

**THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**INTERVIEW WITH: ARLETTE BUCHMAN (AB)**

**INTERVIEWER: WENDY WOON (WW)**

**ALSO PRESENT: RYAN KENNEDY (RK), DAMANI BAKER (DB), JEANMARIE THEOBALDS (JT)**

**LOCATION: BUCHMAN'S HOME**

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**TRANSCRIBER: JANET CROWLEY**

WW: Arlette, what we usually do is we start with you saying your name.

AB: Arlette Buchman and Arles Buchman. I have two names; one is as an artist and one as a teacher.

WW: And today is June 27<sup>th</sup> (Should I say this part?) June 27<sup>th</sup> at 8 Wildwood Circle,

AB: Yes.

WW: Larchmont,

AB: Yes.

WW: New York.

RK: Can we take one minute and I'll just grab her some headphones so she can hear.

WW: Sure. Sounds good. So we just have to wait for a minute. They're going to put headphones on Jeanmarie so she can hear what's going on. So we can take our time, take it slow, and don't feel rushed. We'll get to all of the great stories.

AB: [INAUDIBLE 0:01:25] Super 8. [laughter]

WW: It's a good thing you know a lot about filmmaking. But now you're behind [sic] the camera, instead.

AB: In fact, my daughter gave me a new camera, also a Super 8. And I had an idea for it but I never used it. It was really different, and I'm not very good at new techniques, technology.

WW: I'm surprised you say that because you did all those wonderful drawings and paintings on the computer.

AB: I have one upstairs I want to show you.

WW: I would like to see it.

AB: It was part of my show of the women.

DB: Go ahead.

WW: Okay. So Arlette, could you tell us a little bit about yourself?

AB: Well, I was really, you know, was a great teacher. And from a great teacher I became an art teacher. I used to do a little artwork with the children. Of course, I had an art background to begin with. I used to really work with the children, and then I heard about The Museum of Modern Art had an evening class on Wednesday night at 7:00 with Victor D'Amico. And I didn't know anything about Victor D'Amico, but this friend of mine who was taking the class said, "I think you'll like it. It's going to be different." So I attended the class, and every Wednesday night we would walk at the entrance which was on the left of the regular entrance to the Modern. And Sol Lewitt, the artist, was at the desk. And he was, of course, as an artist he was sketching, and he'd lift up his head, you know, when people came up, to acknowledge that they were students. And I went up and it was a revelation. Victor would present the class, introduce the class with a word or a sentence or a little speech, sometimes a poem. And we were supposed to paint. And I said, "Paint? Why?" Because I was used to seeing, to look. This didn't have much to do with looking. It had something to do with hearing and deciding what you were going to say. So it was a revelation. And from there on, I, after I stopped teaching, I painted full time, and I think that the artwork was really my greatest joy in life. But then, I taught art, I taught children at The Museum of Modern Art, and they were young children, the three-year-olds, all the way up to the teenagers. And the teenagers were extraordinary. I used to find them extraordinary. I'm sure the parents don't know anything about them. [laughing] So I taught for many, many years.

WW: What was

AB: And my teaching was really very much based on Victor's way of teaching. Then, of course, I had [INAUDIBLE 0:05:25] on the other side, on the Arlette side, my marriage was a happy one, because my husband was very much involved in his own work, and he had a good sense of design, and he used it in his work. And once in a while, he would ask my advice, and when I painted, I asked for his advice. And he learned a great deal about art following the Saturday mornings at the Barge, when Victor would give a critique and talk about art. And many of the outsiders came, and it was a very, morning we used to wait for. And Mabel would make a beautiful centerpiece with the weeds that she would find, in the middle of the table, where we had coffee and a cookie. It was a very, very homey feeling. And then, my two daughters, of course, fulfilled our lives. We were a happy family. My husband died two years ago. And, it's too much. There's so much to say.

WW: I want to ask you a little bit about when you first came to the Museum. You were married; you were an artist; you were teaching children.

AB: Yes.

WW: But, and you discovered the Wednesday night classes.

AB: I was teaching, well, when I was teaching the children at the Lycée Français, the French school in New York, they didn't do much artwork, just a little paper and pencil. But it was very satisfying because the children, we didn't look at things. I told them to tell me a little bit about what they did over the weekend, or their vacation. It was very simple; simple requests and simple answers.

WW: When you went to the Wednesday night classes, what was New York like at that time? What did, as a young artist and a mother, what was it like at that time?

AB: I enjoyed going through the Modern and seeing the shows because Victor said, "the language of today;" you have to paint in the language of today. And it was very multiple. In the '60s there was a hit parade; every month there was a new show. All the shows followed one another. And to know more, sometimes I would start my own version of what I saw and knew. I don't think that I did anything so personal, but I tried many things. And I

had a studio in East Hampton, Springs, and it was very important to me to be able to paint and to have the scale. I used to like to paint on large paintings, and sand paintings, of course, being at the Barge. When I painted at the Barge, I would go on the beach and use sand. [0:9:45]

WW: Can you tell me about the Wednesday night classes? Can you describe what it would be like to walk into the class, and what materials, what did the classrooms look like, how many students there would be in a class?

AB: Well, when we had the children's classes, the small classes, we had, the children started with painting. And then we had clay. And sometimes we would work with different materials. But some children didn't like clay, the very little ones. It was the beginning for the three-year-olds and four-year-olds. Some didn't want to touch the clay. And finally they did. And oh, so many times we would play with clay and they would put it back into the bin, because it was the experience that was most important. But the children, the small ones, it was very interesting because there was a development. We kept the folders, and we saw the development of the child from the beginning. It was most interesting. Of course, the older children wanted to know if, when they did the figure, whether it was correct or not. I said, "Well, it depends." [laughing] And I used to bring some bottles, the bottle people, and say, "Some have big hips and some have small hips, and some have a small head, and some are small, and some are fat, and some," et cetera, et cetera. And that started for some of the older children. And of course, the teenagers were most interesting because they were closet people: maybe [INAUDIBLE 0:11:53] poetry in the closet, or sang in the closet, or whatever it was, that nobody knew. And I made them bring that into the classroom by providing projects that would involve them with poetry and art and dance and et cetera, et cetera, relating the arts. So it was a very profitable experience, life experience.

WW: Can you talk a little bit about the students and where the children came from?

AB: It was a very mixed group of children. And we had children who came with a nurse or a nanny, and some who came with their mothers, and children who came all alone, and it was a very, very mixed group of children. And some children came on a scholarship, and some did not, but it was a mixture of children that provided an experience for all of them. They mingled. It was a one-hour experience, but some of them would stay on and talk, even the very little ones. And they couldn't wait to show, the very little ones couldn't wait to show what they did to their parents.

WW: Victor's, his philosophy, how would you describe his philosophy of teaching?

AB: Well, I think Friday when we spoke at the Barge, I said something about it, because the five senses were involved. Which meant that we, when we has a class, sometimes I would bring in little vials full of something or another, vinegar, and different scents. And they would take it and smell it and react with a painting. And sometimes we made a gift for a blind child, so that they would have materials and put it together so a blind child could pick it up and feel it and enjoy it. So we had, the five senses were really at the base of teaching, because it could go from one word to a whole book, the whole experience. If it had been possible, maybe the children could have gone through the Museum. We never did, but it could have been something that would have been very profitable, to be able to discover all the different landscapes. I used to bring in a lot of—we had a very large collection of visual photos and material, and I used to bring them out, even for the three-year-olds, and ask them which one they preferred. And some of the three-year-old said she liked that one because she was wearing jeans, she was wearing pants. [laughing] But the visual part was very much introduced in the classroom, photos from the Modern, from upstairs. But it might have been nice to have the time—time was very, the thing that would have been impossible to do, to go and work. But the five senses, as I said, are here to stay. They're not going to leave us. I think since, in spite of all the technology, we still have to deal with our hands, and many other, all our senses will still be very much in. And I'm very much into mental telepathy. Somebody, one of the professors at Charlottesville, University of Virginia, had

invited me to go down, and of course, my home life did not permit me. But I was very much interested in mental telepathy for many, many years ago, and I know that the Russians have done a great deal about it. And it has been used also recently in medicine.

WW: I want to go back to when you first

RK: I just need to change her battery before it dies.

WW: Okay.

RK: I'm sorry.

WW: That's okay. We just need to change the battery on your microphone. So hold that thought. [laughing]

: Arlette, some water?

AB: Okay, thank you.

: Can I get you anything?

WW: I'm going to circle back to the adult classes and her first experience, and go back and [INAUDIBLE 0:18:00]

: [laughter]

AB: There was a lady from Minnesota. And we started to talk, and she made that and sent it to me. She took my measurements and sent it to me from Minnesota. [laughing]

WW: Really; that's great.

RK: [18:32 to 19:40, mostly inaudible tech talk]

WW:

RK:

WW: That's okay. Are we ready?

RK:

WW: Okay. [only background noise to 0:19:40]

AB: Okay?

RK: You're good; you're good; I'm good.

WW: Okay. Great. So Arlette, I want to go back to when you started with the Wednesday night classes for adults, when you were a student. Can you talk a little bit about what type of classes you took? Did you take one class or two classes?

AB: You mean, here?

WW: At The Museum of Modern Art.

AB: At The Museum of Modern Art. I had that Wednesday night class with Victor once a week; that's all. And when the children grew up, my oldest daughter went to the Modern to take art classes. But this Wednesday night class was followed up with a speaking class that Victor started because he thought that the artists did not really manage to express their work in any good ways. So he had a class on the spoken words, and that was very

interesting in the—it wasn't really innovation, but it really produced some very interesting results, and as [INAUDIBLE 0:21:11] said, it really started me talking without a stop.

WW: Where did that take place?

AB: Pardon me?

WW: Where did those classes take place?

AB: It took place at the Rockefellers' Guest House on I think somewhere, East 54<sup>th</sup> or, I don't recall, in the 50s. And it was a very exciting townhouse. The architect was Philip Johnson. And we entered and it had a small living room, and we found out that if we open the door, and there was a little pond in the middle, with stones, and you stepped on the stones to go into the bedroom in the back. It was very original. And the person who was there to, the caretaker, was a very extraordinary man who liked to do some needlework. And he would look at the painting, if we brought any paintings, and copy them, so he would have a basic[?] for his work. But it was a very interesting experience, very interesting. And of course, we found out that that building was really used for the paintings that were acquired by the Modern, that were privately held upstairs, and we didn't go upstairs.

WW: Could you give me an example of what might take place during one of these spoken word classes? Would he use poetry, or what kind of poetry?

AB: Do you mean that, in that Wednesday night at the spoken word? Well, I don't recall exactly. Sometimes, I think, basically, we started by trying to speak about the painting that we had done. It went on from there, because there were so many different ways of approaching the subject that it took more than one session to cover that. But that was so long ago that I don't remember. All I know is that I can remember my own work being very different from anything I might have done. It promoted my thinking in terms of words. So, I can't remember, exactly. Although I have kept every single scrap of paper from a whole lifetime, so I have a lot of, if I went back, I probably could find it.

WW: With the adult classes, it seems like there was a sense of community of artists

AB: Yes.

WW: At the Museum. I know that there were many well known artists and teachers, like yourself. Can you name a few of the people that you knew? [0:24:43]

AB: Well, I think that a few people were artist teachers, and they, it was, you know, it was called the Kearsarge group. And the Kearsarge group was named by a young man called—oh, not a young man; a man called Joe Revson. And it's a city in New Hampshire. And he was a donor, so he thought we should call this group the Kearsarge group, and it stayed. The Kearsarge group was a group that was originally painting at the Barge, and some of the people who started are still there. That's fifty years ago. Then we have some Sunday painters who come there in the summer, and they paint in New York in winter. But the Kearsarge group has stayed as a group for many, many years, and have made a connection among themselves. I have a good friend, Nicole Bigard, who's going to be, we'll see her. She went to Santa Fe, that's why she didn't come to the Barge this last Friday. But I've known her for fifty some-odd years.

WW: So at the Museum, in the '50s, Victor had many students who became well known artists.

AB: No, not really well known. I think that, first of all, Victor was not much for people that he taught becoming artists. His idea of art was not really the selling of art. And whether he believed in it or not, art does not sell. [laughing] It's a stroke of luck to be discovered. But anyhow, I think that Victor was not for showing, but that didn't stop him from coming and helping me put up my show on Fifth Avenue.

WW: What gallery?

AB: Madison Avenue.

WW: What gallery was that, that you had the show?

AB: The first year was in, well, the show in New York, because I had showed before. But the show in New York was '61. But [INAUDIBLE 0:27:56] I had shown before, but not in New York City.

WW: In New York, during this, the '50s, where were other places that people like yourself, artists, took classes? Were there other places people

AB: Yes. I think Silvermine had student of Josef Albers who taught. And I took a class with him and discovered color. And my first show was all white. [laughing] But I did take a couple of classes there, which was the first time that I saw all the arts under one roof. That appealed to me. And I took a couple of classes there. They had very good instructors. And they had a theater, and they had poetry; they had many things happening under one roof. In fact, at the Barge, we had a writing course one year, and we tried a few different things.

WW: Was that the same at the Museum? In the classes at the People's Art Center, did they do interdisciplinary classes for adults as well? So, painting and writing; you talked about spoken word.

AB: At the Barge?

WW: No, at the Museum.

AB: At the Museum? No. We had, painting was it. Painting was it, and when the assemblage came, that is when we came back. When we were in India, I spoke to Victor, the teachers had asked me to put down a few things for them to do. And of course there was no time, so that, when we came back, he said, "Why don't you start something?" Which I did. And of course, it was the beginning of the Assemblage book. Before that, we didn't use the materials in the same way.

WW: So you talked about the interdisciplinary nature of the Silvermine. And was that something that Victor was also interested in, that interdisciplinary?

AB: No, I think that they used all materials at the Barge, always. We always used a variety of materials at the Barge. And of course, the word "construction" was used by many people. And then remember, in one of my teachers' classes, they used to make fun, every time I would say "assemblage" [laughing] they would think it was funny. But they started using it. But assemblage was really the word, the real word for construction. Construction has a feeling of heavier material.

WW: Can you talk a little bit about what the studio spaces were like at the Museum, when you first?

AB: People at the Museum, I think most of them had had some academic start. And like, I am an example of it. That the Museum teaching was [INAUDIBLE 0:32:00] and opened up a new vista for all of us. And it created a bond amongst us. We had a very similar background. And people, men and women, we had quite a few men in the class, and it was, and I think that there were a few women like myself who had had an academic background from their homeland.

WW: Were there scholarships for the adult programs, as well?

AB: I don't think so. I don't think so. I'm not, I couldn't say for sure, because I didn't know. I don't think so.

WW: How many students would be in a class?

AB: Well, in Victor's class, we had about fifteen, twenty.

WW: And as you walked in to the space, what would it look like?

AB: Well, it was a varied classroom. We didn't have materials around. Painting was really the media we used. And of course, many people worked differently at home, with collage, et cetera, et cetera, but really, painting was the media we used and also the media that we knew, and [INAUDIBLE 0:34:00] changed. And we painted with oil. Some people used acrylic, but most people used oil. And we did one painting each time. It was a finished experience.

WW: How many weeks were the classes?

AB: They class was a whole term, three months.

WW: I wanted to ask you about some of the other places that people took classes and how they might compare to Victor. Like the Art Students League, or the National Academy of Design, or Cooper Hewitt, Parsons, Fieldston. How were those

AB: Well I think, from what I understand, I didn't meet too many people who went there, because we used to think that this was "it." We had reached the top of what we wanted to know that was a contemporary approach. And I think that people considered anything else, 'Well, I've seen that; I've done that.' [laughing] I don't know. Maybe they were more contemporary in some places, but anyone who wanted to, it was a plus to be able to have a course at the Modern. And of course, when we discovered the kind of course we were taking, it was even more enjoyable.

WW: During the classes, did you go and look at the exhibitions or meet artists?

AB: No, but everybody used to go to exhibitions. We all did. We all knew what was going on in New York City.

WW: Were there particular exhibitions or artists that you found very inspirational, that you saw at the Modern?

AB: No, because I think that when I started those classes with Victor D'Amico, we had a, you know, Van Gogh and the Impressionists were very much favored, because they were, we could understand them. So that it was, the new artists, we had to digest them to be able to enjoy them.

WW: And it was a challenge to digest them. I wanted to ask you—I'm going to switch a little bit. I want to talk to you about your relationship with Victor.

AB: Well, Victor was a very, very, at first, he as very strict. And then he knew that I was not going to listen to a lot of things, so he changed. But he was a very, very good friend, a very good friend, and he was a confidant, a very good confidant. But I was not the only one to be able to be able to confide in him. I think everybody, and of course you know the story about Diane Arbus. He was very upset, and I wanted to know why he was so upset. He said, "Well, Diane Arbus"—and I had seen her show at the Modern. The Modern had a show of hers. "Diane Arbus called me up one day and she wanted to come over and talk to me, and I couldn't see her, so I told her that I would call her the following week." Well, in the meantime, she committed suicide; and of course, he never forgave himself for having put off her visit. And then he told me a bit about her and her background. He remembered her very, very well. Fieldston, he taught at Fieldston. And Fieldston, a lot of my neighbors

here said, "I had him." So [laughing] you could write a book, "I Had Him" and name all the people who had him at Fieldston, and they still remember him. It was amazing. But he was a very, very good friend.

WW: He taught a couple of the curators. Do you remember that he had taught some of the curators at The Museum of Modern Art, at Fieldston?

AB: What?

WW: Did you remember, Victor taught some of the most important curators, when they were at Fieldston as students, he was their teacher.

AB: He was their teacher, and they remembered him. I think, not only as an art teacher, but they remembered him as a person. And I saw the yearbook from Fieldston. One of the persons brought out the yearbook from Fieldston one night we went over to visit. It was interesting. They remember him as a man.

WW: Bill Rubin and Arthur Drexler were also students of his.

AB: Yes. They had experience both in art and some not, but they remembered him.

WW: Do you remember, who spoke at Victor's memorial service?

AB: The memorial service, when he was buried? He was buried in East Hampton and well, a few people had something to say but I had my own eulogy because, it was a couple of years before he died, he had become very, he would still come to the Barge, but he was very out of what he used to do. And I tried to make a recording of some questions, but he was not up to it. But I think I have the recording someplace.

WW: You talked about Victor as being, it seemed like he, his classes were very avant-garde. They were the most contemporary. What was it about him?

AB: Well, I think that when he said "the language of today" that was in the '60s, when things were going on. And he did not speak specifically about these individual styles or approaches, but he, the way he taught, was enough to get people to be more interested and to do some more research on what was going on, by looking at the shows and asking questions. So he was not much for going to art galleries. [laughing] I don't think he went. I think he was very involved in what he wanted to say, and I think his pupils became like him. [laughing] But the one thing that was very good is that, if the pupils wanted to be like him, it was good. Some of the teachers have pupils who paint exactly the way the teacher paints, and that's the end. You can see five people and you know who their teacher is. I want to show you something that Victor did. [quiet from 0:43:24 to 0:43:49] That was, he gave it to me, it was done in, from his trip to India. And he made a nice gift to Jackie when she got married, to my daughter, a scene from Bangkok, when we came back from India, and he gave it to her. But he didn't do much artwork, so that the people in the class didn't see any of his artwork. But I know he used to. So his influence was really the man, the man and what he had to say. Which was very, I think people discovered themselves. I think that was the whole thing; it was really a self-discovery, that in a natural way. [0:45:10]

WW: I wanted to ask you how you became a teacher. How did he choose you and how did he tell you about it?

AB: Jean D'Autilia [0:45:25] was teaching a class at the Modern, two classes, and one of them was the three-year-olds. And I went and spent quite a long time with her. And that was my introduction to the young people. And from there I saw a couple of other classes, but I had ideas of my own. And he trusted me and saw what I was doing. And then we had some meetings of the teachers, sometimes once a week, sometimes once a month, to show what we were doing. And although everybody was their own way, when we had the show of the

children's show, there was a great unity. I—sometimes I forget what I'm going to say.  
[laughing]

WW: That happens to me.

AB: But it was interesting because also, Victor was encouraging people, teachers, to use what they knew, to teach. If you were interested in sports, bring in the sports. If you were interested in something else, bring in that something else. So that it became, each teacher had his or her own way of teaching, because they would be able to be themselves. So then, I brought in a lot of trips that I made and ideas that I had, and also personal experiences which I enjoyed. But I think that the teachers gave me so much in return, that I enjoyed teaching.

WW: Can you give an example of some kind of thing that you did that you brought in something personal and you used it in your teaching?

AB: I think that it was personal experiences I came through, and I shared with them the art experiences: if I had seen a show, or if I had heard some music, et cetera. They had Einstein on the Beach. I brought that in. But I think I was showing myself in what I did, and what I thought, and we discussed it, so that it was a personal relationship between the teachers and myself. As far as the children, I was following what they should know.

WW: And what was that? Could you describe?

AB: Clichés; the clichés were one thing that were most, most important. The fact that the [INAUDIBLE 0:49:18], all these clichés, the first impulse of the young child, and it's a revelation to them when you can present these in a different way.

WW: Can you give an example of a cliché—Victor talked about not liking clichés.

AB: He did not; no. Cliché was one of the things that he would stress, no clichés and anything that was not pure and personal. It was a way of living. Everything that he said was not complicated. He made it so you would understand it, and do it.

WW: Was Victor, how did he evaluate his teachers? How would he, if he liked what you were doing, or he didn't like what you were doing, how would he let you know?

AB: I don't know. He didn't say, although what he has written about me included things that he told me aloud, [laughing] when he saw me using certain tools, you know, my way. He would tell me, and I would say, "No, this is the way I like to hold it." But anything that he wrote was usually things that he had already said to you. Not the things he liked. He didn't tell you the things he liked. [laughing] He told you the things he didn't like.

WW: Can you give examples of a teacher, maybe not yourself, but another teacher, that he did not like, or, did he dismiss them if he didn't like?

AB: That I don't know, because I think that he kept, he was very personal about it, I think. I don't think that he would [INAUDIBLE 0:51:52] I know that he was sometimes annoyed with the trustees. [laughing]

WW: I'm sorry, I didn't hear you.

AB: Annoyed with the trustees.

WW: Ah.

AB: Because they never came there. Nobody paid any attention to the Art Department. One trustee came in to see us, one day. And I agreed with him about that.

WW: Who were his supporters at the Museum?

AB: What?

WW: Who were the people who supported him at the Museum?

AB: At the Museum? I don't know, but he was friendly with the publication, I knew because of what happened to Assemblage. But I can't really say. I know that Rockefeller liked him, and I don't know. I know that he thought a great deal of Alfred Barr.

WW: What was their relationship like, between Barr and D'Amico?

AB: That I wouldn't know. The only time I met Mr. Barr was going out with a few people and Victor was amongst us, and Victor introduced us to Alfred Barr. But when Alfred Barr left, he turned around and told us that Alfred Barr was already having Alzheimers. He was not [INAUDIBLE 0:53:41] like Muriel, you know.

WW: Can you tell me a little bit about Victor's background, what you know about him as a young man? Who was Victor, his family?

AB: Well, he had a big family. And the only person I knew of his family was his nephew, Dr. D'Amico, he was an ophthalmologist. But he never spoke too much about his family, but he spoke about his mother. And I think, I'm not sure if I told you this story, what he said, "You remind me of my mother, because when she served even a piece of bread, it was presented well." But he mentioned his mother a few times. I don't think that he mentioned the family too much. I think that Dr. D'Amico paid attention to Victor, so Victor paid attention to him.

WW: Are you okay? Do you need a break now? Do you need a little break, or should we continue?

AB: No; no, no. The only time I need a break is when I walk. [laughter] I can climb the stairs but walking makes me out of breath.

WW: Can you tell me about some of the other teachers that were teaching at the same time. What were their names?

AB: Ah, that's a tall order. But, oh dear, oh dear oh dear. Muriel, of course, Muriel Silberstein was teaching. Hilde Siegal, very good artist teacher. She went into sculpture, no, she was painting with, the last I spoke to her, she was doing a lot of sculpture. And, I can't remember names. The reason I remember these two names is that I've stayed in touch with them. [0:56:20]

WW: How many teachers were there?

AB: There must have been, the men, they had quite a few men. Oh gosh. I would say about ten.

WW: Did you socialize together?

AB: No. No. The only people I was with are the people that, we used to gather with some of the classes. No, we had no contact.

WW: I wanted to ask a little about Victor. Do you know anything about his education?

AB: No. It was written up. I have it from, I learned about it through some of the people from New Rochelle College of New Rochelle who came to ask me about Victor because they were writing their thesis. So they did all the research on his education. So I don't remember.

WW: It seems like Victor was a person, like what you said about his mother, that was very particular about the way they presented things. He designed a lot of the furniture

AB: He designed the whole house he lived in in Amagansett, Lazy Point, and even the tables and the way the TV would swing out of the wall and go back into the wall, and the lighting and the way—it was beautifully conceived. And of course, Mabel D'Amico added her touch, but Victor is the one who really designed it, and I think physically, he might have done some of the work.

WW: Also in the classrooms in the Art Carnivals, he designed things. He designed Art Carnivals and tables and chairs in the classrooms.

AB: And the tables that I have in my studio that go up and go down. And everything that he brought forth for the Art Carnival, he designed.

WW: Can you tell me a little bit about the Art Carnivals at MoMA and how they started?

AB: Oh yes. The Art Carnival at MoMA, that was one of the first ones. And the entrance with all the materials, it was very similar to the other Carnival with which I'm more familiar. But I remember that one, the one at MoMA. The materials were presented at the table, and also the clay and paint. But painting, the Carnival that I know and am familiar with was the Carnival in India, in '63, 1963. And that was the one when President Kennedy was shot. We were leaving, and I was not well. I wanted to see the doctor but the doctor was paying his condolences to the ambassador for, the American ambassador, because Kennedy was shot. So I remember the exit of the Carnival. But the Carnival itself had a motivation area where children would come and touch things, and they'd do, they could do something with their hands, paste shapes on the background. And they had to touch the cat. Of course, the cat is not an animal that is familiar in India. But the cat was made by, I met the lady who made the cat. I can't remember her name. She was an artist in New York City. And then they went into the room where the paint was available, and sat down and painted. And then they could use the materials to do collage. And the children came twenty at a time, and all day long. We were there for two months, and we were there during the holidays, October, November. And it was very colorful because everything was new and strange. We didn't speak the language. And it was amazing how we could make ourselves understood without words. And while we were working with the children, Victor would be working with the teachers. And one of the teachers came to New York and worked at the Barge, and [INAUDIBLE 1:02:45] on the Barge worked at the Modern, and went back. And he wrote us a letter to tell us how happy he was that he chose his own wife, because the custom there was the parents to choose a wife, but he got them organized and he chose his own wife. I think one of the other teachers is now in Canada with her husband [INAUDIBLE 1:03:12]. And she was a very good teacher. She came to see me here. And then, as I told you before, this is how the book was born. But the experience was extraordinary, because when I first got there, I was wondering, "What did I come to do here? I should have come here with something concrete, something to eat or to wear, or something." So many people slept on the street. That was in '63. Things have changed a great deal. But after a couple of days, I knew that we came here for the right thing. And we had a lot of unusual experiences.

WW: You said that you felt you came here for the right reason. Can you talk a little bit more about what that right reason was?

AB: Well, when I came and the kids came over and they had no shoes, and, but I was cutting paper, and they picked up the paper and they looked at it and they played with it. Just pieces of paper. And it was, to them, it was something new, and it was something, their hands were working. And by the time we were working with them inside, in the tents, they were so—some children had never held a pair of scissors, and they were absolutely mesmerized by the little pieces of paper, the things on the table, and what they could do something with it. And the paintings! And being that the language was, there was no

language, I just kept on saying something, and the paintings were turning black. [laughing] And I was using a word that meant black. I don't know what word it was, but. They were really very, very enthusiastic about their experiences. You could see, they were brightening up. We never had the same group twice. We had twenty people at a time. And we must have had a couple of thousand by the time we left. But it was a great experience because the children, you could see the children react and the teachers. It was really seeing the children live.

WW: Did the Carnival travel to different cities?

AB: They went, I don't know how they traveled, but I know they went from city to city. I don't know under what condition, but they went from city to city. And the teachers were very enthusiastic about it, very enthusiastic about it. They really wanted to know so much more. And they had, a few, I guess, visited in New York.

WW: Did you go to the opening ceremony?

AB: Yes, I was there, yes, with Mrs. Kennedy and Mrs. Gandhi. I have a picture of it.

WW: Can you describe it a little bit?

AB: Well, it was, we wanted it to be over with. [laughing] As exciting as it was, it was more the actual, the teaching, and get to it. But there was a lot of roaming around the premises, Mrs. Gandhi and Mrs., very, very busy, busy, busy with a few speeches from each person. But I was not that close. I was second row or something like that, and I couldn't wait to do what I came to do.

WW: Was Victor involved in the ceremonies?

AB: Yes, he had a speech prepared, which I don't remember. [laughing] But we had an evening at one of the ministers' house. And I sat next to one of the ministers and told him how the children were obedient, and he answered, "We don't want them to be obedient." And that was a similar answer that I heard in South America: we don't want them to be obedient. And this is what's happening now in all the Arab countries.

WW: I wanted to know a little bit about materials. You brought materials? Did you bring your materials from New York, or did you need more?

AB: Yes, yes, we brought materials from New York. And we added a few things that we found there. But he brought everything from New York.

WW: Can you explain what kinds of things he bought from there?

AB: I remember papers and cardboards, and of course the glue and the scissors. I can't remember really. I imagine we had kinds of things that we have when we have our young classes. And then he added what that he could find there. But it was a very, very fascinating experience, because it was no language. It was all without talking, quiet.

WW: Were the children in India different than the children in other locations or New York?

AB: No; no. The children came in one bunch and they stayed in line waiting for one group at leave, and then the other group arrived, and all ages. And some of them were mixed, but they were all one age group, mostly.

WW: The Art Carnival traveled to other cities, as well.

AB: Yes, but I don't know much about that.

WW: You did go to Brussels, though. Can you talk a little bit about Brussels?

AB: That I don't know much about the traveling.

WW: Okay.

AB: Because when we left, it happened after we left. And when we left, we were in touch with some of the teachers, but nothing was said about the traveling outside. They were more interested in telling us about themselves and their experience, so that I didn't know, nothing much was said about the traveling abroad, I mean, within this country.

WW: You talked a little bit about your book, *Assemblage*, that you wrote with Victor.

AB: Well, when we came back, nothing had been written, although Lois Lord wrote a book. And this book is not a recipe book, but it is to understand what was said to make it happen. And my nephew read it, and he said to me, "You know, I think it sounds like you translated from French." [laughing] Some of the passages, although it was edited. But somehow, he said. He is a good writer. It was really, I wanted to say something that, when the parents would see some of the work, something was said to make that happen—What? What is that? So that it would give an idea to other teachers that they can say something to make it happen, but it gives an example. It also covers the ages from three years on to the teenagers. And I think that the format, it will gain from more pictures, more photos, and maybe a little color. Although color never really, was not really much into *assemblage*.

WW: Who published the book?

AB: Published the book was, [laughing] I don't remember.

WW: The Museum of Modern Art.

AB: My memory is

WW: No, your memory is very good.

AB: Last year I could have told you. [laughter]

WW: It was a very influential book.

AB: And they sold quite a bit in Australia, I think. And all the teachers have told me, "But I can't find it." They have stolen it from all over Westchester, they stole the book. And I was told that it's still as good today as it was then. And it's an example, so that there were many, many who could write books, and this is one of the examples of what can be done with the children. I think it's good because it's explicit and simple.

WW: I'm going to go back to talk about Victor a little bit. Did he ever teach at Black Mountain College, do you know? Did he teach at Black Mountain College? Do you remember anything about that?

AB: Down South?

WW: Yes.

AB: No.

WW: No. Okay.

AB: But he knew a lot about it and he referred to it quite a bit.

WW: In what context; why? How did he refer to it? [1:16:23]

AB: Je veux aller \_\_\_. I'll be right back. [pause to 1:16:52]

WW: I'm going to go back and talk a little bit about the Art Carnival in India.

AB: Yes.

WW: Can you tell me about who was there at the opening ceremonies?

AB: We came, I think, a little bit before the opening ceremonies, and we were very involved in what we were doing. Now the opening brought a lot of people on the grounds, because we were surrounded by children, but then, at that point, we were surrounded by many local people. And they all gathered more or less in a circle, a small circle, and made speeches individually. Victor D'Amico made a speech, and I remember Mrs. Gandhi, and a couple of other people. Mrs. Kennedy, I don't have a recollection. Maybe my mind was more on Mrs. Gandhi and the Indian people who were there. And then, I must say that I was glad when the ceremony was finished and we go back to what we were supposed to do. But it was very exciting and very colorful, too, because the saris were beautiful.

WW: At the Art Carnival, was there a construction or a building that was made?

AB: No, I think the Carnival was, I always thought of the Carnival as a real carnival, outdoors with all the rides, et cetera. This was really the working with children and the excitement around it. I never did ask Victor exactly what the word "carnival" was supposed to be, but "carnival," I think, was the excitement of the crowd, crowds of children, and all the things that went along with it: the many things to touch and to see, et cetera, et cetera. So I really never knew, and I'm sorry I never asked Victor, why he called it a carnival. And of course, he also had the idea that carnival, going around places, like a real carnival. And he had made those two reconstructions of two buses, large buses. One would have the motivation and the other one was going to be the working. And they would tour the city, to all of the neighborhoods, especially the neighborhoods where the children didn't have a chance to go to a museum or to a school. So that it was, I think the idea was stolen from him from one of the big printing people, who made it over. But I think the Barge still has an example of those two buses. And that was a very exciting thing, because you think about the chance that young people would have who never really went to a museum, to see some artwork and do some artwork. So it was another very good idea of Victor.

WW: That's right. That was called the Art Caravan, and it was not built

AB: No, but still, in all, it was in the same vein.

WW: Yes, absolutely. You had some adventures. Did you have some adventures when you were in India?

AB: Adventures?

WW: Yes.

AB: In the Carnival? Well, not really. The big interruption was going to the Taj Mahal, and that was quite an outing, because we went by car with a taxi, and then we had a tire that needed fixing. And we looked, we found a place that was like a small tent. And we went there, and I said, could he fix it? You know, it was just a tent, but this was the garage. And they did fix it. So we went on, and we enjoyed very much the visit. It was beautiful and really quite an exciting day. On the way back, we stopped because they had one place where we could get a drink. And there was an American man from Washington who came there with his wife, and she said, "I told him how beautiful it was." And he said, "I had to go because how could I go to Washington and tell my friends that I didn't go to the Taj Mahal." [laughing] And I thought that was very funny. Anyhow, it was a very exciting day because it was coming out of the city and seeing it with, and of course, stopping on the road with all the cows in front of us having priority. So we had to go and stop and go and stop. But that flat tire was another, [laughing] a welcome little something, because that was really quite unusual.

WW: What other cities did the Art Carnival travel to?

AB: I don't know, but I believe Bombay, and I don't know. But it went to Pondicherry [1:23:05], I always wanted to go because that was in my geography class when I went to school. And they had a French standing, a commercial standing there. But I believe they went to all the large cities. I don't recall which ones because when we came back from India, we corresponded and had more or less personal messages, but nothing about the outcome of the Carnival. Victor probably had it.

WW: Who was the ambassador at that time in India?

AB: Oh, that was Mr. Galbraith. And the reason I know is because when Kennedy died and I was not feeling well and was supposed to go back, I was not in much shape to go back. I wanted to get a doctor, but unfortunately the doctor was paying his condolence to Mr. Galbraith because of what had happened in America. And Mr. Galbraith, I met him complete perchance, subsequently, in Montauk, at one of the gatherings in a gallery someplace.

WW: So while you were in India, President Kennedy was assassinated.

AB: Yes, that was 1963. And I came back to find all the news in the papers and I sat there and caught up on all the news. When you're away, you don't know what's happening. All I know is that sending a letter to America then, the price of a stamp was the same as what a man would earn in one day there.

WW: How did you find [pause 1:25:05-23] How did the group from MoMA find out about President Kennedy's assassination?

AB: Oh, well, that was when we were at the, in our bedrooms. And when, in the morning, there was the attendant downstairs. And that was the time when I did ask my friend to go down and ask if we could get a doctor, because I was not feeling well. And that's when they told them they had received notice that President Kennedy died. And that was the day that the doctor couldn't come because he was paying condolence to Mr. Galbraith. So that, we were not reading papers, but they had all the news. But it was shocking news that day, very shocking.

WW: I want to switch a little bit to talk about how the Art Barge, or going out to the Hamptons, how did that all start?

AB: How did it start? Well, Mabel and Victor had a house at Lazy Point. And Mabel had a piece of land on the bay, and Victor had a dream. It almost sounds like a song. But anyhow, he had a dream, and he wanted to put it into practice. And I only know that the outcome was that the Barge was secured in New Jersey, and he thought it would make a marvelous school. And he had it towed to the Island, and had a vision of putting a second story to it, embellishing it, and making it livable. It had water and electricity and a road leading to it, into the bay, right near the railroad station, not the station but the railroad. And in those days, when the trains would go by, sometimes there would be sparks and it would start on fire. And the men went after it with a broom; they would put it out with a broom. That was the extent of what they had. Long brooms, and they went, and then they put it out. Of course, they were small fires, but it was really very primitive. So Victor, after the construction, had the Wednesday night class, the Kearsarge group was the first group, and painting downstairs. The teachers' class did not start the first year. And downstairs, the classes were a mixture of people. I think there were only about two or three that were not from the Kearsarge group, but they were all from the Kearsarge group. And many people ended up by and located themselves there and [? 1:29:08] some of them stayed on. It was a very original idea. People came from all over. Subsequently, we even had somebody who came from South Africa, who said it was unique. And it was unique. When

you were on top, you could see the bay and the sea. It's the narrowest part of the Island, so when there's a big storm and it gets flooded, it isolates you.

WW: So did Mabel own that piece of land?

AB: Yes, she owned that piece of land and she left it to the Barge, to the Modern.

WW: Was teaching different at the Barge? Was Victor trying to do different things at the Barge than he was doing in the classes at MoMA? Was he trying to accomplish something different?

AB: Yes, he had, at the beginning, very beginning, it could have been for maybe a day or two? There were landscapes. You can't think of going out into the open without thinking landscapes, but then he thought about it, and he thought this was not the time to do landscapes. And he wrote quite a nice little piece of literature about it, about how it was going to transform landscape into many other things that could be done, with the sea, the beach.

WW: What do you think were the most interesting classes that were held at the Barge?

AB: Classes?

WW: What were the most interesting things that were done there?

AB: Well, when you were downstairs, the most interesting thing was the painting. If you were upstairs, and I was teaching teachers' classes; that's what my classes were the most interesting. I think that one is concerned with one's own thing, because that one thing becomes not only important, but a challenge. And I think that downstairs, the challenge is of a different nature. Upstairs it's a challenge that is almost altruistic. And downstairs it's more personal.

WW: So can you talk about that altruism with teaching teachers? Victor was very committed to teaching teachers and effecting change within the school system. Can you talk about that altruism?

AB: Victor always thought that when you reach teachers, you are reaching hundreds of children. Because when a teacher will teach, year after year, she will teach what she has absorbed from Victor or from myself, and then the teaching of teachers goes on for a different purpose. And I think that so many teachers were thankful for being there, because they were great teachers, and they had to do some artwork with the children, and they were not equipped to do it. So that gave them a way to teach that was more personal, easier, and feasible. Because we used a lot of found objects. We had leftover things that are all over. I never had a garage because my garage was always full of found materials in my work. So we never put a car—was married for 67 years and never put a car in the garage. And it had, the teachers' courses were my favorite because I got so much out of my teaching there, both in meeting these nice people and giving. So they were very, very important to me. I have very fond souvenirs of those years.

WW: Do you have any memories of a teacher who was really, did something extraordinary, from your classes, or that surprised you in your classes?

AB: Well, for my teachers' classes there was one teacher from Long Island. I had been teaching teachers at the Barge that came from all over, some two hours away, as I told you. And in New York City I taught teachers from New York. They were very different; very, very different. And I thought that the teachers on the Island were very dedicated but not stayed by the environment. There was one teacher particularly, and I don't recall her name, but she was a very outstanding person, and stood out in my mind and stayed in my mind. I don't recall her name because unfortunately, my mind is not what it used to be.

WW: What stood out about her? What were the qualities?

AB: Well, I think that she participated in a very personal way to whatever we were doing. And I think that she must have been a marvelous teacher. But she was very enthusiastic, which is something that is to be appreciated. I think enthusiasm goes a long way.

WW: I wanted to ask a little bit about the Hamptons as an environment. I believe that Victor started that in Southampton with classes, is that correct?

AB: Southampton College. I taught with him there. They came to the Barge. And it was a good school, the same courses we gave, well, different from the teachers, but they did a bit of everything. The environment in East Hampton, we were away from what the social part of it was, but we were also regaled with the galleries and what was going on at Guild Hall. Guild Hall had some good things going on. And Guild Hall gave a very nice tribute to Victor in '79, I believe. I think it's '79. And we were very remote from the social part. We did have some nice, a few concerts, at the Barge, sunset, at the sunset, and once, a fundraiser. Nicole and I had a fundraiser outside on the beach, music, with Larry Rivers and a few great artists who played an instrument. They got together and they played on the deck, and everybody sat on the beach, and it was a very exciting evening, very exciting. Then we had other evenings with one single soloist playing saxophone or whatever they were playing, at sunset. There was a very full sunset at the Barge. Then we had, oh, quite a few things. We had poetry. We had one day of poetry by the artists who painted, not only at the Barge but elsewhere, whoever wanted to enter that. Sag Harbor, nearby, also had a library, and I read my poems there and so did other people, and that was a well known library, which is still there. Then, of course, Sag Harbor has grown a lot and they have a theater now, with well known artists. And East Hampton has quite a few galleries, and they have an artists association that originally was headed by Max Ernst's son, Jimmy Ernst. And anyhow, that group is active, and we had a few of their artists teach at the Barge, quite a few.

WW: You have a place in Springs. You had a house in Springs; is that correct?

AB: Yes, that's my studio, my studio in Spring.

WW: And many other artists have lived there.

AB: Yes, and I'm nearby DeKooning. And when I wore my hair all frizzy, on my bicycle, they thought I was DeKooning. [laughter]

WW: Did you know Pollock and DeKooning while you were there? Were they still around?

AB: No, no.

WW: Pollock would have been dead.

AB: Nicole had, went over there, and she made a few sculptures that look like DeKooning. But she used to go and visit there. But the DeKoonings had a daughter, and Joan Ward was the mother. And Joan Ward needed money, and she would do sketches of people. And once the [INAUDIBLE 1:40:20] Hall had a festival, some kind of little festival, and she was there with her pad and paper, and she did some sketches. And I had mine done, my mother, and my husband, Alex, and the three of us have a little sketch by Joan Ward that is upstairs, and I showed you. And then they also had a wheel, and many of the artists would give one of their paintings, well known artists. And I have a couple from there that I won on the wheel. Many artists lived there.

WW: I want to talk a little bit about, going back to the five senses, you talked about Victor and the five senses being important.

AB: Yes.

WW: And you talked about a class where you used vinegar and smelling things. Was that at the Barge that you did those classes, very experimental ways of engaging people?

AB: I think it was on Wednesday night.

WW: At the Barge or at MoMA?

AB: Wednesday night was at the Modern.

WW: At the Modern.

AB: At the Modern. And that's where the Kearsage group was born.

WW: Aah, the Kearsage group was at the Modern.

AB: Yes, and then went over to the Barge.

WW: So there was a sense of community

AB: Yes.

WW: At MoMA

AB: Yes.

WW: That transferred itself.

AB: Yes.

WW: Aah; interesting.

AB: And people who stayed there for ten, fifteen, twenty years, and some are still there.

WW: With that group, in the '50s and '60s so many interesting and experimental poetry and performances and happenings and things. Can you talk a little bit about who was inspired, what inspired the artists in your group?

AB: I don't know. I think everybody was, would be, "Look at me!" you know. That's what spurred on people to go forth and present what they could present. Like this woman who had this study on the Sound, and put up some large tents. And people went in there and the sound was put on to tremendous volume, was fantastic to the point where you were stunned, and you fell asleep on this mattress. And not only did I fall asleep, but it affected my ears, I'm sure. But that was one of the happenings. There were many kinds of happenings. So everybody tried to make happenings, and my happening was the painted weed garden. We painted the native weeds over the Labor Day weekend, and it was like bringing spring back into the fall, because it was very colorful. And then people came and took pictures. And the magazine didn't want to print it because they thought that spoiled the ground. But all the weeds came back. And there were also a lot of poetry readings. It was really, people wanted to be seen. People want to be heard, one way or another, good or bad. And I think it promoted a lot of women's activity. And I think that now, the women painting, are like the women of yesteryear who paint on the plates. They used to paint pretty flowers and birds on plates, and I think that's what women are doing now, for the painting groups. Maybe not flowers and birds, but they paint. And some are very good. And the women in the museum in Washington, I got a last review. Miriam Shapiro was one of the artists there in East Hampton, Audrey Flack, all these people. Some of them [INAUDIBLE 1:45:25] but wanted to come teach at the Barge.

WW: Was there any sort of sense of feminism as being important at MoMA? Feminist art?

AB: Well, not when I was teaching there, but afterwards—what was the name of those women? Who made a big fuss outside of The Museum of Modern Art.

WW: The Guerrilla Girls?

AB: Yes, the Guerrilla Girls, but somehow, I don't know. I don't think so. But from what I can see, all the girls now, they have a lot of women who belong to these girls. And photography, of course, has taken over a lot. Photography and a lot of the women have gone over to photography. But in the '60s, some of the women went over to Super 8.

WW: You did some films.

AB: Yes, I did some film.

WW: Did they do films in the classes at the Barge or at MoMA?

AB: No, no. This was my own. And I did my own few films. But the last day, when the school closed at The Museum of Modern Art, I took some small movies of some of the children. I think I took the three-year-olds for sure, and the others, I don't remember which ones I took.

WW: Do you still have those?

AB: Yes. When I spoke to Shimako [1:47:30] she said I had to send them out someplace to do something to them before I put them on a video, because they're old.

WW: Yes. You were talking about the end of the Education Department at MoMA. Can you talk a little bit about your recollections of that?

AB: Well, that was a great mystery. That was a great mystery of those times, because we asked questions, but Victor didn't answer. He probably knew more than he would say. But nobody could say anything about it. The only thing we knew that it was closing. And this was a time when things were such a, some things were messy in terms of papers and all that. And I acquired a few papers in that time, that I saved.

WW: What do you mean by papers? Can you elaborate?

AB: I mean, things that I thought were important. Things pertaining to the Modern or to the school or to the classes, whatever it was. Or things that Victor would discard. So that, I know, one thing I did ask Victor to do for me. He was going to do a talk at Harvard, and I was very interested in that when I was doing those [INAUDIBLE 1:49:06], drawings.

WW: Like this? This is Victor with one of Arlette's paintings that were very involved with writing [INAUDIBLE]

AB: So I was very interested in doodles. So when he went to Harvard, the president was doodling, and then they threw out everything in the wastepaper basket, and Victor retrieved it, one of his doodles. And it's in one of my paintings, and I'll show you. When we go to Amagansett, I'll show you that painting. But a lot of things he got rid of and, you know, you would find. So, another, a few of us, Victor and a few of us went over to the Met and taught there. I taught there; I taught teachers' classes, not regular classes, with Victor. I shared the course with Victor. And Muriel. And it was really a great mystery, really a great mystery. And we were sorry. I think everybody bemoaned it. The parents, the parents of the children who used to come to the classes were disappointed.

WW: Did anyone have any idea about why the Education Department ended?

AB: No.

WW: Were there trustees

AB: I think that, like in all the public schools, it was a question of finances, and the fact that art education is usually the stepchild, so that, when the funds are tight, they certainly don't go to the stepchild. So that's my own explanation, because it is not only at the Modern, but that has probably aided in all the schools and all over.

WW: Was the Metropolitan Museum receptive to Victor's ideas? You usually think of the other museum, the Met, as being competitive with MoMA. It sounds like they were embracing him to come to the Met and embraced his progressive art education ideas. Were they? Can you talk a little bit about that?

AB: That was really a question, I thought about that. I said, well, I think that Victor, after all, it was after the Second World War, and he had that art therapy, remember? So that he made a place for himself for the Modern. I think that people who knew, who had a vision, knew that Victor had a vision, and they let him go to the National Committee of Art Education, and he dealt with all the people who came to New York, and then, it radiated. After a few years, they held those meetings in different cities, so that, they knew how important it was. Whether it stayed, I don't know, because this was a small fraction of the people who are involved in art education. So you still had other people from, not that I have traveled anywhere, but even for Albany, I could see that Victor did not make his mark. So that it has taken, with selection.

WW: At the National Committee for Art Education, which Victor founded, who were some of the big speakers? What was the program like? What was a conference like when they held it at MoMA? Did you attend any of them?

AB: You had a whole program where teachers were picked by the committee, and speak to that meeting. Speaking at the meeting, they would be involved personally as to what they taught or what they believed in, and you would agree with some; you would disagree with others. A lot of the people who spoke on the dais were people who were philosophers behind a desk, who spoke about art without having any action into it. And I think action is the most important thing in art.

WW: Was Victor one of those people who was always active? Or was he more of a philosopher?

AB: Those people always stayed the philosopher. That was what they did, was write.

WW: Was Victor Lowenfeld one of those people who was a philosopher?

AB: Victor hated them.

WW: Uh-huh. Tell me more.

AB: [laughing] So do I.

WW: Why did he hate him?

AB: Because I think that [INAUDIBLE 1:55:22] why they did not participate in art if they want to talk so much about it? Because I think that they were lacking a real understanding of what they were writing about. It doesn't go together. The words are words, and if they were to do something, they would rewrite the whole thing. That's why I like Michael Kimmelman. He is a man, I don't know whether he, I think he paints. But the first book he wrote, *The Accidental [Masterpiece]*, he's traveling the world now. He's traveled a great deal and written a great deal. But what he writes is the writing of a man who understands what he is looking at. So they are words but they are words that go with knowledge. And I think he was a painter.

WW: Just a thought: did the artist Robert Ryman take classes at Victor's?

AB: I don't know.

WW: Okay. You showed me these photo, these portraits of Victor.

AB: [Laughing] Oh! Yes, that's a group of us, and we were there fooling around. We did a few portraits of Victor.

WW: This one's by Mabel, his wife.

AB: And Mabel's, as well, yes.

WW: So tell me the story about these.

AB: Well, it was in a drawing class. And at the end of the drawing class—I don't know if the drawing class was with him or somebody else, but Mabel and Victor walked in, and we got fooling around, and we all decided we were going to do a portrait of Victor. [laughing]

WW: Was Victor someone who liked to be the center of attention?

AB: No, not especially. He was, but I don't think he looked for it.

WW: This is by you. This is yours, right here, right? Arlette Buchman. Correct?

AB: Yes, that's me. [laughing]

WW: Tell me about his relationship with Mabel, his wife.

AB: It seemed to be fine. I never asked him why he had no children. Was he married before?

WW: Yes, he was. I don't know much about it but

AB: Because, as I told you, this girl who was doing the thesis on Victor sent me the biography completely researched, and yes, he was married before. I don't know. They seemed to be very good—spaghetti sauce, and she would serve it to the pigeons upstairs. She had a little pot, and she would put some of the spaghetti with tomato sauce up there, and they would eat it. [laughing] And he liked it. And when they had a few people over, we had spaghetti.

WW: Where did they live in New York?

AB: In White Plains. And he traveled a great deal there and back. And they had dogs and cats. It was a long day, there and back, a lot of traveling. It was not easy. And of course, she taught in Rye, so that she was not far from where she lived here, and in summer, she spent the whole summer there. And she worked a lot in glass. And she has made, she was doing many different medias, same way as I was too. You know, she was involved in making some clothes, and jewelry, and she had the kiln. But Victor was always afraid that she was going to hurt herself with the glass that she was making, that was hanging around all over.

WW: Who was the stronger personality, Victor or Mabel?

AB: The stronger personality? Victor. Victor; oh yes. I don't think she opened her mouth after he said something. He did not speak in a strong way. He had a way of, he did not push himself. He gave the impression to be milder than he was. It was a false impression.

WW: Did he have any enemies, other than Victor Lowenfeld?

AB: Yes, he did. He used to tell me about them, but I don't remember.

WW: What were the

AB: He used to say, "Oh, he doesn't like me."

WW: What were the reasons that he

AB: I don't know. Odd.

WW: Difference of opinion?

AB: Yeah. A certain amount of jealousy, too. Because you know, the Modern has an aura, and if you taught there, people would really think a great deal about you and would put you on a pedestal. You were already a queen, way up; an empress! Because the Modern has, I don't know whether now it is the same. [laughing] It probably is, but, not there. So, people come to New York, and you know, I took, when I was younger, a friend of mine's father came. He was the mayor where Renoir used to live, in France. So I wanted him to know a little bit about abstract art. So I took him to the Modern. [laughing] He was so bewildered; he was so bewildered! Anyhow, I took him around, and he told everybody about it. And it was really the place, for me, it was the first, the only thing I showed him in New York. [laughing] Because to me, it was number one.

WW: I have a question for you. In the Museum, in the galleries of art that were constantly changing, who gave the tours to the public? Were there people in the Education Department that gave tours of the art?

AB: No. I think there were two entrances, and the two entrances were like black and white. And if you were on 54<sup>th</sup> Street, you didn't know what was happening on the next street. And if you were on 55<sup>th</sup> Street, you didn't know there was an entrance on 54<sup>th</sup>. It was a complete separation. And I think Victor liked it like that. [laughing] As much as he didn't want to be ignored, he liked it.

WW: Interesting.

AB: It was his fief, it was his territory. And there was nothing really that was done there that would have ignited the trustees, the people [INAUDIBLE 2:05:35]. But they were not interested. [laughing] They didn't know that this was the beginning of it all. [laughing]

WW: The founding of the Museum though, it was founded as an educational institution, so that seems strange that they weren't interested.

AB: Yes.

WW: Do you have any sense of that?

AB: No, and that they even knew about the word [2:05:58] [laughing] I always called it The Museum of Modern Art, Victor D'Amico's class, the Kearsage group, we had our own names for it all. But when Shimako put on that little blurry one [INAUDIBLE 2:06:18], I corrected her. I said, "Well, maybe that was the name, but that's not the name under which I taught." [laughing] Because it was part of the Museum. Why did they give it another name? I was not conscious of it. And when Shimako showed it to me, I was taken aback.

WW: Was that the Institute of Modern Art? What did you correct?

AB: They went under the title, for the Friday, she said that I was a teacher at the, what did you call it?

WW: Institute of Modern Art?

AB: No.

WW: People's Art Center?

AB: Yes.

WW: Okay.

AB: And

WW: You never thought of it as

AB: I didn't know, I didn't know that. Well I knew, but I forgot; I had forgotten.

WW: You were really associating yourself with *The Museum* of Modern Art.

AB: So I said, it should be The Museum, because it really was the Museum. [INAUDIBLE 2:07:26] it was. We had a show there.

WW: Oh, you did?

AB: The painting they hung there, the one with the words, hung in the Museum.

WW: Aah, this painting hung there.

AB: Yes, that one.

WW: That one. So it was

AB: When they had a show of the Kearsage group.

WW: What year was that?

AB: I don't remember.

WW: In the 50s?

AB: On the staircase coming down to the school.

WW: They also showed a lot of children's art, exhibitions of children's art.

AB: Yes.

WW: Can you talk a little bit about

AB: We had some. All of the children of the classes at the Modern. We never had any outside. But all of them; we never skipped anything. And he wrote a very good article about showing children's work. And I always lectured it in my class, never to show children's work without showing the whole class. And I also wrote, whenever they had children's shows, Victor was very much against it, and I became very much against it because whoever was shown or picked to be shown, then the other children would look and said, "That's the way to go." So it was a bad example to have children show in different shows, but if you showed the whole class, it was of a different nature. We had some, practically almost yearly shows. And as I told you before, although each teacher taught in his own way or her own way, there was unity to the show, because of the way one taught. But he was very much interested in having people teach in a very individual way. There were no rules.

WW: I found your book, *Assemblage*.

AB: Oh, *Assemblage*.

WW: So there's one copy, at least, left, that hasn't been stolen from a library. [laughter] And I was reading it, and I really enjoyed reading your philosophical approach, your thinking

about the Bauhaus and about how artists were working and how they were doing new and different things that were beyond painting and two-dimensional work, and the inspiration of the Bauhaus. Can you talk a little bit more about what motivated your thinking and Victor's thinking? It sounds like you were very much aligned in your thinking.

AB: Well, [INAUDIBLE 2:10:53] about the Bauhaus, and when I went last time to the Museum in New York, and there was a show about the Bauhaus, I was [INAUDIBLE] teachers who taught here were teachers who had really been influenced by the Bauhaus. And I think that Victor sometimes would refer to it. My own feeling was that I liked what they did. And when I used to go and see some shows here, many people had been students, or students of students. And I don't know whether it influenced me in any way, but Victor used to say that I had a sense of design. Then, when I started thinking about it, I was thinking about my ruler and my compass, and numbers. Not really. When I came back from India, I stopped in Tokyo. [walking away and back again; showing something] I don't have to open any. See?

WW: Beautiful.

AB: And I saw myself in it. So I don't know. Your ideas come from one place or another, and then they make like a salad, that I made for lunch. And they're all mixed together, and sometimes one surface, you don't digest it well, it comes back to you. [laughing] And it's a very, it's so beautiful, you know, because you can't really, as much as Victor gave all of this word, using words, [INAUDIBLE 2:13:47] use words to know why you do this or why you do that, you do it.

WW: I'm going to end by going back to you. I want to know a little bit more about your history. How you came to America, how you came to The Museum of Modern Art.

AB: Well, I think that it is, I was always encouraged, I always liked it. Although, when I used to draw at home, my mother used to say, "Don't be lazy." I had to work with something concrete, like a book, or study. But I was always interested in art, and when I started to understand more about it, [INAUDIBLE 2:14:55] in my mind before. But Victor was more mechanical. And I had to look and see if I could reproduce something. But I never thought about doing something that I did not see. [INAUDIBLE] It opened my eyes. And then all of a sudden, I went out. I flew, you know into the world. I got my own wings.

WW: Arlette, where were you born and when were you born?

AB: It's a long story. I've never really divulged it, and I will divulge it. My mother's English. I was born in Liverpool, because it's the First World War. My mother was in London when they had the bomb fall, and all the pregnant women were supposed to go out. She had a friend in Liverpool, so she went to Liverpool. And then my father brought me back. I was two months old when I went to Paris, because my father's French. So that was the story. So I would say I'm French. I am because I didn't speak English until I learned English, when, I think, I came here. So, it's always embarrassing to have to tell a whole big story that I was born in World War I. [laughing] I didn't want to say I was born in World War II, but the World War I? That's too much. [laughing]

WW: So what was the date that you were born?

AB: 1917.

WW: And how did you end up coming to America? And when?

AB: Oh. That's a very long story, too, because it will tell you more about what was happening in Europe at the time. When Hitler came in, you know what happened to very many people? They were absolutely, didn't know what to do. In America, the medical schools—I'm going to make along story as to what happened. It's not a long story but that's how it happened. A lot of medical students could not go into, were not accepted. They had a quota in

medical schools. So they could not go to medical schools. So many ended up in Edinborough in Scotland, or in Vienna. And I had a group of those students stop at my house because they knew somebody. They stopped at my house on their way to Scotland. And they invited me to go to Scotland on a trip around Scotland, which I did with them. And when the war started, when war was declared, those students came through Paris, stayed at our house, and begged my parents—my father had said the war was a small war, it won't last long. So Mother and I were supposed to come to New York. So those students begged my parents to let me go with them. And my passport came through because the embassy had left Paris and went down south. But my passport came through before my mother. So they begged my parents to let me go with them. There was a boat, an American boat, leaving from Genoa, in Italy. So I took that boat with them, and I came, and then the embassy closed. So they no longer could come, so she couldn't come. So, my father didn't want to come, of course. So I came here and I couldn't go back. And I wanted to go back. I didn't want to stay.

WW: What year was that?

AB: '40 or '41, I don't know. '40, I think.

WW: And what were the names of your parents?

AB: Colbert [2:19:48]

WW: Colbert. And that was your last name?

AB: Yes, Arlette Colbert. So I came, and then when I met Alex, I got married. And six years later, my parents came, because I am the only child.

WW: What happened to them while they were in France?

AB: Well, they traveled around. Mother wrote her memoirs. She had a slight English accent, so she was afraid, you know, they question her. And they traveled around. So when they came, I wanted to know what happened to them, you know? She could never tell me anything because my father said, "It gives me a stomach ache." When he died, I told her to write her biography. By then she had forgotten a lot, but she did write it. It's interesting.

WW: Were both of your parents Jewish?

AB: Yes.

WW: So there was a lot of fear.

AB: It was a very mixed family. [INAUDIBLE 2:21:15] There were a lot of stories.

WW: So when you came here, you met your husband. How did you meet your husband?

AB: [laughing] That was another story, because, you know, a young girl, you wanted to go out. So I didn't have an escort and I wanted to go dancing at the place I had always heard about, St. George Hotel, something like that. So my aunt didn't want me to go. She said, "You can't go alone." "Oh," I said, "I'll pretend I'm with somebody." So I went, and I kept on saying, "My cousin is here," or something like that. So finally, a few people gave me a ride home and took my name and address. And they gave my name and address to my husband. And he was just, oh yes, he called me and made a date, but he made a date before he had seen me. He wanted to look me over. That bothered me. And I was on my way to ski in Canada, no, in Vermont, but I couldn't go because it was restricted. But then I wanted to go to Canada, and you needed a re-enter permit. So I stayed at [INAUDIBLE 2:22:55]. The card that my husband had given me, I called him up and told him I was free.

WW: What did you mean when you said it was "restricted?"

AB: They were not accepting, you could not go to any of the inns if you were Jewish.

WW: Because you were Jewish; okay.

AB: So I couldn't ski that year. Because I skied in France, so I was going to go to Canada. And that's how I met Alex, because it was New Years Eve, I had no date, and he didn't have a date, so we met each other, and that was it.

WW: How many years were you married?

AB: Sixty-seven; one man.

WW: You got a good one.

AB: [laughing] [INAUDIBLE 2:23:55]

WW: And how did you balance being a mother and a wife and?

AB: You know how we met? Because he didn't know where I was and I didn't know where they were. They were with the maquis. Do you know what a maquis is? The Underground, you know, the people who do things underground. And mother spoke English, and my father spoke English. So the Eighth Army was going up the Valley of the Rhone, and they were being pursued, and they stopped where my folks were. And they knew I was in Albany at the time. And they met a young man who was a young soldier who came from Schenectady, which is not too far. So the man from Schenectady, the soldier's father, was a doctor in Schenectady, and he had dinner with a doctor from Albany who had treated me a few days before. I got drunk, because DeGaulle made a big speech, a very good speech, and it was Alex's birthday, and they gave me a drink I had never heard of, something. So I drank it. I don't know if it agreed with me or not but I had heart palpitations. I went to the doctor the next day. [laughing] And the doctor from Albany told the doctor from Schenectady. He wrote to his son. And that's how we knew where we were, both of us.

WW: So that's how your parents and you knew where each other were.

AB: So I'm giving you an earful.

WW: Mm-hm.

AB: [laughing] You thought you came here for art. [laughter] And what are you listening to? [laughing]

WW: Jeanmarie, what am I missing here? [INAUDIBLE 2:26:05]

AB: [laughing] Oh dear.

WW: Pardon me? [INAUDIBLE] Okay, right; excellent.

: Does anybody need water?

WW: Do you need water? A little water?

AB: No thank you.

: How about you?

WW: I'm fine. I think we're almost done.

AB: Well, you really make me talk.

WW: I, really? You're giving me lots.

AB: I don't have to say what year. It all says it.

WW: So—are you ready? Can you tell me about what has influenced you most in your life?

AB: In my life? Three men: my father, my husband, and Victor, for different reasons.

WW: Can you tell me about those reasons?

AB: Well, in their own way. My father was a very, he hated Picasso. [laughing] And yet, in my room, when my room was repainted, he made it red at the bottom, going up to pink. A real art nouveau kind of room. [laughing] Oh, he hated Picasso. And he wanted me to be like a man, to be strong. He wanted me to learn boxing. I didn't, but he wanted me to. [laughing] He was a very strong man. And Alex was the most tolerant person one could meet. And he was very smart. He never could learn French. He learned Spanish in school. And he was very independent. He was my great love, you know. And Victor sort of brought out things that I never knew I had and showed me the outside world. And the biggest shock was coming to America. [laughing]

WW: Is there anything that we've missed that you just want to tell?

AB: No. I don't think so. I don't think so. I think you have really [INAUDIBLE 2:29:40]. Like the artichoke, you take one piece at a time. [laughing]

WW: [laughing] We've been peeling you. Jeanmarie, anything that we've missed that you feel like we need to have?

[INAUDIBLE 2:29:56-2:30:15]

AB: But you know, I think that interview must be so different, you know, different stages. That if you were to be interviewed now, and twenty years from now, it will be different, all of you. Ten years ago would have been different for everybody here, so that what I have said today is a 93-year-old with a memory that is cut in two, before and after. Before meeting Alex and after.

WW: Well, I'd say we're very lucky.

AB: Yes.

WW: Because we have 93 years of experience.

AB: Well, it has added up.

WW: I'm going to ask you one last thing. When we were talking over here, you were showing me films and poems and you were talking about Victor's art class, how you did things. You had a performance three acts, and the light and the dark. One of the things I found very interesting was how avant-garde you were, how open you were to art and to experience.

AB: Yes.

WW: What fostered that kind of openness?

AB: I think my father.

WW: Can you talk a little bit more about that?

AB: Because he was interested in many things. He read a lot and, I don't know. I think it's my father. But then, I wrote a poem once, I Want to Be Like Her, like my mother, like him, and

I like myself today. That's what I wrote, because when he died, I started to think about everything, and I think that his influence was most, the most important one in my life.

WW: Thank you so much.

AB: [laughing] Well, thank you. [laughter] It's like opening, you know, surgery.

WW: I'm sorry. I hope we can stitch you back up. [laughter]

AB: No, you stitched me up properly. [laughter]

WW: I'm so glad we were able to do this.

AB: And this young man here and this young lady. [laughter]

: Okay, so now [2:33:29]

WW: You're going to do \_\_\_, right?

: Right.

WW: And I'm going to read what Victor said to you into the microphone, because I think it's really important.

AB: Oh.

WW: But I think they need to get a \_\_\_, correct?

: Right. So we'll walk around a little bit and do some photographs, and then also I'll talk to Damani about if you don't mind sitting for a little bit so we can also just do.

AB: I'll leave you a minute.

WW: Okay.

AB:

RK: Are we going to follow her around?

: Potentially.

: Will you guys walk around?

: Yes, potentially. Can you leave her, leave you, with your mike on?

RK: Yes, we'll leave it.

**END Arlette Buchman\_1-2 at 2:34:20**

**END OF INTERVIEW**