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Oral history interview with Liliana Porter,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Liliana Porter on June 27-28, 2012. The interview took place in Rhinebeck, NY, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Liliana Porter reviewed the transcript in 2019. Her corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. 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

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Liliana Porter in Rhinebeck, NY, at her home and studio in Rhinebeck, NY, on June 27, 2012, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc one. So, Liliana, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you very much. Let's start with your family background, if you don't mind, and both sides of your family, way before you were born or as far back as you want to go, and then come to exactly when and where you were born.

LILIANA PORTER: Very well. Well, let's see. From my grandparents, from the side of my mother, they were Romanian, and they came to Argentina—I don't know which year. But they were immigrants from Temisoara, Romania to Argentina.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do—can you tell me their names?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I actually never met my grandfather. Was Traian Galetar—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Could you spell that?

LILIANA PORTER: Traian I guess is T-R-A-I-A-N, and Galetar is G-A-L-E-T-A-R.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And do you know where in Romania?

LILIANA PORTER: Mmm, I don't know. I think it was—no, I'm not sure. [From Temisoara -LP] And so I met my—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and that's your grand—

LILIANA PORTER: —grandmother, my Romanian grandmother, her name was Persida, P-e-r-s-i-d-a. [Persida Migáhel - LP] They were, I guess, Greek Orthodox. So they came to Buenos Aires—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --they were both Greek Orthodox, living in Romania?

LILIANA PORTER: I think—Yes, I think they came from a family of Greek, or their religion was Greek Orthodox. I know from the [00:02:00] part of my father, they were Russian Jewish, so when they got married [laughs] it was some kind of controversy there. But—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so they went straight from Romania to Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: To Buenos Aires.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And do you have any idea when it was?

LILIANA PORTER: Oh—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --was it before World War I?

LILIANA PORTER: I should look and then let you know and give you exactly the dates. So they had—well, maybe we concentrate first on my mother's side, what—but it's nice to say first, the two sides first, and then I'll go one by one. For my father, they came from Ukraine, and my grandfather was Porter, no, was the last name, I guess some Englishman went to Russia a long time ago, and my grandmother was Lifchitz.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What's—

LILIANA PORTER: --he was Mauricio Porter.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Mauricio?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Mauricio Porter, and my grandmother, Berta, but without the H. B-e-r-t-a Lifchitz.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: L-i-p-s-c-h—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —i-t-z?

LILIANA PORTER: No, with— Lifchitz. I think with an f-s. [It is Lifchitz - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, L-I—

LILIANA PORTER: —T. Lifchitz. I will check to make sure we have it correct. It is Lifchitz.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So her maiden name was Lifchitz.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and they came in 1909 to Buenos Aires—she was very young; she was 14 years old.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did they come married?

LILIANA PORTER: No, they met in Buenos Aires. [He came in 1910 - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --but your mother's parents were married before they came from Romania?

LILIANA PORTER: I have—you know, I don't know that. I—but I know they had eight [00:04:00] daughters and sons, my—from—my mother had eight brothers and sisters, and the story is incredible, because my mother was the youngest, and every year, one brother or one sister would die from different causes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mean when they were children?

LILIANA PORTER: Children and adolescents, but she was the youngest. So every year, somebody would die, and then at the end, when the father and the mother and one daughter were still alive, the house, the house caught fire, and the father and the last sister died in the fire.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is in Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and my mother was—this all happened before my mother was 15 years old. So at that time, when somebody dies, the custom was that you dressed in black for a whole year, so all her adolescence, all her life until she was 15, she was dressed in black. And it was incredible—it's incredible to believe that it happened, all this, to one family. But—and then she was left with her mother, and she was going to this *liceo*, a school for girls, and they had in the school a magazine, a literary magazine. And my father was going to the Nacional Buenos Aires [Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires]. And they exchanged, it seems, magazines, you know, the publications that they did. So they met that way, first by writing letters and sending poems to each other, and then they [00:06:00] met when they were very young, like 17 or 16, and they married when they were 20.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Let me ask you, going back to your mother's grandparents. Do you know why they came to Buenos Aires? Why they left Romania and then why they chose Buenos Aires? And what profession he had?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. They had like a general store in the place was near the port, called Dock Sud. So they sold—let's say they could sell food, but also there was a little—some tables where people could have drinks or coffee, I don't know. It was like a very neighborhood basic general store. And because my mother told me that in Romania they were farmers and—Yes, I think they were like farmers. So—and my mother was just amazing with all that background, was a very, very positive person. And I think what she did was to—first, she really thought, Well, next, I am going to die. You know, she is going to die, if everyone dies. And I think when—we all are going to die—but when you are really certain—which very few people are; they think death happens to somebody else—I think you become wiser and more generous. There is a moment that you are more wise. There is something that is—it could be that you are crazy—but I think in her case, she became, first, very aware and very appreciative of being alive, [00:08:00] but at the same time, very positive. So my childhood was—I perceived it as a very happy one. You know, with a garden, with—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --did you know all four grandparents?

LILIANA PORTER: No, well, the father—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --of course you didn't know your grandfather--

LILIANA PORTER: —I didn't, but the grandparents, my grandparents, the Russians—because actually, what I wanted to say is that my grandmother, the Romanian grandmother, died when I was five.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Persida.

LILIANA PORTER: Persida. And you know, I look at my hands, and I remember—I think I have her hands, which is incredible because I was five when she died—when she died, I'm sorry. But what is amazing is that—[inaudible] what I was going to say—that—yes, that my mother was very positive, but what I was going to say was that she died when I was five, so all my family is really my father's family because nobody else was left from my mother's side. So I really grew up with a Jewish family. So, you know, it's the kind of mentality, things [Jewish as a culture; the way to eat, mentality, the humor. They really were not religious. - LP].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do they speak Russian?

LILIANA PORTER: They spoke mainly Yiddish, but I—they—I didn't learn, or my father also didn't learn. I guess they spoke Yiddish when they didn't want us to understand. [Laughs.] But they didn't speak Russian among themselves, but she would sing some songs to me when I was little in Russian. So my grandfather, Mauricio, had a printing place, publisher, printing shop. [00:10:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Not just the printing, but the publishing?

LILIANA PORTER: The publishing. And so in his place, Porter Hermanos, Porter Brothers, they published mainly young poets, and they also published for a while the magazine *Martín Fierro*, who was, where Borges and all that generation published—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --did he, did he go to university? Your grandfather?

LILIANA PORTER: I never asked him. But—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --do you have the sense that he—

LILIANA PORTER: --he was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —had been educated before he—

LILIANA PORTER: —he loved literature, and he was well educated—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Russian literature, before he came to Buenos Aires, or was he young enough to go to school when he came to Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: You know, it's interesting you ask me that. I never—I don't know. Because I was always surprised that somebody who was a foreigner would deal with language. Basically language, to have a publishing place and to deal with literature. Because in my family, actually, also, my father was a writer and a filmmaker, and a cousin of my father was also a writer, so there are more—my mother was a writer, too, so there were more—the art part was mainly from writing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Hm. The—you said your mother was one of the eight children. Was your father—did your father have a lot of siblings?

LILIANA PORTER: My father had one sister and a brother, and he was the youngest. And so my father—so they met very young.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did they live in the same part of Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: No. No, because my—no, differently. My bro—my father was like a bourgeois, middle-class, bourgeois, [00:12:00] and my mother was more working-class, I guess.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, since she only had her mother.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I wonder how that was. Well, they had friends, because I remember her speaking Romanian with friends of the mother. You know, not family, but friends, because she spoke very well Romanian, my mother, and she had actually a family, and there was this woman she called Mama, you know, Mother, so I guess she was trying to reconstruct some kind of family, you know? And so they were married very young. They were 20 years old—can you imagine? And my father was very successful—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --now, tell me your mother and father's names.

LILIANA PORTER: My mother, Margarita. Margarita Galetar, and my father Julio, J-U-L-I-O. And then my father was very, very successful. First he was the writer [inaudible] program in the radio, radio days. [He wrote for the radio. - LP] Then he was making movies, and then he was making theater—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --what kind of movies? Features or documentaries?

LILIANA PORTER: Features, features, and with—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --when you say he was making movies, was he the director?

LILIANA PORTER: He was the director and the writer. And actually, many of the very important actors and actors in Argentina started with my father. And then he started to—first they were like more serious movies, then they started to be more commercial—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so he's Julio Porter.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. More comedies, and then at one point—[laughs] my mother was very upset—my father was directing a theater called Maipo, which was like the equivalent of Folies Bergère [00:14:00] in Buenos Aires. [Laughs.] So my mother didn't approve. [Laughs.] My father was very funny, and he loved people and loved to eat and give presents. So my house was a very happy house, always full of people. But my mother was more romantic and more—she loved nature and was more a romantic type, and my father was more a city person.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you know the address where you grew up in Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Roca, R-o-c-a, 1812.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: 1812?

LILIANA PORTER: 1812. Florida is the neighborhood, was like saying—it's a neighborhood with houses and gardens and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --mm-hmm [affirmative], a suburb.

LILIANA PORTER: Suburb, exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Of Buenos Aires.

LILIANA PORTER: Of Buenos Aires.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did your mother go to college?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. She went to this liceo, and I guess she finished probably—I don't know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you said they got married when they were in school still?

LILIANA PORTER: You're right, they were too young.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Maybe they graduated early?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And tell me exactly—and so this is—

LILIANA PORTER: --my mother always—I remember always having—because she spoke many languages, so she always had all kinds of teachers for language. They both were in very—like, at home also would come poets and read poetry and [cross talk].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So exactly when were you born?

LILIANA PORTER: I was born 6 October 1941.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you lived [00:16:00] in Florida then.

LILIANA PORTER: Right. And my brother is three years older, Luis. He's named Victor Luis.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Victor Luis. V-i-k? V-i-c?

LILIANA PORTER: V-i-c. And he's an architect, and we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --it's just the two of you?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and we were always—and we are very, very close. He was very protective of me, so I learned things of life very late. [They laugh.] "Don't tell my sister." So everybody knew all the secrets and I didn't. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you were growing up in this very literary and film family, were there any important really early experiences of visual art? Did you go to museums, or did you have any paintings on the walls of your house?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Or other art?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. And also—Yes, I liked to draw, and my brother too, and my mother also. She was super creative. For instance, she would like to cook, let's say, so she would make some kind of cake or something, but on top were all these inventions that she would make. Very creative. Or she would make my clothes, but you could have—there was in the blouse a little window and you can open it. You know, things that—also people would say, Oh, where did you get this? And I was very proud: "My mother made it." I was always very proud, because also I felt she was very pretty and young, so I was very proud if she would come and pick me up in school. And another advantage I had was that my father was famous, so in school they would say, "Porter, are you anything of Julio Porters?" I would say, "I am the daughter." "Ah." You know, and that gave [00:18:00] you very—you are very secure because you feel you are different or—I don't know, but [cross talk].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Later on, was it a burden at all, to have to—some children of famous parents feel like they're in their shadow.

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, no, because I—also first, I was—when I was little, they would ask me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And I would answer—in Spanish it's "*Una señora cualquiera*," which means "any woman," "a regular woman."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A regular—Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, a regular woman. And they'd laugh also because *cualquiera* also has an alternative connotation, could be like a light woman, but I didn't mean it that way. [Laughs.] And I wanted to be just that: somebody who is married, have children—regular. I never—you know, also because I think at that time there were still these expectations, more from the men than from the women. Like, you were supposed to get married, that sort of thing. And so that was lucky, because you don't have any pressure, really, to be anything. Anything you are is more than they expected, right? [They laugh.] But also, I—my father and my mother were very supportive of things. And so I would draw a lot. I remember, because I remember what—I studied fine arts when I was 12, at school.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So in earlier schools, before you were 12, were there any subjects that you particularly loved?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, love—Yes, I love to write, and I love art. Yes. Mathematics, I wasn't proud of. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In those early years, [00:20:00] when you're living in Buenos Aires, did you do anything particular on a regular basis in the summers or after school? Were there other special things in your life besides school?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, because we lived in that neighborhood, then we had a—like, we—the bicycle was very important. And I had a lot of friends, and we played a lot, and I remember more the idea of the bicycle. And also we were near the river, the river—*el Río de la Plata*, River Plate. So we would go to the river, and it was really wonderful. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Carefree.

LILIANA PORTER: Very nice.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Then you said at 12, you started to study art.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because at that time in Argentina, the school of fine arts came right after elementary school. Now they changed it; you have to have three years of high school. But at that time, you could go directly, so you were 12. So the idea was that you had all the subjects, like Spanish, geography, French, but the main subjects were drawing, painting, sculpture, aesthetics, you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was there a test to get into that school?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, there was a test. And so it's interesting because that means that from the beginning, in my head, you know, the main subjects were always art. And I loved it. The school was a beautiful, decadent building with big reproductions of sculptures of Michelangelo. It was like—and now it doesn't exist. They demolished that street to make a big avenue. So it was like a Visconti movie, you know? [They laugh.] [00:22:00] So that, I like very much. So it was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --was that someplace close to where you lived, or did you have to take a bus?

LILIANA PORTER: No, I had to take a bus. Yes. But when I was 16, we moved to Mexico City.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, before that, so during those—12 to 16, four years, I guess the curriculum was very broad? You studied all kinds of formalist [ph]—?

LILIANA PORTER: Right. It was interesting, I think, because, Yes, we studied—I learned geometry, French, Spanish, Argentine history, and then art history, drawing, sculpture, printmaking.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. I meant to ask you—you maybe alluded to this—about any religious affiliations your family—you said it was mainly your father's family was Jewish, but they didn't practice any kinds of—

LILIANA PORTER: --no. When they got married, they were like regular, young, Latin American intellectuals; they were atheist, communists, when they were 20. Then, when my mother got pregnant and then had my brother, and my brother starts asking questions—"Why they say I'm a bad Jew?" you know, whatever, then she started to study different religions. And I remember she studied the Mormons—everything, everything, everything. And at one point, she said—I remember the day and everything—she said—"Well," she said, "the religion I believe doesn't exist." She said, "Because I believe in the Old Testament, but also studying the Old Testament, I see that the people want—will not accept the Messiah. So obviously I think that the Messiah was Christ, [00:24:00] but I also believe in—that the days of worship is Saturday, not Sunday. I believe." So she started to say all these things. And we had a maid, Esther Arnoldi was her name, Italian, and she said, "Oh, *señora*, that religion exists," and she said, "It's the Seventh-Day Adventist." So my mother—we started to go—my mother first started to go to the temple—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --how did your father feel about this?

LILIANA PORTER: It's interesting because we had—the pastor was this Chilean man, Gaston Clauzet—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How do you spell his last name?

LILIANA PORTER: Clauzet, what I—French, I guess, with a Z. And he—now when I think back, he was really an intelligent guy. And because the Seventh-Day Adventists don't go to the movie, don't use jewelry, don't dance, and my father was a movie maker—you know. And so the men—I remember he would come home and he would say, "Don't worry—that's not important," you know. And so he would teach us the Bible and everything. So it was really fascinating. And the wife—because they are also Italians—so the wife cooked like incredible. And my father loved to eat. So I guess from that [aspect he got closer to the Adventists - LP]—[laughs]. And also he was very flirtatious, and she was a very beautiful woman, I imagine. So I guess, you know, they became very close to us—like, it was great for the family. And I think—and so I grew up going for a few years to this Seventh-Day Adventist church, which I think was good for me, because I think it's good as a child to have a structure and to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --did your brother [00:26:00] do that too?

LILIANA PORTER: My brother too. And my father used to go sometimes and everything. I think it was good to have a structure, and for my mother, I think it was [a positive experience - LP] for all her life. And on top of that, my father, who was, you know, like famous and everything, was not—you know, was very—I loved him, and [inaudible] was, I imagine, as a husband, not so easy, very irresponsible and, you know, flirtatious, and all these women around and everything. So for my mother, it was great to have the structure, and I think it was good for us as children to have some kind of, you know, hope of things. And I remember my mother always told me when I was little that I shouldn't be afraid, that if ever I am afraid, that there was an angel, a transparent angel that looks exactly like me but transparent, that would be there. And when they tell you that when you are very small, I—sometimes I am in the plane and I am afraid and I find myself talking to the angel. [Laughs.] So I think all that magic realism was positive. Then when I grew up, when I was I guess from 18, we stopped going to that church. But anyway, that was I think a good experience.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. When you—you said your father was famous. Was he ever invited to Hollywood? Was that a goal for him? Did that come up in your family?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, it was more local fame. And I guess when I went—well, more Latin America, probably.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what caused you to move to Mexico City? You said when you were [00:28:00] 16, you moved.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because my father, besides being very talented and everything, liked to—very much to play games, but he always lost. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mean gamble?

LILIANA PORTER: Gamble, exactly. So, for instance—so at one point he gambled the house. You know, everything. He was like that type.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you think he was an addict?

LILIANA PORTER: He was an addict to gambling, Yes. I think so, Yes. But he never won, really. And I keep sometimes playing the same numbers to justify him, because I think, If I win, it will be great to say, you see, he won, right?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This must have been a source of tension.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. No, like, really, to be his wife probably was a problem, especially my mother, who was in love with him, but my father was a problem. And he wasn't—also, I was—I was lucky from every point of view, because my father was not a normal father who would give you advice. He was somebody who would bring you presents and make you laugh, but—so my brother is—was—used—made that role. So if I had a problem or everything, my brother—like still, my brother is like the point of reference, very important to me. And at the same time, I didn't need my father to advise me or anything. He would be the one that would think everything I do was great or make me laugh or—you know, or make me proud because he was admired.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Meanwhile your mother had the hard job of raising you, actually.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, exactly. But my—but I always defended my mother. And I had a very good relationship with my father because I could tell him, you know, [00:30:00] everything. I could really say, "Well, you cannot do this." "You are right, you are right," he will say. And I have all these letters because when I got married the first time, they actually separated, but they never separated. So I have all these albums with love letters, and in the last second [ph], you know, it was those very intense relationships that never ended, like even when they separated. So it wasn't easy for my mother; it was probably a very hard life.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So this—you talked about gambling in connection with moving to Mexico City.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because he played the house, I think. Or I don't know if it's in my memory, but we had to move. And so then he went to Mexico. My mother had to, you know, disassemble the house, the whole thing. We went to live for a while with my grandparents. And then when we arrive to Mexico, he already had, you know, the house, the chauffeur, the maid, you know. It was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you mean he moved with a job?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. He was lucky. He got a—he was—they called him, or he went to make movies in theaters, plays.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So he went ahead of your family.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. He went—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you lost the house, he left—

LILIANA PORTER: --he left, with all, you know, my mother had to fix all the debts and the move the house—you know, physically rearrange whatever mess. And then we finally went, and he already—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —had everything set up?--

LILIANA PORTER: —had every—[laughs].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And somehow had gotten himself financially—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, no, because he was very lucky. So he wasn't attached to things really. And actually, for

instance, all his—because he made many, I don't know, more than [00:32:00] 100 movies. And where are all those books or things? I don't know. It's like he didn't care to keep them—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you mean an archive of his filmmaking—

LILIANA PORTER: --exactly, exactly--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —is lost.

LILIANA PORTER: Somebody in Argentina, people who study that have it or something, but it's not that he cared and kept, you know, like—he wasn't—he didn't have that ego thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was it difficult for you to leave that school when you were 16?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was difficult because it's at the time you have a lot of friends, the boyfriend, you know, things like that. It also was the first time I was in a plane to go to another country, and Mexico was very totally different and an incredible experience. And then I started to go to another arts school there. So, you know, it was a very enriching life, no? But Yes, it was. So I missed a lot, Buenos Aires, so I have from '58 when we moved to when the computer started, I have all the letters, I have albums of my letters and the letters—you know, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --people gave you back the letters that—

LILIANA PORTER: In Mexico I started to write to my friends, my grandmother. So you used to write with a typewriter and a carbon paper. So I kept my letter—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, you kept the carbon copy--

LILIANA PORTER: —and then I have the letters that somebody will send me. So I have albums, and it's incredible, because you can now really read, and it's like a kaleidoscope because it's different, the same thing told to my grandmother than to a friend or to—[00:34:00] And you read things that now are really interesting, because my friends were mainly writers that now are these very famous writers. [Laughs.] And I have also a diary from Mexico, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you keep that diary before you went to Mexico, or on the occasion of going?

LILIANA PORTER: In Mexico, when I went to Mexico.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me about the school that you went to there and what that experience was like.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, it was like a different movie. Like Argentina—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] A different movie?

LILIANA PORTER: Totally. It was—in Argentina there was a middle class, the school was free, you know. And in Mexico, the social classes were divided, they are either very rich or very poor, and the school was private university, Iberoamericana, it's called. Architecture and fine arts. But I was lucky; Mathias Goeritz taught there, and I had another professor, a Colombian artist, Silva Santamaria, who was my printmaking teacher.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me his name again.

LILIANA PORTER: It's—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, I see, Guillermo—

LILIANA PORTER: --Guillermo Silva Santamaria. And so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --had you done printmaking before?

LILIANA PORTER: Before in Buenos Aires. But in Argentina I didn't like too much printmaking because—now I understand—we were very young. So let's say we are doing etching. So the nitric acid was diluted in such a way that to make a line, you have to leave the plate in the acid for six hours, and I never understood what was that masochistic way of making art, because I thought, it is are ridiculous. But now I know why [because nitric acid was too dangerous so they diluted it for our use - LP]—but there we had these beautiful studio—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --in Mexico City?

LILIANA PORTER: —very few students in that printmaking class, because the girls didn't want [00:36:00] to get the nails dirty.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So I almost—we were five people there, so it was fantastic.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was—so the facilities were a great improvement over those in Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the facilities were better, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --or it was just because there were fewer students in the class?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. The thing is that—I don't want to say something bad, but the different was—[in Argentina, the cultural level in art school was higher - LP]. It wasn't an intellectual kind of situation. Like the girls—for instance, in Argentina, it was the time of existentialism, so you had this black sweater and the book under your arm. And in Mexico, was like Technicolor. The girls went to school with makeup, and they used a lot of ruffles and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --ruffles.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, very feminine looking—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —clothing--

LILIANA PORTER: —clothing. And also very—more like looking for a husband. You know, it was not like I felt. You know, also when you are 16, you are very snob, so—very judgmental. So to me was like, Oh. And also in Argentina, I like at that time Braque and Cubism, abstraction, or whatever. In Mexico it was to me more realism, Social Realism, and I thought—I didn't like it, you know, because I wanted to be avant-garde—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --what—

LILIANA PORTER: --in my mind, Mexico was more conservative. That's what it was.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It seemed that with the professors or just simply through your attitude, you really excelled. And in [00:38:00] fact, I read that you had a—you were in an exhibition in 1958, the first year you were there, when you were maybe 17.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, 17.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So your work warranted, someone thought, being put into an exhibition. What did that work look like that was in the show?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was—they were—I have the card catalogue—18—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and those were prints.

LILIANA PORTER: Twelve—12 prints—no, 18 prints and 12 paintings. Paintings and prints. And the paintings were more like—they were oil paintings. The subjects were more like streets from Argentina or from Buenos Aires.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You're saying you had 18 prints and 12 paintings or—

LILIANA PORTER: --something like 12—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, I see—

LILIANA PORTER: --a group of prints and a group of paintings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It wasn't a one-person show.

LILIANA PORTER: A one-person show.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, it was a one-person show, I see.

LILIANA PORTER: And I have an incredible review by Juan José Arreola, the writer, that starts like—it says, "Liliana Porter is 17 years old." It starts—I know it by memory because I was so proud to have this critic—you know, Arreola is this very important writer in Mexico—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --tell me his name again, the writer?

LILIANA PORTER: Juan José. Arreola is A-R-R-E-O-L-A. And he wrote—I—they are very generous, the Mexican people. So I have imagined my first person show, and I had these reviews and everything. And I have the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --did you have sales?

LILIANA PORTER: Sales, probably, Yes, but what was more impressive, I have photographs of the opening. In the opening were the writers José Emilio Pacheco, who now, he's the writer in Mexico.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: José Emilio—

LILIANA PORTER: [00:40:00] Pacheco. Carlos Monsiváis just died, but also is an important writer. There were there—oh, Homero Aridjis, who became the ambassador of Mexico later, you know. Then I have the—Juan García Ponce, another writer. Then there was this incredible, Paul Weinstein, who was at that time another art critic. You know, it was all these people at the opening.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was—how did you end up getting—this is called Proteo Gallery.

LILIANA PORTER: Proteo. Because my teacher, the one—the Colombian—they said, "Look"—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Santamaria.

LILIANA PORTER: Santamaria. It was his gallery, where he showed. He said, "Look, I booked"—he almost presented it like something I have to do. "I booked a date; you are going to have this show, so start working."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So the gallery would present anything he said should be presented.

LILIANA PORTER: Probably he said, Look, this girl is interesting. I don't know. But—because I imagine now that I'm older, that it was interesting to see somebody 17 years old with a body of work—with quite a body of work. And so—and people were really generous and—so in a way, it is not that I wanted to be an artist or that I wanted to show; it happened. Like this guy came and said, Okay, you have this show, and then somebody invited me to another, to the Salon Nacional, for instance. I was there with Gironella, all these people. Then I also went to another workshop at the same time, called *La Ciudadela*, where I met Antonio Segué, the Argentinian artist, was there at the time, or Omar Rayo, the Colombian artist—a lot of talented people.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me the last name? You said Colombian artist. [00:42:00]

LILIANA PORTER: Omar Rayo, R-A-Y-O. And so—and Arreola, the writer, what happened is I—if I wanted to be something, I probably was thinking I was going to be a writer. But the problem was, I didn't have a normal high school, so to go to the University of Lettera in Mexico, so I was not ready—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so you went to art—you went to the high school for art in Buenos Aires—

LILIANA PORTER: --but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —because that was what you loved most, but then you started to feel that you really loved writing, but you didn't have then by that time the high school—

LILIANA PORTER: —to, to go there--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —background to go to university as a prospective writer.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, the thing to go to the art school was not that I chose. It was my mother and my aunt when they said, "Where do we send Lilita?" I remember they said, "Well, she could go be a teacher. But I think it's nicer for a girl, fine arts." You know, that kind of conversation. That's the way I got there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see, not because you had a passion for it and begged to go there.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I loved it and everything, but it's not—things always happened before I wanted them. The same with the exhibition. But I really wanted to go to the University of Lettera [Liberal arts/literature - LP].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In Mexico City?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. So then somebody got me a way to go—how you say? [inaudible], just to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --auditor.

LILIANA PORTER: Auditor. So I met all these young writers. And so Juan José Arreola, the writer, every Wednesday he had—people would go to his house and they'd play chess, they'd write poems, and so I met all

these other writers. So actually, when I was [00:44:00] 16, I became—José Emilio Pacheco was my boyfriend, we were boyfriend and girlfriend. And so like I have, you know, his first poems and everything that—now he's amazing, because now you—you know, we are all, like, older people, and it seems like yesterday, all this happened.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do—

LILIANA PORTER: --so it was interesting.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In Mexico City, did you take time to do any writing and try to have it published?

LILIANA PORTER: No, never. No, no, I never intended—I just—I finally got into fine arts, and I continued doing that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see. So this huge body of work that you presented when you were 17, you said they were mostly scenes, street scenes in Argentina, in Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Yes, interesting. And also—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and you said there were prints and also oil paintings.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. The prints were also things that I saw in Mexico like, for instance, all this idea of—because I felt that women were separated from men. Like, it wasn't that they were—it was like—I remember once I went—a boy invited me to go out, and his mother called my mother and said, "Do you know?" And for me, it was like a very strange thing because it didn't mean that I was going to marry him. It was friends was the same: a girlfriend and a boyfriend. You know, it didn't have to be a love affair, could be friends, you know. But it was more like there were more codes and more conservative codes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --in Mexico?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and more, I think, conservative. So, [00:46:00] but there were a lot of things that we didn't have in Buenos Aires, like nature or the crafts, or there was—next to Argentina was, like, in Buenos Aires, was a black-and-white movie, and Mexico was a Technicolor thing. The food, the nature especially was very strong.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you know that you'd only be there for three years, or was it supposed to be permanent?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no. What happened, I missed Buenos Aires, so I decided to go back.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You missed it.

LILIANA PORTER: Buenos Aires, so I went—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --did your brother go back too?

LILIANA PORTER: No. So he's still in Mexico. [Laughs.] I came back and I lived with my grandparents.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So what did you miss about it?

LILIANA PORTER: I missed my friends, I missed—I thought that I was—I felt that in Mexico, you were older because people got married very young. So I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --was it that conservative, maybe more Catholic?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was too much. And so I wanted to go back and to go back to school. So I went back to art school again, and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and you lived with your grandmother?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, with my grandparents, the Russian grandparents.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Berta.

LILIANA PORTER: Berta and Mauricio. When I think the responsibility—because I was from 19 to 21. But I really was, I guess, not difficult. And I loved them and everything. But I remember, for instance, coming from school with these huge carbon drawings and just pin them in the living room without thinking. You know, you—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --charcoal, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. When I think all the things I did—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and they were very permissive?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, [00:48:00] but also, you don't think—you grow up too late, very late, because 19 is already old, and Yes, I remember not thinking—for instance, not thinking so much what was my grandmother's life like. Like you assume they are grandparents, they are there to love you, to cook. I don't know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So by that time you really felt that you would be an artist?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I think so, because I really had shows and everything, and then when I went back, I got—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so you said you were there for two years. Did you get a degree, then, finish?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I continue, finish.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: 1961 to '64.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you finished and you had your degree.

LILIANA PORTER: And then—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --who were the artists at that point who were most influential to you?

LILIANA PORTER: In Buenos Aires?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I don't think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and were you getting news from the US or from Europe about what was going on in the arts?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, we were all looking at Europe. It was still, 1964, was Paris, and then also, the way you learn in school art, all, you know, all the art history is Europe. The United States still was not in the picture, really, too much. Still from Argentina, looking from Argentina. But I admired very much in Buenos Aires an artist, Luis Felipe Noé.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me his last name?

LILIANA PORTER: Noé, N-O-E. And I never met at that time personally, but I remember seeing a show and his work, he was doing what is—then he called New Figuration. That is, [00:50:00] like, for instance, very expressionistic paint, using different codes at the same time. And for instance—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --coats?

LILIANA PORTER: [Codes.] And also found, let's say a found paintings [and then canvases - LP] attached to his painting and maybe painting the back of it using fluorescent ink—a lot of transgressions. And I guess it's interesting why, from the beginning, you have some things that attract you. Because when I think that's the subject that still—the idea of simultaneous things that are different [dissimilar - LP]. And also, because I was very, you know, sort of serious, or I don't know how to put it, I loved this excess and—you know, you are attracted to things you are not, maybe. And when I came to New York, I was surprised because when I decided to stay here—well, we jump, but anyway, jump to say about Noé, Noé was here with the Guggenheim Fellowship, and he was the roommate of Luis Camnitzer, who became my first husband.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow.

LILIANA PORTER: [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: We'll get back to that. So in those three years that you were in—in art school in Buenos Aires, right?

LILIANA PORTER: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How did your work evolve? And what was it like? You know, you can describe the way it looked at that show in '58 in Mexico City.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I was concentrated really in printmaking. And I had a great teacher—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --intaglio, in etching?

LILIANA PORTER: In etching. A great teacher, Lopez-Anaya. Fernando [00:52:00] Lopez, Anaya is A-N-A-Y-A. And he was really—he was—had a very open mind and was a very good teacher. And I learned, I think, a lot with him. But my work looked a little Expressionist, with Picasso influence, [laughs] drawing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mean the Cubist kind of Picasso?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I was also influenced a lot by literature, so the titles of many works have to do with poems and things like. And very—Yes, very printmaker type, like you are very involved in the technique, in discovering textures and things like that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Would you say more, in terms of printmaking, more in terms of the line and linear—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, and the texture--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and texture rather than color?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, color too, but—because some were in color. Because in Mexico, I learned inking in a way that the Mexicans are very good in printmaking, truing [painting or inking the plate - LP], a la poupée, you know, all those—to use color in printmaking. But anyway, let's see what subject. They were just student work, but I worked a lot, always, I have to say.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you were always living with your grandparents then?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So did you decide and plan in advance that when you graduate, you would leave Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: No. No, what happened was that—ah, [00:54:00] because at the end, my parents came back from Mexico.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And they were still together? You said they separated.

LILIANA PORTER: Still together, they were still together. So my brother stayed in Mexico because we were very close and we always wrote letters to each other—so suddenly my brother, who stayed in Mexico, studying architecture, wouldn't write. So they sent me to see what was [laughs] going on. So what was going on was that my brother was having an affair with this actress in Mexico that was like 10 years older than he was. So it was incredible, the whole story. But anyway. So I went to Mexico to see what was going on. [Laughs.] So I met my teacher, Silva Santamaría, he said, "You should go to Europe to see the museums. Why are you going back to Buenos Aires? You really have to go there and see" blah, blah. So he convinced me I should go to Europe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, had you been yearning to see art in the European museums?

LILIANA PORTER: Oh, Yes, Yes, much.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And was—it was just money that kept you from planning it on your own, or—

LILIANA PORTER: --no, because I wasn't like 20—how old I was? Twenty-one.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you still could—21 isn't too young.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, no, but, you know, never—it was—it's not like now, that everybody travels like crazy, it was like a big thing. So I said, "Okay, that's a good idea." So my parents said okay, because I also knew people in Europe that would, you know [receive me in their homes - LP].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Through your parents?

LILIANA PORTER: Through my parents, and also Antonio Segué, the painter, was there. So finally—and then a friend of mine, who had been a classmate in Buenos [00:56:00] Aires, was living in New York, and he said, "No—"

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what's his name?

LILIANA PORTER: It's Juan Carlos Stekelman, S-T-E-K-E-L-M-A-N, Stekelman. And he said, "Why don't you come first to New York to see the World's Fair—"

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, 1960—Yes-- [1964 - LP]

LILIANA PORTER: "—and then go to Europe." So I was planning to come here for a week, and I had—I bought—I was going to go by ship, not by plane, to Europe. So I came here—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so the plan was to go from New York to Paris?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. So I came in '64, and the second day that I went to the Metropolitan Museum, I said, "I cannot stay a week here, because I cannot see this museum in a week."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: So I—and the first—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --where did you stay in New York City? With Stekelman?

LILIANA PORTER: With the Stekelmans. There were three—him, the sister who was studying to be a doctor, and the other sister, who was studying with Martha Graham to become a dancer, and became a very well-known dancer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And where did they live? Where was their apartment?

LILIANA PORTER: In the Bronx. And I have—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --on the Grand Concourse?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I have the letters, very impressed with the stairs, the fire escapes—all that. And the first day when I came, we went to a party, and I met two other girls who were looking for an apartment, so when I came out—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --also Latin American?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. When I came out—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --was there a kind of a sense of sticking together, maybe because—you didn't speak English, right?

LILIANA PORTER: No, I spoke French, like an idiot. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which you studied in school.

LILIANA PORTER: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you were—you talked about these people you live with and who you met, and they were all speaking Spanish in—

LILIANA PORTER: --right. So then, [00:58:00] when I came out of the Metropolitan, I said, "I have to stay." So I remembered these girls. So I called them and I said, "Did you find an apartment? Could I go with you?" "Yes." So we found a place together in Queens, in Jackson Heights. And actually there were a lot of Argentinians living in Jackson Heights, in our building. So on the fourth day I said, "Where can I make prints?" so they told me Graphic Art Center in the city. So I went and I met Luis Camnitzer. They called him so I—to translate what I was trying to say.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. So Graphics Center at that time was—

LILIANA PORTER: —was in Broadway.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And Lafayette? No, some—

LILIANA PORTER: --near 14th.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, I know. I think I read 11th Street.

LILIANA PORTER: Okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But what building? Do you remember what building it was? Was that near Grace Church, which is at 10th Street and Broadway?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was near there. You had to go up a floor.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you weren't going to Pratt in Brooklyn?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, no. This was a printmaking workshop.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that was run by Pratt Institute.

LILIANA PORTER: And the director was Fritz Eichenberg.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. Eichenberg, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So I have all the letters when I went with my prints to see Fritz Eichenberg, and I wrote to my parents, "And then he saw the prints and fainted," you know. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have prints with you?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because I had the prints I made in Mexico and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you brought a portfolio—

LILIANA PORTER: --right--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to—and what did you think you would do with that portfolio, bringing it from Buenos Aires?

LILIANA PORTER: To show, you know, what I was doing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because you thought that when you arrived in Paris, you would be looking for someplace to sell them, or [01:00:00] someplace to continue your studies, or—?

LILIANA PORTER: I guess you feel more secure with your work to show who you are, what you're doing, no?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so you brought them to Eichenberg.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This was the fourth day.

LILIANA PORTER: And he fainted. [They laugh.] No, it was great, great. It was the—like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --it was a print shop for etching?

LILIANA PORTER: For etching, lithograph, anything. And it was next—imagine Buenos Aires. I was going to this workshop at la Cárcova [Escuela Superior de Belles Artes Ernesto de la Cárcova in Buenos Aires - LP], which was —there are three—there were three art schools, and this was the superior, whatever.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is in Buenos Aires.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. But that workshop, first, heat didn't exist. Second, the acid to—from the fumes, we opened the window. So it wasn't like you are used—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --it was primitive.

LILIANA PORTER: Totally. In the art school, also like—we all—we didn't have anything, but what we had was the will to, you know, to study. So the thing is that when I went here to Graphic Art, imagine they have everything you want. Like for instance, in Buenos Aires, to make a print, you have to buy the plates and then you have to polish it yourself. You have to buy the different ingredients of the varnish and mix it yourself. And here you went and everything was ready, and you could buy even fluorescent ink.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—would you be paying to use that, to participate in that workshop?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: At Pratt.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I was—I was paying—but he let me be a little bit free for some things, and then I was—because—ah, I know. I wasn't paying for any class; I was paying just to use the workshop.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. Because you didn't—because actually you knew more than—

LILIANA PORTER: --I didn't need any structure. Exactly, I didn't need. But it was [01:02:00] like—I have the letter that he sent, [inaudible] letter with "I expect—"

[END OF PART ONE, TRACK ONE.]

LILIANA PORTER: —in the first day when I was there. So imagine, first day, there was this woman showing me all the materials I could buy, and the materials I couldn't believe. And then I was working, and somebody came and said, "What do you want [laughs] for lunch?" You know that they ask for lunch and then pay, but anyway, while I—or that they have heat, air conditioner—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --ventilation--

LILIANA PORTER: —refrigerator, the phone. I remember saying, "They have a phone." You know. Public phone inside. You know, everything, everything. So I took advantage, because I think when you don't have all those things and you already knew how to use them—imagine how much you take advantage of that. So I was working and working and working like crazy. And that was a time where publishers bought editions, so I started right away to sell editions, you know, to show. Everything was like fluid. And then on top of that, I was—when I met Luis and Noé and we were together all the time, and Noé was in the best moment of his life, and it was—and he's older. I mean, at that time, you really feel—he's probably 10 years older. It's a lot, 10 years, when you are 22. So I learned a lot, a lot. We went to see shows together, and one of the first shows of Pop art when Leo Castelli Gallery was uptown. New York was perfect to be young at that time. Everybody was coming to New York.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you—did you mainly socialize with artists from Latin America? Was it a kind of a tight group?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, it was, Yes, pretty tight, and—but then we met [00:02:00]—one thing that you discover is "Latin America," because when you are in Argentina, all of the other countries are foreign; it is the same to say Mexico, China; it's the same level of foreignness. But here, what was happening suddenly is that you started to meet all other Latin American artists and to—suddenly what develops once you are here from Latin America, is that you feel that you belong to all [the Latin American territory - LP]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: ---there's a common—

LILIANA PORTER: —because there is a common thing; it's the language, I imagine.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sensibility, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And so that was a discovery of that. And no, we have American friends and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you take any steps to learn English, or did you just talk to—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, I went right away to NYU to a course that was very good.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you said met Luis Camnitzer—

LILIANA PORTER: --saw Luis there, so we were very close, and also we had the studio together in Little Italy at one point. [I met Luis at Pratt. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So wait, so you met in '64.

LILIANA PORTER: We met in '64.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you lived in Queens.

LILIANA PORTER: I lived in Queens with my two friends.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did you then move to Little Italy, your—

LILIANA PORTER: --no. So I would—we would have—because he had this—Noé—Luis lived with Noé on Sullivan

Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sullivan.

LILIANA PORTER: And remember, the Village was the place. So then we had a studio—we shared a studio, Luis and I, in Little Italy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: On Sullivan, the same place, or different?

LILIANA PORTER: No, it was a different place. That was for a short time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mean a few months, short time? Or do you mean—

LILIANA PORTER: --mm, a few months, because what [00:04:00] happened—an incredible thing that happened—is that—because we got married in '65, very soon. So at one point—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were—sorry—how long did you spend at the Pratt Graphic Center, Graphic Arts Center? Was it a few months, or was it a year?

LILIANA PORTER: It was [cross talk], probably a year only, because we opened our own workshop.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: All right, so tell me—Yes, tell me the story about how that happened.

LILIANA PORTER: What happened is, okay, then we moved together, Luis and I.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You moved to live together.

LILIANA PORTER: To live together in the Village.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you remember what street that was?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Perry Street, 55 Perry Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. West Village.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the West Village. So we decided—ah, so I was going to have a show in a gallery called Van Bovenkamp Gallery, on 57th Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], Van de Bovenkamp, Yes. Is that related to the artist Hans Van de Bovenkamp? No? Okay.

LILIANA PORTER: I don't know. So the thing, Van Bovenkamp, was that we decided, okay, we'll get married after the show. So the day of the opening, this man comes and says, "Oh, I love your work, I really love your work. My name is Julian Firestone. I am a dentist, and I have an electric press in my apartment in the Village. I just got divorced, and I work all day as a dentist, so if you want to use the press, I give you the key."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Had he been a printmaker?

LILIANA PORTER: He loved printmaking. There are a lot of dentists that love printmaking. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's that etching tool. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: So I thought, This sounds a little strange, so I said, "Well, listen, I want to [00:06:00] introduce you to my future husband," like saying, you know, "Luis Camnitzer." But he didn't mean anything bad. He said, "Luis Camnitzer, it's amazing! I have a print of yours that I bought"—there was a gallery called Galería Sudamericana, "I bought there, and I love it. This is great. So I give you both the key and you can come and use my press because it's there sitting all day and I am—"

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --is this before you had the first—you were in a show, New York, at Bonino Gallery?

LILIANA PORTER: This was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --this was in '64 --

LILIANA PORTER: —there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Around the same time.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. So—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --which was amazing, that you had arrived in New York in '64 and you already had a—

LILIANA PORTER: --no, no, it's amazing. If you read the letter—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --this was—you would do prints, and that in fact it was—it was reviewed, right?

LILIANA PORTER: It's incredible. So the thing is that Luis at the same time was invited to a residency in—it was a summer seminar at Fairleigh Dickinson University, and he said, "Look. Everything is okay, but I don't want you to be alone with this guy."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Julian Firestone. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: So he said, "Let's call José Castillo," our friend, and another girl. No, first was only José. So, you know, if you are not there. So we went to this, to his place, who has a penthouse. You know in those buildings near Washington Square—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —where the Picasso sculpture is? He had a penthouse, and he had the press in the living room, the acid in the main bathroom. Full of books all over—a mess. So we cleaned—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and this was—

LILIANA PORTER: —'64 ---

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was it on Washington Square? Or actually I read it was—

LILIANA PORTER: --around—it was where—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Third Street?

LILIANA PORTER: No, that was our workshop later. This was his apartment where we had the press. So we started to fix everything. So what [00:08:00] would happen, we would work during the day, and then he would come after his dentistry hours, and we would help him do his prints.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So I interrupted you. You were saying that Luis said, I'm going to go to Fairleigh Dickinson to do this thing, so let's get—

LILIANA PORTER: —José Castillo--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Castillo in here to work with you so you won't be alone—

LILIANA PORTER: --right--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —with possibly Julian.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. So the thing is that when we started cleaning his place and helping him with his prints and everything, in very soon—I don't know how many months passed—he came and said, "Look, this is very uncomfortable. I found a place."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wait, Julian said that? This is very uncomfortable, you're in—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, in the apartment. I find a better place, Julian said.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He meant uncomfortable for you?

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly, for us. So he found—imagine, we are, you know, 23, 22 years old. He found on West Third, which was [Calapai - LP]—the Village was *the* place to be, you know—there was a printmaker that—it was a loft that belonged to a printmaker, which means already had everything, the [inaudible], the tables, and everything, and he bought it or something and said, "Here, for you." And we couldn't believe it, you know. And so Luis said—Luis is very, how do you say, serious, so he said, "We don't have money, you know, to pay." "No, you don't have to pay anything." "No, no, no, no, it's impossible. We want—I want to pay. So what we are going

to do is"—because Luis loves teaching, so he imagined right away a school. He said, "We are going to make money printing for [00:10:00] other artists, teaching, and whatever we don't arrive to the money we should pay you, we give you work."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So either pay—if you make money, pay rent—

LILIANA PORTER: --if not, we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —pay it in work--

LILIANA PORTER: —pay in work. But that was—it's not that he—he couldn't have said, "Work here. I don't need any money," you know. So we fixed the studio—the studio was very impressive. It was at the time before the idea of lofts, but it was a loft. Had a fireplace, air conditioner.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Air conditioning! [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: It was a dream from the sky!

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is not a typical artist loft from those days.

LILIANA PORTER: So we started to have students, print for other people, work. We worked like crazy—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --how did you solicit students?

LILIANA PORTER: We put ads. And—but also because we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --college-level students, or high school, or adults?

LILIANA PORTER: Adults, adults, Yes. We—we got later—Yes, we always had a lot of adults. And it was fantastic because then we said—we started to form—there the New York Graphic Workshop started, and we said, Okay, let's analyze what—our work, because that was the main thing. So we said—so then is when we realized what is going on that all the movements come from painting, from sculpture and printmaking is always a derivative. So Luis is—you know, he is—loves to analyze things. We were a very good group. So we realized that what was happening is the problem was the technique. The technique was so important it became a protagonist. And people forget that you have to [00:12:00] say something. So we started to analyze ourselves, and for instance, Luis was doing these huge linoleum prints, printed on fabric, and then I was doing also my big plates, getting more and more complicated, and José was doing other things. So we—I personally decided, Okay, I'm going to do something that has nothing—is not a—how do you say?—to show how much technique I know, but to say things with the least amount of technical things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And this is a moment when Minimalism was very—

LILIANA PORTER: --and so I started to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —prevalent--

LILIANA PORTER: —the opposite. So then when I started with a string and the hook and the nail and things like that. So it was for us fantastic because we really got along and we could criticize each other's work, but at the same time, we learned a lot by printing for other artists, making plates for other people.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: At one point I read that you created a manifesto.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, we had the manifesto. [Phone rings.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you want to get that, or do you want to leave it?

LILIANA PORTER: [Inaudible].

[Audio break.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, I mean, what made you want to create a formal mission statement, as it were, a manifesto?

LILIANA PORTER: Because we decided that we were going to really revise printmaking, and we became active in all the ideas, so we wrote the manifesto.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did this connect with any political involvements?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, yes, it does, because also it had political undertones also because [00:14:00] Yes, we wanted to avoid the gallery, not to make objects, to do things that were more, how do you say, democratic. Printmaking was perfect. And to really think in terms of ideas and not of products.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: During the years that the Graphic Workshop existed, that was the sole area where you did your work. Were you—is that correct, that you were just—

LILIANA PORTER: —making prints, Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —making prints, right? Okay. And so was Luis.

LILIANA PORTER: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so your work gradually became—I should say, as you described it, you reduced the techniques, you came to a simpler but more—works that were more about the ideas than the technical properties of the printmaking.

LILIANA PORTER: But also—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --was that—and—were there other artists also working there at the time who shared that interest with you?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, José, the Venezuelan guy. I think the three of us were the group, really. And because at the same time, when you start thinking that the work should start from the idea towards the technique, it doesn't necessarily end up in printmaking. So it opened, also, other ways of doing things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Luis, you said, was just running a workshop. He did a residency at Fairleigh Dickinson. Did he continue to—

LILIANA PORTER: --he was teaching there--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —teach in New Jersey?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. We moved to New Jersey [00:16:00] at 20.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, what year was that?

LILIANA PORTER: Uh—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --while the workshop was going on?

LILIANA PORTER: No, we moved—when we moved, we didn't have anymore that place.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay, so that was after 1970. [It was before. - LP]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Luis would remember.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, that's all right. I was thinking—

LILIANA PORTER: --anyway, we moved—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —I was wondering whether it was before or after the workshop closed.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the workshop, because we still called ourselves the New York Graphic Workshop because we said, We are not going to change the name, [They laugh.] but we were in New Jersey.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see, I see. Oh, so it was still going on in New Jersey.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was still going on, and we were doing things and shows and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Why did you need to leave the space on West Third Street?

LILIANA PORTER: Because [laughs], because the dentist had a girlfriend, and the girlfriend hated us, and she was right, because now she could never see him, because after—he ended up, I think, his practice at eight o'clock and he would come to our studio, and we would work until two o'clock in the morning. So when finally she got him, he was [laughs] gone with the wind. So I think it's—so at one point she insisted that she wanted to move there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: She wanted to live there?

LILIANA PORTER: To live there, because there were other rooms. And we said that's impossible, because, for an artist, you cannot have a domestic situation. But then she moved, and so it ended.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm. Have you ever—did you continue to keep in touch with him?

LILIANA PORTER: I did, Yes, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did he continue his interest in printmaking?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. He was interested in printmaking, in music. He still is alive, and a [00:18:00] very interesting man. Very interesting man.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh. Around 1966, maybe, you did a work of what you call mail art.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because what happened—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --could you tell me about that--

LILIANA PORTER: —is that, okay, thinking that way, you end up thinking in disposable works. So we started to do exhibitions by mail.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, you considered them exhibitions?

LILIANA PORTER: And—Yes, we called, because it's interesting how the brain develops slowly, because it's like when people design a car, it still looks like the car for the horses.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: You know, until you change, it is the same. We call it, Yes, *Exhibition Number One*. Yes. So then you would receive the envelope by mail disassembled—mine were—let me think—the first one was *To Be Wrinkled and Thrown Away*. So it was a piece of paper printed with a texture, with printed—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --but this—was that the same work that was at MoMA in 1970?

LILIANA PORTER: The MoMA one was in the *Information*—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --it was called *To Be Wrinkled and Thrown Away*, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But the information show didn't have that. Was called—in the *Information* show, we had one collective work that we did together—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --the desk, the information desk.

LILIANA PORTER: No, the *Information* show at MoMA, that was created by [inaudible]. We had a desk, and it says, "Exhibition number"—I don't remember, let's say 14.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I—yes, that's what I was referring to, but I—

LILIANA PORTER: --and then it says—what was it?—because one was in present tense— [00:20:00] what did it say? I don't remember. But it was in present tense, but then you have to—ah. Exhibition—aye-aye-aye.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I think it's—there's an image on your website of it.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, okay. So the thing is that, let's say you wanted to receive the exhibition. There were envelopes, and you put your name, and you will get it. And what you got was the same thing, but in the past tense. Ah, I know. "The New York Graphic Workshop announces," it says on the wall, "Exhibition number 14," and when you go, the thing on the mail said, "The New York Graphic Workshop announced."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah.

LILIANA PORTER: It was just a change in the verb.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see.

LILIANA PORTER: We felt very clever at the time. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that was the work in the *Information* show.

LILIANA PORTER: —in the *Information* show. But then we had individual mail exhibitions. So one I had was "To Be Wrinkled and Thrown Away." Because I was working with that wrinkled image.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So the idea—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and there was a book you published in '68 called *Wrinkle*.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. So this was something that you receive, and you were supposed to do that, to wrinkle it and throw it away. Which, it's interesting, because it's a gesture one does many times, but when you isolate it and take it out of a function, becomes [a gesture that is closer to art than to life. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right. The book you published, which had 10—

LILIANA PORTER: —photo etchings--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —photo etchings, I think, of paper progressively getting more wrinkled—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, getting wrinkled--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and ending up in a little ball. But that wasn't something that was supposed to be interactive; that was an actual work of art. That was a book.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, was a book.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did—you printed that yourselves—

LILIANA PORTER: --yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —in a limited edition?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did you sell them, or send them to—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes. Yes, [00:22:00] we—Yes, because at that time we already had, you know, galleries and —

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --what was the, um—would you say—I mean, you talked a little about what kind of, what that is a metaphor for, but could you speak about it a little bit more, because that's the beginning of a number of works that have to do with a process in time and memory and—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes. Well, it had also other connotations, because first was when—the beginning, when people started to do photoetching. Remember photography was something out of the question.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: So these—to do photo etching was something that—experimental at that point, because we had, actually, at that moment, we got a grant to go to Philadelphia, to Philadelphia School of Art—[Pennsylvania - LP] University. And, and the one that was—the chair was Angelo Savelli, and he got us the grant. So they had a fantastic graphic workshop there at the university, so we could use it whenever we want, whatever we want. So I decided to do photo etchings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Hm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: Actually we had to—then we couldn't do it in the school, actually; we had to send it someplace else. But anyway, it was my first photo etchings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: To have the plates made, you had to send the plates—

LILIANA PORTER: --to have the plates made--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And then I learned how to make the plates with a deadly thing called KPR from Kodak, which is

toxic, very toxic. Well, I did many photo etchings with that, until now that they invented Solarplate. But, well, anyway, but I liked very much the idea, again, of to—to do—use something as a subject that [00:24:00] doesn't have any heavy meaning, that is something that is—you know, it's very simple, like a paper getting wrinkled. But nothing is simple; that's the point. So—because we—just to tell you—when I started the prints, to simplify my prints, I said, Okay, I'm going to use the simple things. So I was using the nail, a hook, a string. And one thing I realized why I used—I chose those elements. I think it was because when I was little, I thought that all the things in the hardware store were for free, because I couldn't imagine somebody was going to pay to buy a nail. I thought you paid to buy, you know, a dress, but [laughs]. So it's interesting how you think when you are very, very small. But I think that probably, because I remember it, I thought, Okay, what's the least expressive objects? Which is a ridiculous concept, because everything is expressive. Everything has—it's impossible not to say something, I think. So the thing is that—well, that was the year with the paper, and the idea of the wrinkled paper, I liked this mini-animation. And it has so many metaphors, because it could be, you know, the passing of time, you know, uh—a lot of things, or nothing at the same time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right, right. There was also the empty space.

LILIANA PORTER: Empty space.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The emptiness, supposed emptiness.

LILIANA PORTER: The empty space [00:26:00] appeared when I started to use the hook and the nail, because what happened—and it happened from the beginning, and it's interesting because many things, it's not that you have the theory and then you illustrate the theory. You do it by instinct and then you realize what you do, and it's very clear, and it's interesting you didn't see it from the beginning. The empty space where all these things happened, and still are happening now with my objects, is—what I'm doing is instead of doing things on the table in June in New York, I am doing it in this non-space, non-place. So it's perfect because it doesn't—I take out the temporality of the thing. And for some reason, then you see more—you see. It's like there's no interference between you and the thing, because there are—there are no other information but the thing itself. And I think that's why the empty space started.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Were there other artists whose work you were interested in at that time who were exploring similar ideas, either here or elsewhere?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I really like Lichtenstein very much, and I—well, I discovered him when I came here. Because—why I like him. For instance, let's say the brush stroke. I think there is something to learn about the possibility of showing something that is a gesture and is [00:28:00] an expressionistic gesture, within the language that is exactly the opposite, that is flat. You know, the language of the comics.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And I—you know, for some reason I am interested in that, the possibility of those things happening at the same time. Or his painting, the crying woman, also that is crying and everything, but the language is the opposite of something emotional. Hm? Then he has, let's say, the mirror, and it's interesting. We look and we say, "It's a mirror," and then the essential thing of a mirror is not there, because it doesn't reflect. But what makes us think that it's a mirror? The two little lines which are the convention in the comics of a mirror. And we say, "It's a mirror." You know?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And the one that is really to make a monument, are those paintings, where he paints, let's say, a pointillist, an Impressionist painting in a different language—no, that's so good! Because there is a lesson there, because we think that maybe the essential thing was in all this, the way it was painted, when in reality we recognize the church or we recognize the narrative of—which is the secondary, the non-important part of the painting, and we remember it's Impressionist. And we say—it's very—it's interesting that he can talk about the movement of art with a totally different code. That's very good. [00:30:00] So I think he has humor in the—it's intelligent, has a humor, and also it's very graphic, which—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Yes. At that time, were there—I mean, when thinking about the simplicity and the common materials like a nail, were you attracted to something, let's say, Arte Povera?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I love Arte Povera.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And even Victor Grippo with potatoes and something very simple?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Although that's somewhat different.

LILIANA PORTER: Different, different. Because I met him, so much more when you know somebody, you—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Yes. [They laugh.]

LILIANA PORTER: You know? But no, the Arte Povera, I—because then I went to Italy and I met a lot of Italian artists. You see, I know Luciano Fabro. And I love art. Also I feel—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and people have talked about Morandi in terms of your work.

LILIANA PORTER: [Gasps.] Morandi, and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and you had been looking at that too.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Morandi is, for me, is amazing to me to think first that somebody have the—the first person who decided—who discovered him or decided [that he is great. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: Because I think it's a really difficult artist to realize how great it is, because the work is very close to being—eh, I don't know what word to use.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Commonplace.

LILIANA PORTER: No, it's even worse. Like, Yes, Yes, to—it looks—I don't know how to say it without being politically incorrect.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Simple?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, [inaudible] retarded.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm, okay.

LILIANA PORTER: No? I mean that, Yes, like you say, uh. So, but because the—I think what he does in his work, uh, because he is to me a mystic, mm? [00:32:00] It's amazing that somebody, you know, he moved these bottles over and over, and it's the same thing, and he arrived to something that makes me think of the phrase of Borges when he defines the art experience, the aesthetic experience, and he says, "It's the immanence of a revelation." And I think that the work of Morandi is—makes that—it's like that you are about to understand. It's something that—because I think that we are never going to say the final word or make the perfect philosophy or art statement or anything. So it's—the art history is the history of mistakes, of errors, in a way. But the closest thing to perfection is imperfection, is the negative space. So if—[laughs] maybe we can achieve, you know, the mold, making something so imperfect that the other side is the perfect side. So I think Morandi arrived to that. It's like instead of saying something super-intelligent, it's like taking away, taking away, taking away, and it's almost naked, the thing. It's almost nothing. But I think that that is like—I think it—they do that probably in yoga or something, that the idea of arriving to the upper level is not to think; it's to learn how not to think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: To be able to listen, I guess, probably, is the metaphor. So I think these works have a humility or a kind of—I think in order to understand [00:34:00] something, you have to. Because if you talk, you are not—the silence is closer to the truth than saying something, because if you don't say something, you could be about to say the right word, but if you say words, will always be a mistake. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which—which—okay, so this is interesting. You set up—you set up this idea of being, as an artist, being in awe and being—and thinking about these ideas that Morandi puts out without language. Then we think about the whole layer of meaning that literature has for you, which is all about language, and which is from your childhood and everything you imagined and gr—I mean, it seems like you thought in terms of language before you thought visually.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it's true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And yet you gradually evolved into someone who can think very intuitively visually. How do these two pieces play off each other or reside together in yourself as you're thinking about your work? At least—maybe we should think about in the '70s, in the '60s, where we are now, up to early '70s. You're still very influenced thinking about just—not influences, it's too direct—it's very indirect—by literature, by Borges and by all the other writers who were meaningful to you. And we could come to *Alice in Wonderland*, even [laughs]—

LILIANA PORTER: --hmm, Yes, right--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —in a different plane, and meld that with all the visual understanding that you're gaining and being inspired by somebody like Lichtenstein and Morandi.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --at least coexist.

LILIANA PORTER: They coexist, I guess, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: One isn't superior [00:36:00] to the other?

LILIANA PORTER: No. Well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --I mean, people have written so much about the effect, impact of literature on your work, and yet you really—

LILIANA PORTER: --it's not really [inaudible] literature.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That seems like something in the back.

LILIANA PORTER: It's more—well, let's see, for instance, why I like Borges. Because he touches all the subjects that interest me, and because he is so intelligent that I can't—I read again and again, and it ever—I never get tired. And it's intelligent, but it's very accessible, it's very clear. You know, I love when things are clear. And he has a lot of sense of humor.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But clear in a very poetic way.

LILIANA PORTER: Poetic, but a lot of sense of humor and—so he's funny, too, and I like that. He's not—it's always based—instead of making a statement, he's always asking a question or stating a doubt. That's why I think it's intelligent. I think when people feel they know, it becomes, like, sad in a way. [Laughs.] So this—so it's not that I read so many, you know, that I read that much or anything. I guess I always read the same book. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's Borges in particular, not literature overall.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, coming to *Alice in Wonderland*. Around 1968, you did a print, and maybe that wasn't the first time, but the idea of the traveler and the image of the boat as a metaphor, and I don't know if that relates to *Alice in Wonderland*—

LILIANA PORTER: --'68?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: '68, I have, yes. [00:38:00] Where—and she was al—she was, I guess, almost drowning in her tears.

LILIANA PORTER: No, it wasn't '68, was I think 1980-something.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, well—

LILIANA PORTER: --maybe it was '86. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Somehow there's—

LILIANA PORTER: --you should look again.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. It was in the '80s. Or seven—after—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --well, no. I should say that you made a print in '68 that did not refer directly to *Alice in Wonderland*, you're right.

LILIANA PORTER: Oh, okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But I guess it came before—[cross talk]—but it also had a boat, a little boat, and a

little man. Maybe there were a few boats in the imagery.

LILIANA PORTER: But I think it was more the '70s, the boat [1975, a black and white photo - LP].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm, okay.

LILIANA PORTER: We should have a [inaudible].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Well, that doesn't matter so much. But—so let's—we'll get back to that, but let me move to then, uh, you were in a show in 1969 at Paula Cooper.

LILIANA PORTER: Oh, Yes, the *Wrinkle* thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And it was—

LILIANA PORTER: --I showed the *Wrinkle* etchings—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --*N.7* was the name of the show.

LILIANA PORTER: [inaudible] some *Wrinkle* thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you did the—was that a significant event for you, being in that gallery show?

LILIANA PORTER: No, it was great, because she was one of the pioneers—was the first gallery in SoHo—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —and so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and how did she get to know your work, or was it curated by someone else?

LILIANA PORTER: You know, maybe we showed the work. I don't know. Probably—you know, at that time, you go around. I don't remember how we got there. But I remember that it was—I was very happy, you know, in that show, because of the *Wrinkle* work. And then I got—I entered Hundred Acres gallery after that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Which belonged to [00:40:00] Ivan Karp.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Going back for a second, did the show at—the work you had at Paula Cooper, was that what Kynaston McShine saw that made him aware of your work, or [cross talk]?

LILIANA PORTER: He probably came to the studio and everything because José Castillo, the other member—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —made all these dinners, and he knew everybody. José Castillo was—listen to this—he was a director of the Venezuelan Pavilion at the '64 World's Fair in New York. Well, Luis is four years older than me, but I was, let's say, when we started, when I arrived, 22 years old.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: To—and was '64, the World's Fair. José Castillo, who was probably 22 or 23, was the director of the Venezuelan Pavilion at the World's Fair.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was he from a very well-connected family? How did he—

LILIANA PORTER: --he was, yes, I guess--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —have that happen? [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: He was probably from—he's Venezuelan, from—I don't know. It was the—so funny, that guy, and also very intelligent, and he was an organizer. He then—he had a gallery in Venezuela. Later he became our dealer for a while, because he had a gallery in Venezuela after with Adler, Rachel Adler. I think the gallery was called Adler Castillo. But also he was—when the Americas Society was called Center for Inter-American Relations, he was the one that directed the literature department, and he was the one responsible of all these translations of García Márquez—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --really?

LILIANA PORTER: And I guess he never read a book, you know. He wasn't the type that read the book. He was the type that would understand [00:42:00] the situation and find the translator. He was an organizer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow, yes. So he made dinners, and Kynaston came [laughs] to the workshop?

LILIANA PORTER: Probably. And also anybody who came to our workshop was totally impressed, because we were not going to tell them that it's a dentist's space. No. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you created this whole workshop by yourself.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, so it was like—it also was, I imagine—now I feel, I realize more how we may have looked, because we were really young and very—you know, you don't sleep, and you work and do things, and it was amazing. [Laughs.] But—so what were we talking about?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So I was saying Kynaston learned about your work—

LILIANA PORTER: --ah, Yes, so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and you ended up—

LILIANA PORTER: —we were doing all these things that were, let's say, avant-garde for printmaking and all these exhibitions by mail, so I guess it was—because the *Information* show was about what was going on new, and that was true, was new.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. So you had this piece with the desk with the cards. At that point there was some kind of political—you and Luis were involved in some kind of—

LILIANA PORTER: --ah, the Center--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —boycotts with—Yes, with [cross talk].

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, what happened is that the Center of Inter-American relations had, you know, in the board, all what we considered the bad political symbols for Latin America. So we decided to boycott the Center. And the problem was that José was working there. So then sort of there is where we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, where the workshop broke up--

LILIANA PORTER: —broke up a little.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And—but then we continued being friends later.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But the workshop was finished in 1970.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, more or less. [00:44:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And—so where did you go to make prints after that?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, because in my—in our studio, we had a press.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. That's a studio that was on Third Street?

LILIANA PORTER: We were first in New Jersey, then we moved to Long Island because Luis was teaching at Old Westbury University—State University.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So let me go back. When did you move out of the West Third Street to—

LILIANA PORTER: --ah. I think that didn't last that long, because then we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and you were in Sullivan—

LILIANA PORTER: --first we were in Sullivan, which was—we were in Sullivan while we had the studio on West Third. Then we moved to New Jersey because Luis was teaching at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Your home and your studio moved to New Jersey?

LILIANA PORTER: Everything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Where in New Jersey?

LILIANA PORTER: In Morristown. Morristown, New Jersey. Then we moved to Locust Valley in Long Island, because Luis was teaching at Old Westbury University.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And again, you set up a studio there?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. And we always had students in the house, in the workshop.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh. Was that an important source of your income?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, naturally.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was that the main reason that you had students?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, when we moved to New Jersey—the students we had in New York started to come to New Jersey, and we got others, and were people that we still—you know, some died because they were older—but they were fantastic, really fantastic people that we were very close. Then when we moved to Long Island, we lost them. But we—after in Long Island, we didn't have students. We were printing a lot, because I was selling many print editions—it was a time that there were a lot of publishers, so I was, you know, selling [a great deal - LP]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --having lots of shows of prints.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [00:46:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And then I also—I was lucky in that sense, that I always sort of had shows and sold work and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Yes, we'll get to that. In 19—now, I don't know if we're there chronologically, but in 1973 you had what I assume is an important show—

LILIANA PORTER: --the show at MoMA--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the project show at MoMA.

LILIANA PORTER: Because—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --were you in Locust Valley then?

LILIANA PORTER: Uh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. Tell me about how that happened and what that was in the show.

LILIANA PORTER: I, I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and who was the curator who was there?

LILIANA PORTER: Was—well, at that time, the person who chose me was Riva Castleman, because I think the printmaking department had—could make a choice of somebody [for the project room - LP]. And but the person who was assigned, or co-curator, whatever, was Howardena Pindell.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. The artist.

LILIANA PORTER: Because she worked at the printmaking department. And what happened, a year before I had a show in Milan of silkscreen printed on the wall and with strings and all that, and so I had the photographs, and I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --is that the work called "The Line"?

LILIANA PORTER: Uh, one of the pieces [cross talk].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It was on the wall—well, there's string tied on your finger, and then you drew a line, and there was a photo engraving and a print?

LILIANA PORTER: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, that was a different one.

LILIANA PORTER: Wasn't like that. The show in—they were—I started to use photo silkscreen. [I could print on the wall. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: So I'd take a photograph and I'd make the screen, a photo silkscreen. So I could print that on canvas, on paper, on the wall—wherever. [00:48:00] And so I realized that it was very magical to print it on the wall and then to add—let's say if I put the image of a nail to add on the floor—I made little holes on the wall and add the string to a real nail on the floor and things like that. So besides the obvious game, you know, trompe-l'oeil, was more—there was something happening with the space and with the kind of silence of a very simple situation that became sort of poetic in a way, you know, like so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --airy.

LILIANA PORTER: So I did that. The first experience, I have it in a gallery in Milan. So then I wanted—I liked that gallery Hundred Acres, so I came to New York with the photographs of the work and I went to the gallery and I said—you know, show my work to see if they would give me a show.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So Barbara Toll, who was the director, said—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --sorry, who was that?

LILIANA PORTER: Barbara Toll.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Oh, yes, yes, sure.

LILIANA PORTER: She said, "Well, the owner is Ivan Karp." I didn't know that, which—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --this is 1973, your first show there.

LILIANA PORTER: Who had—but this was probably in '72 when I went there. So she—so across the street was Hundred Acres—eh, OK Harris in a different building, not the one they have now. And OK Harris at that time was a very good gallery because they started with photorealism, Duane Hanson, you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So I went, and Ivan Karp looked at the photos and then came back and said [to Barbara Toll - LP], "Give her a show." So a week later, I received this call from MoMA, and I thought, Wow, these people really are incredible. I was sure it happened because of them. So I went to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] You thought the gallery got you the show. [00:50:00]

LILIANA PORTER: I went to New York, you know, and I said something to Barbara, and Barbara said, "No, no, this, it has nothing to do with us." But she gave me then the two floors and the show at the same time of MoMA. And I think probably—I don't remember how Riva Castleman knew, but maybe—because I really don't believe we would send some—I don't know. Or maybe somebody said, Hey, this girl is doing this on the wall and it's interesting. Because it was perfect, because they always look for young people to do something new.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So that was great, [laughs] was a great thing to do.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When—at that point you were living in Locust Valley. Were you kind of feeling out—was that difficult, to be outside of the direct contact with the art world in New York?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was a little boring.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because Luis was teaching there but you weren't.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, exactly. I was a little bored, frankly. And—also I was young, so it was like, whoa. Suburbia was for me like the end. So I would come once in a while to the city, but it's different. I was really—I think I was lonely then, where the first fights—[Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—did you think about going to the city on a regular basis, or was it really just—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, I would come regularly to see shows and to see some friends, but you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative], Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But [inaudible] loved the workshop we had in the house.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Some—at some point soon after that, you started doing a series of photo etchings relating to Magritte.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [00:52:00] That was in Italy I started. Because we bought a house in Italy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes, yes. Tell me—

LILIANA PORTER: --and we started the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --how did that happen?

LILIANA PORTER: Because finally we—I got to Europe. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And—

[END OF PART ONE, TRACK TWO.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Liliana Porter in her home and studio in Rhinebeck, NY, on June 27, 2012, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, disc two.

LILIANA PORTER: Okay, so what happened is this Uruguayan artist, Gonzalo Fonseca—you know him?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: He had a house in Lucca—not in Lucca, in Pietrasanta, which his own quarry—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Quarry, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Quarry. So he said, "Oh, you have to go to Lucca if you come to Europe." So anyway, my first trip to Europe actually started in Amsterdam. And so we went to Amsterdam. We went to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --with Luis.

LILIANA PORTER: With Luis.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—did you create an itinerary, that sometimes artists do, that would bring you to see certain works of art or certain museums in different cities?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, we wanted to see the museums and see everything. But we went to Lucca, which is an incredible city, and, you know, they have all these places where they announce [vendere, affittare (to sell, to rent, in Italian - LP) real estate. And I would say, "Oh, why don't we go and see a place?" And Luis said, "Well, what for?" "Ah, just for fun. Let's look." And we found this place outside the walls of Lucca, in a little town called Valdottavo that was fantastic—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --tell me that again? Valdo—

LILIANA PORTER: Valdottavo, like Vald, d-o-t-t-a-v-o.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: t-t?

LILIANA PORTER: I think it's two ts.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: -a-v-o. One word, Valdottavo.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: t-a-v-a [ph].

LILIANA PORTER: In Lucca. And it was an old mill where they do, [00:02:00] chestnuts, chestnuts flour?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh—

LILIANA PORTER: —it used to be—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —mill—

LILIANA PORTER: A mill with the walls, you know, and stone walls. Beautiful place with a vineyard and a little stream river and everything. And a barn. So Luis immediately saw the summer printmakers school. And so we said—and it was—so we decided—we—at that point, we had made a collection of prints, because many times, when we sold editions, we asked, for instance, for artworks instead of money, and we said, "Well, don't give me money, give me a print." So I also had two prints by the *Suite Vollard* of Picasso in the collection—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh—

LILIANA PORTER: —you know, things that we had collected.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Very collectable, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So we decided to put everything in an auction, and we got exactly the money to buy the place.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which auction? Where?

LILIANA PORTER: Milan, in a place called Finarte.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Finarte.

LILIANA PORTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And we came back to New York, we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —so you told the people who were selling it, "We want it. Just wait; we'll get the money"?

LILIANA PORTER: No, we called Luis's father, who sent us \$1000 to put down—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh—

LILIANA PORTER: —of the cost. Just to tell you, \$8000, at that moment, the whole place. So then, every summer we would come and fix it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that was 1974, something like that?

LILIANA PORTER: Something like that, yes. So every summer we would go and fix it, you know, start fixing the place and everything, and so we opened the workshop. We advertised, and we had—top had to be 12 students, no more. But it became like a full-time thing because, you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you hope to earn profit enough to [coughs] not only pay for the house but live for the rest of the year, or help live the rest of the year?

LILIANA PORTER: I don't know how we thought of it. I think first was the idea of teaching or something like that. Yes, probably. But the idea of profit was not the aim, that's for sure. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you didn't want to lose money, I'm sure.

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did students come from abroad, or just—

LILIANA PORTER: —from different parts, close by—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and you had a place for them to live?

LILIANA PORTER: They had choices. There was a little hotel in town, they could camp in our property, or at one point we rented a house in the town where they could sub-rent or whatever. And we had a cook, Rosa, that—and then we—they had to drink our wine with the labels, Camnitzer Porter Studio. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You had your own vineyards, or you just bought?

LILIANA PORTER: We had our own vineyards that probably made horrible wine, but we thought it was great. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It sounds kind of idyllic.

LILIANA PORTER: It was very nice, Yes, Yes. But very intense because was like a cycle. Luis really got into the case of everyone. [Laughs.] He was the one that made them cry, and I was the one who said, "What? Don't worry," you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, he would be very stern and—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —serious in terms of getting them to consider what they were doing.

LILIANA PORTER: Their own life and everything, Yes. Politics, life, and everything. [They laugh.] So it was a good team. [00:06:00] And so we met a lot of people that are still friends there. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and how many years did you run that as a workshop?

LILIANA PORTER: They still—Luis goes every summer. Now he's there, as we talk. But I think now somebody else—or he rents it or—I don't—it's not—but until very few years, he was still teaching every summer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. He loves, you know, to teach. I love to, but less than he does. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So I was bringing up the photo etchings that were inspired by Magritte.

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, Magritte.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were thinking about Lucca then.

LILIANA PORTER: So I was in Italy, in Lucca, and I had this book by Suzi Gablik—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —of Magritte, and there was a bowl of apples. And I had the book open in the reproduction of that painting where the man has an apple in front.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And so I put a real apple on top of the book, and I loved what happened. So I took a photograph and I made a photoetching. So I started to do a series of prints that were—it's almost like a Magritte mentality, but using his work to go one step farther. Like for instance he has the reproduction—the book has a reproduction of the painting with something called "The Ladder of Fire"—it's in fire, so I will ignite the book and make a photograph and make a print. You know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—

LILIANA PORTER: —to go—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —was this the first series—

LILIANA PORTER: —I did 15 prints— [1975-77 - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that referenced so directly another artist's work in this way, that had a dialogue with another artist's work?

LILIANA PORTER: No, because before, when I was in Argentina, I used Picasso. [00:08:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: And then also—I don't remember whether it was before or after—I did—well, Picasso, I used Picasso—there's a print where—it's a *Suite Vollard* print, and I put my finger in one of his lines. It's like if I put my hand inside the drawing and I took a photograph and I did a photoetching. So—and I used Lichtenstein's postcards—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh, yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —but I think later. I used—Yes, because when I started to use that technique of photo

silkscreen on the wall, you could phot—you could take anything from reality and put it there on paper or any surface—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yes, yes. Many artists were doing that, Yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —so I would do—I used Morandi, also people that were more contemporary, like Steve Gianakos, well, Lichtenstein, [Jonathan] Bonofsky, I used one postcard. A lot of postcards.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, and earlier the Renaissance portrait.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and also [inaudible], Botticelli, I used a lot. Yes, I used a lot of the artists, other artists.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes. When you were in Lucca, were there any Italian artists who you met?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I met, um, this guy, Luciano Fabro. He was really great. Then there was this actually Argentinian guy, but who lived in Milan, Antonio Trotta, who was very close with, uh—well, then I met, um, let me see, hmm—well, but it's not that we were—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —close. Yes, Yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —close, [00:10:00] we were close or anything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you did that tour of Europe before you went to Lucca, were there any particular experiences that really stood out, that were really meaningful?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, Italy itself.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So of all the countries you went to, Italy was the one that was the most—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —exciting.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. For most, like, beautiful, like from every point of view. I like it a lot. But we went to a lot of places.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you were doing this, the works that related to Magritte, at the same time, there was a series with little sailboats, which I don't think relates to Magritte—

LILIANA PORTER: —no—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —called The Journey.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —well, it wasn't prints; it was pencil and collage on paper.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And a kind of a grid.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, no, what happened was then—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it felt like a departure. It felt like—well, I'm only thinking about what you have on your website. Maybe—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no, it's true. What happened is in '78—when was it?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So there were bits, there were collage elements, there were drawings, there were these—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes. In '75, I have cancer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Seventy-five?

LILIANA PORTER: So I was 35 years old. So I had a mastectomy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow.

LILIANA PORTER: And also—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you have to have chemotherapy?

LILIANA PORTER: No, thank God. It was the time that people were sort of drastic.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But I guess that, and then was the beginning when we were—I was starting to—we were starting to have trouble, Luis and me. You know, it was the beginning—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you were starting to what?

LILIANA PORTER: To have some [00:12:00] marital trouble. Like, because we divorced in, I think, '77 or '78.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: And so I guess the boat had to do with, well, that chapter in *Alice in Wonderland*—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —where she cries and then she becomes very small and she almost drowns in her own tears.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So I did a print—but this was later, I think—with that—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —sounds very relevant—

LILIANA PORTER: —and then I put the boat. And I don't know how to swim, so I guess the boat was the salvation. You know, my mother, the optimist. And so—because I'm the type that even if, you know, horrible things happen, I don't get depressed for that long. So the thing is, anyway, I think *The Journey* was the beginning of the journey of—you know, to—I think when I really grew up at that moment, with the separation, the separation from Luis. It was like heavy experiences. But also at the time, when you have that operation, you think you are going to die, so you become wise for a very short time, because then you become more intelligent. [They laugh.] Then, you know, suddenly you start thinking, Okay, what do you want to do? What do you want to do the rest of your life, or do you want [inaudible]? You know, you start making decisions. So I moved to New York.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And where did you—

LILIANA PORTER: —I was living on Sheridan Square.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sheridan Square. Did you have a place by yourself?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A studio, a place—

LILIANA PORTER: —an apartment, and then the studio.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In the same place?

LILIANA PORTER: Across the street. It was very convenient—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh, both on Sheridan Square?

LILIANA PORTER: In—wait, what is this street? Sheridan Square. It was West Fourth and—well now I don't remember the name. Well, anyway, there—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Waverly—

LILIANA PORTER: —Sheridan Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Waverly? I don't remember. Sheridan Square.

LILIANA PORTER: No, Sheridan Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I'm sorry, what?

LILIANA PORTER: It's not Sheridan Street?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I'm not sure. I don't recall that.

LILIANA PORTER: Well anyway, there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I don't think there's a Sheridan Street.

LILIANA PORTER: No. So it's called—I have a blank now.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, well, in the Village there.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, in the Village. And one of my ex-students from New Jersey had a building exactly across the street from the building where I moved, and they rented offices, and so I got the studio like this, in exchange of work.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow.

LILIANA PORTER: And I opened a workshop. I was teaching again and printing and everything right away. And that was the time when Ana Mendieta came to New York, and we became good friends.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you met. That was the first time you had met?

LILIANA PORTER: We met before, but she left Iowa to come to New York.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So she would come to that apartment. Even—but later I moved to a loft, and she also—we were really good friends.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you first came back to New York and had that apartment and the studio, who were you seeing? What other artists, besides Ana Mendieta were you seeing?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —were there new acquaintances you were making? Were there still the same friends and—

LILIANA PORTER: —the same friends, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But being newly single, you probably were [00:16:00] seeing friends more often—and besides, living in New York and not Locust Valley.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, let's see. Well, uh, some people—there is more, no?—uh, let's see, which are they? Well, Ana Mendieta. Well, a lot of Latin artists, it's true. César Paternosto.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, uh-huh [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: And then—well, some people that you probably—they are not well known, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that doesn't matter.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, like my best friend probably was Nicolette Reim. She's an artist also.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me her last name again?

LILIANA PORTER: Reim is R-e-i-m. Nicolette. And also Theodore Maus, who married Nicolette.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Theodore—

LILIANA PORTER: —and Nicolette actually used—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —M-a-u-s?

LILIANA PORTER: M-a-u-s. He—she—I met her because she came as a student in Valdottavo looking at an ad in the newspaper, you know, which is amazing that somebody would do that, because usually, I think, who knows what you are going to find?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes. [They laugh.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, let's see. Mm.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Now, let me—

[Audio break.]

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So at that point, you said you set up a print shop across the street.

LILIANA PORTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: But all along, you're also doing works on paper.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And you were doing that in the print shop, or were you doing that in your apartment?

LILIANA PORTER: In the print shop. Well, let's say, when I moved to [00:18:00] Sheridan Square, I had a workshop across the street—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —mm-hmm [affirmative], so that's where you—

LILIANA PORTER: —with a press and everything.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yes, Yes. And you—and you continued, I think, throughout that time doing various series of etchings, but also starting to do—

LILIANA PORTER: —to paint—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —to do paintings, Yes, and works on paper. And I noticed that in 1970—roughly—around 1978, you started doing what turned out to be many years of large multipart paintings—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —mostly acrylic, sometimes with objects on them.

LILIANA PORTER: Because what happened—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —and that was a huge departure. I don't know if you were continuing doing printmaking at the same time or—

LILIANA PORTER: —I continued [cross talk]—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —you really made a change. And was that a different studio you rented to do all those big paintings?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was a big studio. What happened is that when I had the separation and then the operation, the first drawings, the ones with the boat—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —the boat that gets burned or gets destroyed or, you know, terrible things happened, [laughs] I didn't care if it was art, if it was Conceptual, if it was avant-garde, if it was old-fashioned. It was, like—it was—I wanted to do that. You know, it was more like a diary or something that you need—it would be ridiculous at one point to start to think if it's in fashion, if it's a statement. It was just saying whatever I needed to say, which I think is interesting also. Because I—in the—you know, sometimes you impose yourself a lot of laws [00:20:00] of what have to be—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —rules—

LILIANA PORTER: —this way. Rules, this and that. And at that moment, I didn't care at all. That's why I started to paint, because painting was also against the grain.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And I said, I'm going to paint, I'm going to do whatever, you know. And you become—and that's why you become wiser for two seconds, that you are more free and more—Yes, free. Less judgmental, self-judgmental or whatever. And I think—so the works in general were—they looked like sentences. You mentioned with commas, with everything—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —with lines—

LILIANA PORTER: —coming out. I think it was more, uh—very emotional, everything. Um, less intellectual, less theory. But everything already was there. You know, you carry everything, you learn and stuff like [appear alone - LP].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So I was doing that and doing also wall pieces. A lot that I didn't document. I don't know. And but I did a lot of those silkscreens on the wall with objects and stuff. Also, when I was—I don't remember now, but if I look in my vita, I was showing. Always I was showing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Let me—let me take a moment to go to those early years. Yes, you started showing at Hundred Acres, and you had many shows—'73, '74—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —'75, '77—and at that point, those were shows of prints with some works on paper?

LILIANA PORTER: And canvas, too, but the canvas were printed on—with silkscreen.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And photographs, some photographs.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And how—and did you say how you ended up at Hundred Acres? How you initially—

LILIANA PORTER: —then Ivan Karp closed that gallery, and she opened in her loft the Barbara Toll Gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, right. That was in—so after Hundred Acres—the last show was '77—then Barbara Toll, '79. So she invited you to show your work?

LILIANA PORTER: [Barbara Toll exhibited works in her studio. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because Hundred Acres closed.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I think she had—she still has a big loft, and she had the shows there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But she had a gallery in—

LILIANA PORTER: —then she opened a gallery—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —in—on Broadway—

LILIANA PORTER: —where I showed too.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. And then—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, it wasn't in Broadway. Was Greene Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

LILIANA PORTER: It's called Barbara Toll Gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, and you had several shows there—

LILIANA PORTER: —there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So that was very easy for you, those first two gallery representations. I mean, you actually were showing also in galleries in Italy and galleries in South American, so.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So I guess it was—was it because you were primarily, at those early years, a print maker, and you had a lot of work, and you could participate in a lot of exhibitions?

LILIANA PORTER: In a lot of things. Exactly. It's true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's a real advantage. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: It's a big advantage.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. After Barbara closed her gallery, mid-'80s, did you—I'm looking, and I saw that there was a gap in time, at least in terms of New York representation.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. There was a moment where I worked less because I became a stepmother, because I got married again.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So tell me, who did you meet? [Laughs.] Tell me about that episode, chapter in your life.

LILIANA PORTER: I got married soon, actually, with Alan Wiener, who was a—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —A-l-a-n?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Wiener, W—Yes—W-e—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —i-n-e-r—

LILIANA PORTER: —i-e-n. Yes, right. So he was—so I met him before he was a student in Old Westbury. And—well, anyway, we got married.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And he was an artist? He is an artist?

LILIANA PORTER: He—he died.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. What was he doing when you knew him, when you were married?

LILIANA PORTER: He was doing—Yes, he was in photography and silkscreen. But he was not very social, so he didn't—he wanted to make art and everything, but not necessarily to show or talk to people. [Laughs.] But we had the workshop together, and we were—he also was printing. He became the—eh, what was the title? Something manager of Levine and Levine [ph], who were the ones representing Dalí at the moment.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Dalí?

LILIANA PORTER: In New York. So we did a lot of printing of Dalí's, and also he supervised all kinds of bas-reliefs and things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: All kinds of things?

LILIANA PORTER: They did the reliefs. All kinds of products, Dalí products.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Products, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So—and then—Yes, we had a work—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and he lived with you, then, on Sheridan Square, or did you move?

LILIANA PORTER: We moved to—when we moved together, we moved to a loft on Beach Street in Tribeca. And then we [00:26:00] put a big workshop and we were printing also for other artists, and he was doing all these works for Dalí—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, on Beach Street—

LILIANA PORTER: —Dalí things. Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And then he started to work—he put a little printing shop, but more commercial, in SoHo, so he was working there. So we were married like 12 years.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You said that you became a stepmother.

LILIANA PORTER: I became a stepmother because he was married before and had a son, and I didn't have a son, so I wanted—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —how old was his son when—

LILIANA PORTER: —so he came to live with—well, when I got married with him, I, you know, got—like, met the little boy and everything, and then when he was nine, he wanted to live with us. And I was very happy. And the mother had another boyfriend and probably was—you know how children could be difficult, so probably was also convenient for her. I don't know. I feel terrible for her that—he was beautiful. And also because—Alan was very,

like, looked very American, with blond and blue eyes, but the son, the mother was Dominican, so the son looked more like me, so I loved that. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did the son speak Spanish from his mother?

LILIANA PORTER: He spoke Spanish, so—so I really dedicated, like, three years that he lived with us, I was obsessed with that. And he was like a sad child, and I always—I didn't know what to do to make him happy. So I guess that was a lot of energy. So I think at one point I left the gallery, Hundred Acres, like—I mean, I didn't have a show [00:28:00] [inaudible] weren't working. So I went—then I was ready to show with Bernice Steinbaum.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, wait. So Barb—after Barbara Toll closed in '84, the Steinbaum show was in—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no, no. She didn't close when I moved.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, I'm sorry.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But the Steinbaum show was in '93?

LILIANA PORTER: '93?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, maybe there was one I missed. I saw there was one in '83.

LILIANA PORTER: I think there probably was one before.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay.

LILIANA PORTER: So I showed there, I think, a couple of times, then later I showed with Monique Knowlton.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], that was in '96.

LILIANA PORTER: And then what happened?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But going back to your stepson—

LILIANA PORTER: —ah. So anyway—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —he stayed with you for three years.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, so I guess that's the time I worked less, I think. But, well, and then, um—but I always, you know, worked a lot. That—I think in my life I was lucky to have something constant, which is art, so, you know, sickness, husbands, whatever happened, but like I had something very solid, always constant.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes, right. You said you were married for 12 years? What year was that it was—you were divorced? Or you said he passed away.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, not—but not because—[laughs] I didn't kill him. [They laugh.] He just died two years ago, by himself. He had a heart attack.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: He was remarried and everything. [Inaudible] we were friends, good friends. I am good friends with my ex-husbands. Not that they—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] That's an achievement.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it's an achievement. No. No, Luis, I love Luis, and I really love his wife and the children, and to me [00:30:00] it's a very important relationship, because I think when you live with somebody when you are really young and you, you know, build your life and your art and everything together, it's—it would be a pity not to continue. So it's very moving for us, like, was very moving the other day when I went to MoMA and we are showing next to each other, [inaudible]—I think it's great.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Next to Luis's work, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, to continue relating. I love that—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —when your—when that marriage ended, did you move, or did you still—

LILIANA PORTER: —with whom? With Luis?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: With Alan.

LILIANA PORTER: With Alan? No, let me think. I stayed in the loft.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: On Beach Street.

LILIANA PORTER: No, because we later bought the loft on Franklin Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: Beach Street was transitory—you know, for a while.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Temporary.

LILIANA PORTER: And then we bought the loft, and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —on Franklin.

LILIANA PORTER: On Franklin Street, and then from Franklin I came here.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah. So when—what year was that, about, that you made that change?

LILIANA PORTER: I think—let me think. I'm very bad with dates, but I think '89 or '90. Gone with the wind.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it really was.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, let me go back to the gallery. So then you showed at Monique Knowlton, and then you began a relationship—

LILIANA PORTER: —Monique Knowlton, I showed for the first time the new series of photographs, only photographs.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. Maybe we should go back to the work, and we'll come back to the gallery situation another—another moment. So I was talking about the fact that you did this series of large paintings, multipart paintings, multipanel paintings, starting around '78 and going into the—

LILIANA PORTER: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —into—all through the '80s. And this was a departure. I mean, you were making—you said it was something to do with after the operation, after your illness—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and you're doing these major multi—not just a small painting, but large paintings, which—how did your thinking evolve to the point where you decided to do these large works? So they—that was a departure: they were large, they were paintings, they were multipart. They actually combined a lot of elements from your past work.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —I mean, it wasn't—you can see that they're—it's your work.

LILIANA PORTER: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's not a huge departure visually, but physically having those.

LILIANA PORTER: Because they look a little—for instance, I was doing all of these wall pieces, and it looks almost like the wall piece on top of the canvases. No?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you want to make something more enduring? Was it that making these wall pieces that disappeared was frustrating?

LILIANA PORTER: Probably, Yes. Probably I wanted to go back to painting. Because I used to do the silkscreens

on canvas. It was tempting. And Yes, I liked the idea of these, to make them more permanent.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: With the assemblage, with the element added, most of these—

LILIANA PORTER: —right—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —of the little shelf. Do you recall when you first—I mean, I know the early—there was one piece I saw on your website, [00:34:00] an early piece from the '70s with a little shelf—but basically it was during these '80s.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it's true. And I think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what brought that to your mind to create that shelf and even extend it across most of the—some of them—across most of the work?

LILIANA PORTER: There is something that also is important, that I was making a painting, but very aware of the, um, how do you say, convention of the medium. So the painting includes that awareness. Many times the brush is attached to the canvas, or there is the image of the hand drawing printed on the canvas. So it's like I'm using the canvas, but not—it's like a Post-Conceptual painting, I would say, from the concept, from the way it's used, it's like more—it's not going back, I don't think. No?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right, right.

LILIANA PORTER: So in that sense was—because always I am—it's interesting to enter the virtual space of art, because it's like the image inside the mirror, or it's something that is illusionary but is very real. So the subject is itself, of the medium, is part of the whole idea of the work. The awareness of the person on the side of the canvas, the viewer, the person who does it, you know, all that, it's like—being aware, also, the sense of time, and all the—[00:36:00] also the collective memory, using images of other people. So everything—so it's—that's—it's perfect to use that medium.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Why the multipanel? I mean, besides the practical consideration of not stretching a giant canvas, but—

LILIANA PORTER: [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —there—there are large sections.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because also it's like—it's like, how do you [inaudible]—when something is dislocated but at the same time goes together. So it's the dislocation, but at the same time there is—they belong together. So [multipanels - LP] I guess it gives you another possibility of playing with the space, too. Because you can stop seeing some of these like chapters or a poem, when you stop and then you start something different, but they belong to the same poem. I think it gives you the possibility of this broken space that is richer. I hope. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Do you—do you recall when—during the '80s, when you were doing these large—

LILIANA PORTER: —canvas—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —canvases, assemblages, how your thinking conceptually evolved over the course of making these works? I mean, they were obviously references—they were obviously connected to the works on paper, the previous—the prints, all that you were making.

LILIANA PORTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And there are images of mirrors and books. Would you say that you were working with kind of a poetic narrative? [00:38:00] Were there—was there a story, however, um—maybe not linear—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that was going on that you'd begin, before you started the work, that you really visualized? Did you—did you plan each—I mean, when you're doing multicanvas paintings, you have to do some planning in advance.

LILIANA PORTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative], planning.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So were you making sketches? How—what was the evolution of developing those, that body of work?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, sometimes it started with a sit—what I call a situation, that I put—I take a photograph of a kind of still life of, let's say, a book, geometric shapes, a few things—objects—and that will become a silkscreen. Because they were paintings, but they were sometimes printed on canvas with photo-silkscreen and then painted over, some images that were books, you could actually read the book because it's printed with photo-silkscreen. So the technique was very helpful because it could be very interesting to mix the brushstrokes sort of rough together with this, a perfect description of something.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: If I remember correctly also—and this is hard to see in the images I have—there were passages in the paintings that were ac—that I think were actually very finely painted realist elements.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly, because the superrealistic were silkscreened, so I could take this book—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay, I—

LILIANA PORTER: —and you could read the whole thing on the canvas.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But little scenes that looked like you had painted them, but actually they were silkscreened.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Some things are painted, but some things are silkscreened from photographs—I have what I call sets. I have boxes and boxes of these photographs that then were—the image transferred on the canvas. And actually, when I did a show in Argentina, [00:40:00] curated by Inés Katzenstein, who is the one that I have the dialogue with for the books of Cisneros.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes, yes, I met her, Inés Katzenstein, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And in that show she made me show in cases some of the photographs that generated the work. It was very, very interesting, because at that time I separated the photographs from the thing because photography—first, I am not a photographer, and then I still have the pressure not to do photographs, for some strange reason. So I would do the photo etchings. And now I am going back to my negatives, the negatives of the Magritte series, and I'm going to print those photographs, because the photographs themselves are enough. I really didn't need, in many cases, to make a photoetching.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Hm.

LILIANA PORTER: So I am planning to bring those photos and, you know, make prints with the original negatives.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you were doing those paintings from the—you said you went to a box of photographs. Did you have them sorted?

LILIANA PORTER: I had boxes and boxes I'm sure.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have them organized in categories? [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: They are not still organized. They are now by—I don't know, they are together. But I have boxes and boxes—well, but now I have albums. I'm beginning to organize the albums. And then you can see all these—I call them sets.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But going back to the question of process, when you first would conceive of one of these paintings and you thought—you started by looking at the photographs—

LILIANA PORTER: So I—let's say I have—let's say—let's call it still life. So I do a silkscreen, I print it on a piece of paper, and I could put the paper on top of the canvas, on the side where it would look better. Then I can— [00:42:00] well, there is a technique to do it, because I first painted the background of the image on the canvas, and then I printed it on top of the background over the canvas on the floor. And you have to choose only one color, so because I wasn't going—it's not a color separation kind of situation. And then I would paint over whatever I wanted to look like paint, and leave some things untouched. But if you don't know the technique—I mean, if you are a not a technician, you think that I painted everything including every letter or, you know—because they get all integrated in the image. So it was a fantastic technique to appropriate real things and put them in the virtual space of the canvas. That's the way I felt.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you take—you take one of the large paintings, and there's various images.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So did you have a drawing at first, a plan?

LILIANA PORTER: No, I usually started—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you just start with one image and then decide—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —okay, what else do I want to put on this?

LILIANA PORTER: It's more like that, and then maybe the other canvas next to it appear—not—it's not I'm thinking, "I'm going to make a triptych." Sometimes it could be that; I would say, Oh, I would like to make a multipanel situation, but it's not—I don't—it's impossible to plan so much in advance, so it sort of happened, and sometimes you get stuck, [laughs] and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —mm-hmm [affirmative]. And you're using acrylic. You—

LILIANA PORTER: —I was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —ever since art school when you were using oils, you started using—

LILIANA PORTER: —acrylic. But then there are some paintings that are acrylic, and oil on top, and then some—some are oil. But what happens, oil never dries, [takes a long time to dry - LP] and it's a little annoying—but also it has some qualities that the acrylic doesn't, so I use both sometimes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I mentioned—[00:44:00] I don't know if we talked about it—you're putting the shelves, the little extensions out, and putting objects on them.

LILIANA PORTER: On top.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What prompted you to begin doing that, do you recall, and why, and then what did it become for you that it became so—how—why did it become so important that it's become a very imp—consist—constant element in your work?

LILIANA PORTER: Because what happened is that many times I would, let's say, draw, or let's say there would be an element—let's imagine a wooden little pyramid. You know, the geometric shapes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Geometric—yes, you did quite a few works with geometric—

LILIANA PORTER: So they are painted super-realistic. Then suddenly next appear like in a sketch in charcoal, and then suddenly you see a shelf with the real thing. And what happened is that it looks in theory that you go from representation to real stuff, but the moment you put the real thing on the shelf, it's evident that the thing also is representational. And it's when you start, uh—how do you say it?—overventilating. [They laugh.] Because you really realize that. It's like one thing is to read, you know, a theory or a philosophy or whatever, and the other thing is when you experience it, and it feels that you never can apprehend the essence of anything. Like the archetype is always an abstraction. You can say—you say "chair," and we imagine a chair, but which chair, and from which point of view? And suddenly you say, What is "the chair," the word chair, which chair, at what time? [00:46:00] You know, it—instead of being, becoming more real, the more you analyze, it sort of decomposes. And I—so it's the whole—because it's a subject that interests me, the subject of representation—because it's not only the drawing, the photograph of the thing, the thing, it's your memory, the way you read it, you know, language. You can go forever. And so it's—I think it's the question of analyzing what is the substance of things, what is the essence. So I think the work, my concerns are not formal concerns of a painter, but more concerns that could have been a writer or something else. That's why probably I like Borges also.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, what you're talking about is having this real object—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —associated directly with the painting. That could mean that you would simply attach it directly to the canvas, but instead, in most cases, you have used the convention—

LILIANA PORTER: —the shelf—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —of the shelf. Is the shelf in itself important in some way that you've—that you saw early on, or you've come to see?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, because if you put it directly, it looks weird. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay.

LILIANA PORTER: It needs something to [hold it in place - LP]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —does it look too traditional, like a Kurt Schwitters assemblage? I mean, does it look like—

LILIANA PORTER: —well, because it's a different—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —not removed enough—

LILIANA PORTER: —a collage that is more flat than an object that you see the whole object. Because a normal object is not attached from the side, it's leaning on a surface.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Occasionally—I mean, most of the paintings, I think, [00:48:00] have the shelf attached to the front of the painting—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but there's a couple of examples where the shelf is actually a pedestal or something separate.

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, well, that's more recent, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. I was forgetting when that—when that is. But all through the '80s we're talking about, these were shelves—

LILIANA PORTER: —in the canvas.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Now, one—

LILIANA PORTER: —because—let me say something. There is another little detail, that sometimes the thing that is on top of the shelf is also painted on top of itself. Like if I'm describing the thing in the thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Which is an exercise I used to give my students, to learn how to paint, like, you bring objects, and then you leave them on a surface like a still life, and then you have to paint the thing on top [paint the objects on top of them, directly on them - LP]. So you learn how to mix, you know, the colors to get the color of the thing, but also you realize that nothing is permanent—everything has a lot of colors, the shadows, and—and it's a very strange experience to realize that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you say "the thing on the top," you mean the surface?

LILIANA PORTER: The surface, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Even if it may be reflections and—

LILIANA PORTER: —all that, right. You suddenly realize, because you say, "Oh, table: brown." But no, it has 3,000 colors and changes with the light and everything. You know, it's impossible, so that the thing of the brown, to imagine that, is totally an abstract idea that is not true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

[Audio break.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: All right, I wanted to ask you about the works you did with Alice.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, exactly. [Inaudible.] [00:50:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No, I realize. [Laughs.] That was maybe in 1980 [early prints with Alice; 1987 collages - LP], there was an "Alice" 1, 2, 3," little pieces of paper across the surface of the paper.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and some were—the ones that were more what's called Baroque, had—the material I used were old, discarded prints, proofs of prints, of my—that I did myself, and pieces of drawings I didn't like or acrylic on paper. You know, things. So they were—it was very interesting, the process I enjoyed very much, because I really was like an assemblage of things that you—it looked like I threw everything on top and it got there, but it wasn't like that. It was really back and forth and taking a piece and putting another, and sometimes adding real brushes and objects attached to it and everything. And at the end it looked like a kind of tsunami of fragments of things that are written, works of other people, things in perspective—you know, all kinds of things.

And I think probably the obvious explanation is they have to do with memory or with, you know, all the things you have in your mind, and how, really, mind works, that it's not linear. Because we think in, like, in layers, and at the same time in different things. And I think that process sort of brought that in. And I guess suddenly the protagonist would be Alice. And Alice was perfect, because Alice was falling. You know, there was in [inaudible] something when she's falling. So it [00:52:00] helps. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—they're a little—they're a little bit of a departure from the paintings that are, as you said, that Baroque kind of feeling of excess.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the opposite.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right, the opposite.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. The opposite. That even though they have space around.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, there's plenty of empty—

LILIANA PORTER: —but this is true, in the—they are like—Yes, like accumulations, let's call them—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —of things. And also they have some—because with acrylic, you can make brushstrokes that—let's say you put the texture on glass, and when it dries, you can peel it off.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So you—I would add that to the collage, which looks very strange because the brushstrokes are floating—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —right—

LILIANA PORTER: —when it's supposed to be attached to the paper.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: After you—I don't know—how many of those Alice—I saw an "Alice 3"; I didn't know if there's more.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I didn't—well, sometimes I forget how many I did. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you just, you just satisfied yourself a number of Alices, and then you stopped doing those.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, I stopped, Yes. But I still have—I could do new versions, not of Alice, but maybe the accumulations. It's something that now I—it's not something that I couldn't do again because I don't feel it doesn't come out. I could—it—there was some kind of pleasure doing that, I have to say.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I think this is a good moment to stop.

LILIANA PORTER: The word "pleasure."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. [Laughs.]

[END OF PART TWO, TRACK ONE.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Liliana Porter in Rhinebeck, NY, on June 28, 2012, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and this is the continuation of disc two. Liliana, I wanted to ask you about teaching. You, of course, talked yesterday about teaching printmaking in various locations in New York and Italy, et cetera, but I think in the early '90s, around 1991, you got a position as professor, maybe assistant moving to full, [laughs] I'm not sure, at Queens College, and I wanted to ask you, how did you end up deciding to take that position? Were you looking for a full-time teaching position?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, actually, it was interesting, because I was living in a loft in Tribeca, and Cynthia Gallagher, who is an artist who also lived in the same building and was teaching at Queens College, she said, There is a position that—I know you are not looking for a job, but this is a perfect position for you, because we are looking for somebody who will take care of the printmaking department. And it was the time, also, they were looking for a minority, maybe a woman. I mean, it was—only my name was missing. [They laugh.] So I went there, but I wasn't sure, because I thought full-time meant every day, and I was afraid that it would be, like, to take too much time. And so I went not—you know, when you are not that desperate or anything. So I—it was so

easy, and I really got the position, and I was so happy because I really enjoyed the 15 years I was at Queens College. And I liked my colleagues, I liked [00:02:00] the students, and also the—I got tenure, and I did I don't know how many sabbaticals, I guess two. And in many things—many good things came from teaching there besides the whole experience, but also I had—I got I think eight research awards.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, I saw that on your resume.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What did that mean when you got the research award?

LILIANA PORTER: It meant, like, you could apply to do something that you didn't do before, say I—for instance, I applied for video before I made my first video. So you could—so they give you a certain amount of money, but they didn't give you the money, you have to—you spend it, you send the bills, and they pay them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is it in place of teaching?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No.

LILIANA PORTER: It's separate.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see.

LILIANA PORTER: So I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it's in a way a grant.

LILIANA PORTER: It's a grant. It's a grant that allows you to buy material or to get, you know, if you need an assistant, or whatever you need related to the proposal. So that was very good, and I had really great colleagues.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You said you weren't really looking for a job. You were living on the income from sales of artwork and the—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, I was, and also, well—Yes, and also sometimes printing for other artists. I was doing that and doing the plates and all that. But—and I used to teach, from since I remember, because I also would teach in my studio, or I was teaching at one point in Old Westbury. You know, different things. But this was different because it was a full-time job.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. What exactly did you teach? Did that change over the years? [00:04:00]

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I had to teach always a printmaking class, because I was the only one in that department. And then two other classes, that could be painting, drawing, a seminar for the graduate students. Was very—you could really choose the way you wanted to teach, and that was very free and that was very good. So—because I had undergraduates and graduate students.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What—could you describe your approach to teaching, and were there particular teachers in your past whose example you followed?

LILIANA PORTER: No. Well, I think the whole way of teaching started when we started the New York Graphic Workshop, that—how to approach, how to make a work of art, instead of starting from the technique to the idea, to start from the idea to the technique. And so it's not that I was teaching the technique without the concept of what you wanted to do. So in that sense, you know, I developed some exercises. I really had a lot of fun with different experiments. And it's good when you feel that the students respond and good things come out from the studio.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. What—did you get involved in any departmental issues, administrative—

LILIANA PORTER: —oh, Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —kinds of chores?

LILIANA PORTER: [Laughs.] Yes, you had to. I wasn't—Yes. That's the part I didn't like, but I—you have to do it. And what happened—because the system in Argentina and South America is different, like you had to learn the whole system of the credits and all kinds of things that [00:06:00] I was—it didn't come naturally to me; I had to

learn it. So at one point, I was deputy chair, and it was a little nightmarish, but I went through the whole year, and nobody realized I didn't know what I was doing. [Laughs.] Now, I had a lot of support, because every time I didn't know something, I asked, but it—also because I had to write sometimes memos or things, and when you are writing not in your own language, it takes longer because you have to check that it's correct.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yes. What impact would you say teaching in that way at Queens College had on your work? I mean, I know you said you were teaching forever, especially the printmaking, but did you ever—

LILIANA PORTER: —well, I guess the—I don't know the impact, but I guess when you are teaching, you are—and you are in contact with young people, you are more in tune with the times and with what is going on, I think. Even though in general, students seem to be more, more how do you call, formal. Yes, like for instance, in the beginning, I would ask a question: Which artist—what artist do you like most? And everybody would say Van Gogh and Leonardo da Vinci. It's because they didn't know anybody else. But I think I was a little surprised that they were all very conservative in general, more conservative.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Hm. Did you find that changing over the years?

LILIANA PORTER: I think—no. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Does that reflect that they were—

LILIANA PORTER: —what happened, I was used to the school of fine arts in Buenos Aires. I guess it's different. [00:08:00]

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Maybe if they were students in New York City—

LILIANA PORTER: —maybe if it was the school of visual arts in New York, it would have been a totally different context. For instance, I was super surprised that many of them never went to the museums in Manhattan, or they were afraid to go to Manhattan. Because I thought in general young people are—first, the first thing, questioning the adults. So, like, I remember, like, we had a teacher, and we didn't trust the teacher. It was like we were like, Let's see what they say. And in this case, I found the students were more, um—how do you say?—like, following whatever you say, like if you have the last word. And I was surprised. But I think one thing that I think is a problem here is the whole system of grades, because it's like the student is trying to please the prof to get the grades.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So the aim is not in what—in the work, but in something that has nothing to do with what we are teaching.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —did you succeed in any way over the years in getting students to feel more comfortable going to museums?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, if—because once they went, they were really happy and loved it. But also I had to fight with the whole—to make sure, because then maybe it wouldn't go and go to the internet and try to cheat like they were there, but they did not go—so you have to make some kind of exercise or something that they had to go. And once they went, everybody loved it, and they were very happy and everything. But I guess first they were afraid, I don't know, to go. And also, because many times I also took them to Chelsea to see shows, and it was interesting [00:10:00] also for me to see some shows through the eyes of some people who were not really used to seeing contemporary art, and how do we explain what they were seeing.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], right.

LILIANA PORTER: It was interesting.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Did you have any particularly memorable students?

LILIANA PORTER: Many, many really fantastic ones. I think I had one—Yes, many, actually, that were—I had one I was thinking that I—was in—was in a seminar situation, and I always felt that he had a friend who did all the work for him. Yes. But I wasn't sure, because he—I—we are not saying names, so I can't say—he didn't—he didn't look intelligent at all, and he brought the best work of all. It was always surprising because they were things that we discussed, and then they have to bring—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —you're talking about works of art, not written—

LILIANA PORTER: —works of art. And so I don't know if he did it or he had a friend or—whatever way, it was fantastic. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you never found out the—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no. [Laughs.] I had my suspicions, but I thought, you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it doesn't make any sense. Wow. Is there anything else about teaching that you wanted to say before we move on?

LILIANA PORTER: Well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —I mean, you said you stayed 15 years.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You left in 2007. Why was that the right moment to stop?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I really, you know, was getting older, and I wanted to use my energy to my—for my own work and have more freedom to travel, because many times I had shows or things that I couldn't go because there is a certain amount of days you can not be there, [00:12:00] so I thought this is—and also, things were going very well, like, I could survive without the teaching. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Good, that's great.

LILIANA PORTER: But I really loved the experience.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, let's move on, then, to around the same time and the work you were doing, and I think in the early '90s you started using toys. I mean, you had used objects.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Can you talk about how that—

LILIANA PORTER: —that started—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that started, and—

LILIANA PORTER: —I think it started before the time of *Alice in Wonderland*, with—I think the first object was the geometric shapes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: —and a boat—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. I'm thinking of distinguishing those from what people would think of as kitschy or toys.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, but it starts there, and then I think it was—I don't remember exactly, you know, the sequence, but I remember I used also a Mickey Mouse that—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —was that before—

LILIANA PORTER: —it was a toy after, I think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, I think it was '90, 91.

LILIANA PORTER: Something like, Yes. That was interesting, because once somebody asked me, "So what does it mean?" you know, the Mickey Mouse, and I said—I was thinking, I said, "Well, maybe it's a symbol of this country," and then I thought, That's not true, because when I was a little girl, I thought that Mickey Mouse was Argentinian. [Laughs.] So you don't think in those terms of—that comes later—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —sure—

LILIANA PORTER: —you know, how things develop in other symbol. [Laughs.] But then, um—Yes, I started to do these situations like still lifes that I would put on the table and then make a photograph and then make a work on paper based off the photo silkscreen—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you have a sense that you were [00:14:00] transgressing or doing something maybe you shouldn't do to use these kinds of kitschy, toy-like figures? Or was there no hesitation?

LILIANA PORTER: No, they came so—I don't remember how—they became like a cast, like a cast of—like a theater cast where through them I could say many things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you never had any feeling of, Oh, this isn't serious, or this is—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no, not at all. [Laughs.] No, because see how—Yes, they—many times, they were—the title would be "Them," you know. And what happened is that these are objects that already come with their own history, because I never, you know, made one, or I never transformed them. They are exactly the way they come. So it's like if—you know, if you leave them there and you look at them, they already say everything I need to say. So it's interesting because when I would go to an antique store or something to buy them, and if I go several times to the same place, they cannot figure out what is—what is the link between all of them, because usually people collect Art Deco or certain period or some subject. And mine some of the time are very cheap, some are expensive, but they all have in common that they have this look, like if they don't understand what is going on. They have this, you know, baffled gaze. Or—and sometimes also, you know, they have some [00:16:00] look that I think is the one I'm—because I myself wasn't sure what was the thing that unites it. Because when I go to buy them, I know exactly, This is the one, and I know those, I wouldn't use. But it's not that at that moment, I had a very clear why. It was like when you—it's more an instinct. And then after a while, you are aware, Oh, I see what I'm doing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's—somewhere I read, you talked about these pieces being—selecting the ones that you would either—would imagine you would have seen or played with when you were of an age to do it.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. No, because what happened, I realized that in general, they were from the '40s to the '60s, '50s, so that's when I would have been—I related because probably they looked more like the toys I would have played when I was a child. So, like, I would never use a Barbie because I never played with a Barbie; it doesn't mean anything for me. It doesn't, you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But it's not that necessarily I knew those objects that I discovered, but they looked like or they probably have the same feeling that they feel comfortable, like they feel—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And some of them—

LILIANA PORTER: —familiar—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you moved to political—I mean, the Chinese communist images, the Che Guevara—so that moved a little away from what you would have used as a child.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, what happened, they are all images, very, how do you say, familiar also from when I was a child, an adolescent, and in school. You know, the whole leftist paraphernalia.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Do you remember enjoying cartoons when—and movies?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [00:18:00] I like also very much—for instance, I love to have, let's say, the magazines, the cartoons—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —comic books—

LILIANA PORTER: —comic books in different languages. I love when I don't understand. You know, like to go to Finland and buy one of them, and that—and it's great to not to be able to understand, and see all the little points on top of the sentences. [They laugh.] And I love—I also—I don't know why to me—probably it's a symbol of power—art in front of reality, that you know that it means something but you cannot decipher it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Same as the little figures looking perplexed.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Not knowing what's going on.

LILIANA PORTER: But it's so precise. It's totally precise, and at the same time, for me, that I don't understand.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you look at comic books when you were a child?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Yes, I liked it. So that's where, probably, I met Mickey Mouse, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you ever, like some kids do, draw comics?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. And also I love, you know, all of those movies, like *Bambi*.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Disney.

LILIANA PORTER: Walt Disney was very present in the Argentinian childhood of my time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: All those classic films.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —*Fantasia*.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, *Fantasia*, my mother would take me out before it was over because there were all these violent scenes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, really? [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Then I couldn't sleep for three months, you know. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's a protected childhood.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow. Do—do you think of, in a way, casting the characters, that they're going to play different roles? I mean, normally—well, there are some images where you have a huge, large group of figures, but [00:20:00] usually there's just one or two, and the whole [cross talk]—

LILIANA PORTER: —in a dialogue—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —dialogue. So how do you—what's the process of selecting the pieces that you're going to use?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because—to—first, to relate these things to my previous work.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: It relates, because, like, for instance, I saw, let's say, the exhibition—some exhibitions I had, where you see the works from the '60s and to the present. So physically maybe they look different, but when you see them all together, it's—they relate very well.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Absolutely.

LILIANA PORTER: Because, for instance, let's say when I was doing the print, the image of a string together with a real string, or when I was—it goes together also with, um—of—or for instance, let's see. I'm trying to think. Yes, to go inside the two realities, the virtual reality and the real thing. Also, in these dialogues, in these situations, there is something that continues that idea. And the way I do this dialogue—well, the dialogue, what do I like? It's that I put together two dissimilar objects—let's say, a plastic contemporary toy that is sort of relating or looking at—but they look at each other—um, I don't know, some Renaissance man that is inside a postcard. So I love two things. One, that the physicality of both is totally different. One is a reproduction of a painting of a man who existed. You know, it goes in layers [00:22:00] until you arrive to the face. And then the toy who, at the same time, is a representation of a boy. Also there are all these layers. But they are from different times and totally different situations, but for some reason when I put them together, they seem to look at each other and relate. And I love those encounters, because it's—first it's like changing the nature of time. Like, instead of being a successive thing, could be that time is more something that could unite—you know, is a more complex thing, but possible. And also because maybe also there is some kind of, um, maybe, wish that all these differences are possible to erase, that you could really communicate.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's your—the optimist. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: The optimist in me. And it's moving to me, sort of moving when I—because the way I do it, let's say I have the idea of doing this dialogue. And so you start putting things together, and I think it would be interesting to film, because it's not that everybody goes with everybody; you really have to find the two that suddenly click.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Chemistry. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. So I have this one that I did in the video, and which one was it? I think it was "Drum Solo,"

the kisses, and it's—there is this dog that is—how do you?—when you put in a coin, the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —a bank.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. It's a dog, but that is a bank, and that relates to this Nazi guy in plaster. And they really—it's like they are meant [00:24:00] for each other. [Laughs.] And in that video, I included them in the fragment that is called *Kisses*, and they kiss. And it's—and it's amazing, because in the film it looks like I changed the face of the—especially the Nazi looks like he changes, the eyes or something, and it's nothing, it's your mind that is, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. May—I was wondering. Before you thought of using the toys and figurines in your artwork, did you have—had you acquired any? Just to enjoy looking at them or to imagine stories in them?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You had never had them around?

LILIANA PORTER: No, they started to come when I started to use them in the art. Then it becomes hard [ph] like I—to go and get things. So many of the ones I have still didn't work in any [laughs]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh, so it's just a back—you have a whole cast that hasn't been put into a role yet.

LILIANA PORTER: No, right, they are waiting.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: They're waiting. [They laugh.]

LILIANA PORTER: And some, on the contrary, they were in photographs, they were in films, and sometimes they end up as an object on top of a shelf and I lose them. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The different orders of stardom that they've achieved.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You talked about Mickey Mouse. He was one of the early figures, and you've used different versions of him, but I don't remember seeing any other—or very few other recognizable Disney characters.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, Donald Duck is in a painting that actually is at the Metropolitan Museum. It's a long canvas, a long canvas, green, and at the end it's Donald Duck that is running away, and it's called "The Way Out." [00:26:00]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: But that's the only recognizable thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Would you say that you might have avoided those characters that already had stories, that have already been cast by Hollywood in their Disney roles?

LILIANA PORTER: No. Well, in the case of Mickey Mouse, it's good because he's in the collective memory and it's so—it's almost—you know, it's a familiar person. [Laughs.] So I think in that sense he's good because sometimes—there is something wonderful when you recognize them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. But all the other movies that you saw when you were growing up, those characters—and they exist as objects—but those don't—

LILIANA PORTER: --they didn't work--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —attract you. Work. [They laugh.] There's also something recurring that I want to ask you about, an image of a sort of—a kind of a rabbit that you draw many times and you draw in one of the videos and you see in many earlier works. I'm not sure how much later they continue. But what do—what did you think of that rabbit?

LILIANA PORTER: The rabbit, I think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it's sort of a floppy, humanistic kind of rabbit.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I came to the conclusion that maybe the rabbit is me. But in the—I used to draw that rabbit in school when I was little, so it was—I think it started to be in my adult work because once I thought of this piece that is called "Where are You?" There are two rabbits—like I fold a paper, and each rabbit is on one side of the paper, and the viewer can see both but they cannot see each other. And it's called "Where are You?" and it's a little bit the idea, I guess, that, you know, you are looking [00:28:00] for something that is there and you don't see it, like the explanation of the world, I'm sure that is obvious and for some reason we don't see. And so I was—actually I was in Italy in a residence, in Civatella [Ranieri, Umbria, Italy], and I think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —tell me the—where in Italy again? Chibi—

LILIANA PORTER: —Chibitalia is the name of the residence. It's in Umbertide, is called the place. And I was invited to this seminar where—it's like a beautiful place, and you have a studio and an apartment for yourself. Well, and I was in bed, and I remember imagining this piece of the folded paper. So I just put the light on and I took a paper and I did it fast so I wouldn't forget, thinking that next day I'd do it correctly, and when I saw it later, I thought, This—you don't need to do it again or to do it well. It was nicer, the drawing of the rabbit in a hurry, and sort of very simple, folding the paper, because it was paper from—I used these school papers—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —lined paper—

LILIANA PORTER: —from Argentina that I, when I go there, I buy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [inaudible], yes.

LILIANA PORTER: The ones I used when I was in school. And so there started the rabbit, I think that kind of rabbit that is drawn very fast, and it's very simple. And—so then suddenly the rabbit appeared in different situations, and lately, he's a levitating rabbit.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. [They laugh.]

LILIANA PORTER: Because I'm doing these paintings, and there are these kind of tsunamis and disasters going on, and he's always above. And I thought, Well, maybe it's me trying to, you know, to—like you have to [00:30:00] sort of, to live, even if when you put the TV, you see all these horrible things, but you are in a different reality.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes, hmm. So, going back to the *Dialogues* series, there were many that started in different, in the paper and the photographs. Why has that been such a constant—

LILIANA PORTER: —thing—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —thing for you, evolving but always coming back to it?

LILIANA PORTER: Back. There are a lot of subjects that I come back. One is the *Dialogues*. The other is the *Corrections*.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Then the *Forced Labor* series. And I don't know if it is because originally I was a printmaker, and you are so used to do an image and then print it again and again and again, you know, like a mantra almost, that to make only one seems not enough, insufficient. I don't know if it's true, what I'm saying, but maybe, because it's true that I know I will make more *Corrections* and I will make more *Dialogues*, because I feel like it's not solved totally in my mind, so it looks like you still have things to experiment or look for.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: With the *Dialogue* works, and most of the other works, one of the most prominent features is the empty space—

LILIANA PORTER: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —is usually, but not always, white.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it's true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What—can you talk about your use of that kind of visual reality and why it's such an important constant in most of the work?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, I think, um, [00:32:00] what is important is that—that this—it's a space that doesn't

relate to any particular time or place. So things occur, they are not on top of the table or in this room or in such date, they are in this nonspace. It's a time that is multiple. So what happened, I feel that then you relate to the object directly. So without an interference of the context that tells you what to look for. So let's say if you have one of these figurines in a photograph looking at you and it's alone in the space, you really see it. You see it. It's like it becomes more of itself without any contamination of context. And I think probably that's why I use the empty space.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You also usually place the objects at a certain lower point—

LILIANA PORTER: —it's true—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —which makes you feel that they're in some kind of architectural space. They're not just floating.

LILIANA PORTER: No, they are not floating. They are standing—you see the shadow.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So it's an undefined—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, they are not—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but actual-feeling space.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, they are—Yes, and they are standing on something.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's not an infinite—

LILIANA PORTER: Right. They are not floating. It's important; it's true. The shadow is very important. And also it's true they are lower, and I think the viewer then—it becomes smaller because you are taller, you know. You are really looking like to a child or—you become this bigger [laughs] entity.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So that they're removed even [00:34:00] more from reality, from everyday reality—

LILIANA PORTER: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —if they're a different scale than—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes. And the scale, actually, in the photographs and in the paintings—the only place where they change a scale is in the videos, but if not, they are in general the size of the thing itself.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, I see. So the size—I was going to ask you about this—the size of the work of art with the object is determined by making the object the right, the correct size—

LILIANA PORTER: —the right size. The thing is, when I started to do video, it was a little like disconcerting that suddenly the thing looked enormous.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When it's projected.

LILIANA PORTER: But then I realized that the mind anyway makes it small, and so from there on, some of the photographs have—the size is a little bigger, I realized, because I didn't have that problem anymore. But anyway, they tend to be the real—in photographs, the real size.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The late '90s, I think around 1998 for a few years, you did a series of large paintings that used a black-and-white stencil-like, stylized decorative silhouette sort of technique.

LILIANA PORTER: When—when was that?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The late—1998 to 2001 that I saw. Kind of like that check-cut paper form. So sometimes—it's always black and white; it's in a corner, or there's a figure, but it's always this black-and-white stencil, silhouette—not—silhouette isn't the right word, but black-and-white filigree kind of—it's not like your shirt, but—do you recall what I mean? And it's a very interesting, just sort of small [00:36:00] sort of body of a dozen pieces that—and I was wondering what inspired that. Hold on.

LILIANA PORTER: I'm not sure.

[Audio break.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the *Chinese* series.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So the *Chinese*—yes. Is it—that's called—it's called the *Chinese* series.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What inspired that? That's a very distinct body of work.

LILIANA PORTER: I think, you know, always one has an explanation after the fact, so maybe it's not true, but my explanation is that when—in Argentina, when we don't understand something, we say it's Chinese, like here you say it's Greek.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: So, uh—and I am fascinated by, you know, by what I was saying before, that you see a text in a different language and it looks—it's like you are blind, but you know that somebody else can see.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And that awareness gives you hope that there are a lot of things that you wish you understood, but just the notion that the explanation exists is enough to make you a little more at ease. And the *Chinese* series, I was using—I found a book with all these drawings—I think they are cut ups—I never went to China—but cut-up papers.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, it looks like it.

LILIANA PORTER: And I loved, first, because they are very graphic, and they are very strong, and totally, for me, foreign. And I like that. So I used them in prints. I did prints with *Dialogues*, I told you, with some of the profile. And also I actually bought some of those cut-up papers in Chinatown and I did some collages with them. One is called *Chinese Drawing*, and it's just one of those papers that I wrinkle it and I—you know, I collage it on the paper. But it says [00:38:00] *Chinese Drawing*, but without any farther explanation. [Laughs.] And so I used a lot in paintings, many of those designs, and birds, and—also, Yes, in dialogues, a lot of them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. And then you came to the end of that and thought that you'd done it enough.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, maybe that I would come back. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In the—after 2000, there's a very—there's a series—I guess they're installations. There's a *Painter* series with a little painter with a—painting on the wall.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Yes, Yes, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And there's a *Dot* series with a little figure looking at a dot.

LILIANA PORTER: Looking at. Yes, they are, like, I call situations of—like, I would make a little pedestal in wood and then put one of these real ob—persons onto it. [On top of the pedestal. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, not—yes, they're not these fancy little figurines, they're actual humans.

LILIANA PORTER: No, they are very small, like an inch or less, and metal. They are actually German toys. No, they are not toys; they are for people who collect electric trains.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So they produce all these people. So you can get them in different sizes. And they are doing all kinds of things. They are incredible. So some—I used some, so they are drawing on the wall, or one I love is sitting and looking at the dot on the wall. So it's like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Where did that idea come from, of having these characters sit and look at a dot, or stand?

LILIANA PORTER: Because it's, I think, a metaphor of eternity, you know, to look and look and look. It's like in the—I think in the first video, there is one passage that is called "Death," and you see the penguin, it's a little toy penguin, lying on the floor. And [00:40:00] the scene lasts I think half a minute, and it seems like forever. And then you think if, you know, this is a fragment of eternity and it feels very long, imagine eternity. So it's like a sample of, to say, death, in a very sort of basic way. But, you know, all the ways are basic, [they laugh] to explain death or life.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Well, you know, this brings me to the question of the fact you use humor a lot—

LILIANA PORTER: —mm-hmm [affirmative]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and it's even—even in the *Dialogues*, it seemed most serious, they're also serious in a funny way, because of the—just the discontinuity, the incongruity of the kinds of pairings that you've made. Do you—have you—for—and for how long have you thought consciously of the element of humor, and either wanting it or just not looking for it—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but it coming naturally?

LILIANA PORTER: I think it came naturally, and that—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --I mean, the early work doesn't have that, the very early work.

LILIANA PORTER: It's true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You know, with the little—the boat and the—

LILIANA PORTER: ---Yes, Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and of course the line, the very—

LILIANA PORTER: --it's more romantic--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —this look in the '70s, it's more cerebral and serious, but gradually this element of humor comes into the work.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Well, I realized I like—if I think of which artists I like, they all have humor as an element—important element, like Borges or Lichtenstein or—you know, that they—it's included in the work, I think. But Yes, I think humor probably is the [00:42:00]—some kind of weapon, you know, some kind of—something that helps you cope with reality and makes you a little more humble.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Sometimes artists feel that when their work is humorous, it's not taken as seriously [laughs]—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, Yes, Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —by critics, by—

LILIANA PORTER: --no, for instance, I love the series of the jokes by Richard Prince, because I think it's a humor that at the same time is tragic. Like, I love Steve Gianakos's work because of that, but his work is not funny. It's funny but it's not funny. It's like you laugh, but then you know, you know, it's about very serious subjects. And, for instance, Richard Prince, I love the idea of taking out of context, to put the joke inside the sacred art, you know, virtual space of a painting, of art, inside the gallery. I saw one show where he put the jokes, and the jokes are almost—they have texture, and I thought, This is even better, because it's so absurd, no? And so it seems that I am attracted to [laughs]—to the inclusion of humor in art. No, I don't think it's not—that humor is not serious. I think it's a very serious—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --mm-hmm [affirmative]. And of course irony and the little tiny painters. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, they do things. Because, Yes, like the series of Magritte when he changes the name of things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: That could be taken as a joke, but it's not a joke. What he really is doing is making us aware that things don't have a name, that we [00:44:00] actually do the name. So if we—when he's putting, you know, the drawing of a shoe and calls it "The Moon," what he's doing really taking away the name, so we see the thing naked, like the García Márquez novel *Hundred Years of Solitude*, that he says at point that—he's talking about this town, Macondo. And he says, "The world was so new that some things didn't have a name and people have to point at them in order to talk about them," you know, to refer to them. And I thought, and that's the feeling, you know, the idea of—to be able to see things as they really are. And if you see them without the name, they are very mysterious, you know, they become many things, and you become more responsible of creating, re-creating the thing or reality. Very profound. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes, Yes. You mentioned recurring series a few minutes ago, including Forced

Labor series, which is of course also very funny—

LILIANA PORTER: [Laughs.] Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —a particularly funny group of works, and something that I could imagine could be endless. How did—where did that come from in your mind? How did that start?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, it started—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and then there's recurring things that seem most fascinating to you, the weavers, the people—

LILIANA PORTER: --the weavers--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —with the endless amount of thread or straw or wood or—

LILIANA PORTER: --because I think the first Forced Labor was a man with a shovel that was on top of a shelf and was shoveling earth, and on the floor there was this mountain of earth. And it was like the task was—is [00:46:00] always larger than the possibility of accomplishing it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I mean, is that a metaphor for being [cross talk]—

LILIANA PORTER: [cross talk], for everything--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —or for everything.

LILIANA PORTER: For it to be in front of the world to—all the things we have to do that maybe are overwhelming. And so you can—so there's the weaver that is weaving this enormous thing, or—everybody's doing something that is too big for—or a big drawing, or something like that. And there is something also, because what happened, since the object is so small in this situation, the viewer is enormous, so that you become some kind of a god or something that is looking at this earthly situation, or you become somebody really that—the observer, the real observer with a big O. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Are there any of those that you particularly thought were most successful? And I don't know how you would judge that.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. No, well, I like the Weaver series, and the one also with the earth was funny because there was a point where lots of [laughs] Latin American artists will look, will use earth on the floor, and it was almost like a commonplace thing to use earth. In my work, it's really far from that aesthetic, but I love the idea, so [laughs]—to do one with earth on the floor.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you—when you have something like that, or the straw or some kind of thing, and someone buys that piece, how does that—how do they handle that? I mean, do they need to use what exactly you've supplied? And yet every time it's installed, maybe something of it will be lost.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, well. Yes, like people [00:48:00] are so afraid of things. Like, for instance, the Tate in London has one that is a woman that is sweeping, and the—what she's—how you say?—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --sweeping--

LILIANA PORTER: —sweeping is, I took the dust from a vacuum cleaner, from the inside.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Dust.

LILIANA PORTER: You know, the dust of the vacuum cleaner, except I took all the hairs out because I don't like hairs.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That was a job, to take the hair out of the dust!

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [They laugh.] And so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --that's an endless task.

LILIANA PORTER: So then they wrote to me to ask, you know—how was it?—how, you know, if they had to add more. And I said, "It doesn't matter." You know, the important thing is—I said that it could be from any vacuum cleaner, just [laughs] take the hairs out. Because I don't like ugly things, you know. So I like the—it's very—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --could it be dryer lint?

LILIANA PORTER: Lint, could be, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's cleaner.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, could be dryer lint.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: If you vacuum in a house with no animals, then maybe you cannot get hair. [They laugh.] No cats or dogs.

LILIANA PORTER: The museum probably doesn't have animals, so they could use it from the museum.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's true.

LILIANA PORTER: It would be a very artistic dust--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —dust.

LILIANA PORTER: And—Yes, or let's say if you have to reinstall the fabric, it doesn't matter how it really falls. But —

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so they're not copying exactly the previous—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, the concept is more. But they always have a photograph that they—but you don't have to follow every, you know, wrinkle or anything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you have made these pieces and you've installed them the first time, do you create a set of installation instructions for each of these pieces so they're—

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it can be [00:50:00] made at least somewhat properly every time?

LILIANA PORTER: Right. There are some—also mainly because people are too respectful of the thing, so you have to sort of put them at ease.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Well, that's good; they could do really what you think was wrong.

LILIANA PORTER: Because, for instance, they have to draw on the wall. Sometimes, let's say I have a show in a different country and they sell the piece, and then the person says, So [they have the instructions of how to make the drawing - LP]—in the drawing—so they could do it, but they don't want to do it. So many times I have to go and make the drawing. [They laugh.] [It is a scribble. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which takes you just a few minutes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, exactly. [Less—seconds. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But it's authentic that way.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. Because the little guy has many styles, so it would have been okay if the collector makes the scribble.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: But they don't want to make a scribble. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh. Well. So that series will continue, the *Forced Labor*?

LILIANA PORTER: I think so.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What's the most recent one that you did?

LILIANA PORTER: Uh, the *Forced Labor*—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --I mean, I saw *Man with an Axe*—

LILIANA PORTER: —ah, Yes, Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —was from 2010.

LILIANA PORTER: No, I think the last one was another version of the weaver.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: There's red, there are blue, there are different kinds of weavers—Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, of cloth.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Then there's the other series we haven't talked about yet, but it's kind of related to the *Correction* series, the *Reconstruction* series where you have a broken piece—

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, I love that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and the—Yes. Tell me about that series.

LILIANA PORTER: That was the first one of all, because I [inaudible]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That was around 2004 or ['0]5 that it started.

LILIANA PORTER: I bought in a flea market, there was this Mickey Mouse made in Venice of Murano, you know, the glass—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —and it was very nice because it was very special, this version of him. I mean, you recognize it, but it was in black and white, with a little red—incredible. [00:52:00] And incredibly, I found later another one in another flea market. Obviously, it was a little different because they do it one by one. So—and then one day, one broke, and I thought of that idea of the reconstruction. So I took a photograph of the broken piece, then I framed it, and I put the shelf and put the unbroken in front of it. And it's very magical because it's impossible, you know, the situation, that the unbroken will be on our side. The normal thing would be a photograph of the one that is perfect, and the broken pieces. That is a normal thing, but—because you think it's the same one.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So it was great, because either—I was able to reverse time—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: —or I was an incredible restorer. But the photograph of it, because it is glass, you know, with all the little, little pieces is impossible to restore. So then I kept finding things that have two of the same object to make reconstructions.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah. I was wondering what your trick was.

LILIANA PORTER: You need two of the same. So the thing that was interesting was I kept all the broken pieces. I always keep them. So—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —why?

LILIANA PORTER: For me. I just keep it. And then lately I made a big installation that is a man with an axe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes, that's a wonderful piece.

LILIANA PORTER: So I used all those broken pieces—and so was sort of moving, if I would have a big retrospective and you could see these *Reconstruction* pieces, and suddenly you recognize them in another work and you see the broken—the real broken things that you never saw, because you saw it in a photo—it's very confusing, because you yourself get confused because you have the real one, the broken one, and the photograph [00:54:00] of the broken one. So if you have—because you have many of the same, and then that—there is a point that you say, But wait a second, [laughs] which one is which? But I like very much the *Reconstruction* series. And it's very, like—I had many collectors with those, these kind of pieces. I wish I had all in one room and see them all at once, because also I used so many different objects that they break in a different way.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you try to have them break in a particular way?

LILIANA PORTER: It's not so easy, but—you know, because—in general—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —because if they shattered—

LILIANA PORTER: —in the beginning they broke by themselves, but now when I break them, I put them inside a cloth, so you go with a hammer *boom*, and suddenly, you know, they—you have no control. So. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. What do you—why do you think they're—I mean, you've spoken—maybe you've said everything, but is there anything else about why this series you find so interesting to do and in fact why—you talked about collectors—it's so attractive to people?

LILIANA PORTER: Because I think people—actually, the first time when I did that of the Mickey Mouse, the glass one, it was in a show in Buenos Aires, in Ruth Benzacar. And it was the first—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Ruth Benzacar—

LILIANA PORTER: —gallery. And it was—a woman was standing looking at it, and she was weeping—you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —crying—

LILIANA PORTER: —crying, and she said, "I wish we could do this."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, put things—

LILIANA PORTER: —because probably her daughter [00:56:00] was a disappeared one or something like that, and suddenly she saw it in a political way, if we could, you know, rewind.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, that's a kind of—an ideal viewer, in a sense.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly, and it made me—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —it puts so much meaning into it.

LILIANA PORTER: I mean, it made me really see what I was doing. Because it's true that it's like—it's a kind of, like, sometimes things happen and you wish you could reverse things, and you can't, no? So it's like a—I don't know who said the phrase "To repent is to modify the past." And that has something to do, no,]? To—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: You know, to horrible things that happened, politically or in your life or whatever, that it's a metaphor of the possibility of reconstruction.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

[END OF PART TWO, TRACK TWO.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Richards interviewing Liliana Porter in Rhinebeck, NY, on June 28, 2012, for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, disc three. So are you continuing the *Reconstruction* series?

LILIANA PORTER: I think I will, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you said you have to wait until you have two—

LILIANA PORTER: —I have—I have.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, [inaudible].

LILIANA PORTER: I have to have the time to do it. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so, again, as you said, those are photographic works with a shelf, with a piece standing on it, and the size is determined by the size—

LILIANA PORTER: —of the object—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —of the actual object.

LILIANA PORTER: In general they are small works; they are not huge.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Talking about the photographic works, at the very beginning of your career you were working in black and white, and at a certain point you started working in color.

LILIANA PORTER: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And it seems—but I wanted to ask you about this—that you've changed over the years the kind of photographs you use. I mean, you did Cibachrome and of course traditional photographs, then moving to digital. What was that evolution like, were you—what caused each of those changes?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, the interesting thing, really interesting, is that from the beginning, I was using photography, but as a medium to make photo etchings or photo silkscreens. In—I guess in the very beginning, I did some photographs that I showed as photographs. It was more in the time of Conceptual art that I did a few photographs that I showed as photographs.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Like the ones where you and Luis had lines drawn between your faces.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. That, and a series of the hand, and then also some installations that were—I drew a circle with pencil [00:02:00] on the wall, and then there was this laminated photograph that had my hand and the continuation of the circle. And so I have all those early laminated photos—it's incredible, because the lamination—they are in perfect state. I thought the lamination—I don't think it was acid-free or nothing of the sort, but they are—didn't turn yellow. Who knows. Well, anyway, but besides that, I will use photography more, because I wanted to use the images without the distortion of my interpretation with pencil of the work, I wanted it to be as objective as possible. So I took photographs. I then did—used the photoetching or photo silkscreen, so I would really capture the thing as it was without the distortion of the expression of the hand.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So from the beginning, I have boxes of what I call sets, that then they became either works on paper, or I did a lot of wall pieces, printed on the wall. But then in, I think, '95 was a moment that I suddenly said, But some of the work is perfect with—as a photograph. And so I decided to make a series of photographs. But it was interesting because there is this painting you saw upstairs, *Gauche*—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —that I did a photograph to do the painting, and then when I decided, I went back to the negative and did the photograph in black and white, that exists in an edition also. But actually the edition of the photograph was after the painting, even though the photograph itself was, of course, before. [00:04:00] So then I started to do a series of photos—they were black-and-white photographs, silver gelatin prints, and then I did—the first in color was a red photograph of a small Minnie Mouse looking at the viewer. And then—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and that was what?

LILIANA PORTER: Cibachrome.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that was a kind of a departure because it was red.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, that one was red, because it made sense that the color was red. So then later I did a few series of Cibachromes, many that are white, but there is one that is yellow. I started to use some black background and blue background— [Color monochromatic backgrounds - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the primary colors, red, yellow, blue.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes, and red. And then, let me see. Then came—then they discontinued Cibachrome because it's very toxic, so they do other techniques. I don't know exactly how they call it. I call it Duraflex, because it's what the laboratory told me it's called, but it's very similar to cibachrome.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Who told you that?

LILIANA PORTER: Duggal Laboratories.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: But I—I think people who use it call it some other way that sounds more artistic. [Laughs.] But anyway, they look very similar to cibachromes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but it's not as—yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —Cibachrome, but it's a digital print. But it's not digital like that the ink is on top; it's absorbed by the paper. It's a—it really looks like a Cibachrome. The advantage is that if you have some imperfection, you can fix it. Not like the Cib—the Duraflex, you have to—I mean, the Cibachrome, if you have to fix it, you know, if there was a hair [00:06:00] or something. It was a mess. But this one, if you have any problem, you can fix. But I usually—they are exactly the way they are. And then I started to do also digital prints—and I bought a printer with acid-free inks, and now the acid-free paper that Epson started to do. So I—this years of *Reconstructions*, I did in my own studio.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: They are digital prints that kept improving because Epson also in the beginning was—said, Okay, this is acid-free paper, and now the one that originally was acid-free is called something else and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and it's not as acid-free as they said, ah.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. A better one. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —are you concerned about that?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, so actually, what I did was—because I had a show in Buenos Aires, in Recoleta, and the curator, Inés Katzenstein, wanted to show some of my early photographs, and some that I never really printed. So at that point I had moved to the studio and I didn't have a darkroom because I thought, I don't need a darkroom anymore. So I scanned the negatives and did digital prints for the show.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Just a little tangent—so you had previously had a darkroom and developed your own film?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And made your own prints.

LILIANA PORTER: Right. So then I thought, Well, now I don't need it anymore. It's a pity because then I needed it. But anyway, I took—and also, the negatives were in bad condition, so it was fantastic to scan them, be able to clean them, and make these digital prints that look perfect for the show. But what happened is that, let's say, The Daros Foundation bought some of them, and now I decided to take those old negatives and make silver [00:08:00] gelatin prints, and I am exchanging them, because I think those original digital prints probably are not that good—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what do you mean, exchanging them?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I wrote to Daros and said, Look, I'm doing this now silver gelatin, the way they were intended to do when I did the photographs. And they asked me many times, Do you think this is permanent—you know, they were concerned about—that they were the—printed digitally, but in the beginning, which was—the paper wasn't that good. So I am redoing that, so we have the original negative printed now, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and you literally exchange works, so you can destroy the earlier ones?

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly, Yes. Because I didn't sell as many, so I could do that before. But now everybody, you know, is more—not everybody, but people are really interested in those early works, so I am—I have now—I am on time to do the edition the way it should be. And then I have some of the original ones that were silver gelatin, older ones that are laminated. Those are the ones we call now vintage. [They laugh.] And then we have the new editions.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you are working now, you use a digital camera.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And your—do you manipulate the photograph in any way on the computer once you've taken it?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no. Because it—I just started to use the digital camera, but I used the four-by-five negative before, when I was doing the Cibachrome and all that, so this is like new, the digital. The last show I had with—the last years—are digital, and it's fantastic.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which series, you said?

LILIANA PORTER: The ones I showed at [00:10:00] Hosfelt Gallery. They are new. I don't know if you saw them in web because—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what series did you say they were?

LILIANA PORTER: The one of the [inaudible].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: [inaudible], all those. And so they were, Yes, made—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but I didn't see that they were called a particular series.

LILIANA PORTER: Oh, no. It's not called—it's not a series. Like, because I did them at the same time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But they are not manipulated at all.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so you take the photograph and—

LILIANA PORTER: —and then I take the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —all the intensity is set? I mean, you're not changing the intensity of the colors or—or the exposure or anything like that?

LILIANA PORTER: No, the—let me see if it's true. Yes, because what happened, it's true that they say now I take a photograph of a painting and that I put it in the computer and I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —well, that's different, because taking a photograph of a painting, you're looking for a specific reality, not the—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes. And also, this, I don't develop, I take it to the ones—you know, the work itself, I take it to the laboratory, so they show you proofs. So I imagine if something is too dark or—you can say.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And also to see the scale, you know, the size of the things. Because I think, Okay, they should be this size, but sometimes I see the proof and I say, No, no, they should be smaller.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. So you take the object to the printer?

LILIANA PORTER: No, not the object, but some—I figure out more or less what size—what proportion I want. And sometimes when you see the proof you realize it's too big or too small, and then you can change it before you run the edition.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. I was noticing that, unlike some photographers—well, you wouldn't call yourself a photographer, exactly—but unlike some others using photography, each of the prints is a somewhat different size. I mean, there's—[00:12:00] you don't all have—you don't have all—

LILIANA PORTER: —I don't know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the prints the same size.

LILIANA PORTER: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so there's—Yes, I mean, I was just noticing that [inaudible] prints.

LILIANA PORTER: Because it depends what—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —I mean, 21 by 31 is a fairly common size, or 31 by 21—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but there's other dimensions.

LILIANA PORTER: That have nothing to do.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. [They laugh.] Do you—you talked about, um, at some point, about a sensibility

that you would say came from your childhood, from Argentina. Do you think there's a certain Argentine sensibility in your work?

LILIANA PORTER: I really think that the experiences you have as a child mark you for the rest of your life. So even though I live here since I was 22 years old, all my work, really the majority, most of my work—because the other ones, I was very young—I did here. It's—I still think in Spanish—I have an accent. You know, I think that the language you learn and your first experiences are like the—are the things from where you build all the rest of your life.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Create the mold.

LILIANA PORTER: Create the mold. For instance, you think "apple," and the apple, the first one you saw, is the one that you compare all the rest. And the one I saw is in Argentina. And so—and ways of—all the first habits and ways of relating and all the cultural situation, I think they mark you forever. So I really think that it's impossible that your work doesn't—wouldn't show all those [00:14:00] cultural experiences. At the same time, you build from there, you have all the new experiences. So I think you are a sum of both, of all the things. But I really believe that there is a way of seeing that comes from, you know, my culture of when I was in Argentina. And also, but has to do—because you can ask, So what is being Argentinian? I don't think there is one way of being Argentinian, because my grandparents were Russian. You know, so you have all these other influences that are different from your neighbor and the other guy. But I think there is something—Yes, there is a cultural thing that is there. I don't know how it comes out, but—because, for instance, in the videos I always put everything in English and Spanish, and there are some fragments that if you are Argentinian, you understand more, and others that probably an Argentinian doesn't get it. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You made—there was a quote from a recent interview, or a few years ago, where you said, "I always consider my audience to be in Latin America. I think that always at some level, mutual understandings are generated within a particular language." So you're saying that, as you said in the videos, that a Latin American, Spanish-speaking, maybe specifically Argentine, audience would have a deeper understanding of your work.

LILIANA PORTER: Because probably—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and that's your expectation. Not necessarily your aim, but—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, Yes, Yes. I think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —maybe that quote is incorrect, I—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, well, it's—all the quotes are always [00:16:00] drastic, you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] That's why they pick them, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and then it's not that, you know, true. Because also it's true, for instance, if I think I am doing a work that's going to show—let's say if I think I'm going to have a show in Buenos Aires. And if I have two shows, one in Buenos Aires and one, say, here, something changes in the chosen—in the way I choose the work. And—because I know how it's going to be seen. For instance, I was telling the other day, you the other day, that I remember when I saw I think it at Castelli gallery, the work of Paolini, the Italian artist, many years ago. And I saw his work in Milan. It was like seeing a different work. I could see how it was perceived totally different in each country. So—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —is the—your choosing, your selecting different work for an exhibition in Buenos Aires versus New York, also informed by what the gallery might have said to you, what—

LILIANA PORTER: —it's more—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —they tell you about reception—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no, no—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —or who buys what kinds of pieces?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, it's more like the perception. For instance, let's say, when I saw the videos, people laugh in different places here than in Argentina. It's interesting. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh.

LILIANA PORTER: And it means, for instance, also has different meanings. There is—I think the second video,

there is a fragment called "Argentine Choir," and then you see these children—it's a photo—it's a—actually I took it from the cover of a magazine, a children's magazine in Argentina—in South America, [00:18:00] that is called *Billiken*. And they—you see all these children with the uniform we used to go to school, which is like a white kind of, I don't know, apron or—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —smock.

LILIANA PORTER: Smock—Yes. And then there is the Argentinian flag in the—in a shape that we call *escarapela*, that you put in your—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —like a badge?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, when there is a special date to commemorate. So there is this song, which is a song, a march, we, all the children in Argentina, before going to class, you have to sing in the patio. And when—so if you're Argentinian, you see that—because the fragments of the video are very short, but it brings you immediately back when you were in school and you really believed in *patria*, you know, in all these symbols of your country and the flag, and everything is so pure and it has such a—it's so important and everything. And so you go back in your gut to that moment. But then, you know, we have the disappeared, the dictatorship, all kinds of violence, and you know that all those symbols are, you know, questionable. So it's very fast, all the feelings you have, but for that, you have to be Argentinian. If you are not Argentinian—let's say you are an American looking at that—any way you see the children look like from the '50s, they are all white—I mean, you can have other—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —associations—

LILIANA PORTER: —associations. You know that it has to do with the flag and that it sounds like a march. I mean, you can imagine what it is, but [00:20:00] probably you see something totally different. It doesn't really matter, because when—and everything is like that. When I—we were adolescents in Argentina, the music we danced were all American, and we loved Frank Sinatra and Louis Armstrong and all that, and sometimes we didn't know what the words meant, but you imagine it. And so I guess I am doing the same. Sometimes you have to imagine.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Does what you were just talking about also go for critics, that you—there's—and to expand it, is there a difference between how your work is reviewed and valued by Latin American critics versus American versus European? Is there—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, uh—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —something kind of consistently different among those?

LILIANA PORTER: The difference is—well, the main difference is that even if I am here for 3,000 years, like, it's always—if you look at my curriculum, there is always—the group shows are Latin American art in the United States. You know, like there—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —Yes. Especially when they were prints, and there was Latin American printmaking.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. So even if you—it's not my creation, that situation.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: But if you take out the exhibitions where you're seen in the context of Latin America and you just look at the exhibitions where you're in an international or national group—I mean national US—is there a difference in the way your work is viewed by—critically?

LILIANA PORTER: I wouldn't really know. But what—for instance, I was, I have to say, very moved when [00:22:00] I had the exhibition in Mexico, and one of the—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —this is at the Tamayo in 2009—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, the Tamayo—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —the retrospective.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. And one of the texts in the catalogue is written by Gregory Volk, who is an American critic that writes in *Art in America*, and I never met him before. He was designated to write by the curator of the Tamayo show. And he came here to the studio, and then he wrote—I was super moved by his essay. And for many reasons, but another reason was that I felt that finally, you know, I really realized that it's possible that an American critic see the work the way I think—you know, the ideal work, the way I would like people to see it. Some of them, I don't know, you know, because you always feel that you are a foreigner, you know, because you

—because—I imagine it's even worse if you are Asian, because let's say you look—because you have a face that looks Asian, but let's say that your great-grandfather was Asian, and your mother, your grandfather, were born here. Why do you have to be in the category of Asian art when it's super American, the person? Right? In my case, it's different because I arrive already, I was 22, but imagine if I was born here. It's a little offensive. Or worse, people who are black, like are [00:24:00] super American, it's like they were from the moon, you know. Like why they say, "This is the best black artist." What does it mean? You know. So those are context and political situations that I have no control. So in that sense, it's not that I feel or I want to feel different or whatever, but also the context made me more aware that I am from another place. I think that—at the same time, I don't believe in international art. I don't believe in this idea of global. I think it doesn't exist, because I think that every language and every culture gives—you know, makes you see things in a different way. But I do believe that the sum of all those views would build something wonderful if we all communicated and accepted the way they are. I think, for instance, I love Queens College because there were people from every country. You know, I have Egyptian, Chinese, Korean, you know, Italian students, and I thought, Wow, I wish I would have studied here to have friends from different nationalities. But then I noticed that the Chinese were with the Chinese, the American with the Americans—you know, people really didn't connect that much. And it was—I remember once, in a drawing class, I made an exercise that they had to face each student, another student, and draw, make a portrait. And there was one Orthodox Jewish girl, you know, with a long dress and everything, facing—I think the other one, Yes, was—I think was Egyptian [00:26:00] or some nationality kind of foreign. It was very interesting, because for the first time they really looked at each other, you know, really well, and the Egyptian was saying, "Oh, you are so pretty" to the other one. "You are so pretty." And they are together for such a long time, they just look at each other. You know, there is something that for some strange reason, people don't connect to, connect completely. But at the same time, it's—I think it's fantastic to have all these different points of view.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. You were talking about Gregory Volk really understanding.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: On the flip side, is there something that critics have said that has been wrong and that in this way you can correct the record, in a sense—

LILIANA PORTER: —uh, no—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and, uh—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, I think I was—no, also I really respect people's view, and I think each one has—but I didn't have it so much, you know, anybody that said something that I don't like, really a view, an opinion.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So would you say, in a sense, that you're open to different interpretations—

LILIANA PORTER: —oh, yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that there isn't a right or a wrong overall?

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly, because that's the way the work is—I mean, the only thing, there are more intelligent and less intelligent, that is true. And also some people, you know, say things, but it doesn't even is worth correcting [ph]. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you—do you—have you gotten categorized in some way that you don't think is correct?

LILIANA PORTER: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And if there is—and I haven't seen it—negative press—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, I didn't see—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —then, you know, what would be your reaction? But you just read what people write and—

LILIANA PORTER: I mean, the only thing, some people thought that because they see toys, it's for children [00:28:00] or it's childish—you know, in—but that's, you know, it's not worth. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Not worth reacting. Stepping back from the criticism to the work again, and thinking about your process. So you talked about the photo—the evolution of your photography. Going back to—it seems, most of the time, you're working in different mediums simultaneously, almost.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I mean, you don't just devote a year to just photography—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, right—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —or to just painting. So when you're sitting in the studio and thinking about your new ideas or evolving ideas, what makes you decide, if you can say, what prompts you to say, Okay, this is a work on paper? I mean, sometimes an image ends up being in a photograph and a work on paper—

LILIANA PORTER: —right—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and a painting. So how do you decide which one you're going to be doing, and then do you find there's a certain progression; it always starts in one and then ends in another one?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, for instance, my next project—one project I have for a while, but I didn't do it yet because I'm still—I don't know how to do it—I want to do a kind of theater piece. It's more like a performance, but Yes. Like to use people—because I went from, you know, the printmaking to the photography that seems more closer to reality, to the object itself.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Installations, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, installations. And I would like to use, you know, like people and objects in real time to make some—so I have some notes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you—it makes me think about—not to compare your work to someone else, [00:30:00] but, you know, Laurie Simmons, using the—not puppets, that's not quite the right word—and then she made a film with actual actors—

LILIANA PORTER: —doing a—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —performing.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I would like to do something. I imagine like a little theater and situ—real situations. The way—imagine—a step farther than the videos. So they probably would be also divided in scenes or fragments to make—I love—for instance, just to tell you my inspiration, I love Pina Bausch, but more the theatrical aspect—not the dancing part, but the part that is more theatrical, the visual situations.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's interesting. Pina Bausch is so dark, [laughs] and you're—and so—and not, I don't think you could say, optimistic.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, but I love the richness of the visual situations, and also many things that I really relate a lot. And also when she uses dance at the same time with this woman talking in German or, you know, things that are very disruptive or together different techniques, in a way, that I love. I really think it's so intelligent. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —well, when—my original question may be relating to this. When you begin with an idea, is it beginning as a work on paper, as a drawing, and then becomes something more multilayered and—

LILIANA PORTER: No. What happens is now my subject is already there, so whatever I think, it will be consistent no matter what, even if I don't want. [00:32:00] And so sometimes—I mean, it's different when you are thinking in terms of canvas than if you are thinking in terms of objects, but many of the subjects are really—could say different things in the different media. So that's why I will go from one media to the other.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wait, are you keeping—do you keep a sketchbook or a kind of a visual journal?

LILIANA PORTER: I—Yes. I—well, I keep notes, and I have thousands of little books, Yes, with ideas that I—I forget that I wrote them. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you have them and you make the note, but then you might not find the night when you come back to the idea?

LILIANA PORTER: But for instance, when I travel in the plane, I always have a little book, and I think works, like I plan works. Oh, let's—you know, I can think ideas, and then I know this will be better in paper, this will be better—or I have—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh, that's what I was wondering, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. And I keep writing ideas for the possible performance that I want to do.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So when you're thinking about ideas and you're making these sketches, at that moment you're saying, Okay, this would be a photograph—

LILIANA PORTER: —right—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —this would be a painting.

LILIANA PORTER: Exactly. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And do you find yourself taking an image or an idea and doing it in different mediums to see what—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, they travel sometimes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And they travel in both—all directions?

LILIANA PORTER: Right, Yes. Because let's say when you see the video, you saw many scenes that are very similar to a photograph or then also they appear in a print.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Do the ideas come, in a way, fully formed so that once you know what you're going to do, that's what you do, [00:34:00] or are there times when you change in the midst of doing a piece?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, you always change, because even if you think the idea is really perfect or finished or whatever, when you finally do it, there are formal issues, and then also sometimes there are accidents that take you to another level, or you do it and suddenly you don't like it so you have to transform it. It's always like you are working with this other, transparent person there. It's like—because nobody really—I don't think you are illustrating a perfect idea when you work. You are more like—Yes, there is a margin of—not error, but you know, of like a question mark, how it's going to end up.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you said it didn't work out and you redo it, is there a time where you think something is a failure and you actually destroy it?

LILIANA PORTER: Oh Yes. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's unredeemable.

LILIANA PORTER: Many times, Yes. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But when something, though, is an accident, you can sometimes use the accident?

LILIANA PORTER: Right, many times. And also because—the accidents are great because you would probably never had the guts to imagine that from the beginning. You know, like the accidents help you think of something that you never thought before.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So all those pieces you did that are either in the video or photographs of poured, looks like something like thick ink—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, Yes, Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —black paint, I don't know—

LILIANA PORTER: —paint, exactly—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that's imprecise, in a way, the way it's flowing.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, it could have been horrible.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have to redo and redo until it poured exactly the way you wanted, or—

LILIANA PORTER: —no—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you—were you open to however it happened?

LILIANA PORTER: What happened is that in the case of a video, you film it, say, four hours, and then the video is [00:36:00] 16 minutes. So you always take, you know, you throw away.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But then other—there's a series of works where you have paint poured across a canvas or paper.

LILIANA PORTER: Right. That, for instance, I work horizontally, on top of a table. It has to be horizontal. And when you throw the paint, there is no way to know how it's going to end up, so that—and all those—like I call this, like, *Tsunami* series [laughs]—it's—you have to do it very fast. So let's say I put this, you know, blob of acrylic, and then I would start adding these objects that attach to the paint, like if it was glue. So I have all these objects next to me, and then I start attaching them—it's very strange, because I start, like, making this situation, but I improvise there. So a guy is carving things, the other one is sweeping, then somebody's running, then I have these cards that I can make the marks.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, I saw it.

LILIANA PORTER: So it would be really interesting to film, because the whole process is like when you are working from the subconscious, like you are really doing it and always, almost watching yourself doing it. And it's very fast. And then also you have to wait like four days until you are able to put it vertical to dry. And when you put it vertical, it's totally different, so sometimes you have to add something or go back or you don't like it, you know. So then is when the thing starts. But it's really an interesting process, because you have these subjects [00:38:00] that will appear. I mean, you know you are not going to do certain things. But still there are situations that happen that you have no real control. Let's say I have some soldiers that are going to be fallen on top of the thing, but the way it happens and how it relates to something else is impossible to really foresee. So those are, to me, very interesting to do.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that excitement, the interest that you experience, you revisit the pieces with the red completely covering. So periodically it seems like you revisit that—

LILIANA PORTER: Those.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —element of chaos [they laugh] and tsunami or whatever.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, it's true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Poured over where you can't control it at all as much as other—

LILIANA PORTER: —I really—I was trying to analyze from where that came. I think I was—I am thinking—there was a moment that you put the TV on, there were all the tsunami, the thing, Japan—you know, all these horrible but overwhelming disasters in the world, and then also because they show more than before, you know, things that before they didn't show on TV, like you really see people dying, you know, things like that. And then, two minutes later, they are selling, I don't know, Coke or whatever, and then later there's a program where you—and so all these fragments are really similar to the work, but how do you—you know, why you don't go crazy? You are able to first be horrified, and two minutes later you are laughing, and then you are looking at somebody cooking a cake, you know. And then you go to sleep, and you—how—you know, it's amazing how we are able to process all these things, but it's good that we can do that, because if not, we would be all going crazy. [00:40:00] But also somehow, you are aware that you are not in a tsunami situation, that you are here and you have a happy life, and you have food, and you are—nobody's going to kill you, you are not in the war. And somehow, you feel guilty or something, because we are not that separated, one from each other. And so I guess I imagine that somehow those things come out in a way of reenacting or being part of it in some strange way.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And also, one thing that I am very aware is that, for instance, let's say you see horrible, like, the most horrific things that people do to each other. And you don't—you don't say, "Look what they do." I—what I say is, "Look what I am able to do as a person." I think if somebody else is able to kill somebody, I am able to. So that's why when you see something beautiful, you say—you—we are reconciled, because you say, Well, it's in me also, the possibility of doing that good thing. But it's not that I am that separated or that I am not responsible at all. I think we all have—I mean, if another person is, you know, does the most horrible thing, it's because we also have it in ourselves. We could be that person.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So I think, in that sense, when you make art, I think you are in all those different positions. And that's why I like those portraits I do where everybody is together, you know, the Nazi, the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the group, group shots.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the group. You know, all people who have nothing to do [00:42:00] with each other, and

they come from a different story, but they are all together, because I think that's—it's more real. No? [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, every time—every once in a while you get the group together. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: "Them," I call them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes. The titles are all very straightforward. It's not something that has been an issue. You just—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, I just—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —put the title on after you do it?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, the problem is that the—I always—there are many works with the same title. So there are a lot of "Untitled with Soldier," "Untitled with Levitating Rabbit," "Untitled"—or also, uh, "Them" with whatever.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, or number one, two, three.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But the titles are just a very straightforward wording of—Yes, Yes. Thinking about being in the studio for a moment, it seems that for the most part, you're not working with assistants. Has that always been the case, or—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —do you have assistants from time to time?

LILIANA PORTER: The assistant I have is more for all the paperwork.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A secretarial kind of—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes, it's more for the—how do you call?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Correspondence, or?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, no, the—where you have a list of your work and where it's going. The—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh—

LILIANA PORTER: —ai-ai-ai [ph]—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —registrarial?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —inventory.

LILIANA PORTER: The inventory. So let's say I have the painting. So you know when you did, you know, the photograph, everything, but also where it went, when it came back, and finally who has it and where. You know, all those things take a lot of time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And also, Yes, things you have to answer and send images and—you know, all that part is endless.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But Yes, I stretch my canvases [00:44:00] myself, and I prefer to work without an assistant. Yes. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But with—what you have someone do, though, is incredibly time-consuming.

LILIANA PORTER: And also the assistant will be—if I send the work to a laboratory, but I don't see them. So I—it's, Yes, a more solitary thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. It sounds—it seems like most of the time, your studios have been either very close to where you live or in the same space you live.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. In a way, I love to have it in the same space. Like here, we have the barn and the house, and sometimes I feel that I would like if the barn was closer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You wish the barn were closer?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because sometimes in the winter, you know, [they laugh] you have to cross that garden.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. When did you move here? What year was it?

LILIANA PORTER: It was, I think—10 years ago was when? In two thousand and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —two?

LILIANA PORTER: —two, I think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That would be 10 years, 2002. So you moved at that point from the city.

LILIANA PORTER: From the city, because I have a loft eight blocks from the World Trade Center, and when it happened, I was—I really—you know, like many people, it was a year that many people moved out or moved in or changed life or whatever. And then I—my dealer at the time, Annina Nosei, she has a wonderful house upstate, so I would go there just to get away from the city, because it took a long time, you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —months—

LILIANA PORTER: —the smoke and everything, wow. So she was the one who said, "Oh, you have to move here."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You hadn't been thinking about moving out of the city before then?

LILIANA PORTER: Never.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Were you in the studio on the day, at the time when—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, I was in Spain. I was in Spain. Actually I was in a restaurant—I had—I was in a restaurant, [00:46:00] because when here it's nine o'clock in the morning, there is three o'clock, where they eat lunch. So we were in this restaurant that had a big screen with CNN. Can you believe it?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm.

LILIANA PORTER: And then suddenly we looked at this thing, and like everybody else, we thought it was like some kind of fiction—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —an accident—

LILIANA PORTER: —or for—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —some little plane hitting the tower.

LILIANA PORTER: So then we were—because I had—I was in a show at the—it's called Telefónica. It's a place in Madrid. And they started to call, and they—I remember saying, "They attacked the Pentagon." You know, what—[gasps]. So then we went to the office, and I saw on TV when the towers fell. So I could travel a week later, because you couldn't come back. So it was quite an experience. So I think—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So when you got back, you could get to your studio but there was dust and—

LILIANA PORTER: --well, the studio was okay, but the—you know, every night they came to pour water in the street because the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the dust--

LILIANA PORTER: —the dust was still coming down. And also, like, you still see the smoke. Because from my window—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --what's—where were you? Where was that studio exactly?

LILIANA PORTER: It was on Franklin Street, between Greenwich and Hudson.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So very close.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. And from my window I could see the World Trade Center—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --you imagine eight blocks? You said eight blocks, or—?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's about right.

LILIANA PORTER: I could see the World Trade Center from my window, and suddenly it was deleted. You know, it was like very strange. But also it was very—to me, it was super traumatic. So I was getting out of the city, and—you know, at that point, you—I remember our friends thinking, Okay, are we going to continue making art? Are we going back to our [00:48:00] country—what do you want to do? You know. Suddenly—you know, it's interesting, because you stop and—for a moment and think exactly what do you want to do. Then we realized we should make art. [They laugh.] Continue making art—but for a moment it felt so out of place or something wrong. You feel like being a nurse or doing something useful. But then you realize that's your destiny. And also I really want to stay here, and also then I thought that would be nice, to have a studio in the house in a place with trees and nature. I really needed that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you were living in the city, though, you did spend summers—you talked about summers in Italy?

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did you go other places regularly, outside the city?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I always, of course, went back to Argentina. I always showed regularly, not only in Argentina but in different countries in Latin America. And so in that sense, I never lost communication—on the contrary. Because one thing that happens as a Latin American when you come to this country is that when you are in Argentina, you perceive, you know, Mexico, Peru like really foreign countries, and when you are here, you feel connected. Like, you feel like your territory is Latin America and not only your own country. It's interesting.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I meant to—did you become a citizen?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I am a citizen.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When was that?

LILIANA PORTER: I have both passports.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah. When did you become a citizen?

LILIANA PORTER: It was at the time when the—to go to Argentina, because military dictatorship was there, you arrive with your Argentinian passport and they canceled your passport when you entered, and then you had to go to the police [00:50:00] to get it again. It was—I was so angry with the whole thing, and I decided to get an American passport. But then the first time I went back, they—you have to enter at that time with the Argentinian anyway. [Laughs.] So, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mean you couldn't—if you had the American passport you'd have a problem.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. No, you had to enter with your Argentinian passport if you were Argentinian. There was a [inaudible]. [Now, you must enter with your own passport. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: If you had a dual passport, the Argentinian—

LILIANA PORTER: --so now I have both, which is fantastic, and that's—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --how did you feel about becoming American citizen? Was there a—

LILIANA PORTER: I felt good, because I was here for a long time, and so I—you know, I really feel very comfortable here.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This was your home?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: When I go back to Argentina, I feel I'm going back, and when I come—I feel I'm going home,

and when I come here, I feel I'm coming home too. I feel comfortable—like, I arrive to Buenos Aires, I know all the codes, I know where things are, I have my friends, my family. It's like—I feel like my—I am in a house with different rooms, but I am happy and connect—it's not that I—like, some people that say—I didn't personally have anybody killed in my family, but let's say some people left because of that. It's a different attitude, because you just want to forget the situation. But I really was always very happy in my childhood in Buenos Aires, so I don't have, personally, bad memories. Of course, all the bad things are part of my history; I kind of—you know, I am lucky—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: --there was a piece I read about it. I think it was a piece you did in Buenos Aires, where you had a line, a line of people holding photographs? I read about this, and I wasn't [00:52:00] positive it was your piece.

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, I know what you mean.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Photographs of—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, Yes--

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —person who had disappeared.

LILIANA PORTER: Right. No, it was a lecture I gave on art and politics, and so I was saying that—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: --so you created an imaginary piece?

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, it's a piece that a group of people did in Argentina—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: --but not including you.

LILIANA PORTER: No, no, I didn't do it.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Oh, I see.

LILIANA PORTER: But it was—because I was talking about, you know, how effective, how tricky is political art. But that this piece really was a perfect political piece because it was a group, anonymous, of artists, who did a piece that was like this photograph of the disappeared, and then mirrors next to it, and the idea was that they—the daughters or sons of these people that were—how do you say?—abducted—you know—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: --abducted.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. They were the same age as their parents now, so maybe by looking themselves in the mirror next to this photograph, they would find their parents. And there were two people that did. It was like [gasps]. [Moving - LP]

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: That's amazing. So that's obviously a perfect example of an effective art piece—

LILIANA PORTER: --art piece, but not only that—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —where it did really—

LILIANA PORTER: —it was anonymous. Because the problem with political art is that we are in a context where the work becomes a commodity. So I was making—giving an example. For instance, there is this painting by the Argentinian artist Antonio Berni. It was called—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: --tell me how you spell his last name.

LILIANA PORTER: B-e-r-n-i. So he did a lot of political art, and one of the works was called [00:54:00] "*Desocupados*." It means when you don't have a job.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Unemployed.

LILIANA PORTER: *The Unemployed*. And it became a very important painting, and at the same time, a very expensive painting. So suddenly a piece that he intended to be a political statement became a sign of—how do you say?—a status symbol, because if you had it on your wall, you were rich, you know. And it seemed to me super interesting how the same thing could transform itself, in a way, in the opposite thing. Of course, still has the message and still, you know, doesn't effect—it's not Berni's fault. But it's a danger of political art in the context of capitalism. So, like, without naming the artist, some artists make political art, but the ego part, you know, is stronger than the message. [They laugh.] And then you go to an art fair and see the same picture big

and another smaller, and then—you know. It's almost like unethical, the whole thing. So it's very difficult to make political art and not—it's tricky, let's say. But I—you know. So that's—I was analyzing and giving an example of—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --I see--

LILIANA PORTER: —a successful political. I think somebody, for instance, that was very successful was Felix Gonzalez-Torres, because I think it's so intelligent that he made these rules, that whoever owns the piece has to produce, let's say, the candy or the paper, and that people can take it away. So it's fantastic [00:56:00] because he—it doesn't matter if the piece is owned by whoever it's owned, but it's always become—it's exactly the way he wanted and still is this democratic thing, and still you can take all of the paper home, but it doesn't cost—you know, it's not that you are taking it to resell it or profit it. To arrive to that is very difficult. I think he got the fantastic system, and it worked. And every time I go and see, you know, a piece of him, I'm very moved because I think he would have loved to know, you know, that the pieces still have the perfect destiny.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Just going back to your studio for a second, do you—I remember you have some works of art on the walls, but do you find that it's important, or not at all, to have works from the past present in the studio?

LILIANA PORTER: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I have all these drawers full of—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but not that you're looking at them.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I guess if I had an enormous place, maybe I would hang them. But—well, I'm very much in touch with, because they are there, so it's not that I don't see them. But no, I think many times it's better not to have anything on the wall in the studio, so you start from zero.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. And what about—what about atmosphere? Do you always do work in silence, or do you always have music or radio or some other sound?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, no, it's interesting, because lately I realized I work without music or anything. If I put music—I could—if the music—if I'm thinking, I cannot put music with words. [00:58:00] It has to be [laughs] something classical. But if I already know what I'm doing and it's more, you know, I have—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —execution—

LILIANA PORTER: —execution, it could be anything. But in general, I work in silence, Yes, without music.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And do you—it seems like you have a combination of artificial light and natural light. Is lighting something you want to control?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I usually put the light that more or less the gallery will have, because sometimes I use the shadows, and I like to see how the shadow would be if you put it on the wall. So the light is similar to a gallery light.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Similar in the actual warmth or coolness—

LILIANA PORTER: —Yes—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —or in the direction?

LILIANA PORTER: In the direction, Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you're not trying to adjust the light tone or color to affect the color?

LILIANA PORTER: No. The light—I mean, everybody has a different light, but in general it's that—the kind of generic way that the light touches the work.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So you can look at the shadows.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes. Is there a particular work routine that you've always maintained?

LILIANA PORTER: I work all the time. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Every day, all day.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I work—I really—well, what happened, many—a lot of work is in the, like, writing or answering emails or—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but not that, Yes, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But if not, when I finally get into work, the real work, I work, I work, I work. I work without—I don't have hours, I mean. I just—it's like [inaudible].

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you want to take a break, is there something you do on a regular basis to take a break?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, in Rhinebeck, I love to take a ride and go to—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —drive—

LILIANA PORTER: —drive in nice places. But Yes, no, routine, I don't have a routine. What happen is very [01:00:00] interrupted because I travel a lot. It's impossible.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, moving out of the studio—and you started talking about the video works, so I wanted to spend some time on that body of work. I think the first one was in 1999.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I think so.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Called *For You*.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What prompted you to initially do that work?

LILIANA PORTER: Because I was doing these photographs, the Cibachromes, and there was this toy that is a Pinocchio with the cymbals. And so I wind it up, and he was, you know, playing the cymbals and making that noise. And when he stopped, the silence that came after that was, to me, like very moving. But in order to perceive the silence, you needed the sound first. So I thought, well, the only way that you could really see this—besides having the toy [laughs] in your hands—is to make a video, a film. And I never liked video art. In general I didn't have patience for it. They were boring, I thought they were, because you are trapped sitting there, and you have to see this slow—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —sitting if you're lucky. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. In general, were boring. I mean, there were some that I liked very much, but in general. And presumptuous, boring, everything. So I said, Oh, my God. I'm thinking of doing that. So I started to think in those terms, and so I wrote the storyboard with ideas. So I thought of the idea of the—it was like a step after photography. They were like photographs, in a way, that some have movement. So I called a friend of mine, Juan Mandelbaum, who has a production company in Boston—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Juan [01:02:00] Mandelbaum.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. So I asked him what—how do I do this, that I really would—

[END OF PART THREE, TRACK ONE.]

LILIANA PORTER: —like that I didn't want the video to be fuzzy. I wanted that you really can see the eyes of the characters. So it has to be good quality. And how do I do that? So he said, "Well, the best would be film." At that time film was much better than digital video, because things have evolved a lot. But it's very expensive, so the second choice is to film in 16 millimeters and translate it to digital video—is what we did. So he helped me, you know, to organize the equipment, the camera, the lights, everything. So I went with a suitcase. I went with Ana [Tiscornia] and a suitcase full of figurines—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to Boston—

LILIANA PORTER: —to Boston with all the toys. And so it was—I was impressed. The crew filming came with all these lights and things, and I said, Oh, my God, when they see the first little toy, they are going to kill me.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Because we did everything on top of a table with the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —white paper—

LILIANA PORTER: —white paper. And, but it was in two days I filmed. It took me two days. I never was as happy as—you know, more happy than doing painting or anything when I was doing film.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Why is that?

LILIANA PORTER: The whole process—I don't know—was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —I mean, it's a collaboration.

LILIANA PORTER: I was elated. Yes. The collaboration and then the editing and everything. I loved the whole process. Very—I enjoyed every second. I was so really happy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you plan ahead that you were going to do the text on black, then the images on white?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I planned a lot, and many things, of course, change. Also, I have a—some—like I did more fragments than [00:02:00] finally they ended up, and also the who goes first—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the order—

LILIANA PORTER: —also came after. The order. And also then the music. The music was the best discovery. Because I did the whole thing in silence, and when it was finished, Juan said, "Wait until you put the music; you will be surprised." So he was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but there were other sounds besides music, the wind-up toys and the—

LILIANA PORTER: The real sounds.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But he was going to suggest a musician that then couldn't do it, so Ana just called me and said, "I have a friend, a Uruguayan young composer that is living here that would be perfect. And also if you don't like it, she won't be offended or anything." So we called her, and I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what was her name?

LILIANA PORTER: Sylvia Meyer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: M-e-y-e-r, right?

LILIANA PORTER: Sylvia has a y.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And then, like, I didn't know what to tell her to do. And she said, "Don't worry. Give me the video. I'll bring something, and then we start from there." So when she brought the music, I started to realize what should be silent, what was too literal. Music could be very literal, that it shouldn't be literal. I started to realize what I didn't want, so finally it worked—and she is fantastic. You know, she's very flexible. And her main job is that she makes music for movies and theater. So she loves the idea of interpreting what the person would love. So she doesn't have this ego thing that has to be this way. Also, she has a great voice—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yes—

LILIANA PORTER: —and she can—she's very fast in doing, [00:04:00] trying, bringing different possibilities. So we worked on that. And the second movie, "Drum Solo," I thought of it with the music. Music was a factor and it—now I did all of them with her. And now we really—I mean, sometimes she's in Uruguay and we—and I send her the photograph of the thing and the idea, and by phone she tells me, or she sings, or she—you know, it's like —

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you preconceive—you said you made storyboards, but you, of course, in the editing changed the order from filming. Did you have an idea how long this—the first one turned out to be 15 minutes, about—

LILIANA PORTER: —no, no idea.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you sense that that's how long it would be?

LILIANA PORTER: No, I tried, though, to make it as—to take away as much as I could. Because I was afraid that it would be boring. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So—but still, for instance, sometimes I watched them again, and I would take out more things. So I'm learning, little by little.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you find that the music is—you're using the music to build a drama, to build a narrative?

LILIANA PORTER: I think the music—I am thinking of the music as a—as an element as important as the image. Because, especially in the last ones, it's—for instance, in "Matinee," there is the tsu—the red tsunami that is a very dramatic thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And the music is totally the opposite. She's singing, this—where was—this music that is all love and hope and everything, moon river. She sang the opposite of what you were seeing, and that, I think, creates a kind of thing, a tension that I like.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you think, when you were either [00:06:00] filming or editing, that you were creating a kind of narrative? I mean, when I was looking—I felt like I needed to look at it many times—I didn't have a chance to do that—to decide if I thought you were—what the order was meant to convey.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, there is a basic dislocation of things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But, for instance—okay, *Fox in the Mirror*, let's talk about *Fox in the Mirror*—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that's from 2007.

LILIANA PORTER: *Fox in the Mirror*, a concert. So it's divided in "Preliminary," "Rehearsal," "First Part," "Intermission," and "Second Part." The preliminary—and it wasn't—I didn't make the storyboard like that. That was at the end. The structure came much later. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —because you felt that it needed that structure?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, because I suddenly had this material and it was very chaotic, the whole thing. But many things I wanted to put, so I put preliminary, so the preliminary could be anything. [Laughs.] So they are these little fragments where—with all my subjects. I think there is one of the clock. Now I don't know if the clock was in—I think it was in *Fox in the Mirror*. It's a hand with a wooden clock that I found in a flea market, probably made by a child in school, and you almost don't see that it's erased, the numbers. It's the opposite of a clock; it doesn't give time. You know, it's just—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Yes, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And it's there in silence. And I think the subject of time and what time is [00:08:00] is there and is so—it has nothing to do, a clock with time. You know, it's an object that refers to time. So then there is one—well, there are many little scenes that have nothing to do with a concert, really. So then comes "Rehearsal," and also are these sort of different situations with music, but not a concert. So when the concert finally starts, you recognize, because many of the players are already—were in the "Preliminaries." And they are from the dog to postcards to musicians to, you know, different—all—it's like *Them*, you know, the characters.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And then the director of the orchestra is a Mickey Mouse that doesn't have ears. But it's not that I took the ears off; I found it like that. So it was perfect, the director that doesn't hear.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —hear. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: And the first violin is the fox. So that's why it's called *Fox in the Mirror*, because there is a scene where the fox is looking, it's playing and looking in the mirror. So the concert, the idea of the concert, was the idea exactly of concert as people playing music but also concert, the idea of many things happening at the same time. So that's the subject, I guess.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When you look back—and *Matinee* was fantastic—and again, the music is so perfect, and—

LILIANA PORTER: --and her voice. I love her voice.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes. Now that you've—so at that point, '99 to 2009, that was 10 years, and you had made those, plus the video that you did for Dia—

LILIANA PORTER: --right, it's true. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —which was delightful, those singing chicks, [00:10:00] called *Rehearsal*. Looking back at those videos you did over the 10 years, did you discover some sort of overarching themes or some narrative or evolution that would bring you to what the next video would be?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I think it brings me more to what I said of the—that I want to make a theater thing, with these elements and people. That probably—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --live action. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: Live action. That probably I will use the same way I use the toys, because the toys don't sing, obviously. It's not an animation. You see the toys and you see the music and you put them together, but it's not that I—I am not manipulating anything. So the same—I would use people that probably they won't sing or talk or anything, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --more of a pantomime?

LILIANA PORTER: So, no—probably, no, but maybe the music or the text will be dislocated from the image, so you have to attribute it to what you are seeing—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --but they wouldn't be characters singing themselves or speaking.

LILIANA PORTER: I don't think so, but maybe they will. I shouldn't say anything like that. But I imagined I would do it in a very simple way, the way when you are a child you organize a theater thing and you make your parents sit and watch, but to also add some very refined—you know, somebody who dances very well for a second, or somebody maybe who sings very well—something that is high performance with this very basic other situations. You know, I would like it to be as simple as possible, because I think [00:12:00] if you are able to convey what you want in a more naked situation, it's stronger. I think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. When—in a few minutes, I want to go back to that, but going back to your work from the past, I want to talk a little bit about the commissions. You've done some wonderful commissions, pieces—

LILIANA PORTER: --oh, the public art?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The public art. And they took up quite a bit of time and I'm sure energy to do those pieces, sort of separate from your—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —other work. And I wanted to ask you if you sought out those commissions and how you felt about doing public work.

LILIANA PORTER: The first one called—the one Alice—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes, *The Way Out*--

LILIANA PORTER: —*The Way Out*, that is in—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the subway--

LILIANA PORTER: —the subway on 50th Street and the 9/1 line.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Only the 1 these days.

LILIANA PORTER: I was invited to make a proposal. You know, sometimes MTA invites artists—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —to do a proposal, and then you get it or you don't, and I was lucky to get it. And it was fantastic, because I never did mosaic in my life. But they didn't care, because you could have a fabricator, you know. So I made the drawings and everything, and the—and the fabricator was Miotto Mosaics, who he himself was a printmaker before, and we really worked so well together. And that first experience was great for everybody. MTA said they didn't have any problem, everything was on time, the fabrication went well, people in the subway, the people are delighted, I was happy. You know, everything worked out.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Sounds miraculous.

LILIANA PORTER: It was, really. Because sometimes there are problems, it takes time or [00:14:00] people change their mind, or you propose something that is not possible and there is no money suddenly or something. No. And then the second one—I don't know if this was the second one.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, there's many. There's a piece you did for the lab at Belmar, but then there's one that you did at a train station in San Juan.

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, that was great. It's—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --that's called *The Traveler*.

LILIANA PORTER: *The Traveler*. They made this new elevated train in Puerto Rico, in San Juan, and so every station had an artist doing something, from international artists. It was incredible. So I got this commission because the train was elevated. When you entered the lobby, the main lobby, the walls are like, I think, two stories high or more, very high. So I have all that wall in the side walls, so I decided to use—to work with Miotto again and make, this time, glass mosaic, that he fabricated in Italy, actually. And it's just this blue sky from white to dark blue, and the traveler, one figure of one guy with a suitcase.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And it was an also great experience and was very good.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And people loved it.

LILIANA PORTER: Everybody was happy, and people loved it, so no problem.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Hm, hm.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, was some problem with timing, that, you know, things took longer. It was less fluid than the first one. But anyway, then finally then that [ph] to be good.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And then I did one later in Harlem, in the 1130 school.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: That was really very good, a very good experience.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's [00:16:00] in 2007, *Situations with Them*. Right?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, *Situations with Them*.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Twelve metal boxes. Yes, that one looked really intriguing.

LILIANA PORTER: They are round metal boxes that are painted like a color, you know, the kind of color that cars use.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Crayola color, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: And that they are inserted on the walls inside the school, and each one has my *Dialogues*, but in person. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: I had to leave them there. And I have to say that in all these pieces, Ana Tiscornia helped me, because she's an architect, and she helped me with the design, with the production, talking to the people. And actually, the last one we did together, this time as collaboration, in Scarborough Station.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: And they were—how do you say?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Called *Untitled with Sky*.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, and they—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and that was stained glass, is stained glass.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, they were glasses cut—it's a kind of glass, but it's called—it has a different name. But anyway. Because the normal stained glass—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --faceted?

LILIANA PORTER: Faceted glass, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: The normal one, you design the pieces, but in this case, you have to design—um, how is it? Because the metal in between is poured, it's not—well, it's a different.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh.

LILIANA PORTER: But anyway, I loved to do new techniques I never did this before and work with fabricators that know what they are doing, because it's always a surprise. It's impossible to—so that was a good experience. And also there is a seating facilities covered with mosaics that Miotto did again, that the drawing and the colors are the same as the faceted glass.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So it sounds like all these projects ended very satisfying.
[00:18:00]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I really want to make more.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So sometimes artists are very resentful of all the time it takes to negotiate and collaborate, and time out of their studio. It sounds like it was very smooth for you.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was. Yes, it was.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: With Ana's help.

LILIANA PORTER: With Ana's help, I have to say. She's very good at, you know, talking. She's very patient. And also she knows—she's an architect, so she knows about materials and the design and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and the engineering issues--

LILIANA PORTER: —and the finishing things, and—so. And then there is always a person who is a supervisor and smooths things also. It's very well, the way they organize here the public art, to the public art. I think they—it's— all my experience—because there is a contract, everything is very clear. Only once—it was a pity. I worked with one architect—it was going to be also for a school, and we had the designs, and I was working with—the architect was so fantastic, because my idea was too expensive for the budget, and he said—he sort of donated part of his own budget so I could do it, because he loved it. And then finally they didn't build the school. Because that was from the beginning, to build the whole—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, I see--

LILIANA PORTER: —and it didn't happen.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: One quick question. When—about the project that was at the public school, inside, in the walls. How did the students respond? Was that the way you expected?

LILIANA PORTER: It's—Yes, because it's very—it's for elementary school. It is perfect, I imagine, if I was a teacher, because the students could make an exercise that they could choose from the images in boxes— [00:20:00] because there were I think 13 or 12 different scenes—imagine you can write a story imagining what the figurines are saying to each other. You can draw them. You—you know, there are many exercises that could come from those things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Did you get feedback that it was—

LILIANA PORTER: --uh, Yes, that they—because I went to visit sometimes, and the teachers were happy with it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, that's—

LILIANA PORTER: --also because it had little lights. It's like a theater thing, and it had—the lights had to last. So they used little LED lights, especially in that design—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: LED.

LILIANA PORTER: LED. And that it would last like 70 years or something.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: But it's designed in a way that you could take it out, change the light without—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —touching. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: —touching the thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow, that's great.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Are you in competition now for any new commissions?

LILIANA PORTER: No, because I have to have the time to look for it. Because some, you have to apply; some, they call you.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sometimes galleries work with artists in that way, and I wanted to talk again about galleries. Has that been your experience, or did you do all these independently?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, it was all independently. No. Yes, in that sense.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. So, going back from yesterday, you talked about Monique Knowlton, and then I think we stopped. And in 1999, you joined the gall—Annina Nosei Gallery.

LILIANA PORTER: Annina Nosei.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How did your—how did you become connected with that gallery?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I have to say she asked me to join the gallery. We were—I was in my [inaudible], and I had this some kind of work in the art fair, so she gave it—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --but before—that was before the Armory started.

LILIANA PORTER: It was—I think it was Art Basel.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No, that [00:22:00] was—Art Basel started after 9/11.

LILIANA PORTER: Oh Yes?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So this was '99. So maybe it was the Miami art fair.

LILIANA PORTER: Maybe it was in Miami.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: There was a Miami art fair.

LILIANA PORTER: Or maybe it was in [inaudible]. Well, it was an art fair. And she came and said, Oh, I would like you to show your work in the gallery. You know, I was very moved. And—but I was with Monique Knowlton, but I think galleries do that to each other. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you only had one show, I think, at Monique Knowlton.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. One, only one?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: '96 is what I saw.

LILIANA PORTER: I think, no, I had two.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

LILIANA PORTER: Two, I think. Yes. No, but I liked Monique Knowlton. It was a very nice experience too. But of course, Annina, you know she's a very prestigious historical gallery. So I showed there, and I really like her very much too. And it was great, but then she closed the gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And at the same time, while you were showing there, you were showing at Hosfelt.

LILIANA PORTER: No. It came—Hosfelt came when she closed.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I thought that you showed at Hosfelt—

LILIANA PORTER: Ah, no—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —right before—

LILIANA PORTER: —because it was in San Francisco.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: But then he op—yes, you are right. I showed at Hosfelt, but in San Francisco. Because Annina was New York, so Hosfelt was my gallery in San Francisco. And then he opened in New York.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So then it was—he opened at the same time that Annina closed, so the transition—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --it was—

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And how did you become associated with that gallery, Hosfelt?

LILIANA PORTER: Because Marco Maggi, my friend, was showing with Hosfelt--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh--

LILIANA PORTER: —and I guess through him, I talked, you know, [00:24:00] we met.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were interested in having another gallery?

LILIANA PORTER: No, it always happens, you know, that then he invited me to a group show, and then he invited me to a solo show.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes. And then recently you've started showing with Krakow Gallery, Barbara Krakow, in Boston.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I love that gallery. I have many galleries. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. And I always ask you, how do you manage that?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, Barbara Krakow is the gallery in Boston. I love that gallery. Then—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --why do you love it?

LILIANA PORTER: I always liked that gallery because I liked the shows and—so—and I saw what they show at fairs, and I always liked it. And so once I was googling myself [laughs] and I saw Barbara Krakow appear, and I said, How come? And it was because she was—she likes very much graphic art, so it seems she was buying to publishers [ph] some of my prints.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: So actually she was having one of the Armory uptown fairs, shows, so I saw that my name was there, and I went, and I was very happy because she had all these artists I like—Ruscha and Sol LeWitt and my

little print there. And so I introduced myself, and then little by little we became acquainted, and then she invited me. She and the director, who is Andrew Witkin, who is a fantastic—not only a great director, but a good art—a very good artist. So he invited—both invited me to make a show there, and since then, I show regularly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. So how do you balance, how do you manage to have work in different galleries? [00:26:00] Also with Benzacar sometimes.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I have—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --and do you have certain—do each of them have a different schedule, or do you have certain kinds of work that goes to one place and a different—

LILIANA PORTER: --well, like, if I—for instance, I have—let me tell you. For instance, Ruth Benzacar in Buenos Aires to me, it's very important because it's my country, and I think it's the best gallery in Buenos Aires. And so I'm there—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --no doubt.

LILIANA PORTER: Now, Ruth already died, but her daughter took over, and now her daughter is taking over. Three generations. So to me, it's like my house. You know, I feel very comfortable there. And we have a very good relationship, and then like now, she went to Basel and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --she goes to all the big art fairs--

LILIANA PORTER: —all the fairs, and I am always there, and, you know, it's great. Then—let me see—then, well, Hosfelt is now my gallery in New York and in San Francisco. And he—the space here in New York is beautiful. I think it's a very nice space. Then, well, Boston is Barbara Krakow. That—of course, let's say if a gallery—because sometimes galleries—you know, like, let's say the last work I sold to MoMA was sold by Barbara Krakow, even though it's in New York territory. But that, you know, that's a—it's not that they are going to deal only with people from Boston, so that crosses—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so you—they—you let them worry about [laughs]—

LILIANA PORTER: --like for instance, Hosfelt actually sold a painting in a fair to the Museum of Fine Art in Boston. [00:28:00] So, you know, sometimes that happens—no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But do you feel pressure to produce a lot of work because you have so many galleries asking for work?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I produce anyway a lot of work. Yes, probably it's a stimulus.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's probably what?

LILIANA PORTER: A stimulus. You know, you feel—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --a stimulus.

LILIANA PORTER: Right. And like last—this year I overdid it because I had, like, I think eight one-person shows or something. You know, it's too much. So I am now slowing down a little. Because sometimes you don't realize, you say, Yes, yes, and then you look at your calendar and it's like overwhelming. But anyway, okay. Let's—we said Ruth Benzacar, Barbara Krakow, and Hosfelt, then in Madrid, it's very important, Espacio Mínimo. It's a gallery that actually started Murcia. And I started with them when they started, because I met them in an art fair, and they had this—Espacio Mínimo means "minimal space," and it was a super small space in Murcia, Spain. And I met them in an art fair, and they said, "Ah, we love your work, but we are in a very small gallery, and right now we, you know, couldn't afford bringing you." And I—for some reason I had an instinct, and I said, "Let's do it anyway," the show. And I brought photos to Spain—the first big photographs, the Cibachromes, rolled up, and some objects with me in the plane. And then we hang it and everything. And from then on, we had the best relationship. And they grew up as a gallery, and now they opened in Madrid. And they opened, actually, with a show, my show, which I [00:30:00] felt very moved because I'm not from Spain, so it—but they have a great relationship with the other galleries. For instance, the opening of my show, so all those other directors of galleries came—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --big galleries, Yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —came to the show and bought work.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow.

LILIANA PORTER: And they go—because when they were in Murcia, they were very clever because they started going to art fairs, so they were very well known by—they had, like, a—they knew everybody. So when they opened in Madrid, already everybody knew them. So it's a good—for me, a point—a good point of reference. They also organize shows in institutions. They have—because they really care about the work, you can tell, even though they are very good businesspeople. They like the work; they get into the work. They are interested in what you are doing. You know, it's not a detached commercial thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: Then, what else? I show in Chicago with Carrie Secrist—Secrist?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Secrist?

LILIANA PORTER: C-e-c-r-i-t [ph]. [Secrist - LP] What—how did I get there? In general, it's like they invite me to show and then I show. [They laugh.] And then we start, because we got a good relationship.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh, uh-huh [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: So then, where else? Whatever, I forget.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, do you—when you have exhibitions, do you want to make any decisions about the way it's installed or—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what the image is on the announcement card, or what the press release says, or—do you want to be involved in those decisions?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, I am involved. [00:32:00] I always am there for the hanging of the show, because I think the way a display is shown changes the work. For instance, I love when Barbara Toll used to hang the work. She really was even more extreme than I was. And—but I always—I want to. I want a lot of space around—you know, in between. So. But in general I—like, Annina Nosei is very good also, hanging the shows. It's also more like—she could be more extreme also, but I like that. So Yes, I'm involved in that. Ah, and then I forgot my gallery in Houston.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: Sicardi. She just moved—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --how do you spell that?

LILIANA PORTER: S-i-c-a-r-d-i.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm, Sicardi.

LILIANA PORTER: She's from Argentina.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: And she has many Latin American artists in Houston, and I think it's a very wonderful gallery. Now they moved to a new building, which is in a corner of Menil Museum, you know, right across the street. And she really, with the years also I feel that it's a better and better gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: It's like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --speaking of having enough work for all of these galleries, when you do photographs, you can make editions.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, so sometimes the same work is in different galleries. The same with the prints.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what's a typical size of edition?

LILIANA PORTER: The size of the edition are five.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The photographs. And you—and of course you only do one size, physically, of the print, because it has to—the relationship. You know, some artists do different size of the same.

LILIANA PORTER: No, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And then [00:34:00] when you're doing the graphic work, the prints, those are a little bit larger editions?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, they are in general 35 or—because with the prints now, I work with publishers, so I—let's say with the Poligrafa in Barcelona, so—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --say that—Polig—

LILIANA PORTER: Poligrafa is P-O-L-I-G-R-A-F-A. Poligrafa. In Barcelona. They publish, you know, international artists, and so you go there, you have all the technicians you want, they make the—you know, you do it, but they make the proofs, they make everything. They run the edition. And then there are different ways of arrangements—like, what I personally do is instead of getting money for sales, we split the edition. They pay for the trip, you know, every—all the expenses, the hotel, the whole thing, and the expenses, and then we split the edition. I get half of the edition, they get half, and we do whatever we want with the prints. But some—you could make other deals, that—on consignment, or they pay you in advance, or whatever. But it's great. I work with Poligrafa. I work with La Caja Negra in Madrid are also great publishers that I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Carta?

LILIANA PORTER: Caja is C-A-J-A. It means "box." And Negra, N-E-G-R-A.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Black box.

LILIANA PORTER: The black box. And they do books and prints and photographs.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So when you're doing editions of prints these days, it's when you're invited by a printmaker, by a publisher?

LILIANA PORTER: By a publisher. I did also—one great publishers is Flatbed Press in Austin, Texas. They are amazing technicians, really. So I did also a series there. [00:36:00] Then with SOLO press, I did the *Embroidery* series.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes, yes. That was a while ago.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: With Judith Solodkin.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: So different publishers.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And then when you make the videos, are those in an edition?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. The first one was an edition—I think there were three. I was very lucky with the first one because—well, first I tell you the editions. Three. The second, *Drum Solo*, was an additional three DVD, and 100 VHS. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: That doesn't exist anymore.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No.

LILIANA PORTER: Then the fourth was an edition of eight DVDs, and the last one is an edition of 10.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: DVDs.

LILIANA PORTER: DVDs. And I was very lucky with the collectors. I—all went to collectors. The last one, I still have five, but—for instance, the first one, my first experience was a show, *For You*, in ARCO [bought by Reina Sofia Museum - LP]—they are in Madrid—and I had a special project room, so it was projected in a room with seats and like a little theater. And it was the time that were—I—you projected with a thing called U-matic. Then came the laser discs. Then—you know. When I did *For You*, to make a DVD cost \$3,000.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow.

LILIANA PORTER: And now you do it in your—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --free--

LILIANA PORTER: —computer free. And so the two first ones were in 16 millimeters translated to video, but the two last ones are digital print—digital, whatever. Camera.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So obviously technology has had a huge impact on your work—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —in [00:38:00] every way.

LILIANA PORTER: Incredible.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But I really enjoyed that. I think I will continue making videos.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Have there been any important relationships with other artists that you haven't mentioned that you want to talk about?

LILIANA PORTER: Well, the—well, one thing that I've been doing, some collaborative works, is with my friend Ana Tiscornia. She's from Uruguay, and we lived together for the last 20 years, so we really—because she's an artist but also a writer. I mean, she writes, and she's a curator. So she—we really get along very well in order to share this studio. And we did some works together. We did four shows together. And it's interesting because our work is totally different, so we invented this way of putting together the two, you know, the two ideas—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --aesthetics, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Aesthetics, and something else comes out. And also we did—we invented an artist together, because it—what happened is there was—there is this magazine in Buenos Aires called *Otra Parte*.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: *Otra Parte*.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. And once I—and Inés Katzenstein is one of the—I think is an editor of the magazine. So she wrote to us and said, "Listen. We are making an issue called"—it's called Fiction—wait. Fiction—it was about—wait, wait. What was the name? It was "Literature and Fiction," or something like that. So the idea was [00:40:00] she wanted us to invent an artist that illustrated the book. Because the magazine was about writings—let's say critics of books that didn't exist, or the person existed, but—or the book existed, but the critic was an invention. You know, there was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --mm-hmm [affirmative]--

LILIANA PORTER: —things that were not true, but if you didn't know, you didn't realize. So they wanted to illustrate it, but an artist that was an invention. So we invented this artist, Alicia Mihai Gazcue. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Let me write that down. Alicia, A-l-i-c-i-a.

LILIANA PORTER: Mihai is M-i-h-a-i, which is the Romanian last name of my grandmother—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh--

LILIANA PORTER: —from my mother that I forgot. When you asked me, I forgot the name. And Gazcue is her grand—Yes, grandmother.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Gazcue, G—

LILIANA PORTER: G-a-s—no, z—c-u-e. Let's see if we put it with G—Gazcue. With a z, z.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, G-a-z-c-u-e--

LILIANA PORTER: —c-u-e. And so it is this—so it's interesting, when you invent somebody, how you invent—you start inventing the person, and the person ends up—I mean, because if you invent certain qualities, these qualities only go with certain others that appear by themselves. No? So let's say if you say it's Italian, we like [ph] [inaudible], you know—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [They laugh.] Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So this one is Mihai Gazcue, she's Romanian, but she was living in—no, she's Uruguayan, [00:42:00] she was living in Uruguay, but because of the dictatorship and everything, she left and she went to Romania because her family was Romanian, and she ended up being—working in the National Library. And she was doing this—she's doing, she's still alive— [Alicia Mihai was born in Uruguay but now lives in Romania. - LP]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: —works that are sort of political but influenced also by Pop art. And so [laughs] what is interesting is that the pol—what makes it political are more the titles. So when you read the title, it really changes your gaze to what you are seeing. So let's say you are—you see two men, and it's called *Negotiations*. It's different than if it was called, I don't know, something else. And so anyway, it's very interesting, because we've continued working with her.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

LILIANA PORTER: And actually, we did a one-person show in Boston. And [laughs] it was funny because it was in this—what was the name of the place? Some—Boston Center of the Arts. So at that time, our friend, José Luis Blondet, was a curator there, so we through him could be able to make this one-person show.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me his last name again?

LILIANA PORTER: Blondet, B-l-o-n-d-e-t. He graduated from Bard College, and he was a curator for a while at the Dia Foundation. He was the one that put together the education department—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: Blondet. And then he [00:44:00] worked in this place in Boston, and now he's in the museum in Los Angeles. I think it's LACMA, I think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [affirmative].

LILIANA PORTER: Well, anyway, we are good friends, and so he knew about this.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He knew about this character, Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: So he said, "Let's make a one-person show." So we went to Boston for the opening. So first we went to Barbara Krakow and we said, "You have to come to see the show." Ah, actually, she gave some money for the frames or something; she was a sponsor, but she didn't see the work. So we went and said, "Listen, you have to come. You know, this artist, we invented." "Oh, you are nuts!" She said, "You are totally nuts." [They laugh.] So we went to the opening. So she was starting to look at the work, and she said, "But I like this work! I like this work. I want this and this." You know, she really related to the work. So the way it works is, let's say there is a collector who wants to buy it. We tell them the truth, This is an invention. Or—but the person who doesn't know is the viewer, the normal viewer. But—so it's a collective invention of an artist.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How do you set prices for something like that?

LILIANA PORTER: Easily. [They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's like, there's no career.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, generally sort of thing. And it's interesting because then, for instance, she did the cover of some magazines already. She did the cover of *Review* magazine—in Americas Society there was an issue of the magazine, [number 81, Bob Marley and his Legacy - LP] and she did the cover, and there is an interview with Alicia inside by Gabriela Rangel, who's the director [00:46:00] of the gallery of the Americas Society.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Say his name again?

LILIANA PORTER: Gabriela—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --oh, okay--

LILIANA PORTER: —and Rangel is R-a-n-g-e-l. She's from Venezuela. And she made the best—the more deep interview to this artist, which is published in that magazine. And it's really so good, I had to say, because it really keeps growing, and all the things we said are possible to prove, [They laugh.] so now actually if you Google her, there are some things already there, because she was in different situations.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, and exhibitions.

LILIANA PORTER: So we want to make—to continue working with her.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I'm pausing it for a second.

[Audio break.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: We were talking about the collaboration and this artist, who's kind of part of the art world now, because you found her on Google. [They laugh.]

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, no, we plan to continue, because many people want to have—the thing is, one thing was to work for a magazine, that they were reproductions, and the other thing is to make the real work. Because in the reproductions, it says "charcoal on canvas"; in reality, I don't want to say all the secrets—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --okay. [Laughs.]

LILIANA PORTER: —but they weren't. [Laughs.] So, you know, we invented some alternatives.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah. Speaking about other artists, you don't live in the city, you live in Rhinebeck, but do you make a habit of going to see museum and gallery [00:48:00] exhibitions—

LILIANA PORTER: --oh, Yes--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —regularly? What kinds of things do you most want to see?

LILIANA PORTER: What kinds of things do I most want to see?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What artists or what kinds of art, or what—

LILIANA PORTER: --well, first you always want to see things you don't know, so maybe to discover something is not that easy, but. Let's see. Well, in general, you go to see shows and you don't like—you like very few. But everybody has the same experience, I guess.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But, for instance, there are a lot of shows I enjoy. A lot. And I will say lately, I liked some—the Cindy Sherman show, especially when—the ones that she's dressed as these high, rich people, or—you know, I like the part of the humor. I was surprised they didn't show—I like very much a movie she made, *The Office*, or I don't know if it's called *The Office*, the long—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —feature movie that people didn't—it seems at that moment they had not very good critiques, and I really thought it was wonderful, and that helps you understand more her humor. Well, let's see—well, there are many artists.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You're talking about contemporary art, though. So do you mostly—

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, I like [inaudible], contemporary art, which are taboo [ph]. But there are many, many artists I like.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. So you're thinking mostly—your main objective when you think about going to the city to see exhibitions is to see contemporary art.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes, Yes. But sometimes, of course, you go to Metropolitan, and it's fantastic.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you—have you ever thought that you noticed that your work was influencing other artists, maybe younger artists? [00:50:00] Do you ever s—

LILIANA PORTER: --well, Yes, it's to—I mean, it seems that they—Yes. [They laugh.] But it would be too presumptuous to say. But some people tell me that. "Look," you know. But it is very easy to get influenced.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you're thinking about the future of your work, you have various galleries representing you. Have you made a plan to have one of those galleries, or in some other way assure the future of your work?

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. I mean, that process too, trying to establish a kind of—is—how do you call it?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A foundation?

LILIANA PORTER: Not a foundation, but, no, it—Yes, like—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --a trust--

LILIANA PORTER: —all the work is together, instead of, let's say, if I die, dividing the work for my nieces or whoever—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --Yes--

LILIANA PORTER: —to—like they will stay together, and then there's a board that will decide, you know, what to do or who is going to manage it. And so then if they—when they sell it, then the money goes to whoever—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --I see--

LILIANA PORTER: —I decide. Which is better, so they don't have a problem, right?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, yes.

LILIANA PORTER: But also it assures you that there will be some, you know, following or that the thing will have —

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --so it would be up to these advisors, these people on the board, to decide where it would be shown and who and when it would be sold.

LILIANA PORTER: Right, who will manage this stuff and everything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh [affirmative]. And making sure that copyrights weren't violated and your work —

LILIANA PORTER: --Yes, those horrible things--

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —wasn't appearing on napkins and [laughs]—

LILIANA PORTER: I mean, you—with a lawyer, it's interesting, the process, actually, of making the will, [00:52:00] because you realize there is no way to do it perfect. There are so many different things that could happen, many problems, things with taxes and things. Like if I like you and say, Oh, I'm going to give you five paintings, and at that time they cost a lot, you have to pay taxes and you are in a problem, maybe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm [affirmative], Yes.

LILIANA PORTER: That's why—now I realize why there are all these auctions when people—like, Warhol, you know, died they have to right away start selling to pay all these taxes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. So you're creating some kind of structure which would mean that your estate wasn't going to be taxable.

LILIANA PORTER: Well, I don't know exactly how it works, but it's that I am—one thing they advise you is not to say, Okay, for my niece, this and this, because then they have to—it's better if the work stays together, and then if it sells, then they get the money and they must pay taxes, I imagine. But it's different because you have the money already to pay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right.

LILIANA PORTER: So—and then also—where—because there are letters and documents, and what—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: --archives--

LILIANA PORTER: —is going to happen. I am going to do that. [Laughs.] It's very—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It sounds like you've already made a very good inventory.

LILIANA PORTER: Yes. That's the great part, that I have things more or less in order now. I don't have in order—I could—earlier work; I don't know where it is. And if I wanted, I could go through all my letters, but I am not going to do that because life is short. [They laugh.] But in general, all—I have things in order now; I know who has what.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, Yes.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]