



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

Oral history interview with Michelle Stuart,  
2015 November 3-2017 May 23

Funding for this interview was provided by the Lichtenberg Family Foundation.

**Contact Information**

Reference Department  
Archives of American Art  
Smithsonian Institution  
Washington, D.C. 20560  
[www.aaa.si.edu/askus](http://www.aaa.si.edu/askus)

# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Michelle Stuart on November 3 and 13, 2015, and May 23, 2017. The interview took place at Stuart's studio in New York City, and was conducted by Annette Leddy for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Michelle Stuart and Annette Leddy have reviewed the transcript. Their corrections and emendations appear below in brackets with initials. This transcript has been lightly edited for readability by the Archives of American Art. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written, prose.

## Interview

[Audio check]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I have to say, before we start, this is Annette Leddy, interviewing Michelle Stuart at her house in New York City on November 3rd, 2015, for the Archives of American Art Smithsonian Institution, card number one. Okay. That has to be said.

Now, also, realize that as sometimes when I'm asking you questions, it's not that I don't know them already—can you hear me? It's that I—you know, this is for the public record. So, the way it should read, ideally—I don't know if you've read any of our interviews before. They're very wonderful. It's almost like reading a novella or something. But they should read in a way—like, they logically proceed and tell the story of your whole life, and who—you know, just what made you the person you are.

MICHELLE STUART: That's impossible, in three sessions or four sessions.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It is totally impossible, but you'd be surprised how well—[laughs]—this can get—

MICHELLE STUART: You have no idea how complicated my life is.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I'm so excited to find out. All right. So, let's start at the beginning. Now, according to my records, which could be wrong, you were born in 1932?

MICHELLE STUART: Three.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Ah, 1933 in Los Angeles. Is that correct?

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: And can you tell me something about your parents—

MICHELLE STUART: I was conceived in Sydney.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. This is what I want to know. How did you or they come to Los Angeles?

MICHELLE STUART: By boat.

ANNETTE LEDDY: By boat. What year?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I think she must've—I was born in February, 1933. [. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And—

MICHELLE STUART: She came on the Mariposa, I think. My father was here already. Both my parents were non-Americans. My mother was Swiss, and my father was Australian. And they met in Sydney, and they married in Sydney, and I was conceived in Sydney, but my father was in business with the United States. So, he went back and forth a lot. And he wanted to live here. And, of course, this was the height of the Depression. And at some point, his business went belly up. And so, they ended up in Los Angeles, where my father wanted to live with my mother, though he had lived previously in San Francisco and Seattle because he thought the climate was better there for her. Everything was for my mother. I mean, everything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, going back a little bit. Now, how did your mother, who was Swiss, come to be an Australian?

MICHELLE STUART: Reluctantly. [Laughs.] She was born in a rather small town on the Lake of Constance in

Switzerland of a, I would say, upper-middle-class family. They had a house and maids, and interestingly, both her parents were in business. I mean, her mother was in business, and her father was a mechanical engineer, so he was a professional, and Austrian. Her mother came from a very long alpine background that went forever in Appenzell, which is—which are the mountains above Rorschach, where my mother was born. And she had a lace business.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: And she was a kind of an amazing woman, actually. But I—you know, we're not giving her life. We're giving mine.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exactly. [Laughs.] That's where we started.

MICHELLE STUART: [Laughs.] But she was very interesting. So, unfortunately for my mother, her mother died when she was 16. And it was a big blow, and she never forgot it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And her father decided he wanted to retire because one of her brothers had gone to Australia; the artist brother had gone to Australia. There are a lot of artists in my mother's family. And when he got there, he decided to come back and tell the family they should all move to Australia because it was, it was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Heaven?

MICHELLE STUART: He was a character, I mean. Yeah, it was heaven, yes. It was heaven, and war was coming.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And he was right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's true; World War I.

MICHELLE STUART: It was after World War I, but it was right—it was before World War II.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: And as a European, he was very aware of what German—well, a German-speaking European—was aware what Hitler was up to.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yup.

MICHELLE STUART: And so, he convinced them all to go. Now, my mother was 17 or something, 18. She did not want to go. She had a boyfriend. She liked her town in Switzerland. And, you know, she was in college, and she—so, she had to go because the whole family was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Moving.

MICHELLE STUART: —moving. They did keep the house, interestingly enough, because my cousin was in it for years. But they moved. They moved to Sydney, and my mother then met my father in Sydney. And it was love. [Laughs.] And they—it was a real marriage. I mean, they loved one another. They were together for—he was considerably older. He was 20 years older than she. So, she lived to be 100, and so, she lived alone for many years after he died. Anyway, so I was the one issue.

[They laugh.]

And I was born in Los Angeles, and I grew up in Los Angeles. And they had a house, and it was in a very nice, you know, middle-class neighborhood.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which one?

MICHELLE STUART: It was on Tremaine, between Wilshire and Olympic, you know, not far from Gramercy Park area, kind of?

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, mid-city?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, now it's considered the mid-city. In 1933—

[They laugh.]

—it probably was an outlying suburb. No, I mean, seriously, I mean, there was downtown, and then there was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that's right.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, as you went out toward—I mean, you went to Beverly Hills. We had a car, and we drove around a lot. So, I—and I think that really actually imprinted a lot on me, this driving around. He was actually showing my mother California. But in fact, I got an incredible imprint of California, all over California, on me as a very young child, and with it, a really strong memory of place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what was his line of work?

MICHELLE STUART: He—well, as I said, he had a business, but his business, it was an import/export business of plumbing supplies. But it stopped with the Depression.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, then, he got a job with the Department of Water and Power. And he had had an engineering background, so he was placed in the engineering department of the Department of Water and Power. And so, he had a lot to do with—and I'm not sure what it was because I was really young, and I don't really know, but it had a lot to do with the dam. Because I remember, he made a lot of trips back and forth to the Hoover—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hoover Dam.

MICHELLE STUART: —Dam, mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And it was once called Boulder Dam. I remember that as a child. It was called Boulder Dam. I think it got changed.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It was expanded, right? It was—yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It was a huge dam, because I remember being taken there as a baby—and, like, my father was into experiences for me. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's nice. I thought you said everything was for your mother. What did that mean?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, yes. Well, she was the queen, and I was the princess.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's—what could be better?

MICHELLE STUART: I was always jealous of the queen, actually. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That sounds like my daughter who, when she was younger used to always say, "Mom, you think you're queen, but I want to be the queen." And she had this crown that I brought her from New York, and she would put it on her head and say, "Mom, I'm the queen." And I would say, "Nope, sorry. I'm the queen."

MICHELLE STUART: It's true. It's true.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, I think when it's working that—

MICHELLE STUART: Only too true.

[They laugh.]

But he—I don't know. He had been married before and had had a son. And I think he didn't, he didn't really—he wasn't close to that son because they lived in a distant place. And I kind of became both the daughter and the son. So, you know, at Christmas, I would get a train set—[laughs]—you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really, that's so—yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And then, I, you know, learned how to do balsa wood airplanes. You know? And at the same time, I mean, he was a wonderful raconteur. That was, like, the little Irish part of him, I think. He used to tell me bedtime stories that were so amazing that I think—my mother read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* to me, but he told me real life bedtime stories.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you said it happened to him or to his family?

MICHELLE STUART: That had happened to him.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, yeah. And he'd had already a very interesting life. He ran away from home when he was 13 or 14, joined the army in Australia, had fought in the Boer War as a bugler in the cavalry, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh my goodness. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, he had an incredible background already.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And his family, were—what was there in Australia? Were they—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that—you want to hear about his family? [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, just a little snapshot, yes.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: Little snapshot. His father was from Aberdeen, Scotland, and his mother was born in the Channel Islands. But those were kind of—his father also left home for adventure and went to New Zealand to seek gold. His father's father was a Maritime—what do you—chandler. So, he was already by the sea. You know —

ANNETTE LEDDY: A chandler is like a—oh.

MICHELLE STUART: A chandler sells Maritime—you know, has a Maritime store, takes care of boats and everything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, oh, I see, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And it's an old term now, but it's a valid one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: And so, he was, so, he was a gold miner. But he was not a rough and tumble gold miner. He was a very well-read, highly religious Presbyterian gold miner, who read the Bible every Sunday and insisted that the whole family read the Bible. And my father wanted me to read the Bible even though my father was not religious.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's got some good stories, though.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, but he said, "It's literature. You'll learn a lot about words." He was very strong on words, my father.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But did he find gold, the gold miner.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, he did?

MICHELLE STUART: But in Australia.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow, yes.

MICHELLE STUART: In Australia, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, what he found in New Zealand was my grandmother.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: My grandmother, the one that was born in the Channel Islands, was actually English. And her parents—her father was in one battalion in the army and met her mother in Kent. They decided they wanted to go to New Zealand. Everybody in my family on both sides were actually—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Adventurers. Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, yes. But all of them—I mean, it was really—except my mother wouldn't have gone. But

all the rest of them. Right? [So, they had a couple of children in England, and then decided he was going to change battalions to the 58th because the 58th was going to New Zealand for the Māori wars. -MS] So, Sabina, my grandmother, got born on the way—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Love the name.

MICHELLE STUART: —in the Channel Islands.

[They laugh.]

And my cousin went and saw her, you know, where she, where she was entered and, you know, the child was born. And then, they got back on a ship to New Zealand. So, Sabina was virtually at sea for five or six months as a babe in arms, and survived. And her mother survived. Her mother survived. She died in her mid-80s, this woman who had five or six children, some of them at sea. [Laughs.] Another one with—apparently, they were quite a couple, because another one was born just after they arrived. [Laughs.] And then, when they had an—the [. . . 58th -MS] had an opportunity to go home, they didn't want to go home. That's why they had done this.

So, they got a land grant in the North Island, and that's where Sabina grew up, in Mangawhai. And I went there. And actually, I didn't know much about that family, so it was a big adventure. I knew practically nothing, and I went there several—to New Zealand several times, looking for the town and looking for the people. And finally, Carey and I went together, and she—like an investigative journalist—we found it.

And it was extremely interesting because the woman that was tending the Mangawhai district museum actually said, "You know, somebody else came looking for the same people." They were on the wall in this town. Their pictures were on the wall. The family pictures were on the wall because they were the first five white settlers in that town. And that's how I met my cousins and everything, because she had written who had called, and she called them up and said, "You know who's here? [An Americans who is in your family." -MS]

[They laugh.]

So, anyway, my parents came to the United States, and fast forward; I went to three different schools that were in walking distance from where my parents' house was. And I was very smart.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You told me that, that you were in a special school for kids with—

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, I was—I had a—I was in the high IQ class.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —high IQs, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And you know—which was extremely fortunate because—and I'm really all for this. I know they think it's—you know, they changed about this, but I was in a room with people that were as intelligent or more intelligent than I. And we were exposed to things that other kids were never—we could use the—any part of the library in the school that we wanted. And that meant, you know, books on Africa with, you know—I mean, all kinds of stuff that was behind glass.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And we could write—and we could pick our subjects, and we could write reports on them. And you know, all in all, it was like being in a Montessori school, or something like that, you know, for the—from the fourth grade to the sixth grade. So, that was good. And then, I went on to junior high school. I had a great art teacher in junior high school, because I was already really drawing a lot.

My parents were very—they really appreciated art a lot. They took me to the ballet. They took me to the opera, although they didn't have a lot of money. My father always took me to the library with him. We borrowed books from the library. It was two blocks away. You know, he'd come with his books; I'd come with mine. There was a very strong familial interest in my being well-fed, intellectually, you know. [Laughs.] So, I was lucky. I was extremely lucky. I think they were lucky, too, but I mean—well, I responded well to it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did they have art in their house? Were there any paintings or anything?

MICHELLE STUART: There were when I got started. Somebody walked into their house once and said, "Oh, it's a Michelle museum." My mother would commission work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's nice. That's nice.

MICHELLE STUART: Seriously.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you remember, like, the first painting that you ever saw, or the first work of art?

MICHELLE STUART: Very vividly. Well, the first painting that really impressed me—my mother took me to the museum—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The county museum in L.A.?

MICHELLE STUART: The county museum—oh, you know, L.A. was really poverty stricken, in terms of museums and places to see art when I was growing up.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Of course, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: [What -MS] I was going to say, there was this teacher in junior high that—I was already primed for this—but she would hold up images; Duchamp—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, great. Yeah. Just that special teacher, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: That was the one class in school that was—that impressed me a great deal. I remember her name. I remember seeing these images. It was way before slides were used. You know, I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, this was in the late 1930s. What was the name of the school?

MICHELLE STUART: No, this was in the '40s.

ANNETTE LEDDY: '40s. And what was the name of the school? Do you remember the school?

MICHELLE STUART: The name of the junior high school? John Burroughs Junior High.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, John Burroughs. That's still there, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Still there. But my mother took me to the county museum, and I remember one of the first things that impressed me was Albert Pinkham Ryder because that was about the most—[laughs]—I mean, that was the most recent painting in the museum. But I also remember, vividly, her taking me to—you know, the war came along, and my father was in the war; was gone. So, my mother and I had a lot of time together. He was overseas. He was an officer; he was a colonel. And you know, it was really hard on my mother because she wasn't American, and she was, you know—really, her language was German, and my father never liked her to speak German, so she was—you know. But she learned English very well.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But did you speak German with her?

MICHELLE STUART: No, my father wouldn't like her to speak German, ever.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [inaudible]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, we were fighting Germany.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I know.

MICHELLE STUART: I think it was a mistake, but you know, those mistakes get—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, no, it's interesting. So, you were in high school when he was overseas. Is that right? You had been, sort of had been—1940, let's see—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I can't remember the exact things—I was in junior high school and high school, maybe.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, junior high school, uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, my mother took me to see the salt mine. You remember, the Germans had placed all these major artworks in salt mines. And the United States, upon discovering this cache of very important artwork that, I think, Goebbels or Goering, one of those people, had overseen; you know, they were going to steal them. But then, they put them in the salt mines to hide them.

The United States Army took all those things, and probably the other armies too, took all those things out. But one of the things, in order to, like, put them somewhere, was they organized a show called—I don't know what it was called now, but it was *The Artworks from the Salt Mines*. L.A. got one of the venues. And so, L.A., the County Museum, probably because they had very little of anything, showed—had this big show of the salt mine things. It was probably in '46 or so. [*Berlin Masterpieces Exhibit, 1948-49 -MS*]

[. . . -MS]

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, no. It was *Manet and Other Great Artworks*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I'll never forget it. It was the first time I saw any Impressionists.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That is so great; that's beautiful.

MICHELLE STUART: It was mind boggling for me [at 15 years old. -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: So, that was an important time. And then, all through, you know, those schools, I was, like, you know, I was on the—I was the artist on the art magazines that they had; the annuals, you know—whatever they're called. You know, they have annuals for each class, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like the yearbook, and the—yeah. And, but wait a minute; so, then—at what age did you begin actually drawing? Do you remember? I mean thinking of—

MICHELLE STUART: Five or six.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you thought of yourself an artist from that point on?

MICHELLE STUART: My mother used to put them on the wall. She had one, a wonderful mouse from when I was five. I can still see it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: It was on yellow paper, and it was pink and gray. And I mean, it was great. It was a great mouse. You know? And she would always, you know, put them up on the wall and say, "Wait until Daddy comes home. He's going to love this!" You know? So, there, you know, I had an audience.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And then, I also had a neighbor who was Russian Jewish woman who was married to a kind of leading psychoanalyst. And they didn't have children, and I guess she used to see me, you know, on the sidewalk, you know, going around, probably walking my dog when I was little or something. And we made friends. She invited me in. And I remember one Christmas, she gave me a huge paint set with watercolor, oil, you know; all that stuff. So, I—that was really important. I think that was kind of during the war, because I don't think my father was there. So, she probably was thinking, you know, "Well, maybe they, you know—maybe she needs"—I don't know what she was thinking—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, it was just something nice for a kid, yeah. Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was very nice of her to do it. And I used that. And so, the other thing is, I did like to write. So, I remember all through school, I had this kind of, like, "Should I become a writer or an artist?" There was always kind of that—I had a strong literary bent, too.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you wrote stories and poems?

MICHELLE STUART: I wrote stories, and I kept a diary.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: But I was always better at art. [Laughs.] At least, everybody [thought so -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Was that your perception, or what other people told you?

MICHELLE STUART: No, that was other people's perception, not mine.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative.] I see. [Laughs.] And do you remember what the stories were about that you wrote?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. They were strange little stories. They were very fictional characters. My mother always said I had fictional characters in my mind, and they were always people that were traveling in the Pacific.



ANNETTE LEDDY: Adventurers, yeah. They would be stories about people having adventures at sea? Probably the things you'd heard from your father, and all of that?

MICHELLE STUART: And just thought up myself.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, thought up yourself, but with that content as being something exciting.

MICHELLE STUART: I think I was fascinated by the South Pacific, always. But I was also fascinated by Mexico. When I was about four or five, they went on a trip to Baja, California. And I loved it. Maybe I was—yeah, I was five, I think. I was old enough to know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, like, to Tijuana, Ensenada—

MICHELLE STUART: No, Ensenada—there was a grand hotel down there, and I think—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The—La Fonda? That one?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's still there, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: It's still there?

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's still a great place, yeah. It's pink, right? It's right on the sand—I've actually stayed there, yes.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, it's—yes. Yes, yes. So, I even have photographs of myself in the outside of that hotel. That was, that was kind of important because that was my first foreign country, and I think it imprinted. There was something exotic about it to me, you know; something really exotic. So, I loved that. And then, the other kind of imprint of adventure was when I was about six. They went to Catalina Island. So, I still have Catalina Island imprinted on me. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you stay? Like, in Avalon, or?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, we stayed. We stayed in Avalon, yeah. And we went to the bird park, and my father imitated the kookaburra because he was Australian, and he knew how to imitate the kookaburra. No, it was great. I loved Catalina, and oddly enough, when I was in high school—or junior high and into high school, I had a friend whose father had a yacht. And there were two boys and a girl, and the two boys were not interested in sailing at all. But the girl was, and she always was inviting me to go with—so, we went sailing in this 58 foot yacht. I mean, you don't realize how lucky you are, you know? I mean, it was like, "Okay," you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: No, I did realize.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you go from Long Beach, or did you—is that where it was going from—

MICHELLE STUART: We were from Newport Harbor Yacht Club.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh. Nice. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. It was a big yacht.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. I get it.

MICHELLE STUART: And we would go to Catalina. I mean, he had, he had sailed it to Hawaii. In fact, he proudly said he missed Hawaii once, and was on his way to Japan when he realized; it was in a race. He was great. He was an old Scottish sailor type guy who loved his, loved his boat. We worked on that boat. We really helped him sail that boat, and it was great. And you know, just being in the harbor at night, lying on the deck of a boat when it's just—and it was wood. It was a wooden boat. It was boat from—I can't tell you the year, but it was a, you know, '20s type wooden yacht. It was not a—there were no plastics in that, no.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Fiberglass.

MICHELLE STUART: And it would just—you know, you'd hear—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative.] The creak?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, God, it was—and look up in the sky. I mean, it was—you know, I think it had more to do—so many things make you what you are, you know? And that was certainly something that was really important, really important. Because those are kind of dream time things, you know? Those are times where you kind of collect your thoughts about what is existence, and what is—and I know that was true. I know it was true. You know? It's kind of—those things are so important to children. I mean, it's so amazing how important they are.

ANNETTE LEDDY: In the sense that they fill your imagination, sort of give you this depth of imagination, and that you draw upon for the rest of your life as artists?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, also, what we are in the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, because certainly, in your case—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I wasn't an artist. I was a young girl who wanted to be an artist, probably among several other things; I mean, a writer, archaeologist, you know, veterinarian. I had, you know, I had a bevy of things that I was very interested in because I loved animals.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And I loved archaeology. You know, it was that time when books like that C.W. Ceram book on, you know—I can't remember the title of it now, but came out, you know, it was all about archaeology. [*Gods, Graves, and Scholars: The Story of Archaeology*, C. W. Ceram -MS] And, you know, I was smitten. And I started collecting little archaeological pieces. You remember Stendhal Gallery in L.A.? When my mother asked me what I wanted for my birthday or Christmas, I would say, "Let me go up to Stendhal and buy"—you know. And, you know, for \$10 or \$15, you could buy a little Tarascan piece, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's so great.

MICHELLE STUART: So, my mother and I had that almost all her life.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you were like a collector at that age, as well?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You started collecting—you were a kid who had, like, rock collections, like, that kind of thing?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, well, see, the grand tragedy was that trip to Catalina Island when I was six, I had collected all these ceramic shards. You know, there was a famous ceramic work place in—and you know, I have piece, by the way, somewhere around here, from that Catalina Island—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Workshop.

MICHELLE STUART: —workshop. But all the beach—one part of the beach near the workshop was full of little colored shards of the Catalina workshop after it was defunct. And I had collected a whole bag of them. And we had gone over on a boat, but we had to go back quickly for some reason or another, so we flew back. And they wouldn't let me take my—because of weight considerations, I couldn't take my collection of colored shards.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That just sounds like what they tell a kid when they don't want to take all that stuff back, huh? [Laughs.] I mean, I'm sorry. It just doesn't sound persuasive.

MICHELLE STUART: This was true. [. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, that's—yes, since it's such a foundation. So, that began really early? No, because, I mean, my partner always says that people have the collector gene or they don't. Like, for example, I don't. My daughter, on the other hand, whenever she would get anything that she liked—say, a doll or you know, whatever it was—she would always say, "Mom, can we get another one?" And I would be like, "Can't you be happy with just one? It's great to have just one." And she'd go, "No, I want more." That basic idea—

MICHELLE STUART: I know exactly what you're talking about, because I have very close people to me who have no collector's gene.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I'm one of those people. I really don't. I feel like having one is the most perfect thing. This is not—

MICHELLE STUART: No, I have it huge. I mean, I've always had it. And you know, I had like, probably 250 19th century photographs that I just collected along the way; before Wagstaff, actually, when you could still get them for \$10, \$15, \$40, you know? Then, they went up. I mean, he ruined everything for, you know, little collectors.

Yeah. I love 19th century photography because there's—and I love the 19th century. I mean, for some reason or another—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that age of exploration seems to be a part of your—

MICHELLE STUART: It actually starts in the 18th century because I also have—I collect books on Captain Cook, and I have a lot of things on Captain Cook. So, Captain Cook, who I think was one of the greatest men that ever lived—son of a tenant farmer; probably almost illiterate tenant farmer who worked his way, by being a great navigator and sailor, up to being one of the most important people ever. You know, he was—his trip—his first trip with the Endeavour was the first trip that ever collected fauna, flora. Not only—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hawaii, you mean? The trips to Hawaii?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that was his last trip because he died there. But no, his first trip was to Tahiti, to chart the Transit of Venus. And then, he went on to New Zealand and Australia. He discovered, basically—other people had kind of gone by those; Bougainville, I think, went by. And Tasman, of course, went by. But Cook stopped and collected things and wrote the admiralty that, you know, this is a great place to—especially New Zealand. He was strong on New Zealand, because New Zealand had—was green, and would've been a great place for sheep—[laughs]—which it was. And then he went on to, you know, virtually discover Australia.

So, he was amazing because nobody else kept a double log. He was like an ethnographer. He kept a log of all the people that he saw, the dances he saw. He had a painter, two painters, on board who kept—you know, would draw. I mean, he was—he brought all that back to Europe. He brought back to—he changed things completely, because nobody had any idea of what was out there. In fact, they weren't so sure it was even out there. So, it was—so, the Antipodes was really, basically, discovered by Cook. And so, that's a person that has been really strong in my life. I've read a lot of books about him, and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And circumstances of his death—wasn't it that he was, like, boiled alive? Isn't this what I've always heard?

MICHELLE STUART: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

MICHELLE STUART: No. The circumstance was that he had put in in Hawaii, for a very long time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: On the big island, right?

MICHELLE STUART: I think it was on the big island. I went there, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I went there, too, so I'm trying to remember, actually. I remember exactly what it looked like, and there was a cross there.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. Yes, yes. There's a monument.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you up to see—yeah. But I can't remember the—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, this is, this is—there's several stories, but this story that's most taken as the truth is they were there for a couple of months. The—and they were friendly with Hawaiians. And the Hawaiians brought them food, and they exchanged things. They left. And you know, "Goodbye, goodbye." The Hawaiians probably heaved a sigh of relief. "We got rid of them; nothing happened." And Cook, the same. They got out, not too far out, on their way to—up the coast to Oregon and Alaska and in that area, which is what they—the boat did, after he died. There was a big storm, and they had to go back, put in again.

This time, the Hawaiians were not so happy about having them there. And they started, like, sending some boats in, but the Hawaiians, like, started stealing things from the boats. And the sailors got, you know, unlike in other places and other trips, the sailors and indigenes were clashing. So, they asked Cook to come out and discuss something with the chief. And Cook went out and said, "You know, this can't go on." And they attack Cook, and they killed him. Yeah. They were sorry afterwards, but they—nevertheless, he was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how did they kill him?

MICHELLE STUART: I think they beat him to death. And then, there were stories about—they took parts. I mean, the sailors tried to get his parts back. They got a few parts, but they didn't get all parts. There was a story about how the Hawaiians kept some parts and, you know, had the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Ate them.

MICHELLE STUART: Hmm?

ANNETTE LEDDY: And ate them, right?

MICHELLE STUART: No, I never heard ate them. I heard buried, buried them. There were several different stories. [. . . -MS] No, they were, they were kind of—they were heavily religious, you know, they were—in the Polynesian sense. Although some Polynesians, I think, probably were cannibals. You know, the interpretations on the Polynesians spans—

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Lots of different ones, yes—

MICHELLE STUART: Interpretations.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's the Margaret Mead misinterpretations.

MICHELLE STUART: Actually Margaret Mead's husband was a New Zealander. One of her husbands; I think it was one that she didn't stay with.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you ever meet her?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh I think she was long dead when I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —no, she lived in New York for years.

MICHELLE STUART: [She died in 1978. -MS] Oh she was, okay. No, I didn't. I did go to the New School, and I think she did actually give talks there every once in a while. But, no I didn't. I think of her as so predated me. It's so funny. Maybe because when she made her, her, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: *Coming of Age in Samoa* and all those things?

MICHELLE STUART: It was early. You know, it was like the '20s or '30s or something, wasn't it? [It was 1928. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Let me think about this.

MICHELLE STUART: Or am I thinking of both? I don't know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think you're thinking about both. I think Margaret Mead—I think *Coming of Age in Samoa* was like a '60s classic, right? It was part of "her interpretation" which has since—there was an idea that they, the women, were into free love and it was all very—and then, that turned out later to be untrue. But it was one of the texts that people latched onto in the '60s, to show that it was human nature to have many partners and to have—feel joy in life.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, Samoa, I—I went to Samoa. I spent some time in Samoa actually. And they are really different. My friend Sandy and I went to Samoa on a trip to all the islands [near -MS] New Zealand. This is one of my family searches in the '80s. Men came up and embraced you and kissed you. Now, that was shocking to me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Not like they do in Italy or used to do in Italy? You mean, in a different way?

MICHELLE STUART: Really? Well, maybe. [Laughs.] I guess you had that Italian experience. I had the Samoan experience.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right. Okay, so, let's go back to—so, sounds like you have in your view, actually, kind of a perfect childhood, right? I mean, it sounds fantastic.

MICHELLE STUART: In many ways it was, but in many ways it wasn't, because my father was not there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because he was gone for how many years; like, five years?

MICHELLE STUART: At least.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, oh that's very sad. He would come home on leaves and—

MICHELLE STUART: No. [He was fighting in Europe. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Never?

MICHELLE STUART: He never came home. Well, at the end of the war—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, the princess and the queen were, like, abandoned for—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, and I felt abandoned. And you're absolutely right, and that never left me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. Interesting.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, it's gone now or—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Kind of; it's whatever happens to those few things.

MICHELLE STUART: Kind of, kind of. No I can't—I have very difficult time with abandonment, and it came from that, of course, because he left when I was about eight, eight and a half or nine. And I remember it vividly—hm?

ANNETTE LEDDY: But then he came back, right? He must have been back by the time you were in high school, right? I mean, he was back permanently.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. But I didn't care anymore.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh really. He really affected your—

MICHELLE STUART: We were totally, you know, we were totally estranged.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's so sad. So it never—your relationship never recovered?

MICHELLE STUART: He sent me letters, and I sent him letters. And he sent me wonderful letters, you know, and things and everything, I mean. And he kept up his part. I think I didn't. I mean, I didn't, really. I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What about your mother? I mean, did she feel abandoned too?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I can't speak for my mother.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But when he came back—I mean, there are so many, I don't know, there are so many stories—

MICHELLE STUART: He was a different man when he came back.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yeah. There are so many stories about this, and I've heard this from other people, about the return of the father after the war. I know it's so hard to—

MICHELLE STUART: It was terrible. It was terrible. It was a nightmare—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I can say you know, one thing: At the time I wasn't capable of really understanding what my feelings were. I was a young girl.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Of course, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And I didn't understand what his feelings were. All I knew is this man arrived that looked completely different because he'd lost so much weight and he'd been in—you know, he'd been to Germany and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: He was stationed?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, he was in the war.

ANNETTE LEDDY: He fought.

MICHELLE STUART: He fought in the war. I mean, he was a Colonel and fought in the war and then was, you know, hit and he had—he was in a Jeep accident. He was like a completely—I mean, this vigorous man left and this shadow came back. So, even when he arrived in the United States, they put him in a hospital in Oklahoma for almost a year. I guess he was really in really bad shape. And then, so we didn't see him. And I remember when he came back. I mean, it was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did he have to go or did he choose to go? Because he would have been pretty old; if he'd married your mother when he was 40—

MICHELLE STUART: —he was [in his 50s -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —then he would've been about 50. I mean, someone 50 doesn't have to go into the service.

MICHELLE STUART: I know. He didn't have to go; he went. I think part of it was, you know, he—you know, Australians were British citizens.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And so, he had a very strong association with the Brits. I mean, I looked him up once. I mean, you know, when he came to the United States, he came as a British citizen. And because I was into this ancestry thing, because my cousin got me into it—[laughs]—I was looking up things for him, the New Zealand cousin who has us back to, you know, I don't know—[laughs]—really far back in Kent. And so he was always extremely aware of what was happening in Europe. Actually, I think he started my political sense, because we always had political talks around the dinner table. And he was always reading and listening to the news. And he foretold, you know, a lot of stuff, like the Japan thing, you know, and, and he was very—and he chose to go and he lied about his age. And I remember my mother saying, "You know, daddy, you don't have to go," and he said, "No, I have to go."

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I mean, that's quite a decision, I mean, to leave a wife—

MICHELLE STUART: It was a big decision—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and daughter for five years and, maybe, to risk never coming back. I mean, was he a lefty or was he kind of a New Deal Democrat? I mean, what was his—

MICHELLE STUART: He was an early—not the Roosevelt; the previous Roosevelt—Republican. He was born in 1887, right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Right.

MICHELLE STUART: He was really a Victorian, but he loved Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt was his kind of man.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That would have been his kind of guy, essentially, then.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, he loved the parks and he loved the, you know, adventure and he loved, you know, the soldiery, and he loved—that was, that was his kind of guy. You know, so, that's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: He was Republican, but he was Republican in the old Republican sense, you know. And I used to have the biggest arguments with him; "How can you be a Republican? [Laughs.] You know, I mean, how can you be a Republican?" So, you know, my mother did whatever my father said, so, you know, she was, she was hopeless in that sense.

[They laugh.]

No seriously, but, you know, it was always held against me that I was, like, born a Democrat, you know?

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you were born in '33 and he leaves, then, in 1940, and he comes—'41 is probably when he left.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, '41.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And he came back in 1940s, he came back after the war, in 1946? And—

MICHELLE STUART: Or seven.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because he was in the hospital. It was after the bomb, after the bomb—

MICHELLE STUART: That I don't remember. [Yes. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you remember the bomb?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, of course. I remember Pearl Harbor. I was in the kitchen, and we had a Philco radio. We had a bigger one in the living room, but there was a small one in the kitchen, you know, when it sat on a, on a

table. And it was Sunday morning—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I love that you know that it's a Philco. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: You remember it? Did you say that you remember it?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I said I love that you said, "It's a Philco radio;" that you know the type of radio. Sorry. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: I can tell you exactly what was in that kitchen. I have that kind of visual memory. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's incredible.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, it is actually. It's amazing. I have amazed people, you know, who, who write. And we go somewhere, and they say, you know, trying to remember, "What did that place look like?" And I can just, like, you know—not always faces, but places.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow, [Affirmative]. And objects.

MICHELLE STUART: And objects, right, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And may I ask, so your mother, she was not—she didn't do anything but being a mother?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh yeah, she did.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, what?

MICHELLE STUART: She did do something. She didn't do anything until the war, and then, she started sewing. And she was, you know, sewing for us. And I remember the war fairly well. And then, I remember after the war my father, well, he had his Army, you know, thing, but he had a lot of trouble getting a job. He wanted to get a job, but he had a lot of trouble—

ANNETTE LEDDY: He's, like, 60 at that point, so of course.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, I know. So she started sewing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Well, she was already, like, an amazing designer of clothes and stuff. I mean, she, unfortunately, she got a daughter that didn't much care. But she always looked startlingly beautiful.

[They laugh.]

And always in her sewing room, there was *Vogue*, and *Bazaar*, and you know, all—and that was another thing. I mean, she loved magazines, so we always had *Life* magazine. So, I remember seeing, you know, those incredible *Life* magazines

ANNETTE LEDDY: So many artists talk about that, about how much photographs were—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh my God, it was—I know so many photographers. It was the same story.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know Eisenstaedt; you know, all the great photographers, you know. The—what's his name—the French photographer? I love him so much—the moment—[laughs]—you know what I'm talking about. [Henri Cartier-Bresson -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Atget?

MICHELLE STUART: No, no, no, the one—no he's after Atget.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Brassai?

MICHELLE STUART: No, Brassai too, but no it's a two word name. I don't know why I can't think of his name, but he did the Spanish Civil War. He did a lot of wonderful, you know, photo essays in *Life* that were startling good and really refined ones; "Eye," you know. I mean, it was—*Life* magazine had a lot of things that were very important for eye, -learning. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, it was a form of fine art that actually came into everybody's home. You know, that was probably it. There was nothing else. And there were certain movies you could see if you lived in—

MICHELLE STUART: Hollywood.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, urban centers.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I mean, foreign films, you know what I mean? There were just very few art house theaters, really—

MICHELLE STUART: But I went to all of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You did? So, movies were a big part of your education as well?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, movies were—foreign movies, not American movies. I was not interested in American movies. I went to all the foreign movies. I saw, you know, all of those Italian movies, right, when they first—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, right after the war? So you're talking the Fellini—

MICHELLE STUART: [Vittorio] De Sica.

ANNETTE LEDDY: De Sica, and all those people that were still—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, absolutely. They were very important to me. [*Umberto D.* and *Bicycle Thief.* -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And the French, too?

MICHELLE STUART: And the French too; you know, [*Blood of a Poet* by Jean Cocteau -MS]. All the French—very important.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And other, the other—

ANNETTE LEDDY: You said that was when you were in high school in L.A.?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, L.A. High.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You went to Los Angeles High?

MICHELLE STUART: It was good, then.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It actually looked like Notre Dame then. It doesn't anymore. It looks terrible now but it was, it was, it was a big high school. It was not really that integrated. I think there were about 12 black people in the school; Asians and a modicum of Hispanics, but hardly any black at all. And I had black friends [in school -MS] and so did some of my girlfriends. And that was very unusual; it was very unusual. And actually, there were, there were like sororities, and I was in one of them. And I got them to take Jewish kids, you know. Meanwhile, there was a Jewish sorority, but there, but there was a big split between, you know, people that—I mean, believe it or not; I mean, this is really hard to believe.

ANNETTE LEDDY: L.A. was very racially segregated, you know, and still is.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh my God, I mean, well, the black thing is a little easier to believe, but segregated Jewish girls from non-Jewish girls? I think that—I mean when you think about it, this is the 1940s. This is weird.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative] Well, you know, but even—I just wrote a review for *Art in America* of a book about the—how the L.A. art scene was established, and a lot of it had to do with how they couldn't—you know, the Jews, the Jewish collectors were on the west side, and then there were the WASP collectors. And, you know, they couldn't get a museum together because they couldn't get—there was a limited amount of wealth and it involved merging people. And the WASPs wouldn't even accept the Jews on the same—on the board of the Pasadena museum. And we are talking 1960, right?

MICHELLE STUART: It's startling.



ANNETTE LEDDY: It's so shocking. And when Jews would donate works of art to the county museum, and a lot of them had great stuff that they got from Europe or wherever, it was sent to the basement, right away. It was really amazing.

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, one of the few galleries, when I was little, was Perl's. You know, his brother, I think, had a gallery in New York.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that's—mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So it was a Jewish guy that had the main—one of the—I mean there were practically no galleries when I was growing up.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, because my mother and I went up to La Cienaga sometimes to bookstores and—or I went with friends, you know, and, and to try to go to the art galleries. There weren't any art galleries. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well there was, there was a kind of theater thing there. There was a turnabout theater or something. I mean, I remember seeing it; I don't remember the names of the places. There was a kind of wonderful bookstore there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Of course that is the bookstore. It was also where a lot of art collecting happened. But I'm sorry, I can't remember the name right now. I'll look it up.

MICHELLE STUART: It's wonderful that you know all this stuff. It makes it so much easier for me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well yeah, but let's, let's go back to this thing with high school, because I'm trying to get—so, your father comes back. And so, at the time that he comes back you are about 13. So you're about—you're starting high school—

MICHELLE STUART: I think more 14.

ANNETTE LEDDY: 14. So, you're starting high school. And so, basically, he comes back, but it doesn't feel okay in the home anymore? Your parents are not still in love, but they don't work it out?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh they're still—oh, they were fine.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They were fine. It's you; you're not—

MICHELLE STUART: I'm not sure my mother was happy. I, you know, I have the feeling that, you know—I mean, my mother was so young.

ANNETTE LEDDY: She was, yeah, she was probably in her 30s still; as you say, very young.

MICHELLE STUART: Right, right. My mother was born in 1907.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: So, you know, she was a very young woman and had been totally true to my father. I mean, the thought of being untrue was probably beyond her comprehension.

[They laugh.]

No, it was, it was, you know—she went through everything with my father until he died. I mean, he had strokes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And when—how old was he when he died? What year did he die?

MICHELLE STUART: He died, I think [. . . 1961 -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: So he lived another, you know, 13, 14 years.

MICHELLE STUART: But he was not well.

ANNETTE LEDDY: From the time he got back from the war, he was—

MICHELLE STUART: He was, he was ok for a few years—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —but not really, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, he didn't—so, he came back. You were about to say he was—she was doing the sewing. Did he work at all? Did he ever find another job when he came back?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I wasn't paying that much attention.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. And so—

MICHELLE STUART: All I knew is they really didn't have a lot of money then, that he, you know—and that was kind of—the problem with that was that they didn't have the money to send me to—I was, I would've probably gone to UCLA or something like that. And I said it was ok, that I would go to a trade technical junior college, which I did for a while. And I learned how to draft and do a lot of—

ANNETTE LEDDY: L.A. Trade Tech?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which is still a great school.

MICHELLE STUART: And I learned a lot. I got a job immediately. I walked out of there and got a job the next day —

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —with an engineering and architect [company -MS]—I was very good at it. I was amazingly good at it, actually. And I still like that type of work. You would never know from what I ended up doing with my art life.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: But you know, I was very good at it. And even better and more unusual was, this sounds very immodest on my part, but I was really good at cartography. I loved drafting the maps.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Maps, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, this was a period when companies like the one I worked for, first of all, there was only one other woman. It was all men. And you know, they hired me, I think, because I was cheap. They didn't pay—even though I joined a union, they paid me a lot less than the others. I mean, the guys were getting four dollars and five dollars an hour. I was getting \$1.79 or something. And I talked to the union person and he said, "Well you don't have a family to feed." [Laughs.] That was the way they did it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They've been saying this forever; they're probably still saying that.

MICHELLE STUART: Right. So, then I was put in the cartography department, which was very good for me because, you know, I was then looking at maps and the cosmos and everything. [Laughs.] I mean, they—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Great, yeah; that's fantastic

MICHELLE STUART: All kind of mapping, you know; they had mapping departments. But anyway, the U.S. Army commissioned this company to do maps of Korea; Korean War. So I did, I did plumbing in Las Vegas, but I did a lot of the Korean War. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, so you were mapping the terrain?

MICHELLE STUART: We got, we got, you know, blueprints; we got, you know, the blue things. And we—and I could do it with a brush. Imagine—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: —you know, like a double O brush and just keep that road, you know, at one width, you know. And I really—it was very hard work. And I, and I, and I liked it, but I didn't like the place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I didn't like the atmosphere that much. But I stayed until that—I was laid off because, you know, when that commission with the U.S. government was finished, we were laid—the people that worked on that were laid off until they had another commission. But I celebrated when I was laid off. I celebrated because I,

like, amassed a certain amount of money. I had gone to Chouinard at night because I really wanted to go to Chouinard, and, you know. But I had to have a job to pay for Chouinard. Chouinard was, like, \$400 a half a semester or something—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really expensive, but didn't they have not too many women there either, right?

MICHELLE STUART: No, and that was the problem with Chouinard.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I didn't really like Chouinard that much because the guys would get together, and they'd go to a bar afterwards. And I was never invited. I was friendly, you know, and I was, you know—they all wanted to date, but that was it; I was never taken seriously.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So this would have been in the early '50s—

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and who were the, who were the other—are there any of those male students whose names we would now know?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you know, yeah, one of them came back. He was gone already but he would come back occasionally, and that was Bob Irwin.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh he was—no, he was never a student there was he?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know, but he hung around.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: I remember, like, I don't know whether I went on a date with him or—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, it sounds like from, you know, the things I've read about him, he had quite—

MICHELLE STUART: He was a handsome lad.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really attractive guy with a lot—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh my.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you read—there's that oral history about him, you know, Seeing is Believing that—whatever, I can't remember the title—where he describes how he had sex with a woman and she actually fainted? Did you hear that?

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, maybe, you know, maybe. I never really, I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But he grew up in L.A. too, right? I mean, he went to Dorsey High and, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: He was not very good. I saw, I remember seeing a show of his on Wilshire Boulevard in some little store that, I guess, thought it was a gallery or something. And it was like these boats, you know? I mean, they, they were like watercolors of boats down in, you know, the Balboa or Newport Beach, you know that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I guess it's such a—[laughs]—

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, nobody would have predicted that he would've, you know—[Laughs.] but I'm sure the same thing with me, you know. I can remember when I went to Chouinard, like, you know, one of the, one of the—I left out a little thing I should tell you. When I was in high school, I actually studied drawing outside of school with a man named [Francis de] Erdely? Do you remember him, he was a Hungarian? Lebrun, Warshaw, and Erdely set up a school in a restaurant on, I guess, Wilshire Boulevard. And I would go at night to take drawing classes.

And believe me it was better than anything I learned at Chouinard. He would get these huge, fat women to pose for hours; well, I think I was there for three hours in a night or something. We had those stands, you know, with a board here, and he taught classical drawing; Renaissance. I still have a few pieces that my mother saved under

the bed, you know, where you, you know—amazing, amazing. I mean, he was a grand, grand teacher. He was, he was a refugee, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And he wasn't, he wasn't that interesting a painter I think, although at the time I would not have known that. But he was a master draftsman, just a master draftsman. [He was a great drawing teacher, de Erdely. -MS] You remember Rico Lebrun and Warshaw?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, I've seen those; the Lebrun things—I've seen that.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. And I remember seeing a Lebrun show at the County Museum which was—and a Ben Shahn show. I remember everything I went to see, you know, very vividly, actually.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. And did you study with Emerson Woelffer when you were at Chouinard?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't remember all of their names. I studied with Ed Kohn, one of the painting teachers. In fact, he did two portraits of me and I have them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: One of them's around here somewhere.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. How many women were there? Because it—you know, originally Chouinard's was only—

MICHELLE STUART: The one woman that I remember there, and I don't remember her name, unless it was Darr, but I don't remember her name. But a very important thing happened in her class. She was a ceramic teacher. And I was very interested in ceramics. I really loved ceramics. And I guess it was the, you know, the early sculptural thing going.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —in New York, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, and one day she said, "Well, we're going to have a special guest next week, and I hope you all can come. It's going to be, you know, something unusual." And so I anticipated this with great—and, and it was one of the most electric things I saw in that period, and it was, it was Leach. Bernard Leach came and gave a talk.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Leach; oh, I don't recognize [his name -AL].

MICHELLE STUART: He was an English ceramist [or potter -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: I'm sorry I don't know about him.

MICHELLE STUART: And he brought with him a Japanese, you know, major Japanese potter. And between the two of them, I was—I wish I could remember the potter's name. [Shoji Hamada -MS] I usually, I usually can remember his name because he was—it was like—what was it? I'm amazed you don't know. It was—he went to few places in the United States, Leach, with this potter. And I mean, Chouinard's—it was a big kudo, you know, they went there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, I think he only went to maybe three or four places. It was kind of a tour; taking this, you know, memorable Japanese, kind of older man, you know, who was—what do they call it in Japan? He was a precious object or something like that, you know. I was transfixed, and I'm sure the other students—there were only a handful of students.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I think the other students were transfixed as well. And I remember, you know, him saying, "Only God is perfect, so you can always have a little mistake in your [work -MS]"

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, you know, that's, like, the opposite of what you're taught throughout your, you know, small, artistic career. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: In high school, right, it has to be perfect. You have to make it look like life and all of that stuff, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's, that's amazing. So, how many years is this, then? That's—you were in—you graduated from high school, and then you worked at this draft shop.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, when I graduated from high school, this is—I have to interject. I had three friends, and we went to Mexico for a couple of months.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, uh-huh [Affirmative]. Where in Mexico?

MICHELLE STUART: We drove.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think those days, you could actually drive. It's incredible, huh?

MICHELLE STUART: We drove to Texas, to El Paso. We drove all the way down to Mexico City, the three of us; four of us actually. It was two, three women and one man. I had a friend in Mexico City that I had worked with at the May Company, because I worked at the May Company. You remember the May Company?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like, selling necklaces—I do, I—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I first—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The one on Wilshire?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. I first sold, but I got cajoled into repairing jewelry.

[They laugh.]

So, that's what I did; I repaired jewelry. And I met this man who was a Latin-American, Nicaraguan, who worked there who was going to university, but it was like an extra job, like mine was. And he said that he was going down to Mexico City to finish his medical career at the university and I should look him up. So, when I did go, I did look him up. And so it made being in Mexico City much more interesting because I consequently had a couple of friends, though not Mexican, Latino, and they spoke Spanish. And we had a really great time with them. He took me, you know, where he was being taught, and I saw some of—

ANNETTE LEDDY: At UNAM or something? UNAM, the university?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, and did you speak Spanish at that time?

MICHELLE STUART: I actually was not bad.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you have it in school?

MICHELLE STUART: I had Spanish for two years and French. Well, I had, you know, an academic track, so I had to take four years of language. So, I took two years of Spanish and I took two years of French. I was much better at Spanish, and then, I read a lot of Garcia Lorca. He was, like, a favorite of mine. And I read a lot of poetry, so. And I went to Spanish films; a lot of Spanish films.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Because those same theaters had, you know, had Bunuel, and you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's so amazing. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I know, I know—who I later knew, actually in Mexico City—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow, how amazing.

MICHELLE STUART: So I spent a couple of months, maybe two; I spent the summer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So what part of town did you stay in when you were there?

MICHELLE STUART: Pardon?

ANNETTE LEDDY: What part of town did you stay in, in Mexico City? Do you remember? Was it, like—

MICHELLE STUART: In Mexico City? Oh, can I remember that? When I went back I stayed in Coyoacan, and then later in Colonia Londres. But that, you know, I don't remember, but I did go to all the museums. I went down—mostly I was interested in two things. I was interested in going to all the archaeological sites, because I was very interested in that. And secondarily, I wanted to see all of Diego Rivera's murals and Orozco's murals.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you were very familiar with that already. And did you—

MICHELLE STUART: Totally.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so the fact that, now at that point, Siqueiros had already been in L.A. and painted a mural there, so it's like—

MICHELLE STUART: But I didn't like his work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You didn't like Siqueiros. Okay, well, even then?

MICHELLE STUART: I still don't like him. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [inaudible], yeah. So, there was him. But did you—but you already were—I mean, I'm just saying, you were very aware of the muralists when you went down there, even after high school, yeah?

MICHELLE STUART: Very.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, which murals did you see?

MICHELLE STUART: I saw them all.

ANNETTE LEDDY: At that point—

MICHELLE STUART: Well there were, there were—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The ones at the National Palace were already done, and those were—

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, yes, and then, there were ancillary ones here and there, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Otherwise, I would have had to leave the city and I didn't do that. I didn't go to, like, Pueblo or Guanajuato or, you know, other places. I saw all the murals I could see. And then, there was the Museum of Decorative Arts, which had a lot of Mexican decorative—I don't know if it exists anymore. I mean, it may have been morphed into the museum of—the archeological, anthropological museum.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think it might be sucked into the archeological—the one in the park, yeah. That's still the most amazing place, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. And then my friend, my close high school friend that was with me—we were going to a museum. And we came out of the museum and there, two guys tried to pick us up in the foyer of the museum. And we tried to escape them and then, actually, we got on the wrong bus. And they got on the bus and they said, "Well at least have coffee with us. We want to learn English." They were students. So, we had coffee with them and, strangely, that actually changed my life, because when we had coffee with them, he said, "You know, you should—you're so entranced with Mexico"—I would think he was slightly entranced with me but—"I will find you a place, a family to stay with, so you can come back and you can study at Bellas Artes." And I said, "Great, okay". But then, we kept up this correspondence. And when I went back, it was because he did find me a family to live with and Bellas Artes did accept me. And so I went back, I don't know, maybe a year, a year and a half.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you—they accepted you? You submitted a portfolio, and you got—that's just incredible.

MICHELLE STUART: It was incredible, but it wasn't good. I left quickly—

ANNETTE LEDDY: They were super strict?

MICHELLE STUART: —because they had allotted, you know, me into a class of GIs who were on the GI bill and were not that interested in anything except taking the GI bill in Mexico City, you know. [Laughs.] And the teacher never came, and I went home and I said to Clemencia, who I was staying with, I said, "You know, I'm not learning what I was hoping to learn here. It's just not giving me the"—and she said, "Well you know, I know a lot of people. I'll take you around and introduce you to some artists. And, you know, there's a new gallery; I'll introduce you to those people and I'll take you over. Rivera's painting this mural, [*Insurgentes* -MS] and I'll take you over

there," because he lived a few blocks from her and she, you know, had met him. And that's how I started working with Rivera.

[. . . -MS]

I didn't have that much to do with him except, you know, he said, "Do this and do that." He was very gentlemanly, though. And, you know, when I met him he took my hand and he said, "Oh, so, so nice to meet you, you know." I mean, he was, he was, he was kind of an amazing creature; very unattractive; I mean, you know, huge.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Massive; he looks horrible in all the photos.

MICHELLE STUART: Massive. And, you know, not that—you can be massive and relatively good looking. He was massive and not so good looking, you know, but. And then, and then I, you know, I actually went to La Galleria Prisse —P-R-I-S-S-E—which was this hotbed of, you know, Mexican, Spanish, Russian, et al. painters that were, you know—like, it was wonderful. And I met them all; Alberto Gironella, Vladi, and Bartoli, who I later married, you know. And, but he wasn't there right then; he was on horseback and looking for archaeological things in the Yucatan. But I got to know all these people.

And finally, time is going by. I wanted to set up my own studio. So, I asked them if I could have a room. They weren't, they weren't living there. There was a gallery. They had studios, and there was an extra room. And I said, "Can I use that as a studio if I pay you just a little bit?" So, I got a job designing towels. [Laughs.] You know, designing little things, you know, like designs on towels. And with what I was making there, I rented this room where I had a painting studio set up, you know. And I had a little heating pad for coffee and eats, you know. And finally at the very end, I was getting tired of going out on dates with somebody else with me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Chaperoned?

MICHELLE STUART: Because the father, Clemencia's father, would not let us go out on dates without a chaperone.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Chaperoning?

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, it was getting to be a little heavy. Sometimes, the chaperone was more interesting than the date. But, it was still, you know, kind of—I was kind of an adventurous type, and I didn't like that particularly. So, I left Clemencia's amicably. I said, "You know, I can set up in my studio." So, I set up a pad in my studio, and I said to, you know, the guys, "Is it ok if I sleep here?" And they said, "Fine." And that was, that was my Bohemian life in Mexico City, you know. And then, let's see, what happened next? I was painting, I was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What kind of work were you—was it figurative, or was it—

MICHELLE STUART: It was figurative painting. I remember one painting was, you know that on the—well, I saw it a lot because I was working on the mural. But my painting was nothing like Diego Rivera's, by the way. It was more—it was kind of semi-abstract, but figuratively, you know. I would take a—I remember painting this monument of El Angel, which was on the [main boulevard -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, you know El Angel?

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Angel of Mexico; the Angel of Independence?

MICHELLE STUART: I did a painting of that; I wish I had it. It was, it was, you know, it was like a—I don't know if it was even—if I could really tell you who influenced me. It was not really like anybody. Maybe it was slightly influenced by Vlady Kibalchich, who was a Russian painter who was showing in the gallery, who certainly one of the gallery people. But I don't know how to explain it. It was Tachist kind of. I mean it was, you know. It wasn't bad.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Tachist, you mean what the—

MICHELLE STUART: No, it was like little color strokes. The [Tachists in Paris -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative], I see.

MICHELLE STUART: I can remember that painting vividly. I sold it. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: To someone in Mexico? Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I don't remember many of them from Mexico very well, and I may have left them. I think I left them there because you know, when I left—oh. Well, what happened was Bartoli came back from his sojourn in the Yucatan, and they had a big party. And I had already seen drawings of him, and I thought, "Who's that handsome man?"

[They laugh.]

They said, "Oh, Bartoli; we're having a party for him," so, they had this big party. And now, he was just getting over, you know, having this long affair with Frida. So, you know, he was—I didn't know that. I was totally unaware of that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was not part of my knowledge at all. And I found that out later, but—so, I was very taken with him and he was very taken with me. And that first night he said, "Well, I'm going to Paris; marry me and come with me."

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you did?

MICHELLE STUART: And I said yes, being the impulsive creature that I am.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] And you were, what, 25 then?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh no, I was 19.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were 19. Wow, so—

MICHELLE STUART: My mother always says I was 20. Maybe I was 20. But this was 19—I was married in 1953. So this was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you were 20, if it was 1953.

MICHELLE STUART: Okay, so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So—oh wow, you were so young.

MICHELLE STUART: Well I left when I was 19 and so—and then I—we married. And then, about two weeks later, my mother came down. My father didn't. I don't think he was too happy about it; "You're marrying a Spanish anarchist?"

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow. And was this your first—this was not your first boyfriend, though.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh no.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, no, you'd had boyfriends—you sort of skipped over this part. But in L.A., there were boyfriends and—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh I had a really—I was in love with one person for quite a few years. And actually, we stayed in contact for many years. And maybe 15 years ago, he was taking his daughter to a school in New England and came by New York and called me up. And we went out. I showed him the piece I did at the new Stuyvesant High School. And we had lunch. Yeah. Now I still, you know—well you never lose it for those people, right? I mean, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, it's kind of interesting.

MICHELLE STUART: I still have very fond memories of him. And I'm sure he does of me, too, or he wouldn't have come to find me, you know. But it was star-crossed. I mean every time I went back, he wanted me to marry him, and he waited for a long time. And I just didn't see it. I couldn't—I could not imagine being—well, it was hard for me to imagine being married at all, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well you're very young, yeah, also.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, well—yeah. I like my freedom. I really—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you feel like the—did you have the sense of, like, your destiny is out there in the world through these different migrations, even at that age?



MICHELLE STUART: Oh, my destiny was to become a major artist. That's what I wanted always.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You always felt that? At the point that you—

MICHELLE STUART: Always.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, there was this shift that we missed. From the point when you were thinking of writing or being an artist, there was some point where the artist thing just took hold. And was that when you graduated from high school and got the job as the draftsman? Was it when you—

MICHELLE STUART: I think I realized it on the cusp of the end of high school.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, when you were taking those classes with the Hungarian.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Those were somehow—it grabbed—that—

MICHELLE STUART: I was already knowing that that was the direction I was going to go. Oh, yes. You know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which is not compatible with being married in LA and setting up house at all, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Say that again?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which is not at all compatible with being married in Los Angeles to your high school boyfriend, obviously.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, that would never have—no.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, it's funny—my mother would've loved it, you know.

[They laugh.]

She liked him. He was a wonderful boy, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: But I wanted the big world, and, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Big world. That's great. You know I'm thinking—I don't know if you—because our chip is going to start running down soon. Do we want to—have we had enough, or do we want to go—I know we haven't had enough, but what I mean is do you want to stop and resume on Friday, or do you want to keep going at this point?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know. We can keep going. What time is it?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. Well, we can just wait until you see that little light go down. I think it's like—

MICHELLE STUART: No, I mean the actual time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, the actual time is 12:19.

MICHELLE STUART: Okay. We can keep going.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So we started at, like, 10 to 11, so it's been about an hour and a half. But, you know, okay. So, what I wonder, as you're talking about this, is just more about—

MICHELLE STUART: I'll tell you in a minute whether I want another lap, you know, whether—do you know what I'm saying? Because there's a certain time where it would be an organic time to end something.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exactly. Well, yeah. So, our next, you know—we've scheduled what, Friday, and then, next week, I think it's Tuesday, but then—

MICHELLE STUART: I don't remember

ANNETTE LEDDY: What—I can't remember, next week, but you know, we could also do another one. We don't have to be limited to that. But you know, the thing is, these beginnings are such a rich period, you know. The whole—your whole formation is kind of—it just feels so multilayered or something. But—the part and—here's

what I want to understand more about; Mexico City. So, you were there for two years. Is that how long you were there? Or no, much less than that, so—just getting these dates straight. Okay, so you would've graduated from—did you graduate early from high school?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I had skipped, I had skipped a grade, so I was kind of young. But my mother was let me skip because I—she wanted me to end up graduating in 1950.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, I'm just thinking, were you there for like a year in Mexico City?

MICHELLE STUART: About.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. Okay so during that year—I just want a little bit more about this. Okay, so you're living in Coyoacan. You're working on this mural. You're also working for the towel, the towel design place. You set up your studio, you fall in love, and then you leave and go to Paris, so.

MICHELLE STUART: And then I what?

ANNETTE LEDDY: You left and went to Paris?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, this is what happened. I don't know why this is so important, but I will tell you what happened. Bartoli did not know he was going to get married and already had a place on a—you know, those liners that are just—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Transatlantic?

MICHELLE STUART: No. It was out of Vera Cruz, and it was a—one of those boats that takes 10 passengers.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like a cargo ship?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And there wasn't any room for me. So, I stayed in Mexico City for a while while he was, you know, setting up in Paris. And then, I took a train to New York. At that time, the Mexican trains were fantastic. They were I think built in Switzerland or something. They had really good trains, and then you got to the United States, and they didn't.

[They laugh.]

But I took a train, and then changed trains, went to New York City. So, that was an important, actually, New York City time for me, because I'd never been in New York City. So, I was to stay with a friend of his that lived in the Bronx.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were already married at this point. You're a young wife, yeah, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And it was extremely boring. And I couldn't get a ship out for a while. So, I kind—so a friend of mine in LA gave me two people to contact. One of them was Andy Warhol, believe it or not.

[They laugh.]

I did not contact Andy Warhol. And the other was Paul Blackburn, who if you know poetry at the time, was a relatively well-known Beat poet. So, I contacted Paul Blackburn. And I mean, that kind of had an important part of my life really, because he called up and he said—it was very hot that summer in New York. It was terrible. It was unbelievable. And you know, nobody had air conditioning, I mean it was, you know—cats were, like, lying on the floor like—

[They laugh.]

You know, it was that hot. He called up, and he said, "Oh, thank"—I sent them both postcards. Warhol did not answer my postcard, and Blackburn did.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: And Blackburn sent a friend of his over named Larry Bronfman [ph]. And suddenly there's this knock on the door, and it's Larry Bronfman. And Larry Bronfman said, "Paul and his wife and I are going out

to Montauk. Do you want to come?" And I said to the family I was staying with, "I'm going out to Montauk. I'll see you." You know?

[They laugh.]

Oh, you know. So, you know, I pulled a few things together, and went, got in the car, and we all went out—that was the first time I went—this is 19, I guess, 53, summer of 53. And we all went out to—and slept on the beach and, you know, got mussels and had a wonderful time. And we went back to Paul's house and, you know, I got to know them, all of them. And it was great. It was really interesting to me because it was, like, you know, meeting New York artists, but they were writers.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so besides Blackburn, who else was there?

MICHELLE STUART: It was Larry Bronfman, was a writer at the time, but he didn't continue it. He got married, and he got a job as an art director or something, you know. But he was an extremely interesting literary type. But Paul and I had a bond immediately. I mean, later, I was to find out more about the bond, actually, because later he left his wife for me. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. So, but that was, like, much later.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: It was, like, you know, three years or four years later. But we had a—I didn't particularly have one with him, but he apparently had one with me. You know, those things happen.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah, sure.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean I liked him; I thought he was an interesting man, but I had no attachment, really. But he later told me had an immediate attachment.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were, perhaps, still thinking about your husband in Paris.

MICHELLE STUART: Of course.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I had just married.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, so I had—I was—yeah. I mean, it's hard to—I didn't really know my husband.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. You'd only known him for a couple of weeks it sounds like.

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: No, it was all about what I imagined him to be. Luckily, I was very fortunate. He was a wonderful man. But it could've been something else.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. That's, like, exactly those things they warn you about, you know. Like marrying someone who you fall in love with on first sight and then, you know, like, the boogeyman kind of—

MICHELLE STUART: Right. Now, we stayed friends until he died actually. We were very close.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So, you're here in New York; you have this little interlude. And then does your ship sail?

MICHELLE STUART: And then I got a boat, yeah. I mean you know, it was a question of, you know—at that time, it was very rare to fly, you know. And it was expensive.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: So, you know, my destiny was a boat. And anyway, I wanted to go on a boat. But I didn't have any money to fly anyway, so the boat you could—I think a boat was about \$300, you know, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you took, you—

MICHELLE STUART: I think it was the Flander. It was either—I think it was—it was either the France or the Flander. I think it was the Flander. And it went to Le Havre, you know. I mean, that was it. It was fun. It was great. I mean, I loved it. You know, it was a big adventure. France was not a big adventure, because France was shocking, I think, to me. It was still wounded from the war. I mean it was just—

ANNETTE LEDDY: A lot of poverty and—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh my God.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Everything really, even—

MICHELLE STUART: Were you, were you—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I've just seen photographs of that, you know, where you see, like-

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, it was a—I think of it all as in grey and white. I mean all of it—there was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: People are standing in line for food and things like that. Yeah, well, photographs I've seen were black and white of course, but it's people standing in line for food.

MICHELLE STUART: You couldn't buy paper.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You can—yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You couldn't even buy toilet paper.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But needless to say, you couldn't get art supplies. There was a lot of antipathy to foreigners too, and you know, he was Spanish and I was American. And—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So, where did you live?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, we lived where he had lived before, which was in a place where the woman that owned it—it was a pension. [Pension La Cloche -MS] And the woman that owned its daughter was a really brilliant person, actually. She later became a major curator at the Musee Guimet. But she was living with another Spanish refugee and so, it was a hotbed of Spanish refugees that place, you know. [Laughs.] Yeah. It was, you know—the whole time I lived in Paris, I lived in one room [and worked there, both of us -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what part of town was it in?

MICHELLE STUART: And we both—in St. Mande. And we both painted in that one room. We slept, painted, ate, lived with, you know, suitcases and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well you know, I, last year, went to Paris to see Shirley Jaffe. You know her? She's this—

MICHELLE STUART: I know the name.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Tibor de Nagy; she's one of those—their painters, you know, for many, many years. And she was part of the circle of Joan Mitchell and Sam Francis and all those people. She was probably there when you were there. She lives in the same one room studio with her bed in it that she's lived in since 1950, when she moved there.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's unbelievable.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. Yeah. I believe it. We all lived that way.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. So, I can picture it. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Luckily, we had two big windows that overlooked—well, out from the windows below was a glass thing where their—it was a—I could show you the building. I mean, I have photographs of the building. It was a wonderful old building in, you know, really, what had been the kind of outskirts of Paris in a way, because of Bois de Vincennes was just a few blocks away. So, it was at the end of the number one subway line. And, but from the—but we were facing the back, and facing the back had these two large windows, you know, with doors

that opened and kind of, like, little kind of window thing, and then this glass thing that was the roof of the where you had breakfast and lunch below.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And then, you looked out on a garden. So that was lovely. And we could have a cat, so we had a cat, you know, which—I would've preferred a dog, but, you know. Thank God for a pet.

[They laugh.]

And so, you know, that made it better. And I never minded roughing it. I just came from a smaller room in Mexico City with my hotplate.

[They laugh.]

So, I went to another hotplate, I mean.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, right.

MICHELLE STUART: But you know, in the pension, you—somebody came in with a baguette and coffee in the morning, and they did serve lunch.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Right, so it's like a—

MICHELLE STUART: Which is like dinner.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [inaudible]

MICHELLE STUART: Right. So, all I had to do was cook supper, you know, and—on the hotplate. And you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so, but how was—

MICHELLE STUART: Paris is another chapter. I mean we don't want to talk about Paris right now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: We should stop, you think? This is—is this a stopping point?

MICHELLE STUART: Well I mean there might be peripheral things that you have to ask, which is fine.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well you know it's all seeming—I mean, I'm just so curious as to how this relationship that—with this man went, I mean, that you just only known for two weeks. And suddenly you're in this, like, compressed area together and you're married.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I was quiet.

[They laugh.]

He was the dominant personality. I mean it seems strange now because I'm, like, really not exactly a mouse.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hard to imagine.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, well first, I didn't really speak French. And I spoke a relatively, you know, relatively fair Spanish, but his language was Catalan. So, he was speaking a second language to me, and I was speaking a second language to him. And he didn't speak English at all. So, all his friends were Catalans. To this day, I can tell you, I can understand almost every word in Catalan. Don't speak it, but understand it perfectly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] So funny, yeah. Right.

MICHELLE STUART: Isn't that something?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It's really weird.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you just sat through endless, you know, dinners and like—

MICHELLE STUART: In Catalan.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —sitting around and—

MICHELLE STUART: And then occasionally they would talk to me in Castilian, and then back to Catalan again, right. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, right.

MICHELLE STUART: It was—and it was extremely interesting, because it was a totally different life than I had ever known in my whole life; totally. It was the exact opposite of somebody growing up in LA. I'm not sure that everybody could've dealt with it, because it did take a great deal of—and I really do mean dealing with it, because we had no money. I barely knew this man. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: I didn't have any friends to touch base with. I—my mother said I almost lost English, because I was really, you know, thinking—I was thinking and dreaming in Spanish, because I wasn't speaking English at all. I mean she—when she said that, I was writing my parents.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They must have been very worried about you.

MICHELLE STUART: Pardon?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Were they worried about you? Your parents.

MICHELLE STUART: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, they weren't?

MICHELLE STUART: No. No, I don't—I can't speak for them; maybe they were. But they didn't give me any indication that they were worried.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I can tell you, if I had—if my daughter, at twenty did what you did—I would be worried, but.

MICHELLE STUART: My mother came to visit in 1955, and came briefly and then she and I went to Switzerland and, you know, met a couple of her Swiss friends in Geneva and took a trip around Switzerland and ended up in her hometown. And we stayed there for a few days. Her brother—one of her brothers was still alive then. And so, we stayed—I think we stayed with them in the old family house.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I met my cousin, who's still alive, and we still correspond. He's in his late 80s. And I like him a lot. He's a collector. I mean—[laughs]—more on the other side of the family were collectors too. I have collectors on both sides.

[They laugh.]

He was a banker, and then, he became a financial adviser. And he's, like, really wealthy and, you know, he's a lovely cultivated man, and his wife also, but she's not very well now. But I liked Switzerland a lot. I—we—as I said, we travelled around Switzerland with this—these chums of my mothers. And we met them in Geneva, and then they had a car and a dog, and the four of us and the dog drove all around Switzerland, you know.

[They laugh.]

And they were like—all I can say is typically Swiss, you know; really lively and, you know, like to ski. And you know, this was the life my mother left, you know, and it was—I can see why she probably yearned for it. She did not like Australia particularly, that was not her—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Outback is, yeah, it's like—

MICHELLE STUART: —yeah, atmosphere at all. She was very European and very kind of, you know, [sophisticated. She lived in Sydney, not the Outback. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So, it's so interesting to think you grew up in L.A. with this European mother, and then you end up kind of really rather quickly moving to Europe by a series of weird, you know, coincidences that—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, the other thing that is kind of weird, too, is that later, when my work started getting more out there, it was totally Europe that was showing my work. I mean the whole [body of work was shown in

Europe and sold there. -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which makes sense.

MICHELLE STUART: Almost all the work from the '70s was sold in Europe.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, there's a whole kind of—and even into the '80s, actually. I mean some of it was Germany, some of it was Switzerland, some of it was France, some of it was Sweden, and some Finland, but, I mean, when the work got out—and that's actually why my work was a little slower to be known here.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Although that would be the case of all the land artists, and even, and even many minimalists, but certainly conceptual artists from Los Angeles; I mean all were first shown in Germany and Europe and accepted there.

MICHELLE STUART: So, you know that better than I do.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, that, to me, is not surprising knowing your work, because it just seems like what they would love there, you know [inaudible].

MICHELLE STUART: And I got along very well with him too, I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, because you kind of had that in your—in the way you were brought up without—I mean I don't know. My mother was Italian, so even though I grew up in California, I always had this feeling of not really being like the other kids in California. You know, there was that funny way you're a hybrid, you know. That's it.

MICHELLE STUART: Totally true. I'm glad to hear that, because you understand it, then.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You—you're from there, but you're not really from there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, because your—the way your mother thinks and those all the—especially then and—

MICHELLE STUART: Well it was totally different than the rest—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I mean, so different; I mean all kinds of things that I remember. For example, just things around food and eating, you know, that there—it was so much more ritualized than what American kids had, and you know, it was so important. You had to have a tablecloth

MICHELLE STUART: We always had dinner on Sunday in the dining room with a tablecloth and wine and always—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wine and, yeah, yeah. And always—

MICHELLE STUART: And they weren't big drinkers, but that's the way—-that's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: That was the right way to do things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And just all kinds of things about clothing and everything, it's—everything. But it's—yeah. So, I see that. I see how, I see how you could really transition very easily into that European world, and also, even though it was a hard time in Europe—so, it would be harder then; you know, you were dealing with austerity, which you had never known really.

MICHELLE STUART: At least not to that degree.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. But on the other hand, the aesthetics that you were being brought in to—I mean how did that—like, did you know other artists?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, that was just amazing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. I mean, that must have just been incredible.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh yes, we knew a lot of artists, and you know, Bartoli was just a—I mean, he was fantastically knowledgeable about art, because he had studied to become a professor of art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, he knew, he knew, a lot, you know. And not only that, we went to Chartres. We went to the south. We went to—you know, I saw all of the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you got this whole art education that you can really only get there, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: We went to Italy. And a lot—and some of the places we went, we didn't have very much money, but it was—he was, like, this superb draftsman so—and a socialist, so we got invited to all these socialist things, like, in Milan and in, you know, Holland and everything.

[They laugh.]

And because they'd bring him along as the designer and the draftsman, you know, and so, I was all over the place in these political things, you know, for a united Europe. [. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: The communist party did—the communist party in Europe is—that's the center of the art world.

MICHELLE STUART: It wasn't communist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh no, he was not—he was very anti-communist. No, he had been an anarchist, a socialist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And you know, these were socialists. This is why, you know—what was happening in Belgium and, you know, that socialist—well Europe is now what they were wanting, you know.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. And so it was a time of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and all of those. Did you meet them?

MICHELLE STUART: No. No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Who were the artists that you met?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I didn't—I actually met Picasso once at a show of his, you know, because there were a lot of Spanish artists and everything, but I didn't know him. And I met a lot of Spanish artists, but they were—let me see, who else did I meet? You know, not big names; minor names.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You said you met Bunuel?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, yes, in Mexico City.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about all the people—

MICHELLE STUART: But that was when I went back; that was in the early '60s.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What about all the people, like, say, the affiche artists, those people who were in Paris after the war, working there? Did you meet those people?

MICHELLE STUART: Who?

ANNETTE LEDDY: What they call the affiche artists; the ones who did—anyway they tear the posters.

MICHELLE STUART: No, I didn't meet any of those, no. I don't even remember those.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, if you say that—

MICHELLE STUART: I mean maybe Boris Lurie here in New York was an affiche artist

ANNETTE LEDDY: You would if saw them, you would recognize the work. It's like that stuff that were, you know, you know—that it was part of that whole movement of distressing the canvas, setting it on fire, tearing that—no, you didn't know those people?



MICHELLE STUART: No. I have to think about all the people that—I remember going to [visit Impasse Ronsin – MS], Brancusi's studio, and I don't remember meeting him, but it seems odd that I would've gone to his studio and not met him. But we were friends with—you know, there was a—it was kind of a place where there are a bunch of studios, and we were friendly with a Dutch artist whose name I can't remember, but he was very well known, that lived next to Brancusi, so maybe that was—had something to do with that. That's very fuzzy in my mind. Mostly, I knew a lot of Spaniards; Clave. I mean, there were a lot of Spanish artists that I knew. I'm trying to think—I had a show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: In Paris?

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow, where was it? It was your first painting show?

MICHELLE STUART: It was a painting show. And I actually sold to an American medical—yeah, medical student, who actually became—it's very funny because I was talking to Klaus—Leslie's Klaus [Ottman], who's at the Phillips, you know, as a—and he's—this man ended up being one of the backers of the Phillips. I mean isn't that bizarre?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know. I did remember his name, [. . . Luther Brady –MS]. Mirador, I think, was the gallery's name.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Mirador. Okay. You had a show. How long were you there altogether? In Paris? How long were you in Paris altogether?

MICHELLE STUART: I think I went back—I went back by myself. I think I went back—it was either—it was maybe '57.

ANNETTE LEDDY: '57. So, you were married for seven years to this—

MICHELLE STUART: Pardon?

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were married for seven years?

MICHELLE STUART: I was married for ten years.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Ten years. You were married until 1960?

MICHELLE STUART: But we weren't together all those years. Now, we were divorced, I think, in 1963 in Mexico City.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So you went back—

MICHELLE STUART: We had the same people at a party at our divorce as we did at our marriage; seriously.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were there for three and a half years. What made you go back?

MICHELLE STUART: I wanted to go back.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You were just tired of being in Europe?

MICHELLE STUART: I'd had it with Paris.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But—and with him?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh yes, no, he came back too.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, he came back too.

MICHELLE STUART: No, I went back on another ship. Strangely, I mean this is—I have a funny little tale to tell, actually. I was at a dinner party one night, I don't know, a long time ago, maybe in the '70s. And I was—we were all talking about Europe, and there was a bunch of artists. And I said, "Boy, coming back on the ship"—and I think it was the France or the Ile de France, maybe the Ile de France; it was one of the—you know, that was kind of the end of the liners. And I said, "Oh there was a storm, and the storm was so big, and I was in third class. And

there was a Canadian nurse who I was sharing a cabin with, and you know, we were the only ones that were not seasick on the whole ship."

[They laugh.]

I mean and they finally brought us up to first class, and we ate first class, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And it was—and two people at the table looked at me and said, "When was that?" Two people, other people, other than me, at that table were on the same ship.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's so funny.

MICHELLE STUART: Ed Clark, black artist; do you know Ed Clark?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I don't.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, okay. And Sal Romano, who just died I think a few months ago; a sculptor.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's amazing.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean can you believe the humor in all of this. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Just the weird coincidence.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean—Ed Clark was a painter. I mean, you know, anybody could find them, their—you know. Sal and I actually were in the same gallery for a while. Max Hutchinson, you know, gallery at—and I don't think he, Ed Clark, was, but Hutchinson had a lot of sculptors. But that was funny. Anyway, I came back to New York and just went through New York and went back to see my parents. And I spent a couple of months in LA and, you know, kind of finally coming home, you know. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Kind of rethought everything that had taken place.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah, no it was actually revelatory to come home. It was kind of, you know—and also the light. I think I realized so much about the California light. It was so startling to me, having lived all those years in Paris, where the light is like the total opposite of LA.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's so dark, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean total. You couldn't get two lights further apart, you know. Here was this crashing California light that, you know, was light and shadow and was like a—I mean right between those two there was nothing, you know, it was—and the subtlety of Paris, you know, which was always, it seemed to me, foggy. You know—[laughs]—I mean, once in a while, it wasn't. But it seemed like it was like one grey blanket.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And that was interesting. And then, you know, I wanted to go to New York. And the deal was—you know, it wasn't a deal—but Bartoli and I were going to then live in New York. And so, after a few months, he was doing things too. I've forgotten what he was doing. He was going to visit some friends in the Alps and his brother. He—we visited his brother when I was there. His brother had an underground newspaper, anti-Franco newspaper. I mean they were, you know, like very—

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Subversive.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. Great guy actually. Strangely, his—it's either his son; I guess it must be his son—showed up here a couple of months ago. And he's a photographer, and he's a socialist too, and he lives in a commune in the Pyrenees. And the minute he walked in, I just, you know—he was great, and he thought the same thing, and we sat down like we'd known each other for years, and we'd never met, you know. He looked exactly like Bartoli. I mean it was the weirdest experience, you know. That seven degrees of separation is so, so true. It's so true. We're all so linked. I mean, it is remarkable how linked we are. But anyway, I went back to L.A., and I looked up my old boyfriend—[laughs]—and we went out. We had a great time, you know. And then I knew I had done the right thing, you know, and I think he did too, you know. He had—by that time I think—no, he had not married. He was still waiting, but he couldn't somehow persuade me to go to back to, you know, domestic bliss, as much as my mother would've loved it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But anyway, I then went to New York. I flew to New York, and I had my New York experiences.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And that's where we stop.

MICHELLE STUART: That's a good place to stop; very organic place to stop.

ANNETTE LEDDY: New York is next. Okay.

[END OF stuart15\_1of4\_track02.]

[Sound check]

[END OF stuart15\_2of4\_track01.]

[Side conversation]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Then you went back to New York and you—and you were still married, and you lived with your husband then?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, not then, because he wasn't in the United States. He was still in Europe.

[. . . -MS]

MICHELLE STUART: I came back in order to find a place to live. While I was doing that, I sublet an apartment of a man named MacDougal, who was—who was a very interesting man. And who, unfortunately for MacDougal, died when he—before he came back. He was a poet and writer and a very—extremely interesting man. And, out of a million people, he picked me to sublet his apartment because he left it just as if you were moving in here. You know, everything—only thing he didn't want me to use was his tea set. [Laughs.] But he—anyway, he died. And I, of course, couldn't stay in his—I couldn't continue the sublet because his people wanted the apartment.

So, I found an apartment in the Village on West 11th Street, which was very small. And then I wrote Bartoli that I had a place. We could both—for both of us. But it was small. I mean, you really, you really—it was expensive to buy something more than that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: As ever. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: As ever. And I wanted to be in the Village, and so did he at that time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And because—what was the Village like at that time?

MICHELLE STUART: Wonderful.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That was the time of the folk revival, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, among other things. It was just—it was a village.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And almost everybody in it was kind of a like-minded type. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Writers, artists.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: It was, it was, it was really, it was really a nice place to be. You could, you could go out and hear music, and you could—it was, it was just very, very pleasant. And, you know, a lot of the comedians—not that I'm a big comedian-goer. But, you know, a lot of the comedians were in a lot of the kind of nightclubs there that were trying out. And, you know, it was a, it was a lovely kind of atmosphere. Lovely's the wrong word. It was kind of a hip atmosphere—[laughs]—of the time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And stimulating.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And then, of course there were the universities around. And one of the things that I had wanted to do was continue some studies, which I had been unable, up to then really, to do. So, I almost immediately walked over to—and I could, being on West 11th, walk over to the New School.

[They laugh.]

You know? And started taking classes there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: In what in particular?

MICHELLE STUART: Quite a few different things, because they had great professors. They were all German. They were all German Jewish refugees.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So amazing. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And it was like going to Harvard [. . . -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like Adorno taught there, right? And Horkheimer, and all the whole Frankfurt School; it was so incredible

MICHELLE STUART: It was amazing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It was amazing. So, I studied philosophy [with Hans Jonas -MS]. I studied art history. I studied anthropology. I studied film, documentary—political documentary film, which I was very interested in, and etching, and different literatures—Russian literature. They didn't have an archeology but they had a kind of like an archeology. And it was in the anthropology. And aesthetics. And the interesting part of the New School then, aside from them all being European [German Jews -MS] teachers that you could barely understand—[laughs]—was that they mixed things up, which was very interesting. A philosopher and aesthetician would do a class in art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: In other words, it was art history—one—Hannah Dahnhardt was teaching the aesthetics. And I've forgotten the philosopher's name [Hans Jonas -MS]. And they would kind of do a duo with a small amount of students.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And, I mean, all of this I got because I took tickets. You know, I paid like seven dollars a semester—[laughs]—for all these brilliant people, because, at the art history door—the art history drew a lot more people. They had that in the larger auditorium. And, you know, I mean, funnily—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Who taught that?

MICHELLE STUART: I'm trying to think of his name now, because it was, it was really amusing. He was—he made me like some things in art history that I'd never been interested in, because he was, he was very inclined toward the Baroque. And I was never inclined toward the Baroque. And he kind of shoved the Baroque down our throats. And I started understanding it.

You know, it's so good to have somebody talking about things in a way that—he would, he would—he was very good in the sense that, even though it was a relatively large audience—by today it's not—it wasn't. But, for then, it was a relatively large audience. He asked questions; he involved us, which was very interesting, because not all people who give talks, slide talks, do that. And he had his girlfriend—[laughs]—who was, who was a woman in her 60s I think, and was teaching at Julliard. She was his slide projecting person. And every once in a while she'd—"Ah." You know, he'd ask her a question.

[They laugh.]

I mean, it was wonderful. It was very homey, you know? [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I hope that audience really appreciated what they got, because, you know, in retrospect it was quite wonderful. Now, maybe they teach that way in Germany. That I don't know. But, from what I gather, they don't teach like that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No. This was a unique situation. Everybody says that the New School, around 1960 was just, like, the most amazing education you could get.

MICHELLE STUART: Really? See, I've never talked to anybody about it. So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, even in poetry. For example, I just did an oral history with Bill Berkson, who's a poet and an art critic, right? And he said what kind of changed his life is he started taking classes at the New School. And Kenneth Koch was his teacher, and John Ashbery—you know.

MICHELLE STUART: And Cage was there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Also John Cage, and, you know, just that there was an atmosphere of really incredible intellectual excitement.

MICHELLE STUART: Why doesn't somebody write about that? They write about Black Mountain constantly, but the New School was really—

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] It's a good subject. You're right. The New School 1960.

MICHELLE STUART: It was amazing. It was an amazing place. And, you know, I had professors there that sometimes, their classes weren't filled and I was the only person. And I would say, "Oh. You know, I realize I'm the only one so we could skip the class." And they would say, "No, no, no, no, no. One person is fine." And then, you know, I would go to the class and this professor—I remember one of them, but his name isn't coming to me, but—Wigglesworth.

And so, Wigglesworth would tell me about the history of classical music, and I would tell him about what I knew about art; the art that came at the same time. So, we made it a kind of conversation. And then, we would go out for a drink afterwards, you know, and—because I think he drove in from Connecticut or something. He was not one of the refugees.

[They laugh.]

He was a composer; one of the American, you know, composers of that period of the—so, it was totally a great mini-education. And—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Why do you say, "mini?"

MICHELLE STUART: Well, because I didn't go there for four years.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, you didn't get an actual degree from there. It was just a couple classes.

MICHELLE STUART: They didn't give degrees at that time, [but I was very prepared for this education and it changed my intellectual life. I went there for several years. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: There was no degree. It was not accredited—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, even more amazing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I think the reason that it wasn't probably had to do with how they could hire these people.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. You're right. Yeah. They wouldn't have had such paper-work, I would think, to—

MICHELLE STUART: And I don't know if these people would have survived without their jobs at the New School.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. No. It was—it's, it is an interesting topic.

MICHELLE STUART: So, that was the New York I was looking for. I didn't realize it until I got here. [. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And the reason you couldn't have had that in Paris is just the language barrier? And the—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh my god, no.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and the culture. You couldn't go to the Sorbonne or something like that?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, people can. People do. Carey did. I didn't.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Now, I felt, actually, that was one of the reasons I wanted to leave Paris, was that I really felt like I was in a cage. Well, being married to a Spaniard's a little bit like being incarcerated.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. I felt I needed my own language, which I was really not using at all. My mother—I wrote my mother and father. She used to say, "You know, you used to write beautifully. But now, you're interjecting Spanish words." I started just speaking Spanish, and no English. And I was dreaming—in Paris. I was dreaming [in Spanish. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's good. That's supposed to be how you really learn; you know, pillow talk. They always say that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, it's true.

[They laugh.]

And he didn't speak English. So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —I—you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: *Ahuevo*, as they say in Spanish. You had to speak it if you were going—which is fine. I love Spanish. It's a wonderful, wonderful, very humor-filled language, much more than ours. So, then, I started wanting to meet other artists, of course. And that was, that was, that was not that easy, because most people had gone to school with one another. And I was a Western artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. California.

MICHELLE STUART: Even though my work wasn't.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know? And, let me say that there's always been—I'm going to say this. There's always been a real prejudice against people from the West—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sure.

MICHELLE STUART: —even though half of the Abstract Expressionists came from the West.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Now—and not to mention—yeah. I mean, it's well known. There's just this funny thing. And, even—it's funny to me that, even years after people from California have moved here, they still seem to have—their core friendships still seem to be other people from California.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I didn't have that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, that seems to be something I've noticed.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Even though they have other friends, it just still seems like there's always a sort of group that is their California friends. You know.

MICHELLE STUART: I didn't have that because I didn't stay there long enough.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, you grew up there though. I mean, you had the qualities of somebody from there in certain ways, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. But, I mean, have a bunch of friends. I mean, usually—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. You didn't come here with a network like the Pictures Generation people, who all went to CalArts, and when they were here they and basically around each other.

MICHELLE STUART: Exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I actually don't even remember anybody I went to Chouinard with. [Laughs.] It was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, it was a short time, too, right? It was just—

MICHELLE STUART: That's what—that's what I'm saying.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But when you—so, anyway, you got here. And one of—this is one of the mysteries of your CV and chronology is that there's, essentially, nothing on it from 1960 to about 1969. So, I don't know what you were—you know, in other words, you started having these shows and you started developing a public reputation by 1970. But what happened during those 10 years?

MICHELLE STUART: I had a show in the late '50s at the Nonagon Gallery, which was one of the galleries that was downtown.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's not on any of your things here. Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I mean it—

ANNETTE LEDDY: How do you spell Nonagon?

MICHELLE STUART: N-O-N-A-G-O-N. It was on Second Avenue and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: It was one of those artist's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It was a painting show?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what kind of—and you were still doing that kind of painting that you were doing—

MICHELLE STUART: It was still painting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —in France?

MICHELLE STUART: Actually, there was a—I got a very nice little review from the one in the—[laughs]—[. . . -MS] It was *Art News* I think.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: From Donald Judd.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Nice.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. You were pointing down to the Spring Street—[laughs]—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, because he lived on—[laughs]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I got it. I just thought being closer was the—

MICHELLE STUART: Names are hard to kind of dredge up all the time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's so great. Yeah. Fantastic.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, it was, you know. But, yeah. I had that, and, consequently, then got to know artists.

ANNETTE LEDDY: As a result of that show.

MICHELLE STUART: That's right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what year was that show? Do you remember?

MICHELLE STUART: Maybe '59.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: I'm guessing because I can't remember actually.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: And then I also showed in the March Gallery. But the March Gallery was—had somehow fallen on—the March Gallery as a co-op, I think, had broken up. And several artists—Boris Lurie, an artist named—and several other artists—Goldstein. I don't know. They all died, except for Lurie, fairly soon after that as far—Fisher [ph]—I don't remember the names of those artists, but I did do an article in *Artforum* on them. So, that could be researched if you want. But I wasn't the first creature in there. I mean, it was all about the guys.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And then they would add a few women that they thought were good in what they were doing. And it was, it was kind of anti-war. You know, another interesting factor of that period is most of the mainstream artists—and they were hardly mainstream in the sense we think of it today.

[They laugh.]

But, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —the Cedar Bar guys.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: They were not very political with a couple of exceptions.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Of course, they sort of hung back, yeah

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. I mean, the one—the black painting person—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Ad Reinhardt.

MICHELLE STUART: Ad Reinhardt was.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And he was, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: He was like a Marxist, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And I knew him ever so slightly. But, most of them either didn't—I won't speak for them, but they didn't seem to care one way or the other. You know. It wasn't their—I was still very political, left over from being very political all the time. I didn't quite know what my politics were exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Coming from being surrounded by Spanish anarchists for—

MICHELLE STUART: Of course.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —for ten years.

MICHELLE STUART: But I was already.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Even before that. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I was already. I think I was born with a sense of justice.



ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And it wasn't so much politics, which I hate, really, when I think about it. It was, it was justice that I would seek. And that's how I thought.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, what would be the political causes of that moment?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, we just had McCarthyism.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, we had all those—you know, now there's a film on Trumbo. Well, you know, that was still all in the air; what Hollywood had done to these poor lefties. And New York was a very Left city.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But, like, Boris, who I think was really the catalyst for that period of the March Gallery, was a refugee, a Jewish refugee.

ANNETTE LEDDY: From Germany?

MICHELLE STUART: I think from Latvia, or Lithuania. But he'd been in a camp.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I know that. So, he did—what he did was these kind of collage pin-up things that were anti-war. But there was an erotic quality in them, in them, as well. And I don't think that the art world, in parenthesis, really thought that was what should be promoted. [Laughs.] He was an underdog.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But he was, he was a fairly interesting artist. But, anyway, I was doing—I had shifted by that time. We're talking about 1960, or something. I had shifted. I had moved. I had left my studio in the Village and moved to a much larger place. And I had started doing sculpture. And I did a lot of very strange plaster sculptures. And it was just a burst of a couple of years of these plaster sculptures. And they were based on women—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and self-portraits, and, like, women with shards coming out, chains, real chains—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sounds like feminist sculpture.

MICHELLE STUART: It was really early feminist sculpture.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But also political comment.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh huh [Affirmative]. I see.

MICHELLE STUART: And then, they morphed in this—you're asking about the '60s.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Oh, I love this. This is—

MICHELLE STUART: Your—my unknown, empty—the Sahara. They morphed into boxes with these women portraits.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so, three dimensional plaster with women inside the boxes. Like, with little bars on the windows kind of thing?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, no bars. No. Spray paint on the glass.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You see them in it.

MICHELLE STUART: You have to like—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh. I see. Oh. I see. So you have to—

MICHELLE STUART: Very—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —peer into them.

MICHELLE STUART: Very strange, slightly surreal.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Nobody was interested in them at all.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: At all. I think I sold one piece in all of those years. I sold drawings off and on. But, of the sculpture—you know, Abstract Expressionism was in its heyday and I would have people come in to see my work, and they'd look at it; "I don't think I can sell this." You know. I mean dealers think about sales, right?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sure.

MICHELLE STUART: Nobody was doing me any big favors. Charles Byron of the Byron Gallery on Madison Avenue did put one of the boxes in his famous box show.

[. . . -MS]

MICHELLE STUART: It was not Pop Art at all. I actually—I want to go on record—[laughs]—saying that, though I think Oldenburg is a—one of the great artists of all time—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: —I hated Pop Art. [Laughs.] I mean, I don't know, I don't know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like, meaning, you liked Lichtenstein and you didn't like, say Jasper Johns or any of that—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, no. Jasper Johns wasn't a Pop artist in my estimation.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. Okay. So, who are you talking about? Warhol?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I was thinking of Indiana, you know, Al D'Arcangelo—who I knew very well, actually.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about Warhol?

MICHELLE STUART: You know. Well, Warhol I—you know, the problem with titles of—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —artists don't like them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, I guess they like if they're put in one. But you know, because then they become part of a movement. But I don't think anyone wants to be really—I mean we're all individuals who are all different.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You asked about Land Art. Okay. I'll accept that. I wasn't really a Land Artist in the sense that a lot of these guys were Land Artists. I mean, I did do art in the land.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But it was different.

ANNETTE LEDDY: See, that's one thing I really want to understand, because that whole—of course, that period is so dense with these different movements developing all at once. So, for example, when you talk about Oldenburg, then, what I wonder is, well, did you go to the happenings that Oldenburg did?

MICHELLE STUART: I was almost—he wanted me to be in one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: But—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you knew—how did you meet Oldenburg then, if you're—so -

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I think I went to The Store and it was a kind of period where I was meeting a lot of people.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And he was—he probably would have—you know, if you'd been walking down the street he would've asked you to be—any young woman—

[They laugh.]

If you, if you—you know, they were like directors.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know.

[They laugh.]

And it was a screen test.

[They laugh.]

And I remember—[laughs]—I remember being in the—in this incipient Happening. It wasn't public yet. But I was like crammed into this little box kind of thing, you know, up here. And Oldenburg's mother came in—[laughs]—to this. I don't even remember the loft or anything. But she was magnificent; really, really imposing Swedish woman.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And she started telling everybody what to do. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: It was hilarious. It was hilarious. I thought, "Oh my god." My mother was Miss Mouse, and—[laughs]—Oldenburg's mother was—and look. She produced these two boys that became, like, major figures.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exactly.

MICHELLE STUART: You know. I think Oldenburg is a great draftsman. I think his drawings are superb.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. They're wonderful. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know? And I always appreciate, no matter what they do otherwise—although I think he's a great sculptor as well. I appreciate a great draftsman. I mean, drawing is very important to me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I, and I see it—I know it when I see it. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what about Allan Kaprow?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't—didn't know him. And then he left for California. I did know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The work.

MICHELLE STUART: —the work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like the Happenings, the early ones he did in New York.

MICHELLE STUART: You know whose Happenings I went to always was Whitman.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah. Very interesting stuff.

MICHELLE STUART: I liked his happenings very much. I liked Oldenburg.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Robert Watts? Did you know him?

MICHELLE STUART: Robert Watts. Though I'm not as familiar with Watts; I was more familiar with his sculptures.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I'm trying to think of who else. I was very, very interested in the Fluxus group.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, because I have to say. Looking at some of your early—your boxes, and the books, I mean, the map things; lot of those—the George Brecht pieces come to mind. I mean, it's different.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I was—you know, I was kind of on a—

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, but it seems like—

MICHELLE STUART: —nobody has talked about this with my work at all.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But I was kind of, you know, a transplant too. You know, I'd been in Europe for years.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I know. Yeah. I know. That's how I feel when I look at that early work. I'm thinking, "Wow. This is all happening—you know, it's parallel in some way. It's not coming right out of the American movements." But, at the same time—and there also seems to be a lot of surrealism that comes in, which—and then I was going to ask you about that too, because of the use of frottage and, you know, other surrealist kinds of tactics.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I didn't get that from surrealism. I got that on my own.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative],

MICHELLE STUART: I have to say.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I will give credit where credit's due.

[They laugh.]

Seriously, I have no problem with that. You know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No. I mean, one could, one could obviously come up with that on one's own. It's not—it's just that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I did.

[They laugh.]

You know? I did. I really, really did. The credit, I think, due—as an example, when I was doing the plasters.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I had seen Burri's work in Europe at—just a little bit. And I really—I was really taken with it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Alberto Burri. I love that stuff. I think it's great. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And he never got, really, very much credit here. Or maybe he didn't have a dealer here.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, Alberto Burri was somebody who interested—

MICHELLE STUART: I did not know him, but I—but when I saw some work of his—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —I was very taken with it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: People often ask about Fontana. [Laughs.] And I actually wasn't that taken with Fontana. Although, I've done work that relates to Fontana.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, like the Arte Povera stuff was not really—

MICHELLE STUART: The Arte Povera stuff I saw a little bit later.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: That I did see at—or, at that—at 120—420 West Broadway. But where? Might have been Castelli; might have been Sonnabend; might have been Weber; I can't remember now. But they did have—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —you know, an occasion show of Arte Povera. But, by that time, I was already off on my—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —my own.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, here's what I'm trying to understand. All this time, then, Robert Smithson is in New York in the early '60s, and he's—

MICHELLE STUART: But, I didn't know him.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You didn't know Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt. You didn't know them?

MICHELLE STUART: I knew Nancy Holt.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh. So, how did you meet her?

MICHELLE STUART: I met her at his—[laughs]—funeral, I guess, or his—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The memorial. Maybe it was then?

MICHELLE STUART: The memorial. That's right. The memorial.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But then, when these earthworks shows are starting; you know, the big ones that were in, like 1969, and you know, the one that Willoughby Sharp did. And—so, you're not in those shows, even though you're making earthworks already.

MICHELLE STUART: Right. But I was different. I was different.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I was, I was still—I was working outside, and I was using earth. But, I really wasn't thinking in terms of, you know, being the big outdoor sculptor. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, do you mean that you—like—the whole polemic of Land Art that, "We're going to take the art outside of the gallery system," which they never really did. But, "Take it out of the gallery walls, anyway, and put it outside." And you just—did you subscribe to that? Or did you feel that was not pertinent to your interests?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't think I was that interested in that one way or the other, really. I remember, you know, Charles, who was a friend of mine who—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Charles Simmonds?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, who was putting things outside, if you want to call it that. You know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The little people.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. Somebody's copying him now. I mean, it's like where were you 30 [or 40 -MS] years ago?

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, where, so, where did you meet Charles?

MICHELLE STUART: I met Charles through Lucy.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how'd you meet Lucy?

MICHELLE STUART: We go back to the March Gallery.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Really?

MICHELLE STUART: I—Lucy wrote in one of her books, early on, a chapter on the March Gallery, and left the women out.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh my god.

MICHELLE STUART: Lil Picard—who else was—three or four women showed there. [Yayoi Kusama -MS] They didn't—you know. They weren't as big and brash as the men, although, my pieces really did stand out and they were kind of in your face, for me. And I met her somewhere. I was introduced to her somewhere. It must have been like a cocktail party or something. And I said, "Oh, it's nice to meet you. Thanks for leaving the women out of your"—and she looked at me. I think, I think that was the moment that she became a feminist.

[They laugh.]

I'm totally serious. How can you say to somebody like Lucy—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —"You left the women out of this chapter on the March Gallery. And the women showed there as much as the men."

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. So, that was really a shocking thing.

MICHELLE STUART: I think I—we never discussed it, and we became friends. [Laughs.] But I think that was shocking. I think that was a jolt to her, that, you know, that she had inadvertently done that. Because, I'm sure she just thought, "Well, the women were, you know, maybe an addenda to the March Gallery, and not a very important part." Whatever she thought; I can't put her thoughts on—you know. I can't talk for her.

ANNETTE LEDDY: She's written some good essays about you since then, I must say. I think she amply compensated. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Not as much as I'd like.

[They laugh.]

No. She's wonderful. And, actually, we have a lot in common in terms of some very basic things, like, you know, being an only child, you know, being kind of very—we rode—both rode horses. You know. There's a lot of funny little background things that, though we grew up in a totally different atmosphere and place, there are some kind of things. You know, I'm sure she was born liberal, and so was I. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, she's also—seems so interested in the west, and in land issues, and that kind of thing.

MICHELLE STUART: That was another thing that we were both very interested in—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —in sacred sights—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sacred sights.

MICHELLE STUART: —and that archeology and things like that. Yeah. I thought her book was brilliant—the book on sacred sights and contemporary art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was a brilliant, brilliant book.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, I'm trying to get this—the time—go back to the time thing here. We have—because I also just popped into my mind that Eleanor Munro wrote about you.

MICHELLE STUART: She did.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And—in her—in *Originals*. But that's a little later.

MICHELLE STUART: And she kept asking about my father instead of my mother. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, she was very—she's very father-oriented.

MICHELLE STUART: [Laughs.] I know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's certainly a big issue with her.

MICHELLE STUART: I think I—I think during one of our interviews, I think I said, "Well, you know, I did have a mother."

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, I don't know if you know this, but we have her papers. We just got them. And—I mean, you know, a few months ago. And so, I did a little paper at the Brooklyn Museum about the new acquisitions that we've gotten to do with women, you know, artists, and critics, and so on. And so, I focused specifically on dreams, because so many people seem to keep these dream notebooks that seem to be part of that time.

And so, for example, we have, you know, Mary Frank's dreams. And she has a dream, in fact, about Hayden Herrera. And then, there're these—I was looking at Eleanor Munro's notebook and she has a dream about Mary Frank. And then, she has a dream about you, actually, that has to do with sheep. And—

MICHELLE STUART: How interesting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes. And I started—it just started to feel like, "Oh, there's this whole community here."

MICHELLE STUART: I love that, because I absolutely relate to sheep in a profound way.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think it had to do with the piece that you—

MICHELLE STUART: But I don't think I ever said that to her. [Laughs.] I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No. But it was, it was a thing where you—she said something like, "I have shorn the sheep." And I think it was actually when she finished her book; it had to do with finishing *Originals*—you know, the book, and then feeling—but somehow she dreamed about you and telling you that. And you were standing in this field of sheep. So, anyway, I just think that's kind of fascinating that everybody's so—

MICHELLE STUART: What year was that?

ANNETTE LEDDY: —embedded. Well, see, that's the trouble, because, see, she was writing that book for a long time. So—

MICHELLE STUART: But that was an early book.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think it was published in the—it was—it was the first book really to discuss women artists and their obstacles to success and how they overcome them, and so on. You know, the first one to really take that into some kind of—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, the interesting part is that when she did that book, I had not been to New Zealand. I didn't even really know that much—practically—I knew practically nothing about my father's mother and father, and his mother's family, who were very early [New Zealanders. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: There is a work you do with sheep in it later on, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes. Because I saw that in one of the catalogs.

MICHELLE STUART: That's what I'm about to say.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I see. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: I went to New Zealand many times looking for them—never found them. And then, in the '90s I went with Carey. And the first day we were there, we were, we were in a—we went to the north island, and I got up and I showed this address that I had—when my father died, it had been in a little book of his mother's poems. And somebody knew the town.

Now, I had not been able to find that town. It was a very small town. I went to the town immediately that day. We drove to that town. It was about two hours from where we were. I found a district museum. The woman immediately knew who I was. She didn't know me, of course, but my great-grandparents were on the wall.

[They laugh.]

They had been of the five founders of that town. I won't go into the lengthy—I mean, can you imagine? I had

never even seen these people. And I didn't even know their names. And there they were in front of me with family picnics, you know. This is—this is in the mid-19th century, you know; late 19th century, because the other people had gone to New Zealand in the—fairly early, actually. I mean, mid—you know, mid—1850s. You know, which, for New Zealand, is very early.

And she said, "I know where your great-grandmother is buried. Would you like to—me to make you a map and you—it's in Hakaru, which is not far." And the sun—you know, it was late in the afternoon. I said, "We'll go right now." So, we left with this map to find this little Anglican church, and a few grave stones around it. We got to the grave stones, and pretty much all of them were indecipherable. [Laughs.] So, we were, we were doing the frottage on the gravestones, right? Trying to bring up a name. And I found it.

And, as I was standing—and it was a big granite, worn stone with, you know, a—I mean, it was kind of, you know, impressive, but disheveled somewhat, because, you know, it hadn't been that cared for. It is now, I've noticed, quite cared for, because somebody sent me a photograph of it. But, at that time, that cemetery—[laughs]—was like an old cemetery that—and as I was standing there, kind of pondering this woman—because she had been amazing—I mean, an amazing woman—an amazing, amazing woman—I hear bells. I'm like—I feel like crying right now, because it was so—the sun was setting, and sheep were coming home across the green fields from [pasture -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yes, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —you know, having their day out—[laughs]—eating. And it was so—there was something so magical about it. It was—the sun was going down. The sheep were, you know, walking along. And, I'm standing in front of this gravestone that—you know, a couple of days earlier I had never even heard this woman's name before.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Yeah. So beautiful.

MICHELLE STUART: It was one of the most emotionally—well, it was a day of great turmoil, really—emotional turmoil. You know, because it was kind of that thing where you suddenly, you suddenly have some knowledge about yourself that you had no knowledge of before.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You—yeah. I didn't even—I barely knew my grandmother's name.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Because nobody talked about those things, particularly. I mean, I knew her name was Christina Hogan [my grandmother -MS] because it was in this book. But, her mother had been, you know, the daughter of a fisherman in Kent, England, who married a soldier, who—they already had two children. They decided that their plight in England was not going to be the best. He changed his battalion to the 58th, because it was going to New Zealand, and they thought, a new life. My grandmother was born on the way. [Her name was Elizabeth Rawlings Hogan. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

So, her early suckling was, you know, four months on a sail ship. She arrived. She was healthy baby. More babies were, you know, born. He left the 58th when they—you know, they abandoned the 58th. You could either go home or have a land grant. Their whole idea was to have this land grant.

So, they had this land grant for a farm in Mangawhai. And that's where they went. And they started this town with a couple of other families, and she learned Māori, because they were practically surrounded by Māoris, you know. It was a gum-cutting place. And she became a midwife. So, she—first, everybody thought that was a kind of—I heard that was kind of, "Oh, they made that up." But now I just got a phone call from a cousin that I met when I went there that time, that it was true that a lot of people in their—in their memoirs are saying, you know, "Well I was born because," —[laughs]—you know, "Elizabeth Hogan was the midwife." And, I mean, she lived to be in her mid-80s.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So—but—okay. So, the thing is, though, you go there, and you get—you see her gravestone, and you have this beautiful, kind of, moment there. But what is not—I'm not completely understanding is this: when you learn something—you learn about your grandmother—it's like in a way, you have this relationship to history that comes through also in your work. It's very immediate to you. Like, in other words, a lot of people learn about their grandparents and it doesn't feel like it's altering their self-perception. It's more like informational. But, in your case, it feels like something that is deeply moving. Like, you feel very connected to your past.



MICHELLE STUART: Well, it was kinesthetic as well as visual.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It couldn't be more moving.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It was almost like meeting her.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And then, I didn't do the piece until I got back to New York, actually. I did a piece with sky [about one year later, -MS] encaustic, with, you know, little pebbles in it that were—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —rubbed with aluminum powder—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —so that they were kind of like stars—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and then a granite bench, a really heavy granite bench with wooden legs, and maybe five or six [brown -MS] containers made from beeswax, with beeswax, light beeswax poured in like it was milk—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and sheep's heads—flattened sheep's heads that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Actual heads?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, no. They were—they were—they were a cookie mold, actually.

[They laugh.]

A 19th century cookie mold of a rams head.

[They laugh.]

You know—that they used to make biscuits with in the 19th century. And each one of those was like a brown wax container, with the sheep's milk, and the—and the sheep in it. You know? [*Sheeps Milk and the Cosmos*, for Elizabeth Rawlings Hogan, 1999 -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And that was—that was my experience.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. That's beautiful.

MICHELLE STUART: It was very poetic. It was a very poetic piece. I still have it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, you—and what year was that?

MICHELLE STUART: That was maybe [. . . 1999 -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it was much later. Yeah. It was in the '90s. We're jumping—we're jumping ahead. Oh, dear. Okay. We have to go back to our timeline. Not really, but I think I just want to—I really—I have this idea that it'd be great to—next time, to talk a lot about the work, because we haven't talked about it that much. But, I also have this need to understand more about the whole context that your development took place in. You know what I mean? Your early development. I mean, because if it comes—it sort of feels like when you—this is just my—but, when you do the scrolls—when you finally—

MICHELLE STUART: I think my land interest came from California. I mean, I've never thought any differently. It didn't really come from being here. I—you know, I grew up and my father always drove my mother and I all over the land. I mean, we were—we were always, on Sunday—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —or the weekend, going off to the desert, or the—you know. And, I have to say, that was a very different desert. [Laughs.] You know, there was Scotty's.

[They laugh.]

Anyone that knows California probably remembers the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: In Death Valley?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. I know that place. Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: He was very land-driven.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, he was working, actually, at the time, with the Right of Way and Land division of the Department of Water and Power—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —in L.A, you know. But he was a land person. He wasn't—he wasn't somebody that went out and shot rabbits. Although he did teach me to shoot, but it was only—he taught me to handle a gun.

ANNETTE LEDDY: In self-defense?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But, yeah. So, what you're really saying is you're in New York and there are these—there were these things going on, like Fluxus, and Land Art, and Minimalism, and so on. But, you're saying that—I mean, I'm just trying to get a sense of how much you experienced that as—that you were a part of that, and how much you're feeling that it was kind of at a distance and that you were kind of pursuing your trajectory in a way that is from your own biography and your own history.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I think everything I've ever done had something to do with what I have passion about. And archeology is certainly [one of them, and one of the big passions of my life is time. -MS]. [. . . -MS] I've just always, always read about, studied, purchased when I could—I have a slew of books on two subjects. One of them is the Maya. And—but archeology from everywhere, but mainly American, both North American, Central American, and South American. But primarily, you know, the Central American, Mexican belt.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: A lot of the work that I've done has either a direct relationship or an indirect relationship to, you know, the earth in a certain place or the—or, even photographs of sites—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]

MICHELLE STUART: —that relate to certain places using photos and sites.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And, also, photography plays a part. But in the '60s it didn't really, [until 1968. -MS] Although, I did take some classes in it, and I started doing it more. [I studied photography with Harold Feinstein. -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —than I had previously.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, was it to document these site-specific pieces?

MICHELLE STUART: At one point in early '60s, I actually wanted to be a filmmaker. And it's really—you know, one thing I've noticed when I look back at my work, there's one part of it that is not material, and there's another part that's very material. And, you know, somewhere they meet, and then they separate, and then they meet, and they separate. But it's always kind of a dance between this use of, you know, matter—almost, you know, the kind of Arte Povera thing, where you're actually, you know, somewhere between a sculptor and a painter—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —or a sculptor and a conceptualist, or something like that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and then, film.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. That's interesting, you know, because I mean, of course, other people have written this about your work. But, you know, there's a way that even those early pieces that—like say the scrolls, or whatever, that have that very material land quality, also look— look like, in a way, they could be photographs, or they recall photography by the way they're these sort of—you know, it's black on white paper. And it feels like maybe it's a photograph that's just black, you know? And, anyway, it's a very—you know, it's a kind of fascinating nexus there, of, you know, kind of completely basic—

MICHELLE STUART: But nobody has discussed that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, actually, you know who did discuss it—I just—is Lawrence Alloway. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Oh. He was so amazing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That first piece—boy, was that a good piece that he wrote, huh?

MICHELLE STUART: It was.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. Now, he was—not because he wrote about me—he was brilliant.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes. I think that's certainly true.

MICHELLE STUART: And they don't come around that often. In fact, they don't even happen that often in any which way you want to look at it. He had a kind of special zeroing in on things. He was also extremely temperamental, I think.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But you knew him personally, too?

MICHELLE STUART: He—it was a cold call. He called me on the phone—was the weirdest thing. He said, "Hello. This is Lawrence Alloway. [Laughs.] I'd like to do a studio visit." I never had met him.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: He had seen one piece of mine. I think—you know, NYU—there was a show at NYU that was—it had a—there was a gallery right near Washington Square. I'm not even sure if it's on there [the resume -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. See, according to this, you know, your first one is Wyndham College. But—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that was a—that was a solo show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Maybe first solo show. Right. That was—that was—

MICHELLE STUART: This wasn't a solo show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: This was a show—I had four or five pieces in it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Actually, the Met just bought one of them.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: Castoro—Rosemarie Castoro, maybe another person, and I—maybe three artists, or something. And he had gone to this show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I don't even remember who the curator was.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I'm sorry to say.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And he came, and did a studio visit, and then decided—

MICHELLE STUART: He called and said he'd like to visit the studio, and I said, "That's fine. Please do." It was right before I had the first show at Max Hutchinson.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, it must have been 1974. It was either late '73—

ANNETTE LEDDY: That seems to have been your year, 1974, huh?

MICHELLE STUART: Maybe it was '73.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because it looks here like Wyndham College is '73. There is a group exhibition in Kingston in 1971.

MICHELLE STUART: [This is incorrect. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But, it looks like—I mean, he wrote the—This is Max Hutchinson and Gallery Schmela. And it looks like the brochure or small catalog for that show is what Lawrence wrote the essay for, right?

MICHELLE STUART: This is what happened: when he came to the studio, I was—he wrote an article. That's the first time he wrote. He wrote an article for *Artforum*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: When he came to the studio, he spent a lot of time looking. I had many of the works up that were later shown at Max's and Schmela.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I don't know whether Alloway had a modicum of paternalism in him.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, he is a—you know, he was with Sylvia [Sleigh], right? I mean, is—he's kind of a feminist at that time in a way.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't think so. I don't know, because I was probably so intimidated by having Lawrence Alloway, although, very little intimidates me. But, you know, it was like a kind of a big deal to have Lawrence Alloway cold call you.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes. God.

MICHELLE STUART: And I remember him—I remember it so vividly, because he said so many interesting things about my work while he was walking around. And I thought, "I didn't know that." I mean it was really revelatory to me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Then he stopped at one piece, and it was on that wall over there. And he said, "Are you showing this with the others?" And I said, "Well, I hadn't really chosen what I was going to show exactly." And he said, "Don't choose that one. Leave that one out." I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because"—and maybe he was being diplomatic. But he said, "Because it will be a stronger show without this because this is a step in another direction."

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, maybe—

MICHELLE STUART: I left it out.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I thought, "You know? He knows what he's doing."

ANNETTE LEDDY: And this is the, this is the Schmela show that you were planning at that time, or not?

MICHELLE STUART: [No, the Max Hutchinson Show. The Schmela show happened this way. -MS] The Schmela thing was extremely interesting in—to me. Maybe not to, you know, you. [Laughs.] I mean, but one day a guy came through here. [Laughs.] He said he was from Chicago. And he loved my work. And he loved a few other artists that I knew work. And he was going to Europe to the Basel [Art] Fair. And I had no idea who this man was.

[They laugh.]

And he didn't even have a gallery. He was just—and the audacity. You know, I thought, "Well, I mean, how interesting." So, I gave him a bunch of drawings. And then when I talked to all my friends they said, "What are you crazy? You don't even know this guy, and you're giving him drawings?" You know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: You gave him to sell?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. Well, I assumed that. But he didn't have a booth. He told me, "I don't have a booth. I'm getting a hotel room. I'm inviting people over to my hotel room. And let's see how they fly."

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Selling out of a suitcase. That is hysterical.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, two things happened from that. Risk-taker I am, right?

[They laugh.]

I never got the drawings back—any of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did any of them sell?

MICHELLE STUART: They were totally stolen.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: However, Schmela went to his hotel room to see what he had—[laughs]—and called me up, and said, "I'd like to do a show."

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, see. Placed in the right—just placement, right? That's what it was. You were placed at Basel. That's all you needed. That is hilarious.

MICHELLE STUART: Funny.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Funny. And, of course, this man, whose name I can't even remember—you know, he had a few other artists. But none of the artists that were friends of mine gave him work. So, they didn't have the opportunity to be seen—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —you know, by any dealers in Europe. And that was a very important thing for Schmela to show. I mean, he—how he chose me is, you know, still quite amazing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But, you know, when I see the—I saw the photograph of the installation. It is spectacular. I mean, it is so beautiful. And, you know—

[END OF stuart15\_2of4\_track02.]

[. . . -AL]

MICHELLE STUART: He sold shows out, Schemla.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, here, selling was very difficult, particularly for me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Every single, you know, that show of the scrolls sold out, yeah. No, he could move the stuff. So, but the other thing is this, and this brings me to another question, of course. I think of him as a dealer of conceptual art. And what I'm wondering is do you feel at that point, did you—in 1974—did you have any—besides Fluxus which is a really kind of pre-conceptual, but the actual—what we now think of as conceptual art, did you have any encounters with that at that time?

MICHELLE STUART: All I can say is I think—well, I really liked all that art. It intrigued me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like, say, Joseph Kosuth or, you know—

MICHELLE STUART: No, because Kosuth didn't interest me. [He didn't show Kosuth. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: No? So, who?

MICHELLE STUART: I have nothing against Kosuth's work, you know [laughs.] I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, but I'm just saying that's when, in New York—

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, I respect it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's like in L.A., people don't have the same names that they associate with conceptual art. But in New York, whenever you say conceptual art, people say, "Joseph Kosuth," that's why I mentioned that, but who would you mean by that term?

MICHELLE STUART: Who would I mean by conceptual?

ANNETTE LEDDY: At that time.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, Chico Shiomi, the Fluxus artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Fluxus, so you do think of it more as a Fluxus—

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, I actually had a piece, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: I'm in that piece, in fact. [Laughs.] I mean, you know, I kind of participated a little bit in that. You know, I got their mailer all the time and, you know, I was very, very interested in it. That's how I got here.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you have a little box? Do you have a Fluxus—

MICHELLE STUART: Because of [George] Maciunas.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really, Maciunas found this place for you?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Really?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, explain that. How did that come about?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I saw an ad in the *Village Voice*—I think it was the *Village Voice*—you know, saying, "I found a building. You know, I'm looking for artists to,"—I've forgotten how the ad went, but the ad was short and sweet and said, "If you want to move into a loft, meet at 60 Wooster, George Maciunas." I went.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

MICHELLE STUART: And so did a lot of other people in this building.

[They laugh.]

I mean, Richard Foreman, who was close to Maciunas already. He knew him. I did not know him until I met him then.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: He was madder than a hatter, but brilliant.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And he sold you this place?

MICHELLE STUART: He found this building.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: This was, I think, his second building; 60 Wooster, I think, was his first, where he was with all his little cottage cheese jars. And actually, I just saw somebody—what's his name? I have a little box of his. He was with him too. He's still alive. Kind of a [Hendricks. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Still alive?

MICHELLE STUART: He does clouds or something now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, Whitman is still alive. That's not who you mean, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, Whitman—I don't know. Was Whitman really that involved with Fluxus?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I think so.

MICHELLE STUART: He was? I didn't know that. Well, Allison—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Allison Knowles.

MICHELLE STUART: Knowles, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Of course, we'll see. If I try to remember everyone—Yoko Ono—[laughs]—Robert Watts and George Brecht. But see, who's still alive? That's the hard one to figure out.

MICHELLE STUART: [Geoff Hendricks. -MS] Did little boxes with—

ANNETTE LEDDY: They all did little boxes—

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: They all did little boxes. They all did them.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, well, I love little boxes. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Me too. Did you have one of the boxes they did that was like the fish tackle box? Did you have one of those?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I didn't have one, no. No, I didn't.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because apparently—

MICHELLE STUART: I was busy trying to get my money for this [loft, this great adventure here. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, you got money to—

MICHELLE STUART: So, Maciunas says, you know, "They're going to sell the building. I want a piece for my efforts." You know, part of the ground floor, I think he said. "So, what we need is you have cough up, you know, a certain amount of money." Now, in the scheme of things, it wasn't a lot of money because at that time I had to move from where I was. So, at that time, I was already looking. That's why I read the ads.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And key money on a loft that you did not own was about \$3,000.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, my God. You are kidding me.

MICHELLE STUART: So, this building, he wanted for the front, \$6,500 for the front loft and I think a little more for the back lofts that were slightly larger. So, I had to dig up that. I borrowed from my mother. I had a little bit myself, you know, and I managed to—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Unbelievable.

MICHELLE STUART: —pull it together.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, my God.

MICHELLE STUART: That was raw. It wasn't only raw, it was not raw. You had to haul everything out. I mean, it was a doll factory.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, this—[laughs]—oh, that's so great.

MICHELLE STUART: It was a mess. There were rats. It was a mess.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah, I bet.

MICHELLE STUART: In fact, when I looked at it, the people were still working here and it was, you know, it was a real awful place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative], yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: So, that was when I first looked in here. It was 1970. We signed the papers in end of '70, December 1970 and then we all tried to move in '71. But, you know, it was not—they were literally doing—trying to redo the plumbing, and we were hiring artists. And George didn't follow any rules.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, you know, if the building department had stepped into this building, it would have been closed immediately.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's why there were all the fires here too.

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, two Japanese poets—[laughs]—were doing the plumbing, you know. One painter was doing the electrical riser because what happened was George put the building together, that was his big thing, and then he left. He left it to us.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative], oh.

MICHELLE STUART: We had an all freight elevator that was—that you put two sticks together in the basement to make it go up and down.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And was Max here too?

MICHELLE STUART: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, that was later.

MICHELLE STUART: No, they came two or three years later.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. So, you were the pioneer of the building.

MICHELLE STUART: There were—John Kacere was a pioneer, Richard Foreman, Andy Jansen—well, two of those are dead, but there—well, Karen [ph] kept her loft for a long time. [. . . -MS] So, the building hasn't changed that much. Diana [Kurz] is still an original. [. . . -MS] I mean, it was fixing the place up that was brutal.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. And so is that—the other thing I wanted to know is how the whole feminist movement fits into this.

MICHELLE STUART: How the whole—

ANNETTE LEDDY: How the feminist movement, in some way, fits into this? Were you part of Guerrilla Girls and all these other things that were going on?

MICHELLE STUART: I never was part of Guerrilla Girls. [That was much later. -MS] Nancy Spero and I—I knew Nancy and we used to go to—at the very end of Red Stockings. And that didn't really get to me too much, but then also, I was going through fixing this place up. It was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It took years.



MICHELLE STUART: But then, I had met Lucy [Lippard]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I had met, you know, a lot of women artists who became friends of mine, like, Jackie Winsor and Mary Miss and, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Land Artists, essentially as they're called. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Are they called that?

ANNETTE LEDDY: They certainly are.

MICHELLE STUART: It's funny. I don't think of Jackie Winsor as a land artist at all [. . . -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —and Lucy and—oh, well, part of this—and Joyce [Kozloff]. When Joyce came, Joyce was already very primed by her California experience, I think. And I remember, well, we all got together, and I can't tell you what the beginning of this was. We all started meeting at Lucy's and—oh and May Stevens. There were a lot of others.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And it was like a consciousness raising thing or woman's—

MICHELLE STUART: No, no, no.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, no.

MICHELLE STUART: It was how "are we going to improve our lot?" thing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, in the art—in the art world.

MICHELLE STUART: We're not getting any attention for our work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right, yeah

MICHELLE STUART: So, we picketed the Whitney. It's so ironic. [Laughs.] I said to Adam, "You know, I picketed the Whitney." You know, he wasn't there at the time, but I think it's so funny that, you know, finally I have a piece in the Whitney—well, I did have a piece a long—but a smaller piece, but a major piece in the Whitney and I was one of those bad girls, you know, that—[laughs]—bad women, I should say. But the Whitney was very funny because when we picketed the Whitney back then, all that time back then, I remember, they used to send out these guys that would say, "Do you want some coffee?"

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's cute.

MICHELLE STUART: That's how seriously they took us, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Was Marcia Tucker there at that time or she already gone to—

MICHELLE STUART: No, I don't think she was there. I think it was pre-Marcia Tucker.

[. . . -AL]

MICHELLE STUART: I can't remember. But anyway, what our meetings were about where I wanted to start a magazine because I thought this magazine—it didn't turn out the way I wanted it at all. But I wanted a magazine that, that you could hand out, that would be given out at stores raising people's consciousness about women.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: That they had done a lot more than they were given credit for, and, you know, with articles about that. And not as an art magazine. In fact, I didn't even want it to be about art, particularly. I wanted it to be about history.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But this is *Heresies* that you're talking about.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, it ended up being *Heresies*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Which is certainly—

MICHELLE STUART: Which was not the name I would have given it, but it was better than "Pink," which was what Lucy wanted. But you know—maybe that would have been a great name.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think *Heresies* is better.

MICHELLE STUART: It was—that was part of the meetings. Another part was about people who taught, and they wanted jobs. You know, I think May Stevens was more in that department, you know; a lot of it overlapped, but I mean, people who had credentials and that weren't getting jobs at universities or art schools. Now, the irony is I started getting asked by art schools to teach, and I didn't have any credentials.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MICHELLE STUART: But that was because they liked the work, and there were heads of art departments who were inviting me all over the place, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.]

MICHELLE STUART: That had nothing to do with—but what—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you didn't do that? You didn't teach?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, I did it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, you did teach? I see, okay.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, sure, I did it, of course. I needed to earn a living. [Laughs.] I mean, Schmela was selling work, but it wasn't that high-priced for—I mean, you would die if you knew what he was selling it for. I remember he came once with another dealer from Dusseldorf, also very famous. They were friends. [. . . -Konrad Fischer -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Who was that?

MICHELLE STUART: Did I tell you this?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, but I'm wondering who that is, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: All right, so ostensibly, he was translating for Schmela, and every time Schmela would say, "Well, you know, maybe I'll buy the pieces," and the other dealer would say—I think he's dead now, actually, too. But his son may have a gallery here. [. . . Konrad Fischer -MS]. And he would say, "Don't sell it for that. He's undercutting you. It's too little."

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: It was very funny. And he was right, you know. He was right, but I was, I was so pleased to have somebody that interested, that committed to the work that, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And hey, it's history now, so it was a good place to be, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, what really—I found out last year that the Getty has a whole file on Schmela.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They have a—it's a huge archive.

MICHELLE STUART: [. . . I had five shows with Schmela, and I'm from the coast, and they barely mention me. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I can't believe that.

MICHELLE STUART: I thought—I saw the list and I thought, "What did they do, leave the women out?"

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that's interesting. That's how I know about it because I know that archive, yeah, from when I was there. But that's interesting. Let me look that up.

MICHELLE STUART: I showed with him all through the '70s until—even after his death, I had one more show. But, you know, his wife and daughter were not Schmela. I mean, just—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, it wasn't the same, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Also, they were not really conceptually-oriented. And I started doing these pieces that,

though they wouldn't have been placed exactly in conceptual, you know—they were land with photographs [and were about time. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], yeah, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So they were kind of, you know, the codexes that I did which I might put in this Bronx Museum Show, actually. They were me walking around the site and then the earth from the site.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You're talking about what looked like books? Your codexes—

MICHELLE STUART: No, not the books. [The book objects are sculpture! -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Codexes, what do you mean by the codexes?

MICHELLE STUART: They were [. . . about 32 inches by 32 inches. -MS] And the middle [panel -MS] was rubbed earth, but the freeze around was me photographing walking around the site.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], around it. I see, yeah, I see.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Again, when one thing that really interested me is, I would consider the scrolls to be kind of your—that show and that format—kind of your breakthrough work and I'm just wondering—

MICHELLE STUART: And Art Park, *Niagara Gorge Path Relocated*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Art Park, but what led up to those?

MICHELLE STUART: Art Park actually got an enormous amount of publicity at the time, considering I didn't go up there with a PR person, which a lot of the guys went up with, you know, a huge truck and, you know, somebody flying a helicopter. I remember being so amazed by Dennis Oppenheim. He was a great guy. I mean, I really like him. I liked him and I liked him and his work. But, I mean, they came equipped—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —you know. And I remember Jody Pinto—I mean, we had to come equipped, we just—I didn't—we weren't up there at the same time, but I know she was up there early on, too. I mean, we didn't get the publicity that the guys got. The guys got big articles, because they actually brought up writers, to [write about them. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, you know, one thing—

MICHELLE STUART: It was a big learning period for me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Publicity thing, yeah. I was reading that—you know, there's an oral history with Alice Aycock that's in our archive, you know, and I was reading it. She was saying how, you know, she would do a piece and she would show it to Robert Morris and get his reaction. Then she'd show it to Robert Smithson and, I mean, there was some way she was always kind of, you know, working off—somehow trying to get them to work with her. You know what I'm saying?

MICHELLE STUART: I know what you're saying, but I didn't even know she knew Smithson.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I mean, it's a whole different way than—what you're describing is you're just kind of doing your thing and trying to get—hoping that you're going to some kind of recognition there. You're not interacting with these guys in, kind of, in a way, almost, like trying to persuade them to give her support is how it looks.

MICHELLE STUART: The only time that I remember that I got support from the guys was actually at Art Park. When I was putting my piece down, which was extremely difficult in many ways, you know, down the topography of the escarpment—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The swinging thing.

MICHELLE STUART: —the guys really rallied, you know. [I'm not sure what you mean by "swinging"? -MS] Surls came out there and, you know, the guys that were doing pieces, you know. And I was, I was—I still, you know, really feel good about that. It was, you know, it was like a fellow artist thing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah, you're right. But that's the other breakthrough. That's the one—that's on the cover of the catalogue and that you always see since you—

MICHELLE STUART: It was in books, it was everywhere.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Everywhere. It was spectacular.

MICHELLE STUART: —before Christos did that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's interesting, the Valley Curtain, yeah. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It was very early in the scheme of things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Very early.

MICHELLE STUART: And it was kind of, it was out of nowhere, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: [. . . -MS] You know, I was doing those [. . . scrolls -MS] and I thought, "Why not do one of those pieces all the way down?" [To represent the topography and time. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's what I was wondering, if there was, in your mind a connection. But how did that—just that whole idea of a scroll with earth on it. Can you just tell me, like, how you came to that because it seems very original to me and—

MICHELLE STUART: I think I dreamed it. I think it was a dream.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I really—I dream a lot, but I don't always remember—well, we all do. I mean, that's nothing new.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Four dreams a night, yes. [Laughs.] It's been documented.

MICHELLE STUART: Not new—[laughs]—that we all dream, but I dream and I wake up, you know, if something's really—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Great.

MICHELLE STUART: And I really, you know, was working on the concept of that piece. They flew us up there—us, well—they flew me up there. They flew each one of us up there to look—to choose a site. See the site, then go back and, you know, think, conceive. And I have thought about it before I flew up there because I wanted to see if I could do something like that. And I found a place, a perfect place, I thought. And so, you know, I pissed on that place. I marked my spot.

[They laugh.]

You know, I want this place, you know, before somebody else because it was right between two pillars that had been the first extension—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, there was a historical kind of narrative associated with it, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Plus, there was a five [. . . -MS] family Native American site, sacred site, right off there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was a perfect place for me. I mean, it was—it kind of, you know—all my—I should add something, too; that one of the reasons—one of the things between—in the '60s when I finished those boxes, I went to Atlanta for, I don't know, six months or something. I did a lot of thinking and a lot of drawing. I had the realization that if I was going to really find myself—though I had been doing these self-portraits in the—you know, it was about self. But I had to re-think my California roots. And I made a great big book—I mean, this took a long time—with things from my California experience, with drawings, photographs, [. . . -MS] rubbings—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Where is that book now?

MICHELLE STUART: It's around here somewhere.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So, it was more like a diary or a scrapbook for you; a source book in a way.

MICHELLE STUART: It was, it was my roots book—that's how I looked at it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And that was really the beginning of all that work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: All those books that you do for a long time—

MICHELLE STUART: There were drawings of the land. They were kind of geological things. There were—I did a smallish book later that referred to some of the things in that book. That's why it was kind of torn apart. At one time, it was altogether, but it's kind of here and there now. But I do have—but I don't know where that is. If I had it, I would, you know, if I knew where it was right now. It was—I did it as a catalogue for Williams College. I had an individual show at Williams College, and I had just had another catalogue. So what I did was, I did this, I did this book—well, it wasn't a book [it was a catalogue about that book of references. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, that was in 1977?

MICHELLE STUART: Probably, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was a little brochure, and it had some of the things from that book. But that compilation of ideas was really very important to the work, and it was really all about California. It was totally, it was totally my California.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And why did you come to the conclusion that the direction for your work would be to recover your California roots? Why did that—

MICHELLE STUART: Because that's me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. You just felt like that would be kind of your deepest source, in a certain way?

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely. Well, wouldn't it be?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, not everyone thinks of their, you know, their biologic—not everyone thinks of their cultural beginnings as their greatest artistic source, but yeah, a lot of people do.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I don't know if I would call it culture. [I would call it place and time. -MS]

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: Place. I am very place-oriented. I mean, extremely. I have a very, very, very photographic memory of place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I can, I can tell you everything about a place having been there, and I can see something go by on TV about, you know, a place, and I'll know exactly where it is. I don't know what it is. It's kind of uncanny, actually. I don't have this about people—[laughs]—but I do have it about the land.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Is it about, also, like a room, or is it—

MICHELLE STUART: It can be a room.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But it can be a room, but it's mainly outside [in nature. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so all of these travels that you've done, which I mean, it's a really—you've been everywhere, you know, you had that—even though in one way, I mean, it's almost like a contradiction. You're—the place that you're from and your roots is your biggest source; at the same time, you're constantly moving to other places for material and for—you see what I'm saying? Those are not—

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. I am vagabond. I'm a vagabond. And I've thought about it and I think it's because, you know, my parents. My father was kind of, slightly, vagabond too, but it was the stories he told me as a [. . . child-MS]. You know, the nighttime stories were all about places he'd been.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The adventure stories.

MICHELLE STUART: I think it probably—my mother too, but less. But both of them told me stories about foreign places by—you know. And I say foreign. They weren't foreign to them, but I mean, but places and a lot of that—outside of Grimm's Fairy Tales, which my mother endlessly read to me. All the stories I was told were about these wonderful places, you know, Africa [and the South Pacific -MS]; you know, all these places. And I wanted to see all those places, but my vivid memories were that I really wanted to go. Get on a ship. I thought, "Oh, if I could only pretend that I were a boy, and, you know, get on as a ship's crew or something," because, I mean, women couldn't do that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And stowaway, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, and I wanted to run away and, you know, see the world.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, in a way, you found a way to do that from being an artist.

MICHELLE STUART: I think, maybe it's in my genes. I think, you know, almost everybody back there was moving around. I mean, almost all of them. [Laughs.] [. . . -MS]

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know. I'm very Pacific-oriented. I mean, even my work now is really about the South Pacific or the Pacific.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, that's true, that's true.

MICHELLE STUART: Or my fantasy life lies in the Pacific.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], in the—I see what you're saying. That's what it really is then. That's makes sense. Then it's part of the—it's in a way, not about land, it's about water. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that's right, actually. That's true. That—you know, I remember saying to somebody, that's my coast. That's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because this is like, looking at this [indicating the photo collage on the wall]. This is perfect, right. This looks like—I mean, it's jungle and—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, it is.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —you know, it's water—

MICHELLE STUART: And I've traveled in that area a lot because it's endlessly fascinating to me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, what do you do to these photographs?

MICHELLE STUART: I do a lot of things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because some of them, some of them are yours and some of—

MICHELLE STUART: Some of them are collaged. Some of them are superimposed. They're altered.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Altered, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Many of them are altered.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Well, not all of them, but, you know, I took those in the Galapagos. I mean, a lot of them are—you know, I took that in Easter Island. I mean, I've really been all over the Pacific with my camera.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I guess, I guess there were kind of two backyards. You know, one backyard was Mexico and the other backyard was the Pacific Ocean.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And those two things interested me a lot as a young child. I was very interested. And I think I told you I was in this opportunity room that allowed me to have access to a lot of books on those subjects and write—[brief interruption]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And Captain Cook also, you say.

MICHELLE STUART: Allowed me to kind of fantasize about what that was like and be interested in experiencing it. And I think those things are really hard to explain, but they infuse your work, or one's work—not your work. [Laughs]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I get it.

MICHELLE STUART: —with fantasy and reality, and the fantasy and reality gets kind of enmeshed.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, as I'm looking at this, and I see that, you know, so many of them have to do with hurricanes; I mean, storms and hurricane— a destructive nature, right? This is just this one in particular—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you know, the force of nature when you grow up in California—I don't know whether you—did you grow up in California?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I did.

MICHELLE STUART: All right. So, I remember, one of the first things I remember is a big earthquake.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The earthquake thing is so terrifying. That's one thing I kind of—I have to remind myself a lot in New York; just say, "Annette, you don't have to worry about earthquakes." I have to tell myself that.

MICHELLE STUART: We are on a fault here. Canal Street is on a fault.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, but have you ever had an earthquake?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I think the building moves.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, well—

MICHELLE STUART: I've never experienced a real earthquake in New York City, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised. I know there are several faults because I know that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: One of them's on Canal. I think another one is on 23rd or—No, serious—

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's where I live; 23rd, thank you. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: All right, where are we now?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think, okay, maybe this—are we ready to stop for this time, and then, next time we take up again?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, okay.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay, because here's what I'm thinking—that we're really kind of only up to about 1977. So, we need to talk about everything after that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I took a long trip around United States.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What year—that was here—

MICHELLE STUART: I think it was '77.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You mentioned '77, mm-hmm [Affirmative], yeah. And the other thing, I kind of want to go back and pick up this one thing. What happened with Paul Blackburn and your husband and all of that stuff?

MICHELLE STUART: They're both dead. I survived them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Congratulations.

MICHELLE STUART: We all stayed—well, I stayed friends with each one of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Now, but, all I'm trying to say is you got divorced in Mexico City in 1963; that's what you told me. I know it was a party and people came and it was like a good thing, in some way.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, yeah, it was—we had a good time. You know, we had been apart for a long time by that

time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, we were just friends.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. So, then—

MICHELLE STUART: But legally, you had to get a divorce sometime.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, so you did that.

MICHELLE STUART: So, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You didn't have kids or anything like that. So, then you came back to New York. And was that when you were involved with Paul, or is that some other time?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, Paul was earlier.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That was earlier.

MICHELLE STUART: It was in the late—well, when was Paul? Oh my goodness, Paul was—I can't remember, but '58, '59 perhaps.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], okay, so, earlier. So, I think we should stop. And I think on Friday, maybe talk about the, you know, the 1980s and everything since then. Or what do you want to talk about? What would you like—

MICHELLE STUART: Whatever you want me to talk about I'll talk about.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I mean, I have more questions, but I also want to know what—

MICHELLE STUART: I actually like it when we bounce back and forth. I think it's much more interesting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Than going chronologically, you mean?

MICHELLE STUART: It can have a chronological thread, but I like it—well, maybe because to me, it's more organic if, you know, something makes you think of something that happened earlier or later, and you just—otherwise, you're sticking to, you know, the way life is lived, rather than the way, you know, your psyche is experiencing things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: True, true. Well, I think we've done some of that going back and forth. It's just I kind of feel a need to understand how things developed.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that's, that's—I agree. Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, that's why I keep going back rather than—but anyway, okay.

MICHELLE STUART: No, I think that's good. I think that's good. Going—it's like knitting. You go up a little bit and then you catch. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right. Okay, let me write this down here.

MICHELLE STUART: It just whizzes by.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, I'm glad to hear that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you know how people are when they're talking about themselves. [Laughs.]

[END OF stuart15\_2of4\_track03.]

MICHELLE STUART: Did you forget? I mean, do we have to go through the '70s again?

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I just forgot to say this is Annette Leddy interviewing Michelle Stuart, on—

MICHELLE STUART: —Friday—



ANNETTE LEDDY: —Friday, November 13, 2015 at her studio in New York City. That's what I have to say. I forgot to say that last time; I was supposed to say it—and this is card number three. Okay, it's alright. We have to turn this on for backup.

I think what I feel is that the emphasis in art school is different. You know, it's—it really gets rid of what I think is hard—it takes the focus off academics, you know what I mean? The academics are there to support the art. It's not like you're there for the academics and you also get to do art. And somehow that seems to make a huge difference, especially because, you know, artists, in a way, they have to learn not to think like academics, you know? They have to learn, you know, to think like artists and it's so different.

MICHELLE STUART: I'm not actually very sure that school is important at all. Really—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —for an artist, or for anyone?

MICHELLE STUART: For an artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, for some people absolutely; no question about it. But I think an artist—my guess would be that if you plunked an artist down in an art community—in other words, they have access to a lot of, you know, like minded people, and they looked a lot, they went to all the museums they could go to and all the shows that they could go to and, you know, maybe toured the world—

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But you know, I was also thinking, since you were talking about drawings, were the first drawings you did the moon drawings?

MICHELLE STUART: No, the first drawings I did were, you know, in art school. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, but I mean the first ones that became part—like, you know, like that were shown and became part of your oeuvre— is that where it began?

MICHELLE STUART: I have drawings, a lot of earlier drawings, that haven't been shown.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, and what are they like? What are they of?

MICHELLE STUART: They strangely relate to what I'm doing now, [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: How?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, they were figurative—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and they had relations to kind of cosmic things, and sometimes, they had—well, I remember one of them had airplanes in it and a dog. And it depended on the drawing, and a lot of them, I don't know where they are. I still have to find them. A couple of them have turned up, and one that turned up is like—it kind of had that—and a female, which could be me or could be generic female.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But when you say it relates to what you're doing now, how so?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, the work I'm doing now, obviously, has—[laughs]—airplanes, you know? Some of them—I mean they're all different but they're all kind of stories. I mean one of them, the one—I mean they aren't up, so I can't point them out to you. One is, you know, with a head figure which is looking up at the—toward the sky, and then it has a lot of cosmic—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —aspects to it. It's a huge piece.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so, when you say—

MICHELLE STUART: I call it *Mermaids*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —cosmic, when you say cosmic, what does that mean to you exactly?

MICHELLE STUART: It means everything that happens around us in the cosmos—[laughs]—real or imagined.

ANNETTE LEDDY: A connection, so in other words a way of—

MICHELLE STUART: It's a connection to the other part of the universe. I've always felt that, I mean I did sculpture in the '60s, I mean actually, one of—Leslie is going to show one in a show that I've never shown, which was like—it's on the floor, and there were four moon drawings, and then these tentacles come out from it that are like magnetic forces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Cool

MICHELLE STUART: And I really think there are magnetic forces. I don't think there's any question. I don't think it's the California pie in the sky, because we are determined by the moon and tides and the sun. I mean obviously, you know, there are magnetic forces—[laughs]—that determine the earthlings and, you know, our location and place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], yeah. So—

MICHELLE STUART: Anybody that grows up on the Pacific knows how determined we are by place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you think of it in terms of, you know, in terms of human beings have a connection to the physical or geographical world? Or do you think of it in terms of, like, cosmic as there's, you know, a kind of other life in the universe?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't think it's an either or.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's not either or, yeah

MICHELLE STUART: I think that we're very—we're, like it or not, we're very determined by where we live and grow up, especially where we lived at the beginning. And, you know, you can leave California—[laughs]—but you're still a Californian.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Forever. I think that's true.

MICHELLE STUART: Forever. And, you know, part of it is—and that's why I said, you know, when I felt in the '60s that I was kind of seeking something that I wasn't sure what, I made a notebook, and it was all about California because I was going to find myself, finding about my place and myself. And that's how I came upon, you know, the earth. Not what these guys were doing—[laughs]—out there, you know. It actually slightly predated these guys, or most of them anyway.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The Land Art people you mean?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah which is fine. I mean like that, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It's not something I'm feeling negative about. But I feel very positive about everything that they did. I think they were wonderful and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But you don't think of yourself as one of them which is, so that's been sort of a surprise to me.

MICHELLE STUART: I'm not one of them really.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You really didn't think of yourself—

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I am and I'm not. It's just like you can't lump people together. To me, it's—well, it's like, you know, it was easy to say the Impressionists, but they were all separate artists, and it was easy to say the Fauvists and they were all separate artists, and the same thing with the Surrealists. I mean, my goodness—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —you know. So, yes there are people that you know are interested in sites and place and all of those things and that's a time, a moment in time—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's a lot of different people, though. I mean, you can think Allan Kaprow is part of that too, but

you would never call him a land artist, right? It's true, but at the same time, I only think that I only ask this because I was thinking about how, you know, you've been very insistent about that; that these movements were there, you were aware of them, but they didn't—that wasn't, you know, what was generating—your work came from inside you. And but when I think of you and Mary Miss and Jackie Winsor and those people, I do think of you as—I think of those as your peers. And I'm just wondering if you think of them that way, or if you don't really; you think of them as all doing very different work.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, they were my friends [and still are my friends. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: They were your friends, okay. [Laughs.] Well, that counts. Anyway, I don't want to—one day I want—

MICHELLE STUART: I don't think our work, I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Except for the fact that you work on sites, it's all quite different, is what you're saying.

MICHELLE STUART: Totally.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It is—the meaning of it is different.

MICHELLE STUART: Totally, and Jackie Winsor didn't work on sites ever [. . . except once.-MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, she did those public sculpture things though.

MICHELLE STUART: Jackie Winsor?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Didn't she? Those things—

MICHELLE STUART: Where?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Trying to think; something out of bridge. I'm trying to remember—and on the roofs of buildings? No? Okay, well.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you might know something I don't know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, I know Jackie's squares.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And her, you know, circular rope pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And all that, but I don't know any public art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You think of her as a sculptor, then.

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Totally, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. I think of Nancy Holt as a public artist to some degree. I think Nancy probably is the closest female to the male Land artist.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And that makes sense.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sure.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean she was really part of it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: She was—yeah, she was. She was in all those expeditions with Robert, and so on.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah. I mean there are others, Jody Pinto did some interesting pieces, and there are many others and there still are people doing that. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, well when you talked about—when you saw the Land Art Show at MOCA, for example, did that represent—remember, "*Ends of the Earth*"? It was from 2012? You saw that right? You were in it.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh. [Yes, I saw it and I was in it. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Did you see it? Miwon Kwon and Philipp Kaiser curated it at MOCA in L.A.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh sure, oh yes, I came out to see it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, right. Okay, now that was really expanding the concept of land art, right? I mean it was really saying—

MICHELLE STUART: I thought it was a very good show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's very good; it was very good. But it definitely challenged—

MICHELLE STUART: Although, there were people in it that didn't belong in it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] That's what I'm saying. They totally broadened it. It wasn't just American. It was international, and it wasn't just, you know, it wasn't just out in the country in the desert and so it was also in the cities. And, you know, there was all these ways they expanded it and filled it out. And then they had this one statement, which I found—I personally found problematic. They said—it was that this show proves that land art was never really a movement that was opposed to the art institution, you know. In other words, that's, like, a false polemic, and I don't think that's true. I think it *was* opposed to that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, they can say whatever they like. I think you'd have to ask all the land artists—

ANNETTE LEDDY: The artists what they felt, exactly

MICHELLE STUART: —what they felt. I mean if Charles Simmonds is in there, and I think was in that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: He was in that show.

MICHELLE STUART: —he was in that show, he—and I know this - he said "I'm not showing in any gallery. I'm not showing in any"—you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Exactly. Even Allen Kaprow said that, you know, that was—people said it and maybe in retrospect, it looks like it was less true—

MICHELLE STUART: And I think Smithsonian said it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: He might have said it, but at the same time, you know, their point is he was working with Virginia Dwan—

MICHELLE STUART: Although, he might not have. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think he did say it. I think it was in [his] *Artforum* pieces and so on. But anyway, so, enough of this movement talk. I really want to talk about your work. And, you know, one thing I was thinking as you were saying all this about cosmic—okay I love this photograph so much of this installation, and—

MICHELLE STUART: It's Schmela.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, Schmela, and it seems to me, when I look at this, I mean many thoughts come to me about it. But one thing I feel is the way that it's—and a lot your work and also your books have this impact on me—that they seem to be in one way like writing, like they're on pieces of paper like this is, you know, a document of some kind, and yet they're always— saying that language is useless or language is completely, like, superficial or false or something. T—his is a gospel to me. It's like some kind of, you know—it's like a religious feeling, like a religious document or scroll or something being—The Word being handed down, but The Word is blank. You can feel it but you can't read it.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you're reviewing it right now, aren't you?

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I mean, it's totally your point of view.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: But that's not—

MICHELLE STUART: What do you want me to say?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I want you to say—you don't agree with that, is what I'm saying. But you don't see it that way. It was simply an idea.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't think I could talk about it just off the top of my head.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't. I mean on one hand I'm very distant from it, and on the other, hand, I'm extremely close to it. And I don't think words can really do them justice. I think they were kind of a spurt of really something that I did not think about with my conscious brain. I think they just happened. And they did just happen, but they happened for a lot of reasons, and some of them personal, some of them impersonal.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you want to say what those reasons were?

MICHELLE STUART: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

[They laugh.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay, fine.

MICHELLE STUART: No, I mean, I can say that I—my life—I was going through something that was extremely disturbing in my life, and I think that they just burst out.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do you remember when you first—the first one you did? I mean, do you remember the—what the stuff leading up to it—

MICHELLE STUART: They were numbered so I remember exactly what the first one was. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Is it this one, *Woodstock #1*?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: 197—so you did it in Woodstock? And—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I did it close to Woodstock. I had a house.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you make the paper?

MICHELLE STUART: No. No, oh, that's not handmade—you could not do that with handmade paper. The paper is very, very strong archival paper that was muslin backed, laminated—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —by the paper company that made the paper. And they did not make it for drawing drawings, really.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: They made it—I was familiar with the paper because I was a draftsman in California.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: And the paper was really made to take to the tropics or take it to places that you had to have a paper which would withstand a lot of temperature change, which it does. It doesn't withstand total water; you can't put water on it. But aside from direct water contact, it's the greatest paper. I mean, they don't—they haven't made it for years. The man died. It was the B Paper Company, and his wife doesn't, you know—sold the business. And one of the parts of the business was this big laminating machine that—I remember—[laughs]—where I bought the paper was New York Central Supply, and Rauschenberg and I were vying for the last rolls of this paper.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: I know that because the owner of the company told me well "It's either you or Rauschenberg that gets these last three or four rolls." You know, the rolls were big, you know.

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then so you—can you just tell me something about the process that goes into this, making this surface?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, yes. It was over and over and over and over and over, and that was done with pencils.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: [Laughs.] So it was very obsessive, extremely obsessive, and took months.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, this one piece took months.

MICHELLE STUART: Now later, I changed the manner of—I stopped using pencils, and started using—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, graphite chunks. That's different.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: That's earth smashed into the paper.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's so white.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you can't see the earth. It was rubbed into the paper though. It was a lighter earth.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It was a lighter earth, and you rubbed it in.

MICHELLE STUART: By hand, not by any other means.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Sounds kind of painful. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, well this was therapy.

MICHELLE STUART: No, actually it was smashed in, and then I would rub the residue into the surface of the paper. The paper was really a receptacle for—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Porous?

MICHELLE STUART: It wasn't porous.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

MICHELLE STUART: But the rubbing of it, my hand worked almost like sandpaper, so it slightly abraded the paper, and in that slight abrasion the earth would enter the paper. It's still in there, you know, and it hasn't been fixed or anything. It wasn't—I did not fix these with any fixative. They're just as is. They are smashed with earth, you know. The earth had rocks. [. . . -MS] And that one—actually, this is eastern, but that one is actually western. You know, that the earth is from—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mesa Verde.

MICHELLE STUART: —Mesa Verde, yeah. So, at some point, I think it was 1977 or '78, right in there. It was summer. I bought a van, a second hand van, from a couple of other artists, and travelled around the—well, I had a gig at Notre Dame, where I was teaching for two weeks. And what I did was, I went there with my dogs and travelled all around the country. And Mesa Verde was one of the places I travelled to. But I combined it with—I was looking for sites with a couple of different things; very sacred sites or sacred to somebody sites. Sites that had—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Is that what determines the selection of all—

MICHELLE STUART: —I'm not finished.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —all your locations—I'm sorry.

MICHELLE STUART: And also that has earth—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —that I can use, because you can't use all earth. I mean, it has to have—it generally has to have some clay component in it, so that you can break it down so that it becomes powdered, like, well, like pigments before you add the oil, you know. Pigments are just earth to begin with.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And that's—basically, these are made with; dried pigment. I mean they're earth, but earth is just dry pigment. Of course, it has all the irregularities that, you know, we find if we—I had buckets of earth in the back of my van [laughs], you know. And actually, then, I also started collecting other things that were found on a particular site or in a particular place, is probably a better way of putting it, because site is site-specific. And you know, if I went to a place I would walk around the place, and if I found the dead bird and it interested me, that would also go into the van in the cooler. Well, I used, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Feathers.

MICHELLE STUART: —feathers, yeah, and in some of the so-called book objects, sculptures.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I didn't use them in any of the big pieces at all. And so that's basically—and I kept the bucket, and the buckets were named after the place. And if I needed to do something when I got back, I had a bucket of earth.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Left over, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that I could still use if I—for example, these were all rubbed with earth, and I didn't do all of those at Mesa Verde, because they could have been there for you know, a year.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. But you know, one question I have about the books, this just being one of them, I mean, I wonder—I can't tell because I can't see them you know, in person at the moment, but are they seem to often be tied or closed, and you can't open them, right? They're never to be opened.

MICHELLE STUART: The early ones were very much that way, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what I'm wondering is were there things inside them, that you put in them?

MICHELLE STUART: Some of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That are like secrets?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, some of them; the early ones, not so much. In my memory, probably the early ones did not have anything inside them. That one that you're looking at is—I still have it. I could show it to you, if I could find it immediately. But they were like, you know, they were like—they weren't a copy of but they were—and when I use the work "like" I would have to say they were somewhat of an analogous thing to the stratifications in an escarpment.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: What's in there is hidden from us, but it's a time marker.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: So, I looked at the early books as pages of time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Oh, that's so great, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And they're closed to us.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], it's the past.

MICHELLE STUART: Exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Some of them, some of the photographs of them, you know what I mean, some of them seem to be— like the past or they suggest old documents and things found in old chests or tombs or whatever. But

then, there's also a way that some of them seem be about the future. I don't know if that's true.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you're going to have to tell me which ones you feel that way about. I think of them in many ways, and different ones have slightly different trajectories, I think, of my thought process. But some—I used to think of them, also, as being stories that were simply stories that happened—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But are they—

MICHELLE STUART: —things that happened that we weren't there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So it's earth's story. In other words, it's that site's story or its saying—that's why it's blank in terms of language.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, it isn't blank really. It's full of information, but we don't know it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: We don't know how to read it. That is so cool, yeah, that's right. Well, that's part of what I think I was trying to communicate.

MICHELLE STUART: I remember saying in New Mexico, I'm fairly certain it was New Mexico, on a, you know, very—I had climbed very high up on a kind of plateau. And I was looking out at this plain, and I was thinking, you know, this plain is full of history. The Spaniards were there, the Native Americans were there, all herds of animals were there, and all we see is a plain which appears to be a tabula rasa, but it's full of things that happened that are a mystery to us.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And geological events, obviously.

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely

ANNETTE LEDDY: Before the historical events, obviously, that we know.

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely, oh yes, very much so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it sounds like—well it's true that, even literally, in the earth that you're using, there could be remnants of, you know—

MICHELLE STUART: Relics, relics.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Relics or bones belonging to people who were fighting—

MICHELLE STUART: I found bones.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, and it can be all kinds of—

MICHELLE STUART: And I found beads—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Beads? Like Indian beads and things like that, yeah. So, in that sense it's a mute history but it's not so much even a visual history it's like—you feel it, like that's what I meant when you look at the scrolls; I have a sense that you're feeling history.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I'm really happy to know that you feel it. I mean that makes me feel good, because that means that it actually says what I want it to say. I mean, some of them, you know, some of them are a little more, kind of, literary than others. The early ones were very abstract, I think. And sometimes, like, there were some I did in the 1980s which were a little more—well, I think one had cutout stone tools—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I like that one, yeah. That's in here.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, it is?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, let me—this, no. It sort of looks like—it's this one, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that's a drawing. Actually, that was at Mark [Selwyn]'s, I think it's, I think that's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I didn't know that was a drawing.

MICHELLE STUART: No longer my drawing; it sold. This is *Stone/Tool Morphology* [1977-79] and see, these were all, these were all images of stone tools that I made a—I glued together, and then rubbed with the earth from one of these sites, and then photographed. You know, I did all of these photographs. They look like, you know—they're kind of post card size, but they're all my photographs; analog photographs, of course.



ANNETTE LEDDY: And are these tool things found at this site, or just it's a juxtaposition?

MICHELLE STUART: No, but I knew that they came from those sites.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I was aware—and that's totally made up. See, I walked around this site, which was a site—I was allowed because I went to the local museum. But it was kind of like—there was still archeologists working in the museum, and I asked them if I could go on their site. And they said I could, mostly because I was doing something with a local university—had a show there—Wright State University. And so they called them up and they said, you know, "Can you take Michelle to the"—it was a closed site. They were digging. So, the archeologist and I walked around the site - the whole site—and basically what I wanted to do was pick up some shards and bones for this print that I was doing, because I wanted to put it in the print, and not just on the print, inside the print, and I still have a couple of those prints. And when I got back to the studio in New York, you know, I laid out the photographs. And it was almost the same thing as I just told you about when I climbed the mountain and looked out over the plain and, you know, how you start thinking about what happened and that [it's magic thinking -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —over time?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I started—when I laid out the photographs, I laid them out kind of like this and, you know, then I start playing with them. And as I started playing with them, you suspend your kind of like—well, anyway I suspended—[laughs]—my logical mind—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: —and I started seeing those post holes as being places that the indigenes of that particular place where their garbage dump was, where their houses were, where they—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —where they played. You know, so this is totally imaginary.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: This is an imaginary map of the place, but totally through my imagination.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see, but it also has an element of plausibility.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, they lost all of those in Singapore.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, really?

MICHELLE STUART: They thought—I don't know what they thought. You know when I showed it in Singapore, this is before, way before Singapore became a major art, Asian art center.

I mean in 19—I think it was maybe '83—Jane Farmer curated a show of American drawings or works on paper because they were actually things that were not drawings, but they were all works on paper. And to make a long story short, I think she contacted the US information service, and they were willing to send it to various places, probably to say, you know, the Americans are cultured and it was a great show. I mean it was a beautiful show. Rauschenberg was in it—I mean it was just—and there were four or five artists who had installations, and I was one of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And it had two venues in Japan. One in Korea and one in Taiwan and [in the -MS] one in Singapore. [Laughs.] I was in charge. She did not want to go to every site that had a venue, so she picked out the installation people, if they were willing to go. And I really wanted to go to Singapore, and I wanted to stay in the old [Raffles -MS] hotel. And I wanted to experience the old Singapore, and actually I probably experienced it in its very last gasp.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Because it's changed totally. I stayed at the old hotel and, you know, with the fans and the [cold water, and the BBC on the radio, no, TV and the *South China News* every morning at the door. -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: So, I did TV. I did all the PR. The PR was set up, but I did it. So, I was the spokesperson and I installed the show. And it was extremely difficult because the museum didn't want anything—any holes in their wall. So, everything in their whole show had to be hung like a Chinese scroll.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How can it be—oh, that's—oh my God

MICHELLE STUART: So, it was uphill.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: But I stayed there for two or three weeks and I really loved it. I mean, I really, really—it's a kind of a gem. The old Singapore, it was a gem of a place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And now it's some really international jet set place, huh?

MICHELLE STUART: Is it?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I mean, so I hear. I have not been there myself.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know. It's maybe international business. I mean, even then, it had a leader that was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —very dictatorial, I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —if you threw a piece of paper on the ground it was a \$500—

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, I mean, it was really a tight little place.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I see.

MICHELLE STUART: But tropical, beautiful. You know, you sit this hotel room with myna birds outside making—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —cute—a bathroom that was half this room. You know, it was—I found another room in my suite.

[They laugh.]

It was a writing room. It was huge. I mean it was just—it was heavenly. And you know, I [. . . cannot -MS] say enough about the old Singapore.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. You know, I was looking at this and I was wondering; this is 1978—*Petroglyph from New Mexico*. Was this your first photo grid piece?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I don't know if I could answer that because I did some photo grids, but you might be right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because, I mean, this looks like the ones you're doing now, but it was really early and I don't see anything like that until, you know, 2000 or something.

MICHELLE STUART: I remember doing some earth [grid -MS] pieces with photos at each end.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], those are in here, but I mean this square thing—

MICHELLE STUART: No, they're not in there.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They're someplace. I've seen them.

MICHELLE STUART: Because I don't have that piece and I—go ahead, go through it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, tell me about this piece and how you did it and what it is about.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that's a really good question. I'm glad you asked that question, because I can go through and look and see myself whether that is the first photo grid. It's certainly an early, early, early one, if it isn't the first.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And I think the chances are, it is the first.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think it's really fantastic, and I love how these dark ones—and then this is like, you know—but what—tell me about these dark panels.

MICHELLE STUART: They're earth. Earth, I think—earth and smashed earth and rubbed—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And these are photographs? Are they altered, or—

MICHELLE STUART: No.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No?

MICHELLE STUART: No, no. No, the only thing that's changed in this is that the original photographs were really bad and I re-[printed] the photographs. But they're the original photographs.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: That's—well, I used it there too, but that one's earlier.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes, that says 1978. Now, these you do, of course, all through the '70s with something in the middle and then surrounded.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, in the early '80s, too. [They are called Codex. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then these that have that kind of woven feel to them. I didn't know this one was a drawing. This is so—

MICHELLE STUART: It's drawing on water color.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, it's just so beautiful. It's really magnificent. I cannot believe that it wasn't sold until just now either.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I was shocked when I, you know—but we fished it out of the bottom of the drawer, and it had never been shown.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Unbelievable.

MICHELLE STUART: It was shown in this travelling show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And then—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Put away?

MICHELLE STUART: No, that's when it came out.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, that's when it came out. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Anna Lovatt [ph] was like—she was amazing, I mean she came out of nowhere and wanted to do this drawing show. So, that precipitated me bringing out a lot of things to show her.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: This show—and she was in England at the time. And she was—the show was at Nottingham. She was teaching at Nottingham, then she went to Manchester. But she, at the time, was with Gavin Delahunty

who's now with the Dallas Museum. So she's in Dallas now. Their married and have two sons, and she's teaching. And as far as I know, she's still writing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: She's an extremely intelligent art historian.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Especially I think in particular about drawing impulses.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. In this one, the *Nazca*, I wanted to ask you about this because, of course, that is a sacred site. And it's one also that Robert Morris and Smithson and Robert Watts and other artists have obviously been attracted to And I'm just wondering, I mean, how—you know all of the other works that were done about it, right? You don't know them? You're not aware of the other works that were done?

MICHELLE STUART: No, I remember there was an article, but I don't know whether I even read it. [Laughs.] There was an article by Robert Morris in *Artforum*—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah, that's right, mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and I don't know when it was written, but I know there was one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So now see, here's an example, right, where basically what one would assume is you are aware of all these other works, but in reality you're just following your own drive to see these works.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, one of the things that I wanted to do, you know, when I was in LA and going to Mexico, was and I even wrote to the AA at the time. [Laughs.] They had just finished the Pan American Highway, and my dream was to go down the whole Pan American Highway and then see all these. I mean, it still would be, and it still would be as difficult as it would have been then because I've done part of it and it's very difficult because of boundaries. [My dream since high school was to experience all the pre-Columbian sites in the whole of the Americas had nothing to do with Bob Morris or Smithson. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And then, you have to go on water when you go from Panama to Columbia. You know, you can't go through that jungle.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. But you can—is there a ferry where you can put your car, like a—

MICHELLE STUART: There may be now; there may be. Yes, probably.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: There may even have been then but I know that it was—you could not go on land.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And then South America was like a trip you know. [Laughs.] But needless to say, I didn't do it, but I really, really wanted to do it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And one of the reasons I wanted to do it was because I wanted to visit all these archeological sites that I had read about.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative], over the years, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. So maybe they went through the same thing I went through.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, I think it's clear that, you know, once you start thinking about land, the way that they were, also, you are kind of inevitably going to start thinking about sites that have this special significance. And anyone who's been to one of these places—I mean in my case, for example, I think of Delphi as being this place that, you know—because that's where they went to get news from the prophets, right; the Greeks. But it's the whole way—it's the geography of that site is in itself so awe inspiring and weird and just—I don't know—

MICHELLE STUART: They hold their history.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It strikes you. In some way, you know why they thought that the prophet was there, you know?

MICHELLE STUART: That's right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because it's got shine or whatever you want to call it.

MICHELLE STUART: That's right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's just has that power, and I think that all of the places like that have that.

MICHELLE STUART: That's right

ANNETTE LEDDY: And, but you know, one thing though then, Smithson, you know, has another designation which is "non-sites"; you know, where all the places that he thinks of as, like, marginal or luminal or, like, junk heaps or, like, really awful places in some way, that are still none the less powerful. You know, that he has that designation "non-sites".

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: And I think there was one, in fact, where you—that you did a piece too; Sayreville, New Jersey, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I was taken to Sayreville by Charles and Lucy.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Charles did one there too, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And he said that Smithson showed him the site.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Now, I don't know about that, but that's what he said, and that—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —isn't a big surprise because at the time—I think it doesn't exist anymore.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But, in other words, I think a developer has taken the land. But at the time, it was a vast kind of site that was so magical. It had been a brick factory—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —or at the site of a brick factory. And it had various layers that were opened up—that had been opened up—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —of earth of different colors with a high amount of clay so that there were, you know, there were pinks and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —yellow and grey.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Because they're chemical deposits from the factory?

MICHELLE STUART: [. . . No, they were mineral deposits. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Basically toxic. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, I don't know about that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, you think it could just been—

MICHELLE STUART: No I mean the brick factory was just a brick factory.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: They just gathered the clay together and made bricks out of it. So, I don't think the bricks were infused with anything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Why would they be?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Just my paranoid thinking about—

MICHELLE STUART: It could be, you know. [. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: —urban sites, you know what I mean?

MICHELLE STUART: I hope not. Well, Charles and I are still here.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right. No it's true. I just, you know, I think that I just find—oh, here's more *Nazca*. So, this is a different kind of book.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, those are kind of tablets.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: They're not—you can't move the pages. They're like tablets. They're—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But see, again, I get this feeling about all the books, and even these even more, of that feeling of something religious, like it's, you know the Ten Commandment tablet or something, but obviously with no language, but just coming from another—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, the language is kind of the marks

ANNETTE LEDDY: The marks?

MICHELLE STUART: The marks are a language that we don't know what they are but they are—

ANNETTE LEDDY: There is a language, we assume.

MICHELLE STUART: —speaking to the cosmos.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: This is the sky, the night sky, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And these lines [in *Nazca Lines Star Chart*, 1981-82] match the constellations that they saw, or we think, so, yeah. That's what people think.

MICHELLE STUART: Well I think so. [Laughs.] Yeah, because that's what I thought what I saw, you know, the parallelograms and the more abstract, linear aspects of Nazca lines. Now, obviously, they're counter-balanced by some figurative elements; you know, the whale and the—so they had both things going that they were both doing things that were kind of like this, and they had linear ones that maybe were totally for rituals. Maybe they walked around them, you know, as a ritualistic walk, and thought of the others as determining the sun or the solstices. I mean Maria Reich wrote a great deal on that site. She lived there, or off there, most of her life and wrote about it. I did not read what she wrote. She was still alive and around there when I visited in the—I think it was, what '76?

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it's a mirror in a way, what this is, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: I never thought about it that way, but that's fine, you know. It's like a mirror, you're right. It is like a mirror. It's kind of like an open book that mirrors the sky, yeah. That's a nice way of putting it, actually. Now, see this is slightly later.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: These are slightly later, so they aren't as abstract as the very early one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. They kind of look like they're bleeding.

MICHELLE STUART: It does not make them less interesting to me, but you know, they're just—it's a different exercise.

ANNETTE LEDDY: *The Book of the Stone*.

MICHELLE STUART: They're also made slightly differently. The very early ones were handmade paper; the really early ones. Then, they were muslin mounted rag paper, and then, I started sometimes incorporating you know, linen or canvas or something. Then these, the so-called covers were hydrocal and structolite with earth in them and embellished with, you know, some kind of drawing that I would make into it, as if they were ceramic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: See those were—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, [Affirmative]. Why is it called *The Book of the Stone*?

MICHELLE STUART: Because that's what it is.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: You can take it the way you want. Now, see, this one's relatively early [no longer discussing book objects. -MS.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: This is Nazca also, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, definitely. I wish I had those pieces; a lot of them, most of them, were lost in a flood—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Lost?

MICHELLE STUART: —in Helsinki, because a dealer was not very careful—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow

MICHELLE STUART: —and put them in a basement of a building that had a flood.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, that's horrible

MICHELLE STUART: I have one. MoMA has one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Good.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, it was in—Danhauser [ph] bought it the first time I showed it from—I've forgotten the name of the dealer but [Susan Caldwell-MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then, there are these English ones

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. They're actually in the UK right now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: For a show?

MICHELLE STUART: For a show I had there, but they wanted to keep them, I think they—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —think they can sell them. [They are going in a show at the Tate St. Ives. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, these are not sold either yet?

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: You have a lot of work here that hasn't sold yet from these earlier times. Well, so and that—

MICHELLE STUART: I'm a workaholic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it also shows that—I mean this does seem to be a moment, right? I mean people—do you feel that your work is somehow—there is heightened demand at this moment?

MICHELLE STUART: It seems like it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How do you explain that?

MICHELLE STUART: How do I explain it? It's rather how do I explain that it hasn't been?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well yeah, that's the other thing. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: That's a better explanation.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Why hasn't it been?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I—this, you know, I cannot figure this out. It was very, very shown in Europe in the '70s.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: And then one dealer died.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Schmela.

MICHELLE STUART: Schmela. And then another dealer—well, one of them stole, so much I didn't show with her anymore. And then another one in Hamburg did not like the use of photographs in the work, and I was starting to use photographs.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: She just wanted the materiality pieces, the material girl. And that kind of closed Europe for me for a while, until a Swedish dealer came over and saw something at Basel of mine and came to the studio. And, I mean, it—[laughs]—was very funny actually because I never put my age down and in the Basel catalogue it said 19. And they just decided to give me a number, because it said 19, like, dash? So, they put 1919, and when he came up the stairs—[laughs]—and he looked at me, and he said "Oh you're much younger than—you look very good for your age." And I just burst out laughing. I said, "What do you mean?" And I showed with him until he died. So, a lot of work was sold in Sweden. So, all the things that we're looking at, a lot of the work—

[END OF stuart15\_3of4\_track01.]

—never was shown in this country.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's incredible.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And now it is being shown more.

MICHELLE STUART: More, yeah. Well, Leslie and Mark. Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How long have you been with Leslie?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, actually, I was with [John] Weber, but he was the world's, you know, most impossible dealer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: To put it—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mildly. Yes, I know.

MICHELLE STUART: So, he didn't, he didn't really help. I did have some shows with him, then—and then after Weber actually, I really didn't want another dealer for a while

[They laugh.]

It was not a really great experience.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I've heard that from so many people.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. So—well, before Weber, it was Fawbush. I was with Fawbush and he was downtown. He had a gallery downtown, and I don't think he had the greatest amount of people, you know. He was a young dealer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And most of the artists that he showed were fairly young artists, except for Kiki [Smith]. Kiki and I were a little, you know—and I was older than Kiki too. So, and before that it was Max Protetch, who was



also a very odd dealer. Fine, I liked him very much, but I finally left because I hardly ever talked to him. I mean, there was no, there was no sense of, you know—you would like a sense in a dealer that they care about your—a little bit about your career.

[They laugh.]

I mean, you would think they would be happy to do that because they would sell more.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Before Protetch, I was with Donald Droll and [. . . Frank Kolbert-MS], and they had a wonderful gallery, but it folded after, you know, I had one show there. It was a beautiful show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But I was supposed to have another. Donald left; Colbert kept it. And then, Colbert didn't tell me he was closing the gallery, and I was supposed to have a show and didn't.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And so then—let's see. Susan Caldwell was the next one, and those Nazca and the Galapagos pieces were shown at Susan Caldwell. And then, then, I think—where did I go after Susan Caldwell? It was Protetch, I think.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, that's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, that's your history.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it's pretty much all downtown galleries and you had to break between Weber and Leslie [Tonkonow].

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Long; so what happened during that whole time?

MICHELLE STUART: I just worked. I was [. . . doing commissions and did many commissions in bronze and marble here and in Japan. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. So, were you in—

MICHELLE STUART: And then Leslie and a man named James Solomon, who was just—who had kind of a pop-up gallery in the Hamptons—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: They—I don't know what they, you know—what their thing was, but they got together and they both wanted to show some work. Or Leslie wanted to show—I don't know what the situation was. But I had a kind of—I had a show that was a—I was in a group show at Leslie's, and then they decided to do a show that was together. They both showed the work. And what happened, mainly, was some people went to Solomon and some people went to Tonkonow. And it was rare when people went to both shows, but that was the first kind of show after Weber [in NYC. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And that was years.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, yeah, so it's years. So, you've been with her about 10 years, you said.

MICHELLE STUART: Maybe eight.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Eight, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Something like that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, were you with Weber the same time that Allan McCollum was there?

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I don't know. I mean, I think Alice was still there. I mean, there were a lot of people.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Alice Aycock?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. You know, I went uptown with him. You know, it was—I mean, Chelsea, not uptown.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative.] [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: It's uptown to me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know. I can't remember who his stable was at the time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Okay, now, this one, *Ring of Fire*, you know, this feels to me so filmic.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I think those works are filmic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It just feels like a movie to me, and it reminds me of things that are almost, like, you know, something like *La Jette*; you know, the Chris Marker movie that's all—it's all still photographs that he does in a series that's like a—

MICHELLE STUART: Never saw it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, it's incredible. But it's all just—you feel like you're watching a movie, but it really isn't. It's a series of still photographs.

MICHELLE STUART: And what's it called, again?

ANNETTE LEDDY: *La Jette*—J-E-T-T-E.

MICHELLE STUART: "The dance" or "the leaps"?

ANNETTE LEDDY: "The jetty". It's kind of about—it's about—it's a science fiction film from 1960.

MICHELLE STUART: Because that's a ballet term, *jette*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, but it also means like the pier or the wharf, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, *jette*, yes, I see.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it's also when—it's about this time travel into—it's about the end of the world. It was made in 1961.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, my God.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Beautiful movie.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, where could I see that? MoMA, probably.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, you can just get—you can get a DVD, or do you have a television?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Just get the DVD.

MICHELLE STUART: Gee, are there people that don't?

[Side conversation]

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so, first wanted to know if there were films in particular that have influenced you?

MICHELLE STUART: No. It's my—no, the film is my life [Laughs.]

[They laugh.]

These pieces [referring to *Ring of Fire*]—a lot of them have to do with my fantasy of my parents' life and my, you know—what I thought about when I was little and the stories they told me and my thoughts about the Pacific and —

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it's called *Ring of Fire*, then—

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, which is the Pacific.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —was the Pacific with the earthquake and the, you know—

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: I'm aware that *Ring of Fire* as a concept, but so, it's a story of the Pacific.

MICHELLE STUART: You don't read it that way. You just roam around in it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I know, I don't read it.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah. No, I mean, one might think there is a tendency to do that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, you realize that you don't—well, I do—I have say, here's what I tend to do; I tend to look at it. I get an all all impression, and then I try to break it down or I look at that way or I look at this way, and then I give up. I mean, I always try all these different strategies for reading it.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, that's good. I'm glad you try.

[They laugh.]

You know, that's excellent. That's better than people just walking by. You know, because they're meant to really be looked at and thought about and then, you know, put together and how—the story you get from them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But the intensity of this—

MICHELLE STUART: See, these were letters that my parents wrote to one another when they were separated.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I see. So, it's like—it's really like a history, but breaking out of narrative—linear narrative—and working, in a sense, associatively. And you're working associatively and historically and personally all at the same time.

MICHELLE STUART: Actually, you put it better than I would have done. And that's well put.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And there are then these kind of geological forms that repeat, but they mean different things. You know, it's like kind of connections in nature that are unknowable or unreadable. They're all kind of about—to me, all your work is about how you can't read. In other words, I continually come up against this feeling. You can't read or there's no point in reading or writing. It's meaningless, or narrative—there's this—only this one other—this other narrative that you're giving us, right. And that's—

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —that's what it's about.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. I—

MICHELLE STUART: Maybe you should write about my work.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Maybe so. Well, I'm interested—

MICHELLE STUART: Seriously. I mean, writers do not seem to catch it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, I know. I have—although I think—I think that Lawrence Alloway did a very good job.

MICHELLE STUART: That's what everybody says, and he was the first one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah [Laughs.] Well, you were lucky. But, you know, one thing is when you read—

MICHELLE STUART: But he didn't see these, of course.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Of course, but when you read that—this essay [by Annette Leddy, "The Painting Aesthetic of *Dyn*,"] I want you to read it partly because I feel like there is this way that having worked on those artists makes your work understandable to me.

MICHELLE STUART: Interesting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And that's why I think I connected to it right away when I saw it, because suddenly it felt like something that resonated with it. So, just I'm curious to hear how you react to that and how you feel about that.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, also, I feel that there's always been a—you know, that experience in Mexico probably set—you know, people talk about, you know, my experience with land art or my experience with American, you know, whatever.

[They laugh.]

That time I spent in Mexico had much more of an imprint on what happened to me later, in terms of my art.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, than anything else?

MICHELLE STUART: Than anything else.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think, I mean, to me, when you really open yourself to Mexico, just Mexico City, let alone what's outside of it, you know, it's such a mind altering—just, it changes you. There's just something so amazing about that place; just the layers of history, the antiquities and then the chaos, you know. That's another thing; sometimes one,—you know, Lola Alvarez Bravo; you know, her photographs, like, those collages she does of Mexico City. They're very chaotic.

MICHELLE STUART: I'm not sure that I really actually know them [well. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, they're, like, amazing.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, of course, I love his work. [I own one Alvarez Bravo. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, she—actually, you know, Mexico, she's considered so much more amazing than his.

MICHELLE STUART: I've seen her photographs, but collages—

ANNETTE LEDDY: They're like these photo collages where you see all these buildings in Mexico City, and they're layered.

MICHELLE STUART: Is she in your book?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, no. And they—your work also does—I mean, it brings to mind her work, in certain ways. Yours is more—

MICHELLE STUART: Interesting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, what is the word? Yours is more transcendent. There's a different kind of thing, but that chaos that is part of Mexico, where you feel like somehow, history is all being, like, resorted all the time. You know that kind of feeling?

MICHELLE STUART: I do know what you're talking about. I do know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's amazing. Even you go to the market, it's like your mind is coping with so many different layers of things, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, absolutely. And there were, there were barrios in Mexico City when I lived there that [Laughs.]—I mean, they're gone now, but they were—you know, if you wanted to hear mariachis—and I was always, like, a big, big fan from very early on in L.A. I would go downtown and go to those places, those cantinas that we had that were wonderful. The mariachis would come up and play, you know, in L.A. because they had a big audience in L.A.; you know, five million—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I know.

MICHELLE STUART: —Chicanos. But when I would go that in Mexico City, I mean, it was [barrios with -MS] whose houses. I mean, it was—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —it was a city. I mean, it was [a real city. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: They still have those. They still have all these sex-clubs and—God, it's—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, my God. It was just the most amazing places [but not the sex clubs! -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Still is.

MICHELLE STUART: And the aromas and the fragrances; I mean, it was all like a big flower opening, you know. It was—yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Yeah, now, I think it's true. This is actually one of my favorites of yours. I love this one so much.

MICHELLE STUART: It's now in the National Maritime Museum in the U.K. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Really?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, well, that's great, although it's too bad it's not here in a way. But it's so—it's such an amazing piece about vision and looking and everything, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. It's odd that they chose that, in a way. They bought two things. They bought that and they bought a suite of prints that I did which was called *Navigating Coincidence*, and it was about Captain Cook's first voyage.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [Affirmative]. Well, that, you can see why they would have bought, right.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, this is New Jersey?— No, this is—

MICHELLE STUART: That's in New York, upstate a little.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [Affirmative]. Well, I'm trying to see—

MICHELLE STUART: You haven't looked at this book for a while. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Well, you know, I looked at the other one a lot too, *Sculptural Objects*, but this one, I guess is more recent and seems to have more of a, you know—at first, my—the problem I had in getting into the whole over is understanding the relationship between the books, the photographs, and the site-specific pieces. And then—

MICHELLE STUART: And none of these have the paintings. For years, I did paintings.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that's it. And I've never seen the painting.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, you want to see a painting?

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Sure, I would like to, yeah. I want to make sure that we—

MICHELLE STUART: I can show you a painting right now.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, you'll have to look at it behind, behind the plastic. I can't unleash it for you, but during that period I was [with the gallery -MS] Max Protetch—it's, you know—you can't really get the full color behind the dirty plastic, but those are—those are—

ANNETTE LEDDY: This is slate?

MICHELLE STUART: No, no. It's encaustic and it's done in [inaudible] well, it's an Oregonian painting. These were all encaustic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What year did you do these?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know when I did them. It's just—I know in the '80s [1984-1990 -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: They are very similar to the [inaudible]. These photographs [inaudible]. And it's a terrible way to see them, but I have a lot of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Is that yours?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. Well, that's a piece I'm working on now. You know—you'll probably like this because it, actually relates to what you were just talking about, in a funny kind of way. Well, I shouldn't say you'll like—but you might respond to, you know, what you were talking about; the Mexican—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yeah. Oh, that one with the dogs is really—are these real dogs in—

MICHELLE STUART: Those are real dogs. The upper one is my dog and the drawings I did of my dog. The lower right—the lower right is a Mexican dog.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, when you work on these, do you make each one [inaudible]?

MICHELLE STUART: I make the pieces separate, and I may shift this around. I'm just basing them and putting them on the wall, so—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: —I haven't really, you know—and I haven't come to terms with whether they're separate pieces or they all belong together. I know I'm going to show them together, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: They're good, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Actually, that was painted in Chouinard; not by me, by my teacher. [An old portrait done by Ed Kohn in 1952. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: This one?

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [Affirmative].

[. . . -MS]

[END OF stuart15\_3of4\_track02.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [This is Annette Leddy interviewing Michelle Stuart for the Archives of American Art at Ms. Stuart's loft in SoHo, New York on May 23, 2017.]

[Tape stops, restarts. Side conversation.]

MICHELLE STUART: So, what I thought was that I would start with a piece called *Correspondences* because I had gone on a trip to South America, which—and Central America. And so, one of the—then I got asked to do this piece in Omaha at the Joslyn Museum.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And what year was that?

MICHELLE STUART: 1981. And so, for me, it was a very complicated piece because it was sound, and I wrote the text. And what it was was—it was a whole room and all the walls were filled with earth-covered, you know—paper that was rubbed with earth and there were two photographs, one of them—enlarged, very large photographs—of a place in Seville and a place in the Yucatan. And what it was was the story of Spaniards coming to the New World from Spanish diaries and the reaction of the [Indigenous Mayans of the Yucatan -MS] to the Spanish coming. And then, there were sounds of, you know, the jungle, and I wrote the text which included these notebooks of Spaniards and memories of the Yucatecans.

And then, as you moved around the room you heard this. And then, it ended with music done by the Yucatecans on their handmade wooden instruments. And then, it was—the last part of it was an amalgam of Spanish-influenced and southern Mexican-influenced music, which was on a marimba. So, it was kind of a—it wasn't political at all. It could have been but it wasn't. Nor did I intend it that way. I intended it more—and this goes in a lot of works that I did later—as a time warp in a way. In a comment on what happens to what we do, you know, when we invade or when we marry or when we—any of the correspondences that we have with other cultures.

And I've just always been very interested in that, maybe because I, you know, was not totally [laughs] American when I was born. And my parents were from two different cultures as well. So, I'm looking for the possibility of where it came from. It may not have come from that. Maybe it just came from observations.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, and this is—this piece here? This piece—and this was up for—so, is it still there?

MICHELLE STUART: No, it's not. But it was up in four different places. It was up in PS1, it was in the St. Louis Museum, and it was in a major—it was a major room in Helsinki in the museum in 1984 I think. So, it travelled, and, of course, there were variations on it because you had different plans in different sized rooms, but—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how did it relate to pieces you've done before in your mind? Was it a—because I noticed you start with this. Is it a kind of break-through piece for you in some respect?

MICHELLE STUART: I think it was a break-through piece [only because I hadn't done anything like that, exactly, before with sound and text. -MS] First of all, I hadn't done a room.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's true—

MICHELLE STUART: So, the room is—

ANNETTE LEDDY: —because the other one was outside, the one at Art Park was outside, and then the one at PS1, the first one, was kind of corner, right?

MICHELLE STUART: PS1 was one piece was across from the other one.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But there were other people's work in various parts of the building—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: —so it wasn't a room. No, that was the first room and it was the first thing that I wrote completely and it was the first sound piece. And when I did the sound I was going to have somebody else read it and the person that was designated to do the sound said, "It was better if you did it because you wrote it and you know how to emphasize what you mean, in you know, in the text." So, yes. And then the next one after that was a piece called *Sacred Precincts* and that was another outdoor piece.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: But that was a piece that had some link to that. [Brief interruption.]

MICHELLE STUART: Anyway, *Sacred Precincts* was an imaginary—I'm thinking because it's so funny now because, you know, these people are doing these imaginary, under-sea things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And this was—I was asked to do a piece in Nantucket. So, what I wanted to do was, again, a piece coming from one culture to another but bringing that culture with it. And the culture was the mariners of Nantucket, who were whalers. And the pieces that they had traded in the South Pacific. And this whale boat didn't make it. It sunk before it got home. And so, the detritus from the whale boat was hundreds of sculptures that I made that was—that were cast into the sand and strewn all over. I mean, later I showed that at the Neuberger Museum, and they were all placed on the wall as if they were artifacts, but in the original one they were all [over the beach with -MS] hydrocal with beeswax designs and things.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I've seen a larger photo of that one.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, you have?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. [Inaudible.]

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. So, then I did it again with *A Mariner's Temple* and some drawings of the South Pacific. They were my made-up maps with the names of all the sailors and, you know, where they had caught a whale and I still have it. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, like, made-up maps and made-up artifacts.

MICHELLE STUART: The whole thing was made up.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: It was totally imaginary. But it was about two cultures [and about time. -MS].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know. And then, the next one was in Finland [laughs]. The Finnish Art Association asked me to do a piece in the Archipelago, and so I had a piece in mind, but when I got there and walked over this island where I was stationed—

[They laugh.]

—I had an assistant who I still actually have contact with. She was a wonderful assistant and a [laughs] singer. Just a very unusual person. And so when I walked around the island—I had originally planned to do a boat. Kind of related to the boat aspect or the other. But then, I found an elk.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like, a live one?

MICHELLE STUART: A dead elk. And so, what I did was I built a stone boat, but I incorporated the elk—the elk—what was left of the elk, was a very beautiful cranium and a lot of fur.

Now, I don't know if somebody ate the elk and it was just—but we made packets of the fur that hung from the tree and the elk's cranium, and this was related to the boat because it was on the prow—above the prow of the boat. And I wrote something that was buried in the boat and then there were—the boat was filled with candles, so that at night—on the night that it opened, it looked like the boat was moving—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. Cool.

MICHELLE STUART:—through. And there were other boulders that had candles. Yeah. And it was very moving, actually. And I later got a call when I was in Helsinki from an archaeologist who said that there's—the boat and the elk are inextricably involved with one another in [. . . Finnish-MS] early history—in Swedish and Finnish early history [or pre-history. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: How so?

MICHELLE STUART: The prows of the boats were elk heads.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: Now, I did not know that [when I did the piece. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: You mean, like—

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —the figurehead kind of.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes, yes. And he [the archeologist -MS] was going on a trip to the Lakelands in Finland to look for some iconographic—well, pictographs that some farmer had seen [and found. -MS] And he was going in a couple of days, and did I want to accompany him? And I did.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: And it was extremely interesting. Extremely. We found one. It was amazing, actually. I mean, this is a long, involved story [and was dangerous in many ways.-MS] But just in passing I'm—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Were you the only American who was asked to do this piece on the archipelago?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And how did they react to it, beyond this guy? Beyond the anthropologist? The audience for it?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, there wasn't a huge audience because they had to get to the island, but there was a huge audience to the article that was written about it—

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: —in the, you know, the main paper. So yeah, there was a great reaction actually.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's great. That's good.

MICHELLE STUART: It was big in their world. And their world is extremely literary. [It's a literate country. -MS]



ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: All the artists have read everything. I mean, they keep up with everything in the world plus all of the literature. You can go have dinner with a bunch of them and they talk about books.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Hm.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, which doesn't always happen in—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, it's not typical of American artists. No.

MICHELLE STUART: That's right. So, yeah, I mean, it was a thoroughly engaging—that was 1985, so that was—I really—I mean, I keep it as a really strong memory in my memory of going places. [Laughs.]

And, actually, the next place that I went was Alaska, and Nancy Holt and I were invited up to Anchorage to do some—do a show. But they really wanted us to do a show with work from there. So, we both went up and took a trip around and then went back home and then did a piece and went back up again. And so, my piece was on part of memory being Alaska and it was a very large piece. And then, while I was there, in fact I think she did a piece, too, we were asked to do an outdoor installation just like this [demonstrates], you know?

[They laugh.]

Come up with something.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, it was actually relatively easy for me because I'm kind of a Captain Cook buff.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: In fact, I am a Captain Cook buff. I say, "kind of," because, you know, as time goes by I've been less assiduous about collecting "Cookamania"—

[They laugh.]

— you know, whatever it's called. But Anchorage is on Cook Inlet is where Cook [discovered -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —you know. So, I did a piece called *Navigating*—what is it? *Navigating the Sea, Reflecting the Stars* which was an homage to him. And it was undersea lights.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What do you mean, "undersea lights?"

MICHELLE STUART: Well, here it is. These are lights and that's Cook Inlet.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, I see. So, even though it was on the surface, you used the under the sea lights to create the—

MICHELLE STUART: Actually, I want to see it surface. It came up.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: Because I used very long army surplus flashlights—[laughs]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: —that are torches.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And I secured them to the bottom.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: And so, I made, like, constellations out of—I had many of them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow. It sounds so spur-of-the-moment. That's a really great—a really inventive project.

MICHELLE STUART: It was a great project. I loved it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And everybody else loved it. I mean, again, it didn't have a huge audience. [Laughs.] I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What did Nancy do?

MICHELLE STUART: I'm trying to remember. She did something with big pipes like her big pipe piece.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like *Sun Tunnels*. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Right. Exactly. Not that big, though.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: But they were probably 12 or 16 inches in diameter, and that went around, and then she and I travelled, actually, all over Alaska together. It was quite fun.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And did you see all the, kind of, totems and all those relics or was it more—

MICHELLE STUART: I saw some totems, some relics, but it was mostly wildlife, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It was great. We went up to the capital—no, we didn't go to Juneau but we went up to [. . . - MS] Fairbanks. People put us up, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART:—and we visited different things. We were actually going to do a piece in Fairbanks, but somehow that didn't happen. But we had a driver with a dog [laughs] and he went fishing, and we would, you know—I learned how to fly fish from him.

[They laugh.]

No, we had a great time. And then, we drove down to Homer and, yeah, it was very fulfilling, actually. And since we knew one another already it was, you know, we were quite friends. Then, after that, I did a few works that were commissions for different places. I mean, I ended up doing one again in Alaska, but in California I did some and that's pretty much what I did was a lot of paintings with artifacts in them. I did one in Minnesota where I went to Anoka, and it was called *Minnesota Time Contour*. And it was shards and petroglyphs embedded in wax. It was encaustic. But most of them were plants from certain places. And so, then—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And where did you get the petroglyphs?

MICHELLE STUART: Some of them I found, some of them I got from archaeologists.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, they were very open to giving me [laughs] stuff. You know, a lot of it was, you know, they had buckets full.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And generally, when I got them, they were brought in by people so that they didn't get it from a specific site, and they didn't know what site it came from.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Unidentified, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Unidentified. So, they couldn't say specifically, so it was kind of their dump heap [laughs], you know? I mean, it was from the area but not from a specific site, so they don't care. I mean, that happened to me quite a few times, actually. It happened to me in—I was doing a print, and I wanted to use some parts of an archaeological site. And I went to the local archaeology place and asked them, and they gave me their bucket. So, you know.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. I mean, I've had very good relationships with archaeologists. I'm very interested in it and so I would always—you know, research the area and know what I was talking about. And I did, actually, quite a few pieces that were influenced by sites. I'm not even sure they're on here. One of the pieces that I did want to talk about was—I don't know whether you ever saw *Ashes in Arcadia*? Did you ever see that? Well, I did a show at the Rose Art Museum and they had this big room available—

[They laugh.]

—at the same time the show was up.

[They laugh.]

So, they asked me to do an installation if I wanted to. And I said, "Well, you know, I would need a few things to do an installation." And so, they got a grant from the New England [Council -MS] that gives grants. And they got one. And I did this piece which was—I think it was, in a way, my first political piece, and it was called *Ashes in Arcadia*. And it was really, like, the walls were covered with—encaustic covered units that were detritus.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And the whole room was ashes.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And artifacts that were, like, books, but burned—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —and dipped in wax and plotted with things. And it was kind of my view of what our world is like if we keep up doing what we're doing to our world. And then, there was this sound involved. You couldn't enter the room more than about five feet, like half this table, a semicircle, because the whole room was very dark, and there were buried lights under the ashes—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: —so there was some light.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And there was the sound of a humpback whale. So, it was very haunting.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. It sounds great.

MICHELLE STUART: And I would have liked more people to see it because the Rose Art Museum—I mean, students from whatever—Waltham, Mass., you know, it's Brandeis—would come. But it isn't like having it in Boston or, in fact, New York, you know. And I—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you've never had a chance to re-do it now?

MICHELLE STUART: No, it was so complicated. [It should have been video of it. They said that they would but I didn't opt to tape. -MS]

[They laugh.]

Tons of ashes and, I mean it was—actually I was amazed that they did it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, you get those opportunities I guess and—

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, I mean they got rid of the ashes and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: So, then the next—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And that was ephemeral also, right?

MICHELLE STUART: That was in '87.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it didn't stay—

MICHELLE STUART: '88.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And the show went on to Kent [University] but this, of course, couldn't.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, around the same time I did a piece at the IBM Palisades which was—I think they still have it. They wouldn't let me photograph it which was very weird. It was called *Dawn, Daylight, and Dusk* and it was things that I picked up in the area like plants and stones and things and they were embedded in the piece. And, I mean, that's—

ANNETTE LEDDY: What do you mean they wouldn't let you take pictures of your own work? No, that's crazy.

MICHELLE STUART: Places are very weird. I mean, that was in '89. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's crazy.

MICHELLE STUART: IBM.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, maybe they [inaudible].

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, you know, it's, like, probably going into Apple today. You probably can't take pictures in Apple either. Or Google.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Maybe. I don't know.

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know. The next piece I did that was a large, complicated piece was *Derelict, Tracks: An Observatory* which was '89 and '90. And that was this huge metal structure which was completely covered with thoughts and pictures and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It looks sort of like a temple, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It looks almost like a religious thing.

MICHELLE STUART: It does, but it wasn't.

[They laugh.]

No, they were doing a show of the history of paper at the [New York Public Library on 42nd Street -MS] and it took over the whole library. And they wanted a contemporary piece—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —that dealt with what we do with paper. So, I used Chinese paper. I used rice paper and then I photocopied all these different things out of my notebooks and hung packets of things on them like stones or artifacts or plants or seeds, you know. So, you're seeing something where there's things out of my notebooks because I had been writing a memoir at this same time which I still have. [Laughs.] And then, I never did that one again, either, because it was so specific to the library.

But what I did next was I was asked to go to Sweden. I had had a dealer in Sweden who was a wonderful, wonderful man. Long gone, unfortunately. I think one of the best relationships I've had with a dealer, actually. He was just amazing. And he was in a small town in southern Sweden and had great shows. And he knew these people in Sweden that wanted to start a park for artists where artists could make things. And so, he gave them names of artists that he liked in Europe or in the United States and they invited some of them. So, I was one of them, and so, really, you had to go there and devise what you wanted to do because I hadn't been there before. And so, what I did—and they gave you whatever you wanted to make your piece. So, I did this piece about the constellations and Draco, which was overhead at the time, and had stars—I drew marble stars—and had them made by a local marble [manufacturer].

And a pillar, which was—well, I did a lot of research about the area and went to a lot of churches in the area. And a lot of the churches had language involved. So, I did this—well, the language I had engraved on the marble plinth was "memory, desire"—I think I remember it all—I don't know if I remember it all. But I had four words. And it was called *Tabula* and it was this plinth was directing your eye. You came upon it in the forest—I mean,

this was a big park—and it was directing your eye across the lake in which this constellation of Draco was seen with white marble stars. And it was, you know, something that, when you were walking through the woods, you came upon it and participated in it.

And then, at the same time they had invited—they had a very old barn and the people that they had invited for one floor had split, had abdicated their responsibility.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: So, at the last minute, which was about a week before the opening of this park for the summer, they came to me and said [Laughs.], "Could you make a piece for this floor?" And so, I said, "Well, I'll think about it." And they said, "Well, you have to say yes." And I said, "Okay, I'll say yes." And so, I went to the local—their local supermarkets and, you know, stores, were wonderful. Everything you could possibly imagine. So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: You mean, not just food, but things like—

MICHELLE STUART: Everything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —art supplies and, yeah. Gardening supplies.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I don't know about art supplies but gardening supplies certainly. [Laughs.] You know, I mean. So, what I did was I bought tons of this corrugated stuff that they use for sheds.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know, the roof of sheds.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, corrugated tin. Tin. Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It wasn't tin. It was some form of plastic. But some people use tin in some countries.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like some clear, sort of, green stuff?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, it was not totally clear, but yes. I mean it was, like, it was like this. [It was not green. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I know. It's like a wavy line—

MICHELLE STUART: And then the water runs down.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —and it's out of plastic. Yeah, yeah. I've seen that.

MICHELLE STUART: Exactly. So, I built circles and then they were grommets. But inside—and then this I had to look for all over Sweden practically—Christmas lights. And so, this assistant and I made Christmas lights constellations and put them into these, you know, they were—how should I put it? They were floor to ceiling—well, you can see. So that on the floor of this 13th-century barn, you walked up two flights of this. [The floor was at least 3,000 square feet. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh it's—oh, wow, yeah. So, they're basically pillars that are filled with these lights—

MICHELLE STUART: Exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —that are constellations.

MICHELLE STUART: And you're in total darkness.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But they're translucent pillars. No, it's beautiful.

MICHELLE STUART: It was. It was a very exciting piece.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And did they like it? Did they appreciate it?

MICHELLE STUART: They loved it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, that's so great.

MICHELLE STUART: They loved it. Yeah, it actually got more attention than the other one [because the other was

subtle. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: Well, the other one was in the forest so not as many people saw it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right. [Laughs.] But what a great idea, yeah. And how did you come up with the idea? Was it just seeing the supplies, the materials? Seeing that corrugated plastic gave you the idea?

MICHELLE STUART: I don't know how—I came up with it in five minutes. I mean, I just—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Was it before you saw the plastic at the store or was it when you saw the plastic—

MICHELLE STUART: No, it was when I saw the plastic.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The material is what inspired it.

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's what I was wondering. It sounds great.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. No, that's absolutely right. I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it's called *Star Chart: Constellations 1992*. That's great. And you've never re-done that one either?

MICHELLE STUART: Never redid it, no. I'm not even sure we have that kind of [material -MS]—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, yeah. There is, definitely.

MICHELLE STUART: We do?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Home Depot.

MICHELLE STUART: Home Depot.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I've seen it. I've spent many hours in Home Depot. I know all their inventory perfectly.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, no. I loved that piece actually. And then, the next piece I did was a really complicated piece—it took a couple of years—and that was at the new Stuyvesant—the new Stuyvesant High School.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And, you know, I've never seen that, but I've heard from students who go there about this piece.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, good.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's great.

MICHELLE STUART: Good. Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It lives on. And tell me what went in to that.

MICHELLE STUART: A lot of marble.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh.

MICHELLE STUART: I made marble paintings.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: And then, the ones that were on the—some of them went up—high up on walls going up the stairs. The ones that were on the ground floor were incised, and so I did drawings of different scholarly pursuits like Linnaeus's plant forms or an astrological—an astrolabe with, you know, stars and things like that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It worked out. It worked out. Some of them were—the ones on the stairs were very abstract.

It—I wanted it to be bigger. I mean, I—this was—the architect that I worked with I really like working with, but they're always afraid that you're going to upstage their architecture.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know, I just hear nothing but complaints about these collaborations. So, it's kind of—I was thinking so far everything you've talked about has been, like, a great experience for you, but that's usually not what you hear when you talk to artists about public art. It's almost—I guess public art projects in Europe tend to be, you know, pretty free, but in the U.S., it seems to be—

MICHELLE STUART: That's why I stopped doing it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: — very filled with conflict. Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: That's exactly why I stopped doing it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, that wasn't the last piece but it was almost the last piece.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. But that's still up and they still have it in the building, yeah?

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. And the next one that I did was in Japan and that's still up, too. And that was actually [bronze] sculpture and marble. I mean, because it was marble from the area.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So, all of these are, you know, projected out. They're all reliefs in bronze.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative]. Right. Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: And it was 100-foot stroll. [Laughs.] You know, you walked along that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, the two—

MICHELLE STUART: And the other side was glass so that it was lit from the outside all the time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I noticed that, yeah. That's beautiful.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, *Garden of Four Seasons*, [*Garden for Seasons*] 1996 at the Tochigi Health Clinic. So, did you—and how long were you in Japan to do that?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I went to Japan the first time to see—well, it was a building [laughs] if I could say it that way. I went to the site which they were building.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. I see.

MICHELLE STUART: And wore a hard hat and, you know, went to see the space. And then, I also visited a botanist and his nursery to talk about what were the typical local plants. And we went out and collected them. And I couldn't take them through into California where I was landing, so he sent me huge boxes of them [to my New York Studio -MS] that we had collected. And I sculpted from them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: How long did it take you to do that piece?

MICHELLE STUART: A long time.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, it looks like a very major undertaking, actually. And that was the last public art piece you did.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, you know, that was very—I mean, it worked out very well.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it's more than 20 years since you've done public art.

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then, how would you explain the relationship between your public art projects and your other work?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, there's a really strong relationship, actually, because during this time I was doing these seed containers and tables—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. Right.

MICHELLE STUART:—you know, like, right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like that one, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Well, some of them are, I mean—this one actually is not seeds. This one is earth. But there are containers, you know, where—and I was doing them in wax, and I was doing seed drawings and seed paintings. And the seed paintings I just showed at Marc [Marc Selwyn Gallery, Los Angeles].

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. So, they were inextricably involved with what I was doing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Did you find, though—I mean, which comes—is it cart before horse? In other words is it the kind of major effort of doing a public art piece that kind of pushes your work forward or is it the other way? That whatever you're working on in your "art work" ends up being kind of the catalyst for the public art piece?

MICHELLE STUART: It's more what I'm working on.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's it.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it's just—

MICHELLE STUART: And they can either accept it or not.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I mean, I have to say with Stuyvesant, I did manage to get a few things in there, you know, that I'm very interested in like constellations and Linnaeus's plants and things like that. But I did do the drawings for what scholarly research would be about. What the students were going to be doing.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, this one, the one in Japan, I did—plus another room which didn't have—which had engraved marble around it which we don't see here—that was very much what I was working on, you know? And I put it in my proposal because that's what I was interested in and they could take it or leave it, you know?

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: It went through a dealer who was, you know, working, getting artists to do Japanese commissions.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. Although, I don't think of you as working in marble. It seems like paper is your more usual—

MICHELLE STUART: It's just like paper.

[They laugh.]

I mean, you can engrave it, you can do anything you want with it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know, I did not personally engrave it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Uh-huh [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I found a wonderful Spanish—from Spain—guy in Queens who was the most fantastic engraver. I mean, he could take anything I drew and, you know, he would put it into marble. It's like, you know—



and I found a great bronze—well, he's still—I don't know about the engraver. I haven't seen him since then. But the bronze guy is still in full bronze-making casting stuff because, you know, I see his name all the time. I mean, he does things for [Frank] Stella, and I—what was very good about when I needed to cast those things in bronze because I did some later, you know, of my own, and another commission in California with bronze—was that he was hurting. You know, he had just left a big company that he had started and it had been taken over by money people. So he was starting a new foundry in upstate and he needed artists. So, he was very happy to see me. Gave me a very good price because this—you know, the Japan thing was not a lot of money. The New York thing was money but the Japan thing was [demonstrates], I made money but not much.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And that was one of the things, also, about—I'm sure you know this—you know, that you have to figure ahead exactly, or close to exactly, what it's going to cost.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right, you have to have a budget—right.

MICHELLE STUART: You have to have a budget and you've got to show them the budget and you've got to stand by the budget—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And then they cut it back.

MICHELLE STUART:—and a lot of people I know lost a lot of money—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —because they didn't make out good budgets. Not that I'm a good budget maker [laughs], but I was willing to not include a lot of my time, you know? A lot of times I could come in where they were happy because I wasn't, like, saying, "Oh, well, I want \$100 an hour." I didn't do that at all. I budgeted, you know, the casting, the marble, the, you know, and figured, you know, if I make a little profit for the rent, I'll be happy.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: So, basically that's the way I went. [I did make money that way. -MS] But, you know, I found that I'm a studio rat and I felt much happier making things in the studio than I did, you know, running around visiting marble makers. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. It's kind of like you're working with a team and then you're also working with an institution and all that.

MICHELLE STUART: And you have to have—yes, you have to go back and forth, you have to make sure they're doing what you want—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: —you know, and—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And so, you just withdrew from that back into just a studio practice which has, if I'm not mistaken, has more or less taken the direction of photography at this point.

MICHELLE STUART: What happened was when I finished doing—I was doing some paintings and I was working on the seed paintings, and then I worked on some other paintings that were all about butterflies, but you couldn't see the butterflies, but there were butterfly forms. They were very abstract using dipped string. And I got very interested in that. And then, the whole butterfly thing turned into doing big multi-part pieces with butterflies. And then, that went into multi-part pieces that were gouache drawings. And then, I started thinking about Darwin and they started—then I started thinking, "Well I'll use some photographs and I'll just change the photographs to make them into, like, you know, to shellac the paint on them, put wax on them." You know. And then, I did one piece like that and I started getting really interested in the photographic aspect of it. [Laughs.] And that was it.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: After that, it went into—I did continue to do some sculpture tables that went with the photographs.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right. I've seen that. Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. And I did that in a couple of pieces—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Installation, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: With containers, and, you know—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Components.

MICHELLE STUART: Related artifacts. [Containers. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: And like there's one in Venice Biennale there's a big—there's a table that goes with one of the pieces and they were very worried about the artifacts being stolen. And, in fact, when I saw it [laughs]—Tyler had set it up and installed it and I said, "You know, there's a rock missing." [Tyler Anwater installed the work. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: And there was, from the Bronx Museum, somebody had stolen one of the pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, my goodness.

MICHELLE STUART: So, I said, you know, "Tyler, when I go back to Venice at the opening [laughs] I'm going to take a—" It was a black, smooth rock so I took it and put it there and everybody kind of looked—"She's adding something to the piece?"

[They laugh.]

But I brought it with me, you know?

[They laugh.]

So—

ANNETTE LEDDY: But was it otherwise a photo grid?

MICHELLE STUART: It was a photo grid.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, yeah. It was a photo grid. And the things on the table were about the South Pacific, yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it's not one of the photo grids that were at the Bronx Museum?

MICHELLE STUART: It was.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, it was. Which one? The really big one?

MICHELLE STUART: The really big one with the table.

ANNETTE LEDDY: With the color, that had color photographs? Oh, yeah, it was beautiful. Is that—did the curator [of the Venice Biennale] see that at the Bronx Museum? Is that why she could—

MICHELLE STUART: You know, she never told me where she saw the work—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: —so I—and I never asked.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: You know, what she did was she called Leslie Tonkonow, and said she wanted to see my work and that she was coming to New York on a certain day and would I meet her at the gallery.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So what I did in my memory, or what I think I did, let's see, I made a PowerPoint of [. . . -MS] salient pieces, right?

[They laugh.]

I mean, I've done so much work that it couldn't possibly be all of it, but, you know, I did—I showed her some pieces of *Seed Paintings* and *Book Pieces*, the sculpture *Book Pieces* and some old boxes that I made with earth in them from the late '60's. And then she saw a lot of the photo pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And so she chose what she wanted and later on I sent her two [photographs of -MS] pieces that I made after she was there, whether she would like to include those. One was a very large piece, it was called *Flight of Time*, and the other was a boat because, you know, all along I made these boat pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: And this boat was about memories, and it was, you know, a big boat. Not huge, but, you know. And she liked them both so she said yes, include them. So I did.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: So there were about 13 pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Wow. That's great.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Now what about at DIA? What's at DIA now?

MICHELLE STUART: DIA is a piece from 1976.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Do they own it or—DIA's—

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I don't know whether they're buying it or not. [They bought it. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. But it wasn't something they already had. I see.

MICHELLE STUART: No, it was something they came over and they were either interested in putting that up or another piece, a four-part piece—have you seen that piece?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No. What is it?

MICHELLE STUART: Oh. Jose? Do you have a piece of Sayreville Quartet that's at—I mean, do we have a photograph of it somewhere?

ANNETTE LEDDY: At DIA. What's at DIA—[inaudible]?

MICHELLE STUART: The one at DIA?

ANNETTE LEDDY: I'm going to go out and see—I'm going to go to DIA. I mean, I want to see it.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, it looks great.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, I love going out there. [Inaudible.]

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. And it's fun to go out there anyway.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's so nice.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, especially at this time of year.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Really beautiful. When I drove up for the opening which was the [laughs] day before I left for Venice—

JOSE SILVA: Here it is in a group show. It's these four panels.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative]. And this.

JOSE SILVA: No, just that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, just that.

JOSE SILVA: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see. And is this paper?

MICHELLE STUART: It's very heavy [archival paper. Muslin backed, laminated. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: So it's like you're—this is like one of your scroll pieces but in color.

JOSE SILVA: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Nice.

MICHELLE STUART: And that's not the best photograph I could have found—

MALE SPEAKER: But it's printed.

MICHELLE STUART: [Laughs.] But it's printed. Right. Yeah, it's got a whole room.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Good.

MICHELLE STUART: It's a very big piece. It's almost floor to ceiling, and it's about—each one is five feet—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART:—plus the interval so it's a wall.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, sounds great.

MICHELLE STUART: They were either interested in that one or another one which was a four-part piece that was very subtle grays that was *Serpent Mound*. But that's opening at the Wexner and that was already promised.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I see.

MICHELLE STUART: So, they took that one. That's why I'm not sure whether they're going to buy that one or the other one, maybe.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: Or who knows?

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Neither.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, they said they were interested, so.

ANNETTE LEDDY: They said they'll buy. That's good.

MICHELLE STUART: You know, they're putting it on them.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, you know, you're definitely part of that history that you learn about when you're out there and, I mean, I'm always amazed. It's kind of like you don't need to take a class in Minimalism and Land Art. You just go there. Just spend a day—it's, like, that's like a whole course. You know?

MICHELLE STUART: Absolutely.

ANNETTE LEDDY: You just take—it's unbelievable how perfect that space is for that work. And your work definitely belongs there.

MICHELLE STUART: I sent a little notice to a dealer that I had worked with in the '70s in Germany. And she—[laughs] that's the first time I had heard from her in all these years. And she said, "Oh, my favorite museum."

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, you know, if that's your area of interest—

MICHELLE STUART: That's right. Exactly. Exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: What else would you, you know, I mean, just even that Michael Heizer, that rock in the wall.

God, I just think that's so amazing. It's my favorite piece of his that I've seen, you know.

MICHELLE STUART: I know. I feel the same way. And that spider? [Laughs.] Claustrophobic. Oh my God.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I have to say I'm not really fond of that spider so that wouldn't be one of my favorite pieces.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, I love it. I love the spider.

[They laugh.]

I have no problem with spiders. My mother used to pick them up and throw them out the window.

[They laugh.]

I mean, she was like [Buddhist. -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I just feel like ugh.

MICHELLE STUART: Well, I mean, you—where did you grow up?

ANNETTE LEDDY: In California. [Inaudible], so.

MICHELLE STUART: In California. Well, the only problem was if you met a tarantula somewhere.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, we had Black Widows.

MICHELLE STUART: And Black Widows.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh my gosh, yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Right. That's right. Black Widow.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Oh, my gosh. Sorry. That was scary. Those little red things on them.

MICHELLE STUART: But they were obvious.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: Red spot. [Laughs.]

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's more everyone telling you, "I think [inaudible] got bit by a Black Widow." You know, it's hearing all those stories. That's what makes you scared.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. But, you know, after I started doing the photographic pieces I realized that there was a whole part of me that had not been expressed, really fully, in the work I had done up to that point. And it was the more [. . . literature -MS]-oriented me. You know, the more literary me.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well, did that have any relationship to your being with Carey, who's], a writer?

MICHELLE STUART: None whatsoever.

ANNETTE LEDDY: None. [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: None.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay.

MICHELLE STUART: No, because I wanted to be a writer.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Right.

MICHELLE STUART: I probably said that, you know, at the beginning.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: And, you know, it has allowed me to say things subtly, not, you know, it—

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, it's not—they're narrative but in an abstract way.

MICHELLE STUART: Exactly.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And also, for me, they also show, even more than your earlier pieces, the collector part of you.

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: You know?

MICHELLE STUART: Right. That's right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, it feels like that's often related to—for many people it's very related to reading and to—

MICHELLE STUART: To objects.

ANNETTE LEDDY: —collecting books and things.

MICHELLE STUART: Yes. To objects.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: It's so interesting that some people are so geared in that direction.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah.

MICHELLE STUART: Some people are totally not. Carey does not collect anything.

ANNETTE LEDDY: I don't either. I'm one of those people.

MICHELLE STUART: And usually the people [laughs] that collect things are with people that don't. [Laughs.] I mean—

ANNETTE LEDDY: That might be for a reason, right? You should see our living room. [... -AL] [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: I love it. I love it. Oh, my God.

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's fine. But you could imagine if I were that way, too? It would be one of those horrible, claustrophobic places filled with stuff.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, that's right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But he can do whatever he wants because I don't care.

MICHELLE STUART: Well it might be a claustrophobic place anyway but—[laughs]

ANNETTE LEDDY: It's not. It's very nice.

MICHELLE STUART: No?

ANNETTE LEDDY: No, it's very nice. It's like he's installed it, you know? It's better than any interior designer, of course, but there is some aspect of that to his training, you know?

MICHELLE STUART: Right.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Like, he doesn't have to measure, for example, which I find very strange. Like if we buy a couch, he just goes in to and he says, "That one." And I'm like, "How do you know that's going to fit?" So, just really practiced with that kind of stuff, you know?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah. It's very interesting. Very interesting. No, I'm the same way.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

MICHELLE STUART: I'm the same way. And, you know, people that aren't that way—

[They laugh.]

— aren't that way.

ANNETTE LEDDY: That's right. You can't get it—

MICHELLE STUART: You know, and it's almost like amazing when you say, "Oh, yes, of course." And they say, "Draw it for me." You know, Carey did that for me the other day actually. She's going out to California tomorrow and her mother—well, they're having her mother's birthday now because there's a family reunion and she's not so well. She's 90. And so she said, "I want you to design the cake." [Laughs.] And I said, "You know, these cake-making people, they know what they're doing." You know, but she made me make a drawing, you know?

[. . . -MS]

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.] Well, I do remember that when we talked about it before, we talked about how they were about journeys. And, you know, went back to your, you know—I think it was this one in particular—went back to your, you know, South Pacific interest. And, you know, every time I look at it, it actually is almost like—this is how it feels to me—like you're trying to fit together all the different parts of you, like all the different strands of your interest, and this is a composite, you know? It's like a reflection of your total self in that way. Like, your total different parts. Because I think that's what gives it cohesion. It's not a story, it's the story of your life by depicting the different strands in a single image. Is that right?

MICHELLE STUART: Well-put.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Thank you. Maybe I should—

[They laugh.]

MICHELLE STUART: No, I think that's true.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: So, I feel that they have this power that comes from, I don't know, there's some sort of [inaudible].

MICHELLE STUART: Investigating one's self, in a way, and one's own imagination. Yeah. And where it comes from.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But also, it's your—maybe something to do with your stage in your career where it has that quality of, let me say, looking back, you know? Like a summary kind of statement. They often seem like summary statements to me. And I think that's very interesting.

MICHELLE STUART: Did you—you saw the Bronx museum. You remember the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yes.

MICHELLE STUART: I tried to do that in those still-lives, too.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Still-lives—

MICHELLE STUART: For example, I'll show you—

ANNETTE LEDDY: I remember a huge one that had all the color photographs.

MICHELLE STUART: For example, well—you remember those? They were in white frames.

[END OF stuart15\_4of4\_track02.]

There was a long group of them in white frames. There were about 30 of them in the middle of the show.

ANNETTE LEDDY: In the middle of the show?

MICHELLE STUART: Mm-hmm [affirmative].

ANNETTE LEDDY: Okay. So, what I remember is that you walk in and there was one long wall and there was this major piece—is that the one that you're talking about? And some—there was—

MICHELLE STUART: It was called *My Still Life*.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah, that's right.

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, but those—

ANNETTE LEDDY: And you said that was your autobiography, right?

MICHELLE STUART: Yeah, well, kind of. [Laughs.] I never—

ANNETTE LEDDY: Yeah. No, I do, I thought that was beautiful, but seeing two pieces from it, it's not the piece.

MICHELLE STUART: They're pieces.

ANNETTE LEDDY: But it felt like it was about the total—

MICHELLE STUART: Good.

ANNETTE LEDDY: The juxtaposition was—

MICHELLE STUART: It was kind of a made for the—it was made for the—

ANNETTE LEDDY: It was made for the show because I remember when you were working on it back there you had it on the wall, and at first, I thought—well, I remember what I said, I thought, "Well, I can't see how it all fits together." But then, when I walked into the show, it's like [demonstrates]—

MICHELLE STUART: Oh good.

ANNETTE LEDDY:—it was perfect.

MICHELLE STUART: Oh, good. Yeah.

ANNETTE LEDDY: And big. It felt very epic to me.

MICHELLE STUART: Good. I'm glad. I'm happy.

ANNETTE LEDDY: [Laughs.]

MICHELLE STUART: So, I might be continuing some of these, too, I mean, because they satisfy the same urge, you know? They're like little capsulated memory voyages, you know? [Laughs.] I mean, if you could call it that.

ANNETTE LEDDY: Well they're all real—some of them, I know that it's a compilation of found photographs, altered photographs, real photographs, but it feels to me also some things refer to real-life experiences and some refer to fantasies or stories, right? And that's also part of the mix that makes them work, I think. [Loud background noise] Well, I don't think we should continue.

[Audio interruption]

ANNETTE LEDDY: I think we should stop. Okay.

[END OF stuart15\_4of4\_track03.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]