



Smithsonian  
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Oral history interview with Vera Klement,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Vera Klement on June 12 and 14, 2015. The interview took place in Chicago, IL, and was conducted by Lanny Silverman for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. This interview is part of the Archives of American Art's Chicago Art-Related Archival Materials: A Terra Foundation Resource project.

Vera Klement and Lanny Silverman have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets appended by initials. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

LANNY SILVERMAN: This is Lanny Silverman for the Smithsonian Institution's Archives of American Art. I'm at Vera Klement's studio and home, and we'll be recording an interview; part one.

I guess the first question everyone is probably going to start with is, where and when were you born? I know that's kind of a complicated question in terms of the changing names and all that stuff.

VEERA KLEMENT: Okay, I was born in 1929 in the Free City of Danzig, which was a city-state created by the Versailles Treaty that was German, yet not part of Germany. It's really hard to—

MR. SILVERMAN: And it's Poland now?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. Now it's Gdansk—

MR. SILVERMAN: Gdansk, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —Poland.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. KLEMENT: So, even though it was a free city, it was really, you might say, I lived in Germany.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. KLEMENT: The language was German, and the people were German.

MR. SILVERMAN: Do you speak Polish, as well, out of curiosity?

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—

MS. KLEMENT: I had nothing to do with Poland.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Okay.

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: However, you had a lot to do with Germany, and I think that's going to come up—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the questions, obviously.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's hard to avoid. I thought—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, and then I don't know what nationality to call myself. When people say, "I'm German," or, "I'm French," I don't know how to answer that because my parents were Russian.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Your parents were Russian Jews; that's what I've read.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's kind of interesting, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. And then, they fled and went from Minsk to Danzig. And then, they fled again and came to New York.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—

MS. KLEMENT: Luckily with an affidavit from an uncle here, or we would've been swept up in that whole thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, what year was that? That's what I was about to ask because you avoided the—

MS. KLEMENT: That was right after Kristallnacht.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: We left in December 1938.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it's hard to avoid this subject, but you could sense—your family could sense, obviously—that the—if not the end, at least the craziness was about to begin?

MS. KLEMENT: My father's—had a lumberyard. His business was confiscated, and he was in hiding in Poland. And we [my mother, brother, and I -VK] were in hiding with cousins because the Gestapo broke down the door of our apartment. And we couldn't stay there anymore.

MR. SILVERMAN: How old were you in that point in time?

MS. KLEMENT: I was eight and a half.

MR. SILVERMAN: This must have made a huge impression on you?

MS. KLEMENT: It is.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually—

MS. KLEMENT: It's actually ruined me, I think.

MR. SILVERMAN: It moved you?

MS. KLEMENT: It ruined me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, "Ruined me." How do you say—what do you mean by that?

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, I'm scared of everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that persists to this day? You have—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that sensibility?

MS. KLEMENT: I occasionally have dreams of someone breaking into a window or a door.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's your root. That's your basic—you know, you're a child—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that's sort of—so your childhood was really colored very strongly by this, that sense of place?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I see it in some of your paintings; we'll come back to that. But I see that sense of landscape. It's almost like Kiefer. I mean, Kiefer's a whole different generation, and it's a different thing. But I see that feeling of the landscape. We'll talk about later—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —in that regard. But—so you feel like it's influenced your whole—it's made your very precarious position—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the world.

MS. KLEMENT: The other thing it did to me is that place I was born, which was a—it was a small town in Danzig called Zoppot. And Soppot was a famous spa on the sea, on the Baltic Sea. It was exquisite. And I had that torn away from me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow. So, that's interesting, too, in terms of your sense of place and landscape.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Those are primal, kind of—

MS. KLEMENT: It's a constant longing for the lost, beloved land.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now it's—

MS. KLEMENT: And that thing of land, which I share with Kiefer, is actually, I think, an aspect of German romanticism.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was going to bring that up later, but I'll get—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —into it now a little bit because I also think—Greg and I curated—Greg Knight and I curated an exhibition called [*Sowers of Myth* -LS]—that had to do with that eastern European sensibility. I call it cthonic; this very, like, Emil Nolde earlier on—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and, you know, in Kiefer, there's a certain—Abakanowicz—there's a certain earthiness. Your bark pieces and your landscape—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —there's a certain sense of the earth and of German romanticism.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's where you come out of.

MS. KLEMENT: That's where I come out of.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's your roots.

MS. KLEMENT: Robert Rosenbloom wrote this wonderful book. What the hell was it called? [*Romanticism and the Northern Tradition* -VK] He followed the root of romanticism to the sublime, ending up with Rothko. And instead of going the usual path to the cubists and the whole French thing and La Lumiere, he went through the northern route. And I felt that was my root.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, there's that northern—that's what I'm getting at, yes—

MS. KLEMENT: It's the northern, the sea, the coast; all that up there.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a strong sensibility, a very—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —strong pull to—it's not just nature, but it's a certain feel about nature that's very different.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that's where you come from. So, you mentioned your father. What was your mother like? Was she interested in art, or—

MS. KLEMENT: My mother was a pianist.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really? That's the music interest—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —or partly.

MS. KLEMENT: She studied at the St. Petersburg Conservatory before they fled Russia, and she played the piano.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow. So you had a piano in the house, and you heard music all the time.

MS. KLEMENT: All the time, Chopin and more romanticism.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Well, how glorious; that's a—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm stuffed with romanticism [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it's funny, too, because there's a cool intellectual side, too, that you've tempered it with. And it's not so simple as, you know, the standard romanticism. We'll get into that when we get into the work more. But that's an interesting, sort, of balance in between—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —style and format and—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and your sensibility.

MS. KLEMENT: I think, in a way, it's the Russian versus the German mentality, the order—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —and the emotion.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Russians are pretty, sort of [Laughs.]—so maybe, coming from Russian Jews who left probably the same time—my grandparents probably left at the same time your grandparents did—there's a certain—how to put it?—a morose sensibility in terms of [Laughs.] Russian Jewish, sort of, mentality—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —that's the worrying and the angst—

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].. Definitely—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —I worry about everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: You worry about everything.

MS. KLEMENT: Everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Poor Peter.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I worry about everything. I say, "What if?" and then I conjure up the worst thing that can happen [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you've seen some of the worse, so I guess—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —as you said, that early on had to influence your life. We'll get on to that more later because I know there are some other Holocaust survivors. We've talked about Gerda Meyer Bernstein. I'm also—I was

good friends with Edith Altman, too. Did you know Edith, too?

MS. KLEMENT: Of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes. She was—

MS. KLEMENT: I went with Edith to find her hometown.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was going to ask about going back.

MS. KLEMENT: We did a roots trip.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, my God, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I had to be her translator, she doesn't speak one word of German. She didn't—we left the same year. [1938 -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —but she didn't retain a single word.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And I had to do it for her.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting; I didn't know that.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I just assumed that she retained some.

MS. KLEMENT: No, not one word.

MR. SILVERMAN: We'll get back to that later because I wanted to talk about some of the ways artists deal with that past and how they make art, whether it be political, like Gerda, or mystical, like Edith. There's different ways to go. You're somewhere in between, neither, in a way, but—

MS. KLEMENT: No. I don't believe in using art for politics.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's kind of—

MS. KLEMENT: I think you're preaching to the choir.

MR. SILVERMAN: I pretty much agree, and other than some like Leon Golub, there are very few people that pull it off well—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: [inaudible], too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think that's the other problem. We'll get to that later, but—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —back to your mom and dad; I'm trying to follow an order, but—

MS. KLEMENT: We're getting—[laughs]—everything later. That's going to all bunch up, but—

MR. SILVERMAN: —but I want to try to follow a chronology.

MS. KLEMENT: Okay.

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess my feeling is that that stuff is really important. But it's hard to avoid what's influenced you as a child. But I want to talk about your parents—

MS. KLEMENT: Okay; fast-forward to Manhattan.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: That's where we landed.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So much for my chronology.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, that's chronology.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well—

MS. KLEMENT: I was nine.

MR. SILVERMAN: You were nine when you left?

MS. KLEMENT: When we landed.

MR. SILVERMAN: When you landed, you were that young? I didn't realize.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you came in, and you spoke English?

MS. KLEMENT: And I left an exquisite place—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and landed in a filthy, gray, cacophony, shrek.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Did you speak English?

MS. KLEMENT: Not a word.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, my God.

MS. KLEMENT: Not a word.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's very disorienting, and that can be very—

MS. KLEMENT: And they sent me to school, and I had to walk there. And I only had one word.

MR. SILVERMAN: What was the word?

MS. KLEMENT: "What!"

MR. SILVERMAN: "What?" [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: "What!"

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That's a good start, but it doesn't get you get you very far.

MS. KLEMENT: It was horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: God. So, your parents—

MS. KLEMENT: And also—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, sorry.

MS. KLEMENT: I'd never seen a black person—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, of course, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and, here, my uncle lived close to Harlem and had a shop in Harlem. So, that was—Puerto Ricans, blacks, all shoved together, immigrants from Europe.

MR. SILVERMAN: And the Russian population is Brighton Beach or somewhere completely different. There weren't— [This is wrong. Brighton came much later. -VK]

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and the—I mean, you’re kin, there weren’t, probably, very many people from where you were up in Harlem, in that area. [There were many refugees. -VK]

MS. KLEMENT: Well, we all clung together.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, what few there were probably; yes, because that’s not where the German or the—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —Polish or the Russians—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. The Germans were in Fort Washington.

MR. SILVERMAN: Fort Washington, okay.

MS. KLEMENT: The yekkes.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Actually, yes, so you left at really early age. Your childhood memories are probably—you have primal childhood memories. Your mom, sort of, obviously, influenced your love of music. How about your dad? You mentioned—

MS. KLEMENT: Sang.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so he—

MS. KLEMENT: He sang, and he taught me how to paint.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that may’ve been where you started with the art? That’s what I was about to ask if—did it come from—

MS. KLEMENT: But we didn’t do that in Europe. There was no art and nothing at the end except hiding.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, of course. And so that was more when you got to Manhattan? When you got to—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Harlem. [The upper upper West Side -VK]

MS. KLEMENT: My father bought me a watercolor set [on my birthday -VK]; we sat down, and I copied an image from a LIFE Magazine with his assistance.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And everything I do is already in that picture.

MR. SILVERMAN: I—was something I was going to ask; guess I’ll ask now—is, what kind of art did you make when you were a child, and does it have any bearing on what you do now?

MS. KLEMENT: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: That’s what you’re saying, so—

MS. KLEMENT: —then, I got into the High School of Music & Art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course, that’s a wonderful place.

MS. KLEMENT: And I had a really fabulous background. We were learning Cubism, and they showed us Braque and Picasso and Gris. And that whole class was readied to go to Cooper Union and pass the exams.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, so that’s where you got your art training.

MS. KLEMENT: And that’s where I got—that was a fabulous school.

MR. SILVERMAN: We’ll come back to that in a second—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —but I want to ask—no, because I want—you passed over something that intrigued me. You said everything was in that first—that copy that you made, that first piece that you made? Tell me more. I’m



kind of curious how that's a pre-cursor to everything else that followed.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, you want to see it?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it would be very hard for someone to follow that in terms of these transcripts, but if you could describe it, that'd be even better. Later, I'd like to see it, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, it's a snow—it's a little snow scene. It was a Christmas issue of LIFE Magazine.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. KLEMENT: So, there's a little snow scene and little houses with snow on the roof and all of that, snow on the fence. And then, there are a couple of little figures walking with sheep.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So, in terms of style it wasn't—it didn't have abstraction. It was fairly realistic.

MS. KLEMENT: Who's abstract?

MR. SILVERMAN: What do you mean?

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, I'm not an abstract artist.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, see, you're maintaining that, even though the painterly technique that we'll get to [Laughs.] eventually is—

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, that's a tree trunk; that's not abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, everything is representational to you? They're all—they're not—they're either symbols or actual things—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the world. They're not—

MS. KLEMENT: Everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but even the—

MS. KLEMENT: I—

MR. SILVERMAN: —the paint application. Even the AbEx, kind of, paint application to you is—

MS. KLEMENT: That's how you put paint on.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Well, of course, as you realize, we're going to—this is a topic that's going to get embellished, I'm sure, much more when we talk about—

MS. KLEMENT: Not in Chicago, but that's how in—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —New York you put the paint—[laughs]—on.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, but it's all a game to try to make something look real and three-dimensional. You're obviously doing something—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, what I want—

MR. SILVERMAN: —two dimensional.

MS. KLEMENT: —is a contradiction. I want it to look real and be on the point of falling back into just mushy paint.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's kind of what I'm getting at; the mushy paint, the fact that it's two-D; it's tactile, gushy quality is—it's an abstract game, even if it is reality—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and even if you're representing, which you're saying everything represents in your paintings.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there is still that gushiness and that—

MS. KLEMENT: Absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: —stylings. So, getting back to where you were with the High School of Art & Music, that was your first exposure to art. Obviously, you must have seen a lot of exhibitions in New York, as well as a child, or some?

MS. KLEMENT: I doubt it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Really, you didn't go to many shows?

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, you have to understand, my parents were—they had nothing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, who has time to think about—no. And then my father died; I was 14. So, I mean, it's a rough life that I had.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually, you learned—by the time, obviously, in school, you learned English.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, I learned English before that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, obviously.

MS. KLEMENT: I didn't open my mouth when we lived with the relatives for several months. And they all tried to teach me English, and I refused. But inwardly, I was practicing.

MR. SILVERMAN: You were waiting to be ready.

MS. KLEMENT: And then one day, I opened my mouth and out came a perfect New York English.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That says a lot. I mean, that's the way you work. You want to have it right; you want to do it right—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —and it's going to come out, and it's going to be fully formed. I thought you were going to tell me that it came out as a fully-formed poem or—

[They laugh.]

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —not quite that elaborate. So, you had an early, you know, introduction to New York. I know you spent a fair amount of time there. I guess—

MS. KLEMENT: Until I was 34.

MR. SILVERMAN: And some of the things I was interested in were, if not just exhibitions, in terms of schooling, like at Cooper Union or even at that high school for the arts. Did you have any mentors or teachers of people that were strong influences on you? Any that you remember?

MS. KLEMENT: Well, there were the teachers there.

MR. SILVERMAN: But I mean, yes, oh there probably were some pretty interesting—

MS. KLEMENT: They were wonderful teachers.

MR. SILVERMAN: And did you have any other role models for what it meant to be an artist?

MS. KLEMENT: At what age?

MR. SILVERMAN: As a child, a teenager.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, see. Did you know you were going to be an artist?

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: When did you think made that—

MS. KLEMENT: After I painted that little—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that was it?

MS. KLEMENT: That was it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: —because that was going to be my world that no one could take away from me.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you could be—it was like a refuge from craziness—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and I called the rules.

MR. SILVERMAN: And made it to your own language, too—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —so you could control the language—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the art language, I mean, and maybe otherwise, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that was—and when you decided to—you didn't have any other—you never thought about anything else as a career or as a—

MS. KLEMENT: Never.

MR. SILVERMAN: —point of being? It was just, "There it is; I'm going to be an artist."

MS. KLEMENT: Well, when I was seven, I was given a violin. And I didn't have the strength, physically, to stand there and hold it up in this ridiculous position.

MR. SILVERMAN: Did they have little ones, you know, like child-sized ones?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, but still, you have to—

MR. SILVERMAN: Still, you have to have—yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, we switched to piano, and I studied piano.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you did study some piano. I had a question about that, too—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in terms of your music interests. But then, that was—if it was seven, that's when you to flee, and then everything fell apart.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I studied piano until I was eight and a half. And then, when I came to New York, I had a teacher, Miss Frankfurter.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I went for piano lessons. And then, when music and art came up, I thought, "Good, music and art. No, music or art."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] You made—

MS. KLEMENT: So, I made my choice, and I went and told Miss Frankfurter, "I'm quitting," and she wept.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, things that could've been; you don't have any regrets, I take it, in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but you still loved music.

MS. KLEMENT: But my life was always in music.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you were really—

MS. KLEMENT: I had two husbands in music.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And that's my passion is music. I'd rather hear music than go look at a painting.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you also lived through some wonderful times in terms of New York art. This would probably be the '50s or something?

MS. KLEMENT: '40s and '50s.

MR. SILVERMAN: '40s and '50s, so this is the birth of New York as the new art scene—

MS. KLEMENT: Perfect place to be a young artist.

MR. SILVERMAN: Did you go drinking in the Cedar Bar? Did you meet any of those people?

MS. KLEMENT: I didn't, but I did meet people, and I hung out, and I was—you didn't have to go. It was in the air.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: You just breathed, and you knew push-pull.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. And is that where you met Ralph? In New York or in Chicago?

MS. KLEMENT: I met Ralph at the McDowell Colony.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so it wasn't even either; yes, that's interesting. And that would be in the '50s or '60s?

MS. KLEMENT: In the '50s.

MR. SILVERMAN: And so did that help you to introduce you to the New York music scene as well?

MS. KLEMENT: That introduced me to modern music.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right.

MS. KLEMENT: The tragedy of it was that I had to give up my other music, my real music [Laughs.]—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] And—

MS. KLEMENT: —because he was busy writing and, you know, couldn't bear hearing—and didn't want to hear.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, he didn't want to hear it? Is that the—do you feel that way about art? This is sort of a—

MS. KLEMENT: No. Not at all, the—

MR. SILVERMAN: —because I know some artists that are in their own little, hermetic world and don't want to—I mean, I'd say, "You should look at this work because it reminds me of"—they don't want to hear it; they want to just keep with their own work—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, that I understand.

MR. SILVERMAN: You understand that, but you're—I gather you're very engaged with what's happening in the art world and developments, and you follow—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I'm not at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really? So, you're still have some remove, but you're interested—

MS. KLEMENT: I hate what it is.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: It's a world I did not choose, the world that it became—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and—no, I hate it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because that, obviously, is something we're going to talk about—more about—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the developments, in terms of art. But in terms of shaping your vision, obviously, music was always important to you. But how did your—obviously, your influence, despite your saying it's not abstract, the abstract expressionists' work—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —has a big influence in your work—

MS. KLEMENT: Huge.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in terms of their application of paint—

MS. KLEMENT: Huge and in terms of their content.

MR. SILVERMAN: Also very romantic, I might—

MS. KLEMENT: Romantic and idealistic and passionate and so forth.

MR. SILVERMAN: Also, coming out of the '40s existential angst—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —which we alluded to in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: And coming out of existentialism.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's very big in terms of your work, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's got to be an important aspect. How about in terms of your life with Ralph, in terms of seeing a composer, a very important composer, that that entrée into the contemporary music world, did that influence your work at all?

MS. KLEMENT: Not even a little.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that was separate in a way? By that, you—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I never got passionate about that. It was interesting, but it didn't engage me, my passion.

MR. SILVERMAN: And did you hang out with the music crowd or the art crowd when you were a teenager and above? You know, when you were—

MS. KLEMENT: A teenager?

MR. SILVERMAN: —young adult, when you started to form who you were, did you hang out more—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm not a hanger-outer—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —and that's my problem.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're probably more private kind of person.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you aren't—that's when I asked if you hung out at the Cedar Bar—

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, I knew Dore Ashton, and we were friends.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And Stamos.

Lenny Silverman: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. KLEMENT: But it wasn't a "hanging out."

Lenny Silverman: No, it's—

MS. KLEMENT: I remember once I was at an opening at a gallery that I was with, Roko on Madison Avenue. And after the opening, I was coming out. And Angelo Ippolito—I don't know if that name means anything.

MR. SILVERMAN: No.

MS. KLEMENT: He was a very good abstract painter.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I don't know that name.

MS. KLEMENT: He came out at the same time and, "Which way are you going?" he said. And I pointed this way, which was uptown. And he said, "Oh."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] He was a downtown kind of guy?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: It was very important, where you lived.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, definitely. It's always been the case in New York.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a different artistic and musical—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and every kind of sensibility that's—

MS. KLEMENT: So, I was penalized for living on the upper west side.

MR. SILVERMAN: Although far uptown, like Harlem, is a very sensibility than—the uptown is usually—is the more conservative and traditionalist.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I eventually moved to the 90s—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so that's what you're saying.

MS. KLEMENT: —and the 70s. Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, you moved to the real uptown—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in terms of the—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —yes. So, yes, you were categorized as being—you weren't outré enough; you weren't hip enough—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in today's parlance.

MS. KLEMENT: Exactly right; exactly right.

MR. SILVERMAN: But do you enjoy your position as—there's advantages and disadvantages—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I didn't enjoy it at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: —of being an outsider. Well, because there's something about being a—this is a very Russian thing in terms of sensibility—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —being on the outside, or even Kafka, in German—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —being on the outside, it's both a disadvantage because you don't feel like you fit in. But it can also be an advantage in that—

MS. KLEMENT: Absolutely; you're totally right. And I've always likened myself to Thomas Mann's Tonio Kröger.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. KLEMENT: And that's—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, I mean—

MS. KLEMENT: —who I identify with.

MR. SILVERMAN: —yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Being on the outside looking in where they're dancing and blond and all that.

MR. SILVERMAN: The right people, the right sort.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: The—[laughs]—whatever that is—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —and the changing mores. And so on the other hand, that's true also of your art. I think we're going to come to that, too. Your art doesn't quite fit in with New York. I was going to ask.

MS. KLEMENT: Tell me about it.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: It doesn't fit in anywhere.

MR. SILVERMAN: It doesn't. In Chicago, I had this conversation with Bill Conger, too, because this being an outlier's kind of curious because—well, in Chicago—when you came here, probably, there's Monster Roster, that's different.

MS. KLEMENT: No, it was after that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You came after so—

MS. KLEMENT: I came with the Hairy Who.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, and then we're talking images, which is not your work at all. As a matter of fact, nothing could be further from that; although, I guess, one of the questions is, is like, you know, Chicago has a lot of things that are underneath the surface. That's not all there was in Chicago, even at that point in time. There were abstract people like Miyoko Ito or Thomas Kapsalis; there are other—lots of people—Evelyn Statsinger, Bill Conger. There's abstraction in Chicago; there are a lot of things. Did you—what brought you to Chicago, I guess, is the first question?

MS. KLEMENT: Ralph Shapey.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, he got a job at UofC [University of Chicago], and you came along.

MS. KLEMENT: I often wondered what would've happened to my career had I remained in New York.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you didn't have shows or any success in New York in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: I did; the minute I got out of school, the Museum of Modern Art bought my stuff.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, how did that come about because that's pretty amazing? You don't know? [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I do know. I was doing—I saw a show of Munch in Pittsburgh, and I was smitten. And I started to do wood cuts.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course.

MS. KLEMENT: And I showed them to Stamos, and Stamos, without saying a word to me, walked over to the phone, made a call, and said, "Bill, I want you to see this artist's work." And Bill was William Lieberman, not the same William Lieberman—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I was going to say; yes, all right.

MS. KLEMENT: —who was then the head of prints and drawings.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think I know that name from, yes, from—

MS. KLEMENT: Eventually, he became the director of the Met.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. I've heard that name, too, and—

MS. KLEMENT: He took one look and bought two prints.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's pretty amazing. How old were you at that point?

MS. KLEMENT: Twenty-two or three.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow [Laughs.]. So—

MS. KLEMENT: And I thought, "Hey"—

MR. SILVERMAN: "This is easy" [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: "This is easy; no big deal."

MR. SILVERMAN: Did you get spoiled by that? Did you—

MS. KLEMENT: I did.

MR. SILVERMAN: You expected it to be—

MS. KLEMENT: I did.

MR. SILVERMAN: And as you know, being, A, a woman, a woman of a certain age, all those issues are very complicated to get any kind of—

MS. KLEMENT: I know, but I wasn't a certain age then.

MR. SILVERMAN: But at that point, there weren't that many women—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Look at, you know, de Kooning; I mean, look at the—

MS. KLEMENT: Please; no women.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, the women in terms of their—even if their husbands made art, chances are that the husband got all the attention—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.



MR. SILVERMAN: —regardless of who was the talent.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you weren't aware of any of that stuff? To you, it was just like—

MS. KLEMENT: I thought, "Hey"—

MR. SILVERMAN: —"Hey this is fun. Let's just do more."

MS. KLEMENT: —"let's go."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And then 1960 came, and everything ended.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, it became—

MS. KLEMENT: My dealer died, and Pop art came.

MR. SILVERMAN: Pop art.

MS. KLEMENT: And that was goodbye.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. And then Conceptual and a whole bunch of other things followed.

MS. KLEMENT: And that's the reason I permitted myself to leave New York.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, the timing was actually pretty good for you. It was the art world, the fashion of the art world was changing rapidly, and your work, even if—I was about to say it didn't quite fit into the standard Abstract Expressionist stuff, which is all the better because there was plenty of that. But it didn't quite fit in. But as you know, with someone like Leon Golub, that if don't fit, you get a lot of flak in New York. You have to sort of—

MS. KLEMENT: Tell me.

MR. SILVERMAN: You have to be part of the trend or forget it.

MS. KLEMENT: That's true here, too.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, it's true everywhere. I think it's as much fashion as anything else.

MS. KLEMENT: Absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—but your work didn't fit in in New York, exactly. But then it really didn't fit in. When we go to Pop—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and to some other things—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in Conceptual art, you're talking a whole different world.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, the timing was right, and you came to Chicago. And—

MS. KLEMENT: And here I was on somebody else's turf.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And nobody looked at my work for seven years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow. Now, did you know to take it out to dealers that are—I mean, there's some people—artists that don't do that.

MS. KLEMENT: I tried very, very timidly.

MR. SILVERMAN: You took it out and did the rounds?

MS. KLEMENT: And then, what saved me was an organization called PAC. Did you know that? P-A-C.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I don't think I even—

MS. KLEMENT: Participating Artists of Chicago; it was a group, loosely bound, of about 100 artists that would get together once a year or whatever and have an exhibition in a corridor of a college.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it was kind of like temporary spaces that change—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but just—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, but there are places like that now. So it's—

MS. KLEMENT: Storefronts and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's happening now again; it's sort of like recycling.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: The idea of not having a permanent home and just—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that's what—

MS. KLEMENT: And there I went. And they needed a volunteer to be a treasurer, and I knew nothing about money—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —because Shapey wouldn't let me do it. And I volunteered. And there, I met the secretary and the president of the group, Larry Salomon and Martin Hurtig.

MR. SILVERMAN: The names sound vaguely familiar.

MS. KLEMENT: And we kvetched and complained that we liked large abstraction, what they called international work—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —rather than the small, inner whatever. And we decided to form a group. We took another member, Ted Argeropolos; he was very young—

MR. SILVERMAN: I've heard of him, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —very talented, and you won't believe the fifth member: Larry Booth—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —the architect.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes, that's interesting. So, this is what gave your life cohesion at this point. Otherwise, this was your rescue line.

MS. KLEMENT: It was thrilling, thrilling because I didn't have the nerve to ask for myself.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: But I was very gutsy about asking, "There's this group; would you allow us to exhibit in your lobby?"

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And we did site-specific work; huge.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And the first we show we had in 1970, we hung our stuff in the lobby of SSA at the University of Chicago, on Ellis and 60th. And my painting is still there, 10x20 feet.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I'll have to check that out. That's pretty funny.

MS. KLEMENT: And I realized that I couldn't get the damn thing through the door.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And so I knew I had to break it up.

MR. SILVERMAN: It was already stretched.

MS. KLEMENT: This was before I actually did it. I knew I would have to break it up.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I hated—I still hate—when there's a big painting, and you see a seam because the artist needed to put another panel there, which makes me—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, there's a functional sort of reality that—

MS. KLEMENT: —horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but you do diptychs and triptychs all the time in the last—

MS. KLEMENT: So I decided to use the break philosophically because life is not a nice, fictitious picture.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's made out of jerks and parts and things that don't go together.

MR. SILVERMAN: Disjunction, sort of like—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —jump shifts that can—

MS. KLEMENT: Fragments—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —disjunctions and from there on, my mature work was born.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's what I just said, the—yes, you get to diptychs. So that's actually how you came to diptychs and triptychs.

MS. KLEMENT: That's how it came.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—

MS. KLEMENT: And at first, I would bolt them together. That's how I worked. That's the style of the painting at SSA.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay.

MS. KLEMENT: And I would bolt them together, and that was a drag because the wood would torque. And then I thought, "Why do I have to bolt them? Why can't they just hang next to each other?"

MR. SILVERMAN: That's real interesting solution because if you have the bolting, it throws you back to the reality of what it is that you're making, rather than what you're aiming to express and all the imperfections of that. And I think you want to overcome that, so why not just accommodate it with separation?

MS. KLEMENT: So then, at first, I would glue the secondary image onto the primary canvass. And that was very difficult because it would buckle and the gesso and—nightmare. And I thought, "Why do I have to do this? Why

not just stick another canvass next to it and make a diptych or triptych?"

MR. SILVERMAN: Interesting, so—

MS. KLEMENT: And that's what I did.

MR. SILVERMAN: —so sometimes necessity makes for style [Laughs.], right?

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: So some of your—I was starting to ask about your artistic vision; some of the things that created it were out of necessity almost.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I think one does things out of trite reasons, not—you know, people look for glorious visions and visionary idea. No, it comes out of some stupid need.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: You can't get in the door—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —or that's too heavy or whatever.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, no, that's quite interesting. Some of the things I noticed—I guess we're starting to talk about your work, which is a fine transition. But some of the things I noticed that are your—what I maybe consider your signature style, some of the things that you do with art—we mentioned the bark, but there's also vessels and the void, the space, the void around the—I want to start with the void.

MS. KLEMENT: The void is the most—

MR. SILVERMAN: The void is a big thing. The fact that you have a sense of space around objects that you don't so much care—the background—figure/ground relationship that's there is this void.

MS. KLEMENT: Void.

MR. SILVERMAN: And then there's object. Tell me a little bit about how that came about because that's clearly an important thing.

MS. KLEMENT: It happened, again, very gradually. The whole canvas was covered [with paint -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, completely.

MS. KLEMENT: And then I thought, "I'd like make a drawing." And then I always have this anxiety, "What should I draw? I don't know what to draw."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I thought about it, and that was the beginning of the women's movement. And I thought I'd like to draw a female form. And what is a female form? And so I decided that a vessel was probably the first art form ever done out of necessity—

MR. SILVERMAN: Again, function.

MS. KLEMENT: —by women kneeling on the edge of a river in the mud, and they're fashioning these vessels. And so I wanted to draw a vessel, and I drew a vessel. And I thought, "Why do I like this better than that [painting]?" And I decided because this thing on a white paper is an object, and that other thing is a field because it covers the whole canvas. And an object is more capable than a field of being a metaphor.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was talking about the time—this is a great lead, you know; we're going to talk about symbols and metaphors because, obviously, the vessel was a good example of that.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know you're very involved with literature, and you even translate. So one of the things that interests me is that your work is so much about symbols and metaphors. That's one of the reasons why the vessels seem to work very well. You could also get very Freudian with vessels, too, if you wished [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And there's all kinds of ways you could go with that, so you found that—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and you could do that with the tree trunks; that's the male, and the vessel's the female.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I would also say with the tree trunk—which I was going to ask you about—that's a great metaphor for the skin and for, also, the surface about how much—you mentioned the gooeyness, that tactility of surface. It's also about life and death, about what's living and what's not.

MS. KLEMENT: Definitely.

MR. SILVERMAN: These are all things that you love engaging with—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —when you involve so much with reality, as opposed to abstraction, which we'll still have that discussion or—I don't know—dialogue about that because there is an abstract aspect of your work. You're not denying that.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know how you mean the word "abstract."

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I mean, by abstract, I mean—well, for me, it's really important for carriers of meaning, as you're talking about—pure abstraction, I don't know if such a thing exists. Pure abstraction would be very hard to latch on to for emotional reasons or for—just, it's hard to get a hook into. It can be beautiful, but you almost need—

MS. KLEMENT: That was the closest I got to abstraction.

MR. SILVERMAN: Your field kind of—

MS. KLEMENT: There's no image there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Although, again, it's sort of hard to not be—have some associations to it.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, but it always was something to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you always started from the idea of representation or of carriers of meaning and symbols and metaphors. But I guess, there's that balancing act—I think Bill Conger gets into that, too—between something that's formal and stylistically, sort of, closer to abstraction in terms of breaking down into forms, like the field kinds of things, and maybe some of the splotchier or sort of just—they may have organic relationships to the world. But they're as much about paint application and about formal kinds of things.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a balancing act between that and between—for you, the most important thing, though—you're re-asserting—is carriers of meaning, symbol, so forth. So the barks—let's get back to the bark, which seems to recur even fairly recently, I think.

MS. KLEMENT: I always have bark.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] What—

MS. KLEMENT: Got to have bark.

MR. SILVERMAN: You'll have—it—well, for me, winter trees are the best. Some people love the flowering part, but the structure is just so beautiful—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the winter. You seem to be attracted to that surface. Is that because of the illusion to paint and to skin or—

MS. KLEMENT: No, bark is because we lived near a forest.

MR. SILVERMAN: So this is childhood roots. And do these things—when you make work that, sort of, has this sense of memory, is this a recapturing? Is this like Proustian? Is this like your petite madeleines or something?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Is this like capturing your sort of—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the idyllic time before the Kristallnacht?

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I've written a book. It's not quite finished. It needs editing, but it's a memoir.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, great.

MS. KLEMENT: And it's my effort to grasp the fleeting bits of memory—

MR. SILVERMAN: And—

MS. KLEMENT: —of my childhood, of that place.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you think you're trying to do that in some of your work as well?

MS. KLEMENT: I think so.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's part of it.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't think about it much but—

MR. SILVERMAN: But that's what you think. If someone was to—

MS. KLEMENT: I think so.

MR. SILVERMAN: If you were an outsider—

MS. KLEMENT: I think that's what the trees are and the—see, I also—whenever I have an object, a thing—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —in the void, I also feel I need the distance.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so that void is also—it's not just about an existential void; it's also a sense of—

MS. KLEMENT: It's the unattainable.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's just some sort of abstraction or abstract to sort of just plop out there in the midst of—it's somehow distancing of from all the realities that around it—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —associations; interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: No, I have to have something near and something far.

MR. SILVERMAN: Far, so you have a relationship.

MS. KLEMENT: So they have a spatial reality.

MR. SILVERMAN: You want to create its physicality, its realness.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, a here and a there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, but you want to contrast that with this other, sort of—I don't know—the other lease [ph] space, [Laughs.] this otherness.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I have this one chapter where I'm painting a forest, and I have a blank canvas, and then I have to place the first tree. And so I have to find the there—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —for the tree.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And that's pretty hard.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's like—did you ever read Carlos Castaneda?

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure. A long time ago, it was very fashionable.

MS. KLEMENT: It's sort of like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes, very important. So, I guess that gets—there's a couple of directions I can go from that.

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: I have all these lists of questions, but I think some of what's happening [Laughs.] is just, we're following the path that we're leading.

MS. KLEMENT: Let yourself go [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: "Let yourself go." Well, I think there's a structure; it's, again, like anything—it's just what we're talking about, the balance between structure and just sort of—and—[laughs]—where things go, the flow.

MS. KLEMENT: See, here's the thing that's so hard for the way I paint. I'm not allowed to paint—I have rules—I'm not allowed to paint a background.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: If there's a figure, the figure isn't in a chair in a room in a house.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: The figure is a sculpture, and the tree is a sculptural object. And now, I have to try to create the here and the there through other means, not through descriptive means or illustrative means.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a certain sense of mystery, too, when there isn't the sort of—it's taken out of context.

MS. KLEMENT: Which ain't easy.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's very distinctive of your style. I don't think—are there any other people that you look to in terms of that do that? I can't think of too many.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know anybody.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know anyone either. I'm trying to think of that particular—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm all alone.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's—[laughs]—all the better because—

[They laugh.]

— supposedly, having a distinctive style is an advantage. But I guess, maybe, I'm going to come back to the fact, when you were in Chicago—well—[laughs]—I'm jumping around—but did you feel—other than this group that you joined, the PAC, you must have felt fairly—

MS. KLEMENT: And by the way, Franz Schulze wrote the first entire—filled the entire *Daily News* with a review of our show, never talking about the work, but talking about our manifesto.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, well, I'm about to interview Franz Schulze, so that will be interesting to find out some more about it from his perspective, too.

MS. KLEMENT: And he and I started a correspondence; he was just fascinated and hated us.

MR. SILVERMAN: Really?

MS. KLEMENT: Did you see his work?

MR. SILVERMAN: You mean, his own work or—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: He had a show at Lake Forest recently. I didn't go out to that; I was actually—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, he had a show at Printworks.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, at Printworks, I missed that. You know, I didn't know he made art. I always thought of him as a writer.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, he doesn't really. He draws.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I saw the announcement card, and I didn't see the show. I was kind of curious about that.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I missed it. Well, I guess what I was going to ask you is, even though you had some good support of this group, given that the prevailing fad or fashion—

MS. KLEMENT: The work was never looked at. It was only that we created a dialogue, an argument, a war—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —of image versus abstraction. And it was fierce—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and vicious.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there were turf wars in Chicago.

MS. KLEMENT: And Dennis was engaged in that and so was Franz.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, Dennis was, obviously, the huge promoter, and Don. Those were the people that sort of promoted imagists, although I saw them. I mean, the way I met Dennis Adrian was in Madison. He'd done *Some Other Traditions*, which included some abstraction. It didn't have you, but it did have Evelyn. It had some people that were outside his usual game, shall we say. So he was at least open to any—there are other people that he, you know, championed, shall we say, that were outside of the canon. But you were outside—that's where I was talking about the outlier thing. I'm coming back to that. You were outside that sort of—

MS. KLEMENT: That was horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, because that's a tough place to be.

MS. KLEMENT: That was horrible. And the collectors—and I have to tell you this. It's going to be not nice thing to say. And maybe I'm—

MR. SILVERMAN: It's probably the truth, so I guess it's— [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: No, I may be paranoid—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: —which is very likely. But I feel—first of all, I think the collectors are all Jewish. And I feel they discriminated against me because they were anxious to blend in with the non-Jews, and I pulled them back.

MR. SILVERMAN: I got you. No, that's a big theme in Chicago because, as you well know, The Art Institute, which was—

MS. KLEMENT: I know.

MR. SILVERMAN: —very much very goyishe, very much a different tradition. The MCA was—supposedly was the Jewish institution.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: At least it started that way.



MS. KLEMENT: It started.

MR. SILVERMAN: This was before me. But there's a whole—I'll have to talk to Rhona about that. She obviously will have some thoughts about that, too, which I'm interviewing her next week, Rhona Hoffman. So there was a huge division, and the people that—and this is the Midwest—I know this from my wife—and this is a very big thing. In the Midwest, Jewish people stand out, especially east coasters. We're aggressive; we're emotional; we're everything that [Laughs.]—

MS. KLEMENT: And we're—

MR. SILVERMAN: —is—we're not repressed.

MS. KLEMENT: We kvetch.

MR. SILVERMAN: We kvetch [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: We use Yiddish words—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —God forbid.

MR. SILVERMAN: We don't fit in, and I guess there was—I don't think that's paranoia at all. I think that's very much part of adapting to the Midwest. I mean, I know what you're talking about from my first visit. You know, first, you know, coming to the Midwest.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I grew up in a city where you took for granted Jewishness.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Even people who were Italian said Yiddish words.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure.

MS. KLEMENT: So nobody paid attention; it was taken for granted. Then I come here, and it's flat as a pancake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, the Midwest is very different. It's welcoming in some ways and very friendly and easygoing. But in the point in time you were talking about, there was a lot more, not just turf wars, but anti-Semitism and things like that. There were—and it was much harder to gain acceptance, even into schools, all those things that we know, which are a little hard to explain to people because, at this point, it's so much acceptable.

MS. KLEMENT: And if you say it, it's not politically correct.

MR. SILVERMAN: No.

MS. KLEMENT: It's okay to say that about black—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —or about Hispanic. But you can't pull the Jews into that same place.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, it's a very different thing. It's interesting. Well, I think, in terms of Chicago turf wars, as you know, in the art world, there's only so much success that's allowed, and there are prevailing trends. And it goes on to this day. You know, there's the latest, greatest fads, whatever they may be. So when you're trying to fit in and trying to—I mean, if you want to—I suppose the MCA was—sort of, it had more of a Jewish board, and it was probably more accepting—

MS. KLEMENT: The MCA was vicious to us.[The Five -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: But they actually, also, have gone Eurocentric, and they're trying to get an international reputation in the last 10 or 20 years—

MS. KLEMENT: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: —and they've not shown that many local artists. There are so many local people that have not shown that deserve—people that have shown around the world—look at Michiko Itatani—people like that who don't get those shows. Or you or people that don't get the shows that they should in town. And some of that has

to do with the—I mean, they’ve got in a new curator at the Art Institute. They’ve got more contemporary—they’ve bolstered it. But it’s still very—it’s hard to get your due in Chicago, even apart from that.

MS. KLEMENT: Because the same people are always there; there’s still Judith Kirshner and still [Suzanne] Ghez.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, Suzanne Ghez, and actually, one of them just got an award the Venice Biennale. Those are the gatekeepers, and they—Bill [Conger] and I have that conversation.

MS. KLEMENT: That’s it. That’s it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that’s always the case, and I think one of the problems—

MS. KLEMENT: And they don’t go away, and that’s why I was shocked to see Dennis Adrian’s name again. I thought [he’d moved to Oregon -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And here he is.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, he served a purpose, and I think he helped put Chicago on the map. The negative part of that is that it got stereotyped. And as I always say, there are so many people that are outside that tradition, just like I was saying with Dennis’ show. You know, there were female sculptors: Frances Whitehead, Barbara Cooper. There’s Conceptual art in town; there’s, you know, Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle; there’s people that do other things. But all people talk about is this very—and there’s nothing wrong with Imagism; I love it. And I’m good friends with some of those artists, and I like them. But that’s not all there is, and it became a sort of a one-pony show.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: And I think for an artist as you are, it must be very weird to be looking at all this stuff—

MS. KLEMENT: Very weird; what was very touching to me is that Ed Paschke, who was one of the first distinguished artist members of the Union League Club—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —nominated me; nominated me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And we—you know, [we were in opposite camps -VK], and so it was very touching.

MR. SILVERMAN: But it was welcoming. Well, I found it—I’ve had interesting conversations with some of the feminist artists, people that—from Artemisia days and things like that, that even the women were very competitive and not so gracious. There are people that are, you know—there are exceptions.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I got a lot of wonderful support at Artemisia.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you—

MS. KLEMENT: That was the first sense of belonging when we formed that gallery.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you were there at the beginning of that?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, and that’s important, too. And I’m thinking, yes, Judith Raphael and some other people that I know that are—they were saying that, when we compared notes, it’s just—there was a hope in the ‘60s and ‘70s because that’s a time of strong feminism—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —is that women would help support each other, despite the fact that the museums weren’t showing women. They were feeling. But locally, in terms of the turf wars, women can be just—this is a, you know, characterization, a stereotype; again, I’m not being politically correct—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, they’re human.

MR. SILVERMAN: They’re human; they can be just as—and, of course, there’s so much less to be gotten.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's so many less goodies that they can be just as competitive—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and backstabbing and problematic. So you got support. I didn't even realize that you were one of the founders of Artemisia.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's very important. Toby was a member for a while, and I know other people, too, that were very influenced by that.

MS. KLEMENT: It was a wonderful experience for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know Fern pretty well, too. She was there at the beginning.

MS. KLEMENT: And from there, I went to Marianne Deson.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh that's interesting, too, because Marianne has sort of dropped off, and I was going to—

MS. KLEMENT: And she had a very important gallery, I think. [... -VK]

MS. KLEMENT: She showed work that she knew she could never sell.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's important.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, installations from Italy and [the west coast -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that's important to show that there were other things in town. I was going to have that conversation with Rhona, too, because they were sort of outliers. And they weren't doing the usual stuff. They—both of them were showing tough work, Conceptual work, political work, things that were not the mainstream in Chicago, and they somehow managed to survive and still, for Rhona, I—

MS. KLEMENT: Now Marianne was horrible to women artists.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting—

MS. KLEMENT: Of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: —just personally, in terms of the way she dealt with them. But she did good things in terms of your career.

MS. KLEMENT: Not really. I got them to get a new—out of the clear blue, Dore Ashton in New York, without telling me, showed a sheet of slides to a new gallery in New York. The woman liked it, and she flew and came here—

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: —and stood in front of that wall and said, "I want you." I mean, that's a fantasy; every artist wants that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you bet [Laughs.]. And what happened?

MS. KLEMENT: Marianne, I thought she would be happy for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh this turf—speaking of turf wars.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh man.

MR. SILVERMAN: She didn't want to split the profits.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, what profit? Was ridiculous, but anyway, I did have that NY gallery for a while.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so that was one of my questions, too. You're leading into my question, which is your relationship, not just with the art scene, but also to critics. You mentioned Franz and Dennis, but how your work was received in the world is kind of an important thing. So, you've had pretty good luck with dealers, it sounds

like.

MS. KLEMENT: With who?

MR. SILVERMAN: The dealers in the sense that they've, kind of, come to you, or your opportunities have come to you, even though you were part of the group, and that made it a little easier, but—

MS. KLEMENT: But that was only after a long while.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, and actually—

MS. KLEMENT: Remember, seven years of silence.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there are—

MS. KLEMENT: Sounds biblical.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] You were sentenced to seven years of silence, or at least invisibility, which is the larger issue for woman is the invisibility issue.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So going back to Artemisia, so that was an important avenue for you to have, not just the sense of camaraderie, but feeling like they were colleagues and people that you could—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —identify with.

MS. KLEMENT: It was wonderful. Wonderful.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's a big thing in Chicago. That's funny because one of my questions—

MS. KLEMENT: And it was an important thing to, "Let fresh air in, people. Open the window."

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually, I was director of N.A.M.E. Gallery, and once a year, we did a show—

MS. KLEMENT: And N.A.M.E. was the same. I'd say N.A.M.E., ARC, and Artemisia changed—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was going to say. It was an outlet.

MS. KLEMENT: —changed the city.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because there weren't outlets for—once a year, we did the shows that the MCA or the Art Institution should have done. You know, we had a Tom Kapsalis with—I can't even remember all the ones, but they were one-person shows that were—they didn't have quite the validation that you would get from a big museum, but they had catalogues. They were meant to be what should have happened from the institutions.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: Same thing with Artemisia. It was an outlet for all the things—the stuff that was seething over with stuff. So this is the '60s and '70s.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: You were teaching—you got a job at the UofC eventually, correct?

MS. KLEMENT: And I got it in a bizarre way.

MR. SILVERMAN: What's that?

MS. KLEMENT: I got it because I knew Harold Rosenberg. And he came once a quarter, a quarter a year to teach at the university.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And he would come over for dinner and schmooze, and one day we were talking, and he says to me, "I threw your hat in the ring." And I felt, what?

[They laugh.]

And apparently, he was at a meeting of the art department at the UofC, and they were describing how Max Kahn—yes, Max Kahn—was retiring after many years as a teacher, and that program was very lackadaisic [sic]. It wasn't professional.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, a couple of teachers. You could sign up for a course.

MR. SILVERMAN: Who was teaching? Who else was teaching there? I don't even know.

MS. KLEMENT: Misch Kohn, wonderful printmaker. Virginio Ferrari—

MR. SILVERMAN: Sure, I know him.

MS. KLEMENT: —and Ruth Duckworth.

MR. SILVERMAN: And of course, I know her.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, they needed someone to take Max Kahn's place. So I called Harold Haydon, and I went down there. Mind you, I don't have a single degree.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I was going to say you don't have any teaching experience.

MS. KLEMENT: I have nothing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Didn't, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I come there with nothing.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're just an up-practicing artist.

MS. KLEMENT: And he says, "Well, let's try it for a year and see how it goes." That would never occur now, but anyway.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I well know that.

MS. KLEMENT: So, I did it for a year. He liked what I did. I got another year. He liked what I did. I got another year, then I was on tenure track.

MR. SILVERMAN: Tenure track. Right.

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I got demoted. You know, it all depended on who was the head of art history.

MR. SILVERMAN: They held the power strings.

MS. KLEMENT: And there was a really not nice guy there [... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know the name.

MS. KLEMENT: Dreadful.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's on the record now [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: And I got demoted, and that demotion saved my life.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because you could go back to making more art, or—

MS. KLEMENT: No, because I didn't have to confront "up or out."

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, when you apply for tenure, if you don't get it, you're out of there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Right, and then there's a certain disgrace, or certain—yes. There was—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, well, you're out of the job.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: [... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And so, I teach principles, and I teach going back to historic things. So I taught Cubism and this—anyway.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I'm interested in that.

MS. KLEMENT: And I'm able to throw in, when I give a talk, names of writers, composers, and [philosophers -VK], and salt and pepper the [talk -VK]with citations.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're interested in idea—the world of ideas and how you come to the—you're not—it's—

MS. KLEMENT: And so, the other two [didn't move up -VK], and I got tenure.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's wild. So interesting and while you were there, you were—is that something—this is new to you, teaching, because this is not something—you didn't have any idea that you were going to become a teacher. Is this a role that you enjoyed? Did you find some pleasure—

MS. KLEMENT: I was very good at it, I think, because I know how to analyze, but, you know, it takes a lot.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was thinking. Maybe when you say it saved your life, is that it's hard to do any full-time job. I know many artists, not just my wife, but many people that have trouble turning it on and off, and then going and making art. It saps your—

MS. KLEMENT: It does.

MR. SILVERMAN: —vital energy and your ability to really—

MS. KLEMENT: But it does another thing, and that is it energizes and teaches. So on the one hand, there's a loss. On the other hand, there's a tremendous gain, and I got some education while I was at it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Did you learn from—are there students that really—

MS. KLEMENT: I learned from—if they were reading a book, I read the book.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh right, so—but were there students, in terms of their artistic, sort of, visions and practices, you know, whatever the—

MS. KLEMENT: I learned from my colleagues.

MR. SILVERMAN: Colleagues, too.

MS. KLEMENT: I had very intelligent colleagues. Bob Peters, do you know him?

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes, very well. I like Bob a lot.

MS. KLEMENT: Tom Mapp—

MR. SILVERMAN: Him I don't know, but—

MS. KLEMENT: —he was the head of the [program -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So—and we'd have these critiques, and we'd sparr, and I'd have to learn—being a woman, this is very hard—how to sit with four men and get room to talk.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I learned how to do it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's very important.

MS. KLEMENT: And I got very good at it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's critical because the world is ruled by males who are very good at taking up space and—look at our politics. I mean, it's the same issue. You don't see much in the way of women's voices, and when you do, they're usually—it's mediated by men. Anyway, so it's important for you, then, to grow as an artist, to have some things to bounce off against.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you learned a lot from that.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, they brought in whatever the new ism was, and I could push myself for or against, usually against.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] We're about to talk about that, too, in terms of changes in the art world.

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I wondered often, when I saw how the students had all these guests come into their studios, whether I missed that because I didn't go to graduate school.

MR. SILVERMAN: Having the feedback, you mean? Having—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —critiques and things like that?

MS. KLEMENT: And I just decided, no. I took what I needed for what I wanted to do.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you got feedback. You were parts of groups, and people saw your work. It wasn't like you weren't getting feedback—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but there weren't formal critiques.

MS. KLEMENT: And they weren't forced on me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Well, those supposedly can be very deadly.

MS. KLEMENT: Deadly, and Dennis—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, speaking of relationships to women and to—

MS. KLEMENT: He made—I invited him to do one of those [critiques -VK], and he made women cry.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, he has a very bad reputation.

MS. KLEMENT: He was mean and filthy-mouthed. My God.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, certainly, his reputation proceeds.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, I've heard so many stories.

MS. KLEMENT: Filth.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually, you know, the thing is that, despite the fact that he did so much good, he probably alienated, particularly women—particularly alienated so many people, it's kind of a—it's quite a path that he cut through. In terms of Chicago history, there is some real major battles in terms of, not just turf wars, but, you know, one of the problems in Chicago is there isn't that much in the way of—well, there was a *New Art Examiner*, but there isn't that much criticism.

MS. KLEMENT: There isn't any now. It's terrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're talking about feedback. There isn't any now. I mentioned *Dialogue*, which Cindy was the editor of. That was actually based in Ohio. That's where I met her, in Akron, but it did have—

MS. KLEMENT: John Brunetti was involved with her.

MR. SILVERMAN: John Brunetti, yes, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Did you ever hear from—any word from John?

MR. SILVERMAN: After he closed the gallery?

MS. KLEMENT: He vanished from the face of the earth.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't even know what he's doing anymore. I think—

MS. KLEMENT: Nobody has ever heard one peep from him.

MR. SILVERMAN: He's a good writer, too. Not just a—he did a lot of things. The problem is that—yes, there really—there—

MS. KLEMENT: He didn't have the personality to be an aggressive dealer. He was too shy.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think you're right. And actually, he showed some good people. People I know and like—

MS. KLEMENT: That was a wonderful experience.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes and the problem is there aren't—I guess that—well, let's go right in, actually, into that, the Chicago—changing Chicago art world. When I first came here, all the galleries were condensed into that one Superior area, Superior-Huron area, and I mean, I worked at N.A.M.E. That's where I met Toby in getting my—I didn't have a hot plate, so I needed my—so I could afford the Ramen lunches—

[They laugh.]

— with what they were paying me. I'd go over there for their hot plate in Artemisia. That's where I met Toby, so that was a whole scene that was very condensed. It was great because you could take your glass of wine and go to all of the galleries in one evening. Now, everything's spread around. How else would you carry—I mean, there's West Loop; there's this—you know, places. There's galleries in the south; there, you know—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, there's Corbett and Dempsey.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, they're all—and that's sort of an isolated, little area. How has the art scene changed from that period of time—I came in the early '80s, but you were here earlier. How—what changes have you seen in the, sort of, the—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, it started out on Ontario, near the original MCA.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's where Rhona's gallery, Hoffman/Young was, right?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I think I came in once—

MS. KLEMENT: And Phyllis Kind was there—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and then ARC and Artemisia opened there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And then they moved.

MR. SILVERMAN: So everything move to sort of Superior.

MS. KLEMENT: Everything moved.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that was before me. That's probably '70s or something—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And even N.A.M.E was somewhere over—it was on Hubbard or something like—

MS. KLEMENT: It was on Hubbard. I had a studio briefly on Hubbard.

MR. SILVERMAN: So the physical thing has changed, but how have things changed in terms of the, sort of, presentation, or the mix of art that's showing and all that stuff. How would you characterize—



MS. KLEMENT: Don't ask me.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I'm out of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're out of that scene. Things have—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm totally out it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And I, actually, find it more difficult to go to galleries now because they're so spread out. I mean, it's—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: What I'm saying I liked was that you could see the latest in one evening. Now, even if you— even if you—

MS. KLEMENT: And that was my social life. And that's gone. Friday night openings.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes, well, now, to even do a Friday night opening, you have to go to two or three areas, even to start out with. You got to do West Loop, Superior, which you'll still have some galleries left, and some of those are closing. I guess, that's sort of dying embers of the original. You mentioned PrintWorks. I think that's hanging on by a thread. So that sort of—that social aspect of the art scene is changed for you as well. Do you go to openings still? Are you—

MS. KLEMENT: Almost never.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: If I know the person, I go.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually—

Male Speaker: You try to go [inaudible]—

MS. KLEMENT: I try to go—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, William Lieberman.

MS. KLEMENT: I go to William's to be supportive—

MR. SILVERMAN: He's also your dealer.

MS. KLEMENT: —of William.

MR. SILVERMAN: And he's picked up a number of—when we had a lot of galleries close, there's, you know, John Corbett—you mentioned Corbett and Dempsey—some people—and when Fassbender closed, we lost a lot of—that was also showing a lot of important artists. William's picked up a number of artists that were really important. He's got a hefty lineup of people, including Bill Conger, and I think he just got some of—he just got Fraser, John Fraser—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —too. He's gotten some people from when Boyd closed.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: So yes, there aren't—

MS. KLEMENT: And Katznelson.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, let's see. I was going to get back into—

MS. KLEMENT: William has been wonderful to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: He seemed like—when he called, I had the feeling he was very—he was very paternal. He was very sweet.

MS. KLEMENT: Very sweet.

MR. SILVERMAN: Very nice to see.

MS. KLEMENT: He watches out for me.

MR. SILVERMAN: He was watching out for you to make sure that everything was—he's your protector. Well, that's important because a lot of people, their relationship with dealers, shall we say, is fraught—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —partly because artists are not always the best managers of business and money concerns. Dealers are not always the most forthcoming in terms of those arrangements. It can be messy.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I won't get into details, but you're feeling very good about that arrangement, and that's working out. I was going to ask you who some of you—or ask—I can't think of too many people that were similar, in terms of what they did stylistically, but you mentioned Munch, and you mentioned some sort of—I mentioned Nolde, and you mentioned German expressionists. You have any artistic heroes or models that you—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, it's—I do, but I mean, where do we start?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, let's go back to—it could be even the beginning of time. I'm not—

MS. KLEMENT: You know what? I got to go to the bathroom.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, let's do a pause. That's cool. I guess we touched on this earlier, and I guess I wanted to get back to that. I'm friends with both Gerda Meyer Bernstein and Edith Altman, who were both directly or indirectly survivors of the Holocaust, and I know that there are two different directions that they took in their art. One, she's—Edith is now—I think she's Hassidic, or at least mystical Judaism is where she's always been interested in. Spirituality and internal is the way she went. Whereas, Gerda went to the political end, and you threw out something that I kind of agreed with in passing, which is that you found that political art is preaching to the converted. I often tell political artists, why not do billboards or do things in the world rather than—

MS. KLEMENT: Write a book.

MR. SILVERMAN: —or do something—books are even—kids don't read books anymore.

MS. KLEMENT: Books are no good.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, books—it's got to be on the web or something—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but do something in the world because if you want to change the world, why talk to the liberals and the people like us?

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: But how would you say—you're talking about memory and working through your early experiences. See you're neither of those paths.

MS. KLEMENT: My—

MR. SILVERMAN: You're neither of those polarities.

MS. KLEMENT: I'm—I think my work is very personal.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you've taken a more internal route, but it's more working through. There are some signs and you've done some work—I was going to ask about this, too, in terms of just technique—you've taken photographs and gone—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, that was an aberration because I don't like photography.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: I think it's—I'm suspicious of it. I think it's easy, and when—speaking of photography, when I went

with Edith to her roots—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and there's this little town, and it was gray, and it was in East Germany, and it was creepy and spooky, and she found her house, and a neighbor remembered her—

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: —and all this time, I thought, wouldn't you go in there and lick the walls? No, she's standing there clicking.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's a certain kind of distance, too. I was talking about that when—maybe off the record—but about how traveling—by being outside the experience rather than being inside—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, maybe it's a protective thing because—

MS. KLEMENT: Whatever it is, it was shocking to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, because being in the experience, it's got to be really painful. Look at Polanski or people that fled. I mean, he worked it out through films, but they're tortured films, not to mention his life—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but maybe you want to escape from the reality.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, whatever. Anyway, I've never liked the camera. People send me pictures. I barely look at them. I never look at them again. Birthday parties, whatever. I don't like any of that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, yes, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: And on the internet, people always send me and I just delete.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, what made you do photographs—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, Peter has a house in Wisconsin. It's in the woods.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's where you just were.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. And some years earlier, there'd been a huge storm in the woods, and a lot of trees fell, and they remained lying there, and one day in the snow, we took a walk, and I saw these bodies covered with snow, and it reminded me of James Joyce, "The Dead," and it looked like a battle field with parts and bodies. And I knew that the only way to do anything with that was to take photos, and I figured, you know, I'm so cynical about photography, I figure if you take a lot of pictures, there's bound to be one good one in there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Especially if you have a good eye. It's not so much—eventually you could figure out which ones are the really good ones. Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. So I took a lot of pictures. I took it to Walgreen's.

[They laugh.]

They developed it. I chose the one I liked, the ones I liked, and I took them to Gamma, which doesn't exist [any longer -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —to be enlarged and they made them this size, and they were beautiful. Not because I'm a good photographer, but because it was there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And then I paired that with a head or some other [object -VK], and I thought of it as a lament, a dirge for the fallen, and I called it *War Monody*, and a monody is an ancient Greek lament for a single voice, and that's what I did.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that was it.

MS. KLEMENT: And I had two shows of them, one at Maya Polsky—

MR. SILVERMAN: I—well, she’s still around, isn’t she? Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And the other at PrintWorks.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you’re saying that was an aberration because—

MS. KLEMENT: An aberration and I still look at them and think, “How did I ever do that?”

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, photography can relate very much—memory’s a very strong theme that we’ve been talking about, and there’s memory as it’s in your head, and then there’s what happens when you see the reality, like what you were talking about with Edith, going back and then having a certain kind of—so-called objective distance. Thanks, Peter. Hang on a second. Let’s—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, how lovely.

MR. SILVERMAN: Let’s do a—

[Audio break.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, we were talking about memory and about photography. Seems like photography can be used as a sort of—it can call back memories. There are people like Boltanski, people that have—Christian Boltanski—have used memory very laden with a motive and qualities—I’m not trying to sell you on photography, but it can do some of the same things—

MS. KLEMENT: I’m sure. I just never cottoned on to it.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that you’re hoping to do. But it’s interesting that you use it—

MS. KLEMENT: Because I need to make something.

MR. SILVERMAN: You want the physical craft.

MS. KLEMENT: And I need the resistance of the unmade, so that I can make it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That’s right; there is something easy about the clicking, or nowadays, it’s not even clicking—

MS. KLEMENT: Click, click.

MR. SILVERMAN: —pushing a button. So the materials, I guess this gets back to where I was going anyways. I guess we’re start talking about your—how you work in the studio. How do you generate ideas? Do they come from the resistance of the materials? Do you come in with ideas, or do you improvise?

MS. KLEMENT: Never improvise.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you have ideas.

MS. KLEMENT: When you have that white—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —which is unforgiving—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —one false move and you’re screwed. Let’s say I would decide to make that on the right instead of in the middle. I can’t move it now.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, do you ever—

MS. KLEMENT: So I need to know what I’m doing ahead of time. So, I used to make these little drawings this big that was like a little floor plan. This is here; that’s there.

MR. SILVERMAN: And does it change when you actually do it into scale, or when you actually feel the resistance of the materials, too?

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I can't change that.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you have a pretty clear floor plan—

MS. KLEMENT: Once I make a mark on that white, I'm obligated to continue with it.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting because one wouldn't necessarily guess that. There's a formal exactitude—

MS. KLEMENT: There's no improvisation here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. So—

MS. KLEMENT: None.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that's when—

MS. KLEMENT: The only thing I can improvise is the color—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and the mark.

MR. SILVERMAN: And when you're making the piece, it doesn't change direction ever? In other words, you come in with a plan.

MS. KLEMENT: It can't.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's determined. It's got a course of action.

MS. KLEMENT: It's horrible. I have rules you wouldn't believe that make it so hard to work.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I'm not allowed to repeat the same motif twice in row.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: I have to wait a year.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Because I don't want to learn how to do it by rote, and I don't want to crank out a product.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, that puts me in an awkward position when I'm finished with a painting, as I am right now. I don't know what the hell to do next. I'm without.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was one of my next questions is, what about those transitions between—

MS. KLEMENT: I have nothing.

MR. SILVERMAN: —between pieces?

MS. KLEMENT: I wait.

MR. SILVERMAN: You wait for something to come to you.

MS. KLEMENT: I wait.

MR. SILVERMAN: And—

MS. KLEMENT: It's very nerve racking.

MR. SILVERMAN: When you're in this waiting period, I know [Laughs.] from other artists, that that can be a really awkward thing when you're between—

MS. KLEMENT: It's horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: Does it come—do you get ideas from dreams, memories?

MS. KLEMENT: No dreams. No, I get it from books.

MR. SILVERMAN: From books? That was another question is, I know you probably have music on in the studio. I know you did a piece to Shostakovich. Do you sometimes get inspired by particular books and themes that you—then give you, like, painting ideas?

MS. KLEMENT: I get an image—

MR. SILVERMAN: An image.

MS. KLEMENT: —in a book.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: When I was doing the translations, my project was I would translate from Russian, let's say—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and in the act of translation, I tried not to know what they looked like, photographically.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, I sort of knew, but I didn't study their likeness, and I would—as I was translating, I was getting something out of the iconography in the poem to give me a painting.

MR. SILVERMAN: And sometimes, there're these disconnects between languages—I was just reading about translation and how difficult—there was something in the New York Times about this, about machine translation versus human translation. There're disconnects, too, between what was intended in the language and then the culture of all the stuff that's contained. So sometimes, these ideas are—for you, you get—

MS. KLEMENT: It doesn't matter. I need an idea. I don't care who, where, or what.

MR. SILVERMAN: So the ideas often come from books and just some kinds of literature, particularly—

MS. KLEMENT: It could be some sleazy—

MR. SILVERMAN: —it could be anything.

MS. KLEMENT: It could be something very trite.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: One image I got, I have to tell you about. I bought a house in Michigan. I don't have it anymore. And I spent 20 summers there. It was just a summer cottage.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I went to a place where I knew no one. [... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I was alone there. I don't know—when I look back on it, I don't know how I had the courage to go there by myself.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's an alien territory.

MS. KLEMENT: Because I'm such a wimp.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: But there I was. Anyway, one day, there's a knock on the door, and a couple stands on the steps. They look like Grant Wood, [*American Gothic* -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes [Laughs].

MS. KLEMENT: And they're holding out a pan with a chocolate cake to welcome me to the neighborhood. And they then invited me to come to a banquet at their church. I said, "Thank you, but I'm busy." And then, every

time I saw them, they would invite me to their church, and finally—and I'd make all kinds of lame—but I was too chicken to tell them I'm a Jew because I realize I'm the only Jew in this whole area.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: So finally, one day, they got annoyed, and they said, "Well, what are you anyway?" And I said, I'm Jewish. Oh, shock and disbelief. They thought Jews had horns, but it turns out that it didn't bother the relationship.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's good.

MS. KLEMENT: They remained friendly, and here's the interesting thing. Whenever someone comes in here from the art world, they act like the walls are blank. They never look, never. It's very disturbing. These people asked to see my work. I was chicken. I thought, they'll be horrified. They're big, and they're [growls], and they're messy, and the paint is dripping, and finally, I couldn't get out of it, and they came, and they sat primly, and they looked, and from then on, every few weeks, they would call and say, "We want to see what you're doing in your studio."

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's wonderful

MS. KLEMENT: And they would come, and we would talk about it. Did you do this first, or that first, and why is this here? And blah, blah, blah.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's probably a more sincere and heartfelt response to your work—

MS. KLEMENT: It was direct and not channeled through *Artforum* or any of that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, and a lot of the art people that you were, you know, referring to, they come through. There's a certain politeness that you just sort of—you don't do it. My wife, Toby, has—had a cleaning lady that would come by and say, "Well, how are your projects coming?" She looked at—she had no idea except from a—no idea of even how to talk about it, but it's real.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, cleaning ladies are good, and delivery men are the only people who look at my work.

MR. SILVERMAN: Perhaps, that's the best audience. If you can—I was going to ask you about audience response —

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, so I wanted to tell you how I got an image.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes, that's right. We were at the image.

MS. KLEMENT: So, one day, this woman—I told her my way of working, that I couldn't repeat a thing, and how awful it was in between, and she felt sorry for me. So, one day, she called and said, "I'd like to help you. Paint a fish."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I thought, no, she doesn't understand that the image has to come from my subconscious.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It can't just be stuck on me.

MR. SILVERMAN: It can't be arbitrary.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, I thanked her and forgot about it, and I went back to Chicago. Six months later, I was working on this big canvas with three tree trunks, and I needed something to counter that virility—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and suddenly, her fish swam into my head.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I ran to the phone, and I called, and I said, "I'm painting your fish, thank you."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I got paranoid, and I suspected that maybe the fish was Christ.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's true. In terms of metaphors and symbols.

MS. KLEMENT: And that she was trying to convert me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: And I asked her about it, and she'd never heard of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: She didn't even know that?

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: She didn't know it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're right; that's sort of an uneducated, kind of, crowd. They may not even know that the symbol—where the symbolism comes from.

MS. KLEMENT: So, from then on, I've got [lots -VK] of fish.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So sometimes ideas—so where they come from is not—

MS. KLEMENT: Not only that, but I recently remembered that, on the coins in Danzig, the 10 penny coin has the kind of fish I draw.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, wow, and fish have been used for probably a lot of other symbolic—they could easily be, not just Christian—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, but you know, we lived on a sea, and there was fishing.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it had—what brings—what brings it to your attention or to your field of inquiry isn't so important, but it's something you have to have some connection with, even if you're not sure what that is. So, you're in this idea—I guess, we're at the in-between stage we were talking about. It's like, how do you generate ideas? So, you come in—you don't—if you're in the studio, do you just sit in the studio sometimes and just feel the void—

MS. KLEMENT: I live here.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes, obviously, if it's your home as well.

MS. KLEMENT: I just walk around.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just walk around and pace and sort of wait for something to come—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. And then I read something, and I get an image suddenly thrust upon me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, you listen to music in the studio, I assume.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And I know—

MS. KLEMENT: Constantly.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that I mentioned the Shostakovich piece, does sometimes the music come—an idea get generated from the music? Or does it—

MS. KLEMENT: No, no. Music doesn't do it.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's background for you.

MS. KLEMENT: No, it's not background, but it doesn't have imagery in it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there are—some music can generate images, and some—there's even narrative music, but that's probably the least interesting to both of us, but there is music that can easily help free up associations, shall we say, or has a certain feel to it.



MS. KLEMENT: Yes. Well, I did get imagery from the eighth quartet because, what happened was, this Korean student at Columbia asked to do a film about me. And she came over, and then she said, "I want to do a film of you making a painting from beginning to end." And I thought, "Are you out of your mind?"

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Nobody sees me making messes and horrors. I show it when it's done. But she bugged me and bugged me, and then she said, I like your figures, and so she already gave me the first clue, figure.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And since the last painting had been a female figure, I thought, well, if I'm going to do a figure, let it be a man. Male figure, but I didn't—thought, what male? So then, I'm sitting there in the back where I work, and on the radio, I hear the first four notes, D, S, C, H, of Shostakovich, and I knew that's what I was going to paint.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, any of the political and other background of Shostakovich wasn't part of—again, it was just sort of just like the fish story. It was somewhat—it's things just come together.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, in this case, it was much more actual because he was tortured, and they knocked on the—you know, you sit there quaking that there'll be a knock at the door in the morning, and you even hear the knocks in the Eighth Quartet, dot, dot, dot—it's [frightening -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I'm getting at. That was sort of incidental to what—in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: That came into the whole idea of the painting.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it did end up—

MS. KLEMENT: It did.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's what I thought.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it isn't entirely—it may have been coincidental that it was there just like the fish, but it—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I think all my things have that. For example, did you ever read Kenneth Clark, *the Nude*?

MR. SILVERMAN: Somewhere way back, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, about Aby Warburg. There was a whole article in *the New Yorker* about Aby Warburg's Institute in London—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I missed that. Recently?

MS. KLEMENT: —and his theory about motives being passed, [... -VK]—I feel that I am a link in a chain, and the link goes back, and the link goes forward. And I try to pay homage to the earlier links by reiterating a gesture.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that picks up—you didn't answer my—your heroes from way back.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] But it may have been cookie break or whatever.

MS. KLEMENT: So, let's say Botticelli, the mother holding the dead Christ's feet tenderly, I stole that gesture. I appropriated that gesture. I reused it and had the figure holding a limb of a tree, fallen tree.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. So, some of the heroes and the things that you love show up in your work.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, or there's—well, there's the Exodus, Adam and Eve's expulsion from—not Exodus—the *Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden* by Masaccio.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And there's that image directly.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you're—

MS. KLEMENT: I reuse images, and that is what Kenneth Clark talks about, that there are these prime images that continue; they become archetypal; they go into the collective subconscious or whatever it is, and I want to hook into that.

MR. SILVERMAN: And they're personal for you, too. You incorporate them into—

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I personalize them. So, if I steal the very common renaissance image of Saint Sebastian with his arms either behind, or up above, he's tied. I use that image. I painted a portrait, imaginary portrait of Osip Mandelstam—

MR. SILVERMAN: The poet.

MS. KLEMENT: —in that pose—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —martyred, and then sometimes, I'll take that pose—and those were all males, of course—and I turn them into females.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, in a way, the world of ideas, history, art history, these are all fodder for your filter. [Laughs.] You're filtering them.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, I'm going to go back to something else you said that intrigues me. You said you have—I don't know if you're willing to be open about some of the other rules you have. Not going back to the same themes, motifs because you don't want to knock out a product.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: What are some of the other rules you have? Because that sounds intriguing.

MS. KLEMENT: There aren't that many.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, they're apparently fairly stringent because—

MS. KLEMENT: They're very stringent.

MR. SILVERMAN: —you're chafing at the idea that—

MS. KLEMENT: I can't break them.

MR. SILVERMAN: What are some of the other ones, for example?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know any other ones.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you feel like there are—there are some operational things that you feel strongly—

MS. KLEMENT: I just know that one. That's the only one that comes to mind.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you mentioned you don't—the idea—I was going to ask about the notion of working through—over things. There're—some artists look at De Chirico that comes back 30 years later, and Bill Conger tells me he has trouble believing something's done, too. For you—

MS. KLEMENT: I've done that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really?

MS. KLEMENT: Because, you know, they hang here. I'll be walking around, and suddenly, I'll look, and I'll see, you know, I wanted that tree to have a volume this way, and I see a spot where the volume is lacking—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and I'll fiddle with it.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you fiddle with things well after—

MS. KLEMENT: But I can't do too much because of the white.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I can do things within that thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: The figures as opposed to the ground. So—

MS. KLEMENT: I can't touch the ground.

MR. SILVERMAN: —how do you—there's the notion of mistakes. You said that it's unforgiving, particularly, the white, but the—

MS. KLEMENT: The white is horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, it's unforgiving, so how do you deal with it? Obviously, there's times when it doesn't work, and I'm not sure how you tell. Speaking of rules—

MS. KLEMENT: Then I tear it up.

MR. SILVERMAN: You just tear it up. You don't work over something.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I do until—if it yields itself up to me, okay. If not—

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a battle. How you see it is almost like—

MS. KLEMENT: It is.

MR. SILVERMAN: —it's a very romantic notion. The notion of the artist versus the canvas, there's a struggle going on.

MS. KLEMENT: It's a struggle.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't always win.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: And when you don't, you sometimes just say, that's it.

MS. KLEMENT: I abandon it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Abandon it, but you still do—you—

MS. KLEMENT: Though I try very hard not to have that abandoning. I feel I need to push it as hard as I can.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, and there's also that notion that it is the most vitality to the initial impulse. If you keep editing and reworking, it gets less and less—it gets further and further away from whatever it was that drove you to make it. You have some feeling about that, too, I imagine.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're okay with—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm fine with reworking.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're fine with reworking.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, the book I'm writing is a nightmare of reworking.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I finish a chapter, and I think, "Now, that's the way I want it." And this has something to do with the computer. The next day, I come and I look at it and I see horror. What happened overnight? It got reshuffled.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it's very—it's—there's something about—there's an objectivity you get from seeing it as an outsider almost that you can do when it's on a page, or it's on a screen, that gives you a different impression than when you're making it. You get an outside perspective. It's easy to get involved in, yes. I know many people, in terms of writing, that don't know when to stop. How do you know when to stop with your art?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't. I probably should have stopped long ago.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I've been working on this book for 13 years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you're kidding.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, that's a long time. Well—

MS. KLEMENT: And I love writing. I love it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that was a question for you in terms of alternate careers. Could you see yourself in another world as a writer or as a musician? You could have been the pianist—

MS. KLEMENT: Absolutely. I could have been a pianist, but what I could not have been is a performer.

MR. SILVERMAN: You have performance anxiety?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting, too, because, yes, there are people that are really good. I lived with a pianist, a concert pianist, who was great at it. It's really sad he got the same thing that Leon Kirchner got, the repetitive stress thing—whatever it is you get, but you know, some people that just have a natural ability to communicate are really good. And then, there's other people that are very talented, but can't deal with the audience aspect of it.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you could see yourself as a writer as well.

MS. KLEMENT: See, that's what's so good about painting. You do it when you're alone. Nobody's watching. And now, when that woman wanted to make that film, there'd be the camera watching me.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: It was very difficult.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's a whole different relationship. Well, going back to Ralph Shapey, I think one of the reasons why he's famous or infamous is his relationship to the famous brouhaha about disregarding audience in sense of feeling like, who cares what—

MS. KLEMENT: I think that—I think that was a huge mistake that composers—

MR. SILVERMAN: On whose part?

MS. KLEMENT: —of that period made. A huge mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there was a distance from contemporary music from the—I'm thinking more of Columbia-Princeton School, the people that were—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what you're talking about.

MS. KLEMENT: A huge mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Like Babbit, but those people—

MS. KLEMENT: Babbit. Terrible mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, then we go back into like Steve Reich and Phil Glass who went the other direction, who went to more popular and ethnic, and there's arguments that can be made that that's diluted classical music. There are people that hate that. I don't know how you feel about that, but that notion of—I guess, what I wanted to ask about was that notion of an audience, that sort of disregard for the audience, do you feel unimportant—I mean, we were starting to talk about this when you were talking about your friends from Michigan, shall we say, your neighbors from Michigan. How do you feel about audience? Are you hoping to communicate to the world at large? Are you a shy person? You're not someone who wants to, you know, like, go out there and pitch your work

or do that sort of schmoozing that we talk about—

MS. KLEMENT: I can't schmooze.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well, that's a whole story in and of itself, but I guess I'm curious about your relationship to the sense of an audience.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, the choosing of my—what I call icons—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and they're very few, and they have to—this is another rule.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, here we go [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: They have to pass these rules, which is they have to be recognizable by all, no matter where, what, or how; they have to be timeless, so I can't make a painting with a telephone in it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's got to be something that's always been there and always will be there. And that severely limits the number of objects that I can paint.

MR. SILVERMAN: But they become more loaded objects that have much more history—sense of history or universality as you were talking about.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and they have to be immediately known by anyone.

MR. SILVERMAN: In all cultures, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: And you'd be surprised how few get into that. It's not much.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're kind of like primal things we're talking about. Trees—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, primal images: trees, landscapes, human bodies, the vessel. The vessel can be broken down into the boat; the bell and the jar, and that's it. And there are a few animals: birds—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —fish now—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: —and that's it. Not cats and dogs.

MR. SILVERMAN: Why not cats and dogs?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, they're very common, and they existed—

MS. KLEMENT: I know, but they're—

MR. SILVERMAN: —they existed in Egypt even. They're actually—

Male Speaker: You did an elephant.

MS. KLEMENT: That was a special—

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't remember seeing an elephant in her work.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, that was a wonderful—I had a letter from some dude in France, and he was having a project to save the elephant, and he was—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —asking artists all over the world to make an image of an elephant—a sculpture or whatever they did—and send him the image. So, I made an elephant. It was very hard because I didn't know what it looked like.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] It's not part of your vocabulary, your visual vocabulary, for one.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, right. So, I made an elephant, and I sent him the picture.

MR. SILVERMAN: Have you ever—speaking of that, have you ever worked for commission? That's not your usual —

MS. KLEMENT: [Yes, I had a commission from McCormick Place. -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: —way of working. That doesn't sound like a way that you—

MS. KLEMENT: I think I once did something for someone who told me the dimension of the space they had.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's tricky to get involved with that's—in terms of audience.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that was kind of the question I had was about an audience—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, my group did. We did site-specific work in lobbies.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, you mentioned that. You were talking about, yes, pieces that are for lobbies.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, we went into 1-11—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and I made three 20 foot—well, more than 20 foot—narrow panels that stack one on top of the other and that mimicked the configuration in the lobby.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, the sense of going back to audience, you're really not about—talking about the Ralph Shapely thing, you're really—you think that was a big mistake, the idea—

MS. KLEMENT: Big mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: —of difficult—making abstruse or difficult work.

MS. KLEMENT: Big mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: You really want to make work that communicates. That's your goal is not to—

MS. KLEMENT: But I don't expect people to be communicated to. I mean, that's too much to expect. [... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, so artists, very visually trained people, can sometimes come away with a very different—this is—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —this is a diversion from—

MS. KLEMENT: You know how people look at, when there's a painting, and there're dribbles and drabbles [sic]?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And that's what they focus on. They don't see the whole.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, here I have this—I think it was a—my American Sublime thing, where I did paintings that I paid homage to those artists of the Hudson River Valley and to the emptiness of the scenes. Why? Because they killed all the [Native Americans -VK].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, that was my thesis. So, it was about the Indians and their demise and the empty land, and so I had this swirl that was the Trail of Tears. That was the theme that went through it, and he looked at some drips

at the bottom and said, "Are those people?" And I thought, "What?"

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: "You got to look at the whole piece."

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's interesting. So you have—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm glad he remembered.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, he not only remembered it. I guess that was a little traumatic because I guess—I mean, one of the things that's interesting is—

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: —there's a certain ambiguity. There's always ambiguity, and people come away with different things. It's not quite a Rorschach test—

MS. KLEMENT: Of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but there are—

MS. KLEMENT: It is.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's possible to come away with—even with an educated—visually educated person come away with something very different than what you tended to communicate—attempted to.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I've come to realize—first of all, I'm from another century.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Let's face it. And that the things that I refer to, people no longer know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: So if I refer to a certain book—I had a painting that I named *Sibelius*—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —and [someone -VK] said, "What's that?"

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And I thought, oh—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well—

MS. KLEMENT: —but that's the way it is. Anyway, I've come to understand that no one is going to understand my paintings because if they're based on a certain poem by Mandelstam, whoever heard of that?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well—

MS. KLEMENT: No one. I'm talking to myself.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there's different states of reference, and you're right.

MS. KLEMENT: I'm talking to myself.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's younger kids that don't even know lots of things. They don't know Kent [State -LS]—

MS. KLEMENT: It doesn't have to be younger. It has to—nobody knows what I'm talking about.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there are people—

MS. KLEMENT: They haven't read the books I've read. They haven't heard the music I heard, and they don't know anything.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there are people out there that are cultured and literate and listen to music and art, but—

MS. KLEMENT: I know.

MR. SILVERMAN: —it's a rarified world, and I'm afraid it's probably changing some because the world has become very different, and that's a topic, too, in terms of the changing art world.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and I don't—I don't relate to any of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't—I guess we're getting back to technology. You're saying you weren't—you're not a big fan of technology, and even you mentioned, with your translation, or your writing, rather, the computer—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, the computer is—

MR. SILVERMAN: —you don't ever use computers or social networking, or any of that contemporary stuff in your art, or that doesn't have any influence?

MS. KLEMENT: Oh never. I don't do Facebook or anything.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, yes, I completely understand that.

MS. KLEMENT: It's revolting to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a whole other world. So—

MS. KLEMENT: All these selfies. I mean, it's just revolting.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's out of control. It's changed, also, the way people communicate—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —and visual language.

MS. KLEMENT: And the other thing I bemoan is the way language has gone.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, for sure.

MS. KLEMENT: It's a nightmare language.

MR. SILVERMAN: And literacy, the whole notion—well, just what you're talking about. Points of reference, you can Google anything, but to the people—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm like. What do you mean you're like?

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, there's a real abuse.

MS. KLEMENT: I can't take it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well, we're—I'm a little bit next generation, but I'm not too far behind to feeling out of place in the world in seeing those changes. I don't even own a cell phone, so I guess I'm one to talk. Where are we at? We're getting pretty close to time. I guess we want to save some things to talk about for the next conversation, but—

MS. KLEMENT: Okay.

MR. SILVERMAN: —there's plenty more to talk about.

MS. KLEMENT: Maybe we've used it up.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, no. I haven't even—notice, I haven't even been looking—

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MR. SILVERMAN: This is Lanny Silverman for the Smithsonian Archives of American Art, and this is an interview with Vera Klement at her studio on June 14, and this is part two.

Okay, Vera, I guess what I'd like to do is sort of follow-up on a couple of subjects that we, certainly, touched upon yesterday. And one of them was, I guess, the Holocaust. When—we talked about being Jewish in the Midwest, so I wanted to follow-up a little bit about that in the sense that as a Jew, there's this moral obligation to make the world a better place, which is pretty heavy. And then as a sort of a survivor, there's probably a very



heavy burden to deal with your experience. How do you feel that—do you feel that your art is an attempt to communicate something that's related to those issues? Is this your way of working through or trying to do something positive in the universe?

MS. KLEMENT: No, my art is fairly selfish. What comes out relative to the Holocaust is involuntary. In other words, that thing is in me, and it comes out whether I will it or not. It lines the image, in a way, but it's not because I say to myself, "Oh, I'm making a painting about the Holocaust." And also—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you've never been tempted to do that? You've never tried to directly tackle that?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, I have made that painting at the Illinois Holocaust Museum—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: I took a photograph—I didn't take a photograph; I found an old, faded photograph of the entry to Auschwitz. And it's a building here and a building here, with a space, and that's where the train would go through.

MR. SILVERMAN: Is that where the famous sign is, that "Work Will Set You Free?"

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And what I did was—which many artists were taught in my day—to look at the negative space. So, I looked at the air, and I turned the air into a form. And that became the painting. And then, next to it, I reversed that, and I just allowed it to be a landscape into the distance. Very washy and—

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you did that knowing because you knew what the intended audience was going to be.

MS. KLEMENT: No, I had no audience then.

MR. SILVERMAN: You—in other words, the—

MS. KLEMENT: I made that painting in '87.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, you did it before the Holocaust Museum had requested—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —so it wasn't, in any sense, a commission.

MS. KLEMENT: No, no, no.

MR. SILVERMAN: It was a piece that you—so you actually have taken on the subject independently.

MS. KLEMENT: I have. I've got chimneys.

MR. SILVERMAN: But rarely. Oh yes, that'll do it.

MS. KLEMENT: And I have that entry many times, but it's very abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: What was interesting when I had that show at the Cultural Center, some woman with a German accent came over to me, and she said, "This work is about the Holocaust"—

MR. SILVERMAN: Ooh, oh.

MS. KLEMENT: —and I almost fell over.

MR. SILVERMAN: She picked up those—

MS. KLEMENT: Because she picked it up, even though I don't do it directly, ever.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I wondered is if you were ever conscious of it as a theme or a subject because—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, the only time were when I did chimneys and so forth and so on, but even a boat is, to me, about the Holocaust.

MR. SILVERMAN: At one level, because you also use it for other purposes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's a life boat. It's an escape.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Did you come—you came over by boat?

MS. KLEMENT: I came by boat.

MR. SILVERMAN: That, too, although a much bigger one—[laughs]—fortunately.

MS. KLEMENT: It was a horrendous trip. Winter, storm, the trip took twice as long as it was supposed to.

MR. SILVERMAN: And this is totally alien to you. I was thinking of Jerzy Kosinski, too, and not just Polanski when I was thinking about the experience. Didn't he, like, fabricate some of this experience?

MS. KLEMENT: That's what they say.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what they say, but apparently, he came without—as a writer, he came without being able to speak English, and he was like—maybe he taught himself by TV. It's been a long time since I read any of that stuff, but whatever it is, feeling—if you're already alienated and fearful and have just dealt with—[laughs]—the Holocaust, directly or indirectly, to come to the cacophony of New York without the language, it just reinforced itself when I thought about the two of them. I love Polanski's work, but it is tortured, even the early things before he—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —had the wife murder.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: But I guess you said—you used the word "ruined," and I guess that didn't sink in. I guess that's a major experience, so I just wondered how it—it had to manifest, and I sort of sensed not just the landscape, but some of the things you're talking about. The chimneys seem familiar now that you mention it. And I was looking in front of what could be a bathtub. That's sort of also a vessel and also a—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, it's also sort of a—what's the word?

MR. SILVERMAN: Sarcophagus.

MS. KLEMENT: Sarcophagus.

MR. SILVERMAN: I knew where you were headed with that, too, which probably leads us to the same place again —

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —symbols that do double, triple duty.

MS. KLEMENT: Right, right.

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess you also threw out something that I didn't pick up on at all, or very little; you mentioned that you had been struggling for many, many years on your memoir. Tell me more about your memoir.

MS. KLEMENT: Thirteen years.

MR. SILVERMAN: Thirteen years. So, what's the—what's in this memoir? I'm really curious to see it.

MS. KLEMENT: I love it. I love writing. It's just a kind of passion.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, it starts from your growing up—

MS. KLEMENT: It's not chronological.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Though it does—

MR. SILVERMAN: Why I'm not surprised?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, really. It's like my paintings. It's pieces, unrelated, related, doesn't matter. There's, like, separate essays almost. Sometimes in different styles.

MR. SILVERMAN: Ooh.

MS. KLEMENT: I have five, very short ones that are less than a page that are called "State Street," and they're like a leitmotif in Wagner, repetitive theme.

MR. SILVERMAN: They come and go.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, that brings you back, brings you back, brings you back.

MR. SILVERMAN: Why "State Street" in particular?

MS. KLEMENT: Because I walk there. I live there.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's the idea, right? That's where you are now. You're right within blocks.

MS. KLEMENT: And I follow my walk, and I comment on what I see, and I comment on the architecture.

MR. SILVERMAN: So some of these things are sort of memoir, journalistic, just, sort of, first person.

MS. KLEMENT: They're journalistic.

MR. SILVERMAN: Are they all that way? You said, you tried some other stuff.

MS. KLEMENT: They're all different.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're all different. What are some of the other things?

MS. KLEMENT: Well, the first one is I walk—I left when I was nine, or before I was nine, and I sort of remember it. And I try to take a walk from my house to the sea, and I describe the walk as best as I can remember it [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: So you're doing the same thing with trying to go back to, you know, where you were with—what you do—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —now with what you did as a child.

MS. KLEMENT: Right. I try to describe where it was that I lived.

MR. SILVERMAN: And all the environment and the inner sort of life, too, or no? Because something tells me you were always inner, even before the stuff happened. You were probably an inward kind of child.

MS. KLEMENT: Very.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I guess right there. So—but you can't remember much about what it felt like beyond major incidents.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I knew what it felt like when the Gestapo broke our door down.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well—[laughs]—yes. I mean, before that, you don't remember—

MS. KLEMENT: I remember they burned the synagogue.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, and I'm talking about before that, though, you don't—

MS. KLEMENT: Before that, I was—I don't know—a child.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. I mean, I can't go back that far, and I'm younger. I just wondered if there's an attempt to sort retrace—because sometimes, like, that's that Proustian thing because he talks about that—his trip, his walking through the gardens, and he—it brings back his associations and what he—you know, his train of thoughts, you know, like what it was like then. I think he, sort of, partly relives it through the memories.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I'm just wondering if that's—

MS. KLEMENT: I try to remember the apartment we lived in, what my parents were like, my brother, and so forth, and describe it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you've had a rich life well after that, too. So you go through New York and Chicago and all the rest, too. It's less the other stuff—more—

MS. KLEMENT: Here and there, I pick—I can't describe it. You'd have to read it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I'd love to someday, but you know, I was trying to get Holly Solomon. I was friends with her near the end of her life. I thought she had stories to tell, especially off the record. I don't if she'd do it. I guess, when she was near the end, she could—who cares at a certain point [Laughs.]? Like, what do people say? But the things that were coming out of her, I was thinking you should write a memoir—you know, your memoirs because she had lots of stories.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I'm a kvetch, and I nag, and I overanalyze, and I do that, and that's a perfect forum for me to do it in.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, you've never—let's go back to the art for just a second and jump, I guess, although I think you said some interesting things already about the, you know, the book, but you've never used text in your art. We were talking about Edith Altman, who uses a lot of text—

MS. KLEMENT: I have used text in some—you know, I have two kinds of art. There's the painting—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and then there's some more intimate work, which is graphic—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —drawing, collage. My favorite thing is collage. I think it's the most important—

MR. SILVERMAN: I've seen collages of yours, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —invention of the 20th century is the collage.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you mentioned the difficulty of political art. Look at, not just Heartfield—what's the woman that did the collages? I'm blanking out her name—she was German, but she was wonderful [Hannah Höch -LS]. She did collages that were very—gone right now, but there's some collage artists that have done political things. Heartfield comes to mind immediately, but—

MS. KLEMENT: I don't do political things.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, we had that conversation—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and I guess I understand that completely, but you have used text—

MS. KLEMENT: I used text in those drawings. I used T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland." I used—I reiterate Picasso's *Guernica*. Maybe I should show you one of my collage books.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, afterwards, I want to look at the first piece you did if you could drag that out.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, okay.

MR. SILVERMAN: That one with the snow storm, of course, and maybe some of those, too, because I don't think I've seen them, but there are times when you—

MS. KLEMENT: And then, you know, I'll translate a poem, for example, of Rilke—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and I make a little collage with what I think are some images from that.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was going to say. Sometimes, you've started from a poem; you mentioned some Russian—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —poets and—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in Rilke now, and sometimes, you start from the poem, and the piece is very much about it, but it's not in there. You don't directly present text—

MS. KLEMENT: No, but in this case, I had the text, but I wanted it to be in Sütterlin that—which is an ancient, German script that I—I only went to school for one year.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: And I learned to write this script.

MR. SILVERMAN: Is that sort of gothic looking thing?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's extremely beautiful.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I hadn't thought of it for 80 years, 70 years, or however old I was when I did this.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's got all that context, too, in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: So I thought I would like to write that poem.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: In Sütterlin on the page.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I'd forgotten what it looked like, and I decided just to get myself trance-like, you know, and I'd relax, let myself go, and I just wrote, and when I was done, I was shocked because I wrote it that way, and it came out perfectly.

MR. SILVERMAN: Had you done that as a kid at all, or you didn't even—

MS. KLEMENT: I learned it as a child. That was—

MR. SILVERMAN: So it came back to you some, at least some—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I've got a weird thing with language. I have no language, and suddenly, a language appears fully formed.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, and you—

MS. KLEMENT: In that manner, I speak Russian suddenly.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was going to say you've mentioned Russian because you said you speak German still and Russian—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, German, I had to go to the—I went to the Goethe Institut.

MR. SILVERMAN: And some Polish maybe?

MS. KLEMENT: No, no Polish.

MR. SILVERMAN: No Polish? Probably just filtered by way of Yiddish.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, the Polish are not my favorite people.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I can understand that.

MS. KLEMENT: Because when we escaped from Danzig into a hotel waiting to get on the boat, they were marching in the street with banners, "Kill the Yids."

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, not that some of the other countries were any better. I mean, it's not—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, that doesn't make me—

MR. SILVERMAN: Even some of the so-called, some of the neutral countries, there—I mean, there's [Laughs.]—there's plenty to go around.

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, a lot of people say that I was born in Poland, and that really pisses me off.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it wasn't Poland then, so a—

MS. KLEMENT: I know.

MR. SILVERMAN: —lot of these things are changing of borders and boundaries—

MS. KLEMENT: I know.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and cultures and mixtures, and even within Russia, some of that stuff is still up for grabs.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's, sort of, battles are going on as, you know, what's really Russian and what's, sort of, some of the provincial parts. So your memoir, we're just going to have to wait for that one.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh. I just adore doing it, and I made a rule, of course—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —that I was not allowed to write about any individuals that are alive. No gossip and no sex.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's tough, both of those.

MS. KLEMENT: And when you leave all that out, it might be the most tedious thing anyone ever read.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know. You've had a pretty interesting and rich life.

MS. KLEMENT: I only wrote about one artist—

MR. SILVERMAN: Which artist was that?

MS. KLEMENT: Miyoko Ito.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I love Miyoko Ito's work. Yes, she was—I mentioned her before, and you didn't pick up on that particularly, which is odd given that—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —obviously, that—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I wrote a eulogy for her.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow. So, you were friends with her, too?

MS. KLEMENT: And I wrote a poem—huh?

MR. SILVERMAN: You were friends with her, too?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, I wrote a poem for her, and then—no, I won't go into it, but whatever.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Got my curiosity up. Is it indiscreet to go into?

MS. KLEMENT: No, no, nothing like that, but when she died—the morning she died, I was sitting at the breakfast

table having my breakfast, and I like to read whatever magazine I have. So, I was reading—which one was it? —*the New Republic*—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —and there was a poem by Robert Hass. He later became the poet laureate.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: And it said—it was about the body of a woman, age 60—which was exactly her age at the time—Japanese, and my ears went up, and she has a date with some dude at an art colony, and I knew she went to McDowell.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And he wanted to come into her studio, and she wanted him to. She was always having affairs.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's a lot of—speaking of sex, there's a lot of, yes, affairs at McDowell and those colonies.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, he wanted to come in, but she felt obligated to tell him she'd had a mastectomy.

MR. SILVERMAN: She was married, too, wasn't she, at that point?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I assume, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, she told him about it, and he froze and ran away.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I thought, how dare he not disguise her? Everyone's going to know who this is.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, there's enough information given, and certainly, anyone who was in McDowell or does a little bit—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, everyone's going to know this, so I got so upset. The phone rang. It was Don Baum—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and I thought Don was going to tell me that he's reading this dreadful thing, and we could clack and yak about it. Instead, what does he tell me? Miyoko Ito just died.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, that almost killed me, the way that came together.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's pretty strange.

MS. KLEMENT: I wrote a letter—two letters to Robert Hass and to Robert Pinsky—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Two laureates—

MR. SILVERMAN: Poets, yes, laureates, yes, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and complained that the obligation of a writer is to protect and disguise their source, which none of them did, namely, Bellow and Roth, and so forth.

MR. SILVERMAN: I was going to say, this is, you know, these roman à clef, as they're called—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —there is just more and more of those—

MS. KLEMENT: More and more.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and I actually—

MS. KLEMENT: And so, anyway, out of that came my decision I'm not writing about anybody—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's probably wise in some regard.

MS. KLEMENT: —unless they're dead.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So, I mean, I wrote about my two ex-husbands. They're dead.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I guess we can talk about—you mentioned you were married to a second composer or musician.

MS. KLEMENT: No, no. I was married, first, to a violinist, who became a conductor.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's the one you were—okay, I didn't know that one. That's why I was curious.

MS. KLEMENT: And from him, I had the most extraordinary musical education.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's the way to learn: directly.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, he would practice eight hours a day and go over and over at each phrase until—

MR. SILVERMAN: And take it apart, deconstruct it. I lived with one, too, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —and until I learned the whole violin repertoire.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know Prokofiev's third piano concerto, upside down and inside out, the same way you probably know the pieces.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: My friend was playing, you know, playing that over, learning that—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —when I lived with him in college years. Yes, I know that experience. It's an interesting way to understand music.

MS. KLEMENT: And he was a marvelous violinist, and I would sometimes go with him to his violin lessons. He came from Israel—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: —to study with the, then, greatest violin pedagogue, Raphael Bronstein, who had studied with Mischa Auer.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, that's quite a lineage. So, you learned—so that was before Ralph.

MS. KLEMENT: That was before Ralph.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's actually interesting because that's why, when you mentioned another one, I was—that kind of got my curiosity. So, what is it, do you think, that attracts you about—is it your love of music that you've had—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —a number of—

MS. KLEMENT: Absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's interesting because two artists in the family—

MS. KLEMENT: I like music better than art.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I actually love music a great deal, too; that's why I said we're very simpatico in that regard.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.



MR. SILVERMAN: Two artists in the same household can be very difficult, don't you think?

MS. KLEMENT: No, not if they're in different fields.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yes, if there's not much overlap.

MS. KLEMENT: I've known two painters married, and that was a disaster.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that could be very tricky. Well, Leon and Nancy did pretty well. I mean, I assume. I don't know what their—who knows what relation—

MS. KLEMENT: And then there was Roland and Ellen.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes. I know Ellen. I didn't know Roland. Actually, I know their kids better because I've dealt with them. Yes, and it's really hard. Who knows what goes on in a relationship anyways?

MS. KLEMENT: No, no, you don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: You know the outside, and who knows what's the successful relationship? Well, we're getting a little off the track, but—and we don't want to get too much into gossip, but I guess one of the things I wanted to also pick up on was how your work has changed over the years. Has aging changed it in terms of technique, your ability to work big? Or, you're still working on the same scale, so apparently not. You're obviously, physically, in decent enough shape that it's not a challenge. We mentioned some, you know, other people that are a little older that are, you know, that have scaled down.

MS. KLEMENT: The way my work changed had to follow a rule again. Must be the German in me.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That order. We all have the order.

MS. KLEMENT: Ordnung.

MR. SILVERMAN: We all have order.

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, yes. So how's the—what's the rule here?

MS. KLEMENT: The rule is you can't wake up one morning and say, "I think today I'll be a Cubist." It has to be organic in an evolutionary way. Out of the necessity of its own self, it has to demand what the next step is.

MR. SILVERMAN: So, if you have an idea that requires, in terms of Cubism, if you have an idea that requires multiple perspectives or something like that, that's when it should occur to you. When you're trying to resolve a problem that calls for Cubism, that's when Cubism comes in. You shouldn't—

MS. KLEMENT: No, it doesn't work that way.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, then how does it work? Because then you're saying it has to—this rule is kind of confusing because I'm thinking we're picking a fairly strange example because Cubism is not a style; it's pretty limited style, but—

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know about that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you can do a lot—

MS. KLEMENT: I think it never had enough development before it was hacked off—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. By limited, I mean—

MS. KLEMENT: —which happens to most movements

MR. SILVERMAN: —it's pretty focused style, and it's a very—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: You can discern. But the rules are fairly rigid.

MS. KLEMENT: No, I was never a Cubist in that sense, though I—the school I went to was very Cubist directed.

MR. SILVERMAN: You mentioned Braque and Gris in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —yes, your early training, right?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's something you were exposed to. So when you say that the style—

MS. KLEMENT: For example, for—okay. Here's an example.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay, you're going to give me a—yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I think I mentioned that I—when I made a drawing on paper, I liked it because it was a discreet object on a neutral space—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —and I realized I preferred that to my field paintings, which were covered from side-to-side. Well, once I realized that, I couldn't just turn around and get rid of that. I had to organically, little by little, whittle away at the edges.

MR. SILVERMAN: So these still paintings got smaller, and they got a little space around them?

MS. KLEMENT: The inside got smaller, and there was white on the outside, so that it became a shape, rather than a field.

MR. SILVERMAN: I don't know, it sounds like Mark Tobey or someone like that where there was—

MS. KLEMENT: But it was a very slow—and I remember when I first did it and only had a little bit. Marianne Deson said, "You can't do that. It looks unfinished." And so, I did it more.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there's both of that and just—I'm thinking Mark Tobey, but there's also Rothko where there's these big, giant shapes, and then there's a little bit of space around the outside, and that tension between them. It's not—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's no rules in art. That's the whole point is that—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —but it's funny that she had—

MS. KLEMENT: So that gradually—that thing that remained in the middle became more—less abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: And more representational of—

MS. KLEMENT: More representational, though others saw them as abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, so I'm not the first—

MS. KLEMENT: They were still pretty abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: Okay, so your—

MS. KLEMENT: And it took a while for me to just say, "To hell with this. Do it."

MR. SILVERMAN: Interesting. Now, we've been talking a little bit around a corners of a topic. You mentioned Casteneda, and we've talked a little bit about religion, certainly Judaism. Is there a spiritual aspect to your work? Is that something that you—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm an atheist.

MR. SILVERMAN: I sort of would have figured that, but I guess, I'm not talking about organized religions; I'm talking about—and that's how it came up by way of, like, Edith, who's probably much more into organized religion, but she's of a mystical bent, and I guess that's what I wondered: if you have that in common, or are you

interested in internal, kind of, spirituality as opposed to rituals and rules? Although you like rules though [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: I love rules. I don't know what internal spirituality is.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it's everywhere, speaking of words that we just want to puke with, you know. "Mindfulness" is the new—it's like "artisanal." Artisanal mindfulness—I mean, that's the way this thing—Buddhists—they've taken Buddhism and meditation, and they've probably—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I don't do any of that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't do any of that.

MS. KLEMENT: I'm a—I adore looking at the world, and I try to paint what I see. That's it. Very simple.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a very simple—yes, simple, but that's not so easy to do, and it doesn't—

MS. KLEMENT: And not in a realistic way and not in an illustrative way.

MR. SILVERMAN: And not entirely in an abstract way, as I'm sure you'll be the first to—

MS. KLEMENT: Not in an abstract way at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: Although the application to paint, you can see, it is fairly much, you know, about the surface and about, you know—

MS. KLEMENT: No, well, that's not abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it is, in a way, because—

MS. KLEMENT: It's another reality.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a—yes, but it's a different—it's a two-D—well, not two D because it's actually thick—it's a flatter reality than the one when you're trying to make something have—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I think that when painting got to be very flat—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —in the early 20th century, they threw away the greatest thing painting is capable of, which is illusion.

MR. SILVERMAN: Illusion, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: And I want illusion.

MR. SILVERMAN: You want illusion.

MS. KLEMENT: So I was very influenced by Rothko, but I put back what he removed.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: He removed illusion, and I wanted that.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you wanted to, probably, also have that sense of gesture, that grand gesture. Something that really—

MS. KLEMENT: And I want the illusion to be spatial as well as corporeal. So I like full-bodied, mass—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's—when I say—when I say abstract, that's kind of what I mean because you're using two-D—mostly two-D, but they're thicker obviously—things to create a sense of space and of depth and even the game of, like, what you were talking about; what was given up, two- and three-point, one-point perspective.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that, or if it's Japanese, even the overlaying, all those things are abstract games to try to create that illusion, but you're interested in the illusion.

MS. KLEMENT: I'm interested in illusion.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you don't want to call attention to that, though. You don't want people to necessarily see how you're making your process of that illusion. You want that to—

MS. KLEMENT: Why? They can look all they want.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, so you're okay with—because some of your pieces have those contradictions, just like Bill Conger's, between kinds of space.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Between the kinds of space and whether or not it is situated in the world, or it's situated on that canvas that we're literally looking at, so you're fine with proposing these contradictions and just letting people deal with it.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Maybe I don't see them as contradictions.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so maybe they're all just part of the same experience in different—

MS. KLEMENT: Maybe.

MR. SILVERMAN: Maybe. I'm open to that. I guess I started to ask—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, when I do a tree, which is my most repeated icon, I do—I'm attracted to the three-dimensionality fullness of it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: The same with a body. I'm attracted to the fullness and the weight of a body. And then, in contrast, I want to have distance, and distance represents that—there's a German word, "sehnsucht," which means the longing for the unattainable.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really? That's the distance.

MS. KLEMENT: And I'm—that's very important to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's like—

MS. KLEMENT: And you know, the Metropolitan Museum, not long ago, had a show called *Woman at the Window*, and that's a romantic thing that I—I've done a lot of women at windows.

MR. SILVERMAN: Windows are really good metaphors for a lot of things.

MS. KLEMENT: Because you're looking out and wishing for that—

MR. SILVERMAN: The unattainable.

MS. KLEMENT: —and you can't have it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And that's why I paint landscapes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, in terms of—I mean, unfortunately, people won't be able to see it, but the piece I'm looking at has that—what I'm calling a contradiction, I think, in spades, so to speak, because it has a really up-close and very corporeal trunk, but then the window and/or splotch in the background—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —is a very deep space.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: So are the others, right here and there that you talked about—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —you've got that, and so there's a—your eye is not sure what's happening. You're used to creating that illusion in your head, making it consistent. What kind of space am I really looking at?

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

MR. SILVERMAN: Is this—where am I? What space is it? Well, there's two different things happening.

MS. KLEMENT: It's the same here. This is—

MR. SILVERMAN: Same thing here, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —here, and that's there.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's there. So that's a very important aspect of your work—

MS. KLEMENT: Very.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that sort of dialectic, shall we say—

MS. KLEMENT: Here and there.

MR. SILVERMAN: —between here and there.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: And that, also, is a time thing, too. It's also here and there in the sense that a lot of your work is calling back memories, not all from your childhood, but a lot of memories of things you've read and been influenced by. Well, it sounds like you're doing fine in terms of, you know, your physicality in the world, in terms of you having had to compromise in terms of aging. What do you see as coming next? What's the next body—do you have any idea of what's going to be next?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't ever know.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because you're in that in-between stage.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, I never know.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't know. That's kind of—

MS. KLEMENT: I don't have a clue.

MR. SILVERMAN: And what draws you to continue? To find the next—

MS. KLEMENT: Less and less drives me.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you're aware of mortality and—

MS. KLEMENT: I am. I'm not. I'm 85.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, but are you driven by a need to the next discovery, the next—

MS. KLEMENT: No. Maybe that's why I wrote—I'm writing a book to take the place of that.

MR. SILVERMAN: Is it a habit? Oh, are you surfeited with art?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know. I'm surfeited with the art world. I hate it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, well, we all are there [Laughs].

MS. KLEMENT: I find it repulsive.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's the problem is how to figure out—you have to do it for the real reasons, and at the same time, we talked about this off the record. We were talking about, like, the sense of audience, and you know, having worked as professional and an administrator, I'm very conscious of the marketing and the other end of it, and that's not the pretty end, and it's—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's kind of a hard end to deal with. It's probably why I'm not an artist or a poet, too.

MS. KLEMENT: It's horrible. It's horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, it's—the issue—I mean, it's something that—in terms of pitching or having those skills, I guess that brings up a question; I suppose it's a natural time to ask. We touched on it. You've seen a lot of changes in the art world, some for the better, some for the worse. What do you make of—over the 50 years or more that you've been—more—that you've been involved in the art world, what are some of the changes you've seen in terms of, not just styles, but approaches to, you know, marketing—

MS. KLEMENT: I see money, dollar signs.

MR. SILVERMAN: Money. Well, it's gotten to be a big business.

MS. KLEMENT: That's what I'm saying.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Is that—

MS. KLEMENT: It's repulsive.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I've never been interested in money.

MR. SILVERMAN: And actually, you've been—you also were very fortunate in terms of marketing. I guess we had the conversation yesterday. A lot of people came to you, or—

MS. KLEMENT: I wouldn't say a lot of people.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, not a lot. Some very important people got—

MS. KLEMENT: I'm not in a single important collection, private, in Chicago.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh that—Chicago's another story. I was thinking the MoMA, I think you were talking about—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, the MoMA.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, 22 to have a piece in MoMA, even if it's in storage now. Even to have a piece in that collection is a major accomplishment. On the other hand, yes, you were saying, like, in Chicago, but Chicago is—the politics in Chicago are, in some ways, just as brutal as New York and then some because—

MS. KLEMENT: I think it's much worse because New York being that big, if you don't succeed, you can go there, or there, or there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Probably. There's a lot of galleries.

MS. KLEMENT: Whereas here, there's one game in town—

MR. SILVERMAN: One—

MS. KLEMENT: —and one asshole who controls it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's the problem is that, as we said, it doesn't change, and the same people get the same rewards, and there are younger artists that get chosen, but usually by the same gatekeepers, their buddies. How about the—I mean, some of the changes in the art world—I know you have a really cerebral and intellectual side. A lot of the art that's come out in the post-conceptualism or whatever it's called—this sense of irony. I have a feeling you're not a big fan of irony.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't dig irony.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't do irony, not at all.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't do anything ironic.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're a passionate person. You don't want someone to—

MS. KLEMENT: No irony.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. And the people that usually traffic in that particular mode are usually people who are very casual in the craft of their—they don't care about making beautiful objects. You're old school in that regard.

MS. KLEMENT: And I value technique.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's where I'm going, yes. You're someone who wants to make beautiful objects.

MS. KLEMENT: I want to be virtuosic.

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course, and that's part of what drives you is to make something really beautiful and that also has emotional wallop.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, and then I like looking at it. So I do it for my pleasure.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't want just, like, to dump a room full of your belongings in a gallery and call it an installation and say [Laughs.]—

MS. KLEMENT: No [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: That never crossed your mind, much less—that's not your—not your language. Are there artists that are contemporary artists that you're aware of—I mentioned Doris Salcedo when we were—I was giving that as an example, off the record, just about somebody who does political art that I'm impressed by.

MS. KLEMENT: I was annoyed by her.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, really.

MS. KLEMENT: I saw an interview with her.

MR. SILVERMAN: I watched the video. Was that in that interview that was at the—

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know. I saw it on TV.

MR. SILVERMAN: Maybe it was something different; I don't know.

MS. KLEMENT: It was very short, but she, in a way, spoke in harsh terms about having to speak out with one's work, and I thought that was—what word can I use?—self-serving and—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, easy—as hard as that might be for her, about the desaparecidos, you know, or the people that are—that she's speaking up on behalf of, they don't have voices. They're not part of—is that what you're saying? I mean, she's got an easy route.

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, no, she tried to make those who don't do that feel guilty.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, because they're not speaking out.

MS. KLEMENT: And I don't speak out.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Because I don't see any use in it, and I don't even know what to say, and so I don't speak, and I feel put down by her, or others like her, not specifically her.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sometimes, silence can be very powerful. I mean, is that—I don't know where we got the quote from. The Werner Herzog film, what's that? Silence all around men that's screaming silence or something. There's a quote, maybe Goethe or something, that's just—it's just about the fact that sometimes silence can be a scream—or like Munch, for example.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: Silence can sometimes be just as powerful as—

MS. KLEMENT: I did many paintings with that idea.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that sounds like—

MS. KLEMENT: Silent scream and Munch's thing I did, where I [pay -VK] homage, and one of them was to Munch's *Scream*, where I took that figure, and I turned it, so that its back is to us—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so you don't see the face.

MS. KLEMENT: And its look—and so we see—we follow his gaze into the void.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting, as opposed to that confrontation—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —with his expression. So is there still a feeling of dread and what—you're there or there, is that void, in that case, is that dark and—

MS. KLEMENT: No, it's white.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's white because that's usually, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's untouched.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's untouched, so it's just—so it's all implicit. It's all based on your memory of—

MS. KLEMENT: And I don't even know if anyone would even get it. You know, I don't think most people understand my work.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, again, we had this conversation yesterday. Work is embedded in its references to music, literature, and a lot of other things. Some of which are—

MS. KLEMENT: Whatever, you know, or my references to artists. Most people don't know these artists.

MR. SILVERMAN: But I love that you want—that you love the communication with the neighbor, and that's what you cherished. You want the work to speak to people. In other words, you don't want—we had the conversation vis-à-vis, Ralph Shapely, you're not wanting to make difficult—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I remember how he would chuckle and relish that this was particularly difficult.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's what we were getting at.

MS. KLEMENT: And I think that was a huge mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, yes, it did turn off a lot of—and I mean, there's still reverberations, in terms of the popularity of contemporary music.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's still a tough time getting younger audiences, you know. Now, they sort of—Toby goes to the contemporary series of the—they serve pizza and beer to get people in, to get the kids in.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: But it's a good series. So, it's, you know, it's nice. It's now become a social thing, you know.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: They've turned it into, you know, a younger person's thing. I don't know. Let's see. I had some other—oh, I was starting to ask you yesterday, maybe it was off the record, but I wanted to follow up a little. I guess you said that you didn't really travel very much. You did have a residency. Did you stay in Florence, or—

MS. KLEMENT: No, I was in Cassis.

MR. SILVERMAN: Cassis.

MS. KLEMENT: In the south of France.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, south of France.

MS. KLEMENT: Right on the sea. Oh, exquisite.

MR. SILVERMAN: That sounds nice. Was that—did that have impact on your work? Did that generate—

MS. KLEMENT: No, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]



MS. KLEMENT: Actually. See I got there—I was one of 13 invited. The others were all scholars. They were either Canadian or American. There were very few Europeans among them. From the beginning, from the very moment—and you're allowed to take your significant other, which is why—

MR. SILVERMAN: That's a nice deal.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, so Peter and I went, and we were given this unbelievable apartment right over the sea.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, sensational.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And the whole place was sensationally beautiful, and right from the start, these people decided to ignore us.

MR. SILVERMAN: The other artists?

MS. KLEMENT: They weren't artists. They were scholars.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, they're scholars, so there were—

MS. KLEMENT: Thirteen scholars.

MR. SILVERMAN: You were the only artists, so there was this sort of division right there. So you think that's what the division was?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: They were academics or—

MS. KLEMENT: They were academics, and we were there for whatever—five months, and every Tuesday, one of the residents had to present their project.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just like you do at any colony, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. So finally, my turn came, and I thought, these people are visually illiterate. I'm not going to do a show and tell. They could care less. I'll read a chapter from my memoir, and I read the chapter in which I talk about translating these poets, five Russian and three German. The next day, we had two dinner invitations.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that can be taken seriously, that sort of—that's when you start to get on their registers [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: The other story about that is, I take in a lot of whatever is around me, you know, and I use it, but my studio—I couldn't make my—I couldn't make work this scale.

MR. SILVERMAN: It was a smaller studio.

MS. KLEMENT: Clearly. A, the studio was too small, and secondly, how do you ship it? And I thought, I'll have to work small. [... -VK] I was not happy, and then I had a brilliant idea. I'm going to make a huge painting out of parts.

MR. SILVERMAN: There you go.

MS. KLEMENT: And Peter got on a ladder, and we had some green string, and he delineated the size of the canvas on the wall, and I began working, within that, with paper. Images that were about this big.

MR. SILVERMAN: Twelve inches maybe, 12 inches square or something.

MS. KLEMENT: And they varied, too.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, something like that.

MS. KLEMENT: And some were torn and some were clear, and it became *Death and Transfiguration*.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] So, is that the—

MS. KLEMENT: There were 15 parts, and I had to orchestrate them, and that was a marvelous project, thrilling, thrilling.

MR. SILVERMAN: In terms of rules and as you—and structure, that's obviously to orchestrate that is a whole different thing. Diptych and triptych is one thing because that, usually, is like a dialectic or some sort of clash of symbols; this is all—

MS. KLEMENT: Right, and there was a second canvas, after I got home, to go with it, but that one thing was in a pyramid—I studied Picasso's *Guernica*. It was in this pyramidal form, and these things and I could shuffle them and try different ones—

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's a different way of working. Is that the example you were giving in terms of how it influenced your work? That trip to Cassis?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so it was a more—again, a little like the bolting together of the—where the diptychs came from, this is a little bit working in a grid—a larger grid format came about, again, out of necessity. So that's what you were saying is—

MS. KLEMENT: And the images came, you know, we went to a crypt in Marseille where a saint was buried, and his head was here, and his feet were way down, way down, and I thought, that's death. I'm having that. And Peter was my model. He's got a great head, and so there's the head here, the feet way over there, and then there're other things in between, and then it goes up.

MR. SILVERMAN: And what are some of the other parts? Because I'm kind of curious what filled—

MS. KLEMENT: I took things from [the place -VK]. Things blooming. We got there in January, and things were blooming already, and there was this huge bougainvillea with rubbery-looking leaves. I picked a leaf, smeared it with green [paint -VK], and printed it all over a piece of—

MR. SILVERMAN: So do you ever do that? That's an interesting technical—do you usually—you have a lot of means of application. I didn't get into technical things.

MS. KLEMENT: I have a lot of different ways of putting paint on.

MR. SILVERMAN: You do some splatter and things that relate to—you do some palate knives—

MS. KLEMENT: I do everything. I put charcoal. I put collage.

MR. SILVERMAN: You've done collage.

MS. KLEMENT: That little thing, that's collage there. I do anything that comes into my head.

MR. SILVERMAN: And then smearing leaves.

MS. KLEMENT: And I make it work.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you just—you're open to any—

MS. KLEMENT: Any.

MR. SILVERMAN: Anything that happens.

MS. KLEMENT: Any.

MR. SILVERMAN: And that's something we didn't talk so much about, technical issues in terms of the paint.

MS. KLEMENT: So whatever I—

MR. SILVERMAN: In terms of color—

MS. KLEMENT: Whatever I saw there, the shutters in the town were magnificent. I did that. The mimosa tree in bloom, I did that. Like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it was your surroundings. It was sort of a—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. But the main player was the fallen heads.

MR. SILVERMAN: And heads figure—disembodied heads as well as—heads figure pretty big and large in your work, too. So—

MS. KLEMENT: I discovered that heads—I came up with the idea of heads when I wanted to make a smaller painting. People were always bugging me; “Don’t you make smaller”—well, I’m not going to reduce the size of a figure.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So I had to find something that was that size and that I could work with, and the head was the perfect thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, I might even argue that one of the things I love about old school, kind of, art is how much emotional and psychological meaning is contained in a face. Even from a really early age, you can identify—kids can identify emotions and then think—

MS. KLEMENT: But see, I didn’t want to paint a face. I wanted to paint the whole object.

MR. SILVERMAN: The head as an object, but there’s—I’m thinking of some of the images of heads. I don’t know of any that are just immediately present, but some of them are very expressive—have faces that are very expressive. They may be heads, but they’re—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, but you have to have the whole head.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you want the whole head as a sculptural object.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: And these—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, and then I have to tell you another story. This is totally—

MR. SILVERMAN: That’s okay.

MS. KLEMENT: —unrelated, but at some point, when I was young, I realized that I had a knack for likeness, and so I thought I would paint some portraits.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you have done that.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, I approached Harold Rosenberg’s wife. Did you know them at all?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, that’s a little before me, and I actually, certainly, know who he is. I didn’t—I didn’t even know the wife. Anyways, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: The wife.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I said, May, I’d like to do your portrait. She said, “Oh, Alice tried”—meaning Alice Neal—

MR. SILVERMAN: Alice Neal, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: And [... -VK] de Kooning’s wife [... -VK]—Elaine—

MR. SILVERMAN: Elaine, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —[... -VK]“and they failed, but if you want to, go ahead.”

MR. SILVERMAN: That’s quite a challenge.

MS. KLEMENT: And I learned, very early, that when the sitter was present, it ruined the whole thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh really?

MS. KLEMENT: I needed to look at that person and then remember them, regurgitate them through memory—

MR. SILVERMAN: Have an essence—

MS. KLEMENT: —and then paint them.

MR. SILVERMAN: —to not go for the exactitude.

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MS. KLEMENT: You get caught up in the details—

MS. KLEMENT: Right.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and then don't see the whole physiognomy.

MS. KLEMENT: Because that would ruin the whole thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: So I painted this [portrait -VK] of May, and I started to laugh because there she was. She had these buck teeth that she would suck on [sucks teeth] like that [Laughs.].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I thought, my God, there she is. So I called her. I said, "May, I finished your portrait." She says, "Start running. I'll send Harold to look at it." So Harold comes. He looks, and he was enraged.

MR. SILVERMAN: Really?

MS. KLEMENT: Mind you, a man in the avant garde, knowing what his best friend, de Kooning, did to women—

MR. SILVERMAN: Women, oh my God, yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And what Picasso did, and who complained? What sitter complained?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well, there were a lot of wives in terms of Picasso, so that's a whole other story.

MS. KLEMENT: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: They took a lot on.

MS. KLEMENT: —so he said, "You have two choices. Either you lose a friend, or I go back home, and I say to her, yech [negative]." I said, go tell her yech [negative]. And so, she never saw the thing at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it got edited out of history.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and it's too bad because it looks just like her.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you may have caught her—

MS. KLEMENT: And then, she did a terrible thing to me. She went to the dentist, and she had all that—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, so it changed the whole—

MS. KLEMENT: —so she suddenly looked different.

MR. SILVERMAN: Totally different. Well, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: Then, not having had enough, I decided I want to paint Harold.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're a glutton for [Laughs.]—

MS. KLEMENT: So I'm standing on a ladder. The thing is 90 inches tall, and the top of his head isn't there, and he has no feet because he's so huge. So I'm painting away. I can't get the likeness. I scrape; I paint; I scrape, and suddenly I decide to open his mouth, and there he was. So I ran to the phone. I said, "Harold, come over" [Laughs.]—

MR. SILVERMAN: After—even after the first incident, you—

MS. KLEMENT: I did. And he came, and he stood, and he looked at it, and all he could say was, "You made me look like a golem."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And I have no idea what he meant by that. I mean, I know what a golem is.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, but it's still—yes, I'm not sure how he gets from there—

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know how he—anyway, when he died, I was stunned that I was asked to give the eulogy at Bon Chapel, together with Bellow and Saul Steinberg. That was no joke.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow. Yes, that's some serious heavy-hitters there. So that's interesting. So he's still—even though you made him look like a golem, he still respected—he probably—when you take on—well, portraiture, as you know, in terms of the history of art—

MS. KLEMENT: He was a male, chauvinist pig.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, weren't they—I mean, that whole—it's very—

MS. KLEMENT: Weren't they all?

MR. SILVERMAN: They were all very much—it's a very male society.

MS. KLEMENT: Totally male, totally, and that brings us to a subject I want to get to: the women's movement.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh good. Okay, hit it.

MS. KLEMENT: I think it's, in my life, powerful.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's interesting—

MS. KLEMENT: The late '60s, early '70s, I heard about it first when I was on Martha's Vineyard one summer, and someone came and talked, and I—my ears opened, and then I went to East Hampton, and there was a huge meeting of women at the foot of the windmill, and it was glorious. And I got invited to a consciousness-raising group. And that was scary and thrilling, and when I came back home, I wanted to organize such a group here, and it took me three years for women to be willing to join me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, those were different times, too, and even feminism—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. And we did it, and it was incredibly powerful and helped me divorce Shapey. They gave me strength to divorce.

MR. SILVERMAN: Finding your voice—finding your voice, too, because you mentioned how hard it was, and here you are with a major talker, and it's probably just my style. It's not even—it's genetic. It's my folks, my mom, in particular. My dad was very shy.

MS. KLEMENT: Don't blame them. [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, really, you got to take responsibility. But here you are; it's very hard. I noticed that, yes, it's hard sometimes, and it's not easy to be able to even find space—you talked about finding space to be able—in the art world in particular, which is so male, it's very difficult to be able, not just to have your artistic voice, but to even to be able to speak up and say stuff, and that's very important—

MS. KLEMENT: Very.

MR. SILVERMAN: —in the art world.

MS. KLEMENT: So that—I just wanted to bring that up, and that led into Artemisia.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's the connection to Artemisia.

MS. KLEMENT: And led, also, to my deep disappointment in women.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, look at Judy Chicago. I mean, I know someone who went to one of her workshops, and I think I saw her give a speech once, and then off to be—was going off to be one of her groupies. It was as much—this is the fault of—we were talking about the flaws of political art. Even though her aims might have been wonderful, I think a lot of it was the Judy Chicago show; it was a lot of—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, absolutely.

MR. SILVERMAN: —her ego, and so how do you balance that? Whereas, that's where I think—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —Leon is very different. And I would maintain—well, getting back to portraiture, one of the reasons why I think Leon’s work is so powerful is that physiogeny—that physiogeny, physiognomy, or whatever it is—that, sort of, stance of power, that being able to capture the essence, as you put it, in terms of portraiture, of power and of abuse is more universal and is not about the particulars, whether it be—you know, it doesn’t matter where the torture is or where the political strife is; he gets beyond that into a certain psychology and something that’s really depthful [sic]. But it’s quite possible to go the other route and to have something that serves—even though in theory, it’s about, you know, all the wonderful women that did all these things, that—you know, the skills that China painters, all the stuff, but when it gets down to it, it’s in the service of the Judy Chicago show—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and it doesn’t really seem to call as much attention to them as it does to her. Maybe she’s a good marketer. Maybe that’s the issue we were talking about in the art world.

MS. KLEMENT: But you know, we had already gotten rid of girdles, and this, and curlers, and high heels, and all that crap, and what do I see? It’s horrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, well, the thing is that there’s a—

MS. KLEMENT: They’re crippled by these shoes. They carry these satchels that must weigh a ton. Why?

MR. SILVERMAN: And that’s the thing of the women are now trying to use—it’s become manipulative in the sense of using those charms, shall we say, or whatever externals to get power, and I—good luck to them because there’s some problems with the male end of the equation, too, in terms of having—I saw this with my dad—you know, having to think so much about struggle about survival and supporting a family that you just squish your ego out and squish whatever it is that your vision is, or your dream, and, you know, the male part is equally problematic as the female end. Both—but now, I think there’s feedback. There was an article in *the New York Times* about—by a feminist, who was complaining—there’s back flack—back pressure about this notion of Caitlyn—Bruce Jenner turned Caitlyn—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —about what a woman is.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh gross.

MR. SILVERMAN: And now, we’ve got the same thing with black. What’s black? People are wanting to be black, so they’re just saying they’re black. Well, being a woman, this—I recommend it. I’ll save it for you. It was in the weird section. I saved it for Tobey, too, because it’s so fascinating because it’s about—being a woman is not just genetic. It’s all the experiences you have. It is culturally determined; there’s a lot of it that is, but if you—you know, Bruce was very—he was on the Wheaties box, and he was big and tall. He can defend himself.

MS. KLEMENT: Gross.

MR. SILVERMAN: He’s all these things—you know, as a woman, yes, it’s one thing to be able to wear heels and have nail polish, but there’s a lot of other stuff that you endure that I don’t think he has a clue.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: He’s learning fast through because there’s a lot of feedback on the internet that’s probably—

MS. KLEMENT: There was this book by Margaret Atwood—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I remember her. I never read that.

MS. KLEMENT: —the handmaiden, and women were cattle. They were used for producing offspring, period. And they—their lives were totally confined, and you know, if we get the wrong government in, I can see it going that way. I got to go to the bathroom for a minute.

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess we’re back on the record. I guess I answered my question a while back about heroes, and you sort of alluded to some of your artistic heroes and some of your literary heroes and musical ones, but I think I answered as much as you did. You’ve mentioned Munch. You’ve certainly mentioned the fact that you were brought up in analytic Cubism, Braque, and Gris, and Picasso, who changed quite a bit, but who are some of the heroes—are there any—well, I asked two questions, and I’m not sure if we developed it entirely. Are there

any artists today that you're enamored of? Is there any—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't see much around you that gets you excited.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: And how about in terms of from any point in time throughout history? You mentioned some—oh, you went back to Masaccio and Botticelli—

MS. KLEMENT: Oh, no. All right. There's de Kooning.

MR. SILVERMAN: De Kooning, sure.

MS. KLEMENT: There's Rothko.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And there's Philip Guston [... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. That's a good list. Those are big ones. And Rothko certainly managed to deal with a lot of some of the same stuff you're trying for, not just the grand gesture stuff, but I mean, in terms of—I don't know—the void, staring in front of the void [Laughs.]. His paintings are very much about that and, also, that spatial contradiction between here and there, the—and the two-D—

MS. KLEMENT: And I really learned a lot about how to paint from de Kooning.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting too.

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, that's a master.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, did you meet either of them?

MS. KLEMENT: I met both of them, but briefly.

MR. SILVERMAN: Just briefly, and as you said, you weren't one to hang out.

MS. KLEMENT: Guston a little bit better because I went to his house once in Woodstock.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: That's it. But I was very poor at, you know—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that wasn't—you weren't—and besides—which it would have been very hard, as you said, it's a very chauvinist all-boys club, and they were sitting around drinking with all that testosterone in those days. It would have been very hard for you to probably—it would be hard for anyone, particularly female anyone, to manage to tumble with those guys in any way.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I have a little scene in my book where we're in East Hampton for the summer, Shapey and my son, and we're going to the beach, to this place, Louse Point, and that was a very important place for Rosenberg and for de Kooning. He painted *Rosy-Finger Dawn at Louse Point*, and we're coming down the dune, and I see three guys lying around on the sand, and Harold is one of them, and I thought, I'm going to force myself, against my will—I'm going to force myself to go over there and talk with them. And so, I go there, and in this cheerful voice, I say, "Hi."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: And they say, "Hi," and go right back to each other, and I'm standing there, from one foot to the other, begging to be invited to sit with them, and they ignore that I'm standing there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, this is what—this is almost sort of the metaphor that—for the typical situation of the art world, of the snobbism of the art world, and, also, the male club.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, I walked away.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well, it's probably a lot easier today to be a woman as an artist than it was.

MS. KLEMENT: It is, I'm sure.

MR. SILVERMAN: But it's still difficult. I can attest to that, living with one, and it's—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, it's certainly difficult there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: It's like a country club. You know, I didn't have the right credentials.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I did some really good work there. I had Lester Johnson's studio.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: And I did huge, good work, and no one ever saw it. And I've never exhibited it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, we can—we can all name tons of wonderful female artists from that point in time and, you know—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I've got a lot of work that I've never shown.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, let's hope it gets uncovered. I mean—well, look at Lee Bontecou, who is a rather wonderful artist. Someone—you know, she'd given up on the art world, which is what—one of the things—

MS. KLEMENT: While holding my breath.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, then some curator comes and—

MS. KLEMENT: There isn't that much more time left.

MR. SILVERMAN: I know. It's one of those things that you're—and it's tricky. You're asked about, like, what do you do with your work afterwards, too. Well, how about—and it gets—that leads me to a question I was going to ask you. What would you like your legacy to be? Someone's looking at your work 50 years from now, what do you feel your contribution has been, or what would you like to have—I was asking you in terms of Jewish moral sensibility and ethical responsibility of being a survivor, but how about just forgetting about that stuff? Just, as an artist, what do you want your legacy to be or as a person?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know how to put it into words.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, would you like to—you'd like to be remembered, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: Of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: And, from what you're saying, you'd like to be—you'd like your work to still have some—

MS. KLEMENT: One would like, but it's not very likely.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's hard to control. I mean, history is weird. And as I was mentioning with Lee Bontecou, there's people that—how many people do you know, if you look at a *Whitney Biennial* catalogue from 30 years ago, how many people would you recognize other than the stars? Probably not any of them. People come and go —

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and that's what we talked about.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, what would you like? What do you feel like you've done that—

MS. KLEMENT: I was a good painter.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're a good painter.

MS. KLEMENT: I think I'm the best painter in Chicago.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's interesting. I guess, you know, that would be [Laughs.] interesting—



MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: I mean, I know other people that feel that way, too, but I actually—I know some artists and painters, who I think are really wonderful, that don't hardly get any attention either. And I wonder, you know, why that is, people that weren't—that didn't have the Dennis Adrians, or the Don Baums, or the other people backing them. I mean, it's an alliance of friends. I mean, it's who you know.

MS. KLEMENT: I remember once when I was still with Marianne, somebody wanted to buy a painting, and Dennis told them—told her not to—told that client not to. And it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, they had a lot of power.

MS. KLEMENT: —and instead buy an Ed Paschke.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Well, their—they had a lot of power, and it was kind of like—I mean, it's a promotional tool, and it's like marketing, like a lot of the—we were talking about the kids. A lot of that is kids are much, much more aware of marketing than even making the art. They're more about the product and the meme.

MS. KLEMENT: They study that more than anything else.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, they study that, and, you know, look at Jeff Koons. He was a broker on Wall Street or something along those lines, so those people are in the majority. The art world is very aware of how to place and market the work, and not so much about the old school passion or about, you know, the quality of the art. It's more about how to make a product that gets out there. So, do you feel like—how do you—other than being the best painter in Chicago, how do you feel about your distinctive style? What do you think you bring to the mix?

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I don't know. I decided that I didn't like Abstract Expressionism because it had to do with an immediate gesture, spontaneous—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —and I needed to control things.

MR. SILVERMAN: You wanted those orders, those rules.

MS. KLEMENT: I needed to have it planned and then executed. At the same time, I wanted it to look like that, and that project was immensely difficult. I needed it to describe exactly this mass that I wanted to paint. At the same time, I wanted it to look like it just happened like that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You wanted controlled chaos.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: You wanted—you wanted something to have the chaos of the world, but you wanted it to have a real, physical reality.

MS. KLEMENT: I wanted it to look as though it just flew out there.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, the best at anything makes something very difficult look easy. And that's kind of maybe one of—

MS. KLEMENT: It was very hard. I worked like an animal.

MR. SILVERMAN: And you're still—I mean, it's interesting that you're still driven by this, even though it sounds like, you know, you're as interested in your memoir as you probably are in making the art these days, yes?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know. I like everything.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're still—you like doing it all.

MS. KLEMENT: Huh?

MR. SILVERMAN: You like doing it all.

MS. KLEMENT: I like it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, well, I've probably covered a lot of what I intended to.

MS. KLEMENT: I like solving problems, and that presents a problem, and then I have to work at solving it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And oftentimes, from what you said, the solving of that problem is not only a discovery, but it changes the direction, the course of the piece, or the next bunch of work that you're doing, so it's a discovery process. That's kind of what I was hinting at; maybe that's what drives you to the next one is the thrill of the discovery.

MS. KLEMENT: I just say I love to paint. I love the material. I love the idea that it's an alchemical transformation. We're taking this shapeless shit and turning it into an illusion.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, that's the kind of wonderful magic, and let's hope it doesn't get lost because, nowadays, they're putting museums online, and it's very different not to be in the presence. That's one of the things that's so lovely about looking at your book is that there's a physicality and a realness that is very important to you. That would make a very wonderful book reproduced, but it would be very different than standing in front of the fact that there's collage, and there's a very famous Dali painting, the one with the shoot—firing range. When I was a teenager, of course, that's teenager kind of work.

I remember liking Dali, and I knew that painting pretty well, and it wasn't until I was in Spain, like, you know, 10 years ago, or something—like, it took me 40 years later that I realized that was a postcard. He was a super realist, and he could paint like that, but the image that I had took to be one of his, you know, examples of his expertise in painting was actually a collage. And you can completely misunderstand the physical is-ness of whatever you're looking at. You don't even know if it's a collage or if it's a painting or a drawing. It's really—

MS. KLEMENT: Actually, he has that distance that I long after.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Well, that's interesting because we didn't talk about him at all, but it's interesting. In terms of the landscape, that sense of Catalonian landscape, that was a kind of a magical landscape, too, not as charged as yours in terms of the—I'm sure it was charged for him, in terms of memory, but there's that Catalonian thing that—there's very sculptural rocks and things. Yes, I guess I feel like we've covered a lot of—maybe we went in circles and—

MS. KLEMENT: Probably.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's okay. I'm fine with that. Were the things that you mentioned, the feminist movement—are there other things that you wanted to bring up, too?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know. What do you got?

MR. SILVERMAN: What do I got? Well, I want to make sure that this is—this is how you're going to be represented in terms of, you know, who you are as an artist and as a person, and I think those are—there's a lot there. There's a lot more, I'm sure, in terms of your experiences. I don't know. That's fine.

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MR. SILVERMAN: So an important issue, for you, is the women's movement, which was, I think, important to your growth, too. You wanted to say something about that [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: [Laughs.]

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you wanted to resay something about that perhaps

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes, yes, yes. What? One thing I didn't mention before is that I never considered myself a feminist painter or a woman painter.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're not wanting to be labeled in that regard.

MS. KLEMENT: I'm a painter, and I'm a feminist, apart from my—not related to my work. I mean, it is related, of course, and I purposely chose certain images, female forms. I've translated male gestures into female gestures.

MR. SILVERMAN: So there's some hints—just like the Jewish issue, there's some hints of your past and of your passion and your beliefs in the work, but they're just hints; they're not—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes

MR. SILVERMAN: They're not direct—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes

MR. SILVERMAN: And I guess that has a lot to do with what you were talking about in terms of politics and art. You don't wish—

MS. KLEMENT: And a lot of the art, at the time, that was feminist art was drivel.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Well, we were talking about—I think I was talking about Judy Chicago, just as an example of someone who, even though—I mean, it became the Judy Chicago show, even though the idea was to sort of showcase the history of women's role behind the scenes. Who's in front of the scenes and that, it's obviously at the—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, there was a lot of bad art, but we weren't allowed to criticize it—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: And we had to accept it as good.

MR. SILVERMAN: So doctrinaire—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes

MR. SILVERMAN: — political correctness, any of those things—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, right

MR. SILVERMAN: —definitely, that's not something you're—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, there were girdles, and there were soiled sanitary napkins, and there was all sorts of nonsense.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, confrontive nonsense, the idea being to confront the art world. Now, you talked a little bit about a sense of community that was really important to you, to be able to find your voice and be able to—I mean, within the context of women, it was very different. But you said—I think you also said you were disappointed in women, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I'm disappointed in them now in that the—whatever was gained during the course of the movement seems to have gone out the window. So that clothing or that making oneself a sexual object and so forth is—

MR. SILVERMAN: We've come back around.

MS. KLEMENT: We've come back around.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And I've found that very disappointing.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, there are some people that think history is cyclical, being I see the largesse and the gains in the '60s come back, rather than the '50s, which I think we might be more approaching, politically, in terms of repression and in terms of—

MS. KLEMENT: It's frightening. It's frightening what's happening.

MR. SILVERMAN: Now, you, obviously, feel passionately about a lot of these topics, and they find their way indirectly into your work. Have you ever thought of trying to make a—you disavow the notion of feminist art or woman's art, but have you ever tried to incorporate some of the passion about—I see the passion about politics, but about female issues other than female, sort of, representation? You haven't—

MS. KLEMENT: No

MR. SILVERMAN: —thought of taking that on as a subject?

MS. KLEMENT: That's not a subject for me. I'm interested in human, not in female or male.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].. And I guess something—a subject that I didn't bring up a little is that I know you are very involved with literature and music. How about film? I mentioned Polanski and—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —Herzog, he—

MS. KLEMENT: Herzog made an effect. I even made a painting called *La Soufriere*.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, I know that one, about the earthquake and—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —the people after the—or the—not earthquake, the volcano.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, that was a painting.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, so you like Herzog a lot.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, I do.

MR. SILVERMAN: He's a German romantic, too.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, of course.

MR. SILVERMAN: And a mystic as well. The subjects are—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, he has—maybe I mentioned that in the earlier one, but he has a film where deaf and dumb people from birth are taken out doors and put in front of a tree, and this one person feels the tree, and you can see on the face what he is experiencing, and that's what I wanted my trees to be.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, so you wanted that experience. And of course, there's that famous, sort of, tale about the person who feels the elephant's trunk and says one thing, you know, the parts rather than the whole [Laughs.]. They think it's one thing because they feel the trunk, and the other person feels, you know, the body of it.

MS. KLEMENT:

Yes, but that's different.

MR. SILVERMAN: So is there—

MS. KLEMENT: This has to do with girth.

MR. SILVERMAN: Girth, and you wanted that feeling of corporeality, of—

MS. KLEMENT: I have a chapter in my book about Balzac's *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*. Do you know that work?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I've—

MS. KLEMENT: It's a novella.

MR. SILVERMAN: I haven't read that. I don't think I've ever read any Balzac. That's just funny, too. I don't think so.

MS. KLEMENT: Oh my God.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes

MS. KLEMENT: Anyway, this story is a very important landmark for modern artists who read and loved, and Cézanne was asked, "Have you read *Le Chef-d'oeuvre inconnu*?"—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —and he poked himself in the chest and said "C'est moi."

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] That's what you were saying with—

MS. KLEMENT: So this is the story about, how do you paint a figure in space? When does the figure stop, and when does the space begin? And where exactly is the figure placed in that air?

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, the old master in the story visits some artist's studio, and he says, "Your figure is no good. It looks glued on. There's no back to it," and I became obsessed with that, with that notion.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, that's interesting. So—

MS. KLEMENT: I have several paintings that address that.

MR. SILVERMAN:

How about the—I was talking about film. There's a certain kind of jump shift in a way of using, sometimes, time and memory and film; does that ever affect, since I take you to be someone who gets ideas from—the outside the world of ideas. Do films ever influence—does a film structure or imagery ever get to you?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't seem to remember any film doing anything that way.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that's not happened. There's that—some images of Herzog that have a sense of landscape and a sense of rustling long grass that seems very Germanic—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —and very much, very—it's the beginning of a couple films and—

MS. KLEMENT: I just sold a painting that was a meadow.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Just a door to the meadow.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, you have this green, grassy area.

MR. SILVERMAN: And where is this door going to? Nowhere.

MS. KLEMENT: To the meadow.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh into the meadow. So it actually—

MS. KLEMENT: It's opening onto the meadow.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it isn't a door, like, to the void; it's—

MS. KLEMENT: No, no.

MR. SILVERMAN: —something else. So sometimes—

MS. KLEMENT: I have a door to the river, and I have a door to the meadow.

MR. SILVERMAN: So sometimes, the doors are—

MS. KLEMENT: And what's nice about doors is that they could be opening into, or shutting you out.

MR. SILVERMAN: You have a lot of closed doors, too, which—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, you don't know what's—

MR. SILVERMAN: And there's—

MS. KLEMENT: —going on.

MR. SILVERMAN: There's usually stuff on the surface from—

MS. KLEMENT: Could be either one.

MR. SILVERMAN: And what's behind the door is—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —kind of the—so are you also hoping that your work functions differently for different people? This is an obvious yes to the answer, but—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, you can't control that.

MR. SILVERMAN: You can't control it. This is what we got into yesterday in that conversation, but even though you have a strong notion of what it should be, are you open to the ambiguity of your work? The fact that it could be read like, "What is behind the door?" "What is"—there are people that have different life experiences than yours.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, I can get very annoyed when someone totally misreads what's clearly obvious to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I get annoyed. At the same time, I'm not willing to direct.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what I was getting at with—I don't know if this was on the record—but I was talking about, sometimes with art, you almost want to have some sign post. You don't want to have labels, but do you want the work to speak for itself? Of course.

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: But there are times when there's very specific things going on, very specific illusions, or, you know, it's almost like a language that you might not be privy to the artist—

MS. KLEMENT: Well—

MR. SILVERMAN: —language.

MS. KLEMENT: —you know, I see my paintings as functioning similarly to poetry—

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: —where you have images that are metaphoric or symbolic or who knows what, or random, that then have a dialogue and that those two different—I usually have two different things—and that the two different things, if they are doing the right thing with each other, can create the idea of more—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's what I mentioned—

MS. KLEMENT: —maybe a third thing.

MR. SILVERMAN: —the disjunction or the jump shift—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —that, sort of, sending something in motion, just getting this sort of field set up of ideas.

MS. KLEMENT: And it's like poetry and the art critic, Donald Kuspit—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes.

MS. KLEMENT: —coined a term for my work. He called them poem paintings.

MR. SILVERMAN: Poem paintings. Interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: And that's what I think of them as.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]..

MS. KLEMENT: Ever since he said that—

MR. SILVERMAN: That makes sense.

MS. KLEMENT: —because I think they are.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I think I use—it's like a visual poetry, and there's no real explanation to what that means—

MR. SILVERMAN: And—

MS. KLEMENT: —the way, in poetry, I often read a poem, and I don't know what it is.

MR. SILVERMAN: And maybe that's not important; it's meant to be a literal, obvious—it's now logical world. It's a

world of something else, and you use symbols an awful lot. You have your icons; you have certain—how do you know when to—you say you don't want to treat them in the same way; how do you know when to retire them? Or they don't ever get retired. I guess they keep coming—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —back.

MS. KLEMENT: They never get retired because I haven't used them for a long time; they're totally new to me.

MR. SILVERMAN: So they come back at a different—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —context or different form—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, because I don't remember how I did it.

MR. SILVERMAN: And do you, sort of—you don't look at the previous—let's say if you've got a—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't ever look back at the other ones?

MS. KLEMENT: No, I don't look.

MR. SILVERMAN: You don't look; you just go forward.

MS. KLEMENT: I just do it.

MR. SILVERMAN: You do it. And do you ever—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, some ideas are from very trite sources. It's embarrassing to even tell it. But let's say that green tree—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: Where did I get the idea to make a green tree? I took some photographs of trees at Peter's place in the woods and took them to Walgreens to be—

MR. SILVERMAN: Processed.

MS. KLEMENT: —processed. And they made a mistake.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, you mean that actually—

MS. KLEMENT: —and they came out green.

MR. SILVERMAN: So that isn't Fauvism or—

MS. KLEMENT: And I looked at that—

MR. SILVERMAN: —German expressionism; it's Walgreens [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: It's Walgreens, and I looked at that, and I thought, "That is gorgeous. I want that," and I painted a green tree.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that was a question that I passed over that I never—

MS. KLEMENT: I'll take anything from anywhere, anyhow.

MR. SILVERMAN: What is it? Necessity is the mother of invention, or whatever that is.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, I guess what I was going to ask you is your color sense, but I never did ask about that in terms of technical things, and that answers one of the questions. Some of these things are accidental discoveries that you just might—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: If a color is an extreme color, it's not you're necessarily pushing—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, that's the one thing I can change. I can't change where it ends or the shape of it because of the white.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: The white is unforgiving. But I can change the color.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what you were saying yesterday is that, yes, that's why you have the freedom to—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —play with, but some of the playing isn't necessarily—some of it, like in that case, at least, some of the extreme or the expressive quality of the color comes not—it wasn't entirely a free choice; it was a choice [Laughs.], but it was Walgreens coming up with—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —a color that intrigued you.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Any other examples in terms of your color being derived from something other than—

MS. KLEMENT: No—

MR. SILVERMAN: Than reality?

MS. KLEMENT: —I can't think of anything.

MR. SILVERMAN: Sometimes there's just—

MS. KLEMENT: You know, you see stuff all the time, and it imprints itself on your mind. You don't know how or when, but I like doing different technical things. Like, the painting with the boat has that same splattery—like the cover of that book.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, sure.

MS. KLEMENT: And I've discovered how to get a perfect circle—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that's interesting.

MS. KLEMENT: —while splattering.

MR. SILVERMAN: Splatter, a splatter circle. You've got control, again, controlled chaos, another important theme, to have—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —control. I mean, you talked about gesture in terms of the Abstract Expressionists, and that's so much about what they're about, that sort of dance. But there's an interesting—you can see the process of making the painting is the painting, but yours are controlled chaos.

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

MR. SILVERMAN: You're trying to get something that isn't—you don't want to necessarily show your process.

MS. KLEMENT: I remember someone once looked at my—I had a show somewhere, and they said, "This is chaos." And I thought, you don't understand; it's totally controlled chaos.

MR. SILVERMAN: There are rules here [Laughs.].

MS. KLEMENT: It's totally controlled.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, yes. Interesting. And actually, your work has a formal quality to it. It's very—



MS. KLEMENT: It's very formal.

MR. SILVERMAN: —very formal. It's very—there's an exactitude, and that's when I asked you about—when you came into the studio. You have floor plans, as you called them—

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —so there aren't—if something looks accidental, it's on purpose [Laughs].

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: And even the color and the things that you're talking about, they don't allow you a lot of leeway.

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: You sort of come to those by way of different kinds of decisions. With the Walgreens, it was something that intrigued you with the distortion of the color.

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: When you distort color, take something that's usually one color and change it—

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: —are you looking to get more of an emotional, kind of, sense?

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know. I don't know. I just liked the way that looked, and I did it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Because you come—I mean, I'm thinking of the—speaking of the German expressionists and the Fauves who, like Franz Marc or something, and they paint a blue horse. You clearly get much more—something happens when you change the color completely.

MS. KLEMENT: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MR. SILVERMAN: So, do you ever play that way? Just sort of deliberately—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —just go against the grain color-wise, or you—

MS. KLEMENT: No, mostly I try, believe it or not, to do it realistically [Laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] This is realism for you, but for someone else, it may seem abstract, whatever that means.

MS. KLEMENT: I don't know why people call my work abstract.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, it's got elements of abstraction.

MS. KLEMENT: I mean, a fish is a fish.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: A tub is a tub. Windows are windows. What's abstract there?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well—

MS. KLEMENT: What's different here is that I've taken something away.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MS. KLEMENT: I've painted in a—in a representational manner, but I've removed the context.

MR. SILVERMAN: So—

MS. KLEMENT: And so, that makes it look—makes people think it looks abstract when it isn't. It's not abstract at all.

MR. SILVERMAN: And—

MS. KLEMENT: It's just that the figure isn't in a chair in a room in a building. The figure is in space.

MR. SILVERMAN: And the painterly parts are in the service of creating an image.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And they could be—even if I'm looking at a splotch of red, it could be, sort of, an illusion to a splatter of blood, or it could be a lot of things in terms of it's meant to allude. It's not meant to be a record of your path across the paper or some sort of accidental, just sort of, you know, accidents—

MS. KLEMENT: It's a landscape.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's a landscape.

MS. KLEMENT: And there's a door opening out into it. So you have the tree here, and you have the landscape going out through the door.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, what we're looking at is actually a blotch of color that could be flowers; it could be blood; it could be a lot of things. You could look at it as it's red and—

MS. KLEMENT: It can't be anything because the door sort of holds it in place.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: It's like a frame.

MR. SILVERMAN: And it goes outside the frame as well, though.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: And then there's that sense of space. Well, what space are we looking at? The space right out the door—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, we don't know.

MR. SILVERMAN: —or is it deep space? So there's that ambiguity.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Definitely. And I guess I knew one of the things—I don't know if it's going to come out in the non-mic'd recording, but I guess one of the things I was asking you about is just, you know, you're looking forward towards the future; how did you want your work to be seen? I guess that wasn't an easy one to answer the first time around.

MS. KLEMENT: I have no idea.

MR. SILVERMAN: You're just hoping it's seen and that it actually has some relevance in the future. That's an important thing for you.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, it would be nice.

MR. SILVERMAN: It'd be nice. And the fads and fashions of the art world come and go.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, the fact that it hasn't been really seen up to now doesn't give me much hope that it'll ever be seen in the future.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, the same people are probably—I mean, this may or may not be on the live part of the recording, but the, you know, Lee Bontecou, the people that get discovered, but there's so many of them that don't get discovered. It's—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Particularly women and it's particularly work that doesn't fit into—

MS. KLEMENT: So, you know, why should I be hopeful?

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, because of the quality of the work. You stand behind that.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, but the quality of the work never got me very far.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you got a little bit too much success too early, perhaps; maybe that's part of the—

MS. KLEMENT: No, that didn't count. That was a blip.

MR. SILVERMAN: It may have been a blip, but I mean—

MS. KLEMENT: Nobody here knows about it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, I didn't know that. And, actually, that's kind of—that shocked me and actually—

MS. KLEMENT: Nobody knows about it.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you also had pretty good fortunes in—that's where I was ending—

MS. KLEMENT: I've had all the awards: the Tiffany, the Lee Krasner Pollock thing, the Guggenheim. And when I was teaching at the University of Chicago and I had those things, I never got any hoopla or—

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, you weren't the approved—you weren't the right [Laughs.]—in with the right crowd.

MS. KLEMENT: No, I got nothing. I got nothing there for that.

MR. SILVERMAN: But you also did manage to show your work. You've had some pretty big exhibitions and not just the Cultural Center—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, I did manage.

MR. SILVERMAN: What are some of the biggest exhibitions—other than the Cultural Center show, what are the—

MS. KLEMENT: That was the best one.

MR. SILVERMAN: That was the best—that was the big one.

MS. KLEMENT: But I mean, I've had a beautiful exhibition in the middle of nowhere. Do you know the Daum Museum?

MR. SILVERMAN: I've not even heard of that; I'm shocked.

MS. KLEMENT: Sedalia, Missouri.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh, that might be why [Laughs.]. I've not been around there either.

MS. KLEMENT: It is beautiful.

MR. SILVERMAN: So it's a great space.

MS. KLEMENT: It's like a white temple. I mean, it's just—and my work looked stunning.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow, well, that's great. When was that?

MS. KLEMENT: But what is that?

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, and who goes to see that?

MS. KLEMENT: I think that was in '06.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's not that far back. And was there an audience out in Missouri for your work?

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, and I said—we drove, and I said to Peter, "My work is too heavy. They're not going to go over. They're not going to understand my references."

MR. SILVERMAN: They want happy art, huh?

MS. KLEMENT: And do you know, not only did they understand, but one woman showed me an article of mine that she'd been dragging around with her—

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: —in her portmanteau—

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: —and it was an article that was printed in the new—no, it was a paper I gave for the College Art Association and that was printed for their chronicle of education [... -VK]—

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. Wow, you had a fan.

MS. KLEMENT: It was called—they wanted artists to write about aging, and of course, I took it one step further, “An Artist’s Notes on Aging and Death.”

MR. SILVERMAN: Boy, there you go.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes. It was, you know, a good piece. And she carried it, and that was in Sedalia, Missouri.

MR. SILVERMAN: So you had a fan in Missouri. That’s kind of amazing. So your work does communicate across many boundaries and—

MS. KLEMENT: Amazing. I think some people, who are open to it, like it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, and there’s different—I mean, some people don’t like—some people want art to be more narrative; some people don’t want it to be narrative at all; some people—I mean, there’s things that really appeal to people, and some people want happy art, and some people want morose art. I mean, I suppose some of this is generational, clearly what we talked about in your youth and about the fact that you grew up post-war. There was a feeling, a mood that it’s, you know—

MS. KLEMENT: Here’s an interesting thing; the Union League Club, they nominated me one of their distinguished artist members.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: I can’t go into that building without someone grabbing me and telling me how much they love my work, that it’s their favorite in the whole place.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that’s great. And they’ve shown some pretty interesting stuff, too, over the years. And actually, they’re talking about work—

MS. KLEMENT: You know they have a painting from 1965.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, they have it in their collection.

MS. KLEMENT: It’s quite romantic.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes.

MS. KLEMENT: A woman looking out of a window at the unattainable distance.

MR. SILVERMAN: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].. [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: One of those.

MR. SILVERMAN: One of those. And—

MS. KLEMENT: And then, I gave them, as a gift, a sort of follow-up on the woman looking out the window, and this is an homage to Caspar David Friedrich and de Kooning. So this figure of a woman is standing between looking into the void with open arms and a sliver of a de Kooning’s [... -VK] *Rosy-Fingered Dawn at Louse Point*—

MR. SILVERMAN: That’s what you were talking about.

MS. KLEMENT: —which is a painting I love. So you have these paintings that are almost 200 years apart with the figure holding her arms open. Heavy-duty, romantic stuff.

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh yes—[laughs] —definitely. So you’re a romantic at heart, but you’ve balanced—

MS. KLEMENT: I’m a romantic, not using the word in this colloquial way.

MR. SILVERMAN: No, because I—

MS. KLEMENT: But in the German, Goethe, and so forth way.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, that's why I brought up Werner Herzog because he's kind of fascinating in that regard. He's a mystic, but a romantic and has a real sense of place. I find him pretty interesting. But you're also tempered; there's the Apollonian side, too. There's the order and the rules and the formality—

MS. KLEMENT: Order and rules.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's not the passion; it's not—I was going to almost ask you about Arshile Gorky, too, in terms of —

MS. KLEMENT: He was an influence.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, because I think that relates to your work—

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

MR. SILVERMAN: —in a way, too, but there's that passion, but it's a very—in your case, it's a very controlled passion.

MS. KLEMENT: Very.

MR. SILVERMAN: It's very much symbols, and he sort of balanced that out a little bit. I mean, there was a lot of that angst and passion that comes out, but some of what I'm getting at is that there's a balance between emotion and intellect in your work. You're not—you're not an unabated, you know, paint flinger or [Laughs.]—

MS. KLEMENT: No, no.

MR. SILVERMAN: —or, you know, the—if there's—

MS. KLEMENT: It all has to have a goal and a reason. You can't just slosh around.

MR. SILVERMAN: Even though there's sloses, for which you maintain—

MS. KLEMENT: Highly controlled sloses.

MR. SILVERMAN: They're highly controlled sloses, and they're—that's what you were talking about with the circles, that the sloses that you learned to even put in—so they're—and they're for a particular purpose.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: They have narrative weight and symbolic weight as well.

MS. KLEMENT: The sloses are, in a way, important because they are showing you what the material is that I begin with, that form of runny, drippy stuff.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's what it all comes out of.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Either that or the blank canvas [laughs]; those are gessoed. Those are not completely—those are treated, right? There's gesso on there.

MS. KLEMENT: They're gessoed.

MR. SILVERMAN: So they're not—they're, again, an illusion. It's not [Laughs.] just the materials; the material that's been treated to look a certain way to get you that void is another illusion. It's not—it's not the void of the —it's not the, just, material itself.

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I haven't painted it.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well, that's different, of course.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: But it's still—but it is—there's something that has been applied, so it's—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes, yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —not the actual material; there's a little bit of—

MS. KLEMENT: Well, yes. I don't—I don't celebrate canvas [laughs].

MR. SILVERMAN: Or you don't do like—what was it?—Robert Ryman, you're not looking at the white to look at the slight gradations of [Laughs.]—

MS. KLEMENT: No.

MR. SILVERMAN: —application of—

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: —whatever. I mean, it's not about that either; it's just void. I'm trying to think if there were other things—maybe some other things—

MS. KLEMENT: Someone when I was in France for that residency—one of the residents was an Israeli French person, and she said she thought that the white was the silence of the world community to what was happening with the Jews. And I did what you did.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] Yes, I don't know about that.

MS. KLEMENT: I sort of shook my head. But as time has gone on, I've decided she may be right.

MR. SILVERMAN: The quote I mangled before that may not even be on the taped part, the—what is silence—what is that screaming all around us that men call silence? I don't know if that's Goethe or whatever; it's in the Herzog movie.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes, there's also—that negative space could also be a very charged negative space.

MS. KLEMENT: Yes.

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess that's the question there.

MS. KLEMENT: You know, and silence plays an important role in music—

MR. SILVERMAN: Of course. Intervals is the silence between, and actually, that's kind of what I was asking you about with the—

MS. KLEMENT: There was a Rilke poem about that, and I translated that. Translation is a marvelous activity.

MR. SILVERMAN: Well—

MS. KLEMENT: It may not result in a good thing, but—I was just reading—Nabokov has the translation of Eugene Onegin.

MR. SILVERMAN: I've actually—it's interesting because I've only—I mean, he's written in French and in Russian. I mean, he's actually kind of interesting in that regard, how well he adapted to English. Have you noticed a difference in the—you've probably read some of the original languages; did you read any of it in Russian?

MS. KLEMENT: Well, I'm reading his translation, and it's—he's very proud of it, and I think it's terrible.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Because it's true. That's what they said—

MR. SILVERMAN: It's literal.

MS. KLEMENT: —but that's not how it was said.

MR. SILVERMAN: That's the problem with translation.

MS. KLEMENT: And you can't. Russian is untranslatable.

MR. SILVERMAN: And there's things that, yes, there's language restrictions. Its formal restrictions, though, on

structure and, just, the way things are done that are very different. German is different from Russian—

MS. KLEMENT: Very different.

MR. SILVERMAN: —they're all very different. How would someone translate your work if you were—if we had somebody—if you were—we were talking about—I was talking about signposts and trying to come up with a—if someone was doing a walk—okay, an audio guide, one of those obnoxious audio guides that one does. If someone was trying to translate your work and—

[... -VK]

MR. SILVERMAN: I guess you're saying that it would lack the ability to talk about inner states or emotional expression or—

MS. KLEMENT: You know these things are so ephemeral that, if you put your big thumb on it, it's ruined.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.] The delicate balance of all the forces you set in play. As you said, the poem paintings is something that sticks with you, is that they're meant to just, sort of, assemble a field of meanings and objects and images and memories.

MS. KLEMENT: I had a painting that I did after reading—do you know the poet Nelly Sachs?

MR. SILVERMAN: No, I don't.

MS. KLEMENT: A great German, lyric poet who wrote about the Holocaust, and she escaped and went to Sweden, and she has a poem, in which she uses an image. "The East was red with cockcrow," and that was supposed to mean they're coming. And I thought that was her invention, and so I made a painting of that. It's one of my better paintings, very large, 8x8. And where was I going with this? Oh, so I thought she—

MR. SILVERMAN: Oh.

MS. KLEMENT: —invented that metaphor. And then, what was next?

MR. SILVERMAN: You found where it came from?

MS. KLEMENT: I found—yes. But I found it twice. Well, anyway, I realized or learned or read somewhere that it was a common code that Jews and shtetls would use when a pogrom was coming.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: "The East was red with cockcrow."

MR. SILVERMAN: So this was almost a cliché.

MS. KLEMENT: So at dawn, there's blood on the way.

MR. SILVERMAN: Wow.

MS. KLEMENT: And so, I was amazed that she took that, and that was already was in existence, and then, on the internet, I found something totally amazing: that the poem on the foot of the Statue of Liberty "Give Me Your Huddled Masses" was written by a Jewish woman, Emma Lazarus.

MR. SILVERMAN: I sort of knew Emma Lazarus; that's somewhere deep down there.

MS. KLEMENT: And Emma Lazarus has another poem, and it begins with the same image. I was shocked.

MR. SILVERMAN: So this thing wasn't—and yet, we don't know this. It's not something you would be likely to know, and yet, it was almost a cliché in the shtetls. That's very interesting. So, huh.

MS. KLEMENT: That really stunned me. And I wondered whether the people who chose her poem for that placement knew of that other one because she talks about the Christians are coming afterwards.

MR. SILVERMAN: [Laughs.]

MS. KLEMENT: Burning our roofs.

MR. SILVERMAN: Yes. I'm going to—

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[Postscript from Vera Klement, June 17, 2016: I am a painter that looks. Looking is my passion: the way a field yellows in the distance, the way a tree-trunk bulges to a fullness, how the color of a bathtub is modulated—the list goes on and on. I spend much effort making the images (I call them Icons) recognizable and believable as three-dimensional objects. They have no shadows and are separated from their environment, as though they were sculptural objects. They are icons from a common source, images that are in the collective consciousness, described by Aby Warburg as *Urformen* in the early 20th century. The unusual presentation of these objects doesn't render my paintings "abstract" and I totally disagree with Silverman's insistence on calling them that.]