well, the reason why I decided to leave San Francisco is because it was - I wasn't really happy there. I mean, I loved the place, but it was very expensive. It was hard for an artist. It's very - life is hard. I think that that life should be for somebody that has a lot of money or somebody that's very young. I mean, like if I had gone there when I was 20, I could probably see myself living there the rest of my life, but not as a older woman going there because first of all, the years that I lived there I was working for an organization that is in Austin: the Foundation for a Compassionate Society. They let me work there through the computer and that was like a miracle in itself that I was able to be exposed to this other life in another city, but I still worked for them.

I didn't have a job there except for this grant that I did for the schools that didn't last, I didn't like that either. You know, it was so competitive and so hostile that I didn't do that for long. And so it's like it's always my source of incomes are here, a lot of people know me in Austin, and it's kind of like - and I know people who live in San Francisco are like oh my God, why are you going to Texas? Because they really - I don't know if you know this, but they have this really horrible idea of like Texas. They think it's like a horrible place where people of color get killed, and it's not true. I mean, there's like racism, but there's a lot of friendly people and especially Austin. It's a very laid back place and I love Austin. It's just a small enough city. I mean, everybody's complaining about the traffic, but if they knew what San Francisco was like they would never complain of the parking spaces. That was my worst thing. I don't understand how this can possible be. When I first got there I was like why is there no parking? I don't understand it.

But anyway, that was one of the reasons and basically I just needed to go home and I felt that Austin is more my home than any other place that I've been because I've been accepted here, because people have celebrated my work, and not that they didn't in San Francisco, but it was - it was a little too hard for me, you know, especially money ways. I was having to live in a way that was not very comfortable - kind of cramped in places and - you know, if I was younger I think I could do it, but I need like quiet. I have too much quiet now being in the middle of the country, but at the same time it's good enough. I mean, it's pretty good.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and what I guess this may be also interesting to see is that you clearly seem like you're of the Austin community, but you've also got a lot of ties to San Antonio.

MS. WILSON: I do, yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Right. And that's also been a very important venue for you and continues to be now upcoming.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, exactly. I'm having a show at the Blue Star complex in November and I'm working for that. And a lot of people collect my work there. I work with the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, the Esperanza of course, and St. Mary's University I did like the poster for the - "Latina Letters," so I get a lot of people that know my work to - you know, the artists there, Terry Ybanez, Kathy Vargas, Michael Martinez - there's all people that I love their work and it's very nice working with them.

MS. CORDOVA: How do the two cities compare for you?

MS. WILSON: I think that San Antonio is way stronger in terms of art and the art community and like the Latina community especially it's like they have much more power than in here. I mean -

MS. CORDOVA: In Austin, yeah.

MS. WILSON: Than Austin, yeah. I don't think that the Latino community here is that strong in terms of art. It's not - I don't think it's strong at all sometimes thinking about it. It's not strong at all. In San Antonio, they're pretty well respected, just as the rest of the people and I don't think that happens here. I think we're still kind of in the periphery and we're not considered as much, you know, as the other artists like the white artists or whatever.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, I mean, do you think there's much of a visual arts scene in Austin at all, or -

MS. WILSON: I think that there is. Not that I participate in it, but Mexic Artes. I mean, I don't really go to their openings. I probably should go, but I just don't really like going to openings and I just -

MS. CORDOVA: Even your own.

MS. WILSON: I need to get - yeah, exactly. Actually, I need to get out more and I guess in San Francisco you could go to museums, could say I need to go to the galleries. I need to start doing that here and my tendency to just not go anywhere and that's something I really want to change. I mean, I really want to change that. So - but basically I just feel that this is home. This is the most home that I've - I mean, I've been here for so many years that I have all kinds of people that I can call on if I need to, you know, and I didn't have that in San Francisco and that was scary. You know, like sometimes it was just me and my girlfriend and it was like nobody else and for Gloria and then that was kind of hard because I don't like that. I like to know a lot of people. I like to know that they're there. You know, what are the other people in the city doing?

MS. CORDOVA: Yeah, in some ways I guess it was repeating your original experience of coming here, which wasn't that positive to begin with.

MS. WILSON: When I first got here, yeah. It was - yeah, exactly. I was like - then I became a nobody again and it was hard, you know. So it took too many years to do and even though I did well it just wasn't comfortable and I really like to live a quiet life. That's mainly what I like. I like nature and so the big city kind of less attractive to my - you know.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, okay, Liliana. I think we're - you know, I've had you talking for a long, long time and so I think I'm going to sort of bring our interview to a close, but maybe before I do, is there anything that you would like to add to the tape and just consider that this is for the Archives and I think we've covered a lot of ground and so there's no real reason for you to speak, but I'd like to leave it open to the person that - if I've been guiding the interview, now is maybe your time if there's anything you'd like to say.

MS. WILSON: Well, all that I guess I would like to say, and this is what I just said earlier and I had not thought about that before is that - you know, there's a way where the U.S. get a lot of criticism from a lot of the world, you know, because of their politics and everything, but to tell you the truth it's not like - I don't really want to live anywhere else. I think this is a place where - you know, and maybe I'm like being a - [inaudible] - immigrant with the opportunities thing, but I feel that I have been given a lot of opportunities that I probably would have not been given in Chile, as an artist I mean. I was going to be a judge, but that's totally different, you know.

And I think that that's very important to me - that I'm grateful that that happened, so I think that however - because of the kind of people that there are here, and I'm not talking about the government; I'm talking about just the people that live here that are able to make a difference, you know, have given me their hand to be able to do what I wanted to do and then - I mean, I manage on my own and I understand that, but there is a lot of people that are helping other people that is helpful that can help you progress in what you want to do with your life.

MS. CORDOVA: So you have found home.

MS. WILSON: Yeah, and I would say Austin is my home. Yeah.

MS. CORDOVA: Well, and I think that's a great note to end on, so I'll stop our tape here.

MS. WILSON: Okay, thank you very much.

MS. CORDOVA: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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