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Oral history interview with David Von
Schlegell, 1967 June 5

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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with David Von Schlegell on June 5, 1967. The interview took place in New York and was conducted by Dorothy Gees Seckler for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

Interview

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is Dorothy Seckler interviewing David Von Schlegell in New York on June 5, 1967. I noticed that you were born in 1920 in St Louis, MO and I imagine your early life some special interest for your career insofar as you had a father who was a painter, would you like to talk a little bit first about how you grew up? What kind of place it was and so on?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: As you say my father was a painter and a teacher, and I was born in St. Louis because my father was teaching at university, uh, Washington University. But he quite shortly got a job to teach at the Art Students League in New York, so we moved east when I was about five years old. And I did spend my whole childhood around artists and art students because he was a very popular teacher and the house was always full of art students and I just couldn't bear them. [Laughs.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] What was your uh—why that's interesting, what was it that bothered you about them?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, it's, it's no one specific thing that I was sort of—in those days I reacted as children often do, I sort of reacted against my father and his life. And uh, I was very interested in—just as a child I was interested in boats and airplanes, and that sort of thing, and I couldn't pay much attention to painting. Although, I realized later that I was so surrounded by it and of course it really is part of my background. I was aware of all the painting, French painting although I was just a child.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Your father's work is—is uh, well known but I wondered if uh, you'd like to describe what it was like when you were a young boy—what was he doing, what kind of subjects and—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: He was mainly—he was never an abstract painter, he was—he was uh, oh his influences were like Cézanne and the French Impressionists and he painted New England uh, landscapes and some of—but it was still—they had the quality of French Impressionism although the color was New England color. And his main interest, his passion, was color. He was always talking about color, experimenting with color, and he made his students very aware of color.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You say New England and yet of course uh, you were born in St. Louis and came to New York, did you—was the family from New England?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No but we lived in—we went to Maine every summer—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Oh, I see.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —and then we lived outside of—we lived in Westchester County so that's not quite New England but he had an art school in Ogunquit Maine, and uh, I went there all my life as a child, I mean since I was five years old. And then later on uh, I moved to Maine myself and spent about 15 or 18 years there. [Tape stops, restarts.] [Inaudible.] Is it going now? When I said I was reacting against these students I still, as I look back at it all, I look back at it with a good deal of feeling because my father lived—I mean there were many other artists in this—in Maine at that time. There were about oh, six or eight formed a very close and warm group, and it was rather—it uh, uh [laughs] just the atmosphere of these artists all working together was something, and now I look back on it with a great deal of nostalgia. And uh, there was like Kuniyoshi, and Caulfield [ph], and uh Robert Arndt [ph], and Spencer, people like that. And it was—it was a very nice time.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They were coming up every summer?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: They were there each summer, yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: At Ogunquit?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah at Ogunquit, for quite a few years. And although I wasn't interested in painting at

that time I liked all those people and I became friends with their children and all that so uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What were you doing about your interest in cars and boats and so on and uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —oh I was building from uh—I was always building boats, I built boats as long as I can remember and I built myself a boat which I used to sail, to go cruising in [inaudible].

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did you learn to build a boat, did you uh—were there local tradesmen there that could help you?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I rather taught myself, and this friend and I both had this passion about boat building, and he went on to become one of the top boat builders in the country. He builds huge uh, ocean racing yachts now. So we just taught ourselves really.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Then did you make a living doing that later on in your late teens?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I never actually worked at it as a job. I did work—well I went to college for a while and studied engineering and that—and I started with the idea of being a naval architect, but I changed and decided I'd rather be an airplane designer so uh—I did work for a while in an aircraft factory as an engineer.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well when you uh—your speaking now—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —but that's much later on—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, is that where you started off with this engineering?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And later than that when you uh—that you actually tried to work as an airplane designer?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah, the war came along, and I'd had two years of college and I decided I'd rather be in an aircraft plant than be in the war so I—I did get a job as an aircraft engineer after two years of college, there was a big need for that sort of thing then. But then I was sort of taken with the glamour of airplanes and decided I'd rather fly them so I just stayed at that job for about a year, and then went on—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —into the war—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —into the Army, yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: As an Air Force pilot.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah. But, but going back to my childhood I was always—even though I wasn't interested in painting my father was always helping me as far as drawing boats and airplanes, you know, so I was drawing all the time. I did lots of drawing. It was always fairly hard, sort of hard-edged drawings of things.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You were interested in, you know, describing a particular kind of car or airplane or boat?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes. I was very interested in the forms of boats, for instance it is quite a complicated thing to design a boat and I—and you have to—you have many different curves that all have to work together and to uh—to translate the form of a boat on a piece of paper, in other words, is a complex thing. And I did study that, and I studied that for a while with a boat designer, but as far as building boats I never studied with anybody.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Then uh, after the uh, war experience, what was your state of mind at that point. You uh, I gather that you came to New York?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I—everything—I just kept being unable to decide what I wanted to do. Then for a while I wanted to be an architect, I wanted—I was enrolling in college, in architectural college, it was for Columbia and I couldn't get into Columbia for six months, so I decided to work for an architect because you have to put in so much time anyway. That's how it works. So, I worked for an architect in New York that winter, and I just hated it. In the meantime—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What did you—what made you hate it?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I hated the—the uh—the enormous—I mean the enormous complexities of the problems and the fact that one person couldn't just get into the problem and solve it yourself. It involved teamwork and I was doing one tiny little detail in huge buildings, and I could see my future stretching out, not being able to design houses like I would like to do, but rather having to be involved in this big organization. And so I started painting—I started being interested in painting sort of gradually and I went to the Art Students League in the evenings and I studied with Kuniyoshi. And then I decided to take the GI Bill and study painting completely. I gradually got into painting. Even then I was—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —who else did you study with, beside Kuniyoshi? Well he was the important one I gather.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: He was the important one, and I studied with a man named Johnson. But uh, my father I studied with him too. But, even then at first I was just painting boats and it took a while for me to— [They laugh.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did uh, Kuniyoshi's teaching uh, effect you, I mean what do you remember?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I liked his paintings and I liked the—he was slightly primitive, but on the other hand he had a sort of a—quite a profound feeling for line and values, so he wasn't much of a colorist in that sense. He had a very—his painting was very careful, and I rather liked that careful quality. Again, a slight reaction to my father who was very Impressionistic in his way of painting and I always wanted to be more careful. But uh, gradually as the years went on I came to appreciate my father and really appreciate his painting.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When you entered the uh—the League and began seriously painting, what painters did you admire beside Kuniyoshi? Do you Remember?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah uh, [laughs] I'm embarrassed to say.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] It's all right.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I've gone through the galaxy with paintings I like. I liked uh, Ben Shahn, and then I liked Mayo [ph], and uh—but quite soon I began liking Matisse and that's one of the only ones that's certainly stayed, lasted. I really came to like Matisse. I can't remember how early it was I did like Matisse.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's when you opened to your father's world again, French painting and matière and beautiful color.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes well, I've always—to this day I love Matisse I think he's—and at first my father, in those days he was getting quite old and he wasn't uh, he wasn't even aware of—I guess Gorky of the painters that came on later and was beginning to be known at that time—he wasn't even aware of him or Hans Hofmann I believe. So I—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —he was not teaching anymore at this point?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No he wasn't, not at the League. He uh, he had private classes. And uh, I first saw this New York School painting I was shocked, so I went through a long stage of first hating then gradually coming to love—you'd think that was modern painting.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What were some of the stages of that shift in attitude?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, in my own painting it just went from painting uh, sort of faint figures which were very sort of simplified figures, onto landscapes, onto very abstract landscapes. And finally I ended up painting—I went through many periods of abstract painting I—see I loved a lot of painters I—like de Kooning for instance, I was influenced by him. At the same time I loved Rothko and was influenced by him, and I never could get around these great figures that I felt I liked so much, as far as doing something myself. I finally ended up painting hard-edged stripes, just vertical stripes with clean cut, certain color, and I began to think about color almost completely. By that time Dad was dead; I hadn't been painting like that when he was alive.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well uh, during the time that you were very much influenced by uh Rothko and de Kooning, did you know [inaudible]?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I knew Franz Kline, I guess that's the only one of those painters I knew slightly. I didn't know any of them very well. I was living in Maine most the time. I was away although I came to New York—I had one show in New York. And I—I just thought that I could do—well I had several reasons, I liked living in the country rather than the city and I thought maybe that if I stayed up there I could somehow work my way around all these New York paintings instead of getting sort of lost in it. But, I did have a show and I came down for a while.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You had a show at Poindexter?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Now uh, I remember uh going to that show uh.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I was doing landscapes then but they were really abstractions, they were just vaguely landscapes. They were influenced by, I guess a little like Franz Kline in maybe—in a sense. Not much color.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's it, very strongly black and tan as I recall in that color.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: And uh, there was a great deal of motion in the canvas, the painting was sort of rushing across the canvas.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I thought they were very beautiful.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, after that I started using brighter colors, there was a gradual change, and then I used forms that didn't um, suggest landscape. I got away from the landscape.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What were the impetus that uh, drove you away from landscape and could you repeat why you felt it was important?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I began to feel that the space was uh—it just wasn't uh—it was too ambiguous, it was not uh, it didn't have the power that I could feel in the best paintings that were being done which was a space that would come out of the canvas and go back into the canvas but it wouldn't be tilted back, a plane tilted back, as the old paintings were tilted back towards—close to you at the bottom of the canvas and going away from you at the top. It worked in a much more abstract way, the space would go in and out. In other words, it took me a long way to get away from that horizon idea, but I finally did fall away from it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And who were you admiring then at the point when you were moving away from landscape?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I liked uh—I liked Rothko and Barnett Newman, uh Franz Kline.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Barnett Newman must have been quite a challenge—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, my paintings finally ended up with flat colors and stripes in them actually.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That was a very important and crucial kind of uh change in attitude it seems to me. I'd like to go back and think about ot a little more?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I've really been through every stage there is in painting because I guess in between the landscapes and these flat colored paintings there was a kind of uh, Abstract Impressionism. In other words, it was like an undulating surface where almost, before the paints became absolutely flat, I guess that was a transition between landscape and those very flat paintings. So, an Impressionistic kind of painting, I suppose maybe Jackson Pollock made me think of it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Wasn't it hard to give up the link to nature since you had been so involved with it all these years?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes, it was, and I would still go outside and draw, it was nice—it hasn't happened for a few years now, but I still would to, I don't know maybe this summer. I love landscape. It's just that I love painting more and somehow painting and landscape became irrelevant for a while maybe it isn't so much anymore but—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: At the point where you were influenced by Barnett Newman what was your thinking, what was your thinking about what art was going through in this country? Can you remember?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: [Laughs.] Well, I could never see where it was going; I don't think anybody could see where it was going.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Had you made a number of new friends and become close—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I was rather lonely up there actually.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You were still in Maine?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes, I was—there was nobody up there that was painting very much like I was, and I was reading magazines and reading about it and coming to New York and seeing shows, but I was not amongst other people that were painting my way. So I don't know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So, when you embraced the idea of Barnett Newman was that a kind of rejection of, let's say, creating a painting with planes and space?

DAVIDE: Well, it was—it was also, it was accepting color, at least the way I saw it in those days, I still do. It's—it's taking out any extraneous—anything extraneous to the color, so the color can be the absolutely most, you know, absolutely as direct, strong as possible. And, I was never satisfied ever with my painting. It was very frustrating—I painted all the time, I didn't even have a job, I just painted every day and I'd scrape half the paintings off, throw them away.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This was the period when you were doing stripes, hard edged.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, the whole time I was painting steadily I painted hundreds of paintings. I had continuous shows in Boston. I had a show in Boston every year, and each time I'd do it, you'd just never know what to expect, each year you'd see something different, so it made it hard for him to sell my work, it made me hard—it made it hard for—me to become known as a painter actually. I was—I guess—I was in quite a number of group shows, things like that, but I was—I was feeling, you know, feeling my way around desperately trying to find my style somehow.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What was the gallery in Boston then?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Swetstoff Gallery.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: New York was still unconquered territory uh, in those years, during the uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah I used to come down with paintings trying to get into galleries without any luck.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Your uh, Poindexter show didn't have a follow up or anything did it?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I—I just sort of let that slide, I could have but I didn't. And then later—later on, a few years later it was too late, it was [inaudible], you know she had other painters that were painting the way I was painting at that time so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, it seems that around uh, 1960 then was an important change?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It was. Well, it's just funny, I uh—I painted frantically all summer on one picture and I just couldn't go on anymore.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What was it like?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, it was actually—it wasn't a stripe at all it was a—it was—it—the paintings were quite large, about eight feet square, something like that. And it was a dark, very dark, almost black rectangle against a ground which I guess was an almost as dark as possible blue, so it was almost black, against the quite dark violet or blue-violet uh border just a straight big black shape there, sort of like the end of the road. Some of the—I still have those paintings, I don't have them here but I still have some of those paintings and they're not bad, I mean I have about six or eight paintings maybe left that I didn't sell.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What had happened in your personal life meanwhile at this point, you were married by 1950?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I was married before, you see, I had a family in Maine. And uh, I have four children there, and I—anyway I had a studio and a house up there and I built—the thing that happened it was that I decided since that—painting was going badly and I—I had a nice piece of land right over the ocean, I decided to build a house just to take some time off and build a house. So I've always been fascinated by architecture anyway so I designed myself a house and I went to work. And I worked for about a year building this house. And uh, I loved the work so much that as I was building it, I began to think about sculpture for the first time because I realized that I could build sculpture, I didn't have to carve or model, I could really build things. And uh, while I was building the house I began to make drawings with the idea of starting sculpture. The thing is, to this day, as far as the past goes I still am—am far more moved by old painters than I am by sculptors, in those days—except for Brancusi and Gonzalez I guess. I mean in those days I was painting—there were really no paintings that were—I mean, no sculptors that moved me very much. And painting just seemed far more profound to me, but I finally just—it seemed to be obvious that just—just terribly frustrating for me, I just couldn't somehow do what I wanted to do. And as I built this house I realized that making things with my hands was just a—constructing objects was just a—just suited me. It was uh, in my temperament somehow.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you think of doing them in wood first?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I did, and I built them in wood for a year I guess before I started to—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —what kind of shapes were you working with then?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: A little like this because again I was thinking about boats and airplanes because I liked the structures of those and uh, there's certain ways airplanes were built during the war when they didn't have any—enough metal, out of very thin plywood which is bent with a frame underneath it. I used to build sculpture that way. I'd steam, or steam the plywood so you could get complex forms out of it and I would uh glue it and fasten it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was it colored?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No I never colored it, I used to use the raw color of the wood, and I've never felt like using colors in sculptures.

[Audio break.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, here you are then in Maine uh, building sculptures uh, sculptural forms with plywood, all by yourself, without any apparent connections with what was going on in sculpture in New York. Were you that completely isolated or had you been aware of—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I was always aware of—I was always aware of everything that was going on. I wasn't really isolated in that sense. In other words, I came to New York and I saw the magazines and I knew just exactly what was being done.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What did you like when you came to New York as far as sculpture?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Of course I liked David Smith, that was—I was quite moved by David Smith and Gonzalez.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you know David Smith?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No I never met him, I wish I had. But uh, it wasn't—when I started painting I was—you know I would react against painters, a lot of painting. But, in sculpture I didn't have to go through that period of uh, you know, sort of youthful period of being reactionary when you start, at least I went through that in painting, a lot of people do. I was completely open to all the possibilities and I felt that, which turned out to be the case, that sculpture was just really uh, just beginning to show its possibilities. There were—so many things could be done through constructing—through constructed kind of sculpture, instead of the old casting and all that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative], this was back in 1960 for this time, were people like di Suvero—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah Mark di Suvero, I was—I was also, yes he'd started and I quite loved his sculpture. And uh, I don't think right now offhand of any younger sculptors that I thought much of. I mean there weren't very many other sculptors in those days, but uh [inaudible]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Agostini.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well Agostini I knew about a little later, in 1960 maybe—I guess I did. But uh, Gabriel Kohn I used to buy. He used laminated wood nicely, and uh, and then of course, was interested in all the—there was a lot of Constructivist sculpture done a long time ago by the Russians, I guess, and Picasso, which became fascinating to me and Giacometti, I liked his early Surrealist sculpture more than I liked his attenuated figures. But there was no great—even David Smith was not the same to me somehow as, well, de Kooning was when I was painting, you know, de Kooning was so overwhelming to a young painter, well three or four others were as well you know. But that situation didn't exist at all in sculpture, I was fascinated with the possibilities—the uh, structural possibilities that I'd thought about myself, that I'd worked out by myself, that was able to because of my knowledge about the construction of airplanes and boats.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, I suppose you had worked through your romanticism in painting so that you were not likely to go through a romantic phase in sculpture of say using weathered planks and rusty things, and that sort of—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: All qualities of artiness [ph] I was completely through with—I was repelled by even painting finely of any sort of even brush strokes, [inaudible] in my brush strokes. Although um—so I was sort of

through with all that kind of youthful romanticism, yes. Although my forms sometimes were called romantic because they had curves in them and they looked slightly organic, as though—the idea of being thought of as a romantic, sometimes critics say my sculpture is romantic in relation to the Minimal sculpture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Perhaps in relationship to somebody like Robert Morris, where almost anything would be romantic [laughs].

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I think of him as romantic sometimes. That curved piece at Castelli seemed to me uh, well, it's even sort of a mystical thing.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The grating work?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I didn't see that one, but I saw the other round one, the solid one. Thought that was as romantic as you can get, so with this terms really—except that I know what you, it was true that sort of youthful kind of thing, it was a nice way to start actually, not completely naïve about art.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Now what other possibility that might have occurred to you uh, let's say that involved in things like uh, with airplanes and airplane forms, uh, if you had been a Pop—had a Pop inclination you would have bought actual parts of planes, or something like that, this never of course—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I thought of it, but I never have done I—I don't believe I ever used any—any natural, I mean, found objects in my work, no.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Nor do you refer to them in any way.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I refer slightly obliquely to some of those forms, actually.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But in a formal way, through the form itself.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did Pop art affect you, I mean uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —it had no effect.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It had no effect whatsoever?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I liked some of it, didn't like other—I liked Lichtenstein very much and Oldenburg, I love Oldenburg but—it had no—it wasn't, uh—it just didn't relate to me somehow.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: By this time were you associated with anyone else who was interested in that direction or were you still pretty much on—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, as long as I was in Maine, which is until two years ago, I uh—of course I've only been making sculpture for a relatively short time, I guess four or five years. Does it say 1960 is that when it's supposed—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —yeah.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well seven years, wow so long.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: '61 to—well I guess to the present would be your full time in sculpture then.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Uh-huh. Well, about—until about the last two years I didn't really every [inaudible] of my work, but since I've moved to New York I've [inaudible] quite a few sculptors. It's been very beneficial.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How did you move from the wooden forms, or how long did you continue to work with the laminated?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I guess I probably worked two years in the laminated wood, and even then I was using aluminum for the framework for the laminated wood sculpture, so that, uh, just gradually, instead of covering the frame with plywood I covered it with aluminum. I found that my woodworking tools worked with aluminum, that aluminum was a very nice material to work with, and uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How heavy a gauge of aluminum do you use?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I use—sheet aluminum is about an eighth of an inch thick, or slightly thinner and you can get it in all sort of degrees of hardness.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: From industrial companies.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes you get it from the suppliers.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And how does one work it so that it can be made into a curving blade-like shape.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, first I used to just beat it with hammers [laughs] and force it into the shape just through muscle but gradually I accumulated machinery I have—I have one power hammer. It's a very large machine, which I bought secondhand from a man who used to build car bodies. He used to make custom bodies for cars so you can make any sort of form with it, to make fenders for cars, something like that for instance. And then I have a roller which curves the aluminum one way and uh, so I can make any form out of a sheet of aluminum, and then it takes a great deal of sanding and grinding and polishing, which I try not to do myself because it's so monotonous and takes so much time. I try to have somebody do it for me.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: This is today; I mean this was—you evolved this over a series of—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I—yes it's sort of evolved yes. It's uh, something I never learned and something—nobody makes sculpture like this, and even airplanes aren't really made this way at all, it's just sort of gradually developed, this way of making this stuff.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What happened to the wooden ones did—did you show them and sell them?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No uh, I sold them. I guess I have two left, but one of them was shown at the *Primary Structures* show so it's still around here.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And then, after you began to use the aluminum, you began also to uh, use—did you begin almost immediately to use wire and strut—I don't know, various ways of keeping it in tension?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Even when I was using the wood I would sometimes join the wood with forms I'd have made up in a machine shop of steel. I did used to combine things that way I—I was always interested in the way forms would join together and uh, in the aluminum I would sometimes use struts to join forms together.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Is that kind of construction very similar to uh, actual—to construction of actual planes or is it something really something different?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It's quite similar, it's similar in the sense that you're trying to achieve the same thing that they are in an airplane which is the strongest um—both strength and lightness at the same time. In an airplane you have a problem of vibration, screws would loosen and things like that, that I don't have to worry about. But, I do want to make my things as light as possible because you can—they can span the distances and they can be—can be—I don't know, you can do things with light sculpture you can't with heavy, I mean, you can cantilever and you can make huge forms which are not impossible to move.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How does a conception of one of your metal forms uh, come about, how does it first come into you—or do you pre—pre-imagine it before you start to work, do you make drawings, does it evolve, does it change, do—do the materials themselves affect what comes out in any way?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: The materials affect it, and the techniques of building it affect it. On the other hand, I do sort of search for an idea by drawing. I draw an awful lot for sculpture, and uh I—all those things are true, one piece will lead into the next, I mean it will suggest a quality that I want to develop, or suggest possibilities that I haven't thought of before.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Can you think of any one such possibility or anything that either came from one piece to another, or from a drawing. The thing that would make it sort of gel or really seem important to you, the quality it would have for you at that—as you recognized it? [Laughs.]

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It's hard to describe the qualities because they're so, sort of, abstract. It's just a—it's almost a mood that you—what you're trying to create.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: A mood?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes, it's a—it's an elusive quality I—because you see, I don't want this sculpture to look like anything and on the other hand it does have these naturalistic forms, so I'm always fighting against it looking too much like anything.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What do you mean naturalistic?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I mean I have—I have forms that look like an airplane wing or look like a leaf, or a

bird's wing, or something like—or even sometimes they look slightly—they sometimes relate slightly to figures, it's pretty hard to make sculpture that doesn't look like, a little bit like a figure actually. I don't mind if it has those slightly, slight feeling. I mean, I feel a piece of sculpture should have a complexity of references, a very complicated uh, tensions between all the things it looks a little bit alike, and besides those sculpture that it might come from in the past.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And that way your—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —so it's pretty hard to say what just one piece—the idea of any specific idea behind one piece. I—it's almost impossible, and I—I make—I say I make all these drawings and I suddenly—somehow an idea will come and just in this very—just in a few lines in a drawing, which are enough, if it seems right to me, are enough to start me off on this long—it's a very slow laborious process, a month or two month's work. And I don't like to start with too complicated of drawings that define it too carefully, so I—I just start making it from this tenuous drawing. And in its—it kind of takes over and it will be a little different than the idea itself originally was.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: In the sense that you entertain complexity as a desirable thing, different kinds of parts, you are different from the Minimal artist who—who reject complexity and want a uniformity of art?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes I really am different from that type of uh, sculpture. Because, I like complexities and I think it gives a kind of richness to the work that you lose, and it also leaves the future open to you. I mean, there are so many possibilities, I'm not closing down possibilities with my work. It's much more open. I know the feeling these artists have, because I had it. I had it in painting, at one point I was just—I was painting pictures with a ground and one line going through the ground, and I was always fascinated by that, sort of, reductionist idea. But, somehow in sculpture, to this point anyway, I uh—I like the richness of the way I—you know, of the more complicated forms.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Has there also been a process where you can have perhaps a little adventure, a little discovery?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It's—I'm sure it's more exciting. You know, it's more of a battle, it's more of a struggle to build these things—to build these things is an immense—is an immense struggle. And uh, the feeling of achievement when you finish one is finally making all these things work—these various contradictory forms and ideas, to make it all—and also the difficulties—the actual difficulty of making it; it's pretty exciting. I never know how I'm going to build something and I—when I get this idea I speak of, you know, this tenuous idea, and I sort of have to invent the system whereby I will make it. Because each one—I mean I—I'd be making a form that I've never made before and I don't know how I'm going to do it until I start, and I have to invent a way of doing it. And I find that uh—in other words, I uh—,as you said, I think life is far more exciting when you have all these problems, and when you have—when time is taken up by this slow difficult way of making something. I always find it's hard to go through life making drawings and sending them away and having my sculpture done. I—I wouldn't be involved enough in the sculpture that way. There wouldn't be enough of my life in it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, I often wonder what uh—however one may defend doing that as a, you know, taking a polemical position of some kind [laughs]. I mean you can't, I suppose, question that it's possible to do it.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I—I—I can defend it actually, simply because I know people that do it and I like them and I admire them, and I think they uh—they are making fine sculpture. It just isn't for me, that's all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you think that they also have a uh—a way of growing despite of the fact they are not involved with this—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I think they are taking a dangerous—very dangerous position, you know, as far as what their possibilities are. Not just sort of uh, go off into many a series of the same idea you know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And the last one, the large one that you have uh, on view—I think it's still at the Royal Marks Gallery. Would you like to talk a little bit about the stages that actually went through, where there was some particular problems, or some particular solutions that were interesting? It's such—it's such an enormous piece with that lateral sweep.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: You mean the long—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —the long, I'm thinking of the long one, there.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Oh that—that, let's see—that came—the idea of that mainly was a—the feeling—I was trying to distort perspective. In other words, as you looked down along—well that came out of a piece, I'd made this before, which was very long and had a long curve—long curve, I remember, which was also tapered. And I

was fascinated when I built that piece of the way this tapered section appeared, because it was something like 40 feet long—the way the taper sort of—if you—one end of it accentuated the perspective, if you were at the other end of the sculpture it opposed the perspective. And I like the way that was—the effect that had on the sort of distortion of space. And so, this next one came out of that, this I made a very simple uh, hard-edged form, that's like a pyramid or triangular form, but very drawn out. And uh, that was the only thing I really—that I started with and I didn't know just what I'd do with it beyond that. And uh, there were problems I won't go into as to just how to build it. I mean I—it had to be very strong, it had to support itself from both ends and yet be very delicate, at one end only a few inches thick. And uh, you also had to be able to take it apart to be able to take it so I could get it out of the studio.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] Yeah, I was wondering how you'd get it out of there.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: And uh, it had to be very clean, and straight, and sharp, although it's slightly curved, I wanted it curved. I didn't want it exactly straight. The curve had to—had to be uh—I mean, there had to be a pretty high degree of um—of cleanness about that piece. The edges had to be sharp, the lines had to be very fair, and there were problems involved with solving that.

[END OF TRACK.]

I accentuate this perspective by building a large form on one end, and a small form on the other end. And uh—and uh—I used for the main large form, I used a shape that I had used before, which is a segment of—almost a segment of a circle, a curved arc, which was convex on one side and concave on the other. And uh, so I built that and then I experimented a long time to figure out how to join the pieces together. I finally had one come right out of the other, but I found that by using struts—this is the first time I really used struts like that—bringing it way—lifting it away from that curve—lifting the long narrow piece away from the curved form with the series of struts which um—which have a series of—the sort of struts you see in an old airplane wing or a bridge, I was able to get another quality, which I can't even describe, but it's a quality which I said before, I was—this new piece gave me the feeling of kind of a new mood that I wanted to get—out of that somehow came that lightness, that gave new kind of lightness to the sculpture because these—this long, seemingly fairly heavy mass is supported underneath by five very delicate rods, and in turn is supporting this curving form which leans away from the sculpture. [Laughs.] [Inaudible.]

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: No, fascinating—uh, uh really just exactly what I was hoping you would do.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Another thing that comes into it that I haven't even spoken of is the fact that—partly because I love the idea of aluminum being outside and reflecting the sunlight, and partly because this polished surface is much more durable than any other surface but for aluminum—and I do put this high finish on my aluminum. A result of which is when you look at a form you don't see the form uh, you know, just see a solid form, but you see reflections in the form. And—and this—you get great distortion, for instance, of yourself. You stand next to it, you see yourself distorted. Sometimes it looks transparent, looks like it's made of glass, and you get again more complicated things occur through the reflection—the reflections of this polished aluminum.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Have you ever had a chance to see a form like that installed out of doors where you can really get a distance from it too?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Not—well there's one piece I've seen Howard Lipman has one in his lawn. Uh, it's really the only piece I've seen outside. I have a piece in California I've seen photographs of, I'd love to see it. But uh, I just dream of having things outside, and those pieces you saw. For instance, that long piece you spoke of, I'd like that in a field, a grassy field.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Beautiful reflections in the uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —because I've put little pieces in the grass and if you are sitting down close to the ground, the grass itself is reflected in the sculpture, and sometimes it looks like your looking right through the sculpture, you don't see it at all, it disappears. And other times, of course, it flashes. It reflects the light. I was talking to the man who put the piece together in California, and he—it was in the bright sun—and he said uh—he said he got burned, actually burned from the reflections of that piece. And that's the sort of thing that great distance would be more useful, you could see maybe several miles away, a piece of sculpture, the sun—just reflecting light like that. I hope someday I'll be able to see one.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's one I certainly hope will go outside—will be able to go outside somewhere because of—another one that I know that you've probably been asked too much about, and that's the one—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —Could I go back to this piece once more, one more thing I want to say. You asked me about, influences. Before I made that I saw a show of Anthony Caro's and I was struck by the way he would uh—the way he would exploit, or use space in a very casual and open way, as if he had all the space in the world,

you know—did you see that show? At Emmerich?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: The piece just went all the way across the room delicately, with no thought at all of being compact or—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: A sort of luxury—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —a luxury of space.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Appropriating it [laughs].

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: That was another idea with the [inaudible], because I think probably, because after that I did build that very long, drawn out piece. I was sort of moved by that idea of his. Okay.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you think possibly you might go into structures that would be even quite—I want to say on an architectural scale, being like architecture themselves?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I don't think so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you see it as being in an environment rather than creating an environment uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, that's a matter of scale maybe, if you just mean scale, yes I would like to build very large sculpture. But—but—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —but it would still be sculpture.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It wouldn't—but as far as—of course I think of architecture as being a functional thing related to the cell in which it all boils down to this room and the office and so on, and the vertical and horizontal. Which I would—I always like to oppose with diagonals and curves. But, as far as scale I would love to build large—I mean really large things.

[Tape stops and restarts.]

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Am I still talking too softly?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, don't talk any more softly but I think you're all right [laughs], as you were anyway. We were just looking at the uh, very large piece that you uh—that was shown first at NYU and then in uh, Los Angeles, do these have names by the way?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, well this one doesn't, no. The one that you were speaking of at Royal Marks is called *Needle*. I sometimes have names to identify them but I have a terrible time, I'm not very good at it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.]

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: They're usually called "Untitled."

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Really? Well they're—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I hate to pin it down to any one specific thing as a title sometimes does, and I'm not very good at thinking of general.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, let your poets friends come and contribute [laughs].

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I do, but some people have marvelous titles.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What would the uh, dimension—the overall reach, span of this one in Los Angeles have been?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: That's about 45 feet long. That's the longest piece I've made.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Now these uh, obviously can only be purchased by people with the stakes or by museums. Does this um, bother you in any way? I mean, do you try to make some smaller ones that could be more placed in different ways?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I really I—I like so much the effect of scale that that uh, seems more important to me than building a small piece for—for smaller—for an apartment or a smaller place. So uh, sculpture is

expensive and nobody buys it except for people with a good deal of room anyway so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The one in the Ludwin's [ph] apartment as you know, it uh, dominates the room so you're ducking around it, at least when I was there you did.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah, you have to go under it too just get into the clothes closet I think.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: [Laughs.] You have a captive audience there! But it seems, nevertheless, to be worth it. Uh, one other piece that I know you've been asked about a great deal, possibly to the point where it's ad nauseam is the one that was in the Whitney that was also—involved the principle of movement. How did that come about?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I—that—first I was going—there was a toy show, or a show of sculpted toys, and I'd planned to make a very small sculpture, a car in which—or sort of like a car—which you could control remotely by radio control. I got interested in the idea of this radio control and decided to make a large sculpture instead of little one. And uh, I—I was interested in what new—the sort of, the added level of—I was just—I really didn't know what the result would be but I was—I just wanted to see what a piece of sculpture would be like that would scoot around the room, what it would seem like, and if I could turn it, make it spin around, make it move.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Perhaps uh—I was there and saw it and uh, it was uh, moving just a little bit then. Would you tell—put into the tape how it actually moved?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, it—it had a storage battery and it had electric motors, which were geared to two wheels. It had three legs which went down to the ground, you couldn't see the wheels, and two of the legs had electric motors geared to wheels, the third leg had a revolve—had a uh, wheel which would turn in any direction, so the speed of the two motors, I could control with radio control—also the direction, the speed and the direction of the two motors I could control by radio control with a little box with a stick on it. So I could make—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —that was away from the sculpture.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah it could be any distance away practically. And uh—by moving the stick I could—controlling the speed of those motors I could make the sculpture move in any direction I wanted. And uh, this sort of sculpture which has—it's not symmetrical and it has these curved forms, as you walk around it, it changes completely, I mean its mood changes as you walk around it. And so, I thought it would be—I'd make this sculpture turn by itself and make it present itself in its different aspects, you know by itself instead of the viewer having to do it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you work out the mechanism yourself?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I had a friend who was—uh, who worked out the—the radio part of it. I didn't do it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Billy Kluver? [Laughs.]

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No it's—it was somebody in Maine actually, a fellow in Maine who knew a lot about radio. He used to fly airplanes with this same sort of control, model airplanes. So you can fly model airplanes, that are four, five feet long with these things. So we used one of those. It was terribly complicated and uh, I regretted many times having started it because of the complexity—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: —you'll never repeat it then [inaudible]?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I don't really want to, no. I think it was a pretty nice piece of sculpture in spite of that, not because of the fact that it moved.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Was that bought by some museum?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Lipman bought it and gave it to the Whitney Museum. And so far I haven't seen it since. They put it away.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: When they get involved with the upkeep when a bunch of children get to working the controls [laughs] and so on.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah it's going to be a problem to show it there if they have the motor—if they have it hooked up. My—I had it in one show and I didn't use it—didn't use the motors at all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Those pieces had a quality. The forms were sometimes like horned—horned shapes, a funnel uh—rather than the open blade um, as I recall it. I don't know if I'm rightly speaking of that motorized one or not, but I remember some of yours as having a shape like a long, curved horn. Is that right? [Laughs.]

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I don't know if it looked like a horn. I don't what it looked like. I suppose they did look a little bit like insects, or like uh, Calder's stabiles maybe, a little bit, but uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: They didn't seem to me to recall Calder very much.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I don't know, it's hard to say what they looked like. They were—I guess you'd say they weren't as open forms as they are now.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: These were like—very specifically to planes and things, whereas the other could have had an insect or something, an armored kind of being.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well also they're more of an object that these are.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: More closed in their parts.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: This problem of being an object is something that sculptors think about because they try to—lots of times one tries to open up the sculpture and have it sort of surround one, and not just be an object sitting in a room. But uh, and some sculptors do that a great deal, just sort of the sculpture itself is less important than the space it affects. And these first things of mine were very much objects—I mean they were objects you remembered, something like a later one is a little bit more a relationship between separated parts possibly.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That was a big step actually although uh, you know uh.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Even that changes depending upon where the sculpture is. In a little room, a sculpture can seem to be like that, whereas if it's sitting in the middle of a large field, again it becomes an object even if it is open.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, well have you any thoughts at this moment for directions that are immediately uh, exciting to you?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I have an idea for a piece I'm going to make this summer, possibly of—some of—sort of wing-like forms or planes, which will be supported again by struts, but which will go—instead of resting on the ground, I thought I would have possibly—I'm thinking of one with a, sort of a pyramid shape on the ground supporting two planes, which one plane or—supporting two planes which are just in the air, going up into the air. So, the first plane will support the second one, and the first one will be supported by the pyramid. I'm thinking of that, although I'm not sure I'll do it. I sort of like the idea of them flying off into space like that, having a feeling of absolutely—absolute weightlessness, in other words. I have always liked the idea of light structures, for some reason I have hated the idea of heavy sculpture, even when I built that house I made it the lightest possible house you could imagine. Even the floors are only about six inches thick, the ceiling—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you still live in it in Maine?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, you see I've left this family and they live there. My previous family lives there. But uh, for some reason I've always like light architecture, and lightness is carried over—off over into aluminum, which is of course the lightest kind of material to build in. And so I want to use that quality and see if I can't make something that actually seems to float in the air.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That uh—I understand that some of the uh, primary forms people are going for—inertness, you know let it plop—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —sit.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yeah, sit and no lightness.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well that—yes, you have to be careful—I have to be careful that my things don't—don't seem to be rushing off in one direction. There is a balance, I think, that one should achieve between stillness and the feeling of uh, motion. And of course these people are making very still things.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It seems almost as if they were conceiving this as an irritant, because it's uh—it's so much the opposite of what—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —Well, it's—what it really is, is—it's a—I think it's slight excess, it's a reaction against—I think it's a reaction against Abstract Expressionism. I mean, Abstract Expressionism was an excess of putting oneself in one's work. The brush stroke was everything, and now they are getting out of the work as much as possible. And uh, I think that's the same sort of excess in a different direction, and nowadays in *Art International* you see the same painted boxes in every country, and in every city in the United States the way you used to see

Abstract Expressionism in almost—I mean not—I mean the wild—the final kind of Abstract Expressionism was, oh, Alfred Leslie and that sort of thing, you know. The final, and third generation.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Mm-hmm [affirmative], it goes very quickly nowadays, it gets around very quickly.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, uh that's the trouble with people who get too involved in a—in a style or in a—I think.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You're not associated really with any group.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I have sympathies and all that. I have uh—as I said I had this show with Bob Brugner [ph] and Ronny—Ronny Bladen, and I think the three of us, though our work looks different, we still have the same things in mind. Ronny Bladen's may look like primary structure but you see that it uh—it does other things, it does more.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It has an associative quality I would say.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: There's always—it's always—it's doing something, it's difficult. Like it's balancing in a strange way, which gives it this presence, or it has a form that is—it just uh—it's delicate and again hard to describe but it isn't just a box sitting on the floor.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And the third member is uh—?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Is Bob Brugner [ph] who uh, again he does difficult sculpture. He makes, he cantilevers things from the walls uh, he did this [sound of page turning] see that—a piece that comes down from the ceiling diagonally within a few inches of the floor.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But doesn't touch the floor.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No it doesn't touch the floor. And that again is—is an engineering feat as well, I mean as well as a—as a radical idea.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, it seems as though you are uh—are in a very interesting spot, because you have an individual direction, and yet you have company to some extent.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Of course, I never know where I'm going and I often feel like I can't go on, I just feel lost for weeks sometimes when I finish a piece of sculpture as far as what I'm going to do next. But, I—I don't have a great backlog of ideas, somehow it's difficult for me to get an idea. But uh, at least there is room for—there is room to go on. I have the ideas.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Would the ideas um come from um—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I don't know. It's just a flash of intuition kind of. You never know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you—you haven't done much drawing lately so it doesn't always come out of that kind of activity of—of working through concepts.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I draw all the time. I've drawn—I mean I make hundreds of drawings every week probably.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Drawings of sculptures or, or not things—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, no not natural things, no. No, I'm searching for ideas and I draw when I search for them.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do they seem in any way related to phases of your life or uh—?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes, I think so. I—I—there are forms that I see that go way back to the silly little boats I used to make that weren't even real boats, you know, when I was about six years old. I think the same qualities and forms go right through one's life, one's feeling for them. I know when I first saw Brancusi, just as a boy, I was terribly struck by his work. And it was because of that sort of form.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What of Brancusi's had you seen?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I saw a show at the Guggenheim, the old—well, the Guggenheim when it was in that apartment building. I don't remember when that was, and the *Bird in Space* mainly, and that type of Brancusi era of large *Fish*, *Endless Column*.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, I could see why that would be organic to what you seem to have been thinking about all these years in some way, and how lucky you were in a way to have been in the middle of that environment even though you were rebelling against it.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah, it's strangely—it all—my grandfather was an inventor and he invented machinery and I think that too had something to do with it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Where?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: He—he was in St. Paul, MN. He invented farm machinery and built farm machinery. But uh, again I think that—that my uh, liking of these mechanical forms goes back to that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did your father live to see you launched into any of this?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, he lived to see me just be—a painter of landscape, I think that's as far as it went. But, he was happy. I mean he always wanted me to be a painter and he was happy that—I mean, I didn't take half what I should have from him because I really came to my love of color after uh, he died. And his life was, as I said, color was the biggest thing in his life, and I—it became the biggest thing in my life for quite a few years.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: What was—was your mother an artist or—?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: She painted, yes, she was a painter too. She was a—I guess she was an amateur painter, she didn't uh—there was you know—a Sunday painter you'd call it, she wasn't—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you come from a large family or were you?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No I was an only child.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: An only child.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So it did mean something to them I suppose when you came back into the fold.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah I think it did.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But, they didn't realize how much you'd brought back of your early boats and planes and so on, because that didn't occur until later.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: My father was always trying to—to um, encourage the kind of drawing—I mean, my father could draw like anything. He was a marvelous draftsman, but he was trying to encourage the quality in my drawing which was sort of like hard edged sculpture in the sense that it had lots of straight lines, very delicate gradations and—and very careful drawing, in other words, which seemed—he sensed was the—was my nature.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: He was a very perceptive man.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah, I remember when I was very young, and I was just drawing ships or something, he would teach me how to make the gradations and the contrasts and the—that sort of thing, light and dark qualities.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How do you feel about what's going on in—well, in the art scene itself and more particularly in sculpture today. Does it uh, is there anything that you'd like to say about it?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I think uh—although I think that maybe it's—it's a little—there's certain aspects of sculpture I think are—have sort of their own seeds of destruction in a sense that if—they're getting to be too, I mean, some sculpture is getting to be too, sort of, funky, shall we say and some sculpture is possibly getting to be too simple. But, the range is so immensely wide and the possibilities are so open, and the materials are so—so many possibilities for materials that no one has thought of, that I think sculpture is just in its infancy as far as its possibilities.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: How about color? You apparently don't see it as entering immediately into your own work?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I don't know. I may sometime. At the moment, I just love this quality of reflecting light.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It is very beautiful.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: You know, I still like painting. I think, I mean, the painting I love is mainly based on color, and I so far prefer to see color in painting. I think color has a chance to interact upon itself in a painting in a way that becomes rather mystical, whereas in a piece of sculpture, that color is almost a skin. It's a—it's a—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Then if you were a painter you'd not be going for the shaped canvas probably, but keeping it flat.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well I—I like shaped canvases [they laugh]. I would—I don't—no, I would probably keep it flat.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Whose paintings do you particularly feel close to?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I like—the people that I—I like Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland, Helen Frankenthaler. Those are the painters I—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The color field painters.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: The color field painters. Now, Rothko seems a little sentimental with his colors, it isn't pure enough to me at the moment, but I used to love Rothko, the quality that would come out of a Rothko is overwhelming.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Have you seen the very last things he's working on?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I haven't seen him for a long time, I don't know what he's doing, do you?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, he's doing some things for commission and they're huge and maroon, black range.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, I saw that show at the Museum of Modern Art. I thought it was—it was marvelous. And Matisse still—late Matisse still uh, hasn't diminished at all.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The Matisse of the cutouts or which period do you mean?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, up to the—yes, all Matisse but especially those huge cutouts, again that show at the Museum of Modern Art a few years ago. And I saw the Jackson Pollock show and I was moved by that, saw that the other day.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: At times you look a bit like Jackson Pollock, just a flash [laughs]. Have you been told that before?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Uh, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I think it would come out more in a photograph; you're not him in color.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: But he, you know, he rejected a lot of things which at the time I kind of liked, which is this French quality in paint, and now you see those paintings are still alive because he did reject so much of—so many of those things.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That's always a great problem that uh, one feels what is rejected from in tradition—you come to the very extreme things, it seems so hard to give up things that you've lived with and loved all a lifetime.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I know, but you always have to give them up, and of course a lot of those people gave up so much that they put themselves in a terribly desperate position, and uh, yet they had to. Mondrian of course went back and he started becoming complex again before he died.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You don't think that was a mistake?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I—I think he had to probably, no. And who know what these sculptors will be doing.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You know, having gotten down to the white box, that's uh—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —sheet of plywood on the floor, I mean that's uh—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That almost seems as if it were uh, purely cerebral, or uh, didactic or, staking out a position rather than like being involved in something.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well it comes, sort of out of Duchamp and the fact that you can make a—you can make

anything into art just by saying it is, and that in a sense is an interesting position.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: By what you reject you involve a whole new uh, position.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Sure and these—and uh, it's—I don't think you can dismiss it. It's interesting what you can force into becoming art.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: I find myself agreeing with that—with that conclusion but feeling—

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: —without being moved by the results.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, certainly that too, but also sort of wondering how they're going to have any experience in—involved with the forms you know, but I suppose they will in some way. It's as if they're—doing it all through their mind and not really coming into contact with any kind of sensuous material.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yeah well, that's—again where you're just sort of regretting something, but on the other hand, I find personally that most of these artists I don't like at all, but then if I begin to generalize and say I don't like Minimal art I find one of them, like Bob Morris. I saw that curved piece that I thought was—was just wonderful, I'll never forget it, so.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Is that the one that was sort of sliced?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, you saw it in different ways, one—I saw it twice, but I guess he changed it many times. I saw it once as a circle slanting in like a stadium, you know, and once as an oval. And uh, I don't know, you just can't—I think there's something about Bob Morris that comes through even in that uh—with such slight or such simple forms. And uh, I loved Andy Warhol's floating balloons, did you see that?

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Yes, uh as a matter of fact, I didn't see his uh, his silver balloons you mean?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Silver balloons.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Did you see the uh, show that was just up at the uh, American Federation of Art? The inflatable—what did you think of that?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: I didn't like that. I don't know I thought it was a little—it could have been done better. I just thought it was poorly executed, but I'm not against the idea.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Inflatable and disposable sculpture.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Oh, maybe I'm thinking of a different—I'm thinking of the room you walked into. I guess that's different. I guess this is something different.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well this was a—they were inflated, but they slowly inflated themselves.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No I didn't see that. I didn't see that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: That was another one then.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: There are many things that could be done with inflated forms actually, and not too much has been done with it.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well this chap had made them way over life size, like enormous potatoes, like—and then as one deflated the other inflated, so [laughs].

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, as I see all this I realize that I'm quite conservative and I don't mind too much.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: You intend to pursue your own.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: In other words, the avant-garde at this point is kind of silly, there isn't exactly an avant-garde the way there has—there was at some time because the whole art world is so diffuse. So I just forget about that and I'm not trying to—I'm not worrying about it, but I like—in other words, I'm very sort of touched by tradition. I like the idea of the fact that one piece of sculpture relates to another, that art comes out of art, and all that sort of thing. And uh, so I guess I'm not in the avant-garde.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well, I—I really don't think there is an avant-garde today uh, you could say there are some forms that are more extreme, and I suppose Morris has gone about as far as anyone has, in taking an extremely—an extreme position and sort of staking that out as his own in sculpture. But uh, avant-garde doesn't seem to have much meaning.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well my—my ambition is just—is not be—my ambition is to build sculpture, that's all, and I want to be able to continue to build sculpture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Well I think you've expressed that very well.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: And, you know, I'm ambitious as to what I can do in the future. I'd like—I mean, I think there's room to build things that have hardly been dreamed of as far as excitement, that you could—as far as the possibilities of the scale and all that. As a far as—when you consider a bridge, spectacular bridges, imagine if a bridge wasn't functional.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: But a whole form. If you think of the wildest thing that you've conceived of, in those terms. You know, something that may never perhaps be practical. What would it be? That kind of thing?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: It would be in relation to something as big as that yes, as far as what it would look like, I don't know.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Would it be in a city or uh, would it be—?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Oh, I'd like to do both. I've seen—if it was in the country you could see it for many miles. I'd look to put it on top of a hill in the country, but on the other hand I think that the architecture in cities cries out for something—cries out for sculpture. In other words, the parks and plazas, which sit in front of these new buildings could be used for sculpture. And not just little pieces of sculpture sitting in the garden, but sculptures that really stand up to the buildings, in fact dominate the buildings.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Do you have a feeling that there's a kind of conflict involved in architects, that they are jealous of their own prerogatives?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Well, architects think they are the greatest artists in the world sure, and they—they would hate to think of a piece of sculpture having equal standing to their building, I'm sure. In general, but not all—in general I think that's the case. There is a great mystique built up among architects about architecture, but to me a piece of sculpture is a higher art simply because it is—it's not practical in any way. The sky is the limit, it doesn't have to have uh, rooms, have cells in it. It doesn't have to be practical. In fact, that's the beauty of sculpture. It's useless and impractical, and yet uh, there it is.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: So you're not likely to be involved with too much experimentation in terms of moving forms or of uh, oh, sound involving or anything?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Oh, I'm still intrigued with moving things and moving sculpture but uh, at the moment I have others things which come first, that's all. It's not—I wouldn't want to be kinetic artist in the sense I did moving sculpture or anything like that. But, I do like the idea of things changing I was—I've been thinking about one piece, it would need quite a lot of space and it would have several positions. In other words, it would have three possible legs and they'd sprawl way, way out and be quite horizontal, and somehow these legs would come together and the sculpture would drive up into the sky and become vertical. I've thought of things like that.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Would that have to be motorized?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: That would have to have motors yes. But, I don't want to make that seem the most important aspect, because I don't think it is. Personally, I think of the sculptures I've built so far, kinetic sculpture is nothing in relation to unmoving sculpture.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: It doesn't seem to have been a very important direction so far then.

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I don't think it is. And again, the real strength and power is in the fact that the sculpture doesn't move. It gives it this great mystery, I think, the stillness.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: The reflection is always moving in any case, if it's under sky and so on. [Tape stops, restarts.] By way of winding this up I'd like to say that we are now in your home and—the building which is both your home and your studio at 173 Christopher Street in New York City, that your gallery is the uh, Royal Marks Gallery?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Royal Marks, yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And uh, of course you are married to a painter. Uh, what name does Susan use?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: She uses Susan Quaytman, that's the name she paints under, and she—

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Susan Quaytman?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Yes.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: And she is a um, colorist and has a little girl named Becky who is how old?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Five.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: About five, and a son who has just been born. [Laughs.] And uh, are you still involved with Maine, do you still go up to Ogunquit?

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: No, I'm completely away from Maine. I'm going to go to the country, to Rhode Island this summer, but otherwise I'm a New Yorker at the moment.

DOROTHY GEES SECKLER: Fine, well we'll probably pick this tape up in a few more years when you've built something as big as a bridge [laughs].

DAVID VON SCHLEGELL: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]