



Smithsonian
Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Sarah Edwards
Charlesworth, 2011 November 2-9

Funding for this interview was provided by the Brown Foundation.

Contact Information

Reference Department
Archives of American Art
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560
www.aaa.si.edu/askus

Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a tape-recorded interview with Sarah Charlesworth on 2011 November 2-9. The interview took place at Charlesworth's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Funding for this interview was provided by a grant from the Brown Foundation, Inc.

Judith Olch Richards 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 RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth in New York City at her loft home studio on November second -

SARAH CHARLESWORTH: [Laughs] - [inaudible] -

MS. RICHARDS: - 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc one.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I thought you were going to say at Great Jones Street [Laughs] on November - Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: So, Sarah, I wanted to start back with your family and ask you even back to your grandparents - what their names were, where they came from; of course, if you knew them; if - what kind of relationships you had with them, if -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: With my grandparents?

MS. RICHARDS: - if you wanted to talk about who they were, where they lived, what their occupations were -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I knew -

MS. RICHARDS: - and then your - going to your parents.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I knew grandparents on both sides of my family. When I was a child, up till eighth grade, I lived in Summit, New Jersey, and my grandparents lived not far away in - both of them lived in South Orange, New Jersey.

MS. RICHARDS: What were their names?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: My mother's family was - my mother was Sarah Edwards Morgan - and I'm Sarah Edwards Charlesworth - and my grandmother was Sarah Edwards Speir Morgan. And we're in a line of Sarah Edwardses that go back all the way to the son of Jonathan Edwards, Timothy Edwards, married a woman from England named Sarah Hague [ph]. And so we have a long line of Sarah Edwardses. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell Speir?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: S-P-E-I-R.

MS. RICHARDS: And Jonathan -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Or maybe she was Sarah Edwards Forbes and Speir was the one before. No, I think my grandmother's name was Sarah Edwards Speir.

MS. RICHARDS: And where they came -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: They're - they lived in New Jersey in South Orange. My great grandmother also lived in South Orange, and she had a big old-fashioned house with a kitchen in the basement, like, *Upstairs, Downstairs*, you know. And - not a big staff, but she had a few people that worked in the house. She had a cook and - I don't know. So that was my great grandmother. Her name was Agnes Speir. So I guess her husband's name was Speir. Somewhere in there, there's a Forbes, but I'm confused which one it is, and maybe I'll figure it out by the end of the conversation.

But my grandmothers - married George Morgan. And they lived in South Orange, and my grandmother was a very dear, loving person. She's kind of an old-fashioned type of lady that they don't really have anymore. She

was – she was educated at a finishing school; she didn't go to college. And her job was to be the head of this big household. She had –

MS. RICHARDS: What did your grandfather do?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: He was – he was a treasurer for an aluminum company. So they had a big house. They were quite well-to-do. They had a big house, and my grandmother's job was to tell the cook what to order – what to make for dinner and, you know, what groceries to get at the store and what things to pick in the garden [Laughs]; you know, which day was laundry day and – so her main job was just to sort of make sure everything was nice for everybody. So my mother grew up with a nanny or something like that, that lived in the house. But there were six children; she had an older brother, two younger brothers and a sister – is that six or five? – my mother, her sister, an older brother and two – there are five children.

And so she grew up in a large family, and they were all well-educated, as my grandfather had gone to Princeton, and my father went to Princeton and all the uncles on both sides of my family went to Princeton. So, as you know, the – sort of the loop at the end of this story is that I'm about to start teaching at Princeton. And so it's funny on both sides of the family, I grew up with this deep mythology. And now, it's so odd that it – in a completely separate venue, I'm – it turns out that I'm going to be teaching at Princeton starting in February.

So my grandfather met my mother when he was going to see her brother, who was a pal at Princeton.

MS. RICHARDS: Your –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And my parents met each other when they – my father was going to see my mother's brother, who was a pal at Princeton. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you just talked about your mother's family –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yep.

MS. RICHARDS: – and your mother's –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Okay.

MS. RICHARDS: – and your grandparents on your mother's side. How about your father's side?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: My father – my grandfather and my father's side, who I knew very well and actually spent quite some time with when I was in college, was – went to MIT, and he was an engineer. And his name was Harry Prescott Charlesworth. And he had – Aunt Ro, my father, Uncle Sandy and Uncle Dick –

MS. RICHARDS: Who did you say? Row?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Aunt Ro, Aunt Rosemary, my father's older sister.

MS. RICHARDS: R-O-W?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It was Rosemary, and it was shortened to Ro, R-O. And Aunt Ro is actually very influential in my inspirations, aspirations.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, so Harry Prescott Charlesworth went to MIT –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Was an engineer and went to MIT. My father's mother, who was named Anne Barnes [ph], and she died when he was, I think, in high school – and he always had a kind of sad heart about not having his mother, and my grandfather never remarried. He had a lady who took care of him, who was sort of like a housekeeper. She did the cooking and the cleaning and the laundry and lived her separate life, and it was an economic arrangement, and they traveled together, but just because that was – she'd take care of him on the road, you know. I don't think it was in any way an intimate relationship; it was just a friendship and a job.

So –

MS. RICHARDS: So you were saying how your parents met.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: My father met my mother – because he was friends with one of her brothers – all the boys on both sides of my father's family and my mother's family all went to Princeton. I know, it's like – when I was searched by Princeton to be the head of the art department last winter – and it was – I knew they were looking for somebody, but I didn't, you know, think of approaching them. But when it came to me, it was just – it was very moving. I taught – took my daughter, when she was applying to colleges, to visit Princeton. It's the first

time I actually went around and looked at all the buildings. I went – [gasps] – so that's Nassau [ph] Hall, because I'd grown up with this crazy, you know, thing about it. But anyway, it's come back.

So both my grandparents lived in South Orange. And I was fond of both of them, and we spent a fair amount of time – they'd come to visit us in Summit when we were children. And as I said, my grandmother was like a fairy godmother. She – every time she arrived, she arrived with candy from this special store called Greuning's [ph] that had –

MS. RICHARDS: Greuning's [ph].

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – great candy. I was talking to Kiki Smith the other day; she grew up right near there too, and we were [Laughs] referring to this store. But it had – it was a kind of ice cream and candy store, and she'd come with, you know, the old-fashioned gallon packs of ice cream, frequently on dry ice, and boxes of candies that we liked or that she liked – she had a real sweet tooth – and always quarters and her – so we had money jars in the closet that we would – we were supposed to save our quarters for something or other – I don't know, put in the bank or –

MS. RICHARDS: A rainy day.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. [They laugh.] My mother was very careful with money, and she had us save for things all the time. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: That's interesting since she grew up with – in very comfortable circumstances.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I – my parents were both quite conservative with money. They – their taste was not flashy at all; they liked to kind of keep a low profile. They had – both of them had very good taste, and they had lots of fine things that they had inherited, but they were kind of modest and conservative. I mean, my mother was literally conservative in the sense – I said, you know, I would have no trouble saving the food in my refrigerator because my mother understood the molecular structure of every – you know, she just would preserve things and keep them and mend them and, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: Well, there was the Depression that your – both your parents obviously went through.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, that's the other thing I was going to say. Both my parents lived through the Depression, and they saw – you know, they lived through – their families both survived the stock market crash, but then they lived through the Depression, and they saw how scary it was.

When my father graduated from Princeton, he ended up driving cars at the World's Fair, the 1937 or '38 World's Fair. And he had a degree in engineering from Princeton, but he had difficulty getting a job. And when he eventually did get a job for Western Electric, he maintained that job the rest of his working life.

And at the same time, he had – he was a fabulous builder and inventor and artist; he drew beautifully, and he was always making little signs and little props and little imaginary situations. And he would build boats; he built boats in the garage. He was a sailor and loved to sail, and he – you know, had hand-built these boats detail by detail, some kind of fabulous – and he was very scientific in lots of ways and also very artistic.

And everybody in my father's family – my Aunt Ro was one of the most artistic people I knew. And she wasn't an artist with quote marks around it because she was a housewife; she got married, and she'd been a theater lighting designer and gone to Vassar, as did my mother. And when she got married, she became a housewife. But her creativity was so abundant that her whole house was like a magic show. You know, she had – she loved dollhouses, and she'd collect dollhouses, and she was constantly making furniture and making vignettes, and she'd make little displays that reminded me of something you'd see in the Altman or Saks Fifth Avenue's Christmas windows. She'd have dolls ice skating at Christmastime and – [Laughs] – on, you know, little windows you'd open up, and it'd be a snowy street, and there would be children with muffs and scarves and – so she was just – and the basement of her house was extraordinary. There were – was, for instance, a train set, probably – at least as big as this room that belonged to my – her son, my cousin Timmy. And the train set had little villages in it, and the trains would go around, and they'd stop in a post office and trees and parks and ponds, and it was just amazing to see. And there were also things like my cousin Anne [ph] and I, in addition to playing to these fabulous – Anne [ph] was my cousin who was a year older than I am – and – who was also very creative –

MS. RICHARDS: That was Anne Charlesworth [ph]?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – Timson– Anne Timson. My Aunt Rosemary –

MS. RICHARDS: T-I-M-S-O-N?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yes. My Aunt Rosemary, called Aunt Ro, married an architect named James Timson. And

they had two children, and my cousin Anne [ph] was my best friend, and I idolized her, and she was a year older than I was. She incidentally was close friends – she lived in Essex Fells, New Jersey. She was close friends –

MS. RICHARDS: Essex Folds?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Fells, F-E-L-L-S. She was close friends with Judy Hudson, who is now a close friend of mine [Laughs]. And so years ago, about 20 years ago, maybe a little more, I was at a party at a summer house that Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo had on the North Fork of Long Island. And this woman came up to me, and she said, "Sarah Charlesworth – you're not Suki Charlesworth, are you?" And I said, "Yes, I was called Suki the whole time I was growing up."

MS. RICHARDS: S-U-K-I?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah – well, I changed the spelling of it regularly, but that was probably the last one I arrived at. Sometimes it was S-U-K-I-E. At any rate, she said, "You're not Suki Charlesworth, are you?" And I said, "Yes, I am." She said, "I'm Judy Hudson." And I went – she said, "Anne Timson's friend Judy." And I went, "Oh, my gosh." Because she was always the other – you know, my cousin's other – "Anne can't have a sleepover tonight because she's sleeping over at Judy's house." [Laughs.] You know, it was, like – she and Judy went off to the fair. [Laughs.]

So anyway, then Judy Hudson and I became very close friends, and she's to this day one of my dearest friends.

MS. RICHARDS: You said your mother went to Vassar. Did she have any kind of career?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No – and what she experienced was probably very typical of women of her class and generation. She was very, very bright. She loved music and poetry and math. She thought math was just fabulous. She loved doing the puzzles of math. And she wrote poetry and read poetry and when we were growing up would quote John Donne to us or so on and – she loved to sing; she could just – she knew thousands of songs and would play a game with us where we would just think of a word, and she'd sing a song based on that word.

And – I forgot. I lost my train of thought. Where were we going?

MS. RICHARDS: Did she –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: She went to Vassar.

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And then when she met my father through one of her brothers and that whole connection there, she fell in love with my father, and then when she married my father, she became a housewife. And she didn't know anything about being a housewife. She was a spoiled rich girl, you know. She had people taking care of her, and she had a fabulous trousseau – I mean, the lists of things she had in her trousseau – unbelievable, and unbelievable how much the experience of a generation changes, because she went off – when she got married, she had, you know, six new suits from Lord & Taylor and, you know, 14 sweaters and, you know, 10 nightgowns and handkerchiefs and – a trousseau? What the heck is that? [Laughs.] You know, it's, like – when I got married, I got married at city hall.

Well, anyway – so her experience, I think – when she got married, she became a housewife, and she didn't – we didn't – when I grew up, we didn't have any servants.

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you to back up for a second and say where – exactly where and exactly when you were born.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I was born in East Orange, New Jersey, in 1947. I'm the oldest child in my family, and with –

MS. RICHARDS: Siblings?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I have two younger sisters – one two and a half years younger than I and one five years younger – and a bother who's 12 years younger. Everybody in my family is named after somebody in the family. I told you that [Laughs] Sarah Edwards – I got the really long, shaggy dog story of a name. And my sister, next younger than me, is called Agnes Charlesworth. And she's named after the great grandmother, Agnes Speir, that we knew when we were little.

MS. RICHARDS: You said her name is Agnes Speir Charlesworth?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, on my - it's a maternal grandmother.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, sorry.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And I'm named after a maternal grandmother - Agnes Speir was a maternal great grandmother. And the Sarah Edwardses are not in a continuous line; they kind of skip a generation sometimes. My sister Rosemary is named after Aunt Ro. And she has the full name of Aunt - Rosemary Anne Charlesworth [ph], and that's her name. And my brother is named after my father, Roger Barnes Charlesworth. So he's junior. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So - and where did you - where were you living through early childhood and elementary school?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: We lived in Summit, New Jersey, and I went to the local elementary school. I wanted to finish the thought, however, about my mother and her becoming a housewife, because I think it's sort of significant - not necessarily in terms of my family but of women of that generation and that class; she definitely was upper middle class or upper class, somewhere in between -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, yes, you were talking about how she didn't know anything about -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: She became a housewife, which meant that suddenly she had to cook, clean, take care of babies; you know, run a household. And she didn't really - she hadn't really been taught how to do that. And she stopped doing her math and her poetry and all that, and she took on what she saw as her job, which was taking care of my father and then eventually taking care of the kids.

And I think she was frustrated in many ways. And - she wasn't unhappy; she was actually quite overall happy, but I - we didn't have any servants or helpers or - we didn't even have a cleaning lady or a yard person; my parents did everything. And they worked, like, nuts. You know, they'd rake leaves and mow lawns and clean houses and cook meals and take care of four children. And, you know, my father would go to work every day, and my mother would get up and go to the supermarket and make things and clean things and wash things and iron things and - so she kind of taught herself how to do all that stuff.

And I think it was very typical of women of her generation. That's what a housewife did. And the husband would support the wife, and the wife would support the household. And I guess if the husband ran off and had an affair and ran off and left her, she was kind of [?] - in deep trouble because she had no economic power at all. But at any rate, my mother eventually did have economic power because her love of math - she inherited some - not all that much money, but she inherited some money in the form of stock, and she became - she got very good at investing. And so she - you know, it was an old-fashioned kind of investing. She'd read the annual reports of the company and decide what company was well-run and had a future to it and - very different kind of market. But at any rate, she did eventually develop economic independence. But she and my father stayed married their whole lives. She was very much in love with my father.

MS. RICHARDS: So you said at one point that you knew you wanted - you felt like you were an artist at a very early age.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I remember the day I decided to be an artist.

MS. RICHARDS: And did you know what a - and a second part of the question is, how did you know -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: You'll know - you'll understand when I tell you the story. It was - I think I must have been around five. And I had been the night before with my cousin Anne [ph] to Barnum & Bailey's Circus in New York, and it was a three-ring circus. And it was such a spectacle. I was just awed by this three-ring circus - the tigers and the horses and the girls swimming - swinging from trapezes and so on.

And the next day, I was - I was sitting at the kitchen table in our - I think our first house in Summit, which we moved from when I was five. So I must have been five or under. And I - my parents, particularly my - well, both parents encouraged creativity in general. They didn't like us watching a lot of television. They liked us - they gave us all the kinds of drawing materials and building materials and space and allowed to make messes in the basement - they just gave us the basement; we'd paint the walls or turn it into an airplane or a spaceship or a school or whatever.

And so we always had plenty of crayons and pads and things like that. And I remember sitting at the table. And I was sitting in afternoon sunlight, and it was kind of golden and warm in the room. And I was thinking about the circus, and I started to draw a picture of the three-ring circus. I could barely kind of capture on paper the awe that I experienced at the circus the night before, but I was going, "And there was a trapeze, and there were lights!" And just as I was just lost in this drawing, my mother came into the kitchen, and she looked down, and she said - [gasps] - "What a wonderful drawing!" And I went, "This is for me; this is for me. I'm lost in this -

wonder of this drawing. And my mother sees that the drawing is wonderful." And I couldn't be happier, you know. I felt completely at one with that drawing. And I literally said to myself this is for me; this is something that feels good to me.

And by the time I was in first grade, I had already – you know, I didn't know artists, professional artists. All I knew is I love to draw. And I loved all the creativity around me that my father and that Aunt Ro and, you know, the creative people in – particularly my father's family, and my Uncle Sandy would draw like nobody's business, and he would make the most marvelous Christmas cards and, you know, drawings of everything, projects of everything.

But anyway, when I was in first grade, I had a very traumatic year –

MS. RICHARDS: Was that Sandy Morgan or Sandy Charlesworth?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Sandy Charlesworth. I guess what gets this –

MS. RICHARDS: That's all right. [They laugh.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – straight by the end of tomorrow – we may never get to the artwork, but –

MS. RICHARDS: No, we will.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – anyway, when I was in first grade, I had a – it was a very difficult year. And I didn't like my teacher at all, and I hated school, and I just – I was just kind of – I felt trapped and imprisoned by having to go to school, and –

MS. RICHARDS: You – did you go to kindergarten?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I went to kindergarten, and I had a nice teacher. I hadn't gone to nursery school. I went to kindergarten, had a nice teacher; so kindergarten was sort of okay, but I was going, "What's this school business? I don't think I'm going to like this." I'd just as soon go back out and play, you know.

And so in first grade, I got one of those mean old crabby ladies that liked to control children. And she terrified me; she just terrified me. And I remember an experience, where in the very early fall, one of the things – you know, they – I don't know, you do reading, writing, arithmetic. And then one of the things that they also do in school, which was more fun, was they'd let you draw things from time to time, or they'd read you a story from time to time.

So she passed out paper, and she said everybody could do a drawing now at the end of the day. And I went, "Oh, yay!" I don't even remember what I was drawing, but I do remember – oh, yes, I do remember what I was trying to – a kind of landscape with – looked like the mountains – Summit was the summit of a mountain. We would kind of – it was a hilly area in New Jersey, and – but the girl next to me was drawing a couple ballroom dancing. And the mean teacher came over – and I don't remember what the girl's name was, that – she said, "That is an inappropriate subject for a drawing." And she either took the paper away or gave the girl another piece of paper or told her that she had to change her drawing or turn over the paper, something like that. And I remember feeling so politicized. I – at that moment, I remember thinking, "That girl should be able to draw whatever she wants to draw! And what's wrong with drawing people dancing?"

And so I already had a kind of – an attitude about art and what it could and could be and how it shouldn't be censored by first grade. And as I continued to grow up, in second grade, I won a prize for the best Halloween costume, and I won a prize for the best safety poster. And I had already by second grade become, you know, the class artist. And there was always one or two in every grade, you know, and – but I identified with it. And so I would go out for the things, or I'd be chosen to do the class page in the yearbook. And when I was in – think what grade it was – third grade, I had a teacher – [Laughs] – who loved art. And she – forget the reading, writing and arithmetic; she always had us, you know, doing those silhouette profile things that school kids do or cutting out fruit or making Christmas loops and – we – I loved that teacher. And she just loved art and let the kids do art all the time, you know. And so that was a good year for me. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Did you basically do okay or better than okay in the other academic subjects?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I had difficulty learning to read. I mental blocked in first grade with the teacher that was so mean. And so while everybody else was learning to read, I sort of went, "I can't deal with this. I don't like this teacher. I don't – I'm scared of her. I don't" – you know, I didn't get in the best reading group; therefore, I'm not as good as somebody else who got in the best reading group. I wasn't in the worst reading group that the dunce boys were in, but I was in the middle reading group or something, and I went, "I can't deal with this." And I had difficulty learning to read in first grade.

And then over the summer, my mother sort of – somebody told her – told her – taught her to teach me how to read. And it got better; she had me reading every afternoon. And I got – it got better. But by second grade, I had a nice teacher. And she said, "This is fine. You'll be fine. Don't worry about it; you'll catch up." And I did. I learned how to read right away, and then I was fine from then on.

But – interesting how a mean teacher can make you block and a nice teacher can make you learn.

MS. RICHARDS: Wow, yeah. Do you remember ever seeing art in museums or anyone's homes while you were in elementary school?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, I never thought of it in the way of fine art. I thought of it much more as creativity. And that's what was fun to me, was being creative and enjoying the creativity around me. And, you know, both families were pretty creative. I mean, on my mother's side, it wasn't visual art, but they were all musicians, and they all could play things. Her older brother was a businessman, a banker, who was also a jazz musician. And my – as I told you, my mother could sing and, you know – and so there's a lot of musicians in my family. My next younger sister, Agnes, who's called Nancy in the family – she changed her name to Agnes, and she's grown up, but she was always called Nancy growing up – she is a musician; she teaches music and writes music and does music for theater. And my younger sister Rosemary is very artistic, and my brother Roger is multitalented; he's very artistic but also very – I mean, his – he's a techie. He installs sound systems for recording studios and does television design. And, you know, he can – he was always very creative as well from early childhood on.

MS. RICHARDS: When you were going to middle school and high school, did you continue to find ways to do art in school, or did you take after-school art or weekend art or –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I always took every single art course I could possibly take. And, you know, in, say, high school, I remember – we moved from Summit – my father, as I mentioned, worked for Western Electric. And when I was in eighth grade, he was made – he had worked in New York City and had been, you know, part of the – I don't know – personnel department or something like that. And then when I was in eighth grade, he was made manager of a Western Electric plant outside of Buffalo.

And so we moved in the fall of my eighth grade year from Summit, New Jersey, to a place called Orchard Park, which was just south of Buffalo, upstate New York. So I went to the local junior high school, and I transferred during the year, so it was a little difficult, but – you know, I just left behind all my friends and all my – you know, all aunts and uncles and family and everything and moved, whatever it is, 400 miles away.

But I did – in junior high school and in high school, I always took as many art courses as I could. And I had, for many years, been the class artist, so I was always getting chosen to do the yearbook page or something like that. But I – you know, I would do – volunteer to be on the decorations committee for the Turkey Twirl Dance and, you know, make all the turkey decorations around the gym, you know.

So, you know, it took many forms. It did not take the form of going to museums a lot or being around art collections a lot. It just was more about making things and enjoying the making things that other people did.

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any teachers in high school who were particularly important to you?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, we moved again when I was in – summer between tenth and eleventh grade. I'd gone to the junior high in eighth and ninth grade. And then, I guess in tenth grade, my parents decided that that – that I was, you know, I don't know, not doing what I should be doing or something and sent me to a private day school, girls' school in Buffalo. And I – it was all girls, and I adapted to that okay.

MS. RICHARDS: Was a lot of changes. It must have been challenging.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, well, I moved in eighth grade, I moved in – between tenth and eleventh grade. And we moved – and, you know – and then with a school change in between. And then the summer between tenth and eleventh grade, my father was made manager – or whatever they were called – of a Western Electric works in Oklahoma City. And it had 20,000 employees. So my father was the boss of 20,000 people.

And he had a very nice style. He was very gentle and casual and calm. And he memorized the names and faces of all the people who worked there. And I guess he'd had some personnel – he'd had some training in how to do that. And I remember him doing his homework over the weekend. And he'd sit there with an index card, and he'd look at Frank McGill, and he'd look at Frank McGill's picture and he'd see that Frank had a wife and two children – and so when we'd go occasionally to visit him and have a tour of the Western Electric plant, as we walked through, he'd say, "Hello, Frank, I'd like you to meet my kids. How are your kids doing?" And he'd, you know, pick up not just the executives or the higher-up people, the administrators, but he knew the workers. And he'd walk through and greet them and – he had a nice style with that. And I guess, you know, he understood technically what they were doing, but he was more of a, I would say, an administrator. And, you know, he'd

negotiate what their production would be and how fast they could deliver and whatever.

MS. RICHARDS: So did you move to Oklahoma City?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So we moved to Oklahoma City in the summer between tenth and eleventh grade. And that just killed me – just killed me. I had fallen in love for the first time in the summer between tenth and eleventh grade. And I was so smitten with my boyfriend. I just got butterflies all over my stomach, [Laughs] and it was just heartbreaking to be wrenched away from this guy in Buffalo that I just thought was so cute and so nice and so sweet and just beginning to have an understand what "so sexy" meant, you know, but I just loved to kiss him.

And we moved to Oklahoma City, and I was heartsick and homesick for my friends in Orchard Park and my dear best friends and finally adjusted to the new school and had a new best friend there and finally had a boyfriend. And then I get plopped down in the middle of Oklahoma. And it was a whole 'nother universe.

So I – my parents had signed us up – I don't even know whether you had to properly apply in those days – but they'd signed us up to go to a kind of country day school there. And so I was sent there and entered into 11th grade. And my sister Nancy – I don't know what grade she was in; like, eighth or ninth – and – not sure whether it was eighth or ninth – and, you know, my brother and younger sister went to some other school. I don't know where.

And I had an art teacher there, and her name was Mrs. Daly.

MS. RICHARDS: Daly?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Uh-huh. [Affirmative]

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember how to spell that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: D-A-L-Y, I think – I'm pretty sure. And her daughter Beth was a friend of mine there at that school. But Mrs. Daly was – considered herself an artist. And – I guess anybody considers themselves an artist, they are an artist, you know. She – but at any rate, it was different than a teacher – grade school teacher that liked to make art – like, she you know, had painting – oil painting going on in her house in a room that was called her studio, and she took it seriously. And she did a lot of watercolors. I'd done a lot of watercolors in Richard Park [ph] too, and – I never had – because my parents were sort of – I said "financially conservative," and in certain ways I would say it was downright cheap, but I never had any outside art teachers or classes outside of school, even though I would have liked to have.

So I had whatever the school provided. And I had class with Mrs. Daly, and I liked art class. However, I had another run-in with Mrs. Daly because – where the art class was held was in the middle school, and I was in high school, and the middle school was way far away from the high school. So most – the high school classes, when you went from French to English to History, you were, you know, walking around a little quad very close by. You had five or 10 minutes between class, and then the bell would ring, and you were supposed to be in your chair. But the art class was way over in a whole 'nother campus, and you had to kind of run across a – the soccer fields and the football field and yadda dada to get to the – where the art classes were held.

So when you'd get out of one class, you'd tear – you'd run as fast as you could to get to the next class. And it wasn't quite possible to do so. And you probably had to drop off your French books or something in your locker. So I remember always coming in on the late-ish side to Mrs. Daly's art class. And one day I came in, and it was after the bell had rung, and she said to me – what was I called then – "Sue." [Laughs] By high school I didn't like having the name Suki; I was called Sue. Just shortened it down to make it more like everybody else. So she said, "Sue, you are late." And she said, "This is undisciplined behavior." She said, "You are never going to be a real artist if you can't be more disciplined."

And I even think I got detention. And I said, "Mrs. Daly, don't you realize that we just got dismissed from the class six minutes ago, and I had to tear across here to get here and drop off my stuff at my locker and pick up my coat" – because we had to go so far. But I remember her saying to me, "You will never be a real artist." What a thing to say to somebody. [Laughs.]

And I've often thought of – since then, you know, as I have work in museums and stuff, "Touché, Mrs. Daly. You're wrong. You're just an Oklahoma lady who paints in her living room." [They laugh].

MS. RICHARDS: Did you do well in other academic courses in high school?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I did fairly well. I didn't take any of the rest of the academic courses very seriously. So I did what I had to do in order to do what I wanted to do, which was the art and literary magazine, the – I don't

know what, you know, and all the crazy things that high school kids do. But I took the bohemian things.

That's – at that point, in high school in Oklahoma, because I was transported from the East Coast, I had this, "East Coast is all very Ivy League-y. And Oklahoma – what is this southern party girl stuff?" You know, I don't relate. I don't want to be in the pep club. Well, it's required for you to be in the pep club. We all have to go out and jump around because the boys are going to play football. Well, I don't want to be in the pep club. [Laughs] You know, it was, like – and so I had a kind of attitude towards Oklahoma. And even though the people were very nice, they're very gracious, they're very warm, they're very polite, they're very kind, they welcomed me – they had a party for me to welcome me before I even, you know, knew anybody, but I was heartsick about leaving my friends and my boyfriend, and I was – I had taken on the mantle of "I'm an East Coast girl, and I don't relate here exactly, and I'm going East back again as soon as I can."

So I didn't take academics very seriously. Well, I didn't take it seriously at all. I learned to write when I was in high school because I had a good – they had a good writing program at this school. You had to write on anything under the sun in the spur of the moment; you know, just write an essay [Claps] about that. So I got quite agile as a writer.

But I didn't have particularly good grades, and I didn't pay attention to it, and my parents didn't seem to pay attention, so, you know, I was a B-plus student, B –

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. Were you thinking about college or art school or –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, nobody ever thought about college in those days. And nobody took me to visit colleges, nobody talked to me about colleges; it just came – time – somewhere in, I guess, the fall in your senior year, then the guidance counselor would say, "Now it's time you're going to have to apply for colleges and you have to take these tests, and they're called SATs, and here's – you're signed up to take them on Saturday." Unlike nowadays, the kids are, like, tutored to death –

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – and taken 1,600 practice tests by the time they take their real SATs. And I don't think anybody really did that there and in that time. So you got the score you got, you know. And my scores were decent but not stellar. So somebody said to me, "You know, your grades are decent but not – you're not – you're not Ivy League – I don't think you're going to get – I don't think Vassar's for you." And I said, "Okay, well, what's for me?" And they said, "Well, we think maybe a junior college would be good. Well, how about applying to Bradford and Pine Manor," and I think that's – maybe only applied to two schools. I don't even remember. I don't think I applied to any –

MS. RICHARDS: Those are both in Oklahoma City?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, Bradford was in Massachusetts north of Boston –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – and Pine Manor was somewhere in New York, and they were two-year programs that girls from good families and private schools and so on that didn't have straight A's would be sent to these schools. So I got in both of them, and I don't think I applied in any – you know –

MS. RICHARDS: Did your parents encourage you to go back east for college, or was that you – or what?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, they didn't encourage anything. They just let me do what I want. I think I also applied to the University of Oklahoma and got in, but I didn't really want to go there. It was all, you know, sororities and stuff like that. I wanted to go east. I considered myself a bohemian by that point, and I was doing the covers of the art and literary magazine and drawing in pen and ink and, you know, smoking cigarettes and reading existentialism, and I had – I'd read a great deal when I was in Oklahoma. I read Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and all that kind of stuff. And I had read a lot of existentialism – Sartre and Camus and all that – because I was a bohemian. [Laughs.]

So I kind of – and, I had everything but the beret, and maybe I even had a beret, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: And the bomb [ph] button?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: [Laughs.] So –

MS. RICHARDS: I guess politics didn't infiltrate into Oklahoma City high school.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, that didn't come up till later. And, you know, a lot of – you know, there was a lot of

boy stuff going on. You know, like, those were the days of drive-in movies. And in Oklahoma, everybody drove cars, and we - you know, you'd go out in the weekend evenings, and the girls would drive around in their car and the boys would drive around in their car, and then they'd drive around in circles around in other until they ended up on the golf course drinking beer or something, you know. It was a kind of wild and crazy stuff that went on with kids and teenagers in places like that and cars - you know - I wouldn't want my kids growing up that way.

But at any rate, I went east to college -

MS. RICHARDS: And so did you go to one of these two places?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I ended up just sort of throwing a dart at the map and saying, you know what, I like - I like Boston; I've spent a lot of time on the Cape and in Maine. We had summer places in -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I was going to ask you what you did in the summer when you were growing up.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, we have a cottage in Maine that my parents literally built; my father built it with a builder -

MS. RICHARDS: Where in Maine?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, on the ocean, on an island. And the island's connected to the mainland by a bridge, and we still have it. And it - my father built it in the '50s. And previous to that, we had rented cottages in Maine and houses on the Cape, and my cousin Anne [ph] and her parents and her brother had originally gone to Maine to an area where my family still is located. And then they started going to the Cape.

And Aunt Ro, being creative in the way that she was - one of the things that she did was to renovate and decorate houses. So they'd just move into some fabulous house, and she'd fix it all up and make it beautiful and fill it with antiques and make it just wonderful, and it - they'd always pick great houses anyway - and then they'd sell it and move somewhere else, and they'd do the same thing all over again. They kept their house in New Jersey throughout that period that - where my uncle's architecture firm was right there in the same building with their - with their house, and there were a few other architects, including my Uncle Sandy, Aunt Ro's brother and my father's brother, who was so artistic and, you know, was an architect.

And actually, the architecture thing is something that's run through my life in a strange way because I learned to do architectural drawing when I was very young, I guess, because I had the uncle that was an architect. And Anne [ph] and I both learned how to - you know, how do you draw a door or how do you draw a window, how do you do a wall. And I read architecture magazines all the time. And, you know, when I'd get to stay home from school if I had a cold or something, I'd always have a drawing board in front of me, and I used to design my dream house. So I'd say, "The living room will be there, and there'll be a studio there and" - but all the way - I think all the way up until college, I don't think I was particularly aware of fine art. I didn't really visit museums in Oklahoma and stuff like that. So I started to when I was in college.

MS. RICHARDS: So you were saying you picked a college near Boston. That's when I asked you about the summer.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, it was in - Bradford was in a town called Bradford, which is part of or adjoined to Haverhill, Massachusetts. And my grandfather, Harry Prescott Charlesworth, my father's father, had a country house nearby in New Hampshire in the town - a little mini town called Powwow, that was near Exeter.

MS. RICHARDS: Called what?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Pow-wow.

MS. RICHARDS: Pow Will?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: P-O-W-W-O-W, Powwow, and it was a little mini part of - next to - the real town was Exeter. And my father and his uncles had gone to boarding school at Exeter - my father and his brothers, my uncle. And so my father had a country place there that was a house he had built in the '20s. And it was sort of a farm. It had a big barn, and it had a lot of fields, and it had woods. And my grandfather would continually try to acquire more and more land in the countryside adjoining his land. And so when some field was for sale nearby or some piece of the woods, he would buy it. And he gradually built quite a large landholding in this little country place. And he loved being there in that house. He just adored being there. And he and this lady that took care of him, whose name was Mary Demerist [ph] - and so that was right next door to Haverhill. And in fact, he's buried in Haverhill, as are other members of my father's family.

And so it was really nice when I was going to Bradford, because my grandfather and Mary Demerist [ph] would

come pick me up quite frequently and bring me over to Pow-wow for supper. So -

MS. RICHARDS: Was that - was it a girls' school, Bradford?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Bradford was a girls' school. It was a two-year college. You got a degree, associate of arts, or something like that. But no sooner did I land at Bradford, then I went, "Uh-oh, I made a big mistake." I said, "I didn't pay attention to grades in high school because I was so busy with my art stuff, but I'm not this kind of girl. These girls are all just puff balls from their schools. And, you know, yeah, they're pretty; yeah, they have nice clothes; yeah, they're funny, but I'm - I am an intellectual and I am an artist and I don't want to be in this kind of school, and I want to go to a good four-year school, and I want to get to New York and get near the art world and find out what's going on."

And I was so determined that I was going to get into a good college after that, that I - from then on, I got straight As. And I just learned how to - "Oh, how do you get a straight A in biology?" Well, you just learn everything they tell you to learn. You memorize what the cell membrane looks like and what it's called, you know.

So I could already write, so I didn't have trouble with that. But Bradford was a transformative experience for me because I had there - I went in my first year, and you had to take a freshman tutorial, and - in your field of choice. So, of course, the - my field of choice was art. And I had an art teacher as an adviser. And freshman tutorial was something you had to research and write about. And I researched and wrote about something that the teachers suggested, which was Dada. I didn't know anything about Dada before I - [Laughs] did my freshman tutorial. But that was interesting. But the thing that really had an impact on me there was there was an art teacher that I was smitten - not in a romantic way, but "isn't he great" sort of way - who then became my mentor and my best friend for the rest of his life, which is Doug Huebler.

And I saw - Doug was the head of the art department, and he was a wonderful, wonderful man, a wonderful artist, a wonderful teacher. And after he left Bradford, he was - went to - taught in Florida for a while, and then he went to Cal Arts. He was the teacher - he was John Kelly's teacher. He was Christopher Williams' teacher. You know, he taught many of the important artists of - well, my generation, it was me, but there were other younger artists that he was - specifically Mike Kelly and Christopher Williams. Christopher Williams and I share that.

So Doug Huebler spotted me, right - I had an art history class with him, a kind of, you know, introduction to art history class. And it was just illuminating. You know, you go all the way from Mesopotamia and Greece and Rome right on up to the Northern Renaissance and then 20th century and then Modernism, [Laughs] and you know, right up to the 1960s, where we were. You know, this was - I was in - at Bradford from '65 to '67. And how they get you through all that in one year, who knows.

But they did, and Doug Huebler was my teacher. And he also taught the more advanced studio classes, and I took - and also some other seminar with him - oh, something about filmmaking, and I made some - my first movies when I was at Bradford. I made an animated film. I invented animation myself - didn't know anything about it; just invented it and then told Doug my idea, and he said, "Yes, that's called something or other." My idea was - I wanted to make something inanimate come alive.

And so I made a movie about where apples - it was a whole bunch of apples on the table, and I had figured out if I put the camera - the movie camera - it would be, like, 16-millimeter Bolex or something - on a tripod - tripod - like, mix it up with iPad - tripod, and I'd shoot four frames, let's say, and then I'd move each apple a little tiny twist, that I could choreograph and then shoot four more frames and then move everything and then shoot four more frames and made a five-minute movie in such a way where the apples gang up on one of the apples and one of the apples freaks out and spins out of control and the others go scooting off across the table. It was - it was a silent movie, although I discovered that I could play different music with it and it changed the feeling of the movie. So when I had a screening, I screened it with - what's that called - *Peter and the Wolf* - [hums tune] - you know, and, the apple's really in big trouble!

So Doug Huebler recognized that I was really inspired, and I recognized that he was really inspired. And we kind of kept an eye on each other. And so I took every class that I could, and I was taking painting classes at that time and I was allowed to go into the painting studio. And it was the first time I ever had things like an easel and -

MS. RICHARDS: At that point, did you also start going to museums in Boston?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I did to a certain extent. You know, I'd taken that whole art history class, which - you know, I - that was very inspiring to me. I loved art history. And I learned about how all different cultures have different art, and that was very interesting to me too and fed right into my kind of thought process about what art was. And I - you know, I'd taken the tutorial and written and studied about Dada - let me think - there were

two parts to the tutorial. And for some reason, it strikes me that the second part was very much about my own discovery about being an artist, but I can't - I'm blocking it for the moment. But at any rate, I loved finding out about Dada - oh, I know what that teacher - also, he had me write about Kandinsky. And that wasn't Doug Huebler; this was a different teacher that I had freshman year. And I loved learning about Kandinsky and how Kandinsky had himself discovered abstraction because in his studio in Berlin or wherever it was - I can't remember where he lived - he had gone out to dinner one night, and when he returned to his studio, one of his paintings was upside-down, and he realized that -

[END TRACK 1.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: [In progress] - the reds and the greens and the blues were doing something independent of what he was trying to make them look like, like the trees and the flowers - I don't know. So that's when he began to actually explore abstraction himself, as did many artists at that period, at the turn of the - into the 20th century.

And so I - at that point, I really began to be interested in ideas about art and what art was and what the role of an artist in terms of exploring ideas was. So the most significant impact that that period had on my thinking had to do with Doug Huebler, who was, during the time I was at Bradford, himself making the first conceptual work. And when I - my freshman year at Bradford, Doug Huebler had been doing work that was sort of very abstract sculptures, things that - making boxes that he said had no associations and you weren't able to - I guess that you'd call it minimalism now - you couldn't - you couldn't interpret in any humanistic way. They were non - they were shapes or surfaces or whatever.

And during the time I was at Bradford, he ceased doing that work, and he started doing work that was conceptual. And he went - started going to New York, and there was a guy in New York whose name was Seth Siegelau. And Seth was realizing that there were a few different people who were doing work in this vein. There was Doug Huebler. There was Lawrence Weiner. There was Joseph Kosuth. There was Robert Barry. And it - this was following the period of pop in New York, which I had become very, very interested in - Warhol - and at that point, I had come to think - of my own thought process; this didn't come from Doug Huebler but of my own thought process - I had come to think by that point that every generation has new problems of their own to explore and every time period has new issues and new problems; and therefore, each generation of artists and each individual artist had the right and responsibility and challenge to figure out what was important to know at that point in time.

So, you know, I had gone, "Wow! Pop is so wham-bang." And I came to New York right away - starting my freshman year at Bradford, I began coming to New York regularly because I had a close friend that went to Barnard and - a friend from Oklahoma. And so I'd come down on the bus -

MS. RICHARDS: What was that friend's name?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Barbara Heenan.

MS. RICHARDS: How do you spell her last name?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: H-E-E-N-A-N. And I had another close friend that went to Wellesley and - from Oklahoma. And she also would come down to New York regularly. And this was during the period that I had decided that, you know, Bradford was a school for silly girls and I wanted to go to a smart school for smart girls and that I was a smart girl just misplaced. [Laughs.]

And so I was getting the straight As that I needed, and I was coming to New York to visit my friend. And in the process of coming to New York, I began going to the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan and - you know, and the Guggenheim and the Whitney and whatever. And I was just so awestruck by what I saw at the museums. And I remember, you know, going through the Museum of Modern Art and seeing this - *Gun* - Andy Warhol gun aimed right at you and going - [gun noise] - and I'm going, "Wow, pop art really just smacks you in the face, doesn't it?" And not only that, all this subject matter that's been taboo for so long, you know, like, comic strips and popular culture and - so that was interesting me. And then, you know, at the Modern, you could also go see Monet's *Water Lilies* and go, "Whoa! This is really something!"

And so I started going to the museums all the time and going in-depth to the museums and loving it and loving being in New York. The first time I remember - the first few times I came to New York - you know, I had been in Summit, New Jersey; I had been to New York as a child to go to the circus or with my class to visit the Egyptian wing at the Met. But this was the first time I was coming regularly to New York and being just awestruck. I remember coming on the bus from Bradford, and when the bus would enter into New York City, I just couldn't believe how big it was. And it would go on and on, street and street after block over block with people and this kind of neighborhood and that kind of neighborhood.

And then my friend who went to Barnard – you know, Barnard was up on 114th, 116th Street. And so there was so much going on there. They had – they had boys at Columbia; they had basketball games; they had places where kids hung out in bars and – you know, and they took the subways downtown, and they'd go out in Times Square, or they'd go eat at the Brasserie and get all dressed up and go eat at the Brasserie in the East 50s and – French café food [Laughs], and I just thought this was all fabulous, wonderful.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that why you ended up, because of her – being near Barnard, you decided to apply and went to Barnard?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, what happened was – yeah, I began loving being in New York and loving being around the art in New York. And my friend Doug Huebler was beginning to have some relationship to New York that I thought was very interesting. So by my second year at Bradford, I decided that Barnard was where I wanted to go, and no two ways about it. I don't even think I applied anywhere else. I don't think I applied to Vassar or any – Penn or anything like that. I just decided that New York City was where I wanted to be, and I had to get into Barnard.

MS. RICHARDS: You didn't apply to NYU or other New York City –?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, Barnard – it was Barnard. And so I – the challenge was to make sure I got into Barnard, you know. So I had – already had the good grades, and then I got probably pretty decent recommendations from some teachers. So – and I'd done the application, and I'd come and had an interview and told them how much I wanted to come to Barnard and how serious I was about it and my reasons for wanting to come.

And then after the exam period was over at the end of the school year – or whatever – I don't know, whenever the last exams that went in, before they let you know whether you got into college or not. And I'd already sent in the recommendations, I'd already had the interview, and I went, "Is there anything else I can do?" And then I said, "Yeah, there's something I can do. I'm going to really let them know how much I want to go to Barnard."

So I went to my English teacher who I took a Shakespeare class with, and I said to him, "I really want to go to Barnard and I want them to know I really want to go there, and I think I'm the ideal candidate to get the – get in, and I want to get in. So I want to write them a letter and tell them that. Will you help me?" And he said, "Yes, I will."

So I wrote a draft of the letter, telling Barnard why I wanted to go there and how much I wanted to go there and how I felt I was the ideal candidate and they should just let me in [Laughs] and make sure they let me in. So he reread my letter and he made some editorial suggestions. And I took it back, and I worked on it some more, and then I brought it back to him. And then he said, "Yeah, this is good now. You can go ahead and send it in." I picked the stamp for the envelope and [Laughs] – you know, those are the days you had funny old typewriters. It was a pain in the neck to get a decent letter typed up.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And so I got into Barnard. And –

MS. RICHARDS: I want to say, "Congratulations." [They laugh.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So –

MS. RICHARDS: And you lived in a dorm or an apartment?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I graduated from Bradford in the spring of '67, and I had a friend – one – actually my roommate at Bradford, who I got quite fond – her mother had come up to pick her up from New York. Her mother had a place on Long Island or something like that. And her mother was a – had a small-time art gallery. And she said she'd like to take my paintings out and have them in the small art gallery. And so I let her –

MS. RICHARDS: What were your paintings like? What did they look like?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't know.

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, were they abstract, figurative, semi –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: One of each. [Laughs.] She took my paintings, and we all got into the car and came down to New York. And my friend from Wellesley had also transferred to Barnard, and my friend from Barnard had – we had gotten – some boyfriends had an apartment and they were going away for the summer, so we got to have our first apartment. And I arrived in New York and – after the summer of my sophomore year, and we had our first apartments. We were free! Oh, my gosh, we weren't living in a dorm.

MS. RICHARDS: Where was that apartment?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, we only had the apartment for the summer. It was on 114th Street between Riverside and Broadway. And we had a view of the river, and we were right near Riverside Park. So that was great for the summer; although, by fall, the boys came back and took their apartment back, and I had been assigned - Barnard ran out of dorm space, so they had rented several floors on the Paris - in the Paris Hotel, which was on West End and 96th - or between 95th and 96th, something like that.

And my friend from Wellesley and I had - they just gave you a hotel room. It was a tiny kind of - tiny room in a sort of seedy hotel, but - I had a hard time there. There - the lady in the room next to me - there was only one old tenant that refused to evacuate, move to another floor, another room. And she was somebody, I think, who probably - I didn't understand it at the time - but had probably lived through the Holocaust. And she was a little crazy and a little terrorized and very paranoid. So she thought that I was attacking her or doing evil witchcraft at her or sending evil smells in the night or sending evil vibes in the night. And she hacked at my door and pounded on my wall. And I - you know, I'd go down and complain to the front desk, "She's pounding on my door! What do I do?" And, you know, they'd say, "Well, she's a little crazy. Just put up with it. She's had a rough time." And then I'd go, "Okay, but she woke me up three times."

And so finally I went to the housing office at Barnard and said, "You know, this - something's got to give here." And they gave me another hotel room on another floor, but I was sad because I wanted to be with my friends, whatever, and - so -

MS. RICHARDS: When you were at Barnard, did you start out as a studio major or an art history major?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, it's a liberal arts college. And I didn't know anything about art schools because we - growing up in the kind of family I did, nobody knew anything about art school. They'd never even heard of an art school. It was a liberal arts college, which meant in order to take the maximum amount of studio classes, art history majors were allowed to take more studio classes than, say, a French literature major. So I decided to be an art history major, which was fine with me. I loved art history. And I got to study art history and also take a lot of studio courses, which I did.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Were there any particularly important teachers there those two years?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, yes. I mean, I - there are several different routes I could take at this point. I continued to stay in contact with Doug Huebler. When I came to New York, Doug Huebler said to me, "I'm coming to New York regularly now. And I - as a matter of fact, I'm going to be in a group show" - I'm trying to think whether this was my first year or my second year; I think it was my first year - "I'm going to be in a group show that Seth Siegelau is organizing. And it has" - there were going to be four of us in the group show, and that would be Joseph Lawrence, Bob Barry -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And, you know, he - Doug was beginning to come down to meet with Seth quite regularly. Seth was interested in promoting this work, and he had taken a temporary space, a gallery on Madison Avenue, and was going to have a show with these guys. I don't remember whether he did other shows there. I sort of don't think so.

And Doug Huebler also began introducing me to artists around New York. So it's through Doug Huebler in this first year of my being in New York that I originally met, oh, Carl Andre and Robert Rauschenberg and Joseph Kosuth.

But the story that I want to tell that is not related to Barnard - and I'll integrate Barnard into it, but - was the story of this - oh, Doug Huebler also introduced me to Betsy Baker, who was a friend of his. And she had a place on Madison Avenue, I think. And we'd go over there and have interesting conversations. And - also had interesting conversations with this guy, Seth Siegelau. But - who talked 90 miles an hour. Do you know him?

MS. RICHARDS: Never met him.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, so somewhere in the winter - fall/winter of my first year in New York, I went over to see this show. And I went on my own. And I went in the gallery, and Seth was there. And I walked in the door of the gallery, and my world just changed on the spot. I looked at the work, and I went, "Oh, shoot, I have - I can't go on with my painting anymore." And, you know, what it was, was Lawrence Weiner had a brick taken out of the wall, and Bob Barry had some invisible inert gas -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – and Joseph Kosuth had some thesaurus definitions published in newspapers, and they were just kind of [inaudible]– the newspaper page was ripped out and –

MS. RICHARDS: Let me ask you, at that point, what were your paintings like that you said you would stop doing?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, at that moment, they were flattened-out three-dimensional objects like a chair or a table that was compressed into the surface to make it just two-dimensional and make very obvious that three-dimensional object was being represented in two dimensions so that it was just as though it had been crushed.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what – were there painters who were influencing you at that point to –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, I wasn't paying any attention to painting. I was just paying attention to – I was – you know, I was paying attention to pop and minimalism and all that.

MS. RICHARDS: So was it physically a – maybe monochrome background with this object flattened?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: [Laughs.] I did –

MS. RICHARDS: So you –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I did a window that was just – the lines that defined the shapes on the canvas were the frame of the window and, you know, the panes and so on. But it didn't try to look like a window. It just tried to be – you know, toy with the edge between abstraction and representation. And –

MS. RICHARDS: That was in the air then.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: What?

MS. RICHARDS: It was in the air then, that, yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: So you walked into Seth Siegelau's gallery –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And it just shocked me. I was just shocked. I had no idea how extreme some work was. And I also had already somehow or other assimilated the kind of ethic – aesthetic of vanguardism, so I believed, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: You had to break new ground artistically.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, I believed if this is the edge, this is the cutting edge right here, then I need – I better get right up there on the edge and see what happens next because, you know, I wasn't going to go back, you know, to painting if somebody was taking bricks out of the wall and somebody else was publishing dictionary definitions in newspapers. And whether I liked this or not, this – you know, this was the challenge, was to figure out what this meant and what my role was.

So I – I mean, I found it actually really scary; very, very scary. I couldn't go back and be comfortable with my flattened tables and chairs anymore because, you know, it was, you know– having painting die on me like that was like having God die on you, you know, which God was doing all the time in those days, as you well remember.

MS. RICHARDS: At that time you were at Columbia, and all kinds of things were happening politically – you were there in 1968.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, let's back up a moment.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you involved in any of the –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: When I was visiting from Bradford – I don't know how this happened in such rapid succession, but when I was visiting from Bradford, I came one weekend in the spring, and that weekend, hippiedom had bloomed in New York. And there was a – [inaudible] Bee-in? – in Riverside Park. And I went down there with my friends, and people were tripping around in the park, and they were wearing long skirts, and they – boys had long hair. And everybody had long beads on, and they were loving each other, and they were being kind and sweet and relaxed and smoking pot.

And I had smoked pot – I had a boyfriend when I was at Bradford that went to Harvard and he was kind of a proto-hippie. And we would go around Cambridge, and we'd go to a dinner party where everybody would be in

costume just like those people in *Blow-Up*, you know, and they'd be smoking dope. And I smoked grass with him for the first time. And during the time I was at Bradford, I began to smoke grass at various places from time to time. I didn't keep it around, but, you know, I'd go to a ski weekend, and the kids from Vermont would be smoking grass. So I began to smoke grass every once in a while. And I – and I – it was very, you know, powerful to someone who was not used to smoking. You know, it's, like, "Whoa, this is crazy. Look at – my drawings are getting really nutty when I smoke this stuff" [Laughs] "Whoo, things are so big or things are so small or they're so colorful," or, you know, "they're so full of rainbows." [Laughs.]

So that whole hippie thing had hit New York somewhere right around then. And everybody – when I came to Barnard, everybody was dressed up in hippie clothes. And all the guys that we were friends with that had that apartment – there was a gang of guys, about four or five of them, that were friends from Columbia. And there were four or five of us girls who were friends. And so we – a lot of us were always just going around together, and we had so much fun. We'd laugh ourselves silly about all sorts of stuff, and everybody was – you know, I remember laughing with this group of kids like a child where you get a pain – a stitch in your side and you couldn't catch your breath you were laughing so hard. And so that was good.

And vis-à-vis my art experience at Barnard – well, it was – again, it was a little bit like going to Oklahoma from the East Coast. I – you know, I had gone downtown. I had met Carl Andre. I had seen conceptual art. I – you know, I knew about the big proto lofts in SoHo, and I was taking a course with Barbara Novak – Roy Andersen was in my class. Oh, man, I'm tempted to talk about that, but maybe I won't.

MS. RICHARDS: Sure.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I was – I'll talk about Barbara and – Barbara Novak. It was a senior seminar, and it was for people who were art history majors. And I think there were a lot of artists or people who really liked art in the class, probably about 12 of us in the class maybe. And it – I thought I knew what was really the cutting edge, and I thought this was all very old-fashioned. And I found myself thinking that the whole art department at Columbia and Barnard was very old-fashioned. And I would be over in the Columbia library studying Indian stupas and nodding out and going, "They really – they don't know what's going on, and there's so much happening in New York right now, and they should know." And I took a course with Meyer Schapiro, and I took a journalism course with Fred Friendly.

And so I became kind of political about the art scene at Barnard and Columbia, which I thought was pretty old-fashioned; and particularly something like the senior seminar, where you're supposed to be really discussing ideas – and Barbara Novak would go, "Okay, this week we're going to talk about the difference between classic, classical and classicism." And I would go – [makes noise] – you know. And then she'd say – I still remember this moment – she said, "All right, now, you're going to have to do a senior thesis project, and it will be a research paper and it should be about 30 pages in length. And you will work with a thesis adviser; you will choose someone from the department to work with you, and this will be due on such and such a date."

And Laurie Anderson, who was the art history department's goody-good girl – she was such a good girl – and I was – I'd be in an art history class, and the teacher would say, hand in a one-page essay on something or other. And I'd hand in the blank piece of paper. And she'd say, "What's this?" And I'd say, "Well, John Cage says that music is sound and silence. And so writing can be, you know –

MS. RICHARDS: A blank page. [They laugh].

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – type and no type, and here's the no type." And then she would go, "Oh, get out of here, you know. Go – you know, write – all right, all right, I take your point. All right, take your point."

So I was constantly rebelling against the art department in that sort of a way and trying to overthrow my teachers or challenge them or something or other. And Laurie Anderson was always ingratiating herself to them. She would pour tea at the art history club tea parties. And I was – you know, I was the opposite. We were each other's opposite at that time. And I think I – well, I won't go in – go there, but – so Barbara Novak said, "It'll be 30 pages, and it'll be due on May first. And Laurie Anderson raised her hand, and she said, "Ms. Novak, do you want our name on the left-hand side of the page or on the right?" And I looked at her and I thought, "You've got to be kidding." And I decided right then and there that I wasn't going to write a paper. And [Laughs] –

MS. RICHARDS: And you were a good writer.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I was a good writer, but I – you know, I had to turn this whole thought process on its head. You know, it's like – I was in active rebellion at that point.

MS. RICHARDS: Had you had a period of rebellion as a teenager? Just curious. Sounds like you were so busy moving schools and –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Other than – other than driving around on motorcycles with the guys and drinking beer on the golf course and sneaking out late at night – you know, I – when I lived in Oklahoma, I was supposed to – you know, I had – always had early curfews. My parents were very controlling. And they – you know, I had an earlier curfew – 9:00 in the ninth grade, 10:00 in 10th grade, 11:00 in the 11th grade, 12:00 in 12th grade – and so I'd come home from a date and – or going out with my girlfriends, and I – my parents would be in bed at 11:00, and I'd say, "Good night. I'm home. Good night." And I'd go upstairs, and I'd wait 10 minutes, go back down the stairs. My friends would be waiting at the end of the block, and off we'd go into the night. [Laughs.] My mother said later that she knew that, but I don't think she did at all. I think she's just trying to pretend that she did.

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, so what were the repercussions of not doing your 30-page paper, if any?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, what happened was I decided I wasn't going to do the paper but I was going to do something that they would accept and that I would graduate and that would be okay. But I was willing to go the limit. So I went to Barbara Novak, and I said, "I don't want to write a paper. I don't agree with this whole way of approaching learning." I said, "For me, art is art and not what you say about it; and therefore, I don't want to go saying stuff about art. I want to make art. And I want to do a photographic essay."

And she said, "Well, that's never been done before. I don't know, blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Well, that's what I'd like to do, and I'm going to do it." And she said, "Well, if you can find an adviser who's willing to work with you, I'm willing to look at it and consider it."

So I had an architecture teacher called Ms. Nyberg, Dorothy Nyberg, who was a bit of a more radical soul. And I had a feeling that she might be sympathetic with me. So I went to Dorothy Nyberg during her office hours, and I said, "Listen, I'm supposed to do this senior thesis, and I don't agree with the whole idea of what it – what it is and how it's done, and it's so conventional. And I would really like to do a photographic essay about architecture in New York. As a matter of fact, I'd like to do a piece on the Guggenheim Museum and the – Eero Saarinen – TWA Terminal and something else, Lieber House maybe, which eventually I kind of pared back to being just on the Guggenheim."

And I said, "Will you support me if I go against the departmental requirements? Will you be my thesis adviser, and will you support me?" And she said, "Yes, I will." [Laughs.] And I said, "Okay. Well, then I – the first thing I have to do is I have to learn photography."

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to say, did you know how to take pictures?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No. I had a camera, but I didn't know diddly shit. But, so I went across the street to Columbia School of Journalism where they had a darkroom. And I went into the darkroom, and I said to some guy there, "I want to learn photography. How – what do I do?" [Laughs.] And the guy said, "Well, this is what you're going to need." He said, "You need to go down to this place called Camera Barn, and you need to buy some Dectol, some D-76. You need some trays. Well, we can have you use these trays here and – don't worry about it. But you'll need some big brown bottles like this." And he made me a shopping list of what I needed that I had to bring into the darkroom myself. And he said, "Meet me back here tomorrow afternoon with that stuff and I'll show you," you know, "how to develop your film or how to make a print."

So I started going there –

MS. RICHARDS: So you owned a camera already?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I owned a camera. It was just some kind of simple camera that – I'd had a few simple cameras, but I had never been particularly interested in photography. But now I had a reason to be interested in photography. You know, I'd taken a few arty things in high school, but, you know, I was much more involved in painting and drawing.

And so I started going over to the Guggenheim, you know, day after day after day. And I studied the shape of the building, and I studied, you know, from this angle and that angle. And I started taking pictures and I started developing my own film and I started making prints. And I think in the end, what I did was – and then I kept going and visiting Nyberg every once in a while and saying, "You know, this is coming on well; don't worry."

So I ended up making, I would say, something like maybe – I always have numbers that I kind of like, like maybe 21 – 20, 21, 25 – 21's a number I often pick. So I made prints, and I decided to do an installation. And the installation was going to be the parts of the Guggenheim that were higher up or, like, looking up into the skylight from below, would maybe be the highest print on the wall. And some of the things about the way the wall curved around in the front would be lower down on the wall. And I had dry-mounted the prints. And then I rephotographed them all, and I made them all into slides as well.

And so I made an installation in the hallway of the art history department at Barnard. And I put a little label on

the wall, and I – it said, "Sarah Charlesworth, May, 1969, Guggenheim Museum, Frank Lloyd Wright." And then the little statement said, "Art Is: It's Not What You Say About It." [Laughs.] And that's all. I mean, it wasn't a paragraph or anything. And they ended up giving me an A plus. And I passed, and I graduated, and I got honors. And Columbia University and Barnard College and some other college I can't remember upstate, like SUNY Purchase or something like that, bought slides from me.

And when they bought slides from me, that was the first time that I actually made money from doing photography. And that was the seed of the way I supported myself in the next years to come.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you – how did they end up – especially the SUNY [State University of New York] campus – finding out about the images.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't remember. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: How did you end up deciding what to charge for them?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I charged \$50 for the set, which – and probably cost me \$48 to make [Laughs.] – maybe \$40. [Laughs.] But I went, "Hey! I can make money doing this."

MS. RICHARDS: Speaking of making money, I meant to ask you if you had any kind of summer jobs or jobs while you were in school, either in high school or in four years of college in two places. [Audio break.]

So I asked about summer jobs or even jobs you might have had while you were in school; although I think that you didn't, but –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, the most interesting summer job I had – one thing we didn't touch upon when we were talking about my childhood, was that I learned how to cook at a very early age. I got a Girl Scout badge in cooking when I was in third grade. And I loved to cook from the first time I learned how to make a Bechamel sauce to my first full meal, which was in third grade I cooked a roast pork with apple – baked apples and – or apple pie, I guess, I made for dessert. And one of the requirements of the Girl Scout badge was to make a full meal after you learned how to – what this was, broiling; what's frying; what's – you know, you make different things.

And so I learned to cook that way. And my mother would help me. And my mother was a pretty good cook, and my grandmother was a pretty good cook, even though she had a cook. They both made simple, straightforward American food. But I just – from the moment I got in the kitchen, I loved it. And I – my mother was always – as I mentioned before, always very supportive of any kind of creative thing anybody wanted to do. So she allowed me – she – I think I asked for the job and then she said "Okay," which was I became the cook for the family during the summer.

So starting in about fifth or sixth grade and going for a number of summers – three or four summers – I had as a summer job to cook for my family. And I loved it. I just loved it. And my mother – I got what seemed to me like a serious salary. And for that serious salary, which was \$4 a day, which I guess came to \$28 a week, it seemed to me, I got – I had to – got to, not had to – got to do the grocery shopping, the preparation of the meals, and the cleaning up. Everybody would chip in to the cleaning up, but, you know, I was responsible for sort of making sure everything got taken care of.

So what my mother would do is she'd take me to the supermarket – because I was not old enough to drive or anything then – and allow me to choose what we were buying. And so I – you know, I didn't really have cookbooks at that age. I just sort of made stuff up or saw how things were done. So I already knew how to make, you know, a roast chicken or something like that from watching my grandmother and my mother make a roast chicken. But – you know, and I – my mother – I'd say, "How do you make a beef stew?" "Well, you make – you know, you – you know, da da da da da."

And I sort of knew how to make spaghetti and all those kinds of things that Americans will be getting or had eaten at that period in time. But I also, fancying myself something of a gourmet, was going to make things outside the normal American middle-class diet. So I had heard of words like, oh – "Swedish meatballs" I'd heard of. I didn't know what they were, but I'd heard the word. And I'd heard "lobster bisque." So I decided I'd make some lobster bisque. We were in Maine. Why not?

MS. RICHARDS: With no cookbook.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No cookbook. And I knew how to make a cream sauce, and I knew how to cook a lobster, and so I – let's see – how would I do this – I'd cook the lobster so I could get it out of the shell and then make a little cream sauce, and then I'd dilute it with milk and broth from the lobster. And I'd cut the lobster meat up, and my mother would say, "Well, you maybe want to throw in a dash of sherry; here's some sherry." And I'd

throw in a dash of sherry and made a delicious lobster bisque.

And I – you know, some things I just made up. I didn't know what a Swedish meatball was, but I knew, you know, "Let's get some beef and make it into little balls, and I'll chop up some onion – you know, whatever."

So I had that summer job for a number of years. I don't remember – I got too busy in high school reading Dostoevsky and Tolstoy [Laughs]. I used to spend all that time – but I always cooked. I cooked from early childhood on, and I cook like a maniac to this day. I cook fancy, complicated things, and I have – I'm always shopping for, you know, fresh fruits and vegetables, and I have a garden, and I grow all my own vegetables in the summer. And I buy milk and eggs from the farm and – I made butter a little – last week. I learned how to open oysters. I made oysters on the half shell –

MS. RICHARDS: Wow.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – in the middle of the electrical storm. [They laugh.] Anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, in college, did you have any jobs when you were away from home?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That's right, I do remember –

MS. RICHARDS: In the summer.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I didn't – oh, I didn't tell you about the job crisis when I was in college. My senior year in the fall, they had a meeting with all the seniors, and they said, "Guess what. You're going to graduate come spring" – and it was this big meeting in the gymnasium or – which they used as an auditorium, and they had career counselors there, and they said, "Here are choices that you're going to have to make when you graduate." And one thing we – there's a lot of things we haven't touched on during that period that were happening. And in addition to the – you know, we just mentioned the Summer of Love in 1967 when all the hippie movement was kind of coming into full bloom. The – following that almost instantly was all the political, anti-war stuff that was going on – well, in San Francisco and in New York and all over Europe. And there were – you know, it – when I was at Columbia, there was the sit-ins in the – in the dorms, and I even had – I mean, in all the buildings at Columbia. And I even had a boyfriend who was in SDS.

So I was very close to the whole thing. I was right in there. I didn't occupy the buildings, but I did posters for SDS and I – you know, all the teachers and all the students were sympathetic with the anti-war movement. And they willingly canceled the classes meeting in buildings that were, you know, on strike. We'd meet – you know, that happened in the spring, so we'd meet our classes somewhere, you know, in the park or on – you know, somewhere else on campus our art history class would meet.

And the whole campus was just really so intense during those week when people were occupying the buildings. Butler Hall was, you know, one of the centers of the occupation. And in addition to the very radical SDS kids that were literally – had literally locked themselves into the library and the main building and several of the other buildings, they had asked that other students not be willing to attend classes and enter into other buildings. And we all respected that. And the teachers respected that as well. And so whether or not you were occupying a building, you were on strike against the university's participation in and support of the Vietnam War.

And, you know, I mean, I wasn't part of the – what – the art world had a lot of meetings at – I forget what they were called – I'm forgetting because I wasn't part of the art world at that time. But at Columbia, it was very, very intense. And the police were on one side, and the students, faculty and building occupiers led by the SDS, were on the other side. And, you know, it went on for weeks. And it not only went on for weeks. It went on for weeks in the sense of the literal shutdown of the campus. But it also went on for years in the sense of the anti-war movement and the gradual politicization of our generation – which, you know, eventually led to a great deal of involvement with Marxism and socialism and all kinds of leftist studies and involvements and – which I'll talk about later as we progress in this story.

But in addition to the anti-war movement, which involved lots of demonstrations in Washington and overlapping with the hippie movement – because remember, of course, about the –

MS. RICHARDS: And the civil rights movement.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – sticking flowers down the muzzles of – muzzles – what are they called that guns have? Anyway, putting flowers in guns. [Laughs]. Yeah, I mean, the civil rights movement was a little earlier, and I was younger at the time and not quite so directly involved with civil rights, per se, but Martin Luther King and the whole kind of struggle for racial equality and outing the racial inequality in the country was very active at the time. You know, my sister went with her boyfriend and lived in Atlanta, you know, working in the poor neighborhoods to help people build houses or schools or something like that. And also people joined marches

and demonstrated against lack of civil rights or against the war in Vietnam and the U.S. involvement in – you know, a global politic that it shouldn't be involved in.

And also that was the same period that the draft was still going on. So all of my male friends had strategies for avoiding the draft. And I only know one person who actually went to Vietnam from my class, my – you know, from the educated kids, the choices were you could keep going to graduate school because that could keep you out of it; you could get educational deferment. A lot of people tried to get medical deferments, so they – whatever the word is –

MS. RICHARDS: 4-F, I think.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: What?

MS. RICHARDS: Wasn't it F-4?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah.

MS. RICHARDS: Physically unacceptable? [Phone rings.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I just don't want it ringing on the tape. [Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: We were talking about avoiding the draft.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. The things people did were, like, completely nuts. I mean, people physically wounding themselves or –

MS. RICHARDS: Even pretending you –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: My husband later on, Amos Poe, the father of my children – he – I didn't know him at the time that he was getting out the draft, but he dropped a lot of acid and stayed up for days on end so he'd go in and seem like a crazy – which he was anyway, but, you know, I mean, he literally tried to make himself crazy to get out of the draft and exhausted. And people were constantly – like, they'd have a problem in their foot or their back and they'd deliberately aggravate it in order to be declared unfit. And it's just awful, I mean, that we were so – we so didn't believe in the war, we so didn't want to get killed, we so didn't want to go kill other people. And, you know, luckily one of the good things for girls and women is that you weren't required to do so.

And so my senior year at Barnard, they had a meeting in the fall in the gym, and they said, "Okay, guys, guess what. You're going to graduate, and you're going to have a life after college." And we were all kind of shocked to hear that. And this kind of overlaps a little bit with feminism because this whole time I had been loving art and wanting to do art and whatever, but I hadn't really thought about it – doing it professionally. I didn't know what that even meant. You know, I just – I was sort of raised to think that I would marry some kind of businessman. And, in fact, when I first came to New York, I met a guy from Yale who had just graduated from Yale, and he – and he worked on Wall Street, and he was kind of, you know, a Yale-y guy who worked on Wall Street. And he was funny and fun and – you know, I had a good time with him and he was a good person, but I – he – what – the kind of pattern, the template that was given to girls of my age and my generation and my class was, well, sooner or later you're going to marry some guy and you're going to go and run a house and you're going to have dinner parties and send your children to schools.

And I was beginning to get the creeps. Aside from feminism, I was beginning to go, "I don't think I want to go there. I don't think I want to, like, leave New York City and live in Westchester and drive the kids to the soccer match." And so, you know, this – that whole model that our mothers had lived and been kind of surprised and shocked to find themselves in – wasn't working – wasn't working for myself and my girlfriends. We were just, like – we weren't about to just marry the boyfriend, even though the boyfriend asked us. We didn't want to do that.

And so – but we hadn't – we hadn't thought about having a career. You know, that whole concept wasn't part of what was our experience. And I'm speaking broadly. I'm generalizing, but I'm talking about women of my age and my social class, in particular. And I didn't have any money when I was at Barnard. I – my parents gave me what I would have – they gave me for food what I would have had if I lived in the dorm, which was \$2.25 a day, is what the dorm food plan cost. So I managed to feed myself on \$2.25 a day and –

MS. RICHARDS: You remember that number.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Oh, yeah, because I – living in the Paris Hotel, I'd often not take the bus or the subway down to 96th Street in order to save the 20 cents that the subway token cost in those days. And I earned some extra money babysitting when I was in college and – you know, in those days, babysitting paid a dollar-fifty or \$2.00 an hour, you know, so you'd babysit all night long and finally the parents would come home in the wee

hours and hand you \$14 and some cab fare, you know.

But anyway, at this career counseling meeting, they said, "Okay, you're going to graduate and, you know, these are some choices. You can get a job, [Laughs] you can go to graduate school or you can have a career or get a job." And this "get a job" thing was, like, what?

[END TRACK 2.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth at her loft home studio in New York City on November second, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So this whole idea about getting a job or having a career they brought up in the fall really scared the daylights out of me. And I thought, "Well, you know, I don't think I want to do that. I don't - you know, I'm not going to get a job." I once or twice had a summer job where it involved working in an office or something and it was just completely stultifying, stultifying, whatever the word is.

And I - you know, every once in a while, I had gone for some meeting or something to Madison Avenue, to an ad agency or, you know, apply for something or other. And just the very smell of those buildings would just send me running. I mean, I was more scared of a job even than I was of having a husband and living in Westchester. So I wasn't - you know, that really scared me. And I thought, "Well, maybe graduate school is the way to go, you know." And my art history teachers said, "Yeah, you should - you'd be great in art history; you should apply to art - graduate school in art history." And I went, "Mm." [Negative.]

And I had been doing some film work, and I decided maybe I'd apply to film school, which I ended up doing. And I was accepted, but I didn't end up going. And so I was just - you know, I didn't know. I just didn't know about this graduate school thing either. I'd sort of had it with school.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, it sounds like you also weren't sure whether you would be an art historian or an artist, a filmmaker, what exactly -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I didn't - I -

MS. RICHARDS: - what direction you'd take.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I hadn't thought about "being" something at all. You know, I was just being me. And so the - this idea that I was going to have to figure out what it was I was going to be didn't appeal to me at all.

And I had always thought of myself as an artist, but I didn't think that that was another role I had to take on in some way. I just sort of was an artist. And so I ended up getting kind of depressed by this whole concept of having a career. And I was pretty blue that whole winter. I decided to ditch the boyfriend that went to Yale and got rid of him and - you know, and feminism was very - beginning to be very present at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: You lived in the Paris Hotel for the whole two years?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, only the first year. The second year, we got the nice apartment on 114th Street, and I lived there with my girlfriends. So feeding into this is - you know, there is the personal and there is the social dimension of these political movements. So I remember, for instance - and this is a story that I tell from time to time to students - that I had a book - or someone took a book out of the library; I don't remember - it was called *The Artist in His Studio*. And it was photographs by Alexander Liberman, who was photo editor or editor of Conde Nast or *Harper's Bazaar* or something like that. And I remember turning the pages of this book and seeing Mondrian and the skinny guys in his studio and Picasso in his underpants and, you know, Calder and Miró and - you know, on and on and on. And I'd turn these pages and I'd look at these artists in their studios - his studio. And I'd just get blue, and I didn't know why.

And it took me years to go, "Wait a minute. I was looking for a role model. I had no idea that - you know, there weren't - there weren't women artists. There were, like, two of them. There was Georgia O'Keeffe, and there was Agnes Martin.

MS. RICHARDS: Maybe Louise Nevelson.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I didn't even know about her. And, you know, she wasn't my kind of artist anyway. But - I don't even think that - Georgia O'Keeffe wasn't in that book because she predates that book. And I don't even know if there were any women artists in that book - maybe Agnes Martin.

MS. RICHARDS: Frankenthaler?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Maybe. Maybe. But it - I - all I remember is guys, guys, guys, guys. And every art

gallery was filled with guys, guys, guys, guys. All the guys at Leo Castelli – there was, you know, Rauschenberg and Warhol and Rivers and Johns and – and so, I mean, it's not surprising that it didn't dawn on me to have a career, you know. It was like – so one day – you know, there was two experiences that sort of fed into this – when Doug Huebler was coming to New York, one day I remember he picked me up uptown, and he was going to take me to something or other in the – just baby newborn – SoHo wasn't anything; it was just a bunch of empty warehouses. And I think food was there on Prince Street. And I remember – this must have been sometime – maybe spring of my senior year after I had been blue all winter. And I remember walking down the cobblestone street – I think it was maybe Mercer Street – and walking along with Doug Huebler, and we were going to some kind of a – something – maybe we were going to food for supper and then, you know – and going on to a loft party or something like that.

And I remember walking down the street, and I was looking down at my feet, and I had on a nice pair of red suede heels and – low heels, but, you know, it was shoes I liked and – going-out – going-out-on-the-town shoes – and walking down the street and feeling kind of happy about being down there in SoHo and feeling kind of excited about going to this – whatever it was I was going to and going, "You know what, I'm going to be an artist."

And it was sort of like coming out to myself. It was – you know, it was something that I'd been – I'd been thinking I was an artist since I was five, but it took me till I was 20 to say, "Yep, I'm going to do it." And so how that played out with the whole career thing was that somewhere along – I was – got so blue that winter that I actually went to a therapist at Columbia, and I said, you know, "I – you know, this scares me, all this junk." And, you know, feminism was saying – the feminist movement was saying, you know, "You can't get married anyway; you won't have any economic power and your husband could just go off and leave you and you could – you know, don't even –" it was sort of just out of the question to go back to the old model, even though I didn't want to go back there anyway. And I didn't have any idea about really wanting to have a career. I just wanted to be an artist. But I also had already taken on all the mantle of being responsible to the future after conceptual art. You know, as an artist, I had to make the next step. And I was scared and confused what that stuff would be.

But somewhere during the spring of the senior year, I sort of said, "You know what? I don't have to have a career. I don't have to do anything. I don't have to go to graduate school. The heck with this film school stuff. That's not what I want to do. I just want to have my own life and own it. And I don't care if I have to walk dogs or babysit or design Christmas cards; I'm just going to take my life for myself and own it." And it was such a breakthrough. I can't tell you; it was, like, suddenly I was – you know, I was in charge of my life, and I didn't need to go through any more programs. And it was really liberating. And it was, like, finally I came out of my depression and, you know, "Hey, I'll just do whatever I do."

MS. RICHARDS: You were saying that there were no women in this – *The Artist in His Studio* book. Did you at that point not know any women artists in New York or never study, let's say, in a studio class in college with a woman artist?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I mean –

MS. RICHARDS: I mean, of course, there were many, many women in New York.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – there's two ways that I could connect with that question. One was, no, I didn't know any women – real artists, grownup artists. I knew other –

MS. RICHARDS: I mean – yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – you know. But I was – at that time by – already since 1967 or '68, I was beginning to have an on-and-off affair with Joseph Kosuth. Doug Huebler was interested in me, but I – he – I wasn't interested in having a sexual relationship with him, and we were friends. And – but I did get interested in Joseph Kosuth and did start to have a sexual relationship with him. And that was – he was – he had another girlfriend, and he would call me from time to time, and I would be very excited to go out to dinner with him once every few months and just thought he was brilliant. I just thought he was so smart and he had such good taste and such interesting ideas. And I would just be thrilled to go out with him. And he seemed to really like me a lot.

But he had another girlfriend, and I wasn't going to actively interfere with that. And I was just, like, really trying to realize myself. So even though I was completely smitten with him – and somehow or other, that – my interest in Joseph made it so that it was almost like it had an effect that made me not really be thoroughly involved with anybody else. And I sort of decided at some point that Joseph was meant to be my boyfriend and – or I was meant to be his girlfriend or we were meant to be together, something in – I sure thought that that was probably going to happen, but I also had to bide my time and it would happen when it happened. And that's exactly what happened. It took five years from when I first went out with him 'till we became a couple, and that was so romantic and so fabulous. I was really, really happy to be with him.

But, you know, Joseph was my model artist. And Doug Huebler was a model artist. And I wasn't very interested in what I saw of the women's artist movement. I didn't relate to the whole Great Goddess thing and the women's art galleries that just – I wanted to be a real artist and not just a sort of tangential minority group artist. And I saw the women art movement as yes, it's a good thing; yes, I'm glad these women are getting to have their shows, even though they're in all-woman galleries and the real galleries are all men art galleries. But I didn't – you know, I wanted to go for – I wanted to address – I still wasn't interested in career in the sense of getting a claim or money; I was just interested in addressing ideas about art.

And so – I had no idea what I was interested in saying to those ideas about art, but, you know, I – something had to happen after conceptual art. And I was giving serious consideration to what that thing would be.

MS. RICHARDS: When you graduated, obviously you stayed in New York. Did you then move someplace downtown?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, that's an interesting story. I had this – I inherited this apartment on 114th Street. One friend went one direction; one friend went the other, and I got the apartment. And I was very comfortable living up near Columbia, and going to SoHo was fun as an adventure and –

MS. RICHARDS: Could you afford it by yourself, or did you have to have other roommates?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The first time that I had – you want me to answer that question or go with my train of thought?

MS. RICHARDS: Please continue.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, the first time I ever went to a loft in – I wasn't with Doug Huebler. I went, you know, with – went out briefly with a guy who was in Columbia in architecture school. And he took me to a party, a dinner party, in SoHo. And I just thought that loft was the coolest thing I'd ever seen. Come downtown on the subway, we get off somewhere or other and go to these dark streets, cobblestone streets, and we go into some kind of old warehouse building. And the hallway's dark, but there's some kind of little light bulb dangling somewhere. You can just barely see to get up the stairs, and you walk up to the third floor, and you go into this huge raw space. And it was, you know, brick walls and – I don't know whether – wood floors or something like that, but so big and so barren. And there would be a big old board that would be the table, and there would be candles on it. And it was – it was exquisite. And I went, "Whoa, these spaces are – this space is really cool! This sure beats a – you know, an Upper West Side apartment," even though I had a great apartment.

So I got it into my head that it would be a good idea to move downtown. And I was very scared to move downtown, but I thought that's really where the artists are; they're hidden away in these warehouse buildings. And Joseph lived downtown; he lived on Grand Street, and he had a fabulous loft on Grand Street. And a – you know, it was his studio, and he slept there and – so I got the idea that if I really wanted to kind of deal with this art thing that I should probably get out of the Upper West Side and get downtown and start to meet other artists and get some workspace and get a darkroom of my own.

And by then I was supporting myself doing photography. What happened after I sold the slides my senior year and made some money from it was I – and when I didn't get a job or have a career or something, I started going around with my camera, and I'd just go around the neighborhood and, say, Fellini would be coming to talk at Casa Italiana at Columbia. So I'd go over with my camera, and I'd take pictures of Fellini giving a talk and Fellini shaking hands of the director of Casa Italiana. And then I'd ask Fellini if he'd come out in the sun and sit down on the bench and take another better picture.

I – you know, and then on – that night I'd develop my film, and the next day I'd call up the director of Casa Italiana and say, "Hey, I've got some great pictures of Fellini talking at Casa Italiana; would you like to see them?" I'd go over with my contact sheets and a few prints, and she'd say, "Oh, yeah, these are great. Could we have the right to publish them in our journal?" And I'd say, "Sure, and they're \$2 each for the prints." [Laughs.]

So I did that with lots of things. I'd just kind of go around and go to something. You know, I lived next door to a school called St. Hughes or something like that –

MS. RICHARDS: St. Hughes? Hughes?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: St. Hilary's [ph] and St. Hughes, something like that on 114th Street. They'd have a school fair, and I'd go to the school fair and take pictures of the kids, you know, and the pumpkins. And, you know, I'd call them up and say, "I've got great pictures of the school fair." So I became a freelance photographer just by kind of inventing it for myself. And then I'd say, "Hey, you know, Barnard does a yearbook every year. I could be the person who would take the pictures for the Barnard yearbook, you know. I think I'd like to

photograph each girl in their own room or their own activity or where they – their environment." So I'd go to the – find out who would be the editor of the yearbook and go to them and say, "Hey, I'd like to do this. I can do this. Would you like to see some of my pictures?"

So it was around that time that I was trying to figure out whether I could relate to being a photographer, which I didn't really think I could because I really wanted to do this art thing. But just to sort of explore it a little further, I took a class with one of the most famous photo teachers in the country, who was Lisette Model. And she taught at the New School and she also taught a private master's workshop. And you had to apply for the class and show her your portfolio and be accepted to be in the class.

So I had a meeting with Lisette Model. We met at Howard Johnson's on Sixth Avenue. And she was a kind of fun, nutty old lady. And she'd just recently been Diane Arbus' teacher. And I recognized right away when I met her that she was an artist. She dressed all in black, as did Joseph and as did I. And, you know, it was the thing that sort of signaled that you were conceptual or an artist at the time.

MS. RICHARDS: Serious.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I mean, nowadays, I, you know, dress in all different things, but I, you know, frequently wore the outfit of a conceptual artist, which was all black at the time. And Lisette Model dressed in all black. She had full skirts and things like that, but she'd have some primary color patches sewed on, and she had a really nice style. And she was a great teacher. She was a really, really good teacher.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what year it was that you studied with her?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I can figure it out. I think it was – '70, '71; maybe '71, '72, because there's a period there in between when I graduated and when I got together with Joseph, which was 1973. So there was a period there where I lived for about a year in Morocco and – in Ibiza – then in Morocco –

MS. RICHARDS: For a year?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – with a boyfriend.

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to ask you about traveling abroad, if you had any –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I took my first trip to Europe after my senior year. I went with my sister, who was at that time at Middlebury, my sister Agnes – Nancy. And we had Eurail passes. Do you remember Eurail passes? And they cost something like \$200 or something like that – 250 [dollars]. And what they allowed you to do was to take any first-class train you wanted anywhere from any town to any other town in Europe. And so we – our parents didn't support our trip at all; we went on our own savings, which were not so easy to put away –

MS. RICHARDS: So she was – she was in the midst of studying at Middlebury, and you had graduated from Barnard.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Right. So I was – guess I was two years ahead of her in school. So I graduated in the spring of 1969, and I didn't even go to my own graduation. I was – I couldn't care less. [Laughs.] And we took off for Europe right after I graduated, and she was in – finished her second year at Middlebury. And we had purchased these Eurail passes in advance, and we were going to trip around Europe, go anywhere the spirit moved us, only we didn't have very much money with us. And we were going on – Europe on \$5 a day. And all the other hippie kids, like ourselves, had this book, and it told you every city where you could find a pension or a room or a cheap hotel or a bus ride or a cheap meal or something or other. So everybody carried these –

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – tomes around with –

MS. RICHARDS: Right, right. And they really worked. [They laugh.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So that was our budget, you know, \$5 a day. So you had to figure out if you were going to pay a museum admission and it was going to be a dollar-fifty, you had to somehow or other save that dollar-fifty off of your food budget or your hotel budget. So it was a lot of eating of bread and Camembert cheese and oranges and, you know, Cokes with lemons in them because we were homesick. And nobody had cell phones, of course, and nobody knew anything about phones or – you know, there was no way to communicate with one's family or friends except, you know – I don't know how parents just let their kids go and never heard from them for months on end.

MS. RICHARDS: You had to write letters that took a week to get –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: We wrote letters, and they would – we would receive letters, and they would be waiting for you in some post office or American embassy. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: American Express.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: You had an American embassy in Madrid, and there would be a letter from mom from Maine. [Laughs.] And we'd set up – we were really hippies, and we were also having – at once we went – hit Morocco, we were having a lot of – smoking a lot of grass and stuff like that. So, you know, we would write home crazy letters about what a lovely, free life we were having and what wonders of the world we were seeing.

So we went first – we flew the cheap airline, which was Icelandic, and you land – you'd end up in some country nobody's ever heard of since, called Luxembourg. You wake up in the morning in Luxembourg, and you notice that in Europe they have different kinds of shutters and different kinds of ways of closing the stores. And you'd wake up in the morning, having been on the plane all night, and you're in some park in downtown Luxembourg because the youth hostel isn't open yet. [Laughs.]

So we went from Luxembourg, and we went to Paris because we wanted to get to Paris ASAP. And we found the cheap hotel in Paris, and I found – [Laughs] – it was so funny – I found after studying French in school ever since 10th grade – 9th or 10th grade I could conjugate verbs in the plus-que-parfait, but I could not order a cup of coffee in Paris. You would go, "Un café, s'il vous plait," and the waiter would go, "quoi?" We would say, "Un café." "Un café?" "Un café!" "Quoi? Oh, coffee; coffee, lady, you want some coffee. Okay, I'll bring you the coffee." And I was, like, "Oh, God."

And I used to stay frequently in years to come on – in a hotel on – Rue de Seine – and I'd say to the taxi driver, "Soixante, Rue de Seine, s'il vous plait" and the taxi driver would go, "Quoi?" [They laugh.] I don't know, the French are such – it's – they can be difficult in that sort of way. So we went to Paris, and then I had a – am I going into too much detail of –

MS. RICHARDS: Well –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I'm going on and on. I mean, I'm just remembering my whole life. This –

MS. RICHARDS: You said you spent a whole year. That was the intriguing thing that – we were talking about chronology. We were talking about when you studied with Lisette Model, and then –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I just want to wind up – wind up the summer abroad. So in the end, we just – we ran out of money, and we ended up going to the station every night, and we'd just say, "Where do you have a train that doesn't get there till 8:00 in the morning at least?" And he'd say, "Well, there's one leaving for Copenhagen in an hour." And you'd say, "Okay, I'll take a ticket on that." And you'd go sleep on the train and get to Copenhagen. You know, so we were just – we'd never know where we were going from one day to the next.

MS. RICHARDS: So you had a three-month Eurail pass?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. So that was fun, and I got to see lots and lots of Europe. And, you know, that – I had a great time and had a boyfriend that was a French photographer that I met in Paris. And I saw him on and off for a while.

But – the next time I went to Europe was when I – I guess after the end of my first year out of college when I was doing photography, I met this guy on the subway or in the street or something. And he had a house in – [inaudible] – and rented a place in Morocco. And he says, you know, "You want to come away with me Ibiza? – I'm leaving the day after tomorrow." And I said, "Sure." [Laughs.]

So we went and I lived in his place Ibiza? for a few weeks, and then I said, "Eh, it's too social here. You know, you're tripping around – a lot of hippies living in – [inaudible] – and they were taking up these old finca farmhouses, and they were just kind of living without electricity and eating vegetables and singing folk songs.

And so that was cool, you know, sitting around the lawn of somebody's house, and Joni Mitchell was singing to us, and Taj Mahal was there. And you know, it's – it was great, but I wanted to get on with it. And so we went to his place in Morocco. And he had – nothing cost any money. That's why we were able to live this lifestyle with no money; nothing cost money. And people had these – had rented these houses in Ibiza? and they probably paid a hundred dollars for a year's rent, you know. And then they had no electricity, so that didn't even cost anything. And, you know, the water didn't cost anything. And they grew the food in the garden, so that didn't cost anything. So nobody much needed much money.

And even in New York, that was the case. You know, my three-bedroom apartment on 114th Street had a living room, a kitchen, a good-sized bathroom and three bedrooms, and it was only, I think, \$160 a month. And when I

got my first loft on Mercer Street when I decided to move downtown in 1973 – spring of 1973, I think it was – I signed a 10-year lease. I had to pay, I think, a \$3,000 fixture fee that I borrowed from my parents, but I signed a 10-year lease on an apartment that was 275 [dollars] a month. It escalated up to, you know, 275 [dollars] at the end of the lease. It was even lower initially. So that was –

MS. RICHARDS: What address was that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: 18 Mercer Street. So I had just signed the lease on that, and I was getting ready to move downtown. And something crept me out. I – right after I'd signed the lease, I went up to visit a neighbor in the building and left my purse there when I went down the stairs. And when I came back, took my purse away; my wallet was gone. And I realized that she had stolen my wallet, and she was right in the building. And it really gave me the creeps. And I ran into her boyfriend down the stairs as I was leaving the building and just realized what had happened. And I said to him, "You know, I was just visiting with what's-her-name, and my wallet's missing. And I think she took it." And he looked just struck. And he said, "Oh, my God, she's got a closet full of those. And I went, "I can't be in this building. This is, like, awful." And I wanted to get rid of it, but I put – I advertised –

MS. RICHARDS: I expected he – you would say he went upstairs and got your wallet for you.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I went upstairs and demanded it back, and she took it out of the closet and gave it to me, but it gave me the creeps.

And so I didn't want to be in the building after that. You know, this person is my neighbor? Yikes. And it – I also realized once I was in the place that it was very noisy, that there was this – you know, you could hear everything between the floors. And the couple downstairs from me would have a fight, and I'd hear the whole thing in my loft. And I – they didn't have the money to do insulation in those days. Those – the sound between those places was pretty rough.

So I wasn't really happy, and I put it on the market, but it wasn't – nobody was buying it, so I said, "Okay, well, whatever, I'll just go ahead and move on downtown." And then just then when all that was happening, getting ready to give up my apartment, I got a phone call, and it was Joseph Kosuth calling me from Europe. And he said – so beginning the summer of 1973, and he said, "Christine and I have broken up, and I want you – and I've just bought a farm in Italy, and I want you to come and visit. And I'm sending you an airplane ticket, and you can pick up money and an airplane ticket from my assistant in New York. Here's her telephone number. Can you come next Saturday?" And I said, "Sure." I mean, "Whoa, this is so cool!" And I – and I, you know, rushed around, trying to get some clothes together and jammed everything in an old suitcase and picked up the ticket from the assistant and flew to Rome. And –

MS. RICHARDS: Left your apartment empty?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I left my apartment – I didn't know what's going on there. I didn't know what was going on with the loft. I just up and left everything. I think I had sublet – or was about to sublet the apartment, turn it over to my sister, Rosemary. And maybe she and her boyfriend were sort of maybe going to plan to live there together when I moved downtown or something like that.

And so I took off for Europe, and Joseph met me at the airport in Rome. And now he's all dressed in white, was in a white jacket, white vest, white jeans. And he took me into Rome into Piazza Navona, where he stayed at the Hotel Raphael, which was right over Piazza Navona. And we dumped my bag at the hotel, and we went off to Piazza Navona for lunch. And I had the most heavenly lunch I'd ever had in my life. It was, you know, tortellini and – with truffles and some kind of chicken fabulous thing and white – nice white wine with lunch. And I was so happy to be with Joseph. And we ended up going to Tuscany and staying in his farm there and just falling madly in love, both of us. And that was the beginning of the time I was with Joseph.

I came home on the plane, and he was taking the Queen Mary or the Queen Elizabeth or something like that back. And I went, "Oh boy, my week in paradise – my two weeks in paradise are over and" –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, so you were only there for two weeks, that visit?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: He was coming back and I was coming back. It didn't last too long. It was a few weeks. And then I flew home, and I got back to New York, and I was trying to figure out what to do with my apartment; and I – you know, I'd had a darkroom in my apartment that I built in my kitchen – and trying to figure out about moving to this loft that I couldn't get rid of on Mercer Street.

And Joseph landed a week later. And he called me the minute he got off the boat. And we went out to dinner. And he said, "I want you to live with me." And I said, "I'd love to. I'd, you know, really like to do that." And he had a place on Bond Street. So forget about – you know, I was going to go ahead and fix up the loft on Mercer

and have it as a studio, which I sort of continued to do, and he helped me do it. And he knew a lot more about fixing up lofts than I did, but, you know, that was the first conversion of a loft that I did. And I henceforth did it a number of times.

But I never really lived there, and I never really had it as a studio. I kept it for a while, but I had a studio in the place that Joseph and I shared on Bond Street, and Joseph and I started working together at that point, and we did projects together. And we really saw eye to eye about all sorts of things about art. I mean, no wonder he had been my mentor and I really respected him. So of course we saw eye to eye.

But I also was in the process of trying to figure out what my work really was. And for a while there, I just said my work is whatever it is I do, you know. I wrote a - an article on the women's movement in Northern Ireland for *Heresies* magazine, which was -

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I was going to ask you what that was, yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And - you know, and I said, "Okay, this is what I do. I - I'm writing an article for *Heresies*."

MS. RICHARDS: Was that your idea, or did they come to you and say, "Would you like to write something?"

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I think they came to me.

MS. RICHARDS: The - are the - every issue had a different -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I knew Lucy Lippard, so - I knew Lucy Lippard through the Doug Huebler connection and through the Joseph connection. And I remember once going to a party - and this was, like - I was still at Barnard or just around - coming out of Barnard, and I remember going to a party. And somebody said to me something like, "Well, who are you?" And I said, "Well, I'm nobody." [Laughs.] And I remember thinking, like, everybody else here is famous - Lucy Lippard and Joseph Kosuth and - when I first met Joseph - I remember meeting Joseph. I met him in an elevator going to someplace, and I guess I - I don't know whether - maybe I wasn't with Doug. Maybe Doug had told me about some event that was going on or something. And I met Joseph in an elevator. And Joseph - I had seen that show at Seth Siegel's - Joseph was unknown at the time. He just had graduated from SVA himself. And he had, you know, lots of ideas, and he knew a lot of artists, but he was unknown. And I met Joseph in an elevator, and somebody said - I think by then I was Sarah Charlesworth - "Sarah, this is Joseph Kosuth." And I said, "[gasps] - Joseph Kosuth - you're a famous artist!" [Laughs.] And he said - I think Joseph was such an egomaniac that for somebody to call him a famous artist - I mean, he didn't even know anybody had seen his work, but to me he was, like, cutting edge and really significant. So he liked being recognized as a famous artist before anybody knew who he was at all [Laughs]. But anyway.

MS. RICHARDS: Was - so you did the article for *Heresies*. When was - are we up to about the time when you collaborated with Joseph on *The Fox* magazine? '75?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, that was a little bit later. That was, like, '75.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.], yes.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, that - Joseph had been - way back when I was at Barnard, I remember Joseph had been working with an English kind of art/art theory group called Art & Language. And he - they had a journal called *Art and Language*. And their practice was they would have a conversation - they were all very well-read and very articulate - and they would have a conversation and talk about something or other, and they would have a - write an article, and it would be called "Why the Little Gray Fox Goes Down by the Sea." And it would be something about Wittgenstein or, you know, some philosophical something or other about art or ideas or - you know, and that's how they wrote their articles. They'd just converse. And Joseph was the - fancied himself and put on the hat of the American editor of art and language.

So shortly after I was with Joseph and - we went to visit - Michael Baldwin was sort of, you know, one of the most outspoken - [inaudible] - "outspoken" is not the right word. He was - Michael Baldwin was the power, the center, the leader of Art & Language in England. There were other people involved. Terry Atkinson and - and there was an Art and Language in New York that was Mel Ramsden and Ian Burn. And so they were all - everybody was high theory. And it was in - being around Art & Language that I first learned how to talk and have - you know, I could already write, I could already think, but I learned how to talk on my feet. And I just had to in order to withstand all this, you know, aggressive critiquing and philosophizing going around me. And I was able to completely follow all the discussions and want to participate. But I had to, like, you know, get a voice and get a language and learn how to speak it.

MS. RICHARDS: Everyone we're talking about is men - is a man.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.].

MS. RICHARDS: When you were amidst it, did that occur to you? Did you think about that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, when I first was with Joseph, I remember – Joseph was represented by Sperone in Rome and Bruno Bischofberger in Zurich. And I remember going out to lunches and dinners with Gian Enzo Sperone in Rome. And I would ask Gian Enzo a question, and Gian Enzo would answer it to Joseph. So I'd say, "What do you think of your next show?" And he'd say, "Well," and then he'd turn to Joseph and give him the answer. And I was used to being an appendage to Joseph. You know, Joseph is a main, primary mover here, and he has this cute girlfriend who's pretty smart who collaborates with him a little bit, but he's, you know, the prime mover. So I was used to the – having this sort of – you know, and that ties in with the feminist thing of that time too. We were – you know, we were used to that kind of treatment. We didn't like it, but, you know, what's to be done? Well, you just get on with it and you do what you do.

So I was trying to get on with figuring out what my artwork was. I was trying to not get too bent out of shape by that because I liked these heady conversations. And Joseph and I got along great. I mean, we fought all the time, but that – we didn't mind fighting all the time. That was just part of the –

MS. RICHARDS: Anyway, I kind of interrupted you from your discussion of Art & Language and learning to speak and being amidst this conversation you were talking about.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, you know, I learned the languages. And Joseph and I began in earnest to study together. And the way that we studied together was that we took – we audited a lot of classes. We didn't pay for them, but we audited a lot of classes at the New School Graduate School. And the New School Graduate School has a very leftist politic anyway, as you know. And so I had initiated the – I was interested in figuring out why the world was so screwed up. I wanted to know why we were at war, and I wanted to know, you know, why there were rich people and poor people and why everything was so difficult in the world at large. And so I was going to take some courses to try to figure that out. And I suspected that, you know, one of the reasons had something to do with the nature of the economy, even capitalism. And so I wanted to take an economics course. So I took an economics course –

MS. RICHARDS: You said you and Joseph both went. You weren't taking the same courses, though, were you?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: We did. I started it by taking an economics course. And it – we didn't have money to pay for courses, so you could – you could just pretend that you were enrolled by going to the New School and just showing up in the classroom and sitting down with your notebook. And the teacher didn't know – you know, there was no kind of card you had to bring in to show that you paid your tuition. So you were allowed to audit. You were allowed to – registered students were allowed to audit other classes, so we just pretended we were registered students. And we really took the courses, and we took them seriously. We didn't just kind of show up every now and then to something.

And so I started by taking an economics course, which I found quite interesting. And I decided that capitalism really was a rather exploitative economic system. And, you know, Art & Language people were also interested in economics, and they were reading a lot of, you know, economic theory and trying to figure out what was going on. And I was trying to figure out what was going on, and so then Joseph and I took some critical anthropology courses, and we took a structuralism course. We had a great teacher for the structuralism course. And I took some linguistics courses. And we were really getting a substantial education.

And so that's how we began to kind of get interested in the whole idea of a critical practice, the idea that you – that you didn't necessarily have to go along with the conventions of a capitalist, bourgeois culture; that there could be such a thing as a critical art practice and that it meant slightly thinking outside the loop and also accounting for your relationship to your subject or your culture. So, for instance, everything of critical anthropology had to do with not just going, "Oh, the Indians do something; aren't they weird?" It had to do with, I come from a culture with a scientific epistemology and I've been led to believe that science is objective; and therefore, it seems to me that the Indians are doing a rain dance, and it's probably not going to – I think that it's probably not going to make it rain, but who knows, you know.

So I don't know, I just – I – that's how we started having a conversation about all this. So I was beginning to figure out what my artwork was. And I was doing these complex maps on the wall, like, with all the kind of contradictions in the, you know, cosmology of American culture, contemporary society. So I'd have, I don't know, like, labels that I'd move around the wall and "capitalism does this and Christianity does that but" –

MS. RICHARDS: Using a found map or actually making your own map?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Making my own map. And so around that time, Joseph, you know, had – as I said, had been working with Art & Language. And he said to me one day, "Let's start a – let's start a magazine together.

Let's make an art theory magazine." And I said, "Well, how do you do that?" And he said, "Well, we'll ask some people to join us, and we'll ask some people to write articles. And it's not going to cost much money. We can print it on newsprint and" – you know, he kind of knew about doing stuff. And I was just beginning to learn about doing stuff. And, you know, there's a lot of stuff that people who go to art schools learn that I didn't learn in art school. I didn't – you know, I had to take a silk screen class in order to learn how to make a silk screen, which I did; and I had to take a photography class with Lisette Model in order to learn how to do photography. So I was always kind of picking up technical things that – you know, that were harder, having not studied those things in – to the extent that people who went to art school did.

And so Joseph knew how to make a – put together a magazine. And we ended up asking the people in Art & Language England and in Art and Language New York to work with us. And we asked a bunch of different young artists that we found interesting to write something. And I wrote an article for the first *Fox*, which I guess came out in 1974 – I'm not sure –

MS. RICHARDS: '75, I think is – '75, '76.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Volume one of *The Fox* was 1975, and volume two was as well. And then the third volume, which was, like, the crash and burn, was 1976.

MS. RICHARDS: Those are thick volumes, not some small magazine pamphlet.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: They had – they had a lot of – we decided we weren't going to have any illustrations because we were, like, writing theory and we didn't want to illustrate theory. And I wrote the first article in the first *Fox*, which was called "A Declaration of Dependence." It's funny – I should reread this at some point – but here's the – *The Fox* was edited by Sarah Charlesworth, Joseph Kosuth, Michael Corris, Andrew Menard, Preston Heller and Mel Ramsden.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, could you repeat those names? Michael –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Sarah Charlesworth, Joseph Kosuth, Michael Corris –

MS. RICHARDS: Corris.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – he's Art & Language New York – Andrew Menard, also Art & Language New York; Preston Heller and Mel Ramsden. And there were articles – I wrote the first article called "A Declaration of Dependence." And there were articles by Michael Baldwin, and Philip Pilkington wrote something called "For Thomas Hobbes." Joseph wrote something called "The Artist As Anthropologist," and so on. And then there was an article by Adrian Piper.

So we didn't have any photographs.

MS. RICHARDS: How did it survive financially? Did you sell subscriptions, or you –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I had – I took on the role of distributor, which was a pain in the ass because what it meant was people would – you know, a bookstore in San Francisco would say, "Can you send us five copies?" And I'd have to package them up and type up and interview. In those days, typing was no easy matter.

MS. RICHARDS: Type up an – you said interview – you mean an invoice?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: An invoice. Typing was no easy matter, as you remember. We were – at this point in time, we'd gotten – evolved to the IBM Selectric, but, you know, you still, bonk, bonk, bonk; and when you made a mistake, you had to put white-out on it.

So what basically transpired during the two years or whatever it was from volume one to volume three of *The Fox* was that as the art world was getting more and more political in the sense of leftist, Joseph and I had been attending for some time at this point meetings called Meetings for – Artists for Social Change – Artists for Cultural Change – or just Social Change –

MS. RICHARDS: Artists' Movement for Cultural Change.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Is that it? And what – how that happened was we were invited to an evening by Nancy Spero and Leon Golub, and Lucy Lippard was there; and a woman named Carol Duncan, who was a kind of art historian – leftist art historian and – I don't know. You know, it was like 12 or so people at Nancy Spero and Leon Golub's loft.

And after a pretty intense conversation on a Sunday evening about, you know, why everything was so screwed up, we decided to meet again on the next Sunday evening. And each week, more people came. So we stopped

meeting at Nancy Spero's house, and we started meeting in Artist Space, which was on Worcester Street, I think - was it Worcester? Yeah. And more and more people started coming every week till it was a whole room full of 300 people, and different arguments and discussions about, you know, what was going on in the world and what was going on in the art world and what an artist's role was transpired. And people would join various projects or committees. Like, I - Joseph and I were on a - on a committee or a group that was going to do a catalog which was critical of a show of John D. Rockefeller that was at the Whitney Museum. And the show was all white guys, no black people and virtually no women.

And so we did a catalog that was a counter catalog to their catalog. And our catalog was called *The Anti-Catalog*. And it had statistics about, you know, the lack of representation of women and the lack of representation of racial minorities and how art was basically the expression of patriarchal - white patriarchal culture. So, you know, we did projects with artists for - what's it called, Cultural Change? Social Change?

MS. RICHARDS: Artists' Movement for Cultural Change [Artists Meeting for Cultural Change].

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Oh, yeah. I think that we thought that "social" was a little too hardcore. And there was a certain kind of dimension of that group that wanted to keep things not too heavy. And there was another dimension of it that was moving radically into some extreme leftist - some of the people wanted to go work with labor unions and be involved in organizing strikes in factories and stuff like that. And I wasn't really interested in that, nor was Joseph. And what was going on in Art and Language was that the people in Art and Language who had been working collaboratively felt as though Joseph was getting to be a big art star, which he was; and Joseph was an egomaniac, big art star, which he was; and they didn't want Joseph to continue to practice on his own. And I was trying to practice on my own. I was trying to develop my artwork. And they began to say, "Listen, the only kind of practice that we find acceptable is collaborative practice with no individual names on artwork."

Well, Joseph was not about to give up his name Joseph Kosuth and his individual career, which was really taking off now; he was represented by Leo Castelli; he was doing good shows; he was getting in lots of museum shows; he was having museum shows in Europe; he had top-notch galleries all over the place. And I was just beginning to get a grasp of what I wanted to do or what my - my orientation as a young artist was. And I had, you know, been supporting myself for some time doing the freelance photography, but I was beginning to kind of come to terms with what I thought was important to do as an artist. And I didn't want to give up that that I had been struggling so hard to do, and I didn't even agree with where this conversation was going, which was basically taking off from the idea of a critical practice and moving straight towards actively organizing to bring about some kind of Marxist revolution or something, you know, some kind of - you know, and we were - I had read - during this period, I had read all of *Das Kapital* and - with a woman's reading group, and I had read Mao, and I had studied what socialism was, and I'd studied what communism was, and I'd studied about the history of what went on in Russia, and I'd studied the history of - Joseph and I even took a course in anarchism. We studied with a guy who had been - participated in the Spanish Civil War. And anarchism was really quite an interesting movement, where it didn't demand anything of anybody but - except free participation and contributing what one would.

But what - the straw that really, you know, broke the whole - this whole situation with *The Fox* - broke apart - was that - straw that broke the camel's back - straw that broke the collective group's working method down was they started - they instituted parliamentary procedure. And they said that you had to - there was a chairperson, and the chairperson would, you know - and somebody would make a movement in order to - you know, so there was this scary movement - meeting. And by then, Karl Beveridge and Carole Conde had joined in, and Kathy Bigelow of all people -

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, Karl Beveridge and - you said someone else before Kathy Bigelow.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, Karl Beveridge and Carole Conde -

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - were a married couple.

MS. RICHARDS: That's it.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And Kathy Bigelow, the same Academy Award winning Kathryn Bigelow, who we knew through friends at 112 Greene Street and that whole - you know, we had a whole bunch of friends from 112 Greene Street crowd. They were the food people. They were Gordon Matta-Clark and Suzy Harris, Jene Highstein, Keith Sonnier. So anyway, the whole thing broke down when they wanted to vote that everybody had to - had to give up using their own name and give up their own practice. And I was just out of there. Joseph was out of there. And that was the end of *The Fox* and of our participation with Art & Language.

[END TRACK 3.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth on November third, 2010, in New York City, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, continuing disc two.

So, Sarah, when we left off – pick up where we left off approximately yesterday.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I'm sort of forgetting exactly where we were leaving off, but I did just want to mention very briefly one little project that was short-lived but interesting while it lasted, which was a collaborative group that Joseph Kosuth and Anthony McCall and I had. And we called ourselves International Local. And the concept was that we would go and work in different locations. We'd travel – Joseph and I traveled a great deal – and work with different local artists on projects that somehow or other connected our interests with their interests and –

MS. RICHARDS: What would your function be with those artists?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, for instance, we did – we did a poster that was actually our most completely realized project. We did a poster for the Venice Biennale. And it was based on a nonsensical – an image of a nonsensical labyrinth that we had appropriated from a Lewis Carroll drawing. And it was – everything was just tangled in knots. And we worked with local artists to sort of make this thing a giant poster that looked as though it were a map of Venice. And it was "where are you now?" And it would have locations. But it was all just crazy nonsense showing the kind of bureaucracy and confusion of the administration of the Biennale. And we – and we had a version of it in Italian and a version in English. And we had collaborated with local artists from Florence, actually, who had a collaborative group. And, you know, we wrote the questions and drew the maps and found the printers and so on.

And then we went to the Venice Biennale and – I can't remember whether the Biennales are in – I think they're in odd years. I think this was 1975 maybe, right after – may have been '76 because *The Fox* was – had just broken up then. And we went around in a boat. We got – [inaudible] – boat and we plastered all over Venice these posters and –

MS. RICHARDS: What was your role versus Anthony's versus Joseph's?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: We were – we played very similar roles. We would just discuss the situation. Somebody threw out an idea, somebody'd say, "Yeah, but it might be better if we did it like that." And it was a lot of kind of collaborative work going on in those days. I also was – I can't remember the year, but, you know, we started *BOMB* magazine with Betsy Sussler a little later.

MS. RICHARDS: I think that was '81, yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: '81? And that was just some people sitting around saying, "Hey, what if we had a magazine?" you know.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you meet Anthony?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: From – I think from Artists Meeting for Cultural Change. I'm not sure. I mean, the art world was so networked in those days. I mean, one thing that we didn't discuss but this was consistent from the time I first started coming downtown was that there were artist bars and – you know, first it was Max's Kansas City, which, you know, was slightly before my time. I was there a few times and, you know, went in – the air was just electric with all this, you know, energy from the art stars that were present in Warhol and Rauschenberg and Carl Andre and – you know.

But right after that, there was a succession of bars that were owned and operated by a guy named Mickey Ruskin. And they were – the most recent one was called The Local, but there was one that was – just The Local was the one over on Waverly, I think, where Julian Schnabel was the chef. There was one called the Lower Manhattan Ocean Club. And he had previously had one called The Ninth Circle over in the West Village. And then there was the one on University Place, which was called Chinese Chance for a while, and that –

MS. RICHARDS: Chinese Chance?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, it had another name too. I can't remember what the other name was. But what transpired at those bars was that all the artists downtown would go almost every night – you know, not all – every night, every night, but every table of 15 or 20 tables was taken up with conversations. And the conversations – you know, you could just be sitting at a table and one night you'd be sitting with Carl Andre; and another night you'd be sitting with Hans Haacke; and, you know, another night, you'd be sitting with Anthony McCall. So the artists networked a great, great deal in those days. And you were constantly meeting new

people and meeting their friends.

So there was – it was a very – you know, the word that people use to describe in intellectual terms what was going on is saying it's part of an art historical discourse, but it really was part of an art historical discourse. It really was based on conversation. People would talk about the last shows they saw, what did they think of so-and-so's show at Castelli or so-and-so's show at John Weber, and "I really think that that work is very retro."

And I remember one night, you know, Julian, who was the cook at The Local, liked to come out and, you know, mingle with the clients when he was supposed to be making the fried zucchini in the back, you know. And he'd come out and – you know, I remember him one night coming out and saying, "I'm going to have a show with Mary Boone! And it's got to be the best show!" Anyway.

So I guess the only point was that there were – you were meeting a lot of people all the time in those days and –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember if by that point you had met any of the women artists of your generation?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I think I started meeting them shortly thereafter. I remember when I started working on the *Modern History* series, which was not exactly my first work – my first show was in 1977, and the *Modern History* work grew out of that show, which was in Belgium at the MTL Gallery. But when I first started working on the *Modern History* series, I had sort of invented appropriation and the whole kind of methodology of *Modern History*, which I'll speak about a little bit later, but I remember seeing the first show of Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger both at Annina Nosei Gallery on Prince Street. And I went, "Wow, these guys have something in common with me." And I – you know, I just recognized it in seeing the work. I hadn't met them yet. And then I did get to know – well, both of them – but I remember going to bars with Richard or – Richard and Peter Nadin or – Barbara didn't go to bars that much – a little bit, but, you know, Barbara and I started to be friendly.

And it was shortly thereafter that I met Laurie Simmons. And I met Cindy Sherman – Laurie then became a very close friend and has been ever since – I mean, we're in contact constantly – and very close friends with Cindy too for many, many years. I met Cindy a little later in the '80s. After I had broken up with Joseph, Cindy very briefly for about a month or something dated him. And she went to stay in Tuscany, where Joseph and I had had a house through the '70s. And we – our – my routine with Joseph was we would spend the winters in New York and then in the late spring we'd go to Tuscany. And we had a house there, and we both had studios there. And we'd stay in Italy for the summer and come back again in the fall.

So when I broke up with Joseph after I had met Amos Poe, who then became my husband subsequently, Cindy very briefly dated Joseph. And one day she called me up – I was aware of her work and – but I didn't know her. And it was – Laurie said afterwards that she had introduced me to Cindy, and I just didn't register. But at any rate, Cindy called me – and I was still living on Broadway in the loft that Joseph and I had moved to in 1975 – and she said, "Oh, I brought some stuff of yours back from Italy; Joseph sent some things you left behind." And I said, "Oh, okay." She said, "May I bring them by this afternoon?" I said, "Sure."

So she came by – and I didn't – I didn't know what she was going to look like because in her work she always looks so different. So she came by and we had tea and started gabbing and talking, and we've been close friends ever since then. Cindy and I have been on and off for however many years – I'd say 1981 maybe – so that's 30 years. We've been in a woman's film group together. It started a long time ago around that time. And then we had a hiatus for a period and then started up again about five years ago. And Rosalie Goldberg and Laurie Simmons – Laurie wasn't there till recently but – Louise Lawyer – who else – Barbara Sukowa, who's Robert Longo's wife – this is a German actress – and Vera Dika, who's the film theorist –

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, what was – what's Barbara's last name? I've met her, but –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: S-U-K-O-W-A, I think is how it's spelled. And I'm never certain of the pronunciation. I'm always feeling like I'm saying it wrong, but – who else is in it – Lynne Tillman – but at any rate, I became friends with the postmodern girls. And Richard was the one guy who was, you know, always sort of feeling like he didn't exactly like being the one guy with all the girls and –

MS. RICHARDS: Prince – Richard Prince?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. And he sort of, I think, attempted to identify more – you know, there was – David Salle was doing work that sort of overlapped with what a lot of this, you know, photo work was about, which had to do with living in – I mean, there's a connection here that needs to be drawn that I sort of – since we had the gap between our conversation yesterday. But I think as I was looking for what I thought was important to engage as a – in my art practice, I think one of the things that happened was that I began personally to think that conceptual art sort of pointed to the idea that art can be about ideas and it's not just about seeing things and framing things and, you know, throwing paint on stuff but that it could really engage serious questions about culture and about language and about how we see and organize the world. And when I talked about doing

all those maps of, you know, cosmologies in my studio in Tuscany, that – those were the kinds of questions that I was wrestling with.

And I came to the point where I – well, I was also studying a lot of semiotics then, reading all – you know, Barthes and – there was Sontag, which wasn't semiotics, but after all the New School –Derrida and Foucault and Umberto Eco and –

MS. RICHARDS: Is this reading by yourself, or is this something you and Joseph were doing together, or were they related to a New School course?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, all – I was an intellectual, and I read stuff. And I did a lot of it on my own. And I – and I was doing it mainly just to kind of figure out what I thought of how the world is organized. And one of the things that I came to believe was that all these theorists who wrote about literature and visual culture always wrote in textural forms. So if Roland Barthes said in Eisenstein's *Potemkin* so and so raises their arm and that means – Ivan the Terrible raises his hand and that means – he would then interpret a visual object in textural form.

And I began to think that what we needed to do was to be able to provide conditions to be able to see how visual language affected how we think about the world and not interpret it in textural form. So Susan Sontag says, "I think this and I think that, and this was this and that was that." And she's just, you know, doing her own interpretation. And even Roland Barthes does that, although he's a little bit more concrete at looking at visual objects.

So during that time, I was traveling a lot and spending a lot of time in Europe, and I began to see how different newspapers framed pictures of the world and – from different perspectives. And I think – my very first show was in Belgium in 1977 [Brussels, Belgium 1976]. And for that show – kind of also even connected up a little bit with the work that I had done with *Heresies* about Northern Ireland, because I had gotten very involved in trying to understand the politics between the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. And then when I was invited to do a show at a very interesting gallery in Belgium based on some collaborative projects that I'd done with Joseph called MTL, I decided to do a piece about seeing things from different perspectives within Belgium, also connecting with the international/local idea, you know, do something that makes –

MS. RICHARDS: Also connected with the –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The international/local idea – do something that makes sense in that context. So I asked a Belgian artist to work with me and help me prepare the show. And it was sort of like an assistant.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember that –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: His name is Jan Van Cruz [ph], and he's –

MS. RICHARDS: Jan Van –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Van Cruz [ph] – Vera Cruz [ph]? You can check that.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: He's now a very renowned artist, but at any rate, he was slightly younger than I was or – I don't know what – had slightly less – how could he have less exposure than me? It was my first show. [They laugh.] But any – at any rate, he assisted me.

And what I did was, I did something called "14 Days", which was 14 different Belgian newspapers, half of them Flemish, half of them French; and I think there was one or two English language papers, maybe the *Herald Tribune* in there. And for every day for 14 days, the next day's paper would be push-pinned to the wall and – you know, so the news kept changing, and you kept seeing it from different perspectives. And that was the main element, and there were two others. There was sort of a textural kind of catalog that went with it with 14 questions.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you remember what provoked you to use a daily newspaper?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I had done a piece before using newspapers that was probably a prototype to the *Modern History* series, which was a piece about Chile and the United States' involvement in Chile.

MS. RICHARDS: Was there something, though, about a daily newspaper and the fact that it would be familiar to everyone almost who came into –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, the connection that I was trying to draw was that I came to feel – and I guess my

essay in *The Fox*, "The Declaration of Dependence," sort of argues this – but I came to feel that I was raised in a kind of linear, progressive, modernist art tradition where one art movement would supersede the next. And so after abstract expressionism, then came pop and minimalism. And after pop and minimalism came conceptualism. And what – and then what?

And so what I was thinking was, well, great; conceptual art sort of points to the idea that art can be about ideas, but it doesn't really engage any ideas in a serious way. And I wanted to really be able to use art as a – as a platform for really trying to understand and look at the world around me and in a very contemporary sense. So in the way that, you know, semiotics would interpret visual signs, I wanted to create a kind of way to use visual language to look at visual language.

So for me, what later became appropriation had nothing whatsoever to do with taking something out of somewhere and stealing it and putting it somewhere else. It had to do with making sort of interventions into existent kinds of ways of organizing and seeing the world in order to see how those visual objects positioned us in relation to events and in relation to history. So the *Modern History* series, which is – sort of takes its stylistic spin off of modern romance or something like that – you know, it's supposed to look like kind of a cheap tabloid but – and the word "modern" is used in a sort of tongue-in-cheek way because nobody thought of ourselves as modern anymore. The modern period went up to the '50s or the early '60s maybe. But by the late '70s, "modern" was an old-fashioned word. So calling it *Modern History* was a kind of, you know, way to put a little bit of a –

MS. RICHARDS: Was that title in your mind at the beginning of your work on the series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yes. And so in that – in the *Modern History* series, what I did was – do you remember which is the first piece that I did?

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. [Audio break.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So the very first work in the *Modern History* series was a piece – a fairly simple, straightforward work that was – used – I used the *International Herald Tribune* as a base for the work in part because I was traveling a great deal in Europe at the time, and that was sort of "my" newspaper. And I had been noticing – I looked at it almost every day, and it – the *Herald Tribune* is a combination of the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. So it was sort of like the classic American point of view. And I noticed – began to notice that every day at the top of the page, there was some president of some country, you know – who was president in 1978 in America? I don't remember. I think it was Jimmy Carter actually who was president in 1978. But that's not important.

What I was noticing was that at the main picture at the top of the page every day was some male authority figure – a king, a president, a general, a pope. And down below were various missiles and rockets and bombs and military hardware. And so I noticed that there was this consistent pattern day after day after day where the primary image was of a – of a – of a male power figure, almost always white; occasionally black, like Idi Amin appears in one of the papers. But there were never any women leaders at the top of the page, and there were – you know, every once in a while you'd see a – I don't know, a ballet dancer or something down in a corner. But, you know, it was actually – what I recognized is that you didn't need to know President Who, King Who, General Who – that there was a pattern even more deeply rooted in our culture, both of a power structure but also that in terms of visual culture there was a way to see that instead of getting all involved with what General So-And-So said, they took away all the text and didn't worry whether it was General So-And-So or so-and-so else; you could see that there was some big guy with a big gun and lots of badges telling us what's happening every day, so – and down below, various unpleasant skirmishes going on in the world.

And so I decided to make a piece based on that recognition. And I made the September 1977 piece and the – November's actually follows the exact same form – where I just deleted all the text, all the captioning, all the information – what battle, what rocket hitting what country, bombed out where – and it – to me, the pieces seemed kind of actually very funny when you saw all these guys huffing and puffing at the top of the page and all these rockets blasting and bombing down below. And so that was – that was, I guess, one of the first of the *Modern History* pieces and one of the most straightforward.

But then I was still very interested – and I began to have little mini shows in New York – I had a show at a gallery called C SPACE and did something with Annina Nosei. But I hadn't had a real proper show. And then I was invited to do some shows in – well, I think I was going to the – going to Italy for the summer with Joseph, and I was hoping that I would be invited to do a show. In Rome, I had some contacts there and I was going to show work to my friends in Rome.

And just then, when I was thinking about what I might like to make to attempt to show in Rome, the prime minister of Italy, Aldo Moro, was kidnapped by the Red Brigades. And I went, "Whoa, there might be something here," because by kidnapping a prime minister; in other words, one of those guys that's always at the top of the

page, the Red Brigades were effectively kidnapping public attention. So that meant that the newspaper itself, the front page of the paper, became almost like a battleground, you know, who controls this territory, this real estate, which is public attention.

So I ran out and went to the – there was an international newsstand called Hotlings at the time that –

MS. RICHARDS: Called the what?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Hotlings.

MS. RICHARDS: Hotlings?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: H-O-T-L-I-N-G-S, I think. And I ran up to the international newsstand, and I grabbed every newspaper that had that photo of Moro, who was held kidnapped by the Red Brigades. I think that – I guess this was a little while into the kidnapping. They said one day – they said on April 20th that they had executed Moro. And all the newspapers had sort of headlines saying, "Is Moro Executed?" "What's Happened to Moro?" You know, and the Red Brigades had announced that they'd thrown his body into a lake in northern Italy. So there were, you know, policemen in helicopters looking in the lake and people looking concerned and all – it all gave way to all kinds of visual imagery – nothing consistent.

And the next day they said, "We're just kidding; Moro was really alive." And they had a picture of Moro holding the newspaper from the day before that said, "Moro Assassinato?" So the Red Brigades released that photo in the form of an 8-by-10 glossy to two Rome newspapers, *Il Messaggero* and *La Repubblica*, which were, like, the most, you know – I don't know – they were – they were sort of main, important newspapers. And from there, the photos entered the wire services and went all over the world. So the day that I saw that photo in the New York Times, I rushed up to Hotlings and bought up every newspaper in Hotlings that had that photo on the front page. And then I did the same thing the next day; I went up there, and the papers from further away were coming in. And then I noticed that depending on the relative importance of an event in Italy involving the kidnapping of the prime minister, that photo was bigger or smaller or at the bottom of the page or at the top of the page. So in all the Italian papers, it's blasted out there huge. And then in every separate country, their local president or king or major political figure appears at the top of the page, and the Moro figure appears in a less – picture appears in a less important position on the page.

So one of the things that I had learned – and this work was really revealing even absolutely physically clearly that formal choices carry meaning; they are significant choices; they position us in different ways to information. So larger means something bigger, means something different than smaller. Top of the page means something different than the bottom of the page.

So anyway, I ended up making that piece, which ended up with 45 different front pages of 45 different international newspapers. And for each of the newspaper pieces – pieces in the *Modern History* series, I had a different problem, different question. And each one set up a different structure in order to explore that question. So that was the main one of the Moro pieces. And I had – I spent three months working on it. I think it started in April and I finished it, you know, at the beginning of the summer. And –

MS. RICHARDS: This is the piece, *April 21, 1978*?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Right. And then I also did a piece, *April 20, 1978*, which is when they said, you know, they'd assassinated him and thrown his body in the lake. And the two pieces are quite funny together. Not that anybody will ever see them together, because one is the same photo cropped up differently and next to different – juxtaposed with other images in a way that speaks of its local import. But the *April 20* piece is everywhere in the world that you see front-page pictures of people trying to figure out where Moro is and they – you know, people looking puzzled and maps of northern Italy and arrows and helicopters.

And then the third piece I did in the Moro trilogy was one called *Osservatore Romano*, which is – all the newspaper pieces are either synchronic in the sense of that piece – one day, one moment in time, April 21st, across the board – or diachronic, which means through time in a kind of linear way. So the *Osservatore Romano* piece starts from the time Moro was kidnapped to the time his body was found two months later or something. And it only looks at it from the point of view of the Vatican newspaper. And that piece is very funny too because it starts with the head shot of Moro – you know, kind of formal headshot; must have said below, you know, "Prime Minister Kidnapped" – and day after day after day, it has a picture of the pope waving here, waving there, waving here – performing in various ways at different, I don't know, gatherings. And down below, there would be people in crowds coming to hear the pope. And every once in a while, there would be a new saint or something like that. But it was always the pope and the people and the pope and the people.

And the funny thing was that that newspaper was supposed to be an international news newspaper, so it could say "bombing here," or "earthquake there," but the pictures always said the pope, the pope, the pope, the

church, the pope and the people. And then the day that Moro's body was found, the exact same headshot of Moro, the exact same place on the page as the day he had been kidnapped. So the church is transcendent; Moro comes and goes but – so there ended up being about 12 of those newspaper pieces all together, and they weren't all – I mean, they weren't political in nature. They were – in the sense of being on one side or against – for or against something. I was just trying to understand how visual images sort of orient us in relation to contemporary world events and to history.

MS. RICHARDS: How did you decide – what prompted you to decide that the series would end at a certain point?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I wanted to talk about the eclipse.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: However, there's a piece called the *Arc of Total Eclipse, February 26, 1979*. And that's the last piece in the series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No – there's a piece –

MS. RICHARDS: Or toward the end of the series.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, there's a piece in June 1979, which is called *Movie-Television-News-History*, which has to do with the assassination of a – of an ABC newsman on camera as he's about to give the 6:00 news.

MS. RICHARDS: What year? That was 1978?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That's June – that piece is June 21st, 1979, and it's called *Movie-Television-News-History*. And –

MS. RICHARDS: And that's the last piece?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That was the last piece, but the *Eclipse* piece was – I just wanted to speak about it because I wanted to point to the fact that these are questions about photography and about representation and not really taking any specific point of view on events. And the *Eclipse* piece, which is in the collection of the Whitney Museum and Yale Art Museum and the Berkeley Art Museum, where I have a show opening next week of the *Eclipse*. The *Eclipse* piece follows an eclipse of the sun along its – the arc of total eclipse, which means the exact line where, if you observed the eclipse from the earth, the sun is completely covered by the moon. So in this case, in this eclipse, it hit land in the Northwest Pacific Coast of America and then went across the Northwest Pacific Coast and up towards Canada and then up towards Greenland.

So I was interested in the fact that there wasn't – there wasn't – it wasn't one particular event represented from a number of points of view; it wasn't one photograph; it wasn't even one moment in time. And yet, every newspaper in every town along the arc of total eclipse had a picture of this eclipse. So I – it began to kind of cause me to question what is an image and what is an event, you know. There's no specific moment here, and there's no consistent image.

I wrote to each town along the arc of total eclipse, and I got all the local newspapers and all the local newspapers' points of view on that. So it goes from, you know, Oregon; and then up towards Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; and Bismarck, North Dakota. And so – I don't know, that piece is a little bit more – well, they're all philosophical in a way, but – here's a – here's a little study that – a piece that I did that's called *The Wall of Tears*. And it was just Italian newspapers, and I just happened to notice them. The pope went to Jerusalem –

MS. RICHARDS: What year is that – what year is that from?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's not a real piece; it's just a study.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The pope went to Jerusalem, and every day – I mean, all the Italian newspapers show the pope praying at the bottom of the page. So he kneels at the bottom of the page. And this piece called *The Guerillas* – [inaudible]– *Guerilla* that – sort of threatening the official U.S. point of view in Nicaragua so that guerillas always at sort of eye level coming on to you.

So where a photograph is placed on a page even positions you in relation to events.

So I did a catalog – I ended up having a show in Rome of the Moro piece. And then I did a show in Paris, and

then I sold the first work I think I sold in that series to the Stedelijk Museum in Eindhoven. So I – you know, it was – something was beginning to happen.

MS. RICHARDS: When you did that piece, did you do all the photographic processing in Europe then? It all was done?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, no, no, I did it all here. I – the process that I used – in the old days before we worked digitally, designers would use stat houses in order to, you know, blow up type or enlarge or reduce the size of a photograph in order to make a paste-up for printing purposes. So there was a stat house on Union Square that I used, and what I did was I'd take the original newspaper, say the *Herald Tribune*, and I would mask out all the text by just covering it with white paper and tape and so on. And the Photostats, which were called direct positives, means that it was high-contrast information; it didn't reproduce grey tones. But because the newspaper images were screened, you know, it picks up the Ben-Day dot or the lack of Ben-Day dot. So they were all very clean and bold, and I – they were all made by making Photostats. Photostats were a cheap, you know, commercial process; they weren't fine-art prints by any stretch of the imagination. So in order to make them as archival as possible, I'd bring home these chemically stinky prints from the stat house, and I washed them in – first I had a darkroom when Joseph and I were on Broadway, but then I – later on when I moved to Great Jones Street, I would wash them in the bathtub and, you know, process them just like they were, you know, high, serious fine-art photographs and air dry them and so on.

But now for the last few years, I would say maybe 10 years, if I'm reproducing one of those pieces from a long time ago, I print it digitally, and I work with a – you know, the high-end lab that I work with called Lamont. But they look exactly like the original ones before. They're just a lot more archival and a lot easier to control.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So for instance, last year, I sold that – the last AP of that Moro piece to the Metropolitan Museum –

MS. RICHARDS: You had it – it was an addition of three with a few APs?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Two APs. That – each series is different, but the *Modern History* series was three plus two APs. So last year I sold for the first time the second AP of something, which was the second AP of that Moro piece I sold to the Met. And it was a good deal of discussion with the Met about whether I would sell them and – a fresh copy that I made specifically for them or whether I would give them my original, you know, Photostat copy, which was all bent and dirty and chemical-stained – not really badly but – and we – you know, we looked at the two together, and the new prints just looked so much cleaner and nicer. And, you know, they had a whole aesthetic about vintage prints and stuff. But I had a whole aesthetic about I want my work to look the way I want it to look not – you know, I wouldn't release a dirty, bent print with push-pin marks in the corner.

So we ended up compromising; they'll get it – they'll get the second copy someday just for their archives but –

MS. RICHARDS: They'll get the original AP.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Eventually. It's a promised gift, but now –

MS. RICHARDS: Makes sense.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – I made them a fresh copy that looks gorgeous. So hopefully that'll show some –

MS. RICHARDS: It's like an exhibition copy then, what you made.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, that's the edition – the official edition print. I don't have exhibition copies.

MS. RICHARDS: So what number would you put on that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That was AP number two.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The Walker owns one and – I can't remember – [inaudible]. MOCA.

MS. RICHARDS: So after you did the last piece, the *Movie-Television-News-History*, you decided to end the series, did you have a new project in mind at that moment, or did you feel that just – it had just run its course?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I guess I – you know what, the next series that I did – I felt like I'd sort of covered the ground and asked the questions that I wanted to ask. And the reason – that's – so that's why I sort of ended

the *Modern History* series. You know, it was two years' worth of work, and it was a substantial amount of work for two years' worth of work.

MS. RICHARDS: In the midst of that, you took a major trip to China.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Did I? [Laughs].

MS. RICHARDS: I don't know -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: You're right, 1978.

MS. RICHARDS: - if it's not important, we don't have to talk about it.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I think I - you know, I wouldn't mind speaking about China, but I'd rather continue with the logic of the work right now -

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - because the next series that I did, I think, is a very important, seminal work, if I do say so myself. [Laughs.] You know, this is - I thought yesterday after you left what a strange experience it is to be given the space to just talk about one's life and one's work and have someone listen to it - it's like - it's very - a narcissist's complete, you know, fantasy.

But at any rate, the next series of works that I did was the series called *Stills*. And they were also Photostats or kind of - I think they were called mural prints. They were also made at this stat house, and they were cheap blowups but cheap blowups that now are in - all in major museum collections. But - [Laughs] [inaudible] we'd just go beg - "Could you just wash it a little bit more, you know?" And -

MS. RICHARDS: And these were, as far as I could tell, unique. You didn't edition these.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I didn't. I think the reason they were unique was because they - the images and stills were of people in midair. And they were people either trying to save their lives jumping from a burning building or people who were trying to commit suicide. And because each person had only one life, it seemed to me - and only one jump - that it was appropriate to make only one print out of it. And one of the things that I was looking at in that series - well, a number of things, but one of the things I was looking at in that series was after looking at newspaper imageries so closely for two years, I wanted to get closer to the image and say, well, what's the impact, the emotional effect of an image on us? How do images affect us psychologically, emotionally, politically?

And so I took an image that is rather shocking but that we normally experience in very small scale; could be, you know, two inches by three inches or even smaller; and a story saying "A fire in such and such hotel and people jumped to their death or their life" or - you know, whatever. And I enlarged it to, like, 80 inches high so as to say, "Well, wait a minute; what is our relationship with this person or this event via an image?" And I sort of crudely tore the images out of the paper in order to show where they came from and let the kind of tear marks - when the tear marks enlarge, they become giant tear marks, and you say, "Oh, this is something that once was small and now is big."

I skipped a series in between [Laughs.] - no, no, no, that's right - I did that right. There was a very minor thing in between. I think we should stick with the *Stills*. So -

MS. RICHARDS: I read somewhere that you were inspired by Thornton Wilder's novel *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*-

MS. CHARLESWORTH: *Of San Luis Rey*.

MS. RICHARDS: Is that correct? What would that mean, "inspired by"?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't know whether - that's not the word that I would have chosen for it, but it had something to do with the idea behind the work. Thornton Wilder's book, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, is about a fictional priest who - I don't know, he - it's somewhere in Chile or something like that. And he - one day - there's a very ancient rope bridge that spans a ravine. And one day the priest was standing there and saw the rope bridge that had been there, you know, hundreds of years collapsed, and seven people were thrown to their death. So the priest says, "I wonder if God's will is behind this. I wonder if there's some reason why these seven people just happened to be crossing the bridge at that moment when it collapsed."

So he goes into a project to research the lives of each one of those people. And he goes and interviews the people - their families, their friends or so on. And it sort of suggests that there was some kind of closure in their

- in each of their lives that made it sort of make sense that they would die at that moment. He doesn't say it, but it sort of suggests that might be so; a mother would be reunited with her daughter that she'd been separated from many years.

And so anyway, I mean, they leave - he leaves it as an open question. So I - there were seven of the stills in my first show based on the number seven that came from the Thornton Wilder -

MS. RICHARDS: Is that why there were seven in that series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, I mean, I actually made more images than that, but I realized seven of them; I blew them up and framed them. And I think that that was just a kind of - I don't know what - a little contemplation behind it. But I was much more interested in exploring the kind of narrative capacity of photography that - the fact that you can't tell looking at these people who are in midair, whether they're trying to save themselves or whether they're trying to kill themselves. And you can't tell because there is no textural caption included in the artwork. You don't know what happened; did they live or did they die?

MS. RICHARDS: And you made the conscious decision not to provide that information to the viewer.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, that's half the point. The point is when you look at it, you don't know whether that jump resulted in a - in somebody living and being caught in a fireman's net or whether it resulted in somebody dying. And you don't know whether they were intending to live or intending to die. Some people jumping were trying to die. Some people jumping were trying to save themselves. And that moment between certain life and death is the moment that we all live every moment of our lives, you know. It's, like, we don't know. And eventually we all die.

And so I - you know, there were a lot of overlapping concerns in that series but - the other curious thing about it was - I showed that work for the first time in a little sort of short-lived temporary gallery that Tony Shafrazi had on Lexington Avenue. And he had sort of had an apartment there on Lexington and 28th or something. And he had sort of put all of his furniture in storage, and I don't know where he was sleeping, and his - you know, just turned his apartment into an art gallery. And so the show was kind of crowded in there; it wasn't a very large apartment, but eventually all those seven pieces found their way into important collections. And they're shown regularly and have been ever since then. And there's one showing right now in the PS1 show about 9/11.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Yes.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And so one - you know, one of the things that that work brought home - I mean, it was appropriated work before there was the word "appropriated." And it was interesting, the kind of ambivalence in people's response both to the images and to the work itself. If you walk into the gallery, you go - [gasp] - or you go, "Wow, they're so graceful." You know, so the difference between them being sort of scary and beautiful was - you know, it was an unstable call. And the same goes for the artwork itself, because on one level it's kind of crude; it's black and white and sort of shocking looking, but it also has a kind of power and a philosophical depth to it that has made it resonant for years.

[END TRACK 4.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth at her loft in New York City on November third, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three.

We just finished, I believe, talking about the *Stills* series, unless you had something else you wanted to say about it.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, I'm finished.

MS. RICHARDS: So, obviously that ended neatly, the seven pieces. Do you want to talk about BOMB, which comes chronologically next, approximately, 1981, *BOMB* magazine; or continue on and talk about *Tabula Rasa*, the next series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I'd like to talk about *Tabula Rasa*.

MS. RICHARDS: Good, okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The reason being that I think that *Tabula Rasa* came directly out of my experience of the response to the *Stills*. By the time I did the *Stills*, I was feeling that I was on the edges of really finding a new way of working, and I didn't really know anybody else who was working on that - in that vein. Sometime around then, I began seeing the work of Barbara Kruger and Richard Prince, as I mentioned. And I think shortly thereafter, Metro Pictures opened, and you know, I began - I knew Louise Lawler from - she worked at Leo Castelli Gallery and - but I - you know, I was still at this point out there on my own.

And one of the things that happened in response to the *Stills* series was that I got - I got some feedback. I mean, Tony Shafrazi and I - you know, we liked each other, but we also argued a lot and we saw things quite differently. And I remember one of the criticisms that he was quick to relay back to me was that somebody had said that they thought that the work - that I should do something original, meaning not appropriated. And it really, really made me angry because I felt - not angry in the sense of mad but angry - you know, artistically angry -

MS. RICHARDS: Offended.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - because I felt that my work was so - taking such risks and was so out there on a limb really in unknown territory, and I was suffering a great deal of discomfort being out there in unknown territory. I - you know, I would have been happy to pick up the paintbrush or frame things with my camera if only that was, you know, my - whatever it's called - [inaudible] - but it wasn't. You know, I had to go where I didn't understand things and where I could really create ways of seeing and understanding things.

So I thought, "I need to make something that is so absolutely clearly original and so new and nobody could possibly mistake it with anything that they'd seen before but at the same time would be so rooted in history and so rooted in something that had already existed before." Because in my opinion, art is continually absorbing art of the past and reconfiguring it and remaking it and reinventing it. So I had skipped over telling you before, and I just want to touch on it because it has some bearing, that the very first artwork that I did, even before *Modern History*, way back in mid-, early-'70s was a silkscreen blowup of the first human being to be photographed.

And I had been friends with Lisette Model after I studied that course with her, and she thought I was a promising young photographer, and I thought I'm not really interested in being a promising young photographer. But at any rate, we hit it off really well, and we became friends. And she came many times for dinner and we'd meet for tea. And she just was a very lively spirit, and she told me a great deal about her relationship with Diane Arbus and so on.

But at any rate, you know, she'd look at my photographs regularly and she'd say, "This is coming along nicely" and so on. And then I took a silkscreen course, and I made a silkscreen of an enlargement of a tiny detail in a daguerreotype of the first human being to be photographed. He was somebody who had stopped on the street, you know, long enough that the super-long exposure times recorded the human figure, because usually the boulevards of Paris or wherever were vacant because the exposure times were so long.

So I took this, and I showed it to Lisette Model, and she said, "This is you. This is really you." And I knew she was right. I knew it was really me. It wasn't really me to be going around snapshotting things and framing them with my camera. I was good at it, but I didn't think it was important. And I was supporting myself doing it, but so what? You know, that was just a temporary way of supporting myself.

So when I did the *Tabula Rasa* piece, I wanted to draw some - I was very interested in the early history of photography. I was always interested in everything about the invention of photography and the idea of photography as a medium coming into being and then becoming eventually ubiquitous. And in my work, I've always understood photography to be a dominant language in our culture. It's how we see and order the world in many, many ways and outer space and under the sea and relation to political events and how we know history of the last 200 years.

So anyway, I had spent a lot of time reading and thinking about the invention of photography, and photography was invented simultaneously by at least three different people; the primary ones being Fox Talbot and Niepce and Daguerre. But of those three, Niepce was my favorite. And he was tinkering around in a little farmhouse in the Loire Valley in France and figured out that, you know, light has some effect on paper and stains and so on and began experimenting around with different solutions to try to see if he could make an image and eventually created an image of - well, the one - the photograph of Niepce's that's thought to be the first photograph is of a courtyard behind his house near where he worked in the studio. And yet there's another photograph that they're not quite sure about the dating, which was of a table set for one, you know, a tea table or a lunch table or something like that. And there's a glass and a plate and a knife and a fork and some fuzzy stuff behind it that could have been flowers, or it could be mildew on the paper that it was made on.

So I thought I would take this image and have this image stand for the invention of photography. And I wanted to make it about invention, about something new coming into being, photography or my work.

So I decided to make it white, and I decided to make it white on white silkscreen in order to make it seem very new and very fresh and even though it was an image that was 170 years old or whatever it was. And probably around 1826 or so the image was originally made - so it'd be 150 years old, let's say. And so I ended up making an addition of four large-scale silkscreen prints wherein I enlarged this little image to slightly larger than real life; I wanted to sort of make it monumental.

But I also was interested in it because it begged the question of what an image is. The original image had been on a glass plate when it was first recorded by Niepce. Then the glass plate was thought to have been lost to history. It was lent to some professor in the 1850s, who was studying it, and he had some fit of brainstorm and smashed everything in his laboratory and the glass plate was destroyed. So historians thought that the image was gone. But then they discovered a paper copy of it that had been printed from the glass plate, but the paper copy was distressed and had been mildewed, and the fuzz of the mildew had integrated with the image. And that's the image that appears in history books.

And so I decided to take that image as it appears in history books and make a white-on-white silkscreen of it. And the question at the root – well, there were several questions at the root of that series, but one was, well, what is an image exactly? You know, what does my – what relationship does my silkscreen bear to 4:00 in the afternoon in the Loire Valley in France around 1826? What kind of information has been relayed back and forth? What is, you know, a photographic analog?

And so I brought the thing up to life scale, and there's a slight detail difference in each of the four – which I won't go into at the moment – but that series was supposed to be about invention and about the birth of a way of seeing. And I also made it as a kind of philosophical question about what's the difference between painting and photography, because in addition to the image from the – from the Niepce photo, there's also a subliminal image that's buried within this image, which is in the upper left-hand corner. And it's a lily taken from a Rogier van der Weyden *Annunciation* painting, which is printed in a – with a pure titanium dioxide paint underneath so that it makes that image retain its luminescence when you walk around the room. And the Niepce photo appears and disappears in changing light and changing perspective; the lily still stands out. And the lily was meant to symbolize birth, as in an *Annunciation* painting, but it also was talking about how an image such as a lily can have symbolic meaning in a painting; whereas in a photograph, a lily means that's what was fresh at the florist that day, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: In connection with this dialogue between painting and photography, that's why you actually printed it on canvas?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's not on canvas; it's on paper. No, and the reason I –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, I thought I – sorry, I thought that I read that it was on canvas.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, the reason it's printed – this is – this is it. That's not canvas, that's paper – the reason it's printed that way is just because I wanted to make it white-on-white, and I wanted to be able to make a photographic work that could be made all white and could be made to appear and disappear and – I wanted to make it quite marvelous, which in a sense it is, but the difficulty with this series is because it's so difficult to reproduce, it's not – people don't know about it unless they happen to know about it. I mean, it was in my retrospective.

And I had a show for about five days – Larry Gagosian had a loft on West Broadway that – some friend of mine persuaded him to let me use the loft and – you know, I had made the show in the middle of the winter because I wanted the white to be with the white of the snow and so on. And then what happened was people in the building complained about an art show being in their building, and they told me I had to get out. So five days into the show, I had to yank all the work out of there, and I brought it back to my loft on Broadway and –

MS. RICHARDS: And that was – they're huge; six-by-eight feet. That was somewhat of a challenge to –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I managed to get Betsy Baker over there, and Art in America chose it as a pick for one of the best shows of the year. So I – you know, I was pleased with it. And I – you know, I sold some work, which I intended also to do. I wanted to, you know, begin to try to support myself from the artwork, not just from doing my freelance photography.

At the same time, the exact same period that I was making the *Tabula Rasa* piece, I was making another series that was very different; very, very different, which was the *In-Photography*.

MS. RICHARDS: Right. Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't want to talk about that –

MS. RICHARDS: Is that unusual to be working on two at the same time?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I – they weren't exact – it was the same year, but it wasn't exactly the same time. But this was sort of an aside, and, you know, I always – I always felt like art should be able to come out of and address different aspects of our experience as human beings, that – you know, it didn't have to be only political or only spiritual or only, you know, bold or only subtle, that these are all dimensions of human experience. So

while this work is, say, more spiritual in nature -

MS. RICHARDS: The *Tabula Rasa* you're talking about?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: At the same time, I was doing, you know - not exactly the same time, because this was obsessive, maniacal craziness [Laughs] I fell down the rabbit hole when I was working on this - [inaudible]. I did the series called *In-Photography* in the same year or began the series. I mean, it went on longer than that, but - pieces like *The Samurai*, where I, like, had a swordfight with a photo of Toshiro Mifune. Those pieces were kind of continuing the logic that - the trajectory in the *Modern History* series of sort of looking at the interplay between photographs and their formal relations and how it affected how we understood things - in the *Stills* series, looking at a single photograph close up. And in the *In-Photography*, I literally am taking the photographs apart and really trying to understand the dynamics between even - how can I say it - the shapes of things in photographs.

And so I was cutting up and tearing up all sorts of images, and you'd cut up a modern Japanese house, and you'd see that it came - fell under very Japanese lines. And you'd cut up a Victorian house, and - you know, the chair and the fuzzy sofa, and suddenly it was like a Victorian frame of mind. So I was interested at that point in the idea that the shapes of things carries meaning. It's not just the size of things and the ups and downs of things but literally the shape of things. And that goes on in my work. You know, that's the basis of the next series, which is the *Objects of Desire*.

In the *Objects of Desire* series, which is the first series that I did in color, I'm really looking at - well, say in the *Objects of Desire I*, which is an easy one to talk about, the shapes of role models - I cut clothing out of magazines, of fashion magazines and brides magazines and martial arts magazines and pornographic magazines and saying, "Hey, look, if you take a bridal gown or a black leather motorcycle jacket, before any guy or tough girl comes along and wants to be tough and wear the black leather motorcycle jacket or any young woman wants to have her special virginal moment, you know, that role, that social role - bride or sexy girl with the red sheath or tough guy with the black motorcycle jacket or the - you know -

MS. RICHARDS: Muscle shirt.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - male torso with the, you know, bodybuilding muscle shirt - there's a classic role that goes back to Greek sculpture, you know, at least."

So in the *Objects of Desire*, which was projected as an extended series - it was going to go on probably for four or five years -

MS. RICHARDS: So at the beginning of conceiving this project, you had the idea of how long it would go on?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I had - what happened was I had been interested in the sense that I was interested in how formal qualities affect meaning. I was beginning to be interested in color. So what I did was I began collecting - I had colored boxes in my studio, and one box was red and one box was black and one was white. And I just began tearing all the white things out of different magazines and putting them over there and tearing all the red things out of magazines and putting them over there and tearing black things and putting them over there. And what I discovered was of course blue things, yellow things.

So that's why it was about five years because I was going to look at the red things; what I saw was that they had a lot to do with sexuality and passion and things like that. The blue things had much more to do with much more metaphysical things and mental things and ethereal things. And the white, at least in American culture, tended to suggest purity or virginity or innocence. And the black were, you know, slightly more tough or evil or, you know, slick. So -

MS. RICHARDS: So you defined -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I didn't worry about those words. I just wanted to see, you know, what things - what roles came in what colors. And, you know, the green things that I found frequently had to do with ideas about nature, and the red things frequently had to do with things - about sexuality.

And so I decided that I would do a subseries about gender and sexuality first. And that was the *Objects of Desire I*. So what I did was I took all the things that - you know, I decided, "OK, my pallet's only going to be red and black." And then I ended up throwing one with a white background in, but I was always sort of kind of setting a rule and then just at the last minute breaking it. But - so one of the things I was looking at in that series was I felt that before any individual adopts an idea of self or identity that they're in negotiation with a visual culture around them and a culture at large, but - that says, "Hey, you know, it'd be really nice if you could someday marry your true love and be a bride." And another part would say, "Hey, it would be really nice if you could, like, be sexy in that slinky sheath and wear some high heels."

So I began cutting clothing out of magazines and eliminating the head and facial features because I didn't want it to be a big picture of a person, but I wanted it to be a picture of a - of a role that exists in the culture and that -

MS. RICHARDS: Were -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Then I wanted it to be so that the viewer of my artwork could kind of measure their own sense of themselves or their own sense of whether they liked that role or not.

MS. RICHARDS: Were you also playing that too, I mean, in terms of imagining yourself in those roles?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, but, let's - let me just finish this thought because it's very - it's pretty tricky. That's why I made them with a glossy laminate on them. And I put a glossy laminate on them because I was sort of mimicking that cheesy seductiveness of a fashion magazine or a porno magazine - I mean, they're different cheesy seductiveness - but the kind of, "Come on, come in here, how - what do you think of this" kind of - and so some of the images actually even came from strange porno magazines. There's a leather harness in the *Objects of Desire 1*.

And so I wanted the viewer to be able to kind of go, "Well, that looks pretty good to me," or, "Yuck!" you know. And so you could sort of see how these images affect you and how you think about these things. So yes, in answer to your question that I've made you hold off on, I would take the red scarf and say, "Well, the white t-shirt can stand for the classic male torso and the guy who thinks a lot of himself" - and I actually think he looks pretty good too - "but the red scarf, that's the female fashion victim; that's the girl who has to buy everything in order to be cool and sexy and" - as a matter of fact, I kind of like that scarf. [Laughs.] So in my own ambivalence, I realized just, like, yes, I'm also a part of - I'm subject to that very culture that I'm trying to kind of take a critical perspective on. I can't step outside it, you know. I still like a guy with a nice build and a - you know, I don't wear high heels; I've decided forget it, that's not for me. But I don't - you know, I can't get around as an artist and a photographer, but I still like to be a sexy girl, and I don't mind having that nice red cashmere scarf. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So in the - I made the *Objects of Desire* - I decided to - it was designed as a sort of, almost like a deck of cards. I gave it a consistent format, which was 40 inches high by 30 inches wide. And the reason I did that is because I wanted people to be able to shuffle them like a deck of cards, like -

MS. RICHARDS: Were there any - meant to be diptychs?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. The first diptych appears in the first *Objects of Desire*. And at that point, I had - I had some pretty clear rules I'd set up for myself. I mean, I'm - I did - I've been that way in my work. And - well, one of the things that I had decided was that I was going to make 30-by-40s because the vertical format referred to the human figure, and I was looking at human figures; and that if I wanted to make a two-panel piece, could make a two-panel piece that would be two 30-40s. But the two-panel pieces together as a diptych meant that the meanings of the two images were meant to reflect on each other and did reflect on each other.

There's another format that I used, which is called a duo, where there are two things that are not interdependent that - one's one thing and one's another. But you can look at them together. So, for instance, there's a diptych in - I'll use a really obvious example - in *Objects of Desire 3 1/2* or *4 1/2* - I can't remember which - which is called the *Golddiggers*. And on one side of the panel, it shows a -

MS. RICHARDS: 4.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: 4 - a gold Fortuny evening gown, a female figure in a very expensive gold designer gown. And the other half of the diptych, it has a shot of the back and legs of a naked black man who is bent over. And in fact, that figure is stoking the furnaces in a gold smelting factory. So I'm saying in a sense that these are two parts of the same material hole; you can't separate the labor from the fetish object, the gold evening gown. So in that work, for instance, that's a diptych; the two pieces go together. Or in *The Buddha of Immeasurable Light*, where the outward look of a Buddha - it's a picture of a large turquoise Japanese Buddha, whose name is in Japanese, the Buddha of Immeasurable Light - the outward look of Buddha is in a diptych with an image of a kind of oval opening into the sky, which is taken from an architecture magazine, but it's the look of Buddha and the Buddha mind, so the outside and the inside of a Buddha mind.

So in a diptych, the two panels are interlocking meanings. In a duo, the meanings are meant to reflect off of each other but not be codependent. So, for instance, there is a work called *Bowl and Column* from 1986 - [inaudible] - with *Objects*. During that - during that period, there was a lot of talk in feminist circles about women not wanting to be associated with the earth and with vessels and with some essential idea of the

feminine. And literally, there were articles written saying women shouldn't be considered vessels, you know. And so - who cares, you know? In what sense are we vessels, what sense are we not vessels? I don't know, but every skyscraper was a phallic symbol - a skyscraper, a gun, a pencil, a cigar.

And so in this piece, I'm just - I'm just saying, here's a bowl; here's a column. Now, you can associate what you will with a bowl or with a column - [Laughs] - but they just - there they are. They're two shapes and - you know.

And so in that piece, it's just two panels. And they exist as a duo, but they're not a diptych. The bowl also exists as an individual piece, but the column doesn't. And one of the reasons why that is - or actually the reason why that is, is because the bowl all by itself - the relationship of the gold bowl to the pure royal blue colored field is an interesting relationship. It makes you think, what's image here and what's - what is this negative space? There's much more territory that's just blue, and the image is a very small - the bowl is a very small part of that overall thing that the piece is.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So I thought that a relationship between the positive and negative space or the image and the abstract colored field is an interesting relationship; whereas the column just kind of sits there and occupies the space [Laughs]. I was less interested in it.

There are also some triptychs in the *Objects of Desire*. The triptych form began in the *Objects of Desire 2*, which dealt with nature. And there's an image of a - of a - of a girl and some tribe somewhere in - could be Hawaii or Polynesia or something - playing a flute. And the wing panels in this triptych, which are half of 30-40s - so they're 30-15 - are depicting these huge cobra snakes arcing up. And so I was interested in, amongst other things in this work, the juxtaposition of images creates a reading, almost like a sentence. So the girl playing the flute in the middle and the snakes arcing up but not threatening her makes that whole combination of panels read as, "Girl playing the flute charms the snakes, and they are in abeyance," just as in the *Lotus Bowl* piece, for instance, that you mentioned from the *Objects of Desire 3*, the - there's a gold bowl at the bottom and a lotus that's collaged onto the paper a few inches above the bowl. And when you view the overall thing - green field, bowl and lotus - you read it as, "lotus levitating out of the bowl means some kind of transcendence or spiritual state," you know. You don't - that's the way visual language works; you see one thing next to another, and they become part of another, larger whole.

So there's a lot of that going on in the *Objects of Desire*, where there's a juxtaposition of one thing against another within an image or one image juxtaposed with another makes for a larger consideration such as the very first diptych in the *Objects of Desire*, the one called the *Figures* diptych, where there's a slinky, femme-fatale kind of evening gown juxtaposed with a bondage figure from some heavy-duty porno magazine in the same kind of silky binding that's covering over the whole figure. The piece is sort of saying, "Well, what do these two things have in common?" It's not saying femininity is - or feminine sexuality is bondage, but it's making you stop and think about, well, could that be the case; or if so, in what sense; or, you know, what do these images have in common?

A lot of the play between parts of images and diptychs has to do with visual similarity with something. You look at something else, and then you think about what the things have to do with each other.

MS. RICHARDS: As you were - as you were conceiving of all these pieces one series at a time - looking at one series at a time, did you map them out in some way; I mean, all the pieces in one, all the pieces in two; I mean, using something as a -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, what happened was -

MS. RICHARDS: - quote, unquote, "sketchbook" or putting collage pieces -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, no. No, no, I was going to have one series that was - you know, the series that was red and black, which was about gender and sexuality. And then *Objects of 2* was about - *Objects of Desire 2* was about kind of our mythologies of nature, this sort of National Geographic idea of these primitive societies that supposedly exist in, you know, Africa or Pacific islands or something. And it's an idea or an image that we maintain in this culture. Meanwhile we've, you know, basically colonized, imperialized and destroyed most of these so-called primitive cultures. So the idea of these - you know, Indians running around with feathers and people running around with paint on their faces and so on - it's sort of suspect concept, given what actually goes on in terms of our colonization of local tribal cultures in underdeveloped regions in the world.

So that was *Objects of Desire 2*. And then by *Objects of Desire 3*, which was - I don't - I forget what it was going to be, but maybe material desire or something like that - that was the gold and yellow. And so there was going to be red and black and green and black and gold and yellow and then blue, which was going to be sort of metaphysical desire. And what ended up happening was by the time I got to *Objects of Desire 3*, I was sort of

sick of my own rules, and I decided that *Objects of Desire 3* would be sort of about gods or master icons. So there's a lot of kind of chief gods in *Objects of Desire 3*, and they all have their various corresponding colors.

And by the time I got to *Objects of Desire 4*, I was just completely sick of – I stuck with my color schemata, but I began to mix them together in a much more free-flowing way. And the pieces became more and more poetic and philosophical and less kind of analytical –

MS. RICHARDS: And why 4.5? Why not just 5? Or why not –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Because there were pieces that came in between one complete show and the next complete show that were sort of in between thoughts.

MS. RICHARDS: 4.5 – isn't 4.5 the last part of the series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, and I wanted to talk about 1 and 4. *Objects of Desire 4* had the piece in it that was called *Fear of Nothing*.

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And I just wanted to speak to that –

MS. RICHARDS: 1988.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – because it shows both another format and another kind of, say, shift in the nature of the work, that that piece is two squares – a duo with two squares instead of two vertical panels. And I used squares when the – when the images were referring to the mind or the head of the person instead of the entire body.

So in the *Fear of Nothing*, there's one panel, which is set against blue because it's about mind and metaphysics and so on. The head is a Roman horror vacui mask, which is literally "fear of the emptiness or the unknown or the nothingness." And the other panel is all black, has no image in it, and it's framed – all black panel framed in black. And what that piece was about was – for me [Laughs] it's funny because they're so – they're so layered in a way psychologically that for me – I was in therapy at that time, and I remember saying, you know – saying to my shrink I was afraid of something. And he said, "What are you afraid of?" "Well, I'm afraid – I don't know, I just don't know where my next artwork's coming from. I'm just" – you know. And I realized that I was – every time I made work, I was slightly afraid where would the next work come from? I never knew where it was going to come from, where I'd get the idea, where I'd get it.

So I had for a long time been interested in – I would marginalize an image, push something way up in the corner to see if it – if the work would still be a work without any representational element. So I was curious to make something –

MS. RICHARDS: You mean as you were creating the form – the field – let's say it was a bowl – you'd push the bowl to the very edge and almost –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, no, I – well, bowls always stayed in the center.

MS. RICHARDS: Well –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: But there was one called *The Great Wall*, where I just had a tiny little strip of the Great Wall up in the upper left-hand corner that just barely kind of existed as an image. Ninety-five percent of the piece is just red field. So I wanted to make something with no image and see what it would – what would happen, and – which I didn't – I did not do in this series with no image, no image, no image. But the left-hand panel in the *Fear of Nothing* is – has no image in it. And the horror vacui mask looks into that black square and looks with horror. And it was about the fear of death, the fear of the unknown, the fear of not having the next artwork, the fear of castration, the fear of – the unarticulated. As a culture, we cling to our language, our articulations, our texts, our words, our buildings, our habits and traditions. And so the unscribed and unknown is quite threatening. And so that's what that piece was thinking about.

And I guess another reason to kind of draw that piece out of the *Objects of Desire* is only because it sort of begins to show a shift towards the end of *Objects of Desire* towards a much more kind of poetic, say, engagement with the works and moving away from something that was more directly critical in the early *Objects of Desire*.

MS. RICHARDS: So in the earlier ones, you were more consciously addressing feminist issues, would you say? Or was it all –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, the - [inaudible] - are not feminist issues.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. No, but the very beginning -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, I don't think that - it's not about more feminist or not, but I think I - I think that the critical approach that marks the earliest few series of my work was really more directly about issues about representation; whereas later on in the *Objects of Desire*, even though that concern with representation runs throughout the work and with photography in every sense of its - of its - all the dimensions in which photography informs our world and our experience, I think towards the end of the *Objects of Desire*, there's a shift more towards wanting to make original meanings than there is in analyzing or exploring existent meanings.

You see that in some piece like - the turquoise piece, which is called *Work*, which is about making - "work" stands for artwork - and the piece is made in the color turquoise of the Tiffany's packaging -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - and the reason for doing that was because of the association with value, things of value, that that color connotes. And so in the two panels of the *Work* diptych, the right-hand panel, which has a black background and some very, very crude iron age tools sort of caught in a big V formation in the center of the image, those tools sort of stand for the crude, hard work that work is; making an artwork, you know, writing a novel, going to the factory - work is work in one sense. But as I - as my work is making artwork and - you know, work consists of that hard work. And then the other panel, which is the advancing panel - comes out from the wall further - is now a chemical hex, the abracadabra hex, which is just this spin - that hex would cure - would enact magic or cure fever.

And so those - the two panels to me mean artwork is the hard work of making artwork and that magic spin that makes it come alive, animates art and animates the imagination.

MS. RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you - we just finished - having finished talking about *Objects of Desire* - in the '80s, I think you got married and had two children.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, I -

MS. RICHARDS: So I wanted to talk to you about all that and also where you were living, where your studios - studio was, if the studio and/or the living situation changed because of the children and how that whole situation -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, see, I had met my future husband, Amos Poe, in 1979 right around the time I was beginning to exhibit the first of the *Modern History* pieces. And I was still very involved with Joseph, and we had a huge loft on Broadway. It was -

MS. RICHARDS: In SoHo on Broadway?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, it ran from Broadway to Mercer and was 6,000 square feet. And we paid \$550 a month rent. [Laughs.] I had a 2,000-square-foot studio, and so did Joseph. And we had a 2,000-square-foot living area in between.

And so during the early '80s, I was still living with Joseph in this huge place, but I began dating Amos Poe, who then eventually became my husband. And for a while, it was sort of complicated. [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: It sounds like it.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: But I - Joseph and I were very, very fond of each other and very committed to each other as, you know - I don't know what - working artists and so on, but I was beginning to be romantically involved with Amos and eventually had to move out of my huge loft on Broadway, and Amos and I got a loft together on Great Jones Street, which is this loft. And we were married right around that time, you know, that I just had to change everything. And -

MS. RICHARDS: He's a filmmaker?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, he was sort of a new-wave filmmaker and very - I think really radical for the time and made very, very low-budget movies that were extremely imaginative and interesting. And I had met Amos at the Mudd Club, which was, you know, a scene in the very late '70s and early '80s. And we were married in 1984. And my first child Nick was born in 1985. And that was during the *Objects of Desire* -

MS. RICHARDS: 1985 he was born?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.], yes. And my daughter, Lucy, was born in 1988. And when Nick was born, I was still working out a studio in my loft on Great Jones Street, and I had – you know, initially I had a babysitter come something like, I don't know, two half days a week, and then it became two days a week, and then it eventually became more. But I could only work when the babysitter would come and take Nick to the park or something like that, and then I would have some peace and quiet. But it was a juggling act with both children because I nursed both children, I worked right straight through my pregnancies and nursing them and traveling for exhibitions. And I had no idea how I was ever going to get through the day every day. It was just really challenging.

So when Nick was born, I was teaching at NYU in a graduate school program when I got pregnant with Nick. And I had already committed to do a show at International With Monument. I did a kind of mini retrospective of the clock tower in 1984 right around the time I was married. And that had three bodies of work – *Tabula Rasa*, pieces from *In-Photography*, and the first *Objects of Desire*. And then I was approached by International With Monument gallery, which was a very interesting gallery on the Lower East Side, just as the whole scene on the Lower East Side was taking off in the mid-'80s and asked to do a show. And I had just accepted to do a show and was pregnant with Nick.

And it was during the pregnancy with Nick that I did the *Objects of Desire 2*. It was somewhat difficult working when I was pregnant; the main reason being I found that when you're making artwork, you're sort of pitching your energy out, you know, taking your energy and casting it out into the world. And when you're pregnant, you kind of want to cast – keep your energy in close. And so I had a hard time sort of trying to work through it – not that I, you know, was lazy or anything, but it's just sort of where your body wants to go with its energy. So I actually don't think the *Objects of Desire 2* is one of my stronger series. And I suspect that's why.

And then the series that I did when I was pregnant with my daughter Lucy was the *Academy of Secrets*. And there's even a self-portrait of me in the *Academy of Secrets* being pregnant with Lucy. And there's another piece called *Subtle Body* that sort of is the experience of being pregnant. That series as a whole dealt with the unconscious and images that we use to describe the unconscious.

So when Lucy was born in November of 1988, at that point then I was – you know, it was juggling a 3-year-old and – was being taken to the park every other day by the nanny – and nursing a newborn baby and – oh, when I got pregnant [Laughs] I was – I had just accepted – just like when I got pregnant with Nick, I had just accepted to do a show at International With Monument. And that whole scene in the East Village was really interesting. And there were two galleries that were very good, maybe three. One was International With Monument, and one was Nature Morte and one was – [inaudible] Jay Gorney. And, you know, the other galleries were things like Pat Hearn and so on but I didn't relate to as much. It was more kind of, you know, painting and kind of poppy things.

But the East Village was quite a scene; you know, a lot of big collectors going over there, and the openings were packed. And International With Monument had a very strong roster with Richard Prince and Jeff Koons and myself and – put myself right in with them [Laughs] and Jim Welling.

Then when that Neo-Geo period came along – and the director of International With Monument was a guy named Meyer Vaisman, and he had two partners, and the three of them were young artists that had decided to have an art gallery. But at a certain point, Meyer decided he wanted to be an artist himself. And he had a show with Jay Gorney, and then he decided he was going to sell International With Monument. He sold the gallery to somebody named Ealan Wingate, and all the artists left before Ealan even took over. Meyer took Jeff and Peter Halley and Richard, I think, all went to Sonnabend; and Jim Welling and I went to Jay Gorney. And Ealan Wingate was left holding an empty bag there [Laughs] it was a strange situation. I think [General Idea] was still, you know, with International With Monument. Everybody else had – "I'm out of here; Meyer's out of here, I'm out of here." And it was a funny situation. It was just curious that Meyer sold something that was nothing concrete and he didn't really own.

And so anyway, I had just accepted an invitation from Jay, who was opening up a gallery on Greene Street called Jay Gorney Modern Art. And I had just committed to a show with Jay Gorney, and it was going to be in the late fall or something like that. And I realized I was pregnant. And oh, no – you know, I've got to do this again; I've got to – I've just joined a new gallery. I was the first woman to join that gallery. And there I had to work through a pregnancy again.

All right, so I did. And the series I worked on was called the *Academy of Secrets*. You know, that – well, that – it was – it was – it was a challenging time, to say the least. But at that point, when Lucy was born, I decided that I could no longer work at home; I had to get a studio outside so I could leave and the babies and the nannies could, you know – nannies – the nanny that I was lucky enough – you know, Amos and I – we'd skip food, we'd skip movies, we'd skip everything to buy our time and have the nanny here so we could go to work.

MS. RICHARDS: So he had a studio or workspace outside also.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: He had a little office over on Broadway in the Cable Building, and I got a studio outside the house on Mott Street between Houston and Prince. And that's the studio where I worked on the series called *Renaissance Paintings*. And I remember having a period there when I was working on the *Renaissance Paintings* where I was still nursing Lucy and the babysitter would bring Lucy over in the stroller for me to nurse her. And we were sitting there in the studio, and having a little baby girl on my breast and looking at my artwork on the wall and saying, "This is good. This is good." And I had, you know, a feeling of being very fulfilled. And I was thrilled to have two children. I was thrilled to have a boy and a girl. And I just felt very lucky. And so -

MS. RICHARDS: And you were - you had mentioned earlier the difference you thought between your generation in terms of having children and women who were in a previous generation who perhaps felt that they couldn't have both.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It was a real challenge. I mean, I think that they - as much as the women of my generation - I mean, Laurie Simmons has children. Cindy doesn't. I think she would have - you know, she had other complications why she couldn't do so. But, you know, our generation is borderline. Louise Lawler has a son. Barbara Kruger doesn't have children. I mean, so we went both ways. I mean, more of my friends have children than don't. However, I think that the women of one generation older than me - well, I was friends with Elizabeth Murray; she had children - but they had an even more difficult time than we did. I mean, I think they just were facing "no way" signs with all the galleries and museums. And we had - well, we've never done it before, you know, we've never had a girl before in the gallery, but, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: A girl.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - but this is sort of interesting work and, hey, let's go with it.

So Metro Pictures, you know, was opened in the mid- early-, mid-'80s - I can't remember exactly when. And Metro Pictures started right out with women. And the whole pictures generation, postmodern, whatever - I mean, "postmodern" was a word that was in play a lot at that time, and postmodern actually was different in many senses from modern. And I talked before about how, you know, I had grown up with a sort of linear idea of art history. And I think it was during that period in the '80s where, you know, the whole concept of postmodern, which sort of started out in architecture and design and then sort of filtered into other kinds of practices began to actually sort of mean something.

And I remember being invited by, I think it was Douglas Crimp to be on a panel. And Richard Prince was on the panel in Philadelphia - I don't remember what it was called - the Art Association or something like that - and it was called - something about postmodernism. And I had a lot of disdain for the word. I just didn't think it was very useful. But then I began to realize that there was something fundamentally different about the practice that my friends and myself were engaged with that was different than painting hitherto fore than fine art -

[END TRACK 5.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - photography hitherto fore. Even in minimalism and pop, there was something about exploring ideas of representation that took us into a larger and more complex world. It was almost like the globalism of art; we were, you know, speaking many languages there. And I think one of the reasons why women became so important in that period is because women to a certain extent had been excluded from language. And when Cindy looked at the roles women played in film or I looked at the role models in the *Objects of Desire* or even, you know, Richard looking at these sequences of, like, watch ads or earring ads or so on, we began to - we began to realize that we live in a world that's a world of representations and that women to a certain extent have not been served well by those languages.

When I was doing the *Objects of Desire*, I remember, you know, in tearing things up I'd see the - you know, what's this white thing here? What - it's a guy in a white linen jacket holding a Dewar's scotch; and standing behind him is some sexpot girl who's leaning over. He's the prime mover, he's the guy, he's the one who has the dream, he's the one who has the linen jacket and she's just hanging on him.

So to begin to say, "Wait a minute, what kind of sense of self would serve me, you know? I maybe don't want to wear those high heels because it makes it harder for me to climb around in the studio." And so I think, you know, Laurie, looking at her housewife just playing with the stove and Cindy looking at various ideas of women's roles - and I was too - and I think that there's a way that women began to really take on a critique of representation because it didn't work for them. They weren't - you know, they didn't want to be fashion victims. They didn't want to be hanging on guys. They wanted to create a space or place for themselves, for ourselves, within our culture, a space where it was possible to be a prime mover and not just be hanging on a prime mover.

MS. RICHARDS: You were starting to talk about the *Renaissance Paintings* when you talked about sitting in the loft with the baby, nursing. [They laugh.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: To shift to – [inaudible].

MS. RICHARDS: But I think you wanted to move to this next. Would you like to then pick up that and also connecting that to what you were just saying and those images that you chose and how that –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's like – it's a different – it's a difficult connection, because I think it's a slightly different train of thought now in talking about it. But *Renaissance Paintings* was the last series that I did that was based on what became called appropriated images. And I guess I can make the connection by saying in *Renaissance Paintings*, I was seeing myself as a sort of – it was a sort of double game I was playing. I was seeing myself as heir to a culture. And as an heir to a culture, as someone who grows up situated within language, I grew up situated within Western European and American culture; that is my heritage.

And so if I imagined myself in the *Renaissance* series – I was always playing games in every series; there's always some kind of shtick. And I was imagining myself as though I were the subject of psychoanalysis. And I have this family history. And the family history goes back into European culture, goes back to the renaissance – it even goes back to Greece and Rome. But, you know, I don't need to get – go quite that far back, but I remember *Renaissance Paintings*, and I remember this mother figure and this child figure. And I remember a father figure. There was God, and there was Jesus, and there were various kings and patriarchs.

And so in the *Renaissance Painting* series, each piece sort of goes back into European art history and says, "Hey, this is an old family story, and this is a story I inherited. And you know what? I think I want to take ownership of those parts of it that I want; I want to reorder the pieces of that history, and I want to make it my own story."

So I took fragments from Renaissance paintings, and I didn't try to make the works reflect anything about what the original meanings were but rather try to explore different constructs, psychoanalytic constructs and psychological constructs that I'd inherited – Freudian ideas and Jungian ideas and [Laughs] other patriarchal psychological paradigms.

So pieces like – for instance, one of my favorites is the piece called *Separation*, which is two panels hanging very close together. And one panel is – it's sort of a burgundy color and contained an image of a – of a figure – tiny figure drawn from a Botticelli nativity scene. And the other panel is a figure – [Audio break.].

So one panel has a burgundy figure with a – with a – I mean, a burgundy field with a white figure arching towards the other panel. And the white figure is – it looks like an angel; it has wings. And on the white panel, it has a figure dressed in burgundy robes, leaning towards the adjacent panel. And what this meant to me was this was sort of about what it feels like – what – you know, what it feels like to love someone. I'm thinking about loving my husband and that – always – you're always separate; you're always a separate person, and you lean towards someone, you reach out to someone, but you are – you are always sort of in separate worlds and separate bodies and also that the figures in this piece are – one is an angel, and one is a mortal. So it could be about reaching out for a – across the divide of life and death or –

So it's a piece that's kind of – it's an embrace, and it's a failure of an embrace. And it's an embrace again. And I was – just also liked seeing how the – this images – the images themselves do that; the two panels hang separately, but they –

MS. RICHARDS: Were you aware of all those thoughts and could articulate all those meanings while you were doing it, or was it only later in retrospect that it all became clear?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, no, no – I mean, this is a very emotional body of work for me. This was – I had – I had been kind of, I think, a little depressed after – it wasn't – you know, I didn't have post – whatever – it's called postpartum depression – or anything, but you know, there was something emotional going on in me that stood behind this work. So I think it might have been why I was using the psychological models because I was trying to kind of unravel what my relationship with my own life was and with issues that were going on at the time and the culture.

Like, for instance, there's a piece in here that's called *Denial* that is an image that – it's a group of figures that I originally drew from a deposition painting – a Raphael painting. Just took a cluster of figures. And in my piece, the – there's a figure of a dead – would have been Christ in the original painting, but I wasn't making a piece about Christianity or Christ or anything like that; I was making a piece about death.

And death was quite present at this time in the '80s. This was in the heart of the AIDS crisis, where friends were dying all around us. We were just having to face not mortality but death of peers, and it was a very painful period.

And so this piece says to me, you know, when I experience death, it's not of the dead body of somebody but the incredible absence of that person; they're just not there. And so by cutting away the figure here and leaving an absence in the place of the figure, it's that, - "What - where are you?" There's the template or the shape of the impact of that person's life and your life or in the culture, but they're just not there.

And by the same token, something like - well, the piece that's called *Vision of a Young Man* is - takes a very - some fragments from a very small painting of a knight asleep, and - it's a little tiny Raphael, and it's a horizontal painting. And I silhouetted the figures of two women that are standing on either side of the knight - of the sleeping knight.

And I took the tree that was near the sleeping knight and the landscape, and I made the tree grow very, very, very tall in - and made the collage into a vertical. And I was - changed the name to *Vision of a Young Man*. And that piece is just spoofing on male sexuality, male sense of their own - you know, the importance of their phallic stuff. And so it was just kind of joking - the two female figures hover over the tree and [Laughs] -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - longingly around the tree. And, it's like, okay, enough with your trees, guys.

MS. RICHARDS: At the beginning, do - did you envision you would do this drawing series as well as the painting series, that you would do both and that -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I don't remember exactly the sequence, but there's - you know, there's this sort of - there's a subtle humor, a seriousness but also subtle humor that runs through many of the series. And a lot of the humor - there's a lot of anti-guy stuff in this work, you know, and in the *Renaissance Drawings*, I'm spoofing -

MS. RICHARDS: Which -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - a lot of psychological ideas that have to do with, you know, the whole kind of - stop for a second - [Audio break.].

No, in the *Renaissance Drawing* series, you know, you get to see a lot of the kind of angry humor that - like, there's one called *Adoration* - the *Renaissance Drawings* were all made by - I combined elements of old master drawings to make what looked like old master drawings, but they were just made from fragments that I juxtaposed in ways that were kind of silly.

So there's one, for instance, that's called *Adoration*. It has a lot of praying, kneeling, playing homage figures. They're sort of juxtaposed with anatomical drawings of male organs. So it ends up, you know, a bunch of guys, like, praying and respecting and kneeling before various sort of phallic-y looking things. And, you know, there's one - it's called *Madonna and Child in a Real World*, and it's - you know, it's a Madonna and child but with kind of snakes and crabs and other kind of things crawling in from the sides.

And there's one called *The Theory of the Phallic Mother*, which is, you know, a picture of a sort of sibylline woman and some enormous kind of phallic something rising from her lap. And she's looking quite astonished [They laugh]

MS. RICHARDS: [Laughs.] I remember looking at that.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, it's a funny look she has. She's going, "Oh, my!"

So anyway, I mean, that's - it was a more minor series, but it was just a kind of co-series so that - in the *Renaissance Paintings* and *Drawings*, I chose a pallet and was - that seemed like Renaissance paintings - mainly Italian Renaissance and a little Northern Renaissance. And then the *Renaissance Drawings* - I made them resemble real Renaissance drawings and framed them in mahogany frames and made them look like they would be in the Met and -

Most of the *Renaissance Paintings* are based on kind of spoofing off of or exploring Freudian concepts, some - you know, in a somewhat critical way. However, there are other psychological constructs; like, for instance, the piece called *The Dragon and St. George*, which is based on a Jungian idea of that hero confronts the other - self in form of the other and - you know, on his passage to becoming, you know, full-grown heroic figure. It's a Jungian concept. And what I did with the piece - there was - you know, there's a number of well-known images of St. George slaying the dragon and, "St. George is a very - oh, is very on top of the situation," and the poor dragon is being jabbed with a spear or a sword or something like that.

So in this piece, I said, "Well, wait a minute; when I'm afraid of something, it's not always so neatly under control. It actually can threaten to get completely out of control and overwhelming." So I made an image that's

the reverse scale relationship between St. George and the dragon and the painting that I based it on, which was a Raphael. And I made the dragon get very, very big and St. George get very, very small and threatened by the figure of the dragon.

But then I had the white panel with St. George be the advancing panel; it comes out and sort of wins the day in the end anyway.

I didn't mention to you that in all of my series, wherever there are diptychs, there is one panel that's set back and one panel that comes forward. And it's always the apparent face of things -

MS. RICHARDS: Physically or just visually?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Physically. Every diptych -

MS. RICHARDS: You mean it's mounted away from the wall.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Every diptych has one panel that's, say, two inches deep, and one panel that's one inch deep. One panel is always set within the other and recedes physically. And that's throughout the *Objects of Desire*, in the *Renaissance Paintings*, later on in *Double World*. It goes right on up into my most current completed series, the *Works in Progress*, where there's a diptych.

MS. RICHARDS: And when did you say you started doing that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The first diptych I did was in the *Objects of Desire 1*, and that -

MS. RICHARDS: So - oh, you said it started with the very first diptych, that you took that approach?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah. Yes, the - in the first diptych that I described to you from the *Objects of Desire 1*, the slinky evening gown figure -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - is the advancing panel. Here it is, model femininity. And the one that's set back is the receding panel, is the one that's the bondage figure. So it's sort of saying, "Well, this is what things look like but consider that."

So in the *Buddha of Immeasurable Light*, the figure of Buddha, which is the objective Buddha statue is the advancing statue. *The Opening of the Mind*, which is in the other panel, is the panel receding.

So there's always one side that's, like, the face of things, the apparent look. And then there's the - "what about this panel?"

MS. RICHARDS: And what about the diptych of nothing - *Fear of Nothing*? Which one is -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I told you that's not a diptych.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh. Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That's a duo.

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry. Yes.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: They're two independent squares.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes. You said that this series is one of your most emotionally charged series. Do you still feel that today, or have there been others that have also felt the same?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I think each series has a different kind of mood to it. And I - it may be in part what I'm going through at that time, but it's also just partly what I'm engaging in that body of work.

So for instance, in the *Natural Magic* series, which was in 1991, I had been thinking about - I've loved magic all my life; sleight of hand as well as paranormal or spiritual or whatever, something that's other than, you know, Western scientific, objective, life-as-usual conventional experience.

And so I like the - I like sleight of hand, and I like pretending, and I like spoofing. And I - so I had an idea that I wanted to do a series that was - had something to do with kind of spoofing on the idea of photography as a medium of veracity.

And so - and the *Natural Magic* series was the first series that I shot in the studio. And I used a four-by-five camera, and it is no longer work that - even though I was never fond of the word "appropriated" and it never really made sense in relation to my - I have a big politic about why that word doesn't work, which if we get an opportunity we could talk about. But -

MS. RICHARDS: Is this something that was really an important moment, something you'd been thinking about for a long time, that you were going to make this switch?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I always, always with my series - I think about things for a long time. I would say maybe - between five and 10 years for a series -

MS. RICHARDS: I mean actually taking photographs yourself, making that change, that aspect of this new series. Was that some - a really monumental step?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, no, no. I mean, I think it was a natural progression. I got to a point in the late '80s, and you can see - you can see it happening, you know, towards the end of the *Objects of Desire*, in *Academy of Secrets*, and in the *Renaissance Drawings* where I was beginning to feel constricted by working within a language of things that had already existed. I felt like, yes, I can use that imaginatively; yes, I can turn it to my own ends, but what if I wanted to make something that hadn't existed before? And I was still interested in talking about culture and about photography and about images and language of images, but I also just felt like I wanted to make something on my own.

The work had already gotten kind of more poetic and a little -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - looser towards the end of the '80s. And I felt - while I felt the critical work, the earliest work, was really important, I also wanted to kind of just free my own imagination and my own sense of humor and play and so on.

So the *Natural Magic* series was a series where I sort of - I - you know, even though I'd been doing photography all along, I'd supported myself up until the mid-'80s when I began to sell enough artwork that I didn't really need to do freelance photography anymore, but I knew how to take pictures.

And I wanted to do a series that was sort of making fun of the idea of photography as a medium of truth. And so I decided to - this was before Photoshop, you know. The early '90s - it seems like we've had Photoshop forever, but we didn't. So I did a series that was meant to look like a kind of late 19th century traveling magic show. And - that's why it's called *Natural Magic*, because there were actually posters and things that I found in books on old magic that had names like that.

And the images in that series are all kind of joke-off of ideas about photography. So they're all straight photos. They - there's nothing manipulated about them except that for some reason, you're able to play games with the whole idea of belief and photography. So, for instance, there's an image of a levitating woman. And the image of the levitating woman, who I - and the woman lying in midair - she wears white stiletto heels, and she had platinum blonde hair, and we pretended that she - her name was Monique [ph], and she was the magician's assistant. And it was really my assistant, Nancy Davenport we dressed in falsies and a wig - [They laugh] and had her lie in the studio on a piece of black shelf covered with black velvet against a black velvet drop.

And black doesn't photograph. It just comes out as nothing. So she looks like she's floating through air. And it's just one single straight photograph.

You know, they play - there's play in all of them. There's one that - there's one that's called *Proof of Telekinesis* -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - which is an array of pieces of silverware that I bent [Laughs] using my mind power. And I photographed them in order to document the fact that I had been capable of bending -

MS. RICHARDS: With a complicated project like this, what part of it - I mean, you have the challenge - you have done lots of photography, but this was the first time you were doing these original photographs. You had to create magic tricks that were really challenging with pre-Photoshop, bring actors into the - into your work. Through all this -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: The one that was the most challenging of all is the one that's called *Trial by Fire*, wherein I lit my hands on fire [Laughs]. And it was such a saga to create that image because I heard that there was stuff called "stunt gel," and you could buy it - you know, it's something they use in the movies, and you could buy it

from some special pyrotechnics company but you had to purchase the direction book first that, you know, taught you how to use it and sign a release, "If I burn up myself or my house, we don't hold you responsible."

And the stuff was, like, awful gucky brown junk. And so I bought the direction book, and I signed the release, and then I bought this stuff and – I said, "Well, wait a minute. This stuff – it may keep" – you'd put it on top of a surface, a car in a movie that you wanted to have go into flames –

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – and then you'd put some flammable element on top of that. So for instance, what I used as my flammable element was rubber cement.

So I wanted to have my hands on fire, flames coming out of my fingers. And so I purchased this stunt gel, and then I said, "Well, wait a minute. I – you know, it's a little bit iffy putting this on my real hands" – and besides the fact I had been wearing white gloves for years just as a fashion style magic thing that I did. And – wore gloves all the time.

And so I said, "Okay, I'll wear white cotton gloves like a magician might wear, and then I'll put the stunt gel on the gloves, and then I'll – then I'll put the rubber cement on the stunt gel in order to burn." But I had to choreograph my hands in a way because the stuff was brown and gucky looking, so I had to make sure that the camera couldn't see it. And then I had to put my hands through a black velvet drop so that you wouldn't – you wouldn't see my arms, just see the hand in midair.

And so, you know, I practiced on – I bought some dummy hands that they would use in a store to sell gloves or something, and I practiced on the dummy hands, but the gloves kept catching on fire.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh-ho.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And then I figured out that I had to wet the gloves, let them get partly dry so they didn't look wet, then put the stunt gel on them and then put the rubber cement on them, then ignite the stunt gel, and then everything worked out okay.

Only the thing was, in the real image, it had to be really me. So I had an assistant who's going to operate the camera, and I put a motor drive on the camera. And I'd be blind behind the black velvet curtain. I put my hands through the black velvet curtain. I had on the damp but not wet gloves, put my hands in the choreographed position, had the assistant – having the assistant already put all the stunt gel on the palms of the gloves and then the rubber cement on it. And then I would have the assistant ignite the rubber cement. And the camera would start clicking, and then I'd go, "Okay, blow it out!" [Laughs.] And it was – I –

MS. RICHARDS: Could you feel –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – it was like – it was like if you were taking a hot casserole out of the oven and you could have – you had a pretty thin potholder and you could just kind of get from the oven to the kitchen counter but not much further.

MS. RICHARDS: Because you could feel the heat or you just feared – it was just fear.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, I could –

MS. RICHARDS: You could feel heat.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – I could feel it; there was a limited amount of time that that rubber cement could burn off before it was going to get uncomfortable. It wasn't really dangerous because the gel was really there, but it was hot. So –

MS. RICHARDS: You couldn't wear asbestos gloves.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Come on, magicians don't wear asbestos. [They laugh.] And – well, that's good to stop. I could talk about the piece called *Control or Abandon* or we could not.

MS. RICHARDS: Well, I wanted – I wanted to ask you also, taking these photographs, you're making a step toward being a photographer as opposed to using photography as an artist.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I didn't think about that at all that way.

MS. RICHARDS: At least one could say that.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I just - I never thought of myself as a photographer. I think those distinctions are problematic and - you know, they were at the time, and they have been since.

My experience was that - and I - you know, this is something I - it's a topic that I feel like I understand pretty well, but fine art photography, straight photography throughout the 20th century has existed in a different trajectory than art. And, you know, museums have art, and then they have photo departments. And in the art department, you could have anything from a Magritte to a Matisse to a Duchamp to a Rauschenberg to a Warhol to a Cindy Sherman. But in the photography department, you have objects that are made using a camera, taking pictures, framing things. They can be ironic, they can be beautiful, they can show vast landscapes, they can show animals in the wild, they can show poor people and WPA and whatever.

But photography has been a different discipline than art. And, you know, I think that one of the things that was kind of great about the pictures generation of artists is they weren't trying to be photographers; they were just, you know, making stuff. And the ones that ended up using photography, which was most of them - not all - you know, Allan McCollum's not a photographer and - you know, it sort of doesn't really make a difference what your medium is that - what these artists had in common was that they were - they were talking about images and - in the world and about representation and so on.

So what ended up happening somewhere there in the late '80s was, I think the photo people began saying, "Hey, wait a minute; there's a lot of stuff happening around the work of Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman and Barbara Kruger and Laurie Simmons." And they began - they began to curate shows, which were sort of - all the crazy things you can do with photography. And they would include people like, oh, Duane Michals or Sandy Skoglund or - you know, and this work got sort of indexed into the history of photography by the photo community - not the way I saw it; it's not the way Cindy saw it or Laurie or Richard or - you know, we were just - we were just making art, and we were artists. And it didn't really matter what the medium was; whereas, you know, straight photographers were quite threatened by all this crazy manipulation that was sort of one-upping them and getting more attention in shows.

And, you know, to this day, there have been, you know, a series of invited discussions at the Museum of Modern Art that - I spoke at one last week. But - it was the eighth in a series of these private discussions. And one of the things that happened in those meetings is the curators are apt to say things like, "Oh, we need to discuss the crisis in photography or" - you know, and it's always in photography that this discussion is taking place. "Well, should we be straighter, or should we be more manipulated?" And it's just a completely false way of asking the question. And I'm not interested in whether I'm a photographer or not. Just uninteresting. I happen to use a camera in my work and have for many years. And I happen to explore questions about the life of photographs in our world, and I like to make beautiful pictures and mysterious artworks.

But, you know, I'm not interested in whether or not it's photography.

MS. RICHARDS: Since the '80s, would you say that more of the museum - the museum world and especially - and certainly the gallery world have come around to your way of thinking that in the sense that you can go to a contemporary art exhibition and it's going to have photography and video and sculpture and drawing and painting and the works that use photography aren't going to be separated - even if there's a photography department at the Metropolitan, it's - photographs are still integrated much more -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's different in - from one institution to another, how that institution is structured, how they - and it's the same with art schools and colleges that if they have a photo department that's separate from the art department, then that photo department has to deal with the medium of photography. So then it has to ask questions about, you know, "what is photography and what are we doing here?"

And I think, for instance, the Museum of Modern Art has been one of the most conservative museums in the country with regard to that. Peter Galassi, who's been the head of the Museum of Modern Art photo department has - is deeply invested in protecting the purity of fine art photography and is very threatened by people such as myself. And - whereas the Metropolitan Museum - the photo department - even though it's one of the finest classical photo departments in the country, they're not threatened by contemporary postmodern work, and they collect in depth pictures generation work and even, you know, younger generation artists whose work has anything whatsoever to do with photography. I mean, people like Allan or David Salle or - you know, people who - Jack Goldstein - a pictures generation show is not a show that's about photography; it's about art of a generation and all different kinds of artists are - were curated in that - into that show by the photo department, by Doug Eklund from the photo department.

So I think the photo department at the Met has actually become one of the most edgy of contemporary art departments, whereas, you know - I mean, I think the Modern - Eva Respini and Roxana Marcoci are really trying to bring the Modern up to speed. They still, like, have their little photo closet, you know, photo department that's not part of the museum at large. And, you know, it's less of a problem at the - at the Whitney and at the

Guggenheim; at the Whitney at particular where, I mean - Elisabeth Sussman at the Whitney got a newspaper piece of mine way early on. Way early on they purchased the *Eclipse* in an earlier part of the '80s.

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. Did you - did you find that when you were finishing coming to the end of the *Natural Magic* series that you knew already what you were going to do next, that it was - that you would continue making series using original photographs? That was something that you weren't going to change. And -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I think I - yeah, I think I had sort of finished being interested in working with appropriating images for the most part. And the next - you know, the series actually to the present, I continued to use a four-by-five camera, and I'd shoot in the studio.

I mean, I also have a digital camera, and I also take pictures [Laughs]. But I don't - they're not part of my public work because I feel it's difficult enough to kind of support a train of thought and a practice and really push ideas and try to - try to disrupt conventional thought to a certain extent. So I feel like - you know, I also have - you know, from the period of *The Fox* and the - early on, I wrote some art theory, and wrote, you know -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - things about art. And I stopped writing because I didn't want my writing to take any kind of explanatory role or even a kind of - too clear a position in textural form. I really wanted the artwork to be the main vehicle of my practice. And so the artwork asked the questions, doesn't deliver answers; it just kind of keeps asking the questions and keeps seeing where that takes us.

So in the series that followed from the *Natural Magic* series throughout the '90s and -

MS. RICHARDS: Yeah.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - you know, the next decade -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - up until the present, I've worked using the four-by-five camera and -

MS. RICHARDS: Not using a digital camera?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I use a digital camera as a sort of sketchpad. I sketch things, I test the light, I - you know, and I take pictures of things from time to time. But mainly, the digital camera is a way of sketching. I say, "Oh, how's the light look on that thing?" And I've always shot Polaroid - four-by-five Polaroids -

MS. RICHARDS: I was going to say, did you use Polaroid in that same role?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Hmm?

MS. RICHARDS: Before there was digital, did you use a Polaroid camera for the same purpose?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I still do use a Polaroid camera too. It's not - I mean, after Polaroid went out of business, I started using a Fuji instant four-by-five film. But I - you know, since four-by-five is - once you get something - a set built or something like that and you've got to process the film in New York and - I'm saying it that way because I'm now - my main photo studio is in Connecticut, and - [Audio break].

My main photo studio is now in Connecticut, in the northwest corner, where I have a house and where I spend a good deal of my time in recent years. I maintain my loft in New York as a sort of base in New York. And my daughter, who just graduated from college now, lives here as well part of the time. She lives with her boyfriend part of the time and here part of the time. And I live in Connecticut part of the time and here part of the time.

But anyway, when I'm shooting with the four-by-five camera there, I - in having to drive the film into New York, because I don't even want to send it with FedEx or anything, because if you have original film you don't want to lose it in the mail - so I literally bring my film into the city in order to process it. And, you know, then I pull it back out to see how it looks.

But because the process is so laborious in a way compared to digitally - just go, "Snap! Oh, that looks great! Oh, snap! Now, change the exposure!" - I use the digital camera to kind of say, "Oh, how does that look? Okay, what's the light like? Why did I think of the exposure" - but I also shoot an instant - I call it Polaroid, but, you know, four-by-five to see if everything's in place, is the focus sharp and -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you keep all those pieces as a record of the process for any reason?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I keep a log of all my exposures because you want to say, "Well, you know, the light is similar to that day, and it really worked out best when I shot it at such and such an exposure." You keep a log, and when you come into the lab and you have, you know, 15 sheets of film and you think this one's right but the other one you shot a little bit lighter or a little bit darker, you need to have a record of what's what; number 14 is so-and-so.

So, you know, most photographers keep some kind of a log. And I do so. And I keep Polaroids in the log, although they're flying all over the studio too, push-pinned to the wall and falling off shelves and -

MS. RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] I want to talk more about working methods a little later.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So, I mean, ever since the *Natural Magic* series, I have worked with a four-by-five camera, and 99 percent of the time it's in the studio. And I did a series in 2000 that was called *Zero Plus One*, which was a white-on-white series, and the images were white objects in bright light, and they sort of explored ideas about the beginnings of image, almost like writing degree zero, image degree zero. If there was something and it was borne out of nothing, it might be a little table, and I would build a Japanese-style table that was based on a medieval Japanese writing desk. So this little table that might be an altar or might be a starting point or a beginning emerges just enough image that you can say, "Oh, I see what it is."

So the whole *Zero Plus One* thing was sort of exploring the thresholds of image -

MS. RICHARDS: Connected to the millennium change?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, I think it was. I think there was a lot of looking back and looking forward and "what if the world all ends?" stuff going on at that point. And for me, it - I was looking back at my work and looking back at the history of art and looking forward to a new period. And so I - that work is sort of threshold work. It's, you know, where do images begin and end? And many of the images in that series reference earlier works of mine, but they also all point to beginnings and endings. There's a rough-hewn mother and child that's based on a Madonna and child statue that - it's an unfinished statue, so it's just barely recognizable, that I had bought in Italy, based on a Sedona statue. And there's a skull that's - human skull that's - I softened the focus so you can't quite see it - just almost see it. And she kind of goes, "No! I don't want to see that!"

And so - and, I mean, they're all like that. There's - I did a bowl and column for it, very similar to the one before but this time a white bowl and a white column and barely recognizable.

So yeah, it was a very millennial moment, pretty - [inaudible] - because you come in, and you just - it looks like, you know, 15 white prints with no image, and then you go closer and you say, "Oh, yeah, I see it's something."

And then, you know, I did a series called *Neverland* that's sort of about what a symbol is. They were objects that were isolated from - I mean, not that all my work's art, but I'd shoot a tree and a moon and a Nike figure, and it - and I made a sort of landscape, a mental landscape around the room with objects at different heights. So you sort of relate to these images that take on an almost iconic or symbolic function just by virtue of there being only one of them.

MS. RICHARDS: And there was a kind of a narrative embedded in that -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No, not -

MS. RICHARDS: - depending on how you installed it?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't like the word "narrative," and I never use it. There's no narrative. I imagined it as a -

MS. RICHARDS: Links ?.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - mental landscape. So in this room that is our mind, there are things that are in the sky and things that are on the ground and things that are on the kitchen table. So the installation was like that. It had things that were high up like the moon and things that were at eye level or a little higher up, like the tree. The tree was just a tree. But if you take one tree - and in this case, a sort of pine tree that looks a little bit like a cypress that I shot in Scotland - you take one tree and you cut it away from an actual landscape and a field and a lake - you take that one tree and put it on a green background or any color background, and it takes on this quality like a - like a Magritte or something like that. And you go, "Oh, it's the icon of tree, it's the essence of tree, it's the symbol of tree, it's the symbol of nature."

So symbols are created by isolating one of a kind out from their normal context. Well, this is just kind of looking at how that works. And most of them are monochromes and - here's a candle and fire and a teapot and -

[END TRACK 6.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth in her loft studio in New York City, on November ninth, 2011, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc four.

So, Sarah, when we left off last week, you were in the midst of talking about your work around – we stopped around 2005.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I'm trying to remember – we did talk about the series *Neverland*, and there were a few odd – some – most of the time I work in series that come out every two to three years, and they're kind of extensive exploration of a set of related ideas or some arguments I've been arguing with myself or the world for years.

One of the things that I find very curious about the process – and I think I mentioned this to you briefly last time – I'm forgetting what I said and what I was thinking, but often it takes five or 10 years for an idea to come to fruition, and I'll start trying to think about something and then it kind of bats around in my head and then eventually emerges. And it may take several years, as much as 10 years, for an idea to come to maturity, until I really kind of figure out how to wrestle with something.

That happens over the course of – I guess this happens to all artists, ones oeuvre. And it also happens over the course of, say, one body of work. So there were ideas or forces I was wrestling with as a young artist that had to do with – you know, I was trying to get a grasp of certain aspects of visual language to understand how visual language works and how it informs one's sense of the world within any culture. I mean, our culture is the one I've most been involved with, but I think it would be true of any culture.

But I also at the same time as there was a very kind of critical, political – I can't even say it's question, because it was a statement as much as it was a question. I was really trying to show something and understand something about how visual language worked and particularly photography. So my whole body of work in one sense has explored issues about photography. But also within me, while there is a critical or a political dimension to the work, which is most apparent in the earliest series, there's also part of me that is – loves and appreciates beauty and elegance. And so that part also is always part of the dynamic, part of the dialectic of the working process, you know.

In some series, I am sort of – how can I say – I give way to one or other of those aspects more than the other one, but they're both always at work in my working process. And I'm always trying to learn something or show something new that's unknown, not just, you know, new in the sense of avant-garde but what is it that art can show us about the world that we don't know, that we don't understand and is of value.

And that's the thing that I've always loved about art my whole life is that it's a kind of – it's like an epistemology that has no rules. It can be anything. You know, it can do anything, it can go anywhere, it can see anything, it can speak about anything. And I think that to be a professional in a field that says "do whatever you want to do," it's like a – it's quite a privilege and an honor and a responsibility.

So anyway, to get back to, you know, talking specifically about individual series, there's always a relationship between, say, a larger inquiry and one's personal life and one's personal emotions and psychology.

So, for instance, in the series *Simple Text*, which is – it's quite a simple series – the works in *Simple Text* are almost like meditations. And the main reason for that is I did that series when my mother was dying. And I had great sadness. And so they're almost like little prayers. They're like – there's one where I just – they're just flowers laying on their side like a bouquet of flowers but not even a bouquet, just an armful of flowers lying on their side at the bottom of the frame. And it's just flowers for mom, you know.

And also in that series, there's one piece that I particularly love that is sort of – I don't know, it's the seed or instance of works to come – although several of those ones are – thinking about – I often use the picture frame as almost an altar. You see that in, for instance, the whiteseries, where there is literally an altar, but there could be something – a bowl at the bottom or a flower raising out of a bowl. So the picture frame, amongst other things, could be an altar. There's a lot of Buddhas in my work, which are sort of – I'm not a Buddhist; I just like Buddhas. They're just a "for instance," you know; "for instance, a Buddha," you know. You know, I just like the image better than I like some other icons, and I like that it sits quietly. But he, it, us –

But at any rate, in the *Simple Text* series, there is actually two pieces, but one is, I think, more evolved, which is just a bowl – I mean a circle of seven small bowls that contain pigments. And they're art materials. And so in that work – it's called *Seven Colors* – it's red, orange, yellow, blue, indigo and violet – I think I forgot green – [Laughs] ROYGBIV – green – red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. And I often use the kind of – the electromagnetic spectrum or the colors arranged according to the electromagnetic spectrum as a way of kind of, I don't know, organizing color.

And so these bowls of pigment are normally used for mixing paint. And in my piece, they're just photographic props, shall we say, white – little white bowls. And I am sort of just sort of saying, "This is my pleasure, this is my art, this is my love, this is my material, this is it, this is beautiful."

And so that use of art materials celebrating the things that I handle every day and that I get pleasure out of and that I work with is a – is a thought that goes on and continues in the next few series that I worked on. The series *Concrete Color* followed up on that idea. And I won't talk about it at length, because I know I'm going on and on and on, but –

MS. RICHARDS: That was 2006.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: In *Concrete Color*, I created different kinds of models of color theory that – you know, I studied color theory, and going all the way back to classic period, there's been a number of different theories about color and light and color and pigment and added up and subtract of color and this is how you could describe color and this is how you could mix color and this is a color wheel and this is a spectrum and this is a way of designating.

And so in that series, I took all these different models from different history books and art theory books and so on, and I mixed – I mixed all the different pigments and actually created sort of charts that looked like charts in the books. And they're all made out of dishes of paint.

Did we talk – I don't think we talked about the series called *Figure Drawings*?

MS. RICHARDS: No.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Do you remember the date of that?

MS. RICHARDS: 2008.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: That series is anomalous because it's not really in the sequence of my thought process at the time. I mean, you know, there were other ones that were related to that use of art materials – like the *Action Paint* photos were – I did work on the giant Polaroid, and I had a whole batch of assistants come, and we all threw paint in the air and shot it with a strobe so it's like a three-dimensional, you know, abstract expressionist painting. And they're kind of crazy and some of them very beautiful because you wouldn't even imagine how paint, say, drips or splatters or – and anyway, I photographed them with a giant Polaroid.

But that is not a whole series. That's just a – you know, a project. And there were other kind of singular projects that I did that weren't part of a whole series, but – and *Figure Drawings* is completely anomalous. It's not really a series; it's sort of a piece.

MS. RICHARDS: You conceived of it in 1988, I believe.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's a piece that I had thought of in 1988 and then never produced because it was just too expensive and unmanageable. And so in 2008, Sara VanDerBeek, who has become a friend of mine in the last – oh, I don't know – seven or eight years – we were originally asked to interview each other for an art magazine, and then we – which we enjoyed doing very much, and we became friends over the process doing that, you know, sort of fixed up in a sense.

And so she had a gallery with her brother, Johannes, and another woman whose name I'm forgetting. And the gallery was called Guild & Greyshkul, and it was down on – near Grand Street, Worcester. And it was a fun gallery, a lot of crazy stuff going on, a lot of good shows. And Sara is a very, very, very capable, talented young artist.

And so anyway, she was doing a show and wanted – she was doing a show that was about figure, the human figure or something like that. She wanted something of mine, but she didn't know what she wanted. And she – maybe she wanted something new and – you know, she said – but I – she said, "But I love your work so much; I'm going to give you the biggest wall in the whole gallery. I want you to have this wall, and you're going to use it." And I went, "What am I going to do that's going to cover that wall?" And she said, "Well, maybe" – you know, "You maybe you have a new newspaper piece, or maybe you want to do some new work or whatever, but you get this wall."

So I'm looking at this wall and I'm thinking, "That's a really big wall for a piece, and I – you know, I don't know what" – and then Sara did a studio visit, and I was going to show her various things, thoughts, processes, possibilities. And one of the things that I yanked out was this piece that I had started to make in 1988 that I didn't make because it was so big and unwieldy. And what it was, was kind of a cosmology of figures. And it had various gods. It had Buddha, and it had Jesus Christ, and it had some Thai spirit gods and some American

Indian something or others and some Buddhist something or others and Chinese dragon king.

You know, and it – so it had all gods kind of at the top, and then it had various action figures like soldiers and statesmen giving speeches and Lenin and Mao and various figures moving – dancers and, you know, chorus lines and so on. So – and then at the bottom were various kind of, you know, women – status of women taking a bath or looking at their shoe or being pregnant or nursing a baby. And down at the bottom, there were some yogis standing on their head.

So I had envisioned this piece was that it would be displayed on the wall, individual frames, and moved around and whatever. So I showed it to Sara. It wasn't really completed; it was just sort of roughed out. I had gathered a lot of the images and sort of began to order them. And she loved the piece. And she said, "Oh, we've got to have this. It's perfect for the show."

So I set about making the piece in 2008 that I had started in 1988. So it was a very strange kind of cross-period piece because it's 40 images, and I added some contemporary ones. So it goes from ancient, ancient times and cultures to – right on through history right up into the – it has a rapper kind of sitting on the curb on a rubber tire or something like that.

And so it's funny – I don't think I've – I can't think of other works that I've done like that, that I've actually kind of located in two different time periods. And then the – my most recent show, which was called *Work in Progress*, also was a continuation of that idea of working with the materials that I work with, working with my art tools and working in my studio with the objects that I use to make my work.

And that series, which is also kind of – leads into the series that I'm working on – I'm almost near completion now, but the *Work in Progress* was done in my studio in Connecticut. I don't think I've mentioned to you, but I have a house in Connecticut that I bought in 2004 just shortly before my mother died; she died in 2005. And my father had died in 2000. So it's kind of sad in a way that neither of my parents ever came to see this house because it's the house they would have wished for me my whole life. And it very closely resembles my grandfather's house in New Hampshire that was his kind of summer vacation getaway farmhouse. My house was built in 1830, and it's all made of Chestnut, and it's just a lovely colonial house. And –

MS. RICHARDS: What made you want to buy a house so far from the city?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I had been looking for a house. I never – I don't own my loft; I rent it on Great Jones Street. And I've rented it ever since, you know, my then fiancé, soon to be husband. And I moved in on Great Jones Street in 1984. And then I had this house when each of my children were born, and my children grew up, and we lived at Great Jones. And they went to school in New York City.

But I had been wanting to have a house of my own ever since I was, like, a little girl, like most people would like to have a house of their own. And I always wanted to have a house. And I never had a lot of extra money, never had really any extra money. I just sort of – I could do what I needed to do and raise my kids and get them through school. But I wanted a house for a really long time.

And my husband and I didn't really see eye-to-eye on what kind of house we might have, were we to have a house. He really likes the Hamptons, and I don't care much for the Hamptons. And I really like country-country, and – so we never really figured that out. And then we – our marriage began to dissolve in – around 2004, 2005. It was just sort of – the kids were growing up, and we were sort of just going separate ways. And I kept still wanting a house. And then I went to visit my friend Laurie Simmons, who had a house up in the northwest corner of Connecticut.

And I went to visit her, and I thought it was really beautiful. And one day, we were – we were going to see a realtor friend of hers who had one place that we requested to see, and I woke up the morning and I said, "I want to buy a house today." And there's a realtor, who was a longtime friend of Laurie's and another friend of mine, my doctor, Elizabeth Beautyman –

MS. RICHARDS: Sorry, what was her name, the doctor?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Elizabeth Beautyman is my doctor and is a friend who has a house up there nearby in Massachusetts. Well, this is at the bottom of the Berkshires, and it's beautiful farm country.

And so the realtor, whose name is Betsy Little, took us to see this – house we requested was a dump, and we didn't get – she took us to see this house that she thought I would like. And I laid eyes on the house, and it was the house I'd been looking for my entire life. It was just beautiful. I remember when we came up to it, the realtor drove right past it because the place that you could park was a little further down the street. And I went, "Why is it never the house like that?" [They laugh] The realtor takes me – the realtor always takes you to the dump at the end of the road, you know.

But it was that house, and I fell madly in love with it from the time I first saw it and went inside. And I was, "Whoa, this is what I've wanted all along." And it's a great pleasure to me and has been ever since the first time I walked in the door. And I, you know, had to do very minor work to it, basically just repainting it in my taste. The lady who had owned it before has become a close friend. She's a lovely woman. But she'd done all the serious kinds of renovations that it needed. So it had a good furnace, and it had good working high-end kitchen. And it's a beautiful old colonial house; what more could you ask for? And it had good gardens to start out with. And I had been gardening my hat off ever since I stepped foot in the house. And I'm taking good care of it and spending more and more time there.

And then for a long time, when I first got the house, I had my studio - my art studio in Red Hook, my house -

MS. RICHARDS: Brooklyn.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - my house in New York on Great Jones - you know, Red Hook is Brooklyn. And I - then I get the house in Connecticut. So every dime I made was going into real estate, into mortgages, into rents and into, you know, whatever - light bulbs and -

And so I was driving around this triangle for a few years, and then to make matters worse in - I think it's 2008 - I wanted to spend the summer in Connecticut, and I didn't want to be driving back to New York and Red Hook, but I wanted to be working. [Laughs] So I rented a little storefront down the street from my house in Connecticut.

And so then I had four places for a while. And it was completely nuts. And the overhead was so much that as soon as I completed the last body of work, *Work in Progress*, I ended up moving out of Red Hook -

MS. RICHARDS: Where did -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - moving my working base photo studio to the one in Connecticut in the - in the storefront. And so I used Great Jones Street as my sort of New York studio, where I work with my assistant and do Photoshop, or I have meetings -

MS. RICHARDS: Do you prefer to work outside your house or you just don't have space in your house to make a studio?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't have a strong preference one way or another. I've always gone back and forth, depending on whatever was going on in my life. I had - I worked in my house on Great Jones until my kids were born. I worked in my house on Great Jones when my son was a baby. But by the time my daughter was a baby, as I mentioned, I had to get out, get - you know, get workspace.

And so, you know, my kids had been growing up, and so I wasn't having my studio in the house. I was going off to somewhere where I could concentrate and work and meet people. But my situation now, which I like a lot, is that I'm able to afford to maintain the New York loft just for the time being. And I live at least as much, actually more of the time, in Connecticut than I do in New York. The entire summer, I was in Connecticut, and I'd come into New York maybe once a week or once every two weeks.

MS. RICHARDS: Did you think about the feasibility of creating a studio in or next to your house?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I'd been planning to do that for some time. And I'd been working with a local artist up there, who's also an architect, trying to figure out exactly where I'd build it and how I'd build it. And I also own property in Maine that I've inherited with my siblings and been unable to extricate myself from various Maine - we have two places in Maine. And I don't want to be owning real estate in Maine. But without forcing a whole family crisis, I've had to kind of bide my time with getting out of Maine real estate, and - which I'm quite sure I will eventually.

But I - you know, I will build a studio on my property, I believe, unless I buy something else as a studio up there. But for now, for the time being, I have this storefront that I've been extremely happy working in. It's one building away from where my house is. My house is in a very small town, and it's actually on the main street of the town, only I have a lot of - a lot of property and a vegetable garden and lots of flower gardens and perennial gardens and backyards - a few acres - and a brook that runs through the property. And it's really lovely. And my studio is right nearby, so I'm back and forth, back and forth. I think I'll go home and get a bite to eat -

MS. RICHARDS: So you can - you walk between the two?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's as far as the end of the loft. You know, there's one building in between.

And so the series *Work in Progress* was the first series that I had created in the Connecticut studio. And the studio has a picture window in it. And from the moment I started working in that studio, I covered the picture window in the studio with vellum, which is sort of transparent paper; you know, lets light through but you can't

see through. And the reason I did that was because I wanted to kind of turn the picture window into almost like a giant light table or something.

And I began right away to use that window as backlighting to do photographs. So I'd hang up different props – it started with – my camera happened to be sitting in front of the window, and I said, "Wow, look at the silhouette of the camera in front of the window. Isn't it beautiful?" And I photographed it. I had two four-by-fives there. And so I photographed it. And then I said, "Well, yeah, I mean, it would be fun to make a piece that was sort of about the process of photography. So I'll invert the camera and make an upside-down camera in – as part of a diptych."

So I made a diptych that was called *Camera Work*, and it was sort of the way a camera works. And one side is positive, and one side is negative. And one side is right-side-up, and the other side's upside-down. You know, it has the same diptych format that I mentioned to you where one panel sort of advances and one recedes and so on.

So then I began, you know, photographing other studio tools and props against the window. And I did a level, and I did – then I began putting colored paper over the window, and I photographed – made various kind of images using frames and using an easel and using t-squares and colored vellums. And the – you put the colored vellum, a piece of transparent red or transparent yellow, or blue against the window and the light shines through. So all of the pieces in that series are made with the light just shining through the studio window on the props – on the tools that I used, being used, as props.

And I, of course, created formal, beautiful images out of them. They're not just tools; they're pictures. But I – it was an extension of liking to photograph the things that I work with and that I love and that – making art out of the things I make art out of. [Laughs.] So there's two cameras in that series, and there's a lot of other –

MS. RICHARDS: It makes me think of simple photograms, too, with, kind of, putting something down, putting the light – not actually using a camera – although you did.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So, I mean, I would like – [Audio break].

So that series, *Work in Progress*, was the first series that I did in my studio in Connecticut. And I gave up the studio in Red Hook shortly thereafter. I did a show with the Susan Inglett Gallery in 2009. And I – that show was sort of – I mean, that body of work was sort of directed towards that show. And then I've shown it other places since, but since then I have been working – my studio is in Connecticut. That's where I really do my creative work. And I love my studio there. It's – and I love having it so close to my house. I love working in this beautiful countryside, where everywhere you look it's just gorgeous. It's just so beautiful – trees and beautiful fields and farms and animals and – I get my milk from a dairy farm and the eggs. And I cook, as always, all the time. And I have my own vegetable garden there. I grow, you know, gazillions of vegetables and herbs.

And so it's really a kind of lovely integrated lifestyle when I'm there because I'm – I'll go to the studio, and I'll work and I'll come home and have a lunch with vegetables from the garden. And, I don't know, I'll go out and do some – pick some things and then go back in the studio, and it's very – you know, it's very – it's very whole. It feels great to be there.

And then my schedule varies slightly from summer to winter because I teach, as I have for many years, during the school year. I've been teaching at the School of Visual Arts for 19 years now.

MS. RICHARDS: Yes.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And I've talked for quite a while at RISD as well. I always taught graduate school, and I'm not quite sure why. It just sort of started that way. I started teaching – my first teaching job was at NYU just before my son Nick was born. And then I left that job when I had small children. It didn't pay very well, and I didn't teach for a while. I was selling a fair amount of artwork, and it wasn't really necessary to teach. But I always loved it.

And then a few years – I don't remember when it was exactly – early '90s or, you know – if it's 19 years ago, maybe it was '92.

MS. RICHARDS: '92 is when SVA started.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: So at that time, I was approached by Charles Traub, who's head of the graduate school at the School of Visual Arts and asked if I'd like to teach. And I would like to teach. And it's initially one class and paid quite well and in New York City and didn't take much time. And so I started teaching in his program.

And I loved teaching right from the beginning. I loved it more and more and more and more. The more I do it,

the kind of more fluid and fluent I get at it. So I've always liked it a lot. I mean, I taught a class with Joseph way back in 1975. We taught a class together at the School of Visual Arts called "Theory of Art Workshop," and it was very - you know, a lot of art theory and making various projects and so on. And we had - Tim Rollins was one of our students then. And one of my students when I taught at NYU was Stephen Frailey, who has been head of the undergraduate photo department at SVA for a long time.

Many, many, many of my students are well-known artists now. One of my students from RISD is in a new photography show, Deana Lawson and -

MS. RICHARDS: At where?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: New photography show at MoMA that just opened up. I said, "Oh, that's nice."

MS. RICHARDS: Did you say his name?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Deana Lawson. [Name inaudible] - was a student of mine. You know, but - I mean, it's not about names. I just love - I - what did I say - I guess the thing with teaching is, I've studied so much, I've read so much, seen so many shows, thought about art so much, thought about photography so much. And teaching is an opportunity to kind of share that, you know, and to - and it's also a little tiny bit - I mean, I would hate to say - I shouldn't even say this in public - but it's a little bit like mothering, because what you're doing is helping older kids kind of figure out who they are and get in touch with what they want to do. And so, you know, it's a supportive role and it requires a lot of - I don't know, a lot of giving, but good giving, fun giving, rich giving.

And so I taught a long time at SVA. I've always taught second-year master's crit. I love helping the kids to do their master's thesis project, which is kind of ironic because I - I mean, I also taught master's crit at - not crit - I taught in the master's program at RISD.

MS. RICHARDS: Do you - do you feel there was some model of a fantastic teacher that you followed or you just totally made it up?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I told you that I had - I had two just fabulous teachers -

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: - in Doug Huebler and Lisette Model. I mean, I think each teacher teaches their own - their own way. The way I - one of the ways I teach is I try to bring out of each student the thing that they want to bring out of themselves. And so I have to try to figure out what that is and how to - how to encourage it and how to, you know, give it a language. I mean, you never know when you meet somebody who they - who it is they want to be. But that's what teaching is, is kind of a process where, you know, you encourage them as they figure out for themselves who they want to be. And in general, I believe it's a supportive role, but it also requires a critical perspective too because you want them - you want each person to know who their antecedents are and who they might look to for inspiration. And they really - and challenge them to step up to the plate and really have something - some original idea themselves rather than just, you know - you know, make a conventional artwork or photograph.

So it's a lot of work, but it's a lot of pleasure and joy. And I get a lot out of - not get out of it - sounds so awful - but I am rewarded in return a great deal by what I get out of teaching and what I learn from my students. I learn a lot about people. I learn a lot about art.

MS. RICHARDS: Is it -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I learn a lot of technology. I mean, my assistants are - always come from, you know, my student pool, and I have top-notch assistants that know how to do everything technical and conceptual -

MS. RICHARDS: So in a way I was going to ask you how it feeds back into your work. That's obviously one way.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, my assistant right now is a young man named Matt Lang, and he was in my class last year. And we - you know, sometimes I can have an assistant that ends up being my student. I'll take a younger graduate student, and then they're in my class. And sometimes I have to take a hiatus of being my assistant while they're in my class because the dynamics don't work right. And sometimes it's perfectly fine. With Matt, it was perfectly fine. We were able to keep those roles absolutely separate from each other. And he's a very bright, very talented young artist.

And, you know, so I was able to be his teacher in class and in relation to his work but have him be my assistant in relation to my work and help me either technically or conceptually or - I mean, I ask Matt currently - and this would be typical of a good assistant working relationship - I ask him to proofread papers I write along with me - I just wrote an article for *Artforum*. I had him read it with me and make sure it made sense. And I, you know, play

out, "What do you think about this? Do you like this image here? How do you do that?" And then, "Now let's figure out how to redesign the website or how to create the blog or" – and so my son Nick actually does some of that stuff with me too. Nick just made my web – front page of my website into a blog for me so I can upload photos from my computer or from my camera or from my cell phone very simply and directly so I can have a more active front page to the website.

MS. RICHARDS: And you have a new teaching position coming up. Do you want to talk about that?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I wanted to say something – yeah, I will, but I wanted to just say that my son Nick, who is now 26, just has his first show up. And he has a show called [TABLETS]– at a gallery at Kathleen Cullen. And it's making me very, very, very happy that Nick has really emerged as an interesting young artist. And, you know, he's tried in many ways not to follow his mother's footsteps [Laughs], but he's been an incredibly creative kid ever since he was an infant. And I'm glad that he's finally sort of gotten in touch with that part of himself that he's really good at and makes him very happy. And so he has a beautiful, beautiful show.

Yeah, I just – I guess I was hoping that it would all be official before you and I did these recordings, but I've just taken a new teaching position – it's called an appointment – at Princeton. And I've been in negotiations, shall we say, with Princeton ever since December, so it's almost a year – just a few weeks shy of a year that the conversation's been going on. I was initially approached to consider a full-time tenured teaching position, head of the photo department.

And of course there was something that, you know, really spoke to me very deeply about teaching at Princeton because of my family history with Princeton. And my father would just be overjoyed if he knew not only about my house in Connecticut but, you know, that I was teaching at Princeton. Princeton University purchased some pieces of mine a number of years ago, and they have actually quite a few right now.

But the teaching thing just came up completely out of left field. I knew that they – that Emmet Gowin was retiring and that they were looking for a new head of the photo department. And I thought about applying but just sort of never really got very far in that thought process. And then some months later, I was approached by Joe Scanlan, who's the new head of the Lewis Center for the Arts, which is, you know, the arts program at Princeton. And I was very interested in considering that position, and I did eventually actually apply and was short-listed. And then I went – they wanted me to come and consider taking the position. And they said, "You know, you have to be very committed. If you really want this position, you have to be committed." And I – instead of being committed, I was very conflicted. And I said, "Oh, I don't know, you know, at my age whether I want a full-time teaching position."

But I eventually visited and decided that I had to pass on it. And I was very sad. I just said, "I can't – you know, I can't teach full-time undergraduate, and I live in Connecticut half the time and it's too much of a commute and too much time commitment." And I passed. And I felt very sad about it, but I just – you know, I had to know what I could do and what I couldn't.

And then they came back to me a few months later and encouraged me to teach. And then they said, "Well, we would like somebody to help us redesign the program, and we've got Jim Welling is going to come one semester a year for the next five years; and why don't you also come – if you won't do full-time, how about half-time?" And I went, "Sure, half-time is fine. And I'd love to help redesign the program. And of course I have – you know, from teaching graduate school, I have a lot of resources to draw from. And I like Jim Welling very much and imagine that we could share that responsibility well."

And so I accepted the position, and I will be starting in February. And I'm really excited about it. It's sort of – I'm taking a leave of absence just for this spring because I'm going to be teaching full-time this spring at Princeton and –

MS. RICHARDS: Taking a leave of absence from –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: From SVA.

MS. RICHARDS: SVA.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: But then going forward next fall and for the next four years, I'll be teaching what's called half-time, which means I only have to teach one day a week at Princeton. And they have a short semester. And I think it's going to be a really interesting challenge to figure out, you know, what a photography program at an important Ivy League college could be. It's not an art school. So it's a different story than kids in graduate school that decide they want to be artists. Those kids are smart kids that may want to be anthropologists or Eastern religion majors, you know. And what does photography mean to them?

So I like the kind of conceptual challenge. I like to figure out – and, you know, it's a sort of changing world. It's

curious to figure out, like, what is the relationship between analog and digital photography and how would you put together a facility and a program that teaches visual literacy, technical literacy and challenges ideas and imagination?

So I think, you know, it's a challenge for me, and I'm really excited about it. [Audio break.]

You know, I've been thinking since we've been doing these interviews – [Laughs] it's like some kind of narcissist fantasy to have somebody listen to you talk about yourself with some apparent interest for hours on end. It's also a very strange kind of process of self-reflection to be thinking about all these significant moments in one's life.

And, I guess, on one level I feel like a blabbermouth; I'm just going on and on and on and on and talking and talking, but I also think that maybe it has some value over and beyond anybody who wants to know about me or my particular work but that I feel like any person's life, no matter what they do or whether they're renowned or not, that there is value in knowing about what their life experience is. And I'm very fond of biographies for that reason. I read – I read biographies a lot; I have ever since I was a little girl, but I've been reading almost exclusively, with few exceptions, biographies for the last two, two and a half years partly because of an art project that I'm kind of working on in the back of my mind but also partly because I love the biographies. I love considering what various artists' lives were like in different periods and times and their issues. So it's a certain way of knowing art history but also knowing, you know, what people's personal struggles are about.

And I think one of the things that's fun about biographies is being able to step into different time periods and different social experiences and see what those experiences were like. And I guess you and I have talked briefly when we've just talked with each other, not on record, but we were born at the same time in 1947, and I graduated from Barnard in 1969, the same year you graduated from Berkeley. And they were the same years that students were sitting in the dorms and feminism was sweeping through women's lives and changing the way we thought of our roles.

And I think that the experience of women of our generation in general is quite different than that of our mothers, whatever class we came from, whatever area – geographic area we lived in, that women's lives of our generation were quite, quite different than the generation before us. And as a young artist, I found – I felt like I was entering a territory that had been primarily owned by men in previous generations, with a few exceptions, that women if they were artists were either anonymous or folk artists or not able to really enter the public sphere, not really able to exhibit widely. Of course, that's a crass generalization – I'm aware – but I was the first woman artist in the gallery that represented me – well, I was the first woman artist in Jay Gorney, which was the gallery that represented me from the time my daughter was born in 1988.

[Laughs] I think I mentioned to you how scary it was, you know, when I first was invited to join the gallery and then realized I was pregnant. And I was going, "Oh, my God, how am I going to, like, do my first show? I'm the first woman in the gallery and no sooner do I get in the gallery that I'm pregnant, you know, barefoot pregnant!"

MS. RICHARDS: You had many shows in galleries, both here and in Europe, before then. But do you consider that the first time you were really represented by a gallery on a permanent basis?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, no, I was represented by International With Monument. And then I – you know, but I was already in the process with my show, you know, with them and had done other shows before that when I was pregnant with my son. But when I accepted representation by this new gallery in 1988 in SoHo and then found myself pregnant, I was, "Oh, shoot! How am I going to do this?" So I did it.

But at any rate, I feel like women of an older generation frequently had to make a choice between being artists and being mothers, that the struggle was so difficult, it was such an uphill struggle that – I mean, Georgia O'Keeffe was a great painter, but she wasn't a mother. And just around the time that I started working, you know, there were a few women who decided to have children and a few that decided – didn't slightly older than myself. Like, say, Elizabeth Murray has two children; she's a few years older than I am. And, of course, Elizabeth has passed away now. But Pat Steir is a similar age, a few years older than myself.

And these are women that I turned to to find an anchor; you know, how can I be a woman, how can I be an artist, how can I do – make this work? I remember calling Pat Steir up in the night sometime around maybe 1981 or something. I didn't even know her. I called her up, and I said, "Help! How can this be done? How can I do this? How can I, you know, survive being – there are no women out there and – you know, I'm having trouble with my boyfriend and life is crazy and I don't know what I'm doing." And she said, "Well" – [Laughs] you know, and she just talked to me. And she's been a friend every since. Elizabeth Murray was a close friend.

But my direct peers, like – women like Laurie Simmons or Louise Lawler – we did have children and families. And, you know, different women made different choices. Cindy doesn't have children. Barbara Kruger doesn't have children. Louise has a child that's now grown. Laurie and I both had, you know, nuclear family life. So

women make different choices for themselves and juggle different issues, but I think the possibility of having a family and children and a career and an income, an independent income and being able to be fulfilled in a multitude of different ways is now a possibility for women. And it – and we're really, really lucky.

And I was with Kiki Smith last week going from someplace to someplace else; we were in the car together. And she had just – Kiki doesn't have children. Kiki just got back from doing a residency in Alba, and she's, like, living on an island, making artwork and – you know, and I'm talking about Nick's show and – you know, they're just different experiences. But I think we're the first generation that are out there being able to make these choices and make these calls. And it does involve a lot of juggling, but it's also an opening. And I think the women of my generation have contributed an enormous amount to art.

I did a retrospective in 1998 at SITE Santa Fe –

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: – well, it was initiated by SITE Santa Fe by Louis Grachos and co-curated by Susan Sterling from the National Museum of Women in the Arts. And it was a wonderful experience for me in 1998 to be in Santa Fe. And Louis was always very enthusiastic about my work. And I guess –

MS. RICHARDS: Did it seem – did – it seems very young for a retrospective. Was that –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, it was a retrospective. I mean, I started – it was a 20-year retrospective. And I'm hoping that I'll have, whatever it is, 30- or 35-year retrospective before long. But that was a very exciting experience for me. I didn't know until we started installing that show – Louis and I worked together for a number of years on it, probably four. He was initially at the Queens Museum and wanted to do it there, and I said, "No, I didn't want to do a retrospective at the Queens Museum." And then he went to Miami and wanted to do it there, but before we kind of got that all figured out, then he went to San Diego, and we were starting to apply for grants. He was in San Diego, and then he became the director of SITE Santa Fe, where we did do it. And now he's the director of the Albright-Knox.

And so when I was working with Louis, when we finally had curated the entire show – and also with Susan Sterling; the three of us worked on it together, and Susan did very extensive writing on my work for the catalog. When the work was – started to be unpacked in Santa Fe for the installation, I didn't know what it was going to look like. It was coming from places all over the country, from different private collections and different museums. And we started taking things out and leaning them against the wall on padded things, and it was quite wonderful because I was nervous, you know, the series were going to clash with each other – well, this is all black-and-white and critical, and that's bright red. And, you know, I thought they were going to – there was a good possibility that things wouldn't look good together or wouldn't hang together conceptually. But I was pleasantly surprised that they did. They looked – quite amazing.

And it's funny – you know, like, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, for instance, had a piece of mine that – they had their own private conservator come to oversee the unpacking of the two pieces. And I, who made the work, who designed the work, who knew everything about everything about the molecular structure of the pieces was not allowed to clean my own piece. It was mind-boggling to me. Everybody else sends their pieces to me to be fixed or conserved or repaired. And I understand everything about how the works are made and should be handled.

[Laughs] But the Boston Museum of Fine Arts hired a private conservator to go there with little camel's hair brushes and brush off things. It was nutty.

Anyway, that show went from Santa Fe – went to San Diego, and then it went to Washington, where Susan hosted it at the National Museum of Women in the Arts. And because Washington was near New York, all my friends from New York – you know, Cindy and Laurie and, you know – [inaudible] – Phillips and Kate Winger [ph] and many of the women who were writers or curators or artists, friends, my family all came to the opening in Washington.

And it was so great. It was just so fun. And then later it – during that – it's, like – it was on several floors of the museum, seems to me, room after room after room. And then my mother, who lived in Maine at the time was getting to be an older lady, and my two – it was – young children, came to Washington together, and I had a chance to show my young children what it is I do and my mother what it is I do. And now – my father never made it, but it – then it went to the Rose in Boston at Brandeis. And my father and mother and uncles and everybody came to see it at the Rose. And so that was – that was a lovely experience for me. And – I'm forgetting where I'm going with this – [Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: When you had that wonderful retrospective that traveled, obviously you got tons of review. I've seen some of them; they're almost all very – all very positive. But I wanted to ask you, have there been times

when reviewers have really gotten it wrong and you feel that that's out there and you want to correct the record in that regard, that they've been misinterpreted or misunderstood or -

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I don't know. I mean, I don't think about it that way. I mean, a reviewer is just a person with an opinion. I think that -

[END TRACK 7.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I don't know. I mean, I think art history is a complicated process, and I think it's always a negotiation between an artist and the writers and the collectors and the art galleries and the museums. And it's a complex process. And I think different artists have a different relationship with those sets of forces. I - you know, I mean, being friends with, say, Cindy Sherman, I - you know, I know how different her experience of being an artist is than mine. And I also am close friends with Laurie Simmons and Louise Lawler. And I'm friendly with Barbara Kruger. And each one of us has had a different set of, sort of, forces operative around our work - our works. And, you know, one person has one thing going for them, and another thing is more difficult.

You know, Cindy has had a great deal of notoriety right from early on, and her work has been phenomenally important to contemporary art history; I mean, probably more than anyone else. And, you know, the fact that she's a woman doesn't have - isn't of primary importance to that. And yet Cindy's experience is such - she's such a superstar that she hasn't had the same issues about dealing with money and dealing with opportunities and dealing with, you know, where could I show my work and what can - you know, how do I support myself and what are the issues I'm juggling? And yet she has her other issues that she deals with, other struggles.

And I feel that for every artist it's different, but there's a great deal of commonality between the people I just mentioned, Barbara and Cindy and Louise and Laurie and myself. And, you know, I could expand out from that and mention more names, but you get the gist of what I'm saying. I think that for myself - my work is difficult; it's not easy work; it's not work that's - you know, I think painters have different struggles than photo artists. I think that work that engages complex conceptual questions such as mine is much harder for people to write about, for people to understand and for the market to assimilate. That's okay with me.

I always, always have pitched my work to an imaginary viewer that is smart, sophisticated, visually sensitive and can juggle all sorts of complex ideas and still appreciate those complex ideas coming down in a very, very subtle, minimal, tailored look. That's not really the case. All the people who see the show are not like that. And many, many writers will come along and write something like, "Brightly colored symbols or iconic forms on a colored field." And while it may be that, that's like the crudest, most simplistic, most superficial way of understanding what the work is about. I don't know. I mean, what - what's "understanding" mean? Who cares whether work is understood, you know?

MS. RICHARDS: Has there been a difference between the criticism you've - the critical reception you've received when you've had shows in Europe and European reviewers writing and Americans?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I think Europe has a more sophisticated art public in general than America. But there are also styles and fashions in art that come and go, you know, as sort of - you know, I guess our generation is now being called the pictures generation ever since Doug Eklund's show at the Met. We've officially become the pictures generation, which is sort of derived from Metro Pictures and the whole postmodern shtick about representation and all the things that it was about. And Doug Eklund's version of the story, you know, is very broad and includes artists like Allan McCollum and David Salle and, you know, other - Jack Goldstein. And all these people were part of the same discourse.

And these artists, along with the people who dealt directly with photography such as Laurie and myself and Cindy and Louise - we were part of the same exploratory moment. And it's not part of - I think in its most primary initiation, it's not part of the history of photography; that's not where it comes from. It was really the history of art. I mean, Cindy was an artist, Laurie was an artist, I was an artist, Richard Prince was an artist. Some of us were painters. Louise as well. And she - we didn't start out as picture takers, people who went around - [inaudible] with the camera bugs - in high school, you know.

And so I think this work emerged as a response to challenges that were laid down by pop, by minimalism, by conceptualism and by our experience as a generation and women in particular responding to, you know, things about - questions about their roles as women and the way in which women were represented in mass media and public culture. And a lot of the artwork speaks back to that, challenges that. And so - [Audio break.].

MS. RICHARDS: So you were talking about having your work shown in the - in various contexts, "The Pictures Generation" show at the Metropolitan and other exhibitions. When you're working with your dealer, Susan Inglett, you also show at Margo Leavin - still?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And I show with Baldwin Gallery -

MS. RICHARDS: And Baldwin in Aspen – you've had long relationships with all those wonderful galleries. Do you control the context that your work is seen in; in other words, whether it's being purchased or borrowed for an exhibition, does the gallery dealer know that they convey to the curator that you need to be consulted, that you are concerned?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: They would always consult with me. It's just sort of the proper protocol. Well, also, the Internet's changed a lot about how that works. It used to be, like, for instance, during the later '80s and then '90s, I was represented by Jay Gorney. And first he had a gallery in SoHo and then later on in Chelsea. And in those days, in the late '80s and '90s, the gallery – when you worked with a gallery, there weren't any real contracts, nothing – no pieces of paper were ever signed. Everything in the art world that I've experienced has been word of mouth. And that – you know, everybody's word is as good as a contract. And everybody is responsible for it. And I found it, you know, quite reliable. I mean, when somebody tells me a piece is sold, it's usually sold. And when they tell me they're going to pay me, they usually pay me eventually. And when I tell a gallery I'll do a show with them, I do it.

And so it's kind of – there are kind of rules that govern a relationship between an artist and a gallery. And even though it varies slightly from gallery to gallery, the art world in particular is very much about one's word. So one of the ways in which the galleries used to operate is when you were working with a gallery, that gallery really owned the right to sell your work. And if I sold a work outside of the gallery, that was really taboo. And so if my aunt wanted to buy a work, I practically had to take her over to the gallery and walk her through to the dealer and say, "Here, give her a good discount."

MS. RICHARDS: Right.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Maybe I'm exaggerating a little bit, but that's changed since the Internet. There's much – while artists are quite loyal and responsible to their galleries and – it only works – a working relationship only works if it works for everybody. So nobody wants to represent you if you're selling things cheaper on the side. And you can't do that or you destroy your own market. But – and besides, it's unethical. But it's changed a little bit since the Internet, that people find ways of approaching you and asking you questions.

Some artists like that, and some artists don't. Some artists like – Laurie likes her gallery to be her front; you know, "don't bug me about it; speak to my gallery first." She – you know, she carries on dimensions of her own life and is totally capable of running her own show if she wanted to. But she uses a gallery in that way to be – to protect her privacy and her work time and so on.

I'm very different about that. I like to know everything about every one of my pieces and every one of my choices and be very involved in it. And so I don't even mind if people call me or write me and say, "I've got a problem; there's a spot on my piece." And I want to know about that, so I want to make sure it's handled properly. So I'm a very different kind of person in that regard. I don't know how I managed to turn in – tune in to the details. I do, but I do nonetheless [Laughs].

So the Internet – the fact that people can write to you and ask you things has changed the dynamic between artists and galleries slightly. And so sometimes you end up meeting with people that haven't even gone through your gallery. Or occasionally, if I have developed a relationship with a person and been showing them work and talking to them about work, I'll make a sale and not take 50 percent to a particular gallery because I haven't done the work of the gallery in relation to that particular sale. I don't want to hide anything. Everything is out in the open. There's – everything is – by doing things translucently, transparently, there's no conflict, you know. Anybody who wants to know where I am in the edition, what number is available or not, it's right here in the inventory and it's kept up-to-date, you know.

And so, you know, when pieces are sold or gone to museums or change from one collection to another – even when something's occasionally sold at auction, if I – if I know anything about it, it enters the inventory. So there's always a bit of a catalog raisonné going on in my computer.

So I think that that's different now than it used to be. You know, there are multiple – [Audio break].

MS. RICHARDS: So we're talking about your work and –showing in galleries. And I wanted to focus now on your current work and your museum shows and other related – why don't you pick up where you would like to on that.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: You want me to talk about my current work for now?

MS. RICHARDS: If you want to. We can talk about working methods, or I think you had some other things to say about museum shows and about – that were important.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I – you had asked me before a question that I never really answered about whether

I - whether I would be consulted about a show.

MS. RICHARDS: Right, controlling the context your work is shown in, yes.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, yeah, I wanted to answer that question actually.

MS. RICHARDS: Oh, good. Good.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: And then we can go on to answer the next one.

MS. RICHARDS: Okay.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Because it's interesting - I just recently had an experience where I was approached by a curator, a guy named Peter Eleey, who was a curator at P.S.1 and curated a show that's up there at P.S. 1 right now called *September 11* or something like that. And he approached me, say, early last spring or late in the winter and wanted to know - he was curating a show about September 11 that was going to be at P.S. 1 MoMA. And he wanted to include one of the *Stills*, the people in midair. And he asked me about that. And I said I wasn't sure. You know, I wanted to think about that.

And the thing that I wanted to think about was whether or not - he was doing a show about P.S. 1 - this work with - I mean, about September 11th. This work had nothing to do with September 11. It was created in 1979,'80. And he's talking about an event that took place in 2001, and he's wanting to use an image of - well, the one that he chose is of the woman - *Unidentified Woman, Hotel Corona, Madrid*. It was a woman jumping out of a building, and there's smoke and flames around her. And I thought, "Whoa, you know, I don't want this piece to be sensationalized. This is not what the work was about. It's not about September 11" - and he was actually kind of doing a curious project. He was using artworks that were taken completely out of context in order to create a kind of way of reflecting on September 11th, when works - you know, Diane Arbus's photo of a newspaper blowing down the street or - you know, the different pieces that were drawn from different series - works that were created long before - most of them long before September 11th, 2001.

So I had to think very seriously about whether I'd put that work in that show. And you know, sometimes you don't want to be in a show because you just don't think it's interesting or you don't think it's appropriate or the work's too fragile or something or other. Other times, people curating shows - and they're borrowing works from collectors and you don't even know about it. So, you know, it's not something you can totally control. But as a courtesy, you're frequently approached and asked, you know, what piece you think would be good for a show and would you lend it or would you support it being in the show, which is what Peter Eleey did.

And we ended up having quite an interesting discussion. So at first I hesitated because I thought it changed the meaning of the work. And then I thought, "Well, that's ridiculous. Why should I be self-censoring?" All artists changed and - changing historical context. And this is what curators do all the time is they make up their own ideas using your artwork. So I said yes, that he could borrow the piece, and gave him suggestions of who he could call. And the piece is in the show now.

But one of the things that show made me really think about a lot was how artwork is constantly - its meaning is constantly changing, the way it's understood is constantly changing. And that's not only true of my work or that piece but all artwork. And I knew that - I mean, the *Renaissance* series explored that as an idea. I've known that all along on one level, but that show really brought it home to me on another level how true it is. It's sort of - you know, once it's out there, it's part of the moveable feast. And, you know, art history is - as we were saying before, as I was saying, the styles come and go, and there is a certain kind of dialectic to art history. And things are in fashion, and, you know, for a moment, pictures generation, you know, is cutting-edge, and then it's old hat, you know. Well - shut up, you rhetorical, critical, conceptual - let's just throw paint around again.

Okay, I'm being snide, but, you know, that's what happens. It's - art history can be just like any fashion, you know. Like, everybody is loving this until they can't stand it anymore and they're loving that instead. You know, one of - one of the virtues of not ever being high-fashion as an artist - I mean, I guess I have been a little bit, but - and I - my experience has been more than there's been a kind of constancy to my career, that I've never gone through a period where I haven't sold work at all. But I've never gone through a period where I was just, you know, selling work like crazy. Every once in a while it's happened, but, you know, you have these moments where you go, "Oh, my God, you know, I'm actually okay. You know, I sold 22 pieces." Then you go through 22 months without selling a piece. You know, it's like - it's - you have to have - be able to kind of keep a balance in the middle of all that stuff.

But I guess in answer to your question, I really do like to be involved in decisions about my work. And that's one of the reasons why I stay so accessible. And I don't use my galleries as fronts. And I have a lot of work in museums and a lot of work in shows in museums. And one of the things that I find slightly - don't really love is that museums tend to collect the earliest works, the seminal works more than latter ones, even though I reserve

APs for museums and have – and I – and I think it's partly because museums also kind of collect in – I don't know what to say – in a way that – they copy each other. One museum sees this work, and they say, "That's really important work; that's her most important work. We want one from the same series."

And I just am looking forward to – you know, to a point – and I hope that I live this long – where more and more and more of the work is brought into the public sphere. And it certainly happened in relation to the retrospective, but I think there's – there is substance there that still remains to be explored and appreciated and brought into the public sphere. So out of the closet and into the museums [They laugh].

MS. RICHARDS: Well, hopefully that will include the new work that you're starting to do now or have been doing since *Work in Progress*.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Okay. So –

MS. RICHARDS: And you wanted to say something about Lucy as well.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, which do you want – well – no, I mean, I guess one of the funny things that I thought about – an idea that crossed my head when we'd been talking was that – you know, I said to Nicholas when we went to an opening up at the Guggenheim – and it's fun having a son who's just a young artist and he wants to see stuff and talk about stuff, and he has interesting ideas. And one of the things that I had sort of realized and said to him – "Nick, if you ever want to know anything about me, [Laughs] you can just read this interview, because it talks about your grandparents, talks about your birth, it talks about your childhood, it talks about work I was doing when – you know, blah, blah." And it's so extensive.

And I was thinking about what a nice phase of life I'm having right now. And, you know, one of the joys to me is having my children both kind of begin to be adults and on track. And my daughter Lucy just graduated from NYU, and she's excited – she's interested in science and wants to go to graduate school. She maybe wants to study public health or epidemiology and thought she might want to go to medical school. She's not sure. But she's also been interested in psychology.

So she's just working on figuring out what kind of graduate school she may go to, and she's got a really nice boyfriend that she gets along great with and she's beginning to kind of, you know, really partner in a profound way with her boyfriend. And it's just – it's a – it's a lovely period for me to be sort of getting to that point with my children and also at the same time be at a point in relation to my own work that I'm excited about and feeling kind of happy and looking forward to getting this show realized. I like the work that I'm working on right now, I think – I should knock on wood if there was anything but –

MS. RICHARDS: Does it have a title, the series?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It's – well, I haven't –

MS. RICHARDS: If you want – you don't have to reveal it.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I haven't said it before, but I think it's called *Available Light*.

MS. RICHARDS: Available Life?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Light.

MS. RICHARDS: Light.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Which has – as my titles often do – many different ways of understanding or reading that title. As available light, photography is – it's a term that's used in photography when you don't use studio lights, which I didn't use, but that's not what I mean by it. But it also is a show that's about light and uses light and uses optical tools and optical phenomena.

And, you know, in the last series, *Work in Progress*, the last piece that I made, which wasn't a tool at all; it was just using that window in the studio – and I wove a kind of – almost a plaid out of strips of paper of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet vellum. And I wove a plaid out of them. So where the blue and yellow overlap, it turns green, and you see how light really – color and light work together to create color and light.

And so I've been working a lot with real sunlight, with prisms, with a crystal ball. Cindy gave me a crystal ball for my birthday. I kept borrowing her crystal ball [Laughs]. And crystal balls are pretty expensive, and, you know, you think you don't need a crystal ball until you need a crystal ball for a prop, and then you need a crystal ball. So I was asking Cindy to borrow her crystal ball, and then a crystal ball just arrived in – for my birthday. And I guess I kind of over-borrowed her ball. Cindy was very jealous – I mean very generous.

And this crystal ball was just huge. And I was wanting to be playing with these optical things, and I bought various prisms and so on. But I was playing with them in the studio and creating sets, as I would, but also exploring what these prisms and things did with the light. And so I began to photograph – build a set and – against the window or in the studio and photograph some crystals or a holographic prism that splits open the light and you could just see the whole spectral makeup of the – of the white light when it gets split into the different colors and doing things with rainbows and stuff like that, just kind of playing along, trying to figure stuff out.

But as I was doing this, I created a number of pieces that look just like my work but the props and tools are optical props and tools. But I also started photographing the studio as I was working and photographed it in a way that's very formally controlled and precise so that I ended up making images that will be integrated right with the Sarah Charlesworth type photos of these optical toys doing their tricks. The whole studio becomes almost like a kind of alchemist's crazy workshop of light. And there's, you know, a disco ball throwing circles of light –

MS. RICHARDS: Really? A disco ball?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I – yeah, my studio's on the ground floor and open in the sunlight. And I'm inviting sunlight in the window, and I'm going out on the street and using the natural light. And so there's a kind of fluidity between creating Sarah Charlesworth type pieces using these optical things and photographing the studio looking like a magic shop, you know.

And so the – I'm mixing together images that are real photos of the studio with images of – that I'm making. So there is – you can see in the entire show the process of making the entire show. All the props are somewhere or other. The photographs that become real photographs are push-pinned to the wall in some other image. So the show is basically the process of making a show, and it's quite beautiful because of the turquoise and white light and –

MS. RICHARDS: Do you know – have you actually made the prints yet?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: No.

MS. RICHARDS: So at this point, do you establish how many there will be, or is that as you go along some might get thrown out, some might –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well –

MS. RICHARDS: – new things might be added?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: At this point, I'm really designing the installation and – which would, of course, shift from one gallery to another. I might add more or, you know, take away some or, you know – [inaudible] – but a given series is always altered slightly, depending on, you know, where it's shown, you reinstall it differently in a different gallery. But right now, I'm designing the show to be in the Susan Inglett gallery and open in early March. And I had asked Susan for the March slot because of the colors of the pieces because I wanted to make a lot of them a pale turquoise. And I'm using the turquoise and white and pale gray pallet. So it just seemed like that would be a good pallet – or March would be a good month for that pallet. So that's why I asked for the March slot.

I mean, that's not unusual. I cook to the seasons, I make work to the seasons and always have, you know.

MS. RICHARDS: When you're – another technical question – when you start making the work and you've produced a good number of images that you're happy with, before you actually make the final prints, do you adjust the color of some or all of them in relationship to another to create a –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Oh, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: – the color relationships you want –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Of course, yes.

MS. RICHARDS: – that you couldn't possibly know at the beginning?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I mean, I – ever since the first *Objects of Desire* – I think that would be a good starting point to make this statement, that ever since the first *Objects of Desire*, if I have 12 pieces with red backgrounds or 12 pieces with turquoise backgrounds or, you know, 15, 16 pieces with white backgrounds, I need to get the – you know, I have lacquer frames made for the pieces, and they're custom-made by a Japanese lacquer specialist. And I – you know, I can't have that person having to make 15 different whites or 15 different

turquoises. So I have to somehow or other adjust my palette both in the photography and in the post-production - like, Photoshop now that would be - and in the printing to bring things into the same range. They're not necessarily identical, but they're close enough that if I have lacquer frames made to match the prints, that they match each - you know, we have - occasionally we've had two versions of white - the people wouldn't notice - or different -

But in general, I try to bring the colors into the exact same range. And printing - first post-production and then printing is a pretty extensive process; it takes many, many, many trips back and forth to the lab. And I work with a master printer. My printer's name is Esteban Mauchi. And I work with master framers as well. [Audio break.]

MS. RICHARDS: Okay. You were talking about the framer?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Yeah, and I've worked with two different Japanese framers. I've worked for many years with Yasuo Minagawa, and I've also worked with Haruo Kimura. And, you know, they're both masters; they're excellent. And I've also worked with Russ Burlak [ph], but I'm not working with him so much, but my son is, so - [Laughs] go figure.

MS. RICHARDS: Could you - could you talk about how, why you began so many years ago to incorporate the frame in as an essential part of the piece and every piece, I think, since then?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, I guess - you know, as I've said way early on and in this discussion or interview that I think that all the formal attributes of an - of an artwork are part of how it signifies. So when I make choices about what size something is or what color something is or what the finish is, I - you know, there's a difference to me between whether I put a glossy laminate on something or whether I put a satin laminate on something.

There's different - and by the same token, I would probably have the - I usually have a seamless relationship between a mounted print and a frame. So if I have a glossy laminate on the photograph, I have a glossy frame. I like there to be a continuous surface which is part of, you know, the choice that I've made in relation to what the idea of any individual artwork or series is about. I usually make those choices by the series. And then I'm consistent within that series. I usually have a palette for each series - one series, the series called *Double World*, was a series where I didn't use a laminate. And I instead made mahogany frames and put plexi glazing - I mean, plexi - glazing is, you know, glass or plexi in front of a print because I was - that was the series that was dealing with kind of antique imagery, old paintings and old photographs. So I wanted them to look old in reference, sort of, of other historical periods. But in general, I - the work is quite contemporary looking. And in general, I like to make those formal choices based on what the idea of that particular series is and what I'm trying to bring out.

So in, for instance, the *Objects of Desire 1* when I said that I wanted people to, like, kind of look at the pieces to mirror their own sense of their own gender or sexuality and, you know, how they felt about those models or paradigms - and in a series like *Academy of Secrets*, for instance - which I haven't spoken about - I think we've talked about it quite enough, the work - but I began to use a satin laminate, a much softer laminate, because I was talking about the unconscious, and I wanted to draw people into the work instead of bounce them off this surface.

I make those formal choices based on the idea of each series or each artwork. The prints that I make - since the *Objects of Desire*, my favorite and primary photographic medium is Cibachrome. I shoot with a four-by-five camera, as I mentioned to you before. I usually do extensive tests before I make any individual image, and I reject way more work than I accept. My pieces end up looking very simple in the end, but I may have photographed a simple object over and over and over and over again until I like the exact light or the exact tiny detail of it. It's -

MS. RICHARDS: Are you framing it through the lens or as you take the picture, or does the final cropping happen in the processing?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I always photograph through the camera. I make formal choices. Not only that. I mean, to show you how nutty it is, I have ideas for a particular cropping - I - for instance, there's an image right now that I want to make. I've been - had that image in my mind probably for 12 or 15 years. And I haven't gotten around to doing it yet. But it has a particular kind of composition that's not typical of my composition, but I've been wanting to do it and will eventually, I'm sure, do it.

But it's not only - you know, it can be with the camera, but it also can be in my head before it's with the camera. And then it can be after the camera because things change around on the light table. I'm constantly moving my images around. Suddenly I say, "Wait a minute - that image can speak to that image if I just put the thing over there a little higher." So I'll reshoot it or recompose it or change it afterwards in Photoshop. And so it's constant, it's part -

MS. RICHARDS: There's a lot of change in Photoshop or just a little inaudible] – talked about Photoshop.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Photoshop is – it's another tool. And before there was Photoshop – you know, in the *Objects of Desire*, I was still doing old-fashioned paste-ups. It was before digital. And I – you know, I would cut things out of magazines and rubber-cement them onto pieces of paper and photograph those paste-ups with the four-by-five camera. So the images eventually were four-by-fives. But before that, they were effectively collages. And that was true of the – *In-Photography*, that was true of the *Objects of Desire*, it was true right up until – I'm trying to think – well, the *Renaissance* series was paste-ups.

And I still have those paste-ups. They're on boards. They have tissue overlays because you have to keep them absolutely clean. In the old days, if you had a spot on a paste-up, one little speck of dust fell on it when it was being photographed at the lab with a four-by-five camera, you know, it was useless, and you'd have to go and reshoot it again or re-persuade the lab to reshoot it again or remake the paste-up.

And, you know, that changed when Photoshop came along. Those kinds of corrections were easily made. I mean, even as late as 2000, when I made the *White on White* prints, I had to hand touch the prints – if there was a speck of dust on a print, I still had to go in and burn it out with, you know, retouch bleach and re-clean it and re-archive it and make it archival.

So it's a constant process of working on different stages of the work, whether it's pre-digital or post digital. Things are always in process.

MS. RICHARDS: So how – want to move – think about that cycle of your processing to a larger creative cycle, how that relates.

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, you asked me, I think off the record, whether I threw away images or stuff like that. And I found myself telling a student recently that I was probably the most inefficient artist. I – you know, I spend hours and hours creating things that I end up not using or reshooting something over and over again for some fanatical obsessive reason that I don't really need to but I need to because I'm obsessive or something like that.

So – but that's work. That's process. That's my process. That's what happens with me. Other people – you know, Cindy can just go – [camera shutter noise] – and as rich and detailed as her work is, she can sometimes, you know, generate two or three or five images in two weeks, you know. Different – you know, different people have different ways of working. I'm a slow worker.

MS. RICHARDS: Has it always been that way, or is that changing?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Well, things are changing, but I've always been a slow worker. You know, if I give so much attention to such detail and I think about things a lot and I reject ideas all the time, it's a very inefficient process. But that's okay because, you know, it's all right. I don't need to make – I mean, if I – if I were a photographer that uses a camera, I'd take hundreds of photos all the time and beautiful photos, but I – that's not my work. My work isn't about making photos. They just go somewhere on a hard disc and every once in a while end up in an email or something.

The process of my work cycle is slow. I read, I think, I draw, I experiment, I order props, I photograph them, I like them, I don't like them, they lead to something, they might go in a box, they might become part of something else. I often juggle two or three or four different ideas along until a point where I have to get work ready for a show. And then I begin to let some of the ones that aren't as developed fall to the wayside.

MS. RICHARDS: Over the course of your whole process, is there one moment that you love the most, you know, from the early conceptual phase –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It depends –

MS. RICHARDS: – to the actual making and framing?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: It – you know, it varies from series to series. I like some of my series better than others. Some of them I feel empowered by the time I get it ready. Some of them I'm uncertain about. I like some of the pieces within the series better. But overall, I think I got – very early on – I probably got this from Joseph Kosuth and from Doug Huebler – the idea of working in series. So the way my process works is I'm cooking along on things that I'm thinking about, arguments that I'm arguing with the world and with photography and with writers and thinkers and other artists and things I want to see or know or explore.

And so the process usually works partly in my head, and it's partly in my emotions and my heart, my psychology and a dialogue – I have an ongoing dialogue that I have with my own work. So when I do a series, it usually involves a set of different ideas or considerations – each piece has a specific consideration to it. There's no two

pieces that do the same thing as each other. They all do something slightly different. That's true of the newspaper pieces; it's true of the current pieces.

But they're all part of a whole in a sense. And some series are more extensive than others. Some series take longer than others, but in general the cycle goes – starts with a sort of thought process, something I'd been thinking about for a while, and then begins to be some experiments and some tests and some tries and some yes's and some no's. And it goes on. And I make a new body of work about every two to three years. And along the side while I'm making that work is maybe other things cooking along on the backburners.

But there's not a particular moment. I love the period after I've just finished a new body of work when I get to go on summer vacation and say, "Hey, now I just get to go swimming and gardening and cooking!" [Laughs.] I love that period where, you know, it's sort of, I've got it off my plate and I'm in a free space.

I also really like it when I get a show in the can and I'm about to go into post-production or printing. And, you know, I don't have to agonize anymore about what images are part of it or why and how to do this one or how to do that one. I'm sort of in that phase right now, so I'm sort of excited because I like this body of work and I'm looking forward to seeing it. And I'm a little nervous because there's lots of decisions that I haven't made as to the installation and size and final, final, final edit of – I edit it all the time as I go along, constantly in and out, in and out, next to this, this next to that, you know.

It varies from series to series what point I like, but it definitely has a cyclical nature. I'm – I think almost all artists do that, not just even photographers, photo-based artists. I think in general people work to completion of an idea of body of work and then move on to something else.

One of the things that's unusual about what's happening with me at the moment is even though I have pretty much the show from March in the can, as it were, I'm not finished with the ideas. And so I'm not going to stop; I'm going to continue with this series even after it's in the can. So maybe it'll be – who knows, you know. It'll be – maybe there'll be more images in this body of work, or maybe it'll be in another stage two. I don't know.

The idea of *Available Light* isn't just about physical light. The meaning of light – there's also a Shiva – [inaudible] – image in this show. And Shiva's the Hindu god that constantly creates and destroys the world. And there was a Lakshmi, who's another Hindu goddess, in the show *0+1*. She's the goddess of light. Shiva is constantly creating and destroying the world. And so the Shiva is going to be with the piece that's the prism – they're – all the works in this show have circles, and there are circles of light in them and circles of movement and circles of dance. And so there are formal – there are formal orders within the whole body of work.

So *Available Light* to me is not just about spectral light but it's also about illumination or spiritual light. And to me, they're very close. They're very, very close.

[END TRACK 8.]

MS. RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Sarah Charlesworth on November ninth, 2011, in her studio in New York City for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc five.

We were just – you were just talking about your newest body of work and reflecting on the spiritual quality of life – of light, which makes me think that also has a – that it is about the spiritual quality of life or –

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Is that a question or a statement? [Laughs.]

MS. RICHARDS: A question. Do you want to – how can you expand on that and this moment in your life, where you're starting a new teaching job soon, you've had this wonderful studio set up, new show coming along, your kids are in a great place – places? [They laugh.]

MS. CHARLESWORTH: I'm 64 years old, which is, like, sort of old. I'm feeling like – you know, it's a different stage. You know, I'm in a different stage of life. I guess everybody's in that different stage of life than they have been. I feel like – you know, I'm – I – as I mentioned before, I have a lot of challenges, and I'm really looking forward to the challenges that this new teaching job at Princeton will entail. I have – still have a lot of energy. And I like – I like spending a lot of time in the country and working there and – but I also enjoy touching base with New York and seeing the shows and seeing my New York friends. And I have a boyfriend in Connecticut, who's a playwright. His name is Lonnie Carter.

MS. RICHARDS: Lonnie?

MS. CHARLESWORTH: Lonnie. And he teaches at NYU. So it's very curious – I met him in Connecticut shortly after I separated from my husband in 2006. Well, I actually met him before that, but I mean, he was just a friend and then eventually became a boyfriend about five years ago. And he teaches playwriting at NYU. And I

met him up there, and he would regularly commute to about two blocks away from my house in New York. And I would be working in New York and regularly commute up to Connecticut. So we have similar kinds of locations. And he's lived up there for a long time and comes down here to teach. And I have lived here now for a long time, but I'm spending more and more time there. And, you know, it's a nice - it's a nice phase for me right now.

But I also feel - I feel like I'm excited about working, and I don't always feel that way. You know, I just happen to feel that way at the moment. And I - but I also think that - I realize that getting older, there are a lot of other kinds of challenges besides a new teaching job that one has to face - health issues and, you know, difficult emotional transitions, loss of - you know, my parents are both dead now. Thank goodness my siblings are still alive and my - many of my dearest friends. But we're already at the point where we've lost friends and probably will lose more.

And so, you know, mortality looms increasingly. You know, it's - one thinks about how do I - how am I going to juggle this next phase here? I'm hoping that I get some grandchildren and - you know, that would be nice. And I am looking forward to - I - you know, at some point, I'm going to be past teaching. And I'm not thinking about that right now because I'm starting a new teaching job and I'm energized about it, but I think I've become clearer in the recent years about what I'd like to really accomplish with my life, what I would like - how I would like to feel about myself. And having, you know, worried as a younger woman about career or recognition or, you know, money or those kinds of things, I'm less concerned with those things now. I feel that's all - it is what it is and it's coming if it's coming; it's not if it's not. And, you know, I feel okay about my own work. I feel fine about it. I think what I would really like is to sort of have some - you know, have some kind of wisdom, really, like be able to feel resolved with my children and my choices and, you know, to be able to be at peace with myself and my life and okay about that.

And that's it.

MS. RICHARDS: Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

Last updated...2015 Feb 18