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Oral history interview with Hester Diamond,  
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# Transcript

## Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Hester Diamond on October 4 and 5, 2017. The interview took place at Diamond's home in New York, NY, and was conducted by Judith Olch Richards for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, and the Frick Collection.

Hester Diamond and Judith Olch Richards have reviewed this 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

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Olch Richards interviewing Hester Diamond in her home in Manhattan, on October 4th, 2017, for the Archives of American Art, [Smithsonian Institution] and the Frick Collection. Good afternoon. I'd like to start this interview by asking you about your family background. Your mother and father, their names, siblings.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Approximately when they were born, where they lived. And then, where and when you were born.

HESTER DIAMOND: My mother was born in 1904. She was born in Lithuania and came to this country when she was two years old, brought by her parents in the great wave of immigration for European Jews that took place in the early part of the 20th century. My father was born in Bayonne, New Jersey. His father was part of a very different group of immigrants. His father was Hungarian and had come to this country in 1861. And he came to seek his fortune.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What were their names?

HESTER DIAMOND: My father was named David Klein. My mother was named Edith Wilbur.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Klein with a K?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: K-L-I-N-E?

HESTER DIAMOND: K-L-E-I-N. As if it were German. Many Hungarians, including my father's family, spoke German.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And they—where did they live after they were married?

HESTER DIAMOND: In Bayonne, New Jersey. He—my grandfather had already settled there. When he came to this country he worked as a peddler, as many immigrants did. And then, he quickly saw that Bayonne was a city—not a city. It was a town at that time, where there were many, many Hungarian working-class immigrants and not many Hungarians with any education, which he did have. So, he set up—he was able to set up, first of all, as an agent who could transfer—arrange the transfer of money from people working in this country to their relatives in Hungary. And also, help them—help send them money that they could use, that they sometimes could use to buy a steamship ticket and come here. So, first, he became a kind of small-scale banker, and ultimately became a real banker, with bricks-and-mortar headquarters, and with a state—a New Jersey state banking license. His—the next thing he did was go into the travel business, because that was also connected to people trying to bring their relatives here from Hungary. And he was able to sell them steamship tickets. And he also covered all kinds of insurance—life insurance and any other kind that they wanted. So, he became—he opened an insurance brokerage. He obviously was a very enterprising young man. And he married a second cousin, which I think was not unusual for—among immigrants. It's partly about keeping the money in the family. And he actually had eight children. The oldest and youngest were daughters, so of course they didn't get a proper education. But his six sons all went to Yale, which was very unusual for Jewish immigrants at that time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Extraordinary.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. When my father was at Yale, the only other Jew there was Robert Moses, of all people.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, he must have been tremendously gifted at—academically.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I think he was smart.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: I think he was smart. But, still it has to have been—he has to have been a bit of a fish out of water.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. [. . . -JOR] Did they talk to you about—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. Most of what I know, I gathered by—surmised from different little clues that I got. And actually, at a time when I knew nothing about my grandfather, a friend of mine put me in touch with a woman who was sort of an amateur genealogist, who said she—a delightful woman, who said she would be very happy to help me find out more about my grandfather. And she not only found out where and when he was born, but also his father, and also his grandfather. And I had started out with a sort of very ignorant American attitude that, of course, I didn't know where my fore-bearers were from. That it—I thought it was lucky I knew who my grandparents were. And when I—at the end of this, I had gone back—excuse me—to 1740.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, is that in part because your relatives were the more educated, the more successful members of their communities, and therefore, it was easier to find records?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. I'm not sure how they found all of this, because they were not even all born in the same place. They were all born in the Tokaj district, but in different villages. And I'm not sure how those—how that information was found. I was so flabbergasted when I got it, I didn't ask any intelligent questions. And later, when I thought I was going to Hungary, someone put me in touch with an older woman who was also one of these amateur genealogists, and said she would be happy to help me find out more about my grandfather. And when she found out he was Jewish, she said, very sadly, "I know I'm not going to be able to help you," because the principal records were births and marriages, and so on, were all—the Hungarian government didn't want to touch any question of records for Jews. So, those were all kept by the rabbis, and they were all destroyed during the period that the Nazis were in power in Hungary.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative] So, your—when your parents first married, they lived in Bayonne?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. They lived in northern New Jersey. And very soon after moved to New York. And, you know, I was born just before the stock market crashed. And my father—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me exactly when your birth date is.

HESTER DIAMOND: December 10th, 1928. My father was—in those days, was called a civil engineer, what we now call a structural engineer. And because all construction projects were stopped dead at the time of the stock market crash, he was out of work, period.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—you knew your grandparents while you were growing up?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you said he was a kind of a banker.

HESTER DIAMOND: He was a banker.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did he own art? Was he a collector?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, he wasn't a collector. But they had some funny, you know, objects in their house, and cheap beer steins. Things that you would value if you grew up in Hungary.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: But nothing in the way of art.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, going back to your father and the Depression—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, he was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —he was a civil engineer?

HESTER DIAMOND: —yes. And he was basically out of work until he was able to get a war effort-related job in

1939 or '40.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, that was 10 years.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And it was 10 years of misery for him. This was a very unhappy circumstance.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were living in the Bronx.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, first—yes. First, in East Harlem, and then in the Bronx. And at first, living with my mother's family, which my father found extremely humiliating. But he didn't get along with his own family at all, so it was really their only choice.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And, when—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What did your mother's family do? Your grandparents on your mother's side?

HESTER DIAMOND: My grandfather on my mother's side—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what was his name?

HESTER DIAMOND: —his name was Louis Wilbur. W-I-L-B-U-R.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay, you had said your mother—yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: And he would have told you that he was a painter. And he knew how to do all those fancy finishes, you know, faux marble and all that funny-looking late-19th-century decorative painting. But my mother—but he never had very much work. And my mother, who loved him, blamed him. She thought he was very lazy, and that he didn't want to work, and that he put everything on my grandmother.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And I have no idea how to assess that. It may be true, or it may not be true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So—

HESTER DIAMOND: But, he also, of the four grandparents, he was the one I spent the most time with in my youngest days. And, partly because he was almost never working. And he—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And he's your mother's father, so you were living with—

HESTER DIAMOND: My mother's father.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you were living with—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, we were—only for a short time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: But he was always the one I spent the most time with. And he was the one that I asked the most. I was still spending a lot of time with him when I was six or seven, when I was getting to the age where I had some consciousness that life was not the same in every country, in every place. And I used to beg him to tell me about life in Riga, where he grew up. And he would have no part of this. He would just brush me off and say, "No, you don't want to know that. That's a terrible place. Just forget about Riga." And I think that's part of the general thrust of their generation of immigrants. It's not—you know, young immigrants now want their children to maintain some connection to the—mother country, as it were. They go to Chinese school, or Japanese school, or whatever. There's always some instruction, some connection made. And usually, they make trips to that original country. And that was certainly not true for my grandparents' generation. It was always looking forward. Think about being an American. Think about being the most successful American you can. And successful mostly meant money, but it also meant other kinds of achievement.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, when you were growing up, you were living in the Bronx mainly?

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And moved around? Or stayed in one place?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no. Moved once a year because we could then get a month's free rent. And everybody in the Bronx did that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And this is the time when your father wasn't working as a civil engineer?

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right. So, it was very important to us to have that free month's rent.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you remember in elementary school—what we would call elementary school—up before—to high school, what your main interests were? And if you had an interest in art, or in collecting?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, no. I loved books. But I had no interest in art whatsoever.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have any idea of what you wanted to be when you grew up?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, definitely not. I was just interested in everything. I'm very avidly curious about everything, but I didn't—and I knew that I would want to have a serious career of some kind when I grew up, but I had no idea what.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What—that was perhaps somewhat unusual for a girl to think that. Were there—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —people that influenced you?

HESTER DIAMOND: I knew lots of girls who were interested in what kind of a boy they would marry. They needed to marry a cute boy, and he needed to have some minimum income. All kinds of requirements like that. And I just scorned that whole area of thinking.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When it came time to go to high school, how did you decide where to go to high school?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, first of all, my mother had gone to Hunter. And it was one of the select high schools in New York City, so I knew that would be a place to get a good liberal arts education. And that's what I wanted.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you commuted there from the Bronx.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. It's not a difficult commute.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Just on the subway.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have close friends during that time?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And were they—

HESTER DIAMOND: My best friend also lived in the Bronx. More or less in my neighborhood. And she went to Hunter, and we rode on the subway back and forth every day.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. I read that while you were—even while you were at Hunter, when you had time—oh, you talked about—why don't you talk about the fact that it ended at one o'clock—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and that was during World War II.

HESTER DIAMOND: This was— this was something quite exceptional, because it only happened during World War II. Hunter College at that time had two branches: The Modernist building on Park Avenue, and also a larger campus in the Bronx. And the way they ran it was, the—no, I forget which did which. But two years of students went to—well, the younger students went to 68th Street, and the older students went to the Bronx campus. And then, the U.S. Navy requisitioned the Bronx campus, because that was where they set up a school to train women to be Naval officers for the first time in history.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, Hunter was co-ed, right?

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, just women?

HESTER DIAMOND: Hunter was—both the college and the high school were all women. And so, the school administrators had a problem. They had four years worth of students to cram into a building that was planned for two years worth of students. So they decided one of the ways to solve this problem was to shut the high school out of the high school building in the afternoon.

So, we had to be at school extraordinarily early. I think our first classes began at seven or seven-thirty. And then, we had to be out of the building at one. There were no clubs, no—nothing took place in the building after one o'clock. And that was delightful to me, because I knew from a very young age that the Bronx was okay for living in, but that my destiny was in Manhattan. And I knew that there were all kinds of interesting places you could go, and things to see, and things to think about in Manhattan. And so, I would just take off after school. It's kind of interesting now the degree of freedom I had, considering the super-protective way people raise their children now.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And your parents were supportive of you doing these things?

HESTER DIAMOND: The—well, I think they were relieved that I was interested in so many things. My father had work at that time. Not very lucrative, but he was working. And my mother was working, because she was actually supporting the family.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What was her work?

HESTER DIAMOND: Hmm?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What was your mother's work?

HESTER DIAMOND: She was a bookkeeper, which was, you know, a perfectly respectable kind of job, and for which you actually got a real salary. My father was working for the WPA teaching mechanical drawing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Because that was what he could get. It didn't pay very much. You can imagine. Anyway, I had certain household responsibilities. I had to do all the shopping for dinner. And I would be given the shopping list every morning. But as long as I got to my neighborhood by five o'clock, it was very easy for me to do what I had to do. And my parents never saw any reason to question me about why I wanted to go to all these strange places, or—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did they ever come with you on the weekend?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. On weekends, we did other things. And it was very interesting, because some things clicked, and some didn't. But the thing that clicked the most was MoMA. And it was an extraordinary experience, and it was one that benefited me greatly, because at that time there was very little in print about modern paintings. I had even more meager—if there had been stuff in print, I wouldn't have known how to find it. And I didn't have any adult who I could speak to about art. The art teacher in my high school was extremely conservative. She thought all modern art was ridiculous, so I didn't particularly want to have a conversation with her. My parents had no knowledge of art in any period, so there was not much point in my talking to them. And the only way I could really deal with this stuff was go to the museum and spend hours staring at the pictures and trying to puzzle out, what did this image really mean? And why did he put this over here and that over there? Whereas, in this other picture, he did the reverse. And what about the color? Which was always, you know, not naturalistic.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, MoMA did publish catalogues for some of their exhibitions. Were you ever—did you ever have access—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to those?

HESTER DIAMOND: —no, I suppose I could have, had I had the wit to look for them. But I didn't.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did you have friends who joined you at—on your museum excursions?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, my best friend wouldn't come with me. She thought it was really boring. My first husband and I had a relationship that included the most amazing intellectual growth for both of us. When my

mother, from an early age, used to take me to the theater and also the ballet. And one time, he—Harold asked me for a date, and I said, "Oh, I can't go out with you that night because I'm going to the ballet with my mother." And he looked at me in astonishment and said, "Your mother takes you to the ballet?" "Yes."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How old were you when you met Harold?

HESTER DIAMOND: When I met him?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When this—yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh. We were—I was 17.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In high school.

HESTER DIAMOND: And he was 19.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And how did you meet him?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, on a street corner. That's how you met boys in the Bronx.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He grew up in the neighborhood?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that's Harold Diamond?

HESTER DIAMOND: Harold Diamond, yes. And I asked my mother, could Harold come one time. "One time?" And she said, somewhat hesitantly, she said, "You think he really wants to?" "Yes, he says he wants to." "Okay, then he can come once. We'll see how he behaves." Very—it was all very conditional. But he came, and he was thunderstruck by the beauty of it. And it—I'm sure it was not a performance that, later in our lives, we would have been very impressed with. But at that time, we had so little experience, anything that we saw in the way of ballet was thrilling.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—did you and your family do something in the summers?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Every summer? Or did you just stay in the Bronx?

HESTER DIAMOND: Sometimes—to some extent. I would sometimes go away with my grandmother for two weeks, or for a month. Or we—actually, usually as a family. My father, mother, and I would go down to the Jersey shore. Because that was my father's roots, after all. And we would usually stay in Ocean Grove, because that was the cheapest place you could stay. And then, we would go to the beach there. And then, at night, we would go to a restaurant, or go to amusement stands in Asbury Park, which was just right next door to Ocean Grove. And we certainly didn't do anything intellectual or arty. That would be out of the question.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you met—you met Harold when you were 17, and then you—he was in college at that time?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, he was—no, he was finishing his master's.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He was 19?

HESTER DIAMOND: This is—oh, God. You know, there's certain tragedies that progress inflicts on people, and that was very much a period in which they believed in accelerated promotion for smart kids. I didn't suffer from it as much as he did. I was just—I don't know, a year, a year-and-a-half ahead of myself. But he was three or four years ahead of himself. So, when he—he started college when he was 14. He didn't have a single friend. Nobody would talk to him, let alone play a game with him or make friends with him. He was just this freaky little kid.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What school was that?

HESTER DIAMOND: City College.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, when you graduated Hunter, how did you decide which college to go to? Was it a given that you would go to college?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, it was.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. Both—

HESTER DIAMOND: But what was stupid was there was no real college guidance given in our high school, which was silly, because it was this school full of really bright girls who all could have gotten scholarships one place or another. But we weren't given that guidance. And it was sort of taken for granted we would go to Hunter College.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, you were born in 1928.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And I have, correctly or incorrectly, that you started college in '42. So, that—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, that sounds right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —would mean you're only 14. When you started college?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, maybe I was 15.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, maybe it's not '42, maybe—

HESTER DIAMOND: It may be '43. It could even be '44. I don't know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, but you—when you were in high school, it was during the war. So, maybe these years—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —maybe I have these years wrong, and these are the years when you were in high school. '42. That makes sense. '42 to '46.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. That's—okay [laughs].

HESTER DIAMOND: No, that does make sense—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, when you started college, you started college in—

HESTER DIAMOND: —that was during the war.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —in '46, when you were 17.

HESTER DIAMOND: I graduated from college—yes, I graduated from college in 1949.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes. Okay. So, '46 to '49.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Approximately. Maybe '45. So, you went to Hunter—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, '46 to '49.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —'46 to '49. So, it was three years?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Well, you know, it was very easy to accelerate—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: —in college.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Okay. So, you went to Hunter College.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that was—

HESTER DIAMOND: Which I found very inferior. I had loved my high school. It was—you know, in the neighborhood I grew up in, the only people I knew who valued intellectual achievement were my parents. And it



certainly wasn't a general opinion in my neighborhood, or in my grade school. And so, then I go to this high school where everybody's smart. And everybody values being smart. So, that was a wonderful experience for me. Wonderful teachers. And then, the—Hunter College was very pedestrian by comparison.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—had you thought of going to City College?

HESTER DIAMOND: I—it was only—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Like Harold?

HESTER DIAMOND: —it was only for men at that time. You forget how segregated education was at that time.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, were there—there was really no alternative unless you could afford—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, no, there were a lot of—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to go to a private school.

HESTER DIAMOND: —alternatives. I could have gotten—I could easily have gotten a scholarship to a private college had I known how to go about it. But I didn't know, my parents didn't know, and the school didn't give me the guidance that they should have.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you were at Hunter, what was your major?

HESTER DIAMOND: English.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Had you—did you—

HESTER DIAMOND: That was what I cared the most about.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, not art history? Art history wasn't something—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, certainly not. I'm not even sure I knew there was such a thing. And I don't think art history departments were very developed at that time, at Hunter or any place else.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] This is the beginning of the great art historians coming from Europe, and they probably didn't go to Hunter.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: They probably went to the Institute and to Harvard.

HESTER DIAMOND: Exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Did—but you—while you were at Hunter College, were you continuing to explore museums—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and spend time—

HESTER DIAMOND: That was part of my life. And it was nothing to do with school.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were still seeing Harold?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When—

HESTER DIAMOND: And at some point, he had discovered my other habit besides going to the ballet. He knew I went different places in the afternoon, but he didn't know where exactly. And finally, he asked me to explain to him where I went. And so, I did. And so, again, I got, "Well, could I come, too?" "Well, yeah, all right. We'll see if you like it."

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: At that point, what was he doing? He had graduated college by then.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, and he had a series of rather dumb jobs. And sometime—he ended up—his mother was

—who cared much more about money than about anything else—had insisted that he follow a college curriculum that would end up in a job. And so, he went to Teachers' College and he qualified—got whatever courses it took to qualify—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's Columbia.

HESTER DIAMOND: —as a teacher. And he also went to—took some engineering courses. Enough so he could get a job as an engineer. So, he did that. Mostly that. Until he got a job working on the Brooklyn Battery tunnel. And, of course, he didn't pay much attention to the precautions they gave their employees. And he got the bends. So, that was the end of that career. And in fact, it was something, you know, for the rest of his life, he had to be kind of careful about air pressure and so on.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You—when you graduated college, did you have a career in mind at that point?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no, I was desperate. It was one of those little dips in the economy, where there's a small recession. And there were basically no jobs to be had. And I didn't—I wasn't equipped to do anything. So, I bit the bullet and—

[Sound of telephone.]

Shh. Quiet, telephone. And I went to secretarial school, belatedly, after I got out of college. And I learned touch typing, and I was supposed to learn stenography, too, but I understood the theory of it too well, so I didn't have the patience to memorize it and make it automatic, which is what you need to do if you're actually going to be a stenographer. But it served me—I was very glad that I learned to type. And actually, when my kids were in high school, I begged them all to take typing. And I told them it would save them so much time and effort in college, they had no idea. And only one of them listened to me. So, and he was very glad he had, because not only—because—for the reasons I gave him, but because forever after. He worked in—for children's avant-garde theater companies, which is not a very reliable source of employment. And he could always get jobs temping at the highest level of pay. And usually, his temp employers always asked him if he wouldn't stay on permanently, which he had no interest in doing at all.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you took this secretarial course?

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what came of that?

HESTER DIAMOND: And I ended up—hearing about the only jobs which you didn't need to know how to type or anything else. The only requirement was to be a college graduate. And that was to be the lowest level of social worker with the welfare department. So, that's what I did. And I did it for, I guess, eight years.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Eight years? So, from 1949 or—maybe secretary school, maybe 1950?

HESTER DIAMOND: Secretarial school didn't last that long.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. So, maybe—

HESTER DIAMOND: I learned how to type, and I was out of there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —from 1949 until about '57?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, wait a minute. You know, I don't have a way to put it—no, not that late.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it wasn't eight years.

HESTER DIAMOND: Because in '55 was my first trip to Europe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: So, I was—I had left that job by '54 at the latest.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, around, at most, five years?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, in '56 I left the job. I can tell you definitely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. But you went to Europe in '55, so that was a—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And I had cobbled together a very long vacation, as one can—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Oh. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: —in civil service jobs like that.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Put in this vacation and that religious holiday.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah. Well—

HESTER DIAMOND: Push them all together with a little library paste.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: But meantime in, I understand, 1950, you and Harold got married?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And where did you live, the two of you?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, fortunately, his brother owned a tenement on 61st Street. And—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: East Side or West Side?

HESTER DIAMOND: West Side. And—I've always been an Upper West Sider. And he, as our wedding present, he renovated a one-bedroom apartment for us, which was very nice. And we had cheap rent.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah. So, he—at that point, what was he doing in 1950?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, he was working for the welfare department, too. He was the one who—oh, no, he had moved on. He was teaching fourth grade in East Harlem.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Did—I imagine both of you felt these were temporary, in a way, short-term kinds of occupations, that you wouldn't do this for the rest of your life?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes and no. You know, I didn't see any other future in my life. Harold, on the other hand, was very entrepreneurial and always knew there were going to be other futures. Every year we would have a new little business that he would dream up. I was never the originator of them, but I was a willing co-conspirator —

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Which he did on the evenings and weekends then?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And summer vacation?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well—oh, no. Weekends were—we went running around to the galleries. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: I'm thinking while he was teaching, he's doing these other entrepreneurial—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, yes, well, we could do them in the afternoon, too, after school.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: I see. At what point—and so, this continued, but—and you were looking—you were going together to museums—

HESTER DIAMOND: And galleries.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And galleries in New York City.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Meeting other people who were— had those passions?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not many, but some. Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Were there— at what point did you meet someone— perhaps you did— who was collecting? Or who gave you the idea? Or did Harold's involvement as an art dealer come before the idea of being collectors came up?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, a lot of the dealers—a lot of the smaller dealers knew us very, very well. Because we would show up at every one of their shows. And, at that time, that was pretty unusual. So, they were happy to make friends with us, and we bought things from a lot of them. Not expensive things, but we bought things.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And these were dealers who were showing contemporary art? Or more historical?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, young contemporaries.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, that's what you were looking at, contemporary art?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Yes. People you've never heard of. I promise you, they just sank out of sight.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And these were the galleries on 10th Street and that area? Or on the Upper West—Upper East Side?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, they were much more on—the galleries really were on 57th Street. And on—going up Madison Avenue. Even the cheap galleries were mostly somewhere on the East Side. There was a handful of galleries on 10th Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. And so, at what point did Harold become seriously interested in becoming an art dealer?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, what actually happened was, Martha Jackson, one of the dealers whom we went to often, asked him, would he work for her part-time on Saturdays. And he said sure. Sounded like an opportunity.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, all along you were buying things?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that correct?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I read that—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you were buying things, you know, with a monthly five dollars or whatever it was at —

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was this a passion that you both sort of—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —came upon simultaneously—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes. Absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —together? And were you—

HESTER DIAMOND: Absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —making decisions together?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. And if both of us didn't like something, we didn't buy it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What was the motivation at the beginning to buy this work? To live with it? Or—

HESTER DIAMOND: Just—oh, to live—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to support artists?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, no. Just the excitement of seeing it, and falling in love with it, and buying it. It was always all about love.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you know other people who were doing that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, we did meet one or two people that we would see in galleries. Actually, one of them was the—a friend named Shep Schreiber, who we—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ship—was Ship short for something? Ship is—

HESTER DIAMOND: Shep.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Shep. As in Shepard?

HESTER DIAMOND: Shepard.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Schreiber?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And, what distinguishes this is you used to see him every Saturday in one gallery or another. And we gradually became friends and started having dinner together.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you saw his collection, he saw your collection?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And then, he married a woman we didn't especially like, so the friendship sort of petered out, the way it does in those circumstances. And then, he sort of disappeared out of our lives. Many, many years later, maybe 30 or 40 years later, I got a phone call from a woman who was Shep's wife. She was this delightful Swedish woman. I'm still friendly with her.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What's her name?

HESTER DIAMOND: Her name is Birgitta, and she goes by Schreiber. She changed her name when she married Shep. And so we renewed our friendship with Shep. I'm not sure how many years later it was. At least 40 years later. And I don't know what inspired her or Shep to get in touch with us, but somehow, they did. And we started seeing them. We would meet them in Brussels for a weekend or something, while we were traveling around. And it was a very pleasant friendship. More fun the second go-round with his wife, who we adored.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, in the '50s, when you were going to galleries and buying works, it doesn't sound like that you had a mentor, or a model that you were following.

HESTER DIAMOND: No, unfortunately.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Would you say that you were learning from the art dealers, that they were—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —part of the—

HESTER DIAMOND: You always learn a lot from art dealers. It's still true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what—do you remember what your first purchase, or your first—one of your first—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, it was terrible.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you still own it?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What was it?

HESTER DIAMOND: It was a mother and child, but in a sort of 1930s realistic style.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Something like Raphael Soyer?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's—no.

HESTER DIAMOND: Not as good as that. And obviously, referring to Renaissance mother-and-child images, but wanting to be modern in—but modern 25 years before what we were—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, after that, how did you find—what were you collecting and how did you decide

that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Once we really got—well, we were buying in a kind of haphazard way. If we saw a picture we were interested in, we would look at it and we would see that artist's next show, and then very often buy something out of the second show of his that we saw.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: These were mainly paintings?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Works on paper, or no?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, they were paintings. And not sculpture yet at that time.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And that went on a for a while—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: At some point did you and Harold think, you know, it looks like this is what we want to focus on?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, no, it was more complicated than that. We were never so—[laughs]—never so simply achievement-oriented.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Not as analytical.

HESTER DIAMOND: We—no, we kept buying little things, or we kept having little businesses. And those two things were not connected. And then, Harold got this job with Martha Jackson. And then, she said to him, "You know, we could use one more person here on Saturdays." So, he said to her, "Well, why don't you hire Hester?" So, it's—okay, now, I had a job, too. And it lasted about two months, and then summer came, and we didn't—neither Martha nor we made a commitment for the following fall.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: When you were there for two months, did you meet any of the artists?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Because she had a wonderful group of artists.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, and we were buying from some of them.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Do you remember who they were who you met?

HESTER DIAMOND: John—what was his last name? Hultberg.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Say that again?

HESTER DIAMOND: John Hultberg. H-U-L-T-B-E-R-G. They're all disappeared. Sank like a stone, you know. Seymour Boardman. I'm trying to think who else. I don't think anyone else. I'm not sure. Anyway—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So, you both kept doing your day jobs and going to galleries?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, that's right. And then—and at my urging, we started saving money to go to Europe, something I had always wanted to do. And of course, you know, people don't realize now, it was quite a long time after World War II that you could first travel to Europe. It was the first time I heard of anybody being allowed to go to Europe, unless they were—had some institutional affiliation—was 1954. And as soon as I heard that, we started planning for a trip in 1955.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And that was a life-changing experience.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: How long were you gone?

HESTER DIAMOND: About six weeks.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And where did you travel in Europe?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, we did sort of the standard first trip to Europe. We went to London, Paris, Amsterdam,

Zurich. Worked our way down to Venice, Florence, Rome, which we—Rome, that was it for me for a long time. I just thought it was the most marvelous place. And then, we would work—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Traveling by train?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. Alitalia had a fabulous way of selling tickets at that time. You could buy a roundtrip ticket from New York to Rome, and you could stop as many places as you wanted on the way there and on the way back. Well, basically, you can see all of Europe by doing that. And that's what we did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I read about the fact that part of this trip in England was meeting Barbara Hepworth.

HESTER DIAMOND: That was very important.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But that was preceded by your learning about her work in New York, right?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. We—well, what happened was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Her work is mainly sculptural.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, that's a change.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. We had already started to get interested in sculpture. And we saw a book of Barbara's work. We had never heard of her. But the work looked very interesting. We knew that we loved Brancusi and that we weren't likely to find one any of the places that we went. And we knew that there were other, let's say, modern—strictly Modernist sculptures that we liked. And we didn't— you know, we couldn't—we hadn't put the history of it all together in our heads, probably.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] You said you hadn't collected sculptures, so you—

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —may have known Henry Moore—

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —but not bought his work. In New York before the trip.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, yeah. Yeah. Exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You were buying paintings by contemporaries by—

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —contemporary artists—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —who were working abstractly.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I meant to ask you if you could think of the names of some of those artists whose paintings you were buying.

HESTER DIAMOND: I can't think of anybody right at the minute—this minute, except—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: They were Americans, maybe?

HESTER DIAMOND: —for John Hultberg. They were Americans. They were local artists.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: And— I just don't even—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, Barbara Hepworth.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay. So, we found this book on Barbara, and were very taken with her work. And had never

heard of her. And as far as we could see from what it said from the credits in the book, she didn't seem to have any American representation. So, we sent her a letter. You know, when I think of the pure nerve of it, it really makes me laugh. We sent her a letter saying, "Would you be interested in having a travelling exhibition in the United States? We would be happy to arrange it."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, had Harold—

HESTER DIAMOND: We were, like, 25 years old.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —he had already started considering himself an art dealer.

HESTER DIAMOND: No. He had this one little job.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, how did he come up with—

HESTER DIAMOND: You know, when you're in a job like that—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —creating a traveling exhibition for an artist?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I came up with that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That was your idea?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And where did that idea come from?

HESTER DIAMOND: You don't—you don't need to have any special source for ideas.

[They laugh.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And of course, she immediately wrote back, I'm sure she thought we were these high-flying, you know, rich Americans. That's what all—you know, everybody in Europe thought Americans were, at that time. And she wrote back saying she would be very interested. And that was all I needed to hear. So, I dreamed up a hypothetical exhibition. Fifteen sculptures, something like that. And I priced packing and shipping and insurance and printing. You know, if you've ever seen catalogues of that period—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Pamphlets.

HESTER DIAMOND: —they were just little pamphlets. So, I priced out what it would cost to print up that kind of a pamphlet. And I divided it by X. I don't remember what my calculations were. And I circulated a letter to quite respectable museums, offering them a traveling exhibition of Barbara Hepworth. They also didn't know we were 25 years old and didn't know anything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I imagine that after all the years of going to galleries, with—speaking to knowledgeable gallerists, that you had picked up a lot of information.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, we knew which were the important museums. Certainly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which were the important museums that might be interested in this Modernist sculpture—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and you understood—

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't remember all the museums that showed this exhibition, but I know it went to San Francisco and to Baltimore. And we couldn't get the—of course, we tried for the Art Institute of Chicago and they turned us down, but then we booked it into the Chicago Arts Club. And so on. I mean, they were very respectable places, and we told them that—I think we told them they would be expected to buy one piece. So, that was—they had to pay the fee, which was based on cost, and they would be expected to buy a piece.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you made income from a portion of the sales price—

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and a portion of the booking fee?



HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That just covered the expenses.

HESTER DIAMOND: That was cost.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you were only making income from the sales?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, but for us to make any money on that at all, we thought was ridiculous.

[They laugh.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And we bought a piece for ourselves. So, it was altogether a very successful venture from Barbara's point of view, because these 10 or 15 museums each bought a piece. She had never sold a single piece in the United States before.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Absolutely a dream come true.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And a whole new market. And of course, our piece that we bought for ourselves. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you developed this when you visited with her?

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No, I mean, you developed it in advance of the visit?

HESTER DIAMOND: All of this happened, and then I wrote to her and told her we were coming to England on our first trip to Europe, and she immediately invited us to come and stay in the triplets' cottage. You know, she had triplets. She didn't deal very well with motherhood. So, she ended up with a combination home and studio, which is now, I understand, a museum one can visit. And I'll do that if I ever get around to Cornwall. And it's a creepy idea, because I've done it. Visiting somebody's house that you went to as a guest, and then you go there as a member of the public because it's now a museum. It's a fairly creepy experience. And—but I will do it at some point. And we were right across the street from her in a separate little house. You know, stone fisherman's cottages. And so, that was our first stop on—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How long did you stay there?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I think we stayed there two weeks and it was—and—you know, it was a going concern as an artist colony. There were lots of—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's where you met other artists.

HESTER DIAMOND: — young sculptors and painters there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And she introduced you?

HESTER DIAMOND: She introduced us to all the young people and also to Ben Nicholson, who was her ex-husband. But they were still very involved with each other. And we were thrilled to meet Ben, because he was, you know, an important person in our constellation of artists. And it was Ben, really, who put Harold into business.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] How did he do that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, two things happened. First of all, one day we—of course, you know, we acted as if we were—had moved in. We ordered a newspaper to be delivered to our door every morning. And so, we got the paper one morning, and there was an ad in it for Burberry's. And, do you remember something—they may not have existed by the time you were old enough to think about this—but there was such a thing as a reversible rain coat. It was poplin on one side and tweed on the other side. And that was a very hot item at that time. And they were ten pounds each. That's very, very cheap, but we didn't have a spare ten pounds in our budget.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It wasn't so cheap, if those were—even lower than Europe on five dollars a day, it's probably Europe on three dollars a day, was possible in the '50s.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you imagine the expenses for—

HESTER DIAMOND: But still, the idea of buying one of those coats was very attractive. We were supposed to go

as part—I think it was partly a way of getting us out of their hair during the day, so that they could work, and then pay attention to us at night. And—but they would send us around to meet different people every day. And it wasn't that day—we were supposed—oh, the following day.

We were supposed to go to meet a woman who was universally called Hodgie. I don't know what her first name was, but she went by the initials E. L. Hodgkins. And she had—was a collector of sorts, and she had bought a few things from Ben. And she was interesting because—she was an elderly woman. She was well in her 80s at that time. And she had been the daughter of a dealer in furniture and works of art. Very much in the style of Wildenstein or Knoedler, they all dealt in antique furniture, and also paintings and sculpture. And she had been the daughter of this dealer named Hodgkins. And—but he didn't leave a legacy of any kind, in the form of a going business. But he had left her his estate of paintings and sculpture and furniture. And so, we went there. Harold had this brilliant idea. He went to Ben and said to him, "Do you mind if—would you give me a couple of paintings, small paintings that we can carry easily, and I'll try and sell them—sell one to Hodgie." And Ben laughed at the idea. He said, "That's a great idea." We wrapped up two paintings—we chose two paintings, and he wrapped them up. And the next morning, off we go on the train to Hodgie. And of course, we were invited to lunch. We were supposed to arrive at 11:00 a.m., and hang out for a while, and then have lunch, and then go away. But instead, lunch came and went, and we were still sitting there talking, and that was fine. Everybody was having a lovely time. And then, Harold sold her these two paintings, and—rather to her own surprise. And at the end of the afternoon, she said, "You know, if you could sell me those Nicholsons, you could sell anything. I'm going to give you—I have just four items of my father's estate remaining. I'm going to give you photographs of them, and I want you to see what you can do with them." And so, we carried home these gigantic, you know, studio-sized photographs that dealers had made in the early 20th century. And they were preposterous things that were totally out of date, out of style—a Nattier painting, a [Thomas] Lawrence portrait.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, there was a Lawrence, and what was the first artist you said?

HESTER DIAMOND: Nattier. N-A-T-T-I-E-R.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Also, very high-style portrait, but no longer high-style at that time. An armoire by Cressent, who is one of the great *ébénistes*. And I forget who the maker of the—it was a roll-top desk.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: I forget who the maker was. But it was also an important maker.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: These are also large pieces.

HESTER DIAMOND: Way oversize. Therefore, very difficult to place. So, I had—Harold said, "Sure." And I thought, where the hell does he think he's going to sell these? And—but he already had an idea, or a beginning of an idea. And after we got home, he went to Hirschl and Adler. We didn't know either Norman Hirschl or Abe Adler at that time. He introduced himself, and he showed them these four things, and they bought them all.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, did E. L. tell Harold the prices? Or did Harold—

HESTER DIAMOND: She gave him net prices.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. So, he decided what—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the retail price should be?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, not retail, but something between—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: —wholesale and retail.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The sale price for him.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And so, that was a triumph. And that was what really determined—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That he would be an art dealer?

HESTER DIAMOND: —that he was going to do this.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When—you were involved so much.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I was very involved.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When he first decided—

HESTER DIAMOND: I think it was really his—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to do that—

HESTER DIAMOND: —he was the engine.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —did you think, though, that you were a partner, that you would work with him?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And would that be—

HESTER DIAMOND: I took that for granted.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that would be your career? You—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You had already left social work?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He had already left fourth-grade teaching?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, he hadn't. And he wasn't going to, because—I don't think anybody can imagine now how insecure it would have felt for us, at that time, to have no paycheck coming in that we could count on.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I think we could imagine.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay. And so, Harold had every intention of continuing to teach. And he loved his kids, and he loved—you know, there was no problem with his job. And then, in about the third week—well, the second week, maybe, of November, somebody we knew—we were already starting to know some collectors and talking to them, making it clear that we had things, and we were going to get more things.

And a collector called and said, "I want such and such—a particular piece of Henry Moore's. And I want it here before the first of December. If you can get it for me, I'll give you \$5,000 commission." Well, \$5,000 commission, to us, that was a fortune, an absolute fortune. And so, he went to his teacher. And the next week was Thanksgiving, so it was a three-day work week. And he said to her, "Look, I have to go to Europe, and I would like to leave this weekend and then come back the following weekend. I'll only be missing three days of teaching, and I would take it as personal business days. Is that okay with you?" And she said, "Absolutely not. If you do that, don't bother coming back." And he tried—he explained to her that that would be giving up \$5,000. And his annual salary was something like \$3,500. So, she wasn't going to go for that. He said to her, "In that case, I'll have to give you my letter of resignation."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow. So—

HESTER DIAMOND: It was stupid of her, because he was a very good teacher. And given how insecure he was about money, he would have gone on teaching for years. [Laughs.] But as it was, it was that crisis that pushed him to give it up.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, that was around 1956?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And did he—he was, when he was—he was—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, it was later. David was born, and that was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, no, I'm sorry. I saw '59. Yeah. So, at that point, did he imagine being a dealer with an office, but not a gallery?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. We were never interested in having a gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, did he have a separate office, or was he working from home?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no. Working from home.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And where were you living then? You had started on—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —West 61st.

HESTER DIAMOND: —yeah, and then we graduated to West 65th, which had the advantage of having an elevator. And since I was pregnant—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you had your first—

HESTER DIAMOND: —it was a good idea. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you had your first child then, yes?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, 1959 was when you had your first child?

HESTER DIAMOND: 1958. November.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: '58, oh. You said earlier, before you met Barbara Hepworth, what you were buying were American artists. But at some point, you started buying—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, but that changed.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —European.

HESTER DIAMOND: That changed.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And what changed it? And when did that happen?

HESTER DIAMOND: Just more experience. More experience—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were buying them both—

HESTER DIAMOND: —in looking in museums and in gallery.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were buying those School of Paris, and others, for clients and for yourself, at the same time?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not quite. At that point, we were buying European artists who were less known and less expensive than the ones we bought later.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, I see. I see.

HESTER DIAMOND: And, you know, sort of abstract. There were a lot of interesting abstract artists in Europe, if you think of Max Bill and a whole circle around him, and so on. There were lots of people.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And was there—was it by serendipity, or did you at some point decide you were going to focus on a particular artist, or group of artists?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it grew from one thing to another. And one of the—you know, when you're a young dealer, you're influenced by your clients as well as by dealers you buy from. Just as much. And we had—it was our good fortune that, in our early days, we had two really good clients. So that we could sell almost anything. Be it—their taste was very different. We were selling a lot to Joe Hirshhorn, as in Hirshhorn Museum.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: And we were selling a lot—all of the really—all of the best things we were selling to a collector named G. David Thompson, who lived in Pittsburgh.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: G, the initial G.

HESTER DIAMOND: G, period.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, Jean. J-E-A-N?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, the letter G.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The letter G.

HESTER DIAMOND: The letter G. David Thompson. T-H-O-M-P-S-O-N.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And he lived in Pittsburgh, and he was a very serious collector. And he would lecture us, "Why are you buying that Nicholson crap? You should be buying Picasso." And we—you know, it really brings you up short when you're young, and you don't even think you're worthy to be buying Picasso. Let alone, do you have enough money.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you also—

HESTER DIAMOND: It just seems so beyond reach.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —bought Mondrian.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes, very early on, because we loved it so.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What about Joe Hirshhorn? What kind—did he teach you something that you could know—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, he was mostly a bargain hunter.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: But he bought very good sculpture. Much better than his paintings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I understand you—early, during this time while Harold was working—starting this business as an art dealer, and you were working with him, you also, though, started an interior design firm?

HESTER DIAMOND: That was a little later.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. So—

HESTER DIAMOND: Not much later, but a little later.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, there were a few years when you were working together.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And then, at some point after your first child was born—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, maybe in 1960, '59?

HESTER DIAMOND: It was when—we had a client who said to me—a client for paintings—who said to me—he had just bought an apartment for his girlfriend, and I think he didn't trust her—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, I read about Barbara Johnson.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. And he came to me and said, "I just bought a very pretty apartment for Barbara, for Basia, and would you decorate it for us? Because I love the way your apartment looks." And I have never been a person who ever said, "Well, I'll see about that." I immediately said, "Sure." And so, all of a sudden, I was in the decorating business.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Had you any thought of doing that before then?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. I put a lot of thought and energy into decorating my own apartment. And many, many battles with Harold, who also had lots of ideas for decorating.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, whereas—

HESTER DIAMOND: We didn't—we were a very peaceable couple, but we could argue about how to place a light switch, or other details like that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you eventually created this interior that inspired—

HESTER DIAMOND: It was attractive enough to get Seward Johnson's attention.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. That was Seward Johnson?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The sculptor.

HESTER DIAMOND: No, his father.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Oh. Okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: J. Seward Johnson is the name.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And then, from then on, other clients came to you? You looked for clients? Did you feel that this was—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I did—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —were you excited about starting—

HESTER DIAMOND: —oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —this new company?

HESTER DIAMOND: Of course. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And work from home as well, with the children?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Everything. Harold used to say, "It's a shame we don't have dogs. We could have dogs, children, and two businesses all in the same place." And by that time, I think we were living on 79th Street. Yes, I'm sure we were.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You progressively went further north.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Well, that meant you got more space for less money.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. So, was there ever—so that you're balancing this—your family, your work, his work—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —other activities, interests.

HESTER DIAMOND: No. When I think of what I did in my 40s—I mean, all my life, I've been very active, straight through into my 80s. But when I think of what I did in my 40s, I wonder how I managed it. Because I was doing all of those things, and all with a whole heart.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you had three children?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. But I didn't have them all at once.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well—

[They laugh.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, Barbara did. Think of that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes. So, you were always working at the same time as you were raising the family, and so—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —was Harold.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. It just seemed normal.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: And by the time we were starting to have kids, as—we could afford a little bit of help. And as we had more kids, we could afford more help, and so on. And that makes a huge difference. If I would have had to do it all on my own without a babysitter, without somebody to do the cleaning, that would have been very, very different.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Throughout the '70s, I read that you were—you were living in Manhattan on 79th, or maybe you were—

HESTER DIAMOND: I've always been living—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —here. Maybe you were here by then. But you also had a house on Long Island, in Huntington?

HESTER DIAMOND: It was beautiful. We had beautiful houses, one after another.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: On Long Island?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That you used as country houses, as weekend—

HESTER DIAMOND: As weekend and summer houses.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yeah. Did you also—

HESTER DIAMOND: We didn't do that until—let me think. Michael was born in '65, and so '66 was the first year that we did not go to Europe for the summer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you went to Europe with two—with one child and with two children, but not three?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. That's where I drew the line.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] When you went to Europe, was it always partly business?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah, absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Buying work?

HESTER DIAMOND: Absolutely. Not seeing clients, buying.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Buying. Where were you buying from? And you were always buying for yourself—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, in—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —as well as the business?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Yes. In England, we had this network of—that I have to describe as friends of Ben Nicholson, because that's what it was, at heart. And of course, you know, in England—people think it's very difficult to meet people in England, because everybody is so snobby. If you have one serious entree, one person who says, "This is somebody I really want you to meet," to his friends, one of them passes you on to another. And you—it's almost without limit. And of course, those were all people who didn't consider themselves collectors, but who all had pictures. And so, if suddenly, you could go to them and say, "Well, you know, we can actually get you \$10,000, \$100,000," you know, whatever it is, it was always a price so far removed from what they had paid that even though they said they would never sell, they had to stop and think about it a little. And usually they sold. These were very hard times in England. People did not have money. And they especially didn't have money to take abroad, because you were only allowed to take seven pounds a year out of your bank account to go—to go abroad. So, you couldn't do much with that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In addition to buying a ticket on a ship. I mean, not seven pounds —

HESTER DIAMOND: You could buy a ticket on a ship, but besides that you couldn't—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Seven pounds?

HESTER DIAMOND: —seven pounds. That's not a big travel allowance.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No. No. Wow. So, what were your—do you recall in those years, in the '60s and '70s, any—the most important purchases you made, the things that you thought were just—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, we were—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —as collectors rather than dealers.

HESTER DIAMOND: —always looking for a Nicholson. Of course, all this circle of friends all had Nicholsons. And also, other abstract sculptures and Mondrian, by all means. And probably the most important thing that we had during that time was a Mondrian that Nan Roberts consigned to us. It was beautiful painting.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Who did?

HESTER DIAMOND: Her name was Nan Roberts. She was a sister-in-law of Ben Nicholson. And we were very friendly with her, but even more friendly with her daughter. A lovely woman. And one thing Harold was spectacularly good at was giving people a reason to sell when they thought there was no reason on earth they would sell. And he looked at this picture and he said to Nan, "You know, that's a trip around the world for Tess."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] What a trick.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well. You know, you have to find the right thing for the right person. And it is the key.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. When you were—so, during the '60s and '70s, you were—you had—you were building up this interior design business—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. [Laughs.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —were you always incorporating works of art in the interior decoration?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that was one of the reasons people hired you?

HESTER DIAMOND: It was antique furniture and paintings. Both.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Paintings that are 20th-century?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it was 20th-century paintings and earlier.

HESTER DIAMOND: Antique furniture.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Antique furniture. Was—

HESTER DIAMOND: And that's how I furnished my own house.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did—would you work with someone who said they wanted modern furniture with modern paintings?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I would try to talk them out of it, because I would think it would be boring. I had had modern furniture with modern paintings, and I quickly saw that there was a great benefit in—I hadn't—my last—after I left the welfare department, I wanted a part-time job, because we were getting too busy already for me to have a full-time job. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You and Harold were getting too busy?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And I sort of—it was sort of random, because there were relatively few part-time jobs at that time. It wasn't very customary. Not as much as it is now. So, I got—I took a part-time job in a candy shop. A very eccentric candy shop named Alice Marks, where they sold—there were a couple of kinds of candy. They were very known for—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is this Marks with a K-S?

HESTER DIAMOND: K-S. They would—they sold 18th-century porcelains and other such things. And they would pack your chocolate drops or whatever you chose to buy in a container of that kind. A pretty elegant hostess



gift, which is what they often were.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah. I picture Upper East Side, Park Avenue.

HESTER DIAMOND: You've got it. And these saleswomen were all down-on-their-heels former debts. And none of them could add. So, when I—I was hired to type bills. That was my only function. And then, they discovered I could—I, without even thinking, checked the arithmetic. And it was wrong every time. Either the calculation of the sales tax was wrong, or the addition of the sales tax was wrong. And I went to my boss and said, "You know, I hate to bother you with this, but—" And she looked at me, she said, "You can really add, can't you?" "Yes." [Laughs.] And so, then that was added to my responsibilities.

Well, the shop actually belonged to Alastair Stair, who owned Stair & Company, which was a going concern then, selling antique furniture. And his silent partner was Jules Stein, and the two of them owned Alice Marks. And once Alastair found out I could add, he said, "Oh, you can do arithmetic? We need you. You can come work across the street, she'll have to find somebody herself." [Laughs.] And off I went to work at Stair & Company. And the first thing he had me do was this very, rather elaborate cost sheet, that had to be done once a month, and he quickly discovered that I understood how to convert pounds into dollars and other such esoteric things. So, he was thrilled.

So, then I had a job working for Alastair. And that was—you know, some jobs change your life, and this was one that did. Because I didn't know anything about antique furniture until then. But here I was, every morning, in order to get to my desk, I was walking through the shop. And of course, I was looking. And I would be asking, and reading the tickets, and asking Alastair little questions when I saw he wasn't too busy to answer. And at one point, there was a pair of chairs, and I looked at them, and I said, "That would look terrific in our house with our modern furniture and modern pictures." And before I said anything to Alastair, I made Harold come into the store, and they showed him the chairs. He was quite startled when I suggested this to him, but when he saw them, he said, "Yes, you're absolutely right. They would look sensational." And I told him just where I wanted to put them.

And then, I went to Alastair, and of course Alastair's delighted to pay me in merchandise. It's very advantageous for him. For one thing, he doesn't have to come up with the cash this week. And he was always cash poor. And also, you know, there's a little edge in it for him.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: So that's what I started doing, was taking most of my salary in goods.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Where was the shop then?

HESTER DIAMOND: On 57th, between Park and Madison.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Oh. And was it then one of the top antique—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What were those chairs?

HESTER DIAMOND: They were Adams chairs, with arms that went like that.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: You're showing a kind of a curve.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, a spiral.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Spiral. So, was that—

HESTER DIAMOND: Very dramatic.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —18th-century?

HESTER DIAMOND: Late 18th.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's the beginning, huh?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. That's how it all began. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Huh. As you were developing this—your collection and your business, you said, and you were—

HESTER DIAMOND: See, this is one of the reasons it's hard for me to figure out dates, because it's all happening at the same time—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's right.

HESTER DIAMOND: —the business grows—my business grows. Having another baby.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Were you close to any particular art dealers?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, sure.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I mean, you were—

HESTER DIAMOND: Sure. There are dealers you work with all the time, and ones that you know sort of casual.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I mean, I know you were already then—had quite many years of experience. But were there still mentors, people in the field, whether dealers—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, dealers we would learn from—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —or collectors?

HESTER DIAMOND: —by example, rather than mentors.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, for example, who would—who would've had that role?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, Douglas Corcoran and John Summers.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And certainly Gene Thaw.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When you—talking about Gene Thaw, now at that point, where was he—he was in New York?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, he had a gallery over on 78th Street.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah. That's right. Did he deal with the period that you were mostly looking at? Or was it because he just was—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Yes, he did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: He was broader than we were. But less—no, I would never say Gene was less knowledgeable about anything. Gene was always very knowledgeable about everything. But he was more concerned with 19th-century as well as 20th-century.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] How was your collecting changing? Let's say, when you get to the late '70s, you had been—you had started with American, then you branched out to the English you talked about. Mondrian and—at that point you had the Brancusi?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, we always had Brancusi. [Laughs.] That was early on in our collecting of sculpture, we were looking for Brancusi, and—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was that in the '60s? I mean, in the '50s you weren't collecting sculpture.

HESTER DIAMOND: No, it was in the '60s, and I can't tell you what we bought at what time, because we bought a Brancusi every time we had a chance. And at one point, we had six Brancusi, and then we bought the *Bird in Space*. The best of the *Birds in Space*, I should tell you. And then, we did something—it was the smartest thing and stupidest thing that we've ever done. The smartest thing was buying *Bird in Space*. And the stupidest thing was, it was such an intimidating amount of money. It was so scary to us to have spent that on one sculpture, that we then sold five of the six Brancusi that we had, sort of to amortize the cost of the *Bird*. We shouldn't have

done that. We should have kept—we should have had the world's largest collection of Brancusi.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Would that have been the largest? Six pieces?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, not larger than John Quinn had in his heyday, but the largest there was in existence at that time. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Since you're bringing up that situation, let me ask you a few questions about buying and selling. You talked, at one point in an interview I read, about always wanting to feel that you were upgrading.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That you weren't necessarily wanting to expand the quantity of works you owned. And so, every time you could buy a piece you judged to be superior, you—part of this process would be then selling.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Add to the top of the list and sell from the bottom.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Why did you adopt that position? Was it simply because you wanted to hang and live with everything, and there was a limited amount of space you had? Or was it more philosophical about wanting to just simply keep upgrading, and getting rid of the—

HESTER DIAMOND: Adding to the top of the list and getting rid from the bottom is—seems to me as natural as breathing. It's not only about space. And it's certainly not only about money. It's about aspiration.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it was almost an intuitive process?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That was—

HESTER DIAMOND: We didn't have to discuss that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: We didn't have to think about it. It was what we both knew we wanted to do.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And yet, in the case of the Brancusi, that was a different motivation.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, that was such a scary amount of money for us.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you take a particular—was there a process that you took to sell those five, to make sure either that they landed where you wanted them to land, or that you—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, we just—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —spaced the sales out because you knew it'd be more advantageous to have them spaced out. Was there a strategy?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, there was no strategy. We just did what we always did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Find the buyer.

HESTER DIAMOND: See an opportunity, find the buyer. See how it goes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it wasn't—there was no impact—there wouldn't be an impact of having five of them on the market at once.

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Or was there a perception they weren't really—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. I—you know, the market, it's a very different being from what you think nowadays, because with no internet, there was not information out there all the time about what's on the market. Now, everything that's on the market finds its way onto the internet one way or another. And that was not—there was no central information bureau at that point.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Given that I assume these were important works, these

Brancusi—did you feel some kind of responsibility, obligation, to sell them to, if you could, museums?

HESTER DIAMOND: Sure. That would have been a preference, but we certainly wouldn't—we certainly wouldn't hesitate to sell them to a private person.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It was really a matter of who wanted to—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —offer the price.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you had them, was there a sense that it was important to have them together, and that [it -JOR] might have been ideal if they could have gone some place together?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. I don't think it would have—first of all, we didn't imagine there was anybody in the world except ourselves who would want to own all of those pieces. Brancusi was still sufficiently not mainstream that we would assume that most people would want—who wanted one at all, would want to have one representation.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, many of the questions and issues about buying and selling that I'm thinking about, and talking to you about, really didn't exist so much in those years.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And one of them might be insurance. And values having skyrocketed—

HESTER DIAMOND: It didn't really.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Perhaps owning—

HESTER DIAMOND: It wasn't—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —six Brancusi wasn't a problem, insurance-wise—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —as it would be today.

HESTER DIAMOND: It wasn't. It was a different world in many ways.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What about legal issues? Did you begin with sales contracts—

HESTER DIAMOND: Never. We never had a contract. Not buying or selling.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It was just a receipt for a purchase? As if it were—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —a car?

HESTER DIAMOND: Right. Or a pair of stockings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did you get involved in condition issues? I mean, these weren't older works—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. That was always—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, when you sold something, was it in writing that you represented that the work was —had not been restored, or—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. You know, "Would you like to buy this glass of water?" "Yes." "Oh, okay. You could take it home. Just give me a check for \$20."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Laughs.] Okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: I mean, it was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It was very simple.

HESTER DIAMOND: —it was very simple.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did it remain that way all through the years that Harold was an art dealer?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, but by the time I was selling off things after he died, it was changing. And later on, it became—it was constantly changing. All those issues became—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And issues of privacy—

HESTER DIAMOND: —more important.

[Sound of telephone.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that you?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, it's the—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay. Issues of privacy that gradually became—with the internet. I mean, when you were selling—

HESTER DIAMOND: Privacy was always crucial.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, the buyer and the seller wanted privacy—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Yes. At all times.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that's a constant. What about situations—did you encounter situations where—as a collector, where you had a legal issue, with the seller to you? I mean, there's the Knoedler—the [Larry] Salander case.

HESTER DIAMOND: That was the first time ever.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That was the first time ever. Did that ever get resolved in your favor at all?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. Never got a penny.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, otherwise you didn't encounter those kinds of—

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —unethical and illegal—

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yeah. Well, that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. We were careful who did we business with. And in a sense, I was being careful doing business with Larry. He was a very established dealer when I started doing this with him. And I knew many people who had been his clients who had no problem with him. And, you know, it was apparently a bit of an aberration, because throughout the art world there was shock and horror, and people were astonished that I was taken. And also, the people—those people—I don't remember their names, but they were the—they were the other big patsies besides me. And they would do business under some corporate name, like the Renaissance-something Collection. I don't remember the exact name. And they were apparently very knowledgeable collectors, and everybody in the art world was shocked that they were taken. And shocked that I was taken. And so, what?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: It didn't—it happened just the same.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. And it didn't happen again?

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No. So, as—in the later years, as a collector in the '90s and the most recent decade, when you were—we'll get back to this, but when you were changing your collection, and you were doing quite a

bit of selling as well as buying—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I was selling at a much slower rate. It took me 15 years to sell off—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: —the Modernist pictures I was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Did you—and the internet is developing. What impact did the internet have in terms of your strategy for selling? Did you rely on advisors to sell? Did you just—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You didn't need anyone to help you do it. You knew how to do it. What kind of strategies did you take? Were there changes in how you went about it? Did you always think—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: — about auction house first or last?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, basically I tended to do auction house last. Until it came to the last six—when I had just six Modernist things left. And then, I knew I should do it through an auction house, that it would be—it would pay me to have that special kind of publicity you get when it's more or less a single-owner sale.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. When you—at the most, how large was your collection? How many pieces?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I don't know. I can't tell you how many pieces I have now.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Which brings me to the question of do you have an—I mean, you must have an inventory—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I have an inventory.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —for insurance purposes.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, but I don't have a count in my head. You can count as we go around, if you like.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, that brings up the question, were you always intending, when you bought something, to display it?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You weren't buying something to put in storage?

HESTER DIAMOND: Never.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, even if something fantastic came along that you really wanted, and you thought that the opportunity wouldn't come again, but you have nowhere to put it—

HESTER DIAMOND: There's no such thing.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you would pass.

HESTER DIAMOND: There's no such thing as nowhere to put it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's a basic rule.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. [Laughs.] You would rearrange?

HESTER DIAMOND: Exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see.

HESTER DIAMOND: And that's still true.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, at some—did you—

HESTER DIAMOND: It's very—it's very interesting, because I went through this with my second husband sometime after I got married, and now again with Dave. "I'm interested in—oh, take a look at this because I'm interested in buying this." "Where would you put it?" "Oh, I don't know."

[They laugh.]

HESTER DIAMOND: That's irrelevant.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: I can always find a place.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you're a decorator, and you're creative, and you can—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Move things around.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, you weren't really—you have a database, you have an inventory, but that's not something—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that you deal with?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you have on—did you always work [. . . with -JOR] the same person as the registrar, or someone who does the art handling? If someone wants to borrow something, or if you want to move something?

HESTER DIAMOND: Basically, I'm my own registrar.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you've always done that work yourself?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And if you want to rearrange—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I have now—Janette [Sunio -HD] has been working for me so long, I've trained her to do it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. And then, if you want to move things around, you bring in professional art handlers?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Just—

HESTER DIAMOND: There was a time when Tony [Moura -HD] and I could move everything in the house, but neither of us has the strength anymore.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. What about lending? Have you had a certain policy in mind about loaning?

HESTER DIAMOND: I'm not a generous lender. I lend when there's an exhibition for which the piece they're requesting will make a huge difference art-historically. Or the other way around. If I think that this particular work of art needs a little more exposure than it's had.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Those are the two reasons. And I'm much more moved by the fact that a painting that I have or a sculpture that I have is crucial to the argument the curator is making about another piece. That's a compelling issue.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, those are things that every curator needs to—the case that every curator needs to make about every loan request.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Otherwise—yeah. When you do lend, are there particular conditions that you place?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it always has to be couriered. It always has to be—I always want to know what the security arrangements are in each place.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Just the normal—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: And also, especially in Italy, air conditioning and so on.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: [Air conditioning -JOR]. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: In Italy, everything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Climate control. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Climate controls. And you don't know if they're telling you the truth either.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, do you find yourself sending someone or getting someone to report to you who's not—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I usually know somebody who's going to the opening, or going the first week.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. So, we come to the point—the sad moment when Harold passed away, in 1982.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It must have been quite a shock.

HESTER DIAMOND: Absolutely. He was so young and so vigorous until he got sick.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When that happened, how did you approach the business part of it? The art—his work as an art dealer?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, we were still working. I mean, it sounds bizarre, but, you know, somebody would call and be looking—I mean, we weren't actively working the way we had been, but someone would call—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because he had been ill?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Somebody would call and say, "Well, I have a client for a Franz Kline, can you find me one?" "Sure." I mean, some things, you always say sure to. And then, scramble to find it. And some things you really have to know where it is before you give that answer. And, you know, sometimes we would have to scratch our heads and think, well, who has such and such a thing?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: But that's okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was it—were your kids ever involved in the collecting and then—

HESTER DIAMOND: They always had—they were always interested, and they always had a lot to say about it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you ever think that one of them would go into the business that Harold had created?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. Actually, when David was about 12, he more or less said, "Move over, folks. I'm ready now." And we told him, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When he was 12?



HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. And what we always told them was they could be anything in the world they wanted to be. But not an art dealer. And it's for very specific reasons. It's because they—we knew so many of these dynastic art families. And what usually happens in them is that the son doesn't completely grow up until the father dies.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: It infantilizes the son.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's interesting. So, that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: And you know, I was well aware—even when they were infants, I used to say to Harold, "You know, we have to be very careful not to steamroller these kids." I'm not exactly a shrinking violet, but Harold was a much bigger personality than I, and I knew that was a real danger in terms of being parents.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, you gradually wound his business down after he passed away?

HESTER DIAMOND: After he died? Well, I actually went through a very—the most schizoid period of my life. For three months, I decided to do both. I was carrying on my decorating business and carrying on the art business. To such a degree that, you know, what's now Jeanette's office was then Harold's office, and I always had the corner office. And so, for three months, when I was working on decorating matters, I would sit at my desk in the corner room. And when I was talking to somebody about art, I would sit in Harold's office, where, you know, the library was and all of that. There was a reason for it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: But the reason wasn't as compelling as the knowledge that this is the room where art business is done.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And so, gradually—

HESTER DIAMOND: So, after three months, I looked at myself and I said, "I'm really finding the art business very distasteful to do without Harold." You know, there was always a nasty side to the art business, and he was always willing to take that on and let me do the pleasant side.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: And when I was then doing it by myself, I had to do both. And I didn't like it one little bit. So, I made up my mind that I would—there were steps, you know. I had to sell off the inventory that was only inventory. And then, I had to look at our collection. In any his-and-hers collection, there are some things that are more your favorites, and some things that are more his. So, I sold—also sold off all the things that were really Harold's favorites. And then, I went through a period in which I just had this absolutely stunning collection of 20th-century masters on my walls. And many museum directors coming to marvel at the quality, and so on. Is that all right?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: But no action. And all they could do for action was buy another china service. At that time, I had a huge collection of antique china.

[Microphone adjustment]

HESTER DIAMOND: So, then, if I wanted action, all I—the only thing I could really do was buy another china service for myself, which I did with frequency. It's okay?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You can go—yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: It's recording?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes. Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: All right. And it was really kind of boring. You know, not having that action. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And by then the kids are grown up?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, semi.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Michael was 17 when Harold died. So, he wasn't so grown up.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: But then, at some point, I got really fed up with the decorating business. It was just a moment—you know, the decorating business has gotten steadily more difficult. Two of my former employees are in business for themselves as decorators. And every time I see them, they say to me, "You're so lucky to be out of it. It's so much harder than it was." And at that time, it was already harder than it had been.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And I was getting kind of fed up. What happens is the vendors were becoming more and more unreliable at that time. You would order fabric, and the fabric would come wrong. So, you know, you can send it back, that's no problem. But, meanwhile, you've had to pay an employee to be there to receive it. Somebody else has to inspect it. Somebody else has to arrange for it to go back.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: And your client is only angry at you. They don't care that it was the vendor's fault. And you do that enough times and you get fed up. And so, I decided I was going to give up the decorating business. And I shut down my business. I gave my staff three months notice. And I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do, but I knew I would have time, for the first time in my life. So, I decided I was going to—I was going to look around for—at Renaissance, some Baroque things, possibly to buy. I wasn't sure I was going to buy anything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, now, you shut down your decorating business, I think in 1989. But it sounds like it was closer to the date when Harold passed away in '82. Maybe I'm wrong, it wasn't '89.

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't know the date.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, there was a transition period where you were closing down his business—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —still working as a—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, no, there was a period in which—where his business—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It was closed.

HESTER DIAMOND: Dealing business was closed.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you were just a decorator.

HESTER DIAMOND: Had a beautiful collection, and I was not satisfied with that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And while you were still a decorator, before you closed that, you remarried. Right? Well, you remarried in 1985. You—

HESTER DIAMOND: That sounds like a good guess.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. Maybe it's not so important, but just trying to—hoping I understand.

HESTER DIAMOND: When I married Ralph—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So. That was 1985.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, I was already in the decorating business.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You were still—you were still in the decorating business?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay. Okay. So—

HESTER DIAMOND: And then, a few years later—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —several years after that—

HESTER DIAMOND: —I shut down the decorating business.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —maybe it was shut down. Yeah. Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. '89 sounds like an intelligent guess.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. Now, maybe at this moment is a good time to stop for the day.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because it's this whole other thing of your changing the collection.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. [Laughs.] That's a whole other story.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, we'll stop for the day.

HESTER DIAMOND: To be continued.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

[END OF FILE ONE.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Judith Olch Richards, interviewing Hester Diamond in her home in Manhattan on October 5th, 2017, for the Archives of American Art, [Smithsonian Institution] and the Frick Collection. Hester, so we'll begin where we left off yesterday, around—in the late '80s, but let's just digress a moment and go back to 1985, when you married a second time.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Why don't you tell us about the person you married, and how you—how that affected your collecting, if at all?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it didn't, really. But even that in itself is a statement. Because there's always a possibility that when you remarry that it will affect your collecting, either because your new partner hates the kinds of things you like, or loves other things you don't care about. Ralph had a very hands-off attitude about my collecting. He felt it was—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell us his name, for the record.

HESTER DIAMOND: His name was Ralph Kaminsky. He was a professor of economics and public administration, teaching at NYU, in the school—Graduate School of Public Administration. And he had a parallel career, which was very interesting, as an urban planner, working during vacation periods and other times for AID, or UN, or OECD, doing urban planning in third world countries.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You said OECD?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, isn't that the name of it?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, I'm just—

HESTER DIAMOND: Office of Economic [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development]—I don't remember what everything stands for—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: We'll look it up.

HESTER DIAMOND: —but I think OECD is right. And he was doing urban planning in third world countries, which not everybody has a very good—it was a new field at the time that he got into it. He was one of the founders of it. And so, everything he had to say about that, and things we talked about when we traveled, it was all

intensely interesting. And he was a very interesting man, period. But not particularly interested in art. He had kind of a layman's casual interest in art. If we went to a new city where he had never been before, he wanted to go to the principal museum, and that was it. And then, he left the rest of it to me, which suited me fine.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Does he have—did he have any children?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, he had—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And were they, maybe, involved in art at all?

HESTER DIAMOND: —he had a daughter, Rachel Kaminsky. And she indeed—when I first met Ralph, she was just graduating from NYU, just with a BA in art history. And determined to work in the art field, somehow or other. And delighted to have someone entering the family who had some idea what she was talking about, what she would be doing, and where she would be working. She ended up taking as her first job, quite contrary to my advice, a job with Christie's. And she worked there for, I don't know, ten or eleven years, even though, as I predicted, they were—they abused her in many ways. But it's a mistake many people make when they're starting out in the art world. And she made the best of it, more than most people manage to. So, that was good.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] What department was she in?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, she started out in Old Master paintings, and in a very short time she was made—she was very, very young, and they—from being the secretary of the department of Old Master paintings, she immediately advanced to being the head of Old Master drawings. So, that was kind of astonishing. But it is that way sometimes, especially in the auction houses. When they need somebody for a particular opening, they look around and find somebody who can do it. And Rachel could indeed do that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's great. Now, we're coming to the point—so in 1989, you closed your interior design business?

HESTER DIAMOND: I closed down my business, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you also decided—and I want to ask you to talk about why you made this decision, and how it came about—the decision to change the focus of your collection, dramatically.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I had—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Not suddenly, but—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, very dramatically. I had had for some time—from the time that Harold died, basically, and I sorted things out after his death, what I had in my apartment was an absolutely stunning collection of Modernist work. But it was static. I didn't have enough money to buy additional things, and I wasn't selling anything, and I didn't—I was sort of paralyzed, and I—since I really am a collector.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it wasn't enough just to enjoy living with it?

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You wanted to keep acquiring—

HESTER DIAMOND: I like a little action. All the time. And all I could do during that period was occasionally buy myself yet another china service, because I had a huge collection of antique china, which made sense with my antique furniture. And at the time—my closing down my business had nothing to do with that. I closed down my business because vendors were becoming more and more unreliable, and when the vendors were unreliable, it's the decorator who bears the brunt of the client's displeasure. And I was getting pretty fed up with that. So, I made up my mind to close down my business. Gave everybody three months notice and prepared to do, I wasn't sure exactly what. But of course, I quickly realized this was an opportunity for study. And I decided I would think about what other fields I wanted to collect in, and one of them—there were three fields I considered.

And I really dodged a bullet by not getting started in either of the other two, because one of the ones I considered was Renaissance jewelry, and that was just about the year before they discovered all the late-19th-century drawings for the many things that had been considered 16th- and 17th-century jewelry in museum collections. So, I was lucky to get out and not be involved in that. And the other thing I considered was antiquities, and of course it was very soon after that that buying and selling antiquities became almost an impossibility for political reasons. So, the remaining possibility was Old Master paintings. And I hadn't—I didn't—at the beginning, I didn't really think about sculpture, but it didn't take me long to get started on that. So, I started—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, that's a broad category.

HESTER DIAMOND: It's a very broad category.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Especially if you think about all across Europe.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. But I knew very specifically—well, I knew fairly specifically that I was more interested in the 15th and 16th century than I was in the 17th and 18th century. And probably that I would be focused on Flemish painting, which I liked very much, and some Italian painting, not all. So—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And were you—during this period of thinking, were you studying the field? Not studying the field economically, but studying the work, thinking about—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —where you might make a contribution in terms of collecting?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, not a contribution. I was thinking in terms of how I better prepare myself for this.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Educating yourself to be a knowledgeable—

HESTER DIAMOND: To be an intelligent collector. And I knew some professors, and got recommendations for two tutors, one in Flemish painting and the other in Italian. So, that was very—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Who were those people?

HESTER DIAMOND: One was a man named Matt Kavalier.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mac?

HESTER DIAMOND: Matt. M-A-T-T. Kavalier. K-A-V-A-L-E-R. I should tell you his formal name is Ethan Matt Kavalier. And he—this is a relationship that continues to this day. And he's now one of the authors for VISTAS, the publishing enterprise that I started a couple of years ago.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes, we'll talk about that soon.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right. And the other one was a man named Robert Carlucci. Who was my—he was a very good tutor in Italian painting. But then, he later did something that I regarded as a betrayal, which I won't go into with you. But it was enough to terminate the friendship.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Which was very sad.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so, they also, I assume, directed you to books you could read?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes. Buying books was always a pleasure for me, anyway. And—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you went about studying this—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And to some extent, one of the things that convinced me that I would be able to buy old paintings with pleasure was that, when I went to the Philadelphia Museum, every single time, I would stop dead in a room—I think it was called the Fountain Room, I'm not sure of this. But it was where two corridors came together, and it was where the beautiful Rogier van der Weyden *Deposition* was always hung. They didn't move their things around very often, and that was always there, and I always wanted to sit on a bench and contemplate that for a while. There was a lot to look at in that painting. And that led me to understand that there were joys that I could find in old painting, which I might have doubted earlier.

So, I went to—I made up my mind to start, and my idea of making up my mind to start is to start. So, first I went to my step-daughter, Rachel Kaminsky, who was by that time fairly well-known in the world of Old Masters, and I said to her, "I don't want to waste a lot of time convincing people that I'm serious. Would you just take me around New York and introduce me and tell people I'm thinking of starting a collection of Old Masters? That will save me a lot of time. And then, we'll go to London afterwards." I knew there were sales coming up. "And you'll take me around—introduce me around there, too."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you, at that point or later, make a list of painters whose works you would be looking for?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I've never shopped in that sense of the word.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you have a sense of criteria for what kind of condition you'd accept, how many restorations?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I was not so knowledgeable. I didn't know. All I knew was it had to be love. And that's always affected by condition, by history, by everything. So, I started this little first foray into the world of collecting. And I bought two Northern pictures, which I no longer have—I sold those fairly early in the game. But also, two Italian pictures, which I still have. Because although they're small and not very important—excuse me—they are beautiful. So, they still measure up. They may be more toward the bottom of the list in quality now, but they're still pretty darn good.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] When you were thinking about at this moment—did you—so, you were being introduced to the galleries, the important galleries, and the auction houses, as much as that makes sense.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, the auction houses, I knew a lot of the people anyway.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Because we did business with them on modern pictures.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Were you at the same time going through and deciding which pictures to sell?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I, more or less, had a—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you'd have a—

HESTER DIAMOND: —one of the things that made it possible for me really to begin—I had a little purse, if you will, with which I bought those first four paintings. And then, I had no idea where I was going to go from there, but I've always been sort of of the God-will-provide school of thought. And sure enough, a friend of mine who was a dealer in modern pictures came to see me and said, "You know, [Dr. Jacques] Koerfer may be interested in buying your Léger, your big Léger."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What did you say?

HESTER DIAMOND: Koerfer. K-O-E-R-F-E-R. He was a Swiss collector, who was then in his 90s.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you remember his first name?

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't think I ever knew it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: Mister. "And is there any chance you'd sell it?" And I gave, of course, the classic answer, "Depends what he wants to pay for it." So, my friend asked me, "Well, what would you want for it?" And, you know, I was then still half a dealer, and I still often have a dealer's response to questions like that. My answer was—I picked a number out of the blue, something that I knew was a totally unreasonable price for it. And my friend, who knew me very well, said, "Well, if I get that for you, will you really sell it?" I said, "Yes, I promise I will." So, off he went. And within the week, he called me back and said, "Well, I sold your Léger."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was this before or after you sold the Picasso? You sold a major Picasso, I read—

HESTER DIAMOND: At auction.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —when you were closing your business.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, that was when I was closing the business.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, this, the Léger is much after.

HESTER DIAMOND: Not much after.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A year or so?

HESTER DIAMOND: A matter of some months, probably.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, in that case, what you sold depended on just happening—your friend happened to

—

HESTER DIAMOND: Pure happenstance, yes. And what was happening behind the scenes, that I did not find out until later, was that Koerfer was taking advice from—oh gosh, I don't remember his name—a wonderful museum director, who was at that time the director of the something-something-Westphalian art collection. I don't remember the name of it in German. But he was a very canny, old museum director with impeccable taste. I didn't realize that he was advising Koerfer, but that would have been a very smart person to ask for advice. And he was—he immediately—he, Koerfer—my—the friend who was the intermediary later told me that Koerfer asked—oh gosh, I just can't remember this guy's name—just asked him, "Well, what do you think I should buy?" And without hesitation he said, "Diamond's Léger." End of conversation.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, that worked out for you.

HESTER DIAMOND: So, I probably could have asked even more.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did he—did Koerfer end up donating it to that museum?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no, no, no, no. No, he bought it and hung it in his house. He was 92 years old when he bought it. And I guess he expected to live forever. Just like me now. And his wife always hated it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you know him, personally?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. But—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sounds like you would've enjoyed—[laughs]—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —conversations.

HESTER DIAMOND: We would've been kindred souls. But the dealer who was the intermediary would have been much happier that we didn't know each other. And his wife hated the picture. And—but he hung it in their house, and he died soon after. And she immediately put it on the market. And that was a very unwise thing to do, because it was just a moment when the art market had one of these sudden drops, when all of a sudden nobody wants to buy any pictures.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, the early '90s, definitely, was the time.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it was—and so—and she consigned it to one auction house, and then to the other auction house, and then to one dealer after another. It was altogether a very unwise way to handle it. I was surprised her husband hadn't given her better instruction while he was alive, because he had a very good idea how to handle his own business. But anyway, she didn't know how, and so it just wandered around the market for quite a long time. The next time I was aware of it was—it may have been ten years later that it was coming up for sale at Christie's. And I bought it at Christie's for less than half of what I had gotten for it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I was thinking, maybe you should buy it back.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I didn't—no, I did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You did.

HESTER DIAMOND: Did I buy that back? Yes, I did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You said that you—

HESTER DIAMOND: And then, sold it to Leonard Lauder. And it's now in the collection of MoMA.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wonderful. Was that the only instance where you actually ended up buying a painting back or—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no, no, no, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's happened before?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. You know, when you're a dealer, it's something that happens more often than you imagine. But you can own a picture maybe three or four times, sell it successfully each time, buy it back, sell it again.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The gift that keeps giving.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I noted also that those years, you sold a Severini. Was there a story behind that sale?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Well, you know, I had a lot of friends in the art world. And a Swiss dealer who I was quite friendly with, Thomas Ammann, came to see me, and he sort of stopped dead in front of the Severini and said, "This is really the picture I came to see today. I know you're selling some things, would you be interested in selling this?" And I had been offered a Pontormo, and magically turning a Severini into a Pontormo was my idea of the perfect trick to pull off at that time. And so, that's what I did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's what happened. So, he sold it—you sold it to him privately, and he sold it privately?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No auction house. And the Pontormo, how did you buy that? Also, a private sale?

HESTER DIAMOND: How did I buy that?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's not so important, if you don't remember.

HESTER DIAMOND: You know, once I've sold it, it's not so important to me where I bought it, and since I have sold that, I don't really remember.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, I see. Okay. You've sold it since.

HESTER DIAMOND: It's probably not as interesting—it's very important when I think I might be going to offer it for sale, but not when—if it's gone, it's gone.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Speaking of provenance, I read that you bought a recently rediscovered Veronese. *Venus*.

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was the fact that it had been rediscovered an extra inducement to buy it? Was that element of it—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, no. You know, I need to believe in what I'm buying, but it doesn't—it's not a significant thing for me.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Actually, so, it might inject a bit of doubt that—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, not that either. Neither doubt nor additional assurance.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see. Did you ever think about keeping both paintings from—both the modern paintings and the older paintings?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, for a very long time I did. Because I sold the modern pictures very slowly, very carefully. Always getting the maximum value for every one. And it took me 15 years before I got down to a significantly reduced number of modern pictures.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You were talking about the Pontormo that you bought and then sold again subsequently. Oh, and then the Veronese.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, the Veronese actually I gave to—there were two Veroneses that I had, and I don't know which one you're talking about.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: A *Venus*.

HESTER DIAMOND: But they both ended up—they were both *Venuses*, and they both ended up at the same place. Because I gave one, which I owned for quite a few years, and then I gave it to—I was just bored with it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: We were talking about the fact that there was this long transition period where you actually had works of modern schools, as well as the Renaissance.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, and I loved hanging them together. I never segregated them. [Coughs.] Sorry. And had



only modern pictures in here, and only old paintings in there. It was so challenging to hang them together. It was a joy.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You talked about somewhere I read about color, and how important color was—has been to you in collecting. And I imagine that that's one of the places where these paintings would've spoken to each other.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, absolutely. But it's not only that, it's in the kind of movement and gesture there is in each of them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And structure?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And sometimes even feeling. Although that can be very different.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was there a sense of the artist's hand? Has that ever been important to you?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes, that's always been important to me.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Both in modern works and—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, it's one of the reasons I don't collect drawings or prints.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But, in drawings, you would think that was the moment when—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —you had the greatest sense of the artist's hand.

HESTER DIAMOND: In a different way. In a very different way.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, it's paint, then.

HESTER DIAMOND: Paint, and the different ways it's applied.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Why don't we talk now—around 1995 you founded the Medici Archive Project. I'm very curious to know, to ask you to talk about why—what was it, why you started it. I think—I believe it began in mid-2001.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, what was accomplished? That's a big question.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it actually is something I'm very proud of having done, even though I sort of backed into doing it. I was approached by Edward Goldberg, who was a very brilliant young scholar but was an unfortunate personality, and not very good at raising money. And he had this—he had failed to get tenure at Harvard, that was the beginning of it, for him. And he had this brilliant idea for extending his own career without it being an academic career. And that was to start an electronic index for the Medici Archive. The Medici were the first princely rulers who understood that it was worth saving every piece of paper to document all their transactions. And this was for land and for gardens and for commissioning music and all of these other things, as well as buying art. And they—unfortunately, they left one piece of the puzzle behind. They didn't understand how important it would be to index those pieces of paper.

So, they ended up leaving four million pieces of paper with no index. And it was everything.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What period of time?

HESTER DIAMOND: 1537, when the—it's early in the arch-dukedom. And until 1637, which is when the last Medici dies. And so, they left—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Goldberg brought this to you?

HESTER DIAMOND: To me, and said, "Will you be the president? I can't—it can't be—in order for it to be a non-profit that people can make contributions to and get a tax deduction, we have to have a board of at least four people, and one of them has to be the president."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, did he actually go through the process of creating a non-profit organization? Or he was—he was doing that with an attorney—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, he set it up. He set it up.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: He set it up. He needed to create a board.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And I was sort of reluctant. I mean, first of all, he was a bit of a pain. And I didn't know that I wanted to be that involved in something that, by its nature, is bureaucratic. But I thought about it, and I thought it was such a worthwhile thing, actually. I understood the importance of these documents for history of all kinds, not only art history, but music history, and military history, and banking history, and—the Medici had their fingers in every pie. So, if you're going to study the history of early modern Europe, you really need to be able to get into these documents, and doing it without an index is kind of crazy. So, I did go forward with that. And I had all the pains of a new non-profit, exaggerated by the fact that I was new to that world. But I settled into it, and I did get it going, and I got a board established. We got a lot done.

When we first began, we were regarded with the greatest suspicion by the officials of the archive, of the state archive, where the documents were housed. You know, in Italy, there's no tradition of private philanthropy, or of anybody giving their time or money. And so, we were regarded with the deepest suspicion. What's in it for you, was basically the question. And the fact that there was nothing in it for us was not a believable answer from the Italian point of view. But we—you know, we pushed along, and the great saving for me was I had various people on my board, all of whom were helpful in different ways. But above all else, there was one named Bob Strassler. That's S-T-R-A-S-S-L-E-R, who was kind of a—highly educated, but still with rather rough manners, having worked in the oil fields for some time. And he and I made a very good team dealing with these Italian bureaucrats playing good cop, bad cop. I was the good cop, always very, you know, cajoling and urging and complimenting them, and so on. And he was the bad cop, warning them that they're getting into trouble with what they're doing. And it was amazing how well it worked.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What exactly happened? Did—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, the first thing that happened—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —Edward go there and—

HESTER DIAMOND: The thing that was outrageous was there were not even security copies of these documents. If terrorists had bombed the right rooms in the Archivio di Stato, there would have been no Medici Archive. It would have been just evaporated, which would be—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I hope they have since made copies.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, we finally shamed them—Bob shamed them into using the most old-fashioned technology possible. They made microfilms. I mean, this was already 20-year-old technology, and they could by that time have made an early version of digital copies, but they wouldn't dream of that. They preferred to go back to the earliest possible technology. So, that was certainly better than nothing, as far as we were concerned. And we had made plans—I don't quite know how closely they were followed. But originally, the plan was we would keep one copy in Florence in the Archivio de Stato. We would keep one copy in some safe place in Switzerland. And I forget where the third one was going to go—the Bank of England or someplace like that. We were really serious about protecting these documents. And, however it all played out, they did finally make microfilms of all these documents. So, at least there would be a copy of them somewhere.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did they pay for that?

HESTER DIAMOND: They—yes. We were willing to pay for it, but they understood that with money goes control. So, they paid for it, so they would be able to say—that's why I don't know where the three places are that it ended up. Because they got to choose those places.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I see. So, did that whole project get finished by 2001?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, no. I worked and worked—I was working on it about 60 hours a week, and I finally decided it was—I decided two things: that it was time to get my life back, and also that I realized I had put together a much stronger board that I had had earlier. And I thought I had assembled a good group to carry it forward. It didn't quite play out that way, but what was interesting to me was Bob continued—I believe he is still on their board. The person I had sort of paired with him as being the ideal good cop against his bad cop got cancer and died. And they hadn't been getting along anyway, so I don't think that was going to work, no matter what I thought. And then, astonishingly enough, I can't—I still don't understand this, but there was a kind of board takeover.

Somebody who really wanted to be the chairman of the board sort of pushed Bob aside and pushed the other woman out—it was amazing to me. And I was keeping my distance, because various people on the board from

time to time would ask me, "Won't you come back? You know, it ran much more smoothly when you were the chairman." And I just said, "Absolutely not. I did it, and I took it as far as I could go with it, and now you guys have to carry it forward." And I left them alone, and sure enough I was right in my calculation. They completed it. I had thought it was going to be a 20-year job. And they finished it in something like 17 years.

And they ended up with a very smart young couple running it. One is the director, and he understands very well how to supervise and be the face of the Medici Archive Project. And his wife is quite a brilliant art historian, and she has started a publications project. Books based on material in the archive, which, you know, they can go on publishing books for the next 20 years. There's so much material in there. Ed Goldberg, as long as I was there, I protected him. The board always hated him because he was very rude to them. But I always felt that it was his idea, and we should not take it away from him. However, once I was gone, it was not long after that he was gone, since he didn't have a protector left. And so, then he published his first book about some material that we had found in the archive, and went on from there. One of the things that was fascinating to me, to all of us when we started, was we started finding a whole lot of Jewish material, which we had not expected. And so, I said to Ed at that time, "We could have a whole separate Jewish initiative, because there will be money for that, and it's fascinating stuff. Nobody knows it's there."

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And, for instance, one of the things that we found early was a census of all the Jews in Tuscany in the mid-16th century. Who knew there was such a thing?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And nobody—scholars didn't know that existed?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No. Well, that's—the thing is when you have an archive like this with no index, people publish sort of random things. They're looking for one thing, and they find something else and it looks interesting, so they publish it. But there's no systematic search of the archives for anything. And so, there was no search for this material. The next—actually the thing that—first we found that census, and then the thing that absolutely made it solid in my mind that we should do a Jewish initiative was a fascinating letter we found from a grand duke, Cosimo's ambassador to Flanders, to Cosimo himself. Cosimo had asked him to look out for a particular Spanish family that had been put out at the time of the expulsion. And many of them were living in Flemish territory, keeping their heads down, not having much publicity for their collections or their documents or anything, or their banks. And Cosimo wanted them to invite the Mendez family to move to Florence and set up a bank. Now, that was—that was big news. Who dreamed of such a thing? And as it shaped up later, as more and more documents were revealed, what was happening was the pope was very eager to get all of the Jews moved into ghettos in the different cities where they lived. He wanted all of them out of Spain, where they were a really powerful part of the population. And he ultimately put—and, of course, the pope had much more power than the grand duke of Florence. He had bigger armies and more money and, you know, in every way he had more power. And finally, he pushed Cosimo into building a ghetto, which of course—because this was the Medici, and they were businesspeople above all—turned it into a real estate operation. It was the—if you are in the Piazza della Repubblica facing [Caffè] Gilli and, you know, all the various chic cafes, if you go back from there a couple of blocks, then you would encapsulate the entire ghetto. And they built small houses with small apartments, and that's where the Jews were required to live. And they had to buy their apartment. So, it was a very worthwhile business undertaking for the Medici. They made a lot of money out of it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: During the years, I guess about six years, that you were involved in Medici Archive Project, did it have an impact on your collecting in that field? In the Renaissance? Or later?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not really, you know, I was interested in Renaissance painting anyway. And I—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it was a very separate kind of—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, very separate.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: I must say there was one connection. When I was buying the Pontormo, I asked Robert Carlucci to dig around in the archive and see if there was anything that he could find that related to that painting, and he certainly did. He found a whole write-up of it for the grand duke.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: It was quite amazing. He found wonderful documents for it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Wow. And so, the organization continues still?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Just, like, publishing.

HESTER DIAMOND: And they're no longer indexing, because that's been done. But providing lots of interesting books and other kinds of activities. Symposia and meetings.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Wow.

HESTER DIAMOND: They're doing a very worthwhile job of it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's great. Well, you were there at the beginning.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You mentioned briefly that you owned the modern and the Renaissance at the same time, until the point where you were selling your last six paintings, which I think was around 2004.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, that's—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you decided to sell them at Sotheby's, and you spoke briefly about that fact that they would be a collection of Hester Diamond. But there was a reason why you sold them together, that was a—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, that was a—this was not even a decision of mine. This was a decision taken jointly with Sotheby's. And you know, putting a name, a collector's name on a sale is often of value. Not always, but often.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did you—had you shopped around to different auction houses and spoken to different dealers about these—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, of course. Anybody did that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you—what made you decide on Sotheby's?

HESTER DIAMOND: More money.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: They had higher estimates, or they offered you a better deal?

HESTER DIAMOND: Higher estimates and a higher guarantee.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. And it turned out well?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it turned out better for me than for them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How is that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it—they didn't—the sale prices didn't, by any means, reach the estimates. And since I had a guarantee—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Ah, I see.

HESTER DIAMOND: I got the guarantee.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Were you pleased where they—or did you—you wouldn't know who bought them, I guess?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. I found out several years later. I went with my—on a family vacation, we went to the southwest ending up in Las Vegas. And we're checking into the Wynn Hotel, and my oldest son came up behind me. I was checking in the whole family, and my eldest son came up to me and said, "Ma, stop, look." I said, "David." It was the end of a long tiring day. We had slept in Sedona and then driven up to the Grand Canyon. Spent the day walking around the Grand Canyon and then flew to Las Vegas.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, that's a long day.

HESTER DIAMOND: It was a long day, and with some young children. And so, we were tired. And I was just trying to get us checked in. And I was—I didn't know why David was bothering me. And finally, he said, "Ma, stop." "Yes?" Because he, you know, we usually were very companionable. And he said, "Look over there." And there was my Mondrian. Steve Wynn had bought it. I didn't know it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, he may not even have bought it from that sale, if it were a while later.

HESTER DIAMOND: He may have bought it after the sale. I don't know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Or bought it from someone else who had bought it.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Has that happened another time?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not quite as strikingly. I mean, that was really extraordinary to be checking into a hotel and see one of my pictures.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. I notice when I'm sitting here, I see the Bill Viola, this other work—I don't remember the artist's name. But they're works by contemporary artists.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And—

HESTER DIAMOND: I have now four works by 21st-century artists. So, that's another one.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Who's the artist who did that?

HESTER DIAMOND: That's Dustin Yellin.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: And the name of this—of the artist who made the tree is Xu Chen. X-U, C-H-E-N.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that's, of course, Bill Viola.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's Bill Viola. And at the entrance to the living room there's a sculpture by Barry X Ball.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. So, tell me about this addition of contemporary artists to your home.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I never had a doctrinaire idea of what my collection should be. As usual, I saw something, fell in love with it, and bought it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You were talking about the direct relationship between Bill Viola's work, at least this particular one, and the Renaissance paintings.

HESTER DIAMOND: And the Renaissance. It's a very deep connection.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What about the other works? Do you feel they have the same connection? Or was that not necessary?

HESTER DIAMOND: The Xu Chen is not. It's just, you know, this whole concept of a tree for all seasons was very appealing to me. And the Dustin Yellin, I think it's beautiful. It's clever, and it's an invention of a new technique. You know, it's a whole new way to make collage meaningful, that—he does it on many layers of glass. And he has lots of assistants. And they cut out these tiny little images, which he then makes into a three-dimensional collage.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Have you—are you continuing to look at contemporary works?

HESTER DIAMOND: I guess I always will.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do—how do they fit into your concept of continually, whenever you make a purchase, rating it? That it improves the collection and if you sell something—

HESTER DIAMOND: It's always the same.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Or are they very similar?

HESTER DIAMOND: It's always the same. No. Do I love it is always the first question.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But if you purchase something that's contemporary, it doesn't necessarily mean that you sell something that's Renaissance?

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You just find space for it, that's all.

HESTER DIAMOND: Find the space for it and find the money for it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When—we haven't talked yet about donations of artworks, but I noticed that in 2013, I think, you donated a Veronese painting, *Venus Disarming Cupid*—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to the Worcester Art Museum.

HESTER DIAMOND: Right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How did that come about, and was that donation part of what you envision as a series of donations to other institutions?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not necessarily. First of all, that was a painting I bought very early in my collecting of Old Master paintings, and I was thrilled to get it at that time. But at the time that I sold it, I think I had had it maybe for 10 years or something like that. And I was—and I had shifted direction considerably. And I was bored with it, frankly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell me about this shift in directions. How would you define that? You shifted—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I was turning more toward mannerism, toward tougher kind of expression, and paintings with more movement in them. And that was just—it was a little too sweet for me at that point. And, I mean, there were a number of different museums I considered giving it to, but because my step-daughter had recently joined their board, I wanted to do it in her honor.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] That's very nice. And so, there aren't necessarily other works that you're thinking of donating to different institutions?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, there—actually there are two—one painting that is on the wall right outside the dining room, and one sculpture that I just paid for yesterday, which I own half-shares with the Met, which means we have—each have it for six months of the year. And in my will, it will be left to them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that a unique arrangement for you? Or are there other works that you partially own with—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, just those two, I think.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: How did that come about? This co-ownership?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, the [Bernaert] van Orley came about because it was being sold at auction in London, and I wanted the approval of Maryan Ainsworth. She is probably the authority I trust the most on van Orley. And I wanted to know that she thought it was all or—whole or principally autograph.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Could you spell his name? van Orley?

HESTER DIAMOND: V-A-N, O-R—well, you should have his first name, too.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I'll get that.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. O-R-L-E-Y.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: And she said, "Well, actually, we were going to go after that." That was a whole different story, because there's no way I can go head-to-head against the Met at auction. So, I thought about it a little, and I said to her, "Well, suppose you let me buy it, and I will make it a promised gift." And that's what we did.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That sounds like an ideal situation. They get the work and you get to enjoy it.

HESTER DIAMOND: That's right.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And they get you to pay for it, too.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But you're not in competition with them.

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you get a sense anytime during your collecting that competition—you talked about the fact that when you first settled on the Renaissance—that it was more accessible financially than continuing Modernism.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, but there was less supply.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: But, well, so did you—have you had a sense over the years that competition is increased, decreased? How has that affected your collecting?

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't think it's increased or decreased. I think both things have happened simultaneously. There's been less supply and fewer collectors going after the same things. One of the strange experiences of life for all collectors of Old Masters is going to the TEFAF sales in Maastricht. Because I may be looking at a work that—for which there are only 10 collectors in the world, but all 10 of them are in that building.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: So, I know I better hustle and make up my mind.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that different, or has it been that way the whole time you've been collecting?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it's never been as focused as during the ascendance of these big art fairs. That has changed things a lot.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] I was going to ask you about that. Is there anything else that—any other way that art fairs have changed your collecting?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, but I think that's a very significant way.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What about the idea that you—I mean, I know you travel quite a bit. So, perhaps having all these galleries from different parts of the world in one place wasn't as important to you because you could've visited them anyway? Or has that aspect of it—

HESTER DIAMOND: I could have, I could have, yes. But the thing about Maastricht is everybody wants to bring their best game.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And they're highly vetted.

HESTER DIAMOND: So, you know you're going—they're highly vetted. But, you know, besides that, this is where—the fair they save their best things for.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And, yeah. So, have you purchased quite a few things from Maastricht? Or just—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, yes, quite a few.

[They laugh.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, that's been an important—

HESTER DIAMOND: I tend to buy one a year. But, you know, you do that for enough years you have quite a few.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Have your—you talked about a greater interest in Mannerism and moving away from what you called sweetness. How would you describe—are there any other ways of describing how your tastes have changed? Or maybe taste isn't the right word, but your interests have evolved over the years?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, yes. I became much more focused on sculpture.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, yes. Thank you. I was going to bring that up. When did that happen, and how? What was the first—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it happened gradually. You know, I always knew I wanted to—I had beautiful modern sculpture when I collected Modernist art. And I always knew I wanted to extend that to my Renaissance

collection, but I didn't know quite how to start. And, of course, the first thing I bought was interesting but not important.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: The first sculpture you bought?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. First Renaissance sculpture. And after that, it got steadily more important. And I—my tastes were refined. Well, when you walk around, you'll see what the sculptures look like.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It seems an even more challenging field. There are fewer pieces. The—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, my God, it's impossible. One of the things I had to face up to when I made up my mind that I wanted to buy a lot more sculpture, because I was enjoying it so much, I had to face the fact that I have to give up the idea—stop worrying about attribution. Stop worrying about authenticity. And just focus on quality.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: And I think that's the only way you can do it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, attribution is a much more troubling area with sculpture.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, it's out of the question.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And condition, you really don't know what—

HESTER DIAMOND: Any attribution you come up with can be knocked down.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And was it even also more difficult to determine the condition—the original—what you were seeing, if it was original or not?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not really, I think that's more difficult with paintings. For one thing, because paintings conservation has been going on for so much longer, and it's done with so much more refinement.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did moving into sculpture mean moving away from painting? Or were you doing both simultaneously?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I couldn't afford to do both simultaneously to the same intensity.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was it—was part of that shift exciting, because there's a whole other area to learn about, and—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it was an added challenge.

HESTER DIAMOND: It's a challenge. It's all these new names to learn, right?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Were there other mentors that—you talked about the two gentlemen who helped you when you were first starting out—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, they weren't so involved in this. But—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was there someone else?

HESTER DIAMOND: There are always dealers you can talk to, and the ones that you can respect, you can learn a lot from.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Were there, or are there collectors who you've—you would consider mentors or—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, colleagues.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Colleagues.

HESTER DIAMOND: One in particular. Jon Landau.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And is he in—not in New York, is he?

HESTER DIAMOND: In Purchase, NY.



JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh, not far.

HESTER DIAMOND: Not far.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. How did you meet him?

HESTER DIAMOND: He was on the Medici board.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And he also was a collector in the field of Renaissance sculpture?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, at that time, he was not. He was collecting Renaissance painting. And he moved on to Renaissance sculpture partly because he saw me do it, and I was so sorry that I inspired him. But not really. We're never really in competition. We rarely see a piece that both of us love and really want to have.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Usually, it's one of us or the other.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When—during the years you were married to Ralph, you spoke of the fact that he was an economist. So, he didn't really have any—I mean, obviously, Harold—

HESTER DIAMOND: No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —was very involved. Ralph was not.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you were doing it on your own. And your sons were not involved either.

HESTER DIAMOND: No. They always had an opinion, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Or your daughters-in-law?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no, they didn't even try to speak up.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, so, you really had all the decision making and all the—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —the responsibility, as it were.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, which I never minded.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you ever feel that any of your purchases were mistakes in some way?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, of course.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What did you do with those mistakes?

HESTER DIAMOND: Sell them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What kind of mistakes did they tend to be?

HESTER DIAMOND: Just, it's not as interesting as I really thought. The quality isn't quite there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] The love was fleeting?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, as love so often is.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. [Laughs.] What would you say have been your most treasured works of art?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, some that I own now. The Dossos, for instance. The Bernini, certainly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: You know, I love almost everything I own. I actually am very pedantic about this. I do a list once a year in order of quality. And anything that's at the bottom of the list is sort of halfway out the door.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you do that each year, does it involve some study and research, and—

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No, no, no, no.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No, this is—

HESTER DIAMOND: Love.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —love, intuition.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And it's sort of then halfway out the door?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, each year it's like going through your closet. [Laughs.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, exactly.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do those—but then, just like in other less important things, there might be emotional connections even though you know intellectually it's not as important a piece.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, if I'm still emotionally connected, it's not going out the door.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, it's not a factual kind of judgment, it's-

HESTER DIAMOND: No, no, no, not at all.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: If you were thinking about collecting methods—it sounds like you had a lot of opportunities to learn from other people, but in a way, you were also self-taught, in a sense, through all of your knowledge built up as a dealer and with Harold.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: If you were offering—and I don't know if you've had the opportunity—to sort of be the mentor to younger collectors?

HESTER DIAMOND: It's unlikely that I would seize that. I think it's mostly sort of boring if you have to explain to people why this is good and why that's good, especially since my own judgments are usually intuitive.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Would you say that you have an eye?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: There's no point in even starting this—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: —whole game unless you have an eye.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —something that isn't trained? A trained eye or something that's just your—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, it's your birthright.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, there's this—

HESTER DIAMOND: How many of the people you've interviewed have said the same thing?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah, it's definitely true. Yeah. We talked about the internet, and you were saying how that's changed a great deal in terms of knowing the market.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, there's just so much more information out there.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Have you also used it in terms of—I mean, not just prices, buying and selling, but learning where things are, and—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —what led up to something in place in a way of it [. . . -JOR]—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, I think everybody does that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: But it's just very different having so much information available.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Did—I noticed that when you sold the Brancusi to the Shirleys in Seattle—

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that they promptly donated it—or maybe not so promptly, but quickly—donated it to the Seattle Art Museum.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Did you—

HESTER DIAMOND: And they always bought it with the intention of giving it to them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, I was going to say, did you know that they were going to do that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And did that make you more inclined to sell it to them?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. It was strictly a matter of money.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Strictly business. [Laughs.] Do you, at this point in time, get together with other people who are collectors, and who—

HESTER DIAMOND: I have a few friends who are collectors and a few friends who are dealers, but people don't become my friends just because they're a collector or a dealer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No, no. But I'm thinking that there are these issues when you're a collector of—at the level you're at, and have been, and there are others also—thinking of the Shirleys or others. It must be interesting to discuss issues that you deal with, that you struggle with, perhaps. That you—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, Jon Landau is my great pal, if I want to talk about that.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Think about response—

HESTER DIAMOND: And there are dealers I talk to, but only about—each specific sculpture or painting has a particular dealer whom I would consult about it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I was going to ask you about relationships with dealers. If there have been any important ones that you want to mention.

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, absolutely. There are now. Certainly, Danny Katz has been very influential in my life. Sascha Mehringer.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

HESTER DIAMOND: Georg Laue.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Sorry, what was the name?

HESTER DIAMOND: Georg Laue. L-A-U-E.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And you said Sascha what?

HESTER DIAMOND: Mehringer. M-E-H-R-I-N-G-E-R. Tony Blumka. I don't think of anybody else at the moment.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] In the early years—

HESTER DIAMOND: At this time, in my life.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. In the time when you were buying the Modernists, was there one particular person, or a few that—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, sure. In the earliest days, Rose Fried, who was half out of her mind, was a wonderful source of information and knowledge and—pointing out a way that you can think about art.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Do—have—has that field for you, in terms of your relationships, changed over the years? I mean, dealers and galleries, the whole gallery world—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, sure.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —has changed, but in essence, your relationships, maybe, you still have the same kinds of possibilities?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I'm much more self-confident and know a lot more than I did in the earliest days, right?

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] So, when you have discussions, it's really—you're a peer?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: If not a mentor.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, yes. No, a peer.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. What about relationships with curators? I know you—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, gosh, I'm friendly with so many—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —have been your own advisor.

HESTER DIAMOND: —curators.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: But have there been curators at different institutions—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —that have been important?

HESTER DIAMOND: There are many curators at the Met who have been important to me. Maryan Ainsworth, whom I mentioned before. Keith Christiansen. Andrea Bayer. Luke Syson.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Tell me—Luke? Sorry.

HESTER DIAMOND: He is the one with the shortest tenure, I guess, at the Met, of the ones I mentioned. He's now the head of ESDA, European Sculpture and Decorative Arts.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Oh. Tell me his last name again?

HESTER DIAMOND: Syson. S-Y-S-O-N.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So, was he—he's somebody you—

HESTER DIAMOND: And actually—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —met in terms of sculpture.

HESTER DIAMOND: —that's just people at the Met. One of the people who has been most influential in my life is Nicholas Penny.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: How did you meet him?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, when I met him he was the curator of sculpture at the National Gallery in Washington.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And did you particularly seek him out for—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I'm—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —to discuss works? Or was he—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, I went to meet him.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —interested in speaking to you in terms of—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, it was both.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —being a potential donor?

HESTER DIAMOND: It's both. No, no, it's not even that. It was natural.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: I wouldn't materialize it as anything serious. But we were interested in meeting each other, let's say. I was certainly interested in meeting him because he had a reputation for brilliance, which is justified.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Was there a particular work, or body of work, or artist you wanted to discuss with him?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No. It was just at a time that he had rearranged the entire collection of Renaissance bronzes at the National Gallery in Washington.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Now, I read that bronzes were something that you hadn't been collecting.

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Still don't. So, mainly you're collecting—

HESTER DIAMOND: Maybe some time in my life, I will.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —stone, marble, and wood?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes. And terra-cotta.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: A lot of terra-cotta.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] What is it about bronze? It's obviously colder. It doesn't have that kind of touch—

HESTER DIAMOND: I—it's—yeah. No, it's not—it's not as personal.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's not immediate.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's a cast.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. And the thing about terra-cotta sculpture is often you have a real sense of the artist touching it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Thinking of—when you think of terra-cottas, there are so many other cultures, past and present, that have used terra-cotta.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, but—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you ever—

HESTER DIAMOND: —the notion of buying some kind of pots with zigzag geometric designs, that's never going to appeal to me.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I was thinking of pre-Columbian, or other cultures that—

HESTER DIAMOND: I always look at those, but I don't—and I actually have owned some, but not with—you know, not with excitement.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: When you—when you moved from the Modernist work, which were mostly abstract—

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to—

HESTER DIAMOND: Not all.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Not all, yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: I mean, think about Picasso. I have a lot of Picasso.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right. Right. But not narrative, in the sense that the Renaissance paintings were.

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Was that element of narrative, of history painting, in a sense—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, yeah, I love it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —an important element?

HESTER DIAMOND: I love it very much.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And does it—do you usually approach the painting knowing the history, or did you look at the painting and then study the history that it's depicting?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, one or the other. You know, I very often understand what the story is that's being told anyway, but if not, I can find out.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well, if it's Biblical, then it's—yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.] So, that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: And that's what they mostly are.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Right. So, you were talking about curators, and you mentioned Nicholas Penny. Is there anyone else you would want to mention who's been—

HESTER DIAMOND: I'm sure there are people I should be mentioning.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In the museum world.

HESTER DIAMOND: I'm just not remembering anybody else.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's okay.

HESTER DIAMOND: Those were all very good friends.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. Would you say that curators' opinions have been useful to you? Accepting or rejecting, but the—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, certainly I am happy if I'm buying Italian pictures of a certain—depending on the date, I want to hear from Keith and from Andrea. And if I—I definitely want to know what Maryan thinks about any Flemish painting I'm considering.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: This is Maryan?

HESTER DIAMOND: Ainsworth.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. Yeah. What do you—I guess I—I guess the answer, but do you think that collectors have a responsibility—collectors of earlier work, not contemporary—to have a particular responsibility to anyone but themselves? I mean, to the field—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah. I feel—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —to the public?

HESTER DIAMOND: —very much it's a responsibility to let people who are serious, not just casual people who have some curiosity about what's in your house. They don't have to come. But people who are serious about collecting, or about this particular period, or a particular artist whom I own, I think there is a real obligation to let

them see the work.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] And in those important times to lend, as you mentioned.

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I—as I said yesterday, I lend under very specific circumstances, not just in general.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: Not just because I'm asked.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you—I think we talked about this briefly, but do you have a sense of wanting to avoid publicity, avoid—

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I don't care.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: No? Well, obviously—

HESTER DIAMOND: I mean, I don't see publicity.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: But I don't need—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: It's a privacy—

HESTER DIAMOND: —it either.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Privacy is something that isn't strictly enforced.

HESTER DIAMOND: I'm not so famous, you know.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well—[laughs]—you've generously allowed some magazines to—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, and it's always because the writer is a friend.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: I suppose that other than the sale at Sotheby's, you haven't had an opportunity, or maybe a wish, to exhibit parts of your collection as "The Collection of"—

HESTER DIAMOND: Right. Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that something you would avoid, if offered?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, as an exhibition?

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yes.

HESTER DIAMOND: I wouldn't—I don't think I'd be very interested in that. I'm not sure. It would depend—it would depend what the purpose was for it.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. It's often cultivating a donation, so.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, well.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In fact, the code of ethics, that's supposed to be the goal of any time a museum shows somebody's private collection [it should be a promised gift -JOR].

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, I was thinking of a show at the Williams Art Museum in Williamstown. Clark— sorry, the Clark Art Institute.

HESTER DIAMOND: Uh-huh. [Affirmative.]

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: That's an approach they've taken. Do you think that collectors of major, important works have some kind of obligation or responsibility to really, seriously consider selling it—if not donating, selling it to a public institution, so it's available to the public—

HESTER DIAMOND: Absolutely not.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —rather than keeping it in the family, or whatever? No? Do you have a sense that museums depend too much on donations, rather than having an acquisition fund and being able to purchase things—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I think they're going—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —curators think are important?

HESTER DIAMOND: —I think they're going to be doing more and more so. Not because they want to, but because prices are going up so.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So, they—so you need to depend more on collectors?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Which might skew the collection in a certain direction.

HESTER DIAMOND: I don't know. We'll see what happens.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What would you say—if you were speaking to somebody about being a collector, some aspiring collector, what would you say—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I'm forever doing this.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What would you say is the most rewarding part of this activity?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, you know, creating a collection is certainly a sort of secondhand, not first-level form of creativity. But it is a form of creativity, up to a certain point.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Well. And not only forming the collection, but thinking about its display.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: I wanted to ask you about that. You put—you put a huge effort into—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —creating the installation.

HESTER DIAMOND: It's my favorite game.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And I've read that you move it around sometimes.

HESTER DIAMOND: A lot.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Tell me about that. I mean, not everyone does that.

HESTER DIAMOND: No. People who are passionate about their collections do.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What prompts you to make changes?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, if I buy a new work, I'm not capable of just sticking it on the wall. I always end up moving a bunch of things in order to have the optimum hang.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Do you do that all in your mind? Or do you have a scale model of—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, no, no, no, no.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —the apartment?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I do it in my head. And I sort of walk around the apartment, and oh, I could put this there, and that there. I make little lists for myself as I'm walking.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Do you have a—right now, a long-term kind of a plan? Okay, within the next year, I know I move this there, and this there.

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So it sounds like it's prompted by new acquisitions.



HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, that's the—that's the most frequent reason for changing things around.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: What are other reasons?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, if I don't buy anything for a very long time, I can get bored with the way things look. And then, shuffle things around.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, would you say—how often would you say you make significant changes?

HESTER DIAMOND: At least once a year.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Oh. That's frequent.

HESTER DIAMOND: Sometimes, twice a year. Oh, yeah. And when people come here—and you know, I mean, dealers or curators come here, they're always looking around taking inventory.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And you make it challenging for them—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —moving things around. Do you—what do you enjoy seeing most often now in museums and galleries when you go?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I like seeing things that are—that duplicate my interests. I'm very eager to see this exhibition at Palazzo Strozzi in Florence of Florentine art from Michelangelo through Giambologna. And I'm sure that will be very enjoyable.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: You plan on going there soon?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Do you know the curator of that?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, I don't know—you know, they did this musical chairs of all the directors—

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: In Italy?

HESTER DIAMOND: —in Italy. And I don't know who's running the Palazzo Strozzi now.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that something you think about—

HESTER DIAMOND: I'll find out.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —meeting the person?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah. I guarantee I'll meet them.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because you'll reach out, or they will—

HESTER DIAMOND: I will reach out, because I won't want to stand in line.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Well—[laughs]—and your collection would have been known to that curator.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Because it's a small world?

HESTER DIAMOND: It's a very small world.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Are you still collecting sculpture now? Renaissance—

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, yeah. Sure.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Where do you find—

HESTER DIAMOND: But I'm worried because, you know, for some time now, I've been priced out of the market on paintings of the quality I want. And I think it's—the market is poised for that to happen in the world of sculpture.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Would you think, okay, I'll sell my other paintings now that it's gone up in value so I can buy the sculpture that is maybe—hasn't quite gone up yet?

HESTER DIAMOND: Maybe. It's not that cut-and-dried.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So, you would—since you want to keep collecting, you would just keep looking for something that you thought was a real value?

HESTER DIAMOND: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: And you're looking at galleries, you're looking at auction catalogues—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, everything.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: —internet, private dealers.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Have you slowed down at all, or are you continuing to get the same—

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I think I've slowed down, but other people seem to think I haven't.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What's been your most recent acquisition?

HESTER DIAMOND: Oh, I bought my first Spanish sculpture, and I'm just in love with it.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What is that?

HESTER DIAMOND: It's in the living room. It's a *Mater Dolorosa*. And it's just beautiful. And I'm—certainly not going to be my last Spanish sculpture.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] Is that the first?

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: What took so long then?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, you know, the Spanish sculpture market hasn't been really developed until a year or two ago.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Why is that?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, because it—nobody was exporting them. It was difficult to export them, and the dealers who were working with them were sort of turned inward. It was a very provincial—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: So, you identified, in a way, an emerging market.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't sound as if it should be, but it is true.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Is that—you said that's not the last thing, you hoped to continue that.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yeah, no—

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Where did you find that piece?

HESTER DIAMOND: From—through a young Spanish woman who I know.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Did it have to come from Spain, or was it here?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, she found it in Spain.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Oh.

HESTER DIAMOND: And I actually saw it elsewhere.

JUDITH OLCHE RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] At this point, then—you probably mentioned this, but what would you say are your greatest challenges as a collector?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, the ever-rising prices.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And so, your answer to that—

HESTER DIAMOND: It's a problem.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —is to look for where the values can be had, which is perhaps this market—

HESTER DIAMOND: Maybe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —that's—

HESTER DIAMOND: Maybe.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —yeah. And not, as I proposed, selling something, too?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, I do that, too.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Are you—are you—

HESTER DIAMOND: You need to be flexible when you're collecting.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Are there other areas that you're investigating now, besides the Spanish?

HESTER DIAMOND: No. No.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is that pretty much—well, you've talked about Flemish—

HESTER DIAMOND: I'm sort of locked in place at the moment.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —and French and Italian.

HESTER DIAMOND: But that doesn't mean I will be forever.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. And Spanish. What about Eastern European? Is that an area that you—

HESTER DIAMOND: You know, every once in a while, I see a Bohemian thing that—a sculpture, especially, that's beautiful.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah.

HESTER DIAMOND: But it's rare. It's rare for them to come on the market.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Mm-hmm. [Affirmative.] We talked about your marrying Ralph, and I understand he passed away—

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: —a few years ago. And you've since then married another time.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Tell us about who you married.

HESTER DIAMOND: David. Dr. David Wilson. He's a psychotherapist.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And is he involved with your collecting at all?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, he's very, very interested. Much more than Ralph was.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: And how does this interest manifest itself?

HESTER DIAMOND: Well, he's always expressing his opinions, either pro or con.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Is he particularly interested in sculpture, or more in the painting?

HESTER DIAMOND: I think in both.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Has his interest—his perceptions, since he's a psychotherapist—have his perceptions brought new insight for you into the works? Or into the making of the work?

HESTER DIAMOND: No, because psychological insights aren't what interest me.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: So, you're bringing him into the work.

HESTER DIAMOND: Yes, I am, very actively. And we have a lot of joy in looking at things together.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Yeah. Yeah. Sounds like it. Are there any other thoughts you would like to end with?

HESTER DIAMOND: Not that I think of.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Okay, well. It's been wonderful.

HESTER DIAMOND: Okay. Yes.

JUDITH OLCH RICHARDS: Thank you.

HESTER DIAMOND: You were a very good interviewer.

[END OF INTERVIEW.]