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Oral history interview with Nina Yankowitz,
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Transcript

Preface

The following oral history transcript is the result of a recorded interview with Nina Yankowitz on May 1 and 7, 2018. The interview took place at Yankowitz's studio in New York, NY, and was conducted by Christopher Lyon for the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Nina Yankowitz and Christopher Lyon have reviewed the transcript. Selected emendations appear below in brackets. This transcript has been thoroughly edited. Quotes and excerpts must be from the transcript, not from the audio recording. The reader should bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of spoken, rather than written prose.

Interview

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this is Christopher Lyon. I'm interviewing Nina Yankowitz at her home and studio in Manhattan on May 1, 2018. Thank you for submitting to this ordeal. No, not really—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Not an ordeal.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and we'll have fun. So, as I've mentioned, I thought it might be fun to just start with a general kind of comment that you've made, and ask you to reflect on it a little bit. And this is from Joan Braderman's documentary, *The Heretics*, about *Heresies* magazine and the women surrounding that, and in it you say, "It became very clear to me that everything in my life, in terms of my art, I was going to have to fight for."

NINA YANKOWITZ: And so it was. [They laugh.] And so it is. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now, I—now and just to be intentionally provocative, I'm going to say you, on the surface, appeared to have a comfortable upbringing, and a precociously early success in the New York gallery world, and so I'm wondering why, in retrospect, it seemed to you that you had had a rough—had had to fight.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Because no matter what strides women were making as I entered into my art practice, you were lucky to be considered, but it was very rare, and you never equaled the exposure that the men in the art world were experiencing. You never had the—nothing commensurate was going on with art sales, in terms of prices being paid for male art or female art. [00:02:08] Exposure was limited and choppy, to say the least. So it's not—I've always said, and this is a stream that's run through my whole art practice, and now I have a sense of humor about it, but, truly, it was, it was bad enough being a young woman artist in the art world, but, whoever realized getting older—an older woman artist is really the kiss of death. [Laughs.] It's very hard. But, I've kind of given up certain kinds of expectations and I just love doing what I do, and that's what's carried me through.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good enough. So we want to fill in some biographical things here, and I believe you were born in 1946.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I was. I was born in 1946—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's your birthday? I don't think I know that.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well I don't know that I want to put all that in—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: —for hackability. [Laughs.] I'll tell you privately, just—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's not something I would choose to publish, but no, I mean, I was born in 1946, so that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Grow up, where did I grow up? Well I never grew up—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were born in—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —really. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Newark, though, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, but I never grew up.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Never grew up.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. I mean, you know, I just can't help but respond that way because it really is one of the guiding feelings in my life, that I'll, if I—if I live till 100, which is not going to happen, [laughs] but I'll always feel inside like I'm 16. I still haven't gotten—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sixteen, you say?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, 16 to 21, it vacillates from time to time. [Laughs.] [00:04:12]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have a crackpot theory that everyone in their lives is either approaching or receding from their ideal age. What would—if you had to pick your ideal age, what would it be?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I don't think I could respond to that, because, as I said, I still, inside, I still feel like I'm—everything is new and exciting, and I'm discovering, and I feel really—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Sounds like you could—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —young, until I pass a mirror. Then, mirror, mirror on the wall—whoops! [Laughs.] Who—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is internal; it wasn't—

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Laughs] right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —internal.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right! So—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, sounds like you have a youthful self, that ideal self.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well this is an interesting, actually, this is an interesting thing that has happened, because of the Internet: it actually has been a wonderful thing, because when you apply for proposals, or whatever, people are not seeing you visually; they're just really looking at the work. And sometimes I've received these projects and these, you know, whatever—new art, science, media investigations that I have been doing—and I applied for funding and received it. And then when I walk into these foreign countries which is where we would meet with different collaborators, the shock that I was—I'd walk in the room; I'd say, "Don't say it. Don't; I know you thought I was 30 years old," [they laugh] and everybody laughs. But it's true, but it is—because they were looking for the—they're not judging you by your cover, so to speak. It's like delving into the book. This is more possible in the world of the Internet. But that's running forward, but, that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, that's interesting. It's interesting. So, do you, do you have any recollections of Newark and where you were living then, or—[00:06:17]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh yeah, yeah. I—we lived in a two-family house when I was born, near Bergen Street, then later we moved to Hansbury Avenue which was nearer the park, one block from the park. And then when I was in junior high school, about to enter junior high school, my family moved. We moved to South Orange, New Jersey.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. And, your mother was Ruth, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, my mother was Ruth. She was—she always loved theater, and she was very much—always wanted to be an actress and actually, she was on the road to that. She went to summer camp with Clifford Odets, and Zero Mostel, and you know, it was like a—no, I'm sorry. Luther Adler, that's what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Luther Adler.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I meant. That's who I meant, and my father said, "If you continue this, I won't marry you." Those were the days, you know, yeah. [Laughs.] Those were the days. So, she ultimately did withdraw from it, but I think was quite upset and angry about it. Inside, it bothered her a lot, but then she reformatted herself. She like, rebooted and became very involved with the United Nations and she became the president to the auxiliary

United Nations in New Jersey, and she had a lot of correspondence with Eleanor Roosevelt, and—and I remember her sitting on the dais with Dag Hammarskjöld giving a—[00:08:17]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —lecture, and you know, she—she—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And she was—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —was a bright woman.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this, and she was involved in Democratic politics?

NINA YANKOWITZ: She was very much involved with Democratic politics. My father, on the other hand, was very Republican, and he was involved in politics with—one of his close friends was Congressman Kean. And he became a tax judge and he was very involved with the Republican Party.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You showed me a picture of him with Brendan Byrne, who later became a much admired governor of New Jersey.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. Right, that's right, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. And, and so you—and your father's Irving—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Yankowitz? Right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And he was a lawyer and a judge, and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. Later in life, a tax judge, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Later in life—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —a judge, uh-huh, which sounds like a political kind of appointment. [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, well, right. [They laugh.] I wonder how he would've felt if he were alive today in this world; if it was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —the politics of today.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so you have a sister, Susan.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And is—she's a bit older than you, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Susan is—sorry, Sooz, I'm going to have to say it; it's for posterity. [Laughs.] She's five and a half years older than I am.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Five and a half years, uh-huh.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And, we've been very close friends, and real comrades.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And it's just the two of you, siblings?

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, and there's a brother. I have a brother who was a lawyer, he's now retired, he's two and a half years older than I am, right in the middle of us.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. So, yes, I mean, I know how close you are with—with Susan, and wanted to—
[00:10:05]

NINA YANKOWITZ: We, we had felt ourselves sometimes as almost behaving like twins, in our—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —work in certain ways. Actually, 1971, I think it was, Gloria Orenstein did a whole thing on we sisters in California, because we were, we were both in California at the time, and also both doing workshops for Judy Chicago.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, and so, I went there, and and my sister was there doing a writing project, and she, too, went and spoke at Judy Chicago's house, [laughs] at the time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Which was a—not *Womanhouse*, but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well there was *Womanhouse*. There were two different—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —but there—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —ones. One was what Mimi Schapiro started and the other, Judy did. Anyway, they were—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. And, at any rate, this panel discussion based on the sisters was very interesting because we both realized how much we in some ways, were, even though we're, we are five and a half [laughs] years apart, age wise, we're so similar in certain ways. While she was in another part of the country writing her first novel, *Silent Witness*, there I was painting *Sounds of Voices* and these scenarios that were dealing with using other senses.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We'll, we'll talk about that, I think, at length, because that's an important aspect of it. [00:12:00] And just following up on your mother, did either of you—I know you did some kind of art performance toward the end of the '70s, and did Susan ever perform? Or she was pretty much in the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, she was—no, she wasn't really a performer, but she worked with the Open Theater—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —Joe Chaikin early on, and she was writing these theatrical productions, but again, what was so interesting about Joe Chaikin's Open Theater was it was really an immersive experience, you know. I mean, if you could compare it—in some ways, I would see it more like using certain things that Bill Jones more currently uses. you're using—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Very physical.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —the entire physical and the entire audience becomes part of it, and yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, I only saw the Open Theater perform once, but it was a really transforming experience. And I, I really—asking you that in part because you know, as we start to talk, I think it's interesting to sort of make some building blocks, and you've referred to synesthesia, which we, I think we need to talk about at some length. But there's, very early on, there's this theatrical impulse that, you know, that comes out in various ways in your work right up to the present. And so, I'm curious, naturally, about the origins of that, and it's so interesting that your mother was a frustrated actor. [00:13:43]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, she was into drama, as my sister, it was a passion of hers. I guess I was more interested in being a drama queen! You know, [they laugh] and that's kind of the course that my life took, and actually, doing—collecting all my work for the archives was very interesting for me because I began to learn so much about this thread that really runs throughout my work; this kind of dramatic infusing of, of bringing people into scenarios, stories. Really early on, my earliest draped painting was sound infused within *Oh Say Can You See*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And, that was, that was a piece where the painting draped down the wall, and the notes of "Oh Say Can You See." I—when I was living in Woodstock, in—this is in 1967, '68, I asked [Ken] Werner—a.k.a. Phil Harmonic, was his name, who was a very tech-oriented guy and I asked him could he synthesize sounds of "Oh Say Can You See,"—as it drapes along the wall at the—at wherever it is, which is what we did. It ended up being shown in 1968 at Jill Kornblee's in New York, and it mimicked, the sounds mimicked the notes, as they draped down the wall. I have that tape; I could—[laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, far out.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. That was, that was the beginning of my sound stories.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you asked him, in essence, to distort the sound to follow the draping of the piece.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, and he used to mo—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and actually, as we're talking, there's a somewhat later draped piece on the—rather large—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —[laughs] on the wall nearby. [00:15:50]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. Well there were—yeah, there were a series of them. The earliest ones were politically based; one was *Sagging Spiro*, [laughs] which was included in, in the show, curated by [Robert Littman,] the *Hanging/ Leaning* show—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —*Hanging/ Leaning* show, typically, only one other women artist in the show, Eva Hesse [laughs] and I are the only women. But at any rate, that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no, well there's a couple of important things here. One is, very, again, very early on you did something that you've continued to do, which is collaborate, with technical people, and this, this fellow Ken, or Phil Harmonic is, I guess, an early example of that, and the other thing is that there is a political current that runs through the work. Are you—I don't think it would be correct to describe you as an overtly political artist, but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: There's always challenges in it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I wouldn't say—it's a hard thing to describe. I think all my work has some political elements to it. I think it always has, whether it's been challenging the status quo of painting, viewing painting that had to be on stretchers, [laughs] or, challenging the notion that that our government is not for the people. I'm always trying to make it by the people, and so I'm always, I'm always putting people's multiple perspectives into my work. [00:17:54]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I'm engaging that, that's in all of the interactive projects that I have done—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It makes sense.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —using the technology of the day. This time, it was the early '60s—I mean, I'm sorry, late '60s and early '70s. It was like a Moog synthesizer, [laughs] or it was, you know, audio. Audio in these that I—I used to create like, audio tape paintings where I would address different parts of the body with sounds of voices within an installation of paintings. So the paintings would be hung, like addressing your knees, and there would be these sounds of voices scripted, or addressing your rear end, or—[they laugh] addressing—and, as you laugh, my work, and this is where it's an interesting thing when you asked that direct question about being political; always there's an element of politics in it but there's always a sense of humor, even if it's a—there's a levity to the work. At least, I find, [laughs] and I don't know if the public always perceives it that way, but that's—I mean, I feel it as I'm making—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well that, that's interesting you should say that. I mean, it's something that, that isn't talked about much, you know, humor in art, levity, and how it functions, because it's not as if it's entertainment, necessarily. It can be provocative, it can be ironic, yeah. Interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, with the *Sounds of Voices* pieces that I was doing and performing, in the '70s, they—all of these pieces had this element of humor, and if even—you know, creating different languages, mimicking them, in my *Scenario Sounds* works.

[Brief interruption for a phone call.] [00:19:56]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So we, what were we talking about? We were talking about—

NINA YANKOWITZ: *Scenario Sounds, Personae Mimickings*, that's what I remember, as this.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, let's back up just a little bit. And, so, I'm always curious to know when someone kind of becomes aware of visual art, and begins to develop an interest in it, and, and some kind of sense of what it is, and that could be an attractive thing to do, and do you recall this at all, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: In high school, I remember being interested in—I had an art teacher who I liked a lot, named Mister Domareki. [They laugh.] And he—I remember discovering Rauschenberg through him.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, he's somehow—whether he brought it in, or, for some problems he gave, I found it, whatever it was, inspired by his teaching, you know, or his ability to investigate a lot of representational and abstract discourses, and I liked that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And this would be Columbia High School in Maplewood?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes. Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And that was in ninth grade.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Eighth grade.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Eighth grade, okay. And—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Maybe seven.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —so you would've gone to grade school in Newark, and then you, you all moved to—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well I had 16 months at South Orange Junior High School. I mean, I wasn't even in there in the yearbook, [laughs] because it was 16 months, and so I—yeah. [00:21:56] So they didn't deem it really as graduating somehow, which I, you know, I just noticed it in [laughs] looking at my yearbook from then.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And South Orange in Maplewood shared a school system, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, well Columbia High School, yes, but not, not for the junior high, but for the high school, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So what was South Orange like at that—I've come across a funny article in the *New York Times*, from the *New York Times Magazine*—this would've been about the year 2000—and they were talking about people, you know, sort of hanging on financially in the suburbs. Things obviously have changed a lot, but the author mentioned "South Orange," he says, "where he grew up," and he says, "It was the first stop for Jewish Americans migrating west from Newark, and," and he says, "there was even a fancy neighborhood for it, piquantly named Newstead."

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, that's—we lived at the bottom of Newstead.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh! Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: On Longview Road.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, yeah, we're at the bottom. You know, there was—but up on top was the real *fancy-schmancies*. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: A little more money, huh?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What kind of house was it?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Ours was a—I mean, this is typical of the upper, upward mobility: My father was a lawyer, and he tap danced his way through making money to go to law school.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No kidding.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, and, anyway, so he started making money. I, oh God, I have—I mean, the budgets from those days are, you know, they would write these budgets. I have copies of these. My father would say, "A hundred dollars"—I mean, you know, he was hoping to make like a hundred dollars a week. [00:24:01] You know, that was like a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That would've been really something.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right. Anyway, so, he was upwardly mobile and was very excited to move from Newark to South Orange and he bought a piece of land and had it built on. And it was a two-story house with a garage and it was kind of chiseled out of the mountainside a little bit. You know, it was a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Cool.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I didn't want to move. I just wanted to stay in Newark. I loved, I loved, I loved it. It was a hard transition for me, but then, you know, I mean, that's typical of a teenager.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well this is so interesting. You say your father—I was, I was so amused by the shirt and tie in that photograph with Brendan Byrne, which must date from the 1960s, I would guess. And it like the most startling, and this is a black and white photograph. [Laughs.] I mean, it practically screams at you.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he, was he a bit flamboyant? Was he a flashy dresser, or was he—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Not really, but it was my uncle Eli who was really, I mean, because he used to wear [loud] plaid pants and screaming—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh my God.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —[laughs] shirts. My father wasn't—I don't know. I never quite saw him as flashy. I still have a lot of his ties. I'll have to go look through his silk ties. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, South Orange has a train station as so many of those North Jersey commuter towns do. When did you start, kind of like, kind of escaping a little bit into Manhattan? [00:26:04]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, very early on. [They laugh.] I used to go after school and take the bus into New York, and I'd go to the West Village, and I saw Bob Dylan when he played his first gig. Later Hugh Romney—called Wavy Gravy; it was Hugh Romney who played there later. The owner called Dylan out, and says, "Yeah, we're going to introduce a new guy." This was at the Cafe Wha? and the Cafe Wha? was very cool, and oh my God, I loved him. I just was like totally flipped, and I would go back to my high school I would try and, you know, try to—mimic what he was doing with a harmonica, like *nu-nu-nu-nu-nu*, [laughs] you know, and people were like, "She's crazy; what is she talking about?" But anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So was Susan a bit of a—you know, sort of giving you a bit of an entrée to all of this, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Not that part. No! She used to, she did, she used to take me to New York. We would go to the theater. We would go and see, I think we saw The Fantastics. I can't remember. It was so [fun]—and then we'd go for, you know, Japanese food, and, it was more theater, but no, Dylan was more my own, my own turf. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. So were you doing art in high school then?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I was doing art in high school. I mean, you know, you, in high school you don't major. You just, you know, it's just one—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —it's just, the art class.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. And I found some of them, as I've just been clearing out my basement. I saw the things that I made, just last week. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's wild.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Because I'm just trying to clear out the basement and I have all these different storage rooms here, so, I've been trying to clear that out. Anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, so, okay, so you get to, toward the end of high school, and are you—you've just determined to go to art school? [00:28:10] Or were you thinking of—how did, how did you end up at SVA?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, yes, going through my old papers, which I just found in the basement, these are different [laughs] ones.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: There's still some things that [are] puzzling to me, as I got—had this acceptance letter from University of Ohio State, and I wasn't just to be going there because I thought Roy Lichtenstein was teaching there, at this—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: At Ohio State?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I think he taught there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really!

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I didn't know that.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Or at least I thought he did at the time. I remember thinking that, and I got the acceptance letter and it's like, I didn't remember this. I just found the letter. Why didn't I go? What was it that stopped me? Anyway, I went to Temple University, not Tyler. I went to Temple—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Hmm, that's interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —and studied. Well, I couldn't apply to—there was a reason why I couldn't apply to Tyler. I don't know; there was some reason. And, I think my parents wanted me to have a liberal arts background at the time, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, sure.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —whatever. So I did that, but I did not like it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How long were you at Temple?

NINA YANKOWITZ: For, I guess a year and a half and then I didn't have a portfolio really. I decided I want to go to art school. So, I went, came to New York. I studied; I took a whole bunch of classes—this was for a semester at the New School—and built up a portfolio, and then applied to SVA and that's how that happened.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And was that a two-year program, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, no, it was a four-year program but well, this was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —were you able to carry credits into it?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I was able to carry some credits into it. Actually, it was a three-year program, that, in the last year that I was there, you had an opportunity to go to the University of Massachusetts to get a master's degree and skip a fourth year, do it there, and you get your master's degree at UMass. [00:30:35] But oddly enough, I, that year, I got the job, to teach in the graduate school there, and my students were my classmates. [Laughs.] I'm not going to say all the names. But, oh my God, that was daunting, but it was fun. I mean, I think I was a good teacher.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you graduated from SVA in '69, according to your—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —bio. And what, the—the school year, '70, '71, you, you started at UMass?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And then, well, seven—I guess it was '70, '71, [or] '72, whichever second semester. I was there for a year—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Somewhere around in there.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, and then, I also taught in the Five College program.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The which?

NINA YANKOWITZ: The Five College program at Smith, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —you know, there's that whole network there, too, and that was—I loved it. It was interesting, but I really, ultimately didn't want to be a professor, which, of course, I'm a little sorry for now, in a way. I didn't want to remain a full-time faculty teacher because I wanted to do my art so I began, after that position, taking half-year gigs. In between teaching at SVA, I would have different years that I would teach there, but I would take visiting artists gigs for six months during the year. I'd pile these up, and then the rest of the year I could just do my work. I mean, that was my program, [laughs] you know; that's what—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I liked to do.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow, that's complicated. So, let me not get too far. [00:32:35] You mentioned Bob Dylan. The sum—the summer of '68, you were in Woodstock, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And, this is—becomes important because that's the summer that you work on the piece, *Oh Say Can You See*, according to something I read. But at that point you're still an SVA—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, yes. That was the summer, that's right, it was, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. And so that summer—

NINA YANKOWITZ: When I started showing in galleries, they didn't even know I was still a student. I mean, I didn't try to hide it, but I showed at Kornblee Gallery, in New York, and I was doing stage sets for [City] Center. I got a grant to create stage sets for Pearl Lang Dance Company, [1968, 1969.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Which, whose company?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Pearl Lang Dance Company.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Pearl Lang, oh interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And I did stage sets there, and when Jill Kornblee her assistant, at the gallery—I would go there working as a secretary, assistant to the [Director's admin], and her name was Carol Bergman, and she said, "What do you do?" And I said, "Well, you know, I'm in school and a creator." She said, "Bring in your slides. I'd love to see what you do." So I did, and I gave her the slides, and this was during the time that I had this commission from Pearl Lang Dance Company. I had no fear then, you know. Oh! They're looking for stage sets, so I applied, [laughs] and I got the grant. So at any rate, I get a phone call from Jill Kornblee, and she's like, "I want to come see your work." You know, Carol Bergman had showed her my draped paintings that I was doing. And I was like, "Oh my God, what do I do?" I didn't even have a studio. [00:34:35] I was working in my apartment, this little one room apartment, and was a railroad [flat] with the bathtub in the kitchen, and lots of roaches, and [laughs] you know, the East Village. Anyhow, but I did have that [City Center] studio, and I asked if I could use it to, to show the work. Pearl said, "Fine," and so I did that, so I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm sorry, you had the studio where? At—

NINA YANKOWITZ: At, I had a studio at [City Center] making the stage sets.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Stage sets, got it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, for Pearl Lang. So I invited her—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You invited Jill.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes. I said, "Okay," and so I got back to her and gave her the address, and she walked in. She said—she looked around, and she turned to me and she said—remember, I was working as a secretary's assistant, she said, "You're fired." And I went, "Oh, uh." She said, "You have to start preparing for your one-

person, [one man] show," and she walked out. That was it. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, how cool. That's great; that's great. That's a good story. Let me not forget to ask you about—there was something in Woodstock called Group 212?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Group 212; that's where I met 'Phil Harmonic.'

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. And what were they, exactly?

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was—you know, it's funny. I don't remember the visual artists there that much. I know there were some, but there were more musicians there. Archie Shepp was there, and this fellow who actually introduced me to Bob Dylan then. His name was Juma Sultan and Juma played drums and made drums for Dylan. So, he was a great guy. [00:36:35] I'm still in touch a little bit. [Laughs.] Now he's a pastor, or a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh cool.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —but still very involved with music, and—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Anyway, so, who else was there? Sunny Murray played the drums. He was a drummer. A lot of people, and people would come through there, like Sam Shepard came, and just a lot of arts people came around.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were you—did you have much chance to interact with Dylan, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, [laughs] he wouldn't have remembered me. I doubt it, but I remember him. I was so star struck. Remember it was in high school. I was like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —going into the Village to see him, and I was at his first Carnegie Hall [concert], I was there. I went to hear that concert, at Carnegie Hall. I, oh, I was so in love with him. When Joan Baez brought him out—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —"I got a new talent for you to hear." [Laughs.] And so, when Juma brought me to his house, I was standing—and Juma hadn't arrived late. And, you know, I'd walked up the hill, and I'm standing at the front door, I mean at the gate, really, and he comes out and he looks at me and he says, "You a runaway?" [They laugh.] And, I couldn't even get a word out of my mouth, and my head's going, Wait, wait, I have a piece at Museum of Modern Art; I had a *duh-duh-duh-duh-duh*; I'm a person; I'm a whole person; I couldn't talk; I have a life; I got my own. I could not say a word. So finally he says—"All right, come on in; I'll play you some, play some music for you." [00:38:36] So he played, oh God, was it *Blood on the Tracks*? I can't remember. No, maybe that was earlier. Either way, he play—he played his—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You mean performed it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, uh, yeah, and then—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's fun. Wow.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, that was fun. It was fun.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this—so, okay. So, Werner helps you with this piece, and that's the first showing you have at Kornblee, right, is in a group show with that, that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, with—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Draped piece, *Oh Say Can You See*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And that's like 1968, when you're still a student.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. I didn't actually start—yeah, yeah, I, you know, I saw a card, a postcard of mine in 1967, an announcement that she had, some title—I don't know. I don't know. Anyway, but, '67, '68—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Some—okay. You gave a talk not long ago—was it at Guild Hall—that you talked about

doing something in the park with this. There was some kind of performance?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh! That was 1967. That was, [laughs] that was something else. That was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was that?

NINA YANKOWITZ: When Hoving was the Commissioner for Central Park, he commissioned some artists to do pieces for Central Park.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Uh-huh.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And so, I did these cantilevered beams that were covered with fur—[they laugh]—from, the—Don't ask!—they were going on—environmental issues, you know, and animal rights, and I don't know. My head was always [laughs] in some sort of political undertone going on there. So, these beams were coming from underneath the ground to above the ground.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So, all of a sudden, police come charging in on horseback, accusing me, [Marc] of setting up artillery pointed at the hotel, the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the Plaza.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —the Plaza, right. [00:40:45] And—[they laugh]—oh and I was like—fighting. I have the pictures somewhere. We were like—"Wait! No!" Anyway, so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Thought you had artillery, huh?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right. [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah. [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: So that was, that was my earliest, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so, we've, we've touched a couple of bases so far: the performance-related base, the collaborative base. Now here's where, you know, I think we begin to see a tendency in the work, or a direction in the work of blending the visual and the oral.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You—I mean it's, in a way, it's—it's—it's kind of like—pardon me for saying it this way—it's kind of flatfooted in the, in the *Oh Say Can You See*, because you know, you've literally got music imprinted on the, on the—on the canvas.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But, it quickly becomes more subtle than that—but that's really the beginning, isn't it?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where you're, you're blending this, these two modes of sense perception in, in a work.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right, and it's interesting—I hadn't quite pulled it all together, because I've never looked for a linear track, because I'm not particularly linear, but I do see all these underlying themes that have, you know, been throughout the work. So, I continued with creating audio tapes and installations, and that's when I brought in the work with—I had this project in Italy that I did, Klaus Kertess actually had me invited into this project in Italy where there were all these artists who do—were doing installations with the sound or performance, or probably every artist you can—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And when is that?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —imagine was—this was [. . . 1982 it was finally realized.] [00:43:01]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And [1981, or 1982], and actually, I think I have—yeah, this was called *Sonorità Prospettiche* [laughs] and it was *Suono, Ambiente, Immagine Perspectives*, and this was curated. The curator had invited me and Arsenije Jovanovic who created—was one of the major creators for the *Tree of Life*, and he wrote me

recently, [laughs] that I can use his music anytime. He liked my work, they played a lot of the scenarios, the *Scenario Sounds* that I was doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh right, mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: They used that as a poster child for it. I wasn't even—you know, I just wasn't paying attention. I wasn't like, I wasn't someone who was, at the time, trying to gather public support for the work and tracked how to do it, because stupidly so, I thought that's what happens. Because I was so young, I just assumed, well, this is the natural course for everybody, you know, it just didn't dawn on me that you have to work, and promote it, and you know, I was very naïve in those ways. [Laughs.] Not that I wasn't ambitious, but I was naïve in knowing how to gather that kind of support through trying to track and apply for things that would—or for example, get to critics in hope that they would write about the work, so then I could like, go up a chain of galleries, in the gallery world. [00:45:13]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It just wasn't that part of it. Although, I have an interesting story, actually, now I'm reminding myself. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah?

NINA YANKOWITZ: After Jill Kornblee—talk about naïveté, after Jill Kornblee came to the studio, I mean you know, to that studio where she offered me the show, I thought, Wow, this is amazing. Okay, I'm going to go to Castelli and think—to see what he thinks, because, you know, I thought, Oh, that's the primo gallery. So I went there and the curator then was—oh God, I'm blanking his name. Ivan Karp was the curator—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ivan Karp, okay, mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —and, looks over and says, "Ah, ha, this is great; this is great. Wait, I'll be right back," and he goes into the back room, comes out and he said, "I made a call for you. I made a call for you. This is who I want you to see, because she, she's handling Malcolm Morley. She's handling all"—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh shit.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —"these"—right. [Laughs.] "She's handling, you know, all these interesting artists, Pistoletto, you know, all these people that you're going to fit right in there." It was Jill Kornblee, he called. So, oh my God, the embarrassment of that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But it didn't, didn't spoil things.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, she, she was annoyed at me but it didn't stop it happening. But [laughs]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh my God.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that's being foiled by your own petard.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no kidding. So—

NINA YANKOWITZ: So it was a sense of ambition, but, it's—I learned early on, I'm not going to do that, you know. It was so uncomfortable, I thought, because for me, at the time, I just thought, well, that's what one should do. [00:47:16] You know, it's like free trade, open market, that kind of sensibility, and, anyway, so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Well let's—okay so, so let's talk about synesthesia a little bit. As far as I understand it, it's a neurological condition. It's fairly widely shared but it's apparently especially common among artists and creative people, and it causes the brain to process data through several senses at once.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Through, through different—through different senses.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Several different senses.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, right, right, and apparently, from what I've read, the most common form is what, what's called grapheme-color synesthesia, which is where numbers seem to be colored on a written page, or visualized as colored in the mind, and I couldn't help thinking of the pieces that you've made where, it's, you know, kind of dots of color, or gestures of color that are meant to be—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right to, meant to, be read and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —performed and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —performed, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. Was this—was this, I mean, was this, was this—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I didn't know about the word "synesthesia"—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did you exp—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —then. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —erience this as a, as a young person? Did you experience sort of, taking in sensory data like in two, two modes simultaneously? Does this—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, I used to write, you know, my notes, hearing color, seeing sounds. That was the whole —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —thing, yeah. I didn't know. I didn't know about synesthesia then, or, it wasn't something that I was focused on as—to employ it. [00:49:19] It just came natural to me. Although in 1976 I had an accident, where I fell down a shaft way when I was teaching at the graduate school of the University of Iowa [Art Department]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —at the Iowa workshop and it was a two-story drop and I—yeah, [laughs] and I lost a little hearing in one ear, and—whatever. And when I woke up, because I was in a coma for a couple of days—when I woke up I could—I could taste my feelings. Everything was inside, I couldn't—I couldn't taste outside. Everything was in. I was tasting myself inside—this is when I, [laughs] they thought, the doctors thought that, you know, that there was something neurological. And then the concept I still didn't—it still wasn't discussed as synesthesia as I later become very familiar with what that is. But when they would give me all these tests, I would say to them, "Well, no, I always was like this, you know." Not tasting inside, not tasting my feelings but for example, looking at things. Something is yellow—when looking at the different colors of foods, would kind of suggest what it would taste like. So it's hard to know what exacerbated what, you know, the—physical and—I don't know. I mean it's a bit—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's a bit unclear because I was, in the '60s as I had discussed, I was always involved with using different senses as elements of sound and infusing it into visual formats, or so— [00:51:34]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, one, one of the things that, when you put these things into—when you're looking at your—when one is looking at your career, one of the things that's interesting is this seemingly constant aim of crossing boundaries between genres or mediums, blending the different things, and what I'm thinking of is the—you were in a show. No, am I right about this? It was in—at Kornblee, called *Before the Fall*?

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was my piece that I showed at Kornblee—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well you—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —[After] *the Fall*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Or, was the piece—I couldn't get it straight from the thing. There's some—either the show was called that, and your piece was *After the Fall*, or, your piece—the show was called *After the Fall* and your piece is *Before the Fall*. [Laughs.] I mean, it makes more sense that your piece was called *After the Fall* because it's accompanied by these—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, it's a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —photographs.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, I was trying to [re-]create the quintessential moment before the canvas would enter the phase of diminution. Collapsing on the floor, the highlight—I was trying to capture the most quintessential

experiential moment. This was in my head when I was attempting to do so. I stood way up on a, like a—I don't know—there were 20-foot ceilings in this place—and dropped it and recorded the photographs as it was falling, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But then the piece, the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was shown at Kornblee; now I have to remember where it was.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The piece itself is on the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was *After the Fall*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —on the wall beside six photographs.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now was the piece on the wall, is that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —frozen in that moment—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —essentially, what it—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that highest, that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, it was meant to, to represent the highest moment. [00:53:35]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: The, highest, the most impactful [laughs] positioning before entering into the collapsing phase.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great, okay, okay. Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Because high would mean, [laughs]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, one of the things, besides the crossing of process and sculpture, there, you know, in a sense, the other thing that I'm sensing there is you're making an inanimate object into a performer—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, which again is something that, in various ways, goes through later work.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And also dancing with Yvonne Rainer, you know, when I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh!

NINA YANKOWITZ: Around that time, and I was—I call it dancing, [laughs] but I mean, Yvonne had just people who—just natural walking, or whatever it was, and you know, so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was this part of Grand Union?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, she was working with Grand Union. I wasn't. I was just one of the staged people, or, as part of—you know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where was this? Was it at Judson?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, we did it at Rutgers. It was a performance, and then other things in the subways, and the streets—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She seems like just, must be a remarkable person. I've never met her.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I think she's so brilliant and aside from being so talented, she's a real person, and she's interesting and kind, and embracing, you know. I think she's very special. [laughs] [00:55:35]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: While we're talking about people, I was also curious. I mean, Jill Kornblee was a really important figure, and you know, in those years. What was she like?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well in the—again, this was in the '60s. She said, "You know, I don't usually handle women. I don't handle women artists." But, soon after, she became a really—her stable was filled with lots of women artists. The earliest, Rosalyn Drexler, she said she—she told me, "Rosalyn's the only person—woman I ever showed."

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's wild.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You know, and then, soon after, she got Janet Fish, who was also a teacher of mine at SVA, and Susan Crile. At the time when she—in the mid-'70s, she was taking more and more women artists on. Somehow, whatever the work I was doing, I switched; I started showing at Rosa Esman. But she really ended up championing a lot of women artists. So, I loved her for that because she could change, you know. She was someone who could change her point of views and her perspectives and she was open, and I miss her. I wish I had spent more time with her then. You know, before she passed away. At one birthday party it was Susie Block [ph] and Diane Calder brought, they brought me to a birthday party for her as—I was the surprise, and I was really, really glad to see her again. It was many years later. Anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. Well, that's—I mean, you named many of the people that were in the gallery at that time.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well she had Alex Hay, and the performance type art. [00:57:41]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh really!

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, she handled Alex. This is when I first came in. She handled Alex, Malcolm Morley, Pistoletto—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Howard Hodgkin?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yes, Hodgkin, whose work I loved too. Trying to remember who else.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you mentioned Pistoletto, and—and Rackstraw Downes was—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's right, Rackstraw Downes, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and Michael Mazur—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I don't remember.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No—don't remember him. Uh-huh. So there doesn't seem to be, you know, really much crossover [laughs] between any of those people and what you were doing.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, she had, well, Alex Hay. There certainly was—you know, because he was like a performance-type guy, and Pistoletto was another wild card. Hodgkins, at the time, was a wild card. She did—oh, she handled Flavin, too.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: She liked things that were outside the box. Her taste wasn't defined by one motif or one, you know, trajectory. She really had an open mind to a lot of different things and she took in what she liked. That was her—what she found interesting to her, so you weren't going to find all this art, all that art, not that. That wasn't who she was. So, there was a wide span.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, in these, these draped pieces and so on, I mean, it's natural to think of Robert Morris. Is he somebody that was on your radar screen and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: He was. Well, I knew, of course I knew about him but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm thinking especially of the process pieces [00:59:44]—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I never thought—Yeah, I—no, I remember those pieces, the leather pieces. The leather—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: — and the felt is what I had in mind, the kind of—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, the felt pieces, right, but in my head, they were more—I mean, I found them interesting but they were more structural kinds of things. They were about sculpture, not painting. I was trying—and a lot of those artists who—I wasn't a completely lone ranger. There were other works that one could say there were relative perspectives going on. I never, I never saw things quite in the same way. I wasn't—I was

aware of people who were dealing with expanding the notions of painting, like for example, Rausch—not Rauschenberg, I'm sorry—Oldenburg. You know, I loved Oldenburg's work, but Claes was doing sculpture and 3-D things where I kept trying to—I always had this idea of taking off the canvas. Sometimes I would have them wrap around, like, [your memory is thinking that it's a wraparound piece, like a clown's uniform.] [Laughs.] This is like in 1971, the later stitched and pleated pieces. The idea for me was about extending boundaries in the painting world, which I found a very rigid perspective.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That seems really important. Already in 1970, you were getting some pretty high-level critical attention. Robert Pincus-Witten, who passed away recently, wrote about your work in 1970,—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —1969, 1970, and '73, '74. [laughs.] [01:01:46]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, there were three or four pieces by him that mention you, not uncritically, but clearly as he's, you know, viewing you as a rising talent. And he evidently saw—

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CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you know, some echoes of Oldenburg in the work, and Rosenquist, interestingly. Not sure I would have quite seen that, but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, he wrote about [Samaras and Rosenquist in *ArtForum Magazine* in December 1972.] He wrote that Sol LeWitt and I had influenced the work of Rosenquist. Yeah, it was an interesting article, I know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, that is interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It seems that may have mis-described what you were doing, and there's a kind of amusing little thing, and I didn't know what happened. He talks about the—you were using pieces of maybe lathe wood or something to, to bulk out the pieces.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No lathe wood.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And somebody, who called themselves M. Silverman [ph] wrote into *Art Forum* saying, "No, that's not how it's done. It's about process." And I thought, Who is this white knight that wrote into— [laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —otherwise not identified?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Because I never used lathe or anything, just the gravity of the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That seems very important.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —did it itself, and the way it was re-hung over and over and over again, in different shows, I took a photograph of it, gridded it up, and on the back, marked where the staples go, so you could hang it accordingly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. Good, okay. So then you mentioned the show at Hofstra, that Robert Littman —

NINA YANKOWITZ: Robert Littman, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —organized, and Eva Hesse is in that, or her work is in that show, Robert Morris. It's Bill Bollinger that I wasn't aware of and I looked up the work. When I saw it, I thought, Wow, this guy's is interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You know what? I wrote a letter to the editor about Bill Bollinger, [later in *Art in America*] and said, "Hey, you are forgetting somebody very important here," and I introduced that work to Donna De Salvo. [00:02:10] This is later, I said, "You've got to see this work"—his work it was, I found his work, very interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, it's really very—I mean, it's also got a certain scale to it that's pretty impressive.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so, and that's when you, you made the work, the *Sagging Spiro*, for the, sort of the play on Spiro Agnew's famously collapsed—but this is long before he was forced to retire for his various misdeeds.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes. Sagging face.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, in '71 or '70—I couldn't quite tell from the chronology—you have your first one-person show, at Kornblee.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, I had the first one-person show in '68. [Woodstock, New York.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Looks like it was a group show.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, the—I found the announcements cards. I know it's—you know, I wrote about different things at different times. It was first reviewed—Pincus-Witten, for example, opened it, January 1, 1970. So it was January 1970. Right?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm not sure. I actually have the *Art Forum* site on here.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And the *New York Times*, that was—it was '72?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, and you know, for—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I can't remember all these—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —his first piece of value was in March of 1970.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well by the time it came out, but the show, the show started—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The show was like in January of '70.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I think it was like, I think I can remember Christmas in there somewhere. Okay, maybe it was January 1st; I don't know. It was at—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I think, I could be wrong, but, that's what it looked like.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Anyway, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And there's a photograph of the show. [00:04:11] I mean actually—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, that piece.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —this, this very piece here is the piece that's illustrated in that March, 1970, *Art Forum*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh! I'll tell you why. Okay, no, 1969—see, that's why I'm not sure the—1969, that piece was in the Larry Aldrich show, the *Highlights of the 1969-1970 Art Season*. And that was 1969. And they took the artists that were the big, first-person—you know, the shows that were the *Highlights*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, what is this Larry Aldrich show?

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's called *Highlights of the Season, [1969-1970]*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's 1970, according, according to your, your list—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well I'm wrong. It was not. I have the book, [laughs] '69. Here, it was—yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —unless this is incorrect.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —on my resume?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah that's—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's probably likely because, over the years, different assistants would write different things. I wasn't sure; I didn't remember but I have all the catalogs, and that was, that was, that show was [1969-1970], *Highlights of the Season*, and I could show it to you. [laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I have no idea.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, no, no—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Whatever you say.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, it's an interesting show actually because you could see a lot of the people that were

working and getting some attention at that time. Two to three works from each artist, twenty featured.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, well, hmm. How could this '68 show have been the first one? It just had one piece in it. It was the piece from that, from that summer. That doesn't seem to make sense. It wouldn't—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —you didn't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —have had a big enough body of work to have a show.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, all the pieces in that first January 1970 show, I have installation shots from it. They were all ones that I did in, in college. [00:06:11] Every single piece was one that I did in college, the first show. It was in the old gallery where it had a fireplace and it was in her first gallery. Then, she renovated, and it was like, you know, all white walls, and that was, that's when I had another show. It was different.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so, anyway, so in this '70 or '71 show at Kornblee, you have *Draped, Stitched, and Pleated Paintings*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right. January 1970 *Draped Paintings*, November 1971 *Pleated and Stitched Paintings*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Now, I wonder if you could describe them for me. They used sail canvas, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I worked with John Matera who was a sailboat maker on Lispenard Street, and a pleating company that was [laughs] an uptown pleating company, and so I would go in, and work with the pleater and we would just pleat the canvases, and separate pieces that were stitched. I had diamonds and shapes, the squares, rectangle, abstract forms, in color threads, moving across the canvas so that you're reading them while they're puckered and shirred. This is when I first started like pushing into the *Reading* things, like the *Dilated Grain Readings*. That was the next phase of the work. I hadn't yet gotten there, but these stitching pieces of these abstract colors, you were supposed to read as it jumped over each shirring, so that you would start reading it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: "Jumped over each"?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Shirred, yeah, shirred means it was like puckered—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —you know, like it pinched to where—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —where's it's pinched.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh! Okay. What were the colors involved in those? [00:08:12]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Basically primary colors: red, blue, green. It was basically—the threads were basically—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was the sail—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —and the canvas—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was the sailcloth painted?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, I always used a compressor, and that's why I used to get compared, in a lot of these articles, to Jules Olitski, because I was, and he was, using a spray gun too, you know, mist the surface, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay, so they're funny to look at, because on the one hand they—and in photographs, because I haven't seen them—they have a kind of elegance almost like curtains, like really high-end curtains or something like that. But on the other hand, because they're like these compressed forms, they have an animal-like presence or even an insect-like presence.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They're, they're—they're funny objects. They seem sort of both fashionable and somehow *other*, in a—what was your intention? What were you after with those?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well some—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you recall?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, the stitched ones I just mentioned, what I was thinking about—the ones where there were straps, canvas straps coming through [them] were—they had the feel of a clown's uniform, almost, that was flattened out. But you—it is important to note: I don't know how to sew. I can't even sew a button on. I'm terrible [laughs] at any of that kind of craft. I'm just really bad at it, so, it's not that it was something that I was trying to employ as a gifted person at the machine, which, forget it. I didn't even know how to use—I still can't use—a sewing machine. I still can't sew on a button. [00:10:12] But at any rate, [laughs] the concept was, these ideas of, of looking at something; you see it flat but your memory is completing the image, as you could see it as something that was in the round, like it was an enclosure that's been flattened out on the wall.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm. So what—there is a sense of an animal skin or something like that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, something like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —in a way—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that, yeah. That's interesting—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —because yeah, the one with the stretching, and those are separately fixed to the wall?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. Actually, shirring, not stretching. Those are stapled. They're like canvas webbings, and just, yeah, stapled.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, canvas webbing, okay. So at this point, you were—you're now sort of commuting half time to—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That, it's a different t—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —to Massachusetts—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well no, that job I did for a whole—full time for the year.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —for a year.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And spanned two years because of the date—you know, '70 to '71, whatever, [laughs] it spanned one year, but two different semesters starting in September and ending in the summer.

What was I doing the time of the first show? Well it was after—I'd been to Woodstock. That was '68, I visited the '69 festival. Well I was in town obviously to do the show. But, I would—maybe I was in Chicago? No. You know, I took all these different visiting artists jobs, and so, I'm not sure exactly where I was, but I did, the first showing, I did in New York when I was still a student. The second show I [made at 83 Leonard Street.]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh here, okay. [00:12:14]

NINA YANKOWITZ: [1973/74 *Dilated Grain Readings* I made here.]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —on Spring Street, for the record.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: When did you buy this loft?

NINA YANKOWITZ: 1974, I [owned it but rented it in 1973.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In [197]4, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was 1973, '74, whatever I closed and—I moved in 1974 [and rented it as my studio in 1973.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it. Okay, and before that you were in the '73 Whitney Biennial.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, that was the first Whitney Biennial.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —after it went from an annual to [biennial]—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right. And you were living on Leonard?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I, I [worked] on Leonard Street.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —between Church and Broadway.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —83 Leonard. I still remember, and Barbara Kruger lived down the block, and Joel Shapiro lived down the block across from—Joel lived across from Barbara, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm jumping around a little bit but I was struck that you mentioned that Janet Fish was one of the teachers at SVA. Was there anyone else there that you were particularly drawn to, or that you found particularly—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —useful?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I liked Janet but I wasn't involved; I wasn't interested at all. I mean, no, when you say—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, right, I shouldn't say it that way—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, it wasn't, no—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —because she's a very different, yeah, kind of artist but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: But, you know, I respected her work. I just wasn't, you know. Malcolm Morley was there. He gave me a really hard time because I was showing in his gallery. I walked in, and I—and the first damn question he says, "Students can't make art," draws it big on the, [laughs] on the blackboard, oh God. Anyway, that was, that was difficult.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, he, he's sort of—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's where I met Sol LeWitt. He came in as a visiting artist there, and he was terrific. I liked him a lot. He was a very generous, open person. Actually, went to introduce me to Eva Hesse, when we were—she and I were both on the bus together, and sat next to each other, going to the [inaudible]—was it the Aldrich show, or the [laughs]—okay, to the opening, I think. [00:14:36] God, was it that or *The Hanging/ Leaning* show? I can't remember. I think, I think it was *The Hanging/ Leaning* show we were going to.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The which show?

NINA YANKOWITZ: *The Hanging/ Leaning* show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *The Hanging/ Leaning* show.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay, so—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I think it was that show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So that was like out in Hempstead, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: And then she told me about the Larry Aldrich collection, and I didn't try for it. They just got all of the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The reason, the other reason I wanted to return to SVA is, there's an odd remark in a later Pincus-Witten piece about—that he mentions you in, the 1972 piece, where he refers to "an SVA sensibility," you know, something about—I don't know what he meant by it? That there was almost as if there was like this kind of in-crowd of ex-SVA people who were kind of taking over the galleries or something. And who else was—?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —Well, not doing my kind of work, but, but Adrian Piper was in my class, and I always thought she was fabulous. I thought she was really interesting. And God, I can't remember—[inaudible.] There were more guys than gals. Saul Ostrow was in my class.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And who else was there? [Laughs.] Cynthia Eardley and Terry Berkowitz.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's just a question: I'm curious if there was any—some perception at the time—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, I know why. Okay, Joseph Kosuth, but Joseph was six months behind, you know, older, in the class before me. He was there. He graduated before I did, so he wasn't really in my class, but he was—that may have been who he was referring to. [00:16:38]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know.

NINA YANKOWITZ: There were—I don't know of a lot of students at the time that were showing at that point.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The other thing: he seems to think that, and maybe he's responding to the pleating and the kind of curtain aspect of the work, that there was a certain fashion, or—"fashionability" is the term that he used, which, coming from someone of his generation would not be a compliment, but, he seems to be intrigued by it. He seems to be intrigued by this aspect of your work, and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And so it struck me that, you know, again, that work like that might have seemed interesting to the sort of emerging pattern and decoration people, that they would have seen this and going, "Well here's somebody"—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Not that body of work, but I'll tell you a story about that, but that's the next body of work I did they were interested in, not the draped [paintings.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not this but the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Then later, yes, and I have stories about that, but, I just want to say the first part of this is that I think he was very intrigued with my work, and he didn't—we're talking about Pincus-Witten now—and he didn't quite know how to deal with it. And the reason I say this is because my first cousin was in a class that he was teaching, and he was lecturing about my work as the most important work, and I had no idea you know. [Laughs.] She was like, "Oh, that's my cousin." It was, this is at Queens College. And she—it was like, wow. [00:18:38] So he, I think he was in—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It seems like it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, he didn't know quite what to make of it. It was, it was startling to him in some way. It touched a lot of different categories because a lot of—you know, I wasn't the only person blurring edges, but there was something about the way I was blurring that seemed, I think, puzzling to him. He was interested and curious and puzzled, that's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That makes sense, yeah, yeah. I mean, and there weren't too many people following the scene more closely than he was at that time.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, he was, you know. Well Peter Frank was everywhere. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was he?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh my God, everywhere, Peter Frank, going to every show in the world. Any time you go to a gallery, Peter Frank was there. He was amazing. I don't know how he had that [laughs] energy. Every single show I would ever go out to see, he was there. He was in—every time I would go to see things at the gallery I was showing in, he was there. He was just al—always there. I thought it was a remarkable thing because he was very curious.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And, John Perreault was interested in your work.

NINA YANKOWITZ: John Perreault was a very supportive, wonderful writer—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And he was—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —all through the—all through, even later—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and he was writing for the *Voice* at, at that time, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: And the—well he wrote for many—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —different publications.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —for the *SoHo Weekly*. He wrote in the *Village Voice* about me numerous times. He wrote about—I mean continually, he just, in many different papers and articles, magazines, he would, you know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And just thinking about people doing kind of folded canvases and all, it's sort of natural to think about what Sam Gilliam was doing at that time.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I hadn't remembered this, maybe hadn't known it, but it's—apparently, Gilliam had something like a project show at MoMA in '71, with rather large canvases. [00:20:49]

NINA YANKOWITZ: And I had, upstairs, I had pieces which didn't really get much attention because it was—at least as far as I know—I think that was 1970 or '71. I had these *Draped Drawings* in these big plastic, plexi-boxes, huge, very large, and it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And what, wh—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —was, it was on the fifth floor, and it was the Art Lending Service, and Jill Kornblee had these Larry Zox, and my works in that, a bunch of times. So, I wasn't really familiar at that moment, with his work, but I assume —yes. He was involved in doing these big sculptural installations.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So the next, in terms of—sort of—art world developments, the thing that's [laughs] the blue wave, if you will, that's emerging at this point: of course, it's—the women's movement in art is—you know, really gaining power, and in early 1973, you were part of the *Women Choose Women* show at the New York Cultural Center, which was what, at—Columbus Circle?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, the Huntington Hartford Building, which is—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —famous. [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The—with an essay by Lucy [Lippard], I couldn't help writing down this wonderful quote by her from that catalog for that show which you —

NINA YANKOWITZ: I don't remember what she said.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —must have—saying that "museums are discriminatory under the, usually under the guise of being discriminating." [00:22:58]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Isn't that wonderful?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: She's a— "and galleries, too," she said, but that relates back to what you were saying, you know, about Jill Kornblee and even women gallerists, would be—but you were represented by a work described in a review as "a bilateral crush of pleated cloth." Is this like what you showed at the Whitney, by any—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, what I showed at the Whitney were—that was the beginning of these thread readings. They, they were—I took the cotton duck threads—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the Whitney one.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —right. In other words, imagine canvas all ripped apart and just threads. So I glued cotton duck threads, and then rolled paint, outlining readings, so you were reading from up and down, or across, but mostly from this way, the lateral, not horizontal reading. This is the beginning, starting this outlining the threads of how the canvas was glued together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. It's a little hard for me to imagine.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Here, I have a pic somewhere here. Imagine the canvas—just imagine threads being glued together to form the structure, and where do I have the picture of this? Here—Hmm, I'm on another theme here. All right. [00:24:58] That's the piece, by the way, you were talking about, from the fall, right—before the fall, piece. I know I have it in here somewhere. Okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so, this is—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —*Cotton Duck Canvas Thread Readings*, 1972, although Jill Kornblee forgot to put in the title of my piece, so this was called—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh right, because it's called—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —*Untitled*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —*Untitled*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, [laughs] but anyway, so it was included in that. So again, this is starting—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's also not illustrated in the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, she forgot to send in the picture.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, for—[inaudible.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I know. It's [laughs]— that was the beginning of mishaps. Where having things shown upside down, or, [laughs] you know, a photograph shown upside down, anyway, whatever, it always happens. I mean, sometimes I'm saying to artists, it just does. Anyhow, so yeah, that's it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, okay, so it's pulled apart and then glued back together again?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, well, really what I did was, I bought the threads; I bought cotton duck thread.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I was trying to describe metaphorically, imagine. So this is how: I took all these threads, and then glued these all together to make the surface and used paint to outline the shapes of where the threads join together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's not a flat canvas; it's a little more—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How big is this?

NINA YANKOWITZ: This was about, say, maybe about nine feet by—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, substantial.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yeah, three and a half feet. Sydney Lewis bought this; I don't know where it is now. He later was on the board of the Whitney, but it's not at the Whitney. I don't know where it is. Maybe it is in a museum in Virginia. Anyway.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, this is good. Okay, so really, so you're transitioning out of the sort of shaped and pleated thing and into something more about—[00:27:08]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, the Whitney piece then led me into these—really thinking about reading and visual scanning, and using color, pitch, sound, this [laughs] sound in your eyes—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: "Sound in your eyes."

NINA YANKOWITZ: —right, to read across.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the piece we're looking at, and this is called—this is a series, the *Dilated Grain Readings*?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How did—what—how did you come up with that title?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, the grains are dilated. I bought linen, right, so the grains were dilated, like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: A-ha, nice.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And I used paint to read across—you would—I would squeeze color at different [places]—using all this like notations.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you had a piece at your house in Sag Harbor, right? It was something that looked rather like this.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah! Which one is it? [Inaudible.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Recently.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yes I did. It's not up now, but I—yes, I did, when we—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They're very beautiful there. They look like if somebody in the Peruvian Highlands did minimal art, it would look like that, you know.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. [Laughs.] What was interesting is, more recently, this piece was, about maybe like, 10 years ago, it was shown in Kiev, at the museum there, the *Grain Readings* and—it's—anyway, I loved the series. I had a real passion for that series.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How many of them? How substantial is the series?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Probably about ten pieces in it. I didn't really show them at the time, because I then moved into doing these canvas *Readings*; that's when I started showing at Rosa Esman, and they were more somber, and the sounds that I had were like motions of davening, and, you know, they were more black and mysterious. For my father had passed away. [00:29:23] So, it was during—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What year was that, that he passed away?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —'76, and I had my accident, so—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And what?

NINA YANKOWITZ: And I had—that accident, as I mentioned.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, the one that you mentioned.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh my God, bad year.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Bad year. [Laughs.] But anyway so, these—so I shifted into that, and the *Scenario Sounds* and the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Are there examples of those works here, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: [I do know that I put them in Rosa Esman's show.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't think you did.

NINA YANKOWITZ: [I do think I put Rosa's in there, I mean, those davening pieces. I don't know why I wouldn't have. The photo's here.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm. Okay. Now, were these, these works, these *Readings* works—I mean, in theory, they could've been performed in some way, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, well then that pushed me into this whole notion of performing them, and then I started writing the—well, I wrote a book in 1979 that Stefanotti published, *Voices of the Eye*, and—and at the same time I started doing these artworks. I had two shows with Stefanotti: *The Acoustics of Space*—it was like the sound of the spaces, [laughs] some of those voices that I had talked about. Here the first one was. These were called *Paragraph Readings*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: This was the first show that Stefanotti had; James Ingo Freed designed the space.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Who did?

NINA YANKOWITZ: James Ingo Freed—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, really?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, he—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —designed it, and I was the first show. [00:31:24] And Hermine was—showed there. Hermine Freed, she was—shown later, in another time during the year. And, that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this is—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that show.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —*The Acoustics of Space* show?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, this is—so that's the second show, *The Acoustics of Space*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: '81.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, and that's when—I have some of these pieces here. These are *The Acoustics of Space*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, okay. Okay, so—

NINA YANKOWITZ: The first one, the *Paragraph Readings* —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is the first show. Yeah. And, you're calling them *Paragraph Paintings and Filmic Scenarios*. What did you mean by "*Filmic Scenarios*"?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, I was creating in my head these stories through color and visual sound, and it was my way of creating—this is before—again, I wasn't performing these, but these were more scripting, like seeing them as visual scenarios, visual stories, not yet thinking about actually performing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So these works have sort of built-in framing,

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And—but it looks like parts of the drawings violate the frames?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well it's not—this is—they aren't drawings. This is porcelain-enameled steel, and it's paint on porcelain-enameled steel.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. But I just mean the image is—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, it looks like framing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —breaking the frame.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, it's like—you're right, exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, and also here.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. These are on—the support is steel? [00:33:24]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Porcelain-enameled steel, yeah, that I had—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Porcelain-enameled steel. Are they baked, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: The porcelain-enameled steel is—no, I made—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you're painting on it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I made paint. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You made paint?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I made paint to adhere to that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wow. That must have been an interesting challenge.

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was a feat.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What is this piece over here on the wall? Is that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was called *Conversations*. These were conversations—like they were talking back and forth [laughs] to each other. Sounds a little psychotic. By the way, when you were talking about—what we were discussing at one point, physical, you know, like physical ailments, and, at one point we were saying something about—when we were discussing synesthesia.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: [What I told Oliver Sacks,] I've always felt that the difference between someone who's psychotic, and artists, at their best, are that the artist can follow all their voices without feeling stuck and trapped that they can't get out, they can't come back. And, to me, that's art at its best. [Laughs.] You know, anyhow—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, let's see, in '80—in '76 then, you go with Rosa Esman?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And how long were you with her?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Three years, I think, I was there, and did—I liked working with her and I liked the artists. At the end of that time I started getting into some public art projects, which was not—you know, most galleries weren't handling that at the time. [00:35:34] So you know, that was going on.

The canvases, as I mentioned, were related but they—I remember writing an article for *The 57th Street [Art] Review*, and I was talking about Heisenberg's theory of uncertainty and how the closer you get to something, the further you are away and I—for me, this was about trying to deal with death, life and death issues, and bringing in some religious content. Here, with the davening, back and forth, having the paint take you—rocking back and forth—the paint, squeezed paint, was trying to break from the surface, at the same time as it was sinking into it. There were parts that just sunk into the black, and you couldn't—you just had the—it would like, go back and forth. I think it was harder for me to show these. And, in copies, maybe this is why I didn't put it in this, but I should've written another page. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, right, okay. I was intrigued that a piece from 1978 called *Filmic Frieze* ended up being an illustration in a very popular book of the period, *The Technicians of the Sacred*, and Jerome Rothenberg is somebody you knew from—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the art—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I knew Jerry [from Charlie] and he had bought a painting, and in that way that we exchanged—like, he gave me his house for a year, that was upstate, because he was going back and forth at that time to teach, and so he gave me that for a year and I gave him a painting that he loved. [00:37:41] I've always loved his work. I thought he was very interesting. I was with Charlie Doria at the time, who was a poet, who was a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were with.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yes, who introduced—[well I do know it's he who introduced me. He must have introduced me to Jerry and Charlie Morrow, also. Yeah, because Charlie—and well, Jerry—these are all part of the same moment when I performed at Washington Square Park in the Sound Poetry Festival, where I performed *Personae Mimickings*.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, and that's like 1980s?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, and Jerry had published a bunch of my things already in some of his—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Your things.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, some of my works that were—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were these sort of invented words, or that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: They were—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What were they?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —here. They were *Sound Readings* that were—that also involved a lot of letters, or here.

[Searching through papers.] So many pages in this. Whoops—

[Tape stops, restarts]

—published these. They were performances to—they were called *Performances to Script*, and it was that whole world of Jerry Rothenberg, Richard Kostelanetz, Charlie Morrow, Andor Orand [00:39:57] [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And the fellow you were with at the time, remind me of his name—

NINA YANKOWITZ: He was a poet, and he was a translator of Coptic texts.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Coptic!

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Good grief.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, he taught at University of Texas and he was very close with Dick Higgins, who was another large part of that group, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh really? Dickie, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And, it was—lived two doors down.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And tell me his name one more time.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Dick Higgins.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, no, your—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, Charles Doria.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, I know that name. Yeah, okay. Doria, got it. And you weren't married at these times, were you?

NINA YANKOWITZ: No. I was married in the '60s.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: To whom?

NINA YANKOWITZ: To my still friend, Marc Mannheimer who was part of SITE, Sculpture in the Environment.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh really!

NINA YANKOWITZ: My father incorporated SITE. Jim Wines introduced us. He was the best man at our wedding. [Laughs.] Anyway, we've remained good friends.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: How long did that last?

NINA YANKOWITZ: About three years. I didn't really want to be married. I really liked him, but my career was tak—I didn't—I just wanted to hang out with friends at the bars and I didn't want to walk a dog. I didn't want that—you know I was just—I was too young.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So when did you part, roughly?

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was not—well, 1971, and then we got divorced later. You know. It took a little while for the divorce to go through. There wasn't much back and forth about it. But I really liked him and I still like him, for who knows what would've happened if I met him later. You never—[laughs]—but I mean I'm glad everything turned out as it did because I met Barry Holden, my partner. [00:42:04]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Shuffling through papers.] I'm still looking for this. Anyway, there were—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this was—this is what—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —a lot of sound texts—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you published—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I have them.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —with—yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, there, well, *Voices of the Eye*, I have a book over there, that I'll give you. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, perfect, then I can—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, and then—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well why don't we pick up with that, and I want to hear a full account of your performance, talk about your writings, and then slide into the '80s and '90s and, and your collaborations with Barry, and the work that you've been doing recently. I have an appointment in Brooklyn Heights at—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Okay, that's, that's fine. This is perfect. I hope it came out.

[END OF yankow18_1of1_sd_track2.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is Christopher Lyon. I am interviewing Nina Yankowitz on May 7, 2018, at her home and studio in Manhattan. Thank you for acceding to this for another round. So, I wonder if we can do a little bit of fill-in here. We've been talking mostly about your work, so a couple of points today that I'd like to talk a little bit about biography. But when you were first showing, where was your studio? I think we mentioned this the last time. Was it Leonard Street?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, I had a studio on 17th Street for a short time—well, wait; I'm jumping ahead, okay. I had a studio on Leonard Street. I had a studio on 17th Street: 29 West 17th Street. Oh, I still remember the [laughs] address. I was not that far from Max's Kansas City when I used to [laughs] hang out there. I lived on the corner of Duane and West Broadway, and then in 1973, I got the space in SoHo, and I moved in 1974.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you've been here ever since.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I've been here ever since. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was it a raw space when you moved in, or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Completely raw, yeah, and there—yeah, it was completely raw, and ha—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It must have been a big project.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was a big project. And it's interesting too. I mean, this is when I say to people, as to young artists, "the real estate is so crazy now, and—which it is [00:02:00] but each and every decade, it's always like zeroes are just added to the end of the numbers, because that's really what happens." And I had sold my fixture fee on Duane and West Broadway for the down payment of this—this is only one title—there were two. You know, the second one I had to sell to get Ian, my son, [laughs] to college, but this went on another 2,500 square feet. The whole floor was 50—5,500 square feet.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't think people can quite imagine how big some of these lofts were. I mean, I understand that Nancy Graves had a loft that literally went through the block from West Broadway—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, I loved Nancy's loft. It was great. Yes, it went through that, that whole building. I mean, me, Shael Shapiro, there were a lot of people—Susan Caldwell. A lot of these buildings went from West Broadway through to the Wooster Street side, also the Earth Room.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm! Right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, that's really what had happened, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Were there other artists living in this building?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Not at the time no, [we thought. My sister and her boyfriend found it and I asked a lot of my artist friends to come in on it and some could, some couldn't, you know.] So I originally had the two spaces, and I thought—because in those days, I thought, How am I going to ever afford—it actually ended up being—it's really 6,500 square feet, this floor, because I built the mezzanine here—and how am I ever going to afford paying for the whole floor, \$300 a month? [00:04:04] You know, I could not figure out how I was going to do that. So I thought, Okay, I'm going to take the other side, and I'll rent it out. And, that's how I survived for a long time.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it. A classic story for sure.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Do you—I'm always curious about this: Do you—was there a lot of social interaction among the artists who were living in this area in the mid-'70s?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Totally. Totally. It was. Every—what I loved about it and I still—I miss it. It's kind of like when Paula Cooper left. The whole thing changed, and then galleries starting moving, moving to Chelsea. But it was so terrific because we worked in the studio till 11:00, 12:00 at night, and then you'd all meet, and there were two bars that were around at the time, because it was still basically industrial. But there were a community of artists, and because the gallery scene was here, so people—we would go to the Spring Street Bar, not to be mistaken for Spring Street Natural; that's not [laughs] what it was. It was on the corner of Spring Street and West Broadway, and Broome Street Bar, Kenn and John's, that was on the corner of Broome and West Broadway. And —

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —so, a lot of the painters—I remember Harvey Quaytman—you know, Kes Zapkus or, we would all, all be sitting around, Frances Barth, although Frances in those days was much [quieter than later]—she was married to Quaytman and it was a macho time, you know. [00:06:08] So I'd—it felt—it was harder. David Diao was there. Anyway, but I loved it. You know, I was always a great arguer, and [laughs] nothing was going to stop me. So I, I loved it. I loved the, the interchanges of that and it was always about art, and so it was either that, or, I spent a lot of time at Max's Kansas City.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: This is what roughly when?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, my—for early shows I had, Mickey Ruskin always gave me my opening after parties.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, nice.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And so that was like oh, ['69-'70, '71-'72] my solo shows.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. And that was interesting. We were yesterday, at Dorothea's [Rockburne] [laughs]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —at Dia:Beacon, yesterday.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, Dia:Beacon celebration of her opening. We were talking about this. I was talking with Carl Andre and Robert Morris about how at that time, I would be sitting at the table while these guys are all arguing about their artwork and who was—you know, getting the most attention. We were all laughing. It's so—because this is what? It was 50 years ago or something. It was really wild to see, and relive it, and there were all these—you know, then there was a whole other section with Michael Steiner and Larry Poons and their fighting. So there were the sculptors, and there were the painters, and I was always like sitting back and forth between both.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, that's interesting because you actually were moving back and forth between them in your work, yeah. [00:08:11]

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's right, and when I went to—I was still a student at the School of Visual Arts, and you had to sign up for painting or sculpture, and I went to the director, or the, the owner of the school, Silas Rhodes, and I said, "I don't want to do that. I want to do both." So, he said, "Okay," and he gave me the basement to just do my work—There's a big studio and he said, "Just take any classes you [laughs] want," and I had a studio in the basement, and that was cool.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That is cool. Actually, we were—we were both in on Saturday on the fifth at Dia:Beacon to help celebrate Dorothea Rockburne's and also Mary Corse is having an opening there.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And, you know, in the years you're talking about at Max's there, how much of a presence were women? I think Dorothea was there sometimes, right? Is she—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I didn't run into Dorothea that much there. I kind of don't—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Maybe she was there at a slightly earlier period.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Maybe, I—yeah, I mean I would have to ask her.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: People talk about seeing her there with, you know, Brice Marden and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, okay, I was just going to say, all right. Brice, I would see all the time there. I would see him, and maybe I did see Dorothea, but I don't kind of remember it as much. I don't know.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You and she have become quite good friends. When did you kind of—this is an aside, but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, well we've—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —when did you, the two of you, come together, kind of?

NINA YANKOWITZ: We've known each other forever. We were both, as I think I mentioned, we were both in the first Whitney Biennial that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: 1973, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —inaugural one, 1973, yeah, and she lived close by, you know. We were in Tribeca, and she lived about three blocks from me, and we would hang out at this pl—not hang out but would [laughs] go there—that's now The Odeon. [00:10:21] It used to be a—God, what's—I don't remember the name of it. It was a restaurant like rol—I don't know, boy. You, you go and order your food from, from like a, a metal kind of slab—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, like a—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —type of thing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —cafeteria, almost?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, almost, but not quite but yeah, and we traded art. People would trade art for their meals. [They laugh.] Which, by the way, which Julian Schnabel did for Mickey Ruskin.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh really?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, and so there was a whole bunch of years that, you know, would—I just never had to pay for anything anyway. But that was —that was a little later.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, so, I wonder if you lent me a copy of this catalog here, *Voices of the Eye*, which was print published for your show at Stefanotti Gallery in 1979.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that right? And so—just to repeat a bit from our previous session, we're talking here about work that's addressing multiple senses: oral and visual, and I guess there are other [laughs] senses too, other tactile dimensions to what you're doing. But this book is really interesting because it collects writings from throughout the '70s, so I think the earliest is 1971, and it goes through to '79, not in a sequential way. It's organized differently than that, but—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Why did I—hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So my basic question—you know, this work, it addresses visual art. It has writings by you, and there are scores clearly intended for performing, and I'm wondering—you've already mentioned how you kind of didn't fit into the sculpture or painting at SVA—were you thinking of yourself by this time, by this early '70s, as a kind of multidisciplinary artist? [00:12:39] Was that a term that anybody even used? Or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, first of all, these were writings from the '60s through—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Think—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —later.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —'71 is the earliest one.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Really?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: At least of those that are dated.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —Excerpts from notes from the ground, which st—okay. Right. The earliest painting—in the '60s, I was doing, remember, the sound-infused draped painting with the audio. I don't think I wrote about this in here.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Not in here.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you write about them elsewhere, yeah, mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. And, I graduated The School of Visual Arts—remember I told you I didn't go to the fourth year; I was teaching in the graduate school [laughs] program that they set up with University of Massachusetts. I don't know if we were on tape or off tape when I discussed that. I cannot remember, but so, in the '60s, I—hmm. It was a very conceptual time. Remember, I mentioned Sol LeWitt was teaching there, and he was the one who introduced me to Eva Hesse, and there was Michael Heizer—you know, came, gave some lectures. My classmates were Adrian Piper and Saul Ostrow.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So it was a very conceptual, a conceptually motivated and theoretical time. Joseph Kosuth graduated the year before I did.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So my point is, it's not as though I didn't feel like I fit in. I just—when—as you know, when you go to a first— [00:14:43]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: All I meant to say was that you weren't fitting into somebody's conventional categories of being this or that kind of artist. I don't mean that you didn't fit in with the art scene of that time. But what I was wondering about, in the '70s, your art does go in various directions, in terms of working with sound. For example, in the '80s, there's an—I'm skipping ahead, but there was an architectural dimension that starts to come into the work.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, I'm curious about your mindset in the '70s as you're, you know, kind of like expanding, and this book, in a sense, sort of documents that. It's a really interesting book for that reason.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. Well, I feel that I kind of continued what I had started when I was in Woodstock, you know, the sound infused and working with this fellow who was in a beginning E.A.T. [Experiments in Art and Technology] person—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Aha.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —Phil Harmonic, [laughs] who did the sound—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So he worked on the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —Ken Werner.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —the, the big event that Rauschenberg helped organize at the E.A.T., and, and also other —

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, Ken Werner, he worked with Nam June on some things.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Ken Werner was living at Woodstock at this place that—at 212—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, you mentioned that, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. And I had asked him to mimic the sounds of *Oh Say Can You See* as they draped down the wall, okay, along the wall, and then it was shown at the Kornblee Gallery in '68. He was an early E.A.T. person.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it.

NINA YANKOWITZ: He did unfortunately pass away, and it's very early on, I think like—I don't remember. Maybe—I'm not sure of the date, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We can look it up.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —oh yeah. And what I'm trying to say is that there was that component, of, one would say mixed media, [laughs] mixed—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay. [00:16:51] Yeah, that's a good term.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You know, all of that happening. And then, when I would be part of—I don't, again, know if I mentioned this on tape, or off; I cannot remember from different stories. But, in the late '60s, when I was in some of those performances with Yvonne Rainer, and because she just wanted natural, natural movements—like a slob, I'm not [laughs] a dancer, so to speak, in that way. You know, just natural movement. And I had a great respect for her, and anyway, but you know, it's interesting. As we're talking now, there's this overarching image I am getting, in terms of, even though they're not connected overtly, but I see like Yvonne's work, where I had great respect for her, and Dorothea's work, who—Rockburne, I have great respect for. And there was something about the folding, the moving, that I always felt it was like a dance, like I was dancing with them, and similarly, because I feel there were certain—an underneath skeleton that we were all building upon in some way.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well that's interesting because Dorothea talks about the impact of dance on her conception of her work, and the folding of the body being like the folding of paper. I'm simplifying a bit. [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right. Well, we'll hear her story. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So, what I'm sort of building toward here a little bit is that in the title of this, *Voices of the Eye*, you get this mash-up of the visual and the oral, and there is a whole series of—I mean, it's really kind of remarkable, the terminology in this book, that you talk about paint readings, paragraph voicings, after image of thought, which is interesting; scenario readings, painting scenario text scores, retinal sound and text scorings—[they laugh]—paint filmic text scorings, scanning texts and placements. [00:19:25] I mean this, it's clear that you were you were finding your way—it sounds like you were finding your way, conceptually, toward some kind of omnibus concept where these different senses can be captured in terminology to express what you were trying to do.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm. Now it was—it's interesting you just—I just get another flash on something. For the *57th Street Review*—I don't know if you remember that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Do you remember it?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No.

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, no. It was—oh God, what was his name, who published it? Anyway, maybe it'll come back. But, in *57th Street Review*, they asked me to write something, and so, if we want to take this to another place—I don't know if it's in that book or not, but, I wrote about Heisenberg and the theory of uncertainty.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, right, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And how I saw this—whole thing: as you get closer to something, you're further away, and the whole kind of, almost like black hole [laughs] exploration into my work and seeing sounds and—you know, so it was another dimension, is what I'm trying to say. Oh, the fellow who published it, Jack Reynolds?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh. Really. All right, okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I think so. I'll have to Google it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Jock Reynolds?

NINA YANKOWITZ: [. . . Jock Truman?]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well okay, so this raises a number of questions including one that you were just alluding to. The first one that occurred to me was that, to try to understand the status of the work—[00:21:29]

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Going through images of her work] These are the earliest—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What is that?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Okay, go on. This is the body of work we're talking about, but—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, this is, yeah, the scan of this is in your PDF that you gave me.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, uh-huh.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this is a publication called *Sonorità Prospettiche*—

NINA YANKOWITZ: [*Sonorità Prospettiche: Perspective Sonorities*, book 1982, installation, 1972.] That's where—remember I mentioned well, Vito [Acconci] and all these performing people were in—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yeah, okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —it raises a really interesting question though. When you're talking about scorings, or works meant to be in some sense read—scanned and read—what the status of the work is in relation to the experience of it? So, on the one hand, one could say that, I'm just making this up, that the work is a record of an experience that you have had, and you're representing it in this way, in this scanned sequential drawing. Or—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Both.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —or, and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: And/or. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and/or, one could say it's like a musical score, which is a representation of something that will happen or could happen, you know, something—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So I'm just curious to hear your thoughts about that, sort of the ontological status of these artworks here. Are they before or after experience?

NINA YANKOWITZ: There's never a before or after in NinaLand! [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's always this multi-perspective kind of thing that's going on. [00:23:30] And, really, those early pieces, as I continued to do later projects, they were invitations for people to read. Now their reading of the color pitch key scenarios are going to be very different than anybody else's, because they have different voices; different accents; different ways of highlighting a particular word stream. So, it was really, in a funny way, the beginning of the interactive projects.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And not that it's just something that I was so conscious of when I was doing it. I was conscious of the idea of multiple perspectives and inviting people to participate. But I wasn't thinking about the new kinds of technology tools that I would work with later on [laughs] to—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They didn't exist.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right! I always use the technology of the day somehow, but that was not what later happened. Those tools weren't there, at least, available to me. So, but that's interesting what you said though, because there's another part of it, as in this book. The last stuff was in 1979, it was the public art commissions that I received, that I—that—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: We'll get to that.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, okay.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was the same thing though, the sounds, of voices.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay so, one of the interesting aspects of this, vis-à-vis the art world of the '50s and '60s, is that the norm, the sort of normative form of postwar New York School painting, is a unitary gestalt. You know, you encounter it; you take it all in. [00:25:31] Again, obviously, there are shades of gray there and so on and so forth, but you know, many of the artists' writings of the period talk about the aim to create a single unitary painting experience. You were obviously doing something very different here.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And I wondered to the extent to which that was a considered departure from what you'd been raised with.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. Yeah, it's not that I was opposed to others making monolithic [laughs] work, monolithic paintings, sculpture, installations, whatever. I just—I wasn't interested in it as much as wanting to incorporate multiple possibilities of what could happen. It's kind of like one of my favorite old movies I love, *Run Lola Run*, which you—there're so many different possible endings to something if there ever is an ending—which talks about, in a way—it's kind of like me: there is no [laughs] end. And there's so many different ways you can negotiate the travel—for Lola, it was running to reach a particular destination. For me, it's like running tracks in my [laughs] head, my mind. Or thinking about art, there's so many different [paths]—I always used to call it "a matrix of interactive events." You know, there's so many possibilities. And that's something I was really interested in elucidating, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, this is—I mean, there are other artists in the early '70s who are experimenting with reading work sequentially. [00:27:38] Nancy Spero was one I happen to know about, and she was very taken with, you know, the model of hieroglyphics, the idea of images that could be read, and interestingly, her work tends to read from right to left.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, that's interesting. That's a Jewish—[they laugh]—yeah, a Jewish reading.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You were—you tend to read left to right in your work.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You know—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I'm trying to think of other artists who were, who were experimenting with how work could be read and, there must be a raft of them.

NINA YANKOWITZ: There must. Let me see who I can think of. Well, how I perceived some people's work and exactly what they were doing could be—I mean for me, Jo Baer was reading, in a way. Just, you're reading the edges. You're reading things slipping off the edge, and the edge is very important, [laughs] and what one may think as vacant in the center, it wasn't vacant. It was activated by the edge being dealt with. It was. So, there are—I mean, readings, yeah, it's a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well the other—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Ellsworth Kelly, I could think of so many different people. In a way, they may not talk about their work that way, but—I don't know. I haven't read that they did, but my perception of the works were like—and Brice [Marden], by the way, and I used to talk to him about these. I don't know that he ever agreed or not with me. [00:29:39] I can't kind of remember because in those days, he was a bit more—he was shy. He just wasn't as outgoing verbal, you know,

CHRISTOPHER LYON: He still isn't.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I haven't seen him in a long time, but I used to love how the things would just like, drip off the edge, would drip down to—like the weight would be sometimes just so heavy on the bottom like, just these settled drips, this black—you'd have to really look closely to see it. [Laughs.] I found that fascinating.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: The other model that's clearly there and it's there even in those descriptive titles I was reading, is film.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And, you made works with discrete frames, and can you talk a little bit about your engagement with film at that time? Had you a—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Actually—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And it's also very interesting that your son ended up being a film editor. [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right. Actually, I did write a film script [laughs] called *Animate and (In)animations*.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Which is in this publication actually, or no, not—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —not that one, in another—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —no, not the script—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —another—right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But some words are, are here. No, actually, it—there is a little section.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right, I published it in portions of—well, I went off on, on different things. These were what Richard Kostelanetz published—Jerry Rothenberg, *Consumption*, or—that was the name; published prior parts of it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So this is—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Okay, so you can get it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: *Consumption* or *Animate and (In)animations*, not a name that one can say quickly.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. [Laughs.] But that, if you read what that is, it will give you a hit on to, into what the whole thing was about.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: One of the things that jumped out at me here is—well let me read a little bit of it: "The camera films in flashing frames, approximately 20 sites through a weaving of film clips, slides, and architectural models, across the country, scenery interiors, et cetera." [00:31:50] This is so interesting because architectural models become a primary vehicle for you a little, not too far down the road from this. I'm so—

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's interesting and I haven't met Barry yet, who does architecture.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well that's my point—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I just was thinking about that.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you're already working with this, this idea of the architectural models as a kind of like a motif that can carry meaning and so on, before you meet Barry, before you're making the greenhouses and all that business.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And one thing that you just reminded me of, was how the basic part of this film script had a lot, it had a lot to do with seeing people as props, and props as people. And, again I'm reminded of something really interesting. In—when was it? In '69, actually the first semester I think, I was asked to—I was teaching at SVA in the courses here and there, and they asked me to teach [Philip Pearlstein]'s course, and I said, "But, I'm not a figurative person. I don't know that I could do this." They said, "You, you could do it; just do it." Well, it was really interesting. I learned so much about the human figure as object, because he had this *objectness* involved. Now I can't remember if I was doing this before, and the actual date that I was teaching, and how many years. [00:33:54] We're spanning a few years there. I don't remember if I had—what I was writing about here, in this, in the '70s had connected—well of course I did; this is in actually 1979. Yeah, it must have been.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh! Sorry. [Phone rings.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Whoops! [Laughs.] And that's the background sound to my scenario: [laughs] "It's Chris's phone!" [Recorder stops, starts]

No, so yeah, I'm just weaving through this and working with what you're laying out here, this framework, which I hadn't really quite connected before, that I believe that teaching that class also stimulated a lot of these things with *Consumption* or *Animate and (In)animations* in my film script. Because one of the things that I loved about this work was that it was like, object, like I—the arms or body could be the same as a table, or a cantilevered arm could be like this [arm] just—metallic, it kind of like just looked metallic to me. [Laughs.] Anyway, I found this work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no, that makes sense.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —interesting for that, so.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah. So another thing which you have already mentioned—you mentioned the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, but where I was struck with, I was just struck with that, but also throughout this artist book that you made there is mention of scientific disciplines of various kinds. You talk about neurological concepts like synesthesia, and double vision, how the eye scans. [00:35:54] You mentioned the German physicist Max Born, in talking about wave theory, and so on. And, I'm continuing to find it fascinating

that a number of women artists working in the '70s are evoking science—and I guess this happens with male artists too, but I'm thinking of you; I'm thinking of Dorothea; I'm thinking of Michelle Stuart; I'm thinking—I mean there's just, there's a lot of—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, wait. How do you see Michelle? I see Michelle working more with earth or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Michelle's working more in the, the realm of earth science—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —earth. Well I won't say science, but I see it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —geology and so on.

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Yeah.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And anthropology, which is—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, anthropology was something very dear to her, yes.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. And there, there are male artists doing that too, but it seems to me, and this is maybe a crackpot theory and you'll tell me so—[they laugh]—that part of the attraction of that is that science provides a kind of gender-neutral authority for what you're doing. You know? It's like you're not—you know, any, all art needs a certain amount of—kind of like, "Where is this coming from? What are you basing this on? What does this mean?" You know? And it's always just—it strikes me that this is a way of asserting authority for work that bypasses the question of history, which at that point is largely male, and institutional authority, which at that point is largely male.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: I mean, it's an interesting point. I—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I'm try—no, it is—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: If you think it's—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —an interesting point—and I think—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —nutty, [laughs]—

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, I don't think it's nutty at all. I think it's true in some cases. I can, I totally can see what you're saying. From my perspective, I think, when you talk about Michelle's work, for example, I could see it as her work was making it humanistic, you know, like it was [a poetic] kind of science, anthropology, wax, earth; that's how I would see it. [00:38:21] Other artists—well, I could speak for myself. I just felt my way of understanding science was not linear [laughs] and most of the history of science has always been: you move along a continuum, and scientists add and feed into that history. And you know, I always felt, where are the outliers? How about the people who weren't involved in that, or they didn't get funded because they weren't a friend of somebody on the committee [laughs] who's giving the money, like Hedy Lamarr.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Mm! Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You know, it just—anyhow, I just always felt that for me, I just was adding in my own—albeit whether it's presumed wacky or opening up some other avenue—For me, it was my communicative system of whether it was astral, whether it was brain function, whether—whichever subjects I was working with. Learning about color, color theory, was very—that's why I was mentioning it, or maybe I didn't mention Albers, but that was very influential to me in my way of reading this notion of scanning paint, because I understood those theories as being: the addition or the subtraction of light could make something recede, come forward, backward, could carry your eye moving. [00:40:28] The chromatic elements were different, [laughs] the colors. So there would be like location points: red, blue, green, you know, as opposed to the subtle gradations. So, the gradations to me, that was like serial imagery. That was how I saw Sol LeWitt's work; that's how I saw it, you know, in the '60s and the early '70s, I saw themes—that whole progressive kind of way through Albers's color theories. So, it was, oddly enough, my way of parsing it and using it and making another kind of communication system that became these visual scores.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Along with your many mediums, you made an opera [laughs]—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, I did.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —*Personae Mimickings*—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —*Mimickings, or Voices*—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —or *Voices from the Piano*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —*from the Piano*. [They laugh.] It's a piece about expressing the multiple voices.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I—

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I wonder if you could describe this for us a little bit. This, is now like 1979, and it was performed in 1980, perhaps earlier, I don't know, for the International [Sound] Poetry Festival in New York.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, I just wondered if you could describe the performance?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well I was working on it from the late—I guess I started in 1978 or something, working on it, but there're several different parts to it. There were two. There's part one and there's part two of *Personae Mimickings* and *Voices from the Piano*, which was opera, and then the other one was based on this part of *Scenario Sounds*, this was called *Ethnographic Weavings*. [00:42:34] And *Ethnographic Weavings*, I'm going with the cover, [laughs] and it was printed inside and around the outside of the book of these prints. There were silkscreen prints, of the opera. The *Ethnographic Weavings*, we went around and we synthesized, used a recorder, and we would go around all of New York and record different voices from different communities that comprised New York: Jewish community, Italian community, [laughs] Hispanic, da-da-da, you know, black Africans, and I had recorded that. And then with the Moog synthesizer—[brief interruption] With a Moog synthesizer, we would take all of those voices, I wanted them stretched to sound like musical instruments. So, that was another kind of operatic [laughs] piece that was the backdrop, that was the sound.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So, was part of this opera done live and part through recordings?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, no, okay. Well, the performances were—I'll tell you what happened. I don't know how to play the piano, for example. I never knew how to play the piano, always wanted to, but okay. So, this, the opera, *Personae Mimickings*, hosted multiple personalities. This is what I was addressing, multiple personalities that live inside of us all. [00:44:37] This is my—you know, what I was exploring, and I mimicked sounds of voices from different countries like Russia, Germany, Dutch, and France. I would write like, *The Baroque the Belle of Appetite*. I wrote this whole thing with music and played piano via color as notes—I would play the color scores, on [laughs] the piano. I would read them, and that would be the—I would play the piano to it while I was singing, in all these different voices, like the German voice: "Vashtunk!" I would do the flirty yearnings: "Oh, oh wa-ah-whatchu cola mata cola." You know, I would make up these, from different languages, coming from different countries, a little wacky, and I would perform them in different places. I mean, performing them wasn't my big thing for doing it. Really, it was about publishing the opera, the prints, and having people do it themselves; that was what I was most interested in. But some, somehow—at the time, I was involved with Charlie Doria who had published things with, well, different—[but with Jerry Rothenberg, who wrote the *Big Jewish Book*, which Charlie Doria had collaborated with him on.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So, Jerry had published a series of things of, of mine. [00:46:37] And, when the Sound Poetry Festival happened, because these were all poets and it's—I think I mentioned Dick Higgins, and Jackson Mac Low, and [Anne] Tardos who the people, these performances became a thing in the sound poetry world, which they saw as an interesting input into what they were doing, to have visual artists doing this. Actually, Carolee Schneemann performed something and also—oh, what was her name? I loved her work, the violin and she had her—Yeah, she was on the program. Oh, I loved her work—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —Charlotte Moorman.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, Charlotte, and she'd be flying through the air, and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh my God. She was wonderful.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So, yeah, [laughs] it was great, and they, yeah, she was really terrific. And so they began coalescing artists, artists working with sound, and poets working with sound, so it became a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Interesting. Yeah, no, that's cool.—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I don't, I don't know if I answered your question exactly.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Was there—I mean, my memory of that time is that there, there still wasn't, at that time, a kind of defined discipline called performance art. It was like people were doing a little bit of theater, a little bit of dance, a little bit of—yeah.

[Brief interruption]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Um, no, well—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I mean we didn't call it performance art, did we? [00:48:37]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, there was a movement. No, there [was]—I'm thinking, Michael Smith was doing performances. It was a smaller community, but there were—but yes, there were some going on. They, [there] were more either—well, Michael Smith was like on this sardonic kind of comedic stuff that went on. I always found it very interesting. It later developed much more in the '80s, but I always thought a lot came from black [African American] humor, and you know, that kind of way of expressing oneself through things that they may feel uncomfortable about and they could share it that way and make jokes about it.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So there, there was that. There were people doing it, but it, it wasn't as large a community as later on, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I don't know where to put this, but I didn't want to lose the chance to have you talk about your encounter with Agnes Martin, where you get to explain what you're doing with all these things, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So how did you happen to visit her in New Mexico?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well I was teaching at the University of Colorado. I had a visiting artist gig in Boulder, and actually Betty Woodman was there, and her husband, George, was the director of the art program and [the committee] invited me to teach. I can't remember the woman I drove with. I think she had a very large Native American [face.] I see her visually. She had a Native American visage, and definitely, she was. [00:50:38] [Laughs.] We were driving to Santa Fe; we'd decided we were going to take a trip.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And on the way, she said, "Oh, let's, let's go." She didn't know Agnes Martin either but she said, "Oh, Agnes Martin's studio is along here, or she lives here. I don't know if it's her studio, and she lives here." And it's—there's a long driveway [laughs]—so, she said, "Oh, should we go?" And I said, "Why not? We'll knock on the door. Why not?" All right. So, we knocked on the door. We climbed up this drive. I remember it was like really a hill that was a little—I mean, one could get up and down it, but for me it wasn't that easy. I'm not a mountain climber. It wasn't that bad, [laughs] but anyway, so we climbed, climbed up there, and knocked on the door, and Agnes answered the door. And she looked at both of us and she said, "Come on in." And, we did, and she, asking all sorts of questions about what we were doing, and you know, I'd said I was teaching blah, blah, blah, at Boulder, and she asked me a lot about my work. And at the time, I was in the crux of all of these multiple voices, and I told her about the opera and the multiple personalities that I was portraying and displaying, and she seemed really intrigued. Anyway, it was a very nice visit. So then, okay, we left, and about in 2005, I want to say, maybe 2004, [I was] there at SITE Santa Fe to—I think it was 2004. [00:52:52]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: SITE, SITE Santa Fe.

NINA YANKOWITZ: SITE Santa Fe. I had gone to Cuba, one summer. I'd gone a couple of times—with Holly Block several times, and one time, actually, Michelle Stuart was on that trip and so was Carey Lovelace. I met this woman who I liked very much. Now I'm blanking her name! Hmm, maybe it'll come as I'm telling the story. Very, very interesting woman. She was hosting SITE Santa Fe a following year, okay, and she—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, Bobbie Miller?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, Bobbie Foshay-Miller, that was her name, yes. And Bobbie, so then she hosted the after party for it at her house, we went there, and I'm sitting at the table—it was a long table—and Agnes walked in

with her caretaker. She must have been, I don't know, in her 90s? No, I don't know. She was very old by [laughs] then, and she was [saying], "Hi Nina, how's your work going? What's going on with it? You still doing those [laughs] pieces?" And I was so struck that after all those years she remembered my name. She remembered what I was doing. I couldn't understand how, why? I mean, you know, I wasn't out there in the art world that much for me to be any kind of [laughs]—anywhere near being a household name. So it was—it really struck me.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's amazing. That's an amazing story.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, but then, when I read—you know, all these books have come out more recently about Agnes, scholarly books and Nancy Princenthal's book. [00:55:03] I went to Nancy's book reading, and she wrote about Agnes's life and work in a very different way. And she talked a little bit, anyway, and I went home and I read the book, and I was—oh my God, now I finally understood what was going on, why Agnes must have been like, really intrigued with what I was doing, intrigued with, because she was feeling multiple voices in her head. I wasn't aware, at the time, that she had these, one would say, psychotic breaks, or it's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: No, she had a—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —dealing with—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —serious schizophrenic breakdown.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, yeah, and I didn't know that she had these schizophrenic things going on.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Or I'm forgetting. Anyway it doesn't matter. But at any rate, so I began to understand in that book of Nancy's—you know, that she was experiencing all of these voices and that's why she was so intrigued with—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, no, she definitely—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —what I was doing.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —heard voices and all that, yeah. Okay so in 1981, you had a second show at Stefanotti, called *The Acoustics of Space*, and those, those pieces, they're liked shaped canvases, is that, is that right? [00:57:16]

NINA YANKOWITZ: They were panels, yeah, they're architectural panels, yeah. I could show you those.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I can—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, they were. They had tile frames. Some were rounded, then there were these abstract-shaped panels put together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Well, I wanted to just show them to you for our conversation just because. So these are canvas, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, they were panels, no—well, they were kind of like masonite panels.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —like masonite panels. Okay, that's interesting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And then they're framed by these—sort of like almost, they seem like—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —friezes, like these architectural friezes, ceramic tile.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right. Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And they were hung in different ways, and this is where I had audio tapes also going, addressing different parts of the body. [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What kind of audio?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, they were audios speaking from the hips, speaking from the elbows, from the rear, you know, imagining almost like you're in a 5-D sphere, and you're turning with it, with the piece. I mean, this was my head there, and I would hang the pieces to address different parts of the body.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Ah, okay, okay. How do you mean "address different parts?"

NINA YANKOWITZ: They were lower, like to the knees or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: They were, at, at different levels on, on the wall?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, they were.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay. Okay. So, well that's interesting. So thi—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was kind of the continuation from what I showed you from the early show in Italy with the installations. [00:59:20] Remember I mentioned where there were these painting scores, and again they addressed different parts of the body. This was another. Now I brought architecture into it, the volume, like how visual sound occupies a space. This was in my head.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Visual. Yeah, that makes sense, yeah. So now, at this point—it looks like it comes—there's a big change in materials, and you start working with ceramics, and handmade tiles?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Oh, okay, that's—well, in 1979 was when I had received these two commissions to address two schools for the handicapped, the hearing impaired.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where was that, the school?

NINA YANKOWITZ: In Newark, New Jersey, and in Jersey City, there were two schools. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And what did you—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I didn't know how to make tiles or anything like that, but I wanted to translate like, these kind of sounds, visual sounds as I would see them. I would tell stories with ceramic. I wanted to squeeze ceramic color, like glazes, on to tiles and bake them. I called everywhere, every place in the—oh my God, I researched so much to find different houses or artists from different parts of the country, that could fabricate it for me. I was going to hire them to fabricate these things. They thought I was crazy. They said, "No, there's no technology for that. We don't know how to do that. We don't know." So, I had to figure it out myself.

So what I did was, I started experimenting with different clay slips. [01:01:29] And, I had this idea that I would make the clay plastic by adding in different chemicals, like adding in Rhoplex to paint, then I would squeeze out paint, out as like ketchup bottles. Things like that, that would make them not crack when you folded them up [laughs] or rolled them. So I used—

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NINA YANKOWITZ: —that kind of formula, in my head for clay, and found different kinds of glass particles that could float and don't even ask how I got it. It's amazing I did this. They would float in the liquids and bind them, and I've made up all these formulas and that's what happened and that's what I did. If you go to the bathroom there you'll see the actual tiles from that series that I made. These are the early, when they were paint on the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yeah, anyhow. So, that kind of led me into—that was not my first, my earliest. Well, the earliest public art piece we discussed was in Central Park. Remember the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yeah, that's something else. But this started—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But this is a commissioned—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —right, right, two commissions. And then what happened from there was this: There was a movement going on in the art world where Frosty Myers was showing. These artists were making one-of-a-kind artist furniture pieces, and so I thought to myself, You know, it'd be interesting to do that as a break, like as a painter will go and they'd make a series of prints, silk screens or handmade paper prints, or whatever they choose. What I could do then is, I could make these—I would make multiples. As you know, there were artists making multiples. I thought of that as a multiple.

[Side conversation in Yankowitz' studio.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Should we re-record that or something, with all that noise in the background? [00:02:00] [Laughs.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's okay. Right, okay, so you were thinking of it as—

NINA YANKOWITZ: And that I would take a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —as if it was—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —break, like—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —like you know, working in—like a painter working in multiples, in prints, for example.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —well, a sculptor making multiples, a painter making print editions for this—oh, I could do that, you know, for a couple of years just to do something different and make something in another material that would never, from my perspective, would be anything that I'd want to stay involved with. It would just be—in other words, I'm not—I wouldn't be a printmaker 100 percent of the time. I love doing prints, and I've done prints, and I've done handmade paper pieces, one-of-a-kind pieces—you know, whatever. But I never wanted to be known, my whole—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You do—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —oeuvre would be a printmakers. That wasn't what I was interested in, with the tiles.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you, you were not going to become a ceramic artist.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, and not that I didn't have respect for ceramic artists, although I found that a very different world to function in the logic, and the conversations were so different than I experienced in the art world. Anyway, anyhow, so I then had this first show at Art and Industry. And then I worked with Michael Steinberg, who had *Furniture of the 20th Century*. The biggest problem for me was it got a lot of attention, and people, all these magazines and people, writing about it all over and I didn't want to be a ceramic [laughs] artist. So it really was kind of frustrating to me and even to this day, sometimes people say, "Oh, do you, do you still make any of those fabulous, you know, furniture pieces?" What I would do is, I [made] like a table, for example. It exploded, and it was made to look like it exploded in sections. [00:04:04] And so you could put it together for a family gathering, or they would—like tears, like rips, ceramic rips, you could open them up and expand them and have different people sit separately, [laughs] in this space. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But you also had a show at MoMA PS1?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, I did. That was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —called—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —oh right, right, right, right, that was in, yes, that was what, 1981 or—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —'82, I think.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —two, '82, and that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Looks pretty ambitious, as like eight panels, and then there's, again, this framing border.

NINA YANKOWITZ: This frieze, this architectural frieze relief, it was called *Hell's Breath, The Sounds of Falling*, and it—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Did it have a sound component?

NINA YANKOWITZ: It did, and it was curated by Bill Hellermann, who was this, a sound artist at the time. He was a very interesting guy, and he—so, I was given a space, and yeah, *The Sound, The Sounds of Falling*, again this thing about the body being involved. The devils, or these other implements of Hell, [laughs] were one's fantasy of what Hell is. The audio was composed as if a cacophony of sounds, like as you're—falling from grace, you know, and that's like *woooo*. [They laugh.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay, okay, this is good. So I just wanted to briefly walk through some of the works of the 1980s. At Germans Van Eck Gallery, you made an installation that is both a wall piece and also furniture. [00:06:07]

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There was a table in the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: It was a table, a house, ceramic, [reptiles] it was all ceramic. The house was flipped upside

down, so the roof was a cantilevered slab. It sat on the roof, so—well, it wasn't really upside down, but it was—the roof wasn't the top of the table; it was the landscape that you would imagine underneath, like there were snakes roaming, and Gila monsters. Yes, that should be the ground. That's why I said inverted, but that's the landscape—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So the—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —top.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So in effect, the landscape's on top of the house?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Exactly, and you can see the roof there, the angled roof, and there were places; like you could put glasses in the snake, inside the snake, or you could put napkins in the Gila monster's mouth, or whatever. [Laughs] And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Where did you have these things fired?

NINA YANKOWITZ: I made them!

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Really!

NINA YANKOWITZ: I couldn't find anybody—that was my point. [Side conversation.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you had a kiln?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, okay. That's a story. Yeah, that's what I was getting to when we were interrupted by the people, movers, coming in and out with whatever. I had a kiln. I couldn't find anybody to fabricate these. It—"No, you can't do that. It's not possible." So, as you can see, I came up with casting slip that really made like—some of them are like eight-inch reliefs. They're pretty deep. And so I had a kiln. I had it here for a while. And I thought, God, I'm killing myself; I'm going to kill myself; you know, because it's carcinogenic to be breathing in a lot of the talc in whatever clay body you're using, and the glazes with chemicals. [00:08:23] Anyway, so, I then, Barry had a building, [used] a loft space in the West Village, and actually, Brice Marden's wife was one of the tenants. I'm just thinking who, who was there at the time? It was a really fun place, but people weren't supposed to be living there. It was all studios and he rented it out for income. So I rented it from him. I rented one of the spaces, and I put my kiln there, and I made all that stuff there! This is industrial—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Wonderful.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And you know, I had fans that would take it out—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And it had fans—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —at the building.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and all, yeah, yeah. So, let's, let's veer back into the biographical a little. So you and Barry Holden got together when?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, we—well, we got married on Hiroshima Day, 8-6, '86, 19—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's how you can remember it, huh?

NINA YANKOWITZ: [Laughs] that's how I can remember, right. We'd gone together. Well, we met in Chicago when I was teaching at the Art Institute. He had just graduated, and I met him. He was involved with N. A. M. E. Gallery there with Jerry Saltz, and we met for coffee, whatever. Then, a couple of years later, in 1980, I met him in New York here at Jamie Canvas. We started dating in 1980, but, for like about a year and a half or—then, we split up. It was two years? Whatever, we split up, and [in 1985] I went to Japan. I had a grant to go to Japan, oh, which is where I made the ceramic bricks with Frank Lloyd Wright's—yeah, someone who worked with Frank Lloyd Wright's tiles. [00:10:39] Anyway, that so, another segue into this, but—and then when I came home, ooh, let's see, 1986 is when we formally—you know, we got married. And—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So we should mention that that Barry studied architecture, and is an architect.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well he was an artist, and during the time, oh—

[Brief side conversation about the recording.]

NINA YANKOWITZ: So, during that time that we were together, we were both, before we had met, very close

friends with Hermine Freed and James Ingo Freed. We had met them totally [in] different places. Hermine was one of my best friends, and actually, she was one of the artists at Stefanotti, and Ingo, James Freed was involved with designing the space, with these [curved] walls. This is for my first show in '79, the one with the *Paragraph Readings*, and Hermine was an artist there. Barry had met them when they were living—when Jim was in Chicago, he was teaching. He was there for a while. And his practice—he came back to New York but it was very funny because they were the people that we both knew separately before we got together.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. Got it. Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And then he went back to school; that was my point. He came to New York in 1980. He was an artist, and then, and Ingo kept saying to him, Jim, would say, "You know, you should really apply, apply, apply to architecture school. [00:12:45] I think you'd really be good at it." And anyway, so he did and he went to Columbia, and that's during the [time]—you could see why we probably split up—[they laugh.] It was, it was really hard to, when you're older, going back to school—and it was a very rigorous program. But anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I mean it's interesting to see how much of your subsequent work has a—you know, interacts with architecture at the very least. You did a series, two series: one, *Think Negative*; and one, *Think Positive*. And I wonder if you could—you were as you say, investigating the wall and the floor, as domains, as places to interact with creatively—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I saw them as secrets in the walls, but you just mentioned something; again, it's stimulating some thought here. When I started, when I started getting more involved—I mean, I always had some element of architecture in my work, as you know, we talked about before. But what happened with my earlier piece, when Barry and I had separated during that time: I was involved with doing this building façade, *American Myths*, for Columbia University, and using American imagery as American mythology as opposed to the motifs that are more standard in European embellishments. I wanted to use—it's kind of like *Ethnographic Weavings*, that piece I was talking [laughs] about. I wanted people from America to be on the facades. And this came at the time when a piece of a building fell off, yes, and killed somebody uptown at Columbia in that area there and that's why I chose the Columbia area. [00:14:57] Anyway, so that was a whole thing. That was a combination I used of cast stone and these 3-D ceramic tiles that were set into the walls, which ended up now, at the Doris Freedman Center for the Arts, an architectural frieze for their student center.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh, okay. So, I wonder if you could just—

NINA YANKOWITZ: That's Albright College, by the way. Do you know Doris Freedman?

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I know who Doris Freedman was, but yeah.—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Do you remember her? That center is part of Albright College. I'm just clarifying. Okay, in Pennsylvania.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What? Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Reading, Pennsylvania. No, the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What's Albright University?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Albright—well, Albright College, the Doris Freedman Center is there.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And Mary Miss did this whole installation there, and they did some very interesting projects, installations, and Jill Snyder was the curator there and she wanted me to do this *American Myths* version on the student center. Okay, go on.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Okay so, I just wondered if you could describe briefly the thinking behind the *Think Negative* and *Think Positive* pieces that you made.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, okay. It was, it was a time when I was seeing images as—I was making these like huge, cantilevered airplane wings that came off the wall, that also, in some way, you could see as a big tongue. I started seeing it that way. So I began this whole series of *Think Negatives*, things that were carved into the walls, and *Think Positives*, that came out from the wall. [00:17:03]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So give an example of a *Think Negative* piece, like maybe one of the boats.

NINA YANKOWITZ: One of the boats carved into the, yes, carved into the sheetrock, part into the plaster, set into the wall, and the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So just for the readers' clarity: it's as if you were looking at a boat in a surface except it was vertical instead of being a boat in water, where it was—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, and there's one series that I just actually uncovered while I was cleaning my storage rooms. There was this whole period which, this can explain it, kind of in an interesting way too, I think, where there was a boat. It was filled like in a sea of resin embedded in the plaster, and it's like you're sliding through the plaster.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —that's nice.

NINA YANKOWITZ: The boat itself is like pushing through the plaster.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it, got it. And then the *Positive* pieces, you've mentioned the airplane wing and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: And there was a tongue. There were tongues coming out, and ears.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: There's a front of a car, I think, in—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, that was right. I had the front end of a car. That was a large—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's pretty big, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, yeah, it was a real car, and again, it was like a generic, Americana Ford, you know, once it like, *ploooh*. Yeah, it hung on the wall and I had it painted. I painted it; I had it painted in a car place candy-apple red, and then it went through another iteration, where I had it flocked, and yeah, it, it was fun. There was a whole series of these *Fractured Paintings*, as I would call them, which I had mentioned I had showed at TZ'Art. Frederieke Taylor and Tom Zollner's SoHo gallery. They're partial paintings—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Oh right— that come out partly from the wall, and—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that you were seeing, right, and so it relies on memory—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —you sort of have to imagine the rest of the painting.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —right, on the other side, what's happening, some kind of—what? A foot! [00:19:03] [They laugh.] Or one bit of, a little like abstract form, that's like, sliding off the wall into—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's a bit of a—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —wherever.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —bit of a Robert Gober aspect to this, isn't there?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, I guess in time I—you know, yeah, I guess. Actually, it's interesting, he saw my—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I hadn't thought about that.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I had—yeah, well at the time, I wasn't that aware of him and I met him; it was interesting. At the time of that show, I also curated a show at TZArt, another month during the same year, and I paired—*From Then and Now*, in architecture, painting, sculpture. God, it was massive, and it [laughs]—so I had artists come and do things. So I had Fabian Marcaccio do a wall installation, and Sol LeWitt came in and he did a wall for me. And Fabian Marcaccio was living with Gober at the time. That's when I met him. But I didn't, I didn't really know of his work that much until later and I love his work. Now I just, oh, I—totally—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, it would be—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —especially cool for you. So just to wrap up the purely biographical: Ian is born when?

NINA YANKOWITZ: 1989.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: 1989, okay. So you and Barry in recent years have collaborated in various ways, or at least worked together. I don't know if "collaboration" is quite the word.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, well, no, we've collaborated on—we did a series of public art proposals and projects, and we were awarded some. We did *The Garden of Games*, *the Garden of Scientific Ideas* for I.S. 145 which is in Queens, a magnet school. [00:21:08] And I had—I mean, we didn't collaborate on this, but I did the subway on

51st and Lexington, with—don't go there now because it's in total disarray, disrepair. Don't go there. They are changing the whole subway system so it's probably going to be deaccessioned and—anyways, but that's been there since the 1980s—well, it was commissioned in 1986. It was installed in 1988, and I have—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And, and using tile, specially made tile, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, yes, I had like, like these—I made [relief] tiles that looked like the walls were peeling open and you're peering through into the—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Isn't the walkway there, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: With the between—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —the underpass, to Citicorp.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —and when you go, if you want to transfer from the, what used to be the E and F Lines there—I guess the M goes through there now—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. I can't; I haven't gone back. It's horrible, horrible. I just can't go—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's too bad. Yeah that was, that was a mess. But what I'm curious about is that, you know—what we've talked about, this architectural dimension of the work has become more and more apparent, at least. I don't know of its importance in relation to other things, but it's kind of become your vehicle for—you've dealt with environmental issues; religions and cultural issues, and a whole variety of topics, you know, using the form of a kind of greenhouse, or little—

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, *CloudHouse*, which was, yeah, a whole series that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: What was the earliest—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —in 2004.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —of the greenhouse pieces?

NINA YANKOWITZ: The—hmm. [00:23:08] In 2002, I was doing these feminist houses, like women in science, or you know too—and I had created *Kiosk.Edu*, which was, that was 2004, with quotes from creatives, again culled *From Then and Now*.—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: You, you made the *CloudHouse*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: And then *CloudHouse*, yeah, which was very—and by the way, it's interesting because one thing kind of like led to the other. The *Kiosk.Edu*, I showed it at the AIA in New York,—I remember Ian was in school then, in, whatever, like junior high or something, and they did—no, can't be; must be sixth [laughs] grade or in seventh grade. I don't know. It was from—anyway, he was in school, I remember, and I'm saying that because I remember his whole class went to go to this event. That was, they had begun—they'd moved to SoHo, and they had begun to really—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: In LaGuardia Place, right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: —yes, work with [and] show artists, environmental kinds of issues and concerns and whatever. And then I—okay, *CloudHouse* was one of the pieces that I made that was very much about using technology to create a cloud inside the house to host a cloud moving and changing shape due to the environment surrounding the house; the moisture in the air. [00:25:21] It was made with a small misting generator that forms fine droplets [via] ultrasound. It was done [by] ultrasound, and that totally like, pushed me into a whole other area using greenhouses as ice house, and all these other concerned weather projects. And I saw that piece as being seen as a soothsayer predicting what inclement weather conditions will be coming, because it has that ability because it just—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —because it's responding to moisture in the air, like a barometer.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, exactly. So, anyway—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And you sort of extended the environmental, and also the house form, into some videos, and you made the *ShatterFloodMudHouse*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: *WaterFloodMudHouse*, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And these are, these are computer animations, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, right.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Can you talk about your engagement with computer animation a little bit?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Well, it was a new medium for me, and I still use old tools to create, to create new projects with it, but I worked with two different animators, at different times. I felt they were really great. They technically were just fabulous and they used a host of different programs to create 3-D animations. Without really having the programs, [00:27:23] but the way I designed it for it to be spinning around, it looked like a projectile from the wall, coming out from the wall, and the rest of the other videos that I overlaid [laughs] made it even more 3-D. And sometimes I created pieces with that, like the *ShatterHouse*, where there were QR codes put into it, and you could click on it and interact with it, answer questions, and that was interesting.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And weren't the QR codes used in your *Third Woman*?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, the QR codes were th—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you made this; it's a kind of narrative, and a game.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. It was a—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's interactive anyway.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right. I worked with—there was a whole team of people that created *The Third Woman* project. Pia Tikka, Martin Rieser, had created, really worked on the movie of *The Third Woman* and the concept, and there were a whole host of people, and this project went through different [iterations] and—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So you—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —some people just—I took, I took on—well, I created the tease for the movie, where you're, it's almost as if the third woman is falling. There were like QR cards or text cards—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, I remember those, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —that are flying into a well, which is like one of the perps going underground because remember, the whole story of *The Third Man* film, this is based on *The Third Man* film.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Right, exactly.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah, with the penicillin being robbed, and the underground and the subway stations. [00:29:25] And there, there were—oh, Anna Dumitriu was involved a very interesting artist-scientist with very unique work, and, anyway, there were; there was a host of people, people working with sound. I did a version of *The Third Woman* at Galapagos in Brooklyn where I—Pia Tikka and her husband, Mauri Kaipainen—who I worked with on *Criss~Crossing the Divine*, another project, the religions project we were talking about, not religious, but about religions, and Martin Rieser came, and [Rasmus Vuori, technician;] we all lived here. There were six of us, I guess. Oh, Margarete Jahrmann created these code costumes. I wanted her to create code costumes that people could go and they could use their cell phones, their smart phones, click on them, and respond to questions based on moral issues in the film, to come and create a new movie with us. So in other words, the audience was collaborating with our initial movie by selecting options that were, in real time, being tallied—the totals were appearing.

Anyway it was a very interesting project, and The Algorithmics were dancers who, as people walked in to the space—they were forming the shapes of different codes, introducing how to use your cell phones, through dance. [00:31:40] We just put out an open call. Abby Cassell who was an old friend of mine, just put out a call for just normal, natural people to be part of this and it was great! [Laughs.] Each section of it, of the introduction, showed everything from how, what, the formations of QR codes were; how you used your phone to click on them; and then they would like—you know, this was all through sound and movement and tap: *boom, thoom, mm*, and they'd enter the audience booths where people were sitting. I don't know if you were ever at Galapagos, but they had—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —water, there were like pools of water with banquettes all the way around, and the whole idea was for people not to individually vote; they were voting with their teams. So there were like, let's say, seven or eight banquettes, and each one would use one cell phone, and they'd respond to questions that were texted to them. And as I said, this fellow, Rasmus Vuori, was up on the top deck there tallying, doing the voting tallies, and those sequences that were selected the most in response to the different options that were given. The texted information—how you would vote: Holly Matins was bypassed, because of A, B, or C. I'm just giving you a sample. [Laughs.] And so, and at the end of the movie, the new screening happened. [00:33:45] That audience's new film was [projected] on the wall.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Got it. And then—

NINA YANKOWITZ: I hope that was clear. It was a little bit—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It's—well, I think it's, you'd—

NINA YANKOWITZ: It's a little bit—right, it's a little hard.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —have to, you'd have to really get into it. I think you'd have to see some video or some—you know, to—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —right, to [see and] read it, yeah.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: But continuing your engagement with new media, you already mentioned *Criss~Crossing the Divine*, and you made a, a piece called *Crossings*.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Right, well, *Crossings* was the first one—Yes, and I did *Crossings*, well, in 2000, year 2000, it was called—it wasn't called *Crossings* yet. It was called *House of Worship*, W-O-R-S-H-I-P, or, *House of Worships Not Warships*, W-A-R-S-H-I-P-S, okay. That's what I—that project I used to submit to an open call from MIT [Leonardo/ISAST The International Society for the Arts, Sciences, and Technology, *House of Worships Not Warships*, M.I.T. Leonardo Initiative] for inviting three Americans to come and collaborate with artists and scientists from around the world, to join together and create interactive projects together. I never thought I would get this, whatever, but I was invited. And the first day, we met in five—in several different countries, and we joined different teams. People would come and talk to you the first day we presented our projects that we had applied with. And people would come, and they would either want to work with you on a new project, or they'd want to work on your project, whichever way. So, I was approached, well, Pia Tikka was first involved and Mauri Kaipainen and that [began] *Crossings*. [00:35:46] We worked on it for a couple of—well, almost two years, ongoing through Skype, really, and as I said, visiting different countries. We would meet like, we probably met five, four, four times before the installation. We showed both these projects. By the way, *The Third Woman* and *Crossings*, birthed there. The first meeting was there, in Greece, in Athens. We showed it at the Thessaloniki Biennale and it was really interesting. The whole process of working in this way was very interesting. And Barry was towards the end, I felt he really would be valuable to bring into this because he—you have to remember working with people from other cultures isn't so easy that, number one, their day is your night; understanding the communications a little bit different, and [laughs] English, you know, different languages. It was a little complicated, but Barry, who I always thought was so wonderful at installation, installing projects, and his architectural perspectives, I felt he would have the ability to learn certain kinds of programs, you know, computer programs. That would not be easy for me at all, [albeit] he hadn't known these kinds of programs either, but his propensity to learn it I thought—could be much [faster], which turned out to be true. [00:37:52] Anyway so he, in the last leg of it, he came, got involved, and he helped with the installation in the actual space and so that was good. All right, so that was the first iteration. Then, in 2000—actually it showed at different places—different [museums, educational venues, projection festivals, and interactive presentation conferences.] An updated *Crossings* went, then, in 2013, Guild Hall [Art Museum, New York], where I had shown—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —in East Hampton.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, in East Hampton, their art museum there, the director and curator there, Christina Strassfield, invited me to do something like *Crossings*—they had really never been very involved with a lot of technology there. I created this whole new installation that I called *Criss~Crossing the Divine*, and there were robotic devotee sculptures, and with my team, we created interactive games, and there was a stage. I had a long stage set where there were two of these devotee sculpture mannequins— [hovering all dressed in different kinds of clothing representing their faith, interacting with the quintessential gesture, or the motion, of their faith.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: I seem to remember Ian performing at the opening of this. [00:39:54]

NINA YANKOWITZ: No, it wasn't at the opening.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: It wasn't the opening.

NINA YANKOWITZ: You're right, no, no, but it was similar. He did some great stuff. I loved it. It wasn't at the opening. There was a lecture, a discussion with Christina Strassfield, and after that, everybody walked in and yes, Ian did this wonderful performance, interacting with the mannequins.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Yeah, yeah, because he's a wonderful dancer.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yeah. And Barry was very helpful in that installation.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So I wanted to ask you about one more thing. You've always been very committed to documenting the work of women artists, and you've given archival material to several places, and you've mentioned, in 2005, you created *Widening the Frame*, which is a digital library, is that right?

NINA YANKOWITZ: Mm-hmm.

CHRISTOPHER LYON: And can you talk about that a little bit?

NINA YANKOWITZ: That was a digital library—actually, it—I wanted to augment museum databases and show different women artists and womens' art work from the late 1960s, 1970s onward. The over thought for this was artists from all sorts of different communities, even globally, which I thought, Oh, God, that's going to be a long ways [laughs] down the road, but, at least starting with different communities in different states. They could feed in artworks by women that they felt were very influential in their particular communities. So I did, well, the first one, and I included, I don't know—God, I can't remember—200, I don't know, different women artists' works. [00:41:57] We did this in Keynote where I could show different women—artists who were influential, I felt were influential and had a voice at the time that I found important, during the late '60s and in the '70s. Then I thought, not only will this go to other communities, but then also, other years could be added in—you know, '70s, '80s, '90s—that it could continue. I just had one voice, and the whole thing was set up as an invitation for others too, to put in theirs that had meaning to them. And it was first shown at the Mishkin Gallery, where Sandra [Kraskin], the curator and director there, curated a show of women, women artists, and I did my installation of *Secrets in the Sciences*, the tableau with the [stories]—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —women's—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Very appropriate.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —of women in science stories seen spilling out of a test tube, stories about those women who were not credited during the time of their invented discoveries. Anyway, and then in another room, I showed the *Widening the Frame's* first video in this DVD [library.] It was the first in the library, and, you know, it was hard to figure out how, who, how I could make this, expand this. Because I didn't want my personal voice to be seen or heard in this [alone.] [00:44:09] I wanted others to take it [on] from their perspectives. And, it turned out that Smith has—I mean, there's a Five College program there, [took it on for a year thus far.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Smith College.

NINA YANKOWITZ: Yes, Smith College, [and] the Five College program there. [Drawing Curator] Aprile Gallant I had sent it to her and [asked] would they be interested in hosting this project because it was meant to be an auxiliary [for updating] museum databases. It wasn't meant to replace anything. It was just really meant to augment, you know, and I had started collecting these images and had this idea from the first Whitney Biennial, [with Dorothea and me [laughs] you know, including not all the many women who were left out of that show and that's when I started collecting images, and then later, collecting the artworks too, from women.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's a bit of a motif in your work, the idea of, you know, sort of tip of the iceberg, that's all you're seeing. There's so much that you're not seeing, yeah, yeah.

NINA YANKOWITZ: So that—yeah. Oh, I just wanted to get back to one other thing, that we were discussing about the public art projects. Barry and I did one piece that particularly we collaborated on, and I'm—I don't know how it's faring now—I haven't been there for a long time—but it was called—*Interactive Poetry Walk* which we installed in Cleveland, Ohio, and as you walked down the street and you walked down granite paths, sensors are set off for reciting poetry from different poets who have either written about Cleveland, or were from Cleveland. One of the areas was dedicated for contemporary artists to come and recite their poetry and have that installed within these graphite spheres. [00:46:24] There were a series of graphite spheres that looked like they had rolled to a halt, skidded along these [laughs] paths, and that's when you're walking along the paths and

you set off a sensor and it starts speaking [poetry] to you, and you're also able to look down and read some lines from, from the different poets'—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Great!

NINA YANKOWITZ: —work. Anyway, okay, I just wanted to mention that, because that was—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: That's good.

NINA YANKOWITZ: —interactive science, [was weaving in and around the same time as a lot of these.]

CHRISTOPHER LYON: So that sort of brings me to the end of the questions that I had for you. I wonder if there's anything that you'd like to add, or—you know, it's impossible in a several hours interview to comprehensively cover a career as even—I mean, you've had a very substantial and a long career. So, but, if there's anything you'd like to say—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —I'm sure I'll wake up in the middle of the night and there'll be a million things I was going to —oh, why didn't I discuss this; why didn't I discuss that? But, I'll—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: Think we did a—

NINA YANKOWITZ: —just—

CHRISTOPHER LYON: —fairly good job.

NINA YANKOWITZ: I think we did a pretty good comprehensive over all view, and I just want to toast all those sheroes, and heroes, who have influenced me, injected stimuli from all sorts of different disciplines into my life and my work, and I look forward to tomorrow!

CHRISTOPHER LYON: [Laughs.] Okay, we'll stop there. Thank you.

[END OF yankow18_1of1_sd_track4.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]