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Oral history interview with Lynda Benglis,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a digitally recorded interview with Lynda Benglis on 2009 November 20. The interview took place at Benglis' Studio in New York, NY, and was conducted by Judith Tannenbaum for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Terra Foundation for American Art.

Judith Tannenbaum has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. The reader should bear in mind that he or she is reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

JUDITH TANNENBAUM: This is Judith Tannenbaum interviewing Lynda Benglis at Lynda Benglis' loft at 100 Prince Street in New York City. It is November 20, 2009. The interview is for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, card number one.

Okay, let's start with when and here you were born.

LYNDA BENGLIS: Lake Charles, Louisiana. It is a cow town. They grow rice. It was a big rice producer and was known early on for that. There are a lot of bayous and the River Calcasieu and there is a Lake Charles. It was connected also to the canal that serviced the ships from Florida to Texas.

I remember very early on the water there and the fact that my dad once took me to the lake, Lake Charles, the shores, and he got a clam and he opened it and we ate.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Wow.

MS. BENGLIS: And this seems to me even later, when I was in high school, to be totally unusual because by that time, when I was surfing the waterways in my Evinrude motor and a little boat – speed boat, 35 horsepower-waterskiing in the bayous and the like and the waterways there – I knew every bit of it – that there were no shellfish to be found.

There were refineries, oil refineries, and sulfur refineries just across the way. And there was a town called Sulfer, where my grandmother lived, and we lived in Lake Charles, so we would commute some 12 miles but it would take 30 minutes on the Old Spanish Trail.

My grandmother had a restaurant on the Old Spanish Trail called the Coney Island Café, because she came in from Europe through New York, and I think she had gone to Coney Island when she was just a young woman, and she was very impressed with – this is America and it's – you know, there were all kinds of things there and it was fun for a young woman.

And then she came down to Sulfer, which was a mining town, mostly Hispanic, so she learned Spanish. She knew Italian. She knew classical Greek –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Is this your great-grandmother?

MS. BENGLIS: My great-grandmother – classical Greek as well as the –modern Greek, which are different. And she knew Italian in school. So by the time she was married and sent by her husband to meet him in America – I think she came alone – but I think she was with child and– I don't know the details of the story but the child – little girl child died on the boat, or maybe the girl child was sick.

I don't know the story, but I have just seen recently that people that were sick were kept on one island, and if they were really sick or if they were near death, they were put to death or, you know, not allowed in on another island. Ellis Island was the island that allowed everyone to come in.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So your father was born in Lake Charles?

MS. BENGLIS: My father was born in Beaumont, Texas. There is a triangle that's Beaumont, Port Arthur and Lake Charles. Rauschenberg is from Beaumont – born in Beaumont. And there was – Orange, Texas also I think is a part of that, but the oil was first discovered in Texas. I think the interest of some of the immigrants was the wildcatting that was happening in Texas, and Beaumont, I think, had the first – but this could be checked – wildcatting, oil.

MS. TANNENBAUM: What year were you born?

MS. BENGLIS: I was born in '41. I'm not sure - but, I think my mother was maybe born in 1919, 1917 maybe; my father 1918, something like that - 1919. But my father remembers that his own father's best friend was in jail for not paying his taxes and his own father bailed him out. And this fellow became the richest man in Lake Charles - owned the banks and so forth - and never paid my grandfather back. And my grandfather apparently, my father said, was very bitter and wouldn't forget it. And my father said that he wasn't that kind of man.

So my father was a very good businessman and understood that forgive and forget - had a building material business and was very successful in Lake Charles, and gambled a lot. My mother was a Presbyterian minister's daughter who felt that Lake Charles was a totally foreign place. My father worked as a bookkeeper at one of the hotels where Kennedy - Jackie Kennedy and Jack Kennedy- stayed when they were on their tour.

There were only a couple of skyscrapers. One was the Pioneer Club and the other was the hotel. And there was the bank and there was the main street. I had a very easy and happy, I think, childhood and upbringing, taking piano lessons and dance lessons, and then my brothers - I had a sister and then two brothers and then another sister.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Are you the oldest?

MS. BENGLIS: I'm the oldest, so I felt privileged and empowered. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: Lucky you. Were your parents interested in art?

MS. BENGLIS: My mother, I think, had an interest in art and took a Chicago course by mail and graduated in her art courses from the University of Chicago. I used to see those images on the wall of my grandparents' house where they lived - my grandfather was a big Presbyterian minister in Mississippi. My mother was born in Tennessee - her mother was from a gentleman's farmer's family. In Stanton they had the -the first general store and they had small plantations there. It's still one of the oldest places outside of Memphis.

My grandfather went to school and studied to be a minister because that was one way - a cash road in the mind of the South. It was one way to get an education in the South, to become a minister, and he had his master's degree from Southwestern College in Memphis.

My grandfather was god to my mother because he was educated. He read. He had a little farm. He had a little - a cow, and he had chickens. And she had a very good upbringing. He got rheumatism so he had to move from Tennessee, which seemed to have snow and was colder, to a little drier area in hill country, clay country, Petal, Mississippi, which was just outside of Hattiesburg.

He established the first church there, which is historic to this day. And they have this pulpit there as you walk in, and all the photographs of the ministers as they appear, and there have been five or six. But he established the church.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Do you remember any art experiences as a child, or what was your first awareness of art?

MS. BENGLIS: As a child there were no art experiences, but I thought of myself as an inventor, as all children do, you know, in play. And I remember making - mostly making environments, as children do, of - we had sheets, which were actually they held grain. They held other things, prints; very beautiful prints - they might have been printed in India - of the grain for the cows, and some were just white, I remember, and we had towels made of those. They were beautiful cotton towels.

We took those towels, which were very soft cotton, and we made houses stretched over furniture, turned it upside down. We'd go into trees - my grandfather seemed to make the - he planted a mimosa tree, which grew very quickly, for all his grandchildren. Every time a grandchild would be born we'd have a mimosa tree. So we climbed our own trees by the time we were - you know, they were large enough to support us at five or six. We would take the towels up there and we would have our tree houses.

There were many streams there to play in, and when my father was drafted toward the end of the war, we stayed there while he was in Charleston, South Carolina. My mother came at the end of the - to visit, and I remember we stayed in Charleston for a limited time. And it was in a big rooming house, big mansion just around the corner from the big Presbyterian church.

I remember the big room had a coal-belly stove, and I remember there was snow - it was the first time I saw snow and it was the first experience I had with trying to discover who my father was, because he was gone, and I could discover him by his soldier's hat, the khaki - and he had a big mole. Then when he removed the mole, you know, I thought, well, that was the only way I remembered who he was, in the soldier's hat.

My father was not around a lot when I was growing up, and I think it allowed me a certain independence, which I

realize now, in terms of my own dependence on having men in my life. Although I may have been hurt by it in the beginning, I realized that my mother had a certain independence because she became very dependent on the children and used to confide in me a lot. So I had a certain kind of responsibility with her and also for the family.

My father was a great provider and I only had respect for him, and when he came home he would order me around, the Greek style, and I would do exactly what he wanted me to do. I felt empowered [sic] - or privileged to have him be there.

Men in the South were, you know, the masters of their home and their universe, and when they were gone, my mother ruled. My mother worshipped her own father, and my father was just the opposite of her father. My father was a kind of good old boy. He went duck hunting. He had many men friends. Women liked him. He could tell stories. He was all-Greek and he married my mother because she was all-American.

He played football, got scholarships to Tulane - studied Latin in order to get into Tulane. And I went to Newcomb College, which is part of Tulane, later. And it was a very good school. And he played football, was on a scholarship, and when he had an accident in his football - I think he got a bad knee, so then he had to - he lost his scholarship and went to Mississippi Southern [University, Hattiesburg], where he met my mother.

Now, my mother had her first two years at Holly Springs, Mississippi, which was a girl's school. It was a finishing school basically, and it was in the Faulkner area. And they had foreign students. It was a very classical girls' school, and it was a finishing school in the South. They said that about Newcomb College. You go there and you learn to drink tea.

Of course, Newcomb College called itself the "Vassar of the South." So it wasn't really a finishing school. It was a classical school, but others - you know, blue-collar people call these schools finishing schools. And my mother realized after two years she wanted to finish her degree. She taught in a one-room schoolhouse in the Faulkner area after the two years and then decided - so she finished her degree at Mississippi Southern. That's where she met my father. That's where they met.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did you get interested in art before you went to college?

MS. BENGLIS: The art experience came through my mother because she - I saw her work and I was always curious, and then when she had my sister, she underwent shock treatments - the nuns in New Orleans. So I remember that was very exciting for me to go from the time when my father was in North Carolina, to go visit her.

I realized there was something about pictorial information when we were in North Carolina. And I made a calendar. It was nothing, with color paper, but I remember also after that that I had to leave this calendar I made just around Christmastime. And when we went back to my grandfather's house I remembered this calendar and colored paper, and later I played with colored paper.

The idea of colored paper and having it all spread out on the floor was very exciting to me. So there was always something very intriguing. And then later staying at my grandparents' house I remember they did a thing on the history of man at the Museum of Modern Art, and it had to do with masks, and it had to do with all kinds of places.

MS. TANNENBAUM: "The Family of Man"?

MS. BENGLIS: "The Family of Man," that's it.

I had that and my grandfather had that book. He had many books, and I kept looking at that book and that so excited me. Seeing those images of different cultures I think set me off, and the colored paper. So I began to think - and I've never told this to anyone, but I realize that that was the beginning of my thinking about the human image and the expression of different cultures.

Then I was lucky enough to go, at 11 years of age, with my grandmother to Greece, seeing the Acropolis, the Parthenon, and then traveling with her throughout Greece and then to her home and the islands and Kastelorizo, which was called Megisti, the ancient name, and is mentioned perhaps in the *Iliad* Homer where the seals go to mate, and Odysseus passed through that area. This is a real classical area, and the Lycian Valley of Turkey.

So this particular area, that's where classical Greece really originated and that's where - before the Elgin Marbles, where the Lycian images - which were also pediments from classical - pre-classical Greece, but it was really classical by then. There's so many buried buildings from that area, and it's pre-Roman and pre-Greek really.

And later, you know, I saw, in the Louvre, the [*Winged*] *Victory of Samothrace*, and that's from Rhodes. So you know, Athens thinks of itself as – south as the center of the universe, but it was not. And so they laugh when I say I'm from Southern Greece because everybody – actually, all the islands, all the village people ended up in Athens, so they thought of themselves as sophisticates, you know, establishing – and this city has mushroomed. I went there as a little girl and it was a very small city, and it just mushroomed and exploded – one of the fastest-growing cities of Europe.

But I guess back to your question about what – when and what was art, I was aware of the art of my mother. I was aware of my being a kind of inventor because I used to think – I could tie string together and sticks, and I used to think of mobiles. I'd never seen a mobile but I thought they were inventions of some kind of balance. They didn't do anything but I thought of myself inventing something.

And I think that I was interested in playing with mounds of sand and kind of clay and pine needles in Mississippi at that time, when I was three to four years old, and water, and sitting on them, and as I said, playhouses. So these things I think inform you – and I used to make little boats of moss and matches or toothpicks or paper, whatever – leaves; that's what they were, sticks – little things of, you know, in the earth – moss that you find in Louisiana, and you find everywhere.

So I think the things as a child, the play – the idea of play, I think each artist continues that sense of play and excitement and investigation because of the memory of an earlier experience. So I'm very much a person that believes an experience informs the choice. It's the Dewey system, basically, in education, but I think only through experience can you sort of learn. And I believe that because I never was able to do anything by rote, really.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So learn by doing.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So when you went to college, did you have any idea that you would study art? Was it something that you really discovered in college?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, when I first went to school at McNeese [State University, Lake Charles, LA] – I wanted to go away to school but I stayed at home because I actually went to Houston and I saw the great art of Yves Klein, and at that time the de Menils had, on the University of Houston campus – they had – in the kind of classic tradition, they made a museum there for the school, of their collection, and they brought Yves Klein there and she must have bought a lot of the Yves Kleins, and there they were in these barracks, you know, just right there.

And I saw these wonderful things of blue and saturated blue and rubbed pigments and sponges. And I was very excited by that. And then later when I went to Newcomb, the second year – I happened to go my first year and stayed home at McNeese and studied logic with Jason Xenakis, who is the brother of the famous architect/musician. He studied with [Le] Corbusier. He actually did a lot of the drawings of the house in Ahmedabad.

He actually designed – I learned from the widow of Xenakis, he did the lamps. He did the designs for the concrete lamps and castings that are like that– and a lot of people think Corbusier did them but Xenakis did them.

And I remember when I met Jason, the philosopher, he said, my brother is a musician but he's working with Corbusier. That was the first time I heard the name Corbusier, the architect, famous architect. He lives in Paris. And I took that in. I didn't know – it's not like I went to the – you know, there was no computer –

MS. TANNENBAUM: There was no Wikipedia. [They laugh.]

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, there was none of that, and he probably wasn't in my mother's Compton's Encyclopedia– I mean, he wasn't there yet, but Frankenstein was there, you know.

So I studied with Jason, and logic actually was my first real break with thinking. I wasn't as impressed with the art school there. I studied music. I liked music. I liked the arts. So when I went to Newcomb, that was when art became serious, I went there to study art. At McNeese, logic was the most interesting course that I took, and history. I had two historians that were very good.

I studied with Jason I think a full year, and I made the best grades he had ever seen in logic, and he tried to encourage me to be – he was a logician, but he said what you could. I told him I was interested in art and he said, well, you could be an aesthetician, and I realized that I wasn't interested in thinking about art in that way, and then I realized for me that art could be a kind of logical development and it could be something that was an original statement.

But I felt as far as I was concerned that ideas – to express ideas through logic, or to discern information through a verbal means was not my way, that I was a more hands-on sensory experiential kind of person and that I had an ability to develop information through contextual development and was very interested in the visual. So that's why I chose to become an artist, I think.

I was choosing before – I was slowly choosing, I think. Paramount in that choice was I wanted – in the beginning I thought maybe I should study something like home ec or something like –

MS. TANNENBAUM: [Laughs.] Practical.

MS. BENGLIS: Something practical, you know, because my parents were involved with, you know, sending me to an expensive school. And even before McNeese, after graduating from college, my senior year in school I became very interested in art. My junior year I realize that I was asking information. I was thinking about choice. I thought, the more you know, actually the more you have to choose from, so the more difficult it gets.

So this was a kind of question in my mind: It's going to be very difficult to choose in my life, so I felt very early in my junior year, I remember – with a literary professor I remember thinking about that. And another statement, when I was in the sixth grade, the teacher sort of quoted something that I began to think about, and that was, "Unsolicited opportunities are the guideposts to life."

And I began to think about the question of accident, the question of something coming to you, so I began to think about choice very early – you know, very early in my life, and thought, well, this is the problem of the progression and this is the problem, choice, as a main issue.

And then there was a thing – the philosophy of the Presbyterians, and that was predestination and, you know, was there a choice or not? And then there was the idea of the Bridey Murphy thing and being hypnotized.

And so I began reading about that, too, and thinking that undergoing hypnosis – you have to be a willing subject. So I've been studying hypnotism and then suddenly – because it was in the air, all this hurrah. Our church happened to invite that night a hypnotist, and they invited – we were asked as willing subjects, who could be willing subjects, some of us, but there in the course, the gentlemen that was the hypnotist said, put your legs together; you know, put your arms together. You're falling forward; you're falling backwards.

So of course I knew that I had to be a willing subject, so I complied. He did hypnotize me and gave me a suggestion – put me under a trance and gave me a suggestion, which was go play the key C. And I didn't know which key it was. I really didn't know because I was that deep or that into suggestion. And then I went there and I remember thinking, I don't know but I'm going to do this, and it was that.

And so, it was – so, I knew these things worked. I knew that these things – you know, control was an issue, choice was an issue, context was an issue in terms of how I was going to direct my life.

And I met a guy from Harvard who was selling encyclopedias, my boyfriend that I met through accident. I lost my card, identification high school card, at the movie theater, and I discovered this very intelligent boyfriend, Dafik Briggs, and he introduced me to this Harvard guy. And the Harvard guy I was really smitten by and I visited him. And he was taking a year leave from Harvard.

And I thought of going to school in the Boston area. I investigated Wellesley and I investigated the schools there, and I finally ended up staying in the South. But it was the same time I was, you know – I loved New Orleans, and that's why I chose New Orleans, because my mother had gone there under shock treatments, and the funhouses there were very, for me – New Orleans is still to me a fantasy town.

They have funhouses on Lake Pontchartrain, and I remember visiting my mother from Mississippi when she was in the hospital undergoing shock treatments because she had problems after her second child.

MS. TANNENBAUM: How old were you then?

MS. BENGLIS: I was four.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: Exactly four.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did she recover from that?

MS. BENGLIS: She recovered but she had – she was very high-strung, had a, I think, short – they say you have short-term memory lapses. I think – no, she was very smart. She read a lot. She read magazines mostly. She had huge collections of magazines. And I began – and I had a great collection of comic books and read Little

Lulu and Nancy Drew. And they were big in my life.

And the *Life*, I remember looking at Pollock and I remember looking at the chimpanzee later. And I began to think, what is – my mother was interested in art. She had a reproduction of van Gogh, the two women, and I remember their breasts were like my mother's. My mother had brown nipples, not pink nipples, and I began to think my mother – began to think – and I think to this day my mother thought she was part Indian because her father was born on an indian – where Andrew Jackson – at Horseshoe Bend where thousands of indians were killed, and Andrew Jackson became president.

So this art, van Gogh – I knew about van Gogh but I thought it was my mother, basically. And so, the idea of this connection of van Gogh and then later seeing reproductions of art and later seeing Franz Klein and Yves Klein – Franz Klein, when I went to Tulane the second year of my sophomore year, had a big painting show, his last wet paintings.

And it wasn't until I – I knew that I was going to major in art when I went to Newcomb and met real painters that studied at the University of Chicago – one, Zoltan Buki and Ida Kholmeyer, who was from the Chicago area, and Hal Trevenio [ph], a painter. And Rothko had been down in New Orleans, so they were very into glazing – highly glazed work, which Rothko really didn't do, but they were into color painting.

And there were also great historians in Louisiana and New Orleans. There was a pre-Columbian historian, Robertson, who was into Mischtep [ph] manuscript. And there was Alfred Moir, who later went to California, but he was a Caravaggio expert – "the" Caravaggio expert.

So I had great training in terms of a kind of American history and European history. So I think this connected with my interest in kind of a world culture. Having traveled with my grandmother very early on when I was 11 – allowed me to think beyond Louisiana, beyond New York, beyond Europe in a way, and to Greece and to the Orient; and taking logic certainly allowed me, once I arrived in New York, to break down the systematic approach that was occurring.

Such things – you know, such meetings: Why is easel painting dead; what's the difference? And they still talk about it – illusion and elusion. Nobody's figured that one out. I mean, you know, we're all into that still, but why is easel painting dead? That's an old-hat thing.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Were they talking about it when you were in college or when you got to New York?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, no, when I got to New York.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, when you got to New York.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When did you go to Yale Norfolk?

MS. BENGLIS: Yale Norfolk – I didn't go the first year I was nominated but I went the second year, so it was '64 or –

MS. TANNENBAUM: So you were in college or –

MS. BENGLIS: I was in – yes, I was still in college, and you usually went your junior year because it was kind of a – you know, a proving ground for Yalies, and I might have gone to Yale except that I think that when I went there the second time I was nominated, which was my senior year actually – and I'm still finishing courses – I felt that the people I met – I first heard of names such as a I, you know, thought that was a very strange – Olitski and Greenberg.

So you know, these two graduate students from Yale that were there were talking and I heard of – I think I heard of Brice's name [Marden], and he was a good friend of this artist there. And I remember Joan Baez, you know, and Joan Baez, I knew who she was, and Brice was married to Joan Baez's sister.

MS. TANNENBAUM: He was? Oh, I didn't know that.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, and they had a child. And so they were gossiping and I would sit there eating, you know, hamburgers and drinking beer and listening to all this on the New York art scene. So it was all Greenberg then. And of course when I arrived a year or two later, it was all of that. You know, it was pop art, and I registered at the Brooklyn Museum art school under Reuben Tam because I had a friend –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Now, that was when you moved to New York, after you graduated.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, yes, but as soon as I moved to New York that fall, I went to Reuben Tam, and Reuben Tam was great in that he talked about what was going on, and we had Dan Flavin come and talk. And he talked about a show. There's a Frank Stella show, there's a Ralph Humphrey show, there's a Dan Flavin show. And the first show that I went to was a Hockney show.

The very day that I met with the Reuben Tam group, I think either the next day or that night I went to the Hockney show. And I went to the Bridget Riley show because Gordon Hart, whom I met at Reuben Tam's class at the Brooklyn Museum studied with Bridget Riley, and Gordon wanted to go. I should ask Gordon how he met Bob Murray because Bob Murray was very close to Barnett Newman. He's a sculptor that lives in Pennsylvania, also an airline pilot, and he's Canadian.

And Murray met Newman in Saskatchewan. Newman was up there I think to do a lecture or, you know, do a class, and he met these graduate students. So Terry – I can't think of Terry's last name. So there were two or three Canadians but Bob Murray looms the largest. And there was Terry Severson [ph] – that's his name – and there was one more but I don't think he continued to do artwork or hung around.

And Terry is probably – Terry married a French Canadian – no, a French Parisian, and he might have gone back to Canada but Bob is still around. But, anyway, they were very close to Barnett Newman, and we, Gordon and I, became very close to Barnett Newman and Annalee. I mean, we would see them. We would go drinking with them. We would stay up all night dancing and drinking and end up over at – what is it, the Katz's Deli, having a spinach omelet. You know, it was great. I loved Annalee and Barney – loved them. [Laughs.]

And I would ask them about Pollock. I remember walking through the park – what is that park over there above 14th Street, Tara [ph]?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Union Square?

MS. BENGLIS: Above that.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Washington Square?

MS. BENGLIS: No, above that on the East side anyway – a special park. They have it closed –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Gramercy Park?

MS. BENGLIS: Gramercy Park. It was open then. I remember walking along the square and we were walking through the park, and I remember asking them both about Pollock. And they said – and Annalee began with, well, he had all that publicity and he was, you know – she felt it was because of the publicity. She kind of was a moralist in that way, you know; {She felt that all the publicity was his downfall.}

And then just after that Barney was, you know, with this monocle, in *Vogue* magazine. And who was the famous photographer at that time? I can't think of who it was, but he was posing in front of his painting.

So I began thinking about the contradiction – Annalee with this idea about publicity and fame and then Barney saying things like, oh, that goddamn Reinhardt showing at three shows now, trying to take over the whole Minimalist movement.

And I started thinking about that because Barnett Newman, then after that, was doing *The Stations of the Cross* that Sam Wagstaff was producing in Connecticut. And we saw those and we pasted them, and they were very impressive, you know, and his feeling and his intensity was so impressive. And his gestures, the way he treated his – his manners and the way he treated – I mean, he's like a Thurber cartoon the way they lived and everything, but the way – his style was just grand, the way he treated a cab driver, the way he treated us as young artists. And Annalee supported him as a teacher.

And he, like you, you know, had a haberdasher father. Did you know that?

MS. TANNENBAUM: [Laughs.] No.

MS. BENGLIS: He did. So he always had his hound's-tooth jacket and his little hat with a feather in it, and they had these kind of Thurberesque couches, like one couch and one chair. And then he had this one plaster piece with the – pole, I-beam – with a cow pie plaster sticking in it, which he later cast. And then Bob Murray introduced him to Lippincott, so then he cast these pieces and he cast, you know, the triangle, and then he cast the wall.

So it was kind of interesting, the relationship, you know.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did you stay friendly with him throughout his life, until he died?

MS. BENGLIS: Until he died. He died actually – I heard about his death. I was on a boat – actually Klaus Kertess and I. I had just had my first show in Germany at the Muller Gallery. And Klaus and I – and I bought – I sold – I did one piece, which was commissioned, by somebody that Muller knew, and I did a work and then I sold that work, and with that money I bought a Volkswagen.

So Klaus and I drove all around France seeing every cathedral, eating at great places, and seeing all of France. And we looked up – I knew Joan Mitchell – having met her when I first met Mike Goldberg when I was with Gordon Hart, the painter. I'd left a party because Mike Goldberg sat – and I knew of Mike Goldberg and Joan Mitchell through *ARTnews*, and I knew of de Kooning, reading about de Kooning.

You know, what painters I knew – there were tiny monographs in the libraries at Newcomb – nothing. So I was trying to find out about contemporary art. And then this head of the L.A. County Museum came to teach at Newcomb, and he showed us all the contemporary works of the French painters – you know, Soulages and – the American painters and the Italian painters.

So I knew what was going on and I could see it as a progression of questions – visual questions about what was the surface about, what the frame was about what the process was about. It was obvious to me. You know, having taken logic I could kind of file it in my mind.

But I still had questions when I came to New York where painting should go. I thought, well, should it go back to Cézanne? Shall I, you know, try that again? But I had already done, in my class, just a frame. I took the frame stretchers and just painted the frame. I remember that in my senior year, thinking, what should be next?

And so I think, on that boat, on the radio, we heard Barnett Newman had died, and I was very upset and Joan, just very coolly, said, "Well, I'm not so upset. If it were de Kooning, I would cry, you know."

MS. TANNENBAUM: Everybody has different –

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, but I mean –

MS. TANNENBAUM: – different gods.

MS. BENGLIS: You know, I mean, yes, it was like – I mean, she cut to the quick really fast. And I thought, well, that's a tough one. I mean, she couldn't even sympathize, you know, with the passing of a great man – "I'm not upset, you know."

MS. TANNENBAUM: What year did you move to New York?

MS. BENGLIS: Sixty-five.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: And I met Joan – like I said, I was in a party and it was some people that Gordon knew through – he worked at Ted Bates advertising part time, and he supported us in the beginning and I supported us a little bit. I supported myself, I should say, and our situation by working at the Brooklyn Museum Art School while I was dusting off slides and then casing them for Bernard Bothmer, who was – you know, his brother was at the Met and he was – he was really the foremost authority in Egyptian art.

And so I went to all the Egyptian art and encased them. And he would woo the old ladies and show them the pornography and invite them to pay for his trip and theirs to Egypt. And it was a good – it was a kind of good way to be introduced to the art world.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When did you – you and Gordon Hart get married.

MS. BENGLIS: We did because Gordon was going to be drafted, and I had a friend called Shelly Estrin, who was a graduate student at the time – a very bright woman from New York – lived at Park Row with her mother – Polish lady. Her parents were Polish immigrants. And her mother was in a concentration camp, and the father was much younger.

And the mother apparently, when Shelly was – Shelly was about six years my senior and she would be locked in the closet when she was young to be punished. So her mother was quite kind of nutty, having been through that, having all her – people killed. And Shelly, in her own way, was brilliantly very sensitive, very passionate and she painted. And her mother would do these incredible crochets that were very visual.

Shelly would paint, but she was a historian and she taught at Rhode Island [University of Rhode Island]. And I think when they invited me, she was there, but it was David Bourdon's idea, when they were there – I don't think it was – I'm trying to think; was she at the university or was she at – there are a couple of schools in Rhode

Island, right?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Well, the University of Rhode Island is where you did your installation?

MS. BENGLIS: Right. I don't know – yes, when I was –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Well, RISD is in Providence.

MS. BENGLIS: RISD – she was at RISD.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: And I think I went to RISD to do it – I'm trying to think – the latex painting.

MS. TANNENBAUM: I think it was at University of Rhode Island in Kingston.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, University of Rhode Island in Kingston.

MS. TANNENBAUM: In Kingston – I think so.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I think Shelly was there but I would have to check that. But Shelly was a big part of my being in New Orleans, and she was a kind of Ava Gardner type. She was a wild, intelligent lady, not Southern but with that background, and she still exists today – heavy smoker, heavy drinker, but was a TA, getting her master's at Newcomb.

And I'd never – you know, it was a time of beatniks and my first year in school at McNeese I remember thinking, well, a beatnik is a turtleneck cotton sweater and tights and pony tails. So we had a beatnik contest and I won the beatnik contest, you know.

So I met, I thought, real beatniks when I went to Newcomb because there was a Theo somebody – a dancer, and then there was a Pam Bachchart who was a general's daughter. And there was other – you know, another art school lady, but they wore heavy make-up and they were Yankees, and they had experience, you know, growing up in other contexts – private schools or, in Pam's case, army schools all over.

And so I happened to meet a Brazilian too, whose father was speaker of the house, and he came to get his master's at Tulane. And I thought of going to Brazil because one year later he asked me to come there and to marry him, but by then I was on my way to coming here (NY) and I was interested in other directions.

I was really curious about New York. I wouldn't have gone to L.A. I would have gone to L.A. or New York, and New York drew me more than L.A. But L.A. did too because of the whole Hollywood – that whole thing; the stories, the myth. And so later, after, what, 10 years I went to L.A. – after 10 years being here, 10 or 11 years. And I never regretted that kind of sense of balance because I think our culture was about both coasts in a way. And they were like two medieval cities vying, and even in terms of intellectually.

When Lenny Bruce said, you turn L.A. on the map and – I mean, you turn the map on its side and it all falls in, that's L.A.? [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: I never heard that.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, it's true. I thought it might be like Lake Charles. I thought it was, you know, more like where I had grown up, New York was less as I had grown up, but I was mistaken.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Well, we can – I guess the next question is, when did you start exhibiting? Maybe we should take a little bit of a break. Do you want to do that?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, I think so because we've run out of time there almost.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, we will in a couple of minutes.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. So when did I start exhibiting?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes.

MS. BENGLIS: I think in the beginning, Paula Cooper took a piece of mine and Klaus Kertess took a piece of mine. I first really exhibited, I think – behind Klaus's desk there was a wax painting. And Paula also had an artist, Bob Huot, who was married to the dancer –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Twyla Tharp.

MS. BENGLIS: Twyla Tharp, yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: And he was exhibiting right here in the building. Paula's gallery was just one floor above.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: That's why I think I ended up in this space 20 years ago.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, my goodness.

MS. BENGLIS: It seemed to me a kind of – a very simpatico space. Sort of – I felt very comfortable. This was a big elevator at the time and it would open up – Paula's desk was right here and it was a desk like this.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, my gosh, really?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: In this building– on the second floor? It was the –

MS. BENGLIS: Well, it was on the third floor, I think.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, my gosh. I knew the space on Wooster Street.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So that was after this one.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, this was the first space. So when I saw this space and it was for sale – I never liked large spaces, you know, but because this seemed so sort of familiar and I had a good experience here – I did the big foam piece off the wall there on the third floor, and that was one of the last production pieces I did in foam. MIT was the very last one, I think.

And the latex piece I did in Rhode Island. I was already into the foam works, but because David Bourdon asked myself, Eva Hesse, Richard van Buren and Richard Serra – that was a very important magazine, *Life* magazine. He said we were going to – he thought at the time they were going to put me on the cover, but they did not, but as a result of having been in that magazine, I was offered a job in the University of Rochester.

And so I took the chairman's place at the art school. There were only two other art teachers, so it wasn't a big, responsible job. But they had a big media department and I was really able to play and begin to experiment with video and media, and brought films to the school. And Klaus and I –

MS. TANNENBAUM: This is probably a good place to stop, I think.

MS. BENGLIS: Okay – were beginning to, you know, see a lot of the film archives where all those years – after I worked with Klaus and when I was last there, we began to see all kinds of original films – Ken Jacobs, Paul Sharits.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, okay.

MS. BENGLIS: So this influenced my thinking about video.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Was it Ken Jacobs?

MS. BENGLIS: Ken Jacobs, yes, I saw, and Paul Sharits and the Canadian that did – Michael –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, Michael Snow?

MS. BENGLIS: Michael Snow, yes. I saw all of these films.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Where were they shown?

MS. BENGLIS: At the Film Anthology Archives.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay. We should – let's stop and then we'll pick up.

MS. BENGLIS: Okay, let's stop.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right. Okay, end of tape one.

MS. BENGLIS: Okay.

[END DISC 1.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: This is Judith Tannebaum interviewing Lynda Benglis at the artist's loft on 100 Price Street in New York, on November 20, 2009, tape two.

MS. BENGLIS: I was just commenting – my sister just called me, and she has probably more talent than I do – more real talent. Both sisters do, really. And I think whatever talent is, I think talent is one thing and I think energy and perception and kind of originality is another, but discipline is most important and, I think, focus in forming one's ideas. So I think I've been – I've been trained to – although I seem very dispersed in my conversation and so forth, I'm very focused when it comes to actually committing myself to some idea within a context and following it through.

So I don't even try to waste my time doing drawings or doodling because essentially I conceive of the idea once I've investigated the properties of the materials, and in that way I do a lot of contextual work and a lot of serial work, not because I think it's such a strong idea; it's because I'm forming my ideas and I am asking the questions. They're experiments basically.

And then finally, when I resolve, you know, and I push the idea to the limit, then I can go on to the next idea. And I never know where I'm going but it takes its own course. So I was just saying that I think art is really about information and investigation, and it's about basically same ideas – vision and the way we see things in space – and we rediscover how we see things and things are usually – in seeing things, they're within the context of the change of the environment.

For instance, I was interested in the way media transpired – when video went from reel to reel and now what we call the digital age. But that transformation of photography into video, or experimental photography into video and now video into the digital time. So I experimented with Polaroids. I experiment now with digital photography, and even my iPhone interests me.

So we have different ways of seeing things and we get used to it. We hear sounds digitally now.

MS. TANNENBAUM: You were saying – well, you were talking a little bit about how you saw these early experimental film people.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, and I knew them –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did that encourage you to start experimenting with video or –

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, naturally, yes, when I had the chance, when I showed their works and when I was working –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Where did you show the works?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I taught. I was invited, after being in *Life* magazine, to the University of Rochester and I had – a lot of my students were science majors, so they were very intelligent and they were also somewhat – it was somewhat very definitely into the drug culture. They were experimenting themselves, very – you know, from good families that were paying a lot of money to the University of Rhode Island – I mean University of Rochester, and they were studying science, for the most part, there.

So I gave them problems in terms of asking myself and them what is reel-to-reel video? Let's time it. Let's do short little bits of information about actions and activities and feelings, and that's what I was doing, basically. Let's do a one-minute video about something, about romance, for instance.

And they loved it, and I divided the class, so to speak, into groups. Some of them just wanted to play with the media. Others wanted to play with plaster or make something with their hands. So it was fine by me because I could do what I wanted to do.

And then I began having different artists come there to do either a performance, like Jim Roche, who was sort of like a Baptist preacher. He's part – half Indian – an Indian grandfather, and he was invited to – what was the park in Niagara Falls where I made the [*The Amazing*] *Bow Wow*?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Artpark.

MS. BENGLIS: Artpark. So I met him there and I was, after that, in Rochester –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Had you made any videos yourself when you started to teach it in the classroom?

MS. BENGLIS: No, that was reel-to-reel. This is a very early video. This was like in the – well, it was in the '70s.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Early '70s?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, '70, '71.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Seventy-one?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. So it was just as I was – I had done the MIT piece. I had finished with that and I was making video in Rochester. Mary Boone actually came by and wanted to study with me because she saw the MIT piece that was on the cover of the *Buffalo Weekly*, and I may have done a piece in Buffalo because they were excited about it, and then also the Modern Museum in Chicago, they wanted me to do a piece.

But I just couldn't wear art on my sleeve. I didn't want to do shows – you know, there were such great museums there but – particularly in Chicago – I just couldn't go and do another installation.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So that was after you had done a series of six –

MS. BENGLIS: I'd done the MIT – yes, in different contexts, yes. I just couldn't do another two. I didn't feel like I could see – it was too painful to go on with it and to push myself in an area I didn't need to push anymore. I knew what I could do.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So when you first started to show in galleries – but those were more discreet objects – we sort of skipped a little bit, because I asked you when you first started to show.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I did the wax painting.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: So the reason I was doing the wax paintings –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay. Those were the first things you showed?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, so the question of the wax paintings; I was really trying to decide what is a painting? A painting is about surface. A painting is about form. A painting is about space. So what if you limit the space? You enhance the surface, and you create a line but the line was, you know, like the meeting line of the two surfaces that you were creating.

And I decided to round the corners because I wanted to make it somehow more organic and more floating on the wall. Artschwager, at the same time, was doing his – I didn't know about his blips, you know, his little things. He had begun to do those. And Ron Gorchoff was also doing this paddle painting, so Ron and I came together. Ron had this kind of curve and then it would go into like a point, a paddle.

So Ron and I met. He said, that's strange; I'm doing these –. So he too was involved with what is a figure and what is the ground, and then later he'd begin making those shaped, you know, convex, concave works. And Artschwager too, was, you know, in a sense mocking the object of the painting of the surface and the ground.

And I remember meeting one time – I think I was sitting with Sol LeWitt, maybe Eva Hesse, but I remember it was Ryman, and I said to – no, it was – I was just trying to think, and I said what Ryman should do is paint directly on the wall. You know, Ryman was doing the white paintings. He's never done anything else but the white paintings.

And this was before Sol even thought of painting on the wall. And when Dan Flavin came to give a talk, Dan had never done fluorescent light bulbs. He had only done the little light bulbs on the canvas, the pink canvas, for his brother, like it was a kind of icon. He discussed the idea of icons. He did the Barbara Rose piece.

He was working with electric bulbs. I said, why don't you just use the light itself, and like a little light bulb went up above Dan's head. You know, I could see it. He was totally quiet and he went blink, blink. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: So it's all your fault. You inspired it. He wouldn't have done it.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, no, everybody would have arrived at it – you know. But I really feel, because I was trained

and I trained – that I could see the shortcuts. And it was so – you know, it was just so easy. I was very confident because I had that training, and I was doubly confident because within the context of the galleries and seeing the artist, meeting the artist and seeing the collectors very early, I realized that it was all about – and as Barbara Rose once said too, "If you don't know what you're doing, who else does."

And Barbara Rose would write –media writes its own fiction, and Barbara Rose – I remember this "ABC Art" where she introduced Frank Stella, and a star is born – you know. I mean, she ended it with a corny phrase.

But it was also – at NYU there was a big collection of people totally packed in their little flat auditorium, there was one little stage, totally packed, and the subject was easel painting – is easel painting dead? And there on the – you know, on the stage, where the soothsayers, you know, describing him, Stella would say, "well, I just turned the two-by-four on its side because it was kind of an accident and I liked it."

And then Judd would say, "why don't I call up and order one in every color?" They were all so kind of mocking their involvement, their aesthetic involvement. And of course Barnett Newman, their man, would say, you know, "aesthetics is for artists as ornithology is to birds," you know?

So there was that in the air and they followed it to the most logical degree. Now, Sol LeWitt was doing the cross-hatchings and he had his own system and he would just do them – you know. And he later broke the system, you know, because he was intelligent enough to, okay, you can't have a system forever and then just continually repeat yourself. Carl Andre never broke the system.

So you know, I can say one is as strong as the other in a way because there's a certain kind of Puritanism with Carl, and there is a certain kind of embrace that Sol had with other artists that he could do.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Were you part of a group of artists at that point?

MS. BENGLIS: I think definitely.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did you see them as your friends?

MS. BENGLIS: Definitely they were all my friends, you know, because we met at Max's Kansas City. We knew each other. You know, we were part of – we recognized each other. I don't think they necessarily recognized me as an artist; they recognized me as the pal of Klaus Kertess or the ex-wife of Gordon Hart– but, you know, I think women would look on women in that way, and that's what I recognized.

And so, I felt that I had to break that and go to L.A., and that's one of the reasons I went to L.A., because I think – you know, I had grown up in the art scene. I was blessed. I was there at the right time, arriving at the peak of the Pop art movement.

I met the artists. I saw them – I saw Rosenquist in the elevator wearing a paper suit, you know? I met him later. I met Lichtenstein later and Dorothy. Castelli put me in shows. He put the Knots in shows and said, why don't you do a large one? And he showed my video tapes. You know, I was very lucky, but in between all of that I decided I must go to California – or at a certain point, when I was 30, in my early 30s – 30, 31, 32. I quit Rochester early after two-and-a-half years, and I was two-and-a-half years in the gallery, too.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Which gallery?

MS. BENGLIS: The Bykert Gallery. I worked there part-time. And I decided to go to California, and I stayed there maybe seven years into the '80s and came back, but it was a good time to leave New York because it sort of seemed very dead. And it was a good time to be in California. And I'd had this kind of messianic approach to California. I said, I'll go there. Manson was there. It's crazy. The earthquake just happened and there's a feminist movement. I want to know what's going on.

I said, there's New York and there's L.A. and they're like two medieval cities, and I'm going to find out why they're so defensive. And I felt that way, and they were, you know, like there was the idea in New York, oh, you know, L.A. is too hedonistic. They don't understand the real problems of art, which were totally arguable, they thought. And they took these positions.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did you go – was it after the *Artforum* incident or –

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, no, actually the *Artforum* incident I think resulted in a series of interests of mine to kind of allude and mock the idea of the object –

MS. TANNENBAUM: No, I was just wondering if you were still living in New York when you did the *Artforum* –

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, I still had my – I had a little apartment on 9th Street.

MS. TANNENBAUM: But you had gone to L.A.?

MS. BENGLIS: I had a little apartment on 9th Street and I had my place in Little Italy on Baxter Street. And I kept those places, and I was still – I kept a place in L.A. and I would go back and forth when I wanted. And it was a very lucky time. You could – you know, go round-trip for a couple hundred dollars. And then maybe it was even a hundred at the time, but I remember it was – and I'd do the night – you know, the red eye, and I would go and come when I wanted to.

I told Paula that I was going to quit my job with Rochester, and I said, you know, I'm not going to work anymore; I just didn't want to be a teacher. I didn't want to be in the academic scene and kind of depend on that. I wanted to be free and I wanted to be – and I always felt free. You know, I felt very lucky that I just didn't take it too seriously. You know, I just didn't take it too seriously.

I'd think, I can carve my own way. I can empower myself by doing what I want to do, what I feel. And I felt lucky. But I also was learning. I felt energized by – and still am by the things I do. I feel driven to do them, you know? I feel lucky to be driven, you know? I'm unlucky in certain ways. Emotional things maybe I have problems with attachments and, you know, territorial situations, and maybe even – I don't know. I cannot – I don't think we really own anything, you know, really.

But I think we're really driven by our experience and our desires, and let's hope we can all get along. [They laugh.] You know, the world culture, you know? I just –

MS. TANNENBAUM: You mentioned feminism. Was that something that you were more involved with in L.A. than in New York?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I felt –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Or was it something that you became a part of?

MS. BENGLIS: I felt I didn't want to go to the meetings. The meetings were happening here, and I felt that because CalArts – there was an academic situation and it had kind of – it had – Paul Brach was head of the art department then, and he said to me, when he saw me – I went to – in San Francisco there was a – what do you call it – the big art convention where all the academics come together and the historians for jobs?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, College Art Association?

MS. BENGLIS: College Art Association.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: So I met Paul Brach, and I think I might have been on a panel or something there for my work. And then Paul said to me, why don't you come to CalArts? You're somebody that's really doing something – as if, you know, the women there weren't.

So I thought that was very bizarre that he would say something like that. And, you know, what he really did – he was very smart; he was challenging me. So I took the challenge. And when I arrived, I remember Judy Chicago. They were still teaching there, and I gave a talk but there were no women in the audience. There was Suzanne Lacy who was an artist there, and I think an undergraduate. And all the rest of the women teachers and artists were at Women's Space. And *Time* magazine was there doing a photography session.

And so, they were there to answer for what they were doing. I never saw Women's Space. I was just there for my talk. All the men were extremely paranoid. They were listening to me. Eric Fischl was in the audience. Baldessari was in the audience. There was – I remember Baldessari – and I met him for the first time. And I remember there was – Ross was there.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Who's that?

MS. BENGLIS: Ross was a student later.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Ross.

MS. BENGLIS: He was a graduate student.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Bleckner?

MS. BENGLIS: Bleckner. And David Salle was a student there, a graduate student. And David Salle had his office right next to Paul Brach and was dating the secretary there. [They laugh.] So he had the secretary's

office, and she probably – you know, he probably slept with her there on the couch when everything was closed. I don't know, but – and I remember he had these little mannequins of little dogs and he was positioning them, and I had said, you know, everything is contextual.

So that set off something because I could kind of tell him what the problem was then. And it seemed to me that was the problem, you know. And then I think those guys just took the idea of context and they developed it. They took what was done and they developed the situation.

But with the feminists, I remember Judy Chicago kind of looked me up and down and, you know, I wasn't particularly interested in what Judy was doing but I was interested in the students and how they were thinking. And I taught video and I, meanwhile, was developing the Sparkle pieces. And I stopped that and got into metalizing, because I had just had a show. And then I took a film course that summer on my own there because they had great film equipment.

And then after that I got my own equipment. I had my own equipment anyway, but after that I stayed with – I've got a port-a-pack system and so forth. But I wasn't interested in continuing film; I was interested in the video. And I watched a lot of video. And I was into scuba diving and I was into making art, and I developed the gold, you know, pieces –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, the torsos.

MS. BENGLIS: – those mermaid torso pieces, yes, at that time. They just came to me. And I experimented with some drugs – not a long time. I gave talks all around the country, went to Chicago and all around and began to work with Jack Brogan then, metalizing the Knots. I got a – Guggenheim [fellowship] – cast the pieces, the older pieces at that time. I'm talking about '73. And continued to work there and had a studio for about eight years and then came back here.

And instead of – and at that time, real estate was just kind of booming – beginning to boom there first on the West Coast, and I didn't really want to buy a place there. I wanted to come back and I realized that I really committed myself to some idea of a kind of roots in Long Island because I was used to land and nature.

So instead of buying in New York, I bought property in Long Island. Well, I had already bought property with – I actually loaned Klaus some money and I bought right next to him. He built – I didn't have an income. You know, I was working at the school, but with my money at the time, instead of building – I didn't have a job; I just had the teaching and I knew I didn't want to build or settle, essentially, but I got the property.

And Klaus had the nice house. And then I made a little collection of African pieces, and then I saw, at Schlegman's [ph], the best Cameroon piece. I had a really good Cameroon piece and I had the best one next to the one that I saw that was better, and I realized I paid maybe \$1,300 to \$1,500, which was, you know, a tenth of my income teaching at Rochester. And the one at Schlegman's would cost 10,000 [dollars], which was most of the income – I think I made 13.5 [thousand dollars] for the year, and that seemed like a lot of money then.

MS. TANNENBAUM: What's the name of the dealer?

MS. BENGLIS: I think it was – Schlegman was the big African art dealer, but you might correct me on that. But I saw it in a window and it was a great Cameroon piece and I realized that I knew what was good, and if I knew what was good, I could collect, but collecting should not be my thing. I realized that I had to make what was good. You know, I had to comment on what was – how we see and why something is good.

So I realized that I didn't want to divert my energies or my financing in that area, nor in property particularly, so I think I have been very careful and just lucky with whatever investments. And when I decided to buy, when Klaus and I were together for a little bit and when I realized that after spending time in L.A. – I think it was like seven or eight years – that I could come back. And I wasn't really with him, that I was trying to be away from him, or away from New York for whatever – I felt somehow possessed by Paula and Klaus in a way.

I'd known them very well and I felt I had to make that break. I had to go out and understand what other things were about. And so I moved back and I bought property with the loan from my father and paid him back when he was sick. I borrowed \$6,000 from him and made a down payment and then I paid him back a year or two later. And then I got a bank loan after doing what cash I could, and got a bank loan and finished my studio, which is still – you've seen it out there.

MS. TANNENBAUM: In East Hampton.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. And so, you know, I've been kind of lucky. I was very afraid when I did it, but I just had to do it. And then, I think that it was hard for me to make art out there, and the first piece I really made of consequence was that wave that you see in Ireland. And I think it was very important. It was the second large

piece I envisioned from about '85 on when I began to make the larger pieces.

I envisioned my own demise because I had my first kind of operation in '85, and I thought, well, I could have cancer, I could die, so I made my first large knot called *Pictor*, which I've never shown but I've kept. It's like an angel and it, you know, provided me some hope. And then I realized with the foam pieces I also envisioned a large cantilevered fountain at the same time, and I didn't -

MS. TANNENBAUM: Was that '85 or '75 -

MS. BENGLIS: Well, '85.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Eighty-five, okay, because you made Knots, though, before that -

MS. BENGLIS: I made knots from the '70s - yes, early '71, '72.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: I made the Totems in '71. I gave up the poured pieces. I made the Totems and tied them simply - '72, '73 and metalized in '73. I did all those cast pieces when I got the Guggenheim, whenever that was. And that was looking back at some years earlier because I wanted to make them more permanent.

And, see, I tried to pigment the foam - make metal pieces. I wanted the illusion of metal. I've been interested in the contradiction of the real of metal or the real of plastic, and that kind of, you know, what is synthesized, what is veneer and what is not - you know, for instance, this table is solid; that's veneer. I can't stand the - you know, I can't stand this anymore. To me it was bad cabinetwork to begin with, and I want to destroy almost everything in here. I mean, that's how I feel about - I want it completely bare, completely plain.

That's why Santa Fe is so good because you get down to the basics with - the studio out there is just mud, you know, [they laugh] and brick, and it's all kind of very natural. And I did go back to the clay, but something interests me about the plastics. The glass was pure, but getting into plastics I could make it look like glass, you see, or the glass. So that's why I got into the plastics, because there was a certain kind of illusion that I could get.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When was - which plastic - when -

MS. BENGLIS: Did I move into the cast plastics? Well, it's a urethane that - I arrived at the urethane only because I could arrive at form - form, with the wings - you know, all the poured pieces in the corner and around the corner. It was a way of building up from the latex-poured. When I discovered fire with the Lawson shapes, then I only allowed two to exist.

Henry Dukeson somewhere on the West Coast and Sol LeWitt had one of them. I never considered them very strong works of art. They were transitional works of art. But then I began to pour because of the fire that allowed the wax to flow over - you know, over the format.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So this is going back to around the late '60s?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. Well '60 actually.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: Sixty-seven, yes, maybe.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So from the wax painting -

MS. BENGLIS: I poured -

MS. TANNENBAUM: So you heated the wax paintings.

MS. BENGLIS: Then I made my first poured piece in '67, I think.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay. So the transition was from the wax pieces to the poured latex.

MS. BENGLIS: To the poured pieces. And then the wax pieces became more - I continued - stopped doing the wax paintings maybe for a year or so, and then made them more - I realized I could develop them according to the - because in between the poured large pieces all over the country, I would go back to my studio and work on the wax paintings again. And the same thing happened with the Knots.

After I finished the knot-making, I was already working on the Torsos and those works. And then India, Anand

[Sarabhai] said to me, why don't you do a few knots? And I said, well, if I could do them differently. So we did them in stone. I did some for him, and we did some in marble. And I did some for him and we just painted them silver. So he has two still hanging in his house there.

And then when I got back I made him two - one called Anand and one for his mother, *Minorma* [ph]. And then I stopped those tubular knots. And then I found - I moved into the fan-shapes. But I think I was doing the fan shapes anyway because I was doing the Torsos in the larger wire with the cotton stretched over it. So they were skin-like, and then the gold leaf.

So what I was doing, I developed the Torsos on the West Coast and I continued to develop the shapes. One thing that occurred to me when I was doing the tubular things that preceded the tubular knots, I also folded the fan like you do in grade school, in wire, and I didn't go back. And then I put cloth over that and it didn't work, but the cloth over the wire in the tubular form worked.

Now, Rauschenberg at the same time was doing his scrim - just hanging a scrim. He did the cardboards at the same time in '71 for Martin Friedman. He did the cardboards after the "Art and Technology" show. The "Art and Technology" show - Tony Smith did these boxes and big box forms. Rauschenberg did this wonderful tub of bubbling mud - the mud from silt - and, you know, the oil bubbles like oil - like from his home, you know, Beaumont.

It was a big stainless steel tub, big square, maybe 10 by 10, 15 by 15, bubbling. You know, you would look out and you'd see it. And later I went there and people had done graffiti all over the wall.

In the other room - I went to the opening because I ran out of material at the Walker - Adhesive Products, polyurethane foam. So I ordered the material. When I got back, the material arrived. I was still in the process of making it. Now, a friend that I met there, Rockne Krebs, was doing laser pieces outside, and he had a laser piece in L.A. at the museum there from the L.A. County Museum.

And I sort of got involved with him, and it was very exciting to see him doing his work - my seeing the Rauschenberg, my seeing the Lichtenstein film that he did, the animated thing, and also the Tony - you know, the squares. I think Rockne had one of the most interesting pieces. He had a kind of mirrored piece at right angles in a darkened room where it was infinite. The laser kind of - you know, from the corner to the other corner, like back and forth, back and forth.

I mean, it was very interesting what he did - infinite kind of laser piece with the mirrors in a blackened room. And outside - I think it was Irwin, who was also - had this first scrim piece in Minneapolis, had a cast resin piece outside. And I learned later - much later - a year or so later I met - again, I looked up Bob Irwin and met Jack Brogan through Bob Irwin.

I went to this "Art and Technology" show, and it was then that I knew I wanted to come to L.A. because it just seemed like a wonderful kind of - because I saw the art technology show.

And then Rauschenberg, when he came from the "Art and Technology" show and then came to the show where we were invited to the Walker, was so frustrated that he did these cardboards - his first one - he hadn't marked on them or printed on them. He just did these sort of arrangements and stapled it to the wall, and that's what he did.

And he was so frustrated the evening of our parties at the grand collector's house - the story was told actually by someone - and I'm thinking - oh, by Rosenquist. Rosenquist, Laddie Dill and I were all there, and there was this black waiter all in white gloves and a white outfit, leaning over, serving us champagne. There was a glass table with a bronze Chinese turtle in the middle.

And we all went for the champagne. And as we were going for the champagne, before we could take it, Rauschenberg was turned like this and kicked from behind. The whole champagne tray - the tray fell at such an angle onto the table it was totally shattered. The turtle fell down - straight down on all fours.

It was like a performance. And everybody went over and congratulated - I mean, the waiter was stunned. He went back as if nothing happened. Everything got cleaned up, and then we drank a toast after that. We toasted Rauschenberg for his performance. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: That's great.

MS. BENGLIS: Because he was so frustrated; he was so angry, you know.

MS. TANNENBAUM: What was he angry about?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, he had done this marvelous piece. I had seen it. I mean, I don't even know - I probably said

I'd seen it, but it's like he came back and he was invited to do something there. And it was like an afterthought, but he still - he developed that. But I think he was not the star of the show.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay, so this was when you had the show at the Walker -

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: - at the same time. Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: And, you know, Flavin had a big hallway of green light, and the green light had the opposite affect of the red shadows. I had come there with all these colored pigments of dayglo, you know, the radiant color; the very bright absence-of-black color, powdered color, to pigment - but I did some with black too. The "R" [ph] knots had black. And I didn't know which I was going to do. I was going to look at the situation.

And when I saw Flavin's light - and Dorothea was on the other side - it was very interesting that they put Flavin in the middle of two women. Dorothea was on one side. She was not working with color; she was working with her oil-soaked papers. I decided, as soon as I saw my stirring stick leaning against one-by-twos, against the wall, I said, I can't do color because there was this orange shadow. And I said, I'm going to do a black piece.

And Dan, I remember, afterwards I came over to him and I said, Dan - you know, he thought I was going to get very upset, because he liked the idea of upsetting people with his light. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: He thought I was going to come over and - I said, I wanted to thank him. [Laughs.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: When you started doing the poured latex pieces and then the foam, were you thinking about issues about the floor, like moving from the wall to the floor?

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Were you conscious of it?

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, yes, yes. I was very conscious of the latex - the skin itself coming from my body and the flinging of the pour and the kind of - the bounce, the pull of the rubber. You know, the rubber has a certain kind of pull.

And I was wanting to get that pull onto the wall. I didn't know how to do it. I thought of pulling the rubber. I thought of actually making huge rubber bands or something like that, but I thought it would be too literal. And I wanted to develop something on the wall but I didn't know how.

So that's why - that's one reason I moved from the latex rubber on the floor to the semi-flexible urethane, which I could get. The reason I moved from one to the other, I had a studio door that was a normal studio wall door - Baxter Street over there next to the school - you know, the police station there, where the kids used to burn the cars from the - you know, the Italian kids who would leave a brand new car that they just wanted to get rid of, but firstly the tires would be taken and things, you know, would be taken from the car, and then finally it would just end up in fire. The police would do nothing, just right in front of my studio.

And the kids would play on the playground. So I was very conscious of, okay, how to move from one thing to the other, but I didn't know how. And my own needs, because of the space, dictated that I should get into something that was flexible that I could get in and out of the studio, and I also wanted to build up.

So they had the semi-flexible foam. And then I said, well, there's the rigid foam, so I can do things in situ. So that's what I did. And like Michael said why they cut things; well, people had to cut things, so that's what they did.

And then, you know, I did large pieces. By then, with the large pieces in situ and so forth, there wasn't enough space to store them forever; nor could I continue to do them forever because I didn't want to see them destroyed finally. And once I had seen what I could do and how it could change the space, there was no reason to repeat it. I wasn't learning anything any longer. So I just went on to something else.

And after that was like the ghost of the tubular pieces, and it was like the kind of - you know, I was saying, what is surface; what is form? Maybe the form is within the center of the thing that you form by your hand. Maybe it's just the cloth and the plaster. Maybe it's just the exoskeleton - which I've made the exoskeleton flow, but how do I reform it? Maybe I can make, you know, al-la the myth of the Cubists. Maybe I can make, through the knot, the different planes of the tube that I form.

And that's why I began doing the knots, because everything is a knot, you know, like a growing plant is a knot, a body is a knot, every embryo is a knot. And I began to think, what is form? It's a growth. It's a continuation. It's an expansion. It's a butterfly. It's a cocoon. It expands and it flies away. It flies out, you know, but it also contains energy.

So I think I was thinking about containment of form and then the expression of the – the gesture of form going out, and all of these had to have a certain kind of feeling of movement. So it's symbol of form or surface or energy.

And finally, you know, the gestalt. What is an edge? The texture makes the form, and I'm expressing the inside of the outside, you know. So there are contradictions in the work – inside, outside. You know, the inside is regurgitated form. It's regurgitated feeling. It's the body inside out and it's the skin. So there's contradictions there.

And the idea of the gestalt, the edge, is very interesting because this edge describes – even the – [inaudible] – will recognize me or someone through the movement or through the gesture, or be frightened if somebody has on a hat to change the head form, or moves a certain way. That's why they don't like children so much, you know, because they move funnily, or old people or crippled people or kind of mad people, you know.

They recognize something is different, so it's the movement of form that has to do with the gestalt too, the edges.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When you were doing the latex and the poured pieces – and there was an element of time, I guess – were you aware of thinking about performance in any way?

MS. BENGLIS: The movement of the latex pieces?

MS. TANNENBAUM: I mean, that you knew that you had to get it right or –

MS. BENGLIS: I didn't always get –

MS. TANNENBAUM: It was very different from making a more traditional painting – you know, the action – the action or the process was really so much a part of what turned out to be an object that –

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I did make a big mistake, like a 50-gallon maybe a 20-gallon mistake. Twenty – 50 – no, a hundred-gallon mistake. I'm trying to think that for the Whitney – I remember telling Marcia Tucker and Jim Monte – that I wanted to do two large latex paintings and I really wanted to – I saw the Whitney black floor. It was a brand new floor then and I wanted to really pop it – pop up, you know, from the floor illusionistically.

So I wanted to make a big – large Saturn-yellow piece– I didn't know the show was going to be called "Anti-Illusion: Process [Materials]." So this particular piece was a big pour of Saturn yellow, and it was totally a mistake because the pour of Saturn yellow did not describe anything. It was just a big puddle of Saturn yellow. So it was important, you know, for me to order the material again and then pour over that. And that piece I called *Planet*.

And then I did another one called *Contraband*, in which I did the *Planet* piece in Klaus Kertess' studio; the *Contraband* I'd done in David Diao's studio of the poured piece. And I wanted it to really flow like marbled, because I had discussions with Sol LeWitt and Dan Flavin when they saw *Bounce* at the Bykert Gallery.

That was the first time actually the portrait of Joe Zucker by Chuck Close stood looking down at my poured piece. That was Chuck Close's introduction, and my latex painting was on the floor and caused a spot there. When Dorothea Rockburne came in and wanted to do something in that room, she said, you've got to get rid of that stain. And that was good because she was all about stain in her early pieces, you know.

So – so what's the context I want to get in? I just –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, about making – about action or process.

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, right.

MS. TANNENBAUM: About process and making mistakes.

MS. BENGLIS: So yes, I made a big mistake because I always – my ego sometimes got in the way, and my idea of, you know –

MS. TANNENBAUM: What was the mistake there, the color?

MS. BENGLIS: No. The mistake was that I could not make just a one-color pour.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, and I was telling you the story. After *Bounce*, having done this piece with Chuck Close, his painting looking over – well, I did it in an empty room and then we hung the Chuck Close. This piece [Bounce] had the figure/ground, and I did it after I'd done *Contraband* and after I'd done *Planet*.

And I did it deliberately as a figure/ground because I didn't want it to be just marbled. I wanted it to have a figure/ground. And I remember Sol LeWitt was saying, I prefer the marbled – Dan Flavin also – because they were making rules about figure/ground, and I said, well, the floor is the ground and the painting is the figure, and you walk around it to view it.

So I was doing the argument, in other words, because they were talking about figure/ground – what is figure and what is ground, that whole thing – it goes back to, you know, to push and pull, the whole notion of painting and painterliness. What is a painting? What is figure/ground? What is the brushstroke? How do you continue the brushstroke? What is surface? What is description? What is emotive texture, you know?

MS. TANNENBAUM: So they were against figure/ground?

MS. BENGLIS: They were against figure/ground.

MS. TANNENBAUM: But you weren't.

MS. BENGLIS: No, no.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: I mean, Sol was getting rid of the figure/ground, you know, by doing the grid, the hatch – hatch like a little old lady, you know [Tannenbaum laughs] – hatch, hatch, hatch, hatch, you know, in the system. They were systematically getting rid of the figure/ground. And I always thought their stance was kind of way out there on the limb – Rococo – way out there, you know? And it needed to be there. But they had to follow it through its logical conclusion.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Dave Hickey wrote an essay about you pretty recently for the ["Lynda Benglis"] Retrospective in Dublin [Irish Museum of Modern Art], and he talks about how you brought color back into art and how radical that was. Were you thinking about that?

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, yes, yes, but I think another person who was doing that was Alan Saret. You know, he ordered colored wire, and he actually was in that show, "Anti-Illusion: Process Materials" He pulled out of the show, and I had to pull out of the show finally because they built a ramp and they wanted me to show the piece on the ramp.

I didn't pull out of the show for any reason other than that because I could not show the piece – it was about gravity, it was about walking around the piece, and I realized it was a very important show but I could not do something that was counter to the way the piece was meant to be perceived. So that's why I pulled out of the show. But he –

MS. TANNENBAUM: And that was the yellow painting?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, no, I had poured over the yellow painting.

MS. TANNENBAUM: You poured on top – okay.

MS. BENGLIS: So that was one of the pieces, but I think finally what I presented to them was not the *Planet* piece but the other – the big marbled piece, you know. This was before I did the piece for the Bykert Gallery, where I had that discussion. For me – I had to do both. I had to do the marbled piece for my own information. And I ended finally with another marbled piece. The Whitney now owns *Contraband*. But that was about the bayous with the slicks – the oil slick. That's what happens.

And I finally did the last piece which was also about that, but it was also about drying up the black, which was like a dried leaf, and that piece was the very last piece, where I took all the latex paint that I had and all the – not latex paint but the latex rubber – and made the paint, made the colors.

You know, I was mixing those colors; they weren't premixed. I was mixing all those colors. So I was very conscious of – because of what I would do to the surface, how highly I would wax the surface that I was pouring on – how they would flow. And I was doubly conscious, when I made the big pour, of the Saturn-yellow piece,

how slowly the thing went over. So it's doubly thick, that piece.

MS. TANNENBAUM: How have those survived? Did you expect that they would – did you think there would be problems, or you weren't really –thinking about that?

MS. BENGLIS: No, I did think about it. It's self-vulcanizing. It did have ammonia in it. There's an ozone deterioration; I knew that. I think there's the ozone deterioration but also light. If they're in a lot of sunlight, they shouldn't be in a lot of sunlight.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Do you roll them up?

MS. BENGLIS: They have been rolled up. That's the way I knew I could get them in and out of spaces, but finally once they've been rolled up they have a memory, so they should be flattened with large, heavy things on top, but covered, not directly on them, to flatten them, and they lose their memory. I think that once I had done what I could do (with a particular material or process), I stopped doing them, and that's in everything.

MS. TANNENBAUM: What do you think your most successful shows have been?

MS. BENGLIS: This is one of them that I just finished. [They laughs.] I'm very pleased –

MS. TANNENBAUM: That's the Retrospective or the "New Work" that just opened at Cheim and Read?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes [for Dublin] well, I got most involved with the fountain, even though that idea was so old. When I saw the space in Ireland I thought, well, I need to do three more and just see it, envision this because it sounded very special. So I was very excited about seeing that [Four-part fountain at IMMA: *North South East West*]. And I was very excited about seeing this gallery show together. I've been working on these things for two years.

Whatever I'm working on as a body I'm very excited about. When I'm down in Santa Fe, I'm very excited about these little paintings. You know, I was totally shocked when I saw a little wax painting on the cover of *Art in America*. You know, that little painting is about that big.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When was –

MS. BENGLIS: And I've done them over the last – I've been doing these wax paintings –

MS. TANNENBAUM: What issue of –

MS. BENGLIS: Right now, *Art in America*.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did it come out?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Really?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, they showed me.

MS. TANNENBAUM: I didn't even know.

MS. BENGLIS: I found out yesterday.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Really?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I just found out yesterday.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Really? Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: So that's the December [2009] –

MS. TANNENBAUM: I don't know what issue it is. It must be –

MS. TANNENBAUM: I'll go look. [December, 2009]

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. They have many reproductions. I was so excited about my own show that – so when they showed me that – I didn't look through it. I haven't seen it. I should pick it up, too. I haven't seen it yet, but I saw the cover.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Is it a recent painting, the small painting?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. I got back into the wax paintings, how to work them differently, and I've called them kind of figurative because they have their own personality. I've sort of juxtaposed them on the same plane, not on the wax lozenge.

What got me into it is my home burned down and three people were killed, and I was repainting -

MS. TANNENBAUM: Where was that - which -

MS. BENGLIS: In Lake Charles, Louisiana. My sister lived in the home, so it was a person that she was involved with, and a son.

MS. TANNENBAUM: When did this -

MS. BENGLIS: This happened in 2000 - 2001, just after 9/11. And so after that I began to -

[END DISC 2.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: This is Judith Tannenbaum interviewing Lynda Benglis at her space in New York, 100 Prince Street, on November 20, 2009. Okay, here we roll. This is tape three.

MS. BENGLIS: Okay.

MS. TANNENBAUM: We were talking a little bit about how you think the new work connects with your earlier work.

MS. BENGLIS: The new work is - 9/11, I was thinking - there was the Giacometti show which I saw at the Modern, and I began to think, well, Giacometti did essentially what I'm doing in my work in terms of the texture and drawing. In other words, drawing equal form, except I felt that Giacometti had the sort of frenzied surface that was less about the material and a kind of approach. It was more about the figure.

The figure was of supreme importance, and the surface became secondary. For me, the surface is primary and the surface describes the form. So it's, as I said earlier, inside out. I'm taking the idea of the descriptive definition of how we think about the subject. And I've always been interested in that; what is the subject and how you define that subject. And it's through the process, yes, but then, what is that process and how does that process take form?

And even though you may be dependent on some kind of accidental situation, you're not really doing an accidental situation; you're describing the form through the process. So I think I've always done that, and I've allowed myself to get freer as I knew more or allowed myself to interact more, and then find I was editing so much, you know, because I was editing through the allowance finally on the final piece of the fountain form that you finally saw, or the last leaf, the Blatt [title of poured, latex floor piece], the final form that became so textured and so, you know, marbled and so layered with the pigment that it sort of - to dry it sort of became very wrinkly.

So does that answer the question?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, I think that's really interesting. You know, I would never have thought about the connection to Giacometti. But when you say it, it makes sense.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I only connected it once I saw the show, and I asked myself, well, how am I different?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: This interests me, but for me it was too particularized, too much about the information, that I was not interested in. I was interested in his idea of process. That's all. I couldn't take from it but I began to see what I was not and what I am.

MS. TANNENBAUM: In some bodies of work, does something particular inspire the new work?

MS. BENGLIS: I don't know what the new work is. I never know what the new work is. [They laugh.] I really don't. I guess that's why I need time to play again. I know that in India, the most recent idea I've had was to take, again, my own recipe in the wax and begin to pull the form and modulate the form through the heat so that it has many surfaces, and when that was done, to cast it in stainless steel.

And so, it begins to mirror the fingerprints but it's also pulled and has so many different surfaces. I mean, I've

done the fingerprint things in the clay for over 10 years or more. Ten to 15 years I've worked in clay, so they have the fingerprints as well.

And the large pieces that I transposed from in the round, how to do sculpture in the round, I did it with one of the works called *Ghost Dance*. The first piece of *Ghost Dance* was small clay pieces and then later continually experimenting with fingerprints in the clay, and then going into the larger scale. In order to do large pieces in clay, what I did was make a large format in order to position the surface.

What I did firstly was position the surface, an undulating surface – that became a torso but it was undulating – on the wall, and then make that out of wire, plaster and burlap. And over that I positioned wet clay – chunks of cut wet clay, maybe an inch or two inches thick, and cut them out in rectangle shapes, square shapes, and triangles, and drew on the surface.

So that created – I already had the form and the surface made only through the clay. And the surface varied in the triangles and the squares and the rectangles, but the undulation, which was the underneath surface, was the format that was the ground. But the actual final ground was the wall or the floor.

So what I did, the other two, one was just on the wall. The next one, to develop that idea further – I only did three. To develop that further I did these ones that were – it was basically, again, a kind of torso, but it was a wave torso. There were several waves, how to deal with the torso. And I thought of it as almost like a Kabuki dancer with the arms.

So it was a torso wave – several waves underneath – and arms. So I called that *Torso Wave*. And it was also made the same way, with the clay surface, but made with plaster and burlap, this undulating surface.

And then the final one that I did – I did one in Santa Fe, that one, and then the other one in Walla Walla. The final one was the *Migrating Pedmarks*, which was very birdlike – many different kind of wings in all directions, maybe six directions, resting on three points. And that one – I decided to really differentiate the surface on these. One was gold. The *Ghost Dance* was always gold leafed. I did two, one with yellow underneath and gold on top, and the other one with red underneath and gold on top. And I want to do a blue one with gold on top. I haven't done that yet.

And then the final one was the work that had black underneath, black matte, and white on top. What I'm doing is emphasizing the form through the texture and the black underneath makes that form underneath almost disappear.

What I did was take the mold around the edge, so you get the edge of the clay, the thickness of the clay. Underneath you see the pressure points of where the clay –so you see the fingerprints making the form. So, what you get is a negative from the positive on the top. So it's a skin. It's a skin.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right. And are these cast later?

MS. BENGLIS: These are cast in bronze.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay, so –

MS. BENGLIS: So two are out in Long Island –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: – in the sculpture area at LongHouse [Jack Lenor Larson's place in Hamptons].

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right.

MS. BENGLIS: And one of the large – the *Migrating Pedmarks* is in Cincinnati [Toledo Museum of Art] next to the glass museum there, and done by the same architects that did the new museum, the lovely glass museum.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Let me skip a little bit. When did you start going to India? I know that's been an important part of your life.

MS. BENGLIS: It's not Cincinnati, I'm sorry; Cleveland [Toledo].

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, okay.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Same state. Same state.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, it was in Ohio, yes. I have to check that. I'm getting kind of tired.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. TANNENBAUM: We'll just finish this one.

MS. BENGLIS: So when did I start going to India? I was invited to India two or three years before I [ph] left. I didn't want to go by myself, so I invited my mother and my mother did not want to go, so finally my sister went with me after I did a project in Italy. She was with me and we went to Greece and then I think we went on to India, although we came back and then we went.

My sister was essentially living with me at the time. For several years she lived with me. Then once she discovered India and met somebody there, a famous scientist, a geneticist that taught - who had the whole floor at Yale, - Jusofalof Lyes [ph] - he gave her a job in his research lab, and they lived together for some years. So I went to India and then I think Anand and I began to be involved, and I did -

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did you know him before you went or -

MS. BENGLIS: No, no.

MS. TANNENBAUM: No, so you met him there.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, he invited - he knew of me and I knew of him, basically, because he invited me two or three years before, but I really didn't get to see him - I saw him maybe once before I left for India. And -

MS. TANNENBAUM: Did he invite you to do an art project?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, not an art project, he just invited me to come to do some art, but not a specific project. I had no idea what I'd do. In fact, any idea that I might have had, I didn't do - and that's what usually happened when artists went to India. You don't have the same facilities there that you have here - not the same paint, so artists bring their - whatever they think they're going to do and they find - because Anand is a scientist and he was interested in giving artists the opportunity to expose themselves to other ideas, basically.

He did as much collaborative work with all the artists that were there so that they would experience working with the minds of the Indian people that were there in his workshop.

There was one person in particular that I think that all the artists respected so much, and particularly Stella, I know, Manu and also Rauschenberg. Lichtenstein and Rauschenberg were working with this fellow called Manu. I have a piece now called *The Manu* because Manu and I began to make our own molds there with these stainless steel pieces, and we actually had them cast at a foundry that does machine parts for the Germans, so you can imagine that they are very particular with what they do because they're working with the Europeans.

So I called this section of, I think, seven pieces, *The Manu* - just *The Manu*, and *The Manu* means the law, so I thought that was kind of a way of lauding him and his involvement. But also, he is very opinionated about what's what, too. I mean, he has his own sense of what's - and he's very respected there.

He happens to be Harijan, which is the lower caste there. And there was a cook there in the higher caste, and he seems to give everybody trouble. He's always sort of, you know, making trouble. It's interesting that cooks often are of the higher caste and workers often are the lower caste, but not always because nothing is always or all the time.

But I found that I - that the very complexity in terms of the layering of India interested me, and how people got along and how they worked together and how they lived together side by side even though they may be of different religions, and how the city of Ahmedabad was so complex as an ancient city and as a medieval city, and how they even worshipped underground. The Jains or the Muslims or the Hindus had their own sections, and the whole city was designed in such a way that the breezes sort of flowed toward and through the houses in the city.

And these things people were much closer to. We know that for a fact, that being closer to nature, people were designing in a proper way, even in our own country here in the U.S., the way they would design houses and the way they came along later and just, you know, made things all hot and then -

MS. TANNENBAUM: So you've actually spent time working there. When you go there you work.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. The most interesting pieces - the couple of pieces that I did that were really, truly about there besides the stainless pieces, that I think really come out of my experience there are some brick pieces. I had the idea when I saw in the magazine - digitally someone made a wave that - I'm involved in different waves,

forms – out of brick digitally, and I said, oh, that's such an interesting idea.

So I decided to make this form through a trapezoid thick wall. Anand had a well shape, four by four, well and wanted to cover it up because it was a big hole in the ground and he wasn't using the water anymore. I said, oh, don't – I'd love to do a fountain with it. "No, no, I just want to cover it." He didn't want the water source anymore. So I said, okay.

So I did a carving – one end, the form looks like a vase and the other end a kind of almost elephantine form. When I was a kid, I thought I could draw perfect elephants. And I used to ride elephants at the zoo, as many kids have. You know, zoos, they used to allow that. So this particular form for the trapezoid was about 15 feet long and about 10 to 12 feet high altogether.

And then I wanted to use the base of this, build it up. The idea – I wanted to use the middle of it for a planter. I said, if I can't have a fountain, then I want to make the largest palm frond clamped – grow out of it, and to maybe grow and grow and grow around it. So a palm tree is growing in it now, in the middle of it, from the beginning. And then the second one that I did was a snake around a tree, that lean tree that seemed to be dying anyway. I think that's why Anand said you can have that tree.

So I did a sort of double-headed snake around this form, and then part of the tree, the vine branch, kind of collapsed some of it. So then I did the snake sort of braiding itself away from the wall, but it was actually the tail of the snake because the heads were around the tree trunk, because there were other trees in the distance.

So, what I did was kind of braid the tree out, and that particular sculpture, people come there during the Naga Festival, the snake festival, and they worship it because it is a snake, and they know it's a snake. And they draw on it. They draw little snakes on it and colored – you know, kind of fluorescent chalk, and they give it flowers. So that to me is just very special – very special.

MS. TANNENBAUM: I don't want to run out of time – I mean, we should spend a little bit of time talking about the *Artforum* [November 1974 issue] incident.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, yes. I don't know if I have the energy to do that today.

[...]

MS. TANNENBAUM: Well, why don't we start?

MS. BENGLIS: We can try. We can try.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Why don't we start?

MS. BENGLIS: Because I know we can get into it later but I'm kind of tired.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Let's do what we can and then we'll see.

So I guess maybe you could just tell us what happened – what you wanted to do, what the *Artforum* piece is about, and then maybe how you see it in retrospect. Did you anticipate what would happen? I guess first describe the piece, if you can.

MS. BENGLIS: No, you describe it. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: I'm doing the – this is supposed to be –

MS. BENGLIS: I don't know how to describe it because everybody knows what it is if they look at it.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay, well, you took out – you wanted to do a centerfold, but tell me if it was – I don't want to put words in your mouth. This is supposed to be coming from you.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I don't want to get involved with a description.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: I mean, that's part of history. You know, everybody can see it. But when I had the idea of doing it – and the reason I finally wanted to do something with, say, the idea of the male member was I had been photographing men and thinking of them as the object, as women are the objects, and I had been aware of myself as an object. And I could only use myself as an object.

Then I thought, well, the best way of alluding to men and women in a kind of larger sense was finally the hermaphroditic image, and that the artist was really larger than just the sexual thing of being a woman artist– or a male artist – why these issues were so important; why is this sexual issue so important in art? And I began to

think that by mocking or alluding to both sexes I could sort of forget about the politics, or make it more humorous, or to mock it would be to make it less sensitive.

I realized that it was a very important statement, and I was going to get flak, and I realized that I had to do it, and I risked having the cover of *Artforum*, because they were going to put a knot called *Zulu* that is Barbara Pine's, on the cover. I thought that this was more important to do- when they said I couldn't have centerfold - actually, they were going to put it in the context of the article that Pincus-Witten was doing.

In fact, they came to me - Pincus-Witten - and Coplans came to me and said, Lynda, we'd like to do an article, and I said, well, I would like to do a centerfold. Coplans was consistent in saying that he didn't think that I could do the centerfold, so he put three of the - I showed them what I wanted to do, the centerfold. I said one is the artwork, but I showed them three photographs because I just wanted them to see that it was obvious what the artwork was. But instead they just wanted to print all three of them. I said, no.

That's when I realized that no one understands that I'm trying to do. So I decided to - they didn't -

MS. TANNENBAUM: So there are three different images?

MS. BENGLIS: Three different images of - three of the same image of myself with, you know, the member. So only one was the artwork; I knew that. So I said, okay, I have to copyright this. They said, take it out of the context of the article, because everything is context.

So I said, okay, you want me to do it as that, do a little print like that? And then I had to ask Paula, and Paula said okay. So it wasn't Paula's idea to take it out or Paula's idea of an ad. Paula later wanted to do an ad to commemorate her years of being in the art business, and I said, no, Paula, we can't do that, we can't do that.

Because it was about the time - it was about the time of the movement, the feminist movement. It was about the time of the movement - the feminist movement. It was about the time with everybody talking about numbers - numbers of women in shows, numbers - you know, getting the quota. It was all such a self-conscious time.

And I was not involved with quotas. I was not involved with going to meetings. I was not involved with rules. Rules are made to be broken. And so I just - stuck to what I wanted to do. And Roberta Kimmel helped me do the layout. And we did it and it cost me - I remember it was double the cost of a normal double page. A normal double page ad at that time was \$1,500. They charged me \$3,000. It was my money that paid for it; nobody else's.

Only recently I learned that Rosalind Krauss took the photograph of Bob Morris. And they said that Bob Morris had the idea first. Well, he beat me to the punch, you know. But I was doing photographs with Bob Morris, and Bob Morris was doing his own Polaroids. I was doing my own Polaroids. We just happened to discover that - and Bob Morris was involved with Poppy Johnson at the time.

I think he even may have been married to her at the time that I was - and there were meetings of the artists and the war, and pulling out of - Henry Hopkins was head of the Venice Biennale then, the American Pavilion, and he had the idea of putting these artists in the pavilion. And these artists said, well, let's do posters - and hired somebody, Bill Weege, to do the posters for the Biennale, for the war, the Vietnam War - anti-Vietnam - you know, the positioning of the artists on the war.

And I felt - I was doing a Vera List piece at the time. There were people that marched to Washington at the time, at the very time I was pouring for Vera List - two pieces, actually, I made for her.

And I said to her - you know, she asked - maybe she asked or I wondered or I might have stated, well, if I don't do art out of protest or - I mean, nobody will know my art if I only protest. So that was kind of my position with feminism as well. It's not about protest; it's about doing something about the protest. It's about doing your art as a statement.

So I have always felt that, politically - I've been political and I am political, but by other means. I cannot do it by other means; I have to do it in terms of my work, my own terms.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Let me just explain a little bit about the Robert Morris and what the relationship of your piece was to that piece.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, I had continued to do - my interest was basically the artist as object in the context - the female had already done the pose of - you know, the Betty Grable-type pose. And what led me to think that that was kind of - might be misinterpreted, and it was. Somebody came into Paula Cooper's gallery saying, who did that to her? And I realized that here I was trying to investigate what it was - who was whose object, so to speak.

What was the object, again? What is the spacing here? What is the purpose of my interest?

I first did the – I was holding the knot as my face. That was an announcement. So I was not interested in advertising myself, but I was interested in the idea of the body of the knot being a kind of configuration, a humanist – almost a portrait. Sometimes I name them after people and those people recognize themselves. They recognize their gestures or their feelings.

So I was also stating that I'm not the artist positioning myself in front of my work as an advertisement. Something repulsed me about that. I mean, I have posed in my own studio in front of the work, but I haven't particularly been interested in that as an advertisement for the work.

And when I saw – you know, it goes back to that whole Barnett Newman and Annalee thing and the comment about Pollock. So I was interested – I mean, that's when I first became interested. And when Warhol said – when he wanted to do a movie with myself and Gordon Hart, he wanted to do basically making love, you know? I'd already seen *The Kiss* and I knew that, and I knew about the groupies – the early groupies around Warhol and his factory.

But I didn't want to be there. I didn't want to be a part of that – although I respected Warhol. I just didn't want to be anyone's object, so to speak. So I was – does that answer your question?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, but I guess I was thinking a little bit maybe more –

MS. BENGLIS: And I was studying – and I was studying –

MS. TANNENBAUM: – specifically about –

MS. BENGLIS: Morris?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, did his – he had a show announcement with himself –

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, but I didn't see that.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So you didn't see that.

MS. BENGLIS: No, I didn't see that. It had nothing –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay, so yours really had nothing to do with that.

MS. BENGLIS: No, it had nothing to do with that.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Because a lot of people think that that's –

MS. BENGLIS: No, no, it had nothing to do with that.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: I mean, I saw it later but I had already done mine (ad) and he had already done his (poster).

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh.

MS. BENGLIS: He just beat me to it; that's all.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: I mean, because he knew the whole system.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right. Right.

MS. BENGLIS: He was involved with Rosalind and they set it up that way.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: But I was talking –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Were you friends with him?

MS. BENGLIS: Oh, yes. I mean, I was talking to him about these different things, about – we had many discussions about – but specifically I think he was talking about his relationship, basically to Poppy and the one

video that we did. I handed him the video and then I did that mumble thing.

So I began to kind of cancel out his image, so to speak, or his voice or his musings about women, and he was sweeping Poppy Johnson out of his life. That's basically what he was doing, cleaning his – and so he was kind of – you know, I don't know what their relationship was, nor was I very interested in the intimacies of – I was more interested in positioning myself with and against him because I felt, in a way, that he was a person that sort of usurped ideas– but he still interested me in that he was very theatrical in what he did, and it was very interesting how he kind of took ideas and used them.

I mean, you know, he interested me and I thought about studying with him at Hunter but pretty soon I was teaching there, you know. I was at Rochester and so forth. And I realized when I tried to even register at Hunter, the head of the department at the time was not of interest to me at all and I couldn't get through like the subway school part of it.

So I thought, well, this is not what I want to do. I really want to meet people, the people that I'm interested in. So then I met Gorchov, you know, and I met Morris and – so I didn't need to pursue that.

MS. TANNENBAUM: You knew that you would have reaction to the *Artforum* piece, but did you expect the editors of the magazine to resign or –

MS. BENGLIS: That wasn't my reaction, though. In fact, I was inviting Morris to go with me to –he went with me to buy the dildo. [Tannenbaum laughs.] So it wasn't like I was fighting with him, but I was playing with him. It was fun. You know, we sent letters back and forth and we had – we had fun with the photographs and we were – we were playing with our images anyway, you know.

But I think – I think these ideas also – you know, the photographer – I showed some of those photographs that I had made into slides to – Cindy Sherman saw them. She was collecting magazine photographs of women in different roles. And when I showed her the actual performance of Morris and I, I think something hit, you know. Morris was doing his thing – I mean, he was doing it – I was doing my thing, and then we did it together, so to speak.

So I think this was a germ for her. And I remember Serra saying to me, well, I know people that are, you know – and I said I wasn't really interested in taking it any further, except in *Amazing Bow Wow*. I mean, for me it was too much about acting and producing, and essentially I was more interested in developing I guess more meditative ideas, more abstract ideas and spatial ideas. And that's why contextually I couldn't go into different spaces and make theatrical productions.

Morris himself was a theatrical person, much more than I. You know, I saw in his work – and this show, if you see at the New Museum, this is a theatrical presentation. I'm involved –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Which one, "Urs Fischer?"

MS. BENGLIS: Yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, really?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. You must see it.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, I might tomorrow.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, because there –and somebody mentioned it recently in a magazine. I don't know; maybe it was a theatre magazine, but they mentioned my fingerprints and de Koonings, and they mentioned my name and de Kooning's. And then he blows up the thing in china, you know, to a huge scale.

Now, de Kooning, it wasn't even de Kooning's idea to – it was Fourcade's idea to blow these things up by tens. And de Kooning did 10 pieces. Fourcade did them – the first one I saw, going over to Fourcade's house on the shore, of de Kooning and – not the first one. The first one I saw actually was at the Foundry – at Modern Art Foundry. And there was someone with a primitive machine that measured, and they were making the de Koonings in clay, reproducing them by 10.

And they did all – they did I don't know how many Clam Diggers they did by 10, but Fourcade showed them. And one of the Clam Diggers kind of collapsed, and you could tell it collapsed; I know that one– I mean, it was so funny to try to make wet clay kind of upright again. It was very – listen, I know. It's very difficult.

So anyway, Fourcade finally did it hugely. I saw the huge one, by 10 again, by 10 again, and it was very interesting to see a fingerprint like this. Well, that's what this guy has done, you know, but he has taken a section of something.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. And my response was that I loved the surfacing of what was done and also the softness. That interested me. And then – you should see the show.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, I will. I'm hoping to tomorrow.

MS. BENGLIS: And there were other things that he did. The playing of reality from – you know, that was interesting too about that show. There was a lot in it. I mean, there were too many pieces in what he calls one piece. I think a lot of artists are interested in the same thing. How they express it is different.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Do you want to talk about a few of the more recent things you've been doing with lamps, or the Hot Spots?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, the Hot Spots came out of a study that I did, of how to make a concentrated image. I was working with shaped paintings in New Zealand – I was invited there – because I was invited there to have a kind of retrospective of what I did – do. I began to make paintings. I began to do metalized pieces. I brought a huge metalized piece over. It was in the '90s that I was invited there – mid- to early '90s, I think. And then –

MS. TANNENBAUM: That's when you did the clay. Is that where you worked in clay?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. I was working in clay and – thank you for reminding me of it. I was working in clay in Taos, New Mexico, and then I began to do the large pieces in clay there, 60 at Matakana, the factory, like cutting and doing different things with the clay, but not forming them into a shape but just – it reminded me a bit of Eva Hesse's – but they were huge pieces – and they reminded me also of the kind of painting, letting the surfaces drip, you know, like a rolled canvas and you see the surface drip on the – and they were all of this graphite-type – they were fired and then – bisque, and then I painted them and then they were fired again.

So they were like paintings, rolled paintings. And I did 60 of them and showed them on black sand. They have this iron ore sand. It was iron and it was a beautiful sort of black, like the black of the glass now that – not glass but the black that you see that I did of the – a black ice piece in the back room. You haven't seen it yet. Oh, right.

So anyway, I showed those in the show in New Zealand, and I went to New Zealand twice to do these works, and I began painting. And one thing that New Zealand is involved with, when I began painting again – and I hadn't painted in a long time, since the '70s – was the idea of central image and this kind of – and I began doing an octagon shape, a circle inside cut out and then the octagon on top, or octagon in the center and a circle on the outside.

And I began to do these spinners and I began spinning these pieces and doing the wax painting of the brush strokes. I began designing the paintings on the wheel, so to speak, because I was also making clay works on – you know, like sculpture on the wheel.

So I began painting on the wheel and I had this idea after doing these paintings – and I did blossom shapes; I did elongated ones; I made all kinds of – and then I had the big show at Paula's and Jerry Saltz liked it very much and gave me a really nice write up and review. And I remember – who was the person – I have to – when I did the Vera List piece, Si Newhouse came in, and he responded to the paintings. And I knew he wanted them; he wanted them, and his wife said, oh, no – you know. So he just sort of backed off.

And I didn't do very well at all with that show, but that show, for what it didn't do as an exhibit but people liked it – it was all about music on the walls and about these – I call them spinners. They were all about notes and everything. And I think what's-his-name saw them, the big – you know, the fish and the tank –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Damien Hirst? [Laughs.]

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. No, he did, you know? [Laughs.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: What year was the show?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, it was before Hirst –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, right.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, it was before his spinners.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: And I don't know if he called them spinners, but this is a carnival thing anyway, you know. I mean, I've seen them in carnivals.

And so, anyway, what I was doing, basically – I didn't know what to do about the center, and then it occurred to me, well, you don't have to do anything about the center; you have to make the center in something else. And then I called those Hot Spots. So that's what happened basically. It was about spinners and where is the center and what is the center?

And then the center was a kind of a symbol, I think, of the brain and our brain coral, or, – and my mother had had a stroke, and it was about that time that I began to think of the head, you know, it being the kind of center.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: And I drew, and the first one did looked like a brain.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes.

MS. BENGLIS: And I did it in bronze and I did it in various materials. And I did maybe two or three crystal pieces, and two crystals worked out, and I did a blue crystal as well.

MS. TANNENBAUM: It's interesting to me that you started in painting and you didn't really study sculpture, did you, just sort of –

MS. BENGLIS: Clay – clay –

MS. TANNENBAUM: Oh, you did.

MS. BENGLIS: I did pots. I did – remember you saw that one pot?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes. Yes. Okay.

MS. BENGLIS: So I did pots and I did sculpture and did one head, I remember, in sculpture, and I didn't get into cast bronzes at school, but I really liked very much the wet clay and working with the clay. So I graduated with distinction in painting and ceramics, basically.

So you know, it's interesting; I've returned to ceramics a bit, and probably will be doing some more.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Do you throw on the wheel, or hand-build more? Oh, you had those –

MS. BENGLIS: I hand-build – hand-build, yes.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Right. And the extruder; you use the extruder.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, the extruder.

MS. BENGLIS: Right. But, you know, with those sculptures I'm telling you about – I would never work in plaster and burlap. I consider that a kind of surface. To me it seems very vulgar, just as I would never work on canvas. I think canvas is so vulgar. It's like, you know – it's like that weave is too course or burlap is too course, or plaster is too course. I really like kind of elegant surfaces, and that's probably – you know, I like color, I like layers.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Maybe as a – I don't know if it's a final thought, but what -- this is sort of is a hard question to ask, but what do you think your greatest contributions are as an artist?

MS. BENGLIS: Well, a new way of seeing art – the old way of seeing and a new way of thinking about the old way of seeing, or a new way of expressing oneself. I'm very much of this time. I mean, I could walk down the street and look into all the windows, and I can see that this time is my time, you know, I feel now. I mean, don't you? When you look at something, it's very exciting to feel, oh, this is right; this is a very good time, you know?

I think it's a very good time to be thinking about how we're seeing, how we're feeling because there's so many layers. I kind of like that – [inaudible]. [They laugh.]

MS. TANNENBAUM: Are there particular works that you've done that you think are more important than others? I know, they're all your children so it's a hard question.

MS. BENGLIS: Yes. Well, I'm always surprised at what gets singled out somewhat. And so I think naturally things – certain images are with me as they mark a kind of time – a particular time, yes. I thought about – for instance, the big corner piece I did in foam, I call that, firstly, *King of Flot*. And I don't know why. It's kind of a

play on flocking but it's a play also on flop. And I thought of – I did think of Morris before I got to know him and I did think of the felt pieces –how they seem so stupid – you know, such a stupid kind of way of expressing anything.

And I thought, well, this foam also is a very stupid way of expressing something, and tactilely it's not that interesting but you can make something interesting in spite of it. I'm not attracted particularly to the material but I'm attracted to what it can do. It's not like wax or like metal that you're really attracted to.

So I was just attracted to what I could do with it. And then when I – after I got the Guggenheim I said, well, this is a very good form and it looks good, but I would really like to transpose it into something that makes that form come out, or is even better, because as a painterly product with black and white and gray, it was okay and I went on to do others. I thought, well, this would look great in lead, and that's when I called it *Quartered Meteor*. It would be better to transpose it.

So there's always reasons to go into things. I mean, I'm driven that way. So yes, I have –I have reasons to go into something to see what it looks like.

MS. TANNENBAUM: So you always give your works titles.

MS. BENGLIS: Not always. Sometimes– but I do have associations. Yes, definitely. But, yes – not always but mostly.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Do you still scuba dive?

MS. BENGLIS: No.

MS. TANNENBAUM: No? [They laugh.]

MS. BENGLIS: But I watch a lot of underwater – no, I think it's very bad for your sinuses, you know. I don't want to put my sinuses under that kind of pressure anymore.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Does it have a relationship to some specific works that you did – I mean, seeing things underwater?

MS. BENGLIS: Yes, yes, yes, very definitely. I realized – and I remember commenting to Robert Morris about this. I said, you know, when I went down under the water for the first time, I realized that my art really is about that floating, that feeling of being inside the womb, that feeling of being isolated and suspended and kind of, you know, what's upside down or right side up? It doesn't matter, you know. But it's also about gravity.

So that suspension, that state that we all feel when we're in the water – and I felt that – and we were talking a lot about anatomic chambers at the time, you know, and using that to kind of meditate. So I think being a diver is about that, and when you get the rapture of the deep, it really has to do with what that does to your brain that's being suspended and this being, you know, the desire to be totally in this kind of state, this rapture. And it really has to do with something that we have all experienced before we were born but we have the memory of it.

So these things interest me. What is the human condition? What is even the animal condition? I mean, it's fun to kind of relate to an animal and try to figure out how that animal is responding and why. They're very noble creatures, you know? So this whole thing of what's right side up or this or that, like Greenberg turning things around.

I remember Greenberg saw the show just up above this loft here. And he saw this piece, which obviously depended highly on gravity. And it was painterly, and I pulled it away from the wall so that you could see the layers and the pores and you could walk around it. And I actually saw him scratching his head like this, and I kind of laughed to myself, but I didn't go over and challenge him because I felt it was obvious that I had challenged him in his thinking, and I was very pleased – I just happened to be there, and I was so pleased.

MS. TANNENBAUM: That's great. Well, I think we're almost done.

MS. BENGLIS: I think you did very well, Judith.

MS. TANNENBAUM: I hope it's all there. Any final words? Anything you would like to –

MS. BENGLIS: No. I hope it's all there too.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Anything I didn't – I know if it's not there you'll –I think it's there.

MS. BENGLIS: Well, you might – if you have any – we have certainly enough hours in there, don't we?

MS. TANNENBAUM: I think so.

MS. BENGLIS: We have at least three, don't we?

MS. TANNENBAUM: Yes, we did three tapes so we should be –

MS. BENGLIS: Good. Good. Are we finished there?

MS. TANNENBAUM: I think this is a good stopping point.

MS. BENGLIS: Good. Me too.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Okay, great.

MS. BENGLIS: Good.

MS. TANNENBAUM: Thank you.

MS. BENGLIS: I didn't think I had it in me to go on, but I did. [They laugh.] You're pretty good.

MS. TANNENBAUM: I'm afraid I won't get you back.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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