

## A TEI Project

# Interview of Tobey Moss

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## 1. Transcript

### 1.1. Session One (March 31, 2014)

MOON

UCLA Center for Oral History Research. This is the first session of an interview with Tobey Moss, founder of Tobey C. Moss Gallery, located in Los Angeles, California. The date is March 31, 2014, and the interviewer is Kavior Moon. So to begin the interview, perhaps we could start with your early life, and also to get a sense of how you came to be, in a sense. So perhaps we could just start with some facts. Where and when were you born?

MOSS

I was born in Chicago, Illinois, June 1st, 1928. My father at the time had a dry goods store, and when I came from the hospital with my mother, we were ensconced behind the store in a room, apartment behind the store.

MOON

And in what part of Chicago was this?

MOSS

South Side of Chicago, Drexel Boulevard and 47th.

MOON

So before we begin the interview, you mention that your parents had immigrated to the United States. Both of your parents, or where did they come from?

MOSS

Both. My mother was one year old when she came from Romania in 1901—no, 1902. She was born in 1901. And my father immigrated within the first decade, from Poland. Both were from very modest backgrounds. My father immediately went to school to learn English, and he also had a trade as a tailor. When they married in 1926, my mother was a secretary, a very accomplished

secretary, who was quite active and traveled and loved life. My father was quite serious. And they built a life together. I was born in 1928, within two years after.

MOON

When you say your mother traveled, was that for her work?

MOSS

No, no, no. She just had a spirit of seeking, searching, and in the early twenties, she went on those tours to Niagara Falls, and she also had relatives in New York and Cleveland, Ohio, and they would travel back and forth. She was a very warm and outgoing person, a charismatic person, I might also add, and she was a leader.

MOON

A leader in what sense to you?

MOSS

Every sense. The family always regarded her as an important voice.

MOON

She was the matriarch of the family.

MOSS

No, not exactly the matriarch, but she was the dominant voice, yes. [laughs]  
Her six brothers and sisters all agreed.

MOON

And then for your father and your mother, what were the reasons for immigration?

MOSS

Well, in Europe, Jewish people in small towns in these countries, Romania and Poland, had no future, and there was mass immigration, as will be attested by the history of Ellis Island, where they both entered.

MOON

Did they move immediately to Chicago after?

MOSS

Well, they met in Chicago. That's where they both grew up. My father was about, oh, I think about ten or eight years older than my mother.

MOON

And they attended schools in Chicago?

MOSS

Yes.

MOON

Did they attend college?

MOSS

No. No thought of college.

MOON

And can you tell me which neighborhood in Chicago you grew up? You said the South Side.

MOSS

Well, when I say Drexel and 47th, that is the neighborhood. It's the South Side of Chicago. In fact, it's close to where [Barack Hussein] Obama [II] lived.

MOON

And when you were growing up, may I ask who raised you? Did your mother?

MOSS

My mother. My mother and father, yes. We were a very close family. I have two younger siblings. I was the number-one girl.

MOON

You're the number-one girl. And what did your other siblings grow up to do later in life professionally?

MOSS

Well, my second sister is a great patron of the arts and a very great community leader in San Francisco. She is a recipient of many honorary degrees, and she's truly a remarkable person. My younger sister is a very quiet person. She's the only one of us who graduated from college, and she has a degree in zoology.

MOON

And the first sister that you talked about, honorary degrees in?

MOSS

In civic matters and in sponsorship, patronage, leadership.

MOON

And you mentioned that your father ran a dry goods store.

MOSS

That was very temporary. That was maybe four years. By 1930, he arranged to assume the mortgage of a hotel, a transient hotel right around the corner from our store, and he became the manager of this property, moved us into the hotel so that my second sister came home to the apartment in the hotel, and my third sister as well. We lived in one of the apartments in the hotel for a number of years.

MOON

Did you have any interactions with the guests of the hotel?

MOSS

Oh, sure. Well, no, not so much, just a couple of people who helped my father in one way or another in maintenance and caring for us, [unclear].

MOON

When you were little, before you started school, what would you do in your free time, do you remember?

MOSS

I don't remember that. I remember only one trip that we took to Atlantic City, New Jersey, which was a very, very big event. We went there for about two weeks, but otherwise, I really don't remember that early part. I don't really remember too much until I went to elementary school, and that was very important to me. I'm a good student, always was a good student, and I'm rather intelligent and had a good rapport with my teachers and a good history of accomplishment.

MOON

Well, maybe we can talk about your experience in elementary school. What kind of school did you go to? Was it a public school?

MOSS

Oh, yes, a public school, just walked to school.

MOON

And did you have subjects that you liked a great deal more than others? Were there subjects you excelled in?

MOSS

I was good in everything. I was good in understanding arithmetic. I was very good in reading. I read voraciously. I was very good in language, spelling, writing. I had very beautiful penmanship. Not today. [laughs]

MOON

Can you remember who your classmates were? Were there a number of children of immigrants or was it very diverse?

MOSS

That I don't remember. The immigrant part of it is suppressed, because nobody wanted to be an immigrant or known as a "greener," a "greenhorn." These people were largely Jewish, and we had a great community, centered a great deal around our synagogue, and my mother was a leader in the young group of women, the sisterhood, and we had a very wide range of aunts and uncles who were, of course, just the friends of my mother and father, but we called them aunt so-and-so and uncle so-and-so. It was a very happy time, happy time. Our school was divided into the first four grades in one building, and then for the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth, we were in another part of the building which was for the departmental work. Otherwise, we were grouped in one classroom all the time. For departmental work, we moved to different subjects in different rooms, and that was quite a rite of passage. In fact, in about the seventh grade or eighth grade, I was given the privilege of attending free classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, where on a Saturday morning we would sketch from live models and have our drawings evaluated by the Art Institute, the Art Institute school. That was an event.

MOON

Yeah, it sounds like it. Did you receive that scholarship because of promising talent in drawing?

MOSS

Evidently, yes.

MOON

Had you gone to the Art Institute to see the collections when you were younger, with your parents or with your siblings?

MOSS

Well, we did not go to museums per se, but my mother did take us maybe—oh, maybe half a dozen times that I recall down to the Civic Light Opera Building, which was right across from the museum, from the Art Institute, and we would attend light opera, Sigmund Romberg and Franz Lehár and, and I can't think of all the wonderful light opera that we saw. And then maybe we went across to the Art Institute, too, and we would also have a treat lunch a block away at the Woolworth's, where they had a counter, and I would have roast beef with gravy and mashed potatoes and a milkshake. That was absolutely the pinnacle.

MOON

It's funny how special meals can stand out to a child.

MOSS

Yeah. [laughter]

MOON

Did your sisters also take classes at the Art Institute?

MOSS

I don't think so, not that I recall, but maybe I ignored them. [laughs] I could have ignored them.

MOON

So did you take art classes in your elementary school?

MOSS

Well, there was an option—no, there was a class. There was a class in art. They also had at our school after-school extras, extra classes, like I was a member of the Harmonica Club. I don't remember necessarily an Art Club, though. All I remember is the Harmonica Club.

MOON

And can you talk about the experiences taking these drawing classes at the Art Institute? Was it something that you really enjoyed, that you looked forward to?

MOSS

Well, it was just a big auditorium and with perhaps three hundred other, four hundred other students from similar backgrounds, similar elementary schools. And on the stage they would have, as I say, a live model, who would assume

different poses, and it was very awesome. It was an experience that was indelible.

MOON

Was it always a female model?

MOSS

No, it was just male, female. Not nude. Not nude, no.

MOON

And you said that you're taking these classes at the Art Institute in seventh, eighth grade?

MOSS

I think so.

MOON

Around middle school. Did you have any other intellectual interests around this time, middle school?

MOSS

I was a reader. I simply would go to my library every Saturday and take out as many books as they would let me take, which was usually about ten, and then the following weekend, I would bring them back and get ten more. So I read a great deal.

MOON

What kinds of books?

MOSS

Anything. Anything. One favorite book was the Books of Knowledge. Actually, the Books of Knowledge didn't come from the library. That's another story. But I loved to read about—I remember from the Books of Knowledge, the Mammoth Caves in Kentucky or Virginia—Kentucky, and different strange things. I liked science fiction, like [Edgar Rice] Burroughs' books about Mars. I just read everything, whatever the librarian would suggest.

MOON

Was this the local public library?

MOSS

Mm-hmm.

MOON

Were you able to have conversations with your siblings or with good friends or with your parents about what you were reading and thinking about?

MOSS

Not really.

MOON

Or were you just thinking and accumulating all of these thoughts sort of in your head?

MOSS

It was just in my head. I would take a book and then hide somewhere so nobody could disturb me. [laughter] There was a big blue chair behind which I had a favorite spot.

MOON

And were there any significant teachers in your life or other people, other adults in your life when you were around this age?

MOSS

Well, yes. I had a couple of very interesting—I had good teachers. My elementary, my first-grade teacher was marvelous and she was very encouraging, and Miss Reed—all of them were Misses, you know. You couldn't be married in the thirties and be employed. They saved the jobs for unmarried people. There was Miss McGuinness. She actually got married before I graduated from elementary school. We did have another class that had to do with the arts, and that was the recitation of poetry. It was a poetry and literature class, and that was about the eighth grade also, and we used to perform. I remember Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" But otherwise, elementary school was just a very happy time. I should also say that my mother was very civic-minded, community-minded, and when there was a March of Dimes or when there was a community effort, she was in the forefront and she imbued us, me and my sisters, with a sense of community and community involvement and also with a sense of privilege, if you will. We were a very modest family, but we had more disposable income, perhaps, or privileges that many other people didn't have, and she made us aware of that. I remember particularly there was a girl named Esther Bronstein—my gosh, haven't thought about her for a long time—and she had epilepsy, and the events would occur rarely, but still people were afraid of her. The rest of the classmates were afraid of her. And I went out of my way to be her friend. But I also had other girlfriends, too, that were—that was about it. That was elementary school.

MOON

When you say that your mother encouraged you and your sister to be more civic-minded, specifically what does that mean?

MOSS

It means the local community, really, not the city, but the local community.

MOON

Did that include volunteer work?

MOSS

Yes, yes, she did a lot of volunteer work. And as I say, she was very active with her group of friends who were largely centered around the synagogue, so that the social life was very active.

MOON

Did the Jewish religion play a large role? Was your family observant?

MOSS

We were observant, but not to the extent that you see some of these zealots today. We were not the ultra-Orthodox, no. We did pay attention, yes. Yes, I would say that we were relatively religious.

MOON

Then also you mentioned that compared to perhaps some of the other people in your immediate community, your family might have had a little bit more disposable income. Did you feel the effects of the Great Depression in the thirties as you were growing up?

MOSS

My father and mother protected us a great deal. The Depression I was aware of only in contrast with other people. My father was very, very hardworking. When he took over this little hotel, he did everything from shovel coal to cutting window shades for the windows to sewing curtains for the windows. He did everything, and his hard work paid off. He brought the building around, it was productive, and he slowly turned over those mundane tasks to other people. Gus used to shovel the coal. At the age of about eight or nine, he had me sitting in the office and recording payments from the tenants in a ledger book, so that I had my early experience with bookkeeping. That was about the limit of it.

MOON

And did your mother work?

MOSS

No, she did not. When she got married, she stopped being a secretary. She took care of three daughters and, as I say, became a community leader. That was about it.

MOON

What about the transition into high school? You mentioned that your elementary school, you remember it very fondly. Was it consistent throughout, in terms of your experience at middle school as well as high school, you always did well?

MOSS

Well, there was no middle school. But in my case, high school began at one school for one year, but that school was closing, so we were shifted—no, that wasn't true. I went to one high school, but then we moved to another community, to South Shore, and so I transferred to another high school maybe three miles away. So I had two different high school experiences, and they were both very benign and encouraging.

MOON

So the move to South Shore, was that because of a change in your father's job?

MOSS

No, it was because of our change in our financial foundation.

MOON

And so did your father continue to run the hotel?

MOSS

He acquired another one or two.

MOON

Oh, I see. So he acquired more.

MOSS

Mm-hmm.

MOON

Did your mother sort of create her own network of friends and have influence on the community in South Shore?

MOSS

The community was not quite the same, but they never lost touch. A friendship made on Drexel Boulevard was a friendship for life. At that time, there was a lot of movement to South Shore from Hyde Park.

MOON

And about what year is this?

MOSS

We moved in 1942. 1941 is when I started high school. 1942, I moved to Hyde Park High School. The first high school was called the Branch. It was really a branch of Hyde Park.

MOON

And does anything stand out in your memory from high school?

MOSS

Well, I became more conscious of myself. You know, adolescence is a great pivoting time. I became more social. I wasn't very social earlier. I was very independent. I relied on no one. People relied upon me. In high school, I became a little bit more uncertain, as all adolescents do, and I learned a lot, particularly in the social realm. I was asked to join a club and I met my husband. [laughs]

MOON

Oh, you met your husband in high school?

MOSS

In high school, yes.

MOON

Were you two dating right away, or were you friends for a while?

MOSS

When I first moved, I was just—1942, how old was I? I was fourteen. So I didn't date. My mother didn't approve of that. By the next year, though, I met him, and then there were parties, groups of people, you know. They would have different parties. Roller skating was a favorite.

MOON

And you continued to be very studious?

MOSS

I was a good student, yes. Only one time did I get a lower grade, and that was when Allen and I were in the same chemistry class. He was a year ahead of me, but we had the same chemistry class at the time. We used to get graded four times during the semester, so there were four grades during the semester, and the semester was three or four months. It was the only time in my life that I ever got an F, which is the lowest grade. And I was absolutely—I was aghast, I was humiliated, and I didn't know what to do. It was because he and I were flirting and not paying attention and making jokes, so the teacher taught us a lesson. By the end of the semester, we both had S's, which was "Superior."  
[laughter]

MOON

At the time, it was too much of a distraction.

MOSS

It was very funny. [laughs] We also met before the end of that year in—let me see. What did they call it? I can't remember what they called it. It was a class or a club only for students with E or above on a—

MOON

Excellent?

MOSS

Excellent, yeah. But I can't remember what they—there was a name for it. So we were both in that club. We were both very good students.

MOON

And were you thinking about college at this time?

MOSS

I didn't think about college at all. My parents did not say a word about it. There was no encouragement, no exploration about it. But when I graduated high school, it was brought to my attention that almost all, if not all, of my friends were going to college. There was a party at the University of Illinois down in Champaign—no. There was a party also—well, that was one party. The first party was a party at—not Notre Dame. Maybe it was Notre Dame in Indiana. I can't remember the name of the college where there was a party, and I was invited by a—I was fixed up to go to the party. And I went for that weekend, but I was so gauche and so absolutely naïve that it was a very nice party, but really I felt completely ill at ease. The next party was one down at University of Illinois in Champaign, and a group of my friends stayed at this one house called the Ivy House at 303 Chalmers, which was the Chi Phi House that had gone off campus during the war because all the men went off to World War II, and so it became a girls' dorm house, like a non-sorority house. The girls said, "You're

not going to college anywhere?” They said, “You have to go to Illinois.” And they marched me down to the manager or the director of the house, and she had a room, a room, one room left. And from her office, I called my mother and father and said, “Guess what? I’m going to go to University of Illinois.” Now, I had not told the university. I had not told anybody. I hadn’t told myself. But after that weekend, I rolled it all together, and by September, I was down at Illinois, down at Champaign. So I went there for a year, and then my family moved to California, at which time I transferred to UCLA.

MOON

Was there anything remarkable about or anything that stands out during your year at the University of Illinois, Champaign?

MOSS

Well, it was a very great exploratory year. My husband was in the navy, and we had a good correspondence going. And I had signed in as foods and nutrition major. At the house, at the Ivy House, there was a woman whom I admired very much, who was a foods and nutrition major. She was a senior. Her hands were stained with chemicals. Her clothes all had holes in them because of chemicals. I didn’t realize the extent, what foods and nutrition meant. I thought it had to do with recipes and cooking and nutrition, nutrition, but there was so much chemistry.

MOON

She was working in a lab.

MOSS

The labwork. And at that point, I said, “I’m not going to do that.” I was already taking organic chemistry and physical chemistry, but at the end of that year when I went to UCLA, I made a new major: it was education and history.

MOON

That sounds a little bit more your speed, perhaps. [laughs]

MOSS

It was more my speed, yeah. I also liked languages, so it all fit together.

MOON

You mentioned that your now-husband was in the navy. Were you engaged at that time or you were just together?

MOSS

We were just boyfriend, girlfriend.

MOON

And your family moved to Los Angeles. Was that for a job?

MOSS

Because my parents didn’t like the cold anymore, for which I am eternally grateful. I hated it. I hate the cold. I stood out on the corner waiting for the streetcar in 15 degrees above zero, with the wind whipping off the lake five

blocks away, waiting for the streetcar with blue knees, because, of course, the fashion was the skirt that was two inches above the knee and the stockings that were two inches below the knee. I hated it.

MOON

Did you enjoy the city of Chicago, besides the weather, in terms of the cultural—

MOSS

Well, the bit I was exposed to, yes, the libraries, the music occasionally, the Art Institute occasionally. Yes, and I should say the Museum of Science and Industry, the Rosenwald Museum in Jackson Park, where we spent many happy times. I went through that museum seventeen million times.

MOON

And how was the transition for you to Los Angeles?

MOSS

Very smooth. I knew no one except one girl at UCLA whom I had known from high school, and she recruited me into a sorority and I made friends there that have—well, for the living ones, they're my friends, but most of them are gone.

MOON

Did you take any art classes or art history classes at UCLA?

MOSS

No. History, yes. Language, yes. Education and literature, yes. I had been taking Spanish since elementary school and history since elementary school. So elementary and Hyde Park High School and college. I did not complete college. I stayed there for a year and a half, and then by that time, Allen and I were engaged, and I decided that I'd be more valuable if I had some money in the bank, so I went to work as a secretary. I knew shorthand and typing. When I went to high school, there was a college prep course and a standard course, and at that time I said, "I'm going to take the college course," even though I had no concept of what going to college was. My mother said, "Fine, but you're also going to take elementary business training." So I had shorthand and typing and bookkeeping, all of which I was very good at, and that extended into my work experience.

MOON

Did you have any courses that made a particular impact on you at UCLA?

MOSS

History.

MOON

History.

MOSS

Absolutely. I was very good in writing. I understood grammar, I understood spelling, I understood the flow of ideas, so these were very valuable tools.

MOON

You were at UCLA—this was 1944?

MOSS

Yes. I graduated from high school in '45 and I left UCLA in '48, mid-'48, yes.

MOON

So UCLA in the mid-forties, how was history taught? In retrospect, was it Western-centric?

MOSS

Absolutely. European-centric. High school was American history. College was European history and history of literature. Literature in context was very interesting to me. You know, plays and novels and all reflected the culture of Europe from Shakespeare on, so that was a great history lesson as well. I much prefer history that flows through ideas that were prevalent in the culture than simply the birth and death of kings or wars.

MOON

More traditional chronological.

MOSS

Right. But with regards to Asia, absolutely no exposure.

MOON

And so you mentioned that you had studied Spanish for a number of years as you were growing up. Did you speak any other languages, or did your parents speak Yiddish or Polish?

MOSS

They spoke Yiddish. They did not have a European language in common, so Yiddish was their private language, and I did not speak anything except English and Spanish.

MOON

And so after you graduated from college, you worked as a secretary for how many years?

MOSS

Well, when I left college for those six months— [recorder turned off]

MOON

Okay. So before the delivery man came, we were talking about your starting work after leaving UCLA, not graduating, and working as a secretary for a few—

MOSS

I worked for a beauty supply house at 808 South Broadway—I can't remember the name of the company—until the late summer, when my parents planned a trip back to Chicago with all of us, so we drove across country to Chicago, and while I was there, Allen and I got engaged. So at that point, I came back with my mother and father, but I arranged to move back to Chicago and live with my

aunt and uncle for a year until we got married. We got married in 1949, and so then I worked for a company called Mid America Non-Ferrous Metal Company and was a secretary, I did correspondence, took shorthand, etc., and I continued after I got married. We got married in 1949, and then I came back to Chicago, we had an apartment, and I continued until I was pregnant. I was having a little trouble with the pregnancy, and I quit, making everybody very angry with me.

MOON

And what year?

MOSS

My son was born in 1951, so this was 1950, the beginning of the pregnancy.

MOON

And then your husband, so he was in the navy, and then did he go to school, to graduate school after the navy, or was he working?

MOSS

Well, he was in college. He was at Illinois Institute of Technology, and he was plucked out of college to go to the navy, and the navy put him right back into his same college. He was with the V-12 unit and he also was a very intelligent person. Just before he was ready to graduate, the war was over, and so he had a choice between discharge or, if he stayed in and graduated while he was in the navy, he would have become an officer, but he decided he did not want to go to—he preferred discharge. So as he said, he said, “By your leave, sir, I’ll leave.” So he was an engineer, electrical engineer, not electronic at that stage of history. There was no such thing as electronic engineering. And that’s it.

MOON

And now he’s a lawyer. How did—

MOSS

The transition?

MOON

Yeah.

MOSS

[laughs] He was an engineer, and when we came to Chicago two years later [our first son was born] at the time of my mother’s death [in Los Angeles], I said, “I’m not going back to Chicago.” And he said, “Fine.” And he went back and closed up the little house that we had bought on the GI Bill, and moved out here, and had a job as an electrical engineer working on the CBS Building at the corner of Beverly and Fairfax.

MOON

Right up here.

MOSS

Mm-hmm. Actually, Pereira & Luckman. It was Pereira & Luckman he worked for, and the job was CBS. About a year later, he segued into my father’s

business. My father encouraged him to help him with real estate, management of property, and from there he became a real estate broker. And years later in 1960s, late sixties, he decided that he wanted to be a lawyer specializing in real estate matters, and so it was in the seventies [1973] that he went back to college, night school to start with. And then in 1978, I had gone to work at that time before then.

MOON

That was the year the gallery was founded.

MOSS

No, that was before then. Then he graduated [in 1977] and became a lawyer, but that's already getting ahead of the thing with my story. So when we came to Los Angeles, I was simply raising three sons, one after another, and I did do some volunteer work. [In 1952] I volunteered at Cedars-Sinai as a secretary in the department that was dealing with nephrology, and where the first dialysis was performed, which would have saved my mother a year earlier. So I was active in different things, the Women's Committee for Brandeis University, which supported the library at Brandeis. Brandeis University Women had different study groups, so I was part of reading groups. Oh, I also was involved with Great Books organization. You know Great Books.

MOON

Yeah. You mentioned that when we had our first meeting, that you were involved with the program.

MOSS

Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler from University of Chicago. Yeah, it was a broad humanities course, and their syllabi are very wonderful, and there were groups all over the country. So I was a member of a group for Great Books. And then along about the sixties, into the sixties, I became a volunteer with Junior Great Books, which aimed at—there was special syllabi developed for introducing ideas of the Western world at the student level. It was really for, I'd say, sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders, but they did have earlier sometimes for special children.

MOON

So just to back up, just to get the chronology straight, you were married in 1949 and then you lived in Chicago for one year? One to two years?

MOSS

Well, I was there from '48, the year before we got married, and then we stayed till 1951.

MOON

When your son was born.

MOSS

When my mother was dying, we came to California. My son had just been born, yes. He was born in Chicago, but he was three months old when I came here.

MOON

And then you had three sons a few years apart.

MOSS

Mm-hmm.

MOON

And then when you first moved back to Los Angeles, you were raising your children, but then you were also taking part in a council for Brandeis, in part to help with the library.

MOSS

And I also did Recording for Blind.

MOON

And you did Recording for Blind, and you also worked with a Great Books program. So did you first do a Great Books program for the adult audience and then you did the Junior books?

MOSS

Well, I didn't do it; I was a part of a study group.

MOON

Oh, I see.

MOSS

I did not direct it. In the Junior Great Books, I also was a volunteer initially and then I became a director of it, along about the—it was the end of the sixties. It must have been about the end of the sixties, the last five years of the sixties, because by 1970, my children were no longer needing me. My youngest was about sixteen, and nobody needed me, and so I decided that I had to do something independently. I had to do something. I wanted to do something for myself. So I went to the Docent Council at the L.A. County and asked for membership. Well, this was unusual because they only had art majors. It was a very, very strict core, a very erudite group of women. But I convinced them that my history background and my history of community service was evidence that I could learn and be a valuable member of the Docent Council. So they accepted me, and, of course, I loved the history of art, which I had already been aware of through exposure in other ways. So I was in the Docent Council until 1972, maybe '73, '73, but in the Docent Council one of the docents became a director of the art department, the print department at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, Antiquarian Books and Graphic Arts, and she wanted me to come with her, and I said, "I am not going to work in the arts. I'm not going to take a job where I have to be paid." But finally she persuaded me after six months, so in November of '73, or October, September, I went to work, which was just about

the time that my husband was going to law school, and his income, our income, was very greatly reduced, so it came in handy. I enjoyed every minute of it. I said I would go there to be a secretary. I had all the skills and I would back them up. I would do research, but I didn't consider myself a salesman of art. In fact, I had the feeling that art was so sacrosanct that one can't talk about money and art in the same voice.

MOON

Can I back up a little bit? Because I feel like your experience as a docent at LACMA and your experience at Zeitlin's bookstore are pretty important.

MOSS

Very, very important.

MOON

So just to finish up some more exploring before then, just to get a sense of how you might think about art, the Great Books program and the curriculum that you were going through yourself when you were a participant in the meetings, but then also when you were directing the program for the Junior books, was there art history that was integrated into—

MOSS

No, no, no. It was literature and ideas. It was a flow of ideas, philosophies. Have you ever seen a Great Books course?

MOON

I have. I've seen a listing of names.

MOSS

Well, the course focuses on pieces of literature, fiction and nonfiction, that develop a thread. They pick up a thread and they show the thread proceeding through the mouths, through the ideas of different authors. Sometimes they would span three hundred years, four hundred years. Sometimes it's all confined to one century. But it's a very fascinating program and it encourages discussion and opinion. It isn't simply something that you're feeding to somebody.

MOON

No. Exposure to great texts.

MOSS

It's provoking response, and that was the key to it.

MOON

Well, in retrospect, just thinking about the Great Books, it also seems to want to represent a great rich image of culture, and in this case, European, American, Western culture primarily.

MOSS

Also Asian. Also Asian.

MOON

But you mentioned that there was no reference to art historical thinking or perhaps any mention of aesthetics. In retrospect, do you think that such fields of inquiry should be included, or do you think that it didn't seem to be that anything was missing?

MOSS

This was not a course of performance. Art is really focused upon performance. This was ideas that carry culture, cultural ideas across centuries. No, it was not an art course. It was not an art course. It didn't refer to artists. Many artists don't speak in words; they speak through their work. There are visual imagery. So this did not pertain to art at all that I can put my finger on. The art exposure I had before the Docent Council was really associated with my husband and I strolling on La Cienega Boulevard during a Monday opening night that they did once a month, and the different galleries would stay open and you would go from one to the other, and the provocation by one of the dealers, particularly—his name was Felix Landau—who said to me, “You ask too many questions. Go and hit the books. Go learn more.” And I did. [laughs] He was a very, very forceful and highly intelligent person, cultural person.

MOON

Were there particular galleries you would make sure to stop by? So Felix Landau, for example.

MOSS

Felix Landau was the best, but there were other galleries, sure. There was the Heritage Gallery, Ben Horowitz, and David Stuart Gallery that was really beyond me, almost, and Ankrum Gallery, she was a longtime gallery, and Adele Bednarz [and Esther Robles Gallery]. I just can't remember other ones at this moment.

MOON

Were there specific exhibitions or specific artists whose work you saw that you sort of retained and made you want to study art more, or the works about which you were asking Felix Landau about, and he told you to go read up on them? Anything stick out?

MOSS

Well, he was provocative, you know, and he did make me feel that I really should move myself and do something about that. Don't ask him so many questions. Find out for myself. Felix Landau's Gallery was the most influential. I did buy, which was absolutely astounding, a couple of small pieces of art from Ankrum. One artist, I can't even remember his name, and the other one—  
[recorder turned off]

MOON

Okay.

MOSS

The piece of art I bought was by Robert [Harley] Seyle, and the reason that I bought it was because my eldest son came along and walked with me one night, and he just loved this piece. It was made of nails and it was a composition of nails, and I thought it was a worthy piece of art and I was very impressed by his response, and so we negotiated and I put down some money, and we began to pay that off. And he owns it now. It's in his home.

MOON

When you say that it was a worthy piece of art, could you explain that a little bit? I know it must be difficult.

MOSS

The composition pleased my eye. The technique was unique. It was compact and together. It is about 20 inches square and heavy as could be. I just thought it was a very interesting piece of art, and the fact that he, at the age of sixteen, picked it out was very significant to me. I also must have bought—this was about 1977 when he was sixteen, and Allen and I also bought, we bought two pieces of art that year, which, as I say, was quite momentous. One piece of art was something that had been at the Art Rental Gallery at LACMA, and I rented it for three months.

MOON

Oh, right. They have a rental gallery.

MOSS

Yes. And Allen—I just loved it. He said, “I’m sorry. We cannot buy it,” and we gave it back. Well, that lasted for about one month, and I said, “Allen, I’ve just got to have that.” And he said, “Forget it.” It was May, Mother’s Day, and I came into the house and I saw reflected in the mirror the piece of art sitting on the dining room table. He decided that Mother’s Day and June, where my birthday was, and the anniversary in July, he said, “This is the group present.” So I dearly love it. It was by Sorel Etrog. I dearly love it. I also bought another piece of art. I was working at Jake Zeitlin’s by that time, and next door was David Stuart’s gallery, and I had seen a show maybe six months earlier of Helen Lundeberg and Lorser Feitelson’s work, and I loved a painting, but—

MOON

By which one? You loved a painting by Helen—

MOSS

By Helen Lundeberg. And again, it was completely out of line, but then we talked it over, Allen and I, and by this time the show was history, had past, and I had become friendly with Helen and Lorser by that time, because they would come next door to Zeitlin & Ver Brugge. They collected prints and Old Master drawings, and I was in the art department of Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, Antiquarian Books and Graphic Arts. So I went and visited Helen, and there was the painting on her wall, and I said, “You know, I dearly love that painting. I would

love to own it, live with it.” And she said, “Well, it’s available.” So I said, “Well, could I pay it off?” She said, “Of course.” So I paid it off, and it hangs in my dining room right now.

MOON

I have a number of questions about this, but first you mentioned that when you saw these works, you had this feeling like you had to have it.

MOSS

When I say—that’s wrong terminology. I didn’t have to have it. I wanted to live with it.

MOON

Well, that’s what I wanted to ask you about. What does it mean to own a work? It means to live with it and—

MOSS

That’s it in a nutshell. I deplore people who buy a piece of art and stick it under the bed, but a piece of art that you can live with and see every day and get pleasure from it, it enhances your environment, it enhances your life, and it becomes something that’s part of your existence.

MOON

Do you think your husband understood it in the same way?

MOSS

He became convinced, because he—well, he really, he was just open. He would consider, and I wasn’t greedy, so that he trusted my own feelings, which I was very grateful for.

MOON

Well, you’ve known him for a long time, so do you know if he was interested in art or in other cultural things as a youth, or was he exposed to that from his parents?

MOSS

Not at all. Not at all. The family really was not at all oriented toward the arts.

MOON

Well, he ends up an electrical engineer at the end of studies, the first stage of studies.

MOSS

Yeah. Well, in that time when you went to college in the forties, engineering was the safest, most progressive field to have on your résumé.

MOON

It’s also incredibly useful for society.

MOSS

That’s exactly what my father-in-law said. “You can do anything you want to, except you must become an engineer.”

MOON

And did your parents at all collect, even if it was to have a small library at home?

MOSS

No. The only piece of art I can ever remember in our house, and that was only one piece, and it was so long ago from the very beginning, was either a painting or a chromolithograph of big red overblown poppies that was in the dining room, but I have no idea—

MOON

Who the maker was?

MOSS

No. My mother did enjoy fine things. She enjoyed books. We always had books in our home. She also was a good reader. In the thirties in Chicago, on Drexel Boulevard were the grandest homes, homes of the titans of Chicago industry. By the end of the thirties, those dynasties had waned or they moved somewhere else, but the big houses were being closed and auctioned off, including the contents, and my mother went to a number of these sales at those houses, so that we had beautiful, beautiful linens and many books. I think that's all she really acquired, because I don't think she could afford any more. But we always had beautiful linens, tablecloths and runners, and, as I say, the books that I loved. That's where the Books of Knowledge came from. It was an incomplete set, but I didn't care.

MOON

The Books of Knowledge, I mean, that sounds like a similar kind of offering as the set of Great Books or as sort of an encyclopedia.

MOSS

The Encyclopaedia Britannica was acquired in the forties after we moved to South Shore. Great Books was not even thought of at that time for me, for us. That began in California for me.

MOON

So you mentioned that you decided to do the docent program at LACMA. How did you get involved? What was the thinking process?

MOSS

That I wanted to explore a new area that was totally for myself. I said, "Be selfish." So I wanted to explore art history, which I had never touched before, and I was very happy that they accepted me. It was a very stringent course. It was a very professional training for a year.

MOON

So can you talk a little bit about applying for—you mentioned that most of other docents, they were art majors, art history majors, and that you had to—

MOSS

Convince them.

MOON

—convince them to accept you. So what did the training require?

MOSS

Well, the training was once a week for three hours. We had a lecture and focus, and as provisionals, we had an additional—no, what did we have? Well, we had to select a department to work in and focus upon specific pieces of art, write about them, and finally present a little tour to our fellow docents. The first year was training at provisional. The second year was a provisional tour guide. We actually toured with the supervision of another docent. And for all of those things we had to write very complete, detailed tour scenarios or we had to write a tour, you know, select various pieces of art to promote the premise that we wanted to carry. I had originally asked for the sculpture department. They were overflowing, so they put me into prints and drawings. Wasn't that fortuitous? I met the very wonderful Ebria Feinblatt, who was the curator, and the department, I dove into it, delved into it deeply and enjoyed every minute of it.

MOON

Do you remember the first provisional tour that you gave and how you structured it and which pieces you chose?

MOSS

Well, my first provisional tour was a piece of sculpture, and it was a fourteenth-century Madonna, and I focused upon what we had learned, which was the—I can't remember the terminology anymore, but there is a particular stance that was an S-curve in the sculpture of the period. This was a beautiful wood-carved piece, and when I see it in the museum, I still love it. But after that, after that first year when I was really a provisional tour guide, I was in the Department of Prints and Drawings, so I studied everything from Old Master drawings to contemporary graphics to Chagall and Russian avant-garde. You took a tour based upon either the current exhibition in the museum or an element of the permanent collection. So the Old Master drawings was primarily the permanent collection, but things like Jerry Burchfield or—no.

MOON

Charles?

MOSS

There are different artists that—and the Russian avant-garde was definitely an exhibition that was touring. It was very exciting. That was an entirely other culture, and I loved the abstract part of it. It's affected me ever since. But I just enjoyed learning about every—so we would change. About every three months, we had a new exhibition, a new tour to develop, a new writing to be submitted, and also you have to go to training sessions. Once a month, once you're accepted as a full docent, there are training sessions once a month, where we have fine lecturers and a constant educational process. That's what's very

exciting about the Docent Council. It's very educational. It makes you develop for—at first I was developing for high school students, and then when I did go to work at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, I shifted to Saturdays and adults, so I had different levels to work with. I also used to do volunteer extra tours. Sugar Ray Robinson, on a Saturday morning, took at-risk students from the black community and sponsored the docent tours. And it turned out that many of the docents didn't like to deal with boys, and I was an expert at dealing with boys. So I used to take the tough kids, I mean a sixteen- and seventeen-year-old fellow with a comb stuck in his afro, and we would always start off with examining Maillol's nudes, so that would get that off the table. [laughter] I would make them examine the nude in detail, and then we could go on to other things. We did have fun.

MOON

Who were the other docents?

MOSS

The other docents?

MOON

Yeah.

MOSS

Peggy Hazan.

MOON

You don't necessarily need names, but just in terms of the type of person. Were they primarily women?

MOSS

Primarily women who—oh, yes, it was all women at that time, and they were housewives like I. What was notable is that the Docent Council spawned many a professional, because after a couple of years in docentry, they would get back into an educational mode, growing a growth pattern. One left to become an attorney, more left to become attorneys, or they went into other fields. In the beginning, not so many, but by now, it definitely fosters further educational pursuits.

MOON

And you were doing the docent trainings, so of course there's the content to just to give you more information about a particular work, art historical context and time periods, historical information, but what about the way in which you were being encouraged to have the people approach the artwork? Was there a lot of close looking involved?

MOSS

Oh, yes.

MOON

So what was the methodology?

MOSS

And detailed. Actually, I found myself drawing upon my training in the Great Books, the Junior Great Books, because that was aimed at provoking responses. So with the docent tours, again, I was displaying a piece of art and calling attention to details and eliciting opinions and thoughts, responses. That was the whole purpose. If you had a group that didn't ask questions, that was sad. Questions, questions, questions, I always encouraged.

MOON

You mentioned Peggy Hazan. Was she pretty influential in terms of the training?

MOSS

Oh, very much. She was one of the core. Connie Stengel was another. Oh, there were so many wonderful, wonderful women.

MOON

And were they about your age at the time or was it a bit of a range?

MOSS

No, I think they were a little bit older, but not much. I was young because I was gauche. I mean, they were so advanced in the field, so I always felt younger, but I wasn't necessarily younger in age.

MOON

And was this first time that you had had such consistent experience really looking closely at artwork?

MOSS

Yes.

MOON

And that was important?

MOSS

Yes, that was an enriching time for me. I enjoyed every minute of it.

MOON

And in terms of your interests, you mentioned that they were pretty broad, from the Soviet avant-garde to the Old Master drawings.

MOSS

Right. I'm very well versed in graphic arts. I responded to it. I found I'm fascinated to today. It really surprised me, the intensity of my feeling for delving into this phase of history. It's history broadly, but not through, as I say, wars and kings, but through cultural aspects. In art you can see the costumes that were worn, you can see what kind of activities, foods, what kind of focus on light and dark, abstract terms, the strength of a line. It tuned me. It caused me to respond to it, and I understand it. In the work that I have around me, you can see that my interest in movement, in space, in mood, in abstraction, it made

me identify aspects of my own tastes that perhaps I really hadn't specified before, I hadn't identified.

MOON

And you mentioned that being a docent in the prints and drawing department was an accident or because there was an overflow from the sculpture.

MOSS

Right.

MOON

But do you think that your tastes would have been sort of geared more towards works on paper anyways, or was it just part of the experience of teaching and just conversing about these particular types of works that really fostered your lifelong interest and passion for works on paper?

MOSS

Well, where we're sitting right now, how many works on paper do you see?

MOON

I would say maybe not even half.

MOSS

Right. Works on paper were what I was focused upon intimately, but other concepts derived from visual imagery, be they in oil or in three dimensions or on paper. The technique and the medium is important to understand, but it's the overall composition that you have to appreciate also. But each of the techniques that I show, that I deal with, is interesting to me, and I understand the use of oils on canvas or wash on paper or inks on paper. Print techniques are even more personalized. There are so many ways of speaking through printmaking. Those are special techniques.

MOON

In terms of the application of procedure, but also the kind of printing that can go through.

MOSS

The demands upon the artist. The artist has to conquer a technique. Some artists will not work in one technique but the other they favor. Ynez Johnston, for example, she made some very successful lithographs, but she didn't like lithography. Etching is her medium. She really liked that etched plate. June Wayne, on the other hand, made a couple of very successful intaglios, but lithography was her love, and she developed that. So it's just personal taste.

MOON

I think that if it feels comfortable for you, I think we can end the first session here—

MOSS

Fine.

MOON

—and then pick up next time.

MOSS

Sure.

MOON

Okay. [End of March 31, 2014 interview]

## **1.2. Session Two (April 7, 2014)**

MOON

This is the second session of an interview with Tobey Moss, conducted in her gallery, Tobey C. Moss Gallery, which is located on Beverly Boulevard in West Hollywood, California.

MOSS

Los Angeles, not West Hollywood.

MOON

Los Angeles, California. And so when we left off at the end of the first session, we were talking about your experience in the Docent Council, but one thing that I forgot to ask you during the first session was where you were living in Los Angeles.

MOSS

I'm living in the same house I have always lived in in Los Angeles. In 1946, my family, my mother and father and my two sisters, moved. We all moved to Los Angeles from Chicago to this house, which is a block and a half from the gallery.

MOON

Oh, I see.

MOSS

My mother passed away in 1951, and though I had been living in Chicago after my marriage, we moved to Los Angeles in 1951 and never left.

MOON

Do you think that your family chose to live in this neighborhood in part because of the proximity to the Fairfax district?

MOSS

Yes. The Fairfax High School for my younger sisters. I transferred from University of Illinois into UCLA.

MOON

Where you studied for a year and a half.

MOSS

Mm-hmm.

MOON

So, actually, before we launch into the 1970s, just to wrap up the 1960s, so—

MOSS

Well, this was the 1940s.

MOON

Right. And then to the 1940s and then the 1950s, and you were raising children. The 1960s, you were involved with Great Books, and were you also looking at art during the 1960s?

MOSS

Well, I was also a member of the Council of Jewish Women, and the Council of Jewish Women had a fundraising event which consisted of art, selling art. Someone had allowed the council to use a floor in an unfinished building or an unoccupied building on Wilshire Boulevard—I'm not quite sure where—and I volunteered to be a salesperson for their art section, their art show, and it was about a four-day sale. The first day I set up everything nicely, and at the end of the day, I noticed that I was getting a little anxious about a certain little painting. And the second day, anytime anyone approached that little painting, I really became agitated, and by the end of the second day, I put it under the counter so no one would see it. And by the third day, I bought it, and that was the first piece of art that I had really bought. I bought it for \$60, and it took a great deal of thought and conversation with my husband. So that was an event for me.

MOON

So you were feeling agitated in part because you didn't want anybody else to purchase it—

MOSS

Exactly.

MOON

—because you wanted it for yourself. Do you remember who the artist was?

MOSS

Oh, yes. It's on my bedroom wall right now. I still love it. It's by Mary Benz, B-e-n-z. I have no idea who she is. I have never seen another painting by her. All I know is that painting appealed to me and still is meaningful to me.

MOON

You mentioned during the last session that you were going on the Art Walks that were happening on Monday evenings along La Cienega, and so that was also in the late sixties, I take it.

MOSS

Yes.

MOON

Did you see exhibitions at the County Museum when it was down in Exposition Park?

MOSS

Well, we might have gone down to Exposition Park, mostly for the natural history. We took our boys down there and would go there and spend the day and picnic. But the big event was when, in 1965, they opened on Wilshire Boulevard, and then we went to the museum there.

MOON

And did you ever visit the Pasadena Art Museum?

MOSS

Pasadena Art Museum, not really, because at that point in time, it was a contemporary art museum, and I wasn't that keen on some of the things they were showing. I didn't go down to Pasadena. We didn't drive over there, no.

MOON

So Ferus Gallery closed in 1966.

MOSS

I was not aware of Ferus. This was totally in another world.

MOON

And do you happen to remember the big controversy over the Ed Kienholz exhibition, 1966, at the L.A. County Museum, Back Seat Dodge?

MOSS

Yes, certainly.

MOON

So I'm assuming that you did not wait in line to go see the exhibition, since you didn't seem very interested.

MOSS

Well, that was something else. This was in my backyard and this was—yes, I did go to see that show. The opening months or year of the museum being there was a very exciting event for Los Angeles and for our neighborhood. I'm in that neighborhood, so of course I went to see Back Seat Dodge.

MOON

Do you remember your reactions to seeing that installation?

MOSS

I thought it was humorous. I thought it was shocking, but good shock. I thought that the fuss was silly. Los Angeles has gotten a little bit more sophisticated since then.

MOON

So perhaps can you talk a little bit about your transition from working at the Docent Council at the L.A. County Museum to working at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge bookstore on La Cienega?

MOSS

Well, it was simply something that I never had thought of doing. I joined the Docent Council to serve. I had been serving the community in other organizations in other ways, Women's Committee for Brandeis University and

the Council of Jewish Women and Recording for Blind and Junior Great Books, and this was something that was very purely for Tobey Moss. I felt it was a growth step for me and I considered it a rather selfish focus, and I just jumped into it with great pleasure and great glee. So when I was asked to come to Jake Zeitlin's, I really resisted for a good six months until finally I decided to do it. A number of factors, personal factors, entered into it. But by November of that year, 1973, I came to be a researcher and to be active as correspondence and inventory control. In other words, the back room. I did not consider myself a salesperson.

MOON

And when you say that you were convinced into this position, by—

MOSS

By the person who had become the director at the beginning of 1973. She became the director of the art section of Zeitlin & Ver Brugge Antiquarian Books and Graphic Arts. So she and I had worked together as docents, and she needed me. She liked to do the sales part of it. I didn't want to, but I was, as I say, a good soldier in the ranks.

MOON

And her name was?

MOSS

Marilyn Pink.

MOON

So in Zeitlin & Ver Brugge's bookstore, it was you and Marilyn Pink were running the fine prints and drawings section of the bookstore?

MOSS

Right.

MOON

And so you mentioned that you were not selling any of the artworks, and so you had no direct contact with any of the customers who came into—

MOSS

Oh, I did have contact with them. I would collect their data, I would keep in touch with them, with calling them. I was simply—we had a very good relationship with many of the clients. I wasn't off in another place. I was right center of the gallery, the entry point.

MOON

And do you remember who some of these collectors were? Again, you don't have to necessarily name names, but just in terms of the types, were there a lot of local collectors, a lot of collectors in a different city?

MOSS

There were a lot of local collectors. There was Lorser and Helen, Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg, who collected Old Master prints and drawings

and other things, and there were a lot of national and international visitors, because Jake Zeitlin was internationally renowned for the history of science, particularly in antiquarian books, but also for Western Americana. And we had some very interesting visitors. I remember one scientist, he was an astrophysicist who was from Canada, and he would come because he was collecting books about the pathway down the Mississippi, from Canada to the Gulf. And in addition to books on the subject, he had been collecting music, musical scores and musical recordings of the songs, the folksongs sung along the Mississippi, from French Canada down to the Gulf of Mexico. Very interesting man.

MOON

And did this man also buy drawings and prints?

MOSS

No, I don't believe so. I don't remember that part of it.

MOON

And the range of prints and drawings, they went as far back as Old Masters, but then also contemporary?

MOSS

Well, yes, contemporary, but not what you'd call cutting-edge, focused upon the arts of the thirties and the forties and the fifties, a lot of British prints and earlier American, I mean nineteenth and early twentieth century. We just had a very broad range. In the Old Masters section, we had Brueghel, which was a very great interest to Jake Zeitlin, and Dürer and Rembrandt and a full panoply of Early Master engravers and etchers and woodcutters.

MOON

Were there also photographs in the inventory? Because I know that, for example, Jake Zeitlin was one of the first dealers to exhibit and sell Edward Weston photographs when he was located in downtown.

MOSS

We really didn't focus on photography per se. I wouldn't call us a photography gallery. But, yes, Edward Weston was shown early. Jake had many bold moves. He was the first one to show Käthe Kollwitz in this country. He was the first one to show Paul Landacre in this country. And this is just an example of his eye and his support for specific artists, and it didn't show any bounds of a narrowness that perhaps I show in my gallery.

MOON

So this was in the early to mid-seventies. Do you remember which prints and drawings were selling particularly well at this time? Or was it a whole range?

MOSS

It was a whole range, everything from Brockhurst and Landacre and the Masters, the Master prints, Charles Meryon from nineteenth-century France. It

was a very broad range. The focus was on technique as opposed to political movement or country or a particular artist.

MOON

And during the seventies, well, in '73, there was the oil crisis. Did you notice a slackening in the market from your experience, just from your own observations?

MOSS

My own observations were not very observant. [laughter] No, I really don't remember anything like that. I do know that in my research, sometimes somebody would bring in a print and they would want to consign it to Jake or sell it to Jake, and I'd have to research the market values, and it was always amazing to me to be able to chart the political movements through the sales records of somebody like Rembrandt, whose works were always were salable, but the market dipped in World War I and even at the end of World War I, but then they recovered in the twenties, and then they, of course, fell out when the Depression began, and then they recovered, and then they—in other words, they would always recover, but there were definite ebbs and flows based upon political events of history. And the fact that you cite the oil crisis, which I was not even aware of, I don't remember that standing out in my mind at all.

MOON

You mentioned that one of your responsibilities was to do research. Can you talk about that? Was that provenance research?

MOSS

Provenance and market.

MOON

And looking at the market prices over the years?

MOSS

That's right, but I had to go through Benezit and do research on specific artists, many of whom I did not know at all, and I learned a lot. And then their market, of course, through decades of auction catalogs, and I would comb through them and find references and find sales.

MOON

Were there art institutions that were buying from Zeitlin & Ver Brugge?

MOSS

Oh, yes, primarily through his books, antiquarian books, and he built many a collection. But as I say, I was not that attentive to the marketing part of things, and I can't answer that adequately, but we did deal with museums, yes.

MOON

And can you talk about some reflections that you had in terms of—or if this struck you at all, just thinking about seeing artwork in a museum setting when you were a docent and leading tours, and seeing artwork—

MOSS

In my hand?

MOON

In your hands, exactly, handling them and also seeing them as objects that were bought and sold.

MOSS

Well, the awe that I felt at handling a Brueghel, rather than looking at it on the wall in a frame in a museum, was really very, very overwhelming sometimes. I really was very romantic about it. Yes, it's a thrill to be able to handle art and to be able to examine it. And in future years when I had "Let's Look at Arts" classes in my gallery, I insisted upon passing around art so that people could get up close.

MOON

And were you still collecting artwork at this time, slowly?

MOSS

No. I had no money. We had bought one or two pieces from Felix Landau Gallery, but those were rarities and those were treasures. I still treasure them.

MOON

So Felix Landau's Gallery was not too far away from the bookstore, no? It was located on La Cienega.

MOSS

Mm-hmm.

MOON

And you mentioned before that you had a close relationship with Landau. Can you talk about how that developed?

MOSS

Well, just because I hung around. [laughs] I went to his gallery. I felt that he had the best art, and he also was the most committed to it aesthetically. I always deplore people in art and marketing who are simply marketing "doorknobs". They have no feeling for the piece of art or the artist or the message or the technique. They're just doing what the marketing calls for. Felix Landau was different. He was erudite, he was aesthetically focused, and everything that he selected, that he showed on his walls, I believed in. I liked to talk with him. As I say, he was the one that really pushed me into doing my own research and to answering my own questions, which really led to the desire, as I say, when I joined the Docent Council, to be able to broaden myself in art history.

MOON

And when you say that Landau was the most aesthetically committed to the artwork that he showed, were you thinking also in part the care with which he

presented them in the gallery and produced his gallery catalogs, or were you thinking more of the selection of artists and—

MOSS

He introduced me to artists, many artists I had never seen before, but in examining them, they spoke to me. I mean, I couldn't afford to buy his Henry Moores, although I should have, and he introduced me to many German artists. He introduced me to Sorel Etrog, whom I eventually did acquire a piece of his work. So he introduced me to an international scene, a European and American scene. We didn't have any Asian and he didn't have any Latin; it was just European and American. And I trusted him. I felt that he was someone to follow.

MOON

In terms of his knowledge and his taste in artwork.

MOSS

Exactly.

MOON

And you also mentioned that you had purchased a couple of works from Ankrum Gallery. Would you also stop in to Joan Ankrum's Gallery?

MOSS

Yes, who was right next door to Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, and she was a very pleasant person and she had been around a long time. She was an example of someone who sold doorknobs, though. But they were contemporary artists, and I bought a couple of things from her, at least one thing that, as I say, my son responded to strongly, my sixteen-year-old son. And I think that I bought another painting, but I have no idea, I can't remember what happened to it, but I'm not sure that I did buy it—by Boijer, B-o-i-j-e-r. Otherwise, I really didn't buy art. I looked at art. I visited a couple of different galleries. Oh, I had also met an artist in San Francisco, where my sister lived, whose name was Max Pollack, and he was an Austrian, active since the first decade of the century, and I admired his etchings and acquired a couple of them directly from him, so that when Adele Bednarz showed one of his etchings that was very, very underpriced, I felt, I bought it from her. Another nice good dealer was Ben Horowitz. He also was bound up in the artists that he showed, the art and the artists that he showed. He showed black artists and some Latin artists, and he was a very, very nice man, one of the older generation.

MOON

Yeah, it's funny just thinking about visiting galleries myself now, you would never talk to a gallery owner because they are off preparing for art fairs or they're just not around to really talk to people who come in and engage them.

MOSS

And the gallery personnel is largely just salespeople.

MOON

Mm-hmm.

MOSS

Yeah. I've heard this said many times. That's why I pride myself on feeling that my gallery is different.

MOON

And can you talk about your working relationship with Jake Zeitlin?

MOSS

Oh, he was very gentle and supportive. He taught me many things, corrected many foibles, including how to put my glasses down on the table. He had a great experience. He was a great humanist in addition to having the experience of handling the books for many, many, many years and the art equally. He used to be a book peddler in the twenties. He also was a poet. He had a good relationship with Carl Sandburg. They would sing folksongs together. I admired Jake very deeply. He was a warm, giving person and was my mentor.

MOON

Did his example influence, do you think, your decision to run your own business at a later moment, do you think, or not necessarily?

MOSS

Well, yes, he influenced me very directly, but I did not plan on ever, ever thinking ahead to owning a business. Never. But as I say, I was sort of pushed into it by my husband. My husband had been going to law school. He was a real estate broker, and he decided to go back to law school, which cut our income drastically, and my income at Jake Zeitlin was very welcome. And when he graduated in 1978, he said, "It's your turn now." And I said, "My turn for what?" And he said, "Well, you helped me get the law degree, and I want to help you have your own gallery." And at that point, I did not think of having my own gallery, except that he [Allen] had had this little office here on Beverly Boulevard, around the corner from the house, and at that point, I had planned to leave Jake Zeitlin's gallery. I went to help a friend of mine, Stephen White Gallery of Photography, for a couple of months, which extended into a couple of years, and so I was in transition by the time my husband graduated from law school and passed the bar.

MOON

So you left Zeitlin & Ver Brugge's bookstore to help a friend, Stephen White, run his photography gallery. So what were your responsibilities at the photo gallery?

MOSS

Well, it was all the duties I'd had before, plus sales, plus to be a front office.

MOON

So was this the first time you started to sell artworks?

MOSS

Yes, but I wasn't much of a salesperson. Steve was very pushy for me to get out there and offer things. In the four years that I was at Jake Zeitlin's, I had made many friends, and many friends—collectors I'm talking about, collector friends—so that when I was leaving Jake, I had offers from so many of these collectors who, number one, wanted to support me, wanted to invest in any gallery I wanted to open. And number two, they wanted me to continue being alert to the art that they collected, that I knew they collected, for the future and to contact them. So when I went to help Steve, I really didn't have any ideas of where I was going to go, but as I say, at the end of the two years, before the two years was up with Steve, I had already gotten my business license since 1978, and I had found some art for some of my former acquaintances, collectors from Jake's, and had matched up a couple of sales, made a couple of sales in that way. So it was a very seamless transition between Jake to Steve to my own gallery in the same space that my husband had his office on Beverly Boulevard.

MOON

In the seventies, there weren't that many galleries that were exclusively devoted to selling photographs. Was there a relatively healthy market for photographs?

MOSS

Well, I didn't really chart that that much, but Steve White is an historian, and he followed the pathway from the inception of the discovery of photography in the 1830s all the way through to the contemporary, but his accent was upon history. The history of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century he loved. In fact, one of his great interests was following the use of photography in fingerprinting criminals in the mid-nineteenth century, and he also was very interested in criminology. So that made his gallery different than a lot of other—there might have been a couple of other galleries in photography, but I really didn't pay much attention to anything except what was in front of me on my desk.

MOON

And you mentioned in the first session that there was a moment in the 1970s when you felt that “art” and “money” couldn't be said in the same voice.

MOSS

No. [laughs]

MOON

When did that change for you? Was it gradual?

MOSS

No, I think it happened at Jake Zeitlin, because over the course of those four years, I saw the market value of one piece of—one print as opposed to another, either through the technique or the history of the artist or the subject matter, or

there was something that affected the market value of a piece of paper, and I recognized that market. This is what my job was at Jake's, really, to trace the marketing, and by the time I left Jake, I had a pretty good grasp of it.

MOON

So from your experience, what are some of the major factors that one takes into account when assessing market value for a work of art?

MOSS

Well, the contributions to the history. Somebody like Rembrandt [Harmenszoon van Rijn] made great contributions to art history, somebody like Albrecht Dürer, the same, and you can just go on and on. And it's also a matter of the collecting public and what they respond to. There are some people who like [Giovanni Battista] Piranesi's Carceri series of the dank and dismal tombs or jails that Piranesi depicted. Other people would not like that. They would go to [Gerald] Brockhurst and his beautiful portraits or his focus on women, or Charles Meryon and his views of Paris in the nineteenth century. So there are many factors, but the collector enters into the them, the desirability from the point of view of subject matter, technique, period, as well as the scarcity of an artist, the scarcity of an artist's works on the market. There are so many different factors, and as you pointed out, political activities in the world affected markets. If people are hungry, they're not going to go and spend their food money on a piece of art.

MOON

And when you were helping to sell photographs at Stephen White Gallery, did you notice that the price for photographs were noticeably lower than some of the, let's say, contemporary prints that you were selling at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge?

MOSS

Well, first of all, at Jake's we did not have that many contemporary prints, but photography was relatively inexpensive at the time, yes. There were those that commanded big prices, somebody like [Yousef] Karsh or [Richard] Avedon or Edward Weston. You know, it's just like art. The photography part of it, the technique is its own field. Etching, there are some people who only buy etching, some people will only buy photography, and so it's just a matter of what the collector is leaning towards. The collectors have collected photography for a hundred years. It's just that it wasn't that widely known. Also photography started out on a lower level than art. People considered it as a reproduction or a document, documentary, and so it took a while through the efforts of someone like Alfred Stieglitz, to convince people that the aesthetic was its own and to be admired and collected.

MOON

So if I've heard correctly, you stopped working at Stephen White Gallery because you had been convinced by your husband to open up your own gallery.

MOSS

That's right. And also I just had to get back to prints. I love print techniques. I admire them greatly. Photography was very interesting, and I still like photography very much, but I wanted to get back into the prints because I felt that I could interpret and place many wonderful pieces in some collections that were growing, that were worthy, that were understanding and supportive of the techniques. Not everybody can understand the aesthetics of prints. Some people, like my husband, love intaglio techniques of engraving and etching and mezzotint and aquatint. Some people prefer the virility of a woodcut. Some people like the fluidity of lithography, and in Los Angeles particularly, lithography was very important because of Tamarind [Lithography Workshop]. And then again, in the thirties, the use of screen printing was promoted by the Federal Arts Project, and so screen printing became a subject or a goal of many collectors. So that the aesthetics sometimes are daunting to some casual people who became collectors when they finally locked into or understood what it was that their eye was responding to.

MOON

Were you paying attention to Gemini G.E.L.?

MOSS

Well, Gemini was the first spinoff from Tamarind. Tamarind was very exciting, the goals and the realizations that were achieved, and Gemini, I didn't pay that much attention to Gemini. I mean, of course I was aware of them and I was a booster for it, too, but I didn't handle contemporary printmaking. I didn't handle Tamarind that much either, except June Wayne. June Wayne had been active in the forties and fifties before Tamarind. And I was very interested in Lynton Kistler, the lithography printer, before Tamarind, and he was active since the late twenties, early thirties. So that became very exciting for me to see those roots developing. It made me understand Steve White's fascination with the beginnings of photography back in the 1830s and forties. To be seeing something born is a very special event.

MOON

Maybe we could talk about the idea of your gallery being born. So how long did spend preparing for the founding of your gallery?

MOSS

Not enough. [laughs] As I say, I was encouraged into it by my husband, who was vacating this office, and I felt that, "Well, I'll try it in his space." So here it was waiting for me, and I simply just started off. I told various collectors who had been my friends made at Jake's gallery, I sent out little notices to everybody, I had a little mailing list of perhaps three hundred people, and I

simply said, “I’m opening my gallery, and I know what you like and I can continue to look for it. And in the meantime, here are some things that are available right now.”

MOON

So I’ve heard that perhaps one of the most difficult parts of opening up a gallery is just building up the clientele, but it seems that you had already become friends with many collectors from the bookstore.

MOSS

Yes.

MOON

Can you name some of the most lasting friendships that you’ve had with the collectors?

MOSS

The only things that are coming to my mind is New York Public Library, and that wasn’t exactly a collector who walked in the doors. Robert Duffy, may he rest in peace. I’m drawing perfect blanks in my mind right now. Perhaps at another time I’ll dig and look—I do have the records from my first years, and I could perhaps see who actually were my clients.

MOON

So you mentioned before that you had first met Lorser Feitelson and Helen Lundeberg at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge. Your friendship with the two of them, did that also inform the kind of art and artists that you were looking at?

MOSS

That I was looking at?

MOON

Mm-hmm, and that you had later chosen to show in your own gallery?

MOSS

I would say that the association with Lynton Kistler was much more influential, everyone [he printed for] everyone from Beatrice Wood and Henrietta Shore and Paul Landacre—well, Paul, he did just make something. What was your question again? Say it again.

MOON

I was just wondering how did you get to select the artists that you became interested in and started to represent in your gallery.

MOSS

Just happenstance. When I became involved with Helen Lundeberg after Lorser died, she had a core collection of minor European prints, notably Meryon and Brockhurst. Again, I’ll have to go back into my files. But then I got a collection. A dealer up in Berkeley was going out of business, so I bought a collection of Armin Hansen etchings and those were beautiful. I wish I had them again today. And things just began to cross my desk. I did a little bit of

buying, but I had no capitalization whatsoever. I had perhaps a total of \$5,000, which was ridiculous. Different things crossed my desk. People had art that they wanted to sell. Someone brought me a wonderful drawing by John Sloan, which was just extraordinary, and I was able to find a new home for it. It gave me great pleasure to be able to place good things in good collections. And it just moved along. Mr. Kistler, by this time, by '79, he wanted to close up his studio and he wanted to retire and move down to a Senior Center in Orange County, and he wanted me to buy his studio. Well, he made an offer, and I said, "You know, I don't have the money that you need." I said, "Go and reduce your inventory some other way and come back to me in a year or two." Well, he did. He came back to me about 1980 or '81, and by that time, we happened to have a friend whose brother was the chairman of a bank, and he gave me a line of credit, a \$25,000 credit line, and so I ended up buying Mr. Kistler's studio based upon that line of credit, which I paid off handily within a year or two, and that was a great base in my gallery. Many of the artists that I just now mentioned, Beatrice Wood and Henrietta Shore and Helen Lundeberg and some Edward Weston, Warren Newcombe, Alexander Patrick Fleming—there are just so many artists—I still have some of those prints. Some of them are perhaps never going to be sold, but I've sold quite a bit. It's been a base for me to work from, and it's been very important to me.

MOON

So when you first opened your gallery, you exhibited and sold prints for the first couple of years and then you expanded to show artworks of different mediums as well. What were some of the other anecdotes in terms of working with artists or events that happened in the beginning years of your gallery? For example, you talked about being offered Kistler's studio. Were there any other sort of pivotal—

MOSS

Well, a great pivot was Helen Lundeberg, who wanted me to help her organize and sell her paintings and those of her husband, her deceased husband, Lorser Feitelson.

MOON

Who passed away in nineteen-seventy—

MOSS

Seventy-eight. And so that was a great, great event for me. Through Lorser's work, I met people that he had influenced in his teachings at the Art Center College. And also in focusing on his history, a very important event was an early exhibition of Four Abstract Classicists, and so John McLaughlin's work came to my attention. I met Karl Benjamin, I met Fred Hammersley, and I had an early show of their work. On a different note, I met Peter Krasnow. He had shown at the Hebrew Union College down at USC, and I met him, knew him

for a couple of years before he died and was fascinated by his work, still am. But I just began to meet people. People would walk in. Jules Engel, when I first opened my doors—maybe not when I first; maybe in early eighties—he walked in and asked if I would like to sell some of his paintings.

MOON

Had you had a friend in common?

MOSS

For Jules Engel?

MOON

Yeah.

MOSS

No, no, we had no friend in common. I don't remember. It's just that he used to come in regularly. He would visit very regularly, along with Hans Burckhardt would visit regularly. And Jules, I was intrigued by Jules because of his work for Fantasia and his drawings. It wasn't until I started to offer his drawings for Fantasia that he said, casually, "I also have some paintings from the forties you might like to see." Thereupon he brought in the first of those 1940s abstractions, mid-1940s, and of course they were wonderful, and one by one he would bring them in. As I would sell one, he would bring in another, and so it went on for about seven or eight different paintings. So I had a great friendship with Jules and I showed many of his works from his subsequent days of animation industry for UPA and Format Films and Focus Films and all the way through his paintings of the sixties into his work at Art Center College in 1970, where he founded the Department of Experimental Abstract Animation on Film. So we were friends until he died.

MOON

I think it was actually CalArts where he founded—

MOSS

Did I say CalArts?

MOON

I thought you said Art Center, but—

MOSS

Oh, no. No, Art Center was not Jules. Art Center was—

MOON

That was Feitelson.

MOSS

— Feitelson, yeah. No, Jules had not worked at a studio for about a decade. He had been traveling in Europe and painting. And when CalArts was formed from Chouinard Institute by Disney as a farm team to support the animation for his Disney World, Jules was asked to develop this department, which became internationally known.

MOON

And were you visiting artists' studios?

MOSS

No, I was not visiting artists' studios. I was not interested in contemporary arts. I was focusing on the works of the thirties and forties and fifties, largely based upon the artists that I met through the Kistler collection. But I, early on, recognized my limits with regards to funding, and to promote a contemporary artist is taking on a great responsibility. Instead of that, I took on the responsibility of estates, of collections that had been created or collected by people of the twenties, thirties, forties, fifties, who needed an arena. They were much more patient and much more appreciative and didn't require money to feed themselves with immediately. A contemporary artist has to eat, and the pressure of caring for a contemporary artist implies a great financial responsibility, and I realized I couldn't handle that. So as much as I admire a lot of contemporary art, I put on blinders. I think that's what really saved me, because I could not maintain another kind of a life. I was called upon to appraise, I mean for the artist. The artist would come in and say, "Please, just look at my work and tell me whether I have any aesthetic basis, or what's good about it or what's bad about it." And as much as I tried not to do that, I found myself doing that in some measure.

MOON

And who were some of the estates that you were dealing with?

MOSS

Oskar Fischinger, Lorser Feitelson.

MOON

And Gordon Wagner, or did that come later?

MOSS

Gordon Wagner came right after he died, so that was already into the eighties. I had talked with him, but we didn't get together, and then he died, and so it was one of my regrets, because he was really an interesting man. And [Peter] Krasnow. This is Krasnow also. Oh, I also had the good fortune to meet Clinton Adams. Clinton Adams had been one of the early history of Tamarind, and so he and I had a great friendship, and I did represent him for a while in Los Angeles until he died, and I have always had his work in the gallery since. And Rico Lebrun, I never met him, but he's part of Los Angeles history to be supported. Elise Seeds, an early Abstractionist and Surrealist in Los Angeles in the thirties. Leonard Edmondson, he also walked in the door, and we struck up a friendship, and I looked back at his work in the fifties and forties and I said, "I would love to show your work." He didn't die until—I think it was 2002. I never met Stanton MacDonald-Wright, but I knew his reputation and I know his position in history. I'm interested in the history of Los Angeles, of the art

history of Los Angeles. I became very, very agitated when I did research about women, when I was doing research at the Docent Council, when I realized that the art history of the United States had excluded, overlooked, or denigrated women, and that they didn't cross the Hudson River to investigate what went on beyond Manhattan. And so I said, "This is what I want to do," and I focused upon California here and—not exactly now, but I met many wonderful artists that way. Dorr Bothwell is another one who walked in the door.

MOON

What about Ynez Johnston?

MOSS

Ynez Johnston. Ynez and Leonard Edmondson came in together, and through them, I met Emerson Woelffer. The three of them were the closest of friends. And then there was David Levine, David P. Levine, to distinguish him from David Levine on the East Coast. But David walked in sometime in the early nineties, I think it was, and asked if I would show his work, and I said, "I'm sorry. I don't show contemporary work." He says, "Well, I do have work from the forties and thirties." I said, "Yes, that I would like to see." And thereupon, he brought in a wonderful collection of paintings done in the middle of the Depression in Los Angeles, wonderful, wonderful paintings, and I had a great pleasure in placing his works well, and I still have some of his works here from the estate.

MOON

What about Betye Saar?

MOSS

Betye Saar and I got together through her prints, and we just like each other. We're the same age. Maybe she's six months older than I am. There's an article in today's paper. Did you see it?

MOON

Oh, I haven't yet.

MOSS

She's been given yet another award from the MacDowell Colony.

MOON

Oh, that's wonderful.

MOSS

Yes. So she is very definitely part of the art of Los Angeles, of the United States, of the world, and she also represented a segment of the black community that I was very, very much interested in. I also had, by this time—oh, by the early eighties, had met Elizabeth Catlett, and we had a nice friendship, and we visited her down in Mexico, Cuernavaca. I had by this time also become interested in the early eighties in Latin artists, Latin American

artists, a lot through Elizabeth Catlett and Charles White, whose work I had met at the Heritage Gallery with Ben Horowitz.

MOON

The 1970s in Los Angeles, in terms of contemporary art, was one of the first starting points for the Feminist Art Movement. Do you have any reaction to that, or do you identify with the term “feminist”?

MOSS

I did not. I did not. I felt that I didn't like the idea of them being separate. In effect, what I was doing is echoing Helen Lundeberg. Helen did not like to be called a woman artist. Helen did not want to support women's movements. She said, “I am an artist. I'm an American artist,” and she did not want to be designated a woman artist. And so the Feminist Movement, I observed it, but I was not involved at all.

MOON

Okay. Well, I think that might be good for today.

MOSS

Good.

MOON

We'll continue. [End of April 7, 2014 interview]

### **1.3. Session Three (April 28, 2014)**

MOON

This is the third session with Tobey Moss, and the date is April 28, 2014. So the last time we were talking, we started to talk about the founding of your gallery, and you mentioned that one pivotal moment happened when a few years after you had opened your gallery, you were contacted by Lynton Kistler, who had asked if you were interested in purchasing his collection, what was in his studio. And you also mentioned that another pivotal moment happened through your friendship with Helen Lundeberg. I wondered if you could talk about the history of your friendship with Mrs. Lundeberg and also your work for the Feitelson Arts Foundation.

MOSS

Well, there was no foundation until Helen died. Well, wait a second now. I can't remember now. Forget that. Helen and I met when she and Lorser would trudge up the stairs to the art section of Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, Rare Books and Graphic Arts, and I was up in the loft in the Graphic Arts Department, and we struck up a friendship. I really admired their work, and actually I bought a print of Lorser's and a painting of Helen's that had been in a show I had seen, and I waited a year until I finally said, “I have to have this,” and I paid it off. They very kindly let me pay it off. When Lorser died in 1978, Helen was used to

being more directed than directing, and so things were fallow for a short while until another dealer stepped in and helped her bring some of their collection of prints and drawings to market and began to sell some of the work by other artists from their collection. But about 1980, Helen contacted me and asked if I would come over and talk with her and see what she has, and we would see whether there was a future together. I came over and she took me next door and showed me two storerooms, one of Lorser's paintings and one of Helen's paintings, and I was rather taken aback. I did not realize the depth of their work. And also she had many prints like the prints I had been selling at Zeitlin & Ver Brugge, and so she wanted me to bring those to market. I agreed to help her. I took over the prints and we successfully sold them, and the paintings, we began to organize them, and I had my first show about—I think it was 1982. I can't remember now. But I actively began selling their paintings in my gallery at that time. Lorser's work consisted of paintings, drawings particularly, and a few prints. Helen's work, there were many prints and many paintings and some drawings also, watercolors, studies. We enjoyed our relationship. She came to sort of depend upon me, and I did help her in many instances with a little bit of bookkeeping, and I had to also move her. She and Lorser had lived in this storefront on Third Street for a number of years, but the owner died and the building was sold, and they were evicted. So I had to move her, which I did, to Park La Brea, very nearby, and I had to move two storerooms of art. That was formidable, but we did find a storefront on Fairfax Avenue near Third Street very close to Park La Brea. She naturally wanted to be nearby, and we had it prepared, outfitted with proper bins, storage bins, cupboards, and we transferred all the art in there, her work and his work, separately but together.

MOON

Were the works in good condition?

MOSS

The works were very good condition. They were salable, most of them. Some things were a little bit dusty, but there was nothing that was damaged that I can recall. We had an exhibition called *Between the Olympics*. We had the Los Angeles Olympics here in 1984, I think it was, and the previous one had been 1934, and so I had art of Los Angeles between the '34 and the '84 dates, and it included Helen's work and Lorser's work and the work of artists that they associated with, like John McLaughlin and Peter Krasnow and Nick Brigante and others. It was a very wonderful show, I think. But we had from that point on a regular pattern of showing Lorser's and Helen's works specifically. In 1988, I decided that I was treading on hallowed ground because Helen was aging, and I was worried about losing valuable insight into her history. There was an occasion that came up, and that was that she had done a mural for the Federal Art Project in 1941 that was installed in Inglewood, California, on

Florence Avenue. It was the longest mural project done in the country for the Federal Art Projects; it was 241 feet. And an errant driver smashed into it with his car. In viewing the wall, she was not very concerned about it, but she remarked that it was a special event for the Federal Art Project and for her. It was made of petrachrome stones, natural stones of natural color, and she used that throughout. In other words, it wasn't a painted one. It wasn't a prepared tile. It was actual stones that were of natural colors, and she made this History of Transportation mural. So I decided that I had to record the wall and her before any more time elapsed. So I talked to one of her collectors, one of the collectors that had acquired her work and were very passionately attentive to her, and he was a director, and I proposed that he be the director on a project of Helen Lundeberg: American Painter, and we did it.

MOON

And who was the director?

MOSS

Tom Boles. He assembled a crew, a producer, makeup for Helen, camera, all professional people. They jumped aboard this project, because you have to realize we didn't have any money, I didn't have any money, and I did the best I could, but we ended up spending about \$10,000, which I didn't really have. But we ended up doing that because we just had, you know, the editing and the film alone, and the time—we had to pay the cameraman something and the producer, and we had to pay everybody, except Tom and I didn't get paid.  
[laughs]

MOON

And both of you had funded this project?

MOSS

No, he didn't fund it; I funded it. The gallery funded it, or I funded it. Over the course of a year, we completed a fifty-two-minute film, edited for fifty-two minutes for possible appeal to a television audience, a television time slot. Well, that proved to be impossible. Nobody wanted it. And I, in reviewing it, realized that it really was an amateur project. We did not have the polish that is necessary for a real biographical art production. So in other words, it had to be reedited. The material was great. We recorded paintings, we recorded anecdotes, we recorded Helen walking down the wall, we recorded the damaged wall. It actually became a basis for the eventual, ten years later, restoration of the wall, because the General Services Administration heard about this project, and they claimed the wall, and the City of Inglewood claimed the wall, and the GSA wanted to take it over. The City of Inglewood wanted to restore it and move it to across the street a park from their City Hall. So with correspondence back and forth, I brought reports to the GSA, General Services Administration, of the cost of conservation, which turned out

to be well over \$100,000, and at that point, the GSA said, “We’re willing to let Inglewood have it.” They wouldn’t take it over for financial reasons. So, thereupon, we got busy, and Tom and I and the City of Inglewood, we employed every person we could find who had any influence, and we achieved full funding with a collaboration between the state, the county, and the city; the State of California, the County of Los Angeles, and the City of Inglewood, and some private money, and we got it funded. It was restored with the Mural Conservancy over in Inglewood, I think it was, Inglewood, and it was installed to great fanfare, and I’m happy to say it’s admired and used by the schools and the city. It’s a history of transportation of California, and goes everywhere from the Indian travois to airplane in 1941. The airplane was quite a young airplane industry, transportation. So that was a very notable event. When Helen died in 1998, ‘99—oh, and also in the meantime, the foundation had been formed when Lorser died, soon after Lorser died, now that I remember it, and we formed a board, and I got one of the wonderful collectors, Murray Gribin, to come as a board member, and Henry Hopkins, a curator and director, museum director, he was a professor at UCLA at the time and he came on, and Josine Ianco-Starrels, also a curator. In fact, she introduced me to Lorser and Helen’s work because of an exhibition that she put on for Bart Lytton. So we put together a board, and then when Helen died—oh, yes, and Wendy Van Haerlem was also on the board, I think, and this board functioned, and the attorney was Allan Cutrow and his law office. In that first decade, I more or less did some overseeing of Helen and her bookkeeping arrangements and her functioning, and every time I sold a painting, it was joyously received. I had the feeling that I was supporting her. Well, it turned out, as time went by, that I was supporting her with cash, but that she also had some money in certificates of deposit and those things that were coming due and had to be turned over, and she didn’t know what to do, and I became involved. At any rate, I began to help transferring the monies for her. At the same time I began to examine her bills and find that the insurance company, Chubb, I think it was, was overcharging compared with what I had at the gallery, where I had a quarter of a million dollars worth of insurance. She had less insurance than that for very much less, maybe—I don’t know how much, but it was much less, and she was paying twice as much. So I transferred the insurance company to Huntington T. Block. Then she was becoming a little bit senile, and she started to cancel bills, she wouldn’t pay bills, so that the telephone company cut off the alarm system and the rent for the space that we had on Fairfax Avenue for storage. Well, you could not have that uninsured. It had to be secured and covered by insurance. So I had to go and reinstall that. Then I began to look at her electric bill and saw astronomical figures, and here she was just a single woman living in a very modest storefront, compared with my house household, which was a much

bigger house and the two of us. I called the power company, and they checked it out and found that her electric bill was being tapped by a fortune teller two stores down, and they had rigged up the wiring into her wiring box. So we got that cleaned up. These are just some of the typical things I found myself doing in the nineties. Then she died. All this time we were selling works of Lorser's and Helen's very successfully, I think, but when Helen died, the board by that time had changed, because Murry Gribin, I think by this time had died, and Josine had moved up to Oregon and could not serve, and Wendy Van Haerlem more or less took over the board. Tom Boles was on the board too. I got Tom Boles to serve on the board, the foundation board. Then Henry Hopkins died, so by attrition, it was Wendy Van Haerlem and Tom Boles running everything. Wendy decided that I wasn't making best use of the estate and that I should have been more aggressive, and so she decided that I no longer could represent them, and took the estate to another gallery and she changed the attorney to her own attorney, and that's where it stood then. So I more or less have been distanced from Helen's work and Lorser's work since the beginning of the millennium, since 2000. By this time, I had already established my gallery with a focus on the art and artists of California, 1930 to 1980 or '90, purposely built around Helen and Lorser, but, of course, all the other artists, the wonderful artists of that period as well, people that had known Helen and Lorser, people that were active in the scene and were part of the creative pattern of creative fabric in California, in Southern California particularly. So I felt that it was perhaps a good move for Helen and Lorser, because the new gallery had greater resources than I have, and they did do some highly effective promotion, and I assume that they have been successful. Oh, I forgot to mention one thing, that in the eighties or early nineties, we wanted to do a cataloging of all the paintings, and so I began to photograph them and to record them. Donna Stein, a curator, did not have a position at the time, and I asked her if she would help me create such a catalog. Well, she was, of course, a professional at this, but it required funding, it required her time, and it required materials for correspondence and for photographing, and a lot of things. We raised \$20,000 from a foundation that supports such historical records.

MOON

For American art or—

MOSS

For American artists. I believe it might even have been just for women artists. And they provided \$20,000, and that was enough to launch. She had to be very careful about travel, so she limited her travel to California, but was in correspondence with collectors and museums around the country. When the foundation transferred the estate to the other gallery, they dismissed her, left the catalogue raisonné in limbo, I mean just stopped it, and took over the project in

another direction. It's still ongoing now. But that's enough about Helen and Lorser. There really isn't anything more to say.

MOON

But the project that was never completed, that was supposed to be a catalogue raisonné for both Helen and Lorser or just Helen?

MOSS

Helen and Lorser. No, we really started with Helen. We never got to Lorser. I was photographing it and listing it all. You had the estate, because, after all, there was an estate list made when Lorser died. So I was recording them all visually, but Donna Stein focused upon Helen Lundeberg.

MOON

And so as far as you know, this project was perhaps not continued by the foundation?

MOSS

Well, it was continued. Now they've been working on it. These last two years, they've been actively seeking information about different paintings that I had sold and tracing them. I want to get everybody's painting into the catalog raisonné, so I've been supporting that effort.

MOON

And then over time, let's say from the eighties to the nineties, were there more institutional collectors that were interested in acquiring works by Lundeberg and Feitelson?

MOSS

Yes, particularly Helen Lundeberg. Her works and his works were actually in collection at the National Museum of American Art in Washington before Lorser died, so that started already, but there are many museums around the country that have works by both of these artists.

MOON

I noticed in some of the paperwork that's in UCLA's archive that are about your work for the Feitelson Arts Foundation, that you had suggested some donations of Lundeberg's and Feitelson's paintings to be made to museums. Can you talk about, from your perspective, what is important for a gallerist in terms of helping to create historical significance for an artist that he or she believes in.

MOSS

Well, it's very important to get the art out of the storage bin, and there was such a vast collection in those two storage areas, so that I realized that it was not going to be sold in Helen's lifetime, and it was important for it to be seen. In my little gallery, I was very—I'm a small gallery. I had limited impact. I'm rather naïve, and I did not build up a network across the country, which I soon found would have been fruitless because of the old-boy network. So I, of

course, wanted to sell things, but there are some museums that would never have been able to buy. We did make a couple of donations, but really we sold a lot of things. We did sell a lot of things. The Museum of Art in Phoenix, Arizona, and—well, there are many places. I'm sure that's in the records also. I will say something, and that is that I did not help Helen for money. I did not bill her for my time. I did not take advantage of a lot of opportunities that I realize other dealers might have. Helen and I were friends. I'm interested in history. I always have been in my gallery. That's one of the reasons my gallery is not big. It's a small gallery. My focus is on the history. I wanted to correct the history books, because when I started, the history books really were not covering California adequately. They were not covering the period of the thirties on. The thirties was very important because of the flood of émigrés not only from Europe, but from the East Coast, artists who had gotten fed up with the incestuous arrangements in New York and the artists from Europe who were fleeing the conflagration, the Hitler move. And so the thirties in California, Los Angeles particularly, because of the studios, the movie studios, it was a very fertile place, a very exciting and creative center. This was not recognized by the history books until well into the seventies and maybe even the eighties, the same way that women artists were not recognized in proportion to their contributions. So this became more or less me running at windmills. So the story with Helen and Lorser is over for me. I did what I could when I could do it, when Helen was there and we became friends and we enjoyed each other and we helped each other, and I had commissions from the paintings that we sold. And so, all in all, it was a very wonderful period, but it's over. I still have some of Helen's works in the gallery that sometimes they come to me from some other collections, some I bought directly from her years earlier. This one by Lorser, I bought that at auction. So over the course of years, I've had people consign works to me, I've bought some things at auction, and that's why I'm still vitally interested in them. They are really a core of this period that I choose to focus upon. And in their studios, many of these people came through. They knew Oskar Fischinger. Peter Krasnow used to come through their place. Ben Berlin used to flop on their living room floor when he was drunk or under the influence. But they knew all these artists, and they all respected each other highly. So for me, it was an exciting opening. It opened my eyes and really stimulated me to pursue it further, and I'm still excited about it.

MOON

And in terms of, let's say, the trajectory or the biography of the life of your gallery, were there any other pivotal moments? Was business steady throughout the years?

MOSS

No, there were dips according to the economy. This last four or five years were not—maybe not four or five, maybe two or three, were really very bad, and many galleries closed. I survived, and I'll tell you why I survived this time and why I survived a couple of other dips in the economy. The economy was affected directly by the studios. Many of my clients were affiliated with the studios: the writers, cameramen, and students. Students were thriving on the work of the period. Lorser actually had designated some study drawings, some classroom drawings for students, and we would sell them for \$150 instead of \$450, but this is the way the studio was—I mean the gallery—had great activity, but with these dips in the economy, the studios never really came back. There was a strike followed by another strike, and the workers in this industry could not pay their rent, and they moved away from Southern California, and the writers were hard put to have money for art if they were paying rent and a roof for their homes. So, yes, we have been affected a couple of times over these last thirty-five years, but each time I had a level that always maintained, and that is the passionate print collector. I told you that I joined the Docent Council at the L.A. County, attached to the prints and drawings department. I have been excited and interested and delved into prints and techniques from that point on, and I'm considered rather knowledgeable on the subject, so that the print collector, a modest print collector who would buy a \$250 print or a \$650 print, maybe even a \$900 print, these were steady in spite of economic downturns. This was a cushion for my gallery, and my gallery has always been able to maintain and to survive because of that interest in works on paper.

MOON

They're also more affordably priced.

MOSS

Yes, they're definitely—they're part of editions, and so it's not uncommon—I have pieces here that are \$100, too, not many, but there are some, and that's really made the difference in my survival.

MOON

And was there a heyday? Was there a period where business, just in general, seemed to be going really well?

MOSS

Well, that was in the eighties when we were doing the film, and Helen—we really had a good collaboration, and she would come to openings, and we were more or less personally promoting. But, see, at the same time, I did not develop connections with a gallery in New York or a gallery in Cincinnati or Dallas. Those avenues were not open to me, and, frankly, I was too naïve. I really didn't come in to work with art as a business; I came to be a docent at the L.A. County, and the rest of it just flowed as along with the river. So as a businesswoman, I'm not much of a businesswoman, but I've survived because

of what I offer. Once I place a piece of art with a client, they know they can trust me, so that if I call them up or write to them—before email—and say, “I have a piece that’s just come in and I really think I’d like you to consider it,” and they do, and very often it’s absolutely perfect for them. So this kind of relationship with my clients has allowed me to sustain the gallery.

MOON

Do you think that the type of collector nowadays has changed? What I mean by that is one thing that you read about in the news quite often, especially in the past, I don’t know, at least five years, are people who want to invest in art and flip it or turn it around and sell it at auction.

MOSS

Those people are not welcome here. If somebody comes in and says, “I want a good investment,” I would say, “Go to the stock market.” But I don’t sell investment art. I have a sign on my door over in the other room there. It says “You have to live with the art.” So people who just take art to stick it under the bed or into a storage unit until, quote, “the market is ready for it,” they’re not welcome here. I don’t encourage that. I have short patience.

MOON

It also seems that the idea of learning or pedagogy is important. Before you mentioned that you have this series, “Let’s Look at Prints.” Can you talk about that?

MOSS

Well, my clients began to ask me about things like that, that perhaps I was going to be offering guidance, and so I decided to do that. I’ve done it for a couple of years. I haven’t done it recently. It’s called “Let’s Look at Prints,” “Let’s Really Look at Prints,” “Let’s [really] LOOK at Prints.” So I would split it up into three sections, and each section was about two hours. It was in the gallery of an evening, like a Monday evening, seven to nine, and we would gather around. I would select some prints that focused upon a particular medium and talk about woodcuts today, or we would talk about intaglio, which is covering etchings and engravings and mezzotints and drypoints, etc. Or we would have one on screenprints and monoprints, so that—and I almost forgot. We must have had a fourth one, because lithographs took a whole session, so that we had these how-to, not just to—well, how to appreciate a print technique. There are so many nuances and so many points to see, including the kind of paper that is being used and the nitty-gritty concerned with documentation and conservation, a big point to be made. So we had very successful programs. I think I did it at least two years in the summer, but I’m not sure whether I did a third one or not.

MOON

And the people who came up to participate in these sessions, they were primarily collectors?

MOSS

That's a good question, but I don't know how to answer it. A lot of them were collectors. A lot of them were simply seeking information and wanting to learn more—I welcomed that as well—and a lot of them were curious. I advertised it to my client base, in other words, the addresses that I had already, but word must have gotten around, because I had a lot of people I did not know who signed in also.

MOON

Do you think that this kind of education is important to creating a good collector?

MOSS

I think it's basic. A good collector wants to learn everything about the art. It's not just a collector of names, but a particular technique. I mean, some people are passionate over intaglios. They just love any kind of engraving or etching or aquatint, and that's their collection. Some people collect an artist, across the board. An artist like Ynez Johnston was really an etcher, but she explored lithography very successfully and she did some relief prints. Same way with Leonard Edmondson. Etching was his strongest medium. He loved it. He wrote a book on it. But he also explored with a woodcut once or twice and did a couple of lithographies with Lynton Kistler, because Lynton Kistler persuaded him to sit down and try it. So people took the class for different reasons. I was very pleased to see all, and they were all well attended. I limited it to, I think, twenty-two, because that's all the number of chairs that I could fit in here, and then I would have pre-pulled examples for them to examine that night.

MOON

Examine by hand?

MOSS

Sure. You have to get right up to a print, really appreciate it. You can't see it through glass or plastic.

MOON

To examine all of the surface texture and the materiality.

MOSS

Oh, everything about it, yeah. I mean, the use of papers, there are so many different kinds of papers to use. You can take one plate and print it on three different papers, and it's three different prints. Like Werner Drewes, he would print a woodcut, so he would print about an edition of forty. Well, he would print probably twenty-two of them and say, "I think I want to change one of the colors." So instead of having oranges and yellows, he would have purples and

blues for another ten, but still within the edition of forty. So artists have license to do whatever they want in an edition.

MOON

And when did you start to notice a change in terms of a larger recognition of the history of California and Southern California art?

MOSS

I would say at least by 2000, at least by 2000, but it was maybe before that. But the key point was, is that dealers around the country began to vie for the artists that I had been presenting. Actually, I think it was in 2000, because I no longer had, for example, Feitelson and Lundeborg. It was at that time that they began to want more Helen Lundeborg and Lorser Feitelson, and I wasn't the key person anymore.

MOON

Oh, so the demand for these artists by other dealers—

MOSS

Exactly.

MOON

—was what sort of cued you to this change.

MOSS

That's right, because those dealers, in turn, stimulated their collectors to examine the artists. I mean, I can sell to a collector and that means one painting on one wall. But if I place some paintings with a dealer, the dealer—it's just like Facebook. [Moon laughs.] Exactly. See? Because they have their clients, and their clients begin to understand the aesthetics.

MOON

I see.

MOSS

So that was a key point. The other point, of course, was that by the 1980s, when the books began to be published on American art today, lo and behold, California was mentioned, and women began to be more prolifically present. So I'd say by the early eighties, there were gradual changes taking place, maybe by the late eighties.

MOON

So I notice in, for example, the acknowledgements of Turning the Tide, that you were thanked for your help in terms of the creation of that exhibition. Were there other exhibitions that you were—

MOSS

I helped with many exhibitions. Sometimes I'm credited and sometimes I'm not. But I could provide art and illustrations. I could provide a channel to a collector who had collected an artist that would be appropriate for that show. I could provide anecdotal material for different artists that I had known. Yes, I'm

a source, and different authors have used me, just as museums nowadays they have their little interns call me and ask me to fill in their files, and sometimes I do, and sometimes I say, "Please go to the Internet."

MOON

And so there seems to be this coincidence of a rise in exhibitions and more historical context and, let's say, visibility for California art, especially California Modernism, as well as a rise in the art market or the rise in prices for them.

MOSS

The rise in art market for those specific artists, you mean?

MOON

Yeah.

MOSS

Yes, but that was still affected by the general economy of the country, you know. Just look at the economy of the last thirty-five years and you can see the ebb and flow. What's interesting is that sometimes when the stock market has been very low, that's when the art market would rise, because investors felt that they'd better put their money someplace, and they couldn't put into the stock market, and then they would buy art. That's what's happening today. These million-dollar prices, the dollars that are being paid for those pieces, I don't know where the source of all that money is coming from.

MOON

Right. Because there's this idea that a good work of art won't depreciate over time, but gradually appreciate.

MOSS

Well, it's safer for the value of the money than some stocks. It's safer than putting it under the bed or in a bank account for .08 percent interest. But as I said before, I don't sell investments. [laughs]

MOON

Does that mean that you have to have some sort of interpersonal connection with the person you're selling an artwork to?

MOSS

Very often. Very often. But sometimes people come from out of the blue, like one collector whom I did not know three months ago just bought a beautiful painting, and he came to me purely because on my website I listed artists that he was interested in. So the Web has opened up a whole new arena. It's a whole new exposure, so that I've spent time building a website that has proven to be a very valuable tool for my gallery.

MOON

Around when did you launch a website? Was that in the nineties, 2000s?

MOSS

No, before 2000. Perhaps the end of the nineties or into the nineties. When did the computer—I don't really know.

MOON

Well, let's say in the nineties, then.

MOSS

Yeah.

MOON

Before the 2000s. Did that also mean that your client base became more international, not as local?

MOSS

Oh, yes. My client base is international. I have clients in Australia and Hong Kong, England. I'm trying to think of who I sold to lately. Mexico, Canada. I have contacts in Italy, France, Germany. So, yes, I am considered an international site.

MOON

And the people who purchase these works, do they come to look at the work in person before making the final decision?

MOSS

No. The people in England have never—we've never met, but they've bought a number of pieces from me. We just simply use Federal Express. The first piece I sent to them they were so delighted with, that the second piece was soon followed, etc. And the person from Hong Kong and the person from Australia, they have visited the gallery. Canada, I've never met them. Mexico, I haven't really met them face-to-face, no. So it's a different world with the Internet.

MOON

Yeah, mediation through these electronic images. Just imagining even when I look at a photograph or an image of an artwork, a jpeg on the website, and then if I'm lucky, I see the artwork in person, I think, "Wow. That's not quite what I expected."

MOSS

Yes. I stress that the image on the Web, if you like that, you will love the true—the one in the flesh, and that's why I encourage sending things on approval for people to examine. I don't think I've ever received a return piece.

MOON

Oh, so there's a period in which someone could potentially return a work.

MOSS

Of course. Anything I send out, if they return it within a month and, you know, in good condition. In fact, I think there's one client here, whose name I will not mention, who, I think, when he has a party, he takes things out on approval to decorate his home, and, lo and behold, two weeks later, comes back and his party is over. But he's done this twice now before it got through my thick skull.

And he's right here in California. I mean, he came here, saw the work, wanted to see it on his wall, he said, in situ.

MOON

He should look into the Rental Gallery at LACMA.

MOSS

Of course. You know, that's the place I bought my second piece of art.

MOON

Yeah, you mentioned that, actually, in one of the previous interviews. I'm thinking of, for example, two fairly recent exhibitions on Los Angeles art. So, for example, Sunshine & Noir, which happened in the late nineties, it came here in 1998, as well as, more recently, Birth of an Art Capital, and both of those—

MOSS

Which one was that?

MOON

That's the one that was organized by the Pompidou.

MOSS

Oh, the Pompidou. Was that the name of it?

MOON

Yeah, Birth of an Art Capital.

MOSS

We went to that one, yeah.

MOON

Oh, in France?

MOSS

Yes.

MOON

Oh, wow. And both of those exhibitions don't include these artists.

MOSS

Well, the Louisiana show, the Sunshine & Noir, was really the cutting-edge, much later. None of them went to this period. The Pompidou went a little bit earlier.

MOON

It did go earlier, yeah.

MOSS

Yes, yes. So the Sunshine & Noir, I was so excited about that because it indicated to the eastern seaboard that Europe was jumping over them and coming west and recognized the fertile ground here.

MOON

Did you think that that was a little bit ironic, that both of these shows were Europeans?

MOSS

Of course. It rubbed their noses. [laughter]

MOON

Are there other art dealers with whom you consider close peers and colleagues, and would you talk about these survey shows with them? Someone who's also close by is Jack Rutberg, for example. Are you good friends with him? Would you talk about how the Europeans were organizing Southern California shows and the irony of that?

MOSS

Well, Jack is much more—he's part of an old-boy network, and he's much more sophisticated than I. He also was fortunate to have great backing from a marvelous artist, a lovely man who was one of my friends, too, Hans Burckhardt. And with Hans' encouragement, Jack has been very fortunate in being able to maintain a level that is really far superior to mine. He has a big gallery and he has many contacts all around the country and in Europe, and he does do international artists as well. He's not as focused as I, but he does overlap with a lot of the artists that I—in fact, I set him up with Claire Falkenstein originally, and I'm trying to think of who else. Maybe Oskar Fischinger as well. I can't remember now. But, yes, he's a very active person with much wider interests and contacts.

MOON

Are there any other gallerists that you feel are within your, let's say with a similar kind of commitment in terms of history?

MOSS

Well, you know, they were earlier than I. Somebody like Herb Palmer or Frank Perls. David Stuart and Esther Robles were more contemporary. There were other dealers around, but I came on the scene rather late. You have to understand that all of those galleries and gallerists started when they were in their twenties and thirties, and some of them were gone by the time I opened up. I didn't start my gallery till I was fifty years old. I was already at a different level than they. I was more mature in many ways, but I was also very naïve in so many ways, because I really wasn't grounded in the business. If you're a twenty-five-year-old and you've been working your tail off, by the time you're fifty years old, you are very wise and you've built many contacts within and without the business community. I'm rather independent. I have more relationships with print dealers, like Roger Genser here in Los Angeles or Veronica Miller of the Egenolf Gallery here in Los Angeles, or Daniel Lienau up in Santa Rosa, California, or Susan Teller in New York. We're more collegial. But when it comes to the history of California, I was alone for a while, so there was a greater collegiality between the print dealers than in the painters around the country, because I'm narrow. You see, if I were to develop

a collegial relationship with a dealer in Dallas, Texas, he would want me to give him some of my art, my California art, but I don't want his Texas art. I'm narrow. I focus upon California. I won't accept any consignments unless they are within my purview. It's different with some prints. If somebody brings a fine Picasso in, I will accept it, or a beautiful Dürer or a Rembrandt, I know who to place it with, but when it comes to paintings and estates, no.

MOON

So when you opened up your gallery, you were talking about there was a kind of changing of the guard. Was there anyone else who was working at the time? Let's say, for example, this neighborhood, which galleries were around?

MOSS

There was nobody around. When I opened up my gallery, I was the only gallery within—I don't know. I was alone, and then a couple of galleries opened and closed on La Brea. Oh, there was one building, 170 South La Brea, that had a cluster of galleries in there. That was very nice, but that also faded over time. Today I'm surrounded. I have dealers to the east of me, dealers to the west, to the north, the south, and I'm rather still in my little place in the middle.

MOON

It seems that just the sheer number of galleries in the city, period, really skyrocketed in, what, would you say the late nineties?

MOSS

Well, they've been—no. I would say even in the eighties. I'm not sure. When did say Bergamot Station started?

MOON

Oh, it was definitely open—ooh. It might have been the nineties, no? Was it earlier?

MOSS

Well, the Bergamot Station was a great magnet, but before Bergamot Station, there were a cluster of galleries out in Santa Monica on Colorado Avenue, and today there are galleries from Venice to Bergamot to Culver City to La Brea—

MOON

To Chinatown even.

MOSS

To Chinatown. That's right. So you see, it's quite—and also galleries are just opening up over on Santa Monica Boulevard and Highland in Hollywood, the heart of Hollywood. Now, that hasn't happened before. It's just happened within this last two years. So we're getting to be like New York with the Madison and Chelsea and Soho and points in between.

MOON

And do you think that the collector base in Los Angeles has also increased in accordance with the number of galleries?

MOSS

I'm a poor one to ask, because California is so bound up with the traffic and there are some people who will not come east of La Cienega. They just don't come east of La Cienega, and they're not my clients, but people from London are. Los Angeles is a very peculiar market. Not only that, but a lot of the collectors in Los Angeles don't even patronize California galleries. They prefer to go to foreign climes or to the East Coast.

MOON

Yeah, I've read many accounts of collectors going to a New York gallery in order to purchase a work even if it's work by an L.A. artist. This can happen.

MOSS

No determining.

MOON

At one point you mentioned before that you had—what was your involvement with PST at all? Did you help?

MOSS

PST?

MOON

Yeah.

MOSS

I wasn't really involved except that I was contacted by the Getty, broadly, and when I heard that Andrew Perchuk had decided to do 1950 to 1980, I became rather upset because I knew that '50 was an artificial period, and that it should have been the thirties, but at least, at the least, it should have been at the close of World War II, 1945. And so that's when I contacted him and directly lobbied for him to reexamine the period, and that's when he—that was my input to PST, to 1945 to 1980.

MOSS

Yeah, it seems like if you don't include the 1930s, there's also a whole scene that is not covered.

MOSS

Mm-hmm. But '45, that was the important cutoff—I mean, the beginning when the art, because during the war, everything stopped. California was on full support for the war effort. Lynton Kistler closed his studio. Everybody closed their studios and went to work in making films. That was very active, making films, very important, as well as going to work on a factory. Federal Arts Project closed. So 1945, everything was geared up again.

MOON

And what did you think of Pacific Standard Time? Do you think that there were particularly successful exhibitions in terms of representing Southern California art?

MOSS

It was limited. It was not what I would have curated, but I wasn't the curator, right? It was limited, but as a first effort, I am overjoyed with it. It received nationwide attention. It toured in Europe. What more could anybody want for a first effort? It was time. And the Getty did a very important project because they not only put on an exhibition, but they seeded exhibitions from San Diego to Santa Barbara to Palm Springs to Venice. I mean, it just was throughout Southern California.

MOON

One of the most remarkable things about that endeavor was the relationships and the multiple sites that were a part of this project.

MOSS

That was so exciting, yes. People made it their business to go and visit all the sites. That was very, very wonderful. How could you fault that?

MOON

Yeah, just to give more visibility to the importance of, like, the Laguna Art Museum, for example, or the Orange County Museum of Art.

MOSS

Every museum was brought into it. Norton Simon, Santa Barbara, Palm Springs. San Diego was magnificent. Orange County and Los Angeles, a couple of different places in Los Angeles. The PMCA [Pasadena Museum of California Art], just a lot of them, you know.

MOON

And then in terms of it being limited in some ways, for you that would be in terms of its scope or its span in terms of the time.

MOSS

Not just the time, but the artists that they brought into the show. They left out many, many wonderful artists because they didn't understand the history enough. They did not understand the history enough.

MOON

The history of art or the artists' circles over time?

MOSS

Right.

MOON

And who knew each other, who were friends, how they had influenced one another, and how the community was greater than what they ended up selecting.

MOSS

Right.

MOON

And actually a question that I had a little while back was just to ask you very sort of explicitly about what were the deepest motivations for you in terms of deciding to open a gallery? Why did you do it in the first place?

MOSS

[laughs] It was very silly. When I became a docent and then three years later went to work at Jake Zeitlin's, I went to work at Jake Zeitlin's because I was really demanded, stimulated—not stimulated, but encouraged, and this fellow docent who had become the director of Zeitlin & Ver Brugge's art department, she wanted me to help her. So I said, "Okay, I will come and help you, but I will only do the correspondence and the datakeeping and the preparations, etc., but I'm not a salesperson." Also, on the other hand, my husband had closed his real estate office or had cut it back completely, almost completely, because he wanted to go to law school. He had been in real estate for a number of years, a couple of decades, and had always been the go-to man for contracts, and he decided to make it legal. So he went back to law school, so we really needed the income. So I worked at Jake's, as I say, from '73 until '77, and it was a very welcome paycheck. When Allen graduated in 1978, he said, "Okay, now it's your turn." And he was the one who said, "You have to open your own gallery." And he was just closing his real estate office completely, which was right here, this space, and I said, "Well, I'll move into your office," and that's what I did. By this time, I had been gone from Jake's for over a year, almost two years, November of '78, and many people who had been the clients at Jake's knew that I was leaving and wanted at that time, in 1977, to fund me in a gallery as an independent, and I said, "I refuse." I said, "I'm not going to be a gallerist." In the interim, I went to another friend of mine whose gallery, who had lost his director and he wanted me, so I went to work for him, Stephen White Gallery Photography. But I really wanted to get back to prints and drawings, so that's why by end of '78, I decided—and Allen had just graduated and wanted me to do this and kept pushing me to do this for three or four or five months. So I did it. That's how I happened Tobey C. Moss Gallery in the same office that my husband occupied for a real estate office.

MOON

And these clients at Zeitlin's, when you say that they wanted to support you and were asking you or were letting you know that they would fully support if you happened to open up your own gallery—

MOSS

Well, I refused that on many levels. First of all, I didn't want to open a gallery at that time. Secondly, when I did open my gallery and those same collectors wanted me to take their money and expand, I'm grateful to my persevering as an independent. I don't like to be beholden to anybody. I'm rather opinionated, I like to do things my own way, and I don't want to have to make decisions by

committee. It's anathema to me. So I faltered along for about a year in my own gallery with no budget whatsoever, maybe \$5,000 total, which is crazy, but then a friend of ours happened to be the president of a bank, the Manufacturers Bank, and he gave me a line of credit, \$25,000. This is how I was able to acquire Lynton Kistler's studio, and that sort of set me up.

MOON

Do you think that those clients from Zeitlin were looking to support you and looking for a good business investment, or that they trusted your eye and they wanted you—

MOSS

They trusted my eye, but, yes, they did think I was going to have a successful business, but I did not want a partner. As it is, I was able to placate them, and they became my supporters as clients, but I've had no problem with finding collectors, and that's what, as I say, has sustained me for thirty-five years, over thirty-five years.

MOON

And what do you think are the most important roles a dealer can play in terms of the whole process of the circulation of art and building relationships? What are some of the most rewarding things for you in terms of your experience and your position as a gallery dealer?

MOSS

Well, first of all, in order to be an art dealer, you have to have the art. It can't go from the top down. You have to start with the basic, with the art. And with my experience with Helen, I met other artists, like Dorr Bothwell, David Levine, Peter Krasnow, Nick Brigante, Oskar—well, Oskar Fischinger's widow, Leonard Edmondson, Jules Engel. Ynez Johnston and Emerson Woelffer were introduced to me through Leonard Edmondson. So the artists wanted to work with me. They knew I knew the history, that I'm just not looking at the latest thing off their easels, and all of the artists that I've mentioned go back in time and had wonderful coffers of art that had not been seen. I mean, David Levine came in wanting to show me his eighties paintings, but when he told me that he had paintings from the thirties, that became a different thing, because I had rejected him for the eighties paintings. I wasn't about to go that recent. But for the thirties paintings, that was exactly what I wanted. Los Angeles in the thirties and the Depression, perfect. And the same thing with Peter Krasnow. Peter Krasnow had been in California since the early twenties. Oskar Fischinger's work, he came here in the thirties, one of the expatriates from Europe. Feitelson had been here since the twenties. Helen was his student since 1930. I mean, this plays out over and over again, and that's the basis. Dorr Bothwell, dear, sweet Dorr Bothwell, she had worked in the Federal Art Project with Helen. So as I met these artists, they were grateful to me for

asking them about their histories. I was grateful to them for the wonderful art that they created that was available. So it was a marriage of goals. So, as I say, you start with the art, and then you continue with a solid basis of honesty and directness. You build up trust on all sides from the artists and from the collectors and for your own self-satisfaction as knowing that you're doing the best you can, and that's what I do is I do the best I can.

MOON

To make sure that history isn't forgotten. And also a part of that, maybe perhaps an integral part of that being to give the artwork an audience, to place it.

MOSS

To encourage art—well, I'll take an example. Gerald Buck, who just passed away earlier this year, he came to me. He had been collecting California Impressionists of the twenties and was approaching the thirties very gingerly. He approached me concerning Helen Lundeberg's work. He fell in love with Helen Lundeberg's work, and he collected many of her pieces even into the seventies and eighties. I'm trying to remember seventies and eighties. Yes, even into the eighties. He had never anticipated going into that recent period. He was doing things very methodically. He was a very organized collector, but he couldn't stop with her work. And I showed him the evolution of thought, the way she thought and the evolution of technique, and the materials that she used, the subject matter that she pursued, the questions that she wanted answered for herself, and this sort of started him on a whole new area. He put the Impressionism away, and he launched into the thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, seventies, eighties. I worked with many collectors in helping them to understand that an artist is not static. If an artist is doing something in the 1970s that he did in the 1930s, that's a bit sad. So that the artists I was showing showed that growth, showed that aesthetic evolution, and I've had clients that understood this. Some people bought the art because they wanted to simply have it in their living room. Some people bought it for that history. There are many different factors that enter into the choice that you would make to bring something home. So you can answer your own questions in that regard.

MOON

Just thinking about how you might see the world of artworks in comparison to perhaps the art historian, I mean, I think that the art historian, in part because of the resources that you look for, you concentrate on libraries, archives, museums, but then an art dealer or a gallery owner also sees a much larger universe of artworks that are constantly in flux, that are collected and then released.

MOSS

That's called the marketplace.

MOON

And that's called the marketplace.

MOSS

Yeah. It was a big step for me to enter the marketplace. I'm still not a successful dealer in that respect. I mean, there are many dealers here in Los Angeles who are quite big. I'm not one of them.

MOON

You talked about earlier how when you were at Zeitlin, especially in comparison to this ex-docent who brought you over there, that you couldn't see artworks as things of business or as commodities. Can you just talk about that? That must be such a profound change.

MOSS

Well, it was a matter of do or die, not that I was going to die, but the concept of becoming a dealer was shocking to me. I really was not equipped to understand all the political aspects of it, and that's what has been my weakness, that networking, because what I chose to do was what nobody else seemed to be doing, and I did not have anybody to talk it over with. Most of the art dealers were and are part of the exciting contemporary scene, and truly Los Angeles, California, broadly, is that contemporary scene. It's so creative here. People just burst at the seams, while I was very pedantic and narrow and devoted to the historical aspects that lent themselves to the study of techniques and aesthetics as well as leading me into the marketplace when I found—what do you call it—people with the same interests. I had more in common with some collectors than with others, and those collectors that I had more in common with were those who also understood the aesthetics and the history, the techniques. Those are the people that came to my classes. They weren't necessarily big spenders. In fact, I didn't even really collect any money from them. I just asked them to make a donation to the Graphic Arts Council at the L.A. County. That was what the price of admission was.

MOON

It also seems that being positioned as a gallery dealer would give you an active role in the fluctuation of the art markets, but in a way it allows one from that position to protect the value of certain artists to make sure that the market price is—

MOSS

Maintained.

MOON

—at a fair level with what you perceive the art historical—

MOSS

But some of the art I was showing had not been on the market. They didn't have a market level. When they had a market level, that was easy to determine

and to adhere to, but some of the artists didn't have a marketplace. I'm trying to think of—Peter Krasnow was not being sold.

MOON

Yeah, even though his name—I mean, he was friends with people who did sell.

MOSS

But he was a very curmudgeonly person and really wasn't very glib, didn't like most people. He just painted. And he did have a couple of collectors who collected him in great depth. There are a couple of major collections here in Southern California of his work specifically, but people did not put him into the historical context broadly, into the fabric of Southern California creativity. But he's a typical one out of the twenties. He made a living from the time he came here in 1923. He was at that time doing portraits. He was a very successful portraitist, and he also did some carving, particularly for temples, Jewish temples, carvings for the ark. There's also a [bas relief] carving at USC. Some patron wanted a wall plaque that he carved. He also had clients up in San Francisco, a temple, who also bought commissioned carvings for their ark. So he had a renown of a certain level, but on a popular level, if you want to put it that way—by that I mean open to the populace broadly—nobody knew him. He had a niche that he was in. All of these artists, I mean, Leonard Edmondson, he was a wonderful etcher, wonderful artist, and he was part of the different exhibitions around town, the Print Society things, and he wrote a book on etching, and he was the administrator for the Department of Art at Cal State Los Angeles, but he really wasn't that well known. When I took his work and showed it and promoted it on my website or at different fairs that I attended, because I was in love with his technique, so wonderful, he became more widely known and collected. Same way with Ynez Johnston. Ynez Johnston had broad support, both in Chicago—she had a dealer in Chicago. She had a dealer in Basel, Switzerland, and in New York. But everybody closed at one time in the sixties, I think it was, or maybe the seventies, and her works weren't being seen anymore, and I didn't like that at all.

MOON

And would you say those three examples, Krasnow, Edmondson, and Johnston, would you say that there's a healthy market for their works now?

MOSS

Healthy? I don't know what you mean by healthy. I had an active market for their work. I'm not a big gallery, I keep stressing, so if they had to rely upon sales, they had to live very modestly. But I was there for them, and their works were accepted widely and internationally, and their names did not fade away. I think that's the most important thing that you can say that I did. I kept the names out there.

MOON

And attached to their proper art historical context.

MOSS

In their art historical context, yes, not isolated by any means.

MOON

Also when we first met, you made this statement—correct me if I’m wrong—that was something to the effect that art museums aren’t necessarily as influential, let’s say, as one might think they are.

MOSS

Because the art museums are very tightly structured, and depending upon the director and his relationships with his curators, they have more or less focused upon their collections. I will say something about the New York galleries. Those curators get out of their offices and they do go around to the studios and the galleries. They know the galleries. In fact, when they put on an exhibition, they borrow from the galleries as well as from collectors. In Los Angeles, that isn’t the case. Perhaps it’s been economics, perhaps it’s the budget, but the curators are not that active. They don’t get out as much. They don’t look around the galleries. They expect the galleries to come to them sometimes, because sometimes they don’t have time. They’re always so busy with what’s doing. I don’t know what they’re doing, but they’ve all got collections. And also there’s another thing, is that it depends upon the economic climate of the country, broadly. Right now we’re seeing collectors. My collectors are condensing their lives. They’re changing from five-bedroom, five-bath homes to two-bedroom condos in Palm Springs. They are dying, and their heirs—one way or the other, their collections are coming out. The ones that come out to the market, through the galleries or through the auctions, is one thing, but many of these collections are given to the museums, and that’s what you’ve seen in this last decade. The museums are overwhelmed with simply registering, organizing, classifying, photographing, preparing the art in the museums. They don’t need to buy anything. When they do buy something, it’s a blockbuster, and they go to their trustees and raise money, like the L.A. County just now did. They raised, I don’t know, \$4 million or something like that, I don’t even know. But they just now announced that they acquired ten new pieces of art at the L.A. County. I don’t know whether any of them are from contemporary galleries at all, but I really haven’t scouted that. I know a couple of pieces were ancient pieces. So the museums in California are not as supportive of the galleries as they could be, I think, but, see, I don’t expect it, because if they do get out of their offices, they’re going to studios and contemporary galleries, but I do expect them to support the contemporary galleries. Too many contemporary galleries have closed. Every once in a while, you’ll get someone like Howard Fox. He really got out into the galleries. I really give him credit.

But Howard Fox was dismissed, and now he's being brought back to be an adjunct curator for different contemporary shows.

MOON

But I think that there is an issue with museums working too closely—just from the public perception, there's an issue between museums working too closely with galleries because of the commercial side.

MOSS

Do you mean like Gagosian Gallery?

MOON

Well, I'm thinking, for example, one of the most talked-about examples that comes to mind for me is MOCA [Museum of Contemporary Art] and [Takashi] Murakami and working so closely with Blum & Poe, for example, and that—

MOSS

That was not right, not good. Very poor judgment. That's the director that's no longer here.

MOON

Right. But I mean, I guess it just depends on the people and what exactly the relationship between the museum and the gallery entails.

MOSS

Yeah. Well, I mentioned Gagosian Gallery. He's a phenomenon. He is open in major capitals around the world, he has unlimited funding, it seems, he puts on the most extraordinary shows, and he has dictated more than one museum exhibition. I stand in amazement at the things that I see and hear.

MOON

And so do you see, for example, Gagosian as a model of a gallerist who—

MOSS

Not a model at all. Not a model at all. He's a very successful dealer at what he does, but I hope there aren't too many like him.

MOON

Okay. So from your perspective, who do you think are some of the most powerful forces in, let's say, like the ecosystem that we call the art world?

MOSS

Do you mean other galleries?

MOON

Well, a position. So if the art museum isn't necessarily as powerful as one might perceive, who do think really are the movers and shakers?

MOSS

I do think the museums are important, and particularly in Southern California. We have some wonderful museums. They sort of complement each other. I can't think of a poor museum. I can think of only good museums, everyone from Loyola Marymount's modest little [Laband Gallery]—to the Hammer.

Hammer is great for what they do. MOCA is getting back on its feet. I think the Norton Simon's a very special collection. It has its limitations, but those are complemented by the Huntington or the small Pasadena Museum of California Art. Santa Barbara, of course, isn't immediately here, but they have a very fine program there, and there are other little museums like the Carnegie Museum up in Oxnard. OCMA and the Laguna Art Museum and the San Diego Museum in La Jolla and San Diego, they do a marvelous job. We have some very, very wonderful museums here in Southern California. No complaints, really. As I say, if I was a contemporary gallery, I would feel it a lot more, see, but I don't expect them to come to me here. I'm sort of a museum. I'm in a different—I'm not very exciting.

MOON

Well, you have a historical focus as opposed to trying to showcase the newest young artists straight out of art school.

MOSS

Right, right. That's not my thing.

MOON

No.

MOSS

But the museums are also historical repositories and they also curate marvelous shows, historical shows. They have a much broader mandate.

MOON

Right. They serve the public or are supposed.

MOSS

So everybody does their part. That's why we call it a fabric, because it all is woven together, and together it becomes very beautiful. Individual threads don't always have the same interest.

MOON

And what are some things that you've done in your professional life that you're most proud of?

MOSS

Sustaining. I'm here. When I left Jake Zeitlin—and he didn't really want me to go—he gave me three points. He said, "My last client or collector is my next one." In other words, maintain a relationship with a collector and he'll come back. And then he said, "Don't move. Find a location. Don't move." And that's proven itself over the years. People will not come here for a dozen years, and they'll come back to the door and say, "Are you still here?" They've just flown in from Columbus, Ohio, and I'm still here. They're happy to see me and I'm happy to see them. And then the last lesson was, the last point was, "Stay in business for fifty years, and you've got it made." So those were the three pointers. Of course, after I did leave him, and after I did open the gallery,

whenever I had a problem, I would call him up and say, “Jake, can we talk?” And he’d say, “Pick me up at eleven-thirty for lunch.” And that’s what we would do, go out for lunch, and he would help me smooth over the bumps and tell me what to do. So he was my friend until he died. A wonderful man, a great humanist.

MOON

And is there anything that you would have done differently, in retrospect?

MOSS

No. I would have perhaps had a game plan if I had been smarter, but, you know, there are times when you start off without knowing what questions to ask, no matter what venture you’re engaged in. You don’t know until later, you think to yourself, “I should have known this,” or, “I should have asked this.” I should have had more capital to work with. I should have been able to hire a good assistant and pay good support for that assistant. But I’ve had such a modest way of doing business. You know that old business about “A penny saved is a penny earned.” I have always been very frugal. I don’t like to go into debt. I don’t have any debt, and so I’ve always paid my way. That’s not the business model that is most successful. The business model is to extend yourself, acquire that whole collection, take those big ads in the magazines. I haven’t had that resource, so perhaps I would have, if I had been smarter, planned a little bit better financially. But then again, perhaps I would have closed by now because I wouldn’t have been able to maintain.

MOON

It all worked out.

MOSS

It all worked out. I’m very happy. And in my old age, I’m very content. If I stop tomorrow, I still would feel that what I’ve been doing has been very worthwhile.

MOON

Well, I guess one can’t ask for anything more than that.

MOSS

I don’t.

MOON

And is there anything else that you’d like to add?

MOSS

Probably next week I’ll think of something. Your questions have been very interesting and stimulating. I thank you.

MOON

Well, I thank you for answering them. [laughs] Okay. Well, I guess that’s it for today. [End of April 28, 2014 interview]

*Date:*

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