

CARROLL JANIS ORAL HISTORY

Interviewer: Huffa Frobes-Cross with Jeffrey Sturges	Interviewee: Carroll Janis	Date of interview: May 6th, 2021
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HUFFA FROBES-CROSS: This is a recording for the Wildenstein Plattner Institute and Estate of Tom Wesselmann Oral History Project. My name is Huffa Frobess-Cross. I'm the project manager for the Tom Wesselmann Digital Corpus and Catalogue Raisonné, and I am here with Carroll Janis, of the Janis Gallery, who we'll be talking with today, as well as Jeffrey Sturges, who's Director of Exhibitions at the Estate of Tom Wesselmann, and our oral historian, Josie Naron. So, let's get started. So, I think the first thing that we want to talk about is, yeah, Carroll, your experience growing up in and around your parents' extensive art collection and their initial engagement with art. So I'd love to hear you talk a bit about that.

CARROLL JANIS: Well, it was not only their interest and engagement with art, but they knew all the artists who were in New York at the time. And they met them at galleries, at parties; they threw parties and had people over. But my parents started their collection in the late '20s. By mid-1935, they had a -- such a good collection that Alfred Barr asked to show the whole collection at the Museum of Modern Art. Which he did, under the title as an anonymous collection, because my parents didn't want their name connected with it at that time.

So, in that six or eight years, they bought things like Rousseau's *The Dream*, which I was always amazed that they could get. In fact, I once asked my dad, I said, "How did you ever get to buy *The Dream*?" Because he didn't have much of a collection. And he said, "Well, they couldn't sell --" *The Dream* was one of the last pictures that Rousseau painted, and it was in his estate. They couldn't sell it in Paris. They sent it to London and they had it in the window of Knoedler's on the -- a street-level floor for months. And I've seen a photo of it, it

looks fantastic there. They didn't sell it. So, they decided, well, we'll send it to America [laughs] and see what happens. So, they brought it over here, and the first person they called was of course Barnes, because Barnes was probably the best collector of Rousseau in the world. And he came and saw it, and he said no. So, my dad said, "I was the next one on the list." By which I take it he meant that he was the next and last one on the list, [laughter] because they didn't have -- he couldn't sell that Rousseau.

It's most interesting. And this comes up time and again. There are great paintings by the artist that simply don't sell, that are very difficult. For example, Pollock's great *Number 1* at the Museum of Modern Art. Betty Parsons had it in a show for \$3000; it did not sell. When Pollock moved on to Janis, Janis showed it and it was about \$4500. It did not sell in a show -- a couple of years later. Eventually, a smart collector went to visit Pollock and he bought it. I don't know, I think he paid maybe \$30,000.

Anyway, getting back to the Rousseau. So, we had the Rousseau. Then, dad had about -- and mom had about five Cubist paintings by Picasso. And they had bought a great Dali. They had a -- a wonderful Klee, the *Actor's Mask*, one of the great Klees. And they had a de Chirico from 1916 which was fabulous, but the museum traded that towards the Van Gogh they bought much later. That's another interesting thing that -- after my parents gave the collection to MoMA in the '60s, they gave them the right to sell anything they wanted if -- to buy younger artists. So, at the time, I said to my dad, I said, "Listen, if you do that, they're certainly gonna pick off stuff and sell it because the next director, or whoever comes up, won't have the eye you had," because he had a very far-ranging eye. And it was not only one

art, but many arts. So, he said, "Oh, well, that's how it goes." So, they did sell -- have sold -- the museum has sold a number of, I think, very good things, although they've kept the greatest things, it's true.

Now, one of those great things was the Picasso. One of the great things that they still have, and we hope they will never deaccession, is the Picasso *Painter and Model*, from the late -- so, the late '20s, I believe. Which dad got in -- about the time I was born. So, when my brother and I were coming into the family, all this art was coming into the family at the same time. And the Picasso was especially significant, because it brought all the artists over to see it. Gorky, one of their closest friends, of course, was in his greatest Picasso moment. So he came over every other week, and spent time at the house just looking at the painting. And he was the greatest fan of Picasso, and so was my dad and mom.

So, this painting, which is enigmatic and has many things in it -- I remember as a little kid, about three, coming into the living room and there, seated, in front of this Picasso, was Kiesler, Gorky, my mom and dad, and a couple of other people I don't recall. All silent and mesmerized by the painting. And so, it struck me as a young person that there [coughs] was something important there because of the attention that it was being given. Now, I will tell you that my first brush with any art was with this painting. And since it went to a story that my mother, many years later, told me that Gorky told everybody that it was his favorite art world story, I will mention it. [laughs] [Otherwise?], I [wouldn't?] be mentioning it.

But one afternoon, we had a babysitter; my parents were out. And I was looking at this Picasso. And if you, you know, looking at the Picasso, I would be very close to the bottom of the picture, because I was three. But I noticed, and if you go to the museum and they have it up, you'll see that in the classic profile in the center of the image that the artist is painting, there's a black line that starts at about her upper lip level. And runs down, and it seems to be a support of the easel. And it runs all the way down to the bottom. And my eye level was towards the bottom where this black line, or dark brown line, crosses a white area. And looking at it, I saw that there was a lot of color at the edge between where the black line comes down and the white behind it, a large vertical triangle of white. Between them, you could see what was left of [ridges?] of multi-color. And very lively. And I was looking at it, and I thought that color was good, and I didn't like that the brown line was canceling out the color. So, I thought that I could help the painting by getting out my crayons, which I did, and going over it with my colored crayons, trying to get the color back into the picture [laughs] that the artist had canceled out. And which I took -- I resented the canceling out of the color. And naturally, my little Crayola crayons didn't take on this very thick impasto. But it left enough of a trace as to be seen.

So, that was that, and then, later when my mother and father came home, of course, the first thing they looked at was the Picasso. And the first thing they saw was that -- what is this on the Picasso? So, my mother said she came over to talk to me about it -- not my father. My mother came over, and she asked me what was going on, and I told her exactly what I just said. That, you know, I was trying to bring the color out that the artist had canceled out, and I thought that would be better for

the painting. You know, it would be better to have the color. So, anyway, my parents left this on for about six months. They didn't take it off until they lent the painting to the Museum of Modern Art for that show in 1935. Then, they had to take it off, and they asked -- oh no, I'm skipping. Before that, the next week, Gorky came to the house. And the first thing he noticed was this drawing on the -- and he said, "Well, what's this?" And then my mother explained it to him, and she said Gorky was absolutely charmed by the story and he told everybody about it.

JEFFREY STURGES: [laughs]

CJ: And she said, as I said later, she told me years later, that he told everybody this is his favorite art world story. A three-year-old tries to improve a Picasso.

JS: That's great.

CJ: Anyway, you know, it's the most wonderful painting with this wonderful reversal of the abstract artist -- or surrealist -- and abstract artist and model, and he's painting a classic profile on the canvas. Although the -- he has no eye or ear, it's just the line of the profile. And it's just the reverse of the world of the artist and model, the painting. And there are many ways to look at it, what the reversal means. And it was my mother's idea that she wrote in -- and Alfred Barr put it in his book on modern art. He gave her a page to write on, in which she called the classical image surrealist from the point of view of the artist and model, because he was painting, yes, an auxiliary, a reverse image. You could also look at it, I thought later in life, as a comment on the art and the artist. The complexities of the artist and the complexities of the model are

all dissipated in the classic image of the painting, which I think is a theme that Cézanne had taken up, also, although I'm sure Picasso, if this applies at all, came to it on his own. And it's just a -- yes.

HFC: Just a question. With all of this, like, real early, very early engagement --

CJ: Yeah.

HFC: -- with artworks like this, at what point -- was there ever a point where you kind of realized, Okay, this is actually what I want to do with my life. I want to be involved with the kinds of collecting or exhibiting --

CJ: Yeah, no, well, I was never interested in collecting as such, or exhibiting as such. I must say, this all took place long before the gallery opened. You see, I was about 17 when the gallery opened. So, my original input -- and also, I went with my parents to visit artists' studios, and I visited Gorky's studio in the '40s, and Hans Hofmann with my dad. That was a very interesting visit, because my dad was writing his book on abstract and surrealist art and wanted Hofmann in the show, in the book, because he liked him, liked his work. But there was nothing abstract. And we saw every single painting, because my dad made him bring them out. Every painting in his studio, hundreds of paintings, including a long row of little paintings that -- he must have had a hundred little paintings there. He had nothing abstract. My dad felt he should be abstract, I guess. And at one point, Hofmann said to him, "You know, Sidney, I'm not an abstract artist." This is '43. Of course, he did

become an abstract artist only a year or two later, maybe a few more years later. Anyway, that's another story.

And that's interesting for its impact on the question of Hofmann's so-called drip paintings, the dating of his drip paintings. Which of course, the catalogue raisonné and the Hofmann Estate date as very early, way pre-Pollock and pre-everybody else. And that is an issue that I think is -- they haven't resolved in any reasonable way. Because -- mainly because Hofmann had a show in '48, a retrospective, the first American to ever have a retrospective anywhere, in Massachusetts at a museum, and he only had one drip painting in it called *Fantasia*. Very nice painting, one of his best. Which is now dated Hofmann '43. This is 1948, the painting was shown. And I was interested to look into it, and I got an installation photo of the show of '48 in '48, and he had not signed it and dated it in '48. It was unsigned and dated, and the catalogue listed it as '45. And now, it's dated as '43.

So, I don't want to go into this further, because -- but it's important because Hofmann claimed that Pollock had seen his drip paintings in his studio, which is something that Lee Krasner denied that they ever saw that. And I can say that after spending two hours looking at everything, he certainly had no drip paintings in his studio in '43 when we went there. And in fact, my dad went in '44. So, in that visit, he said, Hofmann said, "Well, come back in six months," and dad said fine, and he came back. And Hofmann still didn't have any abstract paintings to show. And so, dad picked out a head that was abstracted, but that was not really the idea for the show, but he wanted to put Hofmann in so much, he put this good painting -- it's a good

painting -- of a head with a kind of Picasso profile seen via Gorky profile through Picasso.

Anyway, I find this particular painting by Picasso holds up very well. You know, not all Picassos remain as fresh as this. This seems to have a lot of freshness to it, and that's a quality that all art, great art has that. It has that -- no matter how many times you see it, there is a freshness to it.

HFC: Yeah, yeah. And it seems like it was something that, as you said, your father recognized in it, yeah.

CJ: Yes, he recognized it early on. Now, he said -- I asked him how he bought this painting. You know, I was interested, how'd you get this one? He said, "Well, we swapped the Matisse for it. I had bought a Matisse from Paul Rosenberg, a much smaller one, nice but not anywhere as a great Matisse, just a regular Matisse. And he swapped me the Picasso for the Matisse, plus a little money." So, he said he ran into Rosenberg on the street and he said, "How could you swap me that great Picasso for my Matisse?" And he said, "Well, that's easy, Sidney. The Matisse, I would find a buyer for in two weeks. The Picasso, it would take me ten years to find another buyer for it [laughs] if you hadn't bought it." So, this is -- okay, I don't tire of looking at this, I must say, and I have probably seen it for more years than anyone else around.

HFC: I think it would be great, actually, now also to talk about that moment when you were 17 when the gallery first opened, and your experience at that time, yeah.

CJ: Well, you know, the gallery was an affair of my mom and dad. And so, sort of a family affair, and I was in my senior year in high school. And so, I went to the openings, I took some photos there of artists. Some of them are printed in the book on the Sidney Janis Collection. I got a nice shot of Newman and a nice shot of Rothko in there, and Model at another show. No, these were all at the Model show. Those artists came to see Evsa Model, who was -- yes, an interesting artist. He was the husband of Lisette Model, the great photographer.

Well, what can I say? My dad had done a few things for the Museum of Modern Art. So when he opened his gallery, he had a lot of ideas for shows that he thought museums should do, and they hadn't. So, he set out to do the shows. And I would say in his first eight or ten years was the heroic time of the gallery, because he did wonderful shows, one after the other. If you look through the catalogues, it's really astonishing. Even -- I remember Bill Rubin came to the gallery one day and looked through those old catalogues, and said he was just amazed at all the work that went through the Janis Gallery and the quality.

Well anyway, I visited other studios with my parents, including Pollock in 1950. And -- Gorky was a wonderful studio visit. His color -- I went there in '44. His color was the most outstandingly brilliant of any artist that I visited with my folks. It was just amazing how strong it was. He had *The Liver Is the Cock's Comb*, was up on the easel. He hadn't finished it. And all the color there was absolutely miles above any other color of any other artist that I went to see. Now, I will mention that when I was about 12, I was out in California and I was painting a bit, too. So my mother decided she'd send me to [Calka Shire's?] painting studio in California. [Calka Shire?]

had been a friend and student of Kandinsky, and she knew Klee and all these people. She had a place high up on a mountainside. And I went there, and I was interested -- well, I was painting boats and things. And everybody there was painting -- this is 1943 or so -- was abstract. All the kids were doing abstractions. And I was really amazed at how well they did them. They were doing abstract things that were more abstract than I saw in most of the studios that my parents took me to in New York. These kids were -- that's [[Calka Shire's?]] influence. But I was only there for a month or so, and I didn't change what I was painting, but I admired what the other -- what the abstract kids were doing.

HFC: How long did you continue painting?

CJ: Oh, well, I painted for a year or two, a few years. And then I did a few more things later on in life. But what I was more interested in as I was growing up was in blues guitar. I was an early blues guitarist. And I had a dear friend, Steve Montgomery, who was a sculptor, and he was a year older than me. And he played a sensational pocket comb.

HFC: Wow.

CJ: Pocket comb with cellophane. And we were a duo, and we played around at artists' studios and elsewhere, and we were very good, actually. Then, well, we -- I went to Paris in about '51 and I took my guitar with me. And in '51 in Paris, they were very eager to hear anything American. And so, I was playing on street corners and in cafés, and they were very attentive and I had a very nice reception. And I was offered a job in one of the cafés there, just as I was about to come back to New York after

I spent the summer there. But -- which I considered, but I hurt my wrist falling, and I couldn't -- I couldn't turn it enough to be able to play the guitar, so I had to let that little opportunity go by. But that was a lot of fun. If I had stayed on there, I might have been in a different field altogether.

Anyway, getting back to New York. So, getting back to the gallery. So, I thought I would read you a little thing that, if I can find it, which I probably -- should be able to. That Clement Greenberg, Clement Greenberg [papers shuffling] wrote for a show that the University of Pennsylvania did in '58. Now, the gallery opened in '48. And the first ten years, as I say, they were a wonderful succession of shows. For example, a Mondrian show, a retrospective. From which the gallery borrowed from museums in Europe, as well as in America. And it was one of the most wonderful shows -- maybe the best show, of a one-man show -- that the gallery ever did. And so, the University of Pennsylvania gave an exhibition to the Sidney Janis Gallery in 1958 as a kind of homage to the gallery, in which they had paintings by the gallery artists. Plus, you know, the catalogues of the shows.

And they had an appreciation by Clement Greenberg, in which he said so many nice things about my dad and the fact that -- he called the gallery -- he called it a kind of "museum cum seminar." "The twentieth-century from Bonnard to Morot are exhibited in a depth of variety, as well as an exertion of taste that no formal museum in the country was able to match." And then he goes on about the Mondrian show. "His policy implied -- in fact, it declared -- that Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Guston, Rothko, and Motherwell, were to be judged by the same standards as Matisse and Picasso, without condescension and without making

allowances." And Greenberg goes on to say, "I fully believe that some of these Americans have met the test and have justified Mr. Janis's faith in them. In short, he's made that much easier for us to take them with the importance to which the quality of their achievements entitles." This is written in '58. And he also mentions something that I'll take up again, because you're gonna ask me about it. Mondrian once said to Sidney Janis, quote, "I like you because you are not interested in only one kind of art." So. The gallery --

HFC: And --

CJ: Yep, yeah.

HFC: Can you tell me, just during that sort of first initial ten years, what were you doing at the gallery during those --

CJ: Oh, well, when I first came there, you know, we didn't have any -- I think there was just one other person working there besides the typist. And so, we had to do everything, which was -- you know, do the installation of the shows, show the paintings. Whatever had to be done by the gallery. I spent a lot of time talking to people on the floor. I was a sort of self-appointed docent, and took people around and explained the shows to them. I liked the Mondrian show, how he developed over time to this, this, and this. And I got in a lot of discussions with people.

My dad was on the ball enough to want to include Duchamp in several shows. And so, he asked Marcel if he would consider doing another ready-made, say of the fountain, the urinal. And Duchamp said yes. So, that was shown in a show in '48 and again

in the Dada show that Duchamp did and showed at the gallery in '53. Which was actually Duchamp's idea: he came in one day in '52 and said, "I think it's time to do a Dada show in America, which hasn't been done." And so, he said he would do it and he oversaw the selection of the work. But got Art to help him and other people. It was a wonderful show, and beautifully installed by Marcel. And he left -- what he did was install, besides everything on the walls, he dropped from the ceiling two plexiglass panels. One about eight by eight feet, and two others, four by four feet, at right angles. And he dropped them in the middle of the room so you could put things on the plexi panels and still see through the plexi panels the things that were on the wall. And then, he had a whole ceiling of documents and things which were placed near plastic, so you could see them from the floor.

He left an area on one of these hanging panels without anything on it. And so, nobody said anything. But when the whole show was hung, he came in and he took out his -- he had a can of paint and a paintbrush with him. And he painted on this panel that was left bare a big image of a kind of reverse -- vertical infinity sign. And he just painted, and we were all naturally amazed, because we had all been told that he gave up painting years and years ago. And never wanted to have anything to do with it, and didn't like the smell of -- you know, the whole thing.

And he was just blithely and very nicely painting, so I asked him when he was finished -- I was about 21 then or something, 22. So I could ask him whatever I wanted, which maybe if you were older, you wouldn't ask him. So I said, "Well, what did you do there? What is that?" And he said, "Well, you know, that's what they put on new glass, when they install new glass. So --"

-- you know, something so that birds and people wouldn't run into it. He didn't say that, but he just said -- this is that. And then I noticed that it was very similar to the form he put on a kind of ready-made that he had done back in the teens, of the -- which he gave a [punning?] title of a battle, or a struggle, at the train station. So, it actually related to something he did early in life. And of course he never said anything about that. And if I hadn't asked him why he did it, he wouldn't have said anything about it either, you know?

In fact, I asked him, I said -- we had in another show that my dad asked Marcel for a bicycle wheel. He wanted to put it in a French masters show, next to Picasso, [Gris?], Léger, and he wanted to have Duchamp. And Marcel said okay, and so they got this together. And when Marcel came into the gallery, I said to him -- you know, it was like, 1913 and 1953 or '51 or '52 -- I said, "Marcel, how come you didn't make any other, or didn't make a second version of the bicycle wheel? Or -- you know, because the original was lost for thirty or forty years. Why didn't you make another one?" And he said, "Oh, nobody asked me." [laughter]

HFC: And, I mean, it's -- the Duchamp story is really interesting, because it connects directly to this idea that you brought up, which is that your father was not just interested in one kind of art, right? Because you don't -- Duchamp is not someone that you necessarily associate with Abstract Expressionism. It's going on concurrently.

CJ: No, but --

HFC: But he is, right, often someone associated with the development of Pop Art and Neo-Dada a little bit later. So, I wondered if we could sort of talk about that transition, like, in the early '60s. How that move started to be made in the gallery.

CJ: Well, uh -- first of all, it's -- there was -- just from the gallery's point of view, it wasn't such a big jump, because the gallery had showed Mondrian and three or four wonderful Mondrian shows, and had done the first show of De Stijl painting in America. And was interested in abstract art. The gallery also did wonderful shows of the surrealists. They did a beautiful show of Magritte's work called *Word and Image*, in which he had painted an image and associated it with a word. And he had a lot of paintings like that. And that's rather pre-Pop, you know, in its own way.

And so, the jump from -- what you're talking about is the *New Realists* show of '62, in which Tom was in and all of the artists of his generation were in. But it was a new generation, and they were doing different things, and since the gallery had shown many generations of art, artists who were doing different things -- and it included a great show of Rousseau, by the way, one of those early shows. The first retrospective I think he had in America. The gallery did the first Fauvre show in America. It was at the gallery, as well as showing the surrealists and we had a Duchamp show in the late '50s, and -- so, as far as the gallery was concerned, it wasn't such a big move. And what it was was leading artists of the next generation who are doing their thing, which is very different from what the Abstract Expressionists did.

Now, only de Kooning accepted it. He said okay. But Rothko couldn't take the -- his gallery. See, if this show had been at some other gallery, it would not have caused such a brouhaha. But because it was -- by that time, Janis Gallery was the home of Pollock, Kline, Rothko, Guston, Motherwell, Bazziotes, Gottlieb. Really everyone except maybe for Barney Newman. I don't know why we never represented him, but we didn't. And -- so. However, we became known as the Abstract Expressionist gallery because they were all showing there. And so, to show the New Realists, who were the next generation of leading artists, so -- it wasn't such a big jump. But for a lot of people, it was tough to take. Especially the artists who backed the Abstract Expressionists, who had a kind of hold on American art. They were so strong -- and of course, they had come up from nowhere, in which when they were showing, they were disparaged and -- not only disparaged, but they couldn't sell their work. It was very tough going for these artists.

And, you know, today, Rothkos are -- who knows how many zeros after it. But in those days, when he came at the gallery in the mid-'50s, he said to my dad, "Sidney, I have to make \$7500 a year in order to support my family." And -- well, I remember my dad said, "Well, I think you'll do that." In the first year, he made \$15,000, and he was in seventh heaven. I don't think he was ever as happy about things as he was after that first year. No matter how much he made. In fact, making a lot of money, I think, became a serious problem for him, as it did with other artists. I remember Albers -- who by the way, was the first artist with the gallery. It was Albers, first artist. He called up one day and he -- his prices were very reasonable, and he sold a lot. And he said to my dad, he said, "Don't send me any

more money this year; I don't want to see any more money." He was the only artist who you could say that about.

HFC: And this leads me, actually -- I'll come back to this a little bit later, but this leads me to a question I had that relates to Wesselmann specifically. Was this around the time that your father and the gallery started the practice of paying a kind of salary to artists, instead of paying completely on consignment?

CJ: Yeah, well, here's how the gallery did it. Sales were -- the artist gets two-thirds, the gallery gets one-third. That was the commission arrangement. But often, it took time to sell anything, and the artists had to live. So, those artists preferred to get a stipend monthly, which then was set against sales in the future which were gonna be made. And so that they could rely on a monthly -- and I think almost everybody took it but Pollock. He did not take it. He didn't ask for it; he didn't take it. He said he didn't want to be beholden to anybody.

But even Pollock wrote a letter to the gallery in the mid-'50s -- mid-'50s -- after he -- the most famous artist. And he said, "Dear Sidney, I have never wanted to ask for any money in advance, because I never wanted to owe anything." And he said, "However, this winter, we decided we had to reshingle our house out in [East End?]. And the cost of reshingling was much more than we had counted on. So, I have to ask if you can give me an advance, and I'm sorry to have to do this at all." Of course dad gave him an advance, but that was the only time Pollock ever asked for an advance. But see, even he, the greatest of all, the most sought-after of all, didn't have money to reshingle his house in the mid-'50s? When he was -- that was just at the end

of his life, and he was already in -- so, it was difficult in those days. And we don't think about it anymore, because many of the artists are doing very well. I'm sure there are a lot of artists who aren't doing very well. There always were. But it's a little different today. You take the artists who were not doing well then, they're doing very well now, perhaps. Hopefully. So, what else did you ask about?

HFC: I was actually just gonna take us back to the *New Realists* exhibition. And also ask you, was that the first time that you met Wesselmann, during the run-up to that exhibition?

CJ: Well, I might have -- I don't know, that's in the early '60s. He showed at the Green Gallery; I used to go to the Green Gallery shows. I probably would have met him there or seen him there. I might have seen him at an artists' party or two; I don't quite remember when I first met anybody, to tell you the truth. But it was back in those days, and -- yes. And my dad went to see him for the *New Realists* show, he went to the gallery -- he went to his studio -- picked out a couple of works for that show.

Then, when Green ran into its problems and had to close in the mid-'60s, which was a very sad event in the art world, because that was a very good gallery with many, many of the best younger artists of that generation. But whatever it was, he had a difficult time because to begin with, he was backed by Scull. And Scull was a collector. And Scull could come in and did come in to buy whatever he wanted at the price the artist gets paid. So, the gallery -- so he picked off some of the best stuff of all, you know, and he had a very good eye. And he was aggressive, Scull. And I think -- that did not help the gallery

make its way, financially. And then there were other problems, I don't know exactly what. But Dick went downhill, and he began to drink too much and stuff like that. And eventually, I think in '65, he had to close the gallery. And then, when he closed the gallery, his artists had to go to other galleries. So, Tom came to the Janis Gallery, as did Oldenburg and Segal.

HFC: Do you remember that moment? Do you remember anything about that decision to bring him on, bring Wesselmann on as part of the roster at Janis?

CJ: Well, Wesselmann was one of the classical Pop artists, so it wasn't much of a -- I mean, if he wanted to come with the gallery, that was fine. He was one of the five or six of the American Pop artists of the central group of them. Um [pauses] -- well, we wanted to add Rosenquist too, but he was torn between going to Castelli or Janis. Which some of the artists were -- you know, he could go either way. And he told me later that he came to the -- Oldenburg's *Bedroom* show, which was a great show he did at the gallery called *The Bedroom*. The front room was filled with his bedrooms, and he -- that he had made himself. And Oldenburg put a velvet rope over the doorway, because he didn't want people coming in and moving things and putting -- he said his "tuna-fish fingers" on stuff and stuff like that. So, we did it.

And Rosenquist told me that he -- later, after he'd gone with Castelli, he said, "The reason I decided to go to Castelli is because I came to the Oldenburg show and I saw a velvet rope up. And I thought, Oh. A gallery that puts a velvet rope up, I'm not gonna go into -- I'm not gonna." So I said, "Well, I --" -- he told me this story. You know, we were good friends, Rosenquist.

And we had a lot of fun. And I said, "Oh, well, you know, that was actually Claes's idea." "What! Claes's idea? What!" He didn't believe it. Anyway.

Oldenburg had wonderful shows there of his soft sculpture, which was a great contribution to development in sculpture. And he was -- well, when it came to doing the *Erotic Art* show, you see, which was the first show that I was -- no, it was the second show I did. I did the *Classic Spirit in Twentieth-Century Art* in '64, but the *Erotic Art* '66 show, I did for the gallery. And I thought -- you asked me in this brochure, how do you -- what do you think of -- how do you put a show together? Well, first of all, you want to do a show that the artists have been working on, on some themes or subject or ideas that many artists are working on somewhat independently, or not -- and which haven't been done. And so, then you have to find good works by leading artists to carry the show. That's the best way of doing the show. Of any show, you have to get your great work.

HFC: And how did that theme emerge to you? What was it about when --

CJ: Oh, well, that was because the artists were doing erotic themes. You looked around and you saw this artist doing it, that artist doing it, that artist. And it was also in the air, it was in the culture of the time. And artists were -- because artists were doing the show, that means you could do a show on the theme, because of that. And we could get enough artists. And you know, there were some artists whom I didn't know did but I asked them and they had stuff. They had very good stuff. For example, Steinberg, I called -- Saul Steinberg was showing both with us and Parsons, every other year. It was like that, it worked out

very well. So the *Erotic Art* show, I called him up and I said that we're doing this show, do you have something? And he says, "Oh, well let me look." So, he looked, and sure enough, he came up with wonderful pieces he had done years before.

And in fact, for the *Erotic Art* show, he sent in a drawing that I was -- I still think is fabulous. It was reproduced in the show. It's called *Albergo Minerva*, in which he has a kind of Italian bed in a room with Italian furniture, and out the window you see the Dome. It's probably the Dome in Florence, so you know where you are. And on the bed are two objects, in the middle of the bed, on top of the blanket. One is a fantastic signature, like this, which doesn't say anything, but is a typical movement which captures a whole personality in the kind of signature it is. That's the male. And sitting on the bed is this circle, circle, circle, a big circle with many other circles in it, and the signature is embracing this big circle in a way. And it's just a wonderful commentary on, shall we say, an Italian erotic scene as seen by Steinberg. It's just -- and beautifully drawn.

Well, and so, the artists had -- that was what he had. Tom, for Tom, we had a -- oh, I think it was a profile of a breast and nipple set against the sky. Which is a theme that he took up later, where fragments of the body are set against the sky. And some are rather poetically done, and --

HFC: And he also had a *Mouth* in that, right? One of the --

CJ: Yes, he had an open mouth in it. He had an open mouth in it. That was his second one. That was not maybe his -- you know, he had done better works than that one. But that was the -- now,

Oldenburg, I wanted to have in the show because he had the most interesting erotic drawings. Beautifully done drawings. One of them was of a group of people on a couch, along with about a six-foot phallus, on the couch. It was a wonderful drawing, and I said, "Claes, I would like you to be in the show, and I want to show that one." And he said, "Oh, no, no, no, I don't want to -- I don't want to show in the show." And so, I said, "Well, why not?" And he said, "Well, because I think all art is erotic." Well, I mean, I -- you know, I think he has a point there, a good point. However, our show was the theme, the erotic idea as a theme, which is different than saying all art is erotic -- which it may well be. And by saying that, he's out ahead of all the art historians in history, but so be it. I couldn't disagree with him on that. But I still think he should have showed. But he didn't show it.

And he also had other interesting objects. Like for his imaginary objects series, he had a -- an object set in the park, in, I think it was in Europe, in one of the cities in Sweden. And ladies pushing their wheel -- the baby carriages by. But the object was set on a pedestal and it was a big penis. And it was set like a garden sculpture in the middle of the park. And I thought that that was -- so charmingly done, it would have been -- so, Oldenburg is one of the key figures that I wanted to have in the show, but he didn't want to show. Well, what can you do? So, you have to do a show without one of your leading figures in it.

It happened again, later when we did a show called *Sharp Focus Realism* on photorealism. Of course, the central figure for that is Chuck Close. He's done the most important and powerful things. And I went to see him, and he said, "No, I won't show in

the show. I don't want to show in the show." Alright, well -- you can't argue with an artist that doesn't want to show. However, Chuck, to his credit, came to me about four months after the show, and said, "You know, I made a mistake. I should have shown in the show."

But -- now. When I came to do the *String and Rope* show in 1970, nobody said no to that. Everybody I asked wanted to show something he had of string and rope. And that was -- that was an offbeat show, because you wouldn't think that that would make a show, but we had enough artists from Duchamp and Picasso and Miró and Schwitters and Picabia, to the next generation, including Pollock, Ellsworth Kelly, et cetera. And then, the next generation had Segal and the Pop artists, including Oldenburg, Rosenquist. All who had at some time used string as a major element in a work, or several works. And it made a wonderful show. And then the younger artists: Saret, Nauman, and then Barry and -- Eva Hesse had a beautiful piece in it. Anyway.

HFC: You know, I'd like to go back, right, to the *Erotic Art* show and to '66, and even maybe a little bit earlier, to ask specifically about Wesselmann. Yeah, yeah, I'd really -- I'd like to talk about sort of your initial impression of his work. You had sent *Still Life #19* and *#17* as works that had made an impact on you; I know those were earlier than that. But yeah, can you talk a bit about sort of your initial interest in his work and its impact?

CJ: Well, uh, what I always liked about Tom, and still like about him, and feel like one of his essential qualities that runs through all of his work is the fact that he's an artist of *joie de vivre*. And it's that element that is animating his art,

no matter what he's doing with the subject, with the style, with this or that. And that's what gives his -- the art its special appeal. And I think many of his things remain fresh in that sense, that you see them now and -- not all equally, some more so than others. And, well, when I first saw Tom's work, I would imagine it was at the Green Gallery, when he showed the great big -- great big blown-up still lifes of bread and other things. And you had to walk down a little alley, you know, and then there were these two big works on either side. You were like in a [card?] or tunnel of big Wesselmann works. And it was pretty impressive.

I don't know that I think that they were among his best of those big works. I think his later works were maybe better. But they -- when they still today have a real positive pizzazz to them, that is part of Tom's character and nature. And I think that's a very important part of his work, and I think that it shows through all the work that -- especially that has garnered criticism. Things that have been most criticized are probably his women and the -- from the point of view of being somewhat -- somewhat, you know, misogynist, if that's the right word, which it probably isn't. Because he's more exuberant about all this. He's not -- he's not a negative view.

The only things that I see anything negative coming out of, and I think it's a positive quality, are in his great *Mouths*, the *Smokers*. Now, the *Smokers* are wonderfully ambiguous paintings. They're very impressive. Yet they carry a lot of the things that he was criticized for. It's only a fragment of the person. Especially of a woman, it's only a fragment. And so, you just get to see maybe her hand and fingernail polish, or without that, open mouth with smoke coming out. They are not -- some of

those *Mouths* remind me of the hellmouths of the Middle Ages, in which the mouth is -- is a terrifying object.

On the other hand, it also partakes in the kind of glamour of the time, of -- and so his use of lipstick and nail polish were very important. So, it's rather ambivalent about the woman, you could say. However, as a structure and a construction, some of them and many of them are just wonderful paintings. And deal with close-up in a way that he hadn't done it before, and that was very effective. To even do a *Smoker* is problematic, because in those days, and now too, I guess, smoking was very much frowned on, because of the health things. And yet he took that as a theme and made some monumental paintings on it. And if you want to -- he was criticized, I think somewhat unfairly -- not unfairly, but just because it's only looking at one side -- he was criticized by some of the women's movements. More than any artist. They didn't like his fragmentation. They didn't like his emphasis on sexual detail.

HFC: And it's interesting that you mention that, because you know, as I think you're sort of implying, and as your *Erotic Art* show also implies, there were other artists working on similar themes. So, it's interesting that Wesselmann was the one who bore a lot of that criticism. And interesting to think about why.

CJ: He did it more persistently than the others. You know. He did it -- you can find two or three wonderful Steinbergs, but then he did thousands of other things, you know.

HFC: I also -- I just also, before we move on --

CJ: Yes, yes.

HFC: -- I'm just really interested in your idea about the *Smokers*, too. This notion that they combine this *joie de vivre*, as you've mentioned, with this like, kind of, this deathliness. Right, with --

CJ: Well, some of them do. To me, the *Mouths* do mostly. I don't feel that with the giant *Still Lives*. The giant *Still Lives* are another interesting idea he had, which is very based on the Pop idea on the outscaled popular image, which was out in the world before the Pop artists got to it. By the way, the *Smoker* -- you may recall there was a big *Smoker* on 44th and Broadway -- that blew out smoke rings. And somebody was smoking, and that was there for 20 or 30 years. A great huge image of a mouth blowing smoke rings. I think it was a guy, not a lady. That's important. It was not a lady. Tom only had ladies; he didn't have any guys, any smoker guys that he ever did. And so --

JS: There was one thing I wanted to ask, Carroll. I wanted to ask you about this period, because we're talking about '65 and the kinds of paintings that Tom was showing when he started with the gallery. And you had seen the paintings that he'd shown at Green, and most of those paintings were assemblage works or collage works. They included a lot of different elements. But the first show that he did with your gallery was pure painting. Was there anything there that you noticed about a shift in the work, or the reception to the work?

CJ: Well, to tell you the truth, I don't think he shifted that much, but he did shift.

JS: Hm.

CJ: I asked him about his use of collage in the early work, and he said, "Well, I used collage when I couldn't actually paint the image." So, in a way, he was something like a folk artist in his early work, or a popular artist who uses a ready-made image because he thinks it's better than anything he can do. And then, later, he could do it. He got to be so he could paint it all. But in the beginning -- so, on the other hand, when you look at what he did in the *New Realists* show, some of the images like these smaller *Still Lives*, in which he pasted on the actual elements from the packaging of the foods. Now, he might say, Well, I did it because I couldn't really paint it. But by doing it, it entered a whole other aesthetic which he was very good at, which was building up from these elements, and which he built up again later when he was painting the things in his big *Still Lives*. He was still bringing together a number of these images in a kind of constructive way in these huge *Still Lives*. So, the aesthetic is, in a way, different, but it's -- a lot of it is quite similar. And I think in those --

HFC: That's just a really interesting point I wanted to stop on --

CJ: Yeah, okay.

HFC: -- for a second that you made about how you -- you had mentioned in our earlier conversation *Still Life #60*. And when I look at that huge work with your comment, I can see what you're saying.

CJ: Yeah.

HFC: It is as if there are collage elements in that work, even though it is entirely painted. It's constructed in a way that echoes a kind of collage-like construction.

CJ: Well, he collaged his own painted canvases into a constructive image. And I never saw -- and you need the space to show that. You know, we were a gallery with limited space. But I recall that that #60 was shown down in Washington at the Corcoran Gallery. The Corcoran Gallery has these majestic columns in one of its biggest rooms, and they showed the painting against this whole row of columns, and it was absolutely fabulous. That's the kind of space to see these things in. You give them the kind of space that they demand, and they elevate themselves in a wonderful way. And it's not only -- it's not only Wesselmann, but other artists as well. You give them -- especially the Pop artists. You give them the proper space, and they take on a whole monumentality that you might not have seen in it before.

HFC: That makes a lot of sense. And there are definitely, in that period of Wesselmann, there is work that requires that space.

CJ: Yes, it requires it, but who has it? The Corcoran had it. Even at the Gagosian, the biggest gallery in history, Tom's show made the gallery seem too small.

JS: [laughs]

CJ: And they had -- he was the first show they ever had that overwhelmed the gallery. They did not have enough space to give

these things their proper due. Well, down at the Corcoran, I'm sure that you'll find somewhere an installation shot of that wonderful *Still Life #60*, set against the columns there. And you can see how fabulous it looks. In fact, much modern art looks very good set in older settings. Older chateaus or whatever you want to put it.

HFC: These questions about space and the space at the Janis Gallery and everything brings me to another question that I was very interested in, which is if you could take me through -- you worked on so many exhibitions with Wesselmann.

CJ: Yeah.

HFC: If you could take me through a bit of the process, especially as time went on, working on a solo exhibition of his, of how you looked at the work, how he talked about it, how that developed into what became a final exhibition, how that worked.

CJ: Well, I had mentioned to you that I considered Tom very much a hands-on artist. He knew what he wanted to show. For every show, he had maquettes in his studio, and he had our walls set up in little and he had his paintings in little and he set them all around. So, he installed his show in little, miniature, which is also interesting for Tom. In his studio before he ever came to the gallery. I don't recall ever, except in a group show, the *New Realists* show, my dad probably picked out the two Wesselmanns that went into the *New Realists* show. Because he was at his studio.

But Tom, when he was with us, he selected his own show, what he wanted to do, and what he wanted to show. And we didn't have

enough room to show all the things he wanted to show. So -- [pauses] and so there really wasn't a lot of discussion, because he was doing new work and he wanted to show it. But, but, he was very unusual in the sense that he would get an idea for a show -- not for a show, for his work. He'd get an idea and then want to do maybe 20 works on the idea. And then, he'd get another idea and want to -- so, his shows didn't come often enough for him to use up his ideas. So, when we got to, we did some shows in which he said, "Oh, well, this work I had in mind 20 years ago to show. But I couldn't get it in anywhere, and I couldn't even get it -- to do them -- until recently." So, he did recent works of old ideas. And so, there wasn't much discussion. There was very little discussion. He knew what he wanted to do. He had a pretty good idea of where things were going.

And so, he -- Ellsworth Kelly was an artist who was like that. He came with the gallery in whenever it was, late '50s, early '60s. I went to his studio -- he was at the Hotel Des Artistes here. He hadn't shown things in three or four years. And I looked around; he had wonderful work of different kinds. And I said, "Ellsworth, we can do a beautiful show of, you know, the range of your works in the last four or five years. We'll have the best of this, this, and this. It'll be like a mini-retrospective of four, five years." I said, "I think it'll make a wonderful show." And he said, "Oh, no. No. I'm going to show one idea. I have one theme, and then I'll show my variations on the idea." And that's what we showed. And all of our shows were that way, and when he moved on, all the shows he still had were that idea. And you could never get to see a range of his work until some museum did a retrospective. Then you can get to see a variety of his work. But he knew what he wanted, and that was it. There are artists like that; there are other

artists who will take your suggestions, you know. They'll take your suggestions. But --

HFC: And so you're saying, yeah, Tom was really -- he was the kind of artist that he had a plan, he had -- you're even saying he mocked up the show in maquettes.

CJ: Yes. Before he even had the show, it was all mocked up.

HFC: Yeah.

CJ: So, I would go to his studio, and he would say, "Well, here's the show," and I would look at it, and -- nothing you could say about it. It was all there, and it looked good. So, that's how he did the shows.

JS: [laughs]

CJ: Uh --

HFC: Yeah, that's -- I mean, in some ways, I imagine that was probably very easy for you. I imagine there might have also been times when you had ideas that you wish that he had done, or were you always sort of, like --

CJ: Well, of course you tend to always think you can -- maybe he'll do this or that. If I had such a thought, I would say it. For example, the one thing I remember discussing with him is when he decided to -- you know, he did his *Great American Nudes* usually with few features. A mouth, no eyes, usually not even a nose, even. And he did them -- and then, in one show, he started -- I noticed he was painting all the features in the face. Which

is okay, but most of the paintings were quite static. They didn't come off well. And I said, "Tom, how come" -- you know, I said, "How come you're painting now all the features?" And he said, "Well, my analyst said to me, 'How come you're not putting all the features in the pictures, especially the women?'" So, for an analyst, this could be a problem. But that's not necessarily the same as for the artist, I mean, for the artwork. So, I said to him, "Well, Tom, I can understand if you're doing a portrait," which he had started doing. You would want to include all the features of your sitter. But not necessarily in your *Great American Nudes* or your other -- because those aren't portraits. I said, "As a matter of fact, they're mythological figures. And that's your personal mythology. And mythological figures don't usually have all their features. I mean, even in the -- it's not necessary to have all the features. There's something mysterious in not having all the features." There's something that works with -- so, he said, "Oh, okay. Yes." And then, he felt if you made the split between the portraits and the -- he could do them both, and he didn't have to use features in all of these.

And I think that -- now, that brings up an interesting question which we don't have to deal with, is the difference between the psychoanalytic view of what the artist is doing and, you know, a kind of an art view of it.

JS: But this period, when you said he was painting the faces, was this in the '70s?

CJ: Yes, I think it was in the late '70s. Middle '70s.

JS: So there were a few paintings like -- sorry, there are a few paintings then where he did paint the face, and I think Huffa's familiar with those. Like, the *Nude and Lamp* is one of the titles. Some of these are shaped. I mean, you see the full face painted. But you're right. And the other thing being done at that time would have been the *Bedroom Face Paintings*, those large paintings of just the face, right?

CJ: Yes, yes. Well, he was very interested in the face, and you can't -- you know, I only brought it up because I felt there were -- his -- some of his face paintings were much too static, and it looked like he was, you know, working hard to get the features and that kind of had somewhat of a deadening effect on the whole. And so, that's the only reason I bothered to bring it up. Because -- well, anyway. So then he went back to doing what he did do, and he did both. And then, I think it took him a while to get to be able to paint the features. Features are tough to paint. So, he had to go through the process of, How do I handle it? And it wasn't easy. And some of them came out pretty well, but others didn't.

JS: Those big face paintings, the *Bedroom Face Paintings*, are really amazing.

CJ: Yes, they are. But those are --

HFC: And, and --

CJ: Yes --

HFC: No, sorry, I was just -- no, no, continue.

CJ: Yes, well, we have to figure out, which ones are we talking about? Some of the *Bedroom Face Paintings* are wonderful, and that may be after he got -- I don't know where we can get these. Well, here's one. Like, *Brown Eyes Under Glass* is a nice painting. That, that I think is a -- that is a model.

JS: I was thinking about, like, *Bedroom Painting*, I don't know, #39. Many of these are in museum collections. Or *Bedroom Painting #40*, right, in that period.

HFC: Well, and you know what's interesting about those that I was just gonna kind of propose as a hypothesis about them is that the face is there, but they become schematized more, again. He finds ways to kind of reduce to its essentials the face, and a lot of them are in profile. And so, it becomes a little bit different than when they're the more full-on portrait style.

CJ: That's true. That is a difference. Well, another wonderful group of works are his smiling *Mouths*. That's a very difficult image to do. Only the mouth, smiling with teeth, and maybe some gloss on the lips. And he did some wonderful ones, [siren in background] and he did one particularly of Marilyn, in which it's *Marilyn's Mouth*. And you know, he captures a lot of Marilyn just by doing the mouth.

JS: Hm.

CJ: And it's not so -- on the surface, so different from his other mouths. But yes, the mouths, he had a special interest in all his life, and handled it in different ways at different times.

HFC: While we're talking about his work, one of the ones that you mentioned to me that I was, um -- one of the paintings on metal, one of the cutout paintings on metal.

CJ: Oh, yeah. That's another wonderful idea he had at the end of his life, in the '70s and '80s and into the '90s. He came, he worked out with some friends of his a way for him to draw, and his drawing would be picked up by -- some kind of a machine process, which would translate his movement of the brush into making a piece of metal of that shape. So, he could, with a brush, do his brushwork, and it would come out as a metal relief painted sculpture. And it could come out with a lot of the freshness of his brushstroke, which Tom -- that was one of his finer qualities, is his delicacy of drawing and liveliness of drawing. And he wanted to -- and he invented this method of doing drawing sculpture. And I think that was a very interesting idea: very original to him. I don't think that it had to do with any of the other Pop artists. And he did some beautifully spontaneous sculpture through this process of taking his brushstroke and transforming it immediately into a sculptural medium. I'm not sure how he did it; I never understood the mechanics of it. But he certainly did some wonderful things with it. For example --

HFC: And that was --

CJ: Yeah, go ahead.

HFC: And that was a process he developed, kind of -- he went through the whole process of trying to figure out how that would work, and going through prototypes and everything, while working with you. So, you know, as a gallerist, you were kind of

watching him develop this, and I guess giving him the confidence to go out on this experimental --

CJ: Well, I have to tell you. He had the confidence to go out. He didn't need it from the gallery. He didn't need it. All he needed was a gallery who appreciated what he was doing. He didn't need -- he didn't need a pat on the back to do this, he was already out and doing it. And he thought it was a wonderful idea, and it was. And so, he -- and then, he started to do the figure with paintings by Cézanne or Matisse or -- other artists he loved. And I think you have to mention, because there's a lot in his work that you could say is -- has its relation in a general way to Matisse, especially the *joie de vivre*, the color.

The color of the Pop artists has been little investigated. And that's something that somebody will take up someday, and people like Warhol and Tom, especially, pursued color more diligently than many others. And that is yet to be written about. I remember going to a Pop Art discussion at Columbia University in the mid-'60s. They had a [pauses] -- a lot of good panelists, and a lot of artists came. And Frank Stella got up at the -- after people had been talking for an hour, and he said, "This discussion has gone on about Pop Art for an hour, and nobody has said one word about Warhol's color." And that was true. And Warhol is a very interesting colorist. And he isn't really given that much due to it because of all the other things associated with Pop Art and the popular images and so on and so forth.

HFC: And that's really interesting, and it brings me back to an earlier question that I passed over, but --

CJ: Yes.

HFC: -- Tom always had an unusual, or ambivalent feeling about his relationship to Pop Art, right, and about his categorization as a Pop artist.

CJ: Well, he --

HFC: And --

CJ: Yeah, go ahead.

HFC: Yeah, and --

CJ: Well, you're saying that, and I take your word, but he never said to me, you know, I'm not a Pop artist, the way Hofmann told my dad, you know, I'm not an abstract artist. He never said to me, I'm not a Pop artist. And he never said anything to me. It's just that his interest in things was more personal than Pop would imagine. And he's thinking of those things. And so, the Pop element, he's more or less taking for granted as -- it's part of the time, it's in the air, I'm doing it, it's contemporary. That's how I think -- would think about it. I mean, he's a classic Pop artist, and he used those images out of popular culture in his work from beginning to end. And he -- oh, he did it in a different way, and his style changed, and that's a virtue, that he changed how he was doing it. But he was always considered, and I think rightly so, one of the classic Pop artists, with Lichtenstein, Warhol, Rosenquist, Oldenburg.

HFC: Yeah, I guess one of the things I was wondering with this point that you brought up about color is -- the interesting thing about color, right, it's a formal question rather than a

conceptual question or a question of a kind of, you know, post-Duchampian, ready-made move that Warhol was, for example, very associated with. And maybe one of the things that Wesselmann resisted in a certain way was being classified with artists that were being talked about, whether it was correct or not, that was being talked about more in terms of ready-made, you know, gambit, or a kind of pure -- use of collage for its avant-garde and sort of political connotations, rather than his formal concerns. Right? Like color, which he was so interested in. Which maybe were consistent with other Pop artists, but he felt -- I'm just kind of, you know, that it was an element of maybe why he resisted that categorization. That conception of what Pop Art was.

CJ: Well, alright. Can you turn to the *New Realists* show, Tom Wesselmann, *Still Life #17*? You probably have it there, yeah, I think you sent me an image, too. Which has a -- do you have that there? A lady stands behind a table. She's holding a can of a beer in one hand, and the table is covered with Horn & Hardart coffee, a Brillo box --

HFC: Yep.

CJ: -- Del Monte's, and all this other stuff, plus cookies and -- these are all things that are cutouts. The phone is a cutout of something. And he's painted part of the girl, and part of the other stuff, and there are a lot of pasted-together things. Now, you can't look at this without saying immediately -- this is right in the middle of a Pop Art idea, what we've got going here. And not only that, but the labels are giving the picture a kind of emphasis and punch that it wouldn't have without the labels. So, the labels are very important here. The Pop -- but

it's also -- it's part of Tom's aesthetic, that he likes these things that give the picture a real force. So, it is aesthetic, even though it's also -- it's also part of the political scene, or the cultural scene, of using these images. So, it is -- to answer your question, it is both personal and it is social, together. And Tom may be thinking more of it in the personal sense, and as you said, less interested in the Duchampian sense, that maybe Warhol has.

HFC: Yeah, I think that's a really interesting way of characterizing it, and I think that's true. They're clearly both at play in something like *Still Life #17*, both aspects.

CJ: Yes, yes, yes. And you go from this *Still Life* to the big *Still Lives*, like #70. It's not such a big jump, but it is a big jump. But, you know, that's how artists are. Some ideas are a big step, and some things they take with them through their whole work.

HFC: And this actually brings me to another question I wanted to ask you about, which is in the '80s and '90s, I noticed in correspondence with you, that Wesselmann had with you, that you were helping kind of advocate for him with museums for potential retrospectives and for more recognition. That he had a frustration that he voiced in letters to you about that legacy. And I'm interested in your perspective on that, at that time, especially because you were, you know, part of helping to change that, or trying to change that, in the '80s and '90s.

CJ: Well, you know, I don't actually recall these letters that you said that I wrote, so I would be interested to see them. I can't -- I don't know -- it wasn't our particular position to

advocate to collectors and museums in letters for the artist. The [pauses] -- the artist's work really sells itself by being -- or for the museums. And it wasn't up to us to get a museum to do a show. They have to express the interest to do the show. And then, we can put in a -- we can make suggestions or this or that. I may have suggested to the Corcoran to show *Still Life #60* down there, because I thought it would look great. I think I may have made the suggestion. Anyway, they took it, it went down there, and it looked great. So, that was a win-win. I might have -- I just don't recall actually writing those letters. I may very well have said very nice things about his -- some of his late work, including his -- from brushstroke into sculpture that he did.

And -- the problem that I saw; we did two shows of his abstract art, because he wanted to do his abstract paintings, and he said, "You know, I've been planning to do these since the '50s. So, I never got around to doing them until just recently, so we're doing a show." So, okay, we did the show. And there were some nicer than others. But it was -- it was difficult. Then he did a second show of the abstract; I think that's the only time we did two shows in a row of the same theme of his.

But I -- I may well have -- I would have to read these letters, because I can only say what I've already said, and -- if I said anything, it would be what I have told you gentlemen and lady, that Tom was still working on new ideas late in life, and as a matter of fact, his style changed towards the very end when he worked on these nudes with a -- in a highly painterly style. That was a change of style, just at the end. And some of them were quite successful works, and I know our show at the Armory

was very well received. That show of the nudes -- mostly nudes, done in the painterly style of his final years.

JS: Those were these Expressionist nudes that he did, right?

CJ: Yes.

JS: And you showed those at the Armory around -- 2004, 2003? Yeah.

CJ: Five, 2005.

JS: 2005.

CJ: Yeah. That was right at the end of his life.

JS: Mm-hm.

CJ: Yeah. So, and that was after the gallery closed, and we still maintained relations. It's just that for reasons not -- having nothing to do with him, that I closed the gallery. And so, naturally, he sought other galleries. And however, I did do this one show, which I think he was happy to do, and we were happy to do, and it was also quite a successful show, in 2005. So, to your question, how did our relationship -- ended, it didn't end! It didn't end.

HFC: No, that's actually -- that's what I was gonna say. It sounds like from what you're describing about the Armory show that you continued -- even though the gallery ended, you continued to have a relationship --

CJ: Yeah.

HFC: -- both professionally and personally, with Wesselmann afterwards. Yeah.

CJ: And I live with his art; I have some of his work up in my home, and I've had it for years, and I'm very happy. And that's why I say when I say that it stays fresh, I'm giving you an opinion of somebody who has something he looks at every day. Now, for an artist's work to stay -- you know, not every Picasso stays fresh, only some of them.

JS: [laughs]

CJ: You know, his painting now is getting to look a little, um -- dated. Some of the ideas he had.

HFC: Yeah, no, I -- I mean, I agree. And there's another -- we've been talking -- this is a bit of a change of subject. We've been talking a lot about Wesselmann's work, but there's one other thing I was really interested to talk to you about that I didn't want to miss, which was that since you were -- and the gallery was so central to helping his career and helping his relationships with other galleries, you were often the interlocutor, right, between him and galleries in Europe, galleries in Japan. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how that worked. I just -- as you know, a big part of my research is looking at provenance. And I see a lot of works that end up going through galleries in Japan or end up going through Sonnabend or Bischofberger, you know, Galerie Tokoro in Tokyo. And they come through you. So, how did that -- how did you kind of manage that network of galleries for Tom?

CJ: Well, first of all, the gallery had to express an interest in the work. They had a [unclear?] -- they either came to me or they came to Tom. Tom didn't often go to Europe, and I don't think he went to the Far East. I'm not sure about that. But the galleries, like the collectors, have to express an interest in the artist to begin with. So, the gallery would come in, and if it -- if we considered it a good gallery. You know, I mean, there are galleries who want to do shows that you have to think twice about consigning them anything, because you may never get it back, right? And it may not be the right spot to put them, anyway.

So, then we would work with a gallery. If we worked with the -- Tokyo, for example, at Galerie Tokoro, that eventually went out of business. And we gave him a show, and he did nicely with it, and -- we didn't have to say, "Take Tom Wesselmann." He came and asked for Tom Wesselmann. And he worked with -- he did a Segal show, a Marisol show. So, for those galleries, some of the galleries knew Tom independently, especially the West Coast galleries. They knew about Tom. And so, where we could, we worked with them. They had to be willing to -- your biggest problem is when you send the work out of the country, is getting it back. You know, that's always a big problem. So, you have to trust the gallery, too.

And some of the galleries just bought work outright; that's much simpler, much cleaner. And some of the galleries preferred that. Galleries have to work that out with the artist and the other third -- the artist has to like the people. The people have to like the artist. The gallery has to like the people. The people have to like the gallery. And if all that works, then you can

get shows done. Meanwhile, there are many people from Europe who came and bought Wesselmanns at the gallery, who -- we had many collectors, and we had collectors all over the place. So, a lot of paintings went out to the collectors, not to the galleries. Although they may have then gone from the collectors to other galleries, you know, in ten years or whatever. And ended up who knows where, you don't know. But well, that's the general situation.

There are some times it doesn't work out. We gave a very good gallery in Paris a Wesselmann show, and they were supposed to return it, but instead, they made plans to send it to another gallery in England whom we didn't know, have any relation with. And they didn't ask us. They didn't ask us. They just said okay to that gallery, and they were about to ship it out when we found out. And then, we had to go to them and say, "Well, we don't want you sending them." And they said, "Well, uh --" -- so we had to get it back. That wasn't so easy, but we did it. And I don't think the artist lost any works. Some artists -- we had -- I think few enough artists ever lost works over there.

HFC: But yeah, this -- there's always that, yeah, issue of these works going far afield and trying to keep track of them. Yeah.

CJ: Yes, you have make a -- some kind of arrangement. I don't know. In Japan, it's more difficult, because -- if a museum wants to buy a work in Japan, they can't come to you, they have to send an inter-- you know, somebody in between who will then buy the work and sell it to the museum. And that's complicated, too. You know, these --

HFC: Yeah, that's really interesting.

CJ: Anyway, Tom's work made its way in the world because of the nature and quality of the work. And so, it made its way in Europe, it made its way in the Far East, and -- wherever else it went, it was due to the artist, to the quality of the artist's work. And that's how it is, and that's how, I think, the general way it always is. The gallery does nothing more, really, than try to set it up with galleries who will do well and will be honest.

HFC: And that's -- I, yeah, no, absolutely. And I -- that actually leads me to the one last question I wanted to ask, which -- and close with -- which is, how you would characterize both sort of the legacy of Wesselmann's work and his importance, and how the understanding of his work has maybe changed over time. As you have followed his work and its reception for so many decades.

CJ: Well, so you're asking me to give you a sort of a -- a short version of the book I could be writing, right?

HFC: [laughs] I guess so.

CJ: Well, Tom's work, like any artist's work, is always in the process of being reevaluated, reinterpreted. And his will be, and it will be done now and again in the future, and I think his place is secure as one of the leading artists of his movement that you said he didn't like to be called, in the Pop artists. But I must say, he never expressed any -- to me -- any misgivings about being called this, that, or the other. He just never did. And now, there is a difference between the artist and his work, and then the critical reception of it. I mean, that

could be two quite different things. And the critical reception changes over time, because the artist's work gets seen differently, and the times change. And -- now, what was the other half of the question?

HFC: Actually directly related to what you were just saying, which was --

CJ: Oh.

HFC: -- how you see the perception of his work having been changed, and of course, the continued importance of his work.

CJ: Well, I think all the Pop artists are becoming more seen, and have been in the last 20 years, for their positive formal qualities, which were not so much overlooked as not considered in the early days. What we weren't considering the -- the formal meaning of their work and what kind of qualities the forms have and the structure of the work. Of course that, you can't really separate from the enthusiasm and from the, you know, their personal take on life and on society and on women and whatever you want to bring up. But I think we see them more, the formal qualities more so, although you could see them already early on. It's just that critics did not spend much time on that.

You didn't -- you didn't really talk that much about the qualities of Oldenburg's soft sculptures and what they mean and what they owed to Duchamp, too. Duchamp had a big influence on these artists. [pauses] Although he was pretty modest about that. So, I think that -- there are qualities of content in Tom's work that have still to be looked into. There are qualities of his formal invention that still have to be looked

into. There's -- there are qualities of the range of his images that still have to be looked into. There are qualities of the continuity of images from early styles through his late styles, which have still to be looked into. So, there's a lot of things that critics can do, if they want to undertake it. They want to undertake the task.

HFC: A lot of things for the book you might write.

CJ: Well, I won't get around to writing it. But that is what -- those are all things that should be taken up. They should be taken up. Then, there's the relation of Pop Art to older art that used objects for a -- meanings that go beyond the everyday meaning of an object. And even into the religious meanings of objects. So, that's a whole -- another interesting aspect, which I don't think you're gonna find taken up soon, but that is very interesting.

HFC: Yeah, certainly an aspect -- I'm just thinking about Warhol, of course, that's a major aspect of Warhol's work in many ways. But yeah, that is true. The first thing you said about the formal qualities, I mean, the one thing that's interesting about that, I think, with Wesselmann, right, is that it also seems to me that his later work kind of pushes you -- because he becomes so explicitly concerned with formal issues in his later work. It pushes that reconsideration of his earlier work through a lens of his formal concerns, and because he himself was talking about it and encouraging that interpretation in his own writing on his work. So, that is interesting. I think he's -- he's an artist, maybe, who is in general -- has pushed for a formal reconsideration of Pop Art in both his work and his writing on his work.

CJ: Yeah, good for him, he could be a critic, good critic of -- [laughter] of the movement. Yeah. There's a lot of work to be done: not only on Tom, but that's just -- on the other artists as well. There's a big range of issues to be considered, and I hope that you folks will be considering some of them.

HFC: Yes, that is the plan. [laughs]

CJ: Yeah, yeah.

HFC: Well, thank you so much. This has been wonderful. I'm so -- I really appreciate all of your time, and I think this is gonna be -- I know now that this is going to be a great contribution to our project. I feel like I've learned an enormous amount, so yeah, thank you.

CJ: Well, thank you very much for your patience, all of you. It was really nice.

JS: Thanks so much, Carroll. That was really great.

[END OF AUDIO FILE]