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Oral history interview with Tina Barney, 2009
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Tina Barney on December 10, 2009. The interview took place in Gramercy Park, New York, and was conducted by Merry Foresta for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Oral History Interviews of American Photographers Project.

Tina Barney has reviewed the transcript and has made corrections and emendations. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

MERRY FORESTA: All right, we are recording. This is Merry Foresta, and I am sitting with Tina Barney on the morning of December 10, 2009 and this is the beginning of an oral history being done for the Archives of American Art.

And, Tina, would you just like to introduce yourself this morning for the tape recorder?

TINA BARNEY: Yes, my name is Tina Barney and I was born in New York City in 1945. And I'm sitting here on Gramercy Park being interviewed by Merry Foresta, who I've known for many years.

MERRY FORESTA: And it is both an interesting and gratifying thing to have known you for some years and to be able to overlook your career over a number of years. Can you just describe a little bit about your background Tina—sort of how you got here? [Laughs.]

TINA BARNEY: Well, I was born in New York—excuse me—I was born in New York City and I went to a private school. And what I remember most about my interest in art is that I went to a very good school. But when I was 14, I guess, or 15 in the 10th grade, sophomore year, I had a fantastic history of art teacher and her name was Margaret Scolari and her husband was Alfred Barr, the great director and writer of art for the Museum of Modern Art.

But my family were art collectors and had been art collectors for generations in New York City. And so I was surrounded by art for my whole life. And that is not only Italian Renaissance art but also Impressionist paintings that my father collected. And as a child you, sort of, take for granted what you are surrounded by. But I think that this history of art teacher made me understand that—or made me really realize that art was something that was sort of in my blood.

MERRY FORESTA: I'm curious; the paintings that your family collected were they interiors, still lifes, portraits, landscapes? Do you remember, were there any in particular?

TINA BARNEY: Well, they were important Italian Renaissance paintings and I sort of don't remember as a child what they were because, for some reason, those things are sort of shielded from children but as I had this history of art teacher she knew what this important collection was. It was the Robert Lehman collection and Robert Lehman was my great uncle. He was the brother of my grandmother: Pauline Ickelheimer. So my maiden name was—or my father's name when he married my mother was Ickelheimer. And when they got married my father changed our name to "Isles," as in British Isles. It was sort of a name that they liked and was easier to spell and easier to live with. [Laughs.]

And so I knew that my great uncle was an important art collector, probably starting at the age of 12. And funnily enough it was—my introduction was more from this history of art teacher than from my own parents. And then I sort of became more and more interested in the history of art and never really thought about whether the subject matter was people or interiors or what the subject matter was. It just was really an introduction to art and really beginning to look at art. And the more that you learn, the more you become interested in it. I wasn't a good student at all.

But I also went to Switzerland to learn French when I was 14 years old. I decided—I remember distinctly going to my father and saying, "I would like to go" and—"to a boarding school in Switzerland and learn how to speak French." And when I think about that I think, where did I think that idea up? How could I have thought of that? Fourteen is so young. [Pause] I was very shy. I wasn't a good student. But I found the school myself. I remember he got the brochures for me; I chose the school—and went for one year to a very, very strict school in which we had to speak French amongst ourselves in classes from science to math to history, classes in diction, which is just major—mainly pronunciation and intonation. No real history of art.

And that year my father died of a heart attack. So I was 14 and I think he was 48. I don't know if that—I think that changed my life as I think back in the future. But what happened then? I went back to school in New York City to the private school I went to, which was Spence School, graduated—

MERRY FORESTA: Were you able to travel in Europe at that time?

TINA BARNEY: Well, my parents took us skiing while I was there but that's all we did. So I just stayed in that boarding school. But we traveled to Europe since I was nine years old. So my father took us out of school from the age of nine and we would go to the little town of Gstaad [Switzerland]. He was one of the first Americans that went there—and took us out of school for three months from the age of nine to probably 13 every winter and went there. And that's where I learned even more French. And then came back, graduated from Spence [School, New York City] and then decided that I wanted to study the Italian Renaissance, found an Italian family in Florence because one of my friends that I grew up with in the summers was living because she wanted to be an opera singer. We lived with an Italian family, which was very typical to do in the—this would be 1964, 1965; almost married an Italian but had—while I was there had a private teacher, Italian woman, a little old lady that would take me every day to look at Italian Renaissance art in Florence. So that's the beginning of sort of the roots—

MERRY FORESTA: Not bad. Can we just go back and touch on your art, your art teacher in school who was married to Alfred Barr? Did you have any experience with Alfred Barr, even at a young age, at that time?

TINA BARNEY: You know, I don't think I even knew who Alfred Barr was until much later—that this woman who was very strict and very tough was married to this important man. She was, I mean, greatness beyond words because what she had was passion. And my memory of how passion can be infectious is so clear of that at the age of 14 to a student that had no concentration, that was not a scholar, that daydreamed. It just showed that a great teacher can arouse, sort of, excitement in a student.

MERRY FORESTA: That's great. What a wonderful inspiration she sounds like she's been for both her passion and also her rigor of thinking about art. So you come back to the United States.

TINA BARNEY: I come back to the United States and got married the next year.

MERRY FORESTA: At the age of—

TINA BARNEY: Twenty.

MERRY FORESTA: Twenty? That's quite young.

TINA BARNEY: Very young, but funnily enough a great deal of my friends, and my brother and my sister all got married that same year.

MERRY FORESTA: Wow.

TINA BARNEY: So it was sort of a fad or a thing to do that, that's what you did. The idea of having a career and not getting married was foreign. That didn't exist.

MERRY FORESTA: And this year is—do you remember?

TINA BARNEY: I'd say 1966 because my first son was born January 1967 and I was 21 years old. And so then we lived in New York City and in Rhode Island where I still live today and had sort of a life that most of my friends that I still hang out with today had the same kind of life; just sort of very elegant, very sort of spoiled existence of having our children, having nannies, buying beautiful clothes, interior decorating our apartment and house. And that was very typical.

MERRY FORESTA: You should perhaps mention a little bit about your mother who was very beautiful and very stylish and—what role did she play?

TINA BARNEY: So I had—[Pause] I would say the roots were the setting of a father who came from this great history of art background and my mother who was born in Brooklyn from a very nice, normal family—[laughs]—but who had—she said that she inherited her style and taste from, I think, an aunt. And she became a model in maybe the '30s. I still have the photographs.

Worked herself—you know, she said it was so much fun that she never thought she worked hard. But they all worked very hard. And she was very cute; she was tiny; she was five-foot-two and had—but had a very pretty face. And so met my father because I think models met interesting men in New York City at the nightclubs. There wasn't anything sort of raunchy about that. It's just the way things happened in the, sort of, I guess it would be late '30s, early '40s. And my brother was born in 1942, then my sister, then myself.

MERRY FORESTA: So you're the last of three?

TINA BARNEY: I'm the youngest but we were born pretty close together. And so not only did she have great style, taste but then, after marrying my father, was surrounded by great elegance, important people, very important people or famous people that would come to our house as a child that, you know, I remember probably from the age of seven or eight—and yet a very natural existence. And I still when I look back could really say nothing very pretentious. And yet there was great elegance and style. And so obviously a lot of my taste comes from the combination of those two parents. But nothing was ever talked about art. There was no subject of art that ever sort of crossed, you know, crossed the room. But I think it was also the time in which children were sort of brought in to say hello and then brought back to the nursery with the nanny.

MERRY FORESTA: So back to you—by the way, I think it's interesting to sort of go into a little bit of social history in a way here in terms of your background because I think it brings such a great context to the art that your subjects that you're later working on and people, your artwork. So I think it's interesting to—

TINA BARNEY: Well, you know, I think, you know I'm a very private person and my brother is very private. And so even in the movie *Social Studies* [2005] that is made about me there is a lot that I've sort of held back that's very private. And eventually, you know, I think that, that should be brought out by somebody that I trust implicitly because there are so many layers in my pictures that are in *The Theater of Manners* that have to do with my childhood and the things that I observed and the life that I led that I never cared really to talk about. That would be very interesting because at some point somebody has to say, okay, now wait a minute how did these observations happen?

And you don't want to say, "Okay, I am more sophisticated, I am more educated than most people and that's why you're seeing these things" because it's just too sort of, you know, conceited of a thing to do. But I know darn well myself that when you pile up all the experiences, especially visual experiences that I've had since I was born these are the links that people are seeing that really understand and are looking at things; that they are saying that they really don't know but it just amazes me how they pass over things that are very important.

So and it depends how much time somebody wants to spend on dissecting one photograph. But I can literally maybe even take a book to really dissect one or two of the photographs in *The Theater of Manners* [1997]. *The Europeans* is simpler. It's a much more minimalistic, abstract observation. And of course it is not personal, as personal or anywhere close as personal as *Theater of Manners*. So *Theater of Manners* is the book that explains my whole life experience.

MERRY FORESTA: So let's gather ourselves up to the production of these books because we need to get you started as an artist. So you come back and you're living the life as a mother and wife in Rhode Island, in New York, in social circles that are considerably—"glamorous" [cross talk] isn't quite the word but established. And there's a certain hierarchy to the system. At some point you become an artist. How does that happen?

TINA BARNEY: Well, I think the stepping stone is, is that my brother—and, you know, I should go back and ask a him a little bit more about this—started looking at art on his own when he was in his 20s. And, you know, so that means that my father died when he was 19. So he started looking at art probably fairly soon after he graduated from college when he was also married, too. And so I asked him, okay, how do you go about doing that? And he started collecting abstract expressionists and at that time I took a class from Barbara Rose at the New School all on my own not knowing one single thing about Abstract Expressionism, not knowing she was married to Frank Stella and tried and struggled to learn about the New York abstract expressionists.

But then what my brother really taught me how to do (very quickly and impatiently) was to go to the galleries. He would tell me who to go to, who to talk to—and on my own because none of my friends were interested in looking at art. I went by myself and started looking at art in the New York galleries. And then started collecting but on a very, very—

MERRY FORESTA: And what was in the New York galleries at the moment?

TINA BARNEY:—in sort of a spare way. Well, Hans Hoffman, Helen Frankenthaler—

MERRY FORESTA: So Color School?

TINA BARNEY: Yes, but then—

MERRY FORESTA: Late Abstract Expressionism, but no photography?

TINA BARNEY: No photography but then the big leap is a friend of mine called Aly Anderson—we both had kids in nursery school together—came to my apartment and saw art on my walls that my brother had loaned me cause, at that point, I think he had too many things for his small apartment. And she said to herself, oh, my, this person

is interested in art and so am I. And she said, "Why don't you join the Junior Council at the Museum of Modern Art?" And that's when Marvin Heiferman was working there and I can't even remember who else. But I remember Marvin more than anybody else. And they put me on—I went there, very shy, very insecure and said, "Go down to the photography department and would you go down there and catalogue some things?"

And that's when my first kind of experience was see Szarkowski on a floor holding a Ken Josephson photograph, explaining that photograph to somebody and it clicked like that history of art teacher. And so I started learning about photography, asked people—you could borrow art from the junior council's art-lending program. You could rent it, bring it to your home, pay \$100 a month and rent a work of art. And then if you wanted to buy it that rental fee would go towards the art—terrific idea.

MERRY FORESTA: Amazing.

TINA BARNEY: So that's when I said, okay, now, how do I learn about photography? And they told me to go to Witkin Gallery, speak to a woman named Jane Kelley and then Light Gallery [ph]; Victor Schraeger was working there. And then I started buying photographs. Again, not many, in a very humble way; photographs were \$100 dollars at that time. And that's when I started falling in love with photography.

MERRY FORESTA: And what prompted you to start thinking about making it as opposed to collecting it, or talking about it, or going in a—sort of studying it?

TINA BARNEY: Right at that time, as I was becoming very interested in photography and art in general, my husband at that time said, "We have to get out of New York City. This is a terrible place to bring up children." And I did what he told me to do. And we started going to different places in the United States to look for a place to live. But I was in such denial; I just didn't even know this was happening. And we went to Sun Valley because I had been there when my mother—

MERRY FORESTA: Sun Valley, Idaho?

TINA BARNEY: Yes, I went to Sun Valley, Idaho, on our trip because it was a fun place to ski. But I had been there when I was nine years old with my mother because she got a divorce from my father. And you got a divorce at that time by going to states like Idaho and Nevada. And women went there, became a resident. And my sister and I would go there to visit her when she was getting her divorce from my father, which I had no idea was happening. [Laughs.] And so I remembered this wonderful place and we said, let's go back there, take our kids there and decided to go there. And then the next year we moved there not knowing one single person, put our kids in grade school, the Ernest Hemingway Public School. And I was walking around and saw this building, walked in and saw an Ansel Adams, a real one, thumbtacked onto a wall.

And it was an art center—that Glenn Janss, whose husband owned Sun Valley, had started because she was interested in art and that's where it all began. I started taking classes from all the famous photographers that I had looked at or maybe owned. They came in there, did workshops, nobody knew who they were in that town—and started taking classes and never for one minute ever considering myself as an artist because my standards were so high and just was like a groupie; I was just in heaven.

MERRY FORESTA: And this year is? We're talking?

TINA BARNEY: 1973.

MERRY FORESTA: 1973? And you stayed for how many years?

TINA BARNEY: Ten years.

MERRY FORESTA: Ten years.

TINA BARNEY: Stayed there, took all the classes, started really working on my own, got my own darkroom, which was a huge giant leap. My teachers were Peter de Lory and then Mark Klett and—

MERRY FORESTA:—So let me just interrupt you and ask you if you will just a little side trip here on—if you could describe the Sun Valley art center in detail, just a little bit.

TINA BARNEY: It was a group of wooden buildings that Glenn Janss had built fairly inexpensively. But she got quality people from the very beginning there. And Cherie Hiser was the director of photography there. Cherie came from Aspen and brought her friends with her. And they were all, sort of, the coolest, most with-it photographers. There was one building for photography, one building for ceramics and then another building that became for graphics. And it was like the best hang out, the place to be. There was a wonderful, small, professional little darkroom. I can't remember if Cherie helped—well, probably Peter de Lory because she brought in Peter de Lory and he was a perfectionist and still is. And he probably helped, I think maybe design

that darkroom and I'm not sure. And he was the first teacher. And students would come in from different places in America and what happened during those 10 years as the economy dropped and kids just couldn't afford to come there and find a place to stay. But it was a—you know, historically that art center brought everybody from Frederick Sommer to Ralph Gibson to Larry Sultan to you-name-it came there. You couldn't get more of a Mecca than that place was. And I just lucked out.

MERRY FORESTA: And people came there, these people that you're mentioning are both these sort of young photographers like yourself or—

TINA BARNEY: Well, I was a student; they were the teachers. They were—

MERRY FORESTA: They were the teachers.

TINA BARNEY:—the hot—sort of—they were the hot, kind of, photographers. And most of them coming from California because everything was happening in California; here I was from New York totally out of it. And so I learned, I just reaped that place—everything single person I got everything possible you could get out of those, you know, became my best friends—from the history, to how to get into a gallery. I just listened and just lived with them, skied with them and just got everything possible out of there.

MERRY FORESTA: Sounds fantastic, sounds absolutely like it was—it's kind of a hermetically sealed environment that was very exciting at the same time, I mean.

TINA BARNEY: Also, that idea of, you know, starting in a small town. You know, again, never thought of myself as an artist, but protected. And if I had been in New York City I never would have done this. There was competition, but it was so sort of distant. But the competition was to get into a gallery in California, not in New York City. And the pictures that I was taking there were for the class. And they were very hard for me to take because there is nothing there to photograph—all black and white until Mark Klett came in. But still the visuals of Sun Valley did not turn me on even though I love everybody and love the place dearly. But when I went back to Rhode Island that's when the, sort of, body of work started to form of—that was sort of born on a sense of homesickness knowing the difference between East Coast/West Coast, starting to think about where I came from, realizing that I came from not only a different place geographically but socially and in every way possible.

MERRY FORESTA: So if the tenor of the times was to photograph what you know then you went back and photographed what you knew?

TINA BARNEY: You know, I don't know if that was the tenor of the times. You know it's interesting to think back of what—you know, when you think of Lee Friedlander or Gary Winogrand what they were doing. They were sort of the gods of the moment—or Ansel really was. But I didn't really consciously think of that I think I was so desperately just trying to take pictures and the—when I think back of the growth or the development of the body of work, it's very slow. So it's almost saying, do you remember growing up? Do you remember crawling to get to walking? You kind of remember but I think if I do slide show it sort of spurs my memory when I look at the pictures of what I was thinking about. But 1976—because the first show I really had was called *Watch Hill '77*, black and white, were details of things that I knew that were kind of symbolic that were different. And that's where it all really began.

MERRY FORESTA: And what were in those first—[inaudible, cross talk]?

TINA BARNEY: Very kind of corny, clichéd things like a lifeguard's chest from the neck to the waist with a whistle around her neck. But then I started photographing, let's say, the tennis teacher in his whites instructing a child in their whites; cutting off the heads of the people because I didn't want them to be about the specific people. I wanted it to be about the group of people. And it had to do with tradition and ritual gestures of people that I think were specifically indigenous to a certain place as opposed to another, that are handed down from generation to generation. But then also that had to do with respect of children for their parents, manners that were being broken down. I thought because of probably geography, but realized of course it had a lot to do with the times and the times that were changing.

MERRY FORESTA: We've talked a lot about your—the sort of brew of visual art that was in your background and this—your early efforts as a photographer and who you met and who you saw and who you talked to. What kind of books were you reading? Do you read?

TINA BARNEY: I wasn't a reader until I went to Sun Valley. And it was sort of an awakening beyond what you can possibly believe of somehow, somebody who had grown up with this great education and background that almost seemed as if I had been living in a—well, not a coffin but a closed, kind of, dark room. And I don't know what the heck I was doing. But I sure wasn't reading because I had terrible concentration.

And when I got to Sun Valley there were a lot of women. It was the beginning of women's lib. I had no idea what

that was. I never even knew a single woman because everybody was married—[laughs]—and everybody was reading Judy Chicago, Lillian—not Lillian—it might be Hellman, Doris Lessing and, oh, the French woman who married to the man, the great writer Sartre—Simone de Beauvoir, Simone de Beauvoir—Colette. Every kind of—it seemed like everything was feministic and it was almost like being brainwashed. I had never even thought about things like that before.

But then I was so interested in photography. I started reading all the philosophers from, you know, Berger to, you know, you name it I mean this is what Mark Klett and people like that, Ellen Manchester [ph] all had read all these books because they all went to Rochester Institute. So they had been educated about these things that I had never read. So I read, and read, and read. So that was the first time I started reading.

MERRY FORESTA: So you kind of caged off of what had been a reading list for those people who had gone to art school and photography—[inaudible, cross talk].

TINA BARNEY: And it was sort of like, you know, instead of talking about fashion or clothes or gossip, if you wanted to be in you had to know who these writers were and who these philosophers were. I mean I wanted to be in that group so badly I wanted to be in. And so I had to learn what they were talking about.

MERRY FORESTA: So you were—let's see, the '70s were you sort of dealing, starting to deal with the structural and post-structuralists, Foucault, et cetera?

TINA BARNEY: No, I only started way after I started reading Foucault, maybe when I came back 10 years later. No, they weren't reading that yet.

MERRY FORESTA: They weren't reading that yet?

TINA BARNEY: No, that was much too—I don't think.

MERRY FORESTA: Now talking about Sun Valley—[inaudible, cross talk].

TINA BARNEY: I think what Sun Valley did—because I had two teachers that were Peter de Lory and Mark Klett who were so—not only came from the school of, you know, making a great print and the love of the craft of photography which is now almost, virtually extinct. That being side-by-side with somebody every day, you know, my teacher would be making a print while I'm struggling with my little stupid bar and fence picture. [Laughs.] You're absorbing what they're doing and Mark Klett was a perfectionist. And, you know, when he did that book, the rephotographic survey [ph] which with Joann Verberg [ph] and Ellen Manchester [ph] which had to do with going back and recording something that had happened in the 19th century.

But just making a great print and that sort of love of the print, again, was instilled in me. And so that was very important of really looking at a picture and dissecting it and sitting there in those classrooms and dissecting a picture. You know, granted they do that today thank God that's still done: the critique when you rip apart a picture piece by piece. Thank God that still exists. And that came from the workshop sort of ceremony that Cherie Hiser, I guess, was a big part of the workshop where you sit and you do intensive workshops and hash-out what's going on.

MERRY FORESTA: And it must have been then somewhat—there must have been a little bit of anxiety when you get back to Rhode Island and there's not this network, this constellation around you?

TINA BARNEY: The anxiety of that happened when I went and got my little darkroom myself. But when I went back to Rhode Island, no. I was like—as I say in the film, like a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown because I was so passionate, and so energetic, and so hyper when I was young because I was driven. I had something to say and, you know, when you look at artists or politicians or, you know, song writers I think that's what makes them who they are. That there's something—everybody thinks they are important and everybody thinks they have something to say—some people don't actually.

But mine was like I thought I was going to explode if I didn't express it somehow. And it was a combination of, obviously, things that were happening in my own personal life but also just passion, just general passion about every living thing. There was so much I was passionate about from sports even, too. You know, ask anybody how I do a sport, to music, to dancing to whatever. But this one very specific thing about this society that I thought was breaking down, that a lot of things were breaking down that I was sort of angry about at the same time as passionate about. So that was there and when I went back to Watch Hill every summer so I had to put it down. I had to mark it. And when I started showing my work with Janet Borden that became obviously much more serious and it got very frightening to think I had to produce a body of work not only because I wanted to but I had to show it.

MERRY FORESTA: So your first show of this first work from Watch Hill—

TINA BARNEY: Was in Sun Valley, actually.

MERRY FORESTA: Was in Sun Valley.

TINA BARNEY: In a small, little gallery called the Potato Gallery that Glenn Janss started but then a friend of, one my best friends Mary Rolland, was the director. And she really is one of the first people that really pushed me. I don't know if she knew what my work was about but she's a real go-getter and she kept saying, oh you got to get this out, you got to show it, you got to do this and I didn't even listen to her. But she made me do it.

MERRY FORESTA: And do you remember what the reception was?

TINA BARNEY: People had absolutely no idea what the pictures were about. But those also were not—the very beginning were not pictures of about Watch Hill. The second show was, they still didn't know.

MERRY FORESTA: And the second show was also at the Potato Gallery?

TINA BARNEY: Yep, and maybe the third. And then I would bring the work to California, people had no interest in it. For a long time I'd bring it because my friends would tell me where to bring it. I'd bring it to curators, but it wasn't very focused at that time when I was carrying it around from place to place. It was a little bit all over the place and that's not what people were interested in at all. I can't remember what they were interested in but certainly not what I was doing.

MERRY FORESTA: Well, what I remember of—this would have been the mid '70s and looking at work there. I like to call it the bicentennial moment when it seemed that several years before and several years after people were focused on what is America at this moment and what makes America, American? And it seemed that a lot of photographers, many of whom we don't ever hear from again, were trying to take photographs that in their accumulated archive would give us a picture of America at this bicentennial moment. And it doesn't seem—your pictures might be thought of to add to that but it seemed that you were doing something much more interior and to the side of that. So I think, you know, a collection of roadside stands or, you know, all the strange Americana.

MERRY FORESTA: —Americana.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah.

MERRY FORESTA: And yours in a way is Americana. But I think—

TINA BARNEY: —I think the first one or two people that noticed them—Frank Golke might have even been one of them. What they centered on was the fact that it was about the upper-class or the rich. And I was so offended by that or afraid of that and worried about revealing that. It took years to get over that because I thought that, that's not what I was interested in. But I didn't want them to be just about that. So when someone would mention that I thought, oh god you know, they are just—

MERRY FORESTA: They are just pigeon-holing?

TINA BARNEY: And, you know, being sight seers. And yet I underestimated them, probably. So it took a long time. And the funny picture, the one that got noticed the first, which is *Sunday New York Times* doesn't necessarily look like it's about the upper-class in a specific way.

MERRY FORESTA: What year is *Sunday New York Times*?

TINA BARNEY: That was made in 1982, the summer of '82.

MERRY FORESTA: And, as you say, it got noticed. And I know it got noticed. And how did—why did it get noticed?

TINA BARNEY: Well, it's the best story.

MERRY FORESTA: And maybe describe the photograph just a little bit.

TINA BARNEY: I will. It's sort of a long story. But I'll try to be quick about it. I was in the Sun Valley—

MERRY FORESTA: No, don't. We've got lots of time.

TINA BARNEY: Okay. I was in the—[laughs]—Sun Valley Center little darkroom. And one of the women that came there to visit was a woman named Wanda Hammerbeck. She was a California photographer. And she said, oh,

"Tina did you know you can make these photographs bigger?" Now my teacher, and friend Peter de Lory was teaching us how to make black and white pictures 30x40 inches with garbage bags. With the chemicals in the garbage bags we would agitate them. And he built his own wooden trays. And he was the first person that made me realize you can make a picture bigger. So I made a black and white picture in 30x40 which was revolutionary. And then Wanda came in after Peter had gone. And Mark Klett came in to teach color and said you can make a color picture. There's a lab in Berkeley or Oakland that makes big pictures. And then I started making them bigger.

And then I found out through my friends Ellen and Mark about this wonderful curator called Anne Tucker. And so this was how I learned how to sort of work the room. And so I went on a trip, with one of my best friends to Houston, with my pictures rolled in a PVC tube. I think at that time, yeah, they were 30x40. *Sunday New York Times, Beverly, Jill and Pauly* [1982], a couple of, you know, the main pictures I made at that time. And actually went in to see a woman named Marty Mayo who was in Houston. And put them on the floor after waiting, and waiting, and waiting. And she said, oh my god these are the best things I have seen in years.

MERRY FORESTA: Marty said this or Ann?

TINA BARNEY: Martie said this. And you think, okay, I'm in a dream, I'm not believing this. And she goes running out. She gets on the phone. She says, "I have to call my friend Annie. I got to call my friend Annie." And she goes down the hall and she brings all the people down the hallway. She says, "You got to come this. You got to come see these pictures." And I'm sitting there. I think, okay, I'm imagining this. This is not happening. She calls Annie. She says, Annie, I'm going to send a woman across the street. You've got to see these pictures right a way. So that's the pivotal moment. Anyway, I go across the street with the PVC tube under my arm. And Annie looks at them. And she says, do you know, first of all that you can make these pictures even bigger?

MERRY FORESTA: And Annie would be Anne Tucker?

TINA BARNEY: Yes, Ann Tucker. And then do you know that there is a show at the Museum of Modern Art [Museum of Modern Art, New York City, New York] that is coming up called *Big Pictures by Contemporary Photographers*? I think you should show these pictures. And so I register. I go home. And I make *Sunday New York Times* 48x60 inches. And I can't remember who made them now. But obviously it was in California.

MERRY FORESTA: And I think it's worth noting that though we take big pictures for granted today in 2009—

TINA BARNEY: This is pivotal in the history of art.

MERRY FORESTA: This was not the case in 1982. That you would see images—photographic images this big.

TINA BARNEY: No. And the main thing about big was they weren't patched together unless that was conceptual. They weren't posters because people would say, oh, you have nice posters. They were about the fact that they were big. That, that was part of the concept. And so when I go for it *Sunday New York Times* I remember it was in my house from the printer. This was before I sent it off. I rolled it up with my brother-in-law, Dick, on the floor of my son's room. And I remember looking at it. And I think I can remove myself from my own work, again, because my standards were so high. And I looked at it. And I thought to myself, this is an important picture. I just knew it. I knew. And he remembers that day, too. He rolled it up and then sent it to MoMA.

And three weeks later I'm sitting somewhere and I got a call from John Pultz saying, are you an American citizen? I don't know why—something like that. [Laughs.] We would like to show this work. Someone else dropped out of the show. I remember it was Gilbert [ph] and George. And I till this day thank them. [Laughs.] And, oh I know. It was big pictures by—oh I thought it was American art [ph]—no it's contemporary. Anyway, it got into that show. And that's where Janet Borden saw my work for the first time. I had collected from her. And she didn't know that I was a photographer. I wouldn't have even mentioned it to her. I would have not dared mention it to her. And she then decided—I went to Marvin Hefferman, showed them both these big pictures. And Janet said, "I'd like to show them on the floor for a little apartment." And that's how it all began.

MERRY FORESTA: And Marvin at the time, Marvin Hefferman. Who you also showed was working at Castelli at the time. Was that—or was he at Light Gallery?

TINA BARNEY: You know, I don't know what he—he probably was at Castelli. But he might have wanted to show work on his own. And I don't know why I chose Janet over Marvin. I don't know how that happened. Maybe he didn't want to show work on his own. But Janet and I just started, literally, that way.

MERRY FORESTA: So you have—just to go on a little bit about your gallery affiliation. You have been with Janet Borden Gallery your entire career.

TINA BARNEY: Yep. And we have had ups and downs. But, you know, when I think about the other artists I know

and the other galleries that they are in. They're envious because there is a family there. And, boy, I'll tell you. It's scary out there. And it takes enough confidence, anyway, to be an artist. And I think because of her I've never really felt like as if I were an artist. I really like that idea. You know?

MERRY FORESTA: And she's done regular shows. So looking at the—

[Cross talk.]

MERRY FORESTA: And so now it's 1982. This picture has, in a way, established you. People are now like, this is different. This is big, this is color, this is a world we don't get to see. And it was exactly at a moment when people were thinking about how photographs and the truth of photographs gets to be created by the photographer. So I think it might be a good moment to—

[End disc one.]

MERRY FORESTA: —Okay. We are recording again having just changed the battery. What is probably appropriate at this point is for you to describe your work a little bit and how you go about making it.

TINA BARNEY: I think that there is a big jump from the way I started off, which was with a Pentax 35 mm camera and the big jump to a 4x5. And that really had to do with Mark Klett because Mark Klett used a 4x5 and I really—you know, I went on these trips that he took to make the Rephotographic Survey and understood what happens when you use a beautiful view camera. And because I wanted my pictures bigger, I knew that I needed that big camera. And so that comes before making the big pictures. And so I bought the camera and that is right when I sort of left the art center. Probably, maybe Mark left, so I was on my own and I am not a technical person. I knew what I wanted to take and—I knew how to get what I wanted. I had no idea about the reasons for the lens or anything like that. And I really struggled. It was agony and really did it by myself without any help.

MERRY FORESTA: So in some ways, you are self-taught.

TINA BARNEY: Self-taught. I would say self-taught. And would here and there ask advice, but the struggle was all those—okay, if I left Sun Valley in '83, I probably got the camera in '81. I got the camera in '81, so for two years, struggled on my own making lots of really bad pictures just learning how to use that camera.

Went to Rhode Island in the summer with that camera in the back of my car and very hard to socially bring that camera out without people laughing at me or saying "What are you doing?", as I am struggling, not really knowing how to use it. And so the first—until 1985—I can't remember—probably 1985, I did not use any exterior lighting, which was, of course, agony. So those pictures, like Sunday New York Times or Beverly, Jill and Polly are taken by yelling out at the people hold still, counting 1,000, 2,000. So the resolution of the picture or the focus is not—you will see when you look at the pictures in real life how the resolution gets better and better as I start using strobe lighting.

The first lighting I used was a flash on top of my camera, and I found out about that by doing a lecture for Jim Dow in Boston and sort of talking about my struggles and he said, "Tina, how about getting this flash?" So that is my first lesson in lighting. Went out, bought the flash, popped it on top, struggled with that. I had teenagers in the beginning helping me carry the stuff. I carried it for a long time. I carried it—even got the first strobes with one young woman that helped me. She helped me buy the equipment. So we are talking about leaving my home with five bags of equipment as opposed to just the camera and the tripod and the film. And that changed everything.

MERRY FORESTA: So would you say that—where would you rate the influence of the equipment itself on how you make pictures?

TINA BARNEY: The equipment, okay. First of all—

MERRY FORESTA: It is sort of a struggle. It is big. It is, you know, you have to cope with it.

TINA BARNEY: I think that the struggle—and I compare it because I learned I needed that camera the year that I learned how to windsurf. [Laughs.] And I kept seeing that there was a great deal in common with the physical and emotional courage. Number one, extremely physical. And to this day, extremely physical and emotional. They always will go side by side. And then the brain that has to deal with the technical like rubbing your head and your stomach and chewing—you know that thing—at the same time and then the directing, which is a whole other thing that slowly I began to introduce and actually took classes in directing to try and see if that would help me. And the other most important thing about the 4x5 and because I am so untechnical, this is hard for me to explain, is not only do you get to see what you are photographing on a bigger screen, so that you are aware of little objects and details that you could never see on a smaller camera. In other words, that one hand in the foreground is actually touching another hand in the background of another person on that ground glass. So

those little things that you will see in my pictures and that there is a ribbon going down. Those little details can be seen on the ground glass that you cannot see in a smaller camera. But there is also a spatial thing and I really technically don't understand how that happens with the view camera. Because believe me, I have tried other smaller cameras and it just doesn't do the same thing.

And so I would say that the camera is critical. The other thing—and again, this is something that is kind of boasting that I don't talk about is unless someone has used a 4x5 camera with lighting, there is no way that they will possibly understand the feat. And it is like watching a giant slalom race in skiing. There is no way you are going to know what that is like ever until you try it yourself. And the way that unfortunately no one will ever realize is when I photograph these theater projects, for instance, of getting on the stage with the Wooster Group as they are moving, and the machinery of their stage is moving in and out and I am using that 4x5, not only looking upside down, which I have gotten used to, so that doesn't even count, but technically, trying to pull that off or at a wedding is a feat. And nobody is going to know that until they try that camera themselves. And the speed in which I use it. That is another thing, which someone pointed out way, way back. Two things very important that I forget is they said, "Tina, you would never be able to have done what you did if you didn't have money." In the beginning, it hurt my feelings, but then realized they were right because the view camera in the past is a very expensive, precious thing to use. So when Ansel climbs the mountain, he has got two sheets of film. I am sitting there from the very beginning with 20 film backs, 40 sheets of film, unheard of maybe in the medium. I am using the 4x5 like a motor drive on a 35 mm camera. So in other words, someone should watch me because—and, of course, you have to remember I have to have an assistant in order to do that because he is feeding me the film so fast and I can focus so fast and move so fast that I don't think a lot of people use that camera in that way.

MERRY FORESTA: I don't think—I don't think they do at all.

TINA BARNEY: I mean, it is like bam, bam, bam, bam. It is like that. And that camera is just not supposed to be used that way. So you are getting something that is both—you are getting the perfection and the quality, but then used in a different way.

MERRY FORESTA: That is very—

TINA BARNEY: I think that is very, very important.

MERRY FORESTA: Yes.

TINA BARNEY: Very important.

MERRY FORESTA: Yeah.

TINA BARNEY: Pushing a medium past a point. I forget that that is so, so important. And that has to do with my personality and maybe I could say physical strength at the age of 28, when I started using it.

MERRY FORESTA: So I think it is also important to talk almost as much as your camera technique is to think about this role that—you mentioned it briefly, taking this class in the directorial process. The process of being a director, as well as the camera operator, the idea that you come to a setting with having thought through a certain process pre-camera moment and then while things are going on, you are also directing. Maybe you could talk about that.

TINA BARNEY: Okay, one thing that I know and has never changed is I have preconceived ideas. Now you, obviously, in the '80s, up until probably 1990, I would go on a hunch, think I had some idea in mind, but never, even to this day, does anything ever come out to the way that I think it is going to come out. So no matter how much I preconceive an idea, just throw it out in the garbage, it never comes out that way. So I do not decide I am going to say something or decide I am going to do something. It is 99 percent instinct all the way through, instinct on every living thing that you could possibly think of, the room, the lighting, how I feel that day, how the other people feel that day, from the clothes to smell, to you name it. It is instinct.

And I do think, though, that when I realize that it had something to do with me and not the people I had chosen or the place I had chosen that came from my life was when I started getting hired to do editorial work and then when people commissioned me to do the family portraits. One would think or I thought okay, there is no way I am going to be able to reproduce this intimacy or this personal connection in foreign objects or people or strangers or whatever you might think that would be hired on the spot, could I perform. And for some reason, I do. So it must have to do with me and how I relate to people and how they relate to me. And the only time I think that I really flunk is when someone is famous because even with my personality—and most of the time when I am photographing someone famous, I am hired, they have no idea who I am. And if they do, it makes a big difference because they usually respect what I do and it changes the way that they are going to pose. But when you get somebody like Calvin Klein or Donald Trump, they not only hate having their picture taken, but

they have a pre-recipe, a preformed sort of recipe of how they are going to pose and how they are going to look. And no matter what I do, no matter how good I am, I can't penetrate that or change that.

MERRY FORESTA: So in the '80s, however, you were, I guess, thought of as one of the first or maybe the first to really establish what others then followed, which was called the directorial mode in photography, this notion that a scene would be created in order to be photographed, that there was kind of posing that went on. Do you think that is a fair analysis to think that you are one of the first who really established that style?

TINA BARNEY: I think I definitely was one of the first. Obviously, there were other people. And I think that even though there had been many shows to try to demonstrate this, I don't think that there has really been one that has really completely understood this.

MERRY FORESTA: Well, it is very interesting listening to you talk about it in terms of it being instinctual, not directorial, that when you—there is no preparation. It is all about that particular moment, which sounds like a very photographic philosophy rather than something that is preconditioned in any way.

TINA BARNEY: Well, you know, I say this in the movie and I have probably said this many times in lecturing that no one is ever going to know how much is directed and how much is by accident or instinctive on my part and the subject's part. And that is the most interesting part of all. No one will ever know. We will never know and that is the best mystery and the magic of it all.

But to go back to the first people, the first photographers that directed, I think the idea that—the fact that we told people what to do and created the photograph with a lot of sort of restrictions and preconceived notion is very important, that we directed for the sake of the narrative or the concept. That is what was the first time that we changed things that ordinarily would have been left alone. So that is the number one. But all of us did it in a different way or for different reasons. Or maybe the reasons were the same. I mean, those are the things that are interesting.

But yeah, I think, you know, P.L. or Philip-Lorca diCorcia is younger than me, so I think, you know, we would look back—I think he came after me. I certainly don't think I had any influence on him. And then you have Jeff Wall who interested me a lot in the beginning. But he was commissioning people and doing very formal portraits, so I don't know when his stage things came in. And then, you know, Mary Freye was one of the first people that I ever read about that was actually telling her family members to do things. And I was just very upset thinking oh my god, someone is doing the same thing as me, not realizing, of course, that is always going to happen. And, of course, you have Larry Sultan who did it in a very different way, but maybe for the same reasons. And then we could go on and think of more people. But it was a movement definitely.

MERRY FORESTA: Did you have a conscious decision to be working mostly indoors, in interiors?

TINA BARNEY: Yeah, I wanted to be indoors because first of all, I knew it revealed all those wonderful little details that I thought were so precious and important not only because they were beautiful, but because they had so much to do with history and culture and time and tradition and ritual, but also because it is harder technically. That is why you didn't see the view camera inside because you need more light inside for a view camera. And that is something, of course, I always forget to say that technically, it was living hell. And so I said okay, this is where I have got to go. But then every time I try to go outside, which you see is very rare in my pictures. It is really boring. You get green grass and green trees and some gray buildings and it is very hard to find an interesting exterior.

MERRY FORESTA: So when did you start using bringing in lights to the interiors and not using available light because that is a whole nother level of—

TINA BARNEY: So this picture is light on the top of the camera and you can see it there. Okay, that is 19—I think that is 1985

MERRY FORESTA: And we are looking at—

TINA BARNEY: *The Birthday Cake* [1986]. And that is in—I think it is in *Theater of Manners*. I think it is 1985. I will tell you why. Because the picture of my sister at the wedding, the reception was 1985 because that is the year she got married to Dick and that is where I used the flash on top of the camera. I would say 1986, 1986, a picture called *The Card Game* [1986], one of the first pictures I had all the strobe lighting, so 1986. And I still use the same equipment, the same amount of equipment. But the lighting has become more and more important. And that has to do with my assistants. My assistant, Fred Loney [ph] that I have now is really a master. I have got to say, you know, historically, I am mentioning his name because when I just did this fashion shoot for Pop Magazine I just did, the lighting is—I hate to say it, I feel like it is about 85 percent and I am the rest because without that, I am toast, I am nothing.

MERRY FORESTA: Interesting. So when did you start doing editorial work? When did that begin?

TINA BARNEY: Michael Collins was the picture editor for the Sunday Telegraph Magazine. I feel like that was 1993. And we never met in person for a long time. He would give me his prescription or directions on the telephone. He had the most beautiful voice. And it was very frightening for me. And Janet's husband was my first assistant, which we laugh about, Chris Shipley [ph]. We went on a trip. It was very scary. I didn't think I might be able to perform, you know, at command. And it became more and more and more exciting. And I love it.

MERRY FORESTA: Do you think because the kinds of images that magazines were willing to use became more and more exciting that they became, in a way, an exhibition space for photography?

TINA BARNEY: Well, first of all, you don't get many great picture editors. And Michael was brilliant and he, I think, was too racy for the magazine. He knew a good picture. He is now a photographer. It makes perfect sense. But very few picture editors really understand photographs. Sorry everybody out there. But then you get someone like Dennis Freedman who was at W Magazine who loves photography and really understands. You know when they get the contacts back and when they choose the pictures whether they know, you know, what is going on or not.

MERRY FORESTA: But I was just thinking of the way—it seems in the last 15 years, the photographer, you notice that byline. This is by—

TINA BARNEY: Yeah, it has changed a lot.

MERRY FORESTA: Yeah. And so there is a style of image that you begin to recognize. In The New York Times Magazine, when the New Yorker started adding photographs and on and on. So where we didn't quite have that sense before—

TINA BARNEY: No, that has changed a lot. And unfortunately now, you know darn well it is dying like fast, like so fast. And that is one of the most tragic things that is going to happen. I don't think anybody has realized how bad it is right now. But the idea of the magazine, I don't know how instant it is going to be, but it is getting very close. And then you have commercial photography, too, and that is going, too. And I just got hired to do a commercial and those pictures are going to be on the Internet only. That is a weird thought. Why hire me? Well, I am glad they did. But very interesting.

MERRY FORESTA: Because they want Tina Barney.

TINA BARNEY: No, because the name is not even shown when you do commercial work. You know that. When you do commercial, nobody knows who did it.

MERRY FORESTA: But they can say to their advertisers, this is who we got.

TINA BARNEY: Oh, really? See, I don't know. But luckily, this person liked my work and wanted what I have in my own work to be in these pictures. But that is interesting.

MERRY FORESTA: So let's catch up. I feel like we have gotten ahead of ourselves a little bit. And what I would like to do is talk a little bit about some of the major projects or publications or efforts that have been made. We have mentioned several books, *The Theater of Manners*, *The Europeans*. But I would also like to talk a little bit about the films that you have been involved in. So was *Theater of Manners* the first big project?

TINA BARNEY: Yes. Well, you know, I have to say, you have to start off with the Smithsonian book that Connie Sullivan made. I can't remember. *Friends and Relations* [1991], I think it was called. And that was pretty good. People still buy it and still use it because there were very good questions in there that really covered an awful lot. It was a beautiful, little, small, inexpensive book that she did.

MERRY FORESTA: And this was a series of publications that Smithsonian Press did at the time and it was a series of photographers at work, I think.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah. And I can't even remember when that was done.

MERRY FORESTA: It must have been the mid-'80s.

TINA BARNEY: It had to have been.

MERRY FORESTA: Late '80s, maybe.

TINA BARNEY: So that was the first. And *then Theater of Manners* published by Scalo, printed by Steidl was—I have to thank Walter Keller who, you know, was Scalo because he made that book very personal. I would have

never done that. He wanted to have a lot of pictures of me in it and he chose a lot of pictures I would have never chosen. And I just did what he told me to because I was so excited about having a book published.

MERRY FORESTA: Who came up with that title? I think it is quite good.

TINA BARNEY: That title is from Tim Maul [ph], the photographer. And I remember I was sitting in Germany and we couldn't think of a title and I was—we didn't have e-mail at that point—faxing Janet saying help, help, we need titles. She would send me these titles. And finally, through the fax machines comes *Theater of Manners*. She said this is from Tim Maul. And it was so beautiful. And it comes from either Jane Austen or I can't remember who.. It is from a book. So perfect, I can't even believe it. And then went to Europe for eight years and made the pictures of the Europeans. And Steidl, at that point, was a publisher and we published *The Europeans*.

MERRY FORESTA: Talk a little bit about that project.

TINA BARNEY: Well, I had become really tired of photographing at home. I couldn't think of what else to do. I just was stuck. And two friends of mine had told me about the American Academy in Rome, Dorothea Rockburne who had been there and Chuck Close. And they kept saying you should apply, you should go as a visiting artist. I didn't want to apply for a Prix de Rome because you have to live there for a year. I got that, went there, knowing two friends, two Italian women and had no idea what I was going to do. Went there to live in the most extraordinary circumstance with my boyfriend, Bob Liebreich, who was my assistant. The first year, 1996, we went for a month. And my two friends, Verdella De Benedictus [ph] and Nina Von Furstenberg Buccarelli [ph], were my two friends that helped me find the friends to photograph.

Now, when I was 19, I lived in Florence with that friend of mine and had a boyfriend and consequently learned how to speak Italian. And so when I got to Rome, it was a little easier because I spoke a little Italian and it came back a little bit. And in that month, got the best pictures for *The Europeans*. But what happened then is I realized I needed to go back more. So I went back two more years to Rome, but then realized how Europeans are related to other European countries and so consequently developed this relationship with other people in other countries. So for eight years, I did that, never thinking it would last that long.

MERRY FORESTA: And it really seems like it was this hyper network of connections.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah.

MERRY FORESTA: So you would photograph families for the most part initially.

TINA BARNEY: Really that was it.

MERRY FORESTA: In their homes. It was families in their homes.

TINA BARNEY: Once in a while I would get—

MERRY FORESTA: And you wouldn't know the families necessarily—

TINA BARNEY: No.

MERRY FORESTA: But you would have been introduced to them by a friend of yours who knew the family or knew somebody who knew the family. So in some cases, you went in absolutely cold to this.

TINA BARNEY: Most of the time, not knowing the people and then not only not knowing my work, but really not caring too much about it. What was important is that I was a friend. But then also, the other thing is this idea that I realized very clearly that Europeans have had this culture of having their portrait made that has been handed down from generation to generation. So to have someone make your portrait, even though it might be with a camera, was not anything so strange. So what happened very quickly also, I realized, is I could not direct these people, even though I might have spoken their language. They were so formal. It was so overwhelming, the formality. And I realized that they had a way of holding themselves, again, that was handed down from generation to generation. So why not let them be?

MERRY FORESTA: So you were really dealing with also a presentation of not only the traditions of that particular culture, but the traditions of portraiture of that particular culture, which is, I think—so there was like two levels of things going on there that I think in the best of these pictures and so many of them could be claimed to be the best, there is just this reverberation of the portraiture tradition, European aristocracy. It is just remarkable, the details that are zinging around in those images.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah, I mean, I think it is—you know, it is kind of fairly simple, the concept of that book and what is happening there. And again, you know, the one thing that I have to realize is that I felt comfortable going into those grand houses. I think that was important that I had to experience sort of a lifestyle like that to a certain

extent as a child when my parents brought me to Europe. So that helped a great deal. But also—

MERRY FORESTA:—But I think it was also the not knowing. I mean, these are people you didn't know, though.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah, that was interesting. Didn't know them whatsoever. Didn't know anything personal or any connections. But I also think that some of the great pictures and a lot of times, they were of youngsters, you know, a certain age that there is something there that I instinctively connect to without knowing any information at all. And I really liked—I liked the fact that I can feel that.

MERRY FORESTA: And then the films that you were talking about.

TINA BARNEY: Well, I made two—I guess you could call them art films that I am very kind of shy about because I love film so much. And all I really found out by making them is how very hard that is to do. And I am not- I think the patience that you need I don't have. I have a great deal of patience when you think of my still photography, but not enough patience to sit there for as long as you have to sit to make a film. And I made one called *Rhode Island Summer* [1997], which is really just tiny vignettes of the summers in Rhode Island, and then one called *Portraits* [2000] because I loved black and white. I had an old super-eight film camera and tried to combine some portraits there. So those two little films. And then I made two documentaries that I produced, one on Horst—my mother knew Horst and she had been photographed by him. I knew he was getting older and so I made that for a foundation called Checkerboard that makes films on artists, architects and photographers. And then made one on Jan Groover because Jan Groover, the photographer, is very important to me because of how she used a view camera and how important the formal parts of making a picture are so critical to what I do. And I think that that is—when I teach or when I speak to people or when I make pictures for fashion magazines, that is really what they are looking at. Sometimes they don't know that. And it has a lot to do with what Jan Groover was doing with her bottles and vases in her still life that is done in a very sort of pure fashion, but really made me learn a lot.

MERRY FORESTA: And other films?

TINA BARNEY: Nope.

MERRY FORESTA: No, that is good. So you mentioned Jan Groover as being an important influence and the Sun Valley experience. Are there other artists, photographers that you would like to mention that have been helpful, inspiration, intellectual—

TINA BARNEY: Well, I think Lee Friedlander is really one of the great geniuses of the 20th century. In looking at his pictures—and I always sort of say this to Janet—so far, I don't think anybody has really written about him enough or probably not understood him. I think that John Szarkowski did. I don't think—I don't know if anybody else—I would like to think somebody else could dissect his pictures and really explain them because they are so complicated and so multilayered photographically. And these are the things about photography that I really think are dying so fast and that are not being taught in photography schools or art schools. And I just hope to God somebody is smart enough to really see within them. Don't you agree?

MERRY FORESTA: I absolutely agree. I absolutely agree. I absolutely agree.

TINA BARNEY: And, you know, Robert Adams, you know, might be up there, too, in a very different way, those two guys, but in a very different way. But I think that Lee Friedlander is much more my kind of sensibility about layering—you know, photographically layering something in a way that can't be done with any other medium, just with the camera.

MERRY FORESTA: So is there—are there photographers, artists in the younger generation that you think of that relate to you?

TINA BARNEY: I think to me, right now the most important, to me, and I hope he still, you know, holds up to my standards. Well, Rineke Dijkstra is definitely one of my gods. And also, I met her and that just puts the icing in the cake because she is just a rock. I mean, no fooling around, no crap, just this steady boulder just going on her way without just the junk that is in the world. And god, it is great to just meet somebody like that to remind you of what you are doing. Okay, her. But I think that Thomas Demand is very interesting because not only is he doing things that are photographically and intellectually interesting, but he is modern in a way that I don't know—I would love to be, but modern in the way of the way he makes the installations in a sort of digital, strange, computer way, even though I don't know if he is, you know, using the computer in what he does. But he makes me think. And I just hope he keeps doing that and doesn't get waylaid with what is going on out there.

MERRY FORESTA: Any thoughts on technology, on this—newer—digital moment here? You know that that is not how—

TINA BARNEY: No, I know. But, you know, of course, I think about it because very soon, if Fuji hadn't developed—or maybe they had it all the time—instant film, I would not be able to make pictures anymore with my 4x5 because I need an instant film to see what I am doing. Otherwise, I can't do what I am doing. I would probably have to change to digital. And I think it is going to happen soon. I think I am—[Pause] but what people don't realize is the extraordinary expense. It is expense beyond—I don't know if the average person knows what we are dealing with here moneywise. So right now I don't know if I could afford it. I don't think I could even afford it. And I am very computer illiterate. The other thing is the one camera that interests me—and I am not sure—is a \$40,000—you know, the Hasselblad costs \$40,000? I mean, what planet are we on anyway?

MERRY FORESTA: So then what do you tell your students?

TINA BARNEY: Well, the students that come to me aren't—you know, they are scanning their negatives, but they are not interested in what a digital image can do. I wish they would. You know, most of the time, they are not. But boy, I haven't seen anything very interesting that has been done digitally. I mean, we have got a long way to go. I thought Loretta Lux was—I had hope in her and I haven't seen—unfortunately, I haven't seen her grow. The images haven't grown. Now, maybe I am not being patient enough, but they haven't grown fast enough anyway.

MERRY FORESTA: Yeah. So you are not tempted at this point?

TINA BARNEY: I can't. I can't afford it. I mean, just the camera, the computer, the time, the learning. You have to pay somebody to teach you.

MERRY FORESTA: Yeah. Yeah, it is very—

TINA BARNEY: But also, you know, I tried the Canon, the best you can get, and I blew them up. There is something—I will tell you where the distance is and this is what I have also, I am realizing it is very frustrating. What makes me—one of the things that I am in love with photography for is when you get up one inch or two inch to the print and you see that resolution and those lines that are crystal clear. Now, when you go to the best you can get digital, I mean, anybody, you get that mushy pixilated look when you are up close. And I am sorry, but I am still not pleased with that. That is also something else happening that I don't like. I also don't like how clean everything looks. There are things that I am so in love with, this out-of-focus thing that happens in photography, I don't think can be translated digitally. Now, the best—I have to say I forgot one thing—the best digital picture that I have seen—[side conversation] and it really has to do with digitization—is Stan Douglas, I believe—I get Douglas Gordon and Stan Douglas mixed up—is an eight foot print—I believe it is Stan Douglas—at Zwirner of a group of people that are foreign. Have you seen that picture?

MERRY FORESTA: Yes.

TINA BARNEY: Okay, that, to me, is one of the best pictures I have seen in a long time. And that is done digitally and only can be done digitally the way he chose the people, put it together. So there is hope. There is that. That really interested me. So that is the kind of thing that would keep me interested in digitization.

MERRY FORESTA: So I would like to talk a little bit about your role as a teacher because I know you do some work with graduate students for the most part, yes?

TINA BARNEY: Well, you know, most of the things we talk about are the formal things. What is hard for me is, you know, I feel for them because I think how can someone, whatever age they are, 20-something, have a clue of what to photograph out there? Plus, they are sitting in New York City. And I say to them okay, you have got your dorm room or your apartment, you have got New York streets, I mean, it is very hard to find things to photograph.

MERRY FORESTA: And this is at SVA?

TINA BARNEY: School of Visual Arts [School of Visual Arts, New York City]. But then also, you know, you have to have money to go out there and maybe go somewhere else to photograph. So we have—the subject matter is a problem. But then what it comes down to is how to maybe form—the editing, I can help them with, of what pictures to choose depending on the student and then the formal parts. That is the easy part for me. And then also just being a cheerleader. Most of the time, I have had good students. I think what is really hard and why I could never do this full time is when you get somebody that really shouldn't be there. And I don't know why the teachers don't say hey, listen, put this stuff down. This is not your calling. Go out and do something else.

MERRY FORESTA: And then another thing that we skipped over so lightly, but I think is an important part of your work is the work you began doing when you began photographing the theater itself.

TINA BARNEY: Oh, okay.

MERRY FORESTA: And I think that is a very interesting piece of your work.

TINA BARNEY: Well, Janet Borden introduced me to two of her best friends, a married couple, Sheena See and Roy Faudree, who are actors that she met at Smith. And they both act for the Wooster Group. And they got me introduced to the Wooster Group who actually let me photograph them because they thought that I could sell their photographs and help them raise money, but no one was really too interested in that. So that let me in 1990, I would go see the play, write down the scenes I like, then go back and they would perform just for me. I would get on the stage. They would do a scene. I would get the camera, the lights on the stage mixed in with all their stuff and they would do a scene. I would say stop. I would focus to take the picture and go on.

And so I kept doing that for quite a few years. I would collect the pictures. And then I can't remember who introduced me to Richard Foreman. And he was wonderful because he would just let me do whatever I wanted. He knew my work. He liked it. And his stage sets are so zany and so crazy. I would do the same thing. And then I would try to go out and find other theater—and that is when I crashed into a wall because most theater productions would not take the time or did not want to take the time to perform just for me. And then I thought I could get into regular theater and even have Landesman, who is now—I can't remember what he is the head of—but big theater producer, Rocco Landesman's brother—thought he could do it and didn't realize that I couldn't penetrate the unions, that I would have to get union permission to do anything. So I did very little. But what interested me was the fact that it was theater. Here is my book, *Theater of Manners*, the fact that life is a theater. There was that metaphor that was so interesting. But then also having a stage, actors and costumes that were different from reality that would just perform for me, but also actors that would just not be stiff and stand there that had a whole scenario that they could play out that I didn't have to think up.

MERRY FORESTA: So when you are doing commercial work, the magazine or whoever has hired you has hired models, perhaps, actors, to create a scene. Does that feel a little like we are in a theater of this particular little scene of—

TINA BARNEY: Well, first of all, there is a huge difference between a commercial and an editorial work. Commercial work, it took me five years to get my first commercial because I think that the ad world thought that I would not be pushed—that I would not let people push me around. And so commercial work, obviously, you have to sell something. And there is a client and then the ad agency. And that is very hard to figure out where I sort of come in. But one thing I learned is basically, they hire me to do what I do, but basically, I do what they want. Somehow they think that I took the picture, but it is a lot of what they want. And sometimes you can find a happy medium, but only twice have I found that. The editorial is much more fun. I love working for the New Yorker. They really let me do what I want to do. And then I just did a fashion shoot for a magazine called Pop and literally nobody told me what to do and it was fantastic. And that comes closer to the theatrical in which I had a great stage, great set, great costumes. Unfortunately, models are so stiff, it is very, very frustrating for me. And these were 15 year old kids. And they cannot—when I say move, it is almost like they are paralyzed. It is very hard to get them to do anything, to really move just period. And that's frustrating and hard to do, but at least the stage, the set, the costumes are great. So it just depends.

MERRY FORESTA: So tell me what you are doing right now.

TINA BARNEY: I started a project in Rhode Island—this is my fourth year—photographing—trying to photograph the town, the townspeople, everything from parades to—started off by the town I live in has granite. And actually my in-laws were Italian that came from Calabria [Calabria, Italy]. The Calabrese came to this small town because they were stone cutters. So I started off by photographing people like the stone cutters, a welder, tradesmen like that. And the reason this has been taking so long is not only is it very difficult to find subject matter, but normal, everybody people really don't want me to photograph them. When I tell them—when I need them to sign a release, when I tell them what I do, they don't care. The Internet has really ruined street photography. And I just think I could never have done anything that I did in the '80s now. People have changed and are so afraid of being exposed to the Internet. So not only that, we have all those problems. A lot is on the street with my assistant. But then also the colors, the textures, all those things that I loved are not there. And the average everyday life of the world is not a very happy, sort of exciting world. So it is very hard to find subject matter. I have gone back to agricultural fairs, Blessing of the Fleet, things like that.

MERRY FORESTA: Now, what has triggered this?

TINA BARNEY: Desperation of trying to find out what to do, but also watching it for a long time. The first two pictures actually you put in the show, those two pictures of those two boys. That was from that.

MERRY FORESTA: I was going to say—

TINA BARNEY: That came from that. I mean, I have got a lot of problems that I am mad at is I basically keep going back to kids the same age. I keep having them alone. They are a little static. There are things I want to do photographically that I can't do. There is always a lot of frustration in photography. And I think that is why

people start digitizing. It is a very limiting medium.

MERRY FORESTA: Talk—explore that a little bit more. That is an interesting statement.

TINA BARNEY: Well, when I started off looking at Italian Renaissance painting and Dutch painting, 17th century Dutch painting, it really was because not only reading about visual perception, which interests me so much, and how a viewer comes to look at a work of art and what turns a viewer on and the difference between the painting, sculpture and other mediums that have raised surfaces to the work and how that tantalizes the eye between color, light and texture and form and how the photograph is a flat piece of paper and how very, very frustrating and limiting that is.

So for all these years, I have been beating my brains out trying to create space, trying to create scale. That is why I move people around and move myself around. And after all these years, you almost run through your bag of tricks. So the bag of tricks is a combination of the formal properties, the formal things and then the subject matter and then the conceptual, of course, comes afterwards. But really subject, content and form, those three things that make up a work of art. And so that is the limiting part is the flat piece of paper, number one, but also there is only so much you can do. I mean, I have tried every bit of lighting. You know, you can get into getting gimmicky, too. There is a lot of photographers that are doing gimmicky things that I just—you know, you can't repeat that more than once or twice. Forget making a whole body of work on it. And there also the [loves ?] of photography of having something in focus. You have out of focus and in focus. So you know, what it comes down to is I just feel like I have run through everything, every kind of trick I can think of. And that is why people change mediums.

I did also do black and white. I don't know if you have seen those, but I love them very much.

MERRY FORESTA: And when was this in your career? Recently?

TINA BARNEY: No, recently. And nobody has seen those.

MERRY FORESTA: Oh, I had not seen those.

TINA BARNEY: Well, I made one that Janet showed for a while. But I really, really love them not only by photographing in black and white, again, formally, there is an interesting kind of complication that happens technically and conceptually that interests me very, very much, but also I try to photograph things that were kind of quirky. And usually they are in the same turf that I photographed in *Theater of Manners*, but with a twist. And people just don't want to look at my black and white work. You know, they get used to the color. Black and white is harder to look at. It is a little gloomier, definitely gloomier, but just much more difficult.

MERRY FORESTA: What do you think of these artists, the Thomas Ruff, the Dusseldorf school folks, these kind of hyper real documentary, these large-scale portraits that these guys are doing?

TINA BARNEY: Well, Thomas Ruff, those heads—

MERRY FORESTA: Those heads.

TINA BARNEY:—were very important to me and started me off on the pictures I took in 1996 of photographing one person vertically with my 8x10 that is at the end of *Theater of Manners*, very difficult to do.

MERRY FORESTA: Why is it difficult to do?

TINA BARNEY: Because you don't have stuff to fool around with. And it is much harder and much more demanding for the viewer. They have to work harder. The person is sitting there. They are looking with a camera. There is no great stuff happening. And it is—you know, the simpler something is, I think the harder it is to look at and understand and photograph, of course, too. And, of course, that interests me the most right now because I have done everything else. You know, the tableau things I can do for the end of time and I just, you know, have been there, done that. So that is one thing. But Thomas Ruff really interests me because of his exploration of the machine of the camera and all the things he has tried. Some I like more than others. But he really keeps working. And he will flunk one year, but come up another, in my opinion, and just trying to figure out what these machines or this machine can do and stretching it beyond. Thomas Struth interests me sometimes, but the museum pictures don't interest me. I don't understand why everybody is so in love with him because one or two are great, but I can't understand why going back over and over, there are formal issues that I think, you know, he solved. And Candida Hofer just doesn't interest me as much. They are beautiful. But, you know, again, once you saw something, I think, you know, that is enough.

MERRY FORESTA: Well, the Ruff pictures just struck me in relationship to your work, this almost kind of minimized notion of looking at something intently for these tiny details to come together for different ways of

putting together information for different kinds of meanings, which is something that I think often happens in your images. But he has just stripped—it is just this person, just the head, just the face.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah. And, you know, the Germans, I mean, to me, they are my best teachers. But what is interesting is when I went over there and I taught in a couple of schools, and the kids were—the students were so interested in my work. What they were interested in was is that I sort of made a mess. I sort of made mistakes and that is so against German nature.

MERRY FORESTA: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

TINA BARNEY: And they just—they can't do it, you know. Everything has to be perfect. Everything has to be controlled. And they said, "Well, Ms. Barney, how did you do that?" And I am just saying, "You know, you have just got to get down sometimes. You just have got to, you know, sort of get sloppy."

MERRY FORESTA: It is so great because you just described yourself as this perfectionist with very high standards and yet, you are willing to let that go in order to make something happen.

TINA BARNEY: You know, funnily enough, Nan Goldin [ph] was so important to me in the beginning. I mean, to me, she was—it was because she could be sloppy and she could let things go. And it is sort of a tug of war between loving that, the sort of sketch loose picture and the very perfect and focused picture that is always sort of a tug of war. And sometimes you can't do everything in one picture. It is sacrifices all the time.

MERRY FORESTA: So what else do you think we should know about you or your work?

TINA BARNEY: Well, I feel like we have kind of gone—

MERRY FORESTA: What have we left off?

TINA BARNEY:—through almost everything. I think what is interesting now and I almost shouldn't admit this is that I almost sort of forget—don't feel like I am an artist anymore. It is almost like, oh, I had better go do that. It is not an everyday obsession as it was. And I look at art all the time and I am interested in art. But then I say oh, yeah, wait a minute, I do that, too. And I think it is scary, but it is inevitable, you know, to keep—there is something—you know, the angst is gone when you are 64 years old.

MERRY FORESTA: Do you have a studio that you go into on a regular basis?

TINA BARNEY: No, I don't. I mean, this is my studio. And, you know, I sit here a lot by myself a lot. I didn't use to. I used to run around like a crazy nut. And so I just do a lot of thinking. But it is very hard to keep pushing the envelope when you have been working for so long.

MERRY FORESTA: So you are not the kind of artist that walks into their studio and doodles around—

TINA BARNEY: I feel guilty about that.

MERRY FORESTA: You have never done that?

TINA BARNEY: Never. I used to feel terribly guilty about that because even if—

MERRY FORESTA: And so you proceed project by project. When you are in a project, that is what you are working on and whatever it takes to do that, the shooting, sending the prints off, proofing the prints, all that stuff, that is intense. But when it is not intense, you are just sitting and absorbing.

TINA BARNEY: Yeah.

MERRY FORESTA:—until getting on to the next one.

TINA BARNEY: I mean, what really worries me is that, you know—I am not too worried because what can you do—is that finding subject matter is not what it is about anymore, you know. It is not going to make some great picture and really thinking okay, I have done everything. What can you do? And I think that is a really scary thing. And granted, maybe—I mean, even if someone handed me the \$40,000 camera, I wouldn't even know what to do with it. So that is scary when you get to that point. I do love to draw and I have been doing that—you know, I am a closet case, you know, drawer/painter. And I have always said okay, I am going to do that when I can't think of what to photograph anymore. So I am not—you know, that is something that I would definitely do. But subject matter is the thing.

MERRY FORESTA: Subject matter is the thing. Well, maybe we should leave it at that then. Thank you, Tina.

TINA BARNEY: You are welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]